

## THE SEARCH FOR ROOTS

IT was not so very long ago, in the spaces of historical time, that the moral issues of human life were commonly regarded as clear to all. The duties of individuals were graded by the accident of birth and defined by tradition and religious revelation. The life of man was conceived in the terms of a spiritual pilgrimage. Depending upon the subtlety of the prevailing religion, his moral obligations were either subjective or objective. The subjective faiths—mystical and metaphysical in content—proposed a goal of inward realization which would be balanced by a regenerated environment, an environment harmonious with and representative of the achievement of "salvation" or "liberation." This environment, in the philosophical religions, was always itself subjective—that is, it represented the dissolution of physical confinements and the transcendence of illusions produced by both sensation and intellectual perception. The popular religions, as distinguished from those of primarily psychological content, defined morality in the terms of outward behavior, and their promise of reward was usually filled with sensuous imagery—heaven is a tangible place with suitable fittings and appointments for long-term enjoyment. The pleasures of heavenly existence remained rather vague, lest they seem to contradict the canons of earthly morality, but they were plainly meant to suggest the pleasures of *existence*, in the presence of a tangible "Most High," and if the formulators of these portents of bliss sometimes got carried away, to the point of making religious fulfillment sound like an opium dream, this is to be explained by the fact that some such effect is exactly what they wanted to produce.

The assumption which both sorts of ancient religion—subjective and objective—maintained in common, although for different reasons, was that outward circumstances have practically nothing to do with man's moral life. Man's circumstantial fate is his Karma, or it is the result of the Will of God. In either case, circumstances do not determine morality.

Man's moral decisions, regardless of circumstances, determine his morality.

In the philosophical religions, the circumstances are irrelevant because, at root, they are wholly illusory. They are neither good nor evil in themselves, but only the transitory scenery of the moral life. They represent the endlessly rotating kaleidoscope of the pairs of opposites. Mere offprints of the past, the shadows of old choices and actions, they are important only as previously written pages in the book of life. To fret over circumstances is like weeping over lost yesterdays—a dissipation of one's psychic resources and moral strength.

In the dogmatic, objective religions, the circumstances are the property of the stage-managers of the sacred drama, and to be left severely alone. They are imposed by God in His Wisdom. They are a "test" of our devotion, or an instrument of our discipline. They are outward evidences of divine intentions, and while we may not understand them, what arrogance to *expect* to understand them! Get back to the primary business of being a good and docile man. We know what's good for you!

These were the terms of the old morality.

Today, we look about with disillusioned eyes on the shambles of a new morality which, in the course of the past three hundred years, replaced the old. The new morality located the values of good and evil entirely in external circumstances. Whether you interpret this transition as following the lead of the Protestant Ethic, which, proceeding from the virtues of hard work and thrift, eventually came to identify wealth, the natural fruit of these virtues, as evidence of a sanctified life; or, moving from "scientific" assumptions, you see in the Communist assertion that the Good Society can only arise from the Good Environment the proof that morality has been completely externalized, doesn't matter very much. The one is the Individualist's new morality, the other the Collectivist's version. What is important is that

both views ignore inward conceptions of morality, the one hypocritically, the other brazenly, flaunting its materialism as the gospel of human solidarity.

The story of contemporary man's disillusionment with the various forms and assumptions of the new morality is too long and too complicated to be repeated here. So many well-written chapters have appeared in print during recent years that to put them together would amount to compiling a large encyclopedia. For one thing, we know, now, that the Communists' Utopia is the bed of Procrustes. However much we were tempted in the past, we won't let *them* define our morality for us. The latest chronicle of this reaction, with its morally debilitating results, is C. Wright Mills' article, "The Decline of the Left," quoted at length in last week's MANAS. More intimately explanatory of the change in attitude is an extract from *Time and Place*, the autobiography of a young Englishman, George Scott. We quote from a Dell collection, *The Beat Generation and the Angry Young Men*:

Socialism had fought for some fifty years to achieve a redistribution of income, a fairer share-out of the good things in life, in brief, to see that the sons had a better time of it than the fathers. This was the motive-power behind the working-class revolutionaries and the same ends were desired by the more well-to-do revolutionaries as a means of expiating their sense of guilt. Greater opportunities were demanded for the sons of poor men to enjoy a rich man's education; security from financial anxiety as well as assurance of the best possible treatment were demanded for the sick; an equal chance for the lad from the back streets to compete for success in the professions and for public office; guarantees that the weak should not be driven to the wall, but protected and cosseted by society in the hour of misfortune. These and numerous other aims impelled the revolutionaries of old. They were rebelling against ancient acceptance of the idea that the few should enjoy luxury while the many knew only squalor and misery.

