

Art Mind Construction

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ABSTRACT

Learning about human psychology has been ignored and this ignorance has been institutionalized. As a result, the study of art did not concentrate on the actual experience of human expression in this planetary environment and the innate human ability to perceive as a whole; an ability that underlies the primary human impulse toward expression. The creation of art as a distinct category of human behavior had the effect of downgrading the universal urge to expression. Art is degraded in the educative process and looked upon as non-contributive social nicety.

KEYWORDS: *polytechnic aesthetic, mechanization, psychophysical science, sentimental reality*

THE 'LEFT HEMISPHERE SYNDROME'

Not only is the human species divided into masculine and feminine, techne and psyche, but the human brain itself is divided into two distinct spheres, each with its separate functions and attributes; each cerebral hemisphere controls the opposite side of the body. Robert Ornstein summed up the cerebral functions as follows:

“Both the structure and the function of these two half-brains underlie the two modes of consciousness which simultaneously co-exist within each one of us. Although each hemisphere shares the potential for many functions, and both sides participate in most activities, in the normal person the two hemispheres tend to specialize. The left hemisphere (connected to the right side of the body) is predominantly involved with analytic logical thinking, especially in verbal and mathematical functions. Its mode of operation is primarily linear. This hemisphere seems to process information sequentially. This mode of operation of necessity must underlie logical thought; since logic depends on sequence and order.”

Left-hemisphere activities such as language and mathematics depend predominantly on linear time. The left hemisphere is specialized for analysis, the right hemisphere (again remember connected to the left side of the body) seems specialized for holistic mentation. Its language ability is quite limited. This hemisphere is primarily responsible for our orientation in space, artistic endeavor, crafts, body image, and recognition of faces. It processes information more diffusely than does the left hemisphere, and its responsibilities demand a ready integration of inputs at once. If the left hemisphere can

be termed predominantly analytic and sequential in its operation, then the right hemisphere is more holistic and relational and more simultaneous in its mode of operation.

The events of what we call history reflects the continual fluctuations of our own psychophysiological make up. The pathology of our modern world has its roots in the present technical left-hemisphere tyranny, which is European in origin. The fact is that the Europeans were most ripe to be active carriers of the left hemisphere disease that developed and spread with startling swiftness an acuity toward the beginning of the 16th. Century. This time is known as the Renaissance. The pre-Renaissance development of human cultures generally represents a dynamic balance of the two sides of the brain: language, astronomy, mathematics, commerce, and agriculture balanced by the tributaries of some profoundly religious intuition. Thus, among the most notable monuments expressing the unitive, interdependent functioning of both sides of the human brain are the great cathedrals of Europe, dedicated to the Madonna feminine archetype, constructed scarcely a few centuries before the climactic cerebral split began to manifest itself externally.

Wisdom is the union of knowledge and the way of doing things. The artist other than the scientist is emotional inarticulate, intuitive, irrational, passionately involved in life, often political in an overt way; whereas the scientist tends to remain silent, because he is cold, logical, objective and highly literate. In so far as each is rooted in only one side of the human brain the artist in the right, and the scientist in the left – each is in complete being. These stereotypes reflect very real social utilitarian values just as the neurologist tends to describe the right hemisphere as the minor and the left hemisphere as the major. In our technological survival value system, the artist is by far a more dispensable creature than the scientist. In political and financial terms this means that the scientist is assured of success; the artist, at best, is assured of hard struggle. The artist who learns how to survive in contemporary left-hemisphere culture is often the one who adopts its values.

THE HUMAN EYE AS A MODE OF KNOWING

The artist himself who combines both the artist and the scientist archetypes in one personality is akin to Leonardo da Vinci, referred to as the epitome of the Renaissance Man. Here Leonardo set forth the basic left-hemisphere visual bias of the European world view, giving greater weight to the eye as an instrument of knowledge than to the other organs of sense and the body as a whole. There is a mystical truth to the symbolic function of the eye as the organ of divine light.

