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AIM REVISITED

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In case you may have forgotten: AIM is the acronym for Art in the Mainstream, a statement of "value and commitment", authored by Edmund Burke Feldman. AIM first appeared in the March '82 issue of Art Education and then again in the September issue where it was the subject of a "mini issue."

According to AIM, art means three things: work, language, and values. Americans need to relearn the value of work, and art is the best way to do this. Visual imagery is a type of language, and, like any language, it needs to be learned. Finally, art and values are virtually identical; art education, therefore, is the same as values education.

In case you may also have forgotten: Feldman used to be president of the NAEA. Therefore AIM had the status of being a semi-official position of the whole organization. This is probably why it received so much attention. First, it was reviewed editorially and analyzed by several authors in the mini issue, the most interesting pieces being by Ralph Smith (Feldman's "loyal opposition") and Feldman himself (responding to Smith). Second, it was the subject of at least two panels, including one that I served on, in the Detroit conference last March.

Mainly, in this article I want to reflect on AIM, especially its implications. But before that I am going to talk around the subject.

Our field, more than any that I know of, is afflicted by rhetorical overload. One reason perhaps is because it is an educational field and, like all of education, art education is perennially on the defensive. Defending oneself often required heroic feats of rhetoric. Another reason is that our field is connected with art, a special world well known for metaphysical explanations. Still another reason is the history of our

field. Going back to the Lowenfeld era, or perhaps even to the Progressive Education period, Art Education has had a missionary frame of mind. The first chapter of Creative and Mental Growth by Lowenfeld reminds me of an epistle by St. Paul. Both are fervent, ideological, and charismatic. Like Paul, Lowenfeld used bold language, reprimanded sinners (i.e. teachers or parents who interfered with the child's natural development), exhorted the faithful (i.e. art teachers), and, most importantly, won converts. Paul and the evangelists envisioned the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, Lowenfeld and his followers envisioned a utopia of creativity and self-expression.

Today, though there is still a lot of it around, creativity/self-expression utopianism no longer dominates the field. Lowenfeld's following has been extended, modified or repudiated by a number of new ideologies (and ideologists). The listing below is certainly not exhaustive (its range being limited by the author's own limited knowledge) but it will give some idea of the diversity of thinking that exists in art education today:

1) phenomenologists: steeped in the philosophical writings of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, these people are usually just as utopian as Lowenfeld but ten times harder to read. Also, not being as committed to creativity as Lowenfeld, phenomenologists are apt to have children explore the subjective and objective aspects of experience by looking at rather than making art.

2) brain-hemisphere theorists: these advocates struggle heroically to find a physiological justification for art. Like Lowenfeld, brain theorists seek to demonstrate that art in school is necessary for the whole child, but their theories are based in medical science rather than psychology.

3). aesthetic educators: unlike the rest, these people are generally

more interested in cognition than in personality growth or mental health. To them art is a subject to be mastered rather than a developmental process but they divide over just what that subject is.

4) Marxists: steeped in Marxist art criticism these people are just as intellectual (and hard to understand) as the phenomenologists. Potentially, they could become the left-wing activists--the new missionaries--of the field. All they need is a program.

As can be seen even in this incomplete list, the intellectual side of art education today is pluralistic. Moreover, after close study, it becomes apparent that the pluralism has to do with goals and fundamental premises, not just approaches or methods. In other words, art education lacks a philosophical center. Conflicting positions of this nature tend to cancel out one another making all positions--good or bad--incoherent.

If in the 50s there was the problem of rhetorical overload it was at least confined to one channel--a belief in the value of creativity/self expression. Now the overload flows through many channels. The result, of course, is rhetorical chaos, a state of entropy in which workable solutions are indistinguishable from nonsense.

