



BENNINGTON COLLEGE ALUMNAE QUARTERLY



volume VII, number one, special issue:

SYMPOSIUM

ON ART

AND MUSIC

Last spring, for the third venture of its kind in recent years, all regularly scheduled classes at the College were called off and Bennington devoted its collective self to a **Symposium on Music and Art**. Subtitled "An Assessment of Vital and Controversial Developments in This Country During the Last Three Decades," it opened on the afternoon of May 15th with a retrospective exhibition in the Carriage Barn of the paintings of Hans Hofmann, and closed on the evening of the 17th with a concert at the Bennington Armory featuring the premiere in this country of **Deserts** by Edgard Varèse. The time in between was taken up with talks by Roger Sessions and Varèse, composers; James Johnson Sweeney, critic and Director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; José Luis Sert, Dean of the Graduate

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School of Design at Harvard; Herbert Ferber, sculptor; Jane Fiske Mitarachi, editor of **Industrial Design** magazine; Thomas Bouchard, producer of documentary films on art; and Alexander Dörner, art historian and faculty member at Bennington College. During all this, time was found for two general discussion periods at which speakers and audience alike were lively in airing their views. The opening session was moderated by Jacques Barzun, author and teacher at Columbia University; the closing forum was led by Bartlett Hayes, Director of the Addison Gallery of American Art. The audience was made up not only of Bennington students and faculty, but also a large number of visiting artists, teachers and others, including alumnae and ex-faculty of the College.

Most of this issue of the **Quarterly** is devoted to a very small portion of what was "officially" said during the Symposium. It should be borne in mind while reading, that **all of the text printed here has been cut drastically**, usually from taped transcriptions of the original talks, and therefore unavoidable damage has been done, especially in the instances where illustrative slide or sound material was used, (Sert, Ferber, Mitarachi and Varèse).

Jacques Barzun's opening remarks at the first discussion period might well serve as the preface to these articles that follow. In part he said:

"Although we profess a great interest in all the arts, I think you will notice that we almost always tend to think about them separately, and thereby fail to make the most of the possible concurrences and similarities in the state of the arts at the present time. The fact that there is this Symposium, and that we are worried about the state of the arts at the present time, is itself an important fact that we should bear in mind in all our questions.

"There is something very strange about getting together and discussing art. Even so short a time ago as one hundred years, there would have been no such meeting as this in any private or public place that I can think of. People might have been writing articles about where music is going or where painting, but that would have remained the business of critics and performers and producers in the various arts. It would not have become a public concern. It did not become a public concern until some time in our century. This expresses, possibly, the passage of sovereignty from the kings to the people, and also a deep sense of moral obligation on the part of modern peoples to have art at any cost, and even at the cost of listening to talk about it.

"We talk about art, thinking always that we all mean the same thing by the word. But I think we have to recognize a sharp distinction between those who make art and those whose business it is to understand it and enjoy it. The artist wants above all things to communicate only through the means which he has mastered over a life of study. Now that is proper and a desire we all respect. It may lead, however, to a conclusion in some minds which I think would be unfortunate, namely that we ought not to talk about art and, by inference, that this forum would be somehow misplaced, that it would be distorting what has been perfectly put before us on canvas or in musical sound or in any other artistic form. I think that conclusion, which is very widespread nowadays, is a mistake because it overlooks the especial fact of being human. I mean the fact that the reason we can call ourselves human instead of animal is that we have the power of embodying experience in words. There would be no continuity of thought, there would be no such thing as understanding, even of pictures, if we did not have words, so that our duty as beholders and as non-creators is to find the right words which do the least distorting to the things that we are given. But we must talk about them.

"And that points to a parallel distinction in the problems of the modern artist at any time, whenever you take the word 'modern.' The artists, if you listen to them, are constantly talking technicalities and this is perfectly right because their whole business in life is to find the right way, the right device, the proper organization, the true structure, the means. What they take for granted is the thing which these means will serve, and they take that for granted because they are artists to begin with. They don't have to talk about life or philosophy or religion or meaning itself—that they have on tap. Their difficulty comes with the materials. Because of this, when we look at what they are doing, we have to get back through the meanings which may be difficult because they're new and intricate, to the meaning that they originally started with. The meaning they started with, obviously, is a different meaning if the means are paint, the means are sound or even if the means are words. What that initial meaning is, is what we want to get from art, and it doesn't, of course, follow that we can give it a permanent form in words. We can give it an approximated form, and that is how we come to talk of styles and of individual artists."

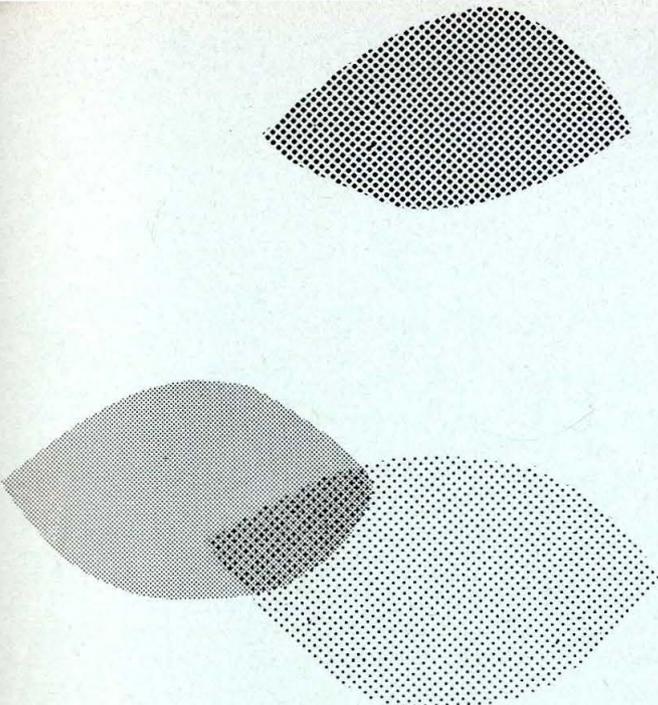


MIRO/BOUCHARD

The film *Around and About Joan Miro* is one of a series of 16mm. color and sound films which Thomas Bouchard has made on painters. The finished color print of the Miro film will have narration and music, but this was not ready for the Symposium. Of the showing at the Symposium, Mr. Bouchard wrote:

"Projecting the black and white negative print from the color original here in New York, we were surprised and excited by its strange and beautiful qualities (some of which the original Kodachrome does not emphasize in the same way), by its eeriness, and the way Miro's work and the natural equivalents related to his painting revealed themselves in a new, contrasting light. I decided, therefore, to show the film in the black and white negative form and to speak informally along with the film. As a result of the discovery of the Miro negative's qualities, I shall probably incorporate certain passages from the negative into the final color print."





ROGER SESSIONS:

MUSIC OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS **—problems and solutions**

One of the very important facts about music in the last twenty years is the place that the United States has won for herself in this time. It's been a tremendous evolution we've gone through here. This view is not simply my own; I find not only musicians in the United States but musicians in other parts of the world constantly referring to it and marveling at it. The United States is no longer, in any sense of the word, a provincial country from the musical point of view. The conditions and problems that prevail generally also apply here.

There are only two other periods that are comparable in any way with this one, periods in which music underwent very fundamental change. One is the period in the ninth century, when musicians first began combining simultaneous voices, in other words, the beginning of counterpoint, and, as a consequence, harmony. The other is the period a little closer to us and somewhat more like our own, in the sixteenth century, in which music became predominantly secular and instrumental, and what we consider our modern harmonic system was born, the harmonic system that has educated the ears of most people in the Western world. It seems to me that music is at the present time going through a change comparable to either of these, and I shall try to bring out certain aspects of this change.

Going back two hundred years, what we see is the gradual and progressive displacement of the center of musical interest from the large design, to that of detail in music, to the individual, very striking features. One relatively superficial thing to which we can point is the place that dynamic shading had in music during the nineteenth century. Beethoven is generally credited with being the first one to use very subtle, dynamic shading in his work, bringing these shadings into a smaller area than any composer had done before him. Bach had used only two indications of that kind, *piano* and *forte*. Beethoven used a great many more, and his music is full of unexpected accents and all kinds of nuances indicating contrast. What does this actually mean? It means, simply, that there is much more detail and much more contrast in Beethoven than in earlier composers. He was giving the music something absolutely essential and organic in giving the outlines of the music the relief they demanded. Another thing to which we can point is the development of the orchestra in the last two hundred years. The orchestra developed as it did

during the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries for precisely the same reason as that which I mentioned in connection with Beethoven, to underline sharper contrasts and to throw detail into high relief.

A further changing aspect of music had to do with harmony. When I use the word "harmony" I mean all the relationships between tones through which musical coherence is achieved, whether they be chords or just simply melodic lines. As music students know, Bach was one of the chief proponents of a new system of tuning which made it possible for a musician to tune his instrument once and to play equally well in all the different keys. Actually Bach himself didn't make full use of this system. He wrote two works, containing in their various parts all the possible keys. But what happened later was that composers used all these keys within a single composition. They could construct works on a much larger scale than was done before, the symphony, the sonata, the big instrumental forms, what we think of today as music of very large design. It made possible the introducing of remote and farflung contrasts within a single work, and brought about the new forms that appeared during the eighteenth century.

At the same time, harmonic effect was intensified through the technical device known as the alteration of chords, and this term expresses a large part of the difference between the style of Haydn on the one hand and Wagner on the other. What happened was simply that in the ordinary, usual chords, one or another note would be raised or lowered in order to make it lead more smoothly into the next chord. And so by this means new combinations of tones were developed. A good example of this is the beginning of "Tristan," where the very first sounds you hear are the result of this process. Wagner also tried to evolve a new form of opera; the main feature of his style was the adoption of a system by which very short phrases, or musical details, were given an evocative significance. Instead of writing extended arias and set pieces of large development and giving those larger pieces the burden of the musical expression, he concentrated the musical expression into very short and small details and built something out of them.