Inevitably the achievement of these aims meant changing the structure of society and meant also, although it was not realized in the heat of battle, destroying much that was good and valuable. But the revolt grew in strength until it commanded the support of the majority in Britain. This was the triumph of Laski, the Left Book Club, the *New*

*Statesman*, of unemployment and of war. The Socialist state was peacefully evolved. But when victory came, to the jubilation of the majority, including the young Servicemen like myself whether we had a vote or not, it was impossible to see what success would really mean. It was not until we had been living in the Socialist state for some three or four years—an imperfect realization of the ideal, but nevertheless fulfilling many of the most desirable conditions—that we began to appreciate what had already happened. Even now, after the Tories have been in power for more than four years, the situation is still fundamentally the same, a situation which grieves great numbers of us.

The terrible truth seems to be that the revolutionaries, in their noble zeal to make the world a better place for their sons, in seeking to maintain the Socialist state and even, as some would still wish, to press it further towards the climax of the collectivist state, are in fact penalizing and trampling on the very people they set out to help. Those "sons of the revolution," those of us who may be considered to have derived most benefit from it, are subjected to constant repression. It is true enough that by various designs or accidents we have been given our ration of the rich man's education and given a smell of his ancient privileges. It is true that this education combined with the breaking down of old barriers, has enabled us to win our places in the professions, in the civil service, in politics. But now we are there, as someone remarked in other circumstances, where are we? Either we are classless, cut off from our roots, but not yet integrated into new environments, or else we are considered members of the vast and amorphous middle class. . . . The predicament of the uprooted man has been known before now, but known as an isolated peculiarity, and the self-made man had at least the fruits of his success to console him for his removal from old friends. But the most common reward today for success achieved through legitimate, taxable channels is to find a boot crunching firmly on one's presumptuous head; and the boot belongs not to a member of the aristocracy, keeping presumption in its place, but to the Socialist state, the revolutionaries' state, the state of blessed opportunity. . . .

The views of one man may not sum up the reactions of an entire generation, but Mr. Scott's measured expression of his feelings does seem to reflect attitudes common among England's younger writers; further, what he says happened was certainly to be expected from England's moderate social revolution.

In any event, there is no possibility of a revival of the strong moral emotions of the political radicals of a generation ago. Another English writer (represented in the Dell collection), Kingsley Amis, calls the British radical leaders of the thirties "Romantics" who had no sound personal reason for the changes they sought in political arrangements, and who were unsuccessful in their attempt to "identify" with the working classes. His comment is not only fresh and original, but probably contains a basic truth:

I think the best and most trustworthy political motive is self-interest. I share a widespread suspicion of the professional espouser of causes, the do-gooder, the archetypal social worker who knows better than I do what is good for me. (The only edge the Tories have over the socialists from my point of view is that they at least are not out to do anybody any good except themselves.)

The British literature of protest is characterized by Walter Allen in a review of Kingsley Amis's novel, *Lucky Jim*:

A new hero has risen among us. Is he the intellectual tough or the tough intellectual? He is consciously, even conscientiously, graceless. His face, when not dead pan, is set in a snarl of exasperation. He has one skin too few, but his is not the sensitiveness of the young man in earlier twentieth-century fiction: it is the phoney to which his nerve-ends are tremblingly exposed, and at the least suspicion of the phoney he goes tough. He is at odds with his conventional university education, though he comes generally from a famous university: he has seen through the academic racket as he sees through all the others. A racket is phoneyess organized, and in contact with phoneyess he turns just as red as litmus paper does in contact with an acid. In life he has been among us for some little time.

Despite their "snarls of exasperation," the British rebels against today's *status quo* are perfect little gentlemen compared to the American dissenters. In the volume from which we have been quoting, the latter are identified as members of the "beat" generation—a group which has already had so much publicity and "promotion" that it will probably never be possible to separate the true "beats" from their phoney imitations. The difficulty, in America,

with developments of this sort is that if anyone happens to come up with an idea or an expression which meets some deeply felt need on the part of people generally, it is at once seized and exploited by the purveyors of commercial entertainment. (The Coca-Cola Company, for example, is trying to make a new soft drink popular by hinting that the Beats like it.)

First indication on the literary scene of the mood of total alienation was probably the sudden popularity of J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, the story of a juvenile "outsider" who couldn't stand the American brand of "phoneyess," by which he was completely surrounded. Salinger seems to have given form to feelings and attitudes which were in the air, and which now have become almost a "movement." Its representatives attempt to break all connection with slogans, conventions, politics, and every sort of "square" value. Norman Mailer, whose novels amount to case studies of human failure—failure of the age and of the people who belong to it—thinks that in many cases the disgust for conventional standards and attitudes leads radicals to seek for fresh vitality in the *mores* of the American Negro, mainly because the Negro is denied normal participation in the white society, and because of his spontaneous music and uninhibited emotional life. Mailer writes:

No matter what its horrors the Twentieth Century is a vastly exciting century for its tendency is to reduce all of life to its ultimate alternatives. One can well wonder if the last war of them all will be between the blacks and the whites, or between the men and the women, or between the rebels and the regulators. Which of course is carrying speculation beyond the point where speculation is still serious, and yet despair at the monotony and bleakness of the future has become so ingrained in the radical temper that the radical is in danger of abdicating from all imagination. What a man feels is the impulse for his creative effort, and if an alien but nonetheless passionate instinct about the meaning of life has come so unexpectedly from a virtually illiterate people, come out of the most intense conditions of exploitation, cruelty, violence, frustration, and lust, and yet has succeeded as an instinct in keeping this tortured people alive, then it is perhaps possible that the Negro holds more of the tail of the expanding elephant of truth than the radical, and if this is so, the

radical humanist could do worse than to brood upon the phenomenon.

