

Art as Experience

by John Dewey

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ART is a quality that permeates an experience; it is not, save by a figure of speech, the experience itself. Esthetic experience is always more than esthetic. In it a body of matters and meanings, not in themselves esthetic, *become* esthetic as they enter into an ordered rhythmic movement toward consummation. The material itself is widely human. So we return to the theme of the first chapter. The material of esthetic experience in being human—human in connection with the nature of which it is a part—is social. Esthetic experience is a manifestation, a record and celebration of the life of a civilization, a means of promoting its development, and is also the ultimate judgment upon the quality of a civilization. For while it is produced and is enjoyed by individuals, those individuals are what they are in the content of their experience because of the cultures in which they participate.

The Magna Carta is held up as the great political stabilizer of

Anglo-Saxon civilization. Even so, it has operated in the meaning given it in imagination rather than by its literal contents. There are transient and there are enduring elements in a civilization. The enduring forces are not separate; they are functions of a multitude of passing incidents as the latter are organized into the meanings that form minds. Art is the great force in effecting this consolidation. The individuals who have minds pass away one by one. The works in which meanings have received objective expression endure. They become part of the environment, and interaction with this phase of the environment is the axis of continuity in the life of civilization. The ordinances of religion and the power of law are efficacious as they are clothed with a pomp, a dignity and majesty that are the work of imagination. If social customs are more than uniform external modes of action, it is because they are saturated with story and transmitted meaning. Every art in some manner is a medium of this transmission while its products are no inconsiderable part of the saturating matter

"The glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome" for most of us, probably for all but the historical student, sum up those civilizations; glory and grandeur are esthetic. For all but the antiquarian, ancient Egypt is its monuments, temples and literature. Continuity of culture in passage from one civilization to another as well as within the culture, is conditioned by art more than by any other one thing. Troy lives for us only in poetry and in the objects of art that have been recovered from its ruins. Minoan civilization is today its products of art. Pagan gods and pagan rites are past and gone and yet endure in the incense, lights, robes, and holidays of the present. If letters devised for the purpose, presumably, of facilitating commercial transactions, had not developed into literature, they would still be technical equipments, and we ourselves might live amid hardly a higher culture than that of our savage ancestors. Apart from rite and ceremony, from pantomime and dance and the drama that developed from them, from dance, song and accompanying instrumental music, from the utensils and articles of daily living that were formed on patterns and stamped with insignia of community life that were akin to those manifested

in the other arts, the incidents of the far past would now be sunk in oblivion.

It is out of the question to do more than suggest in bare outline the function of the arts in older civilizations. But the arts by which primitive folk commemorated and transmitted their customs and institutions, arts that were communal, are the sources out of which all fine arts have developed. The patterns that were characteristic of weapons, rugs and blankets, baskets and jars were marks of tribal union. Today the anthropologist relies upon the pattern carved on a club, or painted on a bowl to determine its origin. Rite and ceremony as well as legend bound the living and the dead in a common partnership. They were esthetic but they were more than esthetic. The rites of mourning expressed more than grief; the war and harvest dance were more than a gathering of energy for tasks to be performed; magic was more than a way of commanding forces of nature to do the bidding of man; feasts were more than a satisfaction of hunger. Each of these communal modes of activity united the practical, the social, and the educative in an integrated whole having esthetic form. They introduced social values into experience in the way that was most impressive. They connected things that were overtly important and overtly done with the substantial life of the community. Art was *in* them, for these activities conformed to the needs and conditions of the most intense, most readily grasped and longest remembered experience. But they were more than just art, although the esthetic strand was ubiquitous.

In Athens, which we regard as the home par excellence of epic and lyric poetry, of the arts of drama, architecture and sculpture, the idea of art for art's sake would not, as I have already remarked, have been understood. Plato's harshness toward Homer and Hesiod seems strained. But they were the moral teachers of the people. His attacks upon the poets are like those which some critics of the present day bring against portions of Christian scriptures because of evil moral influence attributed to them. Plato's demand of censorship of poetry and music is a tribute to the social and even political influence exercised by those arts. Drama was en-

acted on holy-days; attendance was of the nature of an act of civic worship. Architecture in all its significant forms was public, not domestic, much less devoted to industry, banking, or commerce.

The decay of art in the Alexandrian period, its degeneracy into poor imitations of archaic models, is a sign of the general loss of civic consciousness that accompanied the eclipse of city-states and the rise of a conglomerate imperialism. Theories about art and the cultivation of grammar and rhetoric took the place of creation. And theories about art gave evidence of the great social change that had taken place. Instead of connecting arts with an expression of the life of the community, the beauty of nature and of art was regarded as an echo and reminder of some supernal reality that had its being outside social life, and indeed outside the cosmos itself—the ultimate source of all subsequent theories that treat art as something imported into experience from without.

As the Church developed, the arts were again brought into connection with human life and became a bond of union among men. Through its services and sacraments, the Church revived and adapted in impressive form what was most moving in all prior rites and ceremonies.