Then, too, something else happened that formed an increasingly important part of music, that is, composers even went outside of music itself in order to hold their music together in large molds. I'm referring, of course, to the development of "program music" during that time, music which tells a story. The reason is very often ascribed to a literary interest on the part of composers. Perhaps it was partly that. But I think that an extremely important part of it also was the fact that the most exciting thing in music, to the composers of that day, was no longer the big design, the long line, the cumulative effect, but rather the striking or poignant details.

The result is that little by little, as these processes developed, composers found themselves up against a real problem. They saw that in order to create expressive or coherent works, they would have to discover new modes of thought; they found that the traditional conceptions had lost their validity in view of the mass of new material which this constant process of intensifying detail had brought into music.

The composers of the early years of this century and the end of the last century were tending more and more to base a single composition on the development and expansion of one single detail or device. Debussy based a whole composition on a small number of characteristic harmonic devices. The piece seems to have unity of a beautiful and moving kind by its very limitations. Another example is certain phases in the music of the early Stravinsky. For one whole period of his career he was a composer who experimented with very complicated metrical devices, and it wasn't until later on that one could discover a great deal more in his music. Or take another Russian composer, Alexander Scriabin, who tried to establish a whole new harmonic system. He invented a chord which he called the "mystic" chord and tried to base all his music on that. The effect is somewhat monotonous today.

What is actually most modern, perhaps, is the drive towards a new kind of synthesis in music, and I'd like to outline three different approaches to this. In the first place, there is one tendency which seeks at this point new musical theory. This is the tendency represented by Paul Hindemith, who has tried to reformulate the whole of musical theory with a certain relationship to the past but with new definitions and new formulations. The net result, from my point of view, is that it makes rules and seems to slam the door at a certain apparently arbitrarily chosen point in musical development, excluding everything beyond this. I think that in time it may well

prove to be a very reactionary and restrictive tendency. Hindemith is a distinguished composer and this doesn't impair the value of many of his works; I speak simply of a tendency.

A second tendency that we find prevailing is what I would call the diatonic solution. Sometimes this is called Neo-classicism, a seeking of new contacts with the past, of deliberately letting oneself be inspired by certain aspects of the music of the past. We heard at one time of Stravinsky's return to Bach, later of his return to Handel, and then (although Stravinsky himself didn't take much part in the discussion) we heard rumors of his return to this and that other composer. The real point is that he was trying to find the means by which these composers constructed their music, and to apply his own ideas to them. And the result was a music which in some respects seemed simplified, in others different, and in many respects quite new.

The third tendency is found among the group of composers who adopted what seemed like a much more radical solution. They took the chromatic scale as the basis of music instead of the diatonic scale, using all twelve tones on an equal basis and trying to find a new logic which could be applied to this. This has sometimes been called "atonality," which means, literally, the absence of key. Most composers, including Schoenberg, the main exponent of this tendency, reject this word. As Schoenberg pointed out, the term is actually meaningless because it implies music in which the tones have no relation to each other. What he and his followers have done is to evolve a method of musical thinking through which the undifferentiated and therefore shapeless series of semitones which is known as the "chromatic scale" may be given definite configuration in each individual piece of music, the latter deriving its materials from this basic pattern. When it was first adopted, one heard a great deal about the "rules" which composers were to follow, but as it developed, composers naturally ignored the rules and tried to fashion something more living and more flexible out of this medium. And that is about where it rests today.

It is natural that in such a period as this, there should be those who hail the process of transition as a sign of decay and death. A period like our own is a dangerous one, and one of the dangers is pessimism. We don't help music or culture or civilization to survive by giving way to pessimism. However, the present time is also an extremely challenging and exciting one. The outcome depends on the strength of the creative impulse and imagination of human beings, and the energy with which they give their impulse and imagination shape. One thing we hear very often is that there is a great gulf between the artist and humanity today. The question is often asked, to whom does contemporary art appeal; for whom is it written? And the complaint is made that the composer does not write for the public, that the public does not understand it, does not have anything to do with it. We hear that artists are trying experiments because they are the slaves of some evolutionary theory; that composers, for instance, seeing music become more complex, feel they must become more complex too.

However, I don't think that is the real point at all. The question is: with whom does the artist actually communicate, to whom does he address his music? And I think the answer is that in the last analysis, he addresses it to men and women. I'd like to draw a slight distinction between a communication to men and women and a communication to something known as "the public." The public is an abstraction, and if we begin examining the word we find that what it means is quantitative; it is a question of number, not necessarily inclusive. When one speaks of art appealing to the public, one actually means appealing to a majority. Now there is music which is designed for the majority. It's interesting, vital and not necessarily inferior in quality to other music — there's good and bad music in all categories. On the other hand, when art is addressed to men and women it is necessarily addressed to *individuals* who are willing to go out and meet it, and to make their own contribution in effort and understanding. Its communication is with men and women who are anxious for a new experience, anxious for whatever new revelation art can give them. The public today is something which is presumably to be manipulated in some way. We've seen it manipulated by politicians, salesmen and demagogues of various kinds. On the other hand, human communication to men and women as individuals implies the communication of genuine experience — it implies having something genuine to say and saying it to people disposed to listen.



JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

RECENT TRENDS IN AMERICAN PAINTING

In undertaking this introductory survey of what has been happening recently in painting in the United States, I would like to stress the fact at the outset that my purpose is to review, examine and propose certain possible explanations and inferences, but not to offer any evaluation of these trends or any prophecy of future developments. When I speak of one current which may be dominant for the moment, or the absence of another, I do not wish to be understood as advocating the one or regretting the other. And if I single out certain developments which have asserted themselves in the painting of the past ten or fifteen years, I do not imply that they are the only trends of interest within that period, nor necessarily the trends which will have the most important consequences for our painting during the next ten years. In this introductory review I am merely going to point out certain features of American painting during the past decade and a half which have particularly caught my interest as significant in that period, and to speculate on them in relation to possible causes and to what they may signify for us and for painting.

I am taking the period of "recent trends" as that of the past fifteen years, because I feel that the outbreak of World War II in 1939 marked the opening of a definite period in the evolution of American painting — the period of most profound and widespread change of viewpoint and that of the liveliest creative activity in the entire history of American painting. The Armory Show of 1913 was the first great event of the twentieth century in our art. This opened the eyes of the American public and of those artists who had not had the opportunity to travel abroad to the explorations European artists had been undertaking over the previous fifty years. The parochial blindness which had characterized the general outlook of American painting up to that time could no longer have countenance. The nineteenth century schools of Munich, of Dresden, of Florence or of Rome could no longer claim the prime attention of the young American artist. For Paris, as the capital of both exploration and achievement in painting and sculpture, had finally been discovered to him.

Still the Armory Show's principal value was a shock value. It upset hidebound attitudes. It opened up new vistas. It created fresh appetites. But it was a transitory event. After a few months it had disappeared. Its effects remained: the appetites it created — the vistas it opened. And there was no immediate means in this country of fostering or fertilizing the seeds of fresh interest that had been planted. Some artists found a solution in moving to Paris. But in most cases this was not until a World War had intervened and the art they found had already developed a vocabulary quite alien to that which characterized even the most advanced examples in the Armory Show. And those artists who continued to cherish the stimulation which the shock the Armory Show had provided them, gradually found their inspiration thinning with the lack of renovation and their products taking a nostalgic, ingrown, dead-end character.

The outbreak of the Second World War, however, led to quite a different set of conditions.

Since the Armory Show (and especially since the early nineteen-twenties) exhibitions, publications and inexpensive travel and living conditions abroad had helped to familiarize the

American public — particularly the artists—with what the 1913 Show had introduced to them for the first time on a broad scale: the persistence of contemporary exploration in the arts in Europe. But this wider acquaintanceship was still, for the most part, from the outside. Exhibitions generally emphasized work that was already two or three years in the artist's past — or at any rate a year by the time it came to a gallery wall. A visit or two to an exhibition of unfamiliar work left at best little rooted understanding. And as a consequence of the language barrier, few of the American artists found a way to become an intimate part of the creative world of Montparnasse — to share its inhabitants' discussions, to hear their ideas evolved, to see them at work, or to work with them.

The finished, isolated work of an artist has its power to stimulate; but it is in following its production that one acquires the truest understanding of it.

The Second World War gave the younger American painters, particularly on the Eastern seaboard, a chance to know and watch several of the leaders of contemporary painting in a way American artists had never had previously. For during the war such painters as Mondrian, Léger, Chagall, Ozenfant, Lipchitz, Ernst, Tanguy, Masson (and shortly after the war Joan Miro) were settled in or near New York. Their studios were meeting places for young artists. Several of these visitors actually taught. All of them were hospitable and generous with ideas and suggestions. The atmosphere of New York during these years, thanks to these guests and other visitors such as André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, William Hayter, the architects Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto, took on an intellectual and creative liveliness closer in character to that of Paris than to the normal tenor of Manhattan Island.

At first few evident results appeared. In spite of the younger men's interest and admiration for the visitors' work, the rash of imitation which one might have expected did not materialize. Still, the association was having its effects beneath the surface; and by the end of the war a group of younger artists had established themselves in New York with a distinctive character of expression — different at once from their work before the war (and even during the greater part of the war)—different also from the pictorial modes of their older European wartime colleagues—and at the same time very different from what was being done by artists of their own generation in Europe. Pollock, Gottlieb, Rothko, Guston, Baziot, Motherwell, Clifford Still, Tworkov and De Kooning, to name only a few, had worked their way into a field which became loosely known as "abstract expressionism." The influence of the teaching of the Bavarian Hans Hofmann on this generation had undoubtedly a great deal to do with the sense of responsibility to liberate itself from restrictive conventions of representation which it developed. An emphasis on color and the rhythmic organization of free gesture brush-work became the dominant characteristic of the new work.

At the same time in New England and the Middle West, two other Central European expressionists, Karl Zerbe and Max Beckmann, were exerting the strongest influences on the student artists of those regions.

