

## BEYOND INDIVIDUALISM IN THE ARTS

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If you consider the individual by himself, then you see of man just as much as you see of the moon; only man with man provides a full range. If you consider the aggregate by itself, then you see of man just as much as we see of the Milky Way; only man with man is a completely outlined form. Consider man with man, and you see human life, dynamic, twofold, the giver and the receiver, he who does and he who endures, the attacking force and the defending force, the nature which investigates and the nature which supplies information, the request begged and granted--and always both together, completing one another in mutual contribution, together showing forth man. (Buber, 1955, p. 205)

I propose that there is a direct correlation between the precarious state of our cultural pattern and the role that artists and art educators assume in our society. I hope to demonstrate that the near fatal deficit of our culture is its undue esteem of individualism over the community--of private gain over the public good, and that the artist and art teacher reflect these same social values. I wish to demonstrate that artists need not assume the role of estranged other and fierce individualist in order to exercise their powers of imagination and craft, but may put these resources toward the construction of a society that is in harmonious relation with its environment. Finally, I hope to show that the artist can play a central role in society--not as society presently is, but in the construction of a more just and harmonious civilization towards which we must evolve.

### A root problem?

I know of no one personally, nor of any professional scientist, educator, social or political scientist who believes that if the present pattern and direction of our social, political and economic behaviors persist that the likelihood of our survival as a civilization, even as a species, is certain. If we are not likely to "make it", what are the flaws in our system which so threaten its continuation? Is it a matter of insufficient cheap energy, or enough food or enough space, or too many people and too much refuse for too little space? Perhaps we don't have enough information about how the world works, or perhaps we have too much information but insufficient ethical sensibilities to make use of the information. Perhaps the problem is that what we are and what we have is actually on the right track but we haven't as yet traversed sufficiently far in order to see the light at the other end. Some claim too much governmental interference subverting our naturally good tendencies. Others argue the opposite,

that we need a stronger, universal government to curb our naturally rapacious appetites. Is the real issue avarice, spiritual bankruptcy, ignorance, egocentricism or, more pessimistically, is human pain and societal violence due to a generic lack of sufficient intelligence?

Each one of these real problems has its devotees, and from time immemorial people have worked in each of these areas attempting to relieve their oppressive consequences. The plethora of specific problems, however, argues against the supremacy of any one and for a more inclusive characteristic which manifests itself not directly but through the various media of politics, economics, technology, ethics and so on, giving it many appearances but one basic nature.

Our task, then, is to see past the variety of presenting symptoms in the hopes of glimpsing a more fundamental property. We will not begin with asking what is wrong, but with a different sort of question: what are the characteristics of any viable unit, any alive entity? If we can isolate a fundamental process whose absence or presence is the critical determinant of all life forms we may then look for the degree of its presence in our culture.

### A fundamental process: homeostasis

What are the universal and minimum essential life signs? To be viable every organism must be able to entrap a source of energy, acquire nutritive elements, metabolize its food, excrete wastes, and procreate. Other biologic and/or chemical operations could be cited as minimal essentials of life; however, all these activities describe a certain level of organization which are quite complex and already differentiated from each other. We seek a deeper property of life, one which is not the special province of any one organ, but is a behavior which every organ and activity must have.

The absolute essential for viability seems to be not an organ or a process but a quality of a process. This may be described as synchronized appropriate reaction to environment: homeostasis. Simple or complex, single biologic unit or multiple social groups, unless the entity has the ability to achieve and maintain a homeostatic relation with its interior and exterior environment it will perish. Without this quality permeating all of its processes and subdivisions, the insufficiencies and surfeits of any one sub-unit will eventually starve or poison the system. Homeostasis is viability.

There are several important qualities of homeostasis that need to be made clear before we examine our cultural ways of using this factor as a test for the viability of our culture. I wish to describe this term via two quite different methods, one by a quote without additional commentary, which will set a philosophic context, and another by scientific description.

