

Men express their individuality through a myriad of ways in their fabric of life. Art is just one of these ways; but a very important one. It is definitely not a therapy; not a skill and not a Design process. It is a 'gut-feeling', an impetuous decision, an unorthodox viewpoint, an original statement; it is purely personal.

For this reason Art cannot be taught. Not because it is instinctive, not because it is a special talent (how often do people say 'I can't paint, I'm not artistic') which is a characteristic given at birth and not because it is too complex. Art cannot be taught, because 'individuality' cannot be taught. If we try to teach individuality we are merely reinforcing a contemporary wisdom. No, Art cannot be taught. But, it can be learnt. Art is within the scope and capability of all; but at the moment the learning of Art is being strangled by the teaching; and more particularly by the teaching of Design.

Art, then, is suffocating at the hands of Design in particular and in the system of schooling in general. How?

The problem is not entirely new. It began a little less than one hundred years ago, with William Morris. He, and his apostles, created the ethos of the artist/craftsman. The honourable, stoic worker whose skill, acquired by a lengthy and repetitive apprenticeship, mirrored the talents of the medieval masons, sculptors, etc. In other words Morris founded the belief that Art was linked to both tradition and skill. Both of these qualities are identifiable, almost quantifiable and certainly teachable. The result was the creation of a simple methodology for teaching what could be termed 'art'.

Art lives by changing. If it did not, then it would have died with the Greeks, who perfected what they saw essentially as being Art. If Art is restricted in a strait-jacket of tradition and skill it may well become more refined, more subtle and more exact, but after a certain point it can go no further. If we could accelerate this process of refinement we would be left with the same end product as the Nazi art of 1939/40. Technically exact, purposeful, precise; yet pointless. Soulless. In just ten years or so German inter-war Art imploded.

That Art has survived as well as it has done is either a compliment or an insult to our teachers, depending on how you look at it. Either they have failed to teach what was expected of them; or they have succeeded in not teaching it.

As if the 'Arts and Crafts' movement was not enough, Art in schools is now at the mercy of the backlash, that is Design Education. Much of Design is a reversal of the previous doctrine, but, nevertheless, it is an antipathy to the essence of Art. (Art being defined — as above — as the statement or statements of individuality, whatever the medium.) At this point it would be well-advised to define, or try to define, Design Education. It is, I believe, the study of problem-solving, using a process of realisation through various, tangible materials; wood; clay; paint; plastic etc. It involves the student

Art for Our-Sake: A New Direction for Art Learning in Schools

investigating a given problem situation, devising a solution, under constant logical scrutiny; developing this solution; testing it and evaluating the results. Undoubtedly, Design is an essential experience for everyone; it gives an insight into a variety of difficulties and encourages the right to question and change: indispensable ingredients in modern-living.

Design Education, by necessity, must involve a system, a method, a routine. The mental and realisation processes must be capable of being disrupted and re-started. Indeed the journals of the Schools' Council have now even structured the very pattern of thinking of the Designer: there are clearly defined stages in the solution of problems. Initially the designer must recognise the problem, investigate, collate, realise a solution, test, modify if necessary and then evaluate. Each stage must be logged precisely to enable it to be followed within a context where interruption is commonplace. Thus, in schools, where the organisation of a curriculum necessitates interruption and inconvenience Design — if it is worthwhile — should thrive. It is to its credit that Design is working so well.

Under the suffocation of the 'Arts and Crafts' movement Art was debased to the level of a definable skill; but now things are worse. Its single stultifying role has been divided. The illogical inherent in Art is now strangled by the routine: the act of creative realisation is no more than a means of fabrication or construction. Art should be newness; peculiarity; difference, both of mind and thus of product. But now, the thought is systemised and structured. Gone is the 'spark' of inspiration and the unconscious belief: now thinking must conform to a given pattern, it must be reasoned and cumulative. (Some Art movements could withstand this ideology, Cubism for example, or even Neo-Classicism). What place in such a scheme could be found for Action Painting: Minimalism: Pop Art or Photo-Realism? Where would Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman or Warhol fit into this?

So the creative sting is being bathed and soothed into numb conformity. And what of the act of realisation; the painting or printing; the drawing

or sculpting; the filming or constructing? This is no more than a mechanical production. It is a process to be experienced after the logic has decided the form. It is a skill, but now not even married to a belief; rather it is shackled to a predetermined direction.

Design Education is taking the 'life' from Art

If Art is to succeed in schools a new direction must quickly be found. By their very nature the survival of Art in schools is problematical. A school is a microcosm of its parent society; perhaps a caricature would be more precise. A school is a system, rigid by necessity, continuously being monitored and ultimately having to be evaluated. A school has to conform to certain social patterns and it must accept certain fairly permanent criteria. It must provide set hours of tuition, adopt common rulings of time-allocation and so on.

And, of course, it has to be quantifiable in terms of examinations. Any relationship between Art and schools will be difficult; indeed this should be so if both are functioning as they individually should. The acceptance by the one of the other will obviously mean moderation and compromise of principles and interests.

But how can Art be saved?

Firstly it must be divorced from Design Education. The two must not only be allocated individual time but, preferably have separate facilities, staffing and examining. Perhaps, Art should pursue more useful links with other Expressive Arts; Drama, Dance, Music, Literature. Economies may well dictate that facilities be shared; this would not be disastrous as long as the different natures of the two disciplines were recognised; one holds the process of designing, the other the expression of the individual. (These two 'reasons d'être' are not always mutually exclusive naturally, but for the sake of Art it is best that their divergence be amplified).