At the close of the War, Rothko, Still, Tworkov and Motherwell and their colleagues, through teaching posts in different quarters of the country, spread their wartime explorational outlook across the nation, even to the Pacific shores. One of the most responsive areas was the San Francisco Bay area. There Still and the others emulated Hofmann's teaching approach by encouraging a free search for personal pictorial expression and by avoiding the imposition of any particular style.

Already before the war in the northwest, notably in the neighborhood of Seattle, the influence of oriental art had shown itself in the work of Graves and to a less obvious extent in that of Tobey. This was undoubtedly in part due to the rich collection of oriental art in the Seattle Museum; but it was also possibly a product of the consciousness of the Orient so natural to the inhabitants of the Pacific shores. In the work of a painter such as Carl Morris of Portland, the aesthetic influence of Chinese painting mixes with the forest-landscape atmosphere of Oregon's Pacific watershed. And ten years after the close of the war we find oriental influences cropping out in all quarters of the country, from the subtle tonalities explored in the northwest long before the war, to the influence of oriental calligraphy superficially adapted to abstract compositions, or the admiring recognition of work by Oriental-born artists painting in this country—notably

Kenzo Okada and his younger fellows, Tadashi Sato in New York and Yutaka Ohashi in Boston.

Perhaps the war and the acquaintance which many of the younger generations made directly with the orient in the service, or even indirectly as a consequence of focussing national interest on the East, fostered this wide hospitality towards oriental influences. But perhaps the fact that the widening hospitality to oriental forms and calligraphic modes shows itself particularly in the work of artists which might fairly be linked to what we have loosely described as "abstract expression" points to another reason than the increased familiarity brought about by the war in the Pacific.

But before we undertake to explore this possibility, there are two other points I would like to underline regarding the work of practically all the younger artists I have mentioned: the assertive two-dimensional emphasis of their interests and their dependence on running rhythms for the organization of their paintings, rather than an architectonic structure of rectilinear forms within a suggested three dimensional space. Perhaps the one exception to this linear emphasis is the work of Rothko during the first eight years; but in Rothko also the structural solidity of an intellectual concept of three-dimensional form, gives place to a sensuous atmospheric composition of floating light areas.

As a consequence of this emphasis on linear rhythms and a greater interest in two-dimensional organization of the picture surface than through the architecture of a suggested three-dimensional composition, we find the work of these Americans to differ inherently from that of their European contemporaries—"abstract" or "non-figurative" in the conventional sense of representation as both may be.

What is the reason for this difference between the expressions of the younger artists of our country and of Europe? Is it merely a matter of incompetence or lack of understanding on the part of American painters, as we often hear intimated? Or is it something deeper which makes this linear emphasis and relatively two-dimensional interest of our contemporary painting seem so natural and so effective and at the same time so alien, for the most part, to European practice?

One recalls with what a curious frequency the term "expressionists," loose as that term may be, has cropped up, in our review of the background of the evolution of these particular trends in American painting which we are discussing: both in the term "abstract expressionism" and in the fact that the work of those three teachers whose influence was so deeply felt during the war years and just antecedent to them—Hofmann, Beckmann and Zerbe—whether figurative or non-figurative—may all fairly be described as "expressionist." And that "expressionism" in this sense is a mode of pictorial composition based on an organization of dominant linear rhythms emotionally or nervously inspired, in contrast to an intellectual concept of form, architectonically achieved. This in a general sense may be seen as the characteristic art style of northern Europe in contradistinction to the style of the south, or, more strictly, the Mediterranean basin tradition: the linear, decorative or expressive, in contrast to the sculptural or architectural concept of form!

And perhaps it is not strange that "expressionist" art makes such an immediate appeal to the American public—artist and layman alike—since the roots of the transplanted art traditions in this country have always been more often North European than Latin—for a much longer while English or German, than French or Italian. We see this sympathy not only in the abstract expressionism of the last fifteen years, but in the caricature and topographical bases of the American Scene school of the nineteen thirties—Munich's dominance in the latter half of the previous century—in the German Romantic background of the Hudson River School and the English portrait tone of our Colonial Work. All these are basically more akin one to the other than they are to any characteristic Mediterranean basin expression emphasizing as it does an intellectual structural concept of form, rather than a linear and emotionally founded one.

Then, to carry this suggestion of possible links a step further: if our sympathies lean towards the linear expressionist traditions of Northern European art, these in their turn have a direct relationship to the animal design decoration of early Scandinavia. And the picture begins to take a still wider embrace. Europe's invasion by the animal design underlying the art of Mediaeval Scandinavia and the Irish illuminated manuscripts, traces its way along the amber route of the Danube to the Black Sea, and from the Black Sea and South Russia into Asia; and the cycle begins to complete itself. For the roots of the zoomorphic art which the nomads carried

to Europe were also the roots of Chinese decoration and closely allied in spirit to that which gives its rhythms to the calligraphy of China and Japan. Why should a generation and a people peculiarly responsive to the linear rhythms of North European art not be equally responsive to those of the kindred rhythms of the Orient? And why should artists so conditioned by race or tradition be found wanting for following what is evidently most natural to them—the primarily two-dimensional linear expression—and criticized for not employing the Mediterranean basin emphases which are relatively alien?

Another point, our nomadism: for as a nation we are a nation of nomads. We are a nation of immigrants—in a manner of speaking, constantly on the move. From Europe, for one reason or another, towards the west; from the east coast across the continent to the Pacific for three centuries, until in our modern world the possibilities of transportation have finally made a static existence for any people a serious unlikelihood. The art of the nomadic peoples of Europe and Asia has always been that of the zoomorphic decoration with its running patterns in contrast to the art of settled peoples, the immobile dwellers around the Mediterranean basin, whose art is based on the static character of sculpture and architecture. Perhaps the time of the static expression belongs to yesterday—if I may venture to the edge of what I promised not to do and look a little way down the road. Perhaps Calder, as our most “exportable” American artist, is a token of this trend—“Calder, the mobilist.”

And while you will say with justice that abstract painting is not the only type of painting that is valuable—and that quality and interest are not impossible in other modes of expression as is admittedly the case—why is it that, today, so-called “abstract” painting has taken such an important place in the production of younger artists, not only in this country but also in Europe?

Let me, in concluding these introductory remarks, offer a suggestion for whatever it may be worth.

I will not undertake a strict definition of “abstract” painting. All art of course is based on abstraction or selection. What I have in mind when I speak of abstract painting is a subordination of peripheral or referential interests in a painting and a franker, more evident emphasis on structural essentials than has been common in conventional pictorial representation in Europe during the past six hundred years. This description will admit reductions of conventional representation frequently described as “distortions,” as well as pictures subordinating the element of peripheral reference to the point of appearing “non-figurative,” provided that in each case the aim has been to use the accepted media of picture making—color, line, space relationships and the like — to their fullest pictorial possibilities.

Let us conceive a painting as a means of communication. We have to consider it as such if we are to judge it as a work of art. We can only judge a work of art by the effectiveness with which it speaks to us, or to a highly trained sensibility. (It was Thomas Aquinas who in the *Summa* stated that the standard for measuring the quality of a work of art was the judgment of the highest trained sensibility.) As a means of communication we can see painting as a language, made up of two elements: its surface features or vocabulary which is constantly changing, effected by every temporal, physical and psychological condition, just as is the vocabulary of our spoken language; and its basic structure or syntax which changes only very slowly, if at all, from period to period, from style to style.

The peripheral references, the shapes related to a particular style or period, are features of this vocabulary, this constantly changing element; the structural essentials—its basic form relations within the delimitation of the canvas are its syntax. This is the relatively stable element which, when isolated, gives a sense of unity dominating multiplicity, a microsome of the greater macrocosm—a sense of stability.

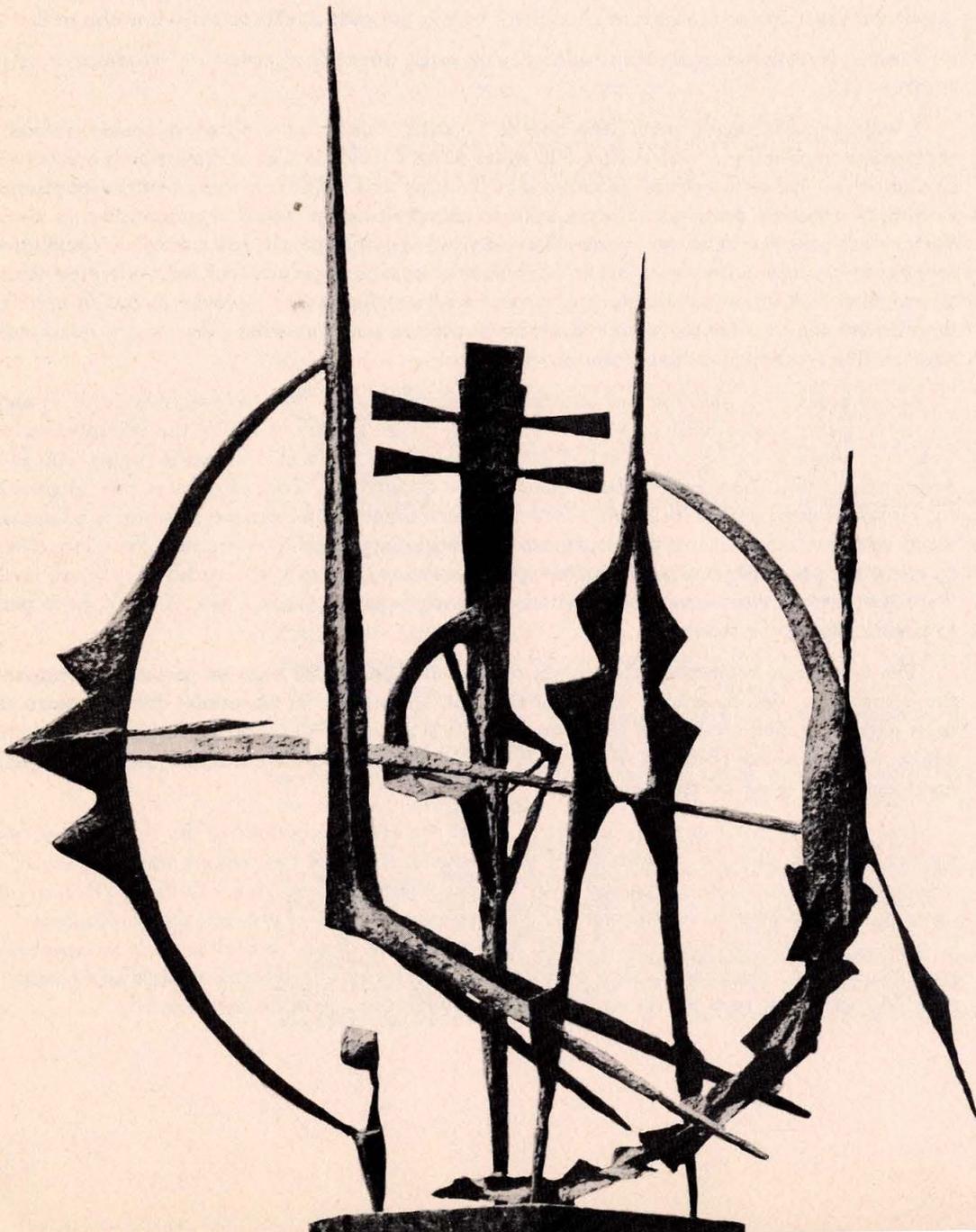
And in an age such as ours—an age in which we are so conscious of the confusion of philosophical outlook which surrounds us—I often wonder if one of the reasons why so many of our artists today are so zealously paring away the peripheral interests of a painting (which in other times have often been so contributory and enriching to a work of art, and today often seem only to confuse the pictorial expression) is not an unconscious desire to find in such an approach a reassurance of the essential stability of existence, and, by setting up such models and reminders, to build a causeway over which we may move through this age of decayed faith?

