WHY DRAWING IS INTERESTING

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THE QUESTION THAT I WANT TO CONSIDER IN THIS TALK IS, WHY ARE DRAWINGS INTERESTING?

More precisely, I want to ask, why are interesting drawings interesting? Because, as you all know, there are many drawings that are completely without interest. And still that doesn't quite get to my question. For there are a number of ways in which a drawing might be found interesting: as a social document, as a transcription of a landscape now vanished, as a memento of a great man, as a reminder of an old love. These are not my concerns. So my question is really, what makes drawings, some drawings, interesting as drawings?

IN ASKING THIS QUESTION, I HAVE CHOSEN THE WORD 'INTERESTING' CAREFULLY. LET ME EXPLAIN.

To find a drawing interesting is to evaluate it, and there are, I believe, two broadly different ways in which we can evaluate works of art. There are two different kinds of artistic evaluation. Traditional aesthetics has clung to the view that there is only one kind of artistic evaluation, and that is evaluation that issues in judgments of beauty. Modernist aesthetics has been fixated on the second part of this tradition, and has, rightly, faulted this emphasis on beauty for its narrow-mindedness. To treat all art as aspiring to the condition of the beautiful is in effect to impose upon the artist a quite absurd restriction as to the subject-matter that is open to him. It would exclude much of the material that has inspired the artists of the last hundred and fifty years: the modern city and its teeming chaos, the life of the poor and the outcast, sexuality in all its varieties, violence, suffering and war, and the mute tribute exacted by quiet domesticity.

But my argument against traditional aesthetics goes beyond this particular criticism. Traditional aesthetics is not simply in error over the criterion of evaluation: more fundamentally, it overlooks the diversity of evaluation.

WHAT THEN ARE THE TWO KINDS OF EVALUATION TO WHICH WORKS OF ART ARE SUBJECT?

There is a kind of evaluation that issues in a judgment of quality, and there is a kind of evaluation that issues in a judgment of interest.

If this seems a clumsy way of putting the matter, it is designed to avoid what is still a common error. For reasons that are internal to the development of philosophy, there has been, in much twentieth-century aesthetics, specifically in that part of it called analytic aesthetics, a tendency, dogmatically supported, to equate evaluation, which is surely a complex internal process involving various parts of the mind, or different faculties, with a judgment, with, that is, something that we say. This seems to me a dangerous
simplification or abbreviation, for though in many circumstances this process is likely to culminate in something that we say, there are circumstances in which it will not. And what we say, the judgment we make, will never exhaust the process.

However, while distinguishing between the evaluative process itself, and any judgment that we might make on the basis of it, I go along with the view that I am rejecting to this degree: that an effective way we have of identifying the two kinds of evaluation is by reference to the content of the judgment in which they might issue.

That is why we can, I maintain, think of one kind of evaluation as an evaluation of quality, and the other kind as an evaluation of interest.

SO NOW TO THE TWO KINDS OF EVALUATION. WHAT ARE THEY, AND HOW DO THEY DIFFER?

Evaluations of quality have two distinguishing characteristics. They are responses either to specific points of craft or execution in a work, or to some overall effect it induces, and these responses are sensuous responses tinged by a specific kind of pleasure.

These two characteristics are not independent of one another, for it seems clear that the kind of pleasure invoked cannot be understood without reference back to the things responded to. In other words, in explaining the pleasure, we would have to say something like, 'It is the kind of pleasure that things like skilful craftsmanship, or fineness of execution, or a poignant effect, can prompt ...' However there is also more to be said about the pleasure than what prompts it, and what more there is to be said frees the account of narrow circularity. The first thing to be said is that the capacity to feel such pleasure is something that we can acquire, and we acquire it through exposure to those things which ultimately prompt it, such as skilful craftsmanship, or fineness of execution, or poignancy of effect. Secondly, the things through which this capacity can be acquired are not confined to works of art. Indeed they are not confined to human artifacts. Nature is a nursery in which we learn to respond to the quality of art.

Evaluations of quality then at once range over all the arts (and more), and they do not presuppose any specific knowledge or understanding of the art to which the work in which quality is found belongs. In traditional terminology, not to be despised, evaluations of quality are exercises of taste: taste signifying not, as is sometimes assumed, a preciosity of response, but a full-blooded sensuousness.
SOMETHING VERY DIFFERENT IS THE CASE WITH EVALUATIONS OF INTEREST.

