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ARTICLES
Memoranda to Politicians concerning the Arts

James Steel Smith
WHY have I written these memoranda to you?
You to whom I address these memoranda about the arts are in politics. You may be a cabinet officer, a commissioner of a federal arts agency, a member of Congress, a member of a Congressional committee that may at times deal with the arts, a state governor, the appointed head of a state arts agency, a member of a state commission on the arts, a state legislator, a member of a state legislative committee that takes up proposals on the arts, a county supervisor, a city mayor, a city councilman, a city manager, a member of a county or city commission on one or all of the arts (library, public building art, museums, recreation), an appointed official responsible for county or city arts, a museum curator, a public librarian, the director of a civic repertory theater or music association, a lobbyist for the arts, a member of a citizens' group trying to influence political action on the arts, an educator, a writer of letters to legislators and editors, a voter. All the persons to whom I address these memoranda are in some sense political people—elected or appointed public officials, speakers and writers on public issues, voters.

By what you do or refrain from doing you can influence the role of the arts in American society. It is quite likely that you will sooner or later be involved, whether you wish to be or not, in public questions relating directly to the arts. This is partly because artists are at this late date in American history becoming conscious of themselves and their problems as significant factors in our society and are organizing and speaking up. It is also partly because inflation, along with the current revolt against taxes and government spending, has created a special crisis for the arts just at the moment people in the arts are beginning to ask government for more than token support. In Congressional halls, state buildings, and local city halls we hear demands for less spending mingled with cries for help from the arts. The result will be many a debate over the arts and
their relation to the public good—and many a political decision affecting that relationship.

These decisions will cover a diversity of matters—budgets for all the arts, appointments to art commissions, policies for libraries and museums and art centers and musical organizations and dance groups and repertory theaters and art festivals (cut out? keep as they are? expand? initiate fees? raise old ones? seek outside support? get support from old taxes? from new taxes?), public art grants and commissions, eliminating or combining or creating administrative offices, governmental controls over the arts it supports, handling public objections to a publicly sponsored work of art. Some of the questions may be broad (e.g., whether a state needs an arts-support program); some may be more limited (e.g., whom to appoint as head of a civic arts commission, whether to accept a gift to the city, whether to contribute city money in support of a festival). Most of them lead to decisions on the expenditure of money. Most of them call for stands on both social and esthetic values. All of them will help to determine the state of the arts in America and, in turn, the effect of the arts on American life.

In our political roles are we prepared to deal with questions about the arts as they arise? Obviously few of us can have an encyclopedic knowledge of the arts—all the visual arts, literature, music, drama, dance—and even if we did have such knowledge, it might not help us much in making political decisions about the arts unless we had asked ourselves the appropriate questions about the arts, society, and politics.

In these memoranda I have tried to raise questions, suggest concepts, and supply facts that might help us think towards political decisions concerning the arts. I have not sought to provide pat answers, but I frankly admit that four ideas underlie and run through these memoranda: 1) That the arts are an important element in a vital—not just a surviving—American society; 2) that they need public as well as private support if they are to contribute to the vitality of American life; 3) that a crisis—partly fiscal, partly psychological—is developing that threatens public support; and 4) that it is possible to control, or at least to lessen, that crisis through informed discussion and through rational, reasonably courageous decision-making by our elected and appointed representatives.

These memoranda will not provide a complete plan to take care of all art questions when they arise. They do not offer a full set of precepts. They are, instead, a series of hints, suggestions, reminders—things that every good politician should consider. I also hope citizens who mistakenly think of themselves as non-politicians (simply because they do not hold office) will look over the shoulders of office holders and use some of these hints in thinking about the arts today in America.

A final pre-word: In what follows there is, I hope, none of the sentimental, romantic awe of the arts that sets them up as idols to worship but not to know and understand. On the other hand, these memoranda may counter some of the equally unrealistic views of people who, priding themselves on "hard-headed

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commonsense," are really just giving expression to their embarrassment by and resentment of art and artists in our society.

**Solemnly to the arts?**

Too often discussions of the arts become insufferably solemn, piously serious, as if the Muses were standing behind us and listening. That is a shame. Sometimes the discussion turns frivolous, indifferent, if not outright scornful. And that is a shame, too. The arts—music, literature, drama, dance, the visual arts—are neither serious nor unserious. They just *are*—like carpentering, engineering, cooking, gardening, fishing, news reporting, airline scheduling. They are part of our social weave, our community fabric. We would not ordinarily think reverentially about *these* activities and their products, nor would we be inclined to dismiss them as unworthy of our attention. Such things—and the arts—are all part of our human living together—and so they should be of concern to us.

**But is it art?**

When a political body has given its blessing to a public project, one of the peskiest questions to arise will be "But is it art?" Pesky because if you say you think it is art, that will be difficult to prove, and because, even if you do, does it really matter? The answer as to its being art is irrelevant to the project's essential qualities—after all, art can be inferior art—and to its contribution to the life of our society. It is irrelevant in the same way the campaign attempt to label you a "politician" is merely a diversionary tactic and does not really help to determine what sort of officeholder you or your opponent will be. Both of you are political candidates; one of you will become a holder of political office and will make political decisions. The practical question is: What sort of political decisions will you make? So with art. The question "Is it art?" is not the important question. More significant are the questions: "What kind of art is it—what is it trying to do? How well does it do it? And is it appropriate to the place, purpose, and budget we have in mind?"

**The arts in service**

Art has served in all sorts of causes—war and peace, despotism and freedom, love and hatred, trust and fear, pleasure and pain, hedonism and asceticism, social reform and the status quo, faith and scepticism. Art has flattered, scolded, attacked, defended, accepted, rebelled, expressed terror and courage, been cowardly and recklessly defiant of danger. It has defended both the powerful and the weak, the vicious and the pure. It has sometimes exalted reason, sometimes irrationality. It has been trustful and cynical, hot and cold, fair and unfair, just and unjust, magnanimous and vengeful. It has expressed all the emotions, given form to all the diverse dreams—and nightmares—of the
human race. It has offered all the conflicting concepts of what society should be. Art can serve anything, anyone.

How, then, can the arts be urged upon us as a social good, a source of inspiration? That argument for preserving the arts in our society is not a particularly strong one—it does not square with the kaleidoscopic reality of art in social history. It acknowledges only the times when the arts seemed to speak for what we consider good and not the times when they did not; such an argument for the arts is based on half-blindness.

Is there a better reason for trying to preserve the arts as a vital part of our society? Yes, this: The arts, since earliest humankind, have been a part of human life; men and women have always created artifacts, compositions, that did not previously exist; so if we are to understand and participate in this creative human function—that is, in this respect to be human—the arts need to remain an integral, vital part of our society. They may be important in different ways and degrees to different parts of society, but their existence somehow, somewhere, in the fabric of society is a social fact. To ignore or deny it is to indulge in dangerous fantasy. Art may or may not at times raise humanity, but it is one of the things that keep us human. Take away the human race's visual patterns, fictions, songs, ceremonies, dances, mimings—and you will have a grotesque, stunted, and sterile society.

Five common anti-art types

In public life there are five types of people who almost make a career of attacking the arts. These types often overlap.

1) The redneck: Not knowing many artists and also sensing the efficacy of demagogic personal onslaught, he attacks the arts in terms of artists, stereotyping them as delicate sissies or untidy nuts. If he gets around to their art, he finds it a subject for head-shaking condescension and broad jests. His usual target in the visual arts is the alleged insanity of abstract artists, but sometimes he presents his maker of drips and splashes and murky masses as a sly trickster who takes the art world for suckers. If his attention turns to music, he makes fun of anything dissonant or not easily melodic as the work of a madman or as a put-on. He similarly characterizes much modern literature. Unworriedly, he often combines the two kinds of attack on the arts; he never seems to wonder about the contradiction between art as insanity and art as fraud. Knowingly or unknowingly, he uses both batteries to blast away at targets his audience is already conditioned to accept as real.

2) The chauvinist: He sees the arts as somehow foreign, un-American, subversive of American ideals. It is easy for him to do this since much of the world's art naturally originates outside America. But even much art created in America he views as foreign to America in spirit; in the visual arts he tends to suspect anything somewhat removed from illustration as an attack on America. (It would be easy to trick him into praising modern Soviet sentimental-realistic sculpture of mothers-with-babies and soldier-heroes as good
native American art, as long as he did not learn of their Russian origin; they are what he thinks art should be.) The fact that many artists travel and study abroad is grist to his mill. He finds less "foreign influence" in the folk arts, as long as they come from America, but then he does not think of them as "art." Of course, his America is a quite incomplete America, consisting of national holidays, American military history, travel-brochure puffs, and life in the remaining unurbanized parts of America—all this filtered through a patriotic glow. So for him both the "subject matter" (where he can find any) of present-day American painting and sculpture and its methods seem to be a kind of treason. He is, of course, shocked by most modern music, which is, to his ears, dissonant and therefore "un-American;" Ives, that very American composer, makes him shudder. Incidentally, the foreign surnames of so many American musicians confirm his view of music in America as a foreign import. And, of course, the stage, with its many plays from Europe and from domestic critics of American life, gives him a broad target; indeed, much modern American literature of all genres gives him cause to think that America has been altogether undermined by un-American ideas.

3) The sex alarmist: He is always on the watch for signs of moral decadence, which he equates with sex. He has to look rather selectively at the arts to find such signs. In music he can seldom find it, though sometimes modern dissonances and the music of non-Western cultures seem to him ways of overstimulating the nervous system and so inducing lascivious behavior. He can, of course, find sexual titillation in popular songs—but in the words, not so much in the music. The visual arts, particularly modern abstraction (which he hates), give him little to work on, but he can find in the Freudian puzzles and physical symbols of surrealist art cause for alarm. Modern dance, with its slithering bodies encased in body stockings, can provide him with evidence of increasing sexuality in modern life and art. It is in literature and theater, however, that the sex detective can find the greatest riches. He does not have to do much research (he is usually a very lazy scholar) to discover the lively interest of most writers in sex. Of course, what he discovers he jerks out of the context in which the writer used it, and so sex accounts done with no more than pornographic intent become almost indistinguishable from those which had many quite different purposes and meanings; if one quotes just the sexual references culled from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Fielding, Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, or Faulkner, one can suggest there is little difference between these writers and the most cynical paperback exploiters of sexual urges. The critic of the arts who makes such forays into literature and drama usually reveals in himself an overdeveloped concern with sex or an obsessed rejection of sex as an aspect of living. But, even in these days of a supposed "sexual revolution," there remains in a large part of our society a fear—no matter what their actual practice—of the consequences of sexual freedom, and this is fertile soil for the neurotic alarmist of either kind. And there are also in most communities utterly cynical exploiters of this fear who see in it one more way of gathering a following or taking it away from a political opponent.
4) The anti-intellectual: His animosity—either a genuine hatred or a mask—is not so much against ideas (he usually holds fiercely some of his own) as it is against that exploratory and analytical kind of mind which peers intensely into itself and the world around it and then projects in imaginative form what it has discovered. Discovery is the bête noire of the anti-intellectual. He does not want things examined and named. The arts are not nearly as intellectual as artists and people who fear artists often consider them to be, but artists do look newly at existence, try to understand it. In so doing, they are going to come up with findings—in their paintings, sculpture, symphonies, songs, poems, novels, plays, dances—that seem to reveal new experiences or new ways of thinking about old experiences. Cézanne's or Moore's ways of looking at physical reality, Bach's or Bartok's or Cage's ways of thinking about—or with—sound, E. M. Forster's sensitivity to the inner curlings of human emotions, a G. B. Shaw's irreverent probings of society's structures—all these are explorings and hence threats to non-thinking, non-consideration. So when the anti-intellectual senses such goings on, he tries to rouse the guards.

5) The budget watcher: He may or may not be suspicious of the arts, but his main worry is not art but money. His motives may vary, but, whatever they are, he always wants to cut public budgets. What easier target than the arts? Crime and fire protection, sanitation, and road maintenance are obvious and immediate social needs; also, they are increasingly protected from cuts by personnel organizations. It is hard to cut budgets there. And cuts in public works can quickly stir up protests from contractors, unions, water users, harbor authorities. Welfare and education are common subjects for anti-spending criticism, but they involve highly sensitive social issues which can backlash; they call up strong conflicting emotions that complicate any attempt to slash expenditures. What publicly supported activities are left for the cost-cutters to go to work on? That is easy: recreation—parks, playgrounds, beaches, arboretums,—and the arts—libraries, museums, art exhibitions, art education programs, musical organizations, concert series, repertory theaters, dance groups, drama schools, art commissions. Many citizens never use such services. Those who do so compose special minorities. Unlike the effects of security, water, sanitation, and transportation services, the benefits of the arts to society are not quick, easily perceived, or reducible to neat statistics. And these special art interests usually lack well-organized lobbies. There are, moreover, reservoirs of anti-intellectualism and anti-art feeling that the cost-cutter can depend on if he decides to turn his budget-cutting campaign in the direction of the arts.

Tokenism and the arts

It is quite possible for a society to seem to be doing something significant for the arts when it is really doing very little. One can be fooled—at least for a while—by facades, false fronts, tokens. A community can possess something
called a Museum of Art, yet deprive it of adequate exhibition space, open hours, security, publicity, and (through admission fees) attendance. Even a fine museum with a superior collection may be starved by such means. All over the country there are "Museums of Art" that are undernourished and not really serving the art needs of their communities; indeed, in their grey, gloomy atmosphere of deprivation, they may be worse than no museums at all. And even where there are good museums left over from an earlier, more generous era, they may become really a pretentious facade if their collections cease to grow, if their raised admission fees and reduced hours make them less accessible, if their lowered security means a closing of certain areas every other day, if their curatorial staffs have become skeletal, if their public relations have diminished to the point where many people simply do not know what their museums are doing, if their schedule of visiting exhibitions has shrunk, if their children's art programs have been reduced or eliminated.

A community art center may become a shell if its instructional staff is cut deeply; if its class offerings are reduced in variety, number, and hours; if heavy fees are introduced; if its gallery exhibition schedule becomes erratic. The community may still be able to boast that, under Proposition 13 and similar measures, it kept the art center open—but what stayed open?

A city may continue to have a symphony season—but with a much shortened schedule, a smaller, less professional orchestra, a so-so conductor, less rehearsal time. A civic repertory theater may survive but do so by lowering its professional standards, curtailing the number of plays, allowing its productions to become tired, permitting its physical facilities to decline into shabbiness. A public dance company may carry on with fewer new productions and fewer performances. A summer festival of the arts may be retained but as a ghost—probably a commercialized one—of its former self. Although the number of scholarships in the various arts may decline sharply, the city fathers can still say they support an educational arts program. The city's musical, theatrical, and dance sponsors may, to save money, cooperate with the schools on a much reduced scale but still be able to say they "cooperate with the schools." A library system may keep going—but with much reduced hours and services; the libraries may continue to function but cease to grow; they become cultural mausoleums but are still called "libraries."

This retreat of the arts may occur without seeming to be more than a tactical withdrawal, not a disastrous collapse. How can the realities be thus obscured? Some part of the citizenry will never know what is happening to their art institutions because they do not use them, and, being unconcerned, they do not pay attention to what is happening to museums, symphonies, theaters, libraries. But even the concerned may, at least for a while, be confused about the seriousness of the cutbacks. It is only natural for heads of institutions and programs to put on the best face they can concerning changes they are forced to make—to explain away as temporary the new inadequacies, to emphasize those points where retreat has not occurred, to maintain they are doing a good job under trying circumstances. Moreover, it is not easy to determine early the
effects of such changes as levying admission and other fees, staggered museum hours, consolidation of services in art centers, reduced library research services, cancelling public art projects, leaving curator posts unfilled, lowering museum security, weakening orchestra or chorus personnel, leaving old facilities unrefurbished. These effects take time to surface, and it also takes time for observers who eventually detect the sad realities to organize an effective critical attack that will expose tokenism.

But public officers who make decisions affecting the arts and who wish to base these decisions upon the actual state of the arts can get behind the tokens and facades by being aware in advance that there will be certain obstacles to getting a true picture and by then keeping their eyes open to the particular, specific, concrete effects of each "adjustment."

What should public art be?

Here are common conceptions of what publicly sponsored art should be:

1) That it should portray idealistically the institutions and heroes of the community, state, region, or country or protest the ideals and actions of our society—ironically, both tend to use the same methods and to sentimentalize their subjects;

2) That it should deal with all things naturalistically, representationally, or that it should be abstract or expressionistic, never "descending" to storytelling;

3) That it should always be primarily entertaining or that it should always be didactic, instructive;

4) That it must meet the dictates of popular taste or that it should make no concessions to popular taste whatever.

There is nothing intrinsically wrong—or right—with any of these contrasting emphases. Good work has come out of all of them—as well as inferior work—and they have all contributed much to public art. The pity is that hardline proponents too often scorn all departures from the kind of art they approve. The result is usually repetition and dullness, as in nineteenth-century French neoclassical painting, sculpture, and architecture and Soviet ideological art. The most desirable course of action is—whenever possible—to get the most lively and original art of whatever kind. This, of course, must sometimes compromise with the need for objects that will not clash pointlessly with what is already in place. Public servants responsible for choices must not, however, be too upset by loud outcries from some quarters; these always will happen. In Paris nearly a century ago it was the Eiffel Tower; today it is the Pompidou.

The slowness of change in the arts

A non-artist who looks at the contemporary arts is likely to get a general impression of turbulent change, but there is also great pressure in the arts
against change. True, certain individual artists experiment constantly; sometimes they rebel and desperately try to counter the prevailing "in" modes, but today, as always, the orthodox are in the great majority. One may easily get a mistaken notion that the experimenters swarm everywhere from the fact that they are more noticeable because of their experimenting. In the arts as well as in other fields of human activity new ideas do not occur very often, even under the most stimulating conditions. Education generally slows down the forces for change in the arts; teachers pass on what they do, also what the artists who influenced them did. They may think they are in the vanguard, but most of the time they are not. Commercial outlets for the arts, except for a few with special clienteles, must stick fairly close to traditional forms if they are to stay in business. Too, the various audiences for the arts are normally inclined to want to go somewhat more slowly than the artists would wish—to have familiar visual experiences, to see plays and dance patterns they recognize, to hear familiar kinds of music, to have familiar visual experiences. Most people still feel that Monet and Renoir, Cézanne, Gauguin and Van Gogh, who painted about a hundred years ago, are "modern" artists. And institutions, both private and public, generally exercise a conservative influence on the arts; they tend to move cautiously for various reasons—the conservative tastes of their boards, the many channels through which projects must proceed, the constant worry about their publics. For many decades the Metropolitan Museum held out against showing "modern art," and only recently did it agree to accept Nelson Rockefeller's gift of primitive art of Africa, pre-Columbian America, and Oceania. Old categories die as hard in the arts as elsewhere.

If a public servant feels nervous about an arts proposal that strikes him as avant garde or freakishly new, he might seriously consider the strong possibility that it is a little froth on a very slow wave.

"But it isn't beautiful."

The work of many contemporary artists strikes most of us as unbeautiful, grotesque, even downright ugly—surrealistic phantasms, grubbily meticulous studies of garage doors, ad-like patterns, found-junk compositions, big color streaks, spikey bronze abstractions, ceramic comic books, graffitti-like scratchings, three-dimensional reconstructions of cluttered rooms, studies in burlap and sand, wall-paperlike repetitions of dots and squares. Now, most of us expect art to be "beautiful" (a mistaken expectation)—therefore, we are puzzled, sometimes angered, by a great deal of present-day art. We find it does not fit into our really very limited conceptions—categories—of "beauty" in art. Outside of painting and sculpture our ideas of beauty may not be so narrow and confining, but in the Western world today most people find beauty in paintings and sculpture only if these present in recognizable form subjects they consider beautiful—natural landscapes, flowers, handsome animals and birds, children, goodlooking men and women, events they find pleasure in thinking about—and
if the paintings treat these subjects somewhat in the manner pioneered by the impressionists of one hundred years ago and if the sculptural treatment of subject is within the late Hellenistic and Renaissance traditions. This leaves out, of course, a great deal of the world’s art—pre-Renaissance European art, most Oriental, African, Oceanic, and pre-Columbian art, much expressionistic and abstract art of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and a major part of the painting and sculpture being done in Europe and America today. People may be moved—interested, made curious, disturbed, horrified, puzzled, spellbound, haunted—by art objects that do not meet their standards of “beauty” in art, but these very real effects are for them not “beautiful” and so are not “art.”

This essentially verbal circle creates a problem for most original artists today. Their work, in great part, does not remain within the narrow conception of “beauty in art;” hence, when something is presented as art, most people do not find what they expect of art. This problem for our artists in turn creates a problem for all persons responsible for making art accessible to “the people.” The easy road—and one that many council members, county supervisors, and art directors take—is to go along with the popular formula for art of “beauty” of those two kinds. This is a policy of not rocking the boat. The only difficulty with this way out is that it also leads away from the realities of contemporary art, the art which they are presumably trying to foster and make more widely available. It also leads away from a great part of the world’s heritage of art.

Normalcy

In debate on the arts the appeal to the “normal”—in the words of one indignant California State legislator, “what you and I and normal people think about as art”—is irrelevant. The “normal” may, at different times, be many things—abstract or pictorial or expressionistic, beautiful or grotesque, socially radical or conservative, witty or unwitty, rationalistic or mystical. The “normal” can be strong or weak, first-rate or trashy. The fact that it is “normal” merely means that, in the opinion of some people, most people think in a particular way.

A main danger always present in public support of the arts is that it can easily become support of “normalcy,” traditionalism, official “kitsch.” There are various reasons for this. Having an official responsibility can itself make the voice go down a few pitches; it may make the office holder fearful of offending those who put him in office; he can come to feel, as a member of the establishment, that he should in everything cast his weight on the side of things as they are. Moreover, the men and women who get into office (elected or appointed) are ordinarily not there because of any special interest in or knowledge of the arts, and it is quite probable that their own attitudes towards the arts will be based on a limited understanding of the arts. If they permit only their own kneejerk responses to determine their decisions on the arts, they will favor the orthodox, whatever that happens to be at the moment. The existence
of public funds for the arts may work subtly on the artists themselves, causing them to think of what will please public taste at the moment rather than making a more original contribution. Further, when artists become even partially dependent on public support, they may become potential targets for political leaders tempted by the chance to play on public fears and prejudices.

But these are risks the arts must take if they are to—and they usually have to—depend to some degree on public support.

**Horrors**

It is a common human failing—and one exploited (and perhaps shared) by some legislative critics of the arts—to be impressed by a "horrible example" without knowing just how representative an example it is. A few "far out" works are described in the press (perhaps because they are "far out" and so attention-getting) and are then picked up, like a bone by an excited pup, and displayed to show that art is silly and frivolous or that "modern art" is "nuts" or that an art commission is the dupe of rogues or fools. This happened recently to a half-dozen grants out of nearly 2000 awarded by the California State Art Council.

To evaluate such "evidence" of "conning" the public (words used by a legislator unhappy over the Council's actions), three questions should be considered:

1) What really happened? How accurate is the report? In the whale case, was the project to record whale songs? To compose songs for whales? Or what? According to the Council's chairman, the funded project was not "to play music to whales" but "to design a musical instrument which could play music in the frequency to which dolphins respond." Going to nature for models is certainly a regular strategy in most fields of human activity (e.g., music, dance, air flight, clothing, diet). Whether this instrument design was worth working on could be argued, but it is a very different project from the satirical description of it.

2) If it happened, how many other times did the same sort of thing occur? Six? Twelve? Forty? And what was the relative frequency of such occurrences? Actually, a half-dozen such projects might easily be used as evidence that the commission was being extremely cautious, even timid. Until we know what the others were like, we are in no position to draw generalizations about the commission's policies.