The Church, even more than the Roman Empire, served as the focus of unity amid the disintegration that followed the fall of Rome. The historian of intellectual life will emphasize the dogmas of the Church; the historian of political institutions, the development of law and authority by means of the ecclesiastic institution. But the influence that counted in the daily life of the mass of the people and that gave them a sense of unity was constituted, it is safe to surmise, by sacraments, by song and pictures, by rite and ceremony, all having an esthetic strand, more than by any other one thing. Sculpture, painting, music, letters were found in the place where worship was performed. These objects and acts were much more than works of art to the worshipers who gathered in the temple. They were in all probability much less works of art to them than they are today to believers and unbelievers. But because of the esthetic strand, religious teachings were the more readily conveyed and their effect was the more lasting. By the art in them, they were changed from doctrines into living experiences.

That the Church was fully conscious of this extra-esthetic effect of art is evident in the care it took to regulate the arts. Thus in 787 A.D., the Second Council of Nicea officially ordained the following:

“The substance of religious scenes is not left to the initiative of artists; it derives from the principles laid down by the Catholic Church and religious tradition. . . . The art alone belongs to the painter; its organization and arrangement belongs to the clergy.”* The censorship desired by Plato held full sway.

There is a statement of Machiavelli that has always seemed to me symbolic of the spirit of the Renaissance. He said that when he was through with the business of the day, he retired into his study and lost himself in absorption of the classic literature of antiquity. This statement is doubly symbolic. On the one hand, ancient culture would not be lived. It could only be studied. As Santayana has well said, Greek civilization is now an ideal to be admired, not one to be realized. On the other hand, knowledge of Greek art, especially of architecture and sculpture, revolutionized the practice of the arts, including painting. The sense of naturalistic shapes of objects and of their setting in the natural landscape was recovered; in the Roman school painting was almost an attempt to produce the feelings occasioned by sculpture, while the Florentine school developed the peculiar values inherent in line. The change affected both esthetic form and substance. The lack of perspective, the flat and profile quality of Church art, its use of gold, and a multitude of other traits were not due to mere lack of technical skill. They were organically connected with the particular interactions in human experience that were desired as the consequence of art. The secular experiences that were emerging at the time of the Renais-

*Quoted from Lippmann's *A Preface to Morals*, p. 98. The text of the chapter from which the passage is cited gives examples of the specific rules by which the painter's work was regulated. The distinction between “art” and “substance” is similar to that drawn by some adherents of a proletarian dictatorship of art between technique or craft that belongs to the artist and subject-matter dictated by the needs of the “party line” in furthering the cause. A double standard is set up. There is literature that is good or bad as mere literature, and literature that is good or bad according to its bearing upon economic and political revolution.

sance and that fed upon antique culture involved of necessity the production of effects demanding new form in art. The extension of substance from Biblical subjects and the lives of saints to portrayal of scenes of Greek mythology and then to spectacles of contemporary life that were socially impressive inevitably ensued.*

These remarks are intended merely to be a bare illustration of the fact that every culture has its own collective individuality. Like the individuality of the person from whom a work of art issues, this collective individuality leaves its indelible imprint upon the art that is produced. Such phrases as the art of the South Sea islands, of the North American Indian, of the Negro, Chinese, Cretan, Egyptian, Greek, Hellenistic, Byzantine, Moslem, Gothic, Renaissance, art have a veridical significance. The undeniable fact of the collective cultural origin and import of works illustrates the fact, previously mentioned, that art is a strain in experience rather than an entity in itself. A problem has been made out of the fact, however, by a recent school of thought. It is contended that since we cannot actually reproduce the experience of a people remote in time and foreign in culture, we cannot have a genuine appreciation of the art it produced. Even of Greek art it is asserted that the Hellenic attitude toward life and the world was so different from ours that the artistic product of Greek culture must esthetically be a sealed book to us.

In part an answer to this contention has already been given. It is doubtless true that the total experience of the Greeks in presence of, say, Greek architecture, statuary, and painting is far from being identical with ours. Features of their culture were transient; they do not now exist, and these features were embodied in their experience of their works of art. But experience is a matter of the interaction of the artistic product with the self. It is not therefore twice alike for different persons even today. It changes with the same person at different times as he brings something different to

*See *ante*, p. 141.

a work. But there is no reason why, in order to be esthetic, these experiences should be identical. So far as in each case there is an ordered movement of the matter of the experience to a fulfillment, there is a dominant esthetic quality. *Au fond*, the esthetic quality is the same for Greek, Chinese and American.

This answer does not, however, cover the whole ground. For it does not apply to the total human effect of the art of a culture. The question, while wrongly framed with respect to the distinctively esthetic, suggests the question of what the art of another people may mean for our total experience. The contention of Taine and his school that we must understand art in terms of "race, milieu and time" touches the question, but hardly more than touches it. For such understanding may be purely intellectual, and so on the level of the geographical, anthropological and historical information with which it is accompanied. It leaves open the question of the significance of foreign art for the experience characteristic of present civilization.

