



## **Arts in society: environment and culture.**

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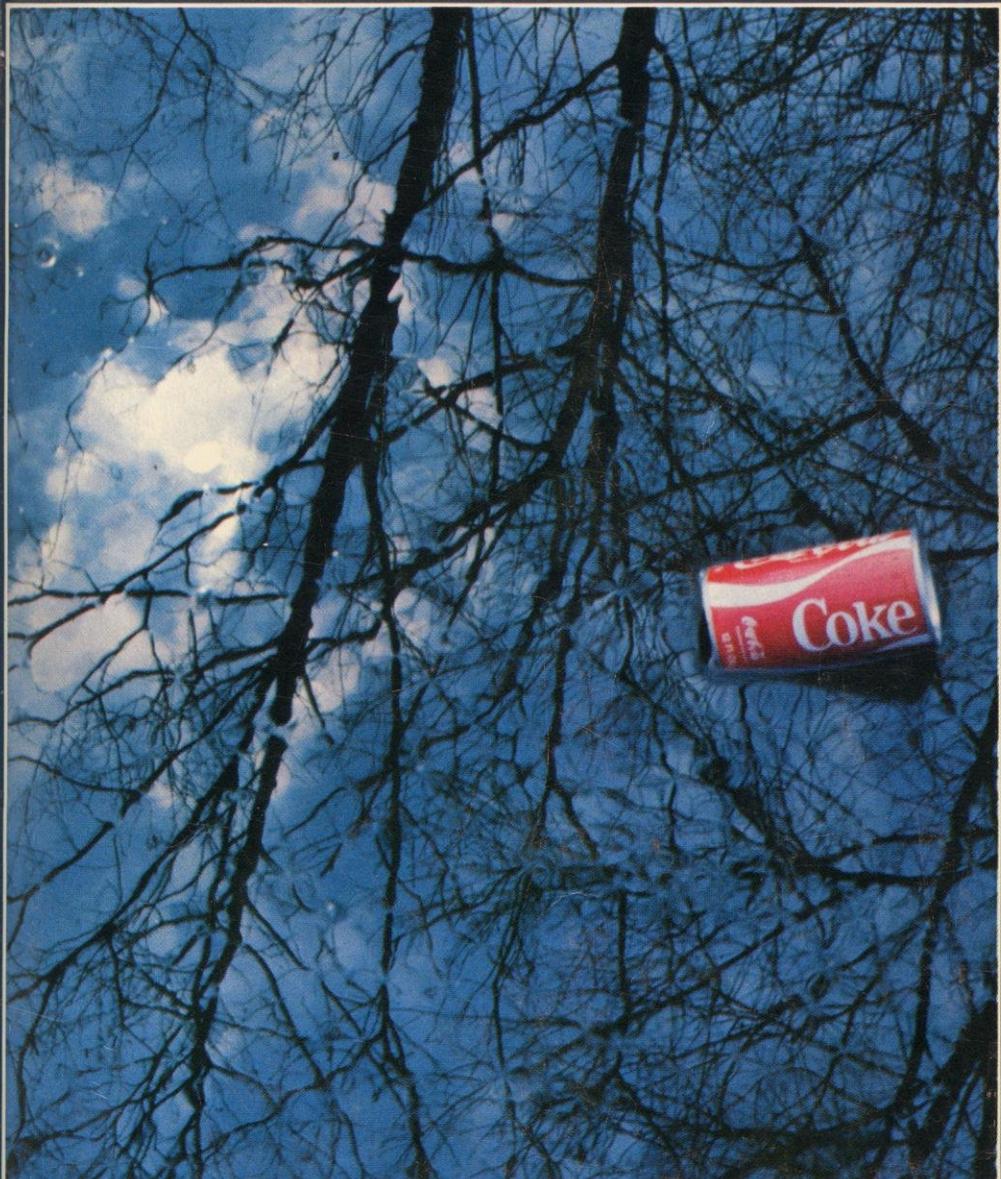
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# ARTS IN SOCIETY

ENVIRONMENT  
AND CULTURE  
\$2.00





# ARTS IN SOCIETY

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*ARTS IN SOCIETY* is dedicated to the augmenting of the arts in society and to the advancement of education in the arts. These publications are to be of interest, therefore, both to professionals and the lay public. *ARTS IN SOCIETY* exists to discuss, interpret, and illustrate the various functions of the arts in contemporary civilization. Its purpose is to present the insights of experience, research and theory in support of educational and organizational efforts to enhance the position of the arts in America. 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 a medium which may be served by the printing process.

The editors will welcome articles on any subjects which fall within the areas of interest of this journal. Readers both in the United States and abroad are invited to submit manuscripts for consideration for publication. Articles may be written in the contributor's native language. An honorarium will be paid for papers accepted for publication.

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Courtesy: Downtown Council of Minneapolis

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Courtesy: M. Paul Friedberg Associates

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Reprinted from *A Handbook Against Gorgons* by Hugh Fox

# EDWARD KAMARCK

## LIFE SCALE



This issue of *Arts in Society* is tied in lineal consanguinity to our recent number (volume 8, number 2) entitled *The Arts and the Human Environment*. The latter, an outgrowth of a national conference sponsored by Pennsylvania State University and planned in concert with the editors of this journal, was broad-gauged in its approach, seeking in the main to delineate the problem area and to build a persuasive argument on behalf of a more central role for the arts in American life. It is pertinent to note that the issue uniquely posited the notion that in the effort to restore humanness to the fabric of contemporary reality the arts must be considered "environmental imperatives." A bold proposition, and one posing a notably difficult challenge, for what was necessarily implied was the need to develop a wholly new aesthetic, one most large in concept and encompassing the many inter-dependent spheres of social action involved in environmental shaping. While several papers eloquently evoked a sense of the possible range and nature of such an aesthetic they did so more by inference than by direct attack. Much was unexplored. Thus it has seemed to the editors that it would be valuable to move to a consideration of the keynote question which logically

ensues from the previous issue, that of attempting to define an appropriate environmental aesthetic for our time.

What should be the premises, values, objectives, and strategies of the arts in shaping a human environment? What kind of new supportive institutions are necessary? What contingent changes seem necessary in social organization? What are ideal roles for the arts? Given their current marginality, what roles are possible? The earlier issue, in providing a substantial social base for our investigation, offers fruitful clues, and to some degree we have attempted to build on those insights. Copies of the number were, in fact, sent to all of the authors\* who were specifically commissioned by us to write on this topic. It will be noted that Ihab Hassan and John Burchard, whose pieces immediately follow, chose to respond critically to the papers in that issue. Their comments provide a useful link.

The developing concept of an environmental aesthetic can only partially cannibalize past and present thinking in the arts. Much of its structure will have to be built afresh out of wholly new visions. But visions casting infinitely longer shadows in social reality than those that have long sought to sustain the arts. The needed visions must have life scale.

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\*Authors who had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the previous issue were: Rudolf Arnheim, John Burchard, Ihab Hassan, Gyorgy Kepes, and David Lewis. It should be noted that the papers authored by Johannes Gaertner, Robert Ginsberg, Olgerts Puravs, and William Truitt were originally presented in a sectional meeting of the 1970 conference of the American Society for Aesthetics. We are grateful to Professor Ginsberg, the chairman of the section, for making them available to us.



# A COMMENT ON THE NEW SIZE OF ARTS IN SOCIETY

The constant reader will note that with this issue we've diminished somewhat in length and breadth. As a cheerful ad man might say, still the same amount of content but packaged more compactly.

- Are *you* cheerful about the new size?
- I guess I have mixed feelings.
- Wasn't it your decision?
- It was and it wasn't. All has to do with state printing regulations. Seems that our long-time size — 7"x10" — is now considered non-standard. Or maybe it has been considered so for some time but we weren't aware of it. In any case, we are aware of it now. We were presented with two choices: either go larger or smaller.
- And smaller seemed better than larger?
- Easier to handle when reading. Lot easier to mail. Also, it's the size adopted by most quarterlies. (A self-conscious philosophic shrug) We'll just have to learn to become more gem-like.

# HABIB HASSAN

## AN ENVIRONMENT



Being a Paracritical Response to an Invitation to Contribute to *Arts in Society* Generally, and to Comment on Volume 8, No. 2, "Conference on The Arts and the Human Environment," Specifically.

by Ihab Hassan

### 1. THE FLAW

In a sense, all things are one; in another, they are endlessly various. The human animal is part of nature and yet apart from it. This is the function of his consciousness.

We live in an environment; we build an environment; we *should ourselves* become our environment. But this assumes oneness: Orpheus singing, and as he sings becoming wolf, cloud, or stone, or St. Francis calling gently, "Brother Sun," "Sister Snow." Yet neither Orphic nor Franciscan, most of us stand a little distance, watch, and watch even the watching. This is consciousness: the Head of Orpheus still singing after his dismemberment, the Apple plopping in Eden.

And art, among human activities, is still the most strange. Even when it was part of magic, myth, or religion, part of whatever way our ancestors took in the temporal forests of evolution, I imagine it to be already quick with some wanton knowledge of its own.

Was there a special glint in that chiseling eye at Altamira or Lascaux?

We require things to be single. I do too. The Beatles said it: "All together now." But things are not one. Not yet anyway. Perhaps never.

If:      Man  $\neq$  Environment  
and:    Art  $\neq$  Man  
then:   Art  $\neq$  Environment

That's true in one kind of logic; there may be other logics. We learn everyday a new lesson in dilogy. When is the last time you consulted *Finnegans Wake*?

And so we have this fissure in our being, this crevice in our consciousness. We have to stretch across the gap. There is a tension between Man and Nature; there is another tension between Art and Man. The tensions are mounting. Has the string already snapped?

But we can imagine it different, and therein lies our hope. The imagination is the teleological organ in evolution, actualizing change. Dreamers are the masters of history. That oneness that dreamers know has been put into lucid metaphors:

If the eye were not sunny, it could never glimpse the sun.  
Goethe

I become a transparent eye-ball; I am nothing; I see all.  
Emerson

In this vision, the great works of art are also great works of nature, produced according to universal laws. Mind and Nature are one.

But we suffer the disease of sight. We insist on distinctions even where none exist. We are all born equally alien, some more than others, in a universe which knows nothing of alienation. We create the Self and the Other so that they may lock in bloody embrace. How else can we prove that we live? There is a rumor that only death has no flaws.

Meanwhile, we are in our dangerous and flawed estate. We have our Anvi-RonmenT.

*Some themes recur in the Conference like a tom-tom beating in a wet jungle, or perhaps a chant of exorcism echoing among whitewashed walls. Rightly, the speakers are much perturbed.*

- Art and Technology: Pro and Con
- Art and Politics: Pro and Con
- Art and Nature: Pro and Con
- Art and Education: Pro and Con
- Art and Anti-Art: Pro and Con

*Within the controversy, a great uncertainty takes hold: What is Man in Change? Or as Paolo Soleri puts it: What is Man Becoming? I fear that neither good sense nor nonsense will suffice to answer the question. Humanism has run its course; a posthumanism is in the make; and we still can only guess at its shape.*

*There are also other issues, concrete, hard edged, immediate, that the contributors raise. On these issues, others are better qualified than I am to sustain their gaze.*

## 2. MUSEUMS

There are many things to do in Scandinavia, which I visited last summer. There are, for instance, museums to see: national museums, city museums (usually full of bric-a-brac), galleries of modern art, special exhibits. Among the latter, I recommend:



- a. The Mannerheim Museum in Helsinki
- b. The Hvitträsk Museum of Saarinen, near Helsinki
- c. The Wasa Museum in Stockholm
- d. The Viking Ships at Bygdøy, in Oslo
- e. The Royal Armory in Copenhagen  
(One face of old Denmark, and the other is Tivoli)

But I must return to my topic.

There is an eerie contrast between the new museums of art, airy and bright  
(the Milles Garden in Stockholm, Vigeland Park and the Munch-  
museet in Oslo, Louisiana outside Copenhagen)

and the great national museums, gloomy structures heavy with Stone Age  
sleep

(only the one at Stockholm is functional and light)

The national museums begin at the beginning, end before our time. They  
start with shards, arrow heads, burial mounds

(the place of death is also where life curls around)

soon we see Nordic vases and spears and looping ornaments; the Vikings  
then arrive with their obelisque swords and gold, their wondrous ships

(shallow and straked like the baleen whale, these long boats  
with high dragon prows slice oceans of sky)

on to Christianity, its naked saints, its emperors in iron

(slow, slow, culture emerges from ice and the winter dark; the  
sword cuts and thrusts, the pot feeds; men wander and women  
weave; with infinite cunning or ferocity, something presages  
Ibsen and Strindberg, Milles and Munch, Saarinen and Sibelius)

finally, the white dream of the Scandinavian welfare state.

Moving through these great, ugly houses of national heritage, I moved in a  
time-trance. Yet I felt there as close to the central endeavor we call man, to  
his force, as I did in those festive environments of bronze and stone, water  
and leaf: Vigeland Park, the Milles Garden.

I concluded the obvious: that the true environment of man is his intuition of  
Life around him, as much of it as he can bear. What seems inert, is inert.  
This has been recognized many times before:

La Nature est un temple où de vivants piliers  
Laissent parfois sortir de confuses paroles;  
L'homme y passe à travers des fôrets de symboles  
Qui l'observent avec des regards familiers.

Can nature speak through the whorls of a Viking brooch? Or through a  
sword, edge hacked, sculpted by brine and earth?

### *The Conference*

wants to reaffirm the value of art in the human environment. Two ways are suggested:

- a. *Art as a shaping, changing influence on our consciousness.*
- b. *Art as a shaping, changing influence on our sensuousness.*

Perhaps the two are the same. Herbert Read said in *The Shape of Things to Come*:

*a new humanism must look for its foundations, not in the reorganization of man's social and economic activities, but in the structure of his psyche. . . . My desire is to redefine humanism in the terms of a sensuous apprehension of being. . . .*

Hence education through art becomes "a salutation to Eros." And what of the Viking sword? Here is Read again, in a quizzical essay called "The Redemption of the Robot":

*If the death-wish is expressed in the evolution of weapons of destruction, the life-wish is represented by the gradual refinement of these weapons until they lose their destructive functions and become works of art, ritual objects removed from slaughter and death and dedicated to life and resurrection.*

*I want to emphasize only one more aspect of education through art: its vatic, mantic, fadic powers. The imagination is a teleological force in evolution, and every dreamer has his muse. Who is master of history, Joseph or Pharaoh?*

### 3. A SUPPOSITION

What if matter were eventually to vanish, become pure energy or spirit? What, then, becomes of our idea of a Human Environment? Perhaps the question needs to be asked. Perhaps the supposition needs to be explored.

Here are some writers, using ideas and languages of their own.

#### a. Toynbee

The agent of historical transformation, Toynbee suggests in *A Study of History*, is immaterial. He calls this crucial tendency in the growth of civilizations Etherealization, the "evocation of a spiritual meaning out of a material one. . . ." The tendency, which "involves not merely a simplification of apparatus but a consequent transfer of energy, or shift of emphasis, from some lower sphere of being or of action to a higher," affects language, science, technics, all human effort. It acts, Toynbee says, through Transfiguration, "a spiritualization of futurism."

#### b. Fuller

Everywhere, Fuller speaks of Synergetics, the art of "doing more with less,"

and of Ephemeralization which means the same. The locomotive, the car, the plane engines deliver more power with less weight. Man introduces the anti-entropic element in the universe, reversing the heaviness of matter. In his *Untitled Epic Poem on the History of Industrialization*, Fuller says:

all trend thereafter  
again towards more with less,—  
ephemeralize,—  
mobilize,—  
grow progressively and  
increasingly exquisite in precision  
and orderliness,  
faster,—less friction  
more light  
cosmic-to-abstract-to-objective-  
to-abstract—  
back to the blue?

c. Barfield

History moves toward self-consciousness, Owen Barfield argues, and mind becomes aware that it is itself a force in the transformation which it observes all around. Thus the "internalization of meanings" becomes progressive. Speaking through the mystic voice of the Meggid, in *Unancestral Voices*, Barfield states: "Wherever you look you will find that sequence: the descent of the immaterial forces into the material which they create by so descending, followed by their setting free and re-ascent."

d. McLuhan

The electric seer, oddly enough, also points to a cosmic consciousness which technology may release. This passage from *Understanding Media* speaks for itself:

Electric technology does not need words any more than the digital computer needs numbers. Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself. . . . The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to bypass language in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson.

e. Brown

"Everything is only a metaphor; there is only poetry," Norman O. Brown concludes in *Love's Body*. Thus the mystic unification of mankind into one body is also symbol of the single Dionysian reality which makes distinctions between spirit and flesh meaningless. "To rise from history to mystery is to experience the resurrection of the body here now, as an eternal reality. . . ." When all our symbols, incarnations, stand revealed, here and now — this is Brown's apocalypse — we can see the single presence everywhere; we are that presence.

#### f. Stockhausen

In an interview in *The New York Times* (February 21, 1971), Karlheinz Stockhausen also suggests an emergent unity of mind in the world. He refers to artists, scientists, mystics—Webern, Boulez, Cage, Wiener, Heisenberg, Einstein, Sri Aurobindo—then comes to his own conclusion: "I came to feel that on this little planet we are slowly moving to a spiritual state beyond exclusive religions. They will converge so that we shall come to a supra-religious orientation, which will be above ideologies, and in which we shall all be one family." His own music strains, beyond the current "atomized spiritual situation" of destruction, toward an essential model of "coming together . . . of love as a cohesive force."

#### g. Chardin

The paradigm of evolution in *The Phenomenon of Man* inevitably comes to mind. Teilhard de Chardin sees the process of "cosmic involution" leading to the Omega point, the state of Divine light. Richer being, he argues, is closer to union; union increases through increased consciousness; Pre-Life comes to Life and the latter ends in Thought. Chardin concludes: "After emergence comes emersion. In the perspectives of cosmic involution, not only does consciousness become co-extensive with the universe, but the universe rests in equilibrium and consistency, in the form of thought, on a supreme pole of interiorization."

These writers do not say the same thing; nor are they all prepared to prophesy a single destiny for man. Yet there is a teasing convergence in their *Do* thought. Ancient mystics presaged their conclusions. Modern scientists and men of letters ponder still and probe. *fail us in this* In a certain perspective, what we take to be the *regard*, the *Conf* human environment may be a vanishing *conference* *needs to* *text*; our true environment may elude a *ask?* *Is this also what Har* banal eye trained to encounter every- *old Rosenberg asks?* *His essay* day more banality. What, then, *on the "Post-Art Artist"* is terse and can the arts do to disclose, *troublesome*, and requires some an- through our senses, an *swer*. The author charges the arts with environment which "baneful aestheticism," "neo-commercialism," only the imagi- "technological intoxication," and willful neglect of nation can all traditions, including "the tradition of the new." In some grasp? sense, perhaps, these charges can be justified, particularly if we Now. make them not in the name of some old piety but in anticipation of some new threat. Rosenberg recognizes a threat: "Given the 'societal patterns' in which mass behavior is presently organized, art is the one vocation that keeps a space open for the single person actively to elaborate his unique potentialities."

Yet we do not know really what "the unique potentialities" of the individual are—except in a context already changed, gone. Our environment is an

emergent consciousness. We connect with it when we feel reverence for all life, not only our own. Such reverence, as Timothy Palmer says, "surely must be more real than the reverence man has developed for himself since the Book of Genesis." The idea that we have "dominion" over the earth is passing. So long as we conceive of our environment as cultural or physical, we behave merely as political or technological animals, blind to the principle that the environment of any life is all of life. This makes mystics of us all. Claude Lévi-Strauss put it more discretely: "He [man, of course] would do well to learn that if one thinks only man is respectable among living beings, well then, the frontier is placed much too close to mankind and he can no longer be protected." This attitude offers one possible redefinition of the "unique potentialities" of the individual in the person of *Sacramental Man*.

Photographer: Duane W. Hopp, University of Wisconsin, Dept. of Photography.



*There are other possibilities of redefinition which unsettle the mind. We already know something about Totalitarian Man. We still need to know more about his more efficient brother, Behavioral Man, as B. F. Skinner conceives him in *Walden Two* or *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. Conditioned by "positive reinforcements" into predetermined patterns of behavior, our Hero may find the "unique potentialities" of the individual superfluous. Skinner says: "If you insist that individual rights are the *summum bonum*, then the whole structure of society falls down." Thus the end of an illusion.*

*Thus, too, we may conclude that any criticism of the arts based on visible realities must be in large part obsolete. This is surely true now more than ever. Yet can we afford to abandon criticism entirely: If not, what is a viable alternative to criticism?*

#### 4. SPHERES OF PRESENCE

If our environment is both emergent and invisible, it still asserts itself in spheres of presence. Here are three that are also one:

- a. The Body
- b. The Body Politic
- c. The Celestial Body

We dare not forget any of these in considering the environment of art.

##### a. The Body

Art has been sensuous from the start. But now we witness extremes of abstraction and concreteness: Concept Art and Earth Art. Also, the languages of the body have multiplied. Consider only one obvious category, the Dance:

Martha Graham  
Balanchine  
Merce Cunningham  
Ann Halprin  
Alwin Nikolais  
Meredith Monk

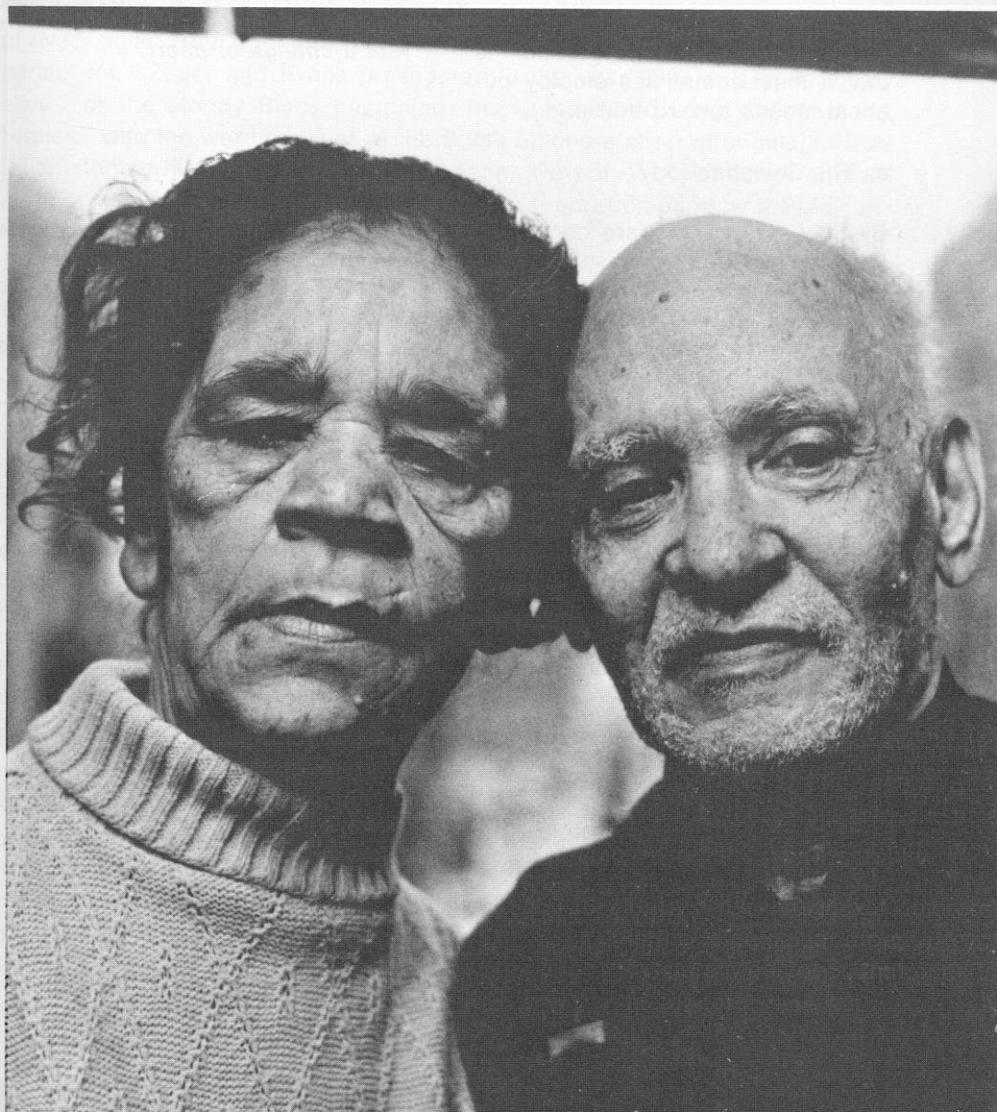
• *Very little said about this sphere in the Conference.*

The new body consciousness, from polymorphous perversity (Brown) to touch encounter (Esalen), comes at a time when extensions of the senses by various media (McLuhan) have reached the out-flying quasars.

Does man become pure Mind the more his Somatic Consciousness increases?

And what is the import of this to his art?

From the exhibit "East 100th Street—Bruce Davidson" which was held at the Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin from September 10 to October 10, 1971. The exhibit was sponsored by the American Federation of Arts.



## b. The Body Politic

Traditionally, squabbling man gave himself to the Body Politic with fierce, tautological efforts. Yet it is possible that this sphere will shrink in the field of human endeavor as the needs for conflict and compromise recede.

Consequently, the new arts are neither simply social nor asocial. Rather, they participate in a greater reality of which social forms are a limited expression.

Post-art also assumes a post-political consciousness. Its paradox is that it must sometimes employ political means toward that end.

## c. The Celestial Body

By now, many of us are convinced that we live on "spaceship earth" (Fuller). Many of us also find charts to connect art with astrology, astrology with astronomy, the latter with a single living cell.

Thus a dripping brush stroke (Jackson Pollack) tells about fortune, blood, and the stars; and dots, lines, and circles (Gordon Onslow-Ford) together render the biography of the universe. "A painting," the latter says in his remarkable book, *Painting in the Instant*, "is a gift that dates from the beginning of the world."

Who knows how art may respond to materials or experiences floating in outer space, still locked within our mind?

- *John Hightower is right: disrupt, if not eliminate, the connection between art and financial investments.*

- *Serge Chermayeff is right: close the gap between technological growth and institutional reactions.*

- *The dread cry of the world now is "Power, Population, Pollution!" But members of the Conference differ on how education through art may help to alleviate this dread. Despite the poet (Auden), let us repeat the question: How can art effect a change of heart?*

- *Without a doubt, the immediate questions concern our biosphere. Members of the Conference know this, and they speak Ecology well. Our oldest memories belong to the earth.*

- *Yet conservation on one level may require a leap of the imagination on another. Save the environment and open new possibilities of life. Practical realities may require us today to choose between A and B, say a clean environment or exploration of space. Ripeness is all, and rhythm is wisdom. But this I also know: if our spiritual energy becomes wholly conservative, we will lose out to another kind of life.*

- *Let the arts, then, encourage men both to conserve and transmute their nature. For we do not yet know what that nature may be.*

## 5. AMERICA

America has always served to incarnate the future in the present. In this sense, Gertrude Stein meant it to be the oldest country, constantly falling forward into time, entering each century of the future ahead of others.

True, the travails of America are now frightening. We recall the forecasts of Spengler: "The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage, willy-nilly, aware or unaware." Yet I myself believe that if man must listen to History he must also refuse to obey it. Life *will* renew itself beyond those twin, insipid terms, Optimism and Pessimism. We must act as if we are part of that Life. Who knows but that the solution to the problem of the American city may contain the secret of success of the world-city?

This is no time to intone the tale of our horrors. We can hear it in pop songs of every style: from Joni Mitchell chanting "They pave Paradise / Put up a parkin' lot," Zager and Evans presaging "In the year 2525 / If man is still alive," or the Moody Blues beginning their apocalyptic song, "Higher and Higher," with the wordless roar of the Bomb among a choir of angels, to Bob Dylan singing his masterpieces of a decade. Do not our best songs contain more of American reality in them than many a report compiled by a Presidential Commission?

*Shouldn't the Conference consider the connection between art and education, and education and the new pharmaceuticals, enzyme-assisted memory consolidators, antibiotics, and general election of the brain,*

It is always time, however, to see that however immediate our actions must be, America plunges into the unmediated future. Speaking of the arts in America, we need an aesthetic perhaps less than a futurology. Indeed, art may become the way by which those monochrome abstractions of the future will be experienced in the sensuous colors of our present.

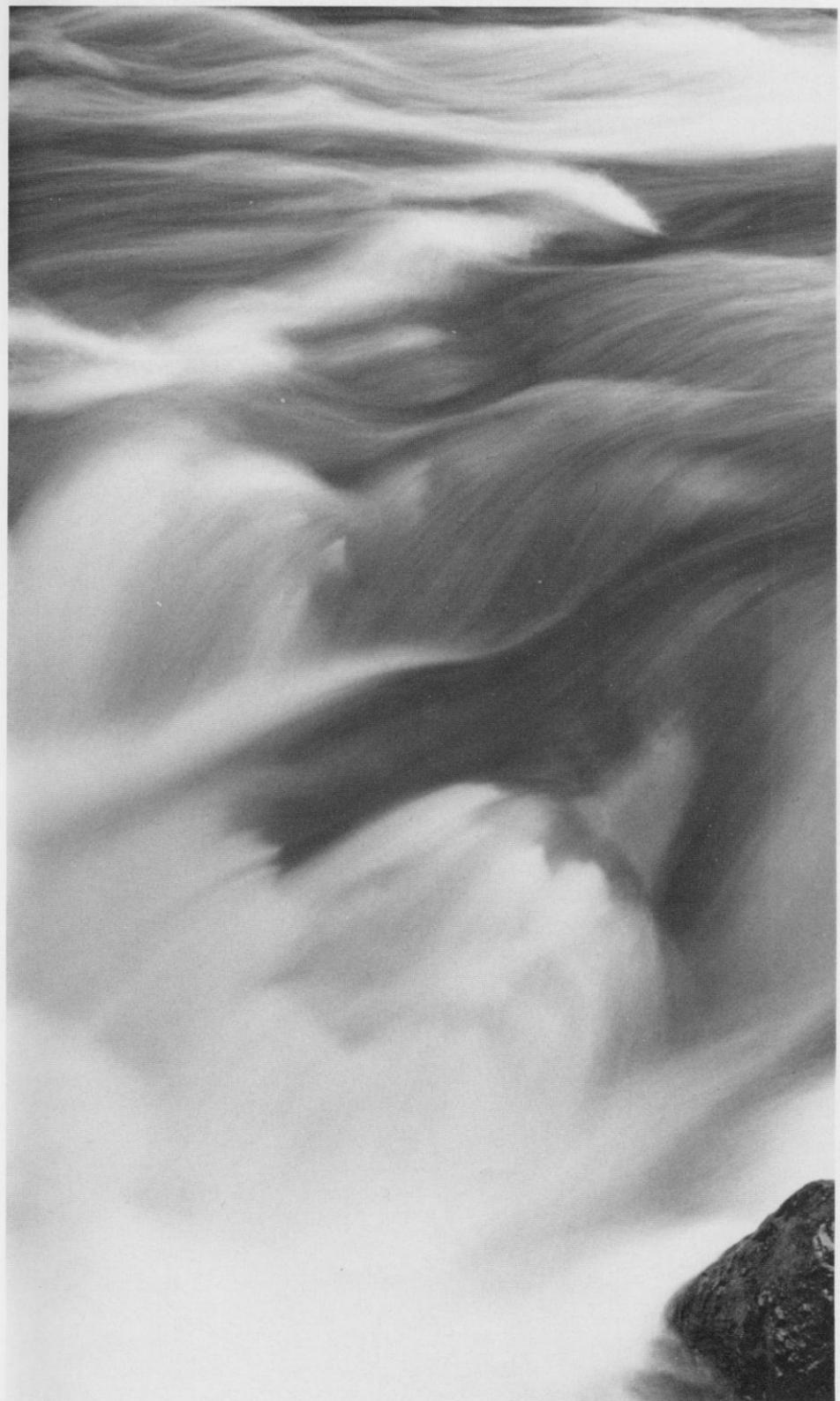
*ence, for instance, between art and tics? If art is a form of communication may soon rely on enzyme-assisted memory consolidators, antibiotics, and general election of the brain, what then of art?*

## 6. PRAXIS

I may seem to have spoken too long in the mantic manner. This is because I believe that today's solution is tomorrow's question. But we never need to choose between the immediate and the yet unmediated: man must learn to live with both at once.

Thus I offer some random notes toward an environmental aesthetic in the guise of actions.

1. Increase the tolerance of audiences to surprise, discontinuity, indeterminacy; increase attentiveness and patience of response. This produces audience anxiety. The artistic environment—gallery, theatre, field, etc.—should therefore provide the means to release this anxiety, getting back at the artist or his art. Provide imaginative punching bags, crayons for the audience to draw, feedback systems. The re-action to an artwork revives that work.
2. Connect artistic with erotic experiences wherever possible. Instead of the snob appeal of the gallery or opera opening, surround the occasion with the conditions of love. Good food and music naturally enhance romance, and poetry was once part of courtship. Why not re-implicate all the arts in the erotic life? Obviously, more ingenuity will be expected than hanging pictures of Nolde, say, in the Eros Palaces of Germany. Rather, we need to awaken to the intimate relations between our sensuous and sensual beings.
3. Encourage the means to “recycle” art; the age of the great collectors is over. Paintings may be photographed then painted over again; sculptures made into new objects or stone fences; musical scores overlaid with various sounds. We possess all the means to preserve everything we need to preserve (data banks, microfilm, frozen sperm, etc.). Now we *also* need to consider art as the continuous process of the human community. Art for eternity? Eternity is, or may soon be, here.
4. Promote awareness of universal design principles, devise courses in grammar school and adult education programs. I mean the principles that govern the shape of an egg, a tern’s wing, a crystal, a rocket, a whorl or exploding star, the functioning of an eye, the echo of sound, gravity and growth, the flow of the elements. We are nature’s illiterates still, and our arts suffer from it. Instead of separate natural history and art museums, create contexts of education and pleasure that include both.
5. Associate art with the utilities. Malraux put treasures of the Louvre in the metro stations of Paris. Yes, as the utilities increase our leisure, give us time, we may choose to fill that time with art. But there is more to it than that. Every time mind connects with mind—communications—or mind becomes aware of body—transportation, employment of light, water, heat—elements of the artistic experience are present. We can learn to confuse “use” with “play.” For instance, a touch-tone telephone can also be a musical instrument: sometimes we call, sometimes we play, sometimes we do both.
6. Practical yet questionable: experiment with community support of young artists. Find a prosperous community that is willing to support five or six artists with an Art Tax. Whatever the artists produce may be sold at nominal prices—say, no painting or sculpture over \$500! The proceeds revert to the community. Furthermore, the artists would have a choice of civic duties, a



few hours every week: teaching children, sitting on the town council, reading water meters, helping design parks, etc.

7. Most problematic perhaps: reclaim the subterranean life of the culture. If art, myth, and dream are royal ways to the subconscious, how can we open them, keep the access to our emotions wide? Meditation? Introspection? Group encounters? Psychoanalysis? Dream narratives? Instead of those "Hate" sessions of 1984, can we have sessions of "Know Thyself," moments of "Letting Go?" Even the fantasies of Madison Avenue can be made to alert us to Fantasy.

## 7. AN ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETIC

When you use the word 'chaos,' it means there is no chaos, because everything is equally related — there is an extremely complex interpenetration of an unknowable number of centers.

John Cage

We are not able ever to think adequately about the behavior that is at the annihilating edge. But what we think is less than what we know; what we know is less than what we love; what we love is so much less than what there is. And to that precise extent we are so much less than what we are.

R. D. Laing

# JOHN BURCHARD

## CHALLENGING SOME PREVALENT PIETIES



## by John Burchard

What I have to suggest in this diatribe may seem so negative in its conclusions that it would seem strange for any journal devoted to the faith that the arts are central to a good society to want to print it.

I have to be quite precise about what I aim to encompass by "the arts" in these comments. I am not talking about music which has, to be sure, its problems but shows no sign of being decadent or moribund. There are serious economic problems for all music except the most ephemeral, fashionable current "people's music makers." To the extent that these people are doing things which will have a longer life and thus become a sort of classic to survive, if not as well as Bach, at least better than Meyerbeer, their work will begin to encounter the same fiscal difficulties as those of classic opera or symphony, in kind, if not in degree. It will be less in degree since the band is not so enormous as that demanded, say for *Also sprach Zarathustra* or *Ein Heldenleben*, but the problem is there in principle as the difficulty of hearing New Orleans, Chicago or St. Louis styles any way now save through recordings already suggests. Though Bach and a handful of other classical composers still appeal to many who also found Woodstock beautiful, these youngsters, even if turned on, are quite clearly not prepared to pay much for it. The "elitists" [incidentally I do not accept this as an inevitably pejorative term] who have paid for big symphony and big opera over the entire lifetime of these forms of music in the United States simply do not have enough money to keep them going much longer. Faced

with mounting deficits both for the support of the large musical enterprises and for the education of the musicians who will be needed later to write new music and to play old and new music, they turn desperately to the public purse, which is already supplying hidden subventions through income tax deductions. And the public purse is stingy. There is no rational basis for expecting otherwise. What, in total, have these enterprises done to make the public want to support them, during the long halcyon days when public support was not needed? For what is the general public now supposed to be grateful? Whether it might have been different in the United States, had the managers of musical enterprises not been so sycophantic to the people of the diamond horseshoe for so long, is more of a conjecture than I am prepared to make but for some reason things did come out differently in Germany and to a lesser degree in Italy, although even La Scala is beginning to look battered. But I think the old and tested will not die in music and that there is enough vitality in current music so that whatever rearrangements need to be made, they will somehow be made. And to reach this conclusion I do not have to assert a preference between Sessions, Cage, Lennon, McCartney, or Peter Townshend, or speculate as to the durability of rock and roll or high-decibel encounters. The fiscal dilemmas of music are important here because they simply reveal, in the most dramatic form, problems facing museums, non-commercial television, all sorts of theatre and so on—and facing them no matter how hard they try to be not mere repositories of a great past but ex-

positors of a great future. This is the consequence so clearly stated by Michael Straight, "The arts today stand at the margin of society . . . In this economy, the mass consumer is the arbiter of style . . . I cannot conceive of a proposition more sterile, more self-defeating, than one which asserts that the taxpayers must support the arts although the arts are not for them."<sup>1</sup>

In short one of the most venerable of the clichés we art-lovers mouth wherever we foregather, that the arts are environmental imperatives, is simply a statement reflecting one line of value judgments and completely undemonstrated as a universal.

Nor do I intend to say anything here about the lively newer arts, film, dance, reconstituted theatre, television. Despite the many corruptions of these media, the many experimental failures, I see no reason to believe that they have had their best day, and, indeed, find in the notable, if only occasional, successes, much promise for the future. All these arts, it is to be noted, have kinesthetic potentials quite absent from the established visual arts of painting and sculpture whose relevance to our times in general and especially to our current physical environment, whether urban or rural, I now propose seriously to challenge.

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Some of the statements we all nod at with sage approval when we convene ought to have been challenged

long ago. We are told that society first rejected the artists, and that the artists in consequence have rejected the society. Is that really the way it was? Certainly it has been harder for society to treat the artist as essential when he is no longer the purveyor of magic (Lascaux), of the spirit of the *polis* (Akropolis of Athens), of religious faith and education (Chartres, Amiens, Sistine Chapel), of revolt (Goya, Daumier, Hogarth, Courbet), of accepted mores (Rembrandt to Renoir), or even of disillusion and delusion (Munch, Ernst). Intellect has supplanted magic and faith, not always successfully. There are really no accepted mores even among the "elite." There are more powerful media for the expression of delusion and disillusion or for the incitement to revolt, but does that mean there was nothing of significance left for the artist to say; does that excuse the artist from taking the easy way out by examining his personal insignificant navel and even then in such a remote and abstract way that no one is sure what he is examining until told in an essay which often takes longer to write or to read than the painting does to see or to make? When a *visual* art needs verbal statements to explain it, its intrinsic power is obviously suspect. Harold Rosenberg<sup>2</sup> has put all this together so much more fully and so much better that the gong needs no more beating by me. Let me only say that the artist left the train of his own volition and was not thrown off it. He offers less to the "people" even than is offered by the Trustees of

<sup>1</sup>Michael Straight, "The Arts: The Time for Total Environmental Concern," *Arts in Society*, VIII, No. 2. (1971): pp. 456 & 462.

<sup>2</sup>Harold Rosenberg, "The Artist as Perceiver of Social Realities: The Post-Art Artist," *Arts in Society*, op. cit., pp. 501-507.



Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

the Boston Symphony Orchestra. No one should contest his right to make anything he wants to make; but also no one should be silly enough to demand that the people should be interested and should therefore pay for his abstract presentation of his personal laundry list. Let him paint as he will and let the approval or disapproval or simple apathy to his antics fall as they may.

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Of course, at least as of now, there is a good deal of "bread" in art thanks to publishers, critics, gallery managers, entrepreneurs, salesmen and purveyors of snob objects of art to a growing number of "connoisseurs"—a sickly world which some artists probably detest but in

which most seem to find some kind of comfortable niche—a world which has its own establishment and one quite as full of conventions and postures and small talk and backbiting and misdeeds as the Establishment, save for the fact that for good or ill the Establishment affects each of our lives while the establishment of Art genuinely touches few lives indeed.

Those who accept these conclusions and regret them and pray for a different outcome seem to me to be counting on one or two other statements we repeat to each other all too often.

1. "The artist, by his nature and his calling has a heightened sensitivity, a deeper perception, a sounder sense of values than some other men."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>Michael Straight, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

The writer of this particular sentence was careful enough to say "than *some* other men." But when this is done, it takes the artist off an essential pedestal. More usually we make the statement without the reservation *some*. It is a nice thing for artists to hear and for their hangers-on to believe in, but if ever it was historically true, in our time and place the statement is at best unproved and in my own opinion actually false if expressed as a generality.

2. The other argument, a much better one, lies hidden in a sentence by Harold Rosenberg. "An environment that lacks the presence of self-developing individuals—but in which persons are constantly being acted upon—hardly deserves to be called a human environment."<sup>4</sup>

Who could disagree with this? It is to be contested only when it is assumed that today "Art is the one vocation that keeps a space open for the single person actively to elaborate his unique potentialities."<sup>5</sup>

This is simply not so. It would come as a strange postulate to many scientists I know—and to others, too. There are many fields of human endeavor where these potentials of not conforming to mass behavior or mass taste exist and are realized, and there is no particular holiness about the single individual as compared to

the dedicated small team so long as the team does not become a horde, as, admittedly it may tend to do.

I am not trying to suggest that painters and sculptors should stop making things for us to look at and hopefully to react to in a positive way. I am suggesting only that we should stop magnifying their importance far beyond the realities of the 1970's or believing that they hold the amulet which may save us all.

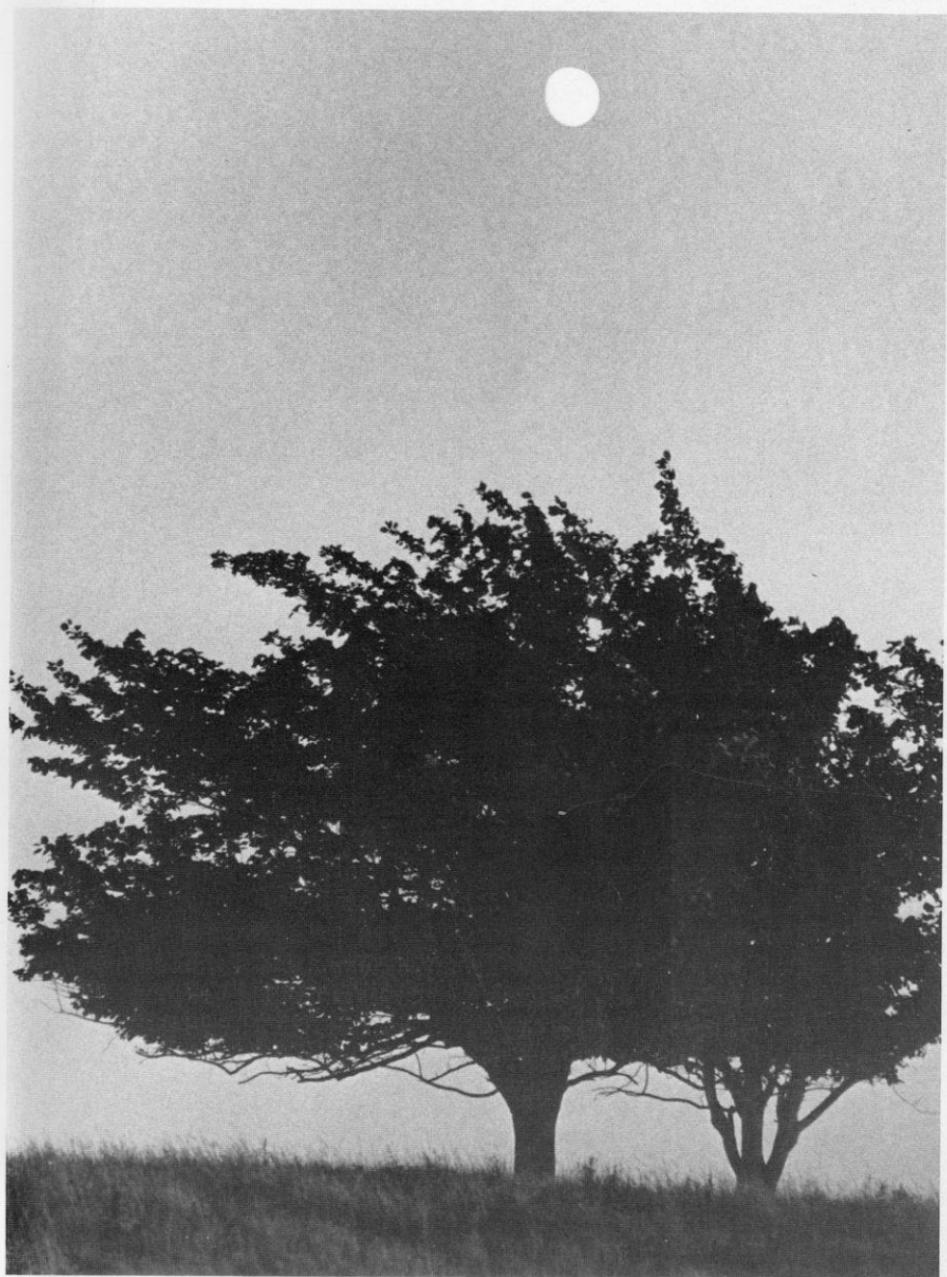
We are not fourteenth century Siena and are not about to become so. No Madonna in Maesta or no great painting of any subject whatsoever is going to send the shivers through the island of Manhattan that will be sent by a small piece of lunar rock. I do not say that this is good or bad. I simply say that it is so. No sculptor of the day can have as much to say to the people of his city as the sculptor of chryselephantine Zeus had to say to the people of Olympia or the sculptors of the Angel of Amiens or the Virgin of Chartres had to say to the people of medieval France. There are no such subjects for artists now—or if there are they have refused to or been unable to find them. The Athena, the Virgin as subjects transcended the Art. If the mammoth Picasso in a spatially ungenerous Chicago plaza has any such message for the people of Chicago, I have yet to have it so affirmed. The most it may affirm is that some public spirited citizens were prepared to pay a quarter of a million dollars or so for something to grace their city and able to convince cautious decision makers who probably did not like it very much

<sup>4</sup>Harold Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 507.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, right.  
Photographer: David Y. Watanabe, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, below







Civic Auditorium Forecourt Fountain, Portland, Oregon: Department of Public Affairs, City of Portland



Nicollet Mall after Renovation by Lawrence Halprin & Associates.  
Courtesy: Downtown Council of Minneapolis

that it would in fact "grace the city" or, if not that, at least show that Chicago was still on the ball even though New York was building taller buildings.

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So when we come to the assertion that sculpture and painting are primary to a good contemporary rural or urban environment, we are orating from a most flimsy soapbox. To the countryside they can bring nothing but ruin and it did not require Gutzon Borglum to prove it. To the city they may bring moments of pleasure but probably not the greatest ones anymore. Why can we not face the fact that these particular visual arts have not been first class in every period of history and therefore may not be first class now? This is not the same thing as denying the truth of an important statement. "Aesthetics are the mark of a society's integrity."<sup>6</sup>

What it is denying is that in this moment of time painting and sculpture are at the center of aesthetics and especially of urban aesthetics. More will be done for the general urban weal along aesthetic lines involving now repose, now excitement, now monumentality, now intimacy, now variety, now surprise, now change by the skillful development of small squares and islands, not necessarily adorned by sculpture, by grass, trees, flowers well placed and sedulously tended, and above

all by water, streams, pools, fountains now just to look at, now to offer coolth, now to use happily as the people of Portland, Oregon do in Lawrence Halprin's splendid array of cascades and pools in that city. I have no doubt myself that Halprin is the greatest urban artist in the Western World today, and that what he does when he is given a chance is more beneficial to the urban environment than a dozen magnificent Moores, Calders, and Picassos all in line along a mall like some modern Sieges Allee or at a great focal point like some ostentatious contemporary version of Trojan's column, lacking, however, any significant victories to celebrate.

As to the role that art education may play in advancing such developments, I am pessimistic, at least as art education is now conceived. Neither old-fashioned art appreciation by which one was instructed what to like or new-fangled self-expression by which one is encouraged to do what one feels like and then to admire it, however lousy, "a poor thing but one's own," will help much. Middleton Murry reminded us years ago that "great poets mean what they say." Distinguished art speaks without the benefit of *explication du texte*. Halprin's urban fountains need no guidebook. Let a few be made, let the public experience and enjoy them, and constraints on the public purse will be loosened. The effective sermons will be spoken, not in the classroom, but by the waters themselves.

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<sup>6</sup>John Hightower, "The Arts as Environmental Imperatives," *Arts in Society*, op. cit., p. 586.

# RUDOLPH ARNHEIM

ART AS AN ATTRIBUTE,  
NOT A NOUN



The visual environment reflects the state of mind of the persons who create it. An unplanned society lets its settlements grow by accretion and attrition, which leads to visual disorder unless its population and its products are unified by a mentality common to all. A society directed towards material profit does not hesitate to destroy buildings and other objects whose principal value resides in their visual form. In a society dedicated to passive consumption, the customer receives the standards of taste furnished by the suppliers together with the merchandise. On the other hand, in a society dominated by individualism, a form of living conceived and imposed by an architect or planner may not fit the needs of the citizens. These and other problems show up in the appearance of the environment, which therefore can be understood only if one explores the philosophical, social, material conditions of the society. An intelligent use of the eyes is an efficient incentive for such exploration because the evidence of the senses points with great clarity at the positive and negative aspects of dwellings, cities, landscapes.

Even so, given the complexity of the task, an assessment of the environment as a whole can be undertaken only by the deepest and the shallowest of thinkers. The rest of us must be content with contributing to the collective enterprise by concentrating on a partial problem, knowing full well that we are like a physician who tries to cure patients in an infested area. With this proviso, I offer a few observations on our subject.

We watch two search parties at work. They are both looking for the solution of the same problem, but from two different points of departure, and they never quite meet. One party starts out from the arts. It notes that painting and sculpture languish in isolation. We are told that artists should be more aware of what the community needs. The issues of our time should reverberate in their works more perceptibly; also the public should be trained to appreciate the arts, and government should take better care of them. We nod and look in the other direction.

The other party starts out from the needs of the community. We are reminded that the world in which we live is ravaged by poverty, over-crowding, and chemical and physical destruction. It would be frivolous indeed to divert any substantial part of our resources to the beautification of walls and streets, especially since the inhabitants themselves would not know the difference. Some of our architecture students and those among their elders who wear the wig of youth talk this way. Instead of merely supplementing their principal task by the study of sociology, psychology, politics, and economics, they spend their time playing the amateur expert in these disciplines and pretend that design is something that can be done without.

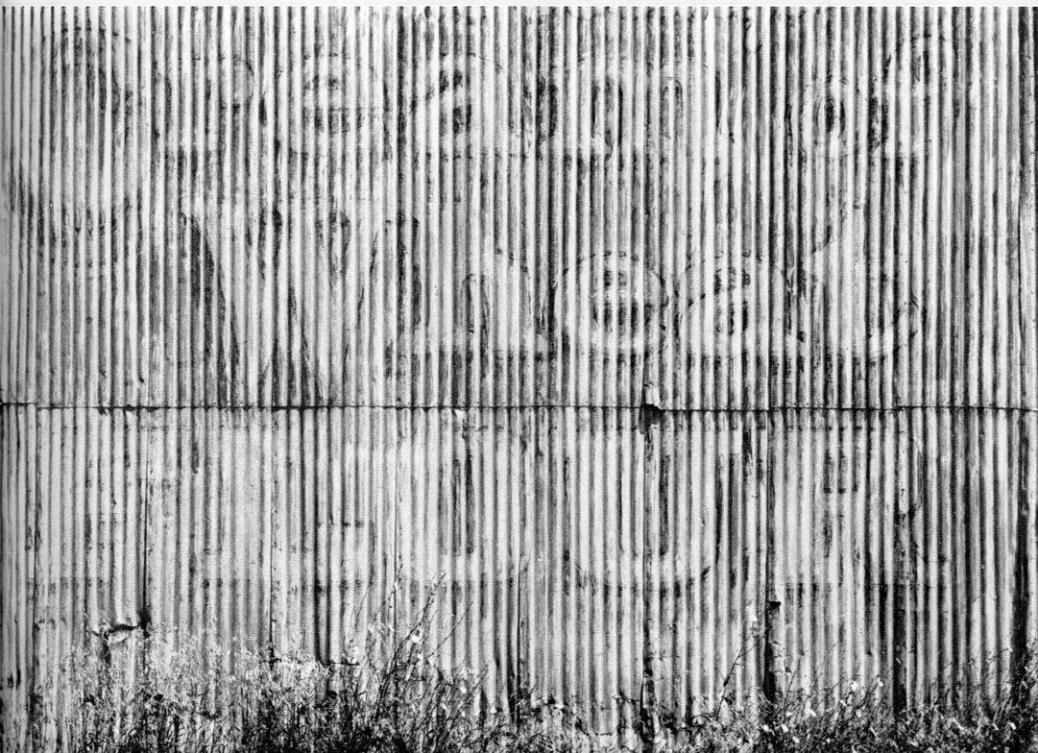
The narrowness of both perspectives is due, I believe, to a common cause. Both parties still think that art is a noun, not an attribute. They are possessed by the narrow traditional notion that certain objects are art, dedicated to the pursuit of beauty, whereas most objects are

not art. Art is some kind of special substance owned by certain shapes, but not by others; most shapes are without art. There are still debates on whether architecture, pottery, interior design are art or not. And if they are, what about jewelry, dress-making, automobile styles? We are told that good art is art, but bad art is not; that handmade things are art, but those made by machine are not; that only the shapes of man can be art, not those of nature. Everyone of these foolish dichotomies cuts across a vital connection, needed to make sense of our environmental problem.

It almost embarrasses me to reiterate the principle that art is indivisible; that it is either an attribute of every visible shape or of none at all. If the aesthetic aspect is absent from stones, forks, gestures, it must be absent from all things, including

paintings. There is no aesthetic classification other than the one that distinguishes readable from unreadable form, organized from disorganized, fresh from trite, profound from shallow, true from mendacious. In our day, we see objects or activities accepted as art merely because they are made or performed by professionals, who call them art or—lucus a non lucendo—who call them nonart. If we would remember that there is no such category as art we would know that the only questions to be asked when a man digs a hole or sprays paint are whether, and to what extent, he contributes to the wellbeing of the human mind or body, whether he commits a stupidity or refreshes and deepens our sense of the nature of our being—and that nothing else matters. As long as we ask whether digging or spraying is art, there can be no answer.

Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay



Also there is no way of separating the merely practical from the aesthetic. A well-made tool cannot but contain the elements of what makes a great work of sculpture; and a painting cannot fulfill its function unless it preserves the sort of utility that makes a road map valuable. Let me use an example close at hand. Every morning I have to contend for breakfast with an electric stove that is headed by a panel of five switches, arranged in a horizontal row and all exactly alike. One switch belongs to the broiler, the other four to the burners, but this is indicated by no visual distinction. The four burners are arranged in a square, but this arrangement is not mirrored by the row of the switches. Of course one can learn what the switches refer to, but only in spite of the visual counterevidence. The design of the switches is not neutral; rather it tells a lie. It proclaims equal status although in fact there is inequality of function and location.

A purely practical matter, this poorly designed stove? Yes, but only as a first approximation to the problem. Is it far-fetched to assume that housewives derive from such an experience and from other similar ones a more general sense that things are not what they purport to be, that appearance cannot be trusted, that we must find out what is behind the tricks the world tries to play on us? After all, the human mind draws its generalizations from concrete experiences, among which the sensory ones are the most impressive. And is the misleading design of the stove different in principle from, say, a portrait head pretending to represent Albert Einstein, but showing us instead the mous-

tache and tired muscles of an aging face, devoid of spirit?

Ineptness of form, which creates a discrepancy between statement and fact, can be confusing, wasteful, even dangerous, but it is harmless, compared with the intentionally deceitful trickery in packaging, in the faking of textures, in false facades, in cosmetically upgraded oranges. Are these daily experiences different, in principle, from a surrealist demonstration by a Magritte or Dali, which teaches us in paint that the world is not what it pretends to be?

The artist who speaks in shapes and colors can hope to be understood only if he lives in a community of visually literate persons who perceive the function and behavior of any object and event not only practically but symbolically. A person for whom the dimness of a badly lit room or the radiance of the sun rising above the roofs has lost its symbolic message cannot be expected suddenly to switch on his aesthetic sense when he faces a Rembrandt in the museum.

The capacity to read the world symbolically is reborn in every child. Not only is the child spontaneously impressed by the sensory qualities of darkness and light, the difference between a velvety and a prickly surface, a straight and a crooked thing; it is also natural for him to perceive these expressive qualities as more general traits of the human experience, and he employs them metaphorically without hesitation. The sad lesson of our own time is that this natural capacity can be crippled if the environment becomes unreadable and if education systematically neglects and destroys the

wisdom of the senses. To pretend that this impairment does not matter is to overlook the elementary psychological fact that the human organism uses all its resources, material as well as mental, for the one final purpose of gaining rich experience — it used to be called the striving for happiness—and that any impoverishment of the senses interferes with this goal most directly. Poverty of any kind asks for remedy, no matter whether the afflicted person is aware of his deficiency or not.

From the exhibit "East 100th Street—Bruce Davidson" which was held at the Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin from September 10 to October 10, 1971. The exhibit was sponsored by the American Federation of Arts.

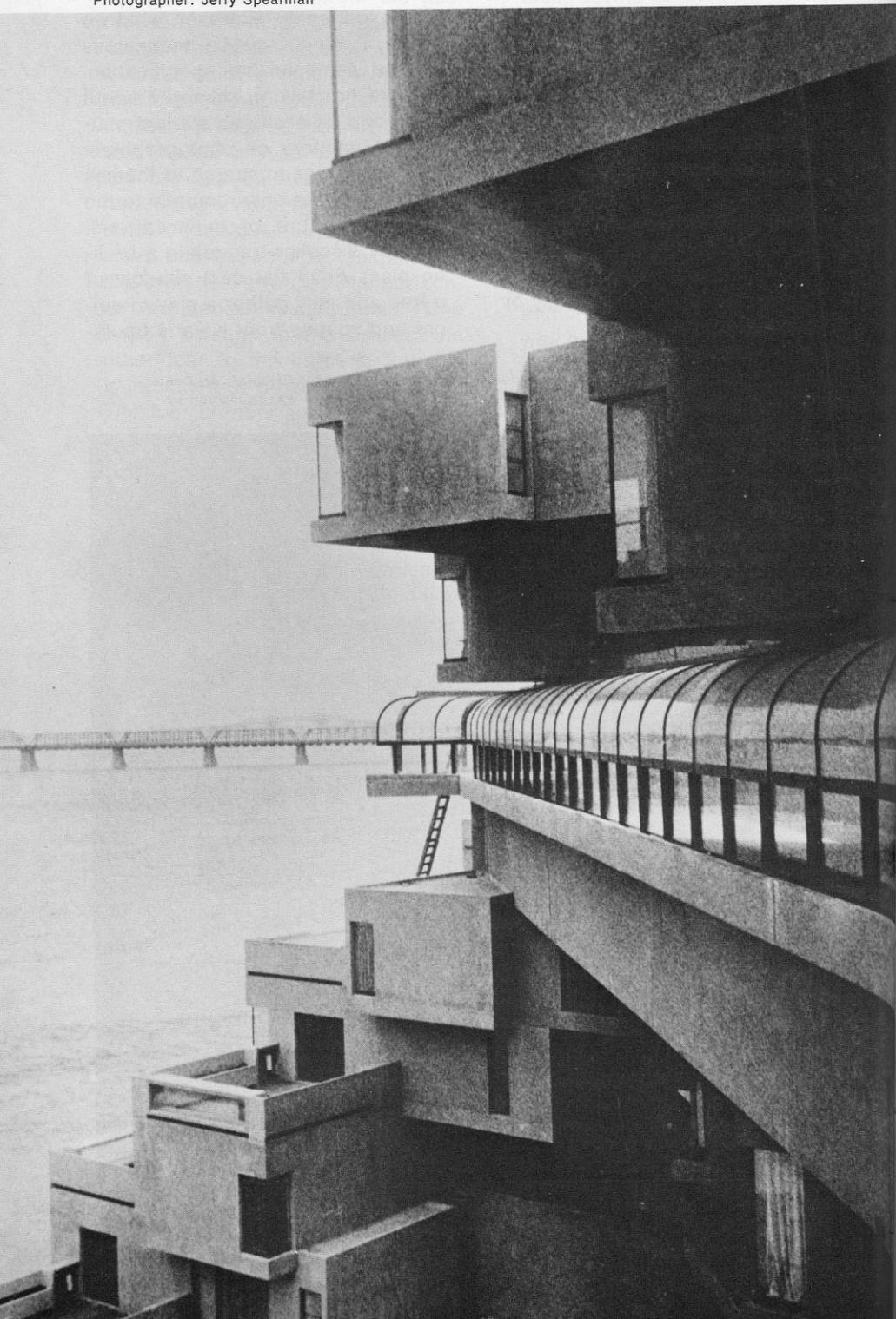
We call the aesthetic aspects of the environment indispensable for human experience. However, what we have in mind may be ambiguous without some further specification. We are not talking primarily about our world as aesthetic subject matter for painters or photographers. The artist goes in search of themes that may relate only remotely to the objective nature of their carriers. He may discover tragedy in a broken glass or in the cast shadow of a tree and may gather a play of colors and shapes from a Paris boule-



"Habitat 67," Montreal, Quebec

Architect: Moshe Safdie

Photographer: Jerry Spearman



yard or an old wall covered with the remnants of torn posters. He may find his sense of form and space stimulated by a Mediterranean slum or by the vulgarities of a suburban road lined with pizza parlors, filling stations, and bars.

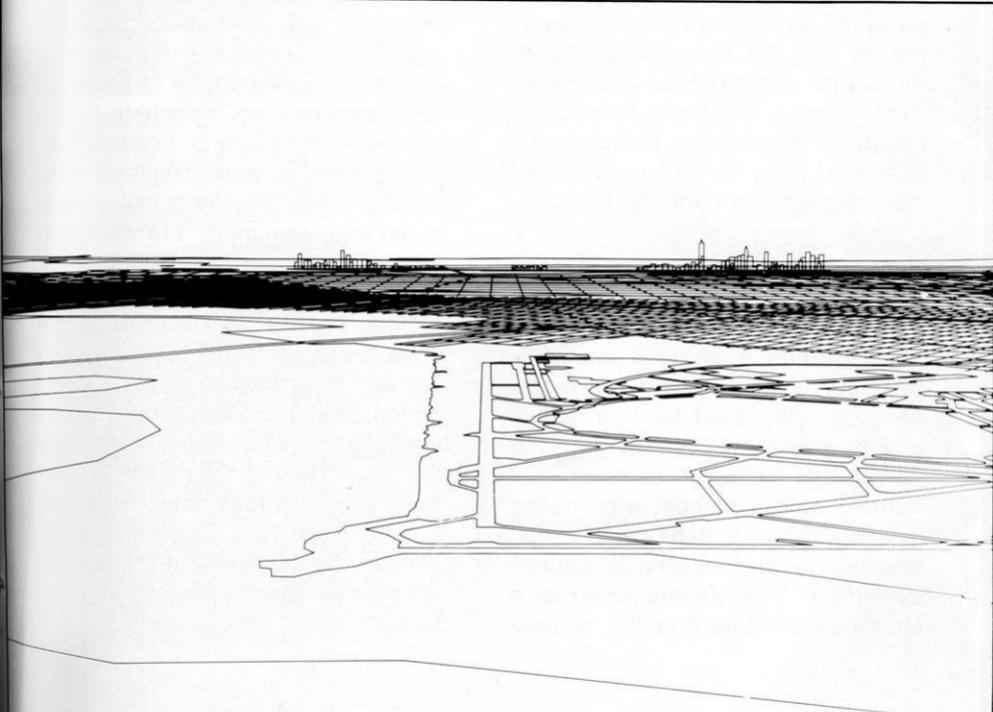
It is true, however, for great artists in particular that their conceptions, most personal though they are, rarely fail to capture some essential characteristics of the subjects they portray. They are profoundly true. They report on what I have called elsewhere the "self-image" of the things surrounding us. At the beginning of this article I spoke of the environment as "reflecting" the mentality of the persons responsible for it, but this again

calls for a distinction, namely, that between symptomatic and symbolic information.

The natural and man-made world is full of telltale signs, which can be interpreted by the social scientist, the ecologist, the appraiser, the detective. These are symptoms, effects of causes, about which information is needed. Often symptoms do not convey the story to the senses directly; they require inference based on expertise.

A building with broken windows, peeling walls, rusty railings may owe its state to a number of causes, which cannot be perceived directly by the eye. But it does speak directly of decay and thereby it con-

View of John F. Kennedy Airport at New York City produced under the direction of William Fetter at the Boeing Company by computer graphics techniques which he developed there.  
Courtesy: William Fetter, Head, Computer Graphics Laboratory, Department of Design, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale



veys another, different kind of information. It acts as a symbol of a particular state of being. Directly perceptible expression of shape, color, movement is the principal domain of the aesthetic. It is therefore most clearly present in those features of the environment that owe their existence mainly to the aesthetic sense of man: "works of art," public monuments like churches or palaces, etc. These most impressive examples are therefore good aids in helping us find the same qualities in every other well made implement.

Aesthetically we demand of the environment that it display its own nature and function to the eye, not only to guide the inhabitants in their use of its facilities but also to offer them a symbolic image of their own way of life. The towers of San Gimignano reflect a spirit of feudal competition and distrust. A "sub-division" of standardized family homes and the richly shaped conglomerate of the Habitat apartments in Montreal symbolize different philosophies of collective living. In the aesthetically formed environment man reveals and confirms himself.

Here a final distinction is necessary. The works of painters, sculptors, film makers have the one purpose of presenting a clarified image of what our world is and ought to be. As such, they must be true, which implies also that they must be ethical in the sense of showing that harmony and fulfillment is produced by some forms of behavior and that destruction and misery is caused by others. The austere order of a Mondrian painting and the homog-

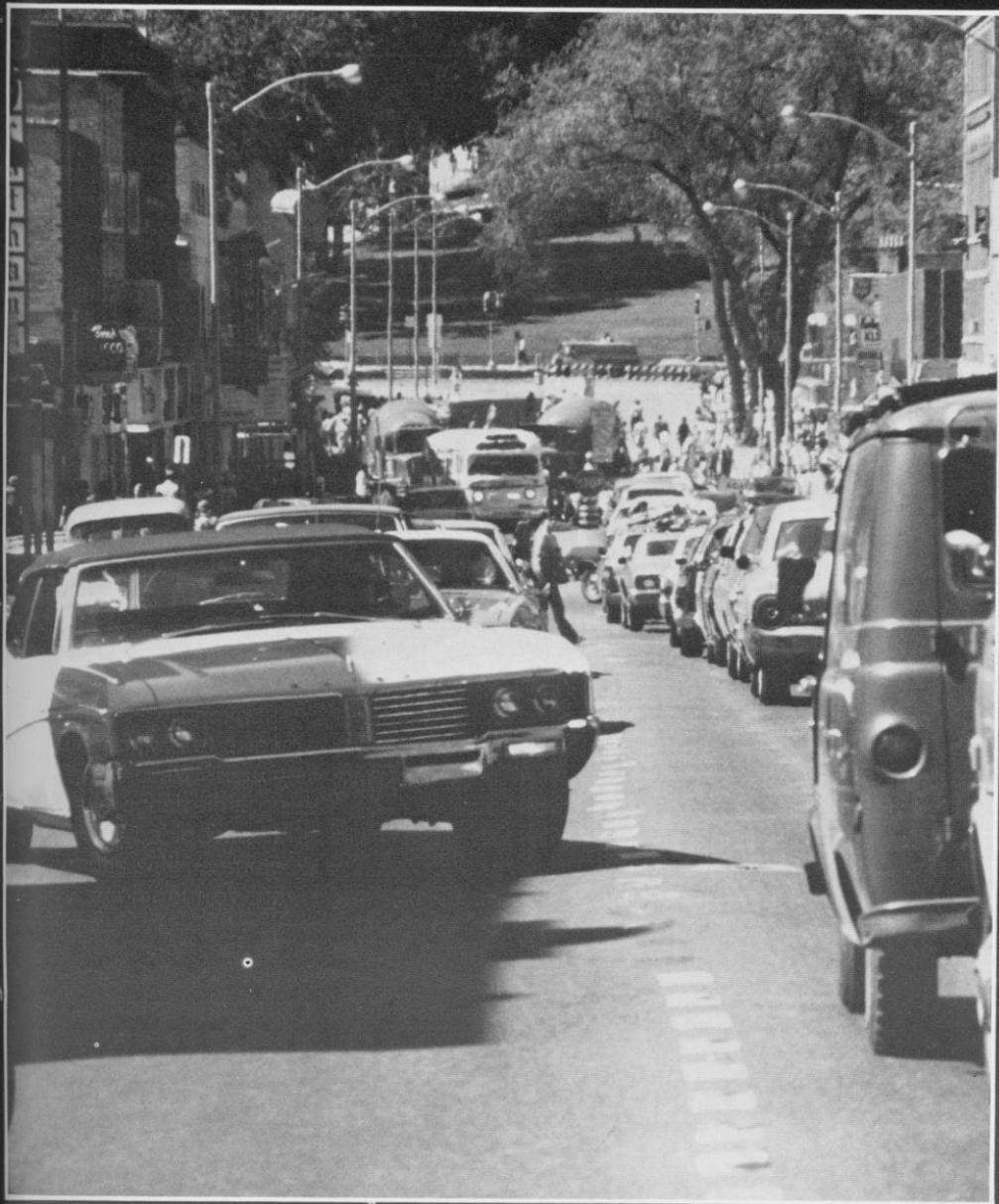
enized milling around of a Jackson Pollock are such images. Some of them recommend a particular way of life, others diagnose what is and thereby contribute to the realization of what ought to be.

As distinguished from such pure images, the facilities and implements constituting the man-made environment serve, of course, to promote the best possible way of life and therefore embody an underlying set of values. Designers and architects are not in the business of proving to the eyes how perverted the human race has become, although they sometimes accomplish precisely this effect. In inventing shapes, they give aid and comfort to a particular philosophy of life, whether it be the notion that an implement should serve its purpose as soberly as possible or that of conspicuous consumption.

However, the aesthetic aspects of practically useful objects are not only the consequences of purposeful designing, they also help to enlighten designers and consumers as to the kind of world they are promoting. This explains why architects and designers are so often driven to act as social reformers. The directly evident characteristics of the shapes they consider tell them much more impressively than any social or psychological investigation would where things are in acceptable order and where they are not. Thus if they wish to produce good shapes they must call for the good life. They must supplement as citizens what they have to offer as judges and creators of form.

# ROBERT GINSBERG

## MAN VS. ENVIRONMENT



## by Robert Ginsberg

The environment is a crossroads of aesthetic and social concerns. The crossroads is uncomfortably congested. Dangerous collisions occur, the signposts are obscured, and the exits lead off in all directions. Alarmed, bewildered, and lost, we are offered conflicting instructions to get us through this strange terrain.

The *urban environment* is choking the vitality out of us. Breathing space in cities has diminished as well as the oxygen to breathe. Our waste products crowd us in and interfere with our life processes. The contaminated air shrouds our homes, erases the towers of office buildings, burns the eyes, and blackens the lungs. The city street, once a stage of human interaction and vitality, now functions as staging platform for transfer of garbage and for the lives of automobiles. We can't get anywhere in the city because of the very proliferation and ubiquity of our instruments of transportation NO LEFT TURN. The downtown area, once the nucleus of the city, is occupied by parking garages, NO PARKING SIGNS, double-parked cars, crumbling buildings, old stores, and variegated filth. There are also crowds of people to be seen herded together at corners. Professor Gaertner, in one of the following articles, analyzes the changing treatment of the city street *in painting*, but we may recognize this as reflecting an altered experience of the city *in our life*. Look how the constriction of the urban environment operates on people:

They rush about trying to beat the streetlight DO NOT WALK or catch

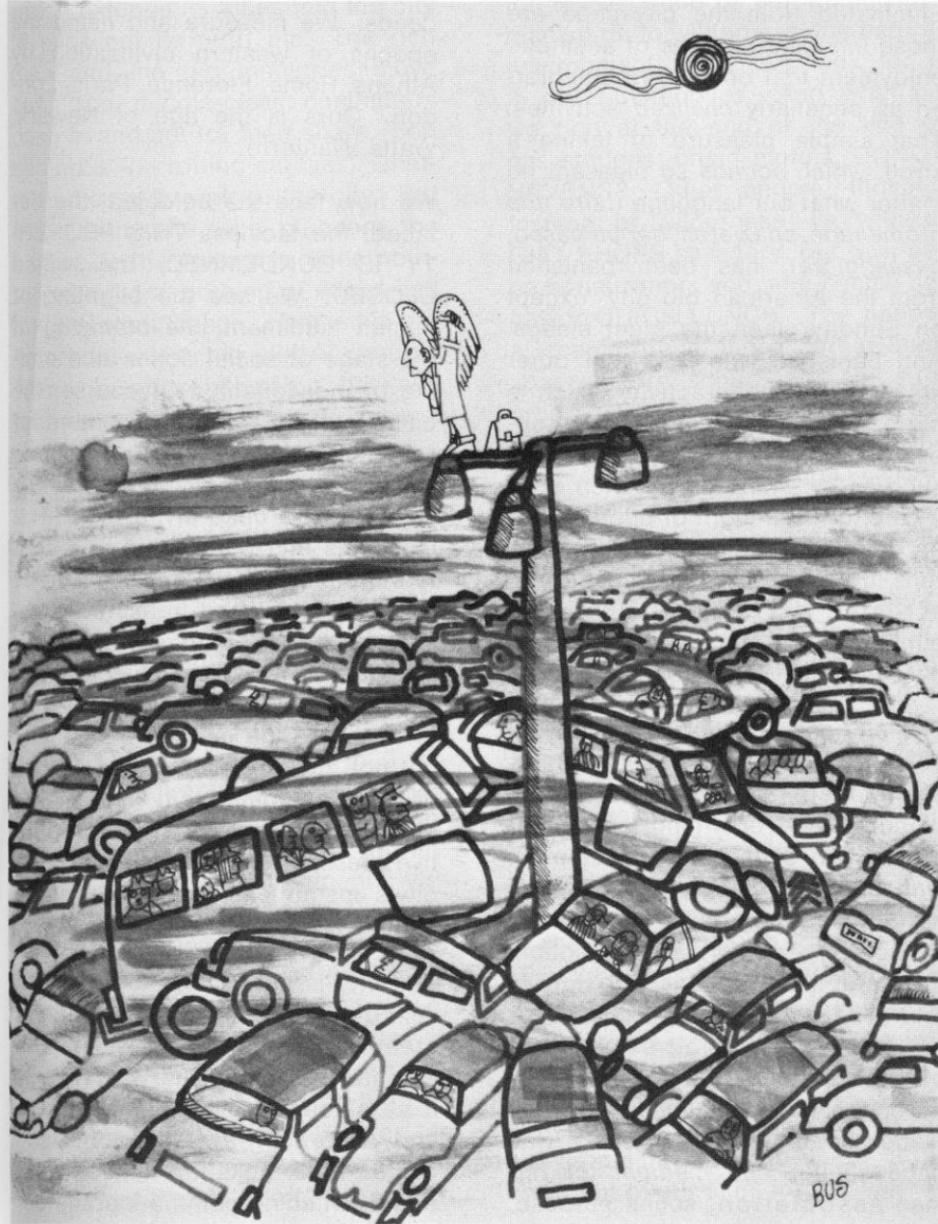
the bus EXACT FARE ONLY. They push past one another STEP TO THE REAR. They do not see others as people but as bodies DO NOT BLOCK ENTRANCEWAY taking up room in the narrow thoroughfare like so many two-legged automobiles STOP. Even for those who have some time to spare there is no place to sit, no place to stand TOW AWAY ZONE, no place to walk KEEP OUT. The shopper GOING OUT OF BUSINESS and sightseer DO NOT ENTER tire quickly. In the back of their mind they keep track of the parking meter VIOLATION or the train schedule. *Escape* is the desire that pulses in the blood of the person downtown. He flees CLOSED AT 5 PM when his work or foray is over for the day EXPRESS NOT RUNNING. He heads home for the suburbs — that quiet dehumanized synthetic arrangement with trees and crabgrass—and immures himself safely in his castle, nay, his cave.

Or else he goes home on the sweat-boxes of buses and subway cars to the ghetto NO PARKING ANYTIME filled with double the filth of downtown NO DUMPING. While it is alarming that our great metropolitan centers are so crushing that men flee them as soon as they can, it is more distressing that other men are obliged ONE WAY to live in them NO EXIT. The physical decay of the city that we are witnessing is but one symptom of social disease which otherwise is manifest in economic polarization, racial inequality, civil unrest, and massive violence. In sum, we are suffering from a general disintegration of the sense of human worth.

Initially, we think of the environment as the backdrop against which

we observe the troubled activities of men in the city, but in reality the city is constitutive of our troubles. The surroundings are the substance. It is the city itself—not simply the men within it—which is impoverished, filthy, crippled, neglected, insensitive, ugly. In a word, the city stinks NO LITTERING, SPITTING, SMOKING, OR SOLICITING.

It is the social crisis of the urban environment that we have been reflecting upon as a dehumanizing and uncivilizing force. But that which is dehumanizing and uncivilizing also creates an aesthetic crisis. For a sense of human worth with an openness toward human fulfillment is at the foundation of both social responsibility and aesthetic



Cartoon by Franco Giacomini, Torino, Italy

enjoyment. The city is distasteful POST NO BILLS. It is an uncomfortable experience that affronts our aesthetic sensibility. We don't enjoy cities any more KEEP OFF THE GRASS. The ugliness and cacaphony that make the city-experience aesthetically disagreeable also turn away buyers, investors, tourists, homeowners.

Eliminated from the cityscape are those innocent sources of aesthetic enjoyment that once were celebrated as peculiarly *civilized* activities. That simple pleasure of taking a stroll, which *sounds* so pleasant no matter what our language (*faire une promenade, spazieren, dar un paseo, passeggiare*), has been banished from the American big city, except on Sunday when the giant sleeps. And banished with it is that other universal aesthetic activity which is more sophisticated though in appearance simpler, namely lounging, such as by sitting on a bench or in a café, or on a flight of public steps or else a great curb stone. One runs the risk of being mugged or arrested NO LOITERING, being gunned down by a sniper or run over by a taxi OFF DUTY.

The city used to be itself a moving aesthetic performance, an interchanging of happenings, with the unique always emerging for the discrimination of the alert participant. One observed people in their separate though partially concealed selfhood, in motion and in action, in interaction with one another, in interpenetration with the city. People were the imperative fulfillment of the architecture, the perspectives, the plazas and spaces: they made the city live. The city was once shelter and *medium* for human association, social purpose,

mutual delight. The city held creative and shaping powers that transformed things and men, bringing out the variety of their possibilities. The city sustained society. This was an organic connection between city and people. Rather than the exterior shell or "environment" surrounding the lives of men, the city was the inner core of those lives, partaking of men's visions and deeds. We measure and name the epochs of western civilization by Athens, Rome, Florence, Paris, London. Ours is the age of Newark, Watts, Nanterre.

We now face the befouled, the defaced, the faceless THIS PROPERTY IS CONDEMNED, the ruined CLOSED. We see the blighting of human fulfillment, the cramping of the stage of social action, the muting of individuality. Of course, the cities still *retain* great centers of art, though they no longer are themselves art centers. We are the skeleton of a dead civilization. The museums and performing arts centers are mere oases in the aesthetic wilderness. Closed treasure boxes, they do not let their contents flow out into (or back from) the city. The suburbanite and traveller comes to town to *use* the cultural institutions but not to participate in the culture of the city. *Doing a city* once meant absorbing through one's contributive presence the special mix of the city's institutions, monuments, and setting *with* its people.