3) Is it sensible to avoid all strange, questionable activities in the arts—or, for that matter, in any other field of human endeavor? When we do this in the arts, the result is generally stuffiness, dullness, banality. When such avoidance of the controversial becomes the rule in a commission or museum board of trustees, safe mediocrity tends to take over. Now, it may often make good political sense for legislators and administrators to sidestep the controversial, but it does not make for vitality and growth in the arts. This will always create a moral problem for the politician who has to make decisions affecting the arts and his own chances for reelection.
The arts as ways of thinking: a major reason for making them accessible to the whole community

The arts are not just a set of learned techniques, nor are they merely certain kinds of subject matter. They are also ways of thinking. The wood carver has a set of relationships to his world different from those of the artist in stone or plastics or tin or bronze or the painter working on a flat surface or the architect designing in three-dimensional space. These workers in the visual arts also have and create experiences different from those of musicians who work with sound, and both the visual artist and the musician deal with the world very differently from the writer, whose reality is verbal and therefore more intrinsically symbolic. And within that world of words the ways of grappling with and shaping reality—the poet's, the realistic novelist's, the fantasist's, the philosophical essayist's, the dramatist's—differ from one another. Therefore, exposure to these different kinds of experience provides us with a variety of experience, or, more accurately, with different ways of looking at experience. This is one reason why it is important that a person growing up in San Francisco or Los Angeles or Compton or Lodi have a chance, either as maker or consumer, to participate in the arts: they offer him many different modes of experience within his physical and social environment. The term "broadening" may sound a bit flabby. It should not if we think of it as describing this function of the arts. Of course, in this respect the arts are not essentially different from other activities which are not strictly repetitious and assembly-line in nature—repairing a motor, arranging the furniture in a home, developing a legislative program, planning a political campaign, making educational curricula, raising a crop, checking a malfunctioning television set, reporting a meeting, tracing a telephone failure, clearing up a traffic snarl, cooking a meal. These all involve particular ways of approaching—looking at—the world and oneself, and a person's understanding can be extended by each new perspective. Travel is one of the more generally accepted modes of "broadening" oneself by exposure to different ways of living and thinking.

If we think of the arts in this way, they lose something of the aura of romantic idealization that has unfortunately clung to them, especially in the Western world, for the past few hundred years. They come to seem similar, at least in this one respect, to other human pursuits and so more relevant to our individual lives and to the whole community. They are not necessarily "higher" or "better" than other things human beings do; they are other ways of being alive—of living—and that is their main value to the individual and his society.

Now, to the extent we reduce within our community the opportunities to participate in the various arts, as makers and/or consumers, we are narrowing our opportunities for rich, many-sided living. And a society reduces these opportunities when they become accessible only to the well-to-do who can pay for them.
Splitting the arts

In thinking about the arts, putting things into pigeon holes is dangerous, for it can lead to an unrealistic divorce of kinds of work that may be intrinsically, though not obviously, related or that can complement one another. The root of such error is the making of false or irrelevant distinctions. This, of course, is a kind of error that can occur in all fields of human thought and endeavor—in the sciences when scientists do not see connections between different forms of life or between forms of energy; in social thought when we split liberals and conservatives, young and old, ancient peoples and modern, into entirely discrete, unrelated categories; in ordinary daily living when we fail to see any connection between physiological and psychological disturbances or between private and public ethics. Such black-or-white, either-or-thinking does not usually describe realities and so leads to unrealistic behavior.

Here are five examples of such artificial separations in our thinking about art:

1) Art and non-art: This disjunction is based on the arbitrary view that art is limited to work by adults in certain media. It focuses on the noun "art" rather than the adjective "artistic" or the adverb "artistically." It conceives of art always as a result—a painting, a sculpture, an etching—rather than as a process or as a quality. People who think this way will probably fail to see the artistic elements in a child's drawings or in a building, typewriter, chair, blanket, car, clock, sand castle. The absoluteness of this limited conception of art prevents them from recognizing art—or the possibilities for it—in the world around them. Even when they themselves create design in wood or cloth, this notion—really a verbal one—may prevent them from thinking of their own work in terms of art. It can halt—or at least reduce—cross-fertilization between activities they call "art" and all else.

2) Arts (or "fine arts") and crafts: When looked at hard, this distinction breaks down quickly. The so-called "crafts"—furniture design, book binding, jewelry making, pottery, glassmaking, weaving—all involve the same elements—space, color, shape, line, texture—that the painter and sculptor work with. Also, in many cultures activities which are thought of as crafts in our culture are respected as art—for example, ceramics in Japan, calligraphy in China. The meaninglessness of any hard and fast distinction between "arts" and "crafts" is revealed by the presence of ancient Greek pots, medieval armor and tapestry, pre-Columbian pottery, Scythian goldwork, and Sheraton and Chippendale furniture in art museums and the absence of modern functional articles from many museums of modern art. It does not seem logical to change categories simply because of the passage of time.

Sometimes the separation appears based on the assumption that the crafts are largely concerned with functional design, things to be used, but here the difference does not hold up. Functional objects from other times and cultures
constantly break through the limitation, and much work done by weavers, potters and glassmakers today has no clearly functional purpose. Attached to the crafts is a related connotation of repetition, mass production for mass distribution, but good craftsmen individualize their work, give it their stamp, just as do painters and sculptors, and some of the so-called "arts," such as lithography, etching and woodcut engraving, repeat the original image. Perhaps the term "crafts" suggests work that is more common than work in an "art;" for instance, many women embroider or make patchwork quilts, and in some cultures many people weave baskets. However, the commonness of an activity has nothing to do with the nature or value of the result. Thinking of the arts and the crafts as separate categories obscures the fact that any artist is necessarily a craftsman or craftswoman.

3) "High or serious art" and "popular art:" The phrases "high art" and "serious art" are seldom said, but they are usually implied as a polarity when the more common phrase "popular art" is used. "Popular art" usually carries a judgment—that the work is somehow light, unserious, perhaps set in wellworn grooves; it also may connote commercialism, sometimes large audiences, and so, for all these very different reasons, it may suggest that the work is not significant as art. Of course, none of these characteristics necessarily spells artistic insignificance, but much thinking about the arts is not at all logical. This is not to say that there may not be important differences between the number and kinds of people who collect Bach or Mahler recordings and those who collect rock 'n roll or between those for whom Norman Rockwell is their favorite artist and those who prefer Henry Moore. But, "popular" really says nothing about the nature and quality of the art referred to. The terms "high art," "serious art," and "popular art" may do well enough as a very rough shorthand, but they are so rough and undescrptive that perhaps it is better to ignore them when deciding questions of public policy affecting the arts. Whether we are thinking of Shakespeare or Disney or Calder or Schulz or the Rolling Stones or Dylan or Chaplin or Benny Goodman or Verdi, the fact that their art can be, and has been, called "popular" is decidedly unimportant, perhaps confusing.

4) Art and folk art: This split is harmless and possibly useful if it does not become too neat and rigid, suggesting no common denominators, and if it does not suggest "higher" and "lower" art. The folk artist works with all the sensory elements (line, color, shape, texture, space, melodic line, rhythm), just as does any other creative artist. Also, there is a continual feeding of one into the other—the effect of jazz on much modern music, the influence of such composers as Poulenc and Milhaud on jazz musicians, composers' many-leveled borrowings from folk music (e.g., Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms, Grieg, Copland), the influence of African and Polynesian folk art design on modern Western art, the inspiration of much fiction and poetry by folk tales and folk songs. A main difference between folk and other art is that the folk artist generally works very much within a cultural tradition—certain long-set purposes, media, forms, and techniques; specific ways of doing certain things are
passed on from generation to generation—whereas the non-folk artist, though working within a cultural tradition, is more likely to try to develop his own individual voice. However, experts on folk art can point out many instances where the folk artist has given his own touch to his creations (e.g., the whimsical Oaxacan woodcarvers, some Southwest Indian potters, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly). The difference between the folk and non-folk artist—especially in the visual arts—has perhaps become more marked within the past 400 years in Western cultures. This swing would seem to have much to do with the dominance of romantic individualism in the thinking of the post-medieval Western world and the rest of the world influenced by it, also with the rise of Western technology and the consequent mass production of articles once fashioned by individual craftsmen. In many parts of the world folk art has become an embattled minority activity. It has thus become a cause to fight for on the part of those who feel that neither the individualism of trained professional artists nor the modern assembly-line manufacturing can assure the survival of the folk arts' combination of traditional forms and loving handworkmanship; so they ask for folk art festivals, folk art schools (particularly in regions with strong folk traditions), and financial assistance for folk artists.

5) Art and commercial art or industrial design: In Western society there is art meant to be of value in itself, and there is also art designed to do jobs—advertising, creating all the functional artifacts in our environment. Some would use this difference to justify keeping commercial and industrial design out of art museums, art education programs, art competition, and scholarship programs, but this would be flying in the face of reality. It would overlook the fact that all artists work with the same sensory elements, that artists in these different categories share many of the same methods (naturalism, abstraction, expressionism, impressionism), and that these two art communities constantly and significantly affect one another. Indeed, today many artists move back and forth between them. An additional reason for not building a barrier between them is that recognition of art in advertising and industrial design is a route by which a good many people in our culture develop an interest in art.

What definitions can do

Painting and sculpture are only two—and at times not the most lively—of the visual arts. The visual arts may be defined to include all kinds of design—lithography, etching, engraving, serigraphy, photography, architecture, ceramic, glassmaking, weaving, embroidery, furniture making, coppersmithing, silversmithing, straw-working, jewelry designing, sand painting, film making, video taping, leathermaking, basketry, costume, "mixed media." Viewed in this way, the arts become less limited, less exclusive, very much a part of the daily concern of the whole society. Also, in recent decades the boundaries between the arts—non-visual as well as visual—have become less rigid than they were in the nineteenth century, and so it is becoming less easy to catalogue an artist neatly. The late Charles Eames—furniture designer, film
maker and display designer—is a case in point. There are other examples of such crossing over: Alexander Calder, Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Man Ray, Leonard Bernstein, Claes Oldenburg, Thornton Wilder, Henry Moore. Artists would seem to be trying to recapture an earlier vision of art—the arts as related and, equally important, the vision of Michelangelo and da Vinci and many another Renaissance Man.

For politicians who must make decisions about the arts it is probably wise to use the broader, less exclusive definitions of art and to think of the particular arts in unrigid, overlapping terms. In doing so they will probably come closer to contemporary work in the arts. Today artists may well work in photography, painting, lithography, silkscreen, weaving, ceramics, sculpture,—sometimes all at once. Much interesting art today can be described as "mixed media." By defining art broadly people in public life will also thus avoid the deep bog of quibbling over what is "real art" and what is "fine art" and what is a "craft." And the most important reason for a latitudinarian view of what constitutes art lies in the fact that it makes a broad range of human creativity—call it whatever one wishes—accessible to the many "publics" that we loosely call "the general public."

Unrealistic expectations

Mistaken optimism can lead to an equally unrealistic pessimistic backlash. That is one reason why politicians who from time to time must make decisions involving the arts should try to avoid expecting too much from those decisions. If they indulge in unrealistic expectations, they may become disillusioned, discouraged, and so unable to keep at the long, slow task of developing the artistic life of their community; their fellow citizens may take the disappointing results as reason for not supporting the arts.

Consider some of the commoner expectations of this sort:
1) That in our society the arts can generally pay their own way.
2) That the private sector can be relied on for massive assistance to the arts without strings (advertising tie-ins, control over architecture, selection and display, trustee appointments, special honors).
3) That major reliance on volunteerism as a means of cutting costs in community art efforts is practical. (Its long-term effect on public interest in the arts can be significant.)
4) That most good painters, sculptors, ceramists, weavers, musicians, actors, dancers and writers will work just for art's sake.
5) That among art collectors they will find more lovers of art than speculators.
6) That exposure to superior work will quickly raise popular taste.
7) That flossy or sensationalized offerings in music, literature and the visual arts will lure the public into demanding sturdier fare (the sugarcoating theory).
8) That the arts will raise the community’s ethical tone, its moral standards. (This is like the popular view that a criminal who loves children and dogs cannot be that bad.)

9) That you can find art which will please everybody.

The diversity of the arts

Art as a social fact has many facets, and this many-sidedness should never be forgotten by people who make decisions affecting the arts in our society. There is the creating of art of many kinds by composers, writers, visual artists, choreographers; there are the arts of the performer—the musician, the actor, the director, the dancer. There are the arts as experienced by their audiences. There are the arts from the point of view of the scholar, critic, curator. There are the arts as experienced by students in our schools. The arts can be thought of as social records or as formal esthetic patterns or as purely personal experiences. Art can be prized for its rarity or for its typicality, its specialness or its representativeness. It can be viewed as comforter or disturber, as escape from social ills or agent of social change.

This diversity of art experience and approaches to art partially accounts for the differences of opinion within any group charged with making decisions about the arts. Some members of an arts commission will think of art programs as mainly for proven professionals; others will want to give more attention to learners through classes, children’s art programs, educational exhibits, youth orchestras and festivals. Some will want the arts to be popular; others will wish to sponsor art that will meet the criteria of a more informed and discriminating clientele, the cognoscenti. Some will want to determine what is shown or heard; others will prefer that the decision be based on popular taste.

All of these different preferences simply reflect the many faces of art in our society, and they all have some validity. The most desirable solution, therefore, would be one that sought to balance all the different—for the band playing Sousa in the park and the chamber group playing Mozart and Bartok in a small concert hall, the San Francisco Museum of Contemporary Art and the more historically oriented De Young and the Palace of the Legion of Honor, experimental plays and classical dramas and slick Broadway comedies, operas and musicals, the museum and the neighborhood art center, Andrew Wyeth and Clifford Still. But such a balance is seldom achieved. The most common reason is lack of funds to meet all these needs. Right now in California, mainly as a result of Proposition 13, a very real crisis of this sort exists. A bitter struggle for scarce funds is occurring throughout the state. Out of fear of losing all, each party to the struggle may seek to grab all; some may even use this unfortunate situation as a chance to set back the kinds of art they do not care for. Whatever the motives, the fight may become a campaign to exclude altogether certain kinds of artistic activity from access to public support.
In the present situation it is to be hoped that responsible men and women will try very hard to preserve the manysidedness of art, that in the fiscal squeeze none of the valid kinds of art and art institutions will be squeezed out, and that “artistic validity” will not be interpreted in a narrow and prejudiced way.

Screens

When we are seeking fresh talent and original ideas in the arts, we would do well to realize that what comes to our attention has probably already been screened, that much that is being created we will never see unless we do a great deal of personal exploring, and that even such looking on our own will reduce our dependence on the screenings only a little. Still, the awareness of the screenings can keep us alive to the difficulties of keeping art sponsorship a force for new, vital creating rather than more rubberstamping; it makes us realize just how hard our job is.

In the visual arts this screening is done by juries, gallery owners, curators, agents, art owners (individuals, corporations, public bodies), teachers, critics, and those members of the “general public” who contribute to gallery attendance figures, voice their reactions, and perhaps fill out preference polls. In the other arts there are equivalent screens. In the performing arts there are juries, theater and music directors, conductors, theater owners, agents, publishers and editors of music and plays, recording executives, disc jockeys, teachers, critics, individual and organization sponsors, public councils and committees, audiences. In the literary arts there are publishers and editors, agents, book clubs, teachers, critics, competition and grant jurors, movie producers, book buyers, magazine readers and movie goers. The relative importance of these screens, of course, keeps shifting; for instance, in recent years, because of increased costs, book and magazine publishers have been relying more on authors’ agents than they formerly did; when a conductor dominates the orchestral world, his selection of compositions may carry great weight; polls themselves have become a major screen.

“If they want it, let them pay for it.”

The greatest threat to public support of the arts lies in the present swing away from a philosophy of public responsibility for the needs of minorities—economic, racial, legal, educational, vocational, medical, recreational, cultural minorities. It is much larger than a “tax revolt,” which is one expression of it. This mental set is characterized by a reluctance to help those sectors of society that cannot fully support themselves.

It often seeks to justify itself by the rationalization that those people—persons on welfare, working women with children, the civic opera company, library users, residents in burglary-prone districts, high school students who need summer school to graduate, the physically and mentally handicapped, artists, the unemployed—could really help themselves if they would put their minds to
it. This rationalization usually comes to grief on the facts—say, the costs of books, or the economic problems of a handicapped or untrained person, or employment statistics.

Another relief-from-responsibility argument: This is a profit-making society, and in such a society it is logical that one pay for the fulfilling of a need, be it childcare, library services, museum entrance, parking, health care, schooling. In the field of the arts such thinking takes the form of approval of higher ticket prices to musical and theatrical performances, museum entrance fees, fees for art classes. Implicit in such measures is the idea that you should pay for what you get. It is the concept behind private security forces, private mail services, private education, rental libraries, private roads, private art collections, and, of course, paying out of one's own pocket for all food, shelter, furniture, transportation, and personal possessions. If you cannot pay, you do without. Adhered to strictly, this principle means that only those with the necessary funds can get what they need, but in practice our society has often picked up the tab in the form of welfare payments, food stamps, college tuition for minority students, medical care, public parks and beaches. From the days of the New Deal the pendulum has moved waveringly towards increasing the exceptions; now it is swinging sharply in the other direction.

In the arts the results of this swing are rapidly becoming apparent—reduced support of public art schools, dropping of grants to artists, curtailing of educational services in museums and art centers, higher admission for concerts and plays, dropping of free concerts and plays, charging admission to formerly free museums, higher parking prices at public art facilities. This means the restriction of art activity of both makers and consumers, professionals and amateurs, according to ability to pay. This very real shift was reflected in the reaction of a sixty-year-old friend of mine to the news of admission prices in San Francisco museums: "My gosh! When I was in high school and college in the Bay area, I always went to the De Young and the museum downtown whenever I was interested—never thought about being asked to pay. Why, I thought I owned those places!"

The life of the senses, the life of the mind—both fed by the arts—should not be let wither because people cannot pay for them. That is, this should not happen in a society that claims to be civilized.

Accessibility of the arts

One central criterion in the thinking of public men about the arts in their communities should be accessibility. Questions about location, admission prices, hours, kinds of exhibitions, display methods, art and music education, costs, security, concert schedules, traveling troupes, library designs can all be translated—with a gain in understanding—into accessibility.

Will placing a new museum downtown make it more accessible to more people than building it out in a park area on the city's edge? If so, will the people to whom the downtown museum is accessible be more or less likely to use their
facility than the people to whom a suburban location would be more accessible? How will the accessibility of a museum's contents be affected by small rooms, large spaces, long halls, crowding or non-crowding of exhibits, lighting, placement of objects, verbal explanations (printed or oral), chronological, thematic, conceptual, or other modes of organization? What changes in accessibility are likely to result if the daily hours and open days are reduced? if sections of the museum are closed at certain times? if tighter security is enforced? if publicity is altered in amount or kind? if inter-museum lending programs are reduced or eliminated? if part of a collection is kept in storage because of public objections or lack of interest or limited space? if the number of visiting exhibits is cut? if purchases to expand the museum's holdings are not made? if purchases and exhibitions are specialized or eclectic? if some museums are closed altogether?

Will fewer people attend musical, dance and dramatic performances if these are moved to smaller halls? if admission prices are raised? if the season is shortened? if parking prices go up? if publicity is curtailed? if public financial support of an orchestra, band, chorus, theater group, or dance group is dropped? Will art training opportunities be made less generally accessible if fewer classes are offered? if fees are raised? if the programs are moved from neighborhoods to a central site? Will fewer children have access to music and drama if school visits to performances or visits of performing artists to schools become fewer?

Will any of the above changes affect the accessibility of the arts for certain social groups—racial and ethnic, economic, age, educational—more than for other groups?

And if we alter the content of publicly supported programs—the visual arts exhibits, the plays staged, the music played, the dances danced, the books and magazines and records bought for the libraries—how may such modifications change—in a fundamental, longterm way—the accessibility of the arts to their present or potential users? Would contemplated changes in content encourage or discourage use by present users? Would they open up or close off the arts to new, as yet untouched, audiences? Would they stimulate a continuing and deepening sensitivity to the arts? These latter questions are not just questions of physical accessibility. They are questions of psychological access, and they are as important as those of physical accessibility—and often more difficult to answer.

This memorandum has offered mainly questions, few answers. Why? Because they are the sorts of fact-finding, specific questions that, despite their practicality, too often do not even get asked.

Art as something else

One has a good feeling when he can do something that is desirable for both one's own reasons and for other people's reasons. This is the case when a politician who wishes to advance the cause of the arts in our society has the
chance to present or support a proposal to use the arts in a particular social context, such as city planning, urban development, mass transit, parks, zoos, tourism, street lighting, public buildings, mental therapy, school curricula, fairs, civic festivals, parades. Not that art experiences cannot in themselves be valuable, but when we think of art as an absolute we tend to divorce it from its "practical" social contexts and applications. Such a separation is not realistic. It is also poor public relations for the arts; it feeds the popular notion that the arts are "only frills" and so makes it easy for cranks and demagogues to jump all over almost any proposal for expenditure of public funds for the arts. But if the art proposal arises as a necessary element in some civic problem or project, then it can be dealt with realistically, honestly, and diplomatically in terms of something other than just art.

There lies in this strategy, of course, the danger that in the process of presenting the art as a part of something else the something else may take over and distort the art elements. For example, in a beautification plan meant to make a city more attractive to tourists, the politician may find himself under pressure to accept the more familiar—even banal—designs simply to get the general program accepted, even though he fears they may make the environment uglier rather than more beautiful.

The arts in politics

When the arts tie their fortunes to political decisions, they become dependent, as do politicians, on the ballot box. When persons who understand and are sympathetic to the arts come into office, the arts benefit, but when hostile or indifferent candidates gain office, those benefits are likely to lessen or cease altogether. Moreover, while in public office elected officials and their appointees are subject to political pressures, and what they can do for the arts will be determined not only by their will and intelligence but also by their wish to stay in office and the consequent need to keep the electorate friendly to them. When there is a lack of understanding of the arts among the electorate, politicians are hampered in their efforts to assist the arts.

These are the grounds for the warnings to the arts issued by some well-wishers to stay out of politics, to avoid dependence on taxes and on political decisions. They are valid reasons for worry and caution, but there is as much reason for caution and worry about reliance of the arts on non-governmental sources. Corporation boards and wealthy individuals can—and often do—seek to impose their notions on their beneficiaries; they can bear down as foundation trustees; they can hold out as bait their money and, in the case of museums and libraries, their prize possessions. Also, shifts in their own fortunes can suddenly lead to a decline in their support of the arts, much as a shortage of public funds can shut down publicly supported activities. Of course, their freelance private support of the arts through commissions and purchases is subject to the vagaries of the moneymart.

In either case, the arts in our society—because they are not food and shelter—
live a life of hazard. One real fact: In our society the arts have no choice but to run the risks of politics in order to secure a part of their subsistence.

**Artists and their publics as minorities**

In our society the arts are fragile, like a desert which can be quickly wrecked by a few motorbikers and fourwheel drivers. They are fragile because, although they really affect everyone in innumerable ways, the majority of us personally are not deeply involved with them; only a small minority read more than one or two books a year, or listen to "serious" or "classical" music or even "popular classical" music, attend stage plays, go to museums and galleries. For those who do, of course, these activities meet very real needs. An even smaller minority themselves participate as professionals or amateurs in the arts. Like the physically disabled or the unemployed or people who want to study a foreign language, both the creators and consumers of art are minorities. So, especially in times of anger and fiscal shortages, their needs are likely to irritate the majority and then be forgotten. The fact that a minority's activities may be essential—as are the arts—to the well-being of the whole society does not make that minority less vulnerable to discrimination.

And they are a minority with certain characteristics and problems that make it particularly difficult to exercise any muscle in the struggle for survival: 1) few and precarious commercial outlets for the visual arts; 2) great expense involved in the dramatic arts and opera; 3) the absence of a well-established, consistent program of patronage by business and industry (growing, but slowly); 4) rising costs of a technology on which the arts must increasingly rely; 5) the still highly speculative nature of commerce in the arts (e.g., the fluctuation of prices of a painting from nothing to thousands of dollars; the low margin of profit on most books published; the commercial "deadwood" in the output of most artists, writers, and composers); 6) the fragmented nature of the arts—literary, musical, theatrical, and visual expression are all very different from one another; 7) popular but largely mythic images of artistic emotionalism and instability and the consequent public distrust of artists; and 8) except in the case of writers and actors, a lack of training in verbal communication that might make them more effectively articulate in presenting their case.