When a work of art is evaluated as interesting - and in this context interesting and boring are the relevant opposites - what is specifically taken into account is the extent to which the methods and the resources of the particular art to which the work belongs have been fruitfully exploited. And exploited here can only mean that the method, the resource, has been put to some use that the artist has in mind. It is when this kind of exploitation occurs that the work acquires interest.

I stress this last point because there circulates another view of the matter according to which interest accrues to a work when one of the resources of the art to which it belongs is asserted or made conspicuous: it is not necessary for the artist to make any use of it. An example of this view of the matter is to be found in Clement Greenberg's claim on the part of the painting of his day that it asserted the flatness of the surface. Fortunately for the enduring reputation of the New York school, some of its members in their art went beyond what Greenberg seems to have thought sufficed for interest.

Evaluations of interest have then a less immediate connexion with our sensibility, and with pleasure - though here I stress the word 'immediate', for, in someone devoted to the art in question, the connexion can be as strong - and such evaluations are made within, and are intended only to hold within, the framework of a given art. Works of art are interesting or boring qua works of a certain art.

Finally, I shall claim that, though this claim goes massively against the contemporary grain, it is not at all clear how evaluations of interest can be accorded sense unless we simultaneously take an essentialist view of the arts. I do not mean an essentialist view of art itself, though that too may be required. I mean an essentialist view of each particular art.

WHAT IS IT TO TAKE AN ESSENTIALIST VIEW OF THE ARTS?

The fundamental commitment involved in taking an essentialist view of the arts is to hold that, for every art, there are certain necessary truths, certain truths that could not be otherwise, that do not derive from mere stipulation, or from the definition of the term for the art. On the contrary, there are truths about each art that arise from its nature, or from what makes the art the very art that it is and not another art.

Now, if there are such truths, at once necessary and non-trivial, whence do they arise, or - the same question - how are they grounded? I believe that the clearest way of answering this question, or of demonstrating essentialism about the arts, goes somewhat as follows.
At the core of every art, there is a medium. What is meant by a medium is a set, perhaps an open set, of materials, whose use has, in very broad terms, been codified. Codifying how certain materials are to be used includes things like the following: saying what properties of the materials count, and why, and how these properties are, in the most general way, to be organized. So, for instance, within painting, the look of the paint counts, but its smell and its taste don't: and marks of paint are to be organized laterally on a support and in a way that is, to some degree, under the influence of the hand. Within music, by contrast, only the acoustic properties of notes count, and notes are organized temporally. In each case, the codification of the medium comes with a rationale. Things are ordered as they are in painting because painting is addressed to the eye, and things are ordered as they are in music because music is addressed to the ear.

However, if there is for each art a medium that is its core, it certainly does not follow that the art can be equated with the medium. In fact, in no case can it be. An art arises only when a medium is inserted into a cultural, or human, context, and is appropriately related to human nature or psychology. In fact, the medium needs to be related to human nature twice over. It needs to be related, in the first place, to the artist and his psychology and secondly, to the spectator and his psychology. It needs to offer the artist, or allow him to find, ways of realizing intentions that he values, and it needs to offer the spectator, or encourage him to have, experiences that, in addition to the value that they have for him, will match the artist's intentions.

The necessary truths about each art, which underpin essentialism about the arts, arise from the complex interaction between (one) the nature of the medium, (two) the nature of human desire, as this seeks realization, and (three) the nature of human perception, as this sets limits upon what is intelligible to the senses.

In one important respect, I lay myself open to a misunderstanding, which I wish to anticipate. It is crucial to recognize that, for each art, there are some necessary truths that hold only at a certain place or at a certain time: they are culturally or historically, conditioned. That this should be so derives from a necessary truth about the arts, which is itself ahistorical: namely, that all arts have a history. The need for improvisation, central to the arts if they are to continue to speak to us, drives them forward, at whatever pace.

I am now in a position to turn to drawing to illustrate, necessarily in a very superficial way, what I have been saying about evaluations of interest and the way they are grounded in an essentialism about the arts.
I HESITATE. FOR I KNOW THAT I CANNOT TOTALLY IGNORE THE RESISTANCE THAT, I AM SURE, IS BUILDING UP AGAINST WHAT I HAVE BEEN SAYING.

