Arts in society. Volume 1, Issue 4 Winter 1960

Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Extension Division, Winter 1960

https://digital.library.wisc.edu/1711.dl/NNLREUIR3W3GU8K

arts in society

winter 1960

.75

Winter 1960
Arts in Society

a journal of the arts in adult education sponsored by The University of Wisconsin Extension Division and The Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults

Arts in Society is dedicated to the advancement of education in the arts, particularly in the field of adult education. These publications are to be of interest, therefore, both to professionals and the intelligent lay public. *Arts in Society* discusses, interprets, and illustrates the various roles of the arts in contemporary society. In general, four areas are dealt with: the teaching and learning of the arts; aesthetics and philosophy; social analysis; and significant examples of creative expression in media which may be served by the printing process.

Until *Arts in Society* becomes a quarterly publication, it will not be sold at a yearly subscription rate.

Additional copies of this issue and of the three previous issues (Winter, 1958; Winter, 1959; and Fall, 1959) may be purchased for 75 cents a copy.

Order from: The Bookstore, University Extension Division, The University of Wisconsin, Madison 6, Wisconsin.

Manuscripts may be sent to The Editor, *Arts in Society,* University Extension Division, The University of Wisconsin, Madison 6, Wisconsin.

Produced by Editorial and Communications Services, University Extension Division

Contents

Mr. Witz is a graduate student at
The University of Wisconsin

ROBERT WITZ | *pictures of van gogh: two poems*

(1)

Van Gogh was alone so he went
To woman, the scarlet mystery.
Through thickening alleyways he bent
His chill, apart, to cut the misery

Of his cold soul, to lose self, for
Scarlet sometimes solves, dissolves cold.
Best it destroys and merges, for, before
The immortal unit dissipates, the savage cold

Is part of and moving stillness, like a tomb's serenity,
Like the dervish, drunken stillness of an art,
Still as dancing dancing, the absolute frenzy
Of silence, Dionysus and Apollo in no way apart.

But scarlet, that whore, failed, and the desire
For rest missed throat, cut ear, got hot blood.

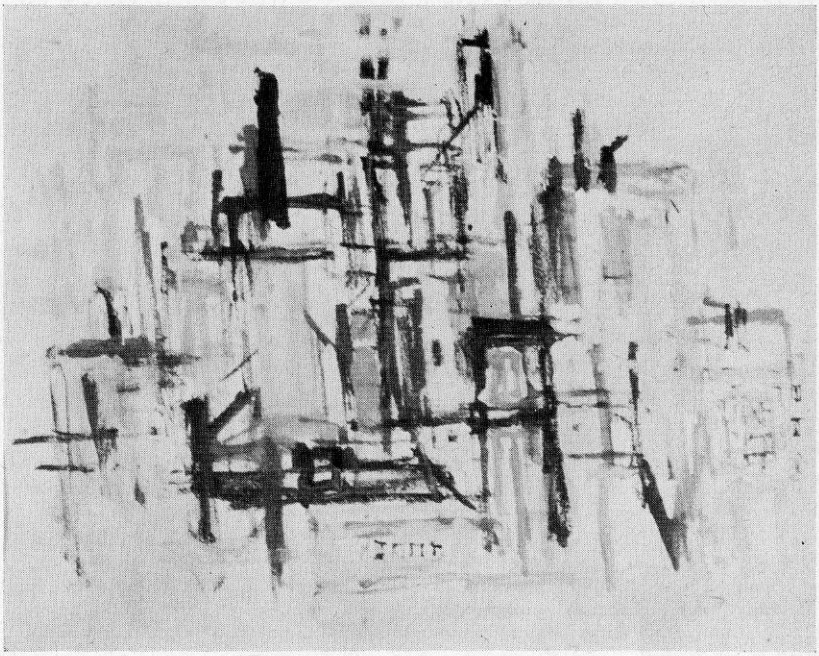
(2)

Vincent sat up, chin on fist, looking
At nothing. Every day the sun was hot,
Bright, creating laughter in the streets around him.
But he, beneath cold sheets, for days had thought

Only of his loneliness, his soul's chill, so
Alone. The desert of his life was expanding:
The shudder of bandage and head, his ear and Gauguin
Gone, even the jeers of the people swelling

Like a sore beneath his window, gone.
He envied his brother's happiness, a wife,
A child, and—quickly he recalled the love
Of Theo, and waters of money and encouragement—

Life—he imagined for Theo, to make sunfilled
Paintings, make joy, make the beautiful.

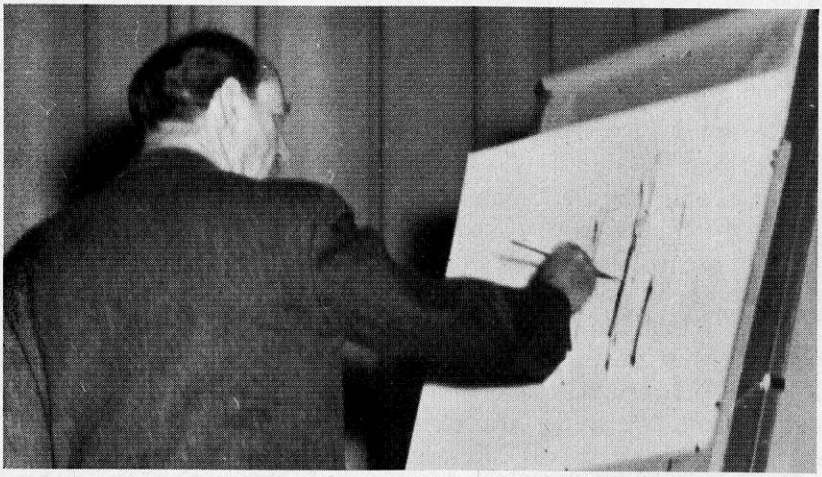


6

The cover painting is the work of Mr. Myrwyn Eaton, who painted the picture before an audience consisting, for the most part, of administrators of university extension divisions at the annual meeting of the National University Extension Association in Syracuse, New York, April 27, 1959. As he painted, the artist gave a running account both verbally and visually of what it is that at least one abstract artist wishes to do with his canvas. A transcript of those remarks follows, interspersed with photographs of Mr. Eaton taken as he worked out his creative problem.
Mr. Eaton is an associate professor of fine arts in the Division of General Education of New York University. He has had one-man shows in New York, California, and Paris; and has been represented in group shows at the Whitney Museum in New York and at the Carnegie International Exhibits.
Photographs of the artist in his lecture-demonstration are by George MacKown, Syracuse, New York.

MYRWYN EATON | *an abstractionist on making an abstraction*

We thought it might be interesting, and a little fun perhaps, if I worked on a casein painting to create a design. What I'd like to do tonight is to paint a picture that has to do with a city—most any American city; not especially my own home town, New York City. I'm fascinated by cities: I like a lot of things that I see and experience in them.

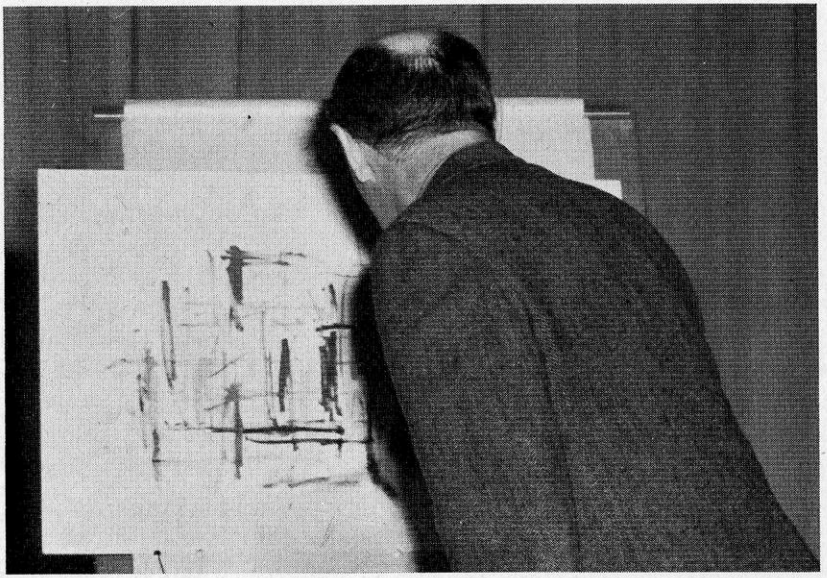


I want now to demonstrate a way in which at least one painter thinks through a problem having to do with painting: perhaps the best thing to do is to start in and make some marks.

What I want to do in painting is to have an adventure. I think all art is more adventure than anything else, and I think it ought to be. The real fun is not knowing exactly what's going to happen next, and what's going to result from what you do; painting is for me the act of "finding" the picture, finding some statement which will say what I feel, not necessarily what I see, for there are many things much more exciting to get down on a piece of paper than a literal visual appearance. Probably most of you would agree that there are certain spiritual qualities, subtle feelings, all sorts of other things having to do with the experience of the city that are just as interesting as the bare visual impression. And that's really what I'm interested in with this little study. Just bear in mind that I'm not really trying to paint the visual image of the city; I'm rather trying to find certain equivalences to the experience of a city.

One of the things that seems to me to be the most helpful to all of us who paint pictures and perhaps to those of us who look at pictures is to realize that a picture is something created within a finite shape, a right angle shape ordinarily—rectangular or squares —although it may sometimes be circular, oval, or irregular. Every single square inch within that canvas or piece of paper is of the utmost importance. And from a pictorially compositional point of view, all square inches within this piece of paper are equally important. That goes for the background, as well as for the foreground portion which is normally the most carefully detailed.

So what I am trying to do now at the outset is to lay in a few quick broad lines and areas of color, which will begin to come together in an orchestration and establish a certain broad relationship to this rectangular paper. Now that may seem like a pretty obvious thing to say, but I find that in my teaching it's something that is not always borne in mind as fully as it ought to be by those who practice painting. What I'm trying to do, then, is to begin to establish relationships: line relationships, intervals between lines, length of lines, distances between one color and another echoing color, this color and this one. I'm trying now to establish the initial relationships of size and of shape and of color, because I have not only the subject to deal with, I've got some aesthetic problems to cope with as well. And, of course, these aesthetic problems have to do with all of those physical relationships I spoke of: the line relations, the color relations, the light and dark relations, and so on.



I think that this is probably a very good time for me to keep still. I'll have more things to say in a little while.

In the early stages, one has to jump around all over the whole picture, I've found, rather than to concentrate on any one part of it very much; the all-over concept of the picture should initially be paid very close attention to. Later, the closer details have their share of attention.

For me the city is a very dynamic thing. It's a bustling, hustling mass of energy with lots of forms, jostling each other. Great buildings alongside smaller buildings. Tall, soaring, vertical, moving forms against the rather low-lying, horizontal ones. And I think that's a pretty good sort of relationship for my painting, because very often paintings rely for their success in fair measure upon a contrast between one thing and another. Between the large and the small, between the round and the square, between the thin and the fat. I'm trying now to get some little set of relationships of that kind, some horizontal moving thing and some vertical moving thing.

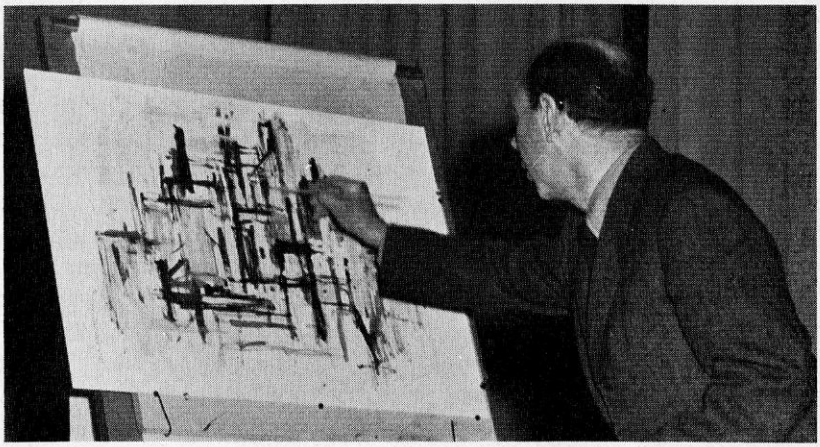
This background of the painting is very important. All of these marginal areas are just as important as the forms which will eventually suggest a building. I want the sky area to be just as much a part of the fabric of the whole thing; even though I leave it white paper, it must be exactly the right size, and it must be touched or un-

touched in just the right degree of relationship to what goes on here. So that the background is not just something that is filled in as an afterthought; it is a very positive part of the picture—a very definite, very active part of the design. It's rather rare to find backgrounds which really lock in with the main theme of the picture, because it is sometimes very difficult to get them related closely.

The casein medium is a very good one to work in, because it's very flexible. You can do all kinds of things with it; you can paint over the casein in a great hurry, and you can paint over it as often as you like, provided that you wait for each wet area to dry before you do anything to it. It must dry. If you try to fool around with wet casein, you get into a lot of trouble.

But one of the most significant things to keep in mind is that every single square inch of this picture is of equal importance aesthetically and from a design point of view.