In Mailer, perhaps, is illustrated the lingering postulate of the Marxist that the regeneration of the world will come with the liberation of oppressed peoples, who are to be raised to authority and power. The oppressed do not participate in the lies and hypocrisies of the dominant race and class, so that they alone have the truth. With the dimming of the dream of a political Utopia, the idealization of the underdog remains, whose dispossessed existence is felt to have more integrity than supposedly "civilized" people.

Kenneth Rexroth, San Francisco poet and critic, notes that the vitality of modern writing is found in books concerned with alienated people:

Much of the best popular fiction deals with the world of the utterly disaffiliated. Burlesque and carnival people, hipsters, handicappers and hopheads, wanted men on the lam, an expendable squad of soldiers being expended, anyone who by definition is divorced from society and cannot afford to believe even an iota of the social lie—these are the favorite characters of modern post-war fiction, from Norman Mailer to the latest ephemerid called *Caught* or *Hang Up*, or *The Needle*, its bright cover winking invitingly in the drug store. The first, and still the greatest, novelist of total disengagement is not a young man at all, but an elderly former I.W.W. of German ancestry, B. Traven, the author of *The Death Ship* and *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. It is impossible for an artist to remain true to himself as a man, let alone as an artist, and work within the context of this society. Contemporary mimics of Jane Austin or Anthony Trollope are not only beneath contempt. It is impossible to keep your eyes focussed on the page. Writers as far apart as J. F. Powers and Nelson Algren agree in one thing—their diagnosis of an absolute corruption.

One thing is evident from these various quotations—the firm and irrevocable rejection of both the *objective* moralities of the past: the old one, concerned with good behavior in order to obtain the promised reward, and the new one, seeking the "ideal" environment, with all measures of right and wrong dependent upon the dominant theory of how to *get* the environment.

If there is still another morality on the way, it is starting out with the principle: Let us be honest about what we can see, touch, and feel—all that other stuff we don't understand and want no part of. To this feeling is added a tentative, experimental mysticism—a kind of empiricism of consciousness. One thing is sure, the coming generations will accept no heavy-handed religious or political doctrines about either political or metaphysical pie in the sky. Meanwhile, the world is really in some sort of moral limbo. The revolt against phoneyess is a reaction against inherently unbelievable claims, rules, and promises. It represents a new feeling about the self, a slow separation of the idea of identity from subservience to the environment, and a furious questioning of oneself about the self.

At the same time are proceeding more deliberate queries in philosophy and mysticism and in psychological experiment and therapy. There is evidence of a return to ancient systems of subjective morality—a re-examination of their postulates and a reconsideration of their subtle affirmations about the nature of things, of man and his environment. What will happen as a result of all these adventurous tendencies, against the background of the enormous physical plant erected by the scientific and technological champions of the objective morality of the immediate past, no one can say. If somebody had handed Gandhi the keys to General Motors, what would he have done? If somebody like Albert Schweitzer were elected president of the United States, what would his "program" be? Curious dilemmas of this sort may arise, if the world keeps on the way it is going, and if people somehow avoid blowing themselves up.

## *REVIEW*

### NOTES ON ZEN

ZEN as a sophisticated fad or as a prop appropriated by some of the largely unintelligible "beat" writers is one thing. But Zen as a focus for philosophic discussion is quite another.

As with Existentialism, there are many layers of meaning, varying with different schools and interpretations. In the case of Zen, it also becomes apparent that comprehension necessitates a knowledge of the meaning of the life and teachings of Buddha. Though some say that Zen begins with Bodhidharma, there is no doubt that the psychological essentials of Zen are present in Buddha's own instruction. A pamphlet issued in 1958, by Ruth Fuller Sasaki, gives an excellent brief account of the relationship between the Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism as a background for her account of the religious disciplines of Zen. She writes:

For the Hinayana or, more precisely, the Theravada schools, the main aim is the attainment of individual enlightenment. For this reason men and women leave their homes to become monks and nuns, believing that in the monastic life they will find the best opportunity to accomplish this aim. The role of the lay believer in Hinayana Buddhism is largely that of sustaining the clergy who are actively seeking this enlightenment, and by thus doing to lay up for himself merit which, in some future life, will permit him to retire from the world and seek Nirvana for himself.