I know that many will find it strange to hear someone at the end of the twentieth century engaged in defending essentialism in the arts. The conventional view is that, at some crucial moment in the course of these last hundred years, essentialism in the arts was refuted. Some will give the credit for this achievement to Picasso, some to Wittgenstein, some to Duchamp, others to others. However, though these different attributions in turn presuppose very different conceptions of what this refutation involved, or indeed of what was refuted, there is general agreement that it was a conclusive refutation. And here am I, talking as though no such thing had happened.

However it seems to me evident that a great deal of the history of twentieth-century art requires the very essentialism that so much of current so-called theory rejects. Take just one strand in that history. In the last few decades, we have witnessed the arrival on the art scene of a miscellany of different practices and procedures, and strenuous efforts have been made to get them accepted as art forms. I am prepared to take these efforts seriously, and at face value. That being so, as far as I can see, the only framework within which this whole discussion makes sense and could be rationally resolved is that provided by essentialism.

If we wonder whether assemblages, installations, earth art, performance art, conceptual art, video art, will survive, not just as hobbies, not just as technology, but as art, we all know that there is nothing for it but to wait and see. But when we do, the big question is, what are we waiting for? What will there be to see which will convince us, or convert us when it heaves into sight?

On this score there are, I believe, two things to be noted. The first is this: Whatever it is that happens of which we can say that it is what we have been waiting for, it will most certainly not be, as some would have it, the fiat of some institution or some body of empowered critics. Mere designation, designation of some practice and its materials as art, settles nothing, whatever certain thinkers say. The only thing that can settle the issue will be a corpus of serious work issuing from some recognizable and repeatable process and expressing some worthwhile human meaning in an accessible form.

Secondly, the process must be structured in the way that, as I see it, essentialism requires: that is, it must generate a medium which is appropriately related to human nature. Nothing follows if the work results from certain material processes, but we have no confidence whatsoever about how these materials will be used in the future, and equally no confidence that they can continue to be the bearers of meaning.
SO AT LAST TO DRAWING.

The simplest way in which the medium of drawing can be used is to make a mark. However, special circumstances apart, making mere marks, or making marks that are made merely as such and are intended to be seen merely as such, is preparatory to the art of drawing. But it is not itself drawing. It is not itself drawing, just because it is as yet quite unrelated to human nature.

The most common way in which the medium of drawing can be related to human nature is when: (one) an artist makes marks so as to represent an object, and (two) an appropriate spectator can see that object in the marks. When this happens, it is important to realize that what I have set out as two things are standardly not two independent things, nor is the convergence between what the artist does and what the spectator sees a happy coincidence. On the contrary: the convergence is anticipated in the very posture that the draughtsman traditionally adopts when he draws - that is to say, he faces the sheet, with his eyes open, and his eyes follow the progress of his pencil across the sheet and the deposit that it leaves. For this traditional posture at once facilitates and explains the convergence. In adopting the posture, the draughtsman makes this commitment: that ultimately nothing will count for him qua artist as realizing his intention to represent a certain object unless qua spectator he has the experience of seeing that object in his emergent drawing. Indeed nothing will count for him as even trying to represent a certain object unless he is prepared, at every moment, to modify what he does, or how he moves the pencil across the sheet, so that what he sees when he looks at the sheet comes to tally with what he intended.

One way of characterizing the traditional posture is to say that it clarifies the role of the eyes in drawing.

If it is said that we use our eyes in drawing, that is true, but there are many things that we do in which we use our eyes. And how our eyes are recruited to the task can vary greatly. In some cases, such as dressing in the morning, we use our eyes, but only after the fact. We use them only to check on what we have already done without our eyes. Next there are cases where the use of the eyes is less minimal. When we drive a car, we couldn't do what we do without simultaneously, and in concert, using our eyes. We couldn't, without mishap, drive first and look afterwards. In such cases, we do what we do with our eyes. But there are cases that go beyond this, and this is where drawing comes in. When we drive a car the criterion of success for what we do is laid down independently of the eyes: we have to keep the car on the road. But, in the case of drawing, it is the eyes that determine the criterion of success. We do not merely draw with the eyes: we draw for the eyes.
I RETURN, WITH THIS LAST THOUGHT MUCH IN MIND, TO THE DRAWING OF AN OBJECT.