It seems to me that the lively colors which I am employing here [*see cover*] are better suited to the kind of thing I want to say than the dull, drab, very quiet tans and browns which one actually sees in the city. I think these lively colors are more expressive of the energy and the bustle, the excitement of the big town, than the quiet colors. Sometimes a painter may decide to leave margins free of color, let the actual forms of his painting fade out rather than come to the very edge. Sometimes I can concentrate upon the things which I feel are most important, just by doing that very thing—having a central nucleus and letting the forms fade out. They'll be just as active and just as important a part of the composition if

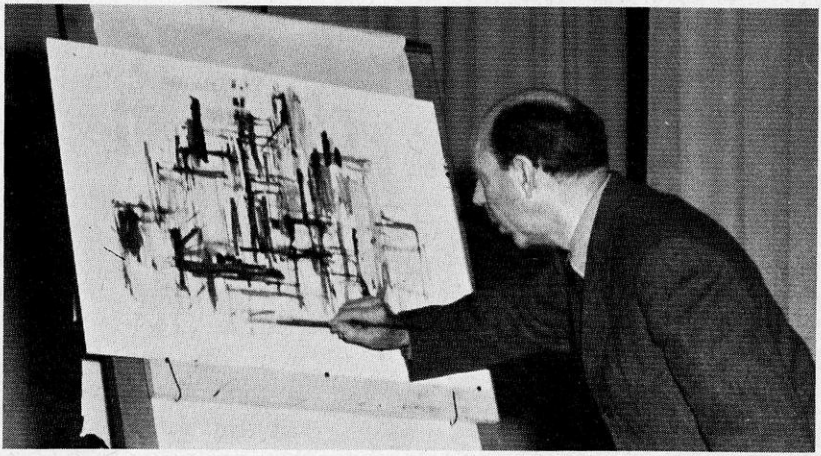


they're properly handled as they would be if there were paint all over them. I haven't decided yet, fully, just how I am going to treat them. But at the moment I think I shall leave them relatively free.

The fun of painting is finding these relations, finding the equivalent for the thing that you think is interesting, that you feel is vital. That's the fun, not knowing what's going to come out, not having a preconceived idea as to what the picture will look like. And it is possible to work that way in this casein medium, whereas of course it was not possible for Michelangelo to do the same in the Sistine Chapel, for there was quite a different sort of job to be done. If you're lying on your back for nearly four years, you don't just make it up as you go along—you have a good idea about what's going to happen. But one of the real joys in this casein, and in oil painting too, is that you can improvise: you can make it up as you go along. And there's a kind of romantic quality about that which appeals to me. I like to explore. I like to invent, rather than merely execute something I have preconceived; or it becomes a kind of canned performance, and I don't like that. In oil painting, if you don't like what you've done, you've got to scrape it, and scrape it, and scrape it, and get down to the canvas and then wipe it off, so that it will take the next batch of paint. But, you see, this is bone dry and all ready to be painted on again. In transparent water color, of course, you can't do that, because the more you paint on a given area the dirtier and more tired looking it gets, and there comes a time when it's no longer a water color—it has lost all the possible charm of a water color through overwork. But if you handle casein a little bit gently, you can do all kinds of things to it—and repeatedly.

One of the most important things of all to do when you paint a picture is to look at it from a distance, very often.

I think a little bit of the movement of the city, a little bit of the congestion of the city is beginning to creep in. I don't want the sky to be too naturalistic, because the buildings are not naturalistic. I will keep the sky as abstract as the buildings, if I am to get a unity in the thing as a whole—which of course is what I want almost as much as anything else. I am trying to paint a picture of some quality; it is very important that all of it tie together, all of its parts relate to each other. If it doesn't do that, then it fails miserably. One has to keep checking all the time to see whether he has enough variety of size, enough variety of shape, or whether there is sufficient variety

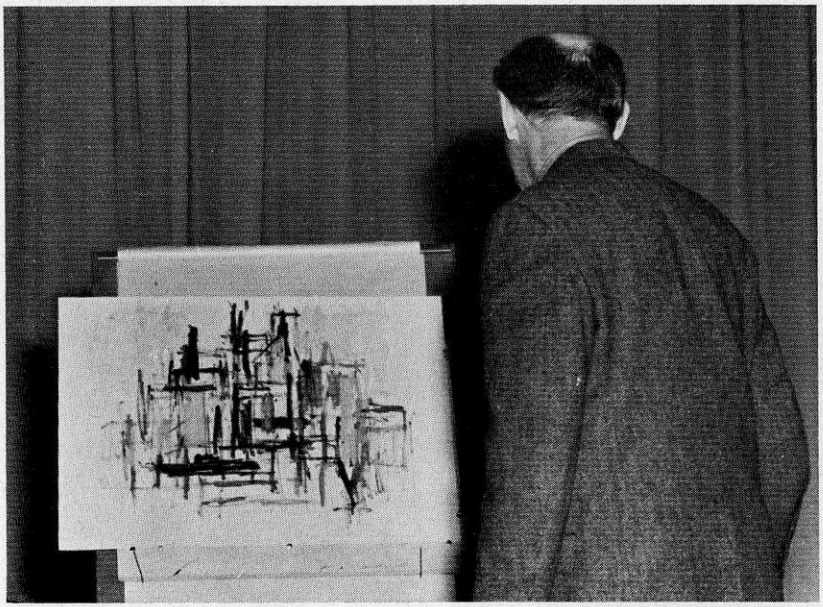


of light and dark to give some strength to the design and yet enough sameness, enough similarity to tie it together.

I think the painting needs a little more strengthening in terms of dark, so we will sneak in a few bands of that. I think the over-all design has a little bit too much uniformity of lightness and darkness, which we call "value," so to help that I'll vary its shape a little bit, and dab in a few more frisky little dot-dash things—I can take them out any time they get in the way.

Now I don't want it to *look* like the city—I can paint it to look that way, but I don't want to do that. I am after something else; after something that I think more significant, more provocative, something that interests me personally in the city. At this point I ought to say that the painter is first and foremost concerned with his own reaction both to the theme and to the picture itself. He is not primarily concerned wih the other fellow's reaction to the painting. He is very much concerned with that piece of paper or canvas, in getting down the things he thinks are vigorous and suggestive of what his experience and emotions tell him are important for him—that's his job; people respond to it happily or otherwise—that's their affair. If a painter is true to his own emotions and responses, if he does his job well, the other things—like peoples' reactions—take care of themselves. A painter paints as honestly as he can, and in the way he thinks most expressive, and then he lets the chips fall where they may. I think the painter doesn't worry about whether he is "communicating," to use a favorite expression of our times.

I want a little more complexity of line in certain areas and I want to make it a little more exciting visually; I want rather more diagonals moving very carefully here and there through the picture. I must keep constantly in mind what I really feel about this and what I want to get down—some of the chaotic mess that most of the city is. The painter's job is to build into his statement a great deal of orderliness even though the theme itself is chaotic. Heaven knows that most of our cities have little city planning involved in them—tall buildings, short buildings, fat ones, thin ones. But there is charm in the city, anyway, and it is that quality I am interested in; but I must be quite sure that I don't get a messy painting—"messy" in my terms. It's got to have a kind of pictorial orderliness, which I am working very hard to get. I personally think it would be awfully tiresome if I just painted those little shoe boxes stood up on ends that most of the city buildings are, sorry to say. I don't say that I am improving upon the architecture of the city in our little study here, but I *am* trying to create a painting. I might just fool you and get one!



You will notice that there has been no attempt to operate in terms of real perspective, because I'm not much interested in the real perspective sort of image—one sees vanishing points, converg-

ing lines, and all that kind of thing. This is not the kind of study which calls for that technique.

Don't think for a minute that I have forgotten about the margins—I am very conscious of them. I have to be conscious of every single square millimeter. I think of a painting as being made up of a certain number of square inches that fill up a whole rectangle and every square inch has to stick together with every other square inch. Each has to move toward completion at the same rate of speed, so that even if I haven't done anything with one corner or another, I am mindful of it.

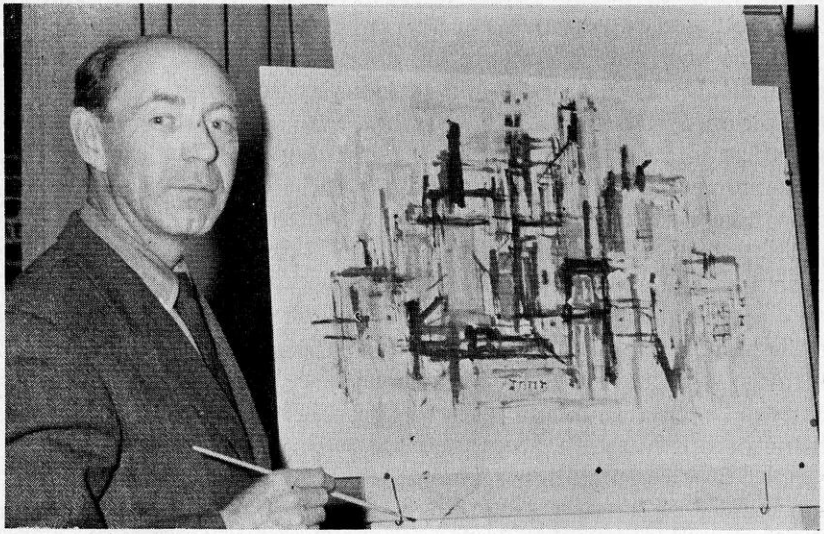
I don't think that this is a good handling—it's just a little monotonous, so let's do something. I don't want to efface these small touches altogether, because if they show through this little wash I am putting on, that's fine. I'll put a very watery coat of paint on here, a very watery little coat, and let that understuff come through—if it starts to drip down a little, so much the better. I think that we will get a little darker accent right here. I have to think very carefully about the profile now, among other things, because that is where the eye goes automatically. I have to be very careful—it isn't too bad—it isn't too bad. Let's get a diagonal moving in here. I think a little more white in this spot—I will tidy this up a bit—I want it to be a little sloppy—I am a great believer in a certain amount of sloppiness in the actual handling of the paint, not in thinking or in feeling; but the result must have a casual look, as far as the actual application of the paint is concerned. I want it to look a little offhand, not as if I had been doing it with a T-square and ruling pen.

I am checking constantly the differences between this line and that one; the movements across the top; the movements down the middle; the pattern of dark against light. I am trying to get interesting textures of paint—not slick and smooth the way a housepainter is supposed to paint. I want it to be informal, not deliberate and carefully done.

I have only just a little more to do. So the logical thing to do is to take stock—well, it's coming along. I've got a much too crooked line up here; this bowlegged line I don't like very much. I need a darker passage—a good, strong, potent dark. I think that a black or something near black, a black with a little brown in it, will do. I will try it and see. That's better—now I know a place to put a diagonal, to afford a necessary change in direction. Now we need

something to dance a little bit. With a complete disregard of the appearance and subject itself, I want two black lines. I don't know why—I just do. I am very fond of zigzags and I think I've found a good place for one. Little accents are nice.

I am nearly finished now. Sometimes I reserve a certain color just for the end, just for accent. Now, I've got a very handsome green I haven't used yet. I know that a sky is usually more blue than it is green, but I want a green here. Now, one more accent and then I'm through. There—that's just about it.



Mr. Mandel is a member of the Department of English at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, New York. He surveys the phenomena of violence from the vantage point of his home in East Meadow, Long Island.

SIEGFRIED MANDEL | *violence and the creative urge*

There is violence in all of us, yet the artist is among the few who know how to use it creatively. There is much that we can learn from him, especially in these days when violence is a common problem. Violence in itself is neither good nor bad; the form it takes is what really matters: in juvenile or adult delinquency it is terribly destructive; in the arts it can become a source of true creativity.

Several years ago, critics gave enthusiastic reviews to a movie called "The Desperate Hours," a celluloid version of the stage play dramatizing the anxieties of a family held captive by escaped convicts. Despite the reviews, the box office showed disappointing returns, so to cure this public apathy, public relations experts went into action; three pulse-jabbing campaigns failed, but the fourth brought results. Apparently what was needed in addition to such an established star as Humphrey Bogart was a strong promise of violence.

One might think that an advertising appeal based solely on violence would fall flat, since tabloid readers and television viewers are smothered daily with the most explicit violence. On the contrary. Then, as now, public appetite has a capacity for absorbing violence in all its forms. Editorials and sermons against such appetites and exhibitions seem to stimulate rather than abate the craving for violence; and measures to curb it, particularly in the cities, are useless unless coupled with intensive day and night police action. We may take certain precautions to curb violence, but it will not be possible to legislate it out of existence no matter how much we may wish to delude ourselves.

The seething life of our cities, with their human and mechanical traffic, their stark beauty and rugged industrial strength, the bold thrust of architecture, all have a touch of coldness. Our climate has extremes of heat and cold faced by few other countries of the world. Some of our Western geography has settings that for sheer impersonal power resemble lunar landscapes. We cannot escape the molding power of these surroundings. But there is a vast difference

whether the ingrained violence, equally a part of us, breaks out in the streets or on the stage, in the schools or between the covers of a book.

Our vitality—with which most foreign visitors are impressed—must find an outlet: unchecked it turns into frenzy, harnessed it becomes a means of dynamic expression. There are signs that more and more our sensibilities are being blunted by the machine age; one of E. M. Forster's stories envisions a time when people will turn all their hopes toward machines: "The machine . . . feeds us and clothes us and houses us; through it we see one another, in it we have our being. The machine is the friend of ideas and the enemy of superstition. The machine is omnipotent, eternal; blessed is the machine." Whether our increasing dependence on machines will lead to adoration, as Forster prophesies, depends altogether on the direction we give our vitality.

Just as we have architectural symbols that mirror stark, geometrical violence, so almost everything around us caters to our taste for violence. No longer is the jazz tempo of Dixie fast enough; our younger generation now is sustained by a frenzied rock-and-roll beat of almost primitive, tribal proportions. In the spectator sports we have become impatient with low-score basketball and have tinkered with the rules so that players may race about like clocked jackrabbits. In baseball we award a crown to the muscle man who smashes the most homeruns. Boxing has become a punishing and lethal sport. When Sugar Ray Robinson's blows killed an opponent he is said to have rumbled glumly, "That's what I get paid for."

