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Essential considerations In designing a new system of art education for South African schools and universities

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2015-01-26
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"A composition which lacks artistic rhythm fails to awaken and hold our interest; the more vital it is, the more powerfully are we impelled to explore it; and the more we sense its rhythmical sweep, the more unerringly do we follow the artist's lead until we finally achieve a single embracing intuition of it as a vital artistic whole."[25]

DISCORD. "Want of concord or agreement between persons or things; absence of unity, applied to persons, things, thoughts, feelings, purposes, correspondence; diversity; disagreement; hence, contention; strife; conflict."[26]

BALANCE. "Means an opposition of equal force. Obvious balance means a balance which is clearly evident. Occult balance is that balance the cause of which is not clear, although the sense of repose may be clearly felt. The clearest example of obvious balance is in designs based upon symmetry or the repetition of the same forces on the right and left side of the axis. Occult or obscure balance is seen in those groups of forms of unlike size or shape which by their arrangement do not follow a law of symmetry, yet obey in their related positions a hidden law which gives to the composition a satisfying sense of repose."[27]

25 Theodore Greene: The Arts and the Arts of Criticism (Princeton 1940) pp.219,220,221

26 Webster's International Dictionary

27 H.H.Brown: Applied Drawing (Chicago 1916) p.18

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"Balance in architecture, in sculpture and in painting is attained by the counterbalancing of one mass by another, whether of colour or form; by the opposition of lines; by such disposition of the elements of the pattern as to stabilize them and leave them in a state of apparent rest".[28] The success of such a disposition will depend on the structure of the work of art.

STRUCTURE. Is "figuratively the interrelation of parts as dominated by the general character of the whole; as the structure of society; the structure of a sentence."[29]

It has been seen how "every work of art is a complex organism of artistic parts or units artistically related to one another. These units and relations have a non-aesthetic basis which can be apprehended without aesthetic sensitivity and which can be described in non-aesthetic terms."[30]

"The structure of a work of art is not always obvious; it may be a subtle balance of irregularly disposed units. But generally speaking a painter, for example, with sufficient boldness will seize upon some easily apprehended scheme and dispose his masses accordingly. A pyramidal scheme is the most common in past Renaissance art; it gives a solid weight at the base of the picture and the eye is carried up to a culmination where it most naturally expects to find it. A similar structural scheme is an arrangement or repetition of triangles...

28 H. van Buren Magonigle: The Nature Practice and History of Art (New York 1924) p.23

29 Websters International Dictionary

30 Theodore Greene: The Arts and the Arts of Criticism (Princeton 1940) p.127

"These structural motives are very important in the making of the picture or any other plastic work of art, though they are not necessarily a deliberate choice of the artist."31

"No work of art is merely the sum of these units and relations, and no unit or relation, when isolated, remains what it was in its specific artistic context. The more artistically unified the composition, the more profound the artistic repercussions throughout its entire extent when any of its parts suffers the slightest alteration. In short, a work of art is an organic whole comprising that unity of the ideas and elements and the relationships between them which gives significant meaning to them all."32

The building up of these elements and ideas into an organic whole will take place around the "structure" of the work of art.

SCALE. Figuratively, scale is that which evaluates. The particular definitions of this complex word which are relevant here are:

The "relative size of parts as compared with the whole, or with the human figure"33 and

"A succession of ascending or descending steps and degrees; a progress of graduated series; scheme of comparative rank or order; a graded system from the lowest to the highest"34 (This interpretation will be used when we speak of a 'scale of values' in relation to painting and sculpture and living.)

31 Herbert Read: The Meaning of Art (London 1931) pp. 31,33

32 Theodore Greene: The arts and Arts of Criticism (Princeton 1940) p.142

33 Websters International Dictionary

34 ibid

FORM. "If someone plays well, or runs well, or does anything well, we say that he or she is in good form. And by that we mean that they do what they undertake to do as well as possible. We mean that their bodies are in good trim, that they see and hear and act quickly and efficiently. If we use the same word about singing a song or playing a violin or acting in a play, then we are already using 'form' in connection with art. We also use the word 'form' as a verb. We 'form' fours. We 'form' cricket clubs and football teams. We 'form' a society for nature study or for political agitation. In this sense the word 'form' means something like 'shape'; it means that we give shape to a number of people for a particular purpose. But we go further and say, for example, that ice 'forms' over a pond, or that dewdrops 'form' on the twig of a tree, then 'form' actually does mean 'take shape'.

And that is what 'form' means in art. The form of a work of art is the shape it has taken. It does not matter whether it is a building, or a statue, or a picture, or poem or a sonata - all these things have taken on a particular or 'specialized' shape, and that shape is the form of a work of art.

I have said that the work of art 'takes on' its shape, but actually the shape is given to it by a particular person, and that person we call an artist; and an artist, we must remember, is not only a man who paints pictures, but equally a man who makes music, or poetry or furniture - even shoes and dresses. There are all kinds and degrees of artists, but they are all people who give shape to something.

