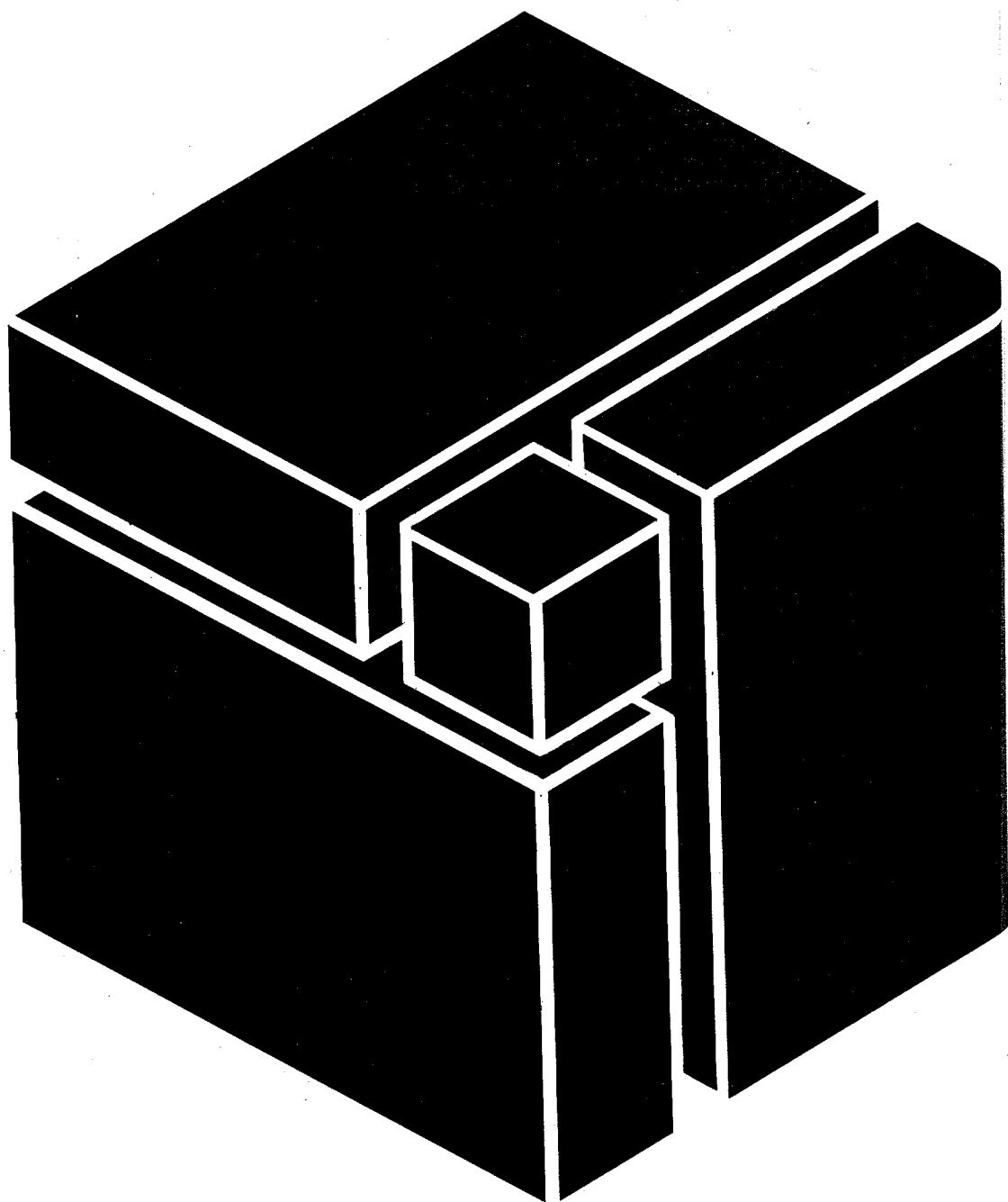


# **Three Functions of Art**

**by Stefan Morawski**



## Introduction

A book-length treatment could easily be dedicated to the functional aspect of art. Suppose that we considered the terminal value of art, and the fundamental aesthetic problem, to be this one of function. Obviously then we would have to consider all other aspects to be derivative from it. If, however, the means-ends relationship leads finally to another value, the function of art must be among the major concerns. For neither artistic structure nor art's genesis can be adequately discussed without a thorough treatment of the question of function. Nonetheless, because any detailed discussion of the uses of art must take a conscientious student into the treacherous quicksands and reaches of the vast realm of anthropology, one has to make decisions. A choice must be effected as to one's preliminary and predominant approach. Such a choice is increasingly seen as, necessary, the more we are aware of the undelimited integration of art and life. Nor can we hope to impose order on this state of affairs through clearly isolating artistic from non-artistic functions. For as we shall see, only the stalwart of aestheticism could steel himself to reject peremptorily any non-aesthetic use of art. Yet another obstacle to suitably focusing-in the topic of our essay consists of the numerous competitive standpoints for framing art's function. And each perspective makes important claims. The social claim promises no less than the psychological. The educator has a case every bit as legitimate as the philosopher; etc.

I must assure my readers that I know the Deweyan conception, and what is more I think very highly of it. The uses of art should undoubtedly be considered in light of the aesthetic experience of both the creator and the audience. Likewise the basic element in art evaluation should be the process of intensifying and clarifying our everyday experience. Nonetheless, to frame one's approach directly on this premise appears to stress psychology at

the questionable cost of sidestepping artistic structure. Yet I am not at all hostile to the Deweyan viewpoint, and, indeed, when I take up the question of the end of alienation (i.e. disalienation) I shall come to a similar conclusion. But my topographic charts lead me by another way.

My philosophy of art is operative from the outset — in defining the three functions of art which I shall deal with in the essay. One might think it the simplest course to assume that one function embraces all of art; the *informative* one. Certainly no art can act upon its appreciators without informing them, at least, that the arrangement of the words, sounds, colors, etc., is thus and thus. All the arts, the applied and the fine, the representational and the non-objective, the esoteric and the diverting, as well as other artistic categories I've passed over, must all initially, as the prerequisite of functioning, be communicative. In this sense the fundamental artistic function is semiological. Artworks are signs and the distinctions to be made among the signs define their functional variations. I do not know of any argument convincing enough to dislodge the semiological approach. But its universal scope does not assure, to my mind, a further fruitfulness. I especially question how well it illuminates the problem of the *artistic sign*. On this matter of conveying messages semiology is very helpful in explaining what art has in common with other realms of culture; but it runs into trouble on the core matters of aesthetic concern. A moment ago, I declared my non-acceptance of aestheticism. I must now add my disagreement with any doctrine seeking to erase totally the demarcations of art and non-art.