Induced frenzy stoked by violence is an emotion common to sports fans, hoodlums, and artists alike. In the first case, violence usually is harmlessly dissipated; in the second, violence results in brutality and destruction; in the last, violence becomes a creative force. Whatever else we may say about these distinct groups of people and the forces which drive them, violence—unless it results in a productive act—is nothing more than displaced energy.

Goethe once said there is no crime he could not commit, but he did it in his poetry, plays, and novels. Sublimation is the concept by which psychologists explain this channeling of impulses, the redirection of energy, and conversion of so-called drives. No matter what name we give it, it is the artist's eternal struggle to bend materials to his will—the physical assault of the sculptor on wood, clay, or stone; the poet's convulsions to shape his visions into words; the

composer's agony in materializing a continually escaping musical idea. Is art possible without assault, convulsion, or agony? It would seem that it is; but then more often than not, it ends as a facile, uninspired bit of mannerism, a pleasantry, a pop version of greatness.

The act of artistic creation engages all the senses. Some artists look upon it as a condition of "revelation" that becomes convulsive and disturbing, compulsive and exacting. "There is an ecstasy," writes Nietzsche, "whose terrific tension is sometimes released by a flood of tears, during which one's progress varies from *involuntary impetuosity* to involuntary slowness. There is the feeling that one is utterly out of hand." He also talks about an "infinitude of shuddering thrills," which to us may seem a hyperthyroid display of sentimentality and emotionalism. Perhaps it is, but it also released him from pressures and tensions to give him a measure of profound happiness. This contentment bears no resemblance to the blankness and blandness caused by the multiple happiness pills dispensed on today's market.

There are romantic and rampant notions that artistic creation resembles inspired "automatic" writing or painting in which the subconscious does all the work. True, though the inner world is a fertile source, it still is the artist's task to discipline chaos; failing that, his emotions reflect nothing but chaos. "For imagination in a poet," observed John Dryden long ago, "is a faculty so wild and lawless, that like a high-ranging spaniel, it must have clogs tied to it, lest it outrun the judgment." It is through disciplined labor that, as Baudelaire put it, "revery becomes a work of art."

Picasso rarely comments on his work, so that when he does, it is worth listening to. "With me, a picture is a sum of *destructions.* I make a picture and then proceed to destroy it." What he means by destruction is a violent rearrangement and continual transformation until he is intellectually and emotionally pleased with the results. He makes the strange statement, "It is not what the artist does that counts, but what he is." Picasso explains further that what interests him is "the uneasiness of Cézanne, the real teachings of Cézanne, the torments of van Gogh, that is to say the drama of the man. The rest is false." What Picasso indirectly suggests is that the artist himself—his personality—is formed and shaped by the struggle and violence which is part of his creative activity. Without this drama there is no creation. In a larger sense, the work creates the man; it brings fulfillment and marks successive stages in a man's life.

The therapeutic value of music, the soothing or stimulation of harmony, melody, counterpoint, syncopation—are undeniably effective. Yet purposeless self-expression through violence, whether socially or in the arts, can only lead to bathos, a momentary satisfaction, a drugged intoxication, an irresponsible disclaimer of lasting results. Autobiographical notes by such artists as Beethoven and Liszt give the impression that music is a cathartic agent that purged them of their wildest emotions. It draws from the energy, restlessness, and dynamic tempo of the inner life. Music and composition do afford release, but they are no more than cries in the wilderness if musical or any other ideas are not disciplined and molded into a lasting form. Beneath even the most passionate music of Beethoven, we find a painstaking development of musical ideas and a logical framework. Even without knowing the composer or the number of times he has suffered a broken heart, we must respond to the general emotion generated by the work; and as the artist bends his violent feelings to form, we gain some new insight into the forms of violence. Just as the artist pours ideas into his work, so the reader, listener, or viewer also must bring ideas into play; otherwise there is a vacuum between the two. When there is communication, the force of the emotion is happily attenuated.

Whatever its attenuation in communication, the emotion of art has its source in the artist's personality; and the artist's preoccupation with himself has often been called narcissistic. In an age where emphasis is placed on conformity, life adjustment, getting along, being liked, the artist is looked upon as a peculiar animal, distant and different, destined to delinquency. What people don't easily understand, they often distrust. Yet, the most difficult task is not the understanding of others but the understanding of one's self, the patient and often painful mining of resources that lie within. If this leads to narcissism or self-love, it may not be a tragedy at all. The man who loves himself may be more capable of loving others as himself, in contrast to the man filled with self-hatred and a corresponding hatred of his fellows.

Creation engages the artist's entire source of energy. It begins with deeply personal introspection and requires objective craftsmanship to complete the work. Thomas Wolfe is a dynamic, modern example of the artist at work, an artist who knew the need for the second and final stage of creation but had immense difficulty with it. After years of "frenzied labor" on his novel *Of Time and the*

River he wrote, "When a man's work has poured from him for almost five years like burning lava from a volcano; when all of it, however superfluous, has been given fire and passion by the white heat of his own creative energy, it is very difficult suddenly to become coldly surgical and ruthlessly detached." Giving disciplined shape to his work he called "bloody execution," doing carnage to his intensely personal writing; but despite his recoiling he did complete most of his designs. The temptation was there to explore more fully the vistas opened by his enthusiasm and to let his emotions run out of hand. Wolfe's torrential flow of words was therapeutic; his imposition of order on chaos was artistic. Rarely have we had more frank confessions of how violence triggers creativity or how self-expression is tempered by discipline.

Up until very recently there has been a popular stereotype of the scientist as a mad creature lost in a maze of laboratory equipment, manipulating dials, and wreathed by lightning flashes shooting through vast glass enclosures. With one mushroom cloud and launching of satellites, the comic strip image of the scientist has been put to rest. The artist, however, is still receiving myopic treatment. At best, he is visualized as a longhair or square and at worst as an overly effeminate *poseur.* Many also confuse sloshy croonery and pathetic instrumental titillations with true artistic virility. We seem to be a long way from accepting and respecting art on the same terms as science. Eventually we must, because the artist's sublimation of violence through creative play shows us the way toward social sanity.

In many enlightened school systems which afford the individual a framework of stability he so often lacks in his home environment, attention is given to creative and humanistic pursuits. Besides extracurricular offerings there are art classes in free expression. These point in the right direction, though the term "free expression" has a misleading anarchistic ring. Free expression, if it is to have usefulness, must be grounded in discipline and sound follow-through. Commendable, though, is the emphasis on *doing* instead of *viewing* that makes the difference between aimless spectatorship and purposeful activity.

Language and picture making are not instinctual characteristics of man. This was demonstrated in several instances when "wild children" who—though they survived their environment and complete isolation—lacked any inventive language by which to make themselves understood. Some degree of social companionship is necessary

in order to play out inner problems. Language and picture making are abilities acquired through exposure, imitation, observation, and for the most part, through guidance. Here is a field in which schools, libraries, and art museums could play a greater role, and should be abetted by parents who stimulate their children and whet their appetites for learning and creative doing.

Senseless aggression is far different from violence directed to some end in the creation of art. The energy, however, is the same; and there is hope that rampant aggressiveness of youth and adults can be redirected into creative channels. We could say, along with Picasso, that the drama of the man is more important than the work. We have a feeling that the value of the work will take care of itself the more aware and proficient the individual becomes in handling his materials and personal violence as he shapes his ideas into tangible forms.

Although he possesses a Ph.D. in sociology, Mr. Duncan considers himself an independent scholar dedicated to the study of the arts in society. He has published several books, and, while pursuing his principal interest of tracing the development of civilization in Midwestern America, has often found time to engage in the teaching of adults at Northwestern and the University of Chicago.
Arts in Society *publishes below a portion of his new book,* Social Hierarchy, Communication, and Social Order in Art and Society, *to be published in the near future.*

HUGH DUNCAN | *comedy in society*

COMEDY AND SOCIAL CONTROL

"Jokes serve as a resistance against authority and as an escape from its pressure." We owe Freud much for his elaboration of this hypothesis, but it is too limited for a social theory of comedy. Comedy *upholds,* as well as resists authority, by making ridiculous, absurd, or laughable whatever threatens social order. American laughter at the immigrant (German, Irish, Scotch, Scandinavian, Italian, and Yiddish in turn), like Molière's laughter over parvenus, is a form of social discipline. It serves to keep them in place until they learn how to behave like established Americans. The German was teased for his "dumb" rural ways, the Irishman for his "blarney," the Scot for his thrift; and, as befits a nation of "go-getters," the lazy and shiftless (of whatever background) were ridiculed as bums.

The American comic bum is seldom ironic, like the seedy aristocrat in European comic art. Nor is he holy, like the Yiddish *schnorrer* who helps to keep Baron Rothschild's piety in good repair. The business community, which pays its clowns such great sums, wants laggard spenders disciplined, just as an earlier generation of plutocrats kept a sharp eye on the "sturdy beggar," who "could, but would not" work. Our TV clowns are now "masters of ceremonies" who dress like plutocrats, surround themselves with glamorous "guest stars," and lead us to "commercials" where we are urged to want everything that money can buy. Bob Hope, Milton Berle, and Steve Allen are "live wires." Even those like Red Skelton who mock the plutocrat with their seedy elegance (in his role as "Freddie, the Freeloader"), cigars picked up from the gutter, and talk about "big deals" or wintering in Florida, introduce their act in highly fashionable dress. Why not? Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Steve Allen are millionaires. Their exquisite grooming and general air of well being assure us that comedy pays. Money not only talks in American TV, it laughs out loud.

Who are these millionaire clowns "out-witting"? Certainly not the authority of money. Their TV shows are "parties" with "guests" who are introduced to us, not in their role as clown, but as "great and wonderful" people who obviously can afford luxurious dress, jewels, and elegant coiffures. The clown, as master of ceremonies, is now a gracious host who "asks" his guests to perform for his guests beyond the camera—but not before an exchange of genteel pleasantries over something which only money can buy (the flight back from Europe "just for this show," etc.) or a "build-up" which shows how well the guest is doing in the American quest for fame and fortune. Humor over money is not from the view of the poor, but of the rich. We hear jokes about how the income tax impoverishes, how hard it is to get Jack Benny to spend, how the government borrows from Bing Crosby, etc. The most sophisticated plutocratic humor, the ironic humor of *The New Yorker,* enhances the glamour of money by making fun of unsophisticated and awkward spenders. Even in sophisticated commercials where the "pitch" is very gay, and the announcer full of joy in his message (the "bland" in contrast to the "hard" sell), luxury and "gracious living" abound.

The bland comedy and polite mutual teasing by wealthy clowns over the trials and tribulations of living and spending in a world of the "fast buck" are very different from the comedy of Charlie Chaplin or W. C. Fields, the parody of Sinclair Lewis, the satire of Ring Lardner, Groucho Marx's assaults on the dignity of the female plutocrat, or the savage thrusts of Veblen. Charlie Chaplin reduced plutocratic dress to absurdity. W. C. Fields made plutocrats phonies and confidence men. Sinclair Lewis made Babbitt adolescent and infantile. Ring Lardner scorned the miserliness, stupidity, the meanness of baseball players, the great popular heroes who were supposed to play for glory and love of the game. These comic artists[1] are not upholding, but attacking money.

Life is a continual party in a luxurious house for the genial plutocratic clowns of TV. The orgiastic party of the Twenties has been shifted from alcohol and sex to money. We are urged, cajoled, shamed, teased, even frightened into buying. Freedom of the air, it turns out, is freedom to sell. The clown has become a salesman who vies with professional announcers in glorifying anything that

[1] Veblen, like Machiavelli and Mandeville, belongs in this tradition, whatever his "official" role as "economist."

is profitable.[2] Thus, as we see daily and nightly, comedy can be highly conservative, as well as radical. Such use is not peculiar to our time, of course. Wise authorities understand well the conservative function of comedy. Greek and Roman Saturnalias, Medieval Lords and Abbots of Misrule, the real and symbolic killing of mock kings, indicate clearly that comedy has long been used to uphold, as well as reject, authority.[3]

Parvenus whose social ambitions far exceed their social skills have been stock figures in comedy for many centuries. We do not laugh at the parvenu to keep him outside our group, but to discipline him so he will learn to act well enough to become one of us. The parvenu knows he can enter good society; what he does not know is *how* to do it—for prestige, like honor, is given, never taken. The established elite disciplines the parvenu because it fears he will confuse techniques of social climbing with the spirit of gentility. The parvenu fears his social gods because he is never quite sure of their regard and because he cannot be sure he worships correctly until they tell him so. So long as we do not have to admit the parvenu to our ranks, and indeed must keep him from our ranks (as in a caste system), manners become ritual whose transgressions are tragic, not comic. Violations of caste can be atoned only through tragic sacrifice, for only in such sacrifice can evils be purged.

Ritual manners are a kind of hierarchical prayer, led by priests who control the "grace" of hierarchy and the means by which we expiate social sins. These sins are acts which threaten the majesty and glory of symbols and offices upon which social order is believed to rest. In a plutocracy such as ours, money and the offices through which money is expressed are held sacred. We must teach our young pecuniary decency. In our colleges and schools, as in the press and TV, we use comedy to shame those who are laggard or inept earners and spenders. Jack Benny is now our national miser. He has replaced the thrifty Scot as a threat to the kind of "heroic" individual spending our business community now requires. For the glory of

[2] Through some kind of unconscious irony, nonprofit programs are called "public service" programs.