The city is not "the place" to live; i.e., it is no longer a *kind of life* creatively satisfying to men. The city has become barbarian. We use it as a reference point for airports and superhighways, as a banking center, a barracks for manual workers, a switching point, a storage de-

pot, an emporium. We aspire to live outside it in our own homes, close to nature, safe and sound, with peace and quiet.

The observer must prepare himself to be further horrified by the *suburban environment*. The suburb is not a town with a soul and identity of its own, but a phony village, a *subcity*, a subordinate parasite which extends its tubes into the city to suck out its nutrients. The rich men and the big industries move out. The middle-class commuters dash in and out for their share. Left behind is the rotting carcass. Ghetto and suburb replace the city. But the suburbanite who plunders the city of its life treasures does nothing with them, nothing of social and cultural significance. He has his private home with his plot of ground. There is no relationship between his stakeout and that of others. Suburb is not Community.

There is no center. One cannot sense either the limits or the wholeness of a suburb. *Suburbs* happen, in the plural, as contiguous discontinuities. What gives some of them their sole identity is a name on the commuter station or at the super-highway entrance where grim-faced men converge each morning as they plunge voraciously toward the city. The suburban shopping center is nothing more than an immense parking lot with gigantic victualling halls. And though the suburb has its lawns and trees one must go everywhere in it by auto. The final irony is that in front of what passes as the main street in every suburb in America are parking meters. What has been left out, as Professor Puravs observes, is some place for the exercise of *imaginative* values. In short, the suburb

is not an independent social arrangement, serving as alternative to or refinement of the city, but it is a disarrangement, without joint efforts at an aesthetically redeeming world of vision and encounter. In the suburb each man is king in the anarchy of taste and values. Suburbs deny Society.

Finally, we may look for relief, nay, for revivification of our waning human spirit, to wilderness, the *natural environment*. Alas, we look for it in our automobiles. And what do we find at the end of the line of gas stations, chain motels, DONUT HAVENS? Other people, looking. Instead of wilderness we witness GIFT SHOPS savagery: our own de-personalization and anti-social behavior QUICK LUNCH. The national scenic areas, those "great open spaces," are suburbs of our suburbs. Nature has been obliterated by GAS the transistor radio, the beer can, the TV antenna, CLEAN REST ROOMS. The pieces of nature that remain have been pounced upon as SOUVENIRS treasures to preserve. They are then unnaturally presented to us as POSTCARDS packages to be enjoyed in the same way we are guided about an art museum by a recorded voice plugged into our head, and the same way we "see" a city by a 2½ hour GRAY LINE SIGHTSEEING TOUR in which we never step off the bus. Neat paths, STAY ON TRAIL, numbered trees and rocks, evenly spaced refuse baskets HELP KEEP AMERICA BEAUTIFUL, booklets, slide shows, ranger talks, and the voices in the wilderness of your neighbors TOILETS THIS WAY.

There is, then, no way out of our environment, just as there is no way out of our skin, for our environ-



From the exhibit "East 100th Street—Bruce Davidson" which was held at the Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin from September 10 to October 10, 1971. The exhibit was sponsored by the American Federation of Arts.

ment, even what we find in nature, is ourselves. And the crisis we have been brought to is not one of man at odds with his environment, but man at odds with himself. What we have done to the environment is really to have shut up doors inside us. We now are struggling to keep the lid down on that locked up humanity inside. There is a misleading way of conceiving of the problem which is a logical extension of what causes the problem in the first place. This consists in regarding the environment as something distinct and separable from man, as space was thought in Newtonian physics to be distinct from the objects that occupied it and the

events that occurred within it. Such an environment would be something that man, using his *ingenuity* and his *mechanical power*, might rearrange and bring under his mastery. The mistake is viewing environmental decay as fundamentally a technological and scientific problem. The real problem is that we have surrendered too much of our values to a social system that operates for technological goals. We are misled into searching for some invention, some chemical substance, some industry for crucial investment, or else some form of regulatory agency which would suddenly clean up the environment for us. Professor Truitt warns us that the



Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

mechanics of any clean-up campaign is merely a continuation of a social system geared to produce crap. Indeed, we notice that the anti-pollution bandwagon has been joined by the profiteers of pollution. Automobile manufacturers, for instance, are putting out products with greater marketing appeal, though at greater *proportional* cost to the consumer, because they can be labelled "safe for the environment." This label may well be the code name for the biggest exploitation and pollution boom in the short history of Capitalism.

Of course everyone is against pollution, including the despoilers of environment. The pollution, then, is not in the environment; it is in ourselves. The environmental crisis,

while described in quantitative and material terms, happens to be a spiritual crisis of values. The resolution is not to be achieved by any manipulation of the physical world but by an affirmation and blossoming of the *innerment*. The question, What is the world coming to?, is to be replaced by the question, What have I not yet become?

What is to be affirmed is the value of human life, the lives of all humans, the living that is distinctively and fully human. Instead of a System built upon possession of things, we need a Culture, a realm of persons engaged in activities and valuing experience, including enjoyment. The self-fulfillment of men should be the purpose of our or-

ganization together. A man should be able to find in community those values and experiences that strengthen his selfhood. From a regained sense of our own humanity, we may then move to a wider sense of community with life and with the forces and forms of nature. It is possible to feel this whole whirling planet as the necessary complementarity of our being, as once certain men felt about their *polis*, and others felt about their farmlands, and as the Navaho nation feels about the earth under their feet. Then, once the soul has healed, it is a mere practical matter to "clean up" the physical sores.

We need to exercise interconnect-edness, to catch up with the earth, and to bring the human measure to bear upon the deranged orders of city and suburb. The force from within which humanizes is aestheti-cally creative, for it shapes our world for our enjoyment, and it is socially committed, for such shap-ing is done with and for others whose humanity is present in our humanity. Culture, Civilization, Community, Humanity, are differ-ent names for the fulfillment of men together.

The problem of the "environment," of nature conservation, of urban re-newal, is largely one of motivating social change, human conservation, and individual renewal. Aestheti-cians, moralists, poets, and philoso-phers have parts to play in this work. But theirs is no isolated cura-tive task. The environmental mess is but one feature of the *innerment* sickness. Imperialistic war, racial degrad-ation, societal violence, brutal poverty are still with us. Piece-meal solutions only take the pres-ure off several symptoms while

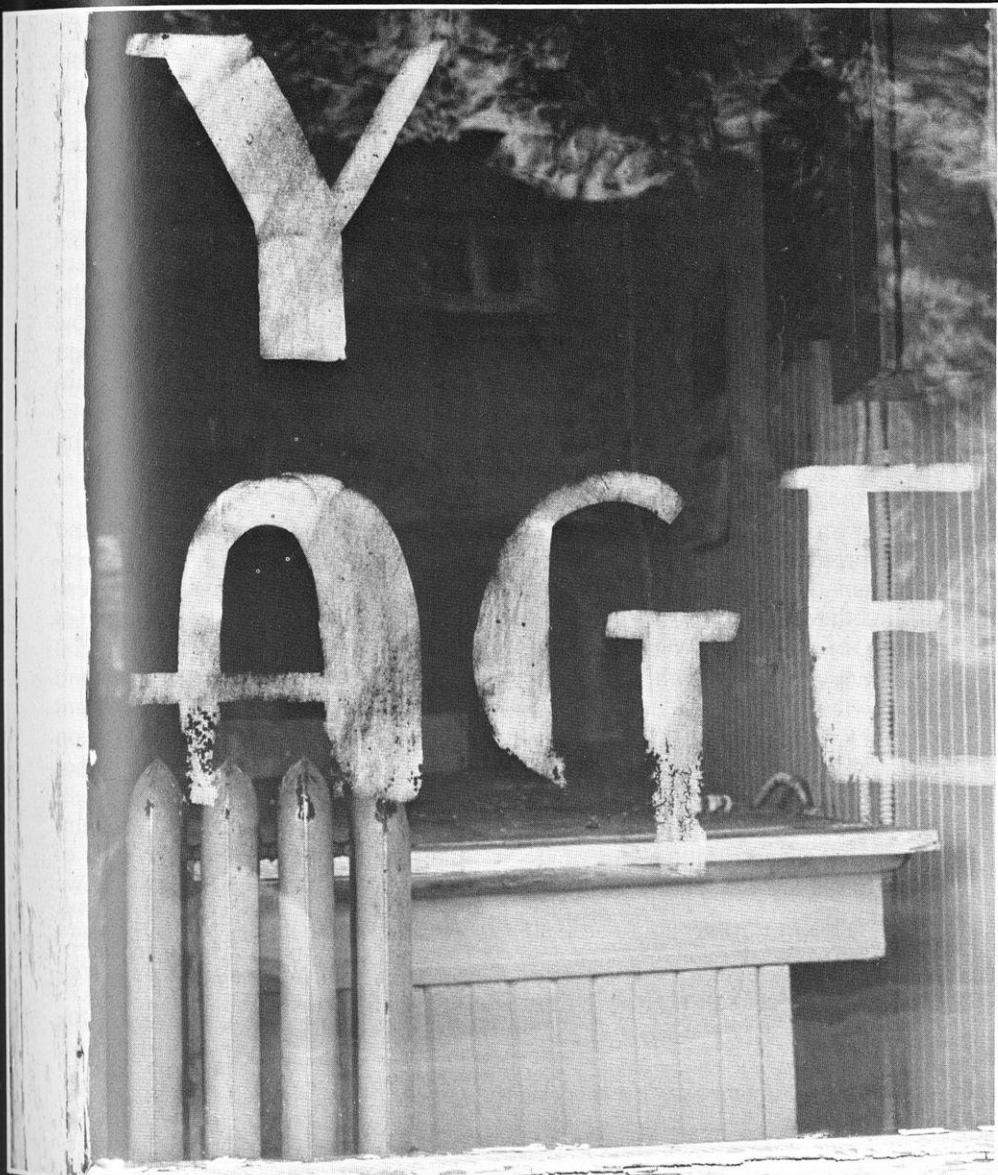
one is given a going over. Notice the shift in relatively few years in national crises: civil rights, anti-militarism, urban disorders, student unrest, economic imbalance, environmental pollution. Five years from now environment might be *out* as subject for special conferences and journal numbers, while landing on Mars or in Chile might be *in* as the national crisis. The contempt for life harbored in our breasts is of astonishing vitality. Hydra-headed, it pops up in a new demeaning manner as soon as we "clean it up" in some one area.

It has been suggested that the only way to bring men back to their senses, back to their respect for life, is to destroy their idols, to burn the cities, raid the suburbs, bomb the arsenals, the banks, and the classrooms. But this method soon contributes to the devaluation of life. Bomb-throwers are collabora-tors in the brutalization of man. Yet we are collapsing not with a whim-per but with a fierce obscenity di-rected against man. If we reach the second millennium we will cele-brate it each with bomb in hand.

Too bad. There is a very slight chance that we will become so hor-rified by this spectacle of self-pol-lution that we will earnestly adopt a radical remedy, though it costs us our imperious disdain for our fellowmen. One has only to look within oneself to see that which is around us. The *innerment* is the environment. The inner vision with which we connect up with one an-other and with all around us is what the great artists and prophets have celebrated and brought before our bewildered eyes as we stood lost. We need their eyes again. But most of all our own.

# OLGERTIS PURAVS

CULTURAL VALUES, ENVIRONMENT,  
AND THE IMAGINATION



Joseph Wood Krutch has said that "man needs a context for his life larger than himself."<sup>1</sup> The history of mankind and its efforts certainly bears him out. Such contexts, however, are never given to man; he conceives them out of the materials of his own variegated experience. Our physical environment is part of that experience. It provides the substance and the opportunities to exercise that ever present urge to conceive more encompassing contexts which manifests itself in scientific theorizing, artistic creation, or ethical supposition. It is my purpose here to try to suggest that all these works of man and perhaps many more represent a fundamentally allied effort of the human mind to shape a chaotic flux of experience into something more comprehensible, more stable and more satisfying.

In order to explain the relationship between the environment and our spiritual conceptualizing activity I shall borrow the traditional concept of the imagination and define it as the synthesizing "faculty" of the mind. My definition does not assume any particular model of the mind — it does assume, however, a distinctive and definable activity by means of which the mind creates more or less unified wholes out of the continuous flux of our experience. Since such unities are obviously imaginary the term has a more than traditional appropriateness.

This concept of the imagination is at least as old as Francis Bacon and it has been seen both in a negative and a positive light. Bacon noted that imagination could produce fictions, that "the Imagination; which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature has joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things."<sup>2</sup> However, it is the moralist who equates fictions with falsehoods and the defensive poet who would have them be truths. As a consequence of these conflicts many important insights into the nature of the imaginative activity have remained isolated in their application. It is seldom remembered that Bacon also observed the very important and functional role of the imagination. It gives "some shadow of satisfaction to the mind of man in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it."<sup>3</sup> It submits experience to the desires of the mind.

Bacon's slim suggestion was picked up and developed further by a number of other writers in the 18th century who saw that the activity of the imagination was a potential source of human satisfaction and pleasure and who saw with Kant that moral precepts are founded on the concept of freedom and not on "grounds taken from nature."<sup>4</sup> Space will not permit me a complete examination of the theories of imagination or the associated views of mental activity. It will have to

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Wood Krutch, "Wilderness As More Than a Tonic." *The Best Nature Writing of Joseph Wood Krutch* (New York, 1969), p. 260.

<sup>2</sup>Sir Francis Bacon, *Works*, ed. Spedding, Ellis and Heath (3 vols.; London, 1870), III, 343.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, III, 344.

<sup>4</sup>Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. James C. Meredith (Oxford, 1952), p. 11.

suffice to say that Kant defines finality as an *a priori* principle which our judgment is compelled to adopt as essential to its activity. It "represents the unique mode in which we must proceed in our reflection upon the objects of nature with a view to getting a thoroughly interconnected whole of experience."<sup>5</sup> Lessing adds to this the recognition that human satisfaction depends also on the imaginative activity involved in this mode of reflection.<sup>6</sup> The whole intellectual development of these ideas is finally capsulized by Coleridge in his definition of the imagination and the ideal poet as one who "brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity."<sup>7</sup> It is recognized most importantly in his adoption of the Pythagorean definition of beauty as being "the reduction of many to one . . . in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole. . . ."<sup>8</sup>

The characteristic features of a satisfying imaginative activity are thus at least suggested. They may be categorized as unity, complexity, independence, and meaning. While unity refers to the potential coherence and completeness of imaginative activity, complexity refers to such variables as discrimination and the extent of the mental activity

necessitated. Satisfaction is seen to depend upon the magnitude of the activity, upon the extent to which our mind is exercised by it.

Independence (which in discussions of art is often labeled "aesthetic distance") is the obvious potential advantage (noted by Bacon) of freedom from ordinary extrinsic constraints. The only natural limit of imaginative activity is the limit of the conceivable. Imagination can conceive its own reality and therein rests its peculiar power to satisfy the desires of man. However, its power may well become a liability unless the imaginative experience remains in some relation to the life of man. It is for this reason that I have emphasized meaning. It provides an opportunity to link the fictitious to the actual and personal.

The features of imaginative activity outlined above are not usually controversial.<sup>9</sup> I have, however, moved away from their immediate association with works of art. The artist has obviously learned to shape his material in such a way as to provide the imagination with a maximum opportunity for successful activity, and, if he is more than a successful craftsman, his work will maintain a relationship to the elements of life and to its values by providing the audience with an opportunity for an imaginative synthesis of individual

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>6</sup>"But only that which gives free rein to the imagination is effective. The more we see, the more we must be able to imagine." Gotthold E. Lessing, *Laocoön*, trans. Edward A. McCormick (Indianapolis & New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (London, 1956), pp. 173-174.

<sup>8</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "On the Principles of Genial Criticism concerning the Fine Arts," in *Criticism: the Major Texts*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate (New York, 1952), p. 373.

<sup>9</sup>A somewhat similar list of observations about aesthetic experiences may be found in Monroe C. Beardsley's book *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York, 1958), pp. 527-530.

human concerns into a larger context of values.<sup>10</sup>

It is my thesis that the value-contexts themselves are a product of imaginative activity and that, therefore, they afford us with an opportunity to apply our aesthetic concepts in trying to understand the relationship of experience and values.

Human values exhibit precisely those characteristics of imaginative activity which I have outlined above. They represent a fundamental sense of order and unity. This is exemplified in a multitude of ways adapted to suit both the culture and the individual. The conceptions of God, or of the oversoul, or even the scientific theories of the universe exemplify not only a sense of order but they are more satisfying when that sense is achieved against the resistance offered by the diversity of experience. Our easy choices do not lead to our most lasting attitudes. Our ethical contexts conceive ultimate good to be in the choices we make and in the independence from extrinsic pressures that we exhibit. Individual value is not measured according to the rewards attained but according to the degree to which we attain ideals. The ideal is an imaginary construct: a synthesis of experience beyond the facts of experience. Yet, it remains in some relationship to that experience. The ideal must remain meaningful in ways that we can comprehend through our daily experience.

This status of the systems of value is not often acknowledged by the moralist, yet all values (as well as works of art) are the result of that tendency of the human mind to attain "a thoroughly interconnected whole of experience."<sup>11</sup> The tendency toward wholeness, as Kant noted long ago, is the essence of judgment and underlies all our formulations of value.

When we turn to the more obvious values of our culture and look behind the simple phrases expressing them, we discover that a sense of unity is also frequently implied. Furthermore, it is implied that our satisfaction will be enhanced by the diversity of elements which our experience comprehends. Man's belief that truth will emerge when all evidence is heard rests finally, and quite apart from the confidence in men's reason, on the unarticulated belief that all experience, however diverse, is comprehensible in a unified way. Our call for national unity rests as much on the awareness of diversity as on recognition of mutual purposes and goals. Whatever the value of such concepts may be, man's patterns of behavior are and will continue to be controlled by them.

Besides the formal qualities outlined above, the realization of these concepts through actual experience by individuals also requires a possibility for personal involvement: a sense of the relationship between that which is external to us and our own private experience. Only in

<sup>10</sup>I have used the term *opportunity* here to avoid any suggestion that these experiences are induced by the art object. It must always be kept in mind that the energy for our imaginative activities must be supplied by ourselves. This, however, does not diminish the importance of properly organized materials. Without such materials many experiences are simply not available.

<sup>11</sup>Kant, *Judgement*, p. 23.



From the exhibit "East 100th Street—Bruce Davidson" which was held at the Elvehjem Art Center, University of Wisconsin from September 10 to October 10, 1971. The exhibit was sponsored by the American Federation of Arts.

this way can man be reconciled to the ever present threatening awareness of his own insignificance and his equally pressing sense of vitality. It is a paradoxical characteristic of all sense of belonging that it is unattainable without a sense of self—as all recognition of unity is unattainable without discrimination.

On an even more personal level the human imagination has conceived values analogous to those of na-

tions and cultures. Among the most central are self-identity and freedom. Both these values merge in our insistence on meaningful choices. We believe that our experiences must not dissipate but rather coalesce into a perceptible and coherent totality which relates to the broader experience of mankind, to the larger context in which our life is transacted. The history of man offers more than enough examples of his efforts to bring his

individual experiences into some comprehensible unity. Confrontation with failure never diminishes this striving but only redirects it into new channels. For reasons which are now lost in evolutionary history, the mind of man has developed a compulsion to play with experience and to shape it into comprehensible unities.

The artist has learned to embody the products of man's imagination in concrete objects and to make them a potential source of coherent and satisfying experience. He has the obvious advantage that he works with an illusion and is free to manipulate it in accordance with his own values, subject only to the constraints of his medium and the limits of imaginative synthesis. No such freedom exists for the individual who is concerned with our daily experience. He works with an intractable actuality, seeking to cast about it the spell of some illusion, to embody in it those values which are central to our lives, and thus to communicate to others experiences in which such values are present.

The physical environment constitutes one dimension of our daily experience. It is the result of many forces other than those with which we are here concerned and it confronts us with an array of sense data which we cannot ignore but which remains frustrating to us until our imagination can act and bring about a sense of unity, "a momentary stay against confusion."<sup>12</sup> Such an array may be man-made or natural or both, but, whatever the

case, it confronts us with material which has the potential of awakening, strengthening and confirming values which our imagination has conceived and which it persists in reaffirming.

I believe that this material has been neglected and that its value as a specific resource has been quite unrealized because we have neglected to examine the role of the imagination in the totality of our lives. We can enhance the individual's sense of self-identity, his sense of freedom and choice, as well as his sense of purpose by a careful attention to environmental qualities. To do so we must provide opportunities for imaginative synthesis, opportunities for the mind to discover in its diverse surroundings a unity which is both related to the individual's experience and allows a sense of independence.

We cannot, however, transform the environment into works of art. We *must not* do so. Works of art require a degree of disinterestedness which is incompatible with our response to everyday environment. Environmental features depend for meaning on the direct perception of their function. If we do not confuse this function with utility we can enhance our awareness of choice and hence our sense of independence. Aesthetic distance in works of art enables us to perceive unity and to participate without incurring certain consequences. When applied to the environment, aesthetic distance frees us from the compulsion to action and enables us to achieve a readiness for action.

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<sup>12</sup>Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes," in *Selected Poems of Robert Frost* (New York, 1966), p. 2.

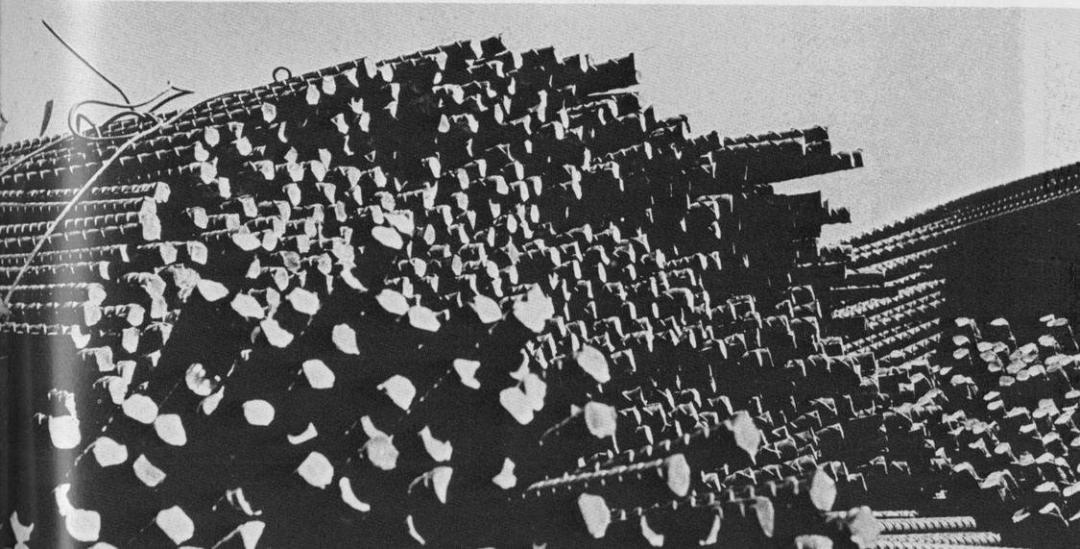
A clutter of discarded objects, store fronts on which hang the shreds of last year's posters—all this fronted with pavement and a few thin-branched trees whose leaves are dying from the drought is a familiar but frustrating sight. The objects in this scene have no function and no relationship to each other. The stores may be in use but what we see does not suggest it. Yet that same scene could be different: the trees could be cultivated to provide shade for the passer-by and for the store front. The store front itself could reveal the nature of the store and the mass of unused pavement could be broken up by grass to reduce the heat. Finally the passer-by could pause under a tree, no longer thrust forward on his errand by the intolerable heat, and contemplate the now comprehensible display. Or consider the mass of signs along our major routes into cities. The supposed functionality of these signs is destroyed by their compulsive uniformity: they obscure all perception of difference and hence all sense of choice and freedom. If we value freedom we must have an environment in which distinctions are

preserved and in which we may pause and realize our choices.

The sense of unity in works of art begins with our awareness of the frame; it is made meaningful by a more or less limited set of related details. No *fixed* frame is possible when we consider the environment. Our lives, however, are conducted within certain overlapping contexts defined by our job, our community, and our nation and within certain unavoidable physical settings such as buildings, institutions, cities, and nature. All of these realities afford an opportunity to emphasize inter-relationships and to provide the imagination with usable patterns for synthesis. If we do not confuse unity with closure and compartmentalization, our experience can preserve a sense of complexity, a sense of mental participation, and a sense of achievement.

There are many familiar instances which can help to illustrate these ideas. Let us consider a polluted stream running through a back alley cluttered with garbage cans. The store fronts face a street crowd-

Photographer: Michael L. Brisson, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay



ed with cars and short term parking spaces. As we arrive we grab the first spot open, get out and hurry to make our purchase for we must return quickly and get out again. There is much that is meaningless in this scene, much that merely crowds our senses. What is not meaningless has only an immediate meaning in the commercial use we make of it. We do not see the street as a place with its own peculiar unity. It presents no complexity, only a predetermined pattern: enter-purchase-exit. Our activity is limited to a compulsive stimulus-response pattern. There is no opportunity for a sense of choice, or freedom, or self-actualization. Our responses are indistinguishable from those of others.

Yet all of this may be altered by organizing the elements already presented so as to suggest several interacting patterns which do not reveal themselves instantly but only as we move about and by providing us with an opportunity to set our own pace. The principles are simple enough. Besides the parking meter and the particular store we wish to seek out, there must be other foci of interest: architecture, sculpture, leisure and comfort, the stream, and last but not least, the displays of the stores so presented that we may enjoy them without ducking the salesclerks. This is no panacea but it does afford a choice of activity for a larger variety of interests; it affords an opportunity to be oneself while performing an otherwise mechanical errand, and because we see about us objects which are related to each one of us we come to accept at least one part of our environment as significant. We take the materials which our en-

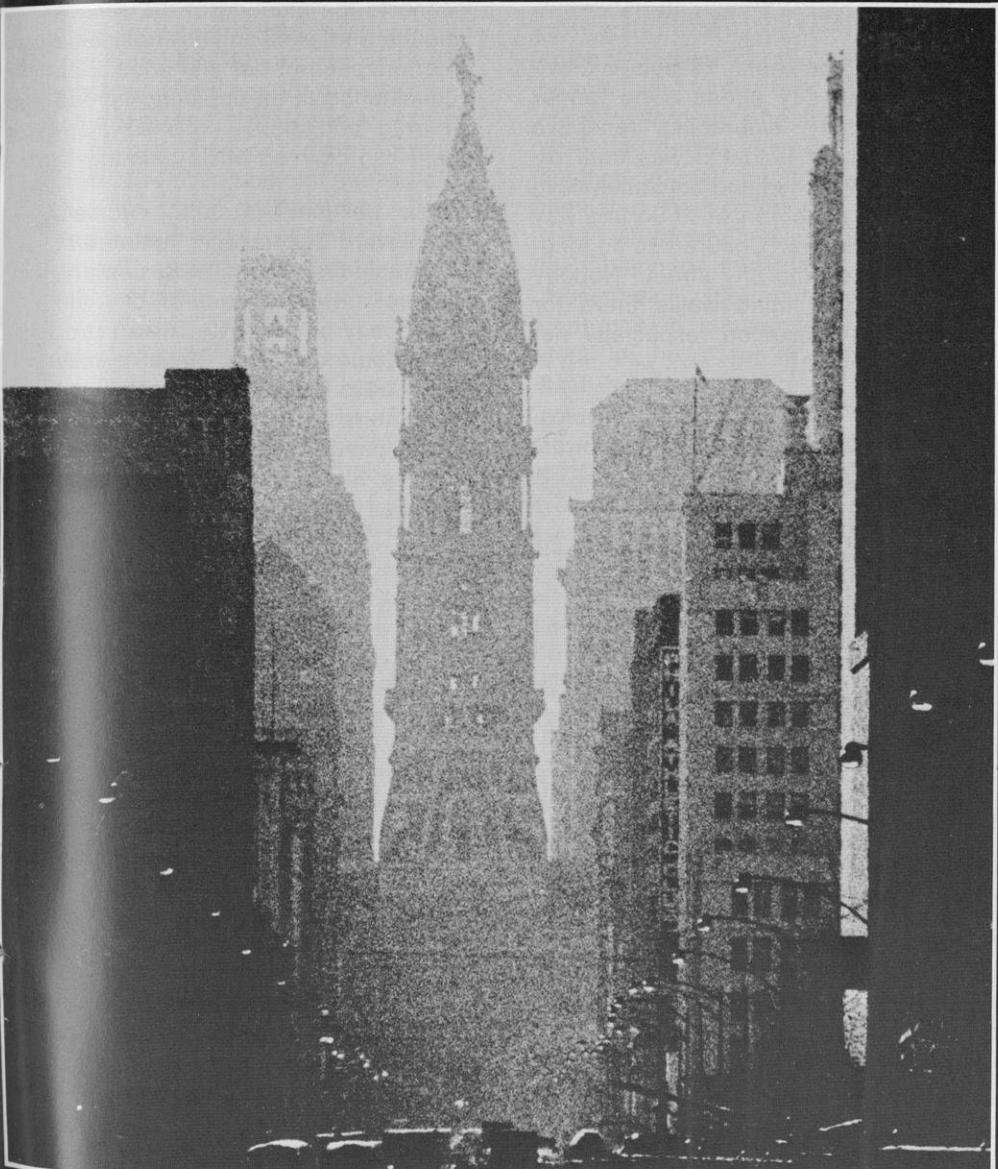
vironment presents and shape them into memorable and satisfying experiences according to the values which we have conceived and utilizing such relationships as the materials suggest.

The practical principles are simple enough. In dealing with the natural environment we must strive to recognize and preserve the order (if not always each instance) that is part of it. The value of wilderness, for example, does not lie in its potential as a museum of our natural origins. It lies in its relative stability which provides a better foundation for self-actualization than does the rapidly changing man-made environment. When considering man-made environment the full range of human values must be carefully integrated and balanced, and when both elements are present man's relationship to nature must be fully recognized and realized. His role as a part of it and a dependent of it, as well as his role as a participating observer, must not be ignored.

The opportunities for the application of these criteria are numerous. My point has been to suggest that aesthetic values, cultural values and environmental values represent a related set of human concepts which have evolved through man's past commitment to imaginative activity and that our desire for beauty in our surroundings is inextricably related to our desires for self identity, freedom and individually satisfying lives. If we wish these values to remain alive and if we wish to cultivate the satisfaction which they promise when realized, we must seek practical means of adapting some of the aesthetic criteria I have outlined to the management of our physical surroundings.

JOHANNES GAERTNER

THE CITY STREET  
IN MODERN PAINTING



## by Johannes A. Gaertner

The city street is reported today by photography, film, and television but no longer by painting. If an archaeologist of the year 3000 would have to reconstruct the appearance of our streets and the life therein from what our professional painters paint, he would be stymied. (Amateur painters, though, still depict streets and street life, as do some of our graphic artists and humorists). Why, then, has serious painting forsaken the city street?

The environmental reason is obvious. The city street is no longer the friendly, embracing, receptive human habitat that it was until recently. Porches and balconies have become anachronisms. So in a way have windows. Children do no longer play on the city street. Nobody in his right mind walks there for fun and relaxation, especially not at night.

Horses, sleds, carriages, bicycles, roller skates, street cars, birds, trees, hawkers, ice cream vendors, organ grinders, processions, parades, street markets, and street performances have largely disappeared. The automobile rules the city street and the street itself has become unhealthy, noisy, and dangerous. The suburbs do not develop a street life of their own, because the people live too far apart. The corner pub is missing and as Mesdames Moholy-Nagy and Jacobs and Mr. Mumford have pointed out: a viable city civilization is only possible in areas of high density population. Levittowns and even garden suburbs do not lend themselves to the kind of picturesque and stimulating street life that the 19th and early 20th century still knew. The

flight to the suburbs, widespread home ownership, the disappearance of neighbourhood stores and restaurants, of neighbourhood theatres, cinemas, and bookstores, the advent of radio, hi-fi sets, and television have done the rest.

This development from city life out of doors to life lived strictly within the apartment and before the TV set, from zestful, "strenuous" living to physical apathy, from hearty appreciation of the ever-changing scene to the blunting of the senses and the wholesale and unwholesome interiorization of our city population (culminating in an appalling spread of drug addiction) — this development can be read off in painting.

When we look at John Crome's "Boulevard des Italiens," painted at the beginning of the 19th century, we look at an aspect of city life which may be slightly idealized. The Boulevard des Italiens may rarely have looked so attractive, but what interests us here is the attitude of the painter. He found the street and its life beautiful, picturesque, and well worth painting, as did his public. A whole class of painters existed who specialized in architectural and/or street painting. Their craft, which often made use of optical devices (camera obscura, camera lucida, mirrors, prisms etc.), derived from that of the older painters of *vedute*, architectural prospects, and urban scenes. Theirs was a calm, sober, precise and reportorial art—painted photography before photography was invented.

This kind of documentary painting came quickly to an end after the introduction of photography. It was slow and tedious work, and demanded extraordinary skill. Such

painting could not be cheap, though a demand for it existed. One notes with interest that, even when reportorial street and architectural painting had ceased to exist, prints of streets and buildings like some of those produced by the firm of Currier & Ives continued to sell quite well.

Buildings, in contrast to humans, can stand still even under strongest sun light for any length of time and thus lend themselves beautifully to photography. Among the very first photographs made therefore we find still lifes and street views. At first only the houses register; around 1860, however, one can already capture the traffic on Broadway. Painting could not compete with the speed, accuracy, and economy of photographic reporting.

Nevertheless, a detailed, objective and, if one may say so, epical kind

of street painting persisted until the Second World War, in a diminished and attenuated form, to be sure, but still as a clear and legitimate descendant of an early 19th century genre which had died prematurely. Men like Hassam, Sloan, and Pennell did excellent work in it.

Yet while the "epical" representation of the street in modern painting quickly vanished under the onslaught of photography, the painters now attempted to do what the camera originally could not do and hence went into two directions: either toward an "affective deformation" of reality, a lyrical, colorful, aesthetically felt and artistically manipulated description of the city street which finally excludes the human being or towards a dramatic presentation which so intensely concentrates on human misery or grandeur in the street that the street itself is lost.

John Crome: "Boulevard des Italiens"



For the Impressionists the street was just another aesthetic event, a "paysage mouvementé" not very different from a forest with trees or a pond with water lilies in it. What the Boulevard Montmartre looked like at the end of the 19th century we know from a contemporary photograph. Camille Pissarro painted this street several times. The people are still there, but indistinctly, tesserae in an everchanging mosaic; in a night view of the same boulevard their presence is felt, is inferred, but no longer actually depicted. The houses have become simple and unsubstantial backdrops. Both they and the people have lost their specificity, have ceased to be elements of "reality" and have become elements of a pictorial scheme, "lyrical" or "symphonic" components of a greater whole like chords in music or words in poetry. The universe has become an iridescent

illusion. Art has become the screen on which the World projects its lovely image. The last great street painter in the lyrical tradition was, of course, Utrillo, where the people have either disappeared or have become a wholly expendable and ridiculous staffage. An American Impressionist like Hassam could capture the wintry atmosphere of a street in New York as well as a photographer, like Steiglitz, at the same time. Towards the end of the 19th century photography and painting often tried to do the same thing and one does not quite know which way the influences run.

Expressionism added a strident and declamatory quality to this kind of painting, for instance, in Marin's "Lower Manhattan," and in some paintings by Kirchner, Delaunay, and Kokoschka. Yet, however freely painted, we are still in the realm

Photograph of Boulevard Montmartre at the turn of the nineteenth century.



of stylization and not in that of abstraction as with Futurism or of systematic transformation as with Cubism.

The city street, however, is not only an aesthetic object to be depicted with the quasi-scientific detachment of the Impressionists; it is also the place where much of the human drama is enacted. The street, for instance, can be seen as the arena of political violence. Delacroix presents revolution to us in a noble and somewhat rhetorical manner, Daumier portrays it realistically, Carrà understands it as a "dynamic" and Futurist event, and Grosz brings to it the fervor of German Expressionism. But instances of this kind of "revolutionary" painting are comparatively rare. The painters from Velasquez and Murillo on do not cease to portray quaint, attractive, amusing, poignant, or re-

pulsive street types running the gamut from the crossing sweeper of Victorian England to the bored prostitutes of Degas and from Daumier's Washerwoman to Marsh's "High Yaller." The number of paintings of this kind is so large that it is impossible to give in a short paper like this even an intimation of the wealth and picturesqueness of different types depicted. This is still more true for street scenes which range from the gay life in Paris during the *Belle Epoque* to the incredible dullness of King William Street in Adelaide, Australia, *anno* 1907, minutely painted by Jacques Carabain; from the lovely and serene honeymoon journey painted by Schwind to the neurotically seen characters in Munch's "Karl-Johans Gate," Oslo; from coach drivers hitting each other in Vienna around 1830 to Bowery bums jostling each other in New York around 1930;

Camille Pissarro: "Boulevard Montmartre"  
National Gallery of Victoria Collection

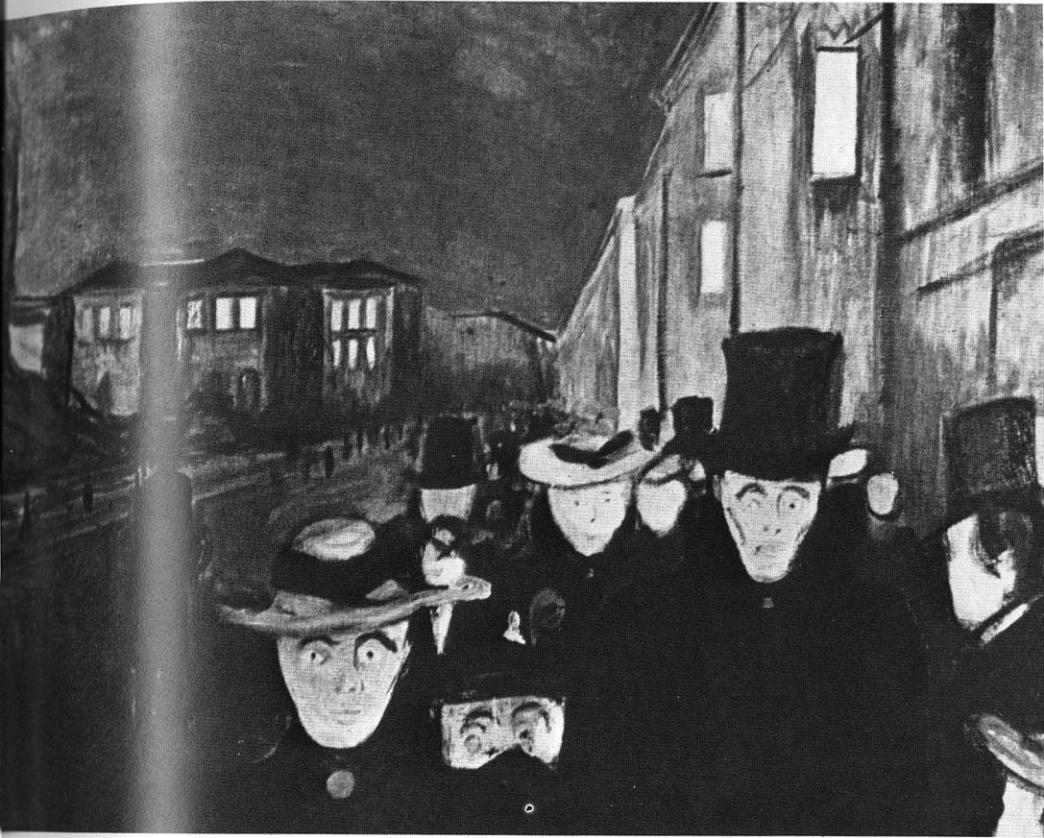




Frith: "The Crossing Sweeper"

Henry Morisset: "Café-Terrace at the Boulevard Clichy"





Edward Munch: "Karl Johans Gate"

from lovely ladies doing lovely things in Macke's painting to fierce characters doing unlovely things in one of Benton's boom towns. Again: the field is so large that we have to forego further documentation.

This "dramatic" presentation culminates in the work of George Grosz. Though one could cite some of his paintings here, the most characteristic aspect of his art was embodied in his graphic work. In his earlier prints, where he still was influenced by the emotional urgency of Expressionism, his main theme was the chaotic simultaneity of life in a big city. Gradually his art became cooler and clearer and his concern,

expressed in many of the titles of his drawings, was the alienation, the lack of cohesion and true contact, the meaningless side-by-side of people in the street. Most interesting in this connection is the ultimate disappearance of the street as such. We know these people are on a street, but we do no longer see the street. Needless to say that Grosz paints and draws his streets as an act of social protest, laced with strong Marxist and Freudian overtones.