The aesthetic experience — and here we refer once more to Dewey, expanding on some of his conclusions and slightly modifying others — preserves our familiarity with the world but is at the same time imprinted with strangeness. Although it does not obliterate our psychic habits it works against their ingrainment. It is contemplative and yet opposed to inertia, to that mode of unapprehending rote response which deadens us to the rhythm of life, to persons and things as they authentically are. The aesthetic response would be impossible if it were not linked to our entrenched schema of familiar perceptions. However its effect is to freshen,

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\*Written in 1963, this essay was reviewed and lightly corrected recently by Dr. Morawski. The introduction was written especially for this first appearance of the essay in English.

Lee Baxandall, translator

to vivify our encounters with the world. In a word, the aesthetic experience is one of tension, it is *concordia discors*. Why? Because art creates transgressions against our life attitudes; because its means cause us to react in a particular way to that which science and philosophy, praxiology and engineering, argue or make manifest by their own specific means.

Accordingly, I am going to distinguish three principal functions of art. One is fundamentally aesthetic, and the remaining two perhaps by rights being termed para-aesthetic. Such ranking is due to the fact that the peculiar idiom of art is alone in evoking the intensity and extent of audience response. Two further functions which are not taken up in the following essay, cannot be ignored. We might describe these as *framing* functions. They are pivoted at the frontiers of art and non-art where they present two farthest extensions. One is related to all art that verges on science or philosophy. Surrealism's place is here, i.e. Breton's renowned remark that art provides the window into the world. The other framing function pertains to arts which organize our ordinary, practical space and time, the paradigm here being architecture or industrial design. The framing functions, indisputably, are very much in the foreground of recent artistic trends. Striking examples are evident in op and pop art, and in the strategies to foresake the fixed artistic structure in favor of the playful character of creative, or responsive, processes. Nor am I biased against the happening and its progeny. This trend should be explored, not just because it is thriving now, but because it represents an important tendency in contemporary art and civilization dating at least from the time of Dada. Nevertheless, the predominant activity of art has remained **between** the framing functions. I find it of significance that this distribution has remained roughly the same up to today; although it is also clear that with the passage of time, art's basic traits and the responses they evoke have altered, and their context has shifted.

No doubt others will want to propose some other choice of fundamental functions. I wish to state in advance my willing tolerance. I want only to emphasize my earlier reservation: that no debate on this issue makes sense if it does not draw upon the total resources for aesthetic

thought, that is to say, if it does not relate to philosophical bases of art criticism.

### Three Functions of Art

For me the three chief functions of art have their counterparts or illustrations in three of humankind's myths — in the mythos, that is to say, centering on Orpheus, on Prometheus and on Philoktetes.

The first, in a sensuous embodiment, expresses the restorative, the organically living power of music and poetry. Orpheus makes whole man's feeling, imbuing him with an inner balance and likewise a harmony with the surrounding world.

The second mythos confronts us with the anguished, and yet quickening, arousal of a dormant conscience. Prometheus takes up and typifies the struggle for the destiny of mankind, and although the venture does fare tragically, Prometheus persists in striving against the world and against himself — torn asunder then, yet ever seeking to better his lot in the world.

And, last, the third mythos makes quite palpable the recognition that life is only supportable in the presence of art, and, moreover, that art can play a significant social role. In art's absence man is bereft of fulfillment and stripped of skills and devices necessary for his victories.

This we can discern as the truth of the tale of a Greek seer, Philoktetes, who has received from Heracles a bow which unerringly finds its target, a bow which will guarantee victory to the Greeks at Troy. On the voyage to Troy, however, Philoktetes is bitten by a serpent. As the stench of his wound proves unbearable to his companions he is put ashore on the isle of Lemnos. Ten years Philoktetes lives on the island in complete isolation. The battle for Troy lasts as long, without a clear-cut result. At last the Greeks are put in mind of the invincible bow. After Odysseus, who represents practical reason (here, coarse political calculation), has given his consent to the journey, they resolve to hasten to Lemnos. Odysseus stipulates that they bring only the bow; there is no need for Philoktetes. Neoptolemus, the young son of Achilles, nonetheless convinces his fellow seafarers that Philoktetes should be retrieved and brought aboard. The wound then is healed, Philoktetes vanquishes Paris, and thanks

to his bow the Greeks carry the fray.

Orpheus, Prometheus, and Philoktetes. Not only can the three themes stand as emblematic of functions of art. Each of the three reminds us of constructive effects of art. But if, on the other hand, we turn the emblems upside down, or inside out, we shall be put in mind of the negative results which can ensue in the sphere of art.

Thus to invert the Orpheus theme is to settle down in complacency with the aesthetically false. It is to confirm one in a debased or undeveloped aesthetic taste. All jerrybuilds which are advanced as genuine art, if accepted as such, must prove damaging. Ignorance of what is artistically good and base has contributed to aesthetic illiteracy to the present day. One need only mention the history of the reception of so-called modern art. The contemporary artist is ill understood by many, because his modes of expression are quite simply too difficult — the public having been made comfortable with some stereotypes, which, once extrapolated from art, are repetitiously advanced as the universally-valid models toward which all art should aspire. Gewgaws come into this category. So too does the slavishly academic art which influences the reception accorded to avant-garde art. Impressionism, reworking the taste of its time, faced for a while the real threat of a lockout. Cubism, Fauvism, and Surrealism were fought back by the eternally vigilant "academicians," and also by Impressionism's newly-spawned slavish epigones. Hence, advocates of supplanted artistic modes have two means of confounding the Orpheus theme. They profusely beget epigonal works which are widely proclaimed to be of very high standing; and they also stubbornly refuse, generally with every sort of barbed taunt, recognition to works which embody the new values. However, to describe this negative influence is not to say that the older artistic trends exert no other influence. Their finest works will remain salubrious in the best meaning of the word. Everywhere and always, the meretricious compromises the quality of life.

The inversion of the Prometheus theme, logically enough, leads to the dulling of conscience. This can occur when reality is looked on as supposedly free of conflicts and contradictions. The extreme case is

the idyll. Such inversions appear not only in capitalist conditions, where in some literary works the illusion was and is supposed to be nourished that this social order functions splendidly and incarnates the humanist values. In socialist circumstances too the ideal of a conflictless society, coupled with the proposition that what should not be therefore cannot be, led to a misappropriation of this function of art.

Yet another possibility of the misappropriation of this theme is what we can call the gamut of amorism. In other words, works which encourage a brutalism that lunges to seize its goal at however high a price. Examples: the crime novels and the comics of capitalist countries and the United States especially.