**Determining the effects of budget cutting**

In a public fiscal crisis which calls for sharp curtailment of expenditures it is very difficult to determine the actual effects of such reduction.

First, the important effects may not be immediately observable; they may be longterm. For some people museumgoing and concertgoing are habits, and it may take some time for them to get out of these habits, even when confronted with new admission prices they cannot afford. It can take years to see the effect of withdrawal or reduction of instruction in the arts. The decline of a public...
facility through lack of upkeep will be gradual and cumulative, and so will the consequent decline in its public use.

Second, the withdrawal of funds may affect different areas of public service in very different ways. The reduction of income in such diverse fields as libraries, childcare, parks, environmental control, art museums, natural history museums, art grants, symphony orchestras, theaters, and mental health is bound to have significantly different effects; thus each field has to be looked at separately. This can be frustratingly hard and slow. Effects in one field cannot simply be evaluated in terms of another field; numbers of visits to a library cannot be neatly equated with museum visits or with the number of people using the public beaches.

A third and very important reason for this difficulty in pinning down the effects of fund reductions lies in the nature of the job of administrators responsible for the departments affected. They are expected to "make do" with the conditions under which their departments operate, to be able to handle emergencies. They hesitate to be known as complainers or alarmists. They are, therefore, likely to look on the brighter side of things and report optimistically that attrition and volunteers have absorbed most dropped positions, that few members of their staffs have had to be let go. They are under pressure to believe and say that their departments are still able to do a good job, and this self-protective pollyannishness will show itself at each lower level of administration. Thus, the really significant kinds of facts—what services, if any, have been dropped or reduced; what services, if any, have been added or expanded—are left unconsidered, or at least referred to only in fragmentary, muffled ways.

And yet specific public services are the very reason for the existence of public institutions, and they should be the focal points of any assessment of results. Fewer open hours? certain parts of a total facility closed altogether, or on certain days, or at certain hours? fewer books, periodicals, records, films available? restrooms cleaned less often? safety measures not taken, or reduced to minimal standards? fewer exhibits? fewer new productions? more repetition of old productions for which sets, costumes, are already on hand? damaged facilities left unrepaired? security standards loosened? information services reduced? shortened rehearsal schedules? briefer performance schedules? fewer or abbreviated research projects? fewer guide services? reduction in analysis and planning activities?—these are the kinds of data which can really give us a sense of the actual effects of cost cutting.

Another kind of significant data that should be gathered and studied is attendance and other use figures—recorded attendance compared with that of previous years, length of stay, any changes in activities of users, reports of approval or complaint, any changes in the kinds of people using the facilities and services. The question of who now uses the facilities and services is a particularly important one; yet it tends to be overlooked by policymakers and administrators. If it is found, for instance, that when admissions are charged the users become the middleaged and the more affluent rather than the more
youthful and the elderly and the poor, this should certainly be a major consideration in setting further policy.

Some odd aspects of museum admission fees

The charging of admission fees at a public museum creates bizarre situations. An artist who does not belong to the museum association has to pay to see his own work and that of his contemporaries at such a museum, and citizens pay at the door for what they have already helped to pay for through taxes. Moreover, unless they are members of a museum association, they do not get special privileges—catalogues, discounts on merchandise in the museum store, free admissions to visiting shows, attendance at opening nights, use of a "Members' Room"—that people who pay dues to the museum association have. With the present wave of tax-cutting and the subsequent reduction of public support for public institutions, situations of this strange kind are becoming increasingly common.

Artists and money

A California state senator, in suggesting scornfully on the Senate floor that the suit worn by the President of the California Arts Council in an interview with the senator was probably his only suit, unwittingly revealed an important difference between the artists' world and the world of professional and business people: Artists, musicians, actors, and writers are accustomed to living on a more modest scale than most middle- and upper-middle class Americans. Most workers in the arts live on a scale considerably more cautious and less showy than that of their fellow Americans who earn their living in business, industry, law, dentistry and medicine. Not all of them, of course. I am describing the common pattern among artists—one of "making do," living in (and fixing up) small apartments or old houses, getting along without good clothes, color television sets, motorbikes, new cars, campers, new furniture, or dinners in good restaurants. The income of a symphony player, freelance writer, or painter simply does not permit such luxuries. When they must buy, they buy at Sears, Penny's, Thrifty Drugs.

These people usually have had much experience with a life of skimping, if not downright poverty. They are not accustomed to the expense account. Indeed, they feel rather awkward on the rare occasions when they are jerked into a world of freer spending by a publisher or producer who will pay for cocktails and a good dinner. They are used to thinking of book royalties of a few thousand dollars (if they can market their books at all), orchestra performance fees of a few hundred, $40 to $400 or $500 for a painting (and they will be doing pretty well to sell a dozen in the year). The existence of most professionals in the arts is grubby. Sometimes a bohemian life may be the result of personal preference; more often it is imposed by economic necessity.

This is not to say that artists, like workers in other fields, may not go for the
gravy if they get on a gravy train, but, because they are accustomed to keeping their money sights low, they are not likely to be extravagant in the use of public or private funds at their disposal. This would seem to be substantiated by the fact that in their organizations’ requests for money from the state of California, one of the largest and wealthiest states, they have requested only several million dollars—and that was for all the arts.

Another factor contributing to artists’ humility in making requests of society is that, until recently, they have lacked strong, effective organization. Musicians and actors have in recent decades managed to develop some machinery for their financial betterment, but the many fields of the visual arts have not yet done so. This situation is slowly beginning to change, but it may be a long time before artists can organize as effectively as people in most other vocations. Such a change is made difficult by artists’ awareness of public apathy towards the arts, also by artists’ own feeling that somehow they would be endangering their creative independence by organizing. But, like teachers, they are realizing that, while working through organizations may at times force them to compromise their freedom as individuals, without organization they may very likely not survive today as creative workers in their chosen fields.

False equations

False equations are common in thinking about the arts, and naturally they carry over into—and distort—decision-making by public servants in their dealings with arts. In argument two different things come to be thought of as one.

Here are four false equations that all too frequently help to shape public fiscal policies on the arts:

1) "Public audience" or "general public" and "public audiences." "The general public prefers . . .," "There is public approval for . . .," "The public wants . . .,"—such phrases express the common view that there is only one public and that its preferences can be determined by majority attendance and approval figures. Actually, there is no "general public"; there are "publics"—a public for alley bowling and another for lawn bowling, a public for prizefights, a public for serious theater, a public for musical comedies, a public for rock, a public for cool jazz, a public for opera, a public for traditional ballet and a public for modern dance, a public for funky art. Though these publics may overlap, they are still definite enclaves, areas of enthusiasm for specific activities. To think of the groups with the biggest turnouts as "the public" means that the very real smaller "publics" get ignored. This result is all too evident in decisions on what to do with public money in the arts. Vital arts with devoted but limited followings—which might increase if given a chance—cannot provide evidence of having great followings; so they are dropped from budgets or given crumbs.

2) Art and the arts. Some arts may differ from certain other arts as fundamentally as contact sports from non-contact sports or selling real estate from
repairing cars. Yet in discussions of what to do about the arts they are frequently lumped together—the performance arts with literature and the visual arts, chamber music with opera; in such crude fusing really important differences in audience, kinds of appeal, facilities, public understanding, and comparative costs get overlooked. One consequence is that the final recommendations, while fitting some arts, may be highly inappropriate to others.

3) People who can afford the arts and people who need and want the arts. In debates over whether to charge/raise admission to museums, concerts, plays, parks, one commonly hears the assertion that admission charges will not keep interested people away. Behind this unsupported conclusion is the assumption that “interested people” equal “paying people,” that interest and ability to pay somehow are identical—an obviously mistaken assumption. And thus far the drops in post-Proposition 13 attendance at arboretums and museums suggest that the hard evidence is all to the contrary.

4) Attendance and interest in the arts, non-attendance and lack of interest. A related widespread assumption is that the people who go to art institutions and functions are interested in them and that those who do not go are not—and will not ever become—interested in them. This overlooks the fact that people may go to a museum or concert for various reasons besides an intrinsic interest in the art or the music. It also ignores the fact that most of us now interested in the arts became so—and usually only gradually. We became so in many different ways, because of many different factors—home encouragement, exposure in the schools, friends, magazines, boredom, going with a group, the chance for free or low-price entertainment, publicity.

Ephemeral art

There are arts that are ephemeral; they last a very short time, some of them even only a few seconds. Artists of this kind work in wet beach sand, snow, colored lights, driftwood on tidal marshes, flowing water, bubbles, mirror reflections, straw, smoke, firework explosions, papier-mâché, flowers. Today a good deal of conceptual art is made for only a limited time—out of sand, water, sticks, sawdust, paper, leaves, chalk—and is meant to be disassembled or erased when the show is over. The contemporary art “happening” is the creation of an event in time rather than the making of an object that will last in time.

This creating of ephemeral objects would seem to go against one of the oldest and deepest feelings about art—that art assures us of one kind of immortality, that “life is short, art is long.” In his “Ode on a Grecian Urn” Keats expressed this sense of art as an extension of the human spirit beyond the artist’s own brief time: “Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave/Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare” and “Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought/As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!/When old age shall this generation waste, Thou shalt remain . . . .” We are shocked when an art masterpiece is vandalized or is lost in fire or flood; we want human creations to last forever.
Then why do artists make out of fragile materials works that cannot last long? Why create ephemeral art at all?

There are a number of good reasons why artists persist in making ephemeral things. One is the easy availability and cheapness of materials like leaves, straw, sand, wind, light, smoke, flowers. Another obvious reason is that certain esthetic effects are attainable in such media; for instance, a light show or a fireworks display creates its own special visual reality, and from long wheat straws one can make a bird with its own kind of golden angularity: a painting of a big soap bubble can never quite match the real bubble; a flying kite—mere sticks and paper—is a very special visual experience, really a whole series of quickly successive designs in space.

Artists can have other motives of a somewhat less obvious kind for making ephemeral art. Sometimes an artist may do it as a blunt assertion of his acceptance of the temporal nature of existence; what he makes sometimes seems to be disintegrating before he completes it; certainly it will not last long. In his visual statement there is a sort of honesty about one aspect of life—its changefulness, impermanence. With some artists it may also be a self-punishing assertion of their own frailty: some present-day conceptual art seems to have this symbolic overtone.

Finally, artists often find in ephemeral materials an appropriateness to certain occasions—sand designs for a beach city festival, fireworks for fairs and expositions, flower floats for street parades, grotesque papier-mâché masks for joyous celebrations, light shows for a dance. It might be noted that most of the occasions that bring forth ephemeral designs are times of excitement, not of contemplative calm.

Ephemeral art poses a special set of problems for politicians who must decide whether or not to spend public money on it. They are being asked to attach their approval to something that may be gone with the next tide or high wind, that cannot be preserved as a part of the community’s treasures; it cannot be defended as a long-term investment, as a gift to the citizens of the future. Also, if a politician’s enemies are looking for a way to make him look ridiculous, his o.k. of some here-today, gone-tomorrow project at public expense may offer them just the ammunition they are looking for. Still, ephemeral art is art, and it has long continued to attract practitioners and to fascinate a large segment of the public; some ephemeral arts—fireworks, floats, water displays—are among the most popular, especially as a part of mass celebrations. Moreover, it can usually be argued that its expense is small compared to art in more stable media. On a more philosophical level, ephemeral art can be shown to share its ephemerality with a musical performance, a play or dance production; these are experiences of the moment and, with all our recording technology, cannot be entirely recaptured in all their directness and immediacy. The play or composition or choreography will last, but not the individual interpretation. Just so with ephemeral art: the idea can be used again—but the particular instance is a one-time event.
Gee, I don't know, Sir. You can have the Supercard Alphaccount with 5 1/4 percent interest and combination checkassure/autotrans/supercash card, or the Autocash 500 account with readyloan reserve cash and free wats line anywhere in the world, or the Transmagic Magnaccount with phone Autotrans, personalized real leather account book, free notary and special rates on tax preparation.

What's a "checking account"?
NOW Accounts:
What's In A Name?

William S. Penn, Jr.

This paper proposes to examine the introduction of interest-bearing checking accounts in Northern California and to suggest how and why what had been heralded as a "major new service" became essentially a non-event. The technical name for interest-bearing checking accounts is Negotiable Order of Withdrawal accounts, or NOW accounts. So far as the checking account user is concerned, there are only two differences between these new accounts and old fashioned checking accounts. We might note that there is a technical label for checking accounts too: they are called "demand deposit accounts," but this financial jargon has never been adopted by the public.

The first difference between the NOW account and the standard checking account is that the bank, savings and loan, or other thrift institution pays the depositor interest on the NOW account balance, while no interest was paid explicitly on the balance before. As a matter of fact, banking regulations expressly forbade payment of interest on checking account balances.
The second difference is that NOW accounts are available from savings and loans associations (S&Ls), from credit unions and other so-called "thrift institutions," as well as from banks. Because the user perceives no functional differences in the NOW account no matter which kind of financial institution provides the service, whether the interest-bearing NOW account is held with a bank or one of the other financial houses seems to be of little consequence. At least so far as the form of the check drawn, the user can see no difference, no matter who carries the account.

The passage of the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act of 1980 (Public Law 96-221) made interest-bearing checking accounts or Negotiable Order of Withdrawal (NOW) accounts available in all fifty states. NOW accounts were first offered in Massachusetts in 1972, and shortly thereafter they spread through all six New England states as enabling legislation was passed. Demand deposits or checking accounts as a percentage of commercial banks' total deposits had fallen rather steadily from around 40 percent to less than 10 percent over the past thirty year period. Congress recognized the fact that depositors would move their funds from non-interest to interest-bearing accounts and passed Public Law 96-221 to assist the banks in holding onto funds. However, the major impetus for the new law came from the Savings and Loans (S&Ls) who sought the NOW accounts as a means of offering checking accounts to their depositors, allowing the S&Ls to compete more directly with the commercial banks (CBs).

The Act made NOW accounts available in all fifty states as of January 1, 1981, setting the maximum interest payable at the standard rate of 5 1/4 percent annually for all offering institutions. The S&Ls were expected to act as they did, vigorously promoting NOW accounts at their offices. The competitive reaction from CBs was expected to be their offering NOW accounts either as replacements for the conventional checking accounts or as supplements to them. These expectations have been fulfilled. Competition has been fairly intense, with the S&Ls being more aggressive so far. The reason for the relatively less aggressive promotion on the CBs' part is plain to see: the Act gave the banks the "privilege" of paying interest on accounts which had not borne interest before, adding to their costs of money. The S&Ls on the other hand saw the NOW accounts as a means of attacking the banks' hold on the checking accounts function, and as noted earlier, providing a way of making them more directly competitive with the CBs.

It has been interesting to observe the pricing of the new service and to note the differences between the S&Ls and the CBs as well as the differences among institutions within the same group. CBs have competed with other CBs — S&Ls have likewise competed for funds with other S&Ls — while each sought to out-market its direct competition.

Consideration of the pricing activities must begin with the analysis of the product offered and its target markets. The product, the NOW account, is a new one among the services offered by banks and S&Ls. NOW accounts can be regarded as an extension of checking account services offered by the CBs, of
course, but for our purposes they will be viewed as new products for CBs as well as for the S&Ls. NOW accounts are services, intangibles, with the normal attributes of such products.\textsuperscript{3} Their attachment to the seller or provider leads to the comment that all banking and S&L services have long been perceived by users as significantly undifferentiated. The attitude has been that within their category each CB and each S&L provides essentially the same services at basically the same costs overall. Depositors expected slight advantages that one institution might offer on a given service to be offset by a corresponding cost in the form of some service that bore a higher price. A legion of patronage surveys reflected this expectation of similarity, and found that the principal reason for which users selected a bank or S&L was physical convenience.\textsuperscript{3}

The target market for NOW accounts consists of all savings account depositors in both S&Ls and CBs, as well as checking account customers at the banks. Those who are not presently customers of any institution make up a special segment to be located and converted to the use of the institution's new accounts. Interestingly, based on the western experience to date, the overall target market may have segmented itself. It appears that holders of smaller balance accounts tend to choose the S&Ls over the CBs for their NOW accounts, but this may reflect only the higher minimum balance requirements for no-service-charge (NSC) NOW accounts set by the banks. Having higher qualifying balances, the CBs appear to have chosen their target market primarily from the depositors who customarily carry high minimum balances in their checking accounts. Judging from their minimum qualifying balances the S&Ls are more volume oriented.

A survey based on CBs and S&Ls in the Bay Area provides the basic data for analysis. Preliminary investigations have shown no major differences between experience in this area and the rest of the state, nor any significant differences among the institutions in this area and those in the rest of the state.

The tabulations that follow summarize the findings of a survey which spanned about four calendar months. As permitted by the Act, some institutions began advertising and otherwise promoting their NOW account offerings in late October—early November 1980. The effective date for the customer's writing of checks on the NOW account was January 1, 1981, but the funds earmarked for the NOW account were set aside in a "passbook" savings account until the opening of business on the first of the new year when they were automatically transferred. Where preprinted checks were offered, these were supplied (often very late by the S&Ls) with the caution that they were not for use until 1981.

There were two basic strategies chosen on the qualifying account balances: either a \textit{minimum} daily or monthly balance, or an \textit{average} daily or monthly one. The monthly minimum or monthly average were the most used modes among the banks and S&Ls surveyed. In the monthly minimum group were fourteen S&Ls and fourteen CBs.\textsuperscript{4} In Table No. 1, I have shown the minimum monthly balance requirements for no-service-charge (NSC) NOW accounts for each institution type; I have given the S&Ls first to make comparisons easier. In each case the data are shown for the basic NOW accounts offered. Some of
Table No. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type and Number of Institutions offering</th>
<th>Minimum Monthly Balance Required for NSC NOW Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 2</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 3</td>
<td>$500 or $1000 in savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 3</td>
<td>$500 or $2000 in savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 2</td>
<td>$500 or $3000 in savings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$1500 plus $500 minimum daily average in NOW account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$2500 plus $500 minimum initial deposit in NOW account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$1500 minimum or $2000 average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 3</td>
<td>$1500 minimum or $3000 average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$2000 minimum or $3000 average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$2000 minimum or $4000 average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 2</td>
<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 2</td>
<td>$2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$2000 combined NOW account and savings accounts balances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 1</td>
<td>$0 plus $2000 savings accounts balances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The S&Ls, for example, have special categories of NOW accounts designed to attract very large savings deposits. One such special account involves a minimum savings account balance of $10,000. I feel that such special accounts are not indicative of the average checking account user and have left them out of the tabulated data. My reason for including the NSC level for the balances required was to put all the competing institutions on a common footing for comparison.

The data in Table No. 1 show the S&Ls with minimum balance requirements ranging from a low of $300 to a high of $2,500. No pattern is apparent in these minimums, save that twelve of the S&Ls have requirements at $500 or less, and
only two at the high end. It is logical to infer that the majority of the S&Ls estimated their costs and revenues to be in balance in the lower range. Balances above the minimum would, it is assumed, be profitable to the S&Ls.

The CBs have minimum balances for NOW accounts in the $1,000 to $3,000 range, with the exception of one bank that has a zero balance requirement provided the account holder has $2,000 or more in savings accounts with the bank. The modal amount for the CBs is $2,000, sharply higher than that of the S&Ls which is $500. This difference is hard to explain on any basis except the lack of experience with checking accounts on the part of the S&Ls. It seems most unlikely that the CBs with many, many years of experience in the handling of checking accounts have erred in setting the required minimum balances. What is likely is that the S&Ls, eager to gain accounts from the banks, underestimated their costs or overestimated the earnings they could make with the low balances they set.

This interpretation is given credence by the fact that one of the S&Ls has clearly labelled its NOW account terms as applicable to the first year's operations only and states that fees and balance requirements are subject to change in the future. This would be a prudent way for the S&L to feel its way into the checking account business.

Table No. 2 gives the data on the S&Ls and CBs that employ minimum daily balance requirements for their NSC NOW accounts. In this group are three S&Ls, two of which accept minimum savings account balances as satisfying the requirements for a NOW account with NSC. All that they ask is that the balance in the NOW account be sufficient to cover any checks written against it. The third S&L holds to a NOW account minimum daily balance of $500.

Table No. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type and Number of Institutions Offering</th>
<th>Minimum Daily Balance Required for NSC NOW Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$300 or $2000 in any savings account(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$500 or $1000 in any savings account(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L — 1</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 2</td>
<td>$1500 or $3000 in any savings account(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB — 2</td>
<td>$2000 or $5000 in any savings account(s)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As was the case for the data in Table No. 1, the four banks in this daily minimum group have set their balance requirements three to four times higher than the S&Ls. Two of the CBs accept the alternative of $3,000 in any savings accounts and two require $5,000 in savings accounts with them. It takes little thought to foresee a great many difficulties for CBs and S&Ls who have selected daily minimums as their qualifications. They will have to try to explain to the angry depositor that it takes time for deposits made to clear their accounts and that this is the reason that the institution has on its books a different minimum than the depositor shows at a given time. It seems safe to forecast a great many adjustments being made to mollify angry account holders.

Table No. 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type and Number of Institutions</th>
<th>Monthly Average Balance Required for NSC NOW Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L - 1</td>
<td>$750 or $500 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L - 1</td>
<td>$1000 or $500 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S&amp;L - 1</td>
<td>$2000 or $500 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 1</td>
<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 1</td>
<td>$2500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 3</td>
<td>$2000 or $1000 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 2</td>
<td>$2000 or $1500 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 1</td>
<td>$3000 or $2000 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 5</td>
<td>$3000 or $1500 minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CB - 1</td>
<td>$4000 or $2000 minimum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table No. 3 offers the figures for institutions using monthly average balances as the required qualification for their NSC NOW accounts. In this group three S&Ls are found with fourteen CBs. Interestingly, the dispersion from lowest to highest average balances is much less than that noted previously in the daily or monthly minimum balance groups. Observe that the three S&Ls in this group combine the monthly average required with a minimum, quite probably as a hedge against the difficulties referred to in the matter of the depositor's balance. As is the case in the two other groupings, the CBs have set far larger average balance requirements but twelve of the fourteen banks have also set alternative minimum balances for NSC NOW accounts.

One interesting fact is that there is a tendency toward consensus among the competing institutions on the required averages. Possibly one could attribute the overall higher average requirements to the greater knowledge of the costs and benefits involved for the bank or S&L. That is, institutions which have
selected the average balance rather than a minimum have a sounder feeling for what the NOW accounts will cost them and what returns they will make on the funds in such accounts. An alternative hypothesis is that these institutions elected a less aggressive program of acquiring NOW accounts than have the others appearing in Tables No. 1 and No. 2.

Reviewing the figures in the three tables makes it apparent that there is a great deal of overlapping among the offers and that there is no clear-cut way of evaluating one against another. Telephone surveys of selected S&Ls and CBs in the area over months December through April (1981) have established that the conversion to NOW accounts from conventional savings or checking accounts have been very small for both the CBs and the S&Ls. As for the acquisition of new money in the form of new accounts opened at the institutions, this has been far, far less than was anticipated. And the results across the country appear to have been about the same. A recent article noted that NOW accounts were being classified as "non-events" by bankers based on their results.4

There has been no satisfactory evidence that the consumer has identified a "best" offer among those proposed. It was hypothesized that because of the plethora of overlapping offers, the customer had become thoroughly confused and had adopted the "wait-and-see" or "do-nothing-now" attitude. There is no proof of a strong flow of funds to the institutions offering the NSC accounts with the lowest minimum or average requirements. Further, there are no data suggesting significant internal account conversions, instances in which the depositor has moved funds from conventional savings or checking accounts into the NOW accounts. No notable activity has occurred despite intense promotional efforts by both banks and S&Ls.