So far, so good. How did it come now that street painting disappeared altogether? We would like to cite six factors in this connection: aes-



August Macke: "Mit Gelber Jacke"

George Grosz: "Friedrich Strasse"





George Grosz: "Ohne Beruf"

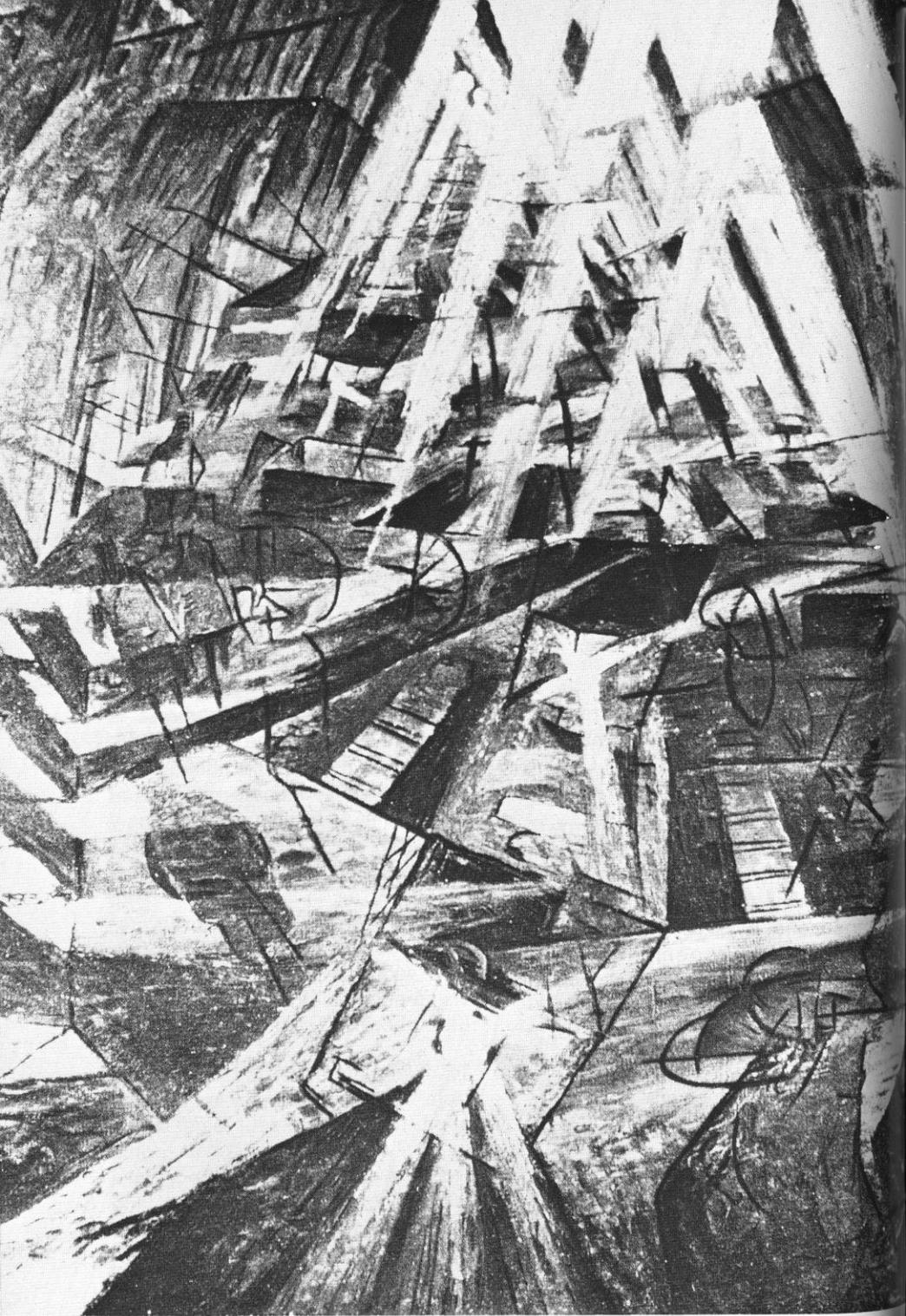
theticism, formalism, abstraction, surrealism, alienation, and interiorization.

Aestheticism: a natural outgrowth of Impressionism. In a lovely water color by Dufy ("La Rue de Nice pavée") the street has lost its substance and become nothing but a charming arrangement of color patches against a white background. "Mit gelber Jacke" by Macke obviously refers to a street, but the street (or park or square or whatever) has disappeared. Reality has been translated into a beautiful hallucination and the visible, tangible street has disappeared.

Formalism: oddly enough, orthodox Cubism did not care about streets. All the street scenes that Picasso painted were done before he turned to Cubism. The nearest thing to Cubist street painting appears in some paintings by Lyonel Feininger,

but the presence of the street is attenuated, to say the least. Buildings or, as it were, the abstractions of buildings dominate the visual field. The street is more strongly felt in some Expressionist paintings like those by Kirchner, though we are here, as in Munch's painting, more concerned with a neurotic reaction of the painter to the street than with the street itself. Ecstatic vision says much about the painter, little about the object of his vision.

The clearest case of transcendence from what the eye sees to what the mind thinks or the soul feels is perhaps given in abstraction. A prime example can be found in Boccioni's "Forces of a Street." As the title says: it is no longer a question of painting what actually happens in a city street, but of making visible the forces of light and movement, of noise and confusion, perhaps of representing what we perceive of a street when we close our eyes.



Umberto Boccioni: "La Force de la rue"  
Private Collection.

Surrealism: the world of dreams and hallucinations. Obviously, a surrealist street is no longer of this world. Still, streets are being painted, by Chirico for instance. In his paintings the clarity of hallucination has replaced the symphonic dreaminess of Macke and the ecstatic vision of Kirchner. This is even more so in the case in Delvaux's paintings where the improbability of hallucination or dream is enhanced by the presence of naked persons.

Closely connected with surrealism we find a representation of the city street that feeds on alienation and estrangement, but in a sense that is different from the alienation in the drawings of George Grosz. In Guglielmi's "Terror in Brooklyn" the aggressiveness of Grosz is replaced by some nameless fear. Even more poignantly is this nameless fear, that "malaise in civilization" (Freud's *Unbehagen in der Kultur*), that sense of threat by the unknown, that feeling of dread and helplessness expressed in Tooker's

"The Subway." The street is underground, a stifling feeling of enclosure prevails. One remembers that one of Sartre's plays is called *Huit Clos*, no exit. Abstractly, Duchamp expresses perhaps the same thought in his "Réseaux de Stoppages."

Ultimately it is interiorization — *der Weg nach Innen*, as Hermann Hesse called it — by which the traditional forms of street representation were transcended.

In abstract painting the painter adopts a private language of his own and the distance between the outer and the inner world (painting a vision not a view) has become so great that we simply do not know any longer whether the painter thought of a street at all when he painted his canvas. Did Motherwell think of streets when he painted his "Afternoon in Barcelona"? Did Mondrian think of music, player piano rolls, or of Broadway when he painted the "Broadway Boogie Woogie"? Did Meneeley when he paint-

George Tooker: "The Subway"  
Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York  
Photographer: Geoffrey Clements

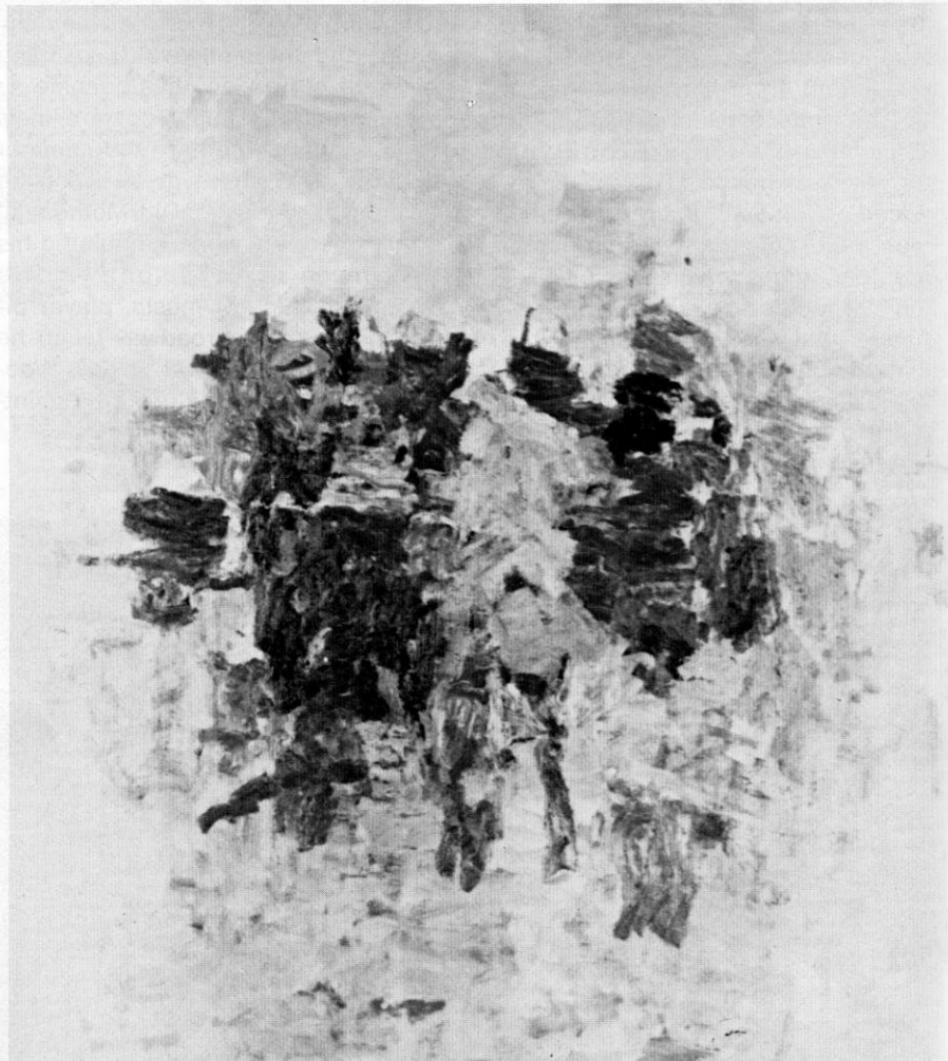


ed four white and two red strips against a dark background and called them "Gotham"? The ultimate in interiorization is reached when we behold such a painting as that by Guston where we only know by the title—it is called "The Street"—what the painter wanted to express.

We have come to the end of our short exposition and are painfully aware of how much had to be left

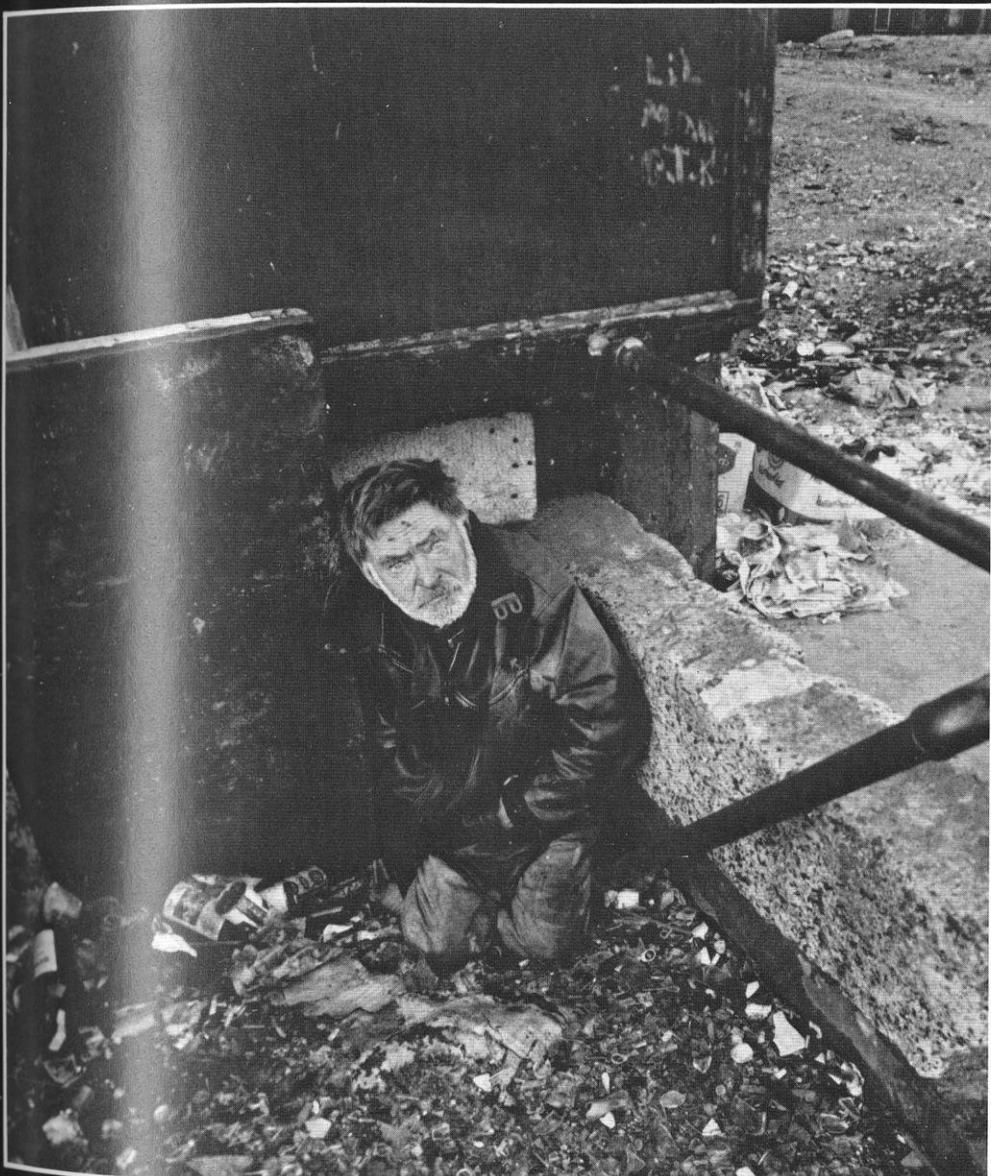
unsaid, how many examples could not be shown, how many painters had to be left out. Surveying the distance between Crome and Guston and contemplating what has happened to the city street in 150 years, what has happened to our civilization, what has happened to the Western mind during that time, a feeling of awe and foreboding overcomes us which no amount of optimistic rhetoric or confident assertion of a better future can dispel.

Philip Guston: "The Street"  
Sidney Janis Gallery, New York



WILLIS TRUJILL

ON LIBERATING  
AESTHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS:  
THE ENVIRONMENT ISSUE



by Willis H. Truitt

## INTRODUCTION

Early in 1964 John Kenneth Galbraith wrote:

*We have developed an economic system of great power. We have good reason to be grateful for its achievements. But it naturally applies its power to its own objectives. It would be surprising were it not to use this power to bend people to its purposes. And if economic goals are preoccupying . . . we will accept the subordination of the individual, and therewith of the quality of life, to what seem to be economic imperatives . . . .*

*The priority according to economic goals comes to focus in a conflict with truth and aesthetics . . . . The pre-eminence of economic values leads to the systematic appeal to a dream world which the mature, scientific reality would reject . . . . There is no necessary harmony between aesthetic and economic goals. One should assume a conflict. We have long accepted ugliness and squalor as the price of industrial progress. There is no reason why we should continue to do so. The social planning and expenditure which erases or limits grime and squalor and which preserves or restores beauty, which insures that art and culture are for their own sakes and not a byproduct of commercialism, will be costly. (New York Herald Tribune, Jan. 17)*

An earlier and somewhat longer version of this essay was presented at the Twenty-eighth annual Meeting of the American Society for Aesthetics, Boulder, Colorado, October, 1970. Continued research on this topic which led to this formulation of the essay has been supported by a grant from the Division of Languages and Literature, University of South Florida, Summer 1971. The ideas set out in this essay are considerably expanded in the concluding chapter of my forthcoming book *Aesthetic Domains* under the title "The Politics of Art."

This passage calls our attention to certain aspects of advanced industrial societies, and especially aspects of advanced capitalist societies that we all recognize today. And, of course, the recognition of these characteristics and the problems raised by them suggests that we can no longer afford to separate, or compartmentalize, considerations of the aesthetic from the economic. Nor can we afford to distinguish either of these from general problems of the environment. Today this is a well-recognized fact among progressive students of all three of these disciplines: aesthetics, economics, and environmental studies.

Notwithstanding this crucial recognition, I want to suggest that the general problem as formulated by Galbraith is an oversimplification which carries with it very problematic consequences. Galbraith touches only the surface of the problem. He fails to get to the bottom of the issue. And a solution to the problems he raises can be projected only if we are willing to execute a more radical, i.e., penetrating, analysis of the conditions that give rise to the repression of the aesthetic with which we are concerned. Rather it is that aesthetic consciousness itself has become mutilated and repressive in its own sphere. Aesthetic deprivation interpenetrates all spheres of life and reality. If the aesthetic impulse were simply repressed, a solution of the type envisioned by Galbraith (redistributive social planning) might be se-

cured by removing or renovating the apparatus of repression. But aesthetic consciousness when taken as a whole, actually serves, and is often indistinguishable from, the societal apparatus of repression itself.

It is not merely the "pre-eminence of economic values," "the priority of economic goals," nor the willingness to "accept ugliness and squalor as the price of industrial progress" that stands in the way of an alternative way of life. No, these factors may have been the preconditions of our reality, but they do not exhaust its repressive and destructive content. What I want to suggest is that the very structure and content of prevailing social experience is repressive and destructive and this encompasses much more than the several historical factors to which Galbraith alludes. Now this is an unacceptable proposition to most men because it implies that only a revolutionary transformation can resolve the problem of the environment, a problem which should be seen as involving the internal as well as the external environment. The solution to the environmental problem involves, on this view, the creation of a new consciousness, a new sensibility, which is basically aesthetic and of which I shall speak later. Yet such a creation and transformation would seem at best unlikely if the whole range of human responses is constricted and nullified, diffused, and subverted, by the given state of affairs, by a prevailing perceived reality which absorbs all philosophical, political, and artistic attempts to overcome it. Philosophy, politics and art lose their critical capacity. As integral

parts of reality they are not alien to it. As parts of this reality they cannot fully grasp its nature; they cannot transcend it. In fact that which appears to be most alien is easily absorbed and reemployed to sustain the very system which it apparently negates. Let me say here what I mean by the aesthetic of repression before considering the possibility of liberating experience from its domination.

#### THE AESTHETIC OF REPRESSION: ITS NATURE AND SOCIAL ORIGINS

The characteristics of advanced capitalist societies are many but they may be reduced to the technological process of production — commodity consumption-destruction. We who live in these advanced societies have learned to call this process by different names. We reify it as abundance and as affluence. Our reality, as we perceive it, is gorgeous and abundant. It is full and it fills our consciousness. By filling our consciousness it also transforms us into part of the gorgeous, full, abundant reality itself. We are filled with foods, apparel, devices; our eyes and ears are filled by the mass media, by television, music, sounds, noises; our noses with perfumes and fumes. We are always occupied, if not fascinated. We are suffocated.

*Impressions become superficial stimuli, selected by opinion-forming monopolies. The senses lose the ability to retain and process that which impresses them; the world is defaced and defaces man . . . <sup>1</sup>*

There is a loss in our discriminatory powers. We no longer have the ca-

<sup>1</sup>Ernst Fischer, *Art Against Ideology*. (New York, 1969), p. 85.



Photograph by Walker Evans from "Walker Evans: Photographs for the Farm Security Administration, 1935-1938."  
Da Capo Press, Inc.

capacity to process, we are processed. What was once a human reality is transformed into the product of an alien process. We are the input, the computer programs us. Educational and training institutions *consume* the multitudes who enter and exist with a blank consciousness, with blank minds, blank faces, and blank sensibilities. We digest the stimuli but do not discriminate its content; discrimination is repressed and replaced by consumption. We consume and are sated.

We are regressed into an "infantilism of having," an infantilism in which we become thoroughly more susceptible to manipulation and further manipulation. But this is not the only change. In order for the regression to be achieved and manipulation to be accomplished there had to be a fundamental historical change in the perceived form of reality itself. Reality had to lose its historical characteristic of a task,

a challenge, and take on the characteristic of a commodity to be consumed. Reality is no longer a problem, the age-old problem of harnessing nature to serve human needs. Now the problem is the "environment," an environment which is no longer natural at all, nor real, but is rather the refuse of reality. Here, only those things are real which are palpable, edible, disposable, destructible, self-destructive, excretable. Reality and its new environment are waste, garbage, feces. Reality buries and conceals the pre-industrial possibilities of enjoyable experiences and with it the natural environment in excrement in order to create a new "environment" in its own image. Being unused to this new "environment" we become troubled. Yet we are unable to discern the problem. We deceive ourselves into thinking that we can clean up the "environment" by better social planning. We believe we can beautify reality. But when real-

ity is reduced to a principle of having, consuming, and eliminating, which in turn thrives on the practice of building in obsolescence or creating "false" needs in order to secure profit, the alternative cannot be beautification, or cleaning-up, i.e., the garbage is self-perpetuating. The alternative must then be a radical transformation in the very structure of reality itself.

Being the first in history to solve the problem of production and scarcity, advanced capitalist societies were then faced with the unique problem of disposing of what was produced. Planned production and distribution to meet social and collective needs was not a feasible alternative for it denied profit. The solution was to transform the product into garbage and thus to manipulate the consumer through profusion and satiation. Our experience of reality underwent a radical change. The new reality was one over which the manipulated had no control, in which the commodity chose the buyer. The relation of supply and demand was mystified and manipulated by bourgeois economic theorists who subordinated "use-value" to profitability and capital accumulation. We who thought we were the takers were ourselves taken. And this is the root of the problem of environmental pollution which cannot be understood, much less resolved, in-

ternally. Pollution is real and necessary for the maintenance of the system.

So far we have said little that bears directly on art and aesthetics. And indeed, our argument here depends on the existence of a causal interdependence among three elements: (1) the organization of productive forces in society and its political rationalization; (2) aesthetic consciousness; and (3) the concrete expression of this consciousness in art. There is abundant literature in the sociology of art and art history which demonstrates this interdependent relationship and I shall not argue this point at any length.<sup>2</sup> Rather I will try to show more specifically how the organization of social-productive forces for profit works upon the aesthetic dimension of life. Here I think the Marxist critique of modernism in the arts and especially in literature is highly instructive.

Much modern art, and especially certain literary tendencies in the West, has surrendered its humanistic and constructive capacities to a sense of frustration, anguish, and absurdity. The most important literary productions of our period show a marked tendency of equating the manipulated condition of men under advanced capitalism with the human condition as such, as if there were no alternative.<sup>3</sup> The mor-

<sup>2</sup>Let me simply refer the reader to several useful sources devoted to an examination of the social relations of art. Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*. (New York, 1951), Pitirim Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*. (Boston, 1957), Max Raphael, *Proudhon, Marx, Picasso: Trois études sur la sociologie de l'art*. (Paris, 1933), Vytautas Kavolis, *Artistic Expression: A Sociological Analysis*. (Ithaca, 1969), Ernst Fischer, *The Necessity of Art*. (Baltimore, 1963), Hugh Duncan, *Communication and the Social Order*. (New York, 1962), Paul Honigshiem, "Die Ähnlichkeit von Musik und Drama in Primitiven und Totalitären Gesellschaften," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie-Sozialpsychologie*. (3, 1964), and, indeed, no small part of the published correspondence of Friedrich Engels (Moscow).

<sup>3</sup>Compare G. C. Leroy, *Marxism and Modern Literature*. (New York, 1967).

al and aesthetic nihilism of our times is definitely reflected in much of this work. Helplessness, abandonment, alienation, and the unintelligibility of the social process are thematically repetitious in the works of the existentialist writers and in Beckett, Albee, and Pinter. Lukacs has argued that modernist literature takes the distortion of human nature and of human relations under capitalism to be inevitable and necessary. The projection of an alternative reality is foreclosed because of the absolute dependency of individuals, even of artists and intellectuals, upon the system. Beckett's portrayal of man as "irredeemably isolated" is reflected in his own life, yet his writing is sustained financially and rewarded artistically (professionally) by the very system which causes and perpetuates this isolation.

Still, the value of modern literature in the depiction of our mutilated reality cannot be questioned. But the potentiality of modern literature seems constricted for it seems incapable of transcending the given. In its depiction of "victimization" literature itself seems to be victimized. Its ruthless exposure of the repressive and dehumanizing aspects of capitalism is neutralized by its consistent identification of "what is" with the "human condition." It cannot project an alternative form of reality.

The material or social basis of this literary phenomenon is rooted in the irrationality of capitalist production, i.e., in a system that transforms basic, human, aesthetic requirements in accordance with the requirements of production for profit. At the same time this system

teaches that no other organization of productive forces is capable of sustaining a comfortable life for the majority. The fundamental irrationality of the logic of capitalist production is exposed in the incapacity of capitalist society to satisfy the real needs of human beings. Advanced monopoly capitalism:

*. . . is in a position to impose a model of production and consumption [on more elemental human needs], and to orient the tastes of the "consumers" toward products which permit the highest profit rate, by the forced sale of services and goods. . . . The results are the disparities and distortions [that are all too evident]: 'public squalor within private affluence,' . . . the creation of wastelands . . . slums with televisions; illiteracy . . . and transistor radios; rural underdevelopment and super-highways; cities with neither hygiene, fresh air, nor sunlight . . .*<sup>4</sup>

This logic of production gives priority to profitable activities; those activities which are essentially non-profitable, those concerned with collective needs, are neglected or abandoned. Activities not translatable into the profitable sale of goods and services cannot be grasped in terms of capitalist logic. This causes the suppression of human needs, the need for real education, for planned urban development, for public health and recreation, for cultural development; most importantly it prohibits the allocation of social resources into the entire range of activities, projects, and occupations which can be termed aesthetic in style and consequence. It thus encourages the uglification of the environment and of life itself. But worst of all, it proceeds sys-

<sup>4</sup>André Gorz, *New Strategy for Labor*. (Boston, 1969), p. 64.

matically to extinguish the aesthetic faculties and capacities of masses of people. In consequence, the recognition of aesthetic deprivation is itself repressed. There is no consciously felt need that demands change. The existing situation appears normal. And it is this aspect of internal pollution which tolerates societal and environmental squalor as real, unchangeable, and even necessary, which is an essential obstacle to human survival. Capitalist production achieves these effects in several insidious ways. First, taking profitability as the chief criterion of all action, it relegates human needs to secondary importance. This allows the degradation and dehumanization of the individual. The individual is evaluated in terms of his productive value for a system of securing profit, as abstract man power. He can be utilized like a machine, or if profitability demands, replaced by a machine. The manipulation of the individual does not end here, however. His labor sapped of purpose, he is now subjected to a mass culture technologically constructed precisely to bring his needs into conformance with production aimed at profit. He is made to desire inferior commodities, useless products, frivolous entertainment at the expense of quality goods, needed services, and art. His consciousness is so mutilated by mass conditioning that he is not even conscious of, much less can he demand, the satisfaction of his most basic human requirements. For these requirements which pertain to the quality of life are sublimated, blocked, extinguished. They are not perceived needs, for

this individual is allowed to choose only between and among commodities which are deliberately made worthless, or experiences which are deliberately trivial and vacuous. The evidence for an alternative reality and way of life lies hidden from sight and access in museums, galleries, libraries and institutions of higher learning.

Under such conditions, the despair embodied in modern literature and in anti-art tendencies in painting is a convincing indictment of the condition of man. Yet here we speak of historical man, presumably with real historical options. Certainly history has not ceased. There must be something beyond what is given. Can man liberate himself from these conditions?

#### AESTHETIC LIBERATION AND ART

*Der Zwiespalt von Sein und Sollen ist nicht aufgehoben.<sup>5</sup>*

Painting and literature have not yet reached a level of articulation that can clearly be called revolutionary. Indeed, in painting there is a tendency on the part of both critics and artists to construe recent developments as attempts to integrate the aesthetic domain with society. Neo-constructivism is most often interpreted as performing this supportive and integrative function. Vasarely has unreservedly affirmed the present condition of society to which he feels indebted for its profusion of new techniques and materials. He proclaims: "Let us love our epoch which one day will be called an elevated epoch."<sup>6</sup> Pop

<sup>5</sup>"The disparity between that which is and that which ought to be is not transcended." From Georg Lukacs, *Die Theorie des Romans*. (Neuwied, 1963) p. 75.

<sup>6</sup>Aldo Pellegrini, *New Tendencies in Art*. (New York, 1966), p. 310.

art also is said by many critics to play an integrative role. In truth, however, I think we must recognize its iconoclastic and unmasking power. It punctuates the absurdity of the contemporary lie. In Rauschenberg's own words: "To be a painter is to be an opposer."<sup>7</sup> In the main, pop art is the "grotesque reproduction of the modern world." It is a reaction against mass culture, yet it cannot project an alternative to it. Its role is limited to exposition. Modern literature, as we have suggested, is equally impotent.

Only the systematic transformation of social processes and the values inherent in these processes will secure the liberation of aesthetic consciousness. And ultimately, only this liberation can transcend representativeness and fully realize the possibilities which are suppressed in the

present. The new sensibility is alone capable of uniting that which *is* with that which *ought to be*. But it is the misfortune of much critical theory that it has persisted in asking the wrong question. Thus it has formulated the problem in a way such that the solutions proposed are at best superficial. Typically, the unreflective revolutionary will ask: What is the proper, or correct, kind of social involvement to which the artist can best commit himself? And how can he best use his art to further the political objectives of this commitment? It will also be asked, how can the artist honor his political and aesthetic commitments simultaneously? How shall he divide his time and energy between creation and action? Should he politicize his art or aestheticize his politics? This way of putting the question leads to fruitless discus-

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*Idem.*

Photographer: Greg Graf



sions as to what kinds of art most profoundly reveal the necessity of social change, and what aesthetic experiences are most apt to provide the individual with a feeling of the nature of *true* liberation.

Such questions as these are incapable of dealing with the need for a new sensibility. The answers do not move us closer to an aesthetic of liberation because their context is defined and exhausted in the immediate confrontation with the apparatus of repression. The aesthetic response in such a situation is constricted. It exhibits itself either in the abandonment of art altogether, or in the production of more or less good or bad propaganda. Form is subordinated to utility.

Herbert Marcuse has characterized the nature of this new sensibility and its requirements. In this he has made a major contribution to critical social theory and aesthetics. Initially, he says, a direct assault must be mounted against the ideological foundations of the existing order. This would require the invalidation of the traditional separation between the imagination and the intellect, between scientific and poetic thought. Once this separation has been bridged, we will have achieved the pre-condition for an aesthetic ethos in which "Technique would . . . tend to become art, and art would tend to form reality . . ."<sup>8</sup> This solution would involve an educational enterprise which results in the release of aesthetic potential; allowing art a significant role in the production and reproduction of social life, often at the expense of efficiency. Aesthetic consciousness

and art would become socially productive forces which are capable of exercising influence on the relations of production, consumption, and distribution of commodities. This requirement suggests new directions for art and aesthetic education at the very least. Its consequences for society at large are revolutionary.

Art as a socially productive force would become the fundamental factor in transforming the appearance of things, in reshaping the environment. For there would no longer exist the ideology which conditions our conceptual separation between theory and practice, the aesthetic and a mutilated reality. The role of the aesthetician and art critic is to vigorously deny ". . . the commercial unification of business and beauty, exploitation and pleasure."<sup>9</sup> Today, this revolutionary concept has before it the objective materials (garbage, waste, and pollution) and subjective consciousness to enter the struggle for liberation.

*The radical social content of the aesthetic needs becomes evident as the demand for their most elementary satisfaction is translated into group action on an enlarged scale. From the harmless drive for better zoning regulations and a modicum of protection from noise and dirt to the pressure for closing of whole city areas to automobiles, prohibition of transistor radios in all public places, decommercialization of nature, total urban reconstruction, control of the birth rate—such action would become increasingly subversive of the institutions of capitalism and of their morality. The*

<sup>8</sup>Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*. (Boston, 1969), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.



Photographer: David Y. Watanabe, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay

*quantity of such reforms would turn into the quality of radical change to the degree to which they would critically weaken the economic, political, and cultural pressure and power groups which have a vested interest in preserving the environment and ecology for profitable merchandising.<sup>10</sup>*

Moreover, the new sensibility which is reflected in the release of aesthetic potentiality is not really new. It is a rediscovered sensibility, or to use Marcuse's Freudian terminology, it is a "desublimated need" with a biological (adaptive) root. It is expressive of the life instincts over and against the aggressiveness which is reinforced by competitiveness and exploitiveness. It requires and demands a transformation in human relations which will free the imagination from domination by commercial interests. It will reclaim the internal and external wastelands of consciousness and nature. For although biological in origin,

*... The aesthetic needs have their own social content: they are claims of the human organism, mind and body, for a dimension of fulfillment*

*which can be created only in the struggle against the institutions which, by their very functioning, deny and violate these claims.<sup>11</sup>*

No significant criticism can be directed against Marcuse's exploration of the structure and dimensions of what the new sensibility entails. However, in the final analysis, his account is not fully convincing. For he explicitly states that the new sensibility will emerge as a precondition, rather than a result, of social change.<sup>12</sup> But the radical consciousness by means of which the aesthetic revolution is made a reality is dependent on much broader complicity than Marcuse suggests. It depends most importantly on political action that momentarily suspends consideration of the aesthetic issue. It is contingent on a movement based heavily in the stifled majority of people who will never read this essay and couldn't care less. For it is only after the political transformation of society that the new reality can be formed by a freed aesthetic sensibility. The objective conditions of society must first be reconstructed in order to give release to this new consciousness.

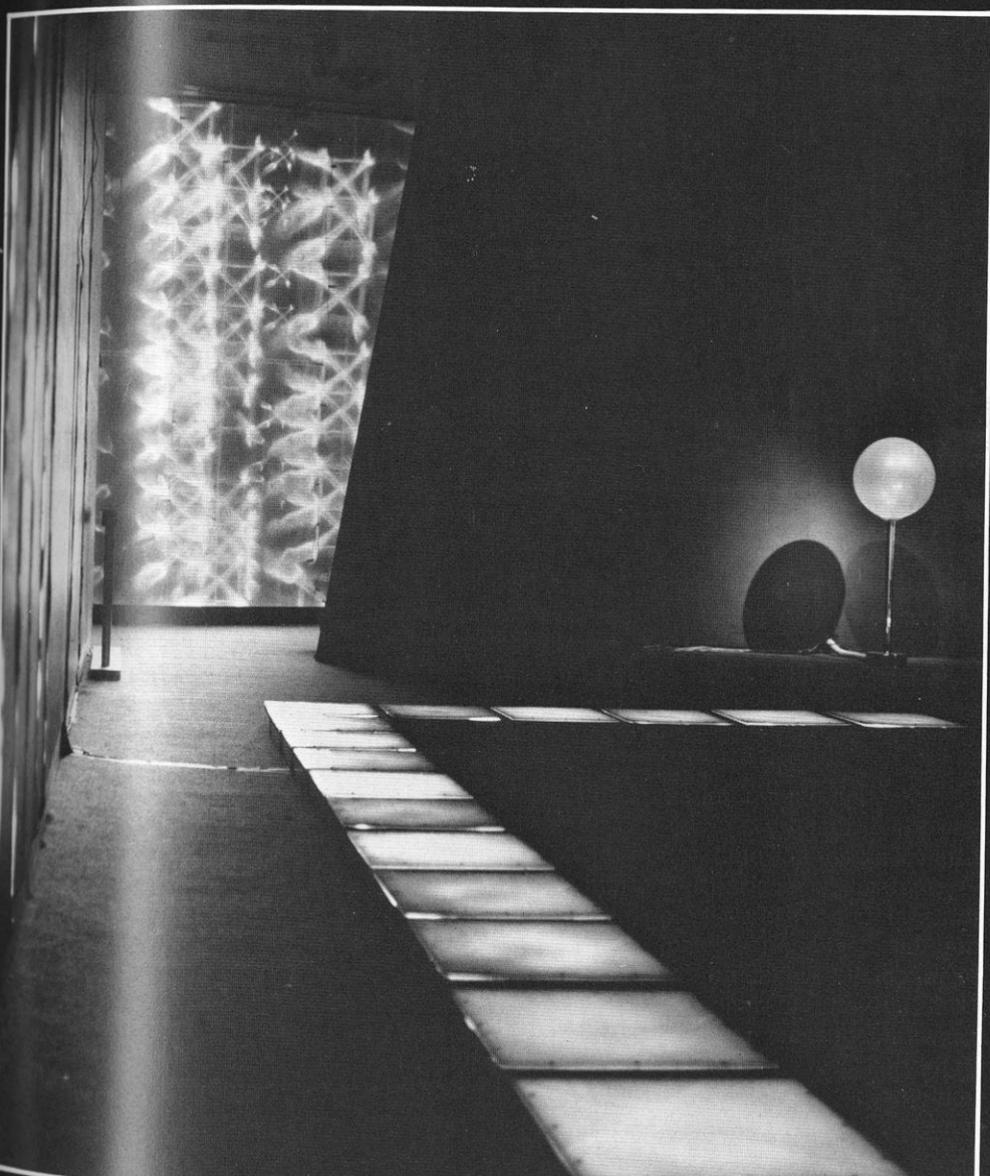
<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30.

# GYORGY KEPES

## TOWARD CIVIC ART



## by Gyorgy Kepes

Individual artistic imagination is neither self-generated nor self-contained; it belongs to the larger environmental field of nature and society. Its role and its strength constantly change, for the artist's responses are in a certain constant relation to the changing human conditions that generate them. The imaginative power of the artist, in its luckiest moments, creates models of sensibility and feeling that will enable all of us to live the fuller, richer life possible at this time in an everchanging world. Today, artists, like the rest of us, face a profound crisis brought about by the increasingly dynamic complexity of our social fabric. Meeting its challenge requires their fundamental reorientation in order to probe, scan, discover, absorb, change, and re-ify their surroundings. They must transform themselves as well as the social framework of the creative process. This imperative refers not only to the exploration of new tools and media—creating new idioms—but also to the exploration of new ways in which the work of art and the public can come together.

This necessary process, it would appear, is now taking place. Art is outgrowing its traditional limitations. The artistic forms have increased in size and acquired explosive dimensions. The isolated, sheltered, limited space of a room at home or in the galleries or museums has proven claustrophobic for many dynamic, explosive explorations. To-

day, the strain is no longer limited to the physical, spatial dimension but includes the conceptual realm as well. Thus, the exhibition, the traditional medium used to create communication between the work of art and the public has had to be questioned. It has been questioned in all its implication. An exhibition, as an anthology of individual works of art and spotlighting the quality of individual work and personal achievements, no longer seems a force in the new sense of life that motivates creative expression. Artists, even more than other men, have been displaced persons in this convulsively changing modern world. Their images, ideas, and confidence have been attuned to an older world, smaller, slower, quieter—a world they could deal with directly and endow with meaning and quality. They have not been able to deal with the new world that has burst upon them.

Artists' links with their own past, with other men, and with their environment—the very source and basis of their art—have eroded as the proliferating scientific, technical, and urban world transformed society, the physical environment that housed it, and the web of folkways, customs, thought, and feeling that gave it shape and structure.

It was hard to make contact with this apparently uncontrollable new-scale world, so big, strange, and explosive. Some artists with courage made an attempt to do so, but few could so much as establish a

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This is a slightly edited version of an article which appeared in the introduction to the catalogue of *Explorations*, an exhibition organized by the author, which was presented at the Smithsonian Institute's National Collection of Art. It appears by permission of the author.

foothold. The extended world revealed by science exhibited unfamiliar vistas of phenomena and concepts: things too big to be seen, too small, too hidden; ideas too evasive to grasp — subnuclear particles, the indeterminacy principle, computers and transistors, lasers, pulsars, DNA, and inorganic crystals that could change into organic viruses and back again. Few of these were accessible to the ordinary human senses or were capable of being related to the human bodies that men use to find their bearings.

The wildly proliferating man-made environment rapidly shrank living space, polluted air and water, dimmed light, bleached color, and relentlessly expanded mass, dirt, noise, speed, and complexity. The changing society exploded with problems on an immense scale: ecological disasters, social trage-

dies, eroded individuality, confused and impoverished human relationships. The expanding vulgar realm of mass communication and commercial entertainment deadened sensibilities and was as inane in meaning as it was sophisticated in technology and aggressive in its destruction of privacy and leisure. Life and art were separated from each other; and both seemed torn loose from their common social foundations. Aldous Huxley's comment that by mistreating nature we are eliminating half of the basis of English poetry is an understatement. The world around us — the luminous, mobile wonders of the sky, the infinite wealth of colors and shapes of animals and flowers — is the core of all our languages and is basic to our sensing of quality and meaning in life.