However Leonardo confounded this truth with an inherited Platonic – Christian prejudice that denigrates the body and elevates the eye whose medium of information is light, symbolic of the spirit, above all other senses and modes of knowing. It has given birth to architecture and to perspective and the divine art of painting.

The eye is the window of the human body through which it feels its way and enjoys the beauty of the world. Owing to the eye the soul is content to stay in the body because thanks to our eyes all the various things of nature are represented to the soul. Leonardo wrote:

“The eye, which is the window of the soul, is the chief organ whereby the understanding can have the most complete and magnificent view of the infinite works of nature. Now do you not see that the eye embraces the beauty of the whole world? It counsels and corrects all the arts of mankind... It is the prince of mathematics, and the sciences founded on it are absolutely certain. It has measured the distances and sizes of the stars; it has discovered the elements and their location... It has given birth to architecture and to perspective and the divine art of painting.”

Lincoln Barnett points out that the human eye fails to respond to most lights in the world and that what man can perceive of the reality around him is distorted and enfeebled by the limitations of his organ vision. The world would appear far different if his eye were sensitive, for example, to x-rays. Besides relegating the right-hemisphere knowledge of psyche to the realm of irrational mystery, the psychological effect of a predominantly visual knowledge system directed by the analytical and technical priorities of the left-hemisphere is to entities of the ego. When the visual process is mechanized into a static check board, the perceiving ego is also mechanized into a series of compartmentalized and rigidly determined I's. Like the external world, the internal world of the self comes to be conceived as a sequentially ordered universe of discrete quantifiable units flowing irreversibly away in one direction; the vanishing point of the past. Space and time are now separate physical categories susceptible of left-hemisphere analysis and measurement. The mystics' world, its fluid correspondences between opposites, between greater and lesser things held together at the center by an ego-transcending mystery, has ceased to exist at the collective level.

In Einstein's world view, in which space and time are viewed as interrelated intuitive functions rather than as the separate quantifiable entities of mechanistic science, the collective mind is still in the grip of what Blake described as “single vision and Newton's Sleep. A correspondingly Einsteinium psychological base for desensitizing the ego has yet to be developed. We do not experience reality but merely our concept of it. The most difficult trials in the development of consciousness are involved in the dissolution of what William Burroughs has described as “the image fix”. The Newtonian idea that the universe is like a perfect machine – a celestial mechanics, is currently a widespread image fix. So pervasive is this idea that all of our attitudes are trained with it. An image of the universe is developed and sunk into consciousness, where it remains a bedrock image-fix; a final resort or proof that the world is really the way we want to be.

THE SCIENCE OF PERSPECTIVE

The one point perspective system – single vision and Newton's sleep – is one of the most powerful means of image-fix yet conceived. Created by the late fifteenth century artistic avant-garde, it gave European man the leverage to fix the world according to his will. When the one-point perspective system was established as an official academic mode in the seventeenth century, it very clearly became the function of the artist to rationalize what originally was a subjective mode of feeling and seeing.

The interplay of art and science in this process is awe – inspiring testimony to the subtle and irrevocable forces of evolving conscious. No one more than Raphael epitomizes the dominant left-hemisphere approach that provided the basis of academic art in the nineteenth century. Even in twentieth century modernism, Raphael's vision proved to be the most powerful molding force of the European consciousness through its dramatic Faustian surge. On the one hand it fixed the world in a particular image, and on the other, it played the vital role of anaesthetizing the right hemisphere; rendering psyche suspect.

In terms of the split-nature of consciousness, the themes reflect left hemisphere philosophy and right hemisphere arts. Left-hemisphere conception of art that began with Leon Battista Alberti's neo-Pythagorean notion that mathematics as the common ground between science and art, emphasizing the functions that occurred in the Renaissance. Architecture echoes with the barrel-vaulted architecture of the Stanza, it also negates that architecture in search of a supreme illusion. And what is illusion? It is that of one moment condensed from eternity, frozen into the spectacle of a stage-set of antiquity, cast in the sixteen century trappings.