One CB undertook an aggressive solicitation to convert its larger depositors and larger checking account holders to NOW accounts. The response of the bank's customers was almost nil, so small, in fact, that the bank abandoned the campaign altogether.

As for the S&Ls, following an intense burst of promotional advertising on TV, radio and in newspapers, they have fallen largely silent. All in all, it seems plain that the promotional campaigns have not worked, have not resulted in the expected increases in NOW accounts. The question is why?

My hypothesis is that the sheer confusion resulting from the many overlapping offers, each claiming to be the best for the consumer, created a non-event. As Shakespeare's Hamlet says, human nature "... makes us rather bear those ills we have/Than fly to others we know not of." In this context, it seems that the consumer has elected to hold onto his conventional account rather than switch to the new NOW account. This hypothesis was tested in two separate focus group meetings which were called to discuss the NOW accounts and their lack of acceptance. In both sessions the participants said that paying interest on checking account balances where none had formerly been paid was a good idea, but that they had not switched their accounts. The basic reason they gave for rejecting the interest-bearing accounts was that what the bank or S&L gave in interest on the NOW account was surely offset by some additional charges on
other services. When probed about switching from CBs to S&Ls or vice versa, participants held to the opinion that, in the long run, they all came out the same.

The confusion over the NOW accounts offers was clearly noted in the sessions. There was voluntary citing of the overlapping offers. Although there was awareness of the fact that the S&Ls had lower minimum requirements for NSC NOW accounts than did the CBs, none felt this was sufficient cause for switching accounts from banks to S&Ls.

It seems safe to conclude that the confusing offers among the CBs and the S&Ls as well as between these two types of NOW account offerers have led to the the non-event. Shakespeare's comment seems to have broad applications to the world of marketing. If no clearcut advantage is seen by the consumer to whom an offer is made, the results will be poor. It follows that even with what would seem to be a plain gain to the consumer — interest paid on the balances in NOW accounts where no interest had been paid on conventional checking accounts — confusion can cause the rejection of the advantageous offer. The truism in politics also obtains in marketing: if you can't beat 'em, confuse the issue sufficiently and you will maintain the status quo.

NOTES

1 Federal Credit Unions are also empowered to offer NOW accounts by the Act. Up to mid-February 1981, none had made such accounts available to depositors so far as could be determined. If NOW accounts are being offered by credit unions, it is being done by stealth.

2 These attributes are detailed in most introductory marketing texts. Commonly detailed are intangibility, inseparability from the supplier, heterogeneity, perishability, and fluctuating demand. In the case of NOW accounts, the last two are not as clearly applicable as the others.


4 It is entirely coincidental that the number of each kind of institution was the same. The survey was by no means exhaustive and some banks or S&Ls may have inadvertently been omitted.

Getting There:
Transits in Speculative Fiction

Jacques Favier

WHAT "is speculative fiction?" How is it similar to and different from "mainstream literature?" This essay proposes some answers to these questions, not because such literary labels signify mightily, but rather because, too frequently, they mask telling distinctions. In answering the questions I've proposed, I'll use a two pronged method. First, I will briefly explain what speculative fiction is by contrasting its relation to reality with that of other kinds of prose. Then, I will offer a fuller demonstration of how speculative fiction works. To do this, I will try to illuminate its deep structure, some of its underlying patterns.

The present article makes extensive use of the material for a course on Science Fiction delivered at San Jose State University in the academic year 1980-1981. Hence the "unspecialized," often informal character of its tone and aims. The text blends elements of basic knowledge in the field with more original attempts at bringing to light specific patterns, structures, and categories.
The Genesis of Speculative Fiction

To begin defining speculative fiction, let me offer an "aeronautic" analogy.

In Fig. I (see above), the creator or reader, (C/R), feeling the need to escape from the plane of reality (R), uses his imagination as an aeronaut of old would his captive balloon, to leave the level of the real, the contingent, the here-and-now, and reach a higher plane. Carried away by the high winds of the thinner air, on a course that symbolizes the passing of time, he will look down upon his fellow men, describing what lies behind (history) or ahead of him (futurology).
In Fig II, having reached the level of (R'), he will also build castles in the air, i.e. create, or read—which is to re-create. The higher in the air he goes, the broader his bird's eye view, and the less faithful, of course, his creation, because of the distance.
Since the degree of similitude to reality of his imaginary creation (or fiction) will vary with his altitude, we can distinguish three main zones, which are recorded in Fig. III. In the lower one, which we shall call Mimetic Pseudo Reality (or R'M), lies all "Mimetic fiction" (to borrow the critic Darko Suvin's phrase). It is the mainstream of almost true-to-life, very realistic but not real, traditional fiction. The second, higher zone, is that of Speculative Pseudo Reality, where "Speculative Fiction" belongs (R'S). C/R has reached a plane far enough removed from R Reality for it to look rather beautiful (if he is an optimist), or definitely ugly (if our C/R is a pessimist) and his attitude will influence his creation (or re-creation). If he thinks mankind is good and deserves to live in a better world, he will create a utopia; if he thinks it's hopelessly bad, he will turn out a dystopia. If he hesitates, his recreated reality will combine both. Frequently, he will start off with a utopia, then realize it won't work because of the imperfection of human nature, and end up with a dystopia, which is a utopia gone sour.

![Figure III](image_url)
When the creator's imagination is fanciful enough to make him soar up above the clouds of Reason and Logic, he will almost lose sight of reality. Actually, he will still be able to see through the clouds what is happening on the plane of reality. However, what he makes out of the bits and pieces he glimpses will turn into a nonsensical pseudo-reality which in literature is known as Nonsense. (Third level, R'N, in Fig. III.) As the people below look up and see the clouds of Reason and Logic, he looks down and sees them, but from the other side and a different angle. Some people may well wonder sometimes if his angle is not a better one from which to view reality.

However, most creators or readers of fiction rise only to a low altitude and are quite happy to remain there. They create or re-create Mimetic Fiction and would never dream of going higher up, where those foolish writers of Science Fiction or Fantasy and other Speculative Fiction venture. Sometimes, though, those whose fiction is the richest and most imaginative catch an upward draught and suddenly soar. Most classic geniuses of literature, not to speak of more recent, allegedly "mainstream" writers have done this. The examples are too numerous and obvious to be listed here.

The plane that we have called Speculative Pseudo Reality must then be opposed to that of Mimetic Pseudo Reality in much the same way as the terms Supernatural and Natural have been opposed. In fact, the only reason why we have to reject those classic terms is that their connotations make them ambiguous. They would only be apt if they were completed by the following restrictive explanations: "natural" means "such as human contemporary science knows it," and "supernatural" means "everything else." This would help solve the problem of whether we can call ghost stories "tales of the supernatural" along with disaster stories of the "what if . . ." Science Fiction type, simply because the real cause of the disaster is labelled "origin unknown" in the overwhelming majority of cases. History has shown that, although things occasionally get out of hand, no disaster comparable to those of most Science Fiction's cataclysmic tales has happened—yet. S.F. still remains speculative, and thus the "what if . . ." disaster stories belong among the supernatural in our distinction. However, the greater part of the Space Opera placed more or less vaguely in our future, inasmuch as the science and technology it uses is supposed to derive "naturally" from our present-day science, can be called "fiction of the natural," or better perhaps "Fiction of Nature Extrapolated."

I have chosen to consider that Fiction of the Supernatural and Fiction of Nature Extrapolated are less ambiguous terms than the labels traditionally used—Fantasy (for the former) and Science Fiction (for the latter)—which cover the same material, but, as I have just shown, overlap. Both of course belong to the category "Speculative Fiction."

Much of the confusion still existing at present, notably in publishing and editorial circles, is due to the temptation (or obligation) to label works in toto. Within the same work the tale can change sides several times. In fact, as many critics noted long ago, many stories start out as Science Fiction and end up as Fantasy. The quibbling over labels, although traditional with the criticism in
the field, may be as useless as frustrating. The matter has to be examined, however, if only to justify our final settling for the terms Mimetic Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Fiction of Nature Extrapolated and Fiction of the Supernatural.

Transits

What is perhaps even more interesting to wonder about than the nature and anatomy of Speculative Fiction is its physiology, and in particular the mechanisms of the very important passage from the level of Mimetic Pseudo Reality to that of Speculative Pseudo Reality. A great many readers of Speculative Fiction come to it precisely because of the specific thrill that the passage gives to the imaginative C/R. First, I shall attempt to show why the passage from the here-and-now to the other world is such a capital element in Speculative Fiction; then I will study the conditions of this passage and the narrative devices used by writers to negotiate this passage.

Any cardinal activity in life implies a passage across a threshold, a gateway, whether abstract or concrete. I use the word “cardinal” with its etymology in mind, for the Latin word it derives from means “hinge.” The connotations of the word are clear: those intense moments of organic or mental activity, from birth to death, correspond to crises reached in the conflicts between the forces that hold the human being to the “older order” of things, and the forces that pull him or her forward, towards the “new order.” Violence is usually inevitable, for those crises mobilize a high degree of energy. Needless to say the conditions in which the passage is accomplished determine the future of the person. Hence the institutional rites of passage and initiations that mark those stages of life in all societies. Jungians will possibly point out that in those fundamentally revealing aspects of the life of a civilization, the myths built up in the collective unconscious come to the surface and play a crystallizing part. The conditions of the passage are crucial. The role of every detail is enhanced to the point where what came before the crisis and what will come afterwards becomes relatively unimportant. Everything, down to the tiniest material detail, and often especially the tiniest detail, means and symbolizes much at this crucial moment of the “passage.”

Art, of course, reflects these crises of human life and perception. Actually, narrative representation, in both mimetic and speculative fictions, uses “passages,” or what we will call transits, as its fundamental structure. Almost any plot, of course, boils down to a succession of crises. Fiction writers are aware of the necessity to focus on those highly significant, polysemous turning-points in the stories. Memory does not cheat about that: what people remember best in life and literature are the transits. Between the building up of a crisis and its solution lies a threshold—a decision to be made, or the intervention of chance, or Providence—in short a simple, determining factor that will operate the complex mechanism of change.
Twenty-seven Formulae

Having stressed the importance of transits, let me now examine the phenomenon in the light of my earlier categorizing of fiction. The first thrill the reader experiences comes as he opens the book of fiction and decides to play the game: the first literary transit takes place between the plane of Reality and the planes of narrative pseudo-reality. The second thrill comes with his passage from mimetic to speculative pseudo-reality. Occasionally, perhaps to save time and combine both thrills, writers jump directly to the level of speculative pseudo-reality. They assume that the reader has effected the transit directly, without their help. They start out without any transition in a tale of the twenty-second century, for example, and possibly make things even slicker by plunging their readers into the middle of the action. This technique of starting in medias res has almost become a general practice in modern-day popular stories. This is not objectionable in principle, especially when the writer is short on ideas about how to make his characters' transit original or convincing. But many readers express a preference for the old, traditional, gradual transit, from R to R'M to R'S (see Fig. III).

Another frequent device is to "transit" only part of the way, so that the reader does not know whether he has reached R'S or is still on R'M. The traditional tale of terror actually bases most of its dramatic effects on the simple device of not transiting all the way. The critic Tzvetan Todorov suggests a formal definition of Fantasy which makes use of this criterion: fantasy is the kind of literature in which the reader hesitates as he reads between two incompatible explanations for the weird event described. He keeps asking himself if the cause of the event is natural or supernatural. Was that a ghost or simply the effects of over-drinking? Was the criminal a very small, very vindictive monkey, or was it some occult power from beyond the grave? Is this the wind howling in the pine trees or is it the restless souls of the damned? Todorov's definition dates back a few years and has been much criticized, but on the whole it still holds for a vast number of tales of terror, although it certainly does not apply to the whole field of Fantasy.

Apart from the two exceptions I have just considered, the traditional structure of the tale of Speculative Fiction can be studied with the help of a double-flow chart (Fig. IV, page 50).
TRANSITS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Starting Point</th>
<th>Means of Transit</th>
<th>Finishing Point</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R'S</td>
<td>C₁</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R'M</td>
<td>B₁</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>A₁</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure IV

A₁, B₁, and C₁ are the states of things before the transits take place, at any of the three levels considered; a, b, and c are the means of passage, the devices that permit it, the catalyzers that trigger the transit—these can be anything from a marriage proposal, a train journey or a winning lottery ticket, to a trip in a space-ship, a magic ring or an overdose of pot. A₁, B₁, and C₁ are the states of things after the passage has been effected. Thus, we have twenty-seven cases, or formulas for transits, to consider. Since it is obviously impossible to give many illustrations and unfair to select but a few from familiar fiction to cover all the cases, I will content myself with a few comments on the mechanism and the use of an all-purpose paradigm.

1) The starting point is a situation in Reality, or Fact: A₁.

Given A₁ - a - A₂, we have either history, or futurology, or an account of present occurrences. It is either pure fact (at least is given as such) or straight prediction. It cannot be considered as fiction. In the instance of A₁ - a - B₂, a hypothesis is formulated on the fictitious consequences of (or sequel to) a recorded event. A few historical romances use this pattern, as well as A₁ - b - B₂. The means of attaining the fictitious state of affairs in B₂ is pure invention. For example, the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo was caused by a bad cold. Also current is A₁ - b - A₂. Recorded historical events are accounted for by the presence of a
purely fictitious catalyst, or even that of a supernatural device such as historians of the classic age would often use with the pattern, \( A_1 - c - A_1 \). The gods intervene in a Greek or Roman battle, or Napoleon's defeat was in fact caused by a gipsy's spell. 

\( A_1 - c - B_1 \) describes the structure commonly found in historical romances, where fact and mimetic fiction mingle, thus permitting the intervention of definite speculative catalysts. 

\( A_1 - a - C_1, A_1 - b - C_1 \) and \( A_1 - c - C_1 \) represent supernatural (or, more appropriately, speculative) consequences of a real event, with the help of either real, mimetic or speculative catalysts to operate the transit. In my favorite example, Napoleon is abducted by an alien race just before the battle (presumably to be exhibited in a Centaurian zoo of remarkable humans), a double has to be found to take his place, and, of course, he loses the war.

2) The starting point this time is fiction, but of the mimetic kind: \( B_1 \).

\( B_1 - a - A_2 \) is yet another kind of romanticized history, where a recorded historical fact is accounted for by purely fictitious causes. So is \( B_1 - b - A_2 \). This time the device that makes history is an invented one: our hero, John Smith, a master spy in Wellington's Intelligence Service, circulated false information at Napoleon's headquarters which he had infiltrated, thus precipitating the emperor's downfall. 

\( B_1 - a - B_1 \) is one of the most common patterns in the mimetic fiction of all ages. A historically recorded mechanism, generally part of the historical background or setting of the table, is used to make things happen in the narrative. Typically, Peter Jones was one of the soldiers who led the final assault against Napoleon's Old Guard; the terrible experience changed the pattern of Peter's life. Straight mimetic fiction also very often does not bother overmuch about historical contingencies and is quite content with another quite common pattern, \( B_1 - b - B_1 \). In extreme cases, this formula is that of tales entirely disconnected from Fact, yet remaining mimetic as far as the universal components of the human comedy are concerned.

In \( B_1 - a - C_2 \), a state of things belonging to a mimetic pseudo reality is modified by a historically recorded fact and ends up in a purely speculative context. Perhaps Jacques Dupont, an old grenadier, put up such a brave fight during the last assault which wiped out the Old Guard that he was noticed by the alien zoologists watching the battle; they abducted him before he received a fatal wound and let him join his old master at the zoo.

The device, which here was the Old Guard's historical last stand, may also be pure invention, yet of a mimetic nature, such as the following pattern shows: \( B_1 - b - C_2 \). This, along with \( B_1 - c - C_2 \), may be considered the basic pattern of Fantasy, Science Fiction, and the Extraordinary Journey. To use another example (for our previous one is getting rather overworked), a storm carries a ship to an unknown island where the travellers discover a world full of wonders. Here we have \( B_1 - b - C_2 \), a formula to be found in countless tales, from Sinbad to Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*. If we used \( B_1 - c - C_2 \), the ship would fall through a hole in the sea at the North Pole and land on a wonderful shore.
(Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter, an American gentleman, pursued by Red
Indians, takes refuge in a cave in Arizona, from which he is transported to Mars
by rather supernatural means.)

3) The starting point is a situation of Speculative Fiction: C. 

C, - a - A,: This pattern is not at all a rare case in the kind of history writing
where myth and legend account for historical fact; neither is
C, - b - A,: found in the same contexts, with purely fictional catalysts, or
C, - c - A,: where the catalyst is often of a magical nature. Most cosmogenetic
myths follow the latter pattern.

C, - b - B,: A situation in a mimetic pseudo-reality has a supernatural origin,
but is due to the intervention of some quite natural device. H. G. Wells imagines
that an angel falls from the Heavenly Kingdom into the sea, swims to the shore
and visits the world of men. Many fables of the XVIIIth century such as
Voltaire's Micromegas follow this pattern.

C, - c - B,: The catalyst may be magical or the product of an advanced pseudo-
science. Aliens in "hyper-drive" spaceships, on a visit to our planet, will appear
in such tales of encounters of the third kind as follow this or the previous for-

mula.

C, - a - C,: Most legends which rely on "a" as a factual, historically recorded,
myth-creating device use this pattern. A great flood in the plains of
Mesopotamia would account for the myth of Noah from an archeological point
of view. The wonderful story combines with other myths, of course, for the
matter is complex. But this pattern occurs frequently in all sorts of
mythologies. Elements of the landscape can also be used to provide mental
anchor, to guarantee the veracity of the most fantastic legends. Mount
Olympus, Charybdis and Scylla had their parts to play in Greek mythology and
heroic legends. Topology is an essential ingredient of all the great myth-
building sagas.

C, - a - B, corresponds to an elaboration on such legends to be found in popular
tales whose heroes do not belong to pure myth (Speculative Fiction) but to
mimetic fiction. For instance, The Iliad has gods interfering in the battle of
heroes.

C, - b - C, is one of the most common patterns in Speculative Fiction, especially
in the kind of Science Fiction where fantastic characters, aliens for instance,
behave like the most mundane earthlings. Little green men fall in love with
little green women; their love being requited, they marry, touch tentacles and
beget little green children. Actually, this mode of reproduction belongs to the
following pattern:

C, - c - C, which is more coherent, and universally favored by all tales of
Speculative Fiction, from sheer Fantasy or pseudo-science romance to what
has been labelled Sword-and-Sorcery, where magic catalysts exist endlessly.
The Extraordinary Journey: Conditions of the Transit

The patterns most commonly used in tales of extraordinary journeys are $B_1 - b - C$, and $B_1 - c - C$, and $B_1 - b - C_1$ and $B_1 - c - C_1$. When the trip does not take place in space but in time, in the past for example, its formula will be $B_1 - c - B_1$, or $B_1 - c - A_1$ (in known history), with the help of some pseudo-scientific or magical time-machine, “c.” The historians of Speculative Fiction usually mention the Extraordinary Journey (often inappropriately or restrictively called “the extraordinary voyage”), as the most common narrative device used in early tales of Fantasy or Speculative Fables. The theoretician Darko Suvin analyzes in detail the motivations behind the narrative quest for what he calls “the novum.” The novum might be the mysterious land behind the mountains, the desert or the ocean, the blessed island, the protected kingdom, the lost city, the fabled Eldorado. It is, in short, the place that is a no-place, an u-topia. The study of the conditions, structures and peculiar virtues of utopian constructions has its place in other articles, of course, and has become the major concern of countless scholars. However, the nature of the conditions of the transit to those utopias seems to have been far less often explored.

Indeed, special conditions have to be met by the traveller or discoverer before he or she gets a chance of effecting the transit. It may well come as a surprise to many readers, but statistical studies show that in the vast majority of cases, the traveller is already going through a physical or psychological crisis even before the transit occurs. The state of things is already very exceptional: the hero is ill, in grave physical danger, or under great mental stress; the ship has been through a terrible gale, and is already sinking; the battle is raging, and the hero is severely wounded; the passenger's vehicle is going to have, or has just had, or is having an accident; enemies are threatening; despair is at the door. In the best cases, the hero has only his reputation, his honor or his wealth left to save. In the worst ones, his life, or his soul, are at stake. Such dramatizing of the plot seems to be indispensable for two main reasons: first, it puts the stress on the exceptional context, without which exceptional occurrences would be unlikely to take place. This is a narrative device making the whole transit more convincing. Second, it builds up suspense which focuses the reader's interest on the hero's predicament and helps cope with the “suspension of disbelief” when the time comes to operate the transit. The idea is to divert the reader's critical intellect so his sympathy will help precipitate him into unchartered territories.

Obviously, the reader who does not want to be convinced will not be; however, this problem is fundamental to all fiction. The question is quantitative, not qualitative. Whoever is ready to stretch his imagination a little further than mimetic fiction does should agree to suspend his disbelief a little longer than he usually does.
Nature of the Gates

Once the special conditions for the passage have been met by the hero, the device is activated and the transit effected. There is an immense variety of such devices. Some may be material, and range from the more or less complex vehicle to the magic talisman or the wizard's wand. Very often, the device is a kind of Sesame that operates an actual gate, a door in the wall that was there, or is made to materialize. Or else the device is the gate itself, which was there all the time, either permanently or temporarily activated, and the traveller needed only to step through. Immaterial "gateways" can be of a physical order, such as sounds, vibrations, magic formulas, shibboleths, incantations. They can also be of a psychological order: dreams, mirages, hallucinations, trances induced by meditation or drugs, smoke, fog. This list is endless.

Sometimes the gateway is simply inherent in the exceptional conditions met by the traveller: the lost world or the unknown island are protected by the mere facts of their remoteness and inaccessibility. These are gates at "zero degree," if I may use the linguistic notion. This accounts for the choice of inaccessible places in which other worlds are set: unexplored or little known regions of the sea or earth—deserts, jungles, lofty peaks, bottomless abysses, caves; other planets, other stellar systems, parallel universes of space and time, and the most traditional of all uncharted settings, the future.

In early Speculative Fiction, other worlds could lie practically next door. The planet hadn't been explored extensively, the Novum could be found just beyond the frontier of the expanding "civilized" universe—in other words, the world where tales were told in language you could understand, where books were circulated, maps drawn, and testimonies were reliable. There were vast expanses of terrae incognitae for the daredevils to explore. As technology and transportation progressed, man's utopias had to be located elsewhere. Hence the new frontiers of space used in the Space Opera. Parallel worlds in the fourth dimension, although less convincing at first, soon became commonplace and almost out-worn before space opera had to resort to interstellar hyper-space or force drives to break Einstein's physico-mathematical barrier. The next stage in the escalation was the so-called "exploration of inner space," or trips supposedly made into the darker recesses of the mind, conscious, preconscious or unconscious. Still, it seems that the inventiveness of the writers and the ability of the readers to suspend their disbelief always walks comfortably ahead of any advanced discoveries of official science. The question in fact is not so much of keeping up with the progress of science and technology but of satisfying man's need to dream. This urge, which can only be suppressed with the disappearance of mankind as we know it, does not call for any particularly elaborate device in order to be satisfied. Almost any magical formula will effect a transit, almost any planet will do for a setting. The moon itself, which astronomers think they know now as well as Golden Gate Park, is still a perfect setting for first rate fantasy. Mars has been used as a setting hundreds, if not thousands, of times,
with each time offering different natural and archeological histories. And Mars
is, in fact, ready for just as many others. The source for variations is
inexhaustible. Some day an inspired critic will praise the gentleness of touch of
Speculative Fiction which keeps its imaginary settings clean and pure and
ready for more.