A different alternative: the inverted Prometheus theme may supererogate, that is, find its energies displaced to, the Orpheus theme. What this indicates is that socio-historical conditions are so hostile to the ordinary functioning of the arts that artists resolve their problems only by resorting to inappropriate aesthetic values. In the time of Gautier and of Baudelaire, the defense of Beauty in its purity was still feasible as a mode of expressing protest against the capitalist social order. It was somehow complementary to the way Balzac and Flaubert, from another side, unmasked the rhetoric about the free development of personality. At the time there were few gifted thinkers who had discerned, as had Marx and Engels, the operative laws of the new social system and had located perspectives (including e.g. those for artists) in effect necessitated by social relations. But the Paris Commune made plain that the religion of beauty "in and of itself" was bankrupt with its devotion to eternal values outside of society. The new social confrontation meant that such an attitude had to entail flight from artistic responsibility.

It may well happen that the artist is not able to discern the main historical contradictions of his time — but he cannot afford to ignore those of which he may be conscious, if he is to draw as fully as he can upon the functions of his art. From this perspective, Plekhanov was able to justify Pushkin but not Merezhkovsky; he sought to explicate the complex position of the 1850s aesthetes but he did not exonerate the Parnassians.

Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Wilde and their followers, yielding exclusively to the Orphic theme, were in disaccord with the conscience of their age. Inasmuch as even the best artists at this juncture (e.g. Debussy, Leonid Andreyev, Gordon Craig) preferred the elemental aesthetic values — conveying, to be sure, a symbolic indictment — over the ethical-social values, as their way to rebel against the capitalist reality, we should sum up the contradiction of Orphic and Promethean themes in such cases as follows. Inversion leads to displacement of the Promethean theme into the Orphic, and accordingly the role of the former dwindles to a vanishing point.

This difficulty should attract our thoughtful concern; perhaps, now more than ever. The threat of total war, the toppling of the gods, the aggressions in the name of absolutes — in a word, all the phenomena that have perplexed the artistic community — encourage a further flight to ivory towers. But it is true that we can also see, particularly in the socialist countries, a steadily greater participation in the life of society and a heightened response by artists to these problems of the present. In the capitalist lands and the USA especially, the artists sense their isolation ever more starkly.

A noteworthy instance of a resort to the Orphic attitude is the theory and the practice of the so-called *nouveau roman*. Not at all depicting how life might go on were man to perceive his genuine chances, it provides rather a registering of fortuitous structures which add up to a meaningless whole. The aleatoric movement in music is analogous; in the plastic arts, action painting. Although here, too, is entailed a protest of art against the modern phenomenon of reification, nevertheless the Promethean dimension has been reduced almost to naught. What is projected is tragic consciousness of a devaluated existence.

The inversion of the Promethean theme may be compounded by actual aesthetic deformation. Just so, the Orpheus theme may suffer impoverishment of the qualities that make art artistic, where it is perverted into a self-congratulatory aestheticism. One case of deformation of the Promethean theme is moralism — the full subordination of art to criteria of giving youth the right experiences. Tolstoy was a proponent

of this tendency in *What is Art?* (1898), in which he questioned the value of Shakespeare's and Beethoven's works as well as his own earlier writings, in the name of a true Christianity. Moralism overlooks the fact that art is sustained by its own peculiar values — much as aestheticism tries to get away from the fact that art does comprise manifold categories of value. Hence the well-publicized quarrel in 1878 between the moralist Ruskin and Whistler the aesthete was entirely insubstantial since each was one-sided in his viewpoint.

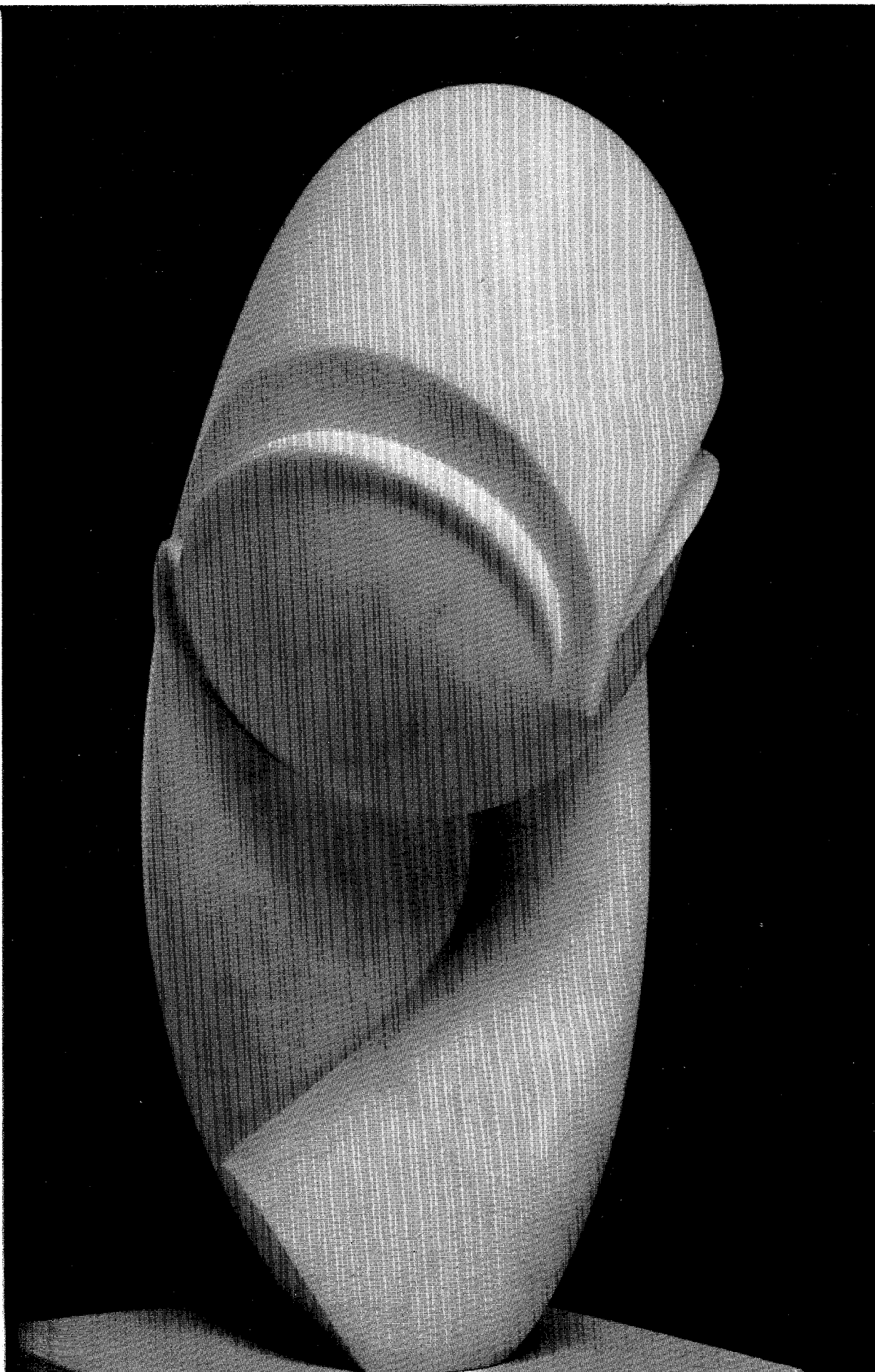
Another sub-order of the Promethean theme's deformation is didacticism. Art quickens the conscience with truth; but it does not communicate this truth in the form of a treatise or a lecture. When we meet such interpolations in literature, as in *The Emancipated* by Boleslaw Prus or in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, we accord them an extra-aesthetic function, considering them appendages of the novel's genuine weave. We react similarly to the allegorical epigraphs on the paintings of the Middle Ages or the Baroque Age. Didacticism here appears in the form of a commentary on the content of the picture. It can also happen that the artist projects a teaching viewpoint within the artwork — as for example when he judges a situation positive or negative, or he scorns or argues on behalf of a character. In children's fables the chief figure is frequently decked out in the noble traits so as to reinforce certain ethical precepts. In a letter of 1885 to Minna Kautsky, Engels argued against handling art in this way. But one could find many instances of it. Just to go back in literary history — among the writings of George Sand as she sought to pass along the influence of Fourier. Or Polish authors influenced by Swietochowski, that major ideological exponent of the early phase of Positivism.