The science of perspective became a real mental passion and one not far from removed from intellectual research, but destructive of pictorial symbolism. Through perspective the picture becomes an imaginary world, and at the same time the world becomes a closed system. Perspective is in reality absurd for it not only destroys the architectural unity of the wall, but it obliges the spectator to place himself on the imaginary visual axis, on pain of subjecting all the forms to a false foreshortening. In much the same way architecture is stripped of its most subtle qualities when the purely geometrical proportions of medieval art are replaced by arithmetical, and therefore relatively quantitative, proportions. In this respect the prescription of Vitruvius did much harm.

In the mechanical, rigidly perspectival visual system of the post Renaissance West, the center is outside the window frame, and not within the work of art itself. This amounts to saying that there is no longer any sacred center; for visual art itself no longer functions but simply as the picture of an imaginary world while the viewer is left to fill in the profound solitude with his own imagination. A rigorous perspective in architecture involves a loss of chromatic symbolism since color is called upon to represent

illumination indispensable to the production of an illusion of space, and so loses its direct nature.

In Europe the world is built from what the eyes report to the body. Art is a critical term developed in Renaissance Europe to denote activity that is primarily right hemisphere in origin. In practice, art came to mean fine art because the practice of fine art became involved with the printed word. Applied arts had no voice because they have suffered from the impact of mechanization in the early sixteenth century. This allowed the left hemisphere functions to develop freely. The artist thus became secondary for survival characteristics. Thus the creation of art as a distinct category of human behavior had the effect of downgrading the universal urge to expression. Art is degraded in the educative process and looked upon as non-contributive social nicety; imagination, the intuitive function of the right hemisphere, is denied and condemned as being irrational, as a consequence, humanity lacks positive expressive means. Right hemisphere energy denied its natural outlet. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) who is referred to, as the epitome of the Renaissance, the universal genius who combined the ideal of the artist and the scientist in one personality. Here Leonardo set forth the basic left hemisphere visual bias of the European world view, giving greater weight to the eye as an instrument of knowledge than to the other organs of sense and the body as a whole.

PHOTOGRAPHY

The eye and mind began to undergo a major transformation. This transformation appeared in the visual arts after the middle of the nineteenth century. The appearance of new forms preceded by the disintegration of the old, and if anything had given impetus to the destruction of the old sensibility in the visual arts, it was the advent of photography. History painting lost its significance, with the displacement of history painting, the entire edifice of academic culture came crashing down. The photograph implied that the determination of physical reality was solely dependent upon the moment to moment perception of the individual eye. This implication was the notion that perception itself was the reality of a slice of life.

The tradition of Western painting after the Renaissance is the prehistory of photography. Just as mechanization, so a naturalistic mode of visual perception had to precede the invention of photography. The Renaissance system of perspective was itself preceded by the invention of the camera obscura. Both the camera obscura and the Renaissance system of perspective have the effect of focusing vision, of creating a visual field in which single vision becomes fixed in space distinct from the flow of time, so that one visual event follows another in linear sequence. It is this sequential-*ity* that is the basis of mechanization. From a photographic point of view the method for viewing the obscuration of solar light should be so important in the development of the modern European mind.

When the perfection of photography was officially proclaimed on January 7, 1839, the academic painter Paul De-La Roche declared, "From today, painting is dead". In fact vision had been mechanized long before the advent of photography, which had been anticipated by the European masses. The standard of reality was firmly fixed by the photograph, and the visual artist's insecurity was raised to a fever pitch. Thus the serious visual artist was forced to see things a new and consider other models of visual perception. On the positive side, this forced the artist to consider no materialistic points of view, thus promoting the larger transformative process. On the negative side, it furthered the alienation of the serious artist who had already been shunted aside by the prevailing fine arts aesthetic and by a society that continued to adhere to the sentimental realistic aesthetic that photography had finally standardized.