Our inventory of possible other worlds would not be complete if we did not
mention one which has been used ever since man became conscious of the great
mystery of life and death. The belief in a world beyond—Heavenly Kingdom,
Hinterworld or Happy Hunting Grounds—is a direct corollary of the mystic
urge present in all civilizations. Visitors to the "Country of the Dead," from
Orpheus, Virgil and Dante to H. G. Wells (in his short story bearing this title),
John Cowper Powys (in Morwyn) or Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (in In-
terno), usually have to pass through the gates of death themselves before they
are allowed to describe what is going on on the other side. Of course, this is often
just a fake death for characters of fiction, because they have to come back to
tell us about it.

Function of the Transits

Since the presence of a gateway implies that sooner or later in the story a
character will pass through it, the motif of the gateway and the device of the
transit are linked like tool and manual work. They lend an atmosphere of ex-
pectancy and suspense to a narrative, thus fulfilling the requirements of the
reader. For Speculative Fiction is a literature of hope and expectancy. Ob-
viously it satisfies man's need to build up daydreams, but it has an even more
important function. By representing a fictional transit, it enables the reader to
live vicariously through this thrilling experience and feel some of the
psychological upheaval that any transit in life implies; yet this thrill is con-
siderably amplified by the uniqueness of the experience, since an escape from
the here-and-now is impossible in real life. The central idea here is that the
representation of the fictional passage from our world to another, with occa-
sional shuttling back and forth, can be much more emotionally and sym-
bolically charged for certain readers than any other representations in fiction,
whether purely mimetic or purely speculative. An image borrowed from
elementary physics makes my point: electricity will only flow through a loop of
wire if it is run across the lines of force of a magnetic field. What counts is the
dynamic aspect of the situation, the passage from one world to the other. It
should be no surprise to us that so many novelists and short-story writers have
exploited this literary vein, with more or less success, and have even harped on
the very subject of gateways and the mechanism of transits. For many creators
and readers alike, much of the charm of Speculative Fiction resides in the
means, rather than in the aims, of the extraordinary journey.
The story of Odysseus' encounter with the sirens occupies a very small place in the Odyssey, altogether less than fifty lines in a poem of over twelve thousand lines. Nevertheless, this brief episode may be more widely known than any other incident in Homer's work. Even in its simplicity, the story possesses a symbolic depth far greater than the tale would appear to have on the surface. In what follows, I want to explore the reasons for the extraordinary psychological power of this seemingly minor event by looking closely at certain meanings embedded in it. The realities thus expressed may explain the tale's continuing appeal. But let me begin by looking at the story itself to see precisely and literally what it says.

Odysseus, who is on his way home to Ithaca after the war with Troy, has been detained for some time by the enchantress Circe. As he finally prepares to leave her island and set sail again, she warns him that he faces several dangers ahead on his journey, the first of which concerns the lure of the sirens. Circe tells Odysseus that soon after he begins his voyage he will pass within sight of a beautiful meadow in which the sirens (two are indicated grammatically) will be sitting. In front of them will be a beach strewn with the bones of rotting men with their skins shrinking on them. When the ship comes within hearing range the sirens will sing a song so compelling that whoever hears it "has no prospect of coming home and delighting his wife and children as they stand about him in
greeting” (Odyssey, XII, 42-43). If, however, Odysseus should want to listen to their singing and yet avoid the fate of those who have perished before him, Circe advises him to plug his companions’ ears with wax and have himself tied to the mast as they sail past the sirens’ island. No matter what commands Odysseus then gives to his men to set a course toward the beach, he will not be heard. In this way, both captain and crew will escape the disaster of shipwreck which has befallen so many previous seafarers. At the same time Odysseus will be able to hear songs no one else has heard and lived to tell about.

Soon after leaving Circe, Odysseus approaches the meadow of the sirens. Suddenly a “windless calm” falls over the waters and Odysseus’ companions take down the sails, plug their ears as Circe had suggested, tie Odysseus upright to the mast, and then quietly man the oars to row past the island. When the sirens see the ship coming near they begin singing directly to Odysseus, whom they recognize:

Come this way, honored Odysseus,  
Great glory of the Achaeans,  
And stay your ship,  
So that you can listen here to our singing;  
For no one else has ever sailed past us in this black ship  
Until he has listened to the honey-sweet voice  
That issues from our lips;  
Then goes on, well pleased,  
Knowing more than ever he did;  
For we know everything that the Argives and Trojans  
Did and suffered in wide Troy  
Through the gods’ despite.  
Over all the generous earth  
We know everything that happens.  

(Odyssey, XII, 184-191)

Hearing this, Odysseus, as Homer puts it, “desire[s] to listen” more closely. He tries to signal this desire to his men by the expressions on his face, but as he does they only bind the ropes tighter around him, as Circe had recommended. In time the ship moves beyond the island and the ordeal is over; Odysseus has heard the sirens’ bewitching melody but has avoided the violent death which, until then, had invariably followed close upon it.

This, briefly, is the story. It now remains to be seen why such a comparatively minor incident has left such a lasting imprint on the Western mind and imagination. The initial question that should perhaps be asked is what the sirens represent. Not what they represented to Homer’s earliest readers (since this we can never know for certain) but what they can be said to represent, figuratively and perhaps even subliminally, to us today. Before answering this question, however, it is important to bring together all that can be known about the sirens from Homer’s narrative.
To begin with, there is no information in the poem itself about their shape or appearance. We are not given any hints about what they looked like, so the image of them as attractive mermaids is a later, unwarranted addition. As far as the *Odyssey* itself is concerned, we know the sirens as nothing more than voices. It may be natural to suppose that behind such beautiful voices were similarly beautiful figures, but there is no reason for assuming this from the text alone. In fact, in pre-Homeric folklore a siren was a grotesque, bird-like creature with a human head who inhabited the underworld and carried off the souls of the dead. The Greek listener may have been surprised to hear Homer give the sirens such melodious voices since it might have seemed more fitting to identify their utterances with shrill, demonic sounds, or with a mournful dirge for dead souls.

Similarly, there does not seem to be anything inherently erotic associated with the sirens’ song. Though, it is true, Odysseus is “seduced” by their singing, this does not appear to be because it represents something carnal. Throughout the epic, Odysseus is not portrayed as a particularly sensual person, and it would be uncharacteristic of him to risk so much for erotic reasons. To be sure, Odysseus was lured into involvements with Circe and Calypso, but both times he acts without much rapture; in any case, they were goddesses and he could not easily contravene their designs on him without getting himself into still more trouble. Nausicaa also seems to have meant little to him sexually, as his cool, almost too formal, parting words to her indicate. Even Penelope as a woman only rarely appears to have held much real erotic interest for Odysseus. He was anxious to return to Ithaca not so much to be with her again as to resume his kingly position of power and authority. The meeting between the two of them in Ithaca, after twenty years absence, is touching but it is almost completely lacking in sensual or erotic overtones.

What, then, can be said definitely about the sirens from within the literal context of Homer’s narrative? Two facts stand out: first, that the sirens are known only as voices, and presumably voices with unearthly qualities; and second, that the song they sing is so irresistibly beautiful that it arouses in the hearer an overwhelming desire to come closer—a desire which, until Odysseus’ time, had apparently led to certain death. The hint that the singing possesses an other-worldly aspect is important; it implies that the sirens’ song represents the breakthrough of something extraordinary into the ordinary, of something supernatural into the natural world of time and space. In this sense, the singing is not meant for mortals to hear since experiencing it amounts to a violation of what the ancients called “right order.” This violation is probably why it is portrayed as punishable by death—because it indicates an unpardonable tampering with the mysterious, and an infringement of the sacred, which no human should be allowed to get away with. That Odysseus not only hears, but hears and escapes, is a double transgression of “right order” of which more will be said later.

At this point it is necessary to take a still closer look at the sirens’ song in order to understand its fatal attraction. There appear to be two things that are
especially compelling about it: its form and its content. Though these are not clearly distinguished in the story, it is necessary to separate them here in order to point out their respective effects.

By the form of the song I mean its beauty and "sweetness," the obviously captivating nature of its tone and melody. Considering this aspect first, the sirens' singing represents what might be termed the temptation of art—the seduction of aesthetic enjoyment or the lure of what the Greeks called "giving oneself up to the beautiful." It is certainly no accident that voice, song, and melody are emphasized in the poem, for to the Greeks music was considered the purest and most moving of the arts, and hence the highest symbol of art as such. At the same time the Greeks felt that the proper approach to art was through an "attitude," where the practical aspects of ordinary life were turned away from because they were too utilitarian or distractive. It follows that since everyday life is founded on "interests," and art on "disinterestedness," there is the possibility that by wholly submerging oneself in beauty, an individual might begin to disdain prosaic, commonplace goals (i.e., the return home, family, and estate). This kind of aesthetic abandonment represented a threat and a danger to Odysseus who was intent upon getting back to Ithaca. Essentially it was the threat of "forgetfulness" which Odysseus often had to cope with in his men, since in the course of their travels they were frequently inclined to lose sight of the ultimate purpose of their journey in the diversions of the moment. But in Odysseus' case, the art or aesthetic form of the sirens' song stood for a type of forgetfulness which was entirely different from the oblivion of the Lotus-Eaters who, in forgetting, simply reverted to an animal level. Art, because it presumably issues from other-worldly sources, represents an elevated kind of forgetfulness which lifts one upward toward the transcendental, not downward toward the mundane aspects of everyday life.

The form, then, or the "art" of what Odysseus hears, is one thing that attracts him. The other is the content, or specific information, contained in the sirens' song. Homer makes it clear that the sirens promise Odysseus a kind of knowledge that he, as a typically curious Greek, cannot resist. What is guaranteed him, if he will only approach closer to their island, is wisdom; complete knowledge of the past, present and future because "over all the generous earth [the sirens] know everything that happens."

Cicero in his De finibus claimed that the chief attraction of the sirens for Odysseus was precisely the knowledge they held out to his inquiring mind. This interpretation seems plausible at first glance not only because it is in accord with what we know about Greek inquisitiveness, but because there are earlier examples in the poem of Odysseus' irrepressible curiosity. Nevertheless, I doubt that this interpretation is correct. It appears that not knowledge but what might be called "aesthetic concerns" provided the main inducement, and this for two reasons. First of all, when Circe initially tells Odysseus about the sirens she mentions nothing about the knowledge he will supposedly acquire from them. Instead she speaks only about the "sweetness" of their singing, the allure of their "melody," and the inexpressible "joy" one feels at hearing their voices.
Apparently, then, Odysseus sails near their island for primarily artistic or aesthetic reasons. (There is no hint of any special information to be had until the sirens mention it themselves, perhaps as a ruse.) Second, when Odysseus is tied to the mast and struggling to hear better the sirens' voices, it is obvious that it is not knowledge that was overwhelming him but the experience of unearthly beauty. Odysseus explicitly says that the sirens "sang in such sweet utterance, that the heart within me desired to listen." It was in the heart that the chords struck home, not in the mind; if it had been the intellectual content of the song that most interested him, he would certainly have responded in a different manner. Furthermore, if it is true that he was given knowledge of "everything that happens," as the sirens promised, he immediately forgot all he had learned. There is no indication that even moments after the encounter he retained anything at all in the way of new knowledge from the incident.

For these reasons, the seductive power of art and not the appeal of knowledge seems to have been what attracted Odysseus. If this is so, then his experience with the sirens is something entirely different from either the temptation in Genesis (where knowledge of good and evil is sought) or the temptation of Faust (where the search for the "truly essential" in life is the purpose of his pact with the devil). Both of these are focused mainly on forbidden knowledge, whereas the sirens episode focuses on forbidden beauty.

This point leads to another, and I think more important, issue—namely, the nature of Odysseus' peculiar (and problematic) relationship to the sirens' song. Adam and Eve and Faust capitulated to the promise of a higher knowledge, but Odysseus does not really fall for the allure of art. Instead, he sets up a controlled relationship to what he hears which allows him to come into contact with the ineffable, but not actually possess it; to hear it, but not really hear it or be drawn into it in the deepest sense. This, I believe, is a significant fact which bears further comment because through it Odysseus signals an attitude of mind that may have become dominant in the modern world. In the brief encounter between the sirens singing in their meadow and Odysseus bound to the mast, it is possible to see the reflection, or at least the anticipation, of an entire disposition toward the world and toward one's self which has by now become so characteristic that it goes virtually unnoticed by most of us. Yet this disposition was not "normative" among the Greeks to whom Odysseus seemed in many ways strange and atypical. Of all the mythic figures in the Iliad and the Odyssey, Odysseus least fits the image of the model warrior-hero; but on the other hand, he comes closer than anyone else in these two epics to being a "representative type" of modern man. To see why this is so, one need only look more carefully at Odysseus' character as revealed by his relationship to the sirens. 4

One of the first things that is evident from the story is that Odysseus is a man of vigorous, indeed exaggerated, self-control. In order to get what he wants he is willing to subject himself to severe, and at times even self-lacerating, means to gain his ends. In his confrontation with the sirens, for example, he not only has himself bound to the mast so that he might hear their voices, but he in-
structural companions to tie him tighter the more he cries out to be released—an extraordinary early instance of a "double bind" where pain increases at the same moment, and with the same intensity, as pleasure. "... I signaled my companions to set me free, nodding with my brows, but they ... straightway/fastened me with even more lashings and squeezed me tighter" (Odyssey, XII, 193-96). The more eagerly Odysseus longs to hear the singing, the more he must be pulled back from it; through his own conscious decision, desire and punishment for desire are made to go hand in hand.

This, however, is not the only occasion where Odysseus manifested what to the early Greeks must have appeared to be an unusual amount of self-mastery. When he, along with others, lay hidden inside the Trojan Horse, Helen passed by and imitated the voices of loved ones, since she guessed that Greek warriors might be within. Several of those inside, including Menelaus, were overcome by emotion and on the point of crying out, but Odysseus restrained them. Thanks to him and his "heart of iron" the impulsiveness of his friends was contained and the Greeks were able eventually to win the day. Later, when trapped in the cave of the Cyclops, Odysseus masterfully repressed his momentary urge to kill the giant while he was sleeping. He remembered ("I took counsel with myself") that it would be better not to vent his spleen and strike out at the Cyclops, for if he did it would be impossible to remove the huge boulder from the entrance of the cave. A thought, in other words, stayed an emotion, which is the essence of self control. Similar examples of Odysseus' ability to suppress his feelings could be given, but the point remains the same: "much-enduring" Odysseus is a man who is able to curb his natural impulses by means of intelligence. This power of the mind and will to suppress desire is Odysseus' most notable quality, and the one that most clearly marks him off from others. Built into the very structure of the Odyssey is the message that if he did give in to his emotions he would die (which would most certainly have been the case in his encounter with the sirens and the Cyclops, and probably in his later confrontation with the suitors as well). In short, in the person of Odysseus feelings are things to be managed, compartmentalized, "put in their place." Spontaneity and instinct are rejected as dangerous; and desires, though not obliterated, are to some extent renounced. But it may be that this triumph of the head over the heart represents a loss that is by now only barely perceptible to us. Perhaps it is true, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno have suggested, that "everyone who practices renunciation gives away more of his life than is given back to him."

Connected with this capacity for self-control is another noticeable quality: purposefulness. Odysseus has one overriding goal which connects all the events of the epic, namely to get home to Ithaca and resume his functions as king. Despite all the obstacles set in his path, he keeps this end always in mind. Even his self-control is related to his overwhelming sense of an objective, his awareness that he is involved in a project from which he must not allow himself to be diverted. Because Odysseus is such a model of purposive behavior he not only has to subordinate his feelings to his intelligence, but he must also
subordinate all that happens to him to his sense of the larger, overall direction of his life. In this way experiences begin to be turned into data to be collected and arranged; his “adventures” are transformed as much as possible into controlled episodes which are not allowed to get out of hand. Randomness is essentially what Odysseus fights against, even though he is constantly subjected to it by the whim of the gods. While the other epic heroes live almost entirely in the present, Odysseus thinks forward and backward, into a future that is not yet and about a past he has left behind. As much as he is able, he wants to make everything that occurs a part of a continuous, structured, and purposeful life history. This attitude is one of the reasons he refuses to be deterred by sex (Calypso, Circe), art (sirens), or idyllic forgetfulness (Lotus-Eaters); each of these diversions would take him away from the single goal to which he has clung continuously throughout his years of tribulation.

It was this kind of zweckrational behavior, this ability to will for a long time in one direction, which endeared Odysseus to the early Church Fathers, who viewed him as a prototypical spiritual pilgrim who would not be led astray from his heavenly calling. (Origen, for example, saw in the figure of Odysseus tied to the mast a prefigurement of Christ on the cross, both resisting the temptation of compromise with the world in the interest of higher spiritual ends.) However this may be, it seems that such a one-dimensional attitude may also have had the effect of destroying other, more important, qualities in Odysseus. Even the most extraordinary experiences do not really register in him inwardly, nor do they appear to have meaningful personal consequences. Encounters like those with the sirens are flattened to a considerable extent because there is so much intelligence and control in them. Consequently impressions tend to be received merely passively, which prevents Odysseus from becoming truly changed by what he experiences. Perhaps a blasé attitude is necessary for his survival, but if so he survives much diminished.

This psychological control suggests yet another characteristic manifested in Odysseus’ relation to the sirens, i.e., his propensity for rational calculation, which has already been indicated in passing above. I want to add here that this calculating attitude has the effect of separating him from the world at large, and turning the world into something objective and detached. The result is a disenchantment with life of the kind Max Weber described when he spoke of the Entzauberung of the world, the loss of magic, the loss of a sense of oneness with life and the cosmos. In some respects it could be said that this process of disenchantment and rational calculation begins with Odysseus and not, as Nietzsche maintained, with Socrates. In the poem it is evident—even to the extent that Odysseus narrates his own adventures to the Phaeacians and makes himself the center of the story—that he is always an experiencing subject, and the world is always an object, or at least filled with objects that are to be related to cognitively. Even the realm of art, as in the case of the sirens’ song, is initially approached not affectively but intellectually (though, as it turns out, Odysseus becomes more emotional than he no doubt expected). This represents something new in the Greek epic since this sort of temperament is not to be
found among the earlier heroes. In the *Iliad*, for instance, the major figures feel an indissoluble unity between themselves and the rest of existence. The self and the world are viewed as distinct but "not permanent strangers to one another" since they are essentially part of the same nature. As yet there is no sign of rational calculation in Odysseus’ sense; the closest to it is Hector’s careful reflection about choices, but interestingly, when he thinks and deliberates about the either/or choices before him, he almost invariably makes the wrong decisions. Achilles, on the other hand, is more typical of the model epic hero. He is undoubtedly highly conscious, but not at all reflective or calculating; rather, he possesses just the sort of freshness and spontaneity that Odysseus lacks. He is impulsive, always ready to act on his feelings, and constitutionally incapable of planning anything through from start to finish. As Hermann Frankel put it, summarizing the character of "Homeric man" in general:

[He] seems marvelously closed and simple . . . . There are no boundaries, there is no cleavage between feeling and the corporal situation: the same word denotes fear and flight, and the same word is used for ‘trembling’ and ‘falling back’ . . . . There is no threshold to separate the will to action from carrying that will out, a threshold before which a man can stand hesitant, like Hamlet. When he recognizes what must happen he does not require a resolution of his own to proceed to the deed . . . . He does not confront an outside world with a different inner selfhood, but is interpenetrated by the whole.¹⁰

Odysseus clearly stands in sharp contrast to this sort of individual. To be sure, his capacity for calculation had its advantages. For one thing it saved his life in his confrontation with the sirens, whereas earlier Greek sailors, responding unreservedly with their feelings, ended as corpses on the sirens’ shore. For another, it made possible the development of a distinctive sense of self which emerged precisely because of his greater subjectivity, that is, because of the intentional distance he placed between himself and the "otherness" of the objective world. Nonetheless, it needs to be pointed out again that this utilitarian, cognitive approach to life also demystifies existence and strips it of something essential. In one respect, Odysseus’ great crime against the sirens was not *that* he listened to their song, but rather it was the *way* he prepared himself to listen to it.¹¹ When, bound to the mast, Odysseus heard on his own terms the "archaic superior power of the song," he must have realized that he had won in one sense, but lost in another.¹² He heard it but could not abandon himself to it unconditionally. The beauty of the singing was surely overwhelming, but more devastating must have been the pain of not being able to surrender to it, the awareness that he could not lose himself in the song and become one with it. As a result, Odysseus no doubt emerges somewhat wiser about the world, but with a less meaningful and less integrated relationship to it. For him, knowledge becomes knowledge about something seen from the outside, not knowledge of something grasped from within. The same loss occurs
on the other side of things as well, with regard to the sirens' song. From the point when it was experienced in the way Odysseus experienced it, all songs, as Horkheimer and Adorno expressed it, "have been affected and Western music as a whole suffers" as a consequence. Songs are no longer echoes of transcendent mysteries, nor do they retain acoustical ties with the music of the spheres, but instead they have become something mundane, something reduced to mere entertainment.

A final point needs to be made about Odysseus and the sirens which may bring us nearer an understanding of another facet of the story. Although the meeting between them signals a triumph of cleverness on Odysseus' part, it also prevents him from establishing links with his own experiences, since they have lost both their identity and intrinsic meaning. Of course, Odysseus does feel emotion upon hearing the sirens' song, but it is greatly weakened by the power of practical reason which decides beforehand how an emotion is to be dealt with. One of the central themes of the story is just this discrediting of the sensuous in favor of the analytical. In striving for an objective attitude, Odysseus dissociates himself from his own sensibilities. It is unfortunate that the faculties of thinking and feeling had to be set against one another in such a way, but this may be symbolic of what has happened within Western civilization itself. The mind appears to have been severed from the body, and reason from desire, so that the two attitudes have been forced to go their separate ways to the great detriment of both. The goal, rather, should be to make thinking a "concrete sensuous activity," that is, to think out of the body and the emotions and to make sure that ideas are grounded in, and maintain a continuous reciprocal interaction with, the affective and feeling side of life. When Nietzsche wrote that "one must want to experience the great problems with one's body and soul," and that he himself had never written anything he had not experienced inwardly (because "I do not know what purely intellectual problems are"), he was expressing the attitude I am suggesting needs to be recaptured. Miguel de Unamuno put it even more viscerally when he wrote that there are "people who appear to think only with the brain . . . while others think only with all the body and all the soul, with the blood, with the marrow of the bones, with the heart, with the lungs, with the belly, with life." If the mind operates apart from, or in opposition to, the affective parts of the self it may achieve great feats of analytical skill, but at the expense of inner impoverishment. On the other hand, if desire is separated from thoughtfulness it becomes pathetic if not destructive and meaningless.

Perhaps the tale of Odysseus and the Sirens resonates so deeply for modern readers because we identify with the self-division afflicting Homer's hero. In Odysseus, the wily, calculating thinker who holds himself back from his emotions and loses touch with his sensuous feelings, we may indeed recognize ourselves.
Notes

1 All citations from the _Odyssey_ are from the Richmond Lattimore translation. See _The Odyssey of Homer_, edited and translated by Richmond Lattimore (New York, 1965).


3 Cicero, _De finibus_, V, 49.


5 See the telling incident of Odysseus and the unfaithful maid-servants (_Odyssey_, XX, 1-24), as well as his meeting with Penelope where he is disguised as a beggar (_Odyssey_, XIX, 309 ff).


7 For a discussion of this concept see especially Arthur Mitzman, _The Iron Cage: An Historical Interpretation of Max Weber_ (New York, 1970).


10 Hermann Frankel, _Early Greek Poetry_, pp. 79-80.

11 Franz Kafka, in a segment entitled "The Silence of the Sirens," imagined that the sirens may not even have sung to Odysseus because, by preparing himself so thoroughly, he destroyed whatever interest they may originally have had in making contact with him. When Odysseus approached them, Kafka wrote, "the potent songstresses actually did not sing, whether because they thought that the enemy could be vanquished only by their silence, or because the look of bliss on the face of [Odysseus], who was thinking of nothing but his wax and chains made them forget their singing." Kafka goes on to say that, whereas it is conceivable that one could escape from the sirens' singing, it is forever impossible to recover from their silence. See Franz Kafka, _Parables_, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York, 1961), pp. 89-91.