HERBERT FERBER

**Twenty-five
years
of sculpture**

"The essence of history is change," said Jacob Burckhardt. Sculpture in America, in the last twenty-five years, could almost be used as a measure of this rule because it has changed, during this time, in a most decided way. Even so, in skimming through the recently published books on American sculpture of the last twenty-five years, I was again struck by the fact that every imaginable "style" not only has been used but *is* being used. If we were to examine all these different kinds of sculpture, the result would be complete confusion. It would be boring, noncommittal and meaningless. So in a sense, I have been asked to make a choice, and the choice must be a personal one if it is to have any meaning. A clear picture of what seems important to *me* necessarily can be drawn only to the exclusion of many men and works which may be important to someone else.

Twenty-five years ago, sculpture in America was an energetic



FERBER "THE BOW" 1950

youngster whose infancy had been spent in the usual academic schools, though most advanced sculptors in the early thirties were carving directly in wood or stone, even in precast blocks of bronze. They had not formerly been so vigorous, but had followed the usual method of modeling and casting. The official sculptors who, just as today, did the big architectural commissions or monuments, were simply in business. But those sculptors who considered themselves in the *avant garde*, who refused to follow the sentimental, dying ritual of the Academy, were literally and figuratively allowing the chips to fall as they might.

The form the revolt took was that of massive monoliths, figures compressed into a block and put there directly by the sculptor. Weight and mass and form for their own sakes became essentials in the carving of a figure. These were all criteria opposed to academic ones, including carving. In fact, a kind of morality grew up around carving. Cemeteries lost their tombstones and orchards their apple trees in the dead of night. It was empathetic for artists caught up on the economic and social turmoil of those depression years to work like hewers of wood or stone masons. The revolt against Neo-classic sculpture brought with it the desire to drop *all* its paraphernalia and to return to what seemed to be more basic ideas and methods. And it was, I must add, less expensive. It made the production of sculpture economically feasible; to some extent a necessity was transformed into a virtue.

Of course all these changes did not come about without a continuous influence from the European scene. The revolt against Neo-classic sculpture had already taken place there. Rodin's expressionism and the cubists' structures were examples of it.

But in America it was above all Maillol, Barlach, Lehmbruck and Brancusi who played decisive roles. American sculptors returning from Europe, and some Europeans who came to live here, worked directly in wood and stone and brought with them ideas which were quickly absorbed. These included, too, a renewed interest in the art of Egypt, archaic Greek and Romanesque sculpture, and the discovery of the arts of primitive cultures. All these contributed to a greater boldness in the rejection of academic formulae and to the mystique of the direct method of carving. Zorach, De Creeft, Noguchi, Calder, Flanagan, Chaim Gross, Ben-Shmuel and Laurent were all carvers and, I think, in their various ways made what might be loosely described as an American kind of sculpture.

Some of these sculptors and their followers still adhere to the tradition of monoliths, but for others something happened in the late thirties and early forties which made a change from this massive idea inevitable. Largely due to the European artists and writers, an intellectual and cultural transplant who because of fascism and the Second World War came to live and work in America, the atmosphere of New York became rather suddenly sophisticated, cosmopolitan, prickly with ideas and stimulating with the presence of mature and original artists. It is my belief that this influence acted as a leaven, a yeast, and helped to change the character of art in this country. By and large it remained an influence though it did not establish a school.

Great credit must be given to such men as Calder, Noguchi, Lassaw and Smith who began in the late thirties to use constructivist and surrealist ideas which had come to them or with them from

Europe. The object became less and less important as an easily recognizable part. *Distortion* of form led to *invention* of form. The willingness to work without a model and to use the fantastic, the unreal and invention, the unorthodox use of materials and the use of unorthodox materials, all contributed, in America, to discarding traditional preconceptions about the forms of art.

What is the present situation? In my opinion the best sculpture today is of the kind generally described as constructions. A method has gradually developed of adding or joining the parts. It is not additive in the sense of working out from a core. It is involved with open spaces as part of the work, not just holes which pierce the solid form and act to emphasize its massiveness. I hold no brief for the "hot" method of welding and soldering which happens to be the device commonly used, or for the metals which are also commonly used. I can easily imagine other materials and other devices. In spite of mechanical and technical innovations, a sculptor is not an artisan. In fact his whole relationship to the material is opposed to that of the artisan. He violates common ideas about the limitations of his material, he forces it to do things for which it was not intended, he does not hold it in awe.

Hemingway once said that some are born just to write a phrase which will give *another* writer the idea for a novel. This may mean that the first writer's only significance is in *that* phrase, but it may also mean that the second writer saw significance in *only* that phrase. I have many times seen in a fragment or a part of a sculpture the idea for half a dozen things. This is the alphabet of an artist. Tradition is the body of ideas which help us to new and creative perception. Tradition studied without imagination becomes sterile academicism. The history of art is the history of men with new ideas who used materials in order to express them. Ideas make art; materials make objects. So while I hold no brief for method or material, I do hold a brief for the idea of construction because it has produced an art which is so radically different from almost all previous three dimensional art.

It should not, however, be confused with the work of European and early Russian constructivists. These men, Pevsner, Gabo, Moholy-Nagy, and others, made constructions in which, it is true, space was an important element; they used metals and plastics and paper. A logic, as in architecture or industrial construction, pervades their work. There is an economy of expression like that of a mathematical equation, even when a complexity of design is used. I think there was the reverence for materials which engineers have, in the work of these artists. And certainly they helped to liberate our ideas.

In contrast to all this, the American construction is rather baroque in its profusion. In this sculpture there is a conception which depends on using space as part of the work. It is an art involved in the extension of forms in space. Forms do not displace space; they hold the void in tension. It almost never uses its shapes from a structural or purist point of view. Rather does it use them to make statements of an intensely personal and subjective kind. The work in turn challenges the best levels of the audience to participate in, and to identify with, its statement. It appears that the greatest liberation of the imagination is possible, at this time, in this way. This work seems more different from the sculpture which preceded it than any other once new sculpture was from *its* tradition. Perhaps it will appear less so in the future.

JOSÉ LUIS SERT

THE INTEGRATION OF THE VISUAL ARTS (excerpt)

We are living today through a period and a civilization of which we are all very proud. But among all the marvelous things that have been done in science, in new means of production, communication and so on, there is one thing today that we still cannot be proud of, and that is our communities. Our cities, if we look at them in terms of growth, in terms of expression or provinciality or production, are extraordinary places. Do they really express the civilization of today? Are they a high expression of what we would like to call our culture?

I think we cannot call them satisfactory examples of that. If you consider the best areas in our cities today in terms of good places in which to live, as compared to what could be developed if modern techniques and knowledge of design and planning were applied to those areas, they are far behind our times. We should recognize that if we do not transform the physical environment of man, especially the urban environment, thoroughly and radically, so that we make it something where the dignity of man not only is taken into consideration but becomes the primary object of our plans, we really will not have succeeded in doing anything representative of our culture.

Very often architecture is called the "mother of the arts." I don't agree with this. The city is the real mother of the arts, for the arts as we know them were born in the city. They are a product of our civic culture; it was in the cities that they prospered and developed. When cities were harmonious examples of the culture they represented, those cities were meeting places of the arts. There is a co-ordination of the arts when there is a period of highly developed urban design. The free cities of Greece, and later other cities around the thirteenth century, were typical of periods where there was an integration of the arts, when man developed a balanced physical environment. This happened again in the Gothic period and in the midst of the Baroque, when the great complexes of Versailles and Bath and Nancy were developed. The arts came together in these complexes; they were alive, they were co-ordinated. Architecture, painting and sculpture seemed to spring from minds that were very closely related and had many points of agreement.

In the last decades we have witnessed a divorce of the arts. This divorce really started in the nineteenth century with a revivalist attitude toward architecture, when architects took more and

more from the past and by degrees dropped anything relating to the actual life of the period. The link between architecture and the academic, "official" arts was greatly responsible for this drift between the live arts of the period and architecture itself.