Hence fine art in the twentieth century is the marriage of anarchic avant-garde subjectivism and the academic pretense at being aesthetically significant. This accounts for the predominance of abstract art as the major fine-arts expressive mode in the twentieth century. Artists at the same time felt ill-prepared to deal with the psychic splendors of the imagination. Thus abstract art unfortunately tended, more and more, to pure aesthetics, pertaining to no reality at all, except that of pure sensation.

SENTIMENTAL REALITY

There was the experience of the profoundly subjective nature of vision and of sensation in general, and the slowly growing feeling that there was a directedness and purpose to be perceived through consciousness itself with emphasis on the diffused subjective nature of sensation and hence our experience of reality of a very sentimental kind.

The significance of the development of a psychophysical science in the mid-nineteenth century cannot be overestimated. The original intention of this new science was to investigate the relation of body and mind and the rapprochement between them to consider reality as a representation of the sensation and perception of the perceiver.

It was the artistic right-hemisphere of consciousness that first tuned into the new science and translates it into a cultural vision what came to be called Impressionism. This suggested that reality was indeed a series of discrete psychophysiological impressions, and that it is only by mental conceptualization that the idea of a concrete object comes into existence. The mental concept itself is subject to social or cultural distortion, thus throwing the meaning of objective reality entirely open to question. For if the optical impression is all that really matters, then a linear, perspectival mode becomes an artificial encumbrance on the visual process. Thus with the abandonment of perspective the social consequences of this perceptual alteration were of the greatest magnitude, since society as a whole continued unconsciously to adhere to the Renaissance model. Thus, with Impressionism, what began as a revolution of the eye was in the end a revolution of the mind.

THE RISE AND FALL OF IMPRESSIONISM

The Impressionist art lied in its fidelity to sense impressions¹. The visual experience was plunged into a world of spectrally pure colors that could take form only in the mind of the beholder. If photography had captured light, then the impressionists released it with colors that have all the deceptive freshness of a bright summer day. The genius of Impressionism, corroborated by the new science of psychophysics, lay in the realization that it is not form but light and color that have a primary effect upon the retina contingent upon cultural conditioning. Impressionism followed no aesthetic precept but pure vision.

Impressionism was a social force transient in nature in cultural influence without parallel. In the mid nineteenth the Impressionism had fallen into place, the Renaissance system of academic art was exhausted; the mechanized vision of photography was with its alienating social consequences, was continuing its irreversible thrust.

The year 1886 was the final absorption of Impressionism into the burgeoning avant-garde which was in its way to replacing official culture. The avant-garde became a social institution popular to the technological society with the notion that reality must be adapted. The avant-garde artist, though his behavior and values were often overtly antisocial, played into the hands of a society that could devour him because it fundamentally had no values at all except the value placed on turning a profit. But because society's acceptance of these artists had to be grudging, there was an underlying bitterness to their lives, they were all engaged in a struggle to survive. The avant-garde artist was but a source of entertainment to a mass of people among whom the wellsprings of creativity had long since dried up.

The rise of Romanticism helped create a more specialized form of criticism and paved the way for the modern professional critic whose task is essentially to explain the artist's work to the interested public. By the mid-nineteenth century literary figures like John Ruskin in England and Baudelaire in France had a strong influence on setting the tone for the visual arts. Ruskin acted as a critical intermediary for Turner and later the Pre-

¹ According to the French psycho-physiologist Charles Henry, visual sensation is broken down into three components, light, color and form. Form is fundamentally a preconceived, mental construction projected outward through the eye; as such, it is intimately related to name or idea. A medieval painting is luminous not because it suggests a source of light situated in the world depicted, but because its colors directly manifest qualities inherent in light, they are touches of the primordial light that is present in the heart. The development of chiaroscuro, on the contrary turns color into nothing more than the play of an imaginary light; the magic of lighting carries painting into a sort of intermediate world analogous to a dream, a dream sometimes grandiose, but one that envelops the spirit instead of liberating it.