13 _Ibid_.., pp. 59-60.


ELEGIAC ESSAY

This Darkened Landscape

Frances Hall

Both nationally and at home, a great deal continues to be said about the way the gray smog of Los Angeles drifts eastward daily to wash the color out of the sky and the goodness out of the air in the foothill towns with the old-time names—Duarte, Azusa, Arcadia, Claremont—to spread its poison throughout the San Gabriel Valley.

But there is a certain tit-for-tatness about this that few people are aware of. In the early decades of the century, it was not smog moving eastward that obscured Southern California's sunlight. It was smudge moving westward to blacken Pasadena, Los Angeles—even Hollywood, where silent movies were darker than they might otherwise have been had this not happened.

Of course, the smudge was seasonal, just as the smog is today. Most of the year, the great citrus ranches lay green and fragrant in the sheltering canyons below the mountains—an opulent, separate world that lasted for about three generations and created its private aristocracy whose names were on the box labels of fruit shipped out across the nation and the seven seas.

As W. C. Fields once said, the whole area did indeed "stink of orange blossoms" in spring; but there was also the elegant scent of lemon blossoms that belongs to a more traditional time of bridal bouquets and wedding boutonnières.
And in summer, there was the all-night rhythm of the water pumps pounding out their cool poetry in a beat to be heard and remembered lifelong—something to sleep safe to in childhood, something to make good dreams. There was, too, the sound of the zanero shifting the weir gate to let the water flow among the trees that was like a watchman’s “All’s well,” in the night.

Then came the times of frost, and lights burned till daybreak in the packing houses that formed the centers to which fruit flowed from the groves. Operators waited at switchboards, and the moment the temperature dropped to 30°, the calls went out to the ranches across the valleys: “It’s time to light the pots in the lemon orchards”—for lemons have the thinnest skins and are most vulnerable to frost of all commercial citrus fruit. At 28°, the calls went out to the orange growers; and the last to be notified were the grapefruit ranchers; for grapefruit, with their thicker skins, are least vulnerable to frost.

Those midnights, for an hour or two, were beautiful in the valleys. Above were the stars, made huge and bright by the cold; and below in the orchards were the flashing torches—working from the outer edges first, where the cold was greatest, into the breathing darkness of the clustered trees.

The metal pots, maybe a foot square and six inches or so deep, with their wide smoke pipes almost three feet tall, had been placed among the trees in early autumn and filled with crude distillate noted for its thick smoke and sooty particles. They belched quickly to the torch-flare, and the smoky ceiling formed rapidly above the groves.

It was a time of hard work and anxiety, for California’s climate rarely operates by halves: If temperatures dropped to 28°, they could fall to 22° just as easily, and then there were real losses for the ranches, with damage to trees as well as fruit.

But it was a social time, as well, after the last pot had been lighted and the workers gathered in the yard around the tailgates of trucks and wagons, where gray-enameled pots of coffee steamed and doughnuts were warm from the frying kettles.

There was always a pot of chocolate, too, for the children, who were out lighting pots in the orchard with their elders, for everybody worked in the groves when emergencies came. Every child, from a rancher’s eldest son to his youngest granddaughter, learned in due time how to turn a water furrow from one tree to the next, how to sling a picker’s bag across a shoulder and climb a twenty-foot ladder, how to work summers in a packing house wrapping fruit in tissue squares and laying it in neatly built rows in shipping boxes—a seven-row, nine-row alternation for lemons; a five and a four for the big grapefruit; a series of patterns by size for oranges.

At smudging time in Southern California, everybody went into black-face—soot around nostrils, around blood-rimmed eyes, around mouths in a clownlike grimace. This was truly everybody—bankers, bakers, shopkeepers—not just the people on the ranches. School children riding into Pasadena on the tall electric cars that ran a “students’ special” each morning and afternoon (the names of the places they ran from still linger as labels for split-level housing
developments—Lamanda Park, Sierra Madre, Los Robles, Fair Oaks) wrote their initials in the soot on window sills and drew dark caricatures on one another's faces. Dusting was a hopeless art. Washings were hung to dry in attics and basements. Chic curly poodles looked suddenly like candidates for the city pound. Long-haired Persian cats washed their silken kittens hour after hour in vain. As long as the frost lasted, the entire area was a stygian land.

What happened to put an end to all of this? Not any Department of Air Pollution Control or Bureau of Public Health edicts, as you might expect. The heyday of the citrus ranches ended when eminent domain moved in on watershed rights, long tied to land grants and original deeds to the soil. Federal dams were built in the mountains; and water was sold at prohibitive costs through meters, at the same rate as it was to city dwellers. The ranches vanished as the pumps no longer sounded in orchards, and the wells went dry.

Of course, technology helped to end the smudging, too. There are still citrus ranches in the Simi Valley to the north—great peaceful acres around Piru, Moorpark and Ojai—good ranches, as well, in the foothills of the San Joaquin—but most of them have wind machines, stilted just above tree height, with propellers like those on planes, which keep the frost away from the groves by creating a mighty breeze.

On the ranches now, the grower presses a button in his kitchen hallway when the frost warnings come or the "all clear" sounds on his local radio, committed at a set time nightly to give the forecast of citrus-community temperatures. Many an old-timer, city dweller though he may currently be, listens for the nostalgia of lingering place names: Three Rivers, Lemon Cove, Whittier Heights, Elsinore; and for the signals of chilly omen, 30°, then 28°, and dropping.

But the foothill ranches below the Sierra Madres, the ones that lost their water rights, what happened to them? The proud old trees died slowly, twig by twig, of thirst. Even after the leaves were gone, there was a final dessicated crop of fruit to say how hard the trees were trying.

It cost $300 per acre, late in the 1940's, to pull the orchards out with tractors; but there were subdividers waiting, checks in hand. Most burned the uprooted trees in windrows, wastefully, where they lay; but on the thriftier ranches, power saws whined for weeks to make piles of fireplace wood, whose fragrant smoke and ash supplied final testament to the vanished groves.

You still can see some old houses standing, treeless, here and there, surrounded by tract dwellings and streets that wind to contours of the land—some grand old gables and cupolas painted grotesquely, used as restaurants or gift shops with bells that jangle above the door.

And the people who lived on the ranches, whose way of life vanished with the water that fed their wells? Short-range, they were affluent, for land has always meant money in California, and the subdividers, for the most part, paid well. Some of those old-time ranchers are still to be found, living comfortably in the retirement communities or the condominiums of Costa Mesa, Laguna Hills, San Miguel.
But only some of them.

I'll offer a little personal anecdote that goes all the way back to 1922 and the infirmary of the University of California at Berkeley—then housed in Phoebe Apperson Hearst's old residence, with the lace curtains and the floral drapes of her final redecorating still hanging at the windows. Agnes Robinson and I were bedded in what had been the Hearst morning room, sharing noisily the croaks and wheezes of our annual springtime bronchitis.

At this moment, you must see us in the evening, just before lights-out time, our heads draped over with bath towels drooped above steaming pitchers rich with the mingled aromas of eucalyptus oil, tincture of benzoin and camphor, our faces lifting scarlet toward Dr. Ruby Cunningham—campus health factotum for the female half of the student body—as she stopped to see us on her good-night rounds.

"I just don't understand you girls," she said sternly, her black eyes snapping with glints like the flashes off her gold-rimmed glasses, the lines of her forehead deep in puzzlement. "You come in from the ranches: wonderful nutrition, wonderful outdoor living, all the advantages money can buy—and yet you have the same kind of lungs you'd have if you grew up in Chinatown across the Bay, smoking cigarettes in some dirty alley since you were ten years old."

She went off down the hall, snapping noisily the old-fashioned light switches as she went, her heels clicking, too, as if they were saying, "Tuberculosis, asthma, pneumonia—What's wrong with today's young? What's gone awry in California?"

"How little she knows," thought I, thumping my cooled steam pitcher beside my bed and turning to sleep as I heard the brisk whirl of the model-T's hard crank in the doctor's parking space outside and her sputtering departure for the slanting house on a shaded hillside that she called home. "Agnes and I could not have had more different lives."

For Agnes had come from one of the foremost of the Sierra Nevada cattle ranches. Throughout four generations, the Robinsons had pastured ten thousand head of cattle on the wild oat grasses in a vast domain along the western slopes of the snow-peaked mountains—a privileged world where Agnes had ridden her own pet horse along trails that led through aspens and sycamores to cedars and sugar pines in the upper reaches of the Robinson private holdings. She had grown up in a thin-aired mountain world, while I had come from a coastal plain, where sea fogs drifted in to drip in the night from the tips of leaves in dark green orchards.

Only recently have I had a sudden insight as to what Agnes Robinson's life and mine might have had in common: the Robinson homestead, large as a country village, lies low on their slanting land, close to the western edge of their domain. The sprawling stone house, the tall barns, bunk houses, equipment sheds, horse corrals, cattle runs, feed silos, a private reservoir—all lie within a mile or two of foothills where citrus orchards spread as far as the eye can see.

Agnes, for all her private tutors, her riding horses, had the smudge-faced childhood and the sooty lungs of winter frosts in citrus country, just like mine.
think I know what she died of twenty years ago in her great stone house above a smudge-darkened valley—beautiful Agnes with her shining Robinson hair, her calm gray eyes, her perfectly controlled horsewoman's body, and her hoofed fortune feeding well in mountain pastures.

We in Southern California don't like to mention our lung cancer and emphysema statistics. Possibly these records are burned at midnight, like the smudge pots of the old days when pollution moved westward rather than eastward through Monrovia and San Marino, through Altadena and La Cañada, through frosty foothill towns.

Anyway, smog moves eastward now—tit for tat—over the hills beyond Redlands and Riverside, out through the wide gateway between the twin peaks of San Gorgonio and San Jacinto, into the tree-lined streets of Palm Springs, over the elegance of Palm Desert golf courses, even into the tall date groves that lie north of Indio. And as the records say, it does create a dull gray world.
POETRY
PAUL PETRIE

BAD DAY AT BLACK ROCK
(For Robert Ryan, dead from cancer six months after his wife)

Stars
   melting like snowflakes—

Bogart, Karloff, Cooper, Tracy, Cagney—
heroes, villains—the lantern jaw, the basilisk
stare, the one-armed karate-chop, all
of no use—

You understudied your wife,
learning a difficult role
by heart—
   watching day by day the pain inside
growing
   like a snowball rolled by a child across a lawn,
and the courage that once could keep the pain inside
melting, wasting
like snow.

So when you stepped yourself
into the dark spotlight,
each cue was known, each action, trick of speech,
down to those last few lines that had so lately
brought villainy
to tears.
Bad Bob, goodbye.

After the curtains' close,
we will applaud you in the dark echoes
of thunder,
the iron jaw of cliffs,
the under-mutterings
of waves—

And after a decent pause—like star-struck fans—
follow you

into the darkness of old movies.
THE WHEELS

Like a lion-tamer primped in a scarlet coat
he leads the grand procession of turning wheels.
They wave their clumped balloons and cheer; the sky
is a rich tatter of pennons and windy banners.
Birds sing in the trees. The band plays.
Head thrown back he struts, his black boots shining.
Behind, the great wheels roll, their metal rims
striking sparks in the sun.

With growing speed
they move, as down some invisible grade. The band
plays. Children bounce from one foot to the other.
Hand upraised, he salutes the cheering crowd.
There is the sound of distant thunder. The wheels move faster,
till he has to trot to stay in front. The crowd
roars. The band plays. Some wag shouts out
“a race” and drops a hanky, and head held high
he’s running, proud face taut, small beads of sweat
streaming down flushed cheeks. The sound of thunder
grows. Faster the wheels move, faster, gathering
momentum, the sun whirling in rings of metal
speed. The crowd roars, the band plays,
the thunder swells. In earnest now he’s racing—
head flung back, feet pounding the hot cement,
arms outstretched like a sprinter’s for the tape.
Up on its feet the crowd is roaring louder
than the great wheels, which are moving faster, 
nibbling at the heels of his black boots. Like a drunken 
man he lurches, stumbles, and almost falls.
The noise dies from the throat of the crowd. Children 
seize their mothers’ hands. Closer the great wheels 
come, striking sparks of sunlight. “This thing should be stopped!” 
someone shouts. A groan bursts from the air—He is down!
He is down! And before their astounded eyes 
over and over and over the great wheels roll, 
pressing the huge momentum of their metal rings 
into that scarlet bundle of rags and man 
that with each wheel’s turning leaps up oddly 
with a frivolous life, then under the next falls down 
crushed flat—bobs up—falls down—and with the last wheel’s 
turning 
lies still.

No sound at all—over the whole length of things— 
except for the great wheels moving off down-hill, 
and a shy whisper in the wind—

“Poor Man . . .
Poor Man . . .”
MEZZANINE, EAST WING

Each knifed down
for the sensual form;
finally, here in one room
Bonnard's brown and grey planes
tussle
the primitive red of Gauguin.
Curious dialogue.
What script for triangle
and ball
at midnight
in a great marble wedge?

JOURNEY

It was a Vermont landscape:
red and gold zigzagged through the trees
and a clean white spire
made assertions of its own.
Far to the left, beyond the checkerboard streets,
in an unruly expanse of deserted farmland,
a scarecrow stood in benediction—
upright and firm, waiting for a slick intruder.
No Oz scarecrow, but one with eyes
that recalled the first sacrifice.
Music moved in with autumn, troubling the chaos;
quickly, to prevent his smile,
I shot the scarecrow and,
quite unaccountably, he bled.
THE DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

Sally was partial to sweets
and loved watching reruns
of the Lone Ranger,

but on the night she strangled her cat
she ate dillweed. Instant dyspepsia
of the lower brain.

They put her in a straitjacket, hypnotized her,
threw black nightmares across her eyes
and tried to change her

back to the doll who thrilled at her lover's
mask. But O, was she riding high
on a hurricane!

She travelled through poppy seeds
and hiccupping galaxies and even debated with
the Goddess Bast

(who was understandably miffed at the assassination),
but then moved slowly, with some compunction,
back to earth.

For she discovered, in the syllogism's minor,
that despite her marauding plea she was no
iconoclast.

Her eyes twinkled at their surprise.
But with fresh roses now she celebrates her
buoyant birth.
fingers drum often try
    to explore
but mind treasures its dark-sheeted
    silence
one icy dream explodes
    into fire
"Tell. Tell them."
only one knows and a cancer
    eats his brain
so it's safe
"Safe for what? How are you safe in
    their ignorance?
You will lose what all men have
    bargained for."
then that loss must be my
    daily step
the crisp apple hoarded
    until spring
and if I never find your gold
I will barter
    with brass.

"O, NEVER SAY THAT I WAS FALSE OF HEART"
TIME OUT

They noticed that the sun, in setting, 
wedged itself between two sentinel trees 
and couldn’t budge. Since they 
were not ready, they smiled at the opportunity 
and moved down the street, 
scuffing golden leaves, to say goodbye.

Long shadows bent around white walls 
and painted a '52 Ford resting on 
carefully arranged piles of brick; 
a laugh broke through a bedroom window.  

Red bougainvillaea blossoms  
tumbled across the pavement  
promising a more lush return,  
while Mrs. McLaughlin’s water sprinkler worked  
overtime in two corner rose bushes.  
Danny and Joe wrestled on the front lawn,  
ignoring pleas of "Bedtime."  
"Not yet. Not dark yet."  

Further along the street, they turned: 
the voices were winding down  
(but more slowly—even the streetlights,  
following the City Council’s schedule,  
were clearly confused by the stranger light).  
This was important: grass that needed cutting; 
a fire hydrant that needed paint;  
Mr. Larcher’s front porch that needed support.  
Was it the need that made them last?  
And, then, the sun slipped through.
In the final chapter of Miss Lonelyhearts, Nathanael West's title character sees a picture of Christ become a "bright fly"; he watches the things in his room—the chairs, table, books—turn into a fish leaping for the Christ fly; he feels roses blooming in his chest and skull, feels his nerves rippling "like small blue flowers in a pasture", feels his heart and brain become God's heart and brain. West's character is having a religious conversion. It resembles the conversions William James describes in The Varieties of Religious Experience. As if echoing James' title, West calls his final chapter "Miss Lonelyhearts Has a Religious Experience."

West admitted borrowing rather heavily both from James and from the earlier study of E.D. Starbuck that James integrated into his own. In some published notes about the novel, West said, "Miss Lonelyhearts became the portrait of a priest of our time who has a religious experience. His case is classical and is built on all the cases in James' Varieties of Religious Experience and Starbuck's Psychology of Religion. The psychology is theirs not mine." Most explicators of the novel have quoted or mentioned that statement, and some to various degrees have followed its guidance. But none that I'm familiar with has yet comprehended just how closely West followed James nor
asserted how much an exploration of the parallels increases our understanding of the novel. Such an exploration leads to the discovery that West took from James not only the psychology for his main characters, but also a psychological structure for the novel as a whole. Further, it leads to the conclusion that West's protagonist is a modern priest whose religious experience is at best meaningless, so far as his suffering parishioners are concerned, and at worst, evil.

In the classical model West got out of James, the first step in the psychological progression is a strong propensity toward religious conversion. Looking backward from the mystical climax of the conversion experience, James writes that "whenever we meet with a phenomenon of automatism, be it motor impulses, or obsessive idea, or unaccountable caprice, or delusion, or hallucination, we are bound first of all to make search whether it be not an explosion into the fields of ordinary consciousness, of ideas elaborated outside of those fields in subliminal regions of the mind." In the climax of the novel that I summarized in my opening paragraph, Miss Lonelyhearts experiences virtually all the automatisms listed. West has prepared for this climax early in the novel by describing the subliminal region of his protagonist's mind. The author tells us that as a boy in his father's Baptist church, Miss Lonelyhearts "had discovered that something stirred in him when he shouted the name of Christ, something secret and enormously powerful. He had played with this thing, but had never allowed it to come alive." As an adult he came to recognize this suppressed something as "hysteria." When he finally allows this hysteria to surface, he triggers the automatisms of the religious conversion.

An expository passage tells us that the first psychological stage, that of subliminal development, took place when Miss Lonelyhearts was a child, before the time covered in the novel. The last stage, the conversion experience itself, occurs, as I have said, in the final chapter. The bulk of the novel presents the protagonist undergoing the two intermediate stages that West discovered in James. In chapter one Miss Lonelyhearts is already in the first of these—a stage characterized by an acute awareness of evil. Miss Lonelyhearts' newspaper column has forced this awareness. Having assumed the lonely hearts column to get away from doing leg work and rise on the paper, like the rest of the staff, he considers the job a joke. But after a time he finds the letters "no longer funny." Miss Lonelyhearts comes to see "that the majority of the letters are profoundly humble pleas for moral and spiritual advice, that they are inarticulate expressions of genuine suffering. He also discovers that his correspondents take him seriously." (106). In the opening chapter, West shows Miss Lonelyhearts agonizing over several of the letters. West takes up most of the chapter with direct quotations from three of them. The first is from a woman gradually being killed by child-bearing because of a "religious" Catholic husband; the second is from a suicidal teenage girl who has no social life because she was born without a nose; the third is from a fifteen-year-old boy who is afraid to tell his mother that his deaf and dumb younger sister has been raped and is probably pregnant.
The insoluble situations these letters describe are part of a disordered world. Disorder is one of the elements making up the dual nature of evil, according to William James. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience* he wrote that for some people evil means "a mal-adjustment with things, a wrong correspondence of one's life with the environment" which is curable through modification of either the self or the things or both; but for others evil is a wrongness in their essential nature which is incurable by any alteration of the environment or any superficial rearrangement of the inner self, "and which requires a supernatural remedy." Tellingly, after reading the three letters in the opening chapter, Miss Lonelyhearts concludes that Christ is "the answer."

If Christ is the answer for the people writing the letters, He is also the answer for Miss Lonelyhearts, who suffers a deep maladjustment. His particular kind of disorder, to which James gives a separate chapter, is the divided self or heterogeneous personality, consisting of a disunified moral and intellectual constitution. Miss Lonelyhearts feels an abnormally strong urge to straighten out the lives of the letter writers, but he comes to realize that before he can do that he must order his own life. He also recognizes that man must struggle against Nature to achieve both internal and external order. In a pertinent passage West's protagonist reasons thus: "Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another. Mandolins are tuned G D A E. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature... the battle of the centuries. Keys yearn to mix with change. Mandolins strive to get out of tune" (104). When Miss Lonelyhearts ultimately invokes the "supernatural remedy," the Christ answer, he achieves inner unity. As West puts it, "he was conscious of two rhythms that were slowly becoming one" (139).

The quality that James presents as the other part of the dual nature of evil is deadness. West relates this quality to his protagonist quite clearly through imagery and character. For Tolstoy, who serves as an example in James, life had become "flat and sober, more than sober, dead." Similarly, Miss Lonelyhearts is aware of "the stone that had formed in his gut" (71). This inner deadness is externalized in waste land images: "As far as he could discover, there were no signs of spring. The decay that covered the surface of the mottled ground was not the kind in which life generates" (70).

The character who most overtly symbolizes death is William Shrike, the jeering feature editor to whom West devotes his second chapter, "Miss Lonelyhearts and the dead pan." West describes Shrike as a man whose "features huddled together in a dead, gray triangle," and ends the chapter with Shrike burying his face "like the blade of a hatchet" in the neck of a girlfriend. Shrike's blank face fails to hide the sharp mockery that he uses to kill everything he comes in contact with. The novel opens with Miss Lonelyhearts finding on his desk an example of the kind of sacrilegious jest about suffering and its alleviation that his boss, Shrike, constantly baits him with:

Soul of Miss L, glorify me.

Body of Miss L, nourish me.
Blood of Miss L, intoxicate me.
Tears of Miss L, wash me
Oh good Miss L, excuse my plea,
And hide me in your heart,
And defend me from mine enemies.
Help me, Miss L, help me, help me . . . .

In an early draft of the novel West wrote, "the joke of suffering and the joke of comforting killed this world."

The disorder and the deadness, represented by the letters and by Shrike, push Miss Lonelyhearts into increasing physical and mental decline. He becomes what James calls a "sick soul." Attempting to cure the sick soul is Betty, his girlfriend, who embodies what James labels "healthy-mindedness." James devotes an entire chapter to each of the two types. West describes Betty as having an honest laugh, characteristically wearing a blue dress, displaying an optimistic faith in nature. Nothing better sums up her character than this summary from James' chapter on healthy-mindedness: "It is to be hoped that we all have some friend, perhaps more often feminine than masculine, and young than old, whose soul is of this sky-blue tint, whose affinities are rather with flowers and birds and all enchanting innocencies than with dark human passions, who can think no ill of man or God, and in whom religious gladness, being in possession from the outset, needs no deliverance from any antecedent burden." James' claim that the Roman Catholic Church provides such people a congenial soil to grow in probably explains why West twice mentions that it is to a farm near Monkstown that Betty takes Miss Lonelyhearts for the nature therapy which she hopes will cure his physical and spiritual illness. His craving for health and order makes her attractive to him, for Betty "had often made him feel that when she straightened his tie, she straightened much more" (79). But in his saner moments he knows that Betty can impose order only on an arbitrarily limited world—one which excludes the suffering humanity he cannot forget. Though James looks on the healthy-minded favorably, to the sick soul healthy-mindedness seems unspeakably blind and shallow. Miss Lonelyhearts reacts to Betty's blissful ignorance first awkwardly and then hatefully. In the chapter "Miss Lonelyhearts and the fat thumb," he finally reduces her to tears through shouting at her and violently tugging at one of her breasts. It is as if, by being consciously malicious, he is trying to force Betty to recognize the existence of evil.