We have contaminated our rivers and killed Lake Erie by dumping

Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay



detergents and excrement. We poison our sky, sea, and land with radioactive waste. By over-exploiting and exhausting our land we have created menacing ugly erosions. We shave barren our mountains, hills, and fields—exterminating birds, fish, and beasts. This fearful destruction of the rich surface of our environment goes far beyond extermination of what some consider lower forms of nature. It is symbolic of our situation that in the 1968 meetings of the United Nations the subject discussed with the deepest concern was the devastation produced in our precious earth, sea, and air by reckless manipulation of technological power.

Some artists were like distant early warning systems of the human condition today. They read the signs of coming ecological and social disasters early and with full grasp. They saw the illusion and the degradation at the height of complacency in the last century over what was believed to be the best of all possible worlds. Their confident understanding of the sensed qualities of living structure would not permit them to accept the nineteenth-century mechanical models of scientific analysis as an adequate framework for the breadth, freedom, and self-variation of life and art. We were not unwarned about the lethal consequences of the wholesale devastation of the natural landscape. With the first blows of industrialization in the opening years of the nineteenth century and the appearance of belching chimneys and mountains of slag, the poet Blake cried out against the "dark Satanic mills" that had de-

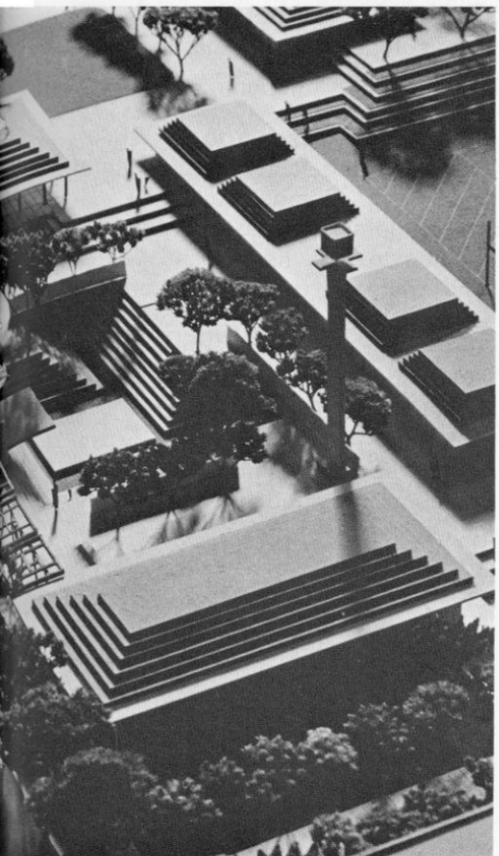
filed "England's mountains green" and "pleasant pastures." He was joined by fellow artists and poets in a chorus of angry protest; but light in the industrial landscape continued to gray with soot and rivers to turn brown with sewage. William Morris summed it up over a century ago.

*It is only a very few men who have begun to think about a remedy for it in its widest range, even in its narrower aspect, in the defacements of our big towns by all that commerce brings with it, who heeds it? who tries to control their squalor and hideousness? . . . Cut down the pleasant trees among the houses, pull down ancient and venerable buildings for the money that a few square yards of London dirt will fetch; blacken rivers, hide the sun and poison the air with smoke and worse, and it's nobody's business to see to it or mend it: that is all that modern commerce, the countinghouse forgetful of the workshop, will do for us herein. . . . Yet there are matters which I should have thought easy for her; say for example teaching Manchester how to consume its own smoke, or Leeds how to get rid of its superfluous black dye without turning it into the river, which would be as much worth her attention as the production of the heaviest of heavy black silks, or the biggest of useless guns.<sup>2</sup>*

Yet only now, at what may well be the very last moment, have we begun to turn our minds toward solutions. There are more tragic and more hurtful aspects still. Who with clear eyes and honest mind can deny the urgency of resolution of

<sup>2</sup>*The Collected Works of William Morris*, Volume XXII, pp. 24-25. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966. Delivered before the Trades' Guild of Learning, December 4, 1877.

the inhuman blight of our contemporary cities? Some of us hardly dare to walk with our heads up, knowing and seeing how men mistreat men. Many of us are tortured by our impotence to act to counteract the destruction of what is best in man. The aborting of the quality and sometimes the very basis of lives because of narrowness, prejudice, and vested interests is the shame of all of us. Though people in increasing numbers recognize the urgency of finding means to redirect our collective suicidal life, for the time being we are carried along by the momentum of our situation: we continue to develop ever more powerful tools and equipment without having the sense of values that tell us how to use them.



Copper Plaza, Washington D. C.

Model, detail showing sunken plaza area, field house and community center buildings.

Courtesy: M. Paul Friedberg Associates

Reprinted from "Design Quarterly 77"

The explosiveness of this time compels us to question all the basic assumptions of the previous generation. Current history calls upon us to adjust ourselves to change faster than men have ever needed to in the past. Each new phase of development, each new bit of knowledge, each new technological power has intensified the continuing struggle between the old inherited guiding concepts, feelings and attitudes and the new requirements of reality. Dickens began his tale of the French Revolution with the following sentence, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." This comment fits no time better than our own. Every age, no doubt, has an option between a good and a bad life. Every age has a spectrum that ranges from suffering to fulfillment, but none has presented these options with so sharp a contrast as our own. Like the men of every age, we have alternative potential futures. But today these alternative futures range from a concrete promise of richness, quality, and security of life that men could never have dreamed of before to the menace of a destruction that could wipe out everything mankind has accumulated, everything that it values.

We seek equilibrium, the optimum condition possible in our circumstance. Individually and collectively men are self-regulating systems. In order to achieve our goals we must learn to proportion our efforts or flow of efforts to the flow of return information. In order to achieve these goals we need an understanding of the reality of the goals, and must allow our sensors or abilities to scan life's circumstances and to gather the data required by our recognized tasks. An engineer who

designs a self-regulating system must learn to synchronize error and correction of error in order to avoid "hunting"—excessive oscillation about his target point caused by inaccuracy of aim. Every purposive movement is composed of two processes, not one; their symmetry in action is the measure of the success of the process. Central to a self-regulating system is the notion of feedback, or, to express it more generally, interdependence. We have not found, in our exploded, explosive age, the right method of self-regulation. The good life, the maximum realization of the intensity, quality and gross potential of individual lives to which all of us aspire, is achieved when we find a balance with minimum hunting—a minimum of human suffering and wasted energy with a maximum of helpful relevance for all of us. For this we need an acute awareness of interdependence. In other words, we need a social standard based upon full cooperation between man and man, and between man and nature. We have not found this yet, and the wild oscillation of our social and cultural life is the reflection of an unresolved historical stage.

The most eloquent display of our frantic search for a resolution may be found in the antics of twentieth-century artists. The vehement, erratic, continuous transformation of artistic idioms, the changing morphological dimension, the continuous shifting of the rules of the game in expressive artistic form-making are characteristic of the contemporary life of the arts. What is most significant is that the artist's search is not only characterized by the repeated redefinition of

artistic idioms but also involves basic changes in the artist's frame of reference, his existential stance, and his basic assumption concerning the meaning, the role, and the purpose of art. After thirty or forty years of soul-searching concerning the language of art, the artists of today are questioning more than the means by which to express themselves. They are questioning the very meaning, the very foundation of their activities. Today there are not only movements of art *isms*, there is also a basic confrontation between art and antiart or no art, the most critical self-confrontation of the validity of making art or not making art.

But the forces that are rending art and society are not less than the forces that are bringing them together. Artists are key men in a reorientation that seems to be taking place; they seem to be regaining their long lost role of cultural leadership. Paradoxically, the displaced persons of yesterday are beginning to look like Moses figures who will lead us into a Promised Land. After a long period of "hunting," their homeostatic processes of automatic regulation have shifted to relationships in which they are beginning to regulate; the artists will indeed find solutions to their problems provided they base their rich responses firmly on an uncompromising sense of life as a whole—a passionate solidarity with humanity and with the natural and man-made environment.

Contemporary life, in a very direct way, is making us aware that it is possible to meet the new levels of scale and to undertake the restructuring of our existence. The new

relationships being formed between the individual and his social and physical environment have made it clear that the time has passed for viewing man as an isolated creature who can be examined separately from his place and responsibilities. We feel the need for the reestablishment of dissolved and broken links, for a union of man and his surroundings, for concrete expression of the new relationships. The quest for it is taking place everywhere, and large numbers of men in a variety of fields are searching for the key to new knowledge. What is more, as they turn to one another for opinions and answers, they are beginning to sense it.

During the past two decades some of the freer and more speculative minds among scientists have focused fresh attention upon the old idea that biological and social evolution are closely linked, with inter-communication playing the same role in social evolution that inter-breeding once played in biological evolution.

Today we are in a critical stage of the human phase of evolution. Evolution is becoming self-conscious, and we have begun to understand that through social communication it is within our intellectual and emotional power to come to better grips with our existential reality. Our future, good or bad, depends upon how clearly we understand and how well we control the self-regulating dynamic pattern of our common existence as it moves into the future.

To coordinate our efforts it is necessary to agree on objectives. To agree on objectives it is necessary to reach a better common under-

standing of "reality." What we are calling reality here is neither absolute nor final. Rather, it is itself an evolutionary pattern continually generated by the evolutionary process, as Charles Sanders Peirce had recognized some seventy years ago.

*What anything really is, is what it may finally come to be known to be in the ideal state of complete information, so that reality depends upon the ultimate decision of the community; so thought is what it is only by virtue of its addressing a future thought, which is in its value a thought identical with it though more developed. In this way, the existence of thought now depends on what is to be hereafter; so that it only has potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community.*

Awareness of the dynamics of evolutionary continuity and our capacity for self-transformation by inter-thinking has opened up rich wide new perspectives. Our potent new tools, both conceptual and physical, contain within themselves an important aspect of these perspectives. For the more powerful devices we develop through our scientific technology, the more we are interconnected, interacting, interwoven with each other, with our machines, with our environment, and with our own inner capacities. Each new tool of vision that science and technology prepares for us opens up a new landscape that compels us to see in its interconnectedness that the farther we can travel and the faster we move, the more we see, understand, and learn about other parts of the world and other people's lives. The more sensitive and embracing our feelers of



Community Map, Hill Districts, Pittsburgh, 1970. 25" x 40"

Community Design Associates, 2012 Wylie Avenue, Pittsburgh, Penn.

Courtesy: M. Paul Friedberg Associates

Reprinted from "Design Quarterly 77"

vision, hearing, and thinking become through radio, television, and computer technology, the more we are compelled to sense the interaction of man and his environment. Our new tools of transportation, communication, and control have brought a new scale of opportunities to inter-thinking and inter-seeing; the condition of a truly embracing participatory democracy.

The advancement of creative life—and, likewise, of human knowledge—is produced by the interaction of the whole community. All society has become an intricately interacting system that can survive only through the intricately interconnected workings of its members. Through the communication of the knowledge and insights of creative men in many fields, we have the opportunity to make all that is valuable within us a shared possession—a new "common" property of all who seek a higher quality of life.

The "common" realm, as we may

name our shared body of thought and feeling, is a generator of human creative powers. The vital artists of this moment of time are converging upon this realm. They are guided by a growing new sense of the structural principle of interdependence. They are beginning to accept interdependence personally, professionally, and ecologically—which is to say, in the balance that modern man so urgently needs to establish with the total of his environment. The artists' current work—it is not too much to assert in consequence—exhibits growing optimism, strength, and authenticity. It looks toward a future art scaled to the expanding scientific-industrial urban world and revealing its latent richness.

Artists are finding in our environmental landscape a new material of plastic art, a potent source for creative objectives. They dream of molding gigantic artistic structures carved from the earth, resting on the ground, flying in the sky, float-

ing in the ocean, that are themselves environments.

Cutting through suffocating cultural isolation, many of them have crossed disciplinary lines and joined hands with scientists and engineers. This collaboration has made available to them the creative tools for imposing technical sophistication: computers, lasers, complex electronic devices, and also the tools for tasks of gigantic dimensions, i.e., the large-scale handling of power. A centuries-old discarded framework for the artistic process, thus, has been revived in the newest evolutionary step in the development of the artistic community. In becoming a collaborative enterprise in which artists, scientists, urban planners, and engineers are interdependent, art clearly enters a new phase of orientation in which its prime goal is the revitalization of the entire human environment—a greatly-to-be-wished-for climax to the rebuilding of our present urban world.

The artist, just as clearly, in addressing himself to such a task, forges a new relationship of social responsibility with respect to his fellow man and a new relationship of interdependence between man and his environment. The tasks that he takes on are different from previous tasks in kind as well as in scale. The values that he uncovers become the values of the rest of us, giving sharpness and definition to our sensed need for union with our surroundings and intimate involvement with them. This emerging creative world is illuminated by the interplay of social needs, increasing knowledge of tools and techniques, the relevant in philoso-

phic and artistic heritage, the full sweep of the physical and social environment, individual imagination, collective vision, and a wide spectrum of contemporary scientific knowledge. This developing embracing vision of the artists, we may hope, is prophetic of a new world outlook pervaded by a sense of continuity with the natural environment and oneness with our social world. This oneness is something we long for, a lost paradise of the human spirit. All of us, at rare and lucky moments, have had the feeling that everything fits together and makes sense, that the world is right and full of promise.

Contemporary anthropology, psychology, and applied science all bring us converging messages that the evolutionary key to the resolution of major disturbances in our individual and common lives rests in achieving a harmoniously functioning human ecology, a state in which we recapture on the high level of today's advanced cultures something of the union of man and his surroundings achieved by earlier and more primitive cultures. We know that the new unity to be sought between man and man, and between man and his environment and to which we may hopefully look forward will need to be fundamentally different from that of the Taoists, preclassical Greeks, and Hopi Indians. It may well be, however, that through correct reading of our current situation we can make effective and realistic use of our scientific competence to project the creative insights that will midwife a new human consciousness and weld the converging fragments of a possible future into a satisfying and enduring reality. That reality can take

on the aspect of an "ecological climax," a dwelling for the human spirit not unlike the dimly remembered Garden of Eden from which advancing knowledge once expelled us and to which advancing knowledge now beckons us to return.

Anthropologists, in studying early cultures, have reawakened our sense of ecological harmony. Early man, like a modern primitive, saw himself as an inseparable part of his group or society and his society as an indivisible aspect of all-embracing cosmic surroundings. Natural phenomena existed only as directly perceivable human experiences that were nevertheless aspects of natural cycles or cosmic events. There was a oneness of man and men, of men and their surroundings. Each sign coming from the outside had meaning in human terms; and each human act was considered to be an inevitable and irreversible consequence of the happenings or events in the surrounding natural world. In this interwovenness, there was no consciously discerned subject-object confrontation. For us the subject-object separation is paramount; without it no scientific knowledge would be possible. It became central to our thinking when the ancient Hebrews demoted the sun, moon, and forces of nature to mere ornaments of a transcendent God who had made everything and was above everything.

The outside world appears to us in a hierarchy of organizations, beginning with the higher animals and descending through plants to inanimate, physical, chemical, atomic, and subnuclear processes. For the primitive man there was no break in the spectrum of life. Life was

everywhere, in men, beasts, plants, stones, and water. For the Australian Bushman, the pearly iridescence of sea shells, the sparkling of a crystal, the phosphorescent glow of the sea at night, and the sunlight caught in droplets above a waterfall are all signs of an embracing, living thing, the basic link seen as the great snake whose body arches across the sky in the rainbow. Everything is permeated by life. Everything seems in contact, interacting, interliving. In the simpler stages of human existence, on the level of children and the primitive world, the connection with the environment is almost as intimate as the unity of the body itself.

The experimental evidence of modern psychology gives further support to this view. Our reactions to the environment are not those of independently functioning discrete systems but of a total organism. Whenever outside forces impinge upon our sensors, a relative equilibrium tends to be established through the mobilization of our entire self, regardless of what sense organ is immediately involved in receiving and registering the impacts from the outside. There are no separate sense modalities; all levels of sensory function are interdependent and blend together. They are furthermore in a fundamental union with motor processes. A dynamic perception theory in which sensory processes are apart from motor functions is not even conceivable in modern psychology.

Applied science, too, provides us with thought models of dynamic interconnectedness and basic complementarity of disparate processes and systems, particularly in such

fields of computer technology, electronics, and communication networks. Such technologies seem almost to plead to be integrated with life, to clarify ecological disorder, and to play an important role in realizing ecological climax. For this is the realm of the new-scale tools by means of which the making of things is automated, astronauts rendezvous precisely in the vast ocean of space, facsimile pictures are sent over telephones, sound becomes light and light sound, and the cycles of nature are reversed, the darkness of night becoming another day. The capacity of this realm to guide us, mold us,

and transform us is beyond calculation. We are given a model of interdependence on a cosmic scale.

A report published by the National Academy of Sciences in 1967 hints at the awesome symmetry of the promises and menaces inherent in our potent technology. Contracts were awarded to some aerospace companies for studies of the feasibility of orbiting a huge satellite to reflect light from the sun onto the dark side of the earth. Among the possible uses listed for such a solar mirror were to provide artificial lighting levels greater than full moonlight for nighttime illumination of

"1933" by Joyce Wieland  
Reprinted from "Artforum," September, 1971



search and rescue operations, recovery operations, security areas, and polar latitudes.

Critical reaction came immediately from astronomers concerned that the lighting of any large area of the night sky to a brightness several times that of full moonlight could jeopardize observational astronomy. Other scientists pointed to the possible harmful effects on the daily and yearly rhythms of plant and animal life.

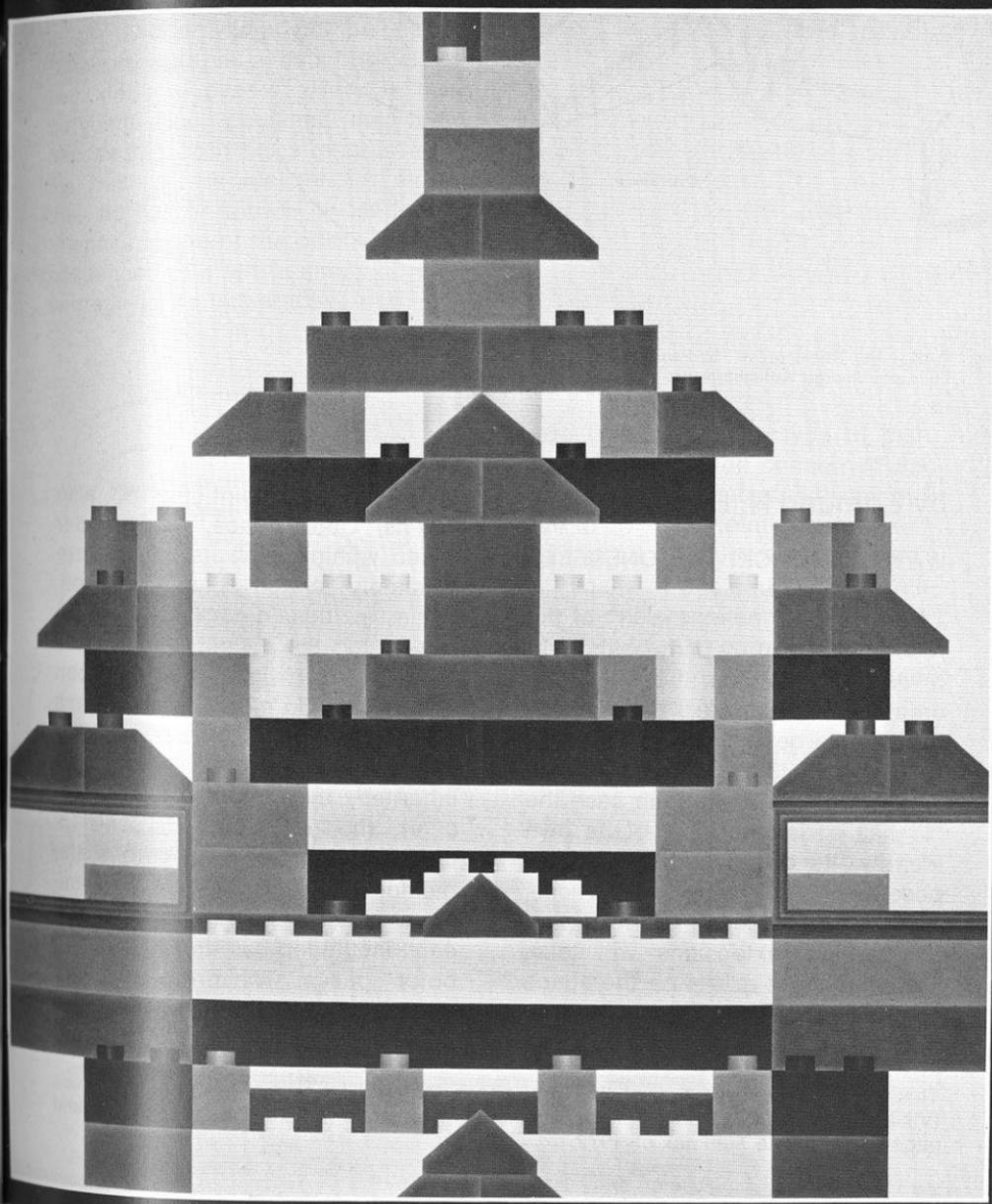
The complementarity of technological and social awareness can be fused into unity if we face squarely our present urgent social needs to combat ecological disasters, further develop consciousness of social interdependence, and build the sense of living freely according to ways in which everything fits together.

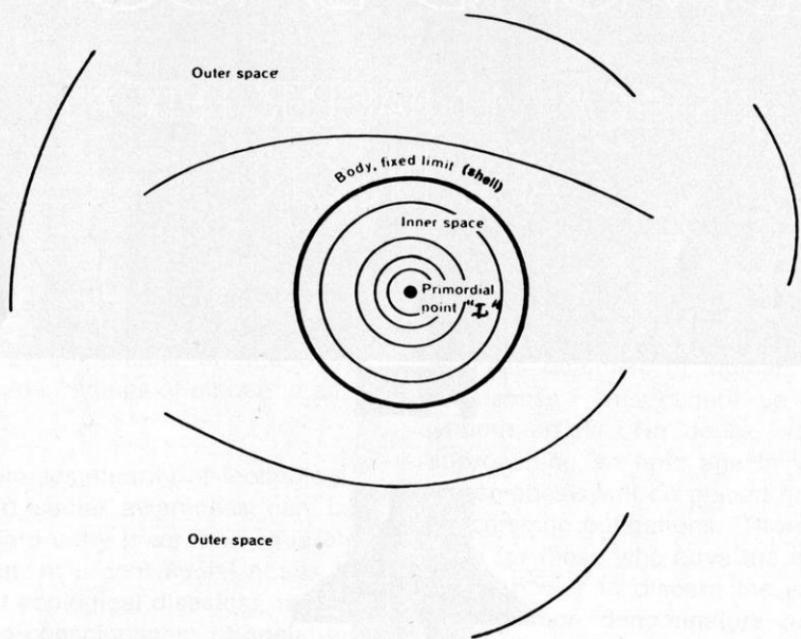
The artists are in a strategic position to bring all these issues together in a living focus. There are signs that they are ready to take on this important role. First, they have reached out to make effective use of the new-scale tools. Second, they are ready to participate in new-scale tasks, to take leave of the small, suffocating spaces of rooms and exhibition galleries and to participate in a bigger environment on a bigger scale than ever before. Third, they begin to open their eyes to the present ecological tragedies. A sensibility that subsumes a highly developed ecological consciousness will find the way to expression of ecological tragedies, just as the sensibility of a previous day could engage itself with great human tragedies. In one and the same form, the tragedy of the environment can be dramatized and means can be provided to recycle unsight-

ly waste and convert a scene of ecological regulation into a stirring focus of civic art. The sense of beauty and the sense of purpose—the patrimony of the artists—can be conveyed to others who do not quite understand these things but who do understand almost everything else. The great-scale tasks to be performed with the new tools need urgently to incorporate the deepest qualities of human consciousness. This cannot be done without artists. No doubt, we are approaching an epic age in which the emphasis will be placed on major common obligations. There is a need for those who have the imaginative power to discern the essential common denominators of this complex late twentieth-century life. There is a need for those whose loyalty is undivided, who can devote their abilities to the epic tasks. But whatever emphasis we wish to and must put on our common goals, in the final reckoning both the beginning and the end of action lie in individual experience. As individuals, all of us live on many levels and experience diverse life qualities. We work, we play, we cry and laugh, we sleep and dream, we fear and hate, we make love, and on rare occasions, we feel the single climactic glow that comes when the distilled essences of our experiences are amalgamated into a unified understanding. This process can occur only within the individual. But great things would emerge if the optimum of individual experience—the artist's poetic insights—would become an integral part of our common life. Only the realization of a dynamic complementarity of the personal and civic can offer the possibility of living up to our immense potentialities.

# EDMUND BACON

## ENVIRONMENTAL PERCEPTION AND DESIGN





From: "The Thinking Eye" by Paul Klee  
Courtesy: George Wittenborn Inc.

## by Edmund N. Bacon

### WAYS OF PERCEIVING ONESELF

The primordial point, the "I" in the Klee diagram above, may be thought of as the individual, the artist, the creator, the organizer, the planner. It may also be an Institution, a University, a building proposal, an innovative concept. In each case the "I" has a definite view of its own identity, its own function and purpose, and its own aspirations. These, in turn, will influence the form that its physical extensions will take, the influence it exerts on the space immediately around it, the "Inner Space" in the diagram above.

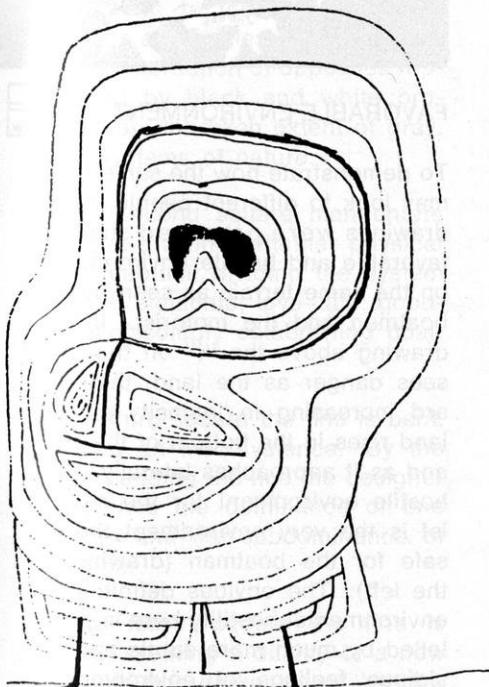
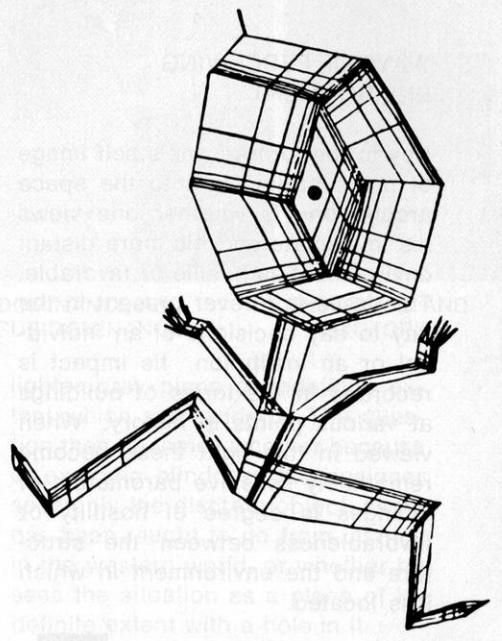
The primordial point, the "I" also has its "Outer Space," the broader milieu within which its inner, more intimately related spaces function. While in this diagram Klee has designated the divider between the two as a fixed limit, a shell, it can also be seen in more abstract terms as the fluid division between the inner, the intimate, the familiar, the inherited, the customary, and the outer, the unfamiliar, the untried, the challenging, the dangerous, the painful and the potentially disastrous. Each person, social group, each institution has these inner and outer spaces. The dress and folkways of the newer generation provide a protective inner space for

This is an unedited portion of the forty pages that will be added to *Design of Cities* (Viking Press, 1967) which will be available in an enlarged edition, hard cover and paperback, in the summer of 1972.

that group just as surely as do the country clubs and social registers of the older: Each has its area outside, repugnant and terrifying. The way in which one's self relates to these two determines the nature of one's life and one's contribution to society, and, in physical terms, the nature and form of an institution.

### OUTGOING

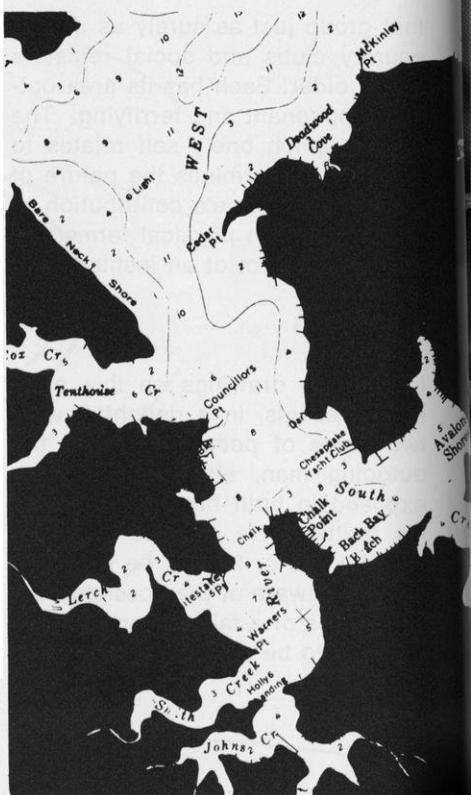
In the two drawings on this page Klee presents, in a delightful way, two kinds of people. Here is the outgoing man, ebullient, involved, exposed in both his strengths and his frailties. He reaches for more than he has or knows, he leaps into space aware of the possible consequences of a fall; a man with the courage to be vulnerable.



## WAYS OF PERCEIVING ENVIRONMENT

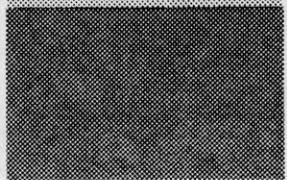
Key to the form of one's self image of one's projection into the space around one is whether one views his immediate and his more distant environment as hostile or favorable. This issue is forever present in the day to day decisions of an individual or an institution. Its impact is recorded in the forms of buildings at various points in history. When viewed in this light these become remarkably sensitive barometers of changes in degree of hostility or favorableness between the structure and the environment in which it is located.

### HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

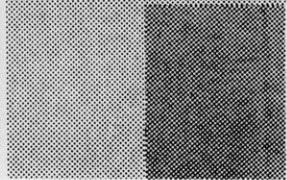


### FAVORABLE ENVIRONMENT

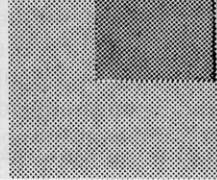
To demonstrate how the same thing may look to different people, these drawings were prepared showing favorable and hostile environments on the same terrain as seen by the boatman and the motorist. In the drawing above the "I" on the ship sees danger as the land, the hazard increasing in intensity as the land rises in the bottom of the bay, and as it approaches laterally. The hostile environment for the motorist is the very environment that is safe for the boatman (drawing to the left). The obvious definition of environmental hostility here is paralleled by much more subtle and insidious feelings of environmental hostility which bear great influence on architectural form.



DUALITY



DOMINANCE AND  
SUB-DOMINANCE



ENDOTOPIC AND  
EXOTOPIC

## WAYS OF PERCEIVING SPACE

Key to the whole concept is the way in which one perceives the total continuity of space within which the outer and inner spaces operate. The four squares above illustrate different ways in which such perception can take place. They should be thought of as planes of indefinite size, extending in all directions to the horizon and beyond.

The square to the left represents space as a boundless unit, the continuous interaction of opposites represented by black and white producing an unbroken extent of gray, as in systems of nature.

In the second square man enters and draws a line, whether physical or conceptual, dividing the system into two elements; love-hate, good-evil, indissolubly establishing duality.

In the third square the line is bent, creating an inequivalence. By the act of bending the line the designer establishes the dominance of one element and the subdominance of the other.

In the fourth square the line is closed, creating a duality of a new sort; one (the darker square) a discrete object clearly defined which detaches itself from the other, the

lighter gray plane of indefinite extent which surrounds it. The question then becomes whether because of exotopic blindness the designer sees only the discrete object, as he has been taught to do from infancy in the western world, or whether he sees the situation as a plane of indefinite extent with a hole in it.

Paul Klee defines the inner square in relation to the line as endotopic, and the outer plane as exotopic, and illustrates ways in which these two intermesh when controlled by lines of differing character.

## ENDOTOPIC

*Shape*—When viewed in endotopic terms the design process becomes that of making shapes. Architecture becomes the imposition of capricious shapes into the environment.

*Mass*—The third dimension is seen as the vertical projection of capricious shapes and architecture becomes preoccupied with mass as geometrical form.

*Object*—This approach culminates in thinking of the building as a discrete object, created independently of its background, arbitrarily placed in anonymous space. True design involves an interplay of endotopic and exotopic thinking.

## EXOTOPIC

*Space*—When viewed in exotopic terms the design process becomes that of articulating some portion of a space of indefinite extent for some human purpose.

*Movement*—Since the articulations of space can be experienced only through movement the designer's function becomes that of providing channels of movement related to larger movement systems.

*Form*—In this approach the design form emerges naturally from the movement systems so that the step of creating capricious shapes doesn't exist in the design process.

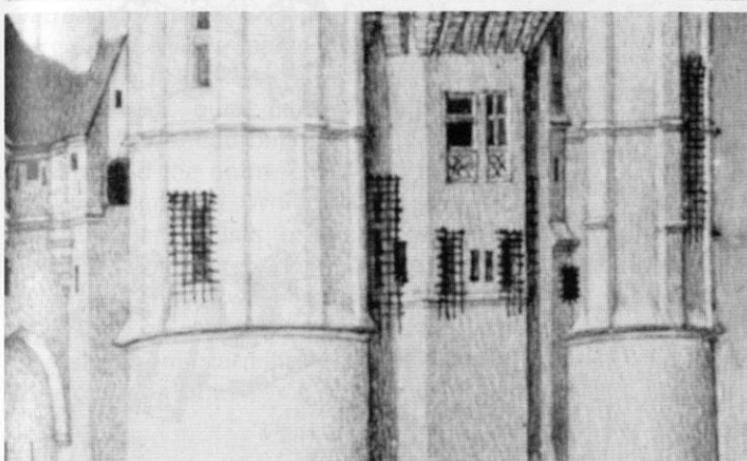
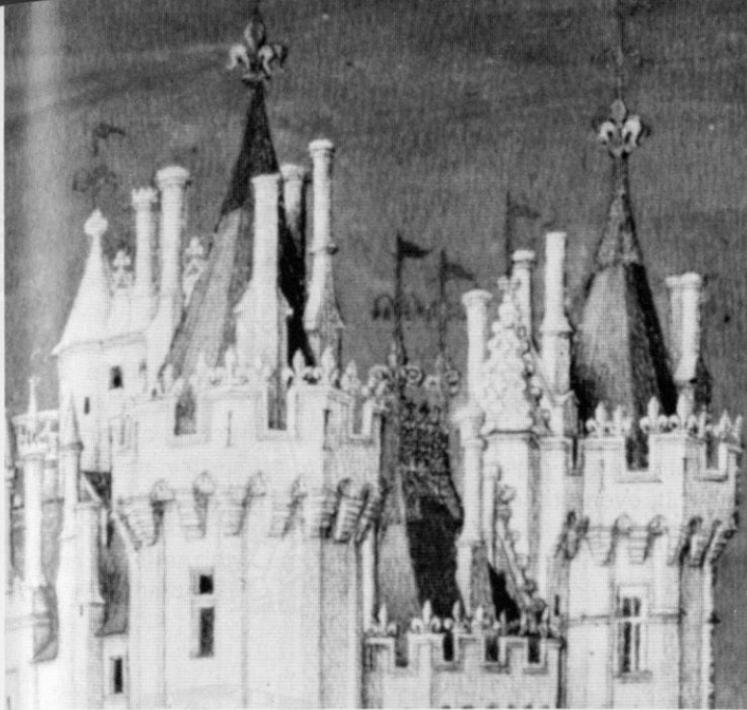
A key test of any design is whether the shapes are arbitrary or are demonstrably derived from movement systems.

*Favorable Environment*—In the medieval period, because of the limited effectiveness of the military missiles of the time, the degree of hostility of the environment varied markedly within horizontal layers. In this drawing of a castle from the Book of Hours of the Duke of Berry, the architectural forms respond to this variation as it rises vertically. Here, in the upper air, the architecture leaps outward into space, exposing itself in all directions, involving itself with the atmosphere to the point that the turrets, foliate projections, spires and pinnacles seem almost to dissolve in space.

*Intermediate Environment*—In this intermediate section of the castle, partly but not completely removed from the threat of military missiles, the architecture involves itself in space more than the minimum. The vertical ridges deliberately extend the area, and so the vulnerability of the wall. The architectural expression is of a single direction of thrust, up and away from the hostile environment of the ground.

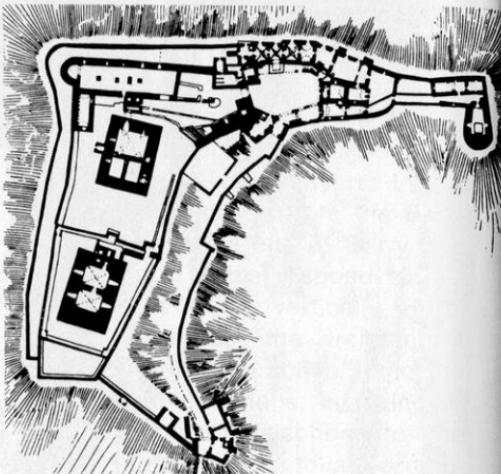
*Hostile Environment*—Here the architectural forms are completely dominated by the need to resist the hostile environment outside. The inward-looking convex forms produce the minimum surface exposure for the maximum interior volume, and the curved mass tended to deflect such missiles as the military mind could produce.

The Klee diagrams in the center suggest the response of the primordial point to the three conditions of environment.

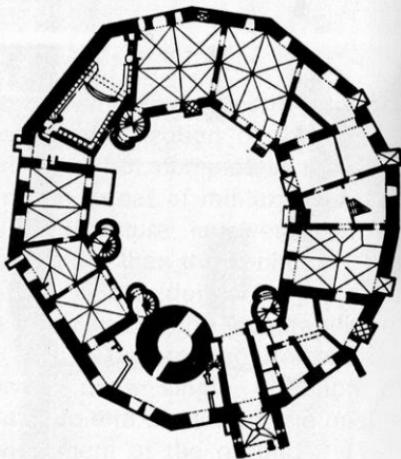


**Outreach**—In these three plans we see the struggle of the medieval structure to free itself from the oppressive demands of an environment seen as totally hostile.

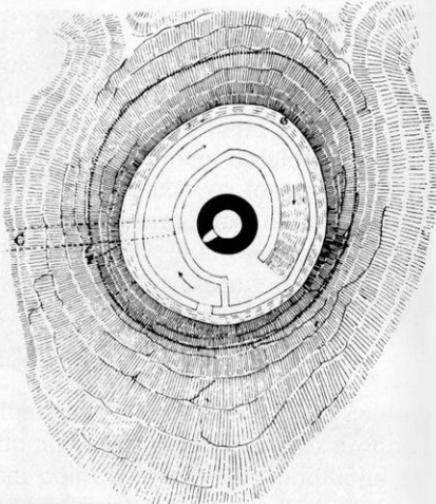
In the upper plan, a late castle is beginning to break out of the rigid circular form of earlier fortifications, and to involve itself more richly in its environment, reaching out to significant points around it, even at the cost and dangers of greater exposure.



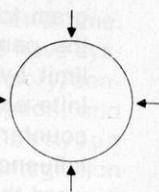
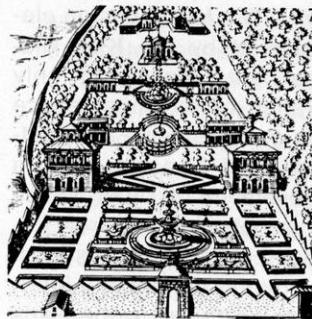
**Intermediate**—In this plan the internal structural discipline of the groin vault demands rectangular over-all form. The need for protection from a hostile environment in turn suggests minimum exposure and so a circular form. In this design, created within the tension of these two conflicting demands, military considerations clearly outweighed structural logic.