I start from what is in effect the most basic way of representing an object, which is that of making visible its shape. Often referred to as delineation, it depends upon a degree of cooperation between artist and spectator and their psychologies, which often goes unrecognized.

The artist begins by banishing from his attention any kind of spectator except one, and that is the spectator who sees every line that the artist makes as having the function of rendering the silhouette of the object that he is endeavouring to represent. Then, for the benefit of this spectator, he tries to show what in the real world the object would occlude, or obscure from view. To do this, he gets as close as he can, correcting his drawing when he thinks he is departing from it unduly, to the practice that a number of theoretically minded Renaissance artists used as a means of introducing the rules of single-point perspective. In other words, he imagines the sheet of paper in front of him to be a piece of transparent glass inserted, at right angles to his line of vision, between him and the object that he is representing, and on it he then proceeds to draw, as best he can, the outlines of the object as he would see them through the glass.

Delineation, and its aims and limitations, are neatly enshrined in one of the various ancient myths about the origins of the visual arts, recounted by Pliny, which traces them back to the potter's daughter, who tried to retain her lover by drawing round the edge of the shadow that he cast upon the ground.

In its pure embodiment, this mode of drawing is unlikely to be found satisfactory either by artist or by spectator. Only in rare circumstances - and then, as often as not, by conspicuously omitting what it thereby recognizes as important - will it convey everything that the artist is concerned to transmit about the object, or everything that the spectator would wish to know. Drawing, the medium of drawing - will be the prevailing feeling - has been underutilized.

The next natural step is to devise ways in which delineation can be supplemented so that it is more fully implicated with human intentions and human expectations, hence the status of drawing as an art can be more firmly grounded. Various drawing procedures can be found that fulfil this role in that they do better justice to the third-dimensional aspect of the object represented: what we might call the form, as opposed to the mere shape, of the object.

These procedures can be arranged on a spectrum running from, on the one hand, those which still involve no more than line, though line is now released from the sole function of rendering the edges of objects, or silhouette, and is put to such uses as cross-hatching, to, on the other hand, procedures that replace line, and employ tone. Procedures that are at
one end of this spectrum take on the task of trying to render the different planes within the confines of the object, something which silhouette ignores even when these planes abut onto the edge of the object, while procedures at the other end of the spectrum are, in the main, concerned with the modelling of form by reference to the relative illumination of the surface, going from light, to half light, to shadow.

**BUT I WANT TO BRACKET THESE DIFFERENT WAYS OF SUPPLEMENTING DELINEATION**

Important though they are, I want turn to what is thought of - and rightly, to my mind - as a new mode of drawing, and hence as an *alternative* to delineation: though it is important to recognize that there is a broad band of borderline cases, which resist clear classification.

Within this new mode, the most interesting procedures, though also the most puzzling, are those where line is not only paramount, but is still used predominantly to render the edges of the object. But now line (one) no longer is intended by the artist simply as a way of giving the silhouette of the object, and (two) is seen by the spectator as showing where the form of the object turns away out of the viewer's sight, and continues unseen into depth.

One term for this mode of drawing is form-drawing, and the kind of line on which it frequently depends is called sculptural line, and it is important to recognize that the shift from delineation to form-drawing has much in common with the earlier shift from merely making marks to delineation. It is an outreach to further, if still basic, human interests and needs. And, since I have already invoked Pliny, let me do so again. For it is interesting to find that a classical author and, if he is to be believed, some classical artists, were fully aware of the sculptural line and the lift that it gave to visual art. Pliny writes:

> Merely to paint a figure in silhouette is no doubt a great achievement, yet many have succeeded thus far. But where an artist is rarely successful is in finding an outline that shall express the contours of a figure. For the contour should appear to fold back, and so to enclose the object as to give assurance of the parts behind, thus suggesting even what it conceals. Preeminence in this respect is conceded to Parrhasios by Antigonos and Xenocrates, writers on painting, who indeed not only concede but insist upon it.