One of the great difficulties today is that after this long divorce of the arts, the architect generally is not prepared for integration, and neither is the sculptor or the painter. They quarrel because they haven't got a community of backgrounds and they don't understand what each of the others is trying to do. We are living through a period in which we give great importance to the individual. The name, the signature, becomes tremendously important. We are obsessed with personalities, and this has been fomented by the press, radio and other means of publicity. We have carried individualism to extremes. A lot would be gained if the different people who are active in the visual fields would get together, as in the musical world, when an orchestra plays a symphony instead of every man, isolated, playing his own little violin regardless of what every other one is doing.

We can't get integration of the visual arts today as long as we remain so far apart. There has to be a community of ideas, a community of backgrounds, more opportunities of getting together. There is an increasing need for the painter and sculptor to leave the gallery. Little tags and catalogue numbers are all very well, but once artists realize they can do something else in sculpture and painting, can bring it into life and combine it with buildings and public places, I think their work will become more expressive of our times. One of our great mistakes is our mania to classify and separate the arts. The arts flow together and are members of the same family.

Many times in the past, walls were used to tell stories or historical facts, but many other times wall surfaces were animated because the artist and the architect felt that the wall came to life by treating it in a certain fashion, by giving the sculptor or painter work to do on that wall which made it more interesting and exciting. Architecture, without ceasing to be functional, can give greater satisfaction with the addition of certain elements that won't compete with function itself.

Sculpture should be conceived with a building for it can play a very important part in accentuating the building and giving it further life and interest. Architecture itself should become a piece

of sculpture, should have certain sculptural qualities of fullness in volume and form, and the varying effects when the light of the sun changes which give every good building a structural interest. We have, by limitation and by elimination of elements, come to a moment when all the sculptural qualities of buildings have been omitted. Unfortunately, sculpture most often is completely detached from a building; it is something put on the building more than belonging to it. Sculpture has fallen so low in its placing in cities today that now one sees a poor bronze general on horseback between red and green traffic lights at the most busy intersection of town; nobody can really look at him unless he wants to risk his life to cross the place, and not even then can he have the right angle to see.

There's no doubt that today as our cities stand, there isn't a real container, a place, where painting, sculpture and architecture can be displayed and related in the proper fashion. Our cities have become busy thoroughfares, crossroads and congested

streets. There is no place of quiet, no place of contemplation. In the old cities there were places where people could move around, where people had an opportunity to live in a space surrounded by forms that were sculptural and architectural in the true and proper relation.

Today, new techniques of advertising, of light, of form, of color, of moving elements, offer a tremendous field of action for the artist in the shape of the places where these things could be displayed, places where there would be a little order, a little harmony, where architecture, sculpture and painting could really be integrated into one whole. If properly designed by good architects and planners, there would be an opportunity, of showing in these places, work of the most extraordinary kind, of the most extraordinary materials. It would have nothing to do with the things we've seen in the past. It would be something absolutely of our time. I think that the trends are in that direction and I do trust that in the near future we may see some results.

"GUERNICA" 1937 PABLO PICASSO



EVALUATING INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

We are talking about art. How then does industrial design deserve to come under this heading? A painting is painted to please the individual who paints it; a piece of sculpture is formed as the product of one set of hands; for each it is a purely private expression. Industrial design, on the contrary, is never the product of one hand. It is compelled to be a co-operative, or at least a group-oriented, creation because of the conditions under which it occurs. There is no direct association of maker and object. What we have instead is the industrial designer who creates models and prototypes for the machine to copy. Not only is the maker separated from his product, but lots of other hands have come along to interfere with his work: the client, the engineer, the toolmaker and molder; and when the object comes off the production line, any resemblance to a personal creation may be more coincidental than natural. Ours is an age in which the organization has replaced the individual artist as far as industry is concerned. The lone creator cannot, by purely physical limitations, serve industry by himself. Here is a situation full of compromises and contradictions: when there are so many hands in the pie, and when the pie may have dubious importance anyway, how can one talk about art and industrial design in the same breath?

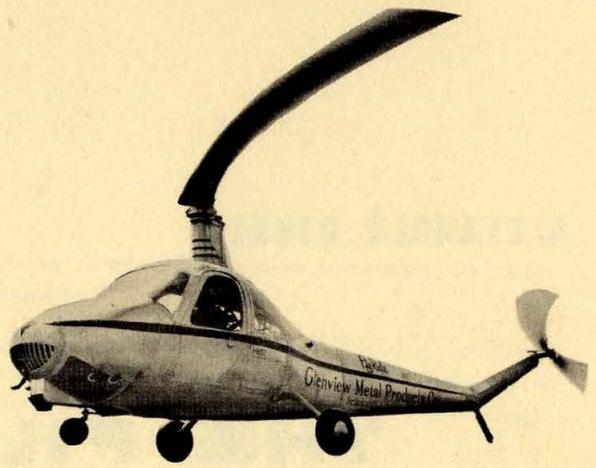
The confusion between art as the product of the individual hand, and as the product of the machine, stems from the industrial revolution. The fallacy was, of course, in the idea that art was art only when it existed in some non-utilitarian form. In England, commissions were actually appointed to find ways of applying art to the first machine-made products. The method they chose was "applied art"; a floral motif was tacked on, like a decalcomania on a kitchen cupboard, and this gave the product the sacred touch of art. The Bauhaus, founded in Germany in 1919,

was a school based on the belief that art training must bring together all forms of visual expression into an integrated whole which would ignore the distinction between "fine" and "applied" art. "Applied," if the word persisted at all, then came to mean that you must apply the *principles* of art to the creation of everything, whether for decorative or practical use. The leaders of the Bauhaus, Gropius, Moholy-Nagy, Breuer, Bayer and others—wanted to make artists productive in society, believing that the future of art would lie in mass production rather than in individual craftsmanship. They tried to break down the barriers between the structural and decorative arts by emphasizing not a code of esthetics but a method of finding an expression appropriate to the nature of the problem. The Bauhaus closed in 1928, but if all had gone well, its teachings and disciples might have ultimately produced an integrated society with no distinctions between "fine" and "applied" art. Of course it didn't work out as neatly as that, and even among artists themselves the words still tend to create a schism. Recently Herbert Read solved this problem very nicely once and for all—at least on paper. In his *Art and Industry*, he disposes of the terms "useful" and "fine" art entirely, but he does admit that there are different kinds of artistic expression. He calls them "humanistic" and "abstract," which cuts the cake in equal slices rather than in graded layers. Humanistic art has its own kind of expression: specific content, places and people, emotions and moods, just as art always has. Abstract art is an expression which appeals to the sensibilities through proportion, symmetry, rhythm and other esthetic qualities.

If we drop humanistic art from the discussion and concentrate on abstract art as it appears in useful objects, we come to another word—design. This word has many shades of meaning, ranging from engineering to esthetics. What I mean by it is *the purpose-*



TEAKOE TEAMAKER/DESIGNER: JAMES L. HVALE

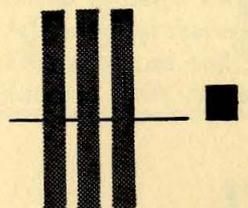


ful act of setting about to solve a practical problem which will involve any number of non-esthetic considerations. Design is not pure self-expression, but is the creation of abstract art in the course of solving a practical problem. The importance of design today means that we are making a conscious effort to bring together art and daily life. We do have a culture—with a small c—and if we have not recognized the fact that it is building up a very consistent picture of itself through many of our present-day artifacts, it is because we don't know how to read the cultural signs. These are quite different from the ones we have become educated to accept. They are trying to communicate something to us which is not entirely absurd or inconsistent, saying, "This is what the twentieth century is made of; these are peoples, values and modes of expression." Design is communication, but we can't receive a communication unless we understand the language in which it is being transmitted. Every form of art has been an unfamiliar language at some point. Our culture today is full of symbolic expressions which are not neatly surrounded by picture frames or tagged with "Good Design" labels, and it is one of our major problems to understand and make sense out of them.

The key to understanding and enjoying art is evaluation—a process of passing judgment on things by studying them, comparing them to what we know, and reacting to them intellectually and emotionally. There seem to be two kinds of evaluation: the automatic kind, and the creative kind. By the first I mean evaluation which judges everything against a prevailing standard, which is sometimes called taste. But taste has little to do with the issue of art—and when it does, it is usually a substitute for evaluation rather than a basis of evaluation. Good taste is one of the problems of a conformist society, for the minute something is commonly accepted as good, many other things are automatically shunned

as bad. The end result is a code-book of styles; no one need bother to think for himself as long as he has the rules firmly memorized. Meanwhile, the most significant things go on unnoticed. Good modern art and music did not become recognized by any rules of taste, but by rules of perception, and they were judged good on the basis of evaluation which, at the time it was made, was creative evaluation—and often highly unpopular. Evaluation is critical to the problem of industrial design. Mass production and the culture growing out of it demand a truly creative kind of perception; they demand that we look at a thing and understand not how it conforms to existing rules, but what new rules it may be suggesting for the future.

The final question, of course, is: What is the purpose of evaluation? Well, it may be to help ourselves live in a somewhat bewildering world, or it may be to help change and better the things we do not like about our existing society. But to criticize, or preach, or try to improve society without first understanding its true nature is a mistake. We have a new kind of culture in the twentieth century, a mass culture, in which artifacts are produced under completely new circumstances according to many rules which we do not entirely grasp. Modern technology is the creation of objects by multiple effort—it is a democratic kind of creativity, but creativity nonetheless. We have in mass-produced objects a new kind of folk art in a new dimension: an anonymous or group-oriented expression of the twentieth century in terms of practical needs—and expression which is not by all the people, but at least for the people. Industrial design is, or can be, the art product of a mass culture. I don't maintain it is all good, but good or bad it matters to us. We can't afford to ignore it, because—who knows—history might decide it was the twentieth century's most significant form of art.