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one form is better than another, and that the work of art which pleases us best is the work of art with the best form, then we shall have explained the real meaning of art. The best works of art, we shall have said, are the works with the best form, and one form is better than another because it satisfies certain conditions. What are these conditions? Generally, of course, they are the conditions which give our senses the most pleasure, and by that we mean the conditions which give pleasure, not only to one sense at a time, but also to two or more senses working together, and finally to that reservoir of all our senses which is our mind. But this is where our difficulties begin. For what pleases one man does not necessarily please another. We even go so far as to say that one man's meat is another man's poison. What we have to find, therefore, is some touchstone outside the individual peculiarities of human beings, and the only touchstone which exists is nature. And by nature we mean the whole organic process of life and movement which goes on in the universe, a process which includes man, but is indifferent to his generic idiosyncracies, his subjective reactions, and temperamental variations." 35

We are very much concerned, however, with these factors. We are also concerned with the processes which lead to the full development of personality, making for a wholeness, a fulfilment of the individual, and through the fulfilment of the individual contributing toward the formation of a better world. These aspects will be more fully considered in the following chapter.

35 Herbert Read: Education through Art (London 1943) pp. 15, 16

DESIGN. Here is another word used in art terminology in many different ways. It is confused with 'pattern', 'composition' (we talk of the design of a rug when we mean 'pattern', or of the design of a painting when we are thinking only of the 'composition') and even with drawing. All these uses are, of course, semantically valid, but in the truly aesthetic sense, only these definitions are acceptable: "to plan mentally; to conceive of as a whole, completely or in outline; to organize a scheme of; to execute as an integral or artistic whole."

"Purposive planning as revealed in, or inferred from; the adaptation of means to an end, or the relation of parts to a whole."36

It is only in the practice and teaching of Architecture that the term design is correctly used in this sense. To an architect it embodies the problem; the function of the work to be done; the material; the tools; the social, climatic and economic circumstances involved; selective (and therefore specially trained) discrimination in solving the various secondary problems arising out of these factors; and throughout all these considerations, the guiding principles of the art of architecture.

For the purposes of this thesis, the architect's concept of design is considered preferable for "in the representational arts the significance in design depends on complete organisation of form and content - organisation in the ideas expressed, organisation in the form both as to

36 Websters International Dictionary

arrangement in space and ir surface pattern, organisatien in the handling and in the procedure, and organisation in the relation of all these factors to each other."[37]

PROPORTION. "The relation or adaptation of one portion to another, or to the whole, as respects magnitude, quantity or degree; comparative relation; ration; as the proportion of the parts of a building or of the body."[38]

"Proportion is the appreciation of fineness of relations which must always govern the method and form of composition."[39]

VALUE. "Something, as a principle, quality, or the like, which is, or is regarded as intrinsically valuable or desirable."

Relative worth, importance or utility; degree of excellence or usefulness; status in a scale of preferences or the like; as, to be a poor judge or values; to arrange in order of value (or values); to determine the value of evidence."[40]

In establishing values as to what is "intrinsically pleasing" in art, and what is not, we enter the field of psychology and are faced with the complexities of individual reactions

37 Arthur Pope: Art, Artist and Layman (Cambridge Mass.1937)p.

38 Websters International Dictionary

39 Arthur Dow: Composition (New York 1923) p.22

40 Websters International Dictionary

in which there are many degrees of feeling, and many degrees of expressing those feelings. But "we are compelled to seek some standard of value to enable us to distinguish between them. It will not do to say that the strongest or most direct way is necessarily the best way: that would put a high value on a mere animal cry of joy or sorrow, and lead to what we call crudity or sentimentality in art. Obviously, if we are to distinguish an art of expression from expression itself, everything will depend on the elaboration or the refinement of these elemental responses (my italics)...

"...the form of a work of art appeals directly to the senses; it is possible to explain that appeal in terms of physics and physiology, and since these sciences are universal, we might expect, and we do find, that the formal properties of art do not vary from country to country, from age to age. There are, of course, many different applications of the laws of nature, and the forms of art are as various as the forms of life; but the underlying principles of form and structure are the same. But the remaining properties of art, those which are not formal, have no inevitable basis: they are rather fancies, conjured up in the imagination. It is possible that the imagination, too, has laws under which it operates - that the fantasies which seem so arbitrary when they come to us in the state of dreaming, and which are instigated by the pathological complexes which psychoanalysis reveals, have their own dramatic unities and tendencies to formal organisation.

..."A great part of our life - as much as a third - is spent in this state of sleep during which we live in another dimension of time

and space, full of an active play of images.

