



Art Awakener of Consciousness, Humanizer of Society

Van James

Art is an awakener of consciousness and a humanizer of society. These functions of art should be clear to all and they should be the cultural experience of all. Sadly, they are not. Hans Belting, art historian, said that “art,” as an understanding of art as an object outside of ourselves, began only about 1400 C.E. Ancient people did not have a word for art as we understand it today because artistic creations were an intimate part of their spiritual-physical lives. For them, original participation, original connection, or oneness with the world was a given.

Aesthetic Education

The word “aesthetic” refers to artistic experience. The antonym of aesthetic is anesthetic, which refers to numbness, a greyness of the soul that is non-aesthetic. This opposition throws light on the meaning of aesthetic. Aesthetic refers also to an “enlivened or perceiving being,” and refers to our ability to respond to the world around us. Because we have a “response-ability,” we therefore have a responsibility to the world to which we are responding. Aesthetic responsibility implies an ethical connection between subject and object.

The process of removing art from our everyday experience continued through various stages of human development, accelerating with the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century. The word “manufacture” refers to things man-made, things created by the human hand. Prior to the industrial age, production involved craftspeople who had learned their skills through apprenticeships, who manufactured things on a small scale and by hand. Industrialization transformed production into large-scale, impersonal, machine fabrication. Today the word “manufacture” is generally understood to mean made by machine.

Aesthetic refers also to an “enlivened or perceiving being,” and refers to our ability to respond to the world around us.

Human input has been largely removed from our understanding of the processes of production.

The eighteenth century also saw the introduction of public education, which soon grew into large-scale, impersonal, product-oriented “edumufacturing.” Based on the factory model, education became an assembly line for learning and teaching.

Education was not, however, left entirely to the factory model. Romantics such as Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Jean Jacques Rousseau saw the value for education in the spontaneity of childhood, play, and creativity. In 1837, Friedrich Froebel established the first kindergarten, one that placed an emphasis on play. The artists Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky, and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, attended Froebel-style kindergartens; these influenced their ways of picturing the world. The impressionist Claude Monet and the modernist Henri Matisse collected children’s drawings and admired their intense expression of creativity.

The twentieth century has seen the progressive school movement continue, in part, through the Waldorf schools’ curricula, which recognize the importance of art. “Art must become the lifeblood of the soul,” said Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf schools. Bring education through art and children learn to live in and work from their innate creativity. According to some, toward the end of his life, Rudolf Steiner advocated turning Waldorf education even more strongly in the direction of art, aesthetics, and practical activity.

Especially in our present age of technology do we require creativity and art. Robert E. Allen, Chairman and CEO of AT&T, said:

We live in an age increasingly ruled by science and technology, a fact that only underscores

the need for more emphasis on the arts. As we find science encroaching on every field of study, we need to ensure that our humanity does not become a historical footnote. That can best be assured with a solid understanding and appreciation of the arts. A grounding in the arts will help our children to see, to bring a unique perspective to science and technology. In short, it will help them as they grow smarter to also grow wiser.¹

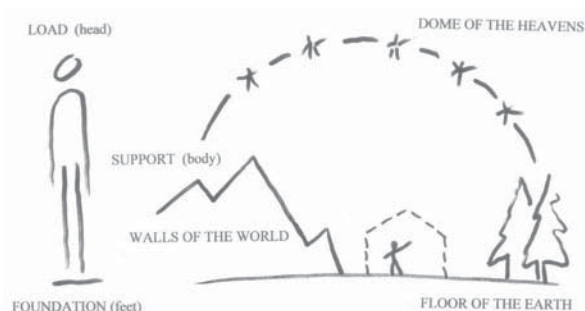


Figure 1. The Threefold Principle of Architecture

Architecture

Look at our bodies. We have two feet standing firmly on the ground. They are our foundation. Our two legs rise up as columns, and our trunks provide walls—they provide support for our bodies' architecture. Our heads are like our roof. They are cupolas or domes and express the load of our physical structure. Our two arms are like free-floating columns that may attach themselves and flexibly support numerous activities in the world. Our bodies, like all architecture, consist of foundation, support, and load (fig. 1).