But what, we may ask, is sculptural line? We may take, as a starting-point, a variety of suggestions that come down to us from the practice of the great Italian artists and others about how to produce the sculptural line. So, from a study of their drawings, we may cull the following ideas: the sculptural line results only when the lines corresponding to the opposite edges of the object are subtly adjusted to one another. No matter how faithful
each line - say, that giving the right-hand edge, or that giving the left-hand edge, of the object - is to the silhouette of the object, without some reciprocity between them there will be a flattening of the form that they aim to enclose. Secondly, every line that corresponds to an edge must indicate where different planes within the object meet the edge, even if they do so without any interruption of the silhouette. Often this difference between the planes is indicated by the artist's inserting a break in the line, or by allowing the line to cut back into the form. Thirdly, the nearer edge of the object may be represented by a more continuous, or more emphatic, line than that which corresponds to the edge that is farther away. And, fourthly, a sculptural line may be generated by a multiple line, or a series of redundant contours, as if to show how arbitrary is any particular placing of the line that surrounds an object.

It may now be objected that these are merely recipes for the production of the sculptural line, and, until we know what the sculptural line is in itself, we shall not be able to evaluate them. But the truth is that, though it is absolutely right not to identify the sculptural line with any one of these suggested ways of drawing the edge of an object, the sculptural line can be identified with the power to produce the visual effect that these ways of drawing induce. In other words, form-drawing, like delineation, has to be understood through the co-operation between artist and spectator and in both cases it is ultimately the hand of the artist that has to respond to the eye of the spectator. The eye of the spectator has, we might say, the upper hand.

Before I turn, as I now want to, to one case out of several where, by contrast, the eye is subservient to the hand, I want to guard against one powerful misunderstanding of what I have been saying about the verdict of the eyes.

When the spectator - and let me remind you that this includes, indeed it gives priority to, the draughtsman qua spectator - acts as a check upon the artist, the test that he runs is whether he can see the represented object in the drawing. In other words, from the very beginning, he looks not for an object but for a drawing of an object: and he recognizes that seeing the object in the drawing differs from seeing the object face-to-face. The misunderstanding that I am trying to combat is most tersely enshrined in the habit of using the word 'illusion' as equivalent to representation. There is, as I see it, no overlap between representation and illusion, and the further point that I should like to stress is that some of the greatest achievements of representational drawing are effected through the spectator's recognition of the materials that the artist uses. Consider, for instance, the amazing effect of solidity that a great artist can induce when he uses the bottom layer of his drawing, or its physical base, to convey the most forward point of the object that he represents, or where the highlight falls.
HOWEVER I SHOULD LIKE TO CONCLUDE THIS TALK WITH A WHOLE NEW, AND EXTREMELY IMPORTANT, DIMENSION OF DRAWING WHERE WHAT THE ARTIST DOES SETS THE STANDARD TO WHICH THE SPECTATOR'S EYE ATTEMPTS TO CONFORM. IT IS HERE THAT WE BEGIN TO SEE THE TRUE GREATNESS OF DRAWING, WHICH WILL FALL OUT OF HUMAN CULTURE ONLY TO ITS GREAT DETRIMENT.

Drawing and painting, we do well to record, are not only visual arts: they are also manual arts. The material residues of which the eye takes stock have been deposited by the movements of the hand. And it is the experience of these two arts, over the centuries, and indeed over cultures, that when an artist has been effectively apprenticed to his art, the hand adds value. In fact, it adds two kinds of value. It gives a unity to the work, and it carries the imprint of a personality. These two values are brought together for us in the term 'style', under which both shelter. Style, individual style, does each of these things through doing the other.

Now, of course, when the hand unifies the drawing, or expresses the draughtsman, it requires the cooperation of the eye. Here too the artist is, to some degree, dependent upon the spectator. But by now the issue of degree has become important. For, though we evidently have from outside drawing, or prior to drawing, a very broad idea of what pictorial unity is, just as we have a very broad idea of what it is for personality to find expression in the external world, drawing, and the experience of drawing give a totally new and unpredictable spin to these ideas. The specific ways in which style permits achievements of this sort is something that we can learn only from patiently looking at drawings. And, when we do so, these achievements turn out to be triumphs of the mind: triumphs, let me stress, of the embodied mind.

If there are recording angels, one thing that they would not be able to do is to record through drawing. Ethereal creatures, they are bound to find the coordination of hand and eye too effortless to wring from it objects that we could evaluate as truly interesting.