Raphaelites in England, and Baudelaire did the same for Delacroix, Romanticism and generally to all of the anti-academic trends in the visual arts. Emile Zola in a similar vein, championed the Impressionist painters in the 1860's and 70's and Felix Feneon, the Neo-Impressionists in the 1880's.

The critical function perpetuates the elitist status that Leonardo and Michelangelo had helped create for European art in the sixteenth century, even in the case of movements like Impressionism, which was essentially no elitist, a judgment borne out by the popularity of Impressionist art. By the mid 1860 s social vision had reached a dead end. Impressionist art is not the novelty of retinal stimulation through a technique of broken brush stroke and prismatic color, or in focusing on the everyday, which is charming enough, but rather in the possibility of seeing and seeking a new what has always been.

The seed of Impressionism's crisis and downfall lay in the inherent contradiction between the ideal of fidelity to the fluid spontaneity of optical impressions and the impossibility of accurately rendering the cumbersome process of painting. The Impressionists in this respect had reached the dead end of materialism.

ABSTRACT ART

The Renaissance could no longer withstand the sensory and psychic impact of industrialization. During the period 1883-1935, a leading group of artists struggled to achieve an authentic expression of the new environment; abstraction, or abstract art. Abstraction means to pull away from or to remove from. The very idea of asserting the superiority of ideas over the particulars of expression.

That modern man has uprooted himself from the direct experience of nature through the process of urbanization constitutes the primary level of his abstraction. As such mechanization is a separative process that in the human organism destroys the unity of the senses and pulls sensory experience away from the body.

The origins of abstract art go back to the 1880's and the various efforts at creating an art that would evoke reality. From this, abstract art flowed into nonrealistic art and nonrepresentational art following the historical belief that each artist must advance beyond the efforts of his predecessors and develop a style he could be identified with. It should be recalled that Degas, Renoir, and Monet all lived well into the twentieth century. Other artists like Bonnard, Vuillard, and Signac followed suite. Paul Cezanne stood out. He was selected as their progenitor and has been canonized as the father of modern art. Cezanne's art is distinctly sensuous, and characterized by a typically modern intellectuality, which emphasized the intellectual perception of material object. Cezanne wrote,

“To achieve progress nature alone counts and eye is trained through contact with her. It becomes concentric by looking and working”.

Cubism had the effect of isolating the material object of art from the psychophysical process that brought it into being, as well as the cultural ambience in which the object existed. As modernism developed from the Cubist premise of the autonomous work of art, the entire artistic endeavor was reduced to a circular process with a gradually shrinking radius. The artist's sole purpose was to make objects or events isolated from all non-aesthetic concerns.

Though the Cubists and Picasso were instrumental in providing the aesthetic base and psychological attitude that were to dominate the later phases of modernism, they were not the actual originators of abstract art. Art Nouveau, was primarily life enhancing, for it sprang from motives other than purely aesthetic or art historical one. Art Nouveau was a direct response to the psychological effects of the industrial environment. Arts and Crafts movement originated by John Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelite painters and the thought of William Morris. The aim of this movement was to sustain the pre-technological craft culture for the survival of the human spirit.

Fine arts painter was accustomed to executing easel paintings independent of any environment. Art Nouveau, lie in the realm of architecture understood as a fully environmental art. What separates the art of most modern Western visionaries from the kind of integral achievement is an intense inner discipline – the development of an internal technology whereas, the knowledge underlying the development of historical culture is intellectual and literate, that of the archaic disciplines derives from a living oral tradition. Tradition is the transmission of an inner quality of being rather than an external expression of it.

Most fundamentally, the history of modern art implied that for the vast majority of human beings, the primary integration of mind and body has become unconscious, and at worst has been destroyed. Prior to the rise of the specialized artist, and mechanization handicraft, artistic activity had been one of mankind's noblest of consciously integrating mind and body. The specialization of art led to the appearance of a few genius selves.

