

Art and Handicrafts in School and Society

Institute of Sociology

Mrs. Engholm and Mr. Clifford Ellis, Principal of the Bath School of Art, illustrated the importance of art and handicrafts as media for the synthesis of school and society. Mrs. Engholm based her remarks on examples of work done by pupils in Rhodesia. She referred to the intellectual and emotional starvation suffered by many pupils because of the absence of appropriate stimuli and the opportunity for response to them, and stressed the value of the pupils' own attempts at creative work in design and imaginative composition. The work exhibited abundantly illustrated the possibilities of using the pupils' homes, their neighbourhood, and their environment as the source of the desired stimuli.

Mr. Clifford Ellis's talk took the form of a commentary on a series of illustrations designed to bring out as clearly as possible the close connection between crafts and the social conditions in the contemporary environment. His examples of various types of craft at different times showed the effect on initiative and individual expression brought about by the social status of the worker and the attitude of contemporary society to the craft in question: the dullness and conventionality, produced by the imposition of standards and stereotypes from without, contrasted with the spontaneous and yet disciplined creative energy which becomes evident when the craftsman is conscious of taking part in an enterprise in which, while co-operating with others, he feels himself an individual and responsible participant.

The discussion which followed led inevitably to the problem of the ousting of the craftsman by methods of mass-production leading to the breaking down of complex processes into the simplest elements, the standardisation of these elements for machine-working, and the consequent emotional starvation and repression of workers, leading to frustration, apathy, and the rejection of responsibility. Mr. Ellis could not accept the tendency to try to compensate for this by providing a richer variety of opportunity for leisure-time occupations. The majority of contributors to the discussion appeared, nevertheless, to think that the provision of a high standard of living for all made

mass-production of utility goods inevitable, and that this contributed an unanswerable argument for mechanising what we must, increasing the productivity of each worker, and thereby shortening working hours and enabling workers to enjoy more creative pursuits in their leisure time. Some speakers noted that many workers do not find the repetition of simple mechanical processes irksome, and still others insisted that much mechanical work calls for a high standard of skill and judgment, and can be a source of considerable pride and emotional satisfaction to the worker.

An excerpt from the report of the Summer Conference of the Institute, August 1945.

1988 Schools Design Prize

Designed by eighteen year old Mark Shannon from Bradford, the device tips bottles containing blood culture every eight hours — a job that currently has to be done manually, often requiring a technician to come in during the night.