ALEXANDER DORNER

THE FILM:

a new species of art

The concept of the "moving picture" coincides with the eruption in the Western mind beginning in the movements of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Traditional Western "rationality," still tied to its magical ancestry, is a mythological duel between celestial and terrestrial demons. Only, by the time of Descartes and Leibnitz, the celestial demons had turned into immutable absolute ideas, grasped only by pure spiritual speculation. In religion, philosophy and art, the being in form and content suppressed the becoming, and art increasingly created static symbols of the all-embracing being, experienced contemplatively, in contrast to the old, sensuously activating magical monuments.

But the way these celestial, change-preventing ideas acted was still magical, and the farther the totalitarian unity of the absolutely ruling idea advanced, the more fanatical was this belief in the magic of acting forces. This was the "rational" connection between the changeless spiritual and the changing sense-world. But such total predetermination of all life could only increasingly tend to suffocate all creative change-making forces and result in the revolution which admitted these forces as part of the divine plan. Thus the traditional Western mind outgrew itself.

Yet to admit the divine quality of change-creating energies meant to split the unity of reality, for they had to be introduced into the spiritual celestial realm of ideas and the physical realm of body and matter. In the Enlightenment and Romanticism the new mechanical sciences began to rule "real" life; new personal self-expression, to rule the world of the soul, religion, humanities and the arts. But these hostile worlds were also split. Science admitted change-creating interaction between energies and matter, while matter and energy remained changeless and moved in changeless space along the casual string of time, and all obeyed immutable divine law. In the world of the soul were admitted constantly different experiences of rational mind and emotional soul, while the mental faculties and emotional needs were fixed forever. Novel styles, for example, emerged, but being pre-existent in the creator's plan, were of equal and timeless value.

Such an equality of contradictory truths could not be expected to last. When inherited truths were proved untenable or inferior

the surviving absolutes were shaken. The coherence of time assumed a new quality and strength and grew into a force transforming the absolutes of space, matter, energy and "immutable" Adamic faculties and needs.

The history of the "moving picture" shows how mechanical movement in space became "moved space" and the contemplation of allegedly eternal human inner conditions became a powerful transformer of man himself.

Inspired by the magical shadow plays of the East, the "camera obscura" and peepshows appeared in the Renaissance. In the 1750's, Carmontelle introduced his "tableau mouvant," a movable transparency rolled off like a scroll. Contemporaneously, a stage designer, Louthembourg, introduced removable side scenes and later even changed the identity of reality on the stage by using strong colors to "express" the different emotional atmosphere of each scene. He also employed moving clouds and moons and sound effects. In his "Eidophysicon" (1781) he achieved different emotional subjective realities by throwing changing lights on gauze hanging before the side scenes and backdrops on several small stages. The invention of the hollow wick in 1783 exemplifies the power of science interacting with art.

Then came an attack on the traditional vision of reality as static space, detached from and superior to time. In 1788 Parker invented his "Panorama," wherein the spectator turned 180° to see a picture of the whole horizon. In 1830 Langlois put solid objects before the panorama, breaking the sacred "windowpane" of Renaissance painting, a direct attack on the perspective picture, the symbol of the traditional truth of a world resting inside absolute space. In 1855 Langlois employed Daguerre's photography in the panorama. Thus science entered art. The subjective interpretation was eliminated. Documentary reality seemed to jump at the visitor. Battle scenes were often used, and later projected through photo-slides in sizes up to fifteen yards high and one hundred and thirty yards around. It was the documentary moving picture for the nineteenth century.

Also in 1823 Bouton and Daguerre showed their "Diorama," an off-rolling picture giving the spectator the feeling he himself

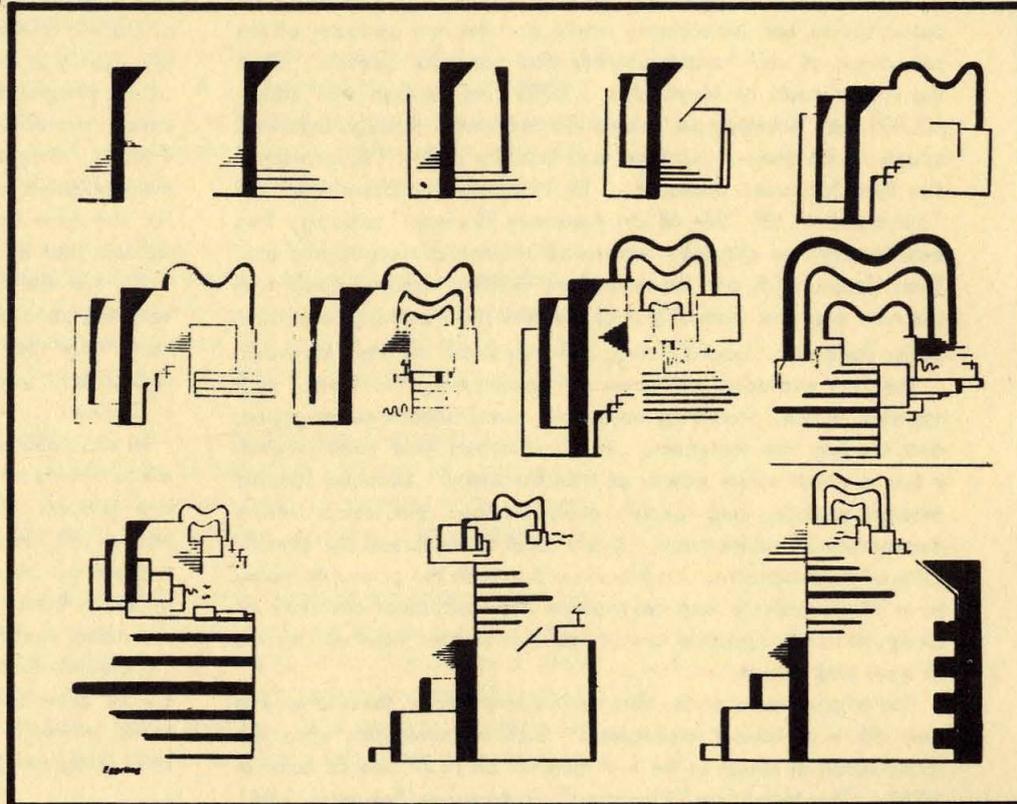


These illustrations show two elements of the modern documentary film in the stage before their integration.

below: Viking Eggeling, 1921. Sequence of 12 phases of self-transformation in an Abstract film. Whilst Abstract painting can only proceed to the point of an oscillating transformation, the Abstract film breaks through to an open growth which never returns to any basis status.

left: Dsiga Werthoff, c.1925. Photogram of documentary subject-matter of a film. It shows the almost unlimited possibility of associating symbols of concrete life which the process of the film contains. (Our photogram necessarily reduces this new force to the oscillating status of the modern picture).

Both illustrations combined give an idea of the new intensive, life-improving impact of the modern documentary film.



moved. In 1831 Daguerre used Louthembourg's "moving stage picture" with a circulating picture, exploding the traditional certainty of a perspective space world. Not only "expressive color" attacked this certainty, but by lighting techniques objects appeared and disappeared. In 1830 the "Pleorama" came, combining the circular opening of the outside world with the power to change its identity by lighting effects. As the audience moved along in boats around the panorama they experienced storms, sunshine and so on. The shock exerted on the minds of our ancestors was of the same intensity as the shock the "Cinerama" exerts on our minds.

In 1832 very close to our moving picture was the "Life-wheel," wherein many pictures of the same thing in slightly constantly changed shape rolled off before the eye.

Though art and science combined in these inventions, it was chiefly painters like Turner, Blake, Friedrich, Runge, Schinkel and the Nazarenes, who exploded the changelessness of the spatial framework with the "Arabesque" (Expressive Line), where the traditional outline began to extend itself from body to body, back and forth, introducing time as a fourth dimension in the static reality. Later, Impressionism and Expressionism merge in the pioneering abstract movements which search for an intense inner self-changeability of any formal composition. In this, easel painting allows the spatial system to be driven to the bursting point, but remains still, a semi-static, oscillating inner mutability.

The static limitations of painting have driven some artists to the abstract film. Their creative experimentation (for example, Eggeling, Richter, Léger and Man Ray) remained an ivory tower detachment and missed what creative communication has been throughout history: a social life-improving force commonly understood and needed.

Yet the film is an ideal medium to communicate the actual processes of life, our evolutionary world, and the new certainty of the coherence of self-transformability and essential growth. With the experiments of Muybridge (1872) and Dickson and Edison (1889) the "Kinetoscope" permitted movement through unlimited space to be shown. Latham and Lumière (1894-95) projected the film for mass audiences. In 1902, Porter introduced the "cut back" in his "Life of an American Fireman," whereby two emotionally and spacially separated sequences merged into one. Then (from 1908 on) the American, Griffith, experimented with the new exclusive possibilities of the film: the close-up, panoramic shots, fade-outs, back-lighting, the dissolved iris and cut-back.

The film explodes the stage by documenting the "real," and opening space, providing ubiquitous, simultaneous super-action, and freeing the viewpoint. Mass-produced and mass-viewed, it has a great social power of transformance. Directed toward present actuality and today's problems, less and less it admits expressionistic subjectivism. It is bound to transcend the boundaries of contemplative art; it can instill us with the power to transform life creatively and so replace the traditional certainty of being, the unchangeable law of motion and the "timeless" nature of man and his art.

The improvement of the film as a documentary, therefore, was and still is of utmost importance. Such improvements were the introduction of sound in the late summer of 1927 and of color in 1931. The latest, the "Cinerama" (in Russia in February 1941

and in the U. S., in October 1952), increased tremendously the participation in real life processes and is for this reason able to promote collective action in a heretofore unknown degree.