Now, let us imagine that we are outside in nature. We are sitting on a rock or a tree stump. We can feel the firmness of the earth beneath us. The ground is our foundation. Above us is the dome of the sky, the heavens. It is the roof of the world. The stars above and beyond the light blue mantle of atmosphere form the cupola of the cosmos. This is the load that the gods put upon us from the heavens.

In Australia, when a group of aborigines was first given buildings to live in, they used them to store their possessions while they slept, cooked, and lived outside under the open sky. They couldn't bear to be in the small, enclosed spaces that the government built for them. Ancient peoples

slept under the roof of the world and felt protected by it.

To our right and left are mountain ranges and the trees of the forest; these act like supports, the columns and walls of the world.

When we construct a building around us, we place the laws of the physical body into nature as a kind of offering back to Nature. These laws already exist in outer nature and in the body that nature has fashioned for us. We then use these laws, these principles, when we create architecture, and they work back upon us.

Winston Churchill, during the rebuilding of London following the Second World War, said, "We shape our dwellings and our dwellings shape us." The art of architecture is a bridge and a mediator between the macrocosmic universe and the microcosmic human being. The art of architecture is also a bridge between the physical world and the spiritual world. Historically, the tomb is the first building. Architecture originally served to conduct the soul of the dead from the physical body back to the spirit world.

Architecture, it is said, is the mother of all arts for it provides a setting, or sets the stage, for all the other arts.

Drama

Drama might also fulfill the role of mother of the arts. Drama often features the other arts as its offspring. The arts that work with word, tone, color, form, and movement are synthesized in drama.

What is it like to act in a drama, in a room with three walls? What is it like to be part of an audience viewing the actions and story portrayed on stage? In Classical Greece, attendance at the theatre was free to all. Greek theater provided a transformative, healing experience for the audience as the audience beheld the play. The stories on the stage provide a multitude of pictures. The souls of the audience enter these pictures and undergo a catharsis. The art stimulates a response and thereby creates a responsibility to the stories. In this way art has long been the foundation of education and soul hygiene.

Rudolf Steiner placed a red, carved glass window in the back of the Great Hall of the first Goetheanum, above the west entrance. This was done so that the red light behind the audience, at

their backs as they entered the auditorium, could work therapeutically, could stimulate the will and inwardly engage the members of the audience. Such an architectural feature works with the performance on stage and enhances the interaction between audience and performers.

Here the question may arise, how do we make art the lifeblood of the soul, a part of our daily lives? How can our soul life pulse with the aesthetic experience of enlivened being? Our creativity makes us unique beings, and, at the same time, it unites us with all of creation. Every scientist, every homemaker, every mechanic, every teacher is, potentially, an artist. Artist and writer Guy Davenport said, "Art is the attention we pay to the wholeness of the world." We are all artists when we pay attention; evidence of our attention is our response. We must awaken this aesthetic response-ability that we all possess.

Who Is An Artist?

As young children develop, forces of growth are gradually released to be used as forces of imagination. These eventually transform again to become the power of conscious intelligence. Physical growth, imagination—the power of fantasy or creativity—and intelligence are linked.

Ask kindergarten children, "How many of you can draw? How many of you can sing? How many of you can dance?" All will agree that they can do these things. As Pablo Picasso pointed out, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain artists as we become adults." Art is the lifeblood of the soul of childhood, but why is it so often lost to grown-ups?

Visual Art

Let us do an artistic experiment. I will speak a phrase of three words. Reflect on each word that I say and see what feelings or pictures you form from each of these words. I will leave some space between each word so you can observe the mental picture that arises from each.

"Smooth—Green—Stone."

