



Spring Thaw

Weave a Circle Round Us Thrice

There is an apparent incompatibility about the undertaking of an issue like this that immediately confronts the serious editor. Print is a medium of mass communication and academic language is a vehicle for directive rationality; art, as generally conceived, is the opposite of both. It seems at the least inappropriate to attempt to discuss the problems of educating people in the ways of art, by using a form normally devoted to sustained linguistic efforts to compel one's thought along precise and narrow lines toward preconceived ends.

Artists are characteristically wary of the written word, and apprehensive of the world in which it is at home. That world includes of course the entire paraphernalia of the education of the young, of the planning of society, and of the conduct of affairs (which may be taken to mean the conduct by those who wish it of the affairs of everybody else). The constant preoccupation with such matters that the endless outpourings of the printed word induce in us all can lead easily to our thinking of life as having to be lived within a vast framework of organization and of foreknowledge, that will guide us with deliberation through sequences of familiar, understood events to the inevitable end of death. Such a frame of mind has us forgetting — and leaves us uneasy with the proposition — that there is an alternative way, of life, in art. Responsive to the moment, creative, not predictable, individual; it seems to be everything the other is not.

But there is no need to think in terms of opposites. Both modes of seeking understanding and control should serve the same person, not necessarily at the same time, but complementarily, in easy harmony. The lives of many admirable people demonstrate that harmony, achieved by a deliberately sought reconciliation. None of us, it may be ventured, lives altogether without art — no more than altogether without reason. But, brought up without an education in its rewards and its disciplines, or left untutored in that reconciliation of two apparently conflicting modes, one's life may easily degenerate into a frustrating affair of unresolved standoffs, with either a consequent loss of certainty or a habitual resort to the sterile posturings of an unwarrantable conviction.

Many writers in this issue are characteristically brief, given to simplicity of statement, lacking the earnest intensity of scholars in the development of themes; they appear to eschew the cautious care with which the typical academic case is buttressed at its every point of potential frailty. The wise reader will not underestimate them on this account. The real problems of education and of art are apt to be few and simple to state.

The statements of problem that emerge from these disquisitions appear moreover to convey one very significant impression of a general kind, namely that the status of the arts in education has by now reached a threshold. The problems we are looking at here are no longer those of whether or not, but of how, to furnish education in the arts to entire generations.

To many teachers of music and art the battle for acceptance and a recognition of the centrality of aesthetics in education may seem far from won. The old rigours of elitism still appear to dominate the scene, being the basis of systems known to achieve high standards of performance, especially where the sophistications of technique appear to demand long years of practice for mastery. Elitist training, however, while productive of results highly gratifying to that class of persons who patronise high performance in the arts, habitually creates such situations of blatant inequality as that prevailing in Québec (described in the *Gazette* of December 1st, 1979), where private tuition in such institutions as the McGill Conservatory of Music has experienced "astronomical growth," while the rate of supply of music teachers in the public schools of the province is down to one for every 1,100 elementary and school children (and most of those are in the large high schools).

These elitist systems however continue to stand, not because they represent the preferred arrangements of our times, but because of the very density and complexity of their structures of reward and failure. Very few people — granted that they be noisy people — really now reject the proposition that art, music, dance and drama ought to form a major part of the education of all children and that they must be educated not as consumers but as participants. The problems that are faced in the following pages are those presented by the prospect of the entire population of a generation learning to use creativity, in the personal, one-to-one context that is required. There are obviously dilemmas about bringing this off, on that scale, within our contemporary systems for schooling, massively habituated as they are to a very different way of doing things. But art has never lacked invention in humouring a system, nor is it likely to be abashed by the system's pretensions.

It is not even any longer a question of artists knowing that we are on their side. They are us.

J. K. H.