As for the Philoktetes theme: its inversion can present us with the Narcissian attitude; which we know to be separately represented in Greek mythology.

Now, it might be argued that Freud and his school asserted the necessary existence

#### Mlle Pogany (1931)

by Constantine Brancusi  
Courtesy: The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection; photograph by A. J. Wyatt.



of artistic narcissism. However, they did not insist that the artist must be condemned to a flight from reality. They state no more than this: The artist becomes absorbed within himself. The cathexis (or concentration of emotional energy) is transforming. His entire psychic structure having become his libido-object, there may occur in this context a shift of attention from the Other to the Ego, from the original inspiration of the work to a focus upon form, which is objectivized expression communicating determinate symbols to an audience.

The inversion of the Philoktetes theme may lead also to nihilism, the conception that the world is on the way to catastrophe and there is no worthwhile act for a man to undertake. This point of view was widespread among the turn of the century decadents. Hence it may readily be seen that under some historical conditions, inversion of the Philoktetes theme entails its displacement into an Orphic theme. On the other hand the inversion of the Promethean theme can take on a Philokteteian aspect.

Admittedly some persons committed to the struggle for a new society, to proletarian revolution, will not be satisfied with mere criticism of the old system, no matter how incisive. They call for a wholly activist artistic attitude and look on the works of Kafka, Camus, Faulkner or T. S. Eliot as taking virtually an escapist position. A complex problem. The above-mentioned authors, and numerous others (e.g. Ionesco), do carry out one of art's basic functions. They convey to the sensitive and attentive reader that the old world is anti-humanistic. To ask more than this of them would be to force a view of reality on them which is not theirs. But suppose one presented arguments based on historical facts so self-evident in their implications that they should in no wise prove elusive to men as intelligent and subtle as are artists? This too would largely be pointless. For reality is many-sided, its contradictions closely impinging on one another, and, moreover, the artist is not always optimally oriented. Such considerations will affect him as his origins and education, his tastes, current ideological controversies, the type of Communist he meets and the circumstances of the encounters, etc. Finally, the work of such artists does in fact constitute a

call to do battle. The ways in which it does so are many, they range from Kafka, and Camus, to Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, to the extreme measure of commitment lately reached by Sartre. Hence the inversion of the Philoktetes theme will result, most pertinently, in one's withdrawal from any criticism of reality. Meanwhile, an artist's refraining from an activist attitude should be regarded as escapism only in a time of dramatically heightened struggle. Just such situations have often occurred for Polish literature owing to the nation's history. For those who know our poetry in the 1840s, the polemics between G. Ehrenberg and E. Wasilewski probe deeply into this question of escapism. French literature saw comparable times between the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, during which period nearly all poets and writers were socially and politically engaged — even those like Baudelaire who would go over later to *l'art pour l'art*. Those who disregarded the life of their time and an historiosophical perspective met disapproval.

But like the other themes the Philoktetes theme is subject not only to inversion but also to deformation which grossly falsifies its significance. One deformation is the 'agitprop' — agitation-and-propaganda — idea of the function of art. It treats art not as a specially constituted sphere of psychic values, but as a means (affording a sensory-concrete form) to an end. An ideological persuader. Perhaps the reader is familiar with the polemical remarks by Heine — he was at that time a partisan of socialism — against the proletarian poets, particularly Weerth. One must admit he was not unfair in chiding them if we look closely at the tendentious verse of that time, which was laden with a propaganda that can put art to death. Time and again from Freiligrath to the present the poetry siding with the cause of the proletariat has skirted or fallen into this deformation. Not many years ago an 'agitprop' function of art was officially sanctioned as equivalent to art's great civilizing function — with predictably disastrous results. For art does not tidily dovetail with immediate priorities, which can shift from one year to the next, from

### The Prophet

by Emil Nolde

Courtesy: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Rosenwald Collection.





month to month, even week to week. Art has always sought to avoid this kind of urgency. When it has acquiesced to pressure, its results have been nil or quickly moribund. The great Baroque artist, Bernini, created monumental sculptures assigned to his workshop by the Church. But he instilled these works with enduring values, precisely because he overstepped the official Jesuit ideology and art theory. When J.-L. David responded to the needs of the French Revolution, and when Dickens later satisfied the pressing requirements of liberal bourgeois journalism, they too did not reduce their interests and level their aesthetic taste to those of the institutional employer. One may hear it said that Mayakovsky and Brecht prove that an artistically excellent propaganda art is possible. Yet neither one produced propaganda *tout court*. Employing personal and inimitable idioms, they each produced images of individually-experienced problems of a modern man — a man for whom the proletarian revolution and socialism provide the center of life, the ABC to which all else relates. They wrote a poetry at once affirmative and difficult. It summons to battle, to the struggle of today; and nonetheless the Promethean element is present.