The nature of the problem is suggested by Mr. Hulme's theory of the basic difference between Byzantine and Moslem art on one side and Greek and Renaissance art on the other. The latter, he says, is vital and naturalistic. The former is geometric. This difference he goes on to explain is not connected with differences in technical capacity. The gulf is made by a fundamental difference of attitude, of desire and purpose. We are now habituated to one mode of satisfaction and we take our own attitude of desire and purpose to be so inherent in all human nature as to give the measure of all works of art, as constituting the demand which all works of art meet and should satisfy. We have desires that are rooted in longing for an increase of experienced vitality through delightful intercourse with the forms and movements of "nature." Byzantine art, and some other forms of Oriental art, spring from an experience that has no delight in nature and no striving after vitality. They "express a feeling of separation in the face of outside nature." This attitude characterizes objects as unlike as the Egyptian pyramid and the Byzantine mosaic. The difference between such art and that which is characteristic of the Western world is not to be explained by interest in abstrac-

tions. It manifests the idea of separation, of disharmony, of man and nature.*

Mr. Hulme sums up by saying that "art cannot be understood by itself, but must be taken as one element in a general process of adjustment between man and the outside world." Irrespective of the truth of Mr. Hulme's explanation of the characteristic difference between much of Oriental and Occidental art (it hardly applies in any case to Chinese art), his way of stating the matter puts, to my mind, the general problem in its proper context and suggests the solution. Just because art, speaking from the standpoint of the influence of collective culture upon creation and enjoyment of works of art, is expressive of a deep-seated attitude of adjustment, of an underlying idea and ideal of generic human attitude, the art characteristic of a civilization is the means for entering sympathetically into the deepest elements in the experience of remote and foreign civilizations. By this fact is explained also the human import of their arts for ourselves. They effect a broadening and deepening of our own experience, rendering it less local and provincial as far as we grasp, by their means, the attitudes basic in other forms of experience. Unless we arrive at the attitudes expressed in the art of another civilization, its products are either of concern to the "esthete" alone, or else they do not impress us esthetically. Chinese art then seems "queer," because of its unwonted schemes of perspective; Byzantine art, stiff and awkward; Negro art, grotesque.

In the reference to Byzantine art, I put the term nature in quotation marks. I did so because the word "nature" has a special meaning in esthetic literature, indicated especially by the use of the adjective "naturalistic." But "nature" also has a meaning in which it includes the whole scheme of things—in which it has the force of the imaginative and emotional word "universe." In experience, human relations, institutions, and traditions are as much a part of the nature in which and by which we live as is the physical world. Nature in this meaning is not "outside." It is in us and we are in

*T. E. Hulme, *Speculations*, pp. 83-87, *passim*.

and of it. But there are multitudes of ways of participating in it, and these ways are characteristic not only of various experiences of the same individual, but of attitudes of aspiration, need and achievement that belong to civilizations in their collective aspect. Works of art are means by which we enter, through imagination and the emotions they evoke, into other forms of relationship and participation than our own.

The art of the late nineteenth century was characterized by "naturalism" in its restricted sense. The productions most characteristic of the early twentieth century were marked by the influence of Egyptian, Byzantine, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, and Negro art. This influence is marked in painting, sculpture, music, and literature. The effect of "primitive" and early medieval art is a part of the same general movement. The eighteenth century idealized the noble savage and the civilization of remote peoples. But aside from Chinoiserie and some phases of romantic literature, the *sense* of what is back of the arts of foreign people did not affect the actual art produced. Seen in perspective, the so-called pre-Raphaelite art of England is the most typically Victorian of all the painting of the period. But in recent decades, beginning in the nineties, the influence of the arts of distant cultures has entered intrinsically into artistic creation.

For many persons, the effect is doubtless superficial, merely providing a type of objects enjoyable in part because of their individual novelty, and in part because of an added decorative quality. But the idea that would account for the production of contemporary works by mere desire for the unusual, or eccentric or even charm is more superficial than this kind of enjoyment. The moving force is genuine participation, in some degree and phase, in the type of experience of which primitive, Oriental, and early medieval objects of art are the expression. Where the works are merely imitative of foreign works, they are transient and trivial. But at their best they bring about an organic blending of attitudes characteristic of the experience of our own age with that of remote peoples. For the new features are not mere decorative additions but enter into the *structure* of works of art and thus occasion a wider and fuller experience. Their enduring effect upon those

who perceive and enjoy will be an expansion of *their* sympathies, imagination, and sense.

This new movement in art illustrates the effect of all genuine acquaintance with art created by other peoples. We understand it in the degree in which we make it a part of our own attitudes, not just by collective information concerning the conditions under which it was produced. We accomplish this result when, to borrow a term from Bergson, we install ourselves in modes of apprehending nature that at first are strange to us. To some degree we become artists ourselves as we undertake this integration, and, by bringing it to pass, our own experience is reoriented. Barriers are dissolved, limiting prejudices melt away, when we enter into the spirit of Negro or Polynesian art. This insensible melting is far more efficacious than the change effected by reasoning, because it enters directly into attitude.