From a scientific basis, homeostasis can be said to be the pattern of interaction between all sets and subsets in which dynamic equilibrium is maintained. It is not a description of any one or more discreet entities, but a description of how any two entities articulate. Homeostasis refers to networks, response ability, coherence, integration, mutuality.

A system cannot survive if any one of its vital parts ceases to function or if any one of those parts functions faster or slower than the others. Coherence is the requisite of existence. Aberrant life forms which are not in homeostasis with their environment do arise but, like all cancers, they soon overtax their sustaining context and perish along with their victims. Every viable system is part of a network of exchange, a synchronized processing conduit pulsing in harmony with all of nature.

A Wintu Indian said this: The White people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots we make little holes. When we build houses, we make little holes. When we burn grass for grasshoppers, we don't ruin things. We shake down acorns and pinenuts. We don't chop down the trees. We only use dead wood. But the White People plow up the ground, pull down the trees, kill everything. The tree says, "Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me." But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. The Indians never hurt anything, but the White people destroy all. They blast rocks and scatter them on the ground. The rock says, "Don't. You are hurting me." But the White people pay no attention. When the Indians use rocks, they take little round ones for their cooking...How can the spirit of the earth like the White man?...Everywhere the White man has touched it, it is sore. (McLuhan, 1971, p. 15)

#### Homeostasis between individual and society

Having selected homeostasis as our test of viability, let us compare the characteristics of our human relationships with those of a system in homeostasis and examine the results. Our Western society's present and historic behavior is one of ethnocentric supremacy, acquisition and accumulation, and domination encouraged by both our secular and religious leadership; our world-view makes humans and the rest of nature discontinuous, making us the chosen people having dominion over nature and all "pagan" others. We value conquest and control. We try to reform nature to conform to our own appetites. We try to hold on to things, to possess them utterly. We are more compelled to proclaim than we are to listen. We value the individual more than the community. We focus on single entities rather than the connections which unite them. We are trained to perceive differences, distinctiveness rather than commonalities. We want to win rather than share. Comparing these social values and behavioral patterns with the qualities of organic homeostasis we cannot fail to notice the marked differences, even the antithetical characteristics, of the two. Nature's pattern is one of a universal community with each subunit being distinctive, necessary and integrated within a larger ecosystem. Our pattern is one of egocentric imperialism.

The problem with individualism is not that it is immoral but that it is incorrect. The universe does not consist of a lot of unrelated particles but is an interconnected whole. Pretending that our fortunes are independent of

each other may be perfectly ethical, but it's also perfectly stupid. Individualistic thinking is unflagging in the production of false dichotomies, such as "conformity vs. independence," "altruism vs. egoism," "inner-directed vs. other-directed," and so on, all of which are built upon the absurd assumption that the individual can be considered separately from the environment of which he or she is a part. (Slater, 1975, p. 15)

With this value system and similarly guided technology we have in fact been remarkably successful in attaining our goals of conquest and acquisition. We have taken these material prizes as signs of achievement, as proof positive for the validity of our goals and our methods. Yet it is becoming increasingly evident that these same values and methods used to win the world are beginning to show signs of overreaching themselves. Their limitations are becoming apparent. By consuming faster than the rest of the system can replenish, by usurping the resources of the entire network for our local gain, we are beginning to see the evidence of the fatigue not only of our culture but of the biosphere of which we are an inextricable member. My claim is that the primary deficit of our society is that we are out of balance with our government due to our overemphasis of individualism and neglect of communion, of private gain over public good.

#### The archetype individual: the artist

There is probably no other group in society for whom individualism is so highly esteemed and operative as among artists. Thus, the very characteristic of our society which promotes such fatal results is the same characteristic which shapes so much of the activity of artists. I wish to examine this relationship between the artist and egocentrism to see if one is necessarily requisite for the other.