The healthy-mindedness of Betty offers no real remedy for the suffering of the letter writers, and the sexuality of Shrike's wife, Mary, or Fay Doyle affords no real escape from it. Returning to the imagery of stone, West shows Fay Doyle sexually exhausting Miss Lonelyhearts with her hams like "two enormous grindstones." Partly because of his sexual bout with her, but mainly because of the deeper spiritual struggle, Miss Lonelyhearts ends up sick in bed. He has reached the next stage leading to his religious conversion. As James puts it, we get "so exhausted with the struggle that we have to stop,—so we drop

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down, give up, and don't care any longer. Our emotional brain-centers strike work, and we lapse into a temporary apathy. Now there is documentary proof that this state of temporary exhaustion not infrequently forms part of the conversion crisis." Miss Lonelyhearts' temporary (but deep) apathy results specifically from his finally admitting to himself the futility of trying to find either a sane solution to or an escape from the burden of suffering. Miss Lonelyhearts drops into the slough of despond in a chapter titled, "Miss Lonelyhearts in the dismal swamp."

Having been seeded with a subliminal urge, which grew to a deep awareness of evil, but subsequently wilted into a pathological depression, Miss Lonelyhearts is ripe for the last step in conversion—a surrender to Christ. As James quotes Starbuck, the person "must fall back on the larger Power that makes for righteousness, which has been welling up in his own being, and let it finish in its own way the work it has begun. The act of yielding is giving one's self over to the new life, making it the centre of a new personality."

Once Miss Lonelyhearts yields, deadness takes on life and disorder becomes order:

He fastened his eyes on the Christ that hung on the wall opposite his bed. As he stared at it, it became a bright fly, spinning with quick grace . . .

Everything else in the room was dead—chairs, table, pencils, clothes, books. He thought of this black world of things as a fish. And he was right, for it suddenly rose to the bright bait on the wall. It rose with a splash of music and he saw its shining silver belly.

Christ is life and light.

He was conscious of two rhythms that were slowly becoming one. When they became one, his identification with God was complete. His heart was the one heart, the heart of God. And his brain was likewise God's.

God said, "Will you accept it, now?"
And he replied, "I accept, I accept."

What happens to the protagonist here constitutes a bona fide religious experience. West carefully duplicates the classical case James formulated. But it is important to recognize that Miss Lonelyhearts, while progressing through the stages leading to the climactic conversion, is also gradually deteriorating mentally to a final breakdown. James himself admits that such hysterical hallucinations signify, to the medical mind, "suggested and imitated hypnoid states, on an intellectual basis of superstition, and a corporeal one of degeneration and hysteria." West, by having his protagonist suffer symptoms such as exhaustion and fever and by repeatedly using the word "hysteria," significantly gives the medical view an emphasis that James does not.

There are two other important shifts in emphasis in West's adaptation of James. The first has to do with the nature of evil. The two forms that West deals with, deadness and disorder, are clearly based on James, but West largely ignores a third form of evil James delineates, the form we most commonly label
Unlike John Bunyan and Martin Luther—two of James' sufferers from this kind of evil—Miss Lonelyhearts never experiences an acute awareness of personal sin, is never obsessed with his own moral and spiritual unworthiness per se. He confesses to vanity and distorted values, and he feels self-contempt. But these admissions and feelings are significant only in relation to his inability to help the suffering masses who petition him.

West's second departure from James has to do with the final step of the classical religious experience. James' major thesis in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* is that religious conversion is pragmatically valuable. Its fruits, which he discusses under the label of "saintliness" and lists as including purity and charity, "are the best things that history has to show." West kills Miss Lonelyhearts at the height of conversion ecstasy before he has a chance to do any good, to use his saintly power to succor those who apply to him.

But his death is not really what stops Miss Lonelyhearts from alleviating suffering in the world. His death merely emphasizes that he has no saintly power to extend to others. West's main point in the novel is that religious conversion, at least for the twentieth-century Christian in America—whether he be the once-born healthy-minded or the twice-born sick soul—does not benefit the person who would like to help the suffering masses. James writes, "When the outward battle is lost, and the outer world disowns him, it redeems and vivifies an interior world which otherwise would be an empty waste." Such private enlivenment is exactly and only what conversion brings Miss Lonelyhearts; the price he pays includes the psychopathic delusion that it is much more. His self-deception—that God has sent him a cripple to make whole through miracles (Fay Doyle's husband Peter, who has actually come to murder him, and does)—is evidence of the uselessness of his religious experience. The healthy-minded Betty, by inadvertently blocking off Doyle's escape, contributes to the murder of the man she tried earlier to save. Both Betty and Miss Lonelyhearts fulfill the prophecy a minor character utters early in the novel concerning Miss Lonelyhearts: "Even if he were to have a genuine religious experience, it would be personal and so meaningless, except to a psychologist" (83).

While William James, of course, saw religious conversion as meaningful and good, Nathanael West not only pictures it as meaningless, but strongly suggests that it may be evil. He does so by characterizing it as hysteria and making it an accessory to homicide. He further links it with the traditional symbol of evil—the snake. Early in the novel West reveals that Miss Lonelyhearts recognizes the subliminal "thing" inside his head as "a snake whose scales are tiny mirrors in which the dead world takes on a semblance of life" (74). The phrase "semblance of life" implies that the evil lies at least partly in the deceptiveness of the experience. West goes on to say that Miss Lonelyhearts had played with this thing many times, "but the moment the snake started to uncoil in his brain, he became frightened and closed his eyes." West here suggests that even Miss Lonelyhearts knows that to succumb to the conversion ecstasy is to give way to evil. It is only after his resistance, his sanity, has been worn away that he loses his ability to hold back the snake.
In the final analysis, Miss Lonelyhearts underscores a truism of all significant fiction: no matter what influences it, literature tells its own truth. By mirroring James' model so far as he did, West calls into question the 19th century psychologist's faith in religion as a force for good in 20th century America.

Notes

1 Nathanael West, "Some Notes on Miss Lonelyhearts," Contempo, III (May 15, 1933), 2.


3 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1925), p. 235. This is the revised first edition of 1902, reprinted during the period when West is most likely to have become familiar with the work.

4 Miss Lonelyhearts in The Complete Works of Nathanael West (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1957), p. 74. Subsequent references to this work will be indicated with page numbers in my text.

5 James, p. 134.

6 James, pp. 152-153.

7 The earlier draft, titled "Miss Lonelyhearts and the Dead Pan," was first published in Contact in 1932 and was reprinted in Years of Protest: A Collection of American Writings of the 1930's, ed. Jack Salzman with Barry Wallenstein (New York: Western Publishing Co., 1967), p. 410.

8 James, p. 80

9 James, p. 212.


11 James, p. 413.

12 James, p. 259.
A cartoon I have shows two lions looking out of a clump of bushes. As two hunters approach down the road, one lion says to the other, "Don't eat them. They're loaded with additives."

Is the talking feline in the cartoon a truly smart cat or merely a cowardly lion? Reformulated, that was the question a research team of which I was a member posed and attempted to answer. We phrased the issue thus: is there a relationship between diet and the behavioral syndrome, hyperactivity, in children? If so, what is its nature? The answers are buried in the attempts to investigate the problem; however, it can be said that there appears to be some evidence of a connection, about which we know very little at present.

The history of this topic goes back about ten years when a Bay Area physician, Dr. Ben Feingold, claimed to have "cured" a high percentage of children who were hyperactive. The basis of the therapy consisted of eliminating all or most of the synthetic additives in the diet of these children. This regimen was originally called an "elimination diet" (ED), and later changed to the KP diet, in recognition that it was developed at the Kaiser-Permanente Medical Center in San Francisco. Now, elimination diets are a basic tool of the allergist, Dr. Feingold's speciality. He claimed to have chanced upon this particular therapy in treating a young patient who was suffering from hives. There is a well-known relationship between hives and the synthetic food color yellow-5. Indeed, a diet which eliminated this additive resulted in the disappearance of the hives in the patient. But, another more interesting thing happened. About a month later, Dr. Feingold received a telephone call from the patient's psychiatrist. The patient, who had been in psychotherapy for some time, suddenly began making a great deal of progress. Where once she had been resistant and negative, she was now highly cooperative and positive. In
short, there seemed to be a marked change in her behavior. Feingold immediately associated this behavioral change with the elimination of the synthetic food color. At the same time, he was becoming more concerned about the physical and behavioral consequences of increased human exposure to chemical agents, especially those ingested because of the technological processing of food. During the same period, hyperactivity among young children in the pediatric clinics in the Kaiser system seemed to be on the rise. Feingold applied the principle of the elimination diet to many of these children and claimed successes in 50 to 80% of his cases. "Success" here meant the clinical observation that the children showed decreased behavioral symptoms (1).

Although much controversy grew out of the original claims, there are a number of interesting facts which emerge when we examine the issue fully. In the first place, the health concerns over exposure to synthetic food colors have not materialized out of thin air. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) noted that there were two major outbreaks of illness in the 1950's—tellingly, among children who were exposed to candy with unusually high amounts of synthetic colors (2). These events led the FDA to set limits on the amount of these materials allowed in food. The second important thread involves possible behavioral consequences of certain dietary factors. While it is not difficult for most health professionals to accept a basic relationship between nutrition and health, this group has much difficulty in sanctioning a connection between behavior and nutrition.

There is, however, a well-established link between diet and behavior. The most fundamental of these interactions is the behavioral outcome among those young children who suffer from malnutrition. One of the cardinal features of this condition is extreme apathy, and social interaction is one of the first behaviors which returns after nutritional rehabilitation. We now know that human growth and development proceeds in emotional/psychological stages as well as physical stages and that apathy brought on by starvation (or by other means) will, if allowed to proceed unchecked, seriously impair normal emotional-intellectual development. We are just now beginning to appreciate the complex interaction between nutrition and social stimulation (3). There are many examples, either in humans or in animals, of a lack of a specific nutrient provoking developmental deficits of the nervous system with the subsequent outcome of neuropathy and behavioral disturbances. Thiamin, niacin, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, zinc, and others have been clearly implicated (4). There are also certain inadvertent additives which wind up in our food supply and which are, unfortunately, quite toxic. Lead and mercury are prime examples and both produce extreme neurological damage and behavioral pathology. Recent work by researchers at MIT indicates that the nutrient balance of our meals can directly influence our behavior (4). That is, a meal high in carbohydrate or high in protein can, in a short period of time, affect the level of certain neurotransmitters in our brain. These neurotransmitters, responsible for processing information in the brain, ultimately control behavior.
Such effects, as well as many others, shore up the evidence for the relationship between dietary factors and behavior. Given this connection, why is it so difficult to accept the relationship of food additives to hyperactivity? In part, the answer lies in the probable nature of the effect. All of the examples cited above are moderate to severe in their impact and, as such, are clinically apparent. Most likely, the behavioral effects of food additives are marginal and manifested only after chronic exposure—i.e., exposure to the point where the body burden is attained and the effects become apparent. Another reason for the limited acceptance of this relationship has been the lack of a physiological model to account for the proposed behavioral effect. Fortunately, this situation is now changing.

It is estimated that there are now over 3000 chemicals added to our food supply. These are used, for the most part, to attain desired technological effects, i.e., preservation, emulsification, anti-caking, flavoring, coloration. They are a by-product of a shift in our approach to food, our rather extensive processing of whole foods. While many of the uses of these additives are important, there is widespread concern over the purely cosmetic uses of some, especially since these are regarded as potentially the most hazardous (4). The use of food additives, regulated by the FDA, provides that nothing can be added to food which is lethal, promotes illness, or causes cancer in test animals. The potential behavioral toxicology of these substances is just now being addressed (5). Most additives, if safe, are placed on the Generally Recognized As Safe (GRAS) list. None of the synthetic food colors have been placed on the GRAS list; they have been given “provisional clearance” which means that the testing is not completed. A number of synthetic food colors which were previously thought to be quite safe are now banned, because there is evidence that they are carcinogenic. Currently, the GRAS list is undergoing review, as is the manner in which we test and guarantee the safety of our food (5). In terms of consumption, we average over five pounds of food additives per year, per person. It is important to remember that very little is known about how the human body is affected by these substances. The manner in which these chemicals provoke alterations in behavior is not understood, although recent evidence might provide a clue.

Currently, the main therapeutic modality for hyperactive children is the use of central nervous system (CNS) stimulant drugs—either methylphenidate (Ritalin) or dextroamphetamine. Although these drugs are purported to have no side effects, a number of investigators have reported cases of children showing anorexia, paranoia, diminished nutrient intake, diminished growth, or a delayed development of secondary sexual characteristics. A recent study indicates that for every year a child is kept on drug therapy, there is a growth decrement of ten percentile points from the norm (6). Many children take maintainence doses for periods of seven years or longer. At question here is the capacity of these drugs to promote learning—a capacity emphasized in their initial use. Many researchers have claimed that there is no evidence of this. In
light of these concerns, it is not surprising that parents of hyperactive children are searching for alternatives to drug therapy (4).

The most popular, and most controversial, of these alternate therapies is dietary. The so-called "Feingold diet" is not a well accepted therapy among physicians and medical policy makers. It is pointed out that the testimonials of parents who have successfully utilized this diet, as well as the clinical reports of its success, do not constitute "proof" of efficacy of this approach. This, of course, is true. These anecdotal reports suffer from the same problems that all clinical interventions do: the plethora of confounding variables and the failure to control for these, so that the effect of diet *per se* is extremely difficult to isolate. As we shall later see, the experimental studies suffer from the same shortcomings with regard to providing definitive proof.

Four crucial variables are involved. First, there is the attentional effect. This effect is well-known in all clinical interventions and involves the principle that any attention which is paid to clinical subjects results in a positive change. This effect can be partially controlled and accounted for by long baseline (non-intervention) periods of observation. Most clinical trials or even the controlled experiments have not been well-controlled in this regard. Next, we have the non-specific nutritional effect. In many cases where a nutritional intervention is involved, it has been noted that the general nutritional status of the subjects improves. The potential effect of this change on subsequent behavioral changes in unknown. Third, there is the family dynamics effect. In such a nutritional intervention within a family, food becomes a vehicle through which behavioral changes can be facilitated. The dynamics in a family with a hyperactive child are, usually, quite negative, involving a guilty parent and a victimized child. If one now suggests that the parent is not at fault for producing such a "problem" and that the child is also not to blame—rather the problem results from some unusual combination of body chemistry and environment—then these very negative dynamics are effectively defused in a non-threatening manner. That this mechanism operates in most families who claim success with diet is of little doubt. We do not know, however, precisely the extent of contribution of this factor to the therapeutic effect of diet. It is also extremely difficult to control in the experimental studies. Finally we must recognize the cultural-behavioral effect of food. A family with a hyperactive child which adopts a dietary therapy usually does so as a unit. It is easier for the whole family to change, rather than maintain one member on a different diet. The result of the switch is that family members, including the hyperactive child, plan meals, shop, prepare the food and share their meals in a very different fashion than they did before the nutritional intervention. Again, the impact of this behavioral shift of the family on the psychological problems of one member of the family is neither known nor well controlled-for in all tests of the Feingold hypothesis. The crucial point is that dietary change involves more than the food that is consumed.

In an attempt to clarify the situation, an advisory group of medical scientists and researchers was formed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This group concluded that there was
enough circumstantial evidence surrounding the so-called Feingold effect to warrant its being investigated in a scientific fashion (7). They recommended two types of research designs; one is the double-blind crossover design, and the other is the double-blind challenge design. The double-blind crossover experiment compares behaviors of groups of hyperactive children when they are consuming an elimination diet and when they are consuming a regular diet, not free of additives. The different diets should be constituted so that the children and their parents cannot tell them apart. In practice, this is quite hard to do. The results of this experimental approach were equivocal and confusing (8,9), and the studies themselves were in need of methodological refinements (4). However, there was sufficient evidence to indicate that some of the children did respond positively to an elimination diet under certain circumstances, and that further research along this line was in order.

The double-blind challenge study design was utilized by the research team at the University of California, Berkeley, under contract to the FDA. The experimental subjects were children ages two to six, selected from the pediatric services of the Kaiser Hospitals in the Greater Bay Area. These children were placed on the Feingold diet for at least three months and responded to this diet by exhibiting diminished symptomology of hyperactivity. They were free of drug and medication usage and suffered no medical complications. Each child served as his/her own control, and after a suitable baseline period of behavioral observations, a dietary "offender" was randomly interjected into the diet, unknown to the subjects, their parents, and members of the research team. The dietary offender was a soft drink containing a blend of seven synthetic food colors. The average exposure to this challenge occurred roughly once a week for the duration of the twelve week experiment. The behavioral measurements were carried out by the parents and consisted of their noting frequencies of individualized target behaviors, those most associated with a hyperactive episode for a particular child. Behaviors were measured every day and then compared on the days of the challenge versus the days the children received a matching harmless substance or placebo. Elevation of these negative behaviors during the challenge period was considered evidence of the additives’ capacity to promote some form of behavioral change. In the Berkeley study, two out of the twenty-two subjects tested in this manner exhibited behavioral changes in response to a color challenge, and in one of these children (the youngest and the smallest) the response to the color was statistically very powerful. One can view this experiment as a single one or twenty-two separate ones, but that one powerful response establishes the phenomenon (10). As in the other studies, this experiment suffered from a host of methodological problems. A major difficulty lay in the dosage of the color challenge. The amount used (35 mg/day) was far below the average daily consumption of children in this age group, and further, repeated dosages were prohibited by the restrictions of the experimental design. A subsequent study which utilized five times this dosage of colors reported behavioral changes in 80-90% of their subjects tested (11).
It appears that the behavioral sensitivity to synthetic food colors, if real, is more of a dose response effect than an all or nothing phenomenon. It also seems that, in order for this effect to be more widely accepted, much more work needs to be done in the area of improving methodology—refining behavioral measures, controlling for confounding variables, repeating dose-dependent challenges, and introducing larger numbers of subjects.

Although there has been some analysis asserting that the Feingold effect is not viable, the bulk of the evidence, which includes the clinical reports and the experimental studies discussed above, is positive. At the very least, the evidence demands that further investigative inquiry take place. A new and interesting angle is being developed using animal models. Researchers have provided evidence that synthetic food colors can mimic actions of neuroregulators in the brain (12). This provides the first model of action of these compounds on the central nervous system and makes plausible a possible behavioral effect. In any case, the policy issues are far from resolved and the debate will and should continue.

In terms of personal strategies, it seems that many people find the Feingold diet an attractive alternative to the prospect of long-term use of drugs for their hyperactive children. It is clear that the Feingold diet does not work for all families and that the success of this therapeutic approach is enmeshed in the expectations and the energy each family brings to bear in the use of the diet. It also requires a great deal of support to effect the changes in personal habits that a shift to an additive-free diet demands. Many people have made these changes and have found the effort rewarding. The personal approach of some of the members of research team in the Berkeley study is best summarized by a quote from one of our publications:

Again the question of the art versus the science of therapy is important. The science cries out for explanations of mechanisms and causes so that 'rational' decisions can be made. However, this does not negate the art of therapy. This consists of the total therapeutic modality which is brought to bear upon a problem, including the nonspecific effect of the therapist and possibly the nonspecific effect of the therapy. If this is beneficial it should not be minimized and in fact should be encouraged and nurtured. If the response cannot be explained immediately, this does not mean that the therapeutic regimen is useless. What it does point out is the limitation of reason.

If a modality is effective for a child and/or family and causes no harm to either, it can and should be employed—whether or not its workings can be explained in a "scientific" fashion. Food and feeding are of great symbolic significance in human behavior. To deny this symbol-belief dimension in therapy is to lose much potential benefits."(4)
Notes

6 Medical World News, August 6, 1979, pp. 24-25.
1981 marks the first anniversary of Sartre's death. For almost two-thirds of the three-quarters of a century that he lived (he died just short of reaching seventy-five), Sartre's influence on his contemporaries was felt acutely by those who knew him directly or indirectly. Students who were fortunate enough to have him as a professor of philosophy in an obscure Le Havre high school recall that he was the first, in the then extremely conservative French educational system, to face them without jacket and tie; the first, too, to inform them that they need not rise when he entered the classroom; and, more importantly, the only teacher in that school, and probably in any French high school at the time, to hold office hours and to permit, indeed to encourage, them to come and confer with him.

Sartre was the stuff that legends are made of. But it is important that those who are his contemporaries not lose sight of the fact that his multifarious contributions and innovations are very real. They range from education to criticism, from philosophy to the stage, and from the novel to the essay. If he can be attacked on any ground, it is in the field of politics, where he erred, perhaps. But the better the politician, the lesser the person, and Sartre, like the best, was rather inept in politics because he was such a great humanist. Eugene Ionesco's contention that Sartre was the rhino par excellence may be readily dismissed if we recall that it was Ionesco the politician who made the remark. In this context, he was a rightist getting back at a leftist who, alternately, warmed up, and then gave the cold shoulder, to Russia, so often.¹
If one is as sad today as one was in 1960 when Camus, Sartre's friend-enemy, died, it is because the death of a person of genius touches everyone, regardless of the ism which the deceased enunciated and attempted to propagate. One need not be an adherent of existentialism, nor even an expert in it, to agree with Valery Giscard d'Estaing's remark that Sartre was "one of the great intellectual lights of our times." Although d'Estaing did not have much use for Sartre during the philosopher's life, he admired and understood him, as is obvious from this subsequent comment: "It would be out of character to eulogize Sartre at length now." After all, Sartre had an unusual scorn for the coveted Legion of Honor and the Nobel Prize, or any other such trappings, which he turned down because they restrict and constrict the recipient.

A cartoon in the May 1974 issue of Playboy captioned "On the Brighter Side," depicts the head of Sartre from which rays of light flow in all directions. It was the period of the Arab oil embargo. The text below the picture reads:

It was a cold, dark winter, but thanks to what the inventor calls Leroy's Existential Wonder Dynamo, the lights and space heaters are going on again all over Paris. The device was developed by an American expatriate from Doom, Mississippi; the LEWD, as it's called, works by converting anguish, Weltschmerz, despair, ennui and guilt into electricity. Since late March, Jean-Paul Sartre alone has been lighting all of Montparnasse. The inventor, Leroy Sump, told us why he constructed the device: 'I was fed up to here sittin' around feelin' bad in the dark. Couldn't even read my comic books.'

The tongue-in-cheek tone of the cartoon notwithstanding, there is little doubt that, for the post-World War II generations of the Western world, Sartre and existentialism have been a source of surprise and wonder, of light and thought-producing processes, and of catharsis.

In the 1940s, the young and the not-so-young by the thousands went to listen to the prophet who claimed that existence precedes essence, to the tough philosopher who preached total personal responsibility, to the godless metaphysician for whom any force outside of man was suspect, even if comprehensible. Content and style blended, then, in the speeches of Sartre, in such a way as to exact attention. Attention, and later tribute, were paid to him for restoring dignity to man, for reminding him that he alone is his maker and his master, that no one pulls the strings, that the puppeteer and the puppet are one and the same: androgynous and salaud, if man should so desire; androgynous and sublime, if that should be his choice.

In fact, choice, unlimited and also pure because untainted by outside interference, is the greatest gift of Sartrean existentialism. For the newly-liberated European intelligentsia who went through years of Nazi occupation and oppression, the notion of the total freedom at man's disposal was bewildering and captivating, well worth the risk of the anguish it entailed, and the weight of the responsibility it implied. Actually, responsibility was magnetic for a post-World War II generation accustomed at worst to the
passivity of the ghetto, to the physical and spiritual humiliation of the concentration camp, at best to the diminishment and precariousness of an underground existence of vague light and hope. If the roots of the chestnut tree were de trop, there was a lesson to be learned: man need not be de trop. If nausea could attack, one could laugh at it. Witness the reaction of a contemporary of Sartre, the writer Boris Vian, who was the existentialist's friend until he died in 1959.

Vian, a carefree individual who had little use for isms of any kind, was nevertheless so attracted by Sartre's philosophy that he belabored it in one of his novels, *L'Ecume des jours* (1948). It is interesting to note that the text appeared a year earlier in Sartre's own monthly *Les Temps modernes*, and so it apparently benefited from the approval of the editor who did not see any harm in airing Vian's good-natured jibes at existentialism. Moreover, when in 1946 the manuscript was submitted to Gallimard, the author was considered for it as a possible recipient of the renowned Prix de la Pléiade which, eventually, went to a poet, Jean Grosjean. But Sartre, at the time on the editorial board of Gallimard, was the only one to cast his vote in favor of Vian's book.