For the Mahayana schools, one's own enlightenment and the assisting of others to attain their enlightenment are two aspects of the one fundamental principle. Self-awakening must be attained first, but just self-awakening is not sufficient. The luminousness of the experience of awakening must be shed abroad for all men to share in. Awakening itself cannot be given to anyone by another, but the awakened man can and must assist others on their path toward the goal, otherwise he has not understood the full import of his experience. This is the role of the Bodhisattva, stressed in the Mahayana schools. To me, Shakamuni Buddha is the perfect example of the complete Buddhist teaching—the Buddha, the Perfectly Awakened One, whose aim

was not to attain enlightenment for himself, but to solve the problem of human suffering, and whose life after his enlightenment was for forty-nine years devoted to showing others how they might solve this problem for themselves. It is interesting to note that one of the favorite subjects in Zen sumi or black ink paintings is Shakamuni coming down from the mountain, the mountain-top representing his awakening and his coming down from the mountain-top his return to the everyday world.

For most of the Mahayana schools one further characteristic must be mentioned. That is, that any man, whether he become a monk or remain a layman, may attain this awakening. The layman's role is not merely that of sustaining the clergy and laying up merit through good deeds. That he must do, but even in the midst of his everyday life, if he exert himself to that end, he also can attain enlightenment.

The title of the Sasaki pamphlet, *Zen a Religion*, raises issues of philosophic import: It has been customary for Zen disciples to deny that Zen is a religion, and to distinguish between the Zen emphasis and other Buddhist emphases on this ground. (It could be conversely maintained, however, that Zen is a more clearly defined religion than either Mahayana or Theravada Buddhism, by reason of its emphasis on meditative disciplines.) In any case, the synthesis between the various forms of Buddhist thought can be provided only by philosophical resolution. If the Zen disciplines are specific, the Zen student is also tutored in a formulation of "The Absolute" which avoids all forms of anthropomorphism. Zen is, furthermore, a most emphatic denial of religion as an allegedly historical penetration of reality. Or we could say that Zen is "simply" concerned with that aspect of consciousness which is timeless.

A recent (Grove Press) volume, *The Zen Teaching of Huang Po* rendered into English by John Blofeld, is a provocative volume. Mr. Blofeld's introduction, for example, lucidly establishes the connection between Zen and existentialism:

Zen followers (who have much in common with mystics of other faiths) do not use the term "God," being wary of its dualistic and anthropomorphic implications. They prefer to talk of "the Absolute" or

"the One Mind," for which they employ many synonyms according to the aspect to be emphasized in relation to something finite. Thus, the word "Buddha" is used as a synonym for the Absolute, for it is held that the two are identical. A Buddha's Enlightenment denotes an intuitive realization of his unity with the Absolute. . . . Of the Absolute nothing whatever can be postulated; to say that it exists excludes non-existence; to say that it does not exist excludes existence. Furthermore, Zen followers hold that the Absolute, or union with the Absolute, is not something to be attained; one does not ENTER Nirvana, for entrance to a place one has never left is impossible. The experience called "entering Nirvana" is, in fact, an intuitive realization of that Self-nature which is the true Nature of all things. The Absolute or Reality, is regarded as having for sentient beings two aspects. The only aspect perceptible to the unenlightened is the one in which individual phenomena have a separate though purely transitory existence within the limits of space-time. The other aspect is spaceless and timeless; moreover all opposites, all distinctions and "entities" of every kind, are here seen to be One. Yet neither is this second aspect, alone, the highest fruit of Enlightenment, as many contemplatives suppose; it is only when both aspects are perceived and reconciled that the beholder may be regarded as truly Enlightened. Yet, from that moment, he ceases to be the beholder, for he is conscious of no division between beholding and beheld. This leads to further paradoxes, unless the use of words is abandoned altogether. It is incorrect to employ such mystical terminology as "I dwell in the Absolute," "The Absolute dwells in me," or "I am penetrated by the Absolute," etc.; for, when space is transcended, the concepts of whole and part are no longer valid; the part IS the whole—I AM the Absolute, except that I am no longer "I." What I behold then is my real Self, which is the true nature of all things; see-er and seen are one and the same, yet there is no seeing, just as the eye cannot behold itself.

The single aim of the true Zen follower is so to train his mind that all thought-processes based on the dualism inseparable from "ordinary" life are transcended, their place being taken by that Intuitive Knowledge which, for the first time, reveals to a man what he really is.