**Inward Looking**—This medieval tower is the most efficient possible structure when protection from a hostile environment is seen as the dominant consideration. The resemblance between this plan and the Klee drawing on page 97 is striking. Here the "inner space" is that space around the tower which is controlled by armaments within it. The divider between this and the darker, uncontrolled "outer space" is not a "fixed shell" but an intangible line determined by the efficiency of the armaments.



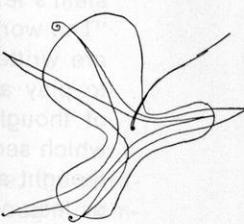
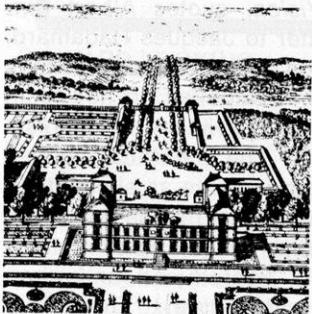
*Inward Looking* — As we move into the Renaissance we observe the out-push of architecture into an environment gradually freed of the most oppressive elements of medieval hostility. The fully developed Italian Villa, such as the 1560 Villa Lante at Bagnaia shown here, contained the seeds of later work in their thrusts and counter thrust, but all of these were totally contained within clearly defined bounding walls in the endotopic sense. The diagrams to the right are from Paul Klee's *Thinking Eye*.



*Outreach* — In 1685 Pope Sixtus V introduced a new design dimension into Italian thought by his plans for Rome. These burst the bounds of any clearly defined building project, and utilized the entire city of Rome as the design field. While the thrusts and counter thrusts of his movement systems extended over great distances, they always reached out to definite objects, and finally came to rest at some terminal point such as a church, a gate or a square.



*Outgoing* — An entirely new dimension of design was introduced into France in the eighteenth century in the form of design thrusts that had no clear termination, that penetrated the boundaries of the inner space, that extended outward indefinitely, over the horizon seemingly to infinity. These concepts were developed at the time of the Encyclopedists and the mathematical explorations of infinity, and established the idea of a design structure capable of indefinite extension over time.



**Involvement**—The fourth design element, suggested by the Klee diagram to the right, involves not only the penetration of the inner space limit by an outward push of indefinite extent, but concurrently a counter movement of outer space influences penetrating inwardly toward the source. While this is illustrated here by the remarkable interaction of design thrust in the Paris region it might better be illustrated in the institutional sense by the kind of involvement that is tending to come about today when wide sectors of people invade what the professional designer had previously thought was his private inner space of design.

## INVOLVEMENT TODAY

Involvement encompasses much more than cerebral comprehension. It is a necessary ingredient for the creation of competent design.

Siegfried Gideon, in his great book, *Space, Time and Architecture* stresses the importance of moving beyond the purely cerebral into the realm of feeling, of involving one's sensibilities and emotions. Rudolph Arnheim, in Gyorgy Kepes' *Education of Vision*, quotes Albert Einstein's letter to Jacques Hadamard, "The words or the language as they are written or spoken do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be 'voluntarily' reproduced and combined." And further: "The above mentioned elements are, in my case, of visual and some of muscular type. Conventional words or other signs have to be sought for laboriously



only in a second stage, when the mentioned associative play is sufficiently established and can be reproduced at will." He adds his own comment "If Einstein's procedure is representative of intelligent reasoning we may be strangling the potential of our brainpower systematically by forcing our youth to think primarily with verbal and numerical signs."

Leonard K. Eaton, in his book, *Two Chicago Architects and their Clients*, says "As long ago as 1919 Carl Seashore noted that musically talented students possessed high auditory imagery, (the ability to re-create a tone image) and that this faculty was closely related to motor imagery and motor tendencies: *These motor images are perceived in terms of feelings, of effort and strain in the body.* This kinesthetic response plays a large part in the enjoyment derived from active participation in music, architecture and sport." (The underlining is mine.)

The point here is not bodily movement as "exercise" or "recreation," separate and divorced from the act of design, but rather bodily response as a built-in ingredient of the design process. It relates to the range of the images or models that are used in design. Thus, if one is bodily inert or incompetent one tends to sit and contemplate. The forms that associate with this kind of bodily condition are spheres, cubes or pyramids, discrete forms which can be comprehended without the need for bestirring oneself; for putting forth the muscular effort required for moving about. If one is physically and muscularly in such condition that it is a joy to move about, that one is impelled by an inner drive to leap forward to the next and the next experience, a very different range of perception of space and time is brought into play, and one is inclined to think in terms of linkages rather than discrete elements.

This may be illustrated by the problem of perceiving the basic design idea of two national capitol cities; Washington, D. C. and Peking. If one stands at the foot of the Washington Monument at the intersection of the two main axes of the United States Capitol, one has only to move around the base, a matter of a few feet, to perceive all of the basic elements of monumental Washington. In Peking there just is no way to perceive the design except by making the effort to move through the spaces over a two mile track. One can't see from one part to another because each part is totally enclosed, yet it is not any individual part, but rather the linkage, which is the design.

In the education of small children

we have systematically suppressed the motor tendency by forcing them to sit still for long hours at a time. In advanced education we have systematically denigrated sensory, sensual and muscular perception, and fostered the dichotomy between body and thought. A reintegration is called for, not to make the student "healthy," but to equip him with the basic faculties needed for his work. Training in muscular skill and muscular and sensory perception should be part of every architectural and planning school. I believe that anyone intending to practice architecture or planning should be able to run up three flights of stairs without noticeable loss of breath, and take joy in doing it.



INWARD LOOKING

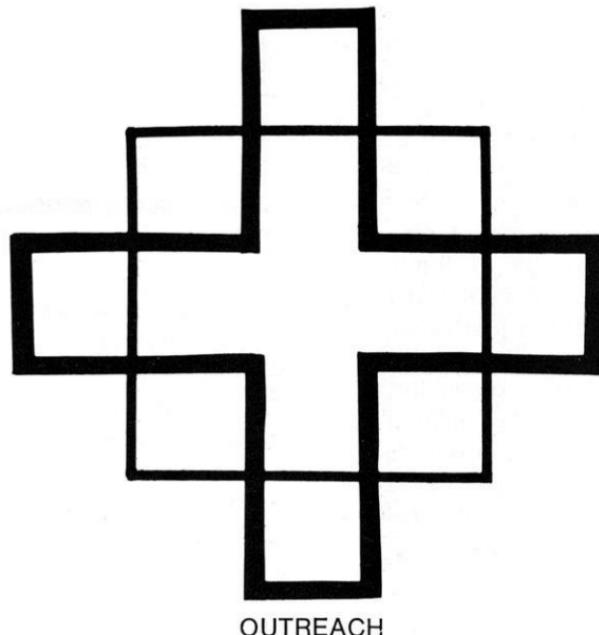
#### THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE SQUARE

Above stands the square, the paradigm of architectural thought, compact, self-contained, the minimum exterior exposure for the maximum interior area if a minimum number of perpendicular straight lines is also an objective. The form was developed in earliest times when pro-

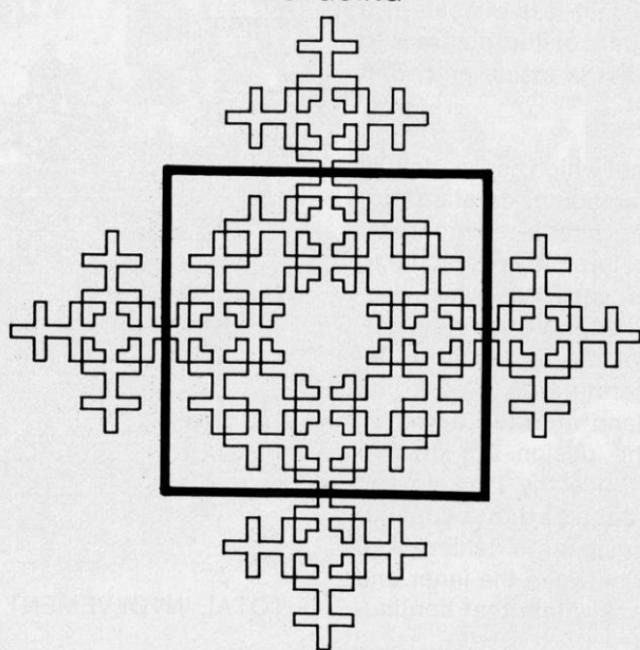
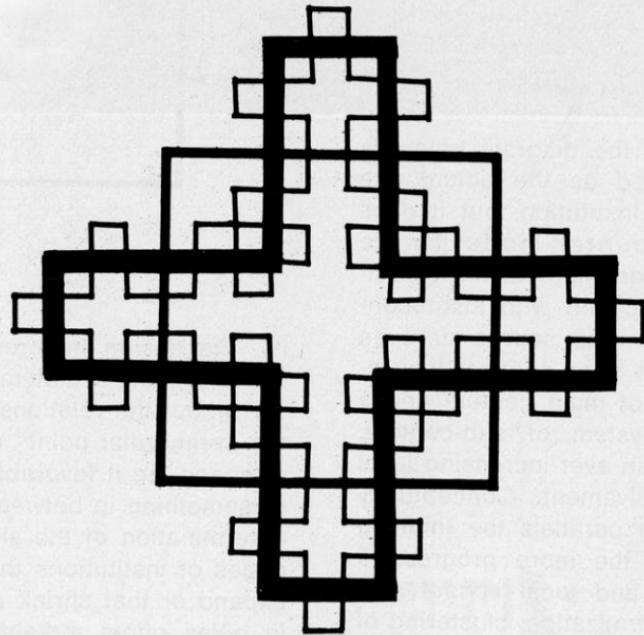
tection from a hostile environment was a building's main purpose. While still efficient as an enclosure of space, and still relevant to parts of a larger whole, it remains all too often as the paradigm for the whole itself. Here the residual effect can be damaging indeed. If it is used by an institution, a university in a low-income area for example, and each extension is designed as nearly as possible to reconstruct a square of larger dimension, the impression will be given that the Institution regards the environment into which it is projecting itself as hostile. The physical form will have a minimum of exposure and so of environmental involvement. The shape of the edge and the nature of the edge are both important because of the way in which they communicate the Institution's message to its neighbors, of favorableness or hostility, as when a neighborhood rose up in protest because a university put a chain link fence along one portion of its boundary.

What follows is a geometrical development of the square in an attempt to present a counter-model for the growth and extension of an entity, be it an Institution or an idea. At the top of the following page the square projects itself into its environment by reconstituting itself into a cross, (heaviest line), substantially increasing its length of exposure to the environment while retaining its original area. While increasing the degree of involvement, the form remains an aggressive one.

In the diagram on this page the lighter line designates the form produced when this same principle of exposure is applied to each of the nine sub-squares produced by the cross form. The two diagrams on the following page show the forms produced by extending this principle in two more stages. The drawing on page 108 (top) shows the form taken to still one more stage of development.



It will be seen that the length of the line bounding the entity can be increased indefinitely while holding the diagram within definite bounds. As the bounding line approaches infinity the degree of environmental involvement becomes greater and greater.



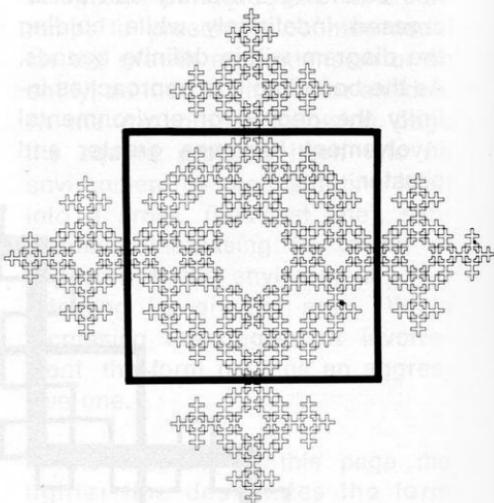
hostile. There is hostile environment, but there was a building's main purpose. It was still efficient as an environment of space and still relevant to parts of a larger whole. It remains, all too often as the paradigm for the whole field. Here the residual effect can be damping. Indeed, it can be used by an institution to unify its parts, but it can also be used to disperse them.

## TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

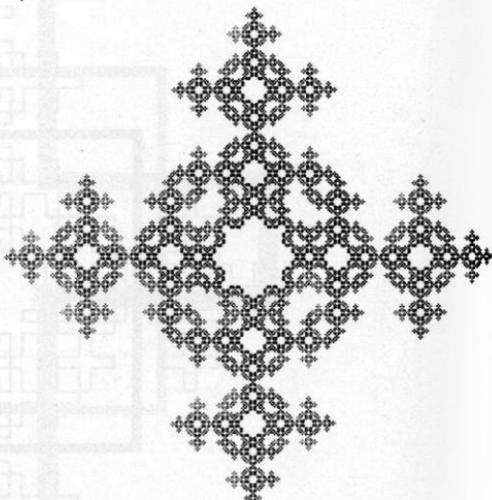
The form of the diagram below is not suggested as the actual site plan for an Institution, but it does provide a counter-model for the rigidities of geometrical form traditionally associated with institutional expansion; the square or even the cross. It does suggest the establishment of main centers and a dispersed system of sub-centers, possible at an ever-increasing level of local involvement. Conceptually this diagram parallels the thinking of some of the more progressive universities and local school systems, decentralization, clustering of schools, extension programs, etc. Under this system it is difficult in a single small part of the diagram to distinguish what is inside and what is outside.

In a discipline which is so deeply rooted in a tradition of creating protection from a hostile environment as is architecture, it is difficult to obtain support for ideas which foster integration with environment. When the problem moves from the design of discrete structures to the design of a land area the demands placed on the design act change completely. Since the land is, and always must be, a part of a continuity, and the designer is dealing with the definition between the inner and the outer space within that continu-

## INVOLVEMENT B



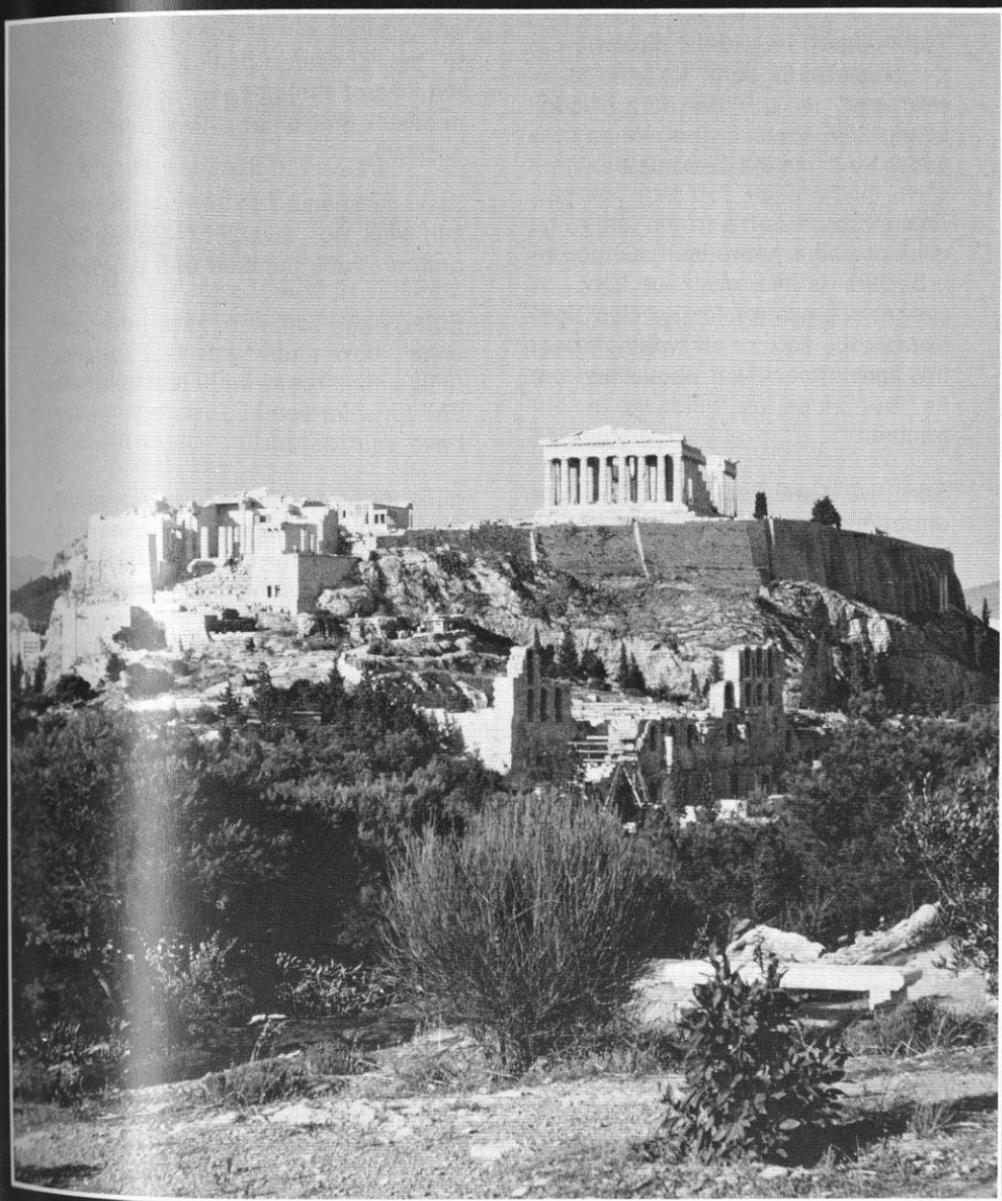
ity, the design he creates will inevitably make a statement of some sort about the relationship between the "primordial point" and the outer space, be it favorable or hostile, or something in between. The very determination of the shapes of the edges of institutions that grow and expand or that shrink and contract in cities offers a field of creative effort that has scarcely been explored.



## TOTAL INVOLVEMENT

# LOUIS KAHN

THE ROOM, THE STREET,  
AND HUMAN AGREEMENT



## by Louis I. Kahn

I have some thoughts about the spirit of architecture. I have chosen to talk about the room, the street, and human agreement.

The room is the beginning of architecture.

It is the place of the mind.

You in the room with its dimensions, its structure, its light, respond to its character, its spiritual aura, recognizing that whatever the human proposes and makes becomes a life.

The structure of a room must be evident in the room itself. Structure I believe is the giver of light. A square room asks for its own light to read the square. It would expect the light either from above or from its four sides as windows or entrances.

Sensitive is the Pantheon. This non-directional room dedicated to all religions has its light only from the oculus above, placed to invest the room with inspired ritual without favoritism. The entrance door is its only impurity.

So powerful was this realization of appropriate space that even now the room seems to ask for its release to its original freedom.

Of the elements of a room the window is the most marvelous. The great American poet, Wallace Stev-

ens, prodded the architect, "What slice of the sun does your building have?"

To paraphrase: what slice of the sun enters your room? What range of mood does the light offer from morning to night, from day to day, from season to season and all through the years?

Gratifying and unpredictable are the permissions the architect has given to the chosen opening on which patches of sunlight play on the jamb and still that enter, move, and disappear.

Stevens seemed to tell us that the sun was not aware of its wonder until it struck the side of a building.

Enter your room and know how personal, how much you feel its life. In a small room with just another person what you say you may never have said before.

It is different when there is more than just another person. Then in this little room the singularity of each is so sensitive that the vectors do not resolve. The meeting becomes a performance instead of an event everyone saying their lines, saying what they said many times before.

Still in a large room the event is of commonality. Rapport would take the place of thought.

This room we are in is big without distinction. The walls are far away

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This is the text of a talk given by Mr. Kahn on the occasion of being presented the 1971 Gold Medal by the American Institute of Architects. In introducing Mr. Kahn, the current president of A.I.A. said: *The American Institute of Architects presents the 1971 Gold Medal—the highest honor it can bestow—to an architect, educator, form giver in the highest tradition of his profession. Through his design and teaching, he has influenced architects of the current generation just as Corbu, Mies and Gropius influenced those of an earlier period.*

yet I know if I were to address myself to a chosen person whose smile would tell me of appreciation I believe the walls of the room would come together and the room would become intimate.

If I were now reading, the concern would be diction. If this room were the Baptistry of Florence, however, its image would have inspired thoughts in the same way as person to person, architect to architect.

So sensitive is a room.

The plan is a society of rooms.

The rooms relate to each other to strengthen their own unique nature. The auditorium wants to be a violin. Its lobby is the violin case.

The society of rooms is the place where it is good to learn, good to live, good to work.

Open before us is the architect's plan. Next to it is a sheet of music.

The architect fleetingly reads his composition as a structure of elements and spaces in their light.

The musician reads, with the same overallness, his composition as a structure of inseparable elements and spaces in sound.

A great musical composition is of such entity that when played conveys the feeling that all that was heard was assembled in a cloud over us. Nothing is gone as though time and sound have become a single image.

The corridor has no position except as a private passage. In a school

the boy walks across a hall as in his own classroom where he is his own teacher observing others as others do. The hall asks for equal position with the library.

The society of rooms is knit together with the elements of connection which have their own characteristics.

The stair is the same for the child, the adult and the old. It is thought of as precise in its measures particularly for the young boy who aspires to do the floors in no time flat both up and down. It is good also to consider its landing as a place to sit, near a window with possibly a shelf for a few books. The old man ascending with the young boy can stop here showing his interest in a certain book and avoid the explanations of infirmity.

The landing wants to be a room.

The bay window can be the private room within a room.

A closet with a window becomes a room ready to be rearranged.

The lightless corridor, never a room, aspires to the hall overlooking the garden.

The library, the work court, the rooms of study, the place of meeting want to group themselves in a composition that evokes Architecture.

The libraries of all university schools sit well in a court entrance available to all its students as a place of invitation.

The entrance courts and their libra-

ries and the gardens and paths knitting them together form an architecture of connection.

The book is an offering of the mind.

The work court of a school of architecture is an inner space encircled by work shops available to construct building experiments. The rooms of study and criticism are of a variety of dimension and spaces in their light, small for the intimate talk and work and large for the making of full size drawings and group work.

Rooms must suggest their use without name.

To an architect a school of architecture would be the most honored commission.

The Street is a room of agreement.

The street is dedicated by each house owner to the city in exchange for common services.

Deadened streets in cities today still retain this room character. Thru streets, since the advent of the automobile, have entirely lost their room quality. I believe city planning can start with realization of this loss by directing the drive to reinstate the street where people live, learn, shop and work as the room out of commonality.

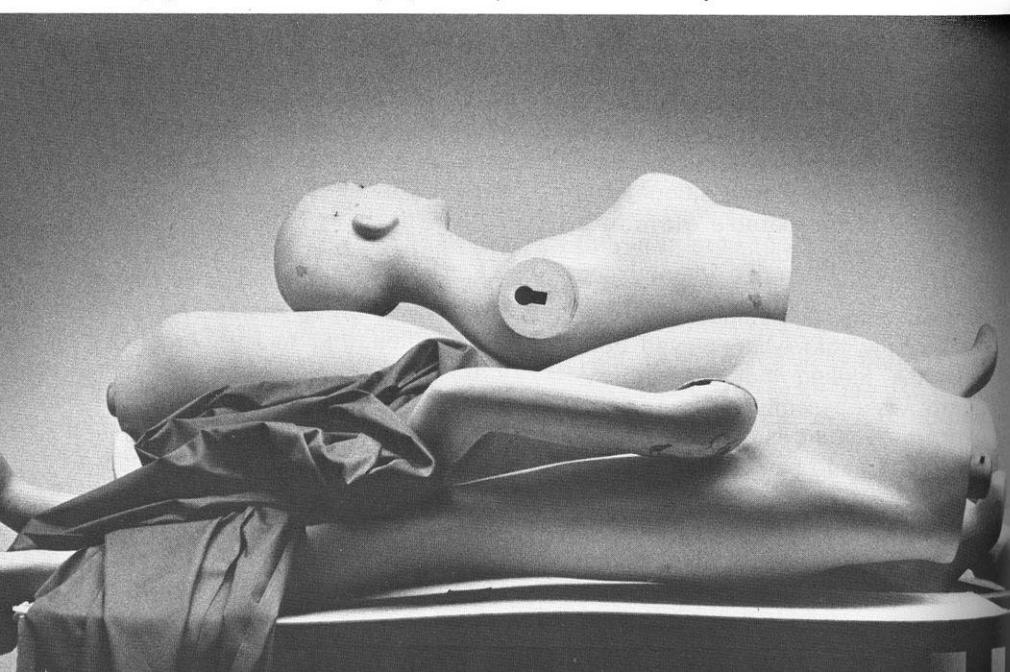
Today we can begin by planting trees on all existing residential streets, by redefining the order of movement which would give these streets back to more intimate use which in turn would stimulate the feelings of well being, and inspire unique street expression.

The street is a community room.

The meeting house is a community room under a roof. It seems as though one came naturally out of the other.

A long street is a succession of

Photographer: James Gordon Douglas, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay





"Habitat 67," Montreal, Quebec

Architect: Moshe Safdie

Photographer: Kéro

rooms given their distinction, room for room, by their meeting of crossing streets. The intersecting street brings from afar its own developed nature which infiltrates any opening it meets. One block in a stream of blocks can be more preferred because of its particular life. One realizes the deadliness of uninterested movement through our streets which erases all delicacy of character and blots out its sensitive nature given to it of human agreement.

Human Agreement is a sense of rapport, of commonness, all bells ringing in unison — not needing to be understood by example but felt as an undeniable inner demand for a presence. It is an inspiration with the promise of the possible.

Dissension does not stem from need but from the mad outburst of frustration. From the hopelessness of the far-awayness of human agreement.

Desire, not need, the forerunner of the new need, out of the yet not said and yet not made seems to be the roots of hope in dissension.

How inspiring would be the time when the sense of human agreement is felt as the force which brings new images. Such images reflecting inspirations and put into being by inspired technology.

Basing our challenges on present day programming and existing technologies can only bring new facets of old work.

The city from a simple settlement became the place of the assembled institutions. The settlement was the first institution. The talents found their places. The carpenter directed building. The thoughtful man became the teacher. The strong one the leader.

When one thinks of simple beginnings which inspired our present institutions it is evident that some drastic changes must be made which will inspire the re-creation of the meaning, City, as primarily an assembly of those places vested with the care to uphold the sense of a way of life.

Human agreement has always been and will always be. It does not belong to measurable qualities and is therefore eternal. The opportunities which present its nature depend on circumstances and events from which human nature realizes itself.

A city is measured by the character of its institutions. The street is one of its first institutions. Today these institutions are on trial. I believe it is so because they have lost the

inspirations of their beginning. The institutions of learning must stem from the undeniable feeling in all of us of a desire to learn. I have often thought this feeling came from the way we were made, that nature records in everything it makes how it was made. This record is also in man and it is this within us that urges us to seek its story involving the laws of the universe, the source of all material and means, and the psyche the source of all expression. Art.

The desire to learn made the first school room. It was of human agreement. The institution became the modus operandi. Agreement has the immediacy of rapport, the inspiring force which recognizes its commonality and that it must be part of the human way of life supported by all people.

The institution will die when its inspirations are no longer felt and operates as a matter of course. Human agreement, however, once it presents itself as a realization is indestructible. For the same reason that a man is unable to work below his level of comprehension.

To explain inspiration I like to believe that it is the moment of possibility when what to do meets the means of doing it.

City planning must begin to be cognizant of the strength and character of our present institutions and be sensitive to the pulse of human relations which senses the new inspirations which would bring about new and meaningful institutions. Traffic systems, sociological speculations, new materials, new technologies are servants to the pulse

of human rapport which promises revelations not yet felt but in the very core of human desires.

New spaces will come only from a new sense of human agreement which will affirm a promise of a way of life and will reveal new availabilities and point to human support for their establishment.

In India and Pakistan I realized that a great majority of the people are without ambition because there is no way in which they are able to elevate themselves beyond living from hand to mouth and what is worse, talents have no outlet. To express is the reason for living. The institution of learning, of work, of health, or recreation should be made available to all people. All realms of expression will be opened. Each singularity will express in its way.

Availabilities to all can be the source of a tremendous release of the values locked in us of the unmeasurable in living, the art of living.

One city can distinguish itself from the other by just the inspirational qualities that exist in sensing natural agreement as the only true source of new realizations.

In that sense the spaces where it is good to learn, where it is good to live and work may remain unexpressed if their nature is not redefined.

It is not enough just to solve the problem. To imbue the spaces with new found self-quality is a different question entirely. Solution is a 'how' design problem, the realization of 'what' precedes it.

### About Inspired Technology.

The wall that enclosed us for a long time until the man behind it, feeling a new freedom, wanted to look out. He hammered away to make an opening. The wall cried, "I have protected you." And the man said, "I appreciate your faithfulness, but I feel time has brought change."

The wall was sad, man realized something good. He visualized the opening as gracefully arched, glorifying the wall. The wall was terribly pleased with its arch and carefully made jamb. The opening became part of the order of the wall.

The world with its many people, each one a singularity, each group of different experiences revealing the nature of the human in varied aspects is full of the possibility of more richly sensing human agreement from which new architecture will come. The world cannot be expected to come from the exercise of present technology alone to find the realms of new expression. I believe that technology should be inspired. A good plan demands it.

### A word about silence and light.

A building being built is not yet in servitude. It is so anxious to be that no grass can grow under its feet, so high is the spirit of wanting to be. When it is in service and finished, the building wants to say, "Look, I want to tell you about the way I was made." Nobody listens. Everybody is busy going from room to room.

But when the building is a ruin and free of servitude, the spirit emerges telling of the marvel that a building was made.



When we think of the great buildings of the past that had no precedent, we always refer to the Parthenon.

We say it is the building that grew out of the wall with opening. We can say, in the Parthenon, light is the space between the columns; a rhythm of light, no-light, light, no-light which tells the tremendous story of light in architecture that came from the wall.

We are simply extending what happened long ago; the beginning may be considered the most marvelous; without precedent yet its making was as sure as life.

Light is material life.

The mountains, the streams, the atmosphere is spent light.

Material, non-conscious, moving to desire; desire to express, conscious, moving to light, meet at an aura threshold where the will senses the possible.

The first feeling was of Beauty, the first sense of harmony, of man undefinable, unmeasurable and measurable material, the maker.

At the threshold, the crossing of silence and light, lies the sanctuary of Art, the only language of man. It is the treasury of the shadows. Whatever is made of light casts a shadow. Our work is of shadow. It belongs to light.

When the astronauts went through space, the earth presented itself as a marvelous ball, blue and rose, in space. Since I followed it and saw it that way, all knowledge left me as being unimportant. Truly, knowl-

edge is an incomplete book outside of us. You take from it to know something, but knowing cannot be imparted to the next man. Knowing is private. It gives singularity the means for self-expression.

I believe that the greatest work of man is that part which does not belong to him alone. If he discovers a principle, only his design way of interpreting belongs to him alone. The discovery of oxygen does not belong to the discoverer.

I invented a story about Mozart. Somebody dropped a dish in his kitchen, and it made a hell of a noise. The servants jumped, and Mozart said, "Ah! Dissonance." And immediately dissonance belonged to music, and the way he wrote, interpreting it, belonged to him.

Architects must not accept the commercial divisions of their profession into urban design, city planning and architecture as though they were three different professions.

The architect can turn from the smallest house to the greatest complex, or the city. Specializing ruins the essence of the revelation of Form with its inseparable parts realized only as an entity.

A word about Beauty.

Beauty is an all prevailing sense of harmony, giving rise to wonder, from it, revelations.

Poetry. Is it in beauty? Is it in wonder? Is it in the revelation?

It is in the beginning, in first thought, in the first sense of the means of expression.

A poet is in thought of beauty and existence. Yet a poem is only an offering which to the poet is less.

A work of architecture is but an offering to the spirit Architecture and its poetic beginning.



# DAVID LEWIS

THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED  
WITH WRECKED BANDWAGONS



It is easy, and apparently very popular, to write about the ills of cities — which explains why there are so many articles and books on the subject. Obviously cities all over the world are in crisis, particularly the big ones. Their inventory of pathologies seems to be endless. Inner city decay; bankruptcy; pollution; crime; traffic congestion; segregation and large concentrations of poverty; the continuing in-migration of the unskilled.

The irony is that all this has happened and continues to get exasperatingly worse and worse year after year, not just in the poorer countries, but in the United States, a nation which claims to be materially the richest and technological-ly the most advanced in the world.

In fact *because* of technological power, a number of utopian theories for dealing with cities have been developed in the United States. It is not surprising, for example, that in the United States the idea that we can abandon the cities we inherit, and move people by the million into entirely new and totally 'planned' cities, the products of scientific and economic reason, from which all of our urban problems have been erased, is perenially prevalent.

The idea itself is not of course new. Several Renaissance philosophers and scientists, aware of their growing intellectual and technological power, devoted a lot of attention to it. And there have been many modern versions, in Scandinavia, Britain, and in this country; particularly since Ebenezer Howard eloquently

expressed his disgust in the late nineteenth century with the poverty and smoke and grime in industrial cities in England and went on to match eloquence with action by actually planning two wholly new towns, Letchworth and Welwyn.

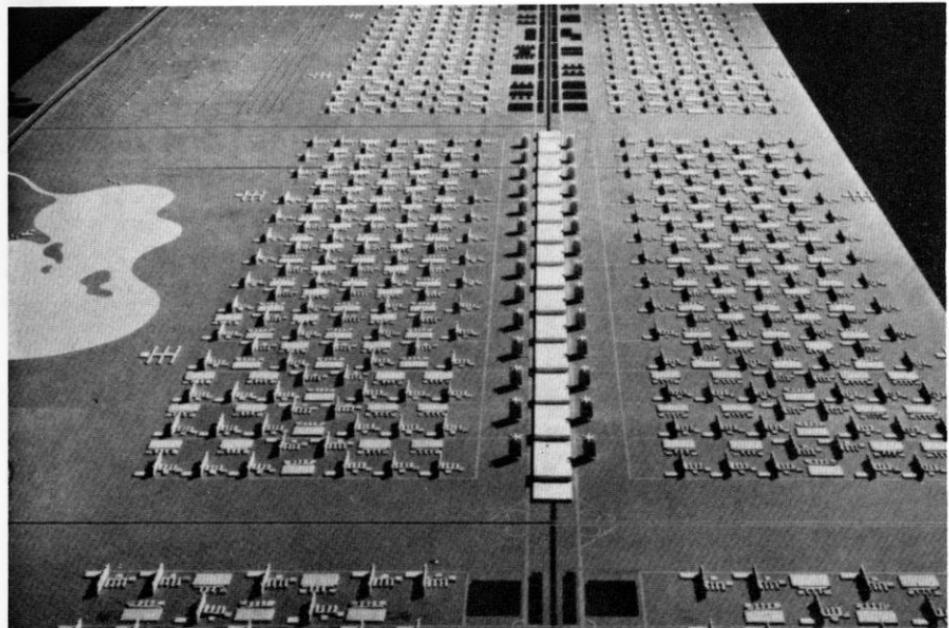
Some of these modern versions have been built. There are the British and Scandinavian new towns. And in the United States Reston and Columbia are under construction; nice clean places where there are trees and grass and access to lakes, where the schools are new and bright and safe for white children, where the roads are serpentine and the housing is in picturesque clusters, and community centers have planned programs for the old and the young, and where everyone is smiling and cherry-cheeked and much the same as you.



Columbia, Maryland. A cluster of townhouses among the trees.

But surely only the United States — where technological power is so great—could take seriously, decade after decade, such unbelievably simple-minded and arrogant solutions to urban crisis as Malcolmson's in the nineteen-fifties and Soleri's in the nineteen-sixties.

Indeed Soleri, ten years later, goes much further than Malcolmson. Whereas Malcolmson's 'linear' cities are conceived as extensions or modifications to existing major cities<sup>1</sup> Soleri would actually replace them. The entire urban populations of the United States, whether they



Reginald Malcolmson: Metrolinear 1956.  
Scale model of a 175 square mile section.

<sup>1</sup>"Devised about 1956, Malcolmson's theory has, as a program, attracted considerable attention in recent years. It has been illustrated frequently in architectural literature, has been exhibited at New York's Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere, and has formed part of a television documentary about the metropolis of the future. The core of Malcolmson's system is made up of a combination of transportation arteries and continuous buildings. The former include central rail and truck routes as well as flanking automobile highways. The buildings of the core are alternatively administrative-commercial and light-industrial, in eight-mile sections. Administrative-commercial units contain the rail and truck transport in two storeys below ground, above which is built a continuous four-storey parking building. The roof of the latter serves as pedestrian promenade and is laid out as a sequence of public squares; at half-mile intervals it is surmounted by higher commercial structures. At similar intervals, out past the auto highways, stand tall office buildings of star plan. The latter are joined to the core building by overpasses (not indicated on model), the different levels of freight, car, and pedestrian traffic being interconnected by elevators, escalators, and ramps. Flanking this in the countryside are residential areas, arranged in groups that include low- and high-rise residences and public buildings. Then come park and farm lands. Heavy industry is ranged along its own arterial belt about six miles out, connected to the core at eight-mile intervals." *The Linear City* by George R. Collins, published in *The Pedestrian in the City*, edited by David Lewis, Van Nostrand 1966, pp. 204-217.

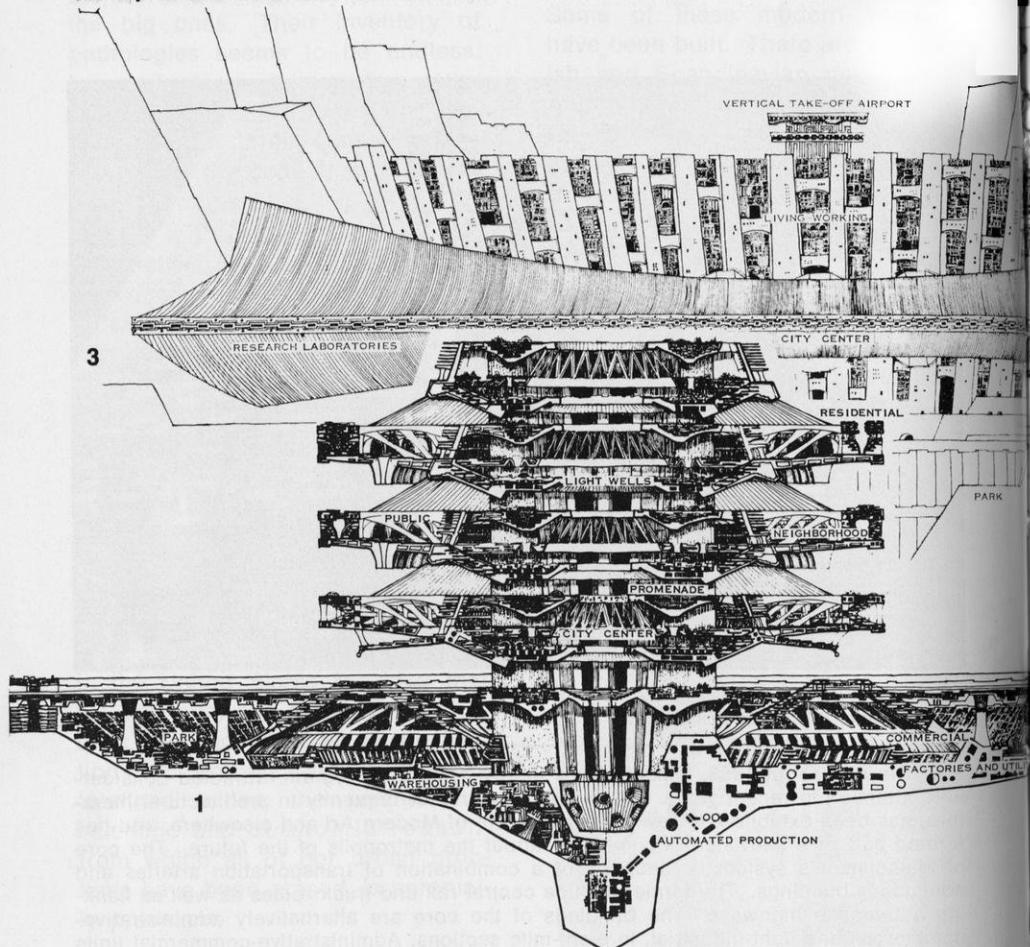
live in New York, Chicago, San Francisco or Dallas, or in the large number of smaller cities in this nation, would be relocated into enormous and technologically 'rational'

linear cities, the construction of which would obviously have to be essentially complete before the people move in, and somewhat difficult to alter once they are there. Imagine

it. "Mentally as well as physically," writes Soleri, "(man) will abide by schedules computed for efficiency."<sup>2</sup>

It would be pointless to bring Soleri and Malcolmson into this discussion were it not that they emphasize

Babel 11B  
Reprinted from "Arcology: The City in the Image of Man" by Paolo Soleri  
Courtesy: The MIT Press

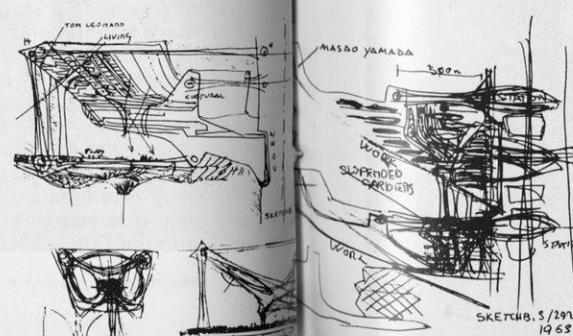


### 9. Babel IIB

**Babel IIB**  
(Flat land)  
Population 520,000  
Density 662/hectare; 268/acre  
Height 1,050 meters  
Diameter of structure 3,160 meters  
Surface covered 778 hectares; 1,920 acres  
1.2. Section and elevation: scale 1:10,000

#### Comparative Arcologies

Arcodiga	280,000
Population	280,000
3. Elevation: scale	1:10,000
Arcoidian I	
Population	19,000
4. Elevation: scale	1:10,000



A hyperstructure over 1 kilometer high and 2 kilometers in diameter at the bowl base. Vertical shafts carry (1) the vertical transportation system, elevator batteries, and continental, trans-continental air transport "shuttle"; (2) services, exhausts. Anchored to the shafts are the platform-grounds of the city: (1) at the periphery, the residential spaces; (2) in the medial belt, the gardens and waste processing plants; (3) toward the center, civil facilities and work. The top platform-ground is for cultural institutions: schools, labs, studios, theaters, libraries.