The interrelationships of the different strands of art have been analyzed in the Marxist literature in a great number of ways, and from very different points of view. Needless to say, the major problems of art are unsolvable without reference to the question of *artistic alienation*, which was raised by Marx himself.

In his description of alienation Marx was indebted to Hegel and Feuerbach, but he diagnosed the phenomenon differently. In the 1844 *Manuscripts* he showed that the economic foundation of the capitalist social order is the main cause of alienation. Alienation for Marx had three aspects: the alienation of the product, the alienation of the production process, and the alienation of the human species-essence. Its effects are indelible not only on the human condition of the oppressed, but also of the oppressor. The results are perpetrated in many spheres of alienation, e.g. ideological and political (by whom and how is power wielded?). The artist is also profoundly affected in his domain. Marx pointed out how money — the chief nexus of alienation — in capitalist times

becomes the measure of value in artistic production, the work being severed from the artist to become a commodity. Moreover the artistic activity is submitted to scrutiny if not final control; he who can pay art's price will wield an economic, political, and ideological power to elicit and encourage certain subjects and treatments.

Given the facts of alienation a great many artists will perform a negative function. We grant that the best works in any epoch have combatted conformity of every kind. Thus they combat alienation, too. But this does not mean — in Marx's view — that the artist can actually attain to expressing the full human individuality.

In spite of his enthusiasm for the 19th Century novel and particularly for Balzac, Marx returned again and again to Shakespeare and the ancient paradigms. As had also Hegel, Marx saw in the art of antiquity a humankind still harmoniously linked to nature, not yet so alienated that the social bonds are dissolved. In his remarks on the emergence (genesis) of the aesthetic sense Marx wrote especially of the reconciliation of history and culture with nature — in other words, the harnessing of nature to realize a common social product in such a way as also to realize humankind's natural dispositions. Such a man, superseding and achieving himself in his labor, is *homo aestheticus*. Art mobilizes all his psychic powers, liberates his uncharted possibilities, and adapts him to the environment in the dynamic process organized on the creating of objects.

The whole late history of culture entails the removal of art from life, the crystallization of a type of artistic creativity which has turned away from production *sensu stricto*, the reification of the so-called aesthetic attitude (which is said to be incommensurable with all other attitudes, particularly the utilitarian). Art declines to the standing of a department of human interest. The way it happens is conjunctural: Economically, artworks take on commodity traits; politically, there is a censorship; and ideologically, art becomes more subjective and mystified. The sum of this is alienation, the loss of any chance for art to achieve a general and harmonizing effect. It stands, then, a tongue-tied testification of the society. The best of

this art will probably elevate just one function, accent and make it something absolute. Hence the ideal of the beautiful, or of the artist's awareness of his responsibility.

Marx indicates that a liberation from this dysfunctionality is only to be had through the socialist revolution. Friedrich Schiller had dreamt, in "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man," that the world would be rescued from need and suffering by aesthetic man. Hegel opted to settle down in the alienated world, for the otherness of that world is separate from the world of spirit. Hölderlin and Keats wanted to escape to the long gone world of Greece, since the future held out a stark and ineluctable fate to art. Marx then, with his probing of contemporary society, was to turn the Schiller conception inside out. Precisely it was political man who was required for the rescue and realization of aesthetic mankind.

Meanwhile one could see that the alienation processes, if deleterious to artistic creation, have secured for art its relative autonomy. They could not have been avoided; and, although one might beat them back, as art has always done, through the interplay art has prepared itself for the superseding of alienation. Indeed the artist has always been attuned to nature; he has continually drawn fresh sustenance from it, in his fight against the decadence of civilization and culture, which is at the same time his fight for an authentic humanity. The unambiguous dependency of an artist on only one class has been rare. His product has had a general social significance (this we read also in Marx) and it on the whole militates against a narrow outlook limited by official ideology. A mutiny is afoot within both the Orphic and the Philoketeian phenomena. Admittedly the battle done against alienation by the two is not equally divided. Amid these two appears the Promethean insurgence, providing, in general, the highpoint of the resistance of art to alienation.

All the same, alienation cannot be completely superseded except with communism, in the Marxian view.

Polemicalizing against Stirner in their *German Ideology*, Marx and Engels anticipated an epoch where there would be no geniuses

and no philistines. All men would be artists to some degree. No longer restricted to a single field, they stress, the artist of the future will simultaneously be painter, poet, singer, etc. And we read (in *Capital*) that work when not compulsory comes to be free play of the psychic faculties and that the development of every talent will figure as a basic element of the communist system. In this way is the man of the future the aesthetic man, in Marx's prediction. All of production becomes an art; and every art is made intimate with productivity. The disalienated man? He will have the capacity to give artistic expression to all phenomena and to all his needs; he will in this way — and while augmenting the store of material and psychic resources — not only reach an ethical goal of individual development; he will as well — a stage his transposition from the natural world into civilization and culture potentially prepared him for — fulfill his species-being, his nature. His enduring nature, then, is aesthetic.

Marx's prediction of the future undoubtedly has utopian underpinnings. The notion of natural concomitants has a basis in Rousseau. It was not, however, the uncivilized man or savage who lent him the most significant model. It was rather Greek man. In this a direct line started by Winckelmann leads through Hegel to Marx.

What of the notion of a genius-less society when all men shall have become artists? This is not just an aberration in a genius's thought; more to the point, it expresses an empirically-founded, acute perception of the intolerable antinomy between art and society — along with a genial hunch as to the undoing of the antinomy.

We are able to understand, then, why Marxist aesthetics ascribes an important role precisely to art in transformations of society; and why the notion, fostered by Hegel, that art is useless and withering away, is unacceptable to Marxists.

The processes both of alienation and of disalienation incorporate all three of the themes.

Contemporary art and art theory bear convincing testimony as to Marx's aesthetic viewpoint as a key attitude for the entirety

of modern aesthetics. Alienation indeed has become a fashionable term today. Owing to the influence of psychoanalysts and psycho-sociologists, the idea is applied to every kind of frustration. It seems worthwhile then to define the conception more exactly. Moreover, when we speak of alienation today we refer to phenomena which in the time of Marx did not yet exist.

We understand, by alienation, certain processes and their results which occur in a concrete historical situation through the conjunction of economic, socio-political, and ideological factors, and which men feel to be independent forces to which they may submit, or else oppose themselves, but which they lack the objective and subjective resources to control. The processes of alienation and the results accordingly curb the freedom of man; they limit the satisfaction of his basic needs both material and spiritual. Artistic-aesthetic alienation, which is an enclave of an encompassing alienation, is effected whether art has succumbed to myths and mystifications not of its own election, or it combats these, or finally the aesthetic values of the social model are so negligible as to become prized in an exclusive way — resulting in the mythos of the artist closed inside his ivory tower and superior to events, the mythos of the eternal "outsider."