Getting back to AIM: I recognize that the statement, as it appears in the Journal, is far too simplified to be a complete philosophical position, let alone a program. But, allowing for its journalistic brevity, I personally approve of AIM as a position (for reasons that I shall explain later). I would like to see it adopted de facto by the field as well as de jure. However, I'm only one art educator and my opinion probably represents the minority. If I were a phenomenologist I would reject AIM because, as an art program, it does not sufficiently provide for the exper-

iential realities of the child; it stresses the cognitive at the expense of the child's affective life. If I were a brain theorist I would agree in part with the phenomenologist but would express my position in medical language claiming that the AIM program favors the left hemisphere and slights the right. If I were a Marxist I would probably condemn AIM as a toll of a conservative educational establishment which in turn is a tool of an essentially corrupt, capitalistic society. I would use the language of political-economist rather than that of the existentialist or neurosurgeon. If I were an aesthetic educator I would be more prone to accept AIM, but, like Ralph Smith (who is an aesthetic educator), question its emphasis on work and language and the lack of mention of the aesthetic experience as a major, if not the sole, justification for art in the schools. Furthermore, aesthetic educators are divided over just what kinds of art examples should be used in the classroom, i.e., fine art or popular art; AIM is not clear about this issue. Finally, if I were a neo-Lowenfeldian I would condemn AIM as a heresy, a throwback to the picture-study era, if not worse.

Meanwhile, many art educators do not belong in any of the above, or any other philosophical camp. I'm thinking of those in elementary or secondary education who, generally, lack the inclination or time to be very interested in philosophy. What is their reaction to AIM? I don't know. I don't believe anyone has taken a poll. But my guess is that of those who have read AIM most probably agree with it. Why? Because they tend to agree with any rhetoric that sounds good. Feldman's writing is good, it's also captivating, almost seductive. Moreover, because of the rhetorical overload, substance no longer matters. Thus AIM elicits agreement because

of its putative sincerity, its tone of advocacy, its charm, but not necessarily because of what it really means, especially for the practice of art education.

What does AIM mean? Negatively: it means putting aside utopian rhetoric, past or present, about how art in the schools will make born-again, creative, right hemispheric children of light. It means abandoning mental health, emotional growth, and personality development as being primary foci and goals of art education. In terms of practice it means much less studio activity in the classroom, in particular, no more studio activity designed to produce instantaneous, satisfying, ego-gratifying results. Positively, it means adopting visual literacy as a main goal of art education. In terms of practice this means much more discourse about art. Let me be clear: discussion and oral reporting in class and written assignments out of class. All in all AIM means much greater emphasis on the serious aspects of art and much less on fun as an end in itself.

AIM, if we take it seriously, is calling for a radical overhaul of the field--from elementary to higher education. How many art teachers today can talk intelligently about art? How many have had a thorough grounding in art history or art criticism? You know the answers. Such things have not been stressed in art-teacher education for at least a half century.

Therefore, the main flaw of AIM, as a semi-official document, is its failure to account for the chasm between what it calls for and what actually exists in the field. Indeed throughout the piece Feldman uses the present tense and the indicative verb mood as if the things the statement calls for actually exist. "In art class," he says, "we study visual images... art education stimulates language--spoken and written--about visual images... As art teachers we work continuously on the development of critical skills....

we study the art of many lands and people..." (my italics). Needless to say, these sentences are inaccurate and misleading. Better that Feldman had used the subjunctive mood and "should" verbs, e.g., "In art class we should study images," etc.

In the final analysis, my feelings about AIM are mixed. I support it wholeheartedly as a manifesto for a new direction in art education. But I question its status as an official pronouncement uttered by a national president of what the field is presently standing for. I think it expects too much in this regard. I fear that, as a position, it is more isolated than it sounds or than its reviewers in the September '82 Journal acknowledge. Worse, I fear that its message is not fully comprehended by those who should react and respond to it.

ART EDUCATION AND THE SOCIAL USE OF METAPHOR

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Human beings are greatly dependent upon social knowledge as a basis for directing their actions in the world and interpreting the actions of others. The dominant quality of social knowledge, or culture, is that it is symbolic. Consider the concept of culture offered by anthropologist Clifford Geertz:

(Culture) denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life. (1973, p. 89)

In his discussion of the epistemological underpinnings of sociological theory, Richard Brown (1977) proposes that all knowledge is perspectival in that it is construed from some point of view. What we know is configured in symbolic forms. Brown argues that knowledge is basically metaphoric. "(M)etaphors are our principal instruments for integrating diverse phenomena and viewpoints without destroying their differences" (Brown, 1977, p. 79)

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also support the cognitive status of metaphor. They maintain that the conceptual system human beings use for thinking and acting "is fundamentally metaphoric in nature" (p. 3). Lakoff and Johnson show that concepts that are referentially based in natural encounters are used in what Victor Turner (1967) calls a condensed or multivocal form. In this way, it becomes possible to create new and more