Serious appreciation of "Zen" psychology is sometimes unwittingly evidenced in the works of thoughtful contemporary writers of fiction as they describe the impact of confusion and suffering

upon their characters. An excellent example is provided in the closing pages of a novel concerning jet airmen, *The Joy Boys*, by Walt Grove. Mr. Grove seems to know a great deal about the frenetic atmosphere in which a pilot may live, in or out of war, and has tried to show the necessity of a "search for self" for men who tend to avoid thoughts of pain and death through sensuous oblivion. In the following passages, Grove's thoughtful protagonist evolves a philosophy that takes him back to the perceptions of ancient Eastern mystics:

I spend many nights alone like this, thinking, sitting alone in a cold room with an unread book lying open on my lap—and what I search for is in no book, I know that, but in spite of myself I can't help reading them and hoping that I will find a valuable thing, something that means something to me, and, of course, trying to understand.

I am convinced that our experiences are valuable. If they are not, then nothing is valuable. And that is a condition I cannot admit. Yet, when I think of what happened, I return again and again to the point where each of us entered a state of pain—the colonel's bewilderment, his feeling he was lost in the world, my own aloneness, which for a time was like an aberration, or was one, and poor Reed with everything he believed in destroyed, although he had destroyed it himself, and at last Willy, sweating and threshing on his hospital bed, his hands shaking in fear, but unable to know what it was he feared, unless it was nothing.

Every time I try to understand our experiences I come to that point—pain. And I know our experiences are valuable, they must be, but then that would make pain valuable, and that simply does not seem right. That a man should ache, lie sleepless in the night, it simply does not seem right. . . .

It would seem that for the truly hopeless there is hope, and that to be full, really, full, you first must be empty. And that sounds too hard to me; I am not certain I am capable of facing it for a very long time—but I cannot help but believe that it must be true.

## COMMENTARY

### FACT AND VALUE IN THE ARTS

THE question of the role of the arts in human life will probably never be answered with finality—no more than any other basic question will be answered with finality—since the making of such answers is the essential process of human growth, which must be completed individually by each one. The trouble with an intellectual approach to these questions is that it implies verbal answers can actually convey the meanings that are sought. This is of course not possible—no more possible than it is for an essay on love to provide the impact of the experience of loving. Yet it is fair to say that an account of the meaning of emotional experience through the medium of one of the arts does supply *something like* the experience itself.

If this be true, then any serious discussion of the arts becomes guilty at the outset of a certain pretentiousness. And, by a parity of reasoning, any serious discussion, not just of the arts, but of any subject of crucial value to human beings, shares in this pretentiousness, unless the limited value of verbal expression is made quite clear.

With this apology, then, we may go on to some suggestions. The most obvious thing that can be said about the arts is that they give order to some aspect of common human experience. Our lives are made up of fragmentary and incomplete perceptions. The daily round of existence is filled with "loose ends" and apparently unrelated elements. The artist "frames" a particular region or level of experience. Sacred art, we might say, makes the frame that "ought" to be considered by men. In this case the artist attempts a frame which relates the elements of experience according to some traditional teaching of meaning. In Oriental representations of the great Wheel of Life, the extremes of pleasure and of pain are shown to be the lot of the soul as it moves through life and death in never-ending cycles. A modern painter, on the other hand, might feel personally preoccupied with what

seems to him the dreadful lack of meaning in experience and put on canvas a report of the inconsistencies and frustrations encountered by human beings. Why, he would ask, should the artist be obliged to make his work represent an order and optimism which neither he nor anyone he knows is able to *feel*? Why not tell the truth—the truth as he sees it—about the meaning, or rather the unmeaning, of experience? If Existentialist despair is the mood of the thoughtful men of the age, it is shallow dishonesty to conceal it.

Or, the artist might say that it is all very well to speak of great meanings, but that he prefers to interest himself in the formal elements of visual experience—the relationships of space, color, mass, and line. He explores the subtle contents of these relationships, as "things in themselves." The techniques of representation, being elements of experience, have their own meanings to examine, just as the movements of a gymnast doing his exercises will on occasion resemble the disciplined configurations of a ballet. A football team running back with the ball after a kick-off may seem to be an accidental masterpiece of choreography. The shadows of naked girders on a mottled brick wall exposed by a construction gang may appear to have the charm of artistic intentions, and the artist may put together an abstract composition based upon these forms, of which only he knows the origin.

In antiquity, little distinction was made between art and work. That is, the daily occupations of the farmer might seem to be conceived by him as symbolic representation of great natural functions. If he sang as he worked, the song was a lyrical link between the work in his life and the cosmic processes of nature. His arts were expressions of his sense of meaning. He was himself a part of nature, his being an instance of the universal being, his work a fulfillment of the intent of universal life. Such a man would not have understood a "museum" at all, although he might have grasped the function of a temple and

the role of the arts in shaping the form of the temple.

The "art" aspect of work, we might argue, was the symbolic illumination of its meaning. It placed the worker in an intuitive rhythmic relationship with nature. It enabled him to obtain a "feeling" reconciliation of the difference between the part and the whole. It helped to close the abyss between the One and the Many by introducing a sense of the harmony uniting the diverse actions of the Many. In "modern" times, this was William Blake's conception of art and the artist; for Blake, every human being is an artist, his life the work of art to be accomplished.