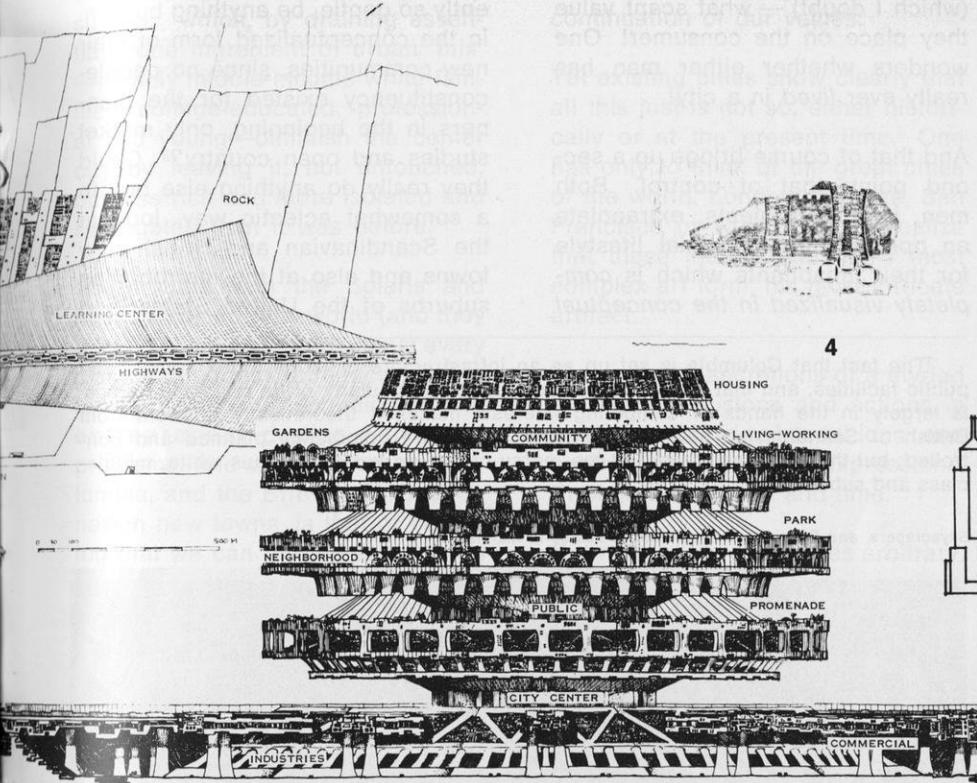
At the ground is a system of parks, gardens, and playgrounds. Under the ground level develops the automated world of production and maintenance with environmental conditions dictated by the functionality of each plant division: there will, or may, thus be production (and research) in an atmosphere of vacuum, fire, cold, gas, radiation, water, pressure . . . the fusion (or equivalent) power plant at the core. Energy is served radially to plants, to the technological "city" and to the totality of the arcology, including the grounds and the atmospheric dome in which the arcology is contained.

Babel IIB floats on a mineral bed. One third of it is scooped out of the ground. From the center the hollow trunk rises 1,200 meters into the air. Four major topographies ring the trunk, partly suspended. On the topography (township) is an annular park separating the outer belt of residences and the inner belt of public facilities. The light reaches deep into the core of the city, vertically from the axial well and obliquely between the four topographies. The whole bowl could be weather-controlled by means of heat-sensitive screens.

For a structure of this size and structural organization, symmetry along the vertical axis is mandatory. The center of gravity of the whole system is located exactly on the axis of symmetry.

The city could well work as a major airport with aircraft taxiing on the outer rim of the bowl within minutes' time from anywhere in the city.

<sup>2</sup>Arcology: *the City in the Image of Man*, by Paolo Soleri, the MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970, p. 25.



some major deficiencies in our generally accepted approaches to planning and architecture. One thing that is evident straight away is their remoteness. However rational these designers may be from technological or economic points of view (which I doubt) — what scant value they place on the consumer! One wonders whether either man has really ever *lived* in a city!

And that of course brings up a second point: that of control. Both men, in their projects, extrapolate an operational and social lifestyle for their inhabitants which is *completely visualized in the conceptual*

*and planning stages*, and then frozen in form. Could they really do anything else, one might ask, since their task is the design of *new communities*?

Could Reston and Columbia, apparently so gentle, be anything but firm in the conceptualized form of their new communities, since no people-constituency existed for the planners in the beginning, only market studies and open country?<sup>3</sup> Could they really do anything else but, in a somewhat eclectic way, look at the Scandinavian and British new towns and also at the metropolitan suburbs of the United States, and

<sup>3</sup>The fact that Columbia is set up as an infrastructure of roads, open spaces and public facilities, and that its physical development, particularly of its residential areas, is largely in the hands of competing interests makes it theoretically different from British or Scandinavian new town models, which are completely planned and controlled; but the end result is still at the mercy of the market and is thus white, middle-class and suburban.

Skyscrapers, and Paley Park, a contrast of scales in Manhattan.



treat these as critical models? And one is immediately reminded that a trenchant criticism of Reston and Columbia, which are situated in the general metropolitan area of Washington and Baltimore, is that they are not new cities at all but really suburbs, which, by draining essentially one ingredient of urban 'mix'—namely middle-income white families, college-educated, professional and young—diminish the center city by leaving it, not untouched, but less rich and more isolated and segregated than it was before.

The trouble with the Soleris and Malcolmsons of this world (and they exist to some degree in almost every planner, architect, bureaucrat, economist, politician, technologist and entrepreneur dealing with urban problems) and with Reston and Columbia, and the British and Scandinavian new towns, is that of believing that we can foretell and control

urban form; that without mandate, and from scratch, we can impel whole societies into being; and that through creating homogeneity or 'balance' (what else is Reston?) we can create social shape and equilibrium and the entrenchment and continuation of our values.

Yet existing cities show clearly that all this just is not so, either historically or at the present time. One has only to think of the great cities of the world, London or Rome, San Francisco or New York, to realize that these indeed are man's most complex art form, his most intricate artifact.

They are the accretions of a myriad individual decisions and actions, a myriad individual additions and subtractions and self-expressions, through both space and time.

But neither are such cities arbitrary.



They are held by immutable collective forces. These forces are often large and powerful — such as defense, economics, or politics. But equally often such forces are subtle and cultural, lodged within the ambiguous mesh of the conscious and the subconscious, drawing thousands of individuals into bonds so close that individual actions succeed in uttering at once a freedom and a belonging, and emerge as an intensely local, cumulative and unified language.

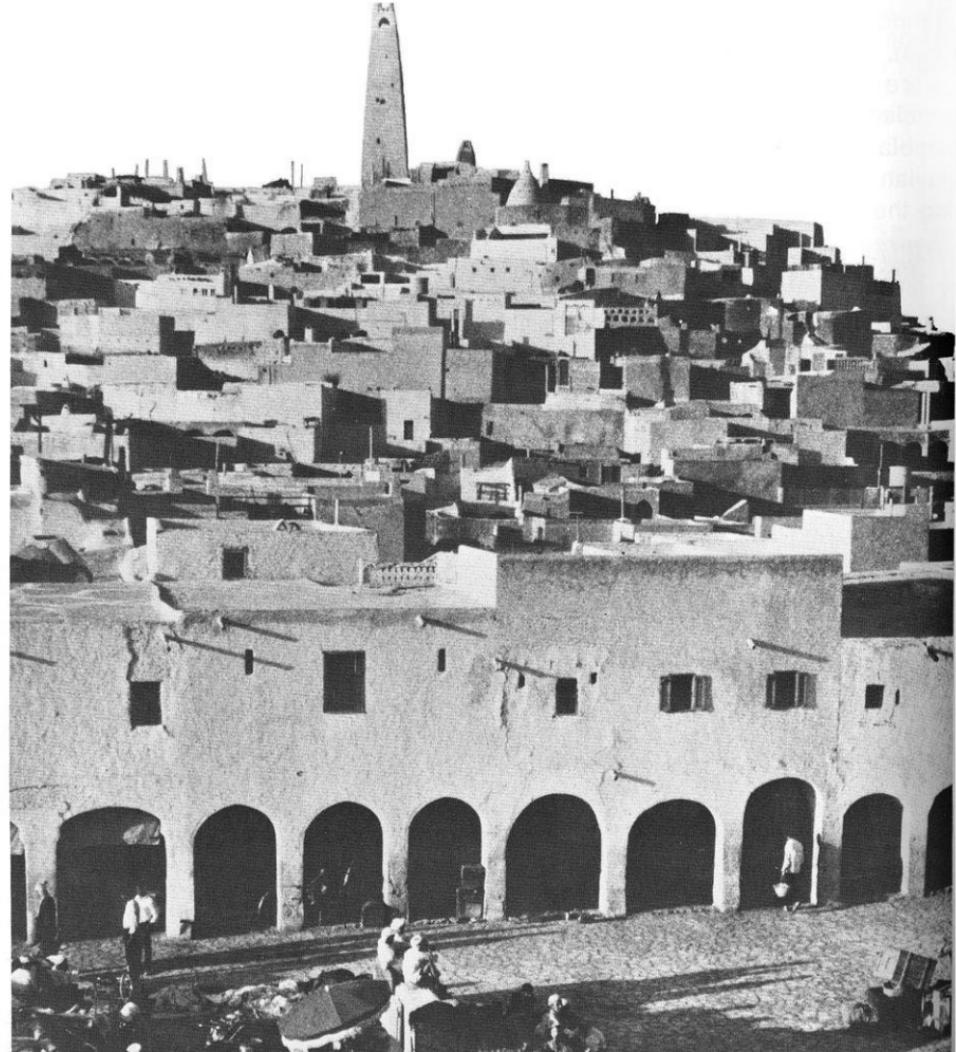
How else can one explain the in-

The market in Ghardaia, a Saharan city.

Photo: David Etherton.

tricacy and unity of ancient cities, whether in Europe or in the Sahara, the intense evocation of stones and shadows, or the attraction for millions upon millions of people of the great cities of the world? Only in the great cities can we find that vast yet intricate depth and range which we call our civilization, whether it is on the sidewalks of Paris, among the skyscrapers of Manhattan or on the Las Vegas strip.

Recently the Federal Government announced funds to be released through the Department of Housing



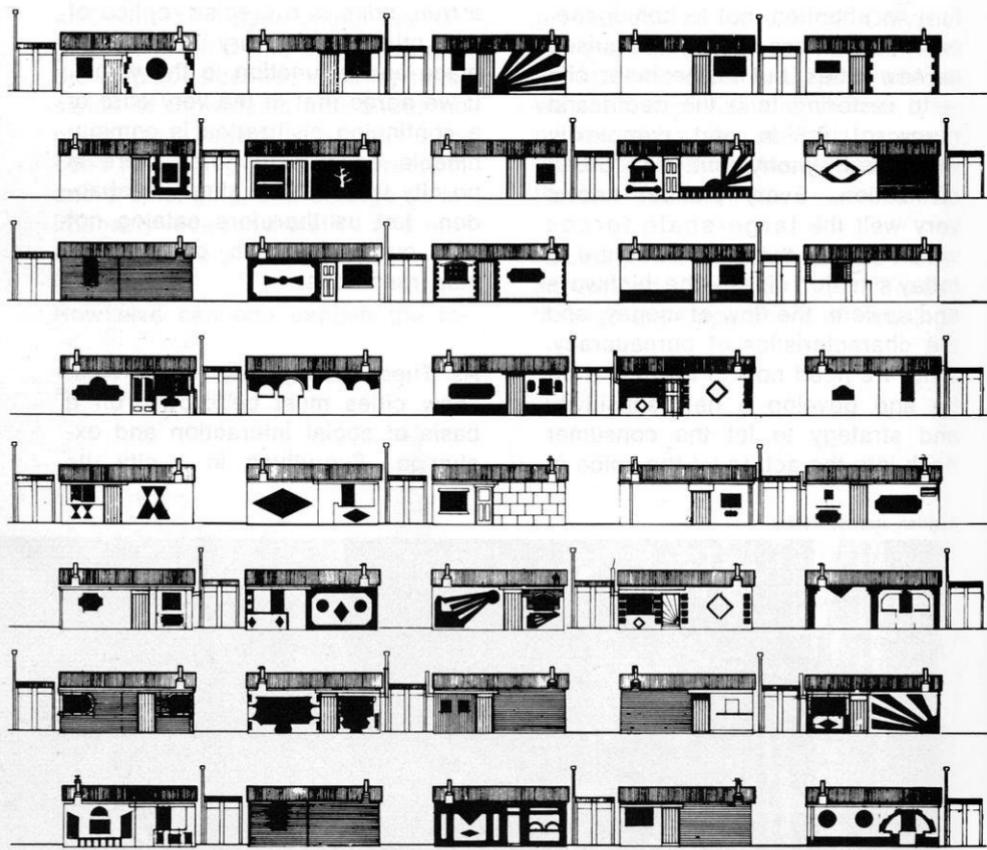
and Urban Development, to be devoted to new communities. My great hope is that the evolution of new communities in existing cities will be encouraged, and that HUD will turn its attention, not to homogeneous middle-class suburbs disguised as new cities, but to the inner city—to restoring to it the depth and range of option and complexity which are synonymous with urban civilization. Every planner knows very well the large-scale forces which control the basic structure of today's major cities—the highways and sewers, the flow of money, and the characteristics of bureaucracy. What we need now is to relax a little and develop a new sensitivity and strategy to let the consumer back into the act, to let the voice of

the people—men, women and children—be heard in articulating the *intricacy* of their lives. After all the city is made up of people, and like the tens of thousands of leaves on a tree, none is a precise replica of any other, and every one has a place and a function in the whole. If we agree that at the very core of a continuing civilization is communicable eccentricity, then there is no city that we can afford to abandon. Let us therefore catalog not only our pathologies, but our human resources.

As Theo Crosby has rightly said, "new cities must be grown, on a basis of social interaction and exchange. Everything in a city, its

Sicilian stones, Cefalu





11

Rows of standardized government-built houses for mineworkers in Johannesburg, South Africa, were transformed by their occupants into brightly painted expressions of individuality and community. Drawings by Julian Beinart.

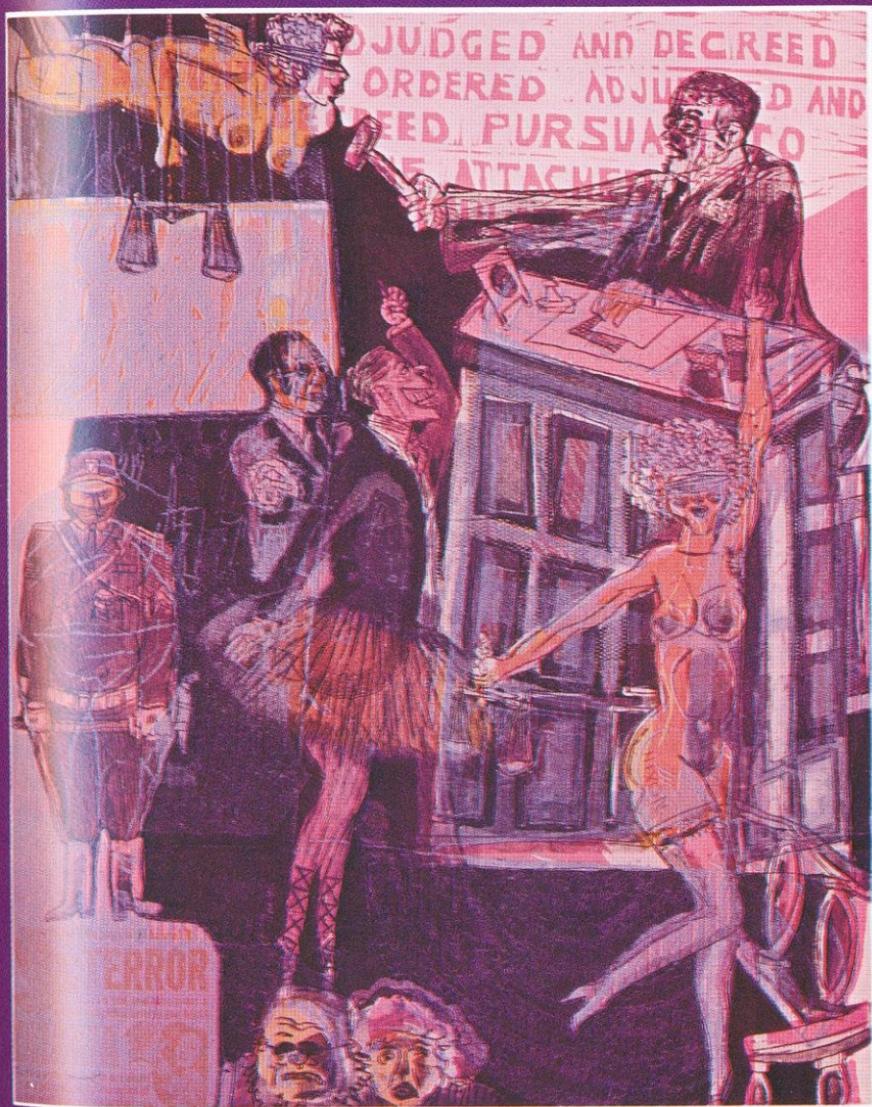
form and systems, should emphasize each person's responsibility for and dependence on his neighbors. We are all *responsible* and to avoid social responsibility is an indication of social, moral and intellectual immaturity. In this sense, the new city can only grow out of accept-

ance of the social responsibility that exists in old communities. . . . To grow a community within a slum and at the same time physically transform it into a new world is (a) real challenge. . . . Out of social intercourse comes social concern. And that is what the city is about."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Architecture: City Sense, by Theo Crosby, Studio Vista/Reinhold, 1965, pp. 89-94.

# COLESCOTT

## WARRINGTON COLESCOTT: PORTRAIT OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL ARTIST



*In August, 1971, as a preliminary to Warrington Colescott's exhibition of prints at the Madison Art Center, Madison, Wisconsin, a group of Art Center staff and colleagues in the University of Wisconsin Art and Art History departments interviewed the artist. The following is a small edited portion of that conversation. Questioners are the art historian, James Dennis, and the Chairman of the Art Department and noted printmaker, Ray Gloeckler.*

DENNIS Do you look at the old master printmakers?

COLESCOTT Yes, indeed. I think I look at them particularly in terms of content rather than technique. I don't look at other printmakers for their technique because technique doesn't really interest me.

GLOECKLER Do we dare ask to whom you relate most strongly?

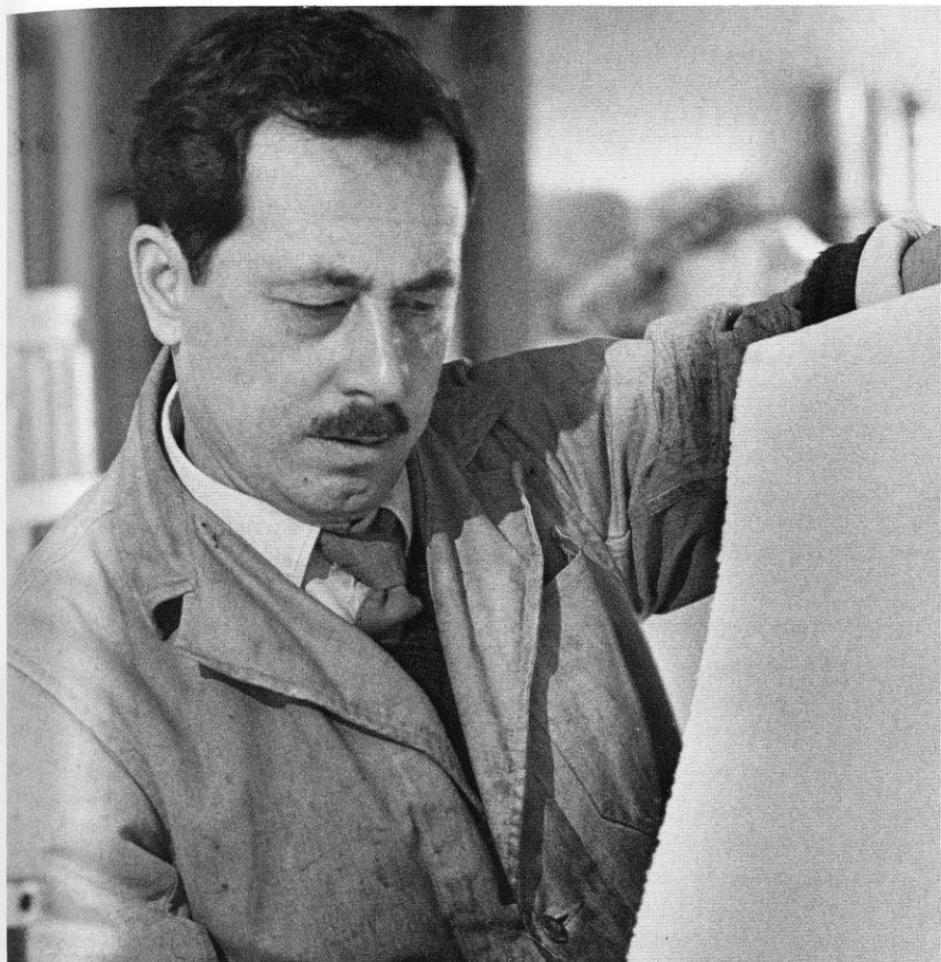
COLESCOTT Goya very much, and Daumier. The ones who might not be so obvious are the English satirists, Gilray, Rowlandson, and of course, Hogarth. And Cruikshank. I've spent a lot of time in England and always enjoyed myself there, and I think it has to do with an appreciation of the English sense of wit and the hard-hitting intellectual exchange that goes on in their public life, in journalism, politics, entertainment, letters and art. It may be generated by moral outrage, or the need for reform, or perhaps just for the sheer enjoyment of a public airing of contradictory ideas, but it is very stimulating and it is wonderful that the tradition is still alive. The vigorous assaults and defenses, the outrageous humor of the great

seventeenth and eighteenth century British lampoons are a high art to me.

DENNIS Looking back at these people then, the people that you mentioned are of a liberal nature. They're criticizing their times and they're picking up on issues. Is this what you do?

COLESCOTT Not in a studied, political way. I'm not an editorial page cartoonist, which is probably where the three shilling prints of eighteenth century London would be today. I like the slow paced material I work in. The time it takes to evolve an intaglio colorprint forces you to consider and reconsider the images you're using and the thinking behind them. I do tend to start my pictures with an issue of some kind, often a general social situation like, say, the vulgarity of wealth without culture, or to see an issue in a way that is counter to the way it is usually thought of. For example, to see war, the abstract idea of war, as horrible and evil, as most artists would see it, but to also see war in its farcical aspect, to see it as ridiculous, to see the military as grotesque clowns, the military trappings as senseless melodrama, like a fifth-rate movie. What a bitter farce, how completely nonsensical to throw away our wealth and our young men for an undefined cause. It is as blackly funny as that other slapstick warfare that goes on between men and women. I have tried to develop this line of thought into prints dealing with war and with group conflicts.

DENNIS Coming out of the thirties and continuing really a kind of tradition of the thirties of social commentary and indirect political pro-



Warrington Colescott

test, do you consider yourself an American Expressionist?

COLESCOTT I tried for a few years to be an abstract expressionist, but I never felt very comfortable in that role. I think it was the "abstract" part of that direction that was difficult. I would agree to the expressionist tag, as I understand it. My drawing is intuitive rather than calculating.

DENNIS Maybe I should explain what I mean by an American Expressionist. There aren't too many

of them that are related to German expressionism. Phillip Evergood and Jacob Lawrence seem to be the major figures who are continuing this tradition. Were you aware of Evergood in the later thirties?

COLESCOTT Yes, but I didn't like his work. Both his drawing and the obvious quality of his comment were unattractive to me. I did look at his work, however.

DENNIS Is your work less obvious because it is more personal?

Famous American Riots:  
*Fracas at Calamity's Place*  
lithograph  
Collection Madison Art Center



*Souvenirs of the Great War*

color intaglio 1971

Collection of the Artist



COLESCOTT Sometimes it is less obvious to the point of total obscurity, even to me. I hate to have a print too clear in its meaning. It offends my devious nature. In a bull fight my favorite character is the banderillero, who faces the bull on foot, with just his dexterity and his skill, who dances and dazzles the bull, and then lightly dashes in and thrusts his darts into the bull's muscle. I admire a ritual use of the satirist's needle.

DENNIS The eroticism that is in your prints. Would you like to comment on that? That seems in the German tradition.

COLESCOTT I plead again that it is the humor involved that interests me. Humor and sex and brutality

are a strong mix. I admire the early George Grosz because he had the audacity to show murder and rape and disease as comic, thereby setting up a secondary reaction of utmost horror and disgust, hastening moral reform. Earlier the British printmakers were using the same device, also erotic in content, often more erotic over gin than women, and really savage in their attacks on public figures.

Sex is a part of any issue that you deal with as an artist. It contains a body of imagery that you can draw predictable reactions from, so it's very useful. On the other hand we shouldn't over-complicate it. There is a nice warm animal pleasure in drawing pretty girls and animating them into prints.

*The Great Mason City Raid*  
color intaglio 1965



## by Robert Grigor-Taylor

At this time, Warrington Colescott's position as one of America's leading printmakers is established and unassailable. His impressive list of one-man and group shows in Europe and the United States, coupled with a fine array of museums and private collections owning his work (including the major museums of England, France, and the U.S.A.) are a clear tribute to this fact.

My own association with Colescott's prints goes back some seven years, during which time he has produced well over seventy images. These have included a wealth of individual plates; at least three major series—"The Life and Death of John Dillinger," "The Great Society," and "A Wild West"; and two illustrated texts—"The Mariposa Suite," which accompanies original poems by Carl Thayler, and most recently, ten etchings for Thomas Mann's classic "Death in Venice" in a new edition published by Aquarius Press. The range of work over this period shows clearly his virtuosity and versatility.

Colescott is something like a "visual sponge." Always aware of his surroundings, he culls elements from historical, literary and contemporary life, transmuting them into wry comments on the social, moral and economic problems with which our society is beset. A master satirist, he is not a cynic—he comments more with compassion than cruelty on our foibles. He has learned well that ridicule is a great weapon against pomposity; he deflates us by making us laugh at our own hypocrisy and posturing. As a de-

voted iconoclast he refuses to accept established sacred cows, but submits them to the question with all the zeal of a latter day Inquisitor. Violence, as the prime problem facet of our time, forms a central part of many of his themes, and it is the veneration of it that concerns him.

Commenting that . . . "The terrain that really grips me is that black zone between tragedy and high comedy where with a little push one way or the other, you can transmute screams into laughter. . . ." he provides the visual paradoxes and premises; we must assess them and reach the conclusions. This concern with the glorification of violence is exposed most strongly in the Dillinger series. Rather than presenting the gangster as a heroic figure, in the mould of several recent movies, spearheaded by *Bonnie and Clyde*, he uses the historical reference as a comment on today's situation. How much have things improved? The characters come and go, but the scenario remains gruesomely similar—Chicago in the thirties vis-à-vis Detroit in 1967. In his print "Verdun: Defense," against a backdrop of barbed wire, soldiers and weaponry we find a small inset section showing a quiet plotting room, where the lives and destinies of men are shuffled, like moving pawns on a chessboard. Next to this a flock of sheep points up the ease with which we accept a barbaric leadership. The scene dates from the Great War, the print from 1968, but the message is for today and tomorrow. "The Great Society" series—begun in 1966 and still continuing sporadically—rips open idolized American institutions and exposes their sleazy interiors. In "Top Management," for example,

*Death In Venice*  
color intaglio 1971  
Ferdinand Roten Galleries



### *Battle at Little Bohemia*

color Intaglio 1966

Collection of the Madison Art Center



the image of a board meeting is flanked by two hooker/stripper figures, suggesting the contrast between the "high minded" rhetoric of business leaders and the underground, expense account way in which business deals are consummated. "Stock Exchange," in turn, contrasts the transitory making of paper fortunes on the house floor with the finality of the suicide leap of the loser. The underlying questions are there again: Is the one worth the other? How do our professed ideals match up to the way we live?

Colescott's abilities to look at once passionately and dispassionately over society and to convey his concern onto paper, stem largely from the breadth of his travel, working and teaching experience. A native Californian, he graduated from the

University of California at Berkeley, and has been on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin since 1949. Self-taught in serigraphy, he went to the Slade School of Art in London on a Fulbright Grant in 1957. There he studied with Anthony Gross, and his work in etching dates from this time. Apart from brief sallies into lithography in 1968 and 1969 this, with his drawings, forms the cornerstone of his graphic work. His technical mastery, using many fragmented plates, often incorporating pieces of letterpress and photo-engraved plates, and involving highly sophisticated inking and wiping, has achieved a quality of printing that is rarely found. However, he has avoided the pitfall of many contemporary printmakers, where technique takes over the image; with Warrington Colescott the idea and image come blazing through at all times.

Warrington Colescott



## by Toby Olson

It's amazing what junk we carry around in our heads and how we always think, when old frames or images surface, that they do so as function, of the moment or some other important occasion from our lives. Or at least we are committed to the effort of finding significance: how does that image fit in? Why does the photograph evoke *that* feeling?

Right here on the desk is a Colescott print, a California landscape: old cars, people, buildings, some mountains; in the background: a coastal freeway lined with houses, telephone wires and beach. I used to live in L.A. But I have never seen this particular aerial view of that basin, and yet I want to keep trying to call up its analogue in my head, feel I have seen this place in all its particularity and that this print is really some after-image, coughed up from the memory of some old photograph, forgotten itself, though changed and carried along by feelings surrounding the now-vague occasion of having seen it. Colescott constantly manufactures this sense of remembered history in my head. I feel always that I have seen these things before, and not an occasional object or image, but the whole piece, and not ever as "Art," but as something personal, though constant, out of some possible past, one that I know does not really exist outside the work. Amazing how these things never did exist, how he takes cartoon-dreams of possible realities, then fixes our junk-filled heads in a sharp historical present.

I would want to say the same kinds of things about good poetry; that it is not "literary" in the sense of that

word used to describe visual art. Colescott's work isn't "literary" either. Maybe that's why he is able to do such fine work in collaboration with poets. He comes at the poems head on, right into the terms of their own force. And he always seems to realize that good poems are not stories or notations about something outside of themselves. In the same way Colescott's work has no important external reference, unless it be that imagined one he creates in our heads. The word that keeps surfacing is "magic": the art of producing effects beyond the natural. I keep coming back to the work itself. It is all in there: the possible theories and questions and answers. It seems wrong-headed to try to say anything objective about its "significance"; the work *stands* against it.



Mariposa Street  
color intaglio 1971

London Prints:  
*Aldgate East*  
color intaglio 1968  
Collection of Mrs. Mark Hooper



Patrioticks  
color intaglio 1969  
collection of the Artist



## by Edward A. Foster

Warrington Colescott is an artist who views moral conflicts and social inequities as a satirist and as a dramatist. His comments are on familiar aspects of our environment, yet he often chooses to view the present time through reference to the past. By judiciously employing historical hindsight he is able to amplify some of the situations today.

Through satire, Colescott displays his wit as he exposes and discredits some of our modern follies. One of his primary interests has been the hypocrisy and violence of modern society. Violence will always be with us, but what must bother Colescott is the degree to which it is idolized today. Violence appears in the Great Society series first in the subject of "Military Life," then again in "Inner Core," and here it is quite real, not an illusion. The Wild West is Indian Territory and Chicago Territory, the cowboy is from Frank Harris out of Universal Films in the pay of Mayor Daley. The battles at Verdun have images of Amazons carrying modern missiles or the flag of Kaiser Wilhelm; Johnson and McNamara are there, too, but what really brings the satire into focus is the inclusion of the flock of sheep. Through such juxtaposition, Colescott brings the message home. It is the mingling of past and present, tragedy and camp comedy, which heightens the satire in Colescott's work.

Colescott is an inventive technician and uses a variety of intaglio processes to obtain the most successful image. He often incorporates scraps of photoengraved plates, chased

and repoussé brass from the Rome flea market, and other printable bits into his composition. He also cuts and reshapes many of his etched plates, so that the final result is an impression from a low relief collage. He makes dramatic use of color by utilizing relief and spot inking, hand wiping, and the use of stencils to achieve proper density and balance. Despite the complexity of the technique, it is only a vehicle for presenting the visual image. The viewer becomes aware of the spontaneity and directness with which the prints are done. It is most important to examine the detail in Colescott's work for it is the selection of detail and the way in which it is used that bring the composition and the idea together.

Like many artists today Colescott is involved with current political and social events. His reaction to his environment is at times one of amusement, at others one of horror. The humor ranges from bittersweet to slapstick, the images are always urgent. The work confirms Colescott's importance as a printmaker and graphic privateer.

Dillinger:  
*The Breakout from the Indiana Pen*  
color intaglio 1966



Mr. Colescott may be the liveliest commentator on the American scene, not going very deep but making the most of all the surface glitter, the odd perverse glamour, in his satirical presentations of such folklore as the Dillinger story and our artificialized tradition of the raw

West. He is also a bang-up technician in these prints, combining what appears to be a kind of ad-lib drawing with an obviously well studied structure of a multiplicity of details into what I can only describe as organized chaos.

John Canaday,  
*The New York Times*,  
March 8, 1969

*The Great Society: Stock Exchange*  
color intaglio 1966  
collection of the Artist



# MORGAN GBSON

THREE FOR THE FIRST AMERICANS  
AND FOR GARY SNYDER



by Morgan Gibson

I

*The Indian graveyard has washed away.  
For years we stumbled on ribs  
and skulls, picking teeth from sand  
where storms had washed them down  
from bluff roots where they were buried  
at some tribe's end of the world,  
the great lake dying  
washing our feet and bones.*

*Now the bluff is clean.*

*When the children who find the last crop  
return to their solid city  
their cottage will wash away.*

*O burn my bones when I'm through!*

*If I must be discovered  
after our end of the world  
let these poems be scattered  
for spacemen to assemble  
with affectionate ache for the ache  
of trepanned squaws and braves.*

*I see my bones burning  
I see theirs gather together  
into a chief of us all.*

II

*In deer woods, burying Indians'  
brown bones gathered from the beach  
I enter again dark memories of birth:  
mosquitoes in the last fungus-path of sunlight  
whining denials, hints of self-destruction  
cold waves of threat and destiny on my cheeks  
shudder me into damp birth of deer woods  
where buzzing light flows painfully new  
over mounds of trees and graves of Indians.*

III

*on hands and knees  
in cemetery wild  
strawberries*

*here I am: here  
I am Pilgrim  
woods dreamed of in city winters  
rooted in graves of Indians  
here  
wherever I go*

*crawling into my skull  
staring into the sky  
I am in my eyes  
glow of my eyes  
body glow*

*body speaks on and on  
wet or dry the same  
with you all about you  
I am all about me*

*not that lonely me  
that holds itself like gold  
a port from an other  
o no no other*

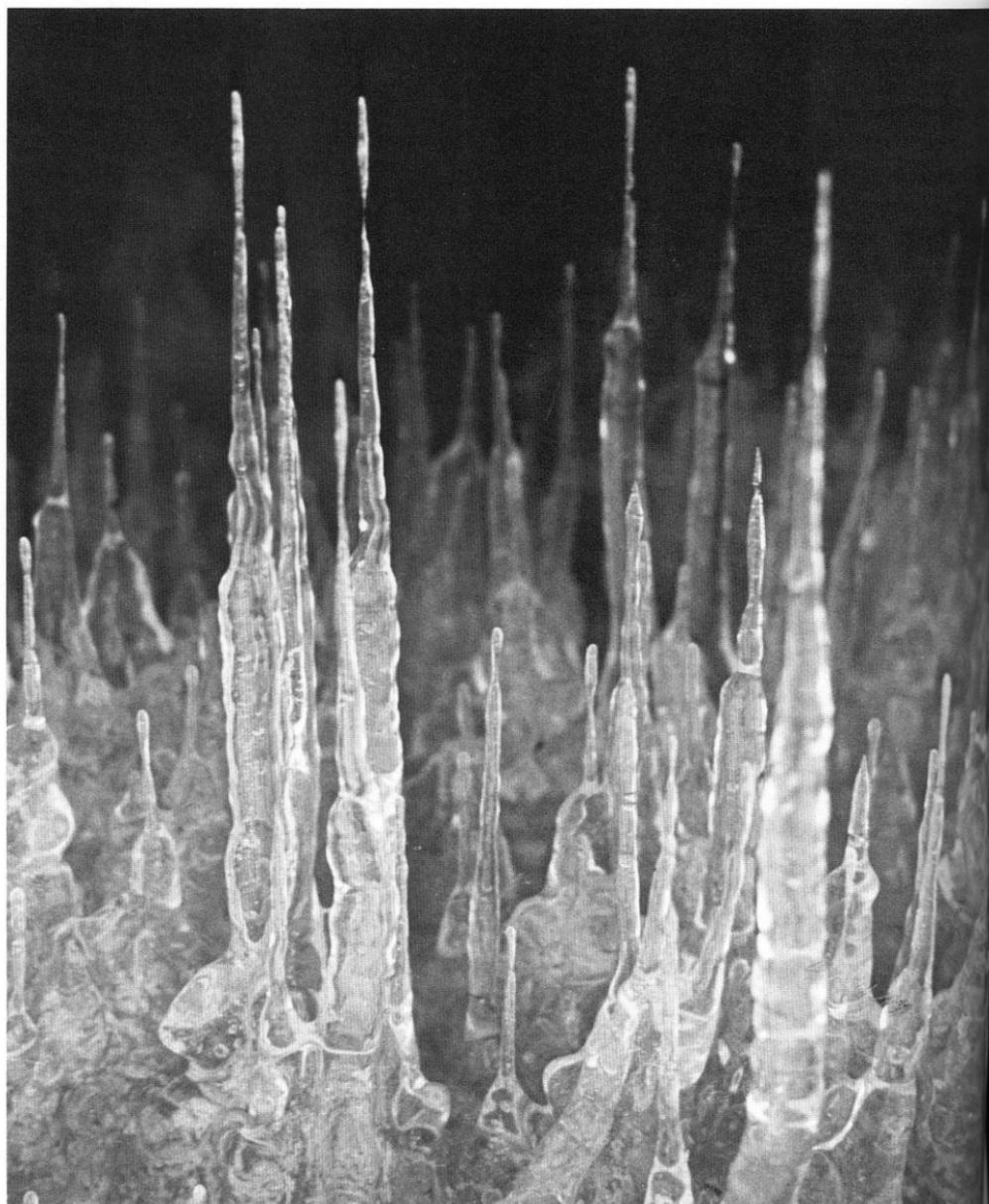
*clouds pass leaves darken glow  
I am here and there  
you take my air  
walk one earth  
we one body*

*rising  
raining  
burning  
storming*

\*

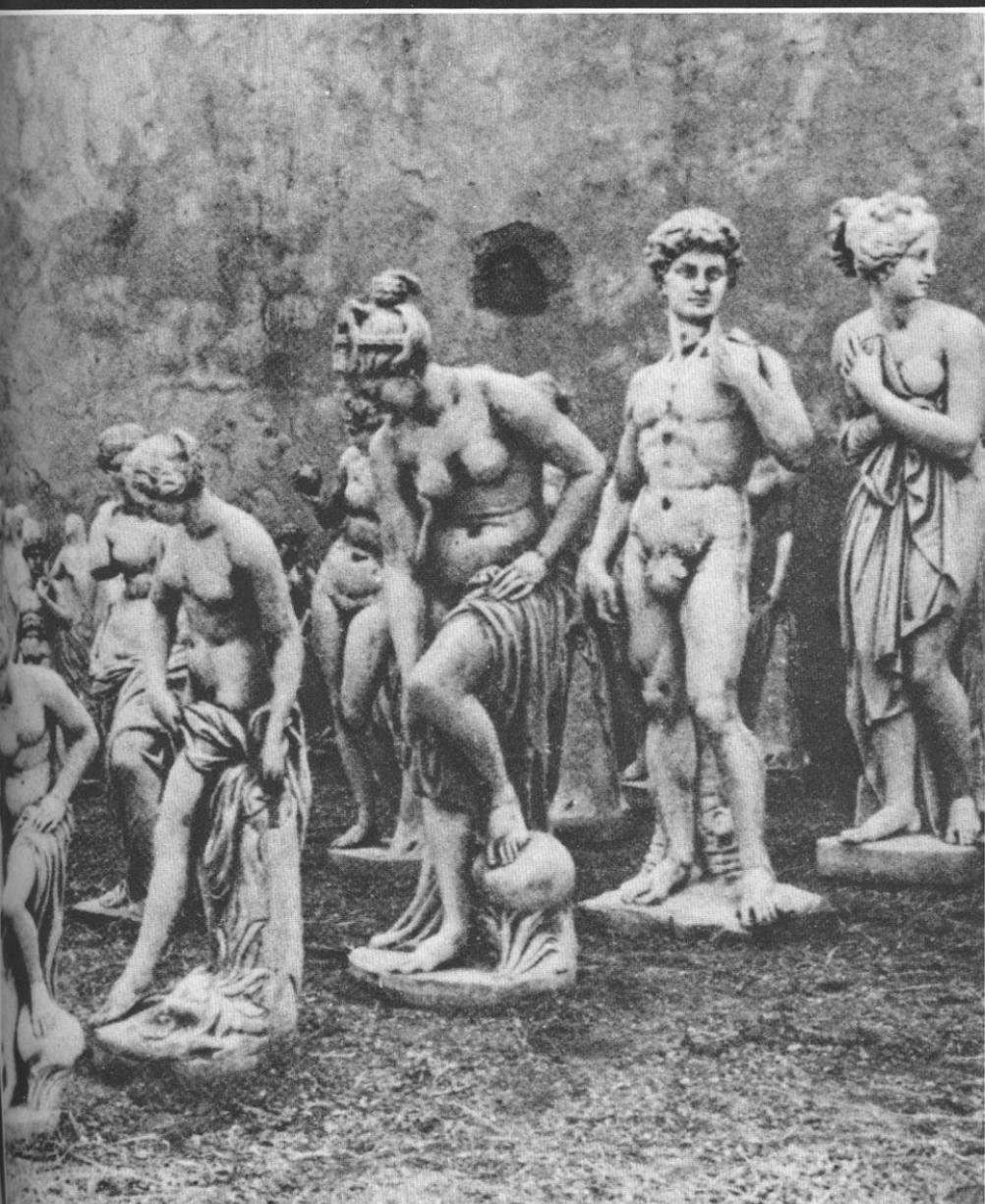


Photographer: Holman E. King, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay



# BARRY SCHWARTZ

## ART CONFRONTATION: THE SACRED AGAINST THE PROFANE



## by Barry N. Schwartz

Dorfles, Gillo, *Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste*, Universe Books, New York, 1969. \$10.00

In October 1970 the Wichita Art Museum offered an exhibition entitled "Kitsch: The Grotesque Around Us." One might have thought the museum would show highlights from the past election, or perhaps a survey of the ecological crisis, or even a careful study of urban housing. Instead, the exhibition, which was largely influenced by the book to be reviewed here, contained numerous examples of "the plague of kitsch which seems to encircle the globe." There is a need for a kitsch exhibition, argues the museum's catalog, because of the "aesthetic insensitivity of the urban masses which is the Petri culture in which kitsch bacteria thrive." The introduction to the exhibition catalog, which begins only after the usual listing of the Museum's board, Ex officios, staff and City Commissioners ends, quotes Dwight Macdonald:

*For about two centuries Western culture has in fact been two cultures: the traditional kind — let us call it High Culture—that is chronicled in the text books, and a novel kind that is manufactured for the market. This latter may be called Mass Culture, or better Masscult, since it isn't really culture at all. Masscult is a parody of High Culture.*

There we have it: High Culture, with its original works of art, its curators, its gallery owners, its textbooks, its black-tie previews, its museums, its art historians, in opposition to Masscult, with its *Mona Lisa* towels, its department store displays, bargain

prices, salesmen, its multiplicity, its vulgarity, its illegitimate origins, and its "kitsch-man." The confrontation between the sacred and the profane can be observed as High Culture battles with the vulgarization of art; its weaponry consists of words of condemnation, control of High Culture press and institutions, judgments of taste, and now with a new field manual written and compiled by Gillo Dorfles. Kitsch, in its arrogance, offers no reply, but merely proliferates at an astonishing rate.