One describes the traits of an artist as being skillful, sensitive, original, courageous, imaginative, freedom-loving, wonderful, internally motivated, emotional and expressive. These seem unequivocally positive personal and social traits sufficient to account for artistic behavior. In addition to these, there are several other traits associated with artists which are less propitious. The artist can also be described as egocentric, narcissistic, elitist, and uncompromising. It is just these and only these latter traits which the artist seems to share with the rest of society, and which lead to a fatal imbalance between man and man, man and nature. These latter traits, all stemming from overemphasis on individualism, have the least to do with the creative experience, the making of art. Sensitivity, openness to the world, a continuous sense of wonder, courage, skill, imagination need not be imbedded in an isolated, narcissistic self. Narcissism has no necessary monopoly on sensitivity or skill or courage or any of the other traits. A global sensitivity, and a universal love is the correlate of sensitivity, wonder, courage, openness more so than is narcissism. Creative expression originating from an individuated self integrated within community has the necessary prerequisites of artistic achievement. Creative expression originating in an isolated self works from a diminished base and reaches toward a smaller world.

The divisibility of artistic expression from rampant individualism, narcissism, has been the basic relation of the artist to society for most of social human history and is still the prevailing pattern of relationship throughout the world, except in industrialized societies such as ours. In other times and presently in other places, the artist stood not at the periphery of society as a decorative or petulant element, but at the very center. The artist, along with the secular and sacred authorities, shared responsibility for maintaining the harmony between the community's internal and external viability. The artist gave significant form to the compelling and often ineffable concerns of the people. Common man addressed each other in times of critical issues and events with ritualized behavior, calling upon the artist to give voice and weight to these matters. In marriage, birth, coming of age and death, the artist was sent for to again give elevated and appropriate form to these vital communications. In this fashion, as a conduit of essential communications between the nodal points of society; the artist stood at society's crossroads.

But our society is not a community, and artists are not longer at the center. Once the center the artists are now on the periphery, once of structural necessity they are now decorative, once articulating the common dream and voice they now only raise their own. The existential anxiety of our society is the individual trying to go it alone, deprived of secular and sacred consul. With nothing before held as credible and nothing definite to follow, we seek our own advice for our own salvation.

#### The potential of artists and art educators

Does the artist have a role in such necessary accomodation? Can we be an agent for such change? Can artists relinquish their hold on the privileges of individualism and put their talents to larger objectives? It would be folly to be overconfident in the potential for success of this task nor underestimate the enormity of change required of artists and art educators.

Nonetheless there are skills that artists do possess and roles which they have assumed which do offer a positive direction. We need to do two things. First, we need to distinguish between what artists in our society presently do and what the potential of their resources are. Second, we need to review what artists have historically contributed to society as forces of an intergrated, homeostatic community. It may be instructive at the outset to itemize some of the resources of artists which, when combined with social values of dialogue and communion, have the potential of nudging the evolution of our society in the direction of homeostasis.

The creative act, making art, is an act of assigning place and order to entities. As such, this activity is one requiring sensitivity to the discrete qualities of things and the "right" relationship between things. It may be said that art is constructed from similar sources and needs as primitive man constructs myth and cosmologies. The prime function of myth is to assign order to all things in the world, locating the self, the social unit and thus binding all entities in a necessary and intercommunicating order. This activity of ordering is also the basic task of the artist. It is also the basic force of the art work, relating as it does, the work at hand to all other images of the world, and the work to the observer. Art making,

like myth making, is a human being's attempt to escape the teeming chaos of things and events. The fabrication of art and myth are means by which we unite ourselves with the world, reducing our sense of isolation, fear of being overwhelmed by forces so much grander than ourselves. Art and myth assign specialness to all separate entities and assigns to each entity its correct place, its right relationship to all other entities. The inability to perceive order and universal relationships is characteristic of our society. Here is a real need for the artist as a person sensitive to subtle patterns and able to compose orderliness from seeming chaos.