Alienation thus understood does not depart from the methodological guidelines of Marx. It is also applicable to our socio-historical conditions.

Henri Lefebvre in his *Introduction à la modernité* (Paris, 1962) draws our attention to the new modes of *Entfremdung* which affect art and which Marx had no grounds for discussing. These are: scientific and technical alienation, e.g. the discoveries of nuclear physics and the dangers issuing therefrom. And the political and ideological alienation which has widely troubled the early stages of socialist power. The literary reflection of the former alienation mode is presented in the fate of Möbius, a major character in Dürrenmatt's *The Physicists*. The latter mode is represented, say, in Kazimierz Brandys' *The Mother of Kings* of 1956. These recent phenomena can occur, obviously, only due to an ongoing unresolved antinomy between the artist and society. And as to the aleatoric aspect of modern creative production, Lefebvre

links it to these pervasive disaccords of our epoch. For the coming period he does not exclude that a socio-political and philosophical resolution might be synthesized. One need not assent to all of Lefebvre's judgments, which tend to be rather rash, to agree with him about the futility of analyzing the function of today's art if one has failed to see the contemporary modes of its alienation.

One must also agree when Lefebvre notes that the Dionysian strain prevails in the cultural model of the 20th Century. The Apollonian vision of a Marx is a good deal more strenuous of attainment; artists may indeed find it unattainable.

We should add that Lefebvre is stimulated not by the visionary but rather by the realistic force of thought in Marx. It is precisely Marx who shows the concrete antagonisms of art and society. One of these is the unprecedented difficulty faced by the artist (whether committed or uncommitted) in his attempt to resolve conflicting aesthetic and socio-political claims, in other words, the seeming distinction between the so-called universally-human content of art and an ideological outlook embedded therein. Marx locates in such phenomena a *dialectical unity*.

Even where the concept of alienation and disalienation does not appear as such in their works, the analyses of the American scholars (among aestheticians, especially T. Munro and M. Rader) lead around at the last to this problem. Herbert Read addresses himself directly to it — as in *The Third Realm of Education* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), where he resumes his earlier view that a true education is impossible severed from art; i.e., education must not merely be discursive, as it is where only a drilling in facts and moral axioms occurs. Read sees a hope for overcoming the antinomy between pleasure and work only in the Marxian alienation theory. Even so, he cannot believe that a society might be organized today in such a way that the work is felt to be pleasurable. Read argues that specialization as its impact grows from year to year leads irresistibly to ever greater alienation, which he calls a technological alienation. He saw firsthand and was sympathetic to experiments in aesthetic education through work in the Chinese People's Republic — but nonetheless Read came to accept

Schiller's thesis, that self-integration is to be achieved only outside of work, in the "play and leisure time" of man. I cannot altogether agree. First — because automation as it ceaselessly advances opens up ever new possibilities, and can evoke a positive attitude toward work, i.e. toward work in high degree creative. Second — Marx never claimed that the humanity of the future would be an aesthetic humanity due exclusively to the character of the work process. Third — in a way Read's vision although stated just yesterday is more a conjecture of imagination than that of Marx a century ago; for it leans upon the Kantian and

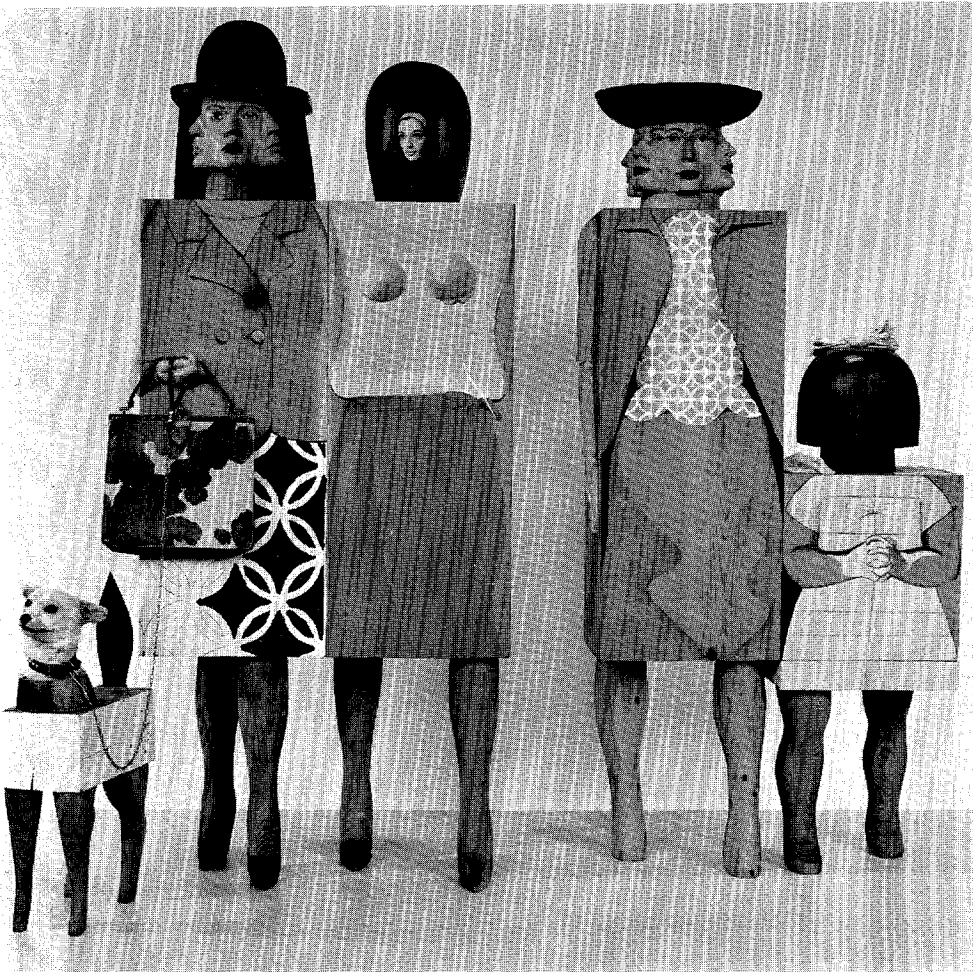
Schillerian idea of three separable aspects of the world. However we are not nearly as interested here in differences as we are in noting that in discussing the various artistic functions Read, too, accords a most prominent role to the concept of alienation.