In this perspective, it seems evident that at least some of the obstacles to clarity concerning the role of the arts have resulted from the separation of the artist, or the function of the artist, from the rest of society. The artist is a "specialist" who does something that every man ought to be doing. Judgments about art which neglect this separation are bound to be wide of the mark, since they ignore the root of our confusion. We can never really understand religion, art, politics, or philosophy except as human beings who practice these undertakings for ourselves. Leaving the practice of the arts to others inevitably creates an artificial, cultist atmosphere with a special jargon and a virtual priesthood of the arts—a distortion for which the general public is as responsible as the artists.

Another line of reflection may be helpful. Art, we might say, is concerned with an approach to the Mysteries, in the sense that the element of final meaning in human experience is always involved in Mystery. The world of public truth is not the world in which the artist works. The distinction between art and nature is the distinction between value and fact. While it is something of an art even to draw the line which separates value and fact, this distinction is of ultimate importance in any attempt to formulate a philosophy of life. Further, simply to identify certain elements of experience *as* facts constitutes

a judgment of value. Why *these* facts, and not some others?

The man who supposes that the universe is made up of a collection of "facts," and who thinks knowledge consists in marking these facts for identification, hides his own activity in deciding which facts are important enough to be so classified for study and organization in terms of knowledge. For the scientist as for the artist, the art lies in the intuition of meaning which makes the selective net that gathers the facts and designs the frame within which they are displayed. What the "academic" frame of reference, whether in the sciences or in the arts, does for both the practitioner and the man in the street is to eliminate the agony of decision. Academic art or science assumes certain well-established canons of meaning, and assumes, also, the validity of conventional forms of expression for that meaning. These standard preconceptions enable an artist or any sort of workman to excel in his field without a noticeable use of the imagination. All the major decisions have been made for him and are now a part of acceptable tradition. He has only to work hard and conform in order to win the praise of all those who, like himself, are suspicious of innovation and fearful of the responsibility of unaided choice.

It is inevitable, of course, that human expression should stabilize according to some set of conventions. A common vocabulary is necessary for there to be communication of any sort. It would be wrong, moreover, to fail to supply to the young some solid ground of known attitudes and values, while they are gaining the strength and maturity to support the independence of individuality. So we must admit that canons and conventions are not in themselves sterilizing and stultifying institutions. Or, even if canons and conventions have this tendency, it is impossible to imagine a society without them. It is rather a question of how these "approved" forms of expression should be conceived, and what we should expect of them.



Manifestly, we do not have, have not had, such ideal institutions, since the most frequent criticism of our civilization is that its standards have *broken down*, and that both young and old, artists and others, are without coherent standards of expression. This criticism is verified by the fact that expression, these days, in the arts may be characterized as unruly, anarchic, obscurely individualistic, against a background of repressive conventionality and timid conformism.

Perhaps all we can say, at this point, is that our present need is for a revised view of institutional guides in the arts. Instead of traditional canons of excellence which are embodied in the forms and examples of work done in the past, we need distinctly *conceptual* standards of excellence. This would mean a discipline of *thinking* as the appropriate preparation for artistic expression, as well as in the techniques of whatever craftsmanship is involved. The man who thinks of himself as an artist needs also to think of himself as one who will, in his work, discriminate between fact and value, and know the difference. For one who broods on such matters, a fusion will undoubtedly take place in his work, making the spirit of value pervade his "facts," and the substance of fact inhabit his values. And this fusion, we might urge, is the magic of the true work of art.

## CHILDREN

### . . . and Ourselves

#### SPORTS—THE SUBLIME AND THE RIDICULOUS

THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES, at this time of writing, is gradually pulling itself together after an emotional jag occasioned by the first World Series for Southern California. A few months ago our eleven-year-old girl knew that baseball was in some way different from football, but that's about all. Now, after hours spent before a neighbor's TV screen and other hours with her ears tuned to the radio, she has Entered Into Sports. To test the extent of this "interest," we tried an offhand remark that went something like this: "Well' it looks as if those silly old Dodgers have won another ball-game." Man, the slur brought immediate and drastic response. So we began to wonder, just what does the sudden craze for a particular sport do for or against our children?

We are all for sports—for boys, girls, and adults, too—partly on the ground that ours is a dangerously sedentary population, and also because participation in a vigorous sport affords the unique joy found in supreme effort in familiar circumstances. But there is some doubt about whether this eleven-year-old, or younger or older youngsters, come any closer to sports participation through TV watching of the World Series. They have learned to "participate" all right, but in what? It may not be mass hysteria, but it is certainly a mass phenomenon, requiring only absorbed attention to the question of which group of athletes will triumph. There is no room for individual evaluation of a team's or a player's ability: If you live in Los Angeles, you are not only for the Dodgers—you *are* a Dodger.