Gillo Dorfles is a man with an unenviable task. As a devotee of High Culture (think: Metropolitan Museum of Art, University of Milan, authentication, thirty-five dollar art books, preservation techniques, and papers on early 12th Century manuscripts) this man of aesthetics is desperately committed to creating categories for the art of bad taste (think: *Mona Lisa Coloring Book*, plaster copies of Greek sculpture to be used as graveside monuments, Bosch postcards, all reproductions of art, big star testimonial advertising, rock record albums, and best selling novels). His is a race against time for he must complete his encyclopedic task before the debasement of art overwhelms us all. His aim is to "try to catalogue such a delicate and vague subject which nevertheless scorches our hands, leaving permanent 'aesthetic scars'!" On close inspection however, the conflict evident throughout his 311 pages of anthology resembles, to use a kitsch metaphor, the argument between Wolf Man and Dracula over which has the greater sex appeal. Though kitsch may be appalling the attitudes displayed by Dorfles in his negation of it are no less so.

The definition of kitsch varies considerably, and though many of the examples of kitsch in Dorfles's world of bad taste are open to question, it is generally agreed that kitsch is unworthy artistically, unless you are Susan Sontag, in which case kitsch becomes "camp" and all is well with the world. Dorfles, however, would agree with Abraham Kaplan that "Popular art is never a discovery, only a reaffirmation." Kitsch is a form of artistic production designed, says Kaplan, to provide "something with which to fill our empty lives; we turn to it always in quiet desperation. It is a specific against boredom, and is thus an inevitable concomitant of the industrial civilization that simultaneously gives us leisure and alienates us from anything that might make our leisure more meaningful." Kitsch asks for recognition and spurns involvement. Thus, while the "true" work of art offers a gestalt experience, the kitsch object is strictly one-dimensional. It requires no significant human response. It calls for the adoption of the work of art

into a lesser situation and turns it into a use rather than allowing it to challenge our world. Instead of permitting ourselves to be disturbed by the creative process we are left with an object-carcass which fits conveniently into our living rooms. Kitsch is there to amuse, to entertain, to lend status to, or to enable that which is decidedly shallow to fill a void that might have to otherwise be filled with what is genuinely involving.

No doubt Dorfles would agree with the above description of kitsch. The only reason Kaplan's views are presented and not those of Dorfles is that while the former is lucid and accessible, Dorfles's descriptions, either because of faulty translation or simply obtuse writing, are often beyond reach, lost forever in categorical assumptions, undefined classifications and a persona that too often couches personal conclusions in authoritative phrases.

Another difference between Kaplan and Dorfles is that Kaplan speaks of

Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillo Dorfles.  
Courtesy: Universe Books



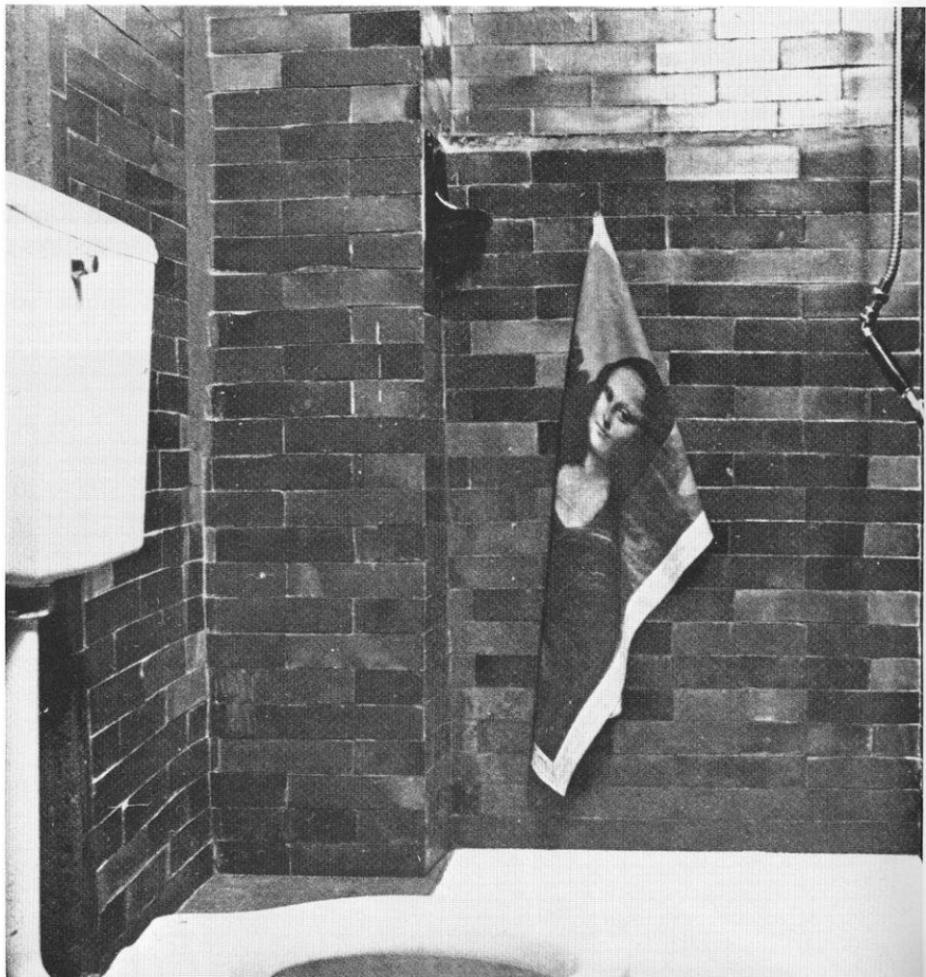
"popular art" while Dorfles speaks of kitsch only. Mr. Dorfles omits from his book the notion that High Culture and kitsch have more in common than each will admit to, and that, in fact, they are both monsters created at the same source. Even the word kitsch has been defined by Dorfles to include only Low Culture. He takes his derivations from the English and German which mean, respectively, "to knock off cheaply" and "to collect rubbish from the street." Nowhere does he mention Gilbert Highet's suggestion that kitsch is "a word of apparently Russian origin. The Russian word *keetcheetsya* means 'to be haughty and puffed up'." Given this defini-

tion High Culture and Low may be seen to be two forms of the same thing.

Unfortunately Dorfles does not give serious consideration to that point of view which sees kitsch as an inferior form of contemporary art and of that cultural vector we call modernism. If one accepted this idea, the differences between kitsch and contemporary High Culture would be seen as having their origin in class and not cultural conflict.

The distinctions between High Culture and Low are everywhere breaking down. Though there seem to be more numerous exceptions within

Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillo Dorfles.  
Courtesy: Universe Books



so-called High Culture, today both it and kitsch aim for success and not achievement. Dorfles believes that kitsch is the bastard child of art and commerce; could this not be said of High Culture as well?

Actually, the kitsch presented in Dorfles's book are examples of class warfare in which the cherished items of the rich are made into middle and lower class funk. Dorfles derides these classes for their bad taste and wishes they would quietly reflect upon those objects legitimized by the established order. No more so did the plantation owner wish that his slaves had a more sophisticated appreciation of the Southern way of life.

Human sensibilities are fashioned by environments and are not usually acquired via revelation. The sensibilities of the "kitsch-man" are outgrowths of the kitsch environment, that bogus and imposed notion of the technological good life, the American dream and the security that can be had by having your life manipulated for you. Dorfles asks, "What could be more symptomatic of kitsch than certain typical modern myths, such as the fascist and Nazi myths, the myth of the sportsman, the champion, the pop singer, the film star, all of whom become heroes adored by the crowd . . . ?" Nowhere does Dorfles turn the critical eye to certain patrician myths: the myth of foreign aggression, credentials making for excellence, the myth of the cold war, the dangers of marijuana, the importance of oil interests, "progress is our most important product," the university as the place for disinterested rational discourse, the Harvard intellectual, the myth of white supremacy, the myth of modern art, the myth of the

art historian, and the myth of law and order.

Dorfles fails to recognize that the most influential men in the arts today, those whose incomes find release in foundations, those who man the boards of trustees of universities and cultural institutions, those who buy, collect and donate High Art, those who legislate state councils on the arts, those who live in the social world that thinks of itself as *the* culturally elite, are also the same men who control the very corporate creations of kitsch. Is it surprising to discover that William F. Paley, Jr. who has done so well with Columbia Broadcasting Systems is also the Chairman of the board of trustees at New York's Museum of Modern Art? Today the same forces responsible for High Art (Dorfles: "true," "genuine," "authentic" art) are responsible for kitsch.

Kitsch is merely one aspect of a general trend in the arts today. As the society has moved from a production economy based on scarcity to a consumer economy based on affluence the equation for success indicates the task is no longer to produce but to distribute. The arts too—first High Art and then kitsch arts—have moved away from production and toward distribution, i.e., marketing, publicity, advertising, critics or consumer reports, and media coverage. The result is that few people care any longer about the worth of craft or ideas but are more concerned with following what is new. The masterpiece is considered a cliché, and the artist works rapidly knowing that his effort depends more on the connections made, the critic's review, and the commitment of a gallery than on all else. Kitsch is the extension of this

trend to its ultimate conclusion. With kitsch the marketing becomes the sole activity; the content is assured by the use of previously approved forms, names and images. The whole thrust is to sell.

Since most of the energies in art are presently toward distribution there will develop new status symbols between rich and poor having a great deal to do with the way they are marketed as well as the older criteria of originality and rarity. Yet, one cannot escape the consequences of art as business; High Culture creates products (movements, salons, fashions), mass culture creates kitsch. Both abort creative talent and successful artists become only those who learn the expediency of commerce. The more High Art tries to distinguish itself from kitsch the greater their similarities are exposed. The owner of the Chevrolet and the Cadillac buy the same gas.

Kitsch is a form of art pollution. Yet it is only one manifestation of the populist trend of the middle and lower classes to have for itself what has previously been exclusive to the aristocracy. The middle class especially insists on having. If the rich will not provide or share (as all their efforts against decentralization of cultural resources demonstrate) the middle class will accept an inferior version. Indeed, so powerful is the middle class, that it can spawn critics who turn kitsch into camp and urge not only consumption but admiration as well.

If the aesthetic choices of the mass are in bad taste, they are no less offensive than the mentality and exclusivity of the elite. In an interesting application of what sociologist Gunnar Myrdal called the Vicious

Circle, Dorfles condemns the victim for his victimization. Thus the conditioned citizen of the consumer society is now blamed for being an unsophisticated and merely consuming person.

Dorfles is against all reproductions and replica art. By doing so he serves to say that only the original work of art is to be valued. But the middle class will not value what it can not own; this is one of the basic tenets of consumer society. If a consumer society is developed and reinforced by millions of advertisements weekly it should not come as a surprise that the public will insist that it admire only the best of what it can own; the result is kitsch. It is surely not High Art oil paintings.

How ironic for those who encourage whole populations to measure life by purchasing power and who define happiness by ever greater consumer status to stand aghast at the unsophisticated and shabby excesses of the mass man's consumer taste buds. Is it not yet clear that if you want finer sensibilities you must first create the possibility of finer lives? It is absurd to limit the awareness and possibilities—political, social, economic and artistic—of men and women only to then become disenchanted with some of their limitations.

*Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste* is a book in bad taste. By intention or by education Mr. Dorfles becomes an apologist for the rare and inaccessible art object and subsequently for the entire socio-economic class whose special function, it believes, is to preserve, collect, trade and profit from art. The author is outside of experience, and from some distant vantage point he is-



Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillo Dorfles.  
Courtesy: Universe Books

sues his dissatisfaction with the way things are going. With that art historian in the sky perspective he fights to uphold "genuine" art against the uses to which it is put by the madding crowd—the "kitsch-men." For these reasons he will argue, "We must regard all repro-

ductions of unique works which were conceived as unrepeatable as the equivalent of real forgeries."

Other attitudes are given as equally absolute. Compare points developed in the issues of *Arts In Society* with Dorfles's observation that:

*Anyone who has watched a show by Rita Pavone or the Beatles (huge theaters packed with crowds of fans, girls screaming hysterically as if they were in the presence of some divinity, ready to sacrifice themselves to it like the vestals of some new religious mystery) will certainly have noticed the cunning way in which these stars calculate the effect of the most typical details of their clothing and apparatus.*

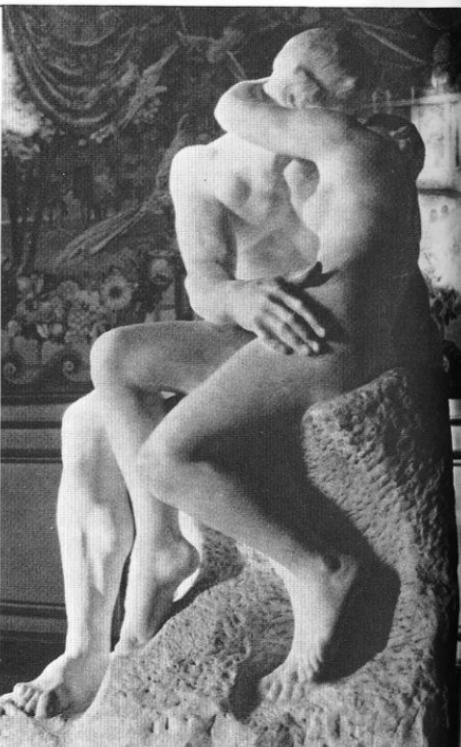
According to the author/editor the "kitsch-man" refers to the 'man of bad taste', i.e. the way in which a person of bad taste looks at, enjoys and acts when confronted with a work of art." But take heart, for Dorfles believes there is still hope:

*There are endless instances of simple people—technicians, craftsmen, electrical workers, individuals involved in some form of the new technological sciences—who have become fans of electronic music composers, kinetic artists and operators of programmed art just by meeting them . . . This would show how a great deal of the lack of understanding of modern art is undoubtedly due to lack of education and habit.*

There are times the reader of this book may take strong exception to any number of arbitrary judgments. However, he or she is advised: "If anyone is not satisfied with our choice and finds some of the images artistic which we will present as pseudo-artistic, un-artistic, too bad! To us at least it will mean that our reader is really a 'kitsch-man'." Of course, there are no other possibilities. Yet, more than the "kitsch-man" the kitsch creator catches the worst of Mr. Dorfles's wrath.

*The producer of kitsch does not produce 'bad' art, he is not an artist endowed with inferior creative faculties or no creative faculties at all. It is quite impossible to assess him according to aesthetic criteria; rather he should be judged as an ethically base being, a malefactor who profoundly desires evil.*

While some may judge these pronouncements as too harsh there are others that are suspiciously generous. ". . . most likely many of the skyscrapers (particularly those built in the Babylonian style, but also the steel ones in Curtain Wall) and the statues (such as the one in Rockefeller Plaza) not to mention the Cloisters could definitely be considered kitsch. Yet who would dream of mentioning bad taste when confronted with a scene which is artistic when viewed as a whole?" Finally, though Dorfles scorns kitsch-



Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillo Dorfles.  
Courtesy: Universe Books

myths he seems quite relaxed about kitsch bias: "It does not seem to me that great thieves, rakes or courtesans have ever been kitsch, but petit bourgeois with corrupted little minds certainly are."

As the reader might anticipate Dorfles encounters no little difficulty when he comes to consider two important questions; his criteria for deciding when a work is "artistic" and his view of such movements as pop art. One could predict the outcome of his analysis, and predictable it is.

*the fact that today there is a prevailing tendency to refuse to apply the adjective 'beautiful' to the work of art—or rather to the artifact—does not mean that one cannot easily differentiate between two artifacts on the basis of a 'pleasure scale' supplied by a number of experts.*



Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillio Dorfles. Courtesy: Universe Books

Here we have come full circle. High Culture can be defined and isolated from Low Culture by certain "pleasure" experts who coincidentally happen to derive more pleasure from High Culture than from Low. Thus Dorfles wishes to measure the differences between enlightened and vulgar pleasures. Nowhere is the concept that pleasure itself is a faulty guide to aesthetic judgment thought worthy of consideration.

Dorfles's commitment is to the elite. What shall he do about those \$50,000 works of art purchased by the affluent which contain kitschy elements? Warhol? Lichtenstein? Oldenburg? They are different from kitsch because, says Dorfles, we are speaking of the "*intentional and conscious use* by top flight artists of avowedly kitsch elements . . ." Though Dorfles doesn't like the 'kitsch-myth' of the sportsman which appeals to the crowd he seems to enjoy the myth of the rebellious, critical, serious popular artist which appeals to the mythical rebellious, critical, serious affluent. Thus he will say "An awareness of kitsch is often present in the work of Roy Lichtenstein." Or he will show that "these same kitsch elements have an undeniable charm of their own which—where they have been used out of context—is translated into the authentic work of art." With the pop artists his "intention is also to point out the *positive aspects* of the presence of kitsch elements . . ."

Dorfles has spared contemporary art—or that part of it that has been absorbed by the elite with the same enthusiasm with which the mass man has responded to kitsch. Yet both kitsch and much established art are concerned with the marketing of objects that do not offend,

that do not disturb, that do not insist that the technological society is faltering.

Dorfles argues that kitsch ". . . tries to communicate to man the safety of his existence so as to save him from the threat of darkness . . . it is used as an escape from the irrational, an escape into the idyll of history where set conventions are still valid . . . In reality, kitsch is the simplest and most direct way of soothing this nostalgia." But most art today—High and Low—is soothing. Does not Kaplan's description of "popular art" describe both pop art and kitsch? And minimal art? And op art? And conceptual art? And earth works? My answer would be yes.

High Art today also amuses, entertains, lends status to and creates

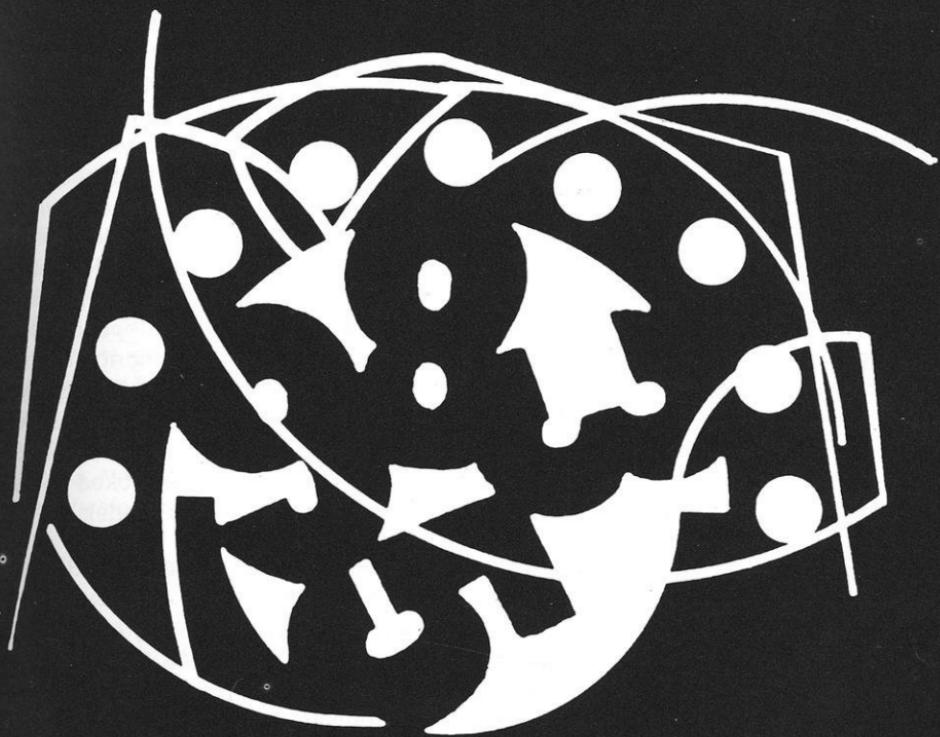
the appearance of art without its demands. The dominance of formal considerations in promoting and evaluating art has enabled the establishment of a new convention—the convention of the new. The modernist is the man who calls revolution in the arts a reduction to experimentation with form. What could be more soothing in an age of technological accelerated change than to witness (how logical, how orderly) the accelerated change in the arts. Countercurrent to this modernist tendency (which is no longer modern) and opposed to it and to kitsch are those artistic forces that seek to deal with human experience of our time, that understand the origin of both the "kitsch-man" and the high-arter. It is an art that is disturbing to both, for it tells them that they are both alone and afraid.

Reprinted from "Kitsch: The World of Bad Taste" by Gillo Dorfles.  
Courtesy: Universe Books



# HUGH FOX

## THIRD WORLD MARGINALITY: THE PLIGHT OF THE CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN ARTIST



## by Hugh Fox

Chase, Gilbert, *Contemporary Art in Latin America*, New York, New York, The Free Press. 1970. \$7.95

The Latin American artist, like all artists in the "Third World," that easily identifiable but ill-defined group of African, Asian and South American nations just on the other side of "technification," today faces an ontological crisis. Before he was invaded and transformed by Europe his identity was secure and definite; he had his "native" tradition—he was an Inca or a Maya or a Laotian... after being conquered and "transformed," his identity was still assured, although syncretic forces fighting between his own "native" and new "colonial" status began to create ambiguities and antagonisms within him. In some cases, as in the stone crosses that emerged in early colonial Mexico, the old (Aztec stonework) merged gracefully with the new (Christianity—the Christ-Icon), but for the most part the "native" was subordinated to the European with results like those of the famed "Cuzco School" in Peru—hundreds and hundreds of pictures done by Indian artists copying the themes and techniques of Spanish art.

During the nineteenth century this Europeanization of Third World art continued, and by the end of the nineteenth century we have in Latin America nothing more than what Marta Traba, the director of the Museum of Modern Art in Bogota calls in *La Pintura Nueva En Latino America*, "the parody of the French or Spanish Academy."

The Latin American artist, like all Third World artists, suffers from a

plethora of "complexes." Deep inside himself he finds it difficult to escape from the weight of "inferiority" placed on him by the brute face of conquest and a strongly genocidal need to impose a Spanish, European mark on whatever he might consider his legitimate "native" past. The Spaniards destroyed the pre-Columbian world; they smashed its idols, razed its temples, annihilated its art. They imposed on the "native" a Spanish "pigmentocracy," that reduced the "native" to the lowest ranks in society precisely because it was "native." The first reaction to being treated as an inferior by a white Spanish conqueror is anger and resistance, but when the conqueror continues to conquer and in fact makes submission the requirement for survival, the only possible reaction is an abandonment of one's own past and an adoption of the conqueror's standards and norms—always very much within the context of a superior (conqueror)-inferior (conquered) relationship. The result—academicism. Even after political independence, which came to Latin America at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the well-instilled sense of "native inferiority" insured that Europe and not America would be looked to as the source for artistic models.

In the twentieth century, as Gilbert Chase points out in his new book *Contemporary Art in Latin America*, this orientation begins to change in favor of a return to and glorification of "native" sources.

Chase's book begins with the Mexican revolution in 1910—a revolution which can be symbolically taken as the final purging in Mexico of Europeanized manners and government. Porfirio Diaz was the "Old World";

the revolution against Diaz signaled the advent of a "New World" that reached back through colonial times to its own indigenous past in order to find the elements with which to forge its new identity.

Mainly under the aegis of the philosopher-politician Jose Vasconcelos, whose *La Raza Cosmica* is the strongest pro-Latin American (with an emphasis on American) manifesto ever written, Mexican art initiated a radically new direction in Latin American art with the work of Diego Rivera, Orozco and Siquieros, the Mexican muralists. The thesis of *La Raza Cosmica* is not that American man should *return* to his pre-Columbian past, but that he should build a new identity, a new humanism, based on the amalgamation of *all* the elements which have gone into his making. This is echoed in Orozco's statement that:

*The art of the New World cannot take root in the old traditions of the Old World nor in the aboriginal traditions represented by the remains of our ancient Indian peoples . . . If new races have appeared upon the land of the New World, such races have the unavoidable duty to produce a New Art in a new spiritual and physical medium.*

The overwhelming characteristic of this new Mexican approach was to glorify the fused Indian-Spanish identity of the Mexican in all its multifariousness. It was a total cultural expression, not selective, but comprehensive, a violent assertion of selfness in the face of decades of a Europeanization that completely ignored Mexican reality.

Throughout the rest of Latin America this Mexican impulse to come

to grips with its own reality found expression in an "Indigenism" which concentrated almost primarily on Pre-Columbian elements which had survived virtually unchanged to contemporary times. The total reality of "Indo-America" (Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Mexico, much of Central America) was fundamentally indigenous, and so the indigenism of a Kingman or Guayasamin in Ecuador or an Armando Pereira Pacheco or Gil Imana in Bolivia or Jose Sabogal in Peru is inevitable as an inclusive, all-encompassing attempt to portray Indo-American reality.

Perhaps one of the most serious defects of this whole pro-American movement has been its too free use of, not European themes, but European techniques. Although Chase does not stress this point in *Contemporary Art in Latin America*, he does quote Marta Traba's condemnation of Guayasamin's having "sacked the most facile and obvious resources of the great Picasian repertory" in order to create an "Americanismo picassiano." The old inferiority complex still at work, compelling Latin American artists to almost instinctively look towards Europe (or now the U.S.) for basic direction, drift, orientation. Rivera was greatly influenced by the Italian muralists during a trip to Italy in 1920. His "artistic baggage," as Chase points out, "was a collection of many styles, from naturalism to cubism, from Cezanne to Picasso, from impressionism to realism." Orozco was similarly influenced by Masaccio and Giotta . . . and the same pattern appears in the most "American" contemporary Latin American artists.

The "American impulse" seems to be activated by contact with Europe.

It is almost as if the artist, while in Latin America, is unable to really free himself from the cultural "filter" that underevaluates the American in favor of the European, but that once in Europe, America, seen from a distance, takes on a whole new perspective. European artists drew from their immediate surroundings, the museum walls proclaim—why shouldn't the Latin American artist draw from his own personal world? From a European perspective "folklore" necessarily becomes vital, fresh, spontaneous.

From this it follows that the most indigenist of all Latin American painters, Torres Garcia, who was so enamoured of the pre-Columbian that he even wrote a metaphysical tract about it—his 1939 *Metaphysics of Indoamerican Pre-History*—spent most of his life in Europe and in the first place came from the least Indian of all Latin American countries: Uruguay. Torres Garcia was born in Uruguay, went to Europe at the age of 17 and didn't return to Montevideo until he was sixty. Yet he is the artist who believed that the pre-Columbian past could, in Chase's words, "provide a key to creative culture in Latin America."

In a sense the Third World artist is forced to be patronizing toward his own cultural past; it is a curiosity, part of the myth of the noble savage, infused with the excitement that is supposed to always adhere to the "primitive."

In Latin America only in those countries (like Argentina, Uruguay and Chile) which have very little pre-Columbian cultural heritage, has it been possible to escape on a large scale from the former colonial's

trap of either rejecting or glorifying his own past.

Any artist inevitably works within a certain tradition, in a certain place, moulded by certain "influences," but the great artist must overreach and extend beyond his "locale" into his own kind of personal expression—subjective, interior, very much "him" and not someone else. A Turner or a Goya, for example, are first themselves, and then a nineteenth century English and a nineteenth century Spanish painter.

In Mexico, the muralists are a bit too consciously Mexican, a bit too militantly social protesters. It takes a preeminently "personal" painter like Tamayo, who feels himself Mexican, but does *not* feel that his "Mexican-ness" in any way interferes with, as Chase puts it, "participation in the main currents of contemporary art," to be able to move into this area of universality required by "greatness." Tamayo is oriented toward pure plasticity that transcends both place and time. The work of art for him becomes a dialogue between the canvas and himself. For him art is "a product whose value derives only from its plastic qualities. Qualities obtained by means of a process of depuration until the essence is reached. A plastic essence ordered by a poetic sense, within the precious limitation of the picture. This is what I call *painting*."

Tamayo is an exception in Indo-America, but in a country like Chile, for example, artists emerge like Roberto Matta and Zanartu who are only tenuously Chilean, both of them now for many years "exiled" in Paris. But are they really "exiled?"

Matta's express artistic purpose is to "discover the morphology of the psychic processes," to seek "a microscope with which he can scrutinize the spirit of man."

Matta "disinvolves" himself from any preoccupation one way or the other regarding pre-Columbian America, the Spanish Conquest, the Independence, the whole question of Third World "marginality," and by detaching himself from any one limited historical frame of reference, he has been able to move into something larger than nationalism—a kind of ample universalism that in turn can be applied to man as man in a variety of historical situations. Matta, instead of looking either to a Latin American or European past, liberated from the multitude of "isms" that most Latin American artists seem to feel they must use as a working frame of reference, has been able to move into areas which are the general heritage of "man" in the twentieth century.

Most contemporary Argentinian and Uruguayan artists are similarly freed from the weight of an encumbering historical "complex." At one point in *Contemporary Art in Latin America* Chase compares Argentinian and Mexican art, claiming that "Argentina has been essentially modern since about 1920, while Mexico was somewhat archaic for several decades longer." Mexican art has been nationalistic and polemic, whereas "Argentinian art has been unsensational, controversial only within the context of aesthetics." The work of Argentinian artists like Penalaba and le Parc, for example, is "completely international."

What Chase fails to mention is the kind of trap involved with this kind

of "internationalism." In Argentina, especially, the individual artist's internationalism to a large extent cancels out the "dialogue" between the artist and his work. Art becomes a question of newness, freshness, innovation, keeping up, finding out the "latest trick" from Europe and then going it one better. Very few artists—like Edgardo Antonio Vigo, whom Chase doesn't mention—allow themselves to escape the terrible weight of fads and tricky trends to engage independently in a search for self apart from the pressures of currents and "schools." A few months ago when I was in Buenos Aires, Miguel Grinberg, an old friend, one of the editors of *Panorama*, the Argentinian equivalent of *Time*, complained about this Argentinian mania for "keeping up." The contemporary Argentinian artist, he said, instead of looking into himself for inspiration, looks into the latest catalogues from Germany, France and the U.S.

Although on one hand the Argentinian artist has been able, in the words of Marta Traba, to express himself "with total liberty, in conformity with the general principles of modern art," he has not been able to escape the very domination of these principles. The Argentinian art critic Cordova Iturburu puts it this way: "The epoch in which you live is your 'country in time'."

Liberated from the limited, backward-glancing restrictions of "South Americanism," the contemporary Argentinian artist has made "modernity" itself his country. Instead of looking for the roots of his individuality within himself, he looks to contemporary currents and movements, with the tragic result that the

"self" is still blocked, censored, often annihilated, by forces extraneous to itself.

"Greatness" in art is conterminous with "transcendence." Most Latin Americans, still laboring under the inertial burden of being "colonial" or "Indian" or both, view their identity in terms of a wide variety of combinations of their collective European and/or Indian past. Both economically and culturally they are outside the main currents of the twentieth century and this marginality disenables them to express a "self" which they intimately feel is unworthy of expression.<sup>1</sup> They are maimed internally, in the core of

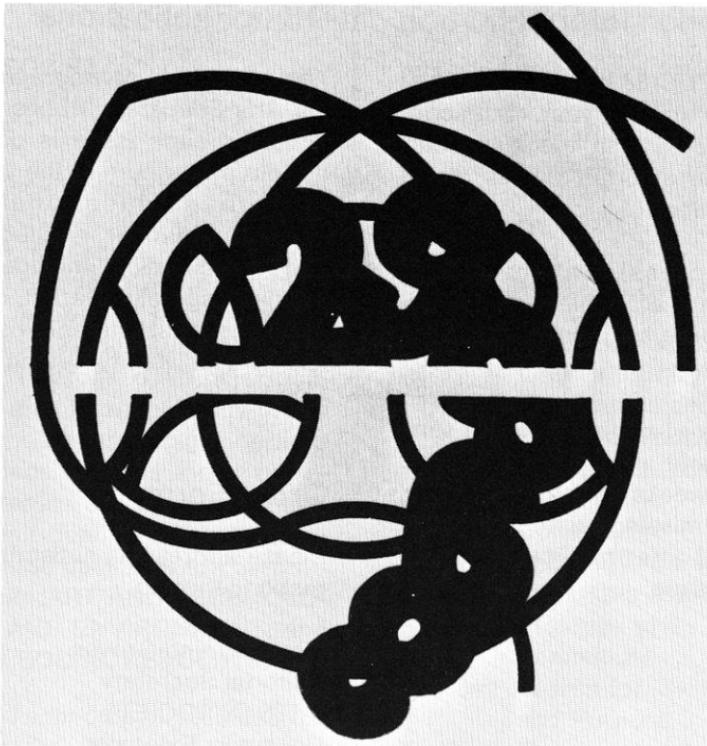
their interiority where their very sense of marginality could be a base for a more than valid artistic expression. Their art could be precisely the art of marginality, an outcry from the halfway house of Third World "incompleteness," where, fully conscious of the temper and feats of the twentieth century, whole continents still have been both physically (economically/technically) and psychologically unable to incorporate this temper and these feats into their own ontological fabric.

Chase's book is a valuable contribution to Latin American studies. Comprehensive, practically encyclopedic, it is clearly written and is,

<sup>1</sup>See my "The Mainstream and Marginality: The Latin American Identity Crisis," *Western Humanities Review*, Winter, 1968, and "The Problem of Identity in Contemporary Spanish-American Philosophy," *Centennial Review*, Spring, 1967.

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as the author points out in his preface, the "first book in any language to attempt a general survey of contemporary plastic arts and architecture in Latin America."

Whenever possible it quotes the painters themselves on their work, and also is written within a knowledgeable framework of contemporary Latin American critical work. Bibliographically exhaustive, *Contemporary Art in Latin America* should serve both the casual reader and Latin American specialist as a basic text for further exploration in the field.

Its weakness is the weakness of most survey books by American authors—the conscious lack of any clearcut theoretical and philosophi-

cal "framework" in which to view individual painters and movements. A Latin American critic like Marta Traba, in the tradition of European critical writing, will base her work explicitly on various theses and postulates. The book becomes not merely encyclopedic but philosophical as well, not descriptive but analytical. Although all the ingredients for such an approach are contained in Chase's book, he rarely launches out beyond the purely factual. This is a very safe and sure methodology; the book is definitive, authoritative, self-assured. My criticism is purely personal. Perhaps I've been married to Latin America too long . . . but I've grown to like more than anything else the launchings out, the chances, the wildly theoretical might's and maybe's of this other, analytical, critical method.

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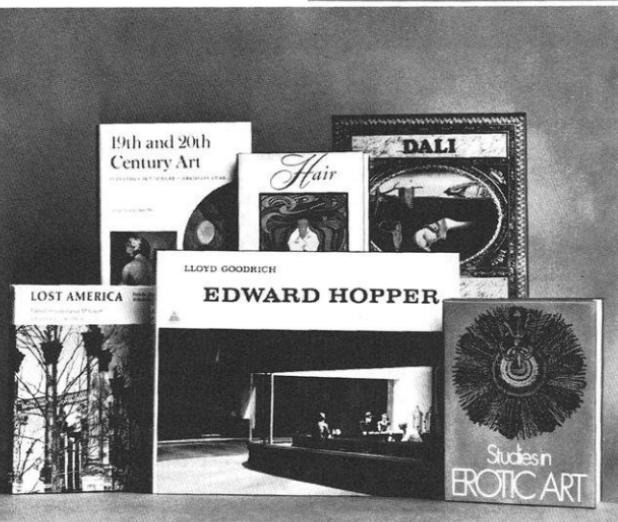
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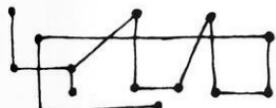
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