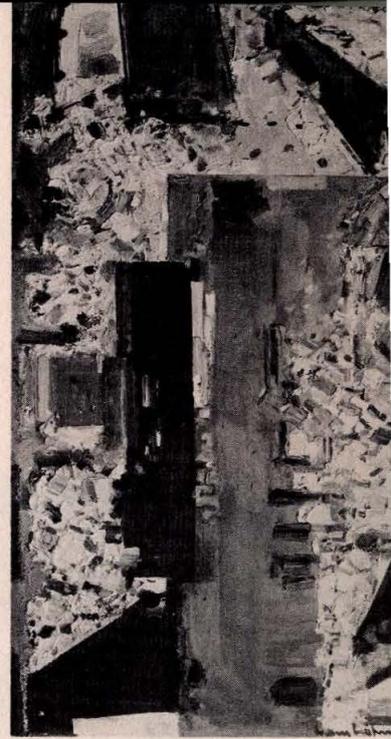
Though the stage habits are tenacious (Meliers' expressionism was carried on in Chaplin's escapism and Lang's mysticism), the power of documentary actuality seeped into Flaherty's "Moana" and "Man of Aran" and into their cult of an allegedly aboriginal status of man. Since the film was the merging of the two new forces — the sciences and the liberated arts — its essence had to become the new *activating documentary quality* (note Griffith's "Birth of a Nation," 1915, and "Intolerance," 1916). It presses forward toward improvement of man and his social life. It makes activating art, unlike self-expressive art, as important as scientific, political and military activities. As "propaganda" for creating progress, it has been used by the Americans, the Russians, the English, the Germans and the Italians. Every good film is infiltrated with the will "to promote the growth of man," while contemplative art was "propaganda" for allegedly unchangeable conditions of man and nature. By integrating arts and sciences the film will lead them out of the inherited still absolutistic split, joining in a creative, psychosomatic evolution. This type of film could be created and used also here at the College, for instance, by showing how the isolated ego gains new certainty by cooperative, self-disciplined action toward common aims.

It is surprising that in the United States, where the first pioneers of the activating documentary film lived and where the parallel break-through in philosophy, *pragmatism*, began, this new language has not been grasped with more enthusiasm. True, pragmatism is still partly imbued with the inherited absolutism of the self-sufficient ego of Rousseau's, and Dewey's aesthetics is still expressionistic. But James' pragmatism was, like the documentary film, a movement to integrate the inherited split world, the worlds of Darwin and Hegel; and Dewey dedicated his life to the scientific inquiry in social and moral affairs. The result of this merging was in pragmatism the same as in the modern film: life-improving action replaces contemplative speculation. A tough Yankee attitude, pragmatism *can* only unify because it outgrows any contemplative cult of allegedly immutable timeless conditions. For the time being, this integrating process is more evident in sciences than in art, which tends to backslide toward the absolutes.

Yet we shall need artists more than ever, a trained group developing imaginative seeing, though their works of art should not have more than a temporary character, without finality of form and content, (note George Grosz' work for the recent film "I Am a Camera").

In all walks of life it is up to the pioneering and imaginative minds to spread a concept of the individual as a socially cooperative process of growth. Is there enough Yankee pragmatic instinct left, or has this country changed its identity too much? Is there an aversion to change when change is most needed in order to break through and survive in a rapidly changing and menacing world?

I decline to believe so. I decline to believe that our nation cannot grow and continue to give mankind the ever open, never static, powerful process which is also the living force behind the new, integrating art: *the activating modern moving picture*.



Excerpts from the Catalogue of the Hans Hofmann Retrospective Exhibition

Over the past fifteen years a body of painting has emerged in this country that deserves to be called major. Hans Hofmann's art and teaching have been one of its main fountainheads of style. The value of his art is, however, independent of its function as an influence.

Hofmann, born in 1880, was brought up in Munich. At eighteen he began to paint. In 1904 he went to Paris, where he stayed for ten years. Matisse's color and cubism made a profound impression on him and he had to "sweat out" cubism over the next quarter-century, until he was able to turn it against itself in the interests of his own temperament. Few people have absorbed cubism as thoroughly as Hofmann has and a good deal of the credit is his that American "abstract expressionists" could from the first take cubism for granted as a necessary discipline on the way to a grand-style abstract art.

Hofmann was just sixty-four when his first one-man show in New York was held at Peggy Guggenheim's gallery in March, 1944. He had, as it were, to wait for fauvism, cubism, constructivism, surrealism and so on, to leave the scene before he could enter it. This show was one of the public beginnings of "abstract expressionism."

The synthesis of Matisse's color with cubist design was for him not an eclectic, composite art but an organic fusion evincing qualities that were new and not foreseeable in either Matisse or cubism. One element of difficult originality in his painting is its dissonant color contrasts. A discord is created when blue and green are used in warm shades as a foil to warm color like red and orange. This is why his color often seems to scream. With time, however, one's eyes become attuned.

In Hofmann's design we again meet with a kind of dissonance. His swift, rather machined line leads the eye to expect something different from the rugged, monumental composition it will often point up. Equally surprising is the crisp design achieved with coils of paint squeezed directly from the tube. The seeming discord between means and end is resolved in a final harmony that, as with all profoundly new art, we perceive only when we have broken with old habits of sensibility.

A triumph and a contribution of Hofmann's art which time will not diminish is that he reveals the picture surface as something alive. Like Klee, he broaches painting as a matter of addressing oneself to the responsive rather than the inert or passive object constituted by a plane surface. He conceives of painting more as the prodding, pushing, marking and scoring of a surface than as the inscribing, tracing or covering of it.

Something of the *active* effect of Hofmann's painting has spread through American "abstract expressionist" painting and accounts for the open, pulsating paint surfaces that most consistently distinguish it from its French and German counterparts. As his pictures dry out and their colors come closer in key, they become smoother, firmer in their unity, more traditional in their resonance, and their force becomes more compatible with elegance. It is perhaps too soon for standard good taste of our time to see this, but it will surely do so when Hofmann's pictures have dried out figuratively as well as literally.

—Clement Greenberg

During the first general forum, Hofmann himself was asked to explain his own paintings:



“I am not a man who likes to answer questions because I am a painter, and I speak in color, in lines, in planes and so on, only of the problems which have occupied me my whole life long.

I have fought in every picture, I have struggled in every picture, to paint out just what I have to say. And I have to say it with the means that I use.

I use no literary theme, I use no religious content, or something like this.

What I want to do is first create a good painting. A good painting I understand.

The painting in itself has a life of its own.

It must have a life that is created through the pictorial means.

This means must be activated and must generate what I have to communicate.

What is generated cannot be verbally expressed.

It can only be expressed in the means which I use, in the language I use, and my language is painting and nothing else.

When people ask me to explain what the picture means, I have to answer them that it means the immense struggle through which the picture has gone in its development to come to the result which finally is offered to the public.

Either my pictures communicate or they communicate not; because they say it in the language which I use and this language must be understood.

This language can be understood.

This language can be dark, and powerful in understanding when it is clear that a picture first of all is a picture, and is created as nature has created a flower, as nature has created a tree, as nature has created a child; so is a picture created. It takes the artist's full heart, full energy, to do this which finally comes out.

It is not my concern and never was my concern if my pictures are liked or not liked; when they are liked I know they are *liked* in the same way I felt it.

And when they are not liked, well, I can only say I am sorry but I am not trying to make you like them, either you like them or you do not.

They are here, they will speak for themselves.

They will speak and if they are not understood today they are understood tomorrow, maybe in a hundred years, maybe in two hundred years.

But I know they will be understood.

That is all I have to say.”



EDGARD VARESE

MUSIC

The physical sciences have discovered and are daily discovering laws and order pervading matter which have changed and keep changing our ways of life and our civilization. What I should like to emphasize may be summarized in these words of Einstein's: "Our actual situation cannot be compared with anything in the past. We must radically change our ways of thinking, our method of action."

Let me particularly stress the problems the composer faces in relation to his environment. If one compared what is going on in the field of music with what is being done in the field of the plastic, graphic and literary arts, the composer would have no reason to be proud. In the plastic and literary arts there is an urge to go ahead, to experiment and to search without fear of what may be found. But music, through its indulgence in routine, its timidity, its desire for a permanent condition, for security, stagnates. Recently several Paris critics have pointed out this persistent lag on the part of music. I was proud to find myself referred to by Jean Roy as the only composer who has always "set his watch at the same hour as the painters and poets." The liberation of music, liberation from systems, academic fads and mannerisms, can only come from itself, from within. It must resign itself to the rigours of creative unrest, to the discipline of constant tension, to plunge again into its normal state of permanent revolution, to refuse to be deaf to the new, admitting on the contrary that the most important element in a work of art is newness. The public to whom music is addressed should shake off its apathy and allow itself to be taught to discern the true nature of music and the necessity for a constant revision of values.

Music having developed into one of the major industries in America, we are faced with the fact that the resulting exploitation has succeeded in distorting the real nature and function of music. The composer is treated as a sub-species. I am speaking of course only of serious composers because, as you all know, composers of popular music are almost, if not quite, as important as Hollywood stars. If you ask the traditional concert goer to name his favorite musician, he is sure to mention a virtuoso, singer, player or popular conductor, rarely if ever a composer, the maker of music. This confusion, expertly maintained by other middlemen of the trade, managers, press agents, or other box office boosters, makes it possible for them to create and control a market for the sale of highly paid and publicized personalities. The musical work—music itself—is an accessory of the business.

Few people in any audience, the "music lovers" as they are

AS AN ART-SCIENCE

called, have ever thought of the dual aspect of music. To them music is one of the arts, is only an art. They do not realize the significance of the fact that for music to be heard the listener must be subjected to a physical phenomenon, that until a certain disturbance of the atmosphere between him and the instrument has taken place, there can be no music. They are hardly conscious that each time a score is performed it can only be done by means of sound-producing machines called musical instruments which make up our orchestras and which are subject to the same physical laws as any other machine. A composer, if he wants to obtain the results his conception demands, must never forget that his *raw material* is sound, must think in terms of sound and not in terms of notes on a page, must accept these signs only as a convenient alphabet, must understand not only the mechanisms and possibilities of the various sound-machines that are to bring his music to life, but he should also be familiar with the laws of acoustics.