The possibility of the occurrence of genuine communication is a broad problem of which the one just dealt with is one species. It is a fact that it takes place, but the nature of community of experience is one of the most serious problems of philosophy—so serious that some thinkers deny the fact. The existence of communication is so disparate to our physical separation from one another and to the inner mental lives of individuals that it is not surprising that supernatural force has been ascribed to language and that communion has been given sacramental value.

Moreover, events that are familiar and customary are those we are least likely to reflect upon; we take them for granted. They are also, because of their closeness to us, through gesture and pantomime, the most difficult to observe. Communication through speech, oral and written, is the familiar and constant feature of social life. We tend, accordingly, to regard it as just one phenomenon among others of what we must in any case accept without question. We pass over the fact that it is the foundation and source of all activities and relations that are distinctive of internal union of human beings with one another. A vast number of our contacts with one another are external and mechanical. There is a "field" in which they take place, a field defined and perpetuated by legal and political institutions. But the consciousness of this field does

not enter our conjoint action as its integral and controlling force. Relations of nations to one another, relations of investors and laborers, of producers and consumers, are interactions that are only to a slight degree forms of communicative intercourse. There are interactions between the parties involved, but they are so external and partial that we undergo their consequences without integrating them into an experience.

We hear speech, but it is almost as if we were listening to a babel of tongues. Meaning and value do not come home to us. There is in such cases no communication and none of the result of community of experience that issues only when language in its full import breaks down physical isolation and external contact. Art is a more universal mode of language than is the speech that exists in a multitude of mutually unintelligible forms. The language of art has to be acquired. But the language of art is not affected by the accidents of history that mark off different modes of human speech. The power of music in particular to merge different individualities in a common surrender, loyalty and inspiration, a power utilized in religion and in warfare alike, testifies to the relative universality of the language of art. The differences between English, French and German speech create barriers that are submerged when art speaks.

Philosophically speaking, the problem with which we are confronted is the relation of the discrete and the continuous. Both of them are stubborn facts and yet they have to meet and blend in any human association that rises above the level of brute intercourse. In order to justify continuity, historians have often resorted to a falsely named "genetic" method, wherein there is no genuine genesis, because everything is resolved into what went before. But Egyptian civilization and art were not just a preparation for Greek, nor were Greek thought and art mere reëdited versions of the civilizations from which they so freely borrowed. Each culture has its own individuality and has a pattern that binds its parts together.

Nevertheless, when the art of another culture enters into attitudes that determine our experience genuine continuity is effected. Our own experience does not thereby lose its individuality but it takes unto itself and weds elements that expand its significance. A

community and continuity that do not exist physically are created. The attempt to establish continuity by methods which resolve one set of events and one of institutions into those which preceded it in time is doomed to defeat. Only an expansion of experience that absorbs into itself the values experienced because of life-attitudes, other than those resulting from our own human environment, dissolves the effect of discontinuity.

The problem in question is not unlike that we daily undergo in the effort to understand another person with whom we habitually associate. All friendship is a solution of the problem. Friendship and intimate affection are not the result of information about another person even though knowledge may further their formation. But it does so only as it becomes an integral part of sympathy through the imagination. It is when the desires and aims, the interests and modes of response of another become an expansion of our own being that we understand him. We learn to see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and their results give true instruction, for they are built into our own structure. I find that even the dictionary avoids defining the term "civilization." It defines civilization as the state of being civilized and "civilized" and "being in a state of civilization." However, the verb "to civilize" is defined as "to instruct in the arts of life and thus to raise in the scale of civilization." Instruction in the arts of life is something other than conveying information about them. It is a matter of communication and participation in values of life by means of the imagination, and works of art are the most intimate and energetic means of aiding individuals to share in the arts of living. Civilization is uncivil because human beings are divided into non-communicating sects, races, nations, classes and cliques.

The brief sketch of some historical phases of the connection of art with community life set forth earlier in this chapter suggests contrast with present conditions. It is hardly enough to say that the absence of obvious organic connection of the arts with other forms of culture is explained by the complexity of modern life, by its many specializations, and by the simultaneous existence of

many diverse centers of culture in different nations that exchange their products but that do not form parts of an inclusive social whole. These things are real enough, and their effect upon the status of art in relation to civilization may be readily discovered. But the significant fact is widespread disruption.

We inherit much from the cultures of the past. The influence of Greek science and philosophy, of Roman law, of religion having a Jewish source, upon our present institutions, beliefs and ways of thinking and feeling is too familiar to need more than mention. Into the operation of these factors two forces have been injected that are distinctly late in origin and that constitute the "modern" in the present epoch. These two forces are natural science and its application in industry and commerce through machinery and the use of non-human modes of energy. In consequence, the question of the place and rôle of art in contemporary civilization demands notice of its relations to science and to the social consequences of machine industry. The isolation of art that now exists is not to be viewed as an isolated phenomenon. It is one manifestation of the incoherence of our civilization produced by new forces, so new that the attitudes belonging to them and the consequences issuing from them have not been incorporated and digested into integral elements of experience.