A prideful news item in the Los Angeles *Times* for Oct. 8 reports on the newspaper coverage given to the three games in Los Angeles:

For the three days of the World Series in Los Angeles while attendance records were being

shattered, Los Angeles *Times* photographers at the Coliseum hoisted a few statistics of their own.

Seven of them, using 15 cameras, took 4,300 pictures of the crowds, players and action. The operation consumed 60 rolls of 35-mm. black-and-white film and 500 ft. of 70-mm. material, plus 4X5 sheet film and 120-size roll film. The photographers worked 200 man-hours, exclusive of laboratory detail.

Cameras used included a custom-made 35-mm. sequence unit and the special Hulcher high-speed sequence camera, besides 4xs Speed Graphics, Leicas, Nikon, Praktina, Contax, Hasselblad and Rolleiflex cameras.

Sports editor Paul Zimmerman comments:

It's a good thing that Nikita Khrushchev went home. . . . Because he'd be unhappy to know that 260,000 words, twice as much as he commanded when he was here, were transmitted by Western Union on the first World Series baseball game, ever, in Los Angeles.

It would startle the Soviet premier but not Americans, that 60 direct circuits and 20 auxiliary wires sent out the 260,000 words on the Dodger-White Sox game yesterday. . . . J. W. Inwood, district manager of Western Union, says this was the greatest outpouring of news under a Los Angeles dateline, ever.

Zimmerman probably is wide of the mark. The Soviet premier, if considering America a chief threat to Russia, should be overjoyed at these statistics.

Already we are in the Big Days of collegiate football. Happily there are enough teams in competition in this and other areas to make fixation on any particular "eleven" closer to being a matter of choice—at least until Jan. 1 and the Rose Bowl. But we have been saving for some time an article from the April 11 *Nation*, by Wade Thompson, titled "My Crusade Against Football," which is pertinent here. A champion of football had written:

What better preparation for all of life than hard work and success both in the classroom and on the playing field? The scholar-athlete, the college football player, is not a divided, cross-eyed person but a man of twofold ability. . . . There are more things in

heaven and earth, Mr. Thompson, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

Mr. Thompson responds:

I am fully willing to concede the existence of more things than my puny philosophy can dream of, and I suppose that this pronouncement contains the sort of wisdom that makes foolish the wisdom of this world. I am, however, not versed in Football Theology. To my tiny mind it seems that this "scholar-athlete" is too rarefied a bird for colleges to try to produce seriously. Surely no more than .02 per cent of the student body could conceivably achieve this state of scholarly-athletic grace. And we have to deal with the other 99.98 per cent of the student body. It seems to me that we could content ourselves with more modest ambitions; that we could concentrate our energies on developing the things of the mind; that we could provide adequate facilities for physical exercise for all students, and that we could let football fend for itself. At the very least we could discuss football as a sport, a game, a pastime—not as an Eternal Verity.

Some interesting things have been said lately on the philosophy and psychology of sports. *Diogenes*, an international review of philosophy, recently printed some commentary on Roger Caillois' work, *Les Jeux et les Hommes* (translated by E. P. Halperin). Mr. Caillois has attempted to classify games according to their basic character and origin. He then sought correlations between certain sorts of games and certain sorts of societies. A Finnish reviewer, Jaakko Ahokas, summarizes Caillois' criticism of Western sports-addiction, who held that the passion for betting *on* sports (or becoming emotionally committed to them) is not at all the same thing as sports participation. Sports are a vigorous physical and emotional outflow of individual energy, whereas watching or betting may be an entirely passive, psychic involvement. The *Diogenes* discussion speaks of "the extraordinary passion for all forms of *alea* [chance], which we witness today almost everywhere in the Western world." The reviewer said further: "Chance offers compensation for the disappointments inherent in *agon* [regulated competition], for the inevitable inequalities among members of any human group. Caillois provides a

penetrating analysis of all the forms that *alea* assumes in our times (games of "double or quits," betting, lotteries, beauty contests, infatuation with movie stars), and he cites examples to illustrate the passions they arouse."

Well, there is a statement in judgment of Big Time Sports! While waiting for an expression of contrary opinions, we shall continue close observation of the eleven-year-old's responses. There is plenty of time, since we'll probably have to wait until the Dodgers *lose* a series before we can fully check the trauma potential in baseball frenzy.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The Artist's Responsibility

FROM time to time, an attempt is made in these pages to achieve some understanding of what is termed "modern art." Difficulties arise from several sources. First, as a matter of habit, most of us long to see an "object" represented in a picture. We want to look at something we can recognize, comprehend the artist's comment, and in some measure enjoy what he has done. Many modern artists frustrate these inclinations. Their paintings are usually non-representational. What "object" there is often seems to be a travesty of the elements of visual experience, making the ingenuous observer wonder why some paintings are said to be "art" at all.