As soon as a word is spoken, we get a picture. Everyone's picture is unique and the picture metamorphoses with each additional word. We participate in this activity thousands of times each day, making our own, individual mental pictures. We

constantly paint mental pictures throughout the day. Cognitive feelings first appear as pictures that are then turned into words and sentences. This often happens within a split second. We are all visual artists.

Imagine you are living at one with nature, in what Owen Barfield referred to as the state of original participation, in Paleolithic times. You are brought to a cave by one of the elders of your tribe and instructed to take some mineral substance from the ground, chew it, and mix it with your spittle. You are instructed to spit this pigment out, over and around your hand that is held against the rock wall of the cave. You become aware of your extended, paint-covered hand, and how your fingers end at the end of your hand.

This is the first time you've noticed this curious phenomenon—that your hand ends at your finger tips. Before this, your consciousness extended beyond your own body to everything that you touched or sensed, just as, in modern times, a blind person extends consciousness to the tip of a cane. Now, however, you have an awareness of living in the vital life forces of your hand, and you see the picture of your hand on the rock wall of the cave, separate from yourself. The picture on the wall helps you to hold a mental picture.

This is a first step on a path that, thousands of years later, develops into the ability of human beings to form concepts. Today, making a hand-print is still part of the initiation ceremonies and rites of passage of Australian aboriginals.

Artistic practices were the means by which human faculties, actual capacities, were formed. Today, we may have forgotten the purpose of art, but it still affects us and shapes us. We have to recreate an understanding for art and create or discover its new meaning in the world. The 1400s may have seen the beginning of art as we know it, but, in the 1960s, art, in its traditional sense, ended. Since the age of pop art and conceptual art, anything can be art. Today the definition of art depends more than ever on the artist's intention.

The Seven Arts

Music and architecture can be compared to one another, for music is invisible, flowing structure. It is like moving, ethereal architecture. Friedrich Schiller said, "Architecture is frozen music."

Drama paints a moving picture, while painted pictures tell a story and create a color drama. Dance and sculpture are also related as dance is moving, modeled form and sculpture fixes and holds fast rhythmic movements. These six arts are united by a seventh art at which we'll look tomorrow (fig. 2).

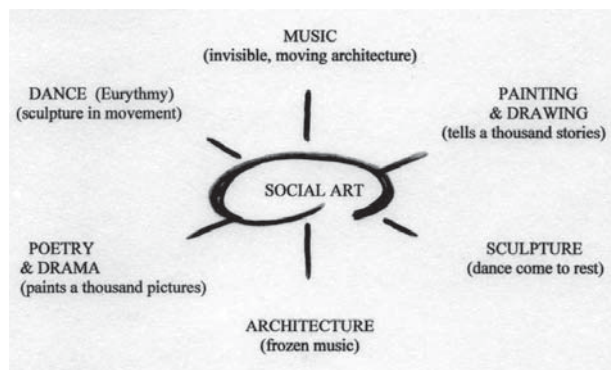


Figure 2. The Seven Arts

Let us do something with some of these arts. I would like you to form several concentric circles, holding the hands of the persons next to you. Without moving the chairs let's make the circles around the center in the floor of the auditorium. Form these circles close to each other and hold hands with the left palm up and the right palm down in a giving and receiving gesture like the one we see in the central figure of Leonardo da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*.

When we have our circles formed and we are holding hands, we will close our eyes and sound a tone to send up through the roof and down through the floor as a vibrating column of sound. It will be an invisible column of tone, a support pillar. First we will let the tone sound upward and then downward in concentric tonal shafts. We will call it, "A Tonal Column of Support for the Arts in New Zealand" (fig. 3). Imagine the potential for all the arts in Christchurch being supported and bolstered by your tone, by our tonal column. Then, let the vibration stretch out to all of the South Island and then all of New Zealand. That will be far enough for today. Please, don't feel awkward about doing this! This is not a scientific experiment. It is not a religious ritual or group meditation, although elements of science and religion, cognition and belief will certainly play a part in the experience. No. We are simply going to make art.