THE EGO AND MATERIALISM

Since the ego perceives the world as a static entity, there naturally developed the powerful philosophy of materialism. Despite the breakthrough of the Einsteinian world view, in which space and time viewed as interrelated intuitive functions rather than as the separate quantifiable entities of mechanistic science the collective mind is still in the grip of what Blake described “single vision and Newton's sleep”. A correspondingly Einsteinian psychological base for desensitizing the ego has yet to be developed. As a

result we do not experience reality but merely our concept of it; and the world is really the way we want it to be.

Addicted to our sensory experiences rather than accepting experience with detachment through the senses, we become artful; that is, we acquire a certain sensory greed springing from a dissatisfaction with the natural mode. But our addiction is hell because it remains purely sensory and can never be satisfied and ultimately serves only to deceive the individual by keeping him enslaved in a particular perceptual gloss. The tragedy of all human collectivities has been the failure to pass beyond their own cultural perceptual glosses.

When architecture, art, or any of the means of knowing and expressing ceases to become evolutionary development and instead becomes an end in itself, the individual becomes blind and dull rather than educated. When the culminated power of culture distorts perception more than it aids it, when knowledge dilutes rather than enlightens, other modes of knowing and artistic practice must be subordinated with the world itself and divided into objective and subjective realms; the function of the fine art became to objectify what is essentially subjective.

The materialism of the early polytechnic aesthetic which is explained in the passage from Lessing's Laocoon as objects which co-exist with bodies; consequently bodies with their visible qualities are the proper objects of painting. Objects which are in succession are called actions. Consequently, actions are the proper objects of poetry ... Painting is able to imitate actions, but only by suggestion conveyed through science and art emphasizing the functions that occurred in the Renaissance. According to the French, Poetry can depict bodies too, but only by suggestion conveyed through action. Painting in its co-existing compositions, can only use a single moment of the action and must therefore choose the most pregnant one from which the preceding and subsequent ones become most intelligent. Hence, flows the rule of the singleness of pictorial epithets, and of reserve in description of bodily objects.

CONCLUSION

The psychophysicist Charles Henry once commented "Sadism will live as long as there is neither aesthetic in our lives nor solidarity in our social situation". Precisely because the visionaries must cross the boundaries of reason.

The realm of creativity became so rationally circumscribed by the mid-eighteenth century that rendered art an imitation of nature and the artifacts of antiquity. Art does imitate nature if the artist can see only with the eye of antiquity. The adoration of the Mediterranean past, made history a supreme ordering value in the reckoning of human affairs. It was the duty of the artist to imitate the works of the past. If the artist was called upon to improve upon nature, the engineer was responsible for reshaping the environment

to accord with the higher ordering principle of the human intellect. The visual arts responded no longer to the eye but to the printed word, which created the supreme fiction of the science of history. Art became the by-product of criticism. It is not surprising that the artistic style accompanying the first industrial revolution was an exacting archeological historicism. It was in this value that the intrusion of historicism became most insidious as the aesthetic conventions engendered by both the American and the French revolution amply illustrate.

For there was no longer a source in the present to feed the spirit. In this, the past became the Vitruvian façade by which the spiritual barrenness and confusion of industrial civilization was kept a fatal secret. Through this, art history became the illusion of culture. And this is the tragedy of history. The mind, divided, and the senses have ceased to respond to the rhythms of nature, and all human value has been reduced to the temporal economic units. At one extreme is the pretentious irrelevance of a technically polished set of fine arts, and at the other, the flawless precision of machine-tooled artifacts exploited today by mass-produced kitsch and the entertainment industry.

Artists deprived of their own creative initiative, thrived for excitement because the bored artist is creatively impotent. Occasionally an artist may become popular and then he or she may become a commodity in this vicious circle and the masses become unable to comprehend him. As a result, art in the industrial age had little to say that is relevant or comprehensible except to the cultured few.