On the other hand, there is the manifest seriousness of most of the men who do this sort of work. And there is the seriousness of the people who write about the exhibitions to make you say to yourself, "Surely, behind all this, there is something worth while, which I do not understand."

If you read a little on the subject, you may reach some conclusion like the following: After the great surge of artistic energy released by the Renaissance had been spent, artists began to be dissatisfied by the particularism of painting this house, this river, that man. They wanted to make statements with a more universal meaning. But their culture was of very little help to them. No over-arching frame of meaning enclosed the modern world. There were the partial meanings supplied by modern physics, suggestive for the study of space-relationships, of the behavior of light, and of form. There was the violence of the mass wars of the nation-states, the ominous human scrap piles left all about by the moral indifferentism of the age, and the personal privations suffered by the artist. There were all these things, and the artist's own instinct for prophecy and his feeling of alienation from the preoccupations of other men. Added to these

developments as a precipitating influence was the development of modern photography, which in many respects exceeded the painter's capacity for accurate representation, releasing him from any sense of obligation to work in this field.

The moral inspiration of the artist comes from the fact that his work is an end in itself. The painting is the thing, not its selling price. The artist is a cultural workman, like the poet or the novelist. He is presumed to have something of value to say. So the question becomes, What does he say?

An American painter, Cleve Gray, has an article in the *Autumn American Scholar* which speaks directly to this question. His title is "Narcissus in Chaos." His inquiry concerns the responsibility of the artist:

The modern revolt against academicism is more than a century old, yet we are still flailing the horse that has long died. The new and the shocking in all arts are still so eagerly received that they are scarcely questioned so long as they are not academic. Branded as conservative and reactionary are any suggestions that order is intrinsic in art, that an artist has an obligation of aesthetic responsibility, that individuality should be disciplined. But if these standards are no longer reputable, what has replaced them?

Choosing the painters known as "abstract expressionists" and "action painters" to represent modern work, he says:

These painters have declared over and over, both in words and in paint, that they were not painting the visual world but rather their inner resources, that they were dealing with pure forms of vision and re-creating a new world, that they had replaced old types of art with the new art of their own unique symbols.

Mr. Gray takes an unequivocal position. He calls this program "presumptuous." "The artist," he says, "assumes that his own ego and unconscious are worth contemplating, are more worthy of contemplation than the objective world." As background for further judgment, he defines the artist's role:

An artist has two kinds of elements or components to articulate: the explicit parts, which are his lines, brushwork, color, form and the like; and the implicit parts, which are the various connotations and meanings implied and contained in the visual work. A painting or sculpture that consists simply of a vertical line has almost entirely eliminated most of the possibilities of significance inherent in the explicit parts. Actually, no work of art can make exclusive use of either of these two kinds of components without some reference to the other kind; but the character of the references and the degree of penetration into the relations between explicit and implicit expression determine the ultimate value of a work of art.

A sense of responsibility in life denotes respect for the obligation to act according to one's best intentions and powers. The artist's responsibility is no different. His obligation is to use the rich possibilities of his chosen art. We say a man is irresponsible if his actions are unrelated to standards of order. An irresponsible artist likewise holds himself not accountable to standards of visual reference. We judge whether the artist achieves responsible expression when we see how he uses his visual references.

There is little hope of summarizing adequately Mr. Gray's judgments, which are searching and particular. Too often, he says, the content of non-objective art is an accident of the materials used by the painter. The cult of individualism has made unlicensed freedom the rule of the artist, with the result that—

Since the first years of the century, . . . little work of truly unique style has been achieved. There have been simply different exaggerations of different aspects of the already liberated imagination. *Most men who have worked in paint have not used the liberated language of their individuality to make constructive assertions.* They have climbed a familiar peak only to hear their own voices echo back, "I made it!"

The specific judgment offered by Mr. Gray is this:

What I am saying is that although the best work of the contemporary non-objective painters, such as Pollock's, may be agreeably decorative, it is nothing more. Whether one displays oneself in dripped lines, in rectangular voids, in misty circles or in regulated

squares is not important. The artist who is so attracted to himself that he is content with his private shorthand, and the group that enjoys the contemplation of his narcissism will, one hopes, be replaced by artists who have learned the importance of human relations. And at this point I simply recall that Western civilization has developed because of its belief in ordered existence.

In connection with the above; it would probably be a good idea to re-read the defense of the modern artist in Lewis Mumford's *In the Name of Sanity* (reprinted in MANAS for July 4, 1956), and to reflect upon the fact that the failure of communication in much of modern art makes explicit a confusion and lack of orientation which afflicts the entire contemporary scene, and not just the artist. The groping efforts of the painter to discover a vocabulary appropriate to the world of the present may be as ineffectual as the attempts of diplomats to find a formula for world peace, but the artist, being possessed of an essential honesty, avoids the pretenses of a conventional certainty. Perhaps we shall have to *change* the world before we can have either peace or comprehensible expressions of meaning in the arts.