Science has brought with it a radically novel conception of physical nature and of our relation to it. This new conception stands as yet side by side with the conception of the world and man that is a heritage from the past, especially from that Christian tradition through which the typically European social imagination has been formed. The things of the physical world and those of the moral realm have fallen apart, while the Greek tradition and that of the medieval age held them in intimate union—although a union accomplished by different means in the two periods. The opposition that now exists between the spiritual and ideal elements of our historic heritage and the structure of physical nature that is disclosed by science, is the ultimate source of the dualisms formulated by philosophy since Descartes and Locke. These formulations in turn reflect a conflict that is everywhere active in modern civilization. From one point of view the problem of recov-

ering an organic place for art in civilization is like the problem of reorganizing our heritage from the past and the insights of present knowledge into a coherent and integrated imaginative union.

The problem is so acute and so widely influential that any solution that can be proposed is an anticipation that can at best be realized only by the course of events. Scientific method as now practiced is too new to be naturalized in experience. It will be a long time before it so sinks into the subsoil of mind as to become an integral part of corporate belief and attitude. Till that happens, both method and conclusions will remain the possession of specialized experts, and will exercise their general influence only by way of external and more or less disintegrating impact upon beliefs, and by equally external practical application. But even now it is possible to exaggerate the harmful effect exercised by science upon imagination. It is true that physical science strips its objects of the qualities that give the objects and scenes of ordinary experience all their poignancy and preciousness, leaving the world, as far as scientific rendering of it is concerned, without the traits that have always constituted its immediate value. But the world of immediate experience in which art operates, remains just what it was. Nor can the fact that physical science presents us with objects that are wholly indifferent to human desire and aspiration be used to indicate that the death of poetry is imminent. Men have always been aware that there is much in the scene in which their lives are set that is hostile to human purpose. At no time would the masses of the disinherited have been surprised at the declaration that the world about them is indifferent to their hopes.

The fact that science tends to show that man is a part of nature has an effect that is favorable rather than unfavorable to art when its intrinsic significance is realized and when its meaning is no longer interpreted by contrast with beliefs that come to us from the past. For the closer man is brought to the physical world, the clearer it becomes that his impulsions and ideas are enacted by nature within him. Humanity in its vital operations has always acted upon this principle. Science gives this action intellectual support. The sense of relation between nature and man in some form has always been the actuating spirit of art.

Moreover, resistance and conflict have always been factors in generating art; and they are, as we have seen, a necessary part of artistic form. Neither a world wholly obdurate and sullen in the face of man nor one so congenial to his wishes that it gratifies all desires is a world in which art can arise. The fairy tales that relate situations of this sort would cease to please if they ceased to be fairy tales. Friction is as necessary to generate esthetic energy as it is to supply the energy that drives machinery. When older beliefs have lost their grip on imagination—and their hold was always there rather than upon reason—the disclosure by science of the resistance that environment offers to man will furnish new materials for fine art. Even now we owe to science a liberation of the human spirit. It has aroused a more avid curiosity, and has greatly quickened in a few at least alertness of observation with respect to things of whose existence we were not before even aware. Scientific method tends to generate a respect for experience, and even though this new reverence is still confined to the few, it contains the promise of a new kind of experiences that will demand expression.

Who can foresee what will happen when the experimental outlook has once become thoroughly acclimatized in a common culture? The attainment of perspective with reference to the future is a most difficult task. We are given to taking features that are most prominent and most troublesome at a given time as if they were the clues to the future. So we think of the future effect of science in terms derived from the present situation in which it occupies a position of conflict and disruption with reference to great traditions of the western world, as if these terms defined its place necessarily and forever. But to judge justly, we have to see science as things will be when the experimental attitude is thoroughly naturalized. And art in particular will always be distracted or else soft and overrefined when it lacks familiar things for its material.

So far, the effect of science as far as painting, poetry, and the novel are concerned, has been to diversify their materials and forms rather than to create an organic synthesis. I doubt if there were at any time any large number of persons who "saw life steadily and saw it whole." And, at the very worst, it is something to have been freed from syntheses of the imagination that went

contrary to the grain of things. Possession of a quickened sense of the value for esthetic experience of a multitude of things formerly shut out, is some compensation amid the miscellany of present objects of art. The bathing beaches, street corners, flowers and fruits, babies and bankers of contemporary painting are after all something more than mere diffuse and disconnected objects. For they are the fruits of a new vision.*

I suppose that at all times a great deal of the "art" that has been produced has been trivial and anecdotal. The hand of time has winnowed much of this away, while in an exhibition today we are faced with it *en masse*. Nevertheless, the extension of painting and the other arts to include matter that was once regarded as either too common or too out of the way to deserve artistic recognition is a permanent gain. This extension is not directly the effect of the rise of science. But it is a product of the same conditions that led to the revolution in scientific procedure.

Such diffuseness and incoherence as exist in art today are the manifestation of the disruption of consensus of beliefs. Greater integration in the matter and form of the arts depends consequently upon a general change in culture in the direction of attitudes that are taken for granted in the basis of civilization and that form the subsoil of conscious beliefs and efforts. One thing is sure; the unity cannot be attained by preaching the need of returning to the past. Science is here, and a new integration must take account of it and include it.