Another capability of artists is their heightened perceptual acuity. Perceptual myopia tends to breed repetitiveness, smugness, smallness of vision and petty, limited ambition. Limited perception makes available only the largest and most obvious of things. The artist having keen perceptual powers for fine, subtle and complex pattern, could present society with images which evidence this universal fabric.

The artist is able to articulate via the intellect the emotional and intuitive dimensions. A devisive quality of human behavior has often been attributed to the apparent split between intellect and emotion. Being able to coherently articulate sensations stemming from the emotional network is a sign of a mind capable of integrating this two processes. Our society, dividing as it does feeling and intellect, could benefit from those whose consciousness takes both into account.

One of the essential characteristics of creative people is their enduring sense of wonder, their openness to the world. A closed mind, like a myopic eye, tends to repeat itself. We are looking for a way to change our system, not repeat it. Therefore the artist's ability to receive new information also allows that newness to penetrate into old patterns, disassembling old relationships and truths. To be surprised, to wonder, is to be available to change.

The artist's position is not so much one of being part of the world-as-it-is, but being in the world-of-possibilities. Artists have an affinity with the existential position of the world without absolutes, without guides and without imperatives. Being wed neither to current ways nor values, the artist is in a position to consider and adopt alternative modes.

These are some of the important resources of the artist. They can be put to their present use and support our unviable society or these same resources can be put to the evolution of an emergent society, one which acknowledges its cooperative role in the universal order of nature.

#### Towards a new role for artists

The process of stewardship begins with a gradual overcoming of the self protective ignorance that isolates us from the majority of people in the world, and with a growing awareness of the needs, fears, and hopes that bind all humanity. Then we come to see that developing a harmonious relationship with nature is a requirement for the survival of the human race. The

continuation of the present competitive assault on the natural order will surely bring chaos, deprivation, and, quite possibly, the death of everything. However, no new relationship with nature is possible without a new stage in human relationships, rooted in the most basic survival values of all: sharing and cooperation. (Barnet, 1980)

We may also gain insight for alternative roles for artist/art educator by looking at the functions of artists working within a society which is in a balanced relation with its environment. What we seek is a society which recognized, in value and behavior, that they are a necessary and inextricable unit in a universal web of life. In those societies the artist serves the community in several integrative ways. The artist, by giving perceptual form to feeling and idea, transforms the realm of concept into incarnate entities. In this way the artist brings privately held thought into public examination and practice. The art object or event, like speech, is the vehicle through which individuals break out of the isolation of private experience and share experiences, creating a common body of knowledge. It is also the force which shapes a collection of random individuals into a coherent society. The act of art is the organizing of seemingly separate entities, be they color, shape, sound or movement, into a pattern which demonstrates their actual interrelatedness. The way in which valued items are organized by the artist manifests the manner in which society-at-large typically organizes itself. Therefore the art object serves to exhibit two fundamental qualities of mind which, when shared, create community: what things are of value, and what relationships are of value. Another way of stating this is that art simultaneously represents the facts about the world as well as the truths which bind the facts into a coherent view of the world held by that particular society.

The artist takes the collective traditions of the past and synthesizes them with current forms making the past known to the present, and the present available for the future. Art can thus be likened to the function of Jung's "collective unconscious" a common repertory of past experiences in the form of a universal collection of images. The artist is the most adept member of society in externalizing that source of wisdom and bringing it into the public domain through significant and decipherable form.

We live in separate bodies, inhabiting different spatial and perceptual territory. We are born alone, live separately and die, one by one, alone. This real physical isolation is our greatest source of anxiety and, likewise, the greatest impetus to escaping that intolerable state by seeking love relations and group identities. The artist serves the need to overcome solitariness by creating the alluring trappings of communal celebrations, of comings-together. The glitter, merry sound, and other sensual delights which infuse every celebration, serve both to lure people to its center, as well as conceal, under the veil of ritual and exaggerated emotionality, the deep compelling hunger we all have to be part of a larger unity, to be imbedded in a seamless cosmos.