[3] It is significant that Freud uses Jewish humor for his illustrative matter on the social and psychological aspects of humor. Jewish humor is a folk humor. The Jewish God is a tragic god who never laughs. Dreams are absurd as well as solemn, and we are embarrassed as well as guilty in dreams. This fact led Freud to his book on jokes; and since jokes and all comedy in Judaism (as well as Christianity) are "low" and tragedy "high," the use of humor to outwit the majestic Super-Ego certainly parallels the relation between comedy as "low" and tragedy as high in Judaism.

capitalism is *individual* spending, in contrast to institutional and state spending which are the heroics of socialism.

The comic villain in American business is no longer the lazy worker or the tramp, but the lazy spender.In the popular comic art of the new urban civilization of America from 1880 to 1930—movies, cartoon strips, vaudeville, and nightclubs—the bum is one who will not work, is always after easy money, and who spends in a vulgar and common way when he does have money. The impecunious aristocrat, or the "innocent" aristocrat who cannot understand money and whom we meet so often in British comedy, has faint echoes in Charlie, the tramp. His elegance, while phony, is still elegance. More characteristic of American urban humor is the lazy bum who wants money but will not work to get it. He rejects the Puritan Ethic of earning, but not the Plutocratic Ethic of spending. Moon Mullins, his brother Kayo, and Uncle Willie in Frank Willard's comic strip "Moon Mullins" are such a trio. Red Skelton's Freddie, the Freeloader, now popular on TV, is another.

George McManus' cartoon strip "Bringing Up Father" (1913–1945) in which Maggie scrambles furiously for the top rung of the social ladder is in direct lineage with Molière's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme* of 1670. Jiggs, Maggie's husband, looks wistfully at the simple joys of Dinty Moore's saloon where he can drink, eat corned beef and cabbage, and spend the night at cards with Casey, Sweeny, and Larry O'Girity. But he returns to Maggie and her "swells" in the great cold marble palace that sudden fortune has brought them. Hard, driving, ambitious Maggie represents plutocratic majesty, and while we shudder as her rolling pin finds its unerring way to Jiggs' skull, we admit sadly that she is right. Millionaires must not spend their money on beer and corned beef dinners. We love Jiggs for his refusal to give up his old friends, but we realize as good Americans that he threatens the glory of money. For if riches are not to lead to some kind of orgiastic future, why should we work so hard? The older Puritan could spend only as a steward of a Lord. The new plutocrats, and certainly their wives, found such heavenly stewardship too impersonal. They wanted to spend on themselves. And to the common people, the new immigrants of the cities, an earthly paradise was more attractive and much more comprehensible.

Thus, while Jiggs resists authority, he always returns to Maggie who upholds it. Like the good folk who would rescue Huck Finn from the river and the woods, Maggie represents the conscience of

the community. She spends as the wife of a plutocrat should and tries valiantly to find a "swell" husband for her daughter. In her are embodied the principles of family and community life among a rapidly rising plutocracy. Jiggs must be punished if the glory of plutocracy is to survive. And so we forgive Maggie her violence and cruelty. She must be obeyed, for only in such obedience can a social order based on money survive.

As Scots, Irishmen, and Germans, we laugh with Americans at ourselves. We understand very well that group judgment has been passed over us, and if we choose to remain in the group, we must accept this judgment and mend our ways. The canny Scot learns to spend. He must learn to owe, as well as own money; for among Americans, credit and bragging about money—not cash and modesty over wealth—determine social prestige. To be in debt indicates confidence in one's self and in the future of American society.[4]

THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF IRONY

But there is another mode in comedy: irony, which neither accepts or rejects, but doubts. Irony helps us to endure what we cannot, or will not, change. Man, La Rochefoucauld tells us, cannot love others because he loves only himself. Even a narcissist needs a mirror to reflect the image of the self he loves so deeply. We disguise our vices as virtues to win audiences who will serve as mirrors for our pride. But the paradox of pride becomes painfully obvious as we strut and preen before audiences whom we really despise, and who, we know, despise and hate us. The saving grace in ironic comedy is the use of reason to confront our vices. At least we are not deluded; we have *chosen* to confront our vices, not to avoid or deny them. Thus, if we cannot will our fate, we can decide how to meet it.

Such faith in reason is possible only when doubt is considered a way to truth, as in reasoned discourse among equals. Where doubt is considered weakness or heresy, irony cannot be used. Where there are great gaps between classes or conditions of life, irony fails. And where reason in society is not a value, irony easily offends those in power, as the fate of Socrates, the creator of "Socratic irony," warns us. The only social certainty offered by the ironist is

[4] With the Americanization of Europe, installment buying, which transforms debt from vice to virtue, has now begun. English banks made their first installment loans to individuals in 1959.

the certainty of open and free discussion as a means to truth. He does not predict, he brings back no knowledge from heavens and utopias he alone has seen, nor does he believe in laws discovered by reason which are beyond reason in some kind of nature whose "laws" can be known but not changed. He believes that we must rely on critical intelligence, intelligence born in open and free discourse among men who believe such discourse creates and sustains social bonds.

Ironic address cannot be made to inferiors or superiors. We communicate with general publics through burlesque and broad humor. Slapstick comedy is simple, repetitious, and violent; gestures are exaggerated and prolonged. Differences between superiors and inferiors are accentuated. Action is depicted from the view of the actor. No one steps out of his role to deliver asides to other members of the cast, or to the audience. No soliloquies are held. Slapstick action is often a chase, a pursuit of the "little fellow" by the "big fellow." The big fellow makes clear by menacing gestures that the little fellow will be beaten, even killed, if caught. As the rhythm of the pursuit accelerates, we share the comic terror of the hunted clown. In such comic action no one is a witness, all—audience and actor alike—are participants. Even the scene *acts* as when telephone poles flatten out and houses crumple under the wind pressure of the racing cars which careen madly down streets where normal traffic laws, and indeed the laws of gravity itself, are suspended.

Irony holds belief, the tragic moment of truth, open to doubt. It exposes motives which the actors do not know, or seek to hide. Roles shift and change. The audience is suddenly involved in the action by being addressed directly. The ironic actor withdraws from action to become an audience to other actors and even to himself. He comments on the action in asides or in soliloquy which audiences are allowed to overhear. Such soliloquy, while "internal," is really an expression of the problem of internalizing "outer" aspects of roles which are in conflict because the roles themselves are in conflict; and it is difficult or impossible for the individual actor to resolve this conflict. Such dis-relationships among social roles always exist, indeed they are assumed in every statement of relationship. We decree punishments at the same time we pass laws; we describe treason in state constitutions which define our duties to the state; we warn men against a devil who has been created by an all-powerful and loving God.

Ironic soliloquy, like talking to one's self or the staging of dreams of the day and night, is a struggle to express problems so we can communicate about them—to the self as well as to others.[5] As we talk to ourselves we take the role of another toward the self. The self replies in turn. The ironic hero does not reject authority, but opens the majesty of authority to doubt and question. He does this through magnification of the distance between ideal and real audiences and actors.

In Chapter XXI of *Huckleberry Finn,* the King and the Duke reject feudal dignity. Kingship is burlesqued[6] by the gestures of ragged and dirty actors before a runaway slave and boy, on a raft drifting down an American river. Within a few pages a feudal duel begins. Soon burlesque shifts to irony.[7] It also becomes tragic, as we realize that Colonel Sherburn, the southern aristocrat who lives by the code of honor, is really going to shoot Boggs, a helpless drunk pleading for his life, because in a drunken fit of bragging Boggs has insulted the Colonel by threatening him.

The majesty of the Colonel is reduced to absurdity by the disproportion between the majesty of the act and the vulgarity of the audience before whom the act is played. Mark Twain underscores heavily the manners and filth of the town and its common people. "All the streets and lanes was just mud, they warn't nothing else *but* mud—mud as black as tar, and nigh about a foot deep in some places; and two or three inches deep in *all* the places. The hogs loafed and grunted around, everywheres." In passages that rival

---

[5] In acts which have a long tradition and are fully developed, as in acts of worship, erotic acts, or ceremonial civic acts, every sense is involved. We experience the meaning of home as a child through smell, touch, and taste, as well as through the eye and the ear. What we call the "motor phase" of an act is still symbolic since its meaning as a social act depends on the *form* taken by the motor elements. Dance, as much as speech, is a communication.

[6] "Well, next they (the king and duke) made out of oak laths, a couple of long swords and began to practice the sword-fight—the duke called himself Richard III; and the way they laid on, and pranced about the raft was grand to see. But by-and-by the king tripped and fell overboard. . ."

[7] It is also grotesque, which is never comic but a kind of contrived nightmare. The grotesque evokes horror and terror, not laughter. It is used in both tragedy and comedy, but neither the tragic or the comic hero can be grotesque because the grotesque character is not disobeying commandments he understands and can will freely to obey or disobey. He is beyond reason, a creature of dark demoniac powers. He is mad, but not evil or comic. Our fear of madmen stems from being unable to communicate with them. We cannot use madmen for sacrificial victims (we must find our murderers sane before we kill them), because they cannot know moral suffering and thus cannot atone for their sins, or for ours.

Swift's terrible pages on the rutting, stinking Yahoos, the beasts who think themselves men, Mark Twain describes the townspeople:

> "There was empty dry-goods boxes under the awnings, and loafers roosting on them all day long, whittling them with their Barlow knives; and chawing tobbacco, and gaping and yawning and stretching—a mighty ornery lot. . . . There was as many as one loafer leaning up against every awning-post, and he most always had his hands in his britches pockets, except when he fetched them out to lend a chaw of tobbacco. . . You'd see a muddy sow and a litter of pigs come lazying along the street and whollop herself right down in the way, where folks had to walk around her, and she'd stretch out, and shut her eyes, and wave her ears, whilst the pigs was milking her, and look as happy as if she was on salary. And pretty soon you'd hear a loafer sing out, 'Hi! *so* boy! sick him, Tige!' and away the sow would go, squealing most horrible, with a dog or two swinging to each ear, and three or four dozen more a-coming; and then you would see all the loafers get up and watch the thing out of sight, and laugh at the fun and look grateful for the noise. Then they'd settle back again till there was a dog-fight—unless it might be putting turpentine on a stray dog and setting fire to him, or tying a tin can to his tail and see him run himself to death."

This is the field of honor where Colonel Sherburn upholds the dignity of a southern gentleman.

But within a few pages Colonel Sherburn changes from villain to hero.[8] The people's rage mounts into hysteria. They rush to the Colonel's home, "ripping and tearing and smashing" the fence palings. The Colonel "steps out on to the roof of his little front porch, with a double-barrel gun in his hand, and takes his stand, perfectly calm and deliberate, not saying a word. The racket stopped, and the wave sucked back." The Colonel "run his eye slow along the crowd; and whenever it struck, the people tried to outgaze him, but they couldn't; they dropped their eyes and looked sneaky." And then begins one of the most damning attacks in all literature on cowards and murderers who confuse punishment with justice:

[8] Surely one of the most magical moments in American literature.

> "The idea of *you* lynching anybody! It's amusing. The idea of you thinking you had pluck enough to lynch a man! . . . . Why a *man's* safe in the hands of ten thousand of your kind—as long as it's day time and you're not behind him.
>
> "Do I know you? I know you clear through. I was born and raised in the South, and I've lived in the North; so I know the average all around. The average man's a coward. . ."

As he finishes his mocking tongue-lashing of the crowd, the Colonel tosses his gun across his left arm and cocks it. The crowd "washed back sudden, and then broke all apart and went tearing off every which way. . ."

We forgive the murder of the drunken Boggs, for now the Colonel upholds a principle of social order which must be upheld if democracy is to be saved from "mobocracy." The individual must stand up for his rights and he must be brave enough to fight for them. The principle of order which must be upheld is the principle of law. The breakdown of law in mob rule is the curse of democracy. The Colonel asks: "Why don't your juries hang murderers? Because they're afraid the man's friends will shoot them in the back, in the dark—and it's just what they would do." So, "they always acquit; and then a *man* goes in the night, with a hundred masked cowards at his back, and lynches the rascal."

In the figure of the Colonel and his relation to the people, the problem of democracy is explored through every resource of art. Comedy, irony, tragedy, and the grotesque are invoked to express the problem of democracy. Neither the southern gentleman nor the people can be trusted. What then is the solution for democracy and how can we build a community of free men? Mark Twain did not know. He loved democracy, and longed for its realization. As he grew older, despair often overwhelmed him. America was right to reject the southern aristocrat, but it is wrong to find the voice of God in people who are cowards and fools. The people of Mark Twain's towns in the Mississippi valley, the "Valley of Democracy," are not to be purified in some golden day of plenty. They have already fallen from grace. Huck and Nigger Jim return to this grace when they abandon the town and return to the river and the woods; for here and only here can they live in joy and love. Here they meet Thoreau, as later they pass on their spirit to Frank Lloyd

Wright whose Prairie Houses return homes to nature. These heroes of the American spirit, like Huck, find refuge in nature. As our cities break up in "flight" to the country and suburbs, it becomes clear that Huck and Thoreau understood the dilemma of a people who would live on freeholds of their own, yet who must bring these islands into some kind of community. For if individuality brings loneliness and isolation, what is its human value?

There is a kind of double-talk in irony where we say one thing but really mean another. This is not simply an artistic trick, for when we act we act before several audiences, and sometimes we must act before all of them at the same time. We are like the politician making a speech. He speaks to the general public, but on the platform are honored guests who represent the conscience of the community; and somewhere in the audience are opponents waiting to heckle him when they can. Hovering over all are insignias of the flag, the cross, and the institution sponsoring the speech—these are the symbolization of the great principles upon which social order is presumed to rest. None of these must be neglected, yet none can be singled out too much or for too long. Irony permits us to say things we must say to superiors or inferiors to uphold conventions necessary to social order and yet, to express our disquiet over these conventions. In ironic address all become equal, since we "let them in" on what is really the truth about the convention.