The most direct and pervasive presence of science in present civilization is found in its applications in industry. Here we find a

*Mr. Lippmann has written as follows: "One goes to a museum and comes out with the feeling that one has beheld an odd assortment of nude bodies, copper kettles, oranges, tomatoes, and zinnias, babies, street corners and bathing beaches, bankers and fashionable ladies. I do not say that this person or that may not find a picture immensely significant to him. But the general impression for any one, I think, is of a chaos of anecdotes, perceptions, fantasies and little commentaries which may be all well enough in their way, but are not sustaining and could readily be dispensed with."—*A Preface to Morals*, pp. 103–104.

more serious problem regarding the relation of art to present civilization and its outlook than in the case of science itself. The divorce of useful and fine art signifies even more than does the departure of science from the traditions of the past. The difference between them was not instituted in modern times. It goes as far back as the Greeks when the useful arts were carried on by slaves and "base mechanics" and shared in the low esteem in which the latter were held. Architects, builders, sculptors, painters, musical performers were artisans. Only those who worked in the medium of words were esteemed artists, since their activities did not involve the use of hands, tools and physical materials. But mass production by mechanical means has given the old separation between the useful and fine a decidedly new turn. The split is reënforced by the greater importance that now attaches to industry and trade in the whole organization of society.

The mechanical stands at the pole opposite to that of the esthetic, and production of goods is now mechanical. The liberty of choice allowed to the craftsman who worked by hand has almost vanished with the general use of the machine. Production of objects enjoyed in direct experience by those who possess, to some extent, the capacity to produce useful commodities expressing individual values, has become a specialized matter apart from the general run of production. This fact is probably the most important factor in the status of art in present civilization.

There are, however, certain considerations that should deter one from concluding that industrial conditions render impossible an integration of art in civilization. I am not able to agree with those who think that effective and economical adaptation of the parts of an object to one another with respect to use automatically results in "beauty" or esthetic effect. Every well-constructed object and machine has form, but there is esthetic form only when the object having this external form fits into a larger experience. Interaction of the material of this experience with the utensil or machine cannot be left out of account. But adequate objective relationship of parts with respect to most efficient use at least brings about a condition that is *favorable* to esthetic enjoyment. It strips

away the adventitious and superfluous. There is something clean in the esthetic sense about a piece of machinery that has a logical structure that fits it for its work, and the polish of steel and copper that is essential to good performance is intrinsically pleasing in perception. If one compares the commercial products of the present with those of even twenty years ago, one is struck by the great gain in form and color. The change from the old wooden Pullman cars with their silly encumbering ornamentations to the steel cars of the present is typical of what I mean. The external architecture of city apartments remains box-like but internally there is hardly less than an esthetic revolution brought about by better adaptation to need.

A more important consideration is that industrial surroundings work to create that larger experience into which particular products fit in such a way that they get esthetic quality. Naturally, this remark does not refer to the destruction of the natural beauties of the landscape by ugly factories and their begrimed surroundings, nor to the city slums that have followed in the wake of machine production. I mean that the habits of the eye as a medium of perception are being slowly altered in being accustomed to the shapes that are typical of industrial products and to the objects that belong to urban as distinct from rural life. The colors and planes to which the organism habitually responds develop new material for interest. The running brook, the greensward, the forms associated with a rural environment, are losing their place as the primary material of experience. Part at least of the change of attitude of the last score of years to "modernistic" figures in painting is the result of this change. Even the objects of the natural landscape come to be "apperceived" in terms of the spatial relations characteristic of objects the design of which is due to mechanical modes of production; buildings, furnishings, wares. Into an experience saturated with these values, objects having their own internal functional adaptations will fit in a way that yields esthetic results.

But since the organism hungers naturally for satisfaction in the material of experience, and since the surroundings which man has made, under the influence of modern industry, afford less fulfill-

ment and more repulsion than at any previous time, there is only too evidently a problem that is still unsolved. The hunger of the organism for satisfaction through the eye is hardly less than its urgent impulsion for food. Indeed many a peasant has given more care to the cultivation of a flower plot than to producing vegetables for food. There must be forces at work that affect the mechanical means of production that are extraneous to the operation of machinery itself. These forces are found, of course, in the economic system of production for private gain.

The labor and employment problem of which we are so acutely aware cannot be solved by mere changes in wage, hours of work and sanitary conditions. No permanent solution is possible save in a radical social alteration, which effects the degree and kind of participation the worker has in the production and social disposition of the wares he produces. Only such a change will seriously modify the content of experience into which creation of objects made for use enters. And this modification of the nature of experience is the finally determining element in the esthetic quality of the experience of things produced. The idea that the basic problem can be solved merely by increase of hours of leisure is absurd. Such an idea merely retains the old dualistic division between labor and leisure.