"There is little doubt that some of the attraction we find in works of art is due to the presence in the work of art of primordial images which have found their way from the unconscious levels of the mind. Both the artist in creating the work of art, and we who look at the work of art, are penetrating more or less deeply into the world of dreams. From that world the artist derives what he calls his "inspiration" - his sudden perception of an image or a theme - and into that world and in the very act of perception, the spectator - the person enjoying a work of art - brings a new image. The psychology of what then happens is still obscure, but we know that it depends, to a considerable extent, on what we bring with us when we come into the presence of a work of art - on what psychologists call our adaptation."41

We have now taken these theories and definitions as far as is necessary for the purpose of this work. We have seen two main principles are involved: "a principle of form derived in our opinion from the organic world, and the universal objective aspect of all works of art; and a principle of origination peculiar to the mind of man and impelling him to create (and appreciate the creation of) symbols, phantasies, myths which take on a universally valid objective existence only in virtue of the principle of form. Form is a function of perception; origination is a function of imagination. These two mental activities exhaust, in their dialectical counterplay, all the psychic aspects of aesthetic experience."42

41 Herbert Read: Education through Art (London 1943) pp.31, 32, 33

42 Ibid. p.35

Our next step is to consider those vitally important psychological factors in art and aesthetics that enter into the sociological and educational problems with which we are concerned.

3 PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

PERCEPTION is the basic act of our psyche or mind and unless it is clearly defined, none of the psychological aspects in the practice and teaching of art can be approached with any hope of understanding.

Two things are here involved: a subject and an object. The subject is a sensitive human being - a living organism - part of whose faculties are sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing. These can be directed on to the object which may be separate and external, or may be a conception of the mind. We are concerned here with the sense of sight, and perception will be considered only in relation to this sense.

When the human being directs his faculty of sight on to the object, a reflection of its outline, mass and colour is transmitted by means of physiological processes through the lens of the eye to the brain, where it is registered as an image. The act of perception, therefore, starts with an awareness of the appearance of the object. But that is not all there is to it. The appearance of the object is only one of many factors which enter into the field of perception. The brain has previously registered many other reflections which are capable of being revived or re-experienced by a stimulation of the memory, and the newly perceived object may have its reflection influenced by the process of association (linking the present act with a revived perception from the past). Such associations may be made with direct experiences or with hidden awarenesses in the subconscious mind of the subject.

In the act of perception, the subject is not only passively absorbent, but also reacts to the reception

of the content of the act of apprehending.
"The subject that responds is actually a psycho-physical organism, and its reaction is a motor reaction of nerves, glands and the whole metabolism of the body to the stimulus received through the sense organs. This motor reaction we call sensation. But there is besides the response of the affective system. The response of the mind to any act of perception is not an isolated event: it is part of a serial development: it takes place within a complete orchestration of sense perceptions and sensations, and is controlled - given its place within the pattern - by what we call feeling. We could not possibly live that 'life of pure sensation' which Keats desired: it would be a chaos from which mind could not emerge. We have therefore evolved, not only the power of discrimination, which is essential for the apprehension of a particular object, but a power of reacting in our own interests to our awareness of the object. If I hear the whistle of a descending bomb, I do not only register the pitch of the note: I do not only have those physical sensations of fear which physiologists tell us are due to the injection of adrenalin into the blood stream: but I also have an instant feeling for the whole situation. Time and space become more than objects of perception: they are factors in self preservation and I seek cover with instinctive speed and economy of action. I am, after all, not a passive mirror of events, but an organism with a desire to live, and this biological aim is involved in all my experience - that is to say, even my acts of perception.

"Such an action (taking cover in the presence of danger) would normally be called instinctive, but from our immediate point of view it deserves a closer scrutiny. It is instinctive in the sense

that the motive of the action is to preserve life: but it has not only a motive, but also a pattern. My agility, in the circumstances, was not deliberate. A detached observer might have discovered in it speed, economy and grace. If it had been clumsy, it would have been ineffective: I should have stumbled and been killed. I am therefore tempted to call the pattern of this reaction aesthetic, and I find support for this view among psychologists." [1] (The following example he quotes from R.M. Ogden.)

"Long before we are able to think of life in general, and about its larger problems, we are guided in the pursuit of ends that are not comprised within the cycle of a single perception. And this guidance is afforded, not by discernment, but by feeling. In the discernment of a perceived event our disposition is a positive factor no less real than the event itself. The feelings which attach to a dispositional readiness for response - either in a single perception, or in a series of perceptions, interrupted perchance by pauses of sleep and distraction - are aesthetic. It is the aesthetic feelings that mark the rhythm of life, and hold us to our course by a kind of weight and balance..... A disposition to feel the completeness of an experienced event as being right and fit constitutes what we have called the aesthetic factor in perception." [2]

TEMPERAMENT. In the preceding chapter we considered the theory of 'empathy' and how the appreciation of art can be influenced by variations in temperament. It is now seen that perception may be objective (apprehending the concrete aspects of outline, mass and colour) or subjective (apprehending associations supplied either by the memory or

1 Herbert Read: Education through Art (London 1943) pp.37,38

2 R.M.Ogden: Psychology and Education (New York 1926) pp. 131, 132, 133

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Name of thesis Essential Considerations In Designing A New System Of Art Education For South African Schools And Universities. 1945

PUBLISHER:
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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