Although *L'Ecume des jours* contains a love story, it is rather banal and insignificant in comparison with the description of Sartre, the Pope of Existentialism, who in the text is called Jean-Sol Partre. To understand the partrian theme of the novel it is necessary to recall that Vian and his wife, Michelle, had both social and professional ties with the couple Sartre-Simone de Beauvoir. The latter attended many parties in the home of the Vians. They met often in Left Bank cafes in order to discuss politics, literature and philosophy. The many articles which Vian wrote for *Les Temps modernes* kept him in constant touch with Sartre's increasing fame. In the middle 1940s, Sartre's repute spread worldwide, but especially within Parisian literary and philosophical circles. In fact, when Vian started to write *L'Ecume des jours*, Sartre was becoming a living legend, a sort of demigod that people looked up to, listened to avidly, and emulated without question. According to Vian's mother (whom I had occasion to interview in 1969), her son thought for years that *La Nausée* was the greatest novel ever written in French. This explains why one of Vian's pet projects was to collect funds for the erection of a statue depicting the head of Sartre resting on a huge block of nausea, smiling benevolently at the vomit beneath him. The project never came to fruition because of lack of money to commission a well-known artist. However, Sartre himself contributed to it and encouraged Vian all along.

What could not be realised in stone was accomplished in the prose of *L'Ecume des jours*. Vian gives a burlesque description of the existentialist movement as a whole, and of Sartre in particular, in the passage which describes the philosopher's now famous conference on existentialism which he gave in October 1945 at the Club Maintenant. Simone de Beauvoir, in *La Force des choses*, noted that, "at Sartre's conference, there came such a crowd that the space would not hold it: there was a frightful skirmish and some women fainted." Vian's biting tone notwithstanding, his description is not too far removed from the truth:
Some arrived by hearse and the policemen plunged a long steel pipe into
the coffins, nailing them to the oak for ever and ever, which meant that
they did no one any harm except the people who would one day die
properly and whose shrouds had been ruined. Others got themselves
parachuted in from special planes (they were fighting at Le Bourget too,
to get on the planes). A squad of firemen used these as targets, and
diverted them toward the Seine, where they drowned miserably. Others,
finally, tried to get there through the sewers. They were driven back by
being kicked on the knuckles with hobnailed boots, just as they gripped
the edge of the manholes in order to get their strength back and climb out,
and the rats took care of the rest. But nothing could discourage such
zealots. It must, however, be admitted that those who were drowned and
those who persevered in their attempts were not the same ones. The noise
mounted to the heavens, reverberating from the clouds with a hollow
rumbling. 5

Later, Jean-Sol Partre is described as entering on an elephant’s back, much
like a fakir. He begins his speech among “countless cases of fainting, due to the
intrauterine exultation which overcame the female members of the audience
particularly” (63). Partre’s speech cannot be heard by anyone because of the
enthusiasm of the crowd and the noise of photographers and newsreel report-
ers. Nevertheless, he does manage to show to the audience “samples of stuffed
vomit” (63), another obvious pun on La Nausée. As the conference concludes,
the roof collapses into the hall and “among the plaster, whitish shapes stirred,
staggered about, and then collapsed, asphyxiated by the heavy cloud which
floated above the debris” (64). At this point, Partre, delighted, begins to slap
his thighs and to laugh heartily, “happy to see so many ‘engaged’ people” (64).

Laughing at nausea neither contradicts the gravity of its source nor the
seriousness of the discomfort it induces. Sartre always maintained that his was
an optimistic philosophy, one that could, through commitment, lead to a better
world and to personal catharsis. He may have been wrong, of course. For no
ism, no science, no structure can eradicate the scandals of disease and death,
the despair brought on by love or the lack of it, or the anguish generated by
myriad other uncontrollable human emotions. But this matters little. It is the
struggle to the summit that counts, as Albert Camus reminded us. The conquest
itself is of minor importance. Sartre must not be remembered as a messiah. He
did not want to be a saviour and he mistrusted those who assumed this role. On
the contrary, he viewed his part with considerable modesty. He is even reputed
to have been embarrassed and to have blushed when thanked by those whom he
had helped.

And help he did, many and in many ways. In the 1940s and in the 1950s part of
his royalties went to young, aspiring writers and artists. His cash gifts became
so widely known that, when he turned down the Nobel Prize, several
newspapers wondered why he did not accept it simply in order to get the money
and give it to charity. He was accused of haughtiness, then of harshness, of
placing principle above the need of the poor, the sick, and the starving. Actually, it is the accusation itself that may be characterized as harsh and unwarranted. After all it was addressed to an individual whose financial means allowed him to live luxuriously; instead, he adopted an orphan Arab girl, sent money to Bangladesh, helped innumerable friends and acquaintances with donations of cash, time, advice, even influence. It should not be forgotten, for example, that when Jean Genêt was caught stealing for the tenth time, an offense automatically punishable in France by life imprisonment, it was Sartre who initiated a petition, subsequently signed by dozens of writers and artists, to the President of the country, asking for an official pardon. The request was granted, an event without which Genêt's triumphant career as novelist and playwright would have been immensely curtailed.

The role of Sartre in helping beleaguered Russian dissidents is all but legendary. Simone de Beauvoir summarizes it in her 1974 All Said And Done, and her honest documentation is corroborated by newspaper and magazine records and by witnesses both in Russia and in France. After the 1956 Russian invasion of Hungary, Sartre broke away from the policies of the U.S.S.R. Not only did he criticize the Soviet Union for its repression of freedom, but he also indicted France, England, and the United States whose clamorous love of liberty resulted only in rhetoric. The man who, as early as 1939, had turned to Hegel for the understanding of political events, and to Marxism for their control; who had founded the group Socialisme et Liberté; who denounced American imperialism at every opportunity, became disenchanted, in time, with the governments of the People's Republics of the Soviet Union and of China. The Russian camps came to the fore. He was shocked by the Rajk and Slansky trials. He was horrified by the aping of the Bolsheviks practiced in the Iron Curtain countries only for the benefit of a precious few in the governing classes. He was astonished by the widespread oppression of the masses in China. Sartre travelled to Russia on several occasions, not only because of curiosity but also because considerable royalties had accumulated for him in the Soviet Union, and he could only cash them in and spend them within the boundaries of that Socialist haven. Unfortunately, the haven collapsed a little more in the course of each visit, until nothing but debris was left.

Disappointments were generated by direct exposure to the lives of Russian artists and writers. Ehrenburg, for example, informed Sartre of the persecutions to which even the least non-conformist men of letters were subjected. He told of the Soviet government's control of the Writers' Union, of the censors, of the perversion of the authorities which engaged often in public flagellation of those whom they branded counter-revolutionaries. He told of the labor camps to which many were sent and of the official prohibition of publication. Simone de Beauvoir describes how incensed she and Sartre were at a Khrushchev speech in March 1963, presented to an audience of Party and government leaders, writers and artists. She reports that in the speech he defended Stalin, made a blistering attack against formalism and abstraction in writing and the fine arts, and called Ehrenburg, Nekrassov, Paustovsky and Yevtushenko dangerous, unpatriotic, and treacherous. Khrushchev, who liked and respected Sartre,
went on to blame Ehrenburg for the Frenchman's abandonment to the Communist Party. When Ehrenburg informed his government's leader that Sartre had never been a card carrying Communist, Khrushchev refused to believe him and blindly pursued him with recriminations. Both Sartre and de Beauvoir viewed the incident, we are told in *All Said and Done*, with absolute horror.

Sartre's alienation from the U.S.S.R. was furthered by the Brodsky affair. As if to underscore her scorn of the Soviet leaders, Simone de Beauvoir goes into the details of the scandal. Brodsky, a Jewish poet of considerable talent who had the audacity to criticize Marx in some of his poems, was accused of, and tried for, parasitism, a charge which in Russia is brought only against whores and pimps. In spite of the protection of some, including Ehrenburg, he was sentenced to a labor camp. He was released only much later, after Sartre had sent a letter to Mikoyan in which he asked that the poet be pardoned.

Later, Sartre's intervention was helpful in the Sinyavsky and Daniel trials. It also may be presumed that his refusal to attend the 1967 congress of the Soviet Writers' Union aided in bringing about a course of moderation, for a time, in the bellicose attitude of the Soviet Government *vis-à-vis* dissidents or would-be dissidents. Sartre's help to Solzhenitsyn in the 1970s, although never acknowledged by the latter, has been well documented and needs no belaboring here. There are other examples of Sartre's commitment to human and humane causes, but a list, one senses, would very much displease Sartre. It will be recalled that the twelfth century scholar, Maimonides, enumerates eight possible courses of generosity, in ascending order of worthiness. The sixth, and one of the most worthy, is that of generosity practiced anonymously, the recipient never learning the identity of the donor. Sartre made numerous gifts, wrote numerous letters, and helped with petitions, telephone calls and personal appearances. If his identity became ultimately known, it is not because he revealed it later, or because he ever boasted; rather it was because Sartre's existence was always public domain, prey for news-hungry reporters and critics.

It seems, then, in the case of Sartre's *persona*, that whatever else existentialism means, it is also an attitude and a way of conduct resulting in a deep concern for one's fellow man, in a refusal to accept the *fiats* of nature or of totalitarianisms. To be sure, little can be done, and problems can be alleviated only temporarily. But the very limitations inherent in Sartre's efforts enhance the validity of his attempts; they likewise validate our sorrow today, as well as our hope on this, the first anniversary of his death.

Notes

1 Eugene Ionesco in an interview to *Le Figaro* (2 April 1965), 1.
EVEN years after the end of World War I, a thoughtfully chosen selection of verse by English, Irish, and American writers turns out to be drenched in melancholy, obsessed with death, and markedly reminiscent of Victorian poetry in subject and technique. In a year which saw the publication of such original fiction as Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*, and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, these poets seldom break new ground, but, rather, compulsively go over the old terrain and try to bury their dead. Hence my epithet "post-mortem effects" (borrowed from D. H. Lawrence's pronouncement on white American civilization after Moby Dick sank the Pequod). For *The Best Poems of 1925* evidences a weary struggle against postwar inertia. The most famous poem included, T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men," objectifies this deadened feeling:

Shape without form, shade with colour,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion.

Unfortunately, few of the poems have comparable originality, and weariness is manifested in various kinds of triteness. Although my encounter with this book was fortuitous—I picked it up several years ago in a used book store—I find that it can serve as a time capsule recording culture shock.
How was this book assembled? The editor, L. A. G. Strong, was a young Anglo-Irishman (born 1896), educated at Oxford, who had made his first annual collection of poems in 1923 and was later to produce a good book on Joyce—The Sacred River (1951)—as well as novels and poems of his own. Here in his "Introduction" he explains that he has chosen from poems published in periodicals between June 1, 1924 and May 31, 1925. To be included as one of the year's best, Strong says, a poem must give pleasure by its sincerity, music, faithfulness to life. It must not contain padding, "affectation, reminiscence, mimicry; vagueness of epithet, especially in dealing with colour; and so on and so forth." Strong adds that all else being equal, he prefers an unknown to a known poet, and something from a small magazine rather than from a commercial "giant." Anticipating critics who may carp at his book's lack of unity, he maintains that he has tried for as many different subjects and types as possible. (Actually, his choices are curiously unified in subjects and feelings.) He dismisses the charge that he is partial to Irish poets, and reiterates that he is concerned with the poem itself only, regardless of the nationality of its author.

A few figures tend to support Strong's rationale of selection, at least as far as nationalities. One hundred five poets are included, with one hundred nineteen poems in all. Of these about half are American, nine seem to be Irish, the rest British. In all, twenty-five poets are women. More poems appeared first in the London Mercury (twelve) than in any other magazine. On this side of the Atlantic, poems originated in Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, Nation, New Republic, Poetry, and Yale Review. But Strong also looked at some little magazines like Buccaneer, Chapbook, Decachord, Fugitive (outlet of the young Southern Agrarian writers, here John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate), Palms, Voices and others long since perished, including the now defunct Dial and Scribner's Magazine. In his Acknowledgements, Strong regrets that he was unable to include particular poems by Thomas Hardy, Vachel Lindsay, and Edwin A. Robinson, among others whom he admires. And I note that there are no poems by Walter de la Mare, Robert Frost, John Masefield, Wallace Stevens, and W. C. Williams, who did not publish during the year. Finally, the range of versification types does seem wide: there are fourteen sonnets, sixty-two poems in stanzas of various kinds, seven in blank verse, and the rest in open forms.

Given these kinds of diversity, it is remarkable how similar the poems are in their retrospection, remembrance of the dead, regretfulness. The volume is dedicated "In Memoriam" to Amy Lowell, the eccentric American poet who had died in 1925. Often the titles name the dreary subject or mood: "Lost," "Driftwood," "The Anniversary" (of a death), "From Our Ghostly Enemy," "Brief Return" (to a grave), "Midnight Lamentation," "December," "At the Grave of Henry Vaughan" (the seventeenth-century poet), "Aged Ninety Years" (on a New England woman just dead), "Thames Valley in Winter,"
"Aunt Hannah" (an elegy), "The Dark Memory" (of the death of love), "The Undiscovered Country" (death), "In Winter." Rather typically, "Midnight Lamentation" opens:

When you and I go down
Breathless and cold,
Our faces both worn back
To earthly mould . . . .

And two of the nostalgic poems begin with the very same formula, "Do you remember . . .": "Harvest Home" by George Villiers and "The Pleasure Gardens" by Edith Sitwell. The title of the latter is obviously sardonic as we confront menacing images and dismal figures:

These that seem our own prophetic shadows,
The old Bacchantes of the suburbs, sit
Where sunlight wraps their unloved bones with warmth,—
Stare like the dead at something none may see,
Mumble unspoken words that died long since . . . .

Although three English soldier-poets are here represented—Edmund Blunden, Robert Graves, and Siegfried Sassoon—neither they nor any others refer directly or explicitly to the war just ended. Yet poem after poem refers to the death of the day, of a season, of a year, of a life. Some bewail a final ending empty of meaning, like Leonie Adams' "Bird and Bosom—Apocalyptic," which counters the dream of the bird-like soul's escape with the reality of the dead soul within the dead body. Or like "October Sunset" by the unknown Alberta Vickridge which begins: "The world shall pass in flame, the preacher saith . . . ." In fact, the "Index of First Lines" offers even more examples of the volume's leading subject. There one finds these openings for poems whose titles are not especially revealing: "Alone with thoughts that chill me;" "The thought that he had buried her;" "How shall we praise the magnificence of the dead;" "Now the day is dead, I cried;" "Why say Death? for Death's neither harsh or kind."

So many concern themselves with gently easing out of life that I am tempted to call these the New Graveyard Poets, but rather than reverting to that eighteenth-century fashion in versifying, a number of the writers turn back only to nineteenth-century models. The reverie poems reflect Tennyson's influence, and "December" even uses the stanza form Tennyson made famous in In Memoriam when expressing his grief for his dead friend Hallam. Though not on the surface about death or grief, the images of Eden Phillpotts "December" suggest suffocation, as the second stanza illustrates:

Yet stole, the patient eve to mar,
An earth-born fog that stifled all,
Drowned the pure twilight in a pall
And blotted hope of any star.

And the wistful tone, even the language and form of Matthew Arnold's poems of
alienation can be found in Edwin Muir’s “Remembrance,” in which the speaker mourns the boy, youth, man he once was:

I can no more have speech with them, nor know
The light which lights them. Vaster than the sea
The yawning distances o’er which we go
On our frail paths of sundering destiny.

Again, a pervasive sadness spills over into the poem, which is ostensibly not about a dead person. Unfortunately, there is nearly always something worn and stale about the expression of this postbellum “tristis.”

The poems tend to be imitative and derivative. Among their literary forebears are Wordsworth and Hardy, with their focus on country life, including the occasional use of dialect speech. Besides the poems suffused with death, the next largest class in The Best Poems of 1925 takes as subject the pastoral landscape or the doings of country folk. The titles “A Hillman,” “Country Fair,” “Espied: In Harden Woods—Yorkshire,” “Eclogue,” “Woodcraft,” “Harvest Home,” “Horses” show their bucolic interests. “Northumbrian Duet: Ned Nixon and His Maggie” is one of five in dialect—the other four are by Americans, among them Amy Lowell—strange to late twentieth-century eyes and ears. Even in 1924 and 1925, the daily experience of most poets and their readers was urban, and returning to country matters is just another form of retrospection.

For all the homogeneity of subjects and tones, some curiosities stick out. As Strong himself observed, “There has been occurring independently, in America and in Britain, a surprising amount of work having for subject the impregnation of the human by the divine” (“Introduction,” p. xx). He chose two such poems, one, “Pieta,” by an otherwise unknown American, Mary Ellis Opdycke, being a rather strange account of Christ’s conception. The second is W. B. Yeats’ deservedly famous “Leda,” about Zeus’ rape, in swan form, of the Greek maiden. Another peculiar subject is central to “Florizel in Love (A Scenario),” about a monkey who escapes his cage to join his love, lying in her nest with another:

Poor Florizel
It is she
She loves another
She is perhaps married
Thou wast happier in thy cage.

Apparently, the poet, Louis Gilmore, does not mean to be funny.

Several bad writers also have California connections. Jack London’s friend, George Sterling, tries the same classical subject as Yeats, and the same form, the sonnet, in “Three That Knew Helen.” The epigrammatic “Streets of San Francisco,” by Yossef Gaer, at least acknowledges the existence of the city. Here is “Pacific Avenue”:
Starting out in life
In poverty of body
And rising over hills
To a poverty of mind.
This is merely flat, whereas most of the passages quoted have been more pretentiously bad.
There are even worse poems. Consider, for example, this stanza from an elegy, "The Bee":

She by centuries of bees
Was furnished with efficiencies,
Yet no device of all her pack—
Scissors, baskets, combs nor sack
Nor the barbed wonder of her tail,
Nor hollow tongue will now avail.

Ruth Manning-Sanders intends seriousness, but the details are ludicrous. In a lighter vein is a dialect poem by the once popular Stephen Vincent Benét, "The Mountain Whippoorwill: How Hill-Billy Jim Won the Great Fiddlers’ Prize.” Badness runs rampant here, but perhaps the prize lines are:

Oh, Georgia booze is mighty fine booze,
The best yuh ever poured yuh,
But it eats the soles right offen yore shoes,
For hell’s broke loose in Georgia

One is tempted to blame the strains caused by Prohibition. Tediately long, loose, and discordant in diction is “The Joy Ride,” about “an ordinary hooker” picked up by the driver of “a 1920/ford coupe.”

I’d rather be in this damn ford, she said,
with you in this damn ford than be in heaven.
No one, she said, not even God, she said,
has ever been as true to me before.

Whatever became of Strong’s resolve to reject poems which contain padding? The author, Warren Gilbert, could claim to be a precursor of Rod McKuen in his prosy, “tough guy” sentimentality. Such efforts deserve admission to an anthology of bad verse, like The Stuffed Owl or Pegasus Descending.?

Who are these poets anyway? In the first place, it is important to realize that Strong seriously considered all the writers he included to be genuine poets. They are not the merely popular verse writers of that time, like Eddie Guest—best known for “A Heap O’ Living”—or Robert W. Service, author of “The Shooting of Dan McGrew.” Strong really did choose widely from the respectable poets publishing in the respectable periodicals of his day. Excepting the three poets with whom I shall conclude, at least half the writers Strong chose are still counted among the good minor poets of the early twentieth century. Oddly, there are several better known now as writers of fiction: Hervey Allen
(Anthony Adverse, 1933), A. E. Coppard (short stories), Richard Hughes (A High Wind in Jamaica, 1929), Henry Graham Greene, V. Sackville-West (The Edwardians, 1930). It might be tempting to explain the derivative, nostalgic, conventional nature of much of the poetry by pointing to the "Georgian" poets who are included: AE (George W. Russell), Wilfrid Gibson, Harold Monro, and others. They had a reputation for being "content with small things," and for being traditional in their versification. But Edith Sitwell, who founded Wheels in 1916 to champion poetic experimentation and to rival anthologies of the Georgians, and her brother Sacheverell are also represented. Only their manner is different from the others'. Moreover, "name" poets are as likely to blunder as unknown ones; after all, Stephen V. Benét and Amy Lowell wrote two of the awful dialect poems.

With rare exceptions, The Best Poems of 1925 does not venture very far into the twentieth century. Not only are the poems limited in range of experience, but they seldom extend the forms and language of poetry. It is all the more striking that Strong should have chosen Marianne Moore's "An Octopus." At one hundred twenty-five lines, it is the longest single work in the book, a leisurely open form poem which is a collage of passages drawn from Moore's reading, enclosed in quotation marks, worked into her reflections on the nature and meaning of a glacial mountain. Look at the way it begins:

An Octopus

Of ice, Deceptively reserved and flat,
it lies "in grandeur and in mass"
beneath a sea of shifting snow dunes;
dots of cyclamen red and maroon on its clearly
defined pseudopodia
made of glass that will bend—a much needed invention—
comprising twenty-eight ice fields from fifty
to five hundred feet thick,
of unimagined delicacy.

It is utterly unlike anything else in the book, indeed unlike anything written earlier except by Marianne Moore. It is remarkable for its wit, precision, and intelligence.

Also in a class by themselves are the two most memorable poems, Yeats’ "Leda" and Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (first section only). The presence of these poems is a chastening reminder that in any period the number of truly fine works is very small. They relate to most of the lesser poems in their subjects at least: one the mythical violation out of which came war and death, the other the living death of men without purpose and action. Yeats packs into the constricted sonnet form the essence of the god's encounter with Leda. And he connects the beginning, the forced conception of Helen, with the end, brutality on a vaster scale—the defeat and destruction of Troy, "The broken wall, the burning roof and tower."
In the few short lines of the other famous lyric, Eliot creates the whispered chorus of scarecrows who have barely the energy to identify themselves. "The Hollow Men" could serve as an epitaph of the War's survivors, those who lived to write fragile verses inadequately expressing their sense of emptiness. Eliot's chorus seems to speak for all the poets' voices in this book. It murmurs, it is not we who commemorate the dead lost in the War, but they who will recall us as the living dead:

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death's other kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

Notes


3 One black American poet is included: Countee Cullen, "Epitaph: For a Mouthy Woman." There is a poem entitled "Black Man" by William Yandell Elliott, but given its patronizing tone and the fact that it was published in The Fugitive, I am sure that its author was white.


5 See especially Arnold's "To Marguerite—Continued." Whitman is also evoked, if not by name, in John Gould Fletcher's "To Columbus," with its choice of American "epic" subject, irregular long lines, heavy parallelism, and piled-up details. Paul Eldridge's "Turning the Cheek" suggests one of Stephen Crane's laconic, ironic poems.

6 The title "Espied: In Harden Woods—Yorkshire" by James A. Mackereth reminds me of Frost's great lyric "In Hardwood Groves" (published in A Boy's
Will, 1913). But instead of Frost's masterful understatement, Mackereth gushes on and on about witnessing the kiss of earth and sky:

There was no sound; yet, in eclipse
Of thought, my thrilled enthralled heart knew
The meeting of a myriad lips,
The passionate green, the passionate blue!

There are even two poems about old lost causes, Elizabeth J. Coatsworth's "The Three Misses Barker," American Loyalists after the Revolution, and Austin Clarke's "The Lost Heifer (A Jacobite Song)," which harks back to the Stuart Pretender's vain effort to regain the English throne in the eighteenth century.


9 The Complete Poems of Marianne Moore (New York: Macmillan & Viking, 1967), "Notes," pp. 273-274, give the sources used in "An Octopus." The principal one and the source for 1. 2: is Dept. of Interior Rules and Regulations, The National Parks Portfolio (1941). Moore was accustomed to revise her poems after their first publication; the original "An Octopus" had a long passage on flowers not included in The Complete Poems.

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