In his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*,² Friedrich Schiller says that the aesthetic education of humanity lies in the art of play. Between the form and duty of science on the one hand and the substance and freedom of religion on the other is art—the nature of which is revealed through play and creativity. We will now engage in serious play. I will join the outer ring and we will each choose a tone to sound. Change it and vary it as you will in response to what you hear around you. We will continue with this until it seems complete.

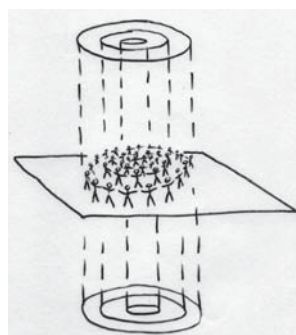


Figure 3. The Tonal Column of Support for the Arts in New Zealand

I have a question for all of you. How many of you can sing? How many of you can dance? And draw? Yes! We are artists. We are truly human when we engage ourselves as artists.

Anthroposophy involves awareness of one's humanity and certainly in an anthroposophical gathering such as this we should all be able to say "yes" to all of these questions. We are aware that we are creative beings. Art, also, involves an awareness of our humanity, and as such is a path from the spirit in the individual to the spirit in the universe.

Art as a Bridge Between Science and Religion

Let us now focus on how art promotes ethical individualism and moral imagination. Rudolf Steiner said:

True art stands beside real [scientific] knowledge on the one hand, and on the other, genuine religious life. . . . No artist could create in his medium if there were not alive in him impulses springing from the spiritual world. This fact points to the seriousness of art,

standing alongside the seriousness of cognition and religious experience. It cannot be denied that our materialistically oriented civilization diverts us, in many ways, from the gravity of art. But any devoted study of true artistic creation reveals it as an earnestness of humanity's struggle to harmonize the spiritual-divine with the physical-earthly.³

We have a picture here of art as the bridge between science and religion, between the earthly and the spiritual, between thinking and willing. (fig. 4).

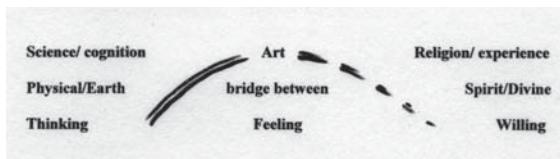


Figure 4. Art as the Bridge Between Science and Religion

Proper and Improper Art

James Joyce, the twentieth century literary giant, had a vision of the arts. He saw the arts as consisting of both proper and improper manifestations. But he saw two kinds of improper art. This distinction between two types of improper arts is most important. One he called “pornographic” because it seduces one, pulls one toward it and sells itself. The other form of improper art he called “didactic” because it wants to teach one a lesson, whether or not one wants to learn it. It is in-your-face, avant garde art, pushing itself on one. Didactic art is true but not pretty.

Pornographic art is pretty but not true (fig. 5).

Improper Art 1	Proper Art	Improper Art 2
Pornographic		Didactic
Pulls one toward itself. Seduces one into liking it. Sells itself. Pretty but not true.	A thin line of quiet. A state of aesthetic arrest.	Pushes one away. In your face. Tries to teach one a lesson. True but not pretty.
<i>Sympathy</i>	<i>Epiphany</i>	<i>Antipathy</i>

Figure 5. Proper and Improper Art

The arts have a special and serious mission of engaging us on three fronts. Pornographic art, not in this case necessarily referring to anything sexual, appeals through our feelings to our will, while didactic art appeals through our feeling to

our thinking. These are forms of art that go too far in the direction of the metabolic-limb or will experience on the one hand or too far into the nerve-sense or thinking process on the other. They do not resound fully within the rhythmic, feeling realm in which, as Joyce calls it, an epiphany in the stillness of the heart can take place. They do not achieve a state of aesthetic arrest.

No Art!