The artist, through song, dance, costume and precious object, brings people together, celebrating not only the immediate event but the joint

recognition that life must be a briefly shared, all-too-fleeting excursion from unknown to timeless unknown. The artist strengthens society by providing an opportunity for society to pause in the midst of the hurly-burly of daily life and to contemplate the larger patterns of life. Art refers not only to its immediate self but points in many referential directions-- a pointing to precedent, to emergent possibility, to similarities and contrasts. The consideration of art is always an act of extension beyond the here and now.

The artist then serves society in several integrative ways: describer of the human condition, the synthesis of past into present and towards the future, the shaper of private dreams and visions offered to common consideration. The rememberer, recorder, prophet. The decorator. The one who separates the mundane from the significant, the assigner of order, the cosmic clown, the one who helps us celebrate, to howl our grief and joy unto the heavens.

#### In sum

I have tried to show how individualism is an insufficient social value for a viable social unit, unable as it is to direct social forces towards homeostasis with the rest of the cosmos. I have also attempted to show how the artist and, by implication, the art educator could make a central contribution to the evolution of our society from its present disintegrative state to one of a coherent community. It is a legitimate and possible role for the artist to make a contribution to the establishment of a society which recognizes the mutual interdependence of man and nature, and which seeks accord and the common good as the product of individual imagination and enterprise. Communion is no threat to individualism; rather, individualism is the first necessary step of one distinctive soul turning towards another in the eventual act of dialogue, communion, acknowledging the qualities which unite all diversity in a larger universal pattern.

If we are going to make it, the world view of dialogue, communion and homeostasis offers an alternative to egocentrism, domination, and solitary individualism. The artist needn't be wedded solely to the range of individual utterance and private advantage. There can be equally gratifying enterprise offering a much wider palette of sources and purposes and, ultimately, much deeper reward.

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## CARL JUNG: A FORMALIST CRITIQUE

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I will present a review of the basic thoughts of Carl Jung and outline his research in areas such as psychological types and the uses of symbols in art. Special attention will be placed on his discussions of Schiller's work on aesthetic play. His work on psychological types will be related to research in art education with the Myers-Briggs tests. His work on symbols in art will be related to the new and growing interest of art education in the whole field of Creative Arts Therapy. Jung's influence on art education will be discussed within the historical and philosophical context of the past 30 years of art research.

The title is a play on words because instead of being a critique of Jung according to formalistic aesthetic theory, I offer Jung's work as a critique of aesthetic formalism. But, why present this at the Caucus for Social Issues and Art Education? My response is that aesthetic formalism is essentially an elitist doctrine and by its insistence upon the formal properties of the art object, neglects many critical social and psychological concerns. Too much of the recent developments in aesthetic education have been dominated by aesthetic formalism.

While Jung's ideas were implicit in many writings by art educators such as Read (1967), Munro (1941), and others, the current return to interest in his ideas is a result of the movement that considers art therapy as a part of art education concerns. In addition, recent interest in mainstreaming in art and in education have directed the art educator to widen the range of his professional interests.

This paper will also seek to review those collected writings of Carl Jung that most specifically relate to problems in the psychology of art and to questions of education in the arts. This writer has long argued that psychological studies are relevant to questions of aesthetics, and Jung's work demonstrates the wisdom of that argument (McWhinnie, 1971). It would seem that a meeting of the Caucus for Social Issues and Art Education is a most fitting place to present and review this material.

In addition, Jung's work will be reviewed with special reference to the work of Arnheim and Gombrich. All three of these thinkers have in many ways formed the cornerstone of the psychology of art, and as this paper will try to show, have greatly influenced theories of art education and have provided the theoretical underpinnings for significant research efforts in art education. In this paper, we take a new look at an old question, "What is the psychological structure of art and of aesthetic expression?"

This paper on the work of Jung forms the final part of a trilogy of papers written during the summer of 1979. In many ways, that summer was