The important matter is a change that will reduce the force of external pressure and will increase that of a sense of freedom and personal interest in the operations of production. Oligarchical control from the outside of the processes and the products of work is the chief force in preventing the worker from having that intimate interest in what he does and makes that is an essential prerequisite of esthetic satisfaction. There is nothing in the nature of machine production *per se* that is an insuperable obstacle in the way of workers' consciousness of the meaning of what they do and enjoyment of the satisfactions of companionship and of useful work well done. The psychological conditions resulting from private control of the labor of other men for the sake of private gain, rather than any fixed psychological or economic law, are the forces that suppress and limit esthetic quality in the experience that accompanies processes of production.

As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art

nor civilization is secure. Why is the architecture of our large cities so unworthy of a fine civilization? It is not from lack of materials nor from lack of technical capacity. And yet it is not merely slums but the apartments of the well-to-do that are esthetically repellent, because they are so destitute of imagination. Their character is determined by an economic system in which land is used—and kept out of use—for the sake of gain, because of profit derived from rental and sale. Until land is freed from this economic burden, beautiful buildings may occasionally be erected, but there is little hope for the rise of general architectural construction worthy of a noble civilization. The restriction placed on building affects indirectly a large number of allied arts, while the social forces that affect the buildings in which we subsist and wherein we do our work operate upon all the arts.

Auguste Comte said that the great problem of our time is the organization of the proletariat into the social system. The remark is even truer now than when it was made. The task is impossible of achievement by any revolution that stops short of affecting the imagination and emotions of man. The values that lead to production and intelligent enjoyment of art have to be incorporated into the system of social relationships. It seems to me that much of the discussion of proletarian art is aside from the point because it confuses the personal and deliberate intent of an artist with the place and operation of art in society. What is true is that art itself is not secure under modern conditions until the mass of men and women who do the useful work of the world have the opportunity to be free in conducting the processes of production and are richly endowed in capacity for enjoying the fruits of collective work. That the material for art should be drawn from all sources whatever and that the products of art should be accessible to all is a demand by the side of which the personal political intent of the artist is insignificant.

The moral office and human function of art can be intelligently discussed only in the context of culture. A particular work of art may have a definite effect upon a particular person or upon a

number of persons. The social effect of the novels of Dickens or of Sinclair Lewis is far from negligible. But a less conscious and more massed constant adjustment of experience proceeds from the total environment that is created by the collective art of a time. Just as physical life cannot exist without the support of a physical environment, so moral life cannot go on without the support of a moral environment. Even technological arts, in their sum total, do something more than provide a number of separate conveniences and facilities. They shape collective occupations and thus determine direction of interest and attention, and hence affect desire and purpose.

The noblest man living in a desert absorbs something of its harshness and sterility, while the nostalgia of the mountain-bred man when cut off from his surroundings is proof how deeply environment has become part of his being. Neither the savage nor the civilized man is what he is by native constitution but by the culture in which he participates. The final measure of the quality of that culture is the arts which flourish. Compared with their influence things directly taught by word and precept are pale and ineffectual. Shelley did not exaggerate when he said that moral science only “arranges the elements that poetry has created,” if we extend “poetry” to include all products of imaginative experience. The sum total of the effect of all reflective treatises on morals is insignificant in comparison with the influence of architecture, novel, drama, on life, becoming important when “intellectual” products formulate the tendencies of these arts and provide them with an intellectual base. An “inner” rational check is a sign of withdrawal from reality unless it is a reflection of substantial environing forces. The political and economic arts that may furnish security and competency are no warrants of a rich and abundant human life save as they are attended by the flourishing of the arts that determine culture.

Words furnish a record of what has happened and give direction by request and command to particular future actions. Literature conveys the meaning of the past that is significant in present experience and is prophetic of the larger movement of the future. Only imaginative vision elicits the possibilities that are interwoven

within the texture of the actual. The first stirrings of dissatisfaction and the first intimations of a better future are always found in works of art. The impregnation of the characteristically new art of a period with a sense of different values than those that prevail is the reason why the conservative finds such art to be immoral and sordid, and is the reason why he resorts to the products of the past for esthetic satisfaction. Factual science may collect statistics and make charts. But its predictions are, as has been well said, but past history reversed. Change in the climate of the imagination is the precursor of the changes that affect more than the details of life.

The theories that attribute direct moral effect and intent to art fail because they do not take account of the collective civilization that is the context in which works of art are produced and enjoyed. I would not say that they tend to treat works of art as a kind of sublimated Æsop's fables. But they all tend to extract particular works, regarded as especially edifying, from their milieu and to think of the moral function of art in terms of a strictly personal relation between the selected works and a particular individual. Their whole conception of morals is so individualistic that they miss a sense of the *way* in which art exercises its humane function.

Matthew Arnold's dictum that "poetry is criticism of life" is a case in point. It suggests to the reader a moral intent on the part of the poet and a moral judgment on the part of the reader. It fails to see or at all events to state *how* poetry is a criticism of life; namely, not directly, but by disclosure, through imaginative vision addressed to imaginative experience (not to set judgment) of possibilities that contrast with actual conditions. A sense of possibilities that are unrealized and that might be realized are when they are put in contrast with actual conditions, the most penetrating "criticism" of the latter that can be made. It is by a sense of possibilities opening before us that we become aware of constrictions that hem us in and of burdens that oppress.