This question was linked to the problem of time by another author, H. Meyerhoff. Man has grown acutely sensitized to time: the constant need to fragment one's day, the excess of obligations one has, leads to a loss of the sense of selfhood. The problem of "alienation through time" recurs in 20th Century literature from Proust and Virginia Woolf to the so-called anti-novel of Robbe-Grillet and Butor.

### Women and Dog

by Marisol (Escobar), Gift of the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Wood, plaster, liquitex and Miscellaneous items. 1964. 72 x 82 x 16. Collection Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Literature and art indeed evidence the fact that the concept of alienation figures as a key to the current reality. The life work of Bertolt Brecht is one sustained unmasking of the capitalist modes of alienation. Dürrenmatt has pursued his



example. Diverse aspects of the same single phenomenon are illumined by Kafka and Musil — the alienation of the uninformed and helpless individual in the power of the state; Thomas Mann in *Doctor Faustus* — the alienation of modern art; Max Frisch in *Homo Faber* — the technical-rational alienation which stems from the highly organized nature of life. The alienation processes in socialism have yet to receive a portrayal as effective as in these works. The documents that are inspired by an anti-Soviet attitude can not meet the literary standards of an authentic look at reality. The entirety of the truth will only be laid bare and reconstituted in a literary work by Soviet writers who have thoroughly lived the modes of this alienation.

It can not be my aim here to discuss the alienation problem fully, for I do not have the space. On the other hand, the problem could not be passed over. The functioning of both modern and earlier art is focused by the concept as by an optical lens. Our Marxist interpretation has discerned a threefold artistic functioning. We can also specify the interconnections and the hierarchy of the particular themes — or strands — under the conditions of alienation.

We can ascertain that in comparison with the other themes the Orphic strand plays initially a lesser role. The Philoktetes theme asserts precedence, where the historical processes of alienation are pitted in conflict with those of anti-alienation. Disalienation processes, on the other hand, restore the Orphic strand to its appropriate operation. And it is in the aftermath of the socialist revolution, and of securing the socialist state, that an aesthetic education *sensu stricto* will acquire increasing importance, helping to prepare the aesthetic humankind of the future.

We are witness to artistic processes which to some degree would seem to confirm the Marxian hypotheses about the future of art, and its integration with life. Applied art has come to occupy a central place in the arts of the 20th Century; indeed it now appears to have prefigured the style of the epoch. By organizing the space of the locales in which we live, work, shop, and take walks, art enters directly into life. A taskforce of men specifically concerned with *l'art implique* — to borrow

a term from E. Souriau — are employed in the machine-dependent industry of today, bringing it closer to the handcraft industry of yesteryear. They lend the personal touch to items which always had been treated as technical, impersonal products. We may glimpse in this a disalienating development. It is, however, limited and only fragmentary. For one thing, although an enlargement of the field for aesthetic perception is gained, the (Marxian) question of homo faber as homo ludens is wholly begged — with no likelihood of its being dealt with in this mode. Second, the "do-it-yourself" (in French, *bricolage*) tendency does not necessarily imply that a competence in work technology can be turned into artistic activity. Third, the authentic liberation of a human being can only be said to be attained, where his entire psychic energy is activated in expression of the most completely human sense of his existence — and his principal aspirations (the Promethean theme) are thus fully embodied.\* All of these qualifications, however, do not diminish the significance of "the aestheticization of everyday life."

Somewhat similarly, one can see a limited disalienation in the continuous life spectacles organized by television — i.e., a lessening of the demarcations between the life model and the art model. Or, say, in improvisatory jazz. The mode of experience to be had by a listener at a jazz concert is such as to induce one to reconsider the effect of art. There is the story of King Saul who sent his retinue to Nayoath to clap David into custody. But the prophets at Nayoath (the Nabi) frustrated the aims of these emissaries, by thrice beguiling them: with song, dance, and mime. I attended a performance of the Dizzy Gillespie Band in San Francisco; and as I sat among the rhythmically swaying, enraptured throng of listeners, in a near-dark hall lit by a few dull-red

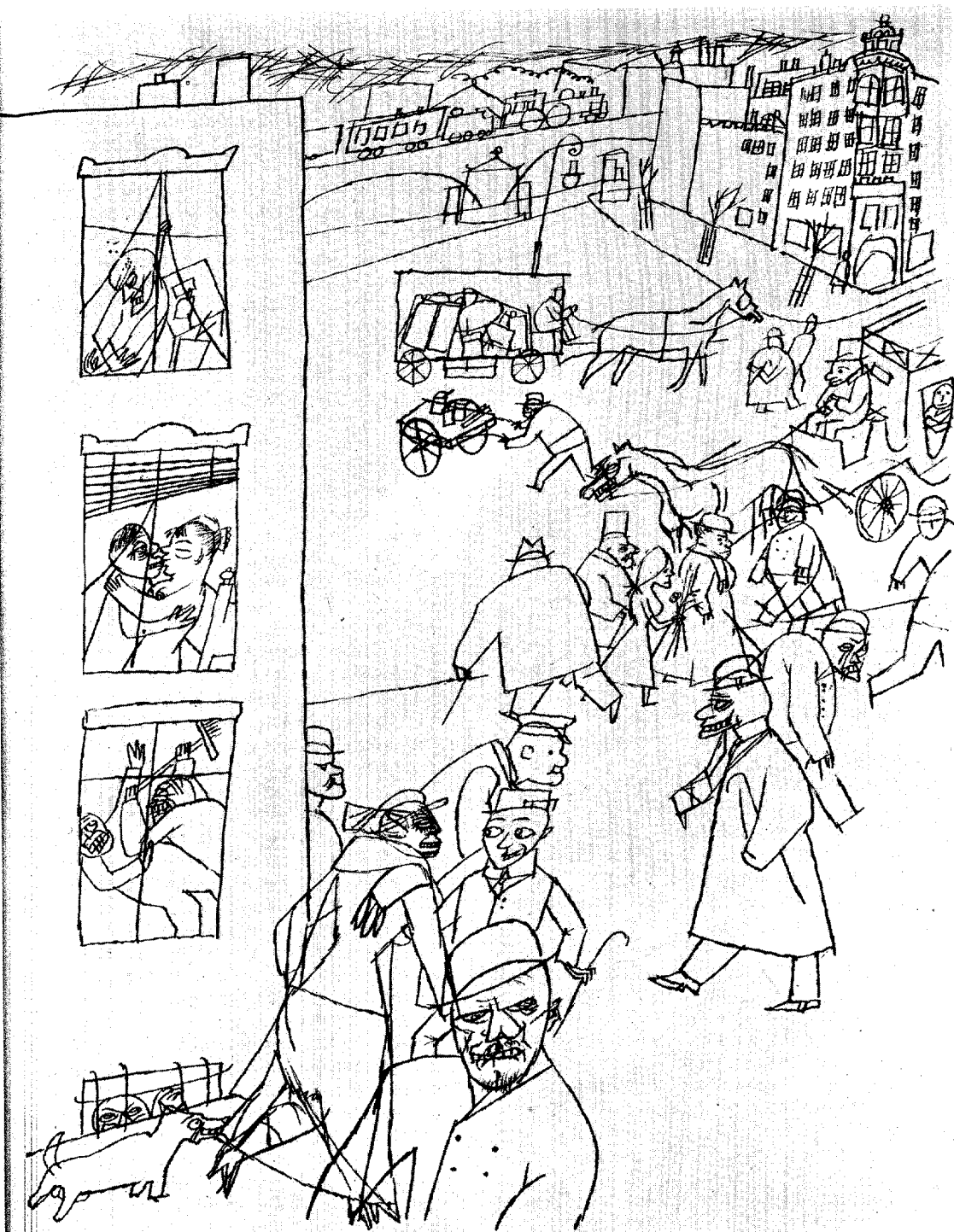
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\*i.e., to be the actor of history and not its slave, to "finish with all kinds of tyranny and authoritarianism, to live in a society which is free of hunger, poverty, violence, and repression."