The strain (sometimes indeed the impossibility) of pleasing different and often antagonistic factions in "outer" audiences is experienced by everyone in his appeals to his "inner" audiences. Such appeals are an address. We *talk* to ourselves. The Id, Ego, and Super-Ego must communicate to function. Even if the Freudian "cathects," or concentrates desire upon some object or person, he does so in communication. If the Ego cathects "the presentations of objects with libido—to change narcissistic libido into *object* libido," as Freud tells us,[9] what determines these "presentations"? They cannot, as sensory images, arise from soma alone, for an image is a symbol not a charge.

As we address the Super-Ego whose "calls of conscience" demand response, we feel at the same time the call of the Id. Such quandaries are met in ironic comedy by *exposing,* not by hiding, inner conflicts. The Ego *confronts* the Super-Ego with the Id, as the

[9] In Chapter II of *An Outline of Psychoanalysis.*

comic actor confronts one audience with another, to let *them* reconcile demands made upon him. Irony is like arbitration where disputants are treated as equals, locked in a room, and told not to come out until they have settled their dispute among themselves. We are never quite sure just how the dispute will be resolved, but we are determined that it shall be faced. It is as if we say: "Well, I don't know how to solve this problem, but at least I admit my ignorance. Certainly I am not taken in the way those fools are who refuse to see the problem."

Irony is a kind of complicity among equals. The air of detachment, of playfulness, so characteristic of irony, disturbs a superior for he is never sure his majesty is believed. Leaders do not want us detached, but committed. Thus Carlyle, a true believer after his conversion in *Sartor Resartus,* tells us: "An ironic man, with his sly stillness, and ambuscading ways, may be viewed as a pest to society." Inferiors dislike irony because they are never quite sure whether the ironist means to insult or compliment them. When we teach children, we soon discover that what we think ironic they often find insulting. But with colleagues, friends, brothers and sisters, fellow workers, or with those with whom we share any kind of common dilemma as equals, irony is often used. Through irony we discuss the shortcomings of superiors and inferiors, even as we admit that their weaknesses must be endured, for without superiors and inferiors social order would be impossible.

But irony does not simply "debunk" principles of social order which make authority possible. The ironist makes reason an ultimate value. He believes that doubt is a principle of social order. Like all comedy, irony keeps society flexible and open to change. It does not favor violent rejection, as in obscene comedy (which really is a kind of curse), nor does it favor devout acceptance, as in scornful comedy (which blesses snobbery). It is the comedy of reason, because it keeps reason at work in situations where it threatens to become subordinate to unreason.

There is a kind of superiority in irony, but it is the superiority of detachment. Perhaps this is why two old friends, or husband and wife, so often greet each other ironically in formal and ceremonial occasions where protocol and ritual "company" manners must be followed. We mock slightly the rather grand manners we have been putting on to meet the formal demands of the occasion. It is as if we say: "You and I know what trumpery all this bowing and scraping

is, but it's the way you keep things going." There are many expressions which convey this kind of ironic comment. The wink, the shrug, raised eyebrows, eyes opened wide in mock amazement, any gesture which expresses doubt over the good sense of what we must be so serious about—all are familiar forms of ironic communication.

Ironic address of the self (as well as others) is an attempt at control through increased self-consciousness. We address ourselves to *affect* what we do, not simply to comment on our action. Incongruities between ideals and practices are more apparent to the self than to others. The curse of self-love is that we end by knowing our favorite subject—the self—too well. The neurotic deludes others far more easily than himself. Even in the deepest compulsion, the self stands apart as witness. Who has not vowed never to love or to believe again? Yet who has not watched himself begin again to love or to believe those who have caused so much pain and sorrow? At such times we turn to the self and echo La Rochefoucauld's ironic courtier who tells us that man is constant only in his inconsistency. Yet even as we watch ourselves plunge into causes where faith stifles reason, we struggle to overcome our madness through irony, as at other times we struggle to subdue the senses through mortification. For so long as we confront our madness there is hope of controlling it. In ironic self-address we hope to expose the mystery of the moment of faith which places action beyond reason.

Irony is the great comic means by which various factions within the self and the community question one another. Irony uncovers the magic and mystery which lurk in every social bond. As he turns to his audience of equals, the ironic clown transcends superior and inferior alike. He can take the point of view of one toward the other without seeming treacherous to either. The tragic hero, in life as in art, must treat difference as heresy, and doubt as weakness. The ironic hero detaches himself from belief in any one course of action, so he can respect and reflect on others. He does not want to mock or "debunk," but to keep faith open to reason in action. The ironist is not concerned with using reason to "perceive" the world, but to act in it.

Awe and reverence depend on strangeness and mystery; we use such mystery to enhance the "supernatural" power of social bonds. Our styles of punishment, like Greek ritual drama, are community tragedies. The majesty of the law must be upheld. But laws are often broken, or when obeyed, sometimes augment the disorders

they are supposed to prevent. Incongruities between the ideals and practices of authority often threaten the majesty of the offices they uphold. Even when authorities recognize dis-relationships between social ends and means, *how* to admit these with small risk to their majesty and to the social order upon which their majesty rests is a problem. Tragic invocation to punishing and vengeful gods preserves the mystery and majesty of the principles of social order by which we live.

Comedy, especially ironic comedy, *institutionalizes* doubt and question. It is *sanctioned* disrespect. The ironic clown lacks the mystery of community priests, but his social office is no less real. Bob Hope, "ribbing" the President at the annual Washington gridiron dinner, is not "out-witting" a censor but performing as a highly honored public functionary—the people's Fool. His laughter, like the incantations of the priests, is sacred, because his jokes create comic forms which we use to ward off threats to social order. The incongruities and follies of the President and his staff are brought to light. The mystifications and grandeur of the President's office are opened for examination. His office is returned to reason through laughter, when it submits itself to the greatest power of all—the social solidarity of the community.

COMEDY AND GROUP IDENTIFICATION

The burst of glory in comedy has many roots. One of these is our sudden reassurance that while some aspect of authority is threatened the *principles* of authority are not. The individual priest may be venal, the soldier cowardly, the scholar pedantic, but the church is still holy, the army still brave, the school a community of scholars searching for wisdom. Indeed only to the degree that the institution is idealized can there be sufficient incongruity between the ideal and the real to excite laughter. We laugh with Swift at the pedantic scholar because he uses his mind for such trivial purposes, not because he uses his mind. We laugh with Rabelais at lustful big-bellied monks who use their office to bully and cheat. But this is possible because kindness, love, and intelligence are monkish virtues, too, as the inscription of the Abbey of Theleme reads:

"Here enter you, pure, honest, faithful, true,
Expounders of the Scriptures old and new.
Whose glosses do not blind our reason, but

Make it to see the clearer, and who shut
Its passages from hatred, avarice,
Pride, factions, convenants, and all sort of vice.
Come, settle here a charitable faith,
Which neighbourly affection nourisheth.
And whose light chasteth all corrupter hence,
Of the blest word, from the aforesaid sense.
The Holy Sacred Word,
May it always afford
T'us all in common,
Both man and woman,
A spiritual shield and sword,
The Holy Sacred Word."

Against this benign and sunny vision of "neighbourly affection," "villainous hypocrites, wrangling barristers, pinching usurers," and "makers of demurs in love adventures" and "peevish jealous curs," become ridiculous. For they set themselves apart from the brotherhood of joyous, loving Thelemites who are the true citizens of an ideal commonwealth.

As we submit our problems to group consideration we become more confident of solving them. We cannot laugh at what we secretly or unconsciously fear and we cannot think well about fears we cannot submit to group discourse. We submit to the discipline of comedy because we believe it necessary to social solidarity and group survival. Communication is kept open and free through laughter because laughter *clarifies* where tragedy *mystifies*. Tragic art and religious ritual lead to victimage and mystification because the ultimate audience of ritual is supernatural power. When the tragic artist and his audience are in complete accord, the most terrible violence and death may be, indeed *must* be, visited upon victims who symbolize threats to social order. But comedy opens to reason the mystifications of social hierarchy, whose pomp and wonder are so often enhanced by secular variations of priestly art. Because we possess forms created in the wonderful art of Aristophanes, Rabelais, Molière, Shakespeare, Swift, Mozart, Verdi, and in our own day Mark Twain and Charlie Chaplin, we can communicate over our many social incongruities.

Comedy is a cry of the heart as much as tragedy. Like Don Quixote we grow old and must find in memory and fancies of another time what we can no longer find in the present. Like Gulliver

we see pride confused with reason. Like Mozart we see lover's vows vanish in a moment of lust. As we laugh together, loneliness and alienation vanish. Such laughter is a moment of reaffirmation. We re-create our social bonds even as we recognize our differences. When we laugh at the haughty gentleman who slips into the swimming pool, as he backs away from the lady to whom he bows, we feel superior because his formal dress becomes ridiculous in a swimming pool, and the elaborate status pantomime of bowing to a lady has ended incongruously. If, in helping the drenched plutocrat out of the pool, we too tumble in, laughter mounts until in a moment of complete disregard for the expense of our plutocratic status trappings, we *all* jump in the pool, we are "in the drink" together and flounder about in a mad, but glorious moment of solidarity as we reaffirm once again our common human bonds.

We laugh at immigrants so long as we are secure in the glory of our principles of social order. As we laugh at the thrifty Scot we feel the glory of our boldness with money and at the same time make him aware of how he must spend if he is to be one of us. There is hostility in our laughter, but it is not the hostility of derisive laughter which ends in alienation and hate. We are anxious to prepare the Scot for membership in the American community. Such joking is really a form of instruction, a kind of social control, directed at those we intend to accept once they learn to behave properly, that is, like us.

Address in comedy is to the supernatural power of society, but a society purified by love and reason whose glory is joy. The comic actor must keep alive belief in reason. His dilemma is how to explain why men so capable of reason and joy are yet so irrational and sad. He resolves this by showing that men sin because they abandon reason. But ignorance is not lack of knowledge of how to think, but of not testing thought for its social relevance. Great comedy is not born in contempt, but in love of man in society. It is a kind of inverse sublimity, exalting and raising into our affections what is inferior to us and at the same time returning our superiors to our affections by showing them struggling to make sense out of their world.

"De-bunkers" enlist our sympathy by creating the illusion that we do not share the follies of the world we see and by giving us vicarious victories over vice. But after they have exposed the evil of the villain and convinced us that virtues are but vices in disguise, we suddenly pause. For if no man can trust another, how is society

possible? Why should vice bind us any more than virtue? At such questions the comic mask must drop. Now we must know what can be right in a world where so much is wrong, if the world is to be worthwhile.

Thus, all comedy is highly moral, but it is the morality of reason in society. It seeks to unmask vices by confronting ends or ideals with means or practice. The final transcendence in comedy is society itself, people who in hate and love try to resolve differences. Laughter is the scourge of vice, just as tears are the purge of evil. Vice is ridiculous, for its pleasures turn into pain and suffering. Great comic artists distrust tragedy, not because they do not suffer or take a melancholy view of life, but because they think tragedy alone is not enough to purge men of folly. La Rochefoucauld's dislike of tears ("misfortune breeds a variety of hypocrisies"), pride in suffering,[10] and gravity ("a physical mystification to conceal spiritual defects") is not based in destruction of pleasure, but of reason. Whatever removes the individual from a social context is irrational. For if man is beyond society, how can we think about him? And if we cannot think about man, what is the good of thought? Comedy creates joy, joy creates social euphoria which deepens love and trust[11] in each other. Comedy is ethical because it is rational[12] and rational because it leads to good social relationships.

Hierarchical address in comedy begins by exposing authority, as when La Rochefoucauld tells us that virtues are but vices in disguise. But it must end in some kind of authority. Vices may be disguised but their disguises can be seen through. Whoever sees through them is the "true" authority. Clues to such authority abound in moments of address, or presentation of the self. The authority in the courtly act is the king, whose authority in turn comes from a principle of nobility, which in turn is derived from God. But the principle of courtship addressed by La Rochefoucauld is not the noble as warrior, priest, or statesman, but as grand seigneur, the great gentleman, who rules through manners which are based in the authority of God *in,* not beyond, society.

---

[10] "A man convinced of his own merit will accept misfortune as an honor, for thus can he persuade others, as well as himself, that he is a worthy target for the arrows of fate."

[11] "Trust contributes more to conversation than does wit." That is, reason depends on friendship, a relationship where all must be equal to make discussion possible.

