

LECTURE NOTES, CHICAGO MAY 21, 1969

WORKS OF ART*

Our Aim: our generalisation of past results but only to representative arts
 twentieth century visionary arts excluded
 also music, architecture
 main subjects painting, drama, poetry

Sum up: three possible views,

a) deceptive, b) normal, c) analytic

distinction based on integration of subsidiaries to focal

a) paint blots integrated only

b) blots and canvas integrated

c) blots and canvas viewed focally

only a) and b) show paintings

d) deceptive painting: angular distortion

e) normal painting: angularly stable this integrates incompatibles; hence
 flat cum deep; essentially unnatural: trans natural detached

Strange misconception going back to Plato reinforced by Coleridge: “voluntary suspension of disbelief” Gombrich endorses it

so I emphasize: Pirenne’s theorem and trivialisation or lunacy

suspension of disbelief disastrous

modern reduction of simulation merely shift of emphasis

Moreover, while it abandons ancient fallacy it tumbles into: painting = canvas + paint for it lacks distinction of focal & subs.

whether old or new; either way: theory has misrepresented art moreover has obstructed understanding independent status beyond natural experience

The main difficulty: integration of incompatibles

harden this before going further

by example of right seeing with inversion it emphasizes the part of tacit powers

* This text was written as notes to the lecture *Works of Art*. It is the number 5 supplement material of the series of lectures. One handwritten variant of the text is in Box 39, Folder 8, more copies of a corrected and a re-typed variant can be found in Box 39, Folder 9. We chose to publish the text of the re-typed variant, and kept the original structure of it.

this the token of *detachment*

More precisely: integration of incompatibles enables a peculiar detachment essential to representative art;
more of this later

Meanwhile: to the stage

Actor cannot and must not try to produce illusion

e.g. Hamlet killing Polonius or being killed by Laertes

It would produce wild alarm.

We watch a play while conscious of machinery and actors on stage. They form a distinctive component which balances speech and action preventing illusion and thereby integrated to a trans natural reality.

Once more modern movement rejects all artifices, abolishes curtain, etc.

Art shatters all pretences of illusions for pretence of illusion was dishonest.

So reduces stage to rock bottom but actually this but change in emphasis.

Integration of incompatibles remains and also trans natural detachment (its relation to natural experience: later)

Now Poetry

During earlier centuries

poetic form, rhyme and rhythm

was separable from prose content

actually much more inarticulate form

Gray's Elegy:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day

The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea

The analysis of the sound pattern of these two lines by Norman Rudich (of Wesleyan) covers two printed pages.

Disparity of frame and content less marked here

yet fully sustains artificiality: prevents illusion and sustains trans natural quality and produces consequent detachment

Fortunately, I.A. Richards dispels doubts.

I.A. Richards: *Principles of Literary Criticism*

Through its very appearance of artificiality metre produces in the highest degree the 'frame' effect, *isolating the poetic experience from the accidents and irrelevancies of everyday experience.* (Richards 1924, 145)

Rhymes, expressive sounds and peculiar grammatical constructions, strange connotations of words, are other poetic accessories. They all function as subsidiaries which, combined with such content of the poem that can be put into prose, form the meaning of the poem.

Detachment includes the poet himself.

Normally people talk in prose and this is true also for the usual conversation of

poets. Thus the artificial structure of a poem, which has so much of the poem's meaning in it, forms a blockage insulating the poem from the poet as a private person. When, entranced by a poem and we repeat its words through our lifetime, it is the poem that speaks to us, not the poet.

The same holds for other representative arts. Both the stage and poetry are detached from their makers.

The persons of Hamlet, Othello and Shylock are known in themselves and not as part of Shakespeare's person. A painting by Cézanne will be instantly recognised by many people who know next to nothing of the painter. These facts are so obvious that one hesitates to state them in such detail. But their significance is far from being fully recognised.

Let me elaborate on this to illustrate the integration of incompatibles in poetry, where it is not as evident as in plays and painting.

Compare Shakespeare's 18th sonnet, "Shall I compare thee with a summer day?" with its content stated in prose.

He says to his mistress: "You are beautiful, but will fade and die, except that you will be remembered by my immortal verse." We can see now that the difference is twofold: the poem is not the voice of the poet, and its meaning does not convey its content in prose. For its meaning is formed by the integration of its formal pattern combined with any content that can be expressed in prose.