#### Street Scene

by George Grosz

Courtesy: The Philadelphia Museum of Art; photograph by A. J. Wyatt.



electric candles in the corners, it struck me that I was participating in a modern ceremony. The rhythm and the never-to-be-duplicated expression of the jazz ensemble induce a state in the listener such as to tear down the boundaries separating the ego from its environment, if full attention is diverted to one's body. This effect is reminiscent a *rebours* of the syncretic birth of poetry, song, and dance in collaborative labor — described by Karl Bücher in the eighth chapter of his book *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (1896). In two ways the concert affected me: as a structure of sounds (the Orphic dimension) and as a sensory-rhythmical climate the pervasiveness of which was intensified by the milieu. I quite early yielded myself to the performance and experienced a pleasing aesthetic emotion such as I had never previously known in this way. The Philoktetes theme was illustrated here in a special mode: I, and the other members of the audience, submitted to the identical aesthetic spell. This distinctive, unique experience became merged with life-experience, and I was ready at a single word from Dizzy Gillespie and his group to respond with practical acts. I was virtually a jam session participant myself, prepared to take initiative or to be propelled along willy-nilly. Without question we likewise observe a fusion of the Orphic and Philoktetes strands in communal celebrations and in demonstrations. There may be Orphic presentations included (music, dance, plastic arts) but just let the participant or spectator get caught up, and he will develop a practical-ceremonial attitude. If the situation or times move into a dramatic sequence, the Promethean strand often emerges as well. Again, we should stress that this mode of disalienation — much like applied art, or, more specifically, industrial art — affords a somewhat increased freedom to the aesthetic sense, indeed extending its domination over the technical world. But as certainly, it does not in itself solve the major human problems. Moreover there is the danger that such freedom will prove illusory and fleeting if the problems coped with by the Promethean outlook in art remain essentially unchanged.

How practicable then is the Marxian vision of an aesthetic humankind? Of course, at the last history alone will deliver its verdict. The prediction is based on the idea of a humankind delivered from misery

and necessity. Marxism, and the theories closest to it, again and again refer to this vision. Accordingly Christopher Caudwell wrote, in *Illusion and Reality* (1938): "Art is a mode of freedom . . . . Communist poetry will be complete, because it will be man conscious of his own necessity as well as that of outer reality . . . . Art is one of the conditions of man's realization of himself, and in its turn is one of the realities of man." Ernst Fischer's *The Necessity of Art* (1959) holds that in future, art will enlarge its function of developing the personality, in contribution to the process whereby the individual develops identity with nature and with his fellow man. Art, says Ernst Fischer, is to become a genial faculty of the society as a whole.

The passages just cited do have a note of the prophetic to them, as their authors certainly were aware. If one adopts a scientific view of social development, it is feasible, in line with Comte's rule — *savoir pour prévoir* — to set down a few predictions. Yet no genius has ever forecast the concrete processes of the historical development to come. From certain indications it does appear — as we said — that elements of the Marxian vision are starting to be realized. In countries of very different ideological stamp, similar trends can be observed — whether they may be the conscious aim of politicians, or if not, then present, for all that, in the art and theories of art.

But not without raising many grounds for scepticism. As we said in discussing Herbert Read, the question seems to be whether the individual's entire psychic potential can be brought all together to accomplishment. The epoch of an ever-burgeoning specialization appears not to favor realization of the ideal of the aesthetic man in this respect. Those who support the idea (H. Read is among them) will reply that even if the production process does not conduce toward this goal, the expansion of leisure time yet enables, increasingly, the emergence of aesthetic sensibility and an emotional life. A return to Hegel — to his thesis about the termination of art, and its replacement with philosophy — is made nowadays by some thinkers. These theoreticians draw a smidgeon of evidence from the intellectualizing tendencies of the arts, for example the anti-novel, anti-film, anti-

painting. But alongside the highly intellectualized work, so nearly related to the essay and manifesto, the 20th Century can lay claim to direct and spontaneous creations, which theorists have overlooked who wish to prognosticate the end of art.

There remains the possibility that rather than becoming identified with life, art will (unavoidably) retain its independence in a century of increasing specialization. Or again — even if disalienation does prove practicable, in other words, the aesthetic values can be realized in a particular social model and production comes to be identical with artistic creativity — even so not every artistic creation can possess a productive character. And precisely beyond this juncture where art and production do not coincide, the situation will become exceptional, in brief, a situation of alienation; for the evolution of art does not lead to the overcoming of all internal and external antinomies. These cannot but remain; although they will present themselves in a changed context and one unknown to us.

Accordingly as one confronts such questions, one reaches conclusions about the role of the different themes. If art is to be shucked off, then the Orpheus theme is anachronistic and major changes are required in the other strands. But if art is to be amalgamated to everyday life, then the Orpheus strand will eventually absorb and supersede the other two themes. Should art retain its independence, then all the themes will persist; however, replacing the tensions of today among these themes, newer tensions and conflicts will emerge.

Supposing that we reject the updated Hegelian theory of the end of art, we must then choose the more plausible of the two remaining possibilities. It is not the business of a scholar, whose job it is to analyze the facts available to him, and to generalize cautiously from them, to make predictions about the far future. He can only ask the questions, the answers are not for him to provide.