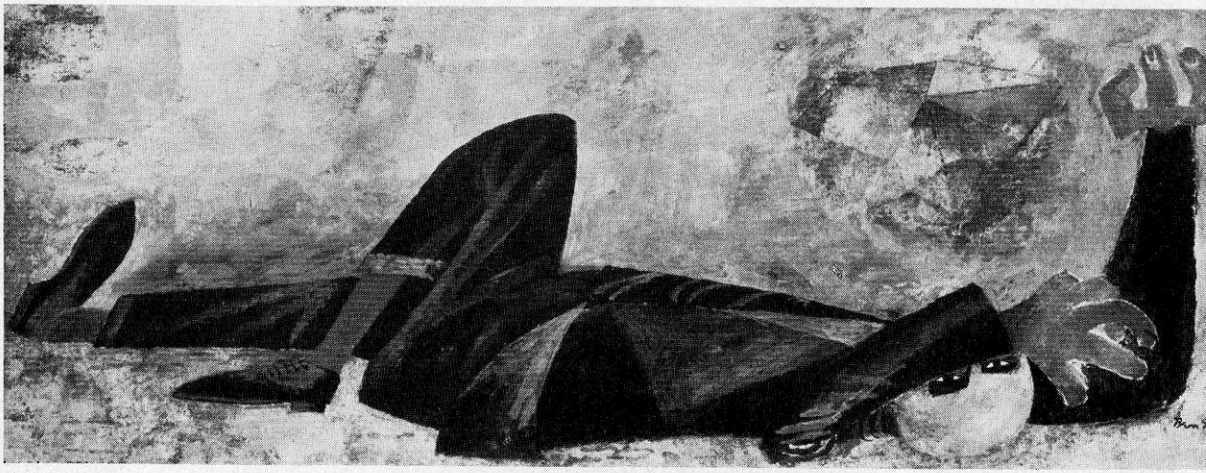
[12] Spinoza states the case for joy in his Ethics: ". . . men being moved not by fear or aversion, but solely by the affect of joy, may endeavor as much as they can to live under the rule of reason." (Appendix, Part IV, xxv.)

Ben Shahn is one of the internationally known American artists whose work goes to prove that "social realism" is not the patented product of Soviet artists. Moreover, while the doctrine as practiced in Russia often takes the form of highly propagandized and almost formless representation of the "happy lives of workers and peasants," Shahn's use of it is distinguished in at least two ways: (1) his subject matter never dominates the expression at the expense of color, line, and form; and (2) the object represented is not an appeal to the acceptance of a pre-established political or economic end. The former characteristic marks him as an artist; the second, as a humanist and satirist. While his craftsmanship commands the respect of all who would view art, his satirical prodding of the American social scene has more than once caused inquiries into his political sympathies.

Arts in Society *is grateful to Miss Edith Halpert, director of the Downtown Gallery, New York City, and Shahn's agent, for her cooperation in making available the photographs of the portfolio. Title, description, and present owner are listed with each reproduction. Our further thanks are due to the artist and to the owners for permission to print the following series.*

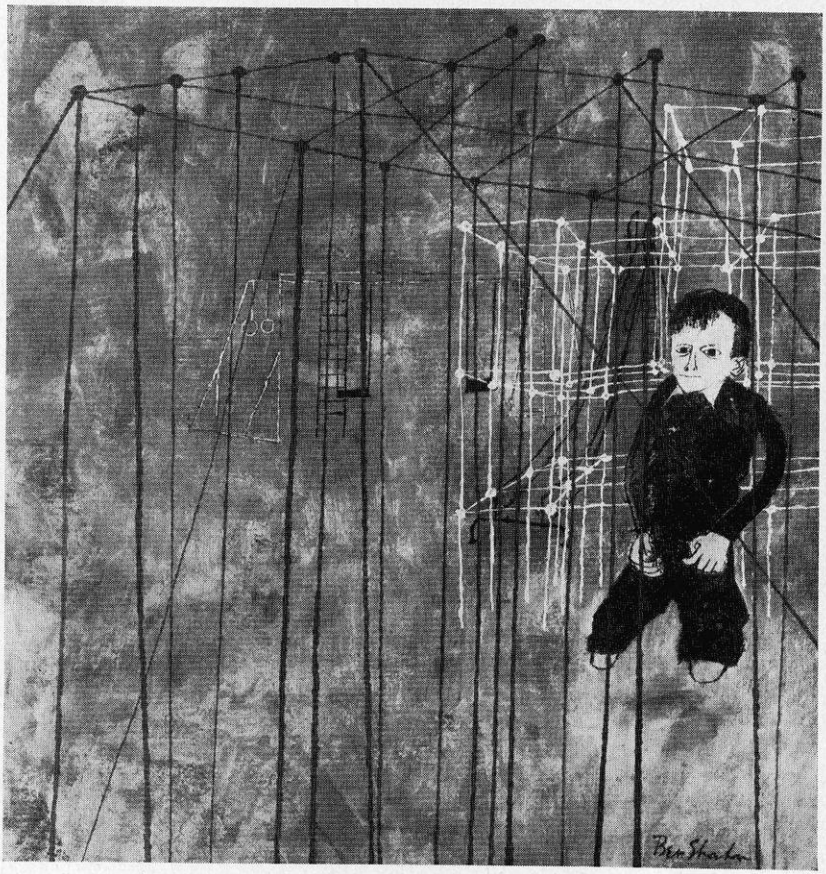
BEN SHAHN | *portfolio*

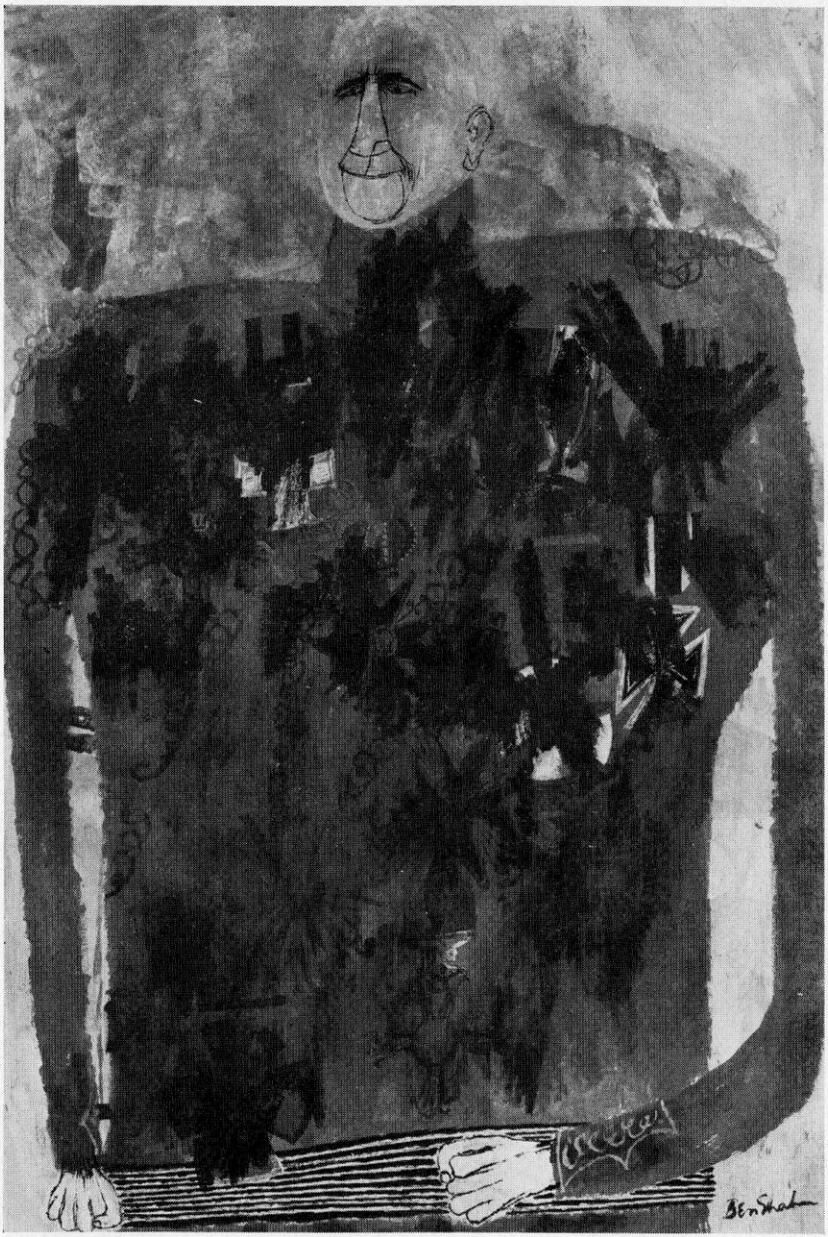
Man (1952), 21 x 8, Tempera, Joseph Hirshhorn Collection



Conversation (1958), 25½ x 36¾, Watercolor, Whitney Museum Collection

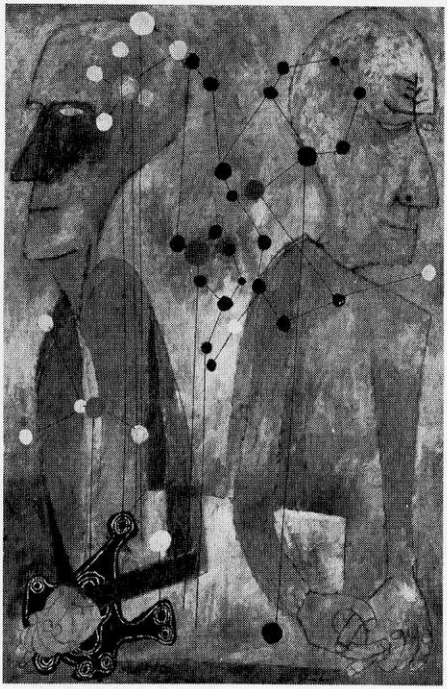
The Playground (1953), 14 x 15, Tempera, The Lawrence Fleischmans Collection



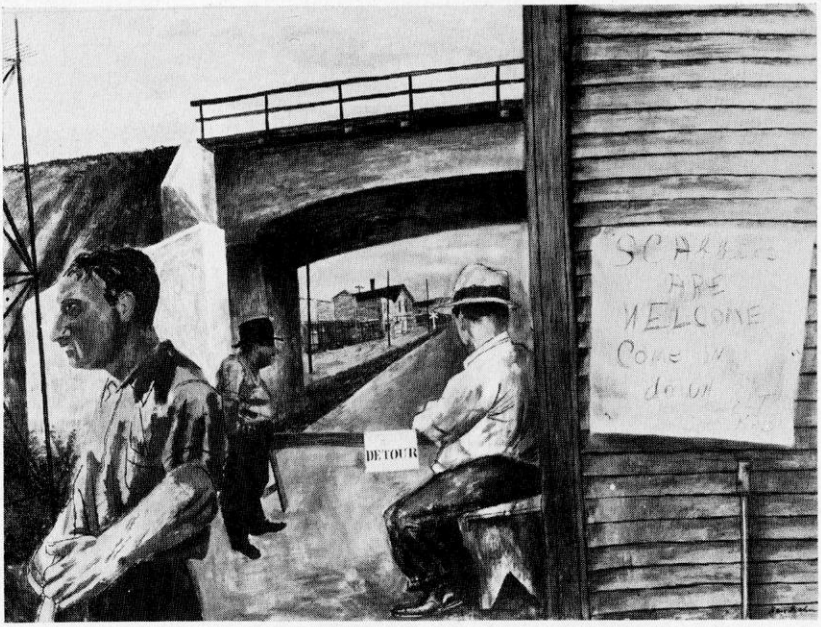


The Defaced Portrait (1955), 27 x 40, Tempera, The Hake Levins Collection

Nocturne (1949), 40 x 27, Tempera, Cornell University Collection



Obsession (1957), 30½ x 47, Tempera
Parkway Triangle Co. Collection



Scabbies Are Welcome, Tempera, Earl Ludwin Collection

We Want Peace (1946), 27 x 41¼, Lithograph Poster, Museum of Modern Art Collection, Gift of Mrs. S. S. Spink

Head of Oppenheimer (1955), 12½ x 17½, Drawing, Mr. Harold Clifford Collection

Mr. Ray is a former contributor to, and editor of, the Chicago Review. *His poetry, fiction, and criticism have appeared in such magazines as the* Nation, *the* New Republic, *the* London Magazine, *and the* Paris Review. *He has edited* The Chicago Review Anthology *and received the Young Writers Award from the* New Republic. *He now teaches at Northern Illinois University.*

DAVID RAY | *three poems*

URSULA

Outside, affectionate eyes
Grateful for steak
And Rocquefort dressing;
Smiles and anecdotes
Of prewar childhood Europe.
We had held hands
In the subway.

Inside, huddled in an air
Raid shelter, reduced
To ask immorally,
"Do you mind. . ."?
A spot of air above,
After love, burning
Children running in streets,
Rivers of flaming tar,
Beside an orchard, trees
Blazing with blackened apples.

PROVINCIAL MEMORY

Brooklyn Bridge has a little bounce;
A small wave flutters the grey string
Of its pavement. The clean eye sees
This arch shake like a grey leaf
And the tiny beasts crawl over,
And a cab driver is a poet
In Manhattan at five Sunday morning
Heading toward Grand Central:
Look at that big red sun trying
To come out and the tranquil water,
He says, Goddamn, look at that bridge!

Manhattan is strings strung in air,
And at a party I kissed the shoulder
Of a giggling actress, talcumed.
She talked cute, with words like
Kooky and *meshuggah.* She took an olive
From my fingers and now, back home
In a drab town, full of Chevrolets
And churches, I see her name on a
Marquee. I will sit in the dark
Chanking popcorn. My eyes goggle:
She is somewhere beyond me;
Somehow I lost the bridge to her;
She is a shoulder, an olive, remembered.

MOVIE REVIEW: *I WANT TO LIVE*

Barbara Graham now joins the list
Of those who paid for their supper
And years later are fed with love.
She's there now with Dreiser's Clyde
And Bigger Thomas and The Quare Fellow.
How transfixed we sit in the theater
And mutter disapproval, shudder to see
The monstrous engines commissioned killers
Built to strap and slap their victims
To submission. We have no part of this.
How quietly and with caring protests
Everyone excuses his role, saying
Oh dear, this is such a terrible thing
Which somebody makes us do.
We're all so sorry it is so.
Matrons and executioners wring hands,
Blame the governor. He blames God.
Yet every hand in the theater
Throws the switch and every hand
In the wide land throws the switch.
Let no man who has not screamed
His indignation snigger at black hoods.