Imagine there is no singing, no humming, no musical instrument. Imagine there is no music of any kind in the world. Imagine there is no dance, no creative movement, no eurythmy. Imagine there is no theater, no acting, no drama. Picture a world with no drawing, no painting, no special effects, no animation, no graphic design of any kind. Imagine no stories, no poetry, no literature. Imagine no sculpture, no architecture, no buildings. What kind of world would this be? We have the ability to imagine this and yet it is unimaginable, because there is no such thing as a natural world without human beings in it. In very early times, says Steiner, people put their hands into cold water as it was about to freeze and as the water hardened they found that they could make forms in the freezing water. Art exists in nature as potential.

The Seven Arts

Rudolf Steiner gives a picture of how the various arts are related to one another and also how they are linked to a human being (fig. 6). Architecture is based on the laws of the physical body. Sculpture arises out of the laws of the vital, formative forces, or etheric sheath. Painting is based on the laws and activities of our sentient experience, our sympathies and antipathies, or astral being. These three arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting, are the spatial, formative arts, or the visual arts. The three arts that have to do with time, otherwise known as the performing arts, are music, drama, and dance. Music is an expression of the laws of the human “I,” or ego principle. Drama and poetry, the literary arts, and the art of speech formation, arise out of the laws of the Spirit Self, the self that arises when the ego transforms soul forces or astral being. When the

ego is able to penetrate and refashion the habit and temperament, transform one's etheric sheath, Life Spirit results. Dance, that is, a movement art like eurythmy, unfolds according to the nature of Life Spirit.

Beyond these six arts lies the new Social Art that arises out of the principle of a still higher spirit member of the human being, out of Spirit Man. When the physical body is permeated by the ego, is transubstantiated by the work of the "I-principle," then a truly human higher spirit results. A new art form is possible when our highest member, that is Spirit Man, works into our physical body. The seven arts are related to and intimately bound up with the sevenfold nature of the human being (fig.6).

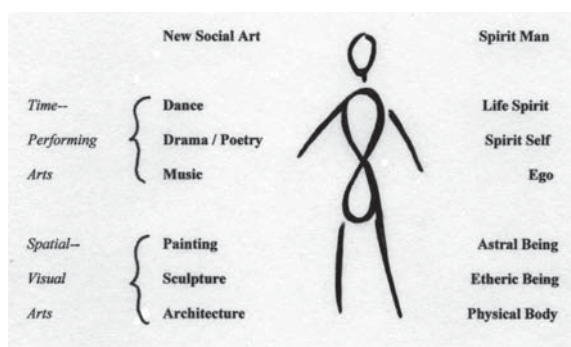


Figure 6. Sevenfold Picture of the Arts

The Healthy Social Life

Rudolf Steiner gave Edith Marion, his first appointment to head the Visual Arts Section of the School of Spiritual Science, a verse that by extension could be said to be for all artists. It is called *The Motto of the Social Ethic*:

Healing only occurs when
In the mirror of the human soul
Is pictured the whole community,
And in the community
Lives the individual soul's strength.

The individual must become a mirror of the community and share his or her virtues and strengths with the community. The community allows every perspective from every individual to make up its body and to encourage the virtues and strengths of all its members. How does every individual become a mirror for the community? How does the community form itself around the

gifts of each individual? And why the "social ethic" for artists?

The late avant-garde performance artist and German professor of sculpture, Joseph Beuys, who died in 1986, extended the concept of art to what he called *social sculpture*. A controversial member of the Anthroposophical Society, he said, "Every human being is an artist, a 'freedom being,' called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and condition our lives." Beuys' extended concept of art is that we are all creative artists continually working on our greatest artwork, the masterpiece of our own lives.

We are all called to respond, to be responsible, to have a response-ability as artists. By working with forms, shapes, gestures, colors, and tones we are working with elements in a way that is a preparation for a greater Social Art that is yet to come. One can speak about colors as qualities, activities, energies, personalities, and, finally, as beings. One can come to the "beingness" of colors. Through color and engagement with all other arts, we prepare for this greater Social Art. Art is practice for our social future!