What happens is that the integration of prose content with artificial pattern produces a joint meaning of both which is the meaning of the poem. In this meaning we are subsidiarily aware of its two components which, viewed in themselves, are incompatible, but speak in one voice as the subsidiaries of the poem's meaning. This is how the grotesque content of its prose version is dissolved in the lines of Shakespeare's 18th sonnet. Indeed a radical novelty, a trans natural reality is produced by the poet's imagination and the reader absorbs this novelty in turn by the powers of his own imagination. Thus we come to share in our experience of a poem the detached position the poet has in his own relation to his poem and enjoy the poem *in itself* and not as we enjoy the satisfaction of our personal desires.

This is also how we can watch a murder in a play in integrated conjunction with its theatrical subsidiaries, without either jumping up to rescue the victim of a stage murder or feeling that the pretending of a murder is nonsensical. We accept the clues offered to us for sharing the meaning of the play. This autonomy, this self contained nature of a work of art is what Kant meant by defining the aesthetic appreciation of art as a disinterested pleasure. And it accords with the claim made for painting by Konrad Fiedler that art is "a production of reality."

But these terms are too abstract, and we must sharpen them by carrying further our structural analysis of representative art.

Looking again at poems and also at paintings, sculptures or plays, we can see them now as so many fixed packages of clues, portable and lasting. Their durability is infinitely superior to that of our personal experiences and the linkage of their

parts is very much firmer and far more effectively organised. This formulation marks a turning point in my argument. We see man's humdrum ordinary life on which artists draw in their work. Which is also our lives from which we turn to the arts, to seek fulfilment and guidance in them.

The contrast between the looseness of our lives and the organised 'parcels' of art has been described effectively for the case of poetry. I.A. Richards writes:

In ordinary life a thousand considerations prohibit for most of us any complete working out of our response; the range and complexity of the impulse-systems involved is less; the need for action, the comparative uncertainty and vagueness of the situation, the intrusion of accidental irrelevances, inconvenient temporal spacing -the action being too slow or too fast - all these obscure the issue and prevent the full development of the experience. We have to jump to some rough and ready solution. (Richards 1924, 237)

He contrasts this condition with the severely circumscribed existence of poetry as achieved and as absorbed by its audience.

This transition is stated more definitely by T.S. Eliot; he writes:

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for his work, it is consistently amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are already forming new wholes.

Remember our program: representative arts. We hear mentioned now one phase of such art "diffuse experiences are formed to wholes" but there must also be a public

understanding new wholes

understanding and acclaiming them as expressing their own diffuse life space.

How is it done? I shall describe it.

ii shall mean intrinsic interest

+ii having

intrinsic value

-ii not having

the *word* "table" is a -ii; but it has a meaning

→ -ii →

+ii

"table"

a table

"table" means a table

but suppose we write the reverse

+ii → -ii
 a table “table” this means nothing

but → +ii  -ii⁹
 a table “table” table expressed as the word “table”

take the case of mapping:

country  map → country

country represented by a map map indicating way in the country
 thus a country has been *represented* to people for finding their way in it
 now write again

+ii  -ii

let this mean country represented by a national flag
this is an emotional embodiment

deep diffuse experience is embodied in a canvas this is not a communication;
 if we write:

+ii  -ii → -ii
 country flag it does not work out

it works when we write:

+ii  -ii  +ii
 emotions of country embodied in flag also embodies (evokes) feelings of other
 people

so in representative art

+ii  -ii  +ii
 diffuse life embodied also embodies (evokes) feelings
 of poet in poem from diffuse life readers

This gives at last an inkling

of the function of *Detachment*
 of the trans natural character of art,
 its origin in incompatibles

⁹ The symbol A  B means A is embodied in B

of artefacts and communications
integrated into a wholly novel entity

This makes art the kind of thing like a *national flag*, like a *festive occasion* or a *sacred ritual*.

It is the kind of thing which takes us out of diffuse existence into something beyond us and *draws from the great store of our inchoate emotional experiences* a *circumscribed entity of passionate feelings*.

This diffuse existence gives itself first in the artist to *produce* from it a shape circumscribed in a brief space and a short time and wholly incommensurable with the substance of its origins.

Then the public responds to it by surrendering from its diffuse memories of moving events a gift of purely resonant feelings.

Poetry, painting and the stage, the three arts which speak explicitly, can be understood best I think by their kinship to other transcendent occasions, all of them integrations of explicit statements with artificial forms, I mean festivities and solemnities, rituals and all other kinds of the sacred.

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¹⁰ This is a dubious reference – the year of publication in the manuscript differs from the probable source.

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