Mr. Kaelin is an associate editor of Arts in Society

E. F. KAELIN | *notes and discussion*

THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION OF THE FINE ARTS

I

The entrance of The University of Wisconsin into the field of publications in "Adult Education in the Arts" has posed some serious problems in administration to the Extension Division of the University, its Arts Committee, and to a succession of editorial staffs. What is to be its content? The level of its communication? Who is to edit? And how? Who is to contribute? And what? Who is to pay? And why?

We do not suppose that such a list of questions is either exhaustive of the series of headaches and frustration produced in the course of the past two years, or that each question is independent of the others. Armed only with a title, *ARTS IN SOCIETY*, which suggests that our magazine should be interested in the arts and their effects upon society as well as with the problems of teaching the arts —whether it be the production or the consumption of the art product, its creation or appreciation—the editors have insisted that it is the express purpose of this journal not to be "academic" or "professional" with the connotations of sterility and alienation these epithets carry to any enterprise they may be affixed to, but to promulgate the arts and the benefits they may bring to any society which is enlightened enough to allow their pursuit. It is for this reason we have chosen to (1) print outstanding examples of creative works, whatever might be their source; (2) print critical articles illustrating, describing, or defending the roles art may play in the construction, criticism, or reorganization of the society in which we live. Articles are solicited from anyone who has something to say in either of these two directions; in particular, we have sought material from philosophers on the philosophy of art, from sociologists on the sociology of art, from educators on the teaching of art, from artists on the making of art, from galleries on the display and distribution of art, from critics of all the arts on specific judgments of the worth of particular works of art. If articles on certain of the

various art media have not yet appeared, the reason seems clear that not all artists are equally adept at expressing themselves in a verbal medium, or extremely motivated to do so. That the motivation should be lacking in a creative artist, who quite correctly assumes that his work speaks for itself, is easier to understand than the lack of enthusiasm shown by critics and commentators, whose ego may be identified with, and demand, that prestige which a beginning magazine can only lack. But what might be said for the educators themselves? The main body of this discussion is an attempt to answer this question.

For the past two years the annual meetings of the National Committee on Art Education have been dedicated to the subject of "the art in art education." Outside of the apparent interest in defining and evaluating art objects, the aim of the participants seems to have been to emphasize the need of producing artists, *i.e.,* students capable of producing effective works of art, as well as future teachers of the arts. The irony of this emphasis is that a closer look at the supposed dichotomy will show that there are no grounds for any dispute over the matter in the first place. We are not arguing here that there is no difference between an artist and an art teacher. It is too painfully obvious that in many cases the artist who is teaching in a recognized art school is no educator and just as obvious and painful to see that some of the teachers engaged in art education are not artists. Nor are we suggesting that an artist is born (or inspired) and not made (or taught); techniques and inspiration go hand in hand in the creation of the work. What we are arguing is that artists are artists only because they produce works of art and that teachers are teachers of art only when they produce students who in turn produce works of art. The emphasis has thus shifted to the work of art and it is there to be found when it is made by an artist whether he is self-taught or has learned his craft at the hand of another master—or even at the hand of one something less than a master. It is imperative, then, that we return to the work. What do we find there?

One answer to this query may be of extreme importance to contemporary art educators. An impartial analysis of works of art and our experiences of them may yield reasons to support certain art educator prejudices and to reject others. By appealing to experiences which are common, we shall hope to convince even the least endowed of the adults engaged as teachers or students in adult edu-

cation; we can, of course, hope for no more objectivity than that afforded by the communality of an experience, nor espouse a more worthy aim. It is a common assumption, for example, that education for adults must be cast on a level which only a "layman" can understand. And a layman is one not conversant with the subtleties of a given field of inquiry. Good enough. Viewed in this light, the assumption is not so much false as misleading. To educate anyone to anything one must begin with the level of the student's development at the start of his education. But this is equally true of resident and adolescent students as well as of adults. The suggestion that adolescents may be expected to read a sentence with more than one qualifying clause and understand what is being said, but not an "adult" student, seems contrary to common sense, especially since one might properly expect a higher degree of motivation, if not of sophistication due to his broader experience, upon the part of any adult who enrolls in the course in question at a time when his formal education has long since passed. Whatever the terminology used, and no matter how complex the sentences in which the terms occur, there is always the added pedagogical assumption that the speaker or writer knows whereof he speaks because what is said or written refers to some characteristic of his own experience which he hopes to communicate to his audience. It is clear enough that critics and commentators must meet this demand of objectivity; their job is to explain. The question is: to what extent must an artist meet the same demand? Do artworks communicate? And if so, what?

If we can answer these questions, we should have gone a long way to justify the inclusion of original works of art in a "journal of the arts in adult education." If, for example, it is true that the fine arts in and of themselves tend to educate their "appreciators," the case has been made, and some doubt has been cast upon the propriety of the term "appreciation" as descriptive of the effect of the work upon its audience. In order to make this case, we shall address ourselves to a prior question: "What is expressed in a work of art?"

Too many critics have attempted an answer to this question without reflecting upon the nature of the thing assumed to be the vehicle of expression. Is a nonobjective painting a work of art? If so, is it likewise true that an objective painting is a work of art? If we take "modern" art as our criterion of identification, and apply it to the traditional, we shall be led to doubt that anything, before the work of the French impressionists, was in fact a work we could

call "art." But the same is true if we reverse the procedure and compare the moderns against the traditionalists. Obviously they are different. What makes each a work of art?

There is a danger here of using the expression "art" in its two senses at once. Sometimes we say, "That is a work of art," and mean by it that the work is good or excellent; if we do, we are using the term normatively. We have applied some norm or standard to the work in question and have judged its worth. The earlier questions put to a modern and a traditional work in this normative sense can only produce confusion. Quite clearly if the modern is the standard of excellence the traditional must suffer in comparison and vice-versa. The second sense of the term "art" is a purely descriptive one. In asking the question above with reference to either the modern or the traditional style, it is quite clear that both are works of art in this sense. Both are expressions of a thought, feeling, desire, or value in a sensuous medium. Yet both are different. As a matter of fact, from a psychological viewpoint the experience of a modern painting has as much in common with music or the dance as it does with traditional representational painting. And no one property seems to be common to all media of expression. What does the person do who adopts the task of describing works of art?

One way of starting the inquiry is to point out the various kinds of things to be investigated. We are interested in musical compositions, paintings, architecture, sculpture, dances, novels, poems, theatrical performances, and the like. Now, although it is true that no one art medium is in any way specifically like any other, it is apparent that they all have in common one general property: each is an expression in some kind of sensuous material. Thus, if we are to describe the vehicle of artistic expression, it is not out of the question to begin a catalogue of the elements, beginning with the sensuous, which may go together to make up a work of art; and this in a purely descriptive sense. The problem of normative judgment is not here in question. That is a longer argument, and perhaps more difficult to understand.

II

Descriptively, the vehicle of artistic expression may be considered primarily in terms of its "sensuous surface." The term "surface" here refers to all the values of the medium used in the expression

as they are organized in the perception of individuals contemplating the work of art. It includes the play of colors and attitudes of lines in painting; the melody, harmony, and rhythm of music; the style, tone, and rhythm of prose. In certain of the arts, *e.g.,* nonobjective painting and the so-called absolute music, the experience of the art object is exhausted by the experience of the sensuous surface and its attendant mood. Now, since all art forms present a sensuous surface of the kind described and the measure of the artist's ability as a technician is the deftness with which he may construct a surface for the expression of his "idea," it has been assumed by some thinkers that aesthetic value is limited to this single element of an aesthetic object. Such a position, when consciously maintained, is called a "thin" doctrine of aesthetics. It is thin, because it purposely excludes any element of representation in the consideration of the value of the piece. Let us examine a judgment on a statue. An ultra-purist, one espousing the thin doctrine of aesthetics, would maintain that the representative quality of the statue is irrelevant: if the statue represents a Virgin, the likeness of the statue to the image or ideal concept we entertain with respect to the Virgin is beside the point; the only requirement for an aesthetic judgment would be that the statue—not the Virgin—be well built. In defense of this position, certain of its adherents appeal to the well-known distinction between a blue-print or a workaday photograph and a "shimmering sensuous surface" vibrant with a life of its own.

It may be clear from this description that the cover painting of this issue is nothing more than such a surface. Although the artist makes some claim to "representing a city," he expressly states that he is not interested in presenting a literal visual impression of the object. He "abstracts" from the city until he has achieved a surface which yields a mood, taken by him to be the mood of the city. Since no one viewing or series of viewings gives any objective representation of the city, his abstraction is complete; no object is seen within the confines of his composition and his painting is therefore called "nonobjective." Does the viewer have to relate the mood of the sensuous surface to the mood of the city in order to understand the painting? The answer to this question will be given in the third section of this discussion. Suffice it to note here that some art objects are limited to the surface elements of perception. It should be clear, if this description is adequate, that a viewer who looks for some depth in a painting which contains none is bound to be disappointed.

Much of the dissatisfaction with modern art stems from the ignorance of the nature of nonobjective art—a fact which is all the more astounding since music has almost always been of this nonobjective nature, as is much of the dance and some poetry.

Whether we look at the piece under discussion as a nonobjective work or as a representative picture depends, to be sure, upon the work itself. To exclude any representative, or depth, elements upon principle is a highly arbitrary procedure. Let us reconsider the example of the sculpted Virgin. We may agree with the purists that a great deal of the aesthetic value of the statue derives from the artist's manner of depicting the subject; but we may still disagree with the concept of a technique of depicting which is entirely divorced from the object depicted. If the artist distorts the ideal image, this distortion is visible on the surface of the sculpture. But any distortion is only a means for abstracting from what is taken to be the real object depicted. In order to judge the effect of a partial abstraction, it therefore becomes necessary to conceive the idea of what the nonabstracted object would be. In other words, some element of depth (representation) enters into the structure of the art object. What are these elements?

The first element of "depth" which enters into the artifact is a represented object; and with objects, any associated feeling or emotion connected with them. The Virgin may call out feelings of reverence, or disgust, depending upon one's attitude toward the person alleged to be the mother of God. Which of these associated feelings is the correct one? Obviously there is no way of answering this question outside of the context of the work itself. If the figure is distorted, the distortion may reinforce the depth feeling with the mood of the surface; or some other object may be depicted in such a way that the relation between the two objects would allow a clearer conception of an idea to be associated with the first. If, for example, the Virgin is depicted with her foot on the back of a writhing serpent, we may be authorized in conceiving the relationship of the Virgin to the Temptor, symbolized in the serpent. Mary, the symbol of purity, takes her vengeance on the Evil One for his victory over Eve, the mother of all; and womanhood is vindicated. Much of the energy spent in art history has been of this nature; and it is certainly a part of a complete aesthetic analysis of any work of art which does in fact contain iconic content.

The question to pose at this juncture is the extent to which iconic meanings can be considered "the meaning" of the work. Already we have enough framework to sketch out an answer. If iconic meanings are only one of the series of elements of the work of art —starting with the sensuous surface—it is no more valid to select them from the total context than it is to select the surface itself as exhaustive of the meaning or "message" of the art object in question. The work of art is the total context of relations obtaining among all the elements. And, it may be noted in passing, it is for this reason that many works of art rejected as "obscene," "sacrilegious," "counter-revolutionary," "communistic," and the like, have been rejected for nonaesthetic reasons. These epithets are moral, religious, political, and socio-economic; and not aesthetic. The aesthetic judgment states a relation between the depth and surface or between the surface and its mood; and when we perceive a work of art, we perceive the tension holding these two factors together into a single context. Theories maintaining this necessity of relating surface to depth, in aesthetic judgment of "realistic" works, are called "thick," as opposed to the thin described above.

But objects and ideas do not exhaust aesthetic depth. It is clear that in moving from the perception of representative objects and their associated (depth) feelings to the conception of an idea, there has been a motion away from the mood of the surface. Is there any element which serves to bring the attention of the viewer back to the surface in order for the experience to be a single or unified perception? Ideas are abstract and engage the intellect. To that extent, whenever they occur in the perception of the work of art, they tend to destroy the sense of "presentational immediacy," the sense of a feeling we attribute to the object as if it were one of its qualities rather than one of our own affective states. One of the values in perceiving a work of art is precisely this feeling. How is it retrieved in the so-called "intellectual arts"?

The answer to this question is readily available by a further consideration of a particular art-form, literature. A poem has a surface which is primarily auditory. But in a poem we are never merely presented with rhythmic sounds; we are presented with meaningful rhythmic sounds. We perceive the words and almost immediately conceive their meanings. And the entertainment of these meanings, the formation of ideas or concepts, tends to divert our attention from the pressing immediacy of the surface thereby bringing it into

contact with the intellectual content of the depth or content of the piece. What brings us back to the focal interest of the surface is, of course, the set of images we put into play to make the ideas more concrete. But images are vicarious or substitute sensations; so that literature which is composed on the surface of auditory perceptions may be buttressed in depth by a simulated sensuosity stemming from a substitute stimulation of all possible sense organs. Poetic images may be visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, kinesthetic, even directly visceral. The richness of the poetic medium is owing to no other property. But this richness is in the depth, not on the surface, which still maintains some claim upon our attention.