Leo Tolstoy said:

The task for art to accomplish is to make that feeling of brotherhood and love of one's neighbor ... the customary feeling and the instinct of all people. The destiny of art in our time is to transform the realm of reason to the realm of feeling the truth that well-being for men consists in being united together, and to set in place of the existing reign of force that Kingdom of God, i.e., of love, which we all recognize to be the highest aim of human life.⁴

This is an earnest social task.

The Spirit-Filled Work of Art

In 1909, Steiner spoke words at the dedication of the first building that he had designed, in the village of Malsch, Germany. This building—a very small proto-type of the first Goetheanum—was a kind of esoteric clubhouse. This verse contains the seed of the Foundation Stone Meditation, which he gave years later:

With the laying of this foundation stone of the Malsch building we entreat the blessings of the Masters of Wisdom and the all-high and highest

beings of the spiritual hierarchies that are connected with earth evolution. We entreat that all of your power of spirit may stream through in harmony together with what is brought, felt, willed and done here. On this building may there shine the light of the spirits of the East; the spirits of the West may they reflect this light; the Spirits of the North may they strengthen; and the Spirits of the South warm it; so that the Spirits of the East, West, North and South may stream through this building. In pain and suffering our Mother Earth has become materialized. It is our task to once again spiritualize her, to redeem her, in that through the power of our hands we fashion a spirit-filled work of art. May this stone be a first foundation stone for the redemption and transformation of our planet Earth, and may the power of this stone work a thousandfold.⁵

How do we transform the world into a spirit-filled work of art? Ten years later, while lecturing about the first Goetheanum, Steiner said:

If ideas underlying such works of art find followers—then people, who allow themselves to be impressed by these works of art and who have learnt to understand their language, will never do wrong to their fellow men either in heart or intellect, because the forms of art will teach them how to love; they will learn to live in harmony and peace with their fellow beings. Peace and harmony will pour into all hearts through these forms; such buildings will be “lawgivers” and their forms will be able to achieve what external institutions can never achieve. . . . However much study may be given to the elimination of crime and wrongdoing from the world, true redemption, the turning of evil into good, will in future depend upon whether true art is able to pour a spiritual substance into the hearts and souls of human beings. When human hearts and souls are surrounded by the achievements of true architecture, sculpture and the like [painting, music, literature, drama and dance] they will cease to lie . . . will cease to disturb the peace of their fellow men . . . [B]uildings [art] will begin to *speak*, and in a language of which people today have not even an inkling.⁶

True art and architecture will in future have such a moral force as to reorient the intentions of people. Not improper pornographic or improper didactic art, as described by Joyce, but proper,

true art, with its “thin line of quiet,” will promote moral judgment worthy of a human being. Harmony and peace will flow through artistic forms and human capacities will be transformed.

“Art is the creation of organs by which the Gods may speak to mankind,” said Steiner. Art is an instrument by means of which the spiritual worlds may speak to us. It is one of the most powerful gifts humanity has at its disposal. Art must become the lifeblood of the soul for it awakens consciousness and it humanizes society.

Endnotes

1. Loyacono, Laura. *Reinventing the Wheel: A Design for Student Achievement in the Twentieth Century*, National Conference of State Legislatures, 1992.
2. Schiller, Friedrich. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, editors and translators, Oxford: Clarendon, 1982.
3. Steiner, Rudolf. *The Arts and Their Mission*, New York: Anthroposophic Press, 1964.
4. Tolstoy, Leo. *What is Art?* Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky, translators, New York: Penguin, 1996.
5. Translation by John Wilkes.
6. Steiner, Rudolf. *Ways to a New Style in Architecture*, Dornach: Philosophisch-Anthroposophisch Verlag, 1929.

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