Secondly, the philosophy of Art Learning in any school should be clearly defined. Shirley Williams' not-so-recent governmental paper along these lines may have already inspired this important task in many schools. Local authorities, Parents, Staff, Governing Bodies and Students must all be aware of the aims.

Thirdly, and more specifically, the emphasis placed on the study of Art History should be increased. That many Art students pursue their own work without knowing about the work, life, thoughts and beliefs of leading artists is no less than criminal. Do English students write essays without having read books? Do Chemists use equipment without knowing what the equipment is for? Knowing about the past is a foundation for any knowledge or feeling about the present and the future. Few schools' art courses provide even a minimum of stimuli in the form of reviewing the work of artists living and dead. With the facilities available to schools for travel to any major city where valuable works are retained there is no excuse.

Fourthly, the lesson form itself. To define a lesson structure closely would be self-defeating; it would be to try and force a blanket routine on the individualism that is being nurtured. But one or two basic principles can be defined:

a. No group work should be initiated. It may arise spontaneously, but even then, it does not encourage the individual to express from an isolated standpoint. In Design Education, however, group work is often an important factor for it illustrates a collective solution to a problem which may well be out of the scope of any one person.

b. Groups involved in an Art area should always be mixed ability and, if possible, of a mixed age-range. Naturally, this would have to be modified, for practical purposes where necessary, but generally, the wider the scope of participants, the more expansive the cross-flow of influence.

c. Representational art should always be presented as merely a means of practising vision, dexterity, perception and technical knowledge. No more. A purely representational piece of art is only after all a refinement of skill. (Not that this is unproductive, but to exist as 'Art' it must contain that will for personal expression).

Practice by repetition is a valuable process in the learning of any 'language', and Art embodies the use of a new language, that of visual statement. But it is not Art; for the student has neither chosen a work of art – nor has he made a personal expression in the statement.

d. Skill aspects would be best learnt by demonstration. A lesson in which students 'have to' print, for example, would already start from too restricted a brief. Subject matter – and perhaps this is one of the most outstanding similarities with Design Education – should always be conceptual: it should also be broad and expansive. To develop any strength, literally or metaphorically, one must always have something to fight against, and thus, boundaries of subject matter can reasonably be used. But they should, of course, provide scope for a personal decision to be made. This personal perception of subject matter is an utterly crucial part of any act of creativity. It is all too easy to dispense with, particularly in schools. (Because it is difficult to quantify a student's 'thinking' time, or 'decision' time, and similarly it is easy to equate physical activity with lesson success). Perhaps an example may well be useful here:

Topic Parameters: Age; old; aging; dying; decaying; Illustrative example: (Supported by visual display of slides; and containing a piece of artwork, preferably by the teacher involved)

Teacher's Dialogue:

This building (Slide 1) is old. Once however, it was new. It contained a family and warmth and light. Now it is derelict. (Slide 2) Plants grow in and around it, (Slide 3) and the fabric of the building is decaying, (Slide 4). I didn't like the shape of the building (Slide 5), but what interested me was the door (Slide 6); I don't know why exactly, perhaps it was the texture of the metal (Slide 7) or the shape

of the bolts in the door-hinges. (Slide 8) In my drawing, which I made from a photograph, I have not included all the door, because I wanted to show the detail in large scale and I wasn't interested in the whole door. (Slide 9) I have increased the shadows to make the features stand out more. I made a drawing, rather than a colourful painting because I thought that this showed better the 'deadness' of the house. You may disagree. This would be the teacher's introductory dialogue.

In such a method as this, the use of camera is seen as essential. Preferably instant cameras, for the taking of reference photographs is to artwork, what the use of a dictionary is to language work. It is merely increasing the vocabulary. The creative syntax of that vocabulary is a matter for personal choice.

e. As far as examinations are concerned two aspects are of greatest bearing. Firstly, the form of the examination and secondly, the criteria or scope of the evaluation. To take the second first, the evaluation should be no more or no less than that of 'quality control'; that is, it should confine itself

to the technical aspect of any given piece of work. To 'wander' into discussion of the suitability of subject matter or the reasoning behind its creation is to enter the realms of subjectivity. Technique is more easily measurable.

And what form should an examination take? ('Examination' in the sense of total evaluation of course progress, rather than a single paper). For the most satisfactory and understanding scrutiny, a moderated continual-assessment is preferred. An exhibition of work would perhaps provide a satisfying culmination to study and it may give facility for less usual forms of media; film, on-site sculpture, large-scale work.

These points provide only a basis for change; it may well be that others are needed (the drastic alteration of the normal time-table so that Art is taken out of the system and attended as and when desired: the opening of Art areas during holidays for normal 'time tabled' attendance, and, to compensate staff, their closure during, for example, examination times: the use of senior students to act as demonstrators of skills (much as is done in Universities by post-graduates); all these are possible other notions to bear in mind.

Although dolphins and men have an important similarity, they are essentially very different creatures. The analogy is to be drawn with artists and designers. Their similarities are vast, but their difference is just as basic. Man, while showing a keen interest in the dolphin has never yet understood it; and while purporting to act unselfishly has made only menial uses of the dolphin's possibly superior senses. Is this also to be the relationship between Design Educators and Artists? Or will Art at long last be free to develop without this outside interference. For our sakes, let's hope so.

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