Mr. Garrod, a follower of Matthew Arnold in more senses than one, has wittily said that what we resent in didactic poetry is not that it teaches, but that it does not teach, its incompetency. He

added words to the effect that poetry teaches as friends and life teach, by being, and not by express intent. He says in another place, "Poetical values are, after all, values in a human life. You cannot mark them off from other values, as though the nature of man were built in bulkheads." I do not think that what Keats has said in one of his letters can be surpassed as to the way in which poetry acts. He asks what would be the result if every man spun from his imaginative experience "an airy citadel" like the web the spider spins, "filling the air with a beautiful circuiting." For, he says, "man should not dispute or assert, but whisper results to his neighbor, and thus, by every germ of spirit sucking the sap from mold etherial, every human being might become great, and Humanity instead of being a wide heath of Furze and briars with here and there a remote Pine or Oak, would become a grand democracy of Forest Trees!"

It is by way of communication that art becomes the incomparable organ of instruction, but the way is so remote from that usually associated with the idea of education, it is a way that lifts art so far above what we are accustomed to think of as instruction, that we are repelled by any suggestion of teaching and learning in connection with art. But our revolt is in fact a reflection upon education that proceeds by methods so literal as to exclude the imagination and one not touching the desires and emotions of men. Shelley said, "The imagination is the great instrument of moral good, and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the causes." Hence it is, he goes on to say, "a poet would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his own time and place, in his poetical creations. . . . By the assumption of this inferior office . . . he would resign participation in the cause"—the imagination. It is the lesser poets who "have frequently affected a moral aim, and the effect of their poetry is diminished in exact proportion as they compel us to advert to this purpose." But the power of imaginative projection is so great that he calls poets "the founders of civil society."

The problem of the relation of art and morals is too often treated as if the problem existed only on the side of art. It is virtually assumed that morals are satisfactory in idea if not in fact, and

that the only question is whether and in what ways art should conform to a moral system already developed. But Shelley's statement goes to the heart of the matter. Imagination is the chief instrument of the good. It is more or less a commonplace to say that a person's ideas and treatment of his fellows are dependent upon his power to put himself imaginatively in their place. But the primacy of the imagination extends far beyond the scope of direct personal relationships. Except where "ideal" is used in conventional deference or as a name for a sentimental reverie, the ideal factors in every moral outlook and human loyalty are imaginative. The historic alliance of religion and art has its roots in this common quality. Hence it is that art is more moral than moralities. For the latter either are, or tend to become, consecrations of the *status quo*, reflections of custom, reënforcements of the established order. The moral prophets of humanity have always been poets even though they spoke in free verse or by parable. Uniformly, however, their vision of possibilities has soon been converted into a proclamation of facts that already exist and hardened into semi-political institutions. Their imaginative presentation of ideals that should command thought and desire have been treated as rules of policy. Art has been the means of keeping alive the sense of purposes that outrun evidence and of meanings that transcend indurated habit.

Morals are assigned a special compartment in theory and practice because they reflect the divisions embodied in economic and political institutions. Wherever social divisions and barriers exist, practices and ideas that correspond to them fix metes and bounds, so that liberal action is placed under restraint. Creative intelligence is looked upon with distrust; the innovations that are the essence of individuality are feared, and generous impulse is put under bonds not to disturb the peace. Were art an acknowledged power in human association and not treated as the pleasuring of an idle moment or as a means of ostentatious display, and were morals understood to be identical with every aspect of value that is shared in experience, the "problem" of the relation of art and morals would not exist.

The idea and the practice of morality are saturated with con-

ceptions that stem from praise and blame, reward and punishment. Mankind is divided into sheep and goats, the vicious and virtuous, the law-abiding and criminal, the good and bad. To be beyond good and evil is an impossibility for man, and yet as long as the good signifies only that which is lauded and rewarded, and the evil that which is currently condemned or outlawed, the ideal factors of morality are always and everywhere beyond good and evil. Because art is wholly innocent of ideas derived from praise and blame, it is looked upon with the eye of suspicion by the guardians of custom, or only the art that is itself so old and "classic" as to receive conventional praise is grudgingly admitted, provided, as with, say, the case of Shakespeare, signs of regard for conventional morality can be ingeniously extracted from his work. Yet this indifference to praise and blame because of preoccupation with imaginative experience constitutes the heart of the moral potency of art. From it proceeds the liberating and uniting power of art.

Shelley said, "The great secret of morals is love, or *a going out of our nature* and the identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own. A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively." What is true of the individual is true of the whole system of morals in thought and action. While perception of the union of the possible with the actual in a work of art is itself a great good, the good does not terminate with the immediate and particular occasion in which it is had. The union that is presented in perception persists in the remaking of impulsion and thought. The first intimations of wide and large redirections of desire and purpose are of necessity imaginative. Art is a mode of prediction not found in charts and statistics, and it insinuates possibilities of human relations not to be found in rule and precept, admonition and administration.

*"But art, wherein man speaks in no wise to man,
Only to mankind—art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the deed shall breed the thought."*