As for the audiences attending the concerts of the established orchestral organizations, their acquaintance with music does not exceed a span of two hundred and fifty years, from Bach and Mozart to the masters of the early twentieth century. The few significant composers of our time, sporadically and timidly performed, are considered by the general musical public as ephemeral nuisances or curiosities and are more or less politely tolerated—in my case more often impolitely. "The arts," Busoni said, "the spirit of a work of art, the measure of emotion and humanity it contains, these remain unchanged in value through the changing years. The forms they assume, the manner of their expression and the flavor of the epoch that gave them birth are transitory and age rapidly." I should like to add that this is why, listening to music written by Monteverdi in the seventeenth century or Bach in the eighteenth, we are conscious of living substances, but not when we hear music written today *in the manner of* the seventeenth or eighteenth century. This brings us back to the much debated and misunderstood question of musical form. First we must know whether we are talking about form that is the inevitable result of a personal conception or of ready-made forms or patterns to which a work has been cleverly adjusted. For me the form of a work is always dictated by its own substance, its inner content, its density. As a tangible example, imagine a box or any container of any shape. You will be able to fill it with objects smaller than it is and whose shapes and volume can fit into it, or because of their elastic properties can shape themselves to fit into it. But imagine an object no bigger in surface, no larger in volume but of a definite, a different shape which on account of its rigidity cannot be modified, and then insist on trying to force it down into such a container. The result will be that the object, being harder and more resistant, will break the container. We have history to

show how many times musical containers have been broken.

I should like to say something about the conception of music purely as an art. I like Brahms' definition of composition: "The organization of disparate elements." With this definition in mind, consider the problem of the young composer today shaken by all the aural shocks of our age, the new sounds and new rhythms. How is he to accomplish this "organization"? Where should he look for those "disparate elements"? Will he find them in the various theoretical treatises? In the works of the admired masters he studies? Unfortunately, too many composers have been led to believe that the elements of composition can be found as easily as that. To this conception we owe one of the most sterile tendencies of music today: the return to the formulas of the past under the name of "Neo-classicism."

The word "evolution" is generally used when the startling changes that have taken place in the past are discussed in the present, for they have ceased to startle. But radical changes in music written today are considered not evolutionary, but dangerous and destructive. And they are. Dangerous to inertia and destructive of habits. It is a great pity that so many music critics, whose professional integrity and greater historical knowledge should make them at least more cautious, are as often trapped into snap judgments by what is new and strange to them as the lay listener. Probably the most glaring blunder ever made by a critic is to be found in a statement of a Mr. Parker of London who wrote: "Pioneers and experimenters are seldom first rate creators." By it he reveals his unfamiliarity with such pioneers and experimenters as Perotin, Monteverdi, Schutz, Beethoven, Chopin, Debussy and so on, to name only a few great innovators. I think one could state just as categorically, and conform more nearly to the historical facts, that there has never been a creator of lasting importance who has not been an innovator. The example of the great past should serve the young only as a spring board from which to leap into their own future. They must always keep in mind that each link in the chain of tradition has been forged by a revolutionary of a previous age.

Today even the word "music" no longer seems to suffice for our needs. I wrote a few years ago in an article "Organized Sound for the Sound Film" in the *Commonweal* (December, 1940): "As the term 'music' seems gradually to have shrunk to mean much less than it should, I prefer to use the expression 'organized sound' and avoid the monotonous question: *But is it music?* Organized sound seems better to take in the double aspect of music as an art-science, with all the recent laboratory discoveries which permit us to hope for the liberation of music, as well as covering without dispute my own work in progress."

PAUL BOEPPLE

the concert

The *Symposium on Music and Art*, sponsored by Bennington College, came to a memorable climax in a concert of contemporary music held in the Armory.

One of the two pillars of the well-planned program was Roger Sessions' *Second Sonata for Piano*, a powerful, deeply stirring work. What Sessions commits to print struck me always as final, to be accepted as a whole or not at all. So did the three, beautifully contrasted movements of this sonata, the relentlessly driving *Lento* and the robustly romping *Misurato e pesante*. Thoroughly new sounds from beginning to end, though they were made of the same twelve tones to the octave and with the same keyboard instrument which have served so well and for so long.

Sessions' music may sound forbidding at first to all but those who really "hear" their Bach and their Beethoven. This sonata is of similar substance and seeks the same ends. In Claude Frank it found a masterful, imaginative and penetrating interpreter. (The sonata should have been repeated, as two other pieces of this program were!)

Charles Edward Ives' *Pieces for Theatre or Chamber Orchestra*, by contrast, struck me as loosely sketched trifles. To be sure there were, as in many of Ives' works, visionary passages which anticipated new idioms long before they were to come into their own, but they could not lift Ives' music above a rather amateurish level. I cannot help feeling that the vogue which his music seems to enjoy of late is due to musical patriotism rather than to critical judgment. Lionel Nowak, who conducted the work with much care and authority, made the Bennington College Orchestra sound handsomely indeed. Miss Stell Andersen at the piano blended tastefully with the whole.

I felt quite differently about Carl Ruggles' *Angels* a short, intense piece for seven muted brasses, which struck me as carefully wrought, untrammelled music. A second hearing confirmed this impression.

To this point of the program the listener could, at least in one respect, feel on familiar ground. The instruments used at least were all thoroughly conventional.

The second major piece on the program opened new territory also in this respect. Edgard Varèse seeks a wholly new palette

EXCERPT FROM
SCORE OF
"DESERTS"

of musical colors. To this end, armed with a microphone and a tape-recorder he explores the world of sounds and noises in which we live much in the way the painter sketches anything that catches and strikes his eye. He then moulds and transmutes these sounds and noises electronically to suit the needs of a particular work. In *Deserts*, a vast symphonic work which was performed for the first time in this country, Varèse uses, in addition to an orchestra of winds, percussion instruments and piano, a double track Ampex tape recorder which feeds two sets of loudspeakers antiphonally placed on opposite sides of the concert hall. Thus the listener is completely surrounded by sounds which seem to float through space and which at times give the illusion as if the listener were floating through space himself while in reality he is holding onto his seat for dear life.

The work is divided into four orchestral sections separated by three interpolations of "organized" recorded sounds, the first and the last of industrial origin, the second developed from recordings of percussion instruments. The sheer physical impact of this work was overwhelming. But there was more than just noise. Call it what you will, but there were moments which stirred me in a way which I can only call musical. I must confess, however, that even after two hearings—this piece too was played twice—I did not become aware of a convincing over-all structure of the work beyond some obvious landmarks. I felt also that the juxtaposition of orchestral and industrial sounds, no matter how highly organized, produces the effect of a musical "collage," similar to that which the painters seem to have outgrown so happily. The arbitrariness inherent in this procedure will disappear when means can be found enabling the composer to produce at will any sound and tone color with no microphone other than his ear.

But I am convinced that this work represents a serious advance into new territory by an artist of immense skill and of high standards. The performance was a feat in itself for which much credit is due to Frederic Waldman who conducted admirably both Ruggles' *Angels* and Varèse's *Deserts*. His group of instrumentalists was superb and Ann McMillan, a graduate of Bennington College, did nobly at the Ampex controls.

A memorable evening!

The Symposium's last session devoted to the spoken word was moderated (refereed might better express it) by Bartlett Hayes who, although people still could and would have kept on talking, had finally to put an end to it. In ending he said:

"We are seeking, as human beings, to find out where we are by reference to the past and also what we are by reference to ourselves and others in terms of total society. The creative act is essentially a lonely one. That is why the artist is forever doomed to loneliness. One cannot create except in one's own terms; this is the emphasis of individuality whether we like it or not. At once there is a correlation and an integration that we are seeking between the individual and between many individuals through the ineffability of loneliness, and yet at the same time there is the search for relationships between many lonelines that form the total society. I think that this has been expressed in some sense in the meetings held here, and I note, although I have also noted disparagements and controversial issues, that there are two areas of fairly vital agreement expressed in very different ways by some of the speakers.

"Mr. Sweeney referred to the paring away of the periphery of art in order to seek nature, which was the revolution that he spoke of against parochial blindness. This paring away of the periphery is an essential act of seeking a unity, if you wish, and an understanding of the various elements involved. When Mr. Barzun was talking he referred to communication and its necessity, which is the search for the correlation of the individual in his loneliness with others. But the search is nevertheless the same as that to which Mr. Sweeney referred. Mr. Varèse was emphasizing the relatedness of sound, or as he put it, sound relations, and sound can be taken in both meanings in that particular case. The relationship of sounds in their vibrations, in their transformations and in their other time-wise transpositions, certainly is and always has been the element of music. Mr. Sert referred to the community of backgrounds as being the essential element of any civilization and of any art in any society, and that when that background exists in a community way, then society and the arts flourish in big fashion. Mr. Ferber has referred several times to the relatedness that is to be sought in the extensive sculpture. Whereas the mass form before was the search for a nuclear sense of existence, at the present time this is an act of seeking relationships between various elements. Mrs. Mitarachi referred to the design relatedness which was the result of social search and of acceptance on the part of the consumer. Mr. Bouchard, again, was concerned with relatedness in terms of the time image and sound elements of a film as being a good medium in which to transcribe the similar efforts of an artist such as Miro. Dr. Dorner has referred to the relationship exemplified by the film in terms of time, substance, spirit and image — all of those things upon which man, in his search for a unification of his own spirit in terms of others, essentially depends.

"In spite of the fact that Dr. Dorner referred to Emanuel Kant as one who is relatively static, he did refer to the eighteenth century as the starting point for much that we are now groping with and finding ever so slightly at the present time. And there is one phrase of Kant's that I recall which, as I remember roughly, went something like this: 'There are two things that impress the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the stars in heaven above and the moral law within.' It is this search beyond ourselves into the starry heavens, coupled at the same time, correlated, if you wish integrated, somehow brought together with the moral law within the human being himself — and law interpreted as the not static quantity of law, but the law of each human being, as a verse in *Ecclesiastes* puts it: 'To the counsel of thine own heart' — this, I think, is the core of our discussions, not only this afternoon, but perhaps throughout this entire Symposium."