In order to summarize our account of the elements of a work of art, we may compose the following list. Some works of art are entirely surface: namely, the nonobjective arts in which there is no representation of recognizable objects. These are constructed uniquely out of sensuous elements and their attendant mood. To "appreciate" this kind of art object one must let his senses operate in the way they are capable of operating. Any attempt to impose depth upon them is to falsify the experience. In this sense they are the most immediate and the feeling they arouse is the subjective registering of the effect of the objective ordering of the elements. The nonobjective visual arts are primarily spatial and the "objective ordering of the visual elements" is called a design. The nonobjective aural arts are primarily temporal; a melody exists in time and is punctuated by the accents of rhythm. We say "primarily" because of the relative importance of the one mode of sensation. It is obvious that there is rhythm is painting, but it is a secondary phenomenon and appears only when the total design is broken up into individual parts and a repetition of like elements perceived within the whole. Likewise, there is a secondary perception of space in music: merely imagine the difference between an "open-air concert," from the same pieces performed in a vaulted cathedral, and you will have imagined the way in which our perceptions confined in space influence the temporal forms of music.

When, on the other hand, we proceed to the depth, we find there "objects," "ideas," and "images," but not necessarily all of these in any one work. Each of these sets of elements may be accompanied by associated feelings or emotions which may either reinforce or tend to modify the immediate mood of the surface. The extent to which they do so will be the "total effect" of the piece.

To put the matter more succinctly, a work of art is constructed out of these five elements. Some works will contain only the first two: surface and mood; others contain these, plus the representation of objects, ideas, or images, and their associated feelings. The whole work of art is a relational construct formed by the artist for our perception.

III

We have traced above the elements which make up the vehicle of artistic expression. Our purpose was to arm ourselves for answering the question, "What is expressed in a work of art?" We had assumed that an answer to this last question was necessary before any speculation concerning the educational function of the arts would be fruitful. We may now proceed to the specific task of considering the expressiveness of the art object.

Since artistic expression takes place via the art object as the vehicle of expression, some critics have assumed that the work expresses whatever the artist intended it to express in the act of creation. They argue quite rightly that the artist is the dominant personality in the creation of the object and that he is free to express whatever he should like to express. But it does not follow from these statements that the work expresses his conscious intention. And because it does not follow, critics who attempt to determine the artist's intention in order to adjudge what is expressed in the work are said to have committed the "intentional fallacy." We should consider the reasons which have led critics to deny that a work of art expresses objectively the subjective intention of the artist.

The first such reason is the rather obvious statement that the artist might not himself know what he intends to express. Recent psychoanalytic literature is replete with examples to substantiate this claim. But we need not retreat to the position of the "unconscious" in order to ground our denial of the relevance of the artist's intention. Let us assume for the moment that he had a conscious intention and was successful in carrying it out in the particular work under consideration. If we ask ourselves the question, "What does the work of art express," it would follow immediately that the work expresses the artist's intention; but the intention is the work, so that in the long run the artwork expresses itself. Then, in order to answer our original question all we would have to do is to experience the work as expressed. The intention, by hypothesis, is the work itself. Instead, therefore, of looking to the artist for a clarification of his

intention, we should merely look at the work. The artist as a person disappears from the context of judgment.

Clear enough. But what, one might ask, is the case if the artist is unsuccessful in expressing his original intention? What indeed? In this case we would be presented with a very peculiar phenomenon —a work of art which by hypothesis is a failure. Should we go groveling through the artist's waste-basket in an effort to determine what his intention was, the best we could find would be a verbal description of the intention, since the original work is a failure precisely because a part of the artist's original intention is not expressed there. Furthermore, if our description of the work of art above is acceptable, there are no grounds for making a comparison between a verbal description, paraphrase, or gloss of the original work and the concrete expressiveness of the elements in their individual relations. The "meaning" of the original work can only be perceived or pointed to, not described. Thus, even should the artist be able to describe what he wanted to in his creation, that description could not be assumed adequate to the expressiveness of the work itself. If it could, after all, there would be no purpose in constructing the object in the original form.

Aesthetic judgment consequently has nothing to do with determining the artist's intention. To put it ironically, the assumption that a work of art expresses the intent of the artist is tantamount to assuming that the work expresses nothing at all, since when successful the work is the intention and when not, the intention is not expressed, or nonexistent. For these reasons, finally, the viewer is freed from the tyranny of the artist. But this freedom is not so much the leveling of the artist as it is the elevation of his work. In other words, "genius" need not be considered subjectively as the peculiar faculty, power, or ability of the artist to do superior deeds, but must eventually be considered objectively as the work produced. Shakespeare's genius is not a structure of his mental powers; it is no more and no less than the collection of his works. And Picasso's genius is quite literally hanging on the walls of houses the world over.

Having rid ourselves of genius and the overbearing attitude its assumption has produced in many of our creative artists, we are faced with another problem. If it cannot fruitfully be said that a work of art expresses the intention of its author, perhaps it is the case that the work expresses what a viewer finds there. And there is some evidence that may be adduced to support this contention. Consider

once more the nature of the expressive vehicle. The recognition of represented objects, the conception of ideas, the formation of images —in a word, the whole of the depth of an objective work of art— depend for fulfillment on the activity of the viewer who must perform these functions for a work of art to exist. One critic calls this act "the performance of the work." Likewise, in arguing against the first position, the viewer-centered theory points out that the artist's intention is purely private to the artist himself, while artistic expression is public and communicable. Therefore, in order for the artist to communicate at all it is necessary for the artist to be the first viewer of his work. When the two viewings are similar, communication has taken place. Thus, when the artist associates the same kind of objects, feelings, ideas, and images with the surface of the work as any other viewer his expression is fulfilled. What the critic must do in the face of the work, according to this position, is merely to gauge the effect of the work upon himself. Can this position be maintained in the light of our aesthetic experiences?

I think it is clear that it cannot and for the following reasons. First of all, although the artist's intention is not the expressed idea of the work, it cannot be claimed that the artist is reduced to the level of any other viewer of the work he has produced. When we reduced his genius to the objective structures of the works he has produced, we have not eliminated the effect of his personality on these same structures: we have merely objectified whatever of his personality is relevant to the given work. Picasso's one-time connection with Communism and his communist sympathies have taken the objective form they have in at least one instance in the frightening picture of destruction contained in the *Guernica* mural. The effect of his activity is to have embodied the destructiveness of fascism in the broken-lined forms we actually perceive. And iconographically, the symbols of destroyer and the destroyed, the bull and the horse, reinforce the mood of the line-character perceptible on the surface. Propaganda it may be, but so expressive; and it is as expressive that the critic must determine his aesthetic judgment of the work. The critic's judgment is presumably the same sort of judgment the artist himself has made when he decides to sign, and therefore mark as his, whatever he discovered himself as having said.

Secondly, since the depth elements come into play in aesthetic experience by the mechanism of association, any objective work of art may be taken to mean anything else; any two objects can be

associated by any given viewer: the association of this red with fire engines or fire or roses or what have you. If this is an acceptable explanation of the experience, the result may be ironically stated that, from the viewer's vantage point, the work of art expresses the entire universe and the entire gamut of possible feelings. And this is the case, since there is no control on the process of association by which different objects, ideas, and images may be brought to bear on the art object within the experience of any one viewer—no control, that is, if not the structures of the work itself.

We may therefore agree with the viewer-centered position on the expressiveness of works of art with the following provisory considerations: (1) that the credit for the creation of the work be placed with the artist and not with the viewer; (2) that the viewer bring to the work only those associations which are controlled by the formal structures of the concrete object we call the "work of art." From this it would follow that a given art work may be thought to express anything consistent with the structures of the work; and it is to this extent that a work may be said to express more than one thing for the author, the viewer, or different viewers. The purport of our proviso is to allow for the correction of false judgments on the object: the creator may be mistaken on the structures of his own object, as may any given viewer. Since it is the structures of the object they are in disagreement about however, there is always a way of mediating the dispute. In matters aesthetic there are no authorities. But anyone may become a more or less qualified viewer. The evidence that he is qualified is readily available in the amount of sense he can bring to the judgment of what constitutes the aesthetic object before him. As some critics have insisted, the work doesn't "mean"; it "is." And this is precisely what is meant by saying that a work of art expresses itself.

IV

In the light of the foregoing we may now ask our final question. What is the educational function subserved by producing students—and teachers—qualified to make aesthetic judgments? For the teachers engaged in the teaching of the arts, the answer seems obvious. Since their very competence is to some extent measured by their ability to substantiate personal and social judgments of the worth of a given work of art, training in aesthetic judgment is a necessary part of their development. And it is this training that has been

generally lacking in the education of the average art educator. Thus, the interest of their association in our subject.

But what about the students themselves? What do they gain from being introduced into the mechanics of aesthetic judgment? Some writers have had recourse to a rather weasel-like expression, "culture," to explain this educational value. But objectively considered this word refers to all forms of human behavior which produce objects tending to develop the potentialities of men and societies. Such behavioral institutions are the scientific, artistic, religious, political, and so on. Now, if this interpretation is given to the word, the person appealing to it as descriptive of the value of aesthetic judgment is saying that making intelligent judgments on art objects is valuable because it makes one cultured; but this is the same as to say that engaging in the cultural enterprise makes one cultured, or still more tautologously, that culture makes culture. We all know without even considering the matter that growth is growth; the question of first order remains, "What, in the perception of the elements and structures of aesthetic objects, tends to produce the acculturating influence upon the student?" It is in answer to this question that the educational function of the fine arts becomes clear.

If it may be safely assumed that the work of art is and doesn't mean, then the art work expresses only itself. It places a demand upon the perceptive and cognitive faculties of the individuals who would judge the effectiveness of the work. Even in a completely nonobjective piece, the viewer's perceptivity is undergoing development as he places his perceptual apparatus under the discipline of the structures of the work. From the same element of control gained by insisting upon the inter-subjectivity and communicability of feelings, the student learns to control his feelings: only those feeling are relevant to the work which are consistent with the organization of the sensuous surface. We may call this the advantage of perceiving "beauty," if you like, but nothing is gained by adding this name to the experience described. The value to the perceiver in the perception of interesting sensuous surfaces is therefore double: to increase discrimination in perceptions and to control our vaguer moods. This is perhaps the oldest of known values ascribed to music, a nonobjective art. The mad King Saul was rid of his melancholic humours by the pleasant harmonies of the boy David's harp, or so it is written. And as "music hath charms to soothe the savage breast," so have any

other art objects which yield nothing beyond their sensuous surface. Such is the value, in particular, of the so-called "modern" art—no matter what the degree of abstraction from represented reality it may achieve.

Beyond the maximum of sensitivity and perceptivity demanded in the experience of nonobjective arts, there is the further development of the cognitive and imaginative "faculties" in "realistic" art. To perceive a represented object as just this object and not another, it is necessary for the viewer to conceive the nature of such objects; to understand the idea imparted by the relations between concepts, it is necessary to conceive these relations; to concretize any ideas in specific illustrating images, it is necessary to exercise the imagination. These are the further advantages of including the arts in an educational curriculum, due in particular to the perception and judgment of realistic works of art. To be trained in constructing or reconstructing the depth of art works is to have one's intellect trained. Thus, surface and depth of the aesthetic experience demand intellectual exercise and this exercise may produce habits of awareness which become integral parts of the personality being trained.

But there is a further consideration, that of taste. Since, in the judgment of works of art, it is necessary to relate the expressiveness of the surface to that of the depth, when there is depth, the exercise of aesthetic judgment serves to develop what might be called a "style of life." Ideas have only as much aesthetic value as their physical expression and the physical expression of an idea is its embodiment in a sensuous surface. The aesthetic personality is never a fanatic; he is never carried away with the value of the idea itself and finds the worth of its expression in the tension between what is expressed and the sensuous vehicle of expression. Such men are men of taste and the production of this kind of individual is certainly a legitimate aim for educators, even of those preparing individuals for their entrance into the structures of a "bland society." We must only add that "taste," like "genius," is not primarily a reference to the taster's faculties. Like the man of genius, the man of taste is known by the objects he "appreciates." To present objects worthy of taste to student—adult or adolescent—is surely no mean enterprise and constitutes one of the objectives the founding of *ARTS IN SOCIETY* was intended to achieve.

The above article was intended to serve a double purpose: (1) to clarify the position of the editors of this journal on the kinds of art objects which may be included in a magazine dedicated to liberal education in the arts for adults; and (2) to invite discussion of the policy by other educators engaged in a similar activity.

It should be clear that the article was written from the point of view of aesthetics considered as the philosophy of art. It is hoped that critical discussions of the matter from teachers, students, artists, and laymen may lead to further clarification of the role of the arts in the educational curriculum; and that *ARTS IN SOCIETY* may thereby serve its function of bringing into sharper focus the aims and objectives of those engaged in teaching the arts.

Although anything which appears between our covers is open for discussion and criticism, we are particularly anxious to continue this series on "The Educational Function of the Fine Arts." It would be enlightening, for example, to have articles in support or in criticism of the beginning article, written from the point of view of those engaged in teaching a specific art *genre.* The presumption is that no one should have a firmer conviction, if not a clearer idea, of the value of music to individuals or to the general society than musicians themselves; of the dance, than dancers; of painting, than painters.

We cordially invite all educators to join in the discussion. *ARTS IN SOCIETY* is their magazine.

Prof. H. Donald White, who served as editor of the last three issues of *ARTS IN SOCIETY,* has relinquished his post as editor and as professor of art and art education in the Extension Division of The University of Wisconsin. He has taken up residence teaching of art at the New York State Teacher's College, Oneonta, New York.

Since Professor White also served as associate editor of the first issue of our journal, the continued existence of the magazine is to a large extent due to his continuous efforts to fill the gap he felt in the training of adults in the fine arts. We extend our best wishes for a successful career in his new situation.