

SOCIAL PURPOSES OF ART EDUCATION

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In very broad terms, I wish to address the social purposes of art and art education in an historical context, assuming that art education's purposes extend to some extent from those of art. I will discuss these social purposes in the framework of major historical divisions: the tribal society, the agricultural community, industrial civilization, and the future scientific - planetary community, or new age.

Art education is one side of a triad in which art and education make up the other two sides. All three are human enterprises with social origins which change as society's need for them changes. Within this triad art education has, more often than not, responded primarily to the social purposes of education which have been more economic, ethical, moral, political, and religious than aesthetic and spiritual.

Throughout most of art history, since the cave painters, art instruction has been a form of apprenticeship, a one to one experience between a master and an apprentice. The structure we today recognize as art education is really a product of industrial civilization. Arnold Hauser, in the Social History of Art (1951) repeatedly makes it clear that art styles change in response to the purposes that societies have for art. Accordingly, the position of the artist and the art teacher in society also reflects those changes.

In the tribal communities, the major purposes of art were magic and divination or prophesy, and in some tribal societies narrative history of the clan or tribe. In magic and divination the techniques of making art were ritualized to create the magic. The artist and shaman were one. The shaman-artist taught his/her initiate the skills and rituals of image-making, the historic traditions of their clan, and their importance to the clan community. The apprentice learned by imitating,

or copying the techniques and rituals and by memorizing the chants and procedures.

The agricultural community began with the Neolithic Age and continues from the ancient world, and the great ages - Classical, Roman, Medieval, and Renaissance - to the Reformation. In the early stages of agricultural societies a division of labor between the artist and shaman developed. The artist was reduced to an artisan and the shaman elevated to high priest. The artisan painted on the tomb walls and carved the scriptures, while the craftsman made utilitarian objects. Women, who had done the weaving and pottery in the early tribal society, continued to do so for the home, but the man made them for the market place. Art in ancient Egypt had metaphysical purposes, depicting the lives of the pharaohs on tomb walls, or effigies on monuments. In Crete, the craftsman making idols to sell in the market place disregarded the magic ritual. The purpose became industrial and commercial. During the Christian area, from the Byzantine to the Renaissance, the purposes of art were religious instruction of the illiterate masses, and the glorification of the church.

The ancient Greeks, in distinguishing between the liberal arts and the servile arts, identified the artist with the liberal arts - the intellectual, poet, dramatist, and musician. The artisan was associated with the servile arts, the manual arts, and was considered one

who used his hands rather than his head. This distinction continues through the Renaissance, and is still with us in many ways. The artisans' trades carried forth the apprenticeship training system. When Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo achieved status as artists, because of their genius, methods of instruction also changed. At that time, it developed that painters and sculptors were taught in academies of design. The masters had studios with many apprentices assisting in their work and studying classical design. Formal principles of design were established, and disciplines related to style were also changing the content of art instruction. It has been frequently noted that Rubens' studio was like a factory of apprentices working on his commissions.

Beginning with the Reformation period, the development of the industrial civilization set the framework for art education as we know it today. For this structure, we need a middle class, and leisure time that reaches a level of society other than the rulers and aristocracy. The aristocracy had long been the patrons of the arts and its chief collectors. For one thing this patronage meant that the artist was freed of the tyranny of the wall. S/he could paint or carve in his/her studio and carry the work to its place of installation. The Protestant antipathy for religious art and idols opened the range of subject matter to landscapes, portraits, still lifes, genre, and with the blessing of John Calvin, history painting. Possessing works of art gave merchants and businessmen social status. This gave art an entirely new purpose. The Protestant artists and businessmen created their own market, rather than depending entirely upon the aristocracy and the church. The feudal institution of religion evolved into the industrial institution of education. Religious moralism, and realism of the

industrial civilization replaced the scholasticism and humanism of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Education was installed into the homes of the upper and leisure classes with tutors, and governesses for young children. Orphans and children of the working class were taught in public institutions, if at all. Society prescribed the type of art that would be taught, according to the social class and the sex of the child, and dictated the limitations of its use.

Boys in the upper middle class were taught lettering, drawing, and perspective as practical skills for making diagrams, illustrating descriptions when words were not enough, designing their own houses, and reading plans for machinery. Girls were taught watercolors, drawing, embroidery, and playing the pianoforte and singing - the so-called female accomplishments - for the purpose of gaining a suitable husband in the marriage market. Neither young gentlemen nor young ladies were encouraged to take their art making seriously enough to become artists or professionals. The artist was still considered a member of the working class who could not make a suitable living. Children of the working class were taught geometrical drawing, printmaking, and etching, skills which could be used for industrial employment.

Although the North American colonies were founded during the early stages of the Industrial Revolution, they were agricultural communities. The agrarian Protestant work ethic was strong, and the artist was considered an artisan. Several generations passed before the standards of upper middle class instruction in America reached those European standards described above, but the divisions between middle class and working class purposes for drawing remained much the same.

Art instruction had definite purposes. Geometrical drawing and

linear perspective, when taught in the common schools prepared students for factory employment. This was established by the Industrial Drawing Act of 1870 in Massachusetts. But, in the private schools of the Transcendentalists, geometrical drawing taught the Pathagorean philosophy of the divine order of nature and the universe. It was a form of moral education. In the private schools, children learned picture making, often through copywork; but in the public schools, it was discouraged. Horace Mann promoted drawing because it improved penmanship.

Art Appreciation, introduced into Yale and Harvard in the 1850's, was more to insure that young gentlemen taking the grand tour would know which works of art to purchase and which to avoid than for increasing their depth of sensibility. Art appreciation for women was for moral uplift, and it was this aspect which was carried to the Art Study Units of the 1880's to the 1920's.

When we look at the whole long history of art, the aesthetic movement of the 1860's and the art for art's sake movement at the turn of the century are late arrivals. These movements represent the arrival of aristocratic elitism in the upper middle class, and possibly the ultimate social response to the democratization of art which followed the American and French Revolutions. The real social purpose of elitism is establishing social status above the general middle class. Art collecting served this purpose. It showed one has good taste, a depth of sensibility, and the money born of success and education.

Throughout the early 1900's, the manual arts and crafts programs sustained the industrial orientation of the 19th Century with an emphasis on skills for the home; and Progressive Education encouraged the use of art and crafts correlated with other subjects as a means of making the curriculum less dull and academic.

Correlated art education peaked in the 1930's and continues with us today.

The picture study units, which were the main source of art appreciation in the lower grades at the turn of the century, emphasized the moral lessons of artistic narrative, and the pride of work. The upper grades were supposed to develop aesthetic criteria for critical appreciation but this advanced stage of appreciation was never really developed. Most of the subject matter predated the Impressionists, but included the Barbizon school of realism. Modern art, and even the Social Realists of the Depression years, were not widely taught until after World War II, when returning servicemen and women entered art education. Post World War II brought the use of art for developing creative and mental growth (Lowenfeld, 1947) and established the stages of growth, as perceived in childrens' image-making ability. They were recognized first in the Child Study Movement of the 1890's, but neither our schools nor society were ready for them. The emphasis on self-expression propagated by Lowenfeld, and creative drive espoused by D'Amico, (1947), addressed a public school audience ready to use them. Art was seen as a release of emotional tensions.

If we briefly identify social purposes in the decades since then, creativity was certainly one of the major thrusts of the 1960's, and reflected the American concern over the lapse in not beating the Russians into space. Arts for the disadvantaged, handicapped and exceptional children developed in response to legislation dealing with these concerns in the 1970's. With the psychological orientations of the arts, self-expression, and arts for the handicapped, art education is moving into the next major area - or role that art will play in our society - and that is art therapy. This is a long-range direction. It

has also been part of the thrust of the 1980's.

New enthusiasm for art in education is also being perpetrated by arts advocacy groups, who very often represent the wealthy and the elite in American society. Whether or not these groups effect an elitist attitude on the content of teaching art remains to be seen.

We are now in transition from the industrial civilization to the next phase of social-cultural development. It has been called The Third Wave, (Toffler, 1980), Scientific-Planetary Civilization, (Thompson, 1972), The Aquarian Age, (Ferguson, 1980), but most popularly the New Age. Whatever it is, John Naisbett (1982) seems to have described it best as a conflict between high tech and high touch. On one hand, high tech advocates the advancement of a

materialistic, automated society, while high touch advocates a return to the spiritual, mythic and natural world lost with the incursion of the industrial age. We already see movement toward a human services oriented economy, indicating that high touch is the wave of the future.

I think the next movement in art and in art education will reflect the humanistic trend through the therapeutic uses of the arts in society, and in the schools. Historically, there has been promise of a time when the arts would be the center of our culture and a great deal is happening in that direction. Art education, in the future, may balance the high tech aspects of society with the spiritual, mystic, and natural qualities that make society humane. That is the major role of art education in the future.

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