

BOOK REVIEWS

John Fisher (ed.), *Essays on Aesthetics: Perspectives on the Work of Monroe C. Beardsley*, Temple University, 1983, Pp. xiii + 309, hardbound \$ 24.95

M. C. Beardsley's intellectual commitment concentrated on literary theory and philosophy of the arts extends over the four decades last since his association with W.K. Wimsatt in 1946. His multi-dimensional approaches to and the critical analyses of the aesthetical problems have roused sensational reactions among the readers and critics all through. It was extremely necessary that an assessment of his writings, through the various critical responses by different scholars in different times, pro and contra, be undertaken. The present collection of essays by Professor Fisher meets the need timely and most successfully.

Contributors to the volume are well acquainted with Beardsley's scholarship either as students or as friends, colleagues and readers. The essays contributed, seventeen in number, are arranged in six different sections that may be the general lines along which Beardsley thought and wrote: the philosophy of art, aesthetic experience, art and society,

narrative in literature, literature and language, tragedy and comedy. Finally, the editor tags very appropriately a brief but substantial response of Professor Beardsley himself to the essays collected.

In the first section Sibley thinks that Beardsley's views on the importance of critical reason supports aesthetic value judgment. Aagaard-Mogensen analyses the concept of aesthetic quality and Hermerén discusses the twelve different answers to the question - is art autonomous? The second section comprises three philosophers including Professor Fisher himself who examines the question why Beardsley has not so far provided a complete theory of aesthetic experience. The third section contains Dickie, Dyke and Sparshott. Dickie responds to Beardsley's criticism of his own Institutional Theory of Art and Sparshott argues that pictorial representation is a social practice that is parasitic upon a biological one. The critics of the next section are all exciting ones. Ricoeur establishes the correlation between the concept of narrativity and temporality with the argument that our temporal experience finds

an analogue in the "followability" of a story in its narrative properties of being forward moving. Chatman distinguishes Beardsley's concepts of theme and thesis. Tormey offers a new analysis of metaphorical meaning, in the next section, which is "elliptical, literally implausible, yet significant counterfactuals". Banfield is of the opinion that literary style may be a suitable object of enquiry for literary theory. In the sixth section McFadder suggests that the source of the comic lies in an "active, independent and productive power" whereas Morawski concludes that 'the tragic derives from *Coincidentia oppositorum*"

In his response to these essays Beardsley is characteristically patient, polite, brief but bold and emphatic. He is respectful to the critics for their pointing out his weakness and humble where he is appreciated.

The critical responses collected in the volume not only offer updated analyses of the views of Beardsley, but also help build distinctive theories on the views in their own right raising, therefore, the volume to a status, far beyond a mere collection of essays by several hands on a particular author, where it achieves a unity of its

own in focussing on several basic issues of contemporary aesthetics. Professor Fisher deserves admiration for his manoeuvring dual responsibilities : paying tribute to Beardsley and bringing out an outstanding collection of essays in recent thoughts on theories of the arts.

A. C. Sukla

Hugh Curtler (Ed.), *What is Art ?*
Haven Publications, 1983, 220 pages,
\$ 7.95 pbk.

This book is the first of a projected series that will examine art and its relation to other aspects of human culture. Each work will be unified by a "focal" essay written by some noted scholar. Other scholars are then invited to submit essays which either directly or indirectly respond to the focal essay. All authors are asked to avoid the jargon of academic philosophy so the reader with no extensive background in philosophy or aesthetics could understand and appreciate a collection of essays making up an integrated whole. Judging from the results of the first book, the series should be excellent.

This is a fine collection of essays, even exciting one might

say—provided one is keenly interested in clear and rigorous attempts to say something interesting about the nature of art and the possibility of defining it. Although this first member of the series closely examines the definitional question in the philosophy of art, the essays also discuss a variety of other interesting and related topics, such as expression, aesthetic value in nature, music as art, and the restoration of painting and sculpture. The focal essay of *What is Art?* is "An Aesthetic Definition, of Art?", written by the noted aesthetician Monroe Beardsley. As always, Beardsley's essay is provocative and clear. He works his position out with some care, but the analysis is certainly not analytically tedious. First he argues that the task of defining art is important and practically useful for critics, historians of art, and even anthropologists. He then argues against proposals to define art in terms of some skill or in terms of the concept of institution (George Dickie's theory). He also rejects the suggestion that something is art simply by virtue of someone calling it "art". Beardsley's main contention is that a helpful and powerful definition of art can be offered in terms of two central notions: artistic intention and the concept of the aesthetic. "An artwork is something produced with the intention of giving it the capacity to satisfy the aesthetic interest." (p 21) For those who know something about

Beardsley's other work in aesthetics, in particular his theory of aesthetic experience and aesthetic value, his explanation of key terms in the definition will come as no surprise. Sometimes experience has a decidedly *aesthetic* character (and here he briefly describes these characteristics). When we approach paintings, films, etc., we often have an interest in obtaining aesthetic experience from them, a kind of experience we desire and we take to be valuable. From the artistic point of view, an artwork is produced if the artist intends to create "something that aesthetic experience can be obtained from." (p. 21) Beardsley spends the last half of the essay explaining the definition and considering a number of curious examples and possible objections which might be problematic for the definition.

It is impossible in a brief space to convey the richness and depth of all the remaining essays. Morris Grossman's "On Beardsley's Definition" is an "artsy" and ironic philosophizing. Grossman is suspicious of the whole definitional task and its tendency to produce an exclusive and misleading analysis. Beardsley's exclusion of some products from the domain of art "leads to the exercise of power under the guise of objectivity, a more dangerous habit than the exercise of power on the basis of frank preference or antipathy." (p. 38) Also, Grossman thinks that a philosophical method which "presses forth exclusionary tendencies

of definition and analysis" (p. 40) misleads because it implicitly endorses a separation of art and philosophy which must be rejected. Frank Cioffi, in "The Aesthetic and the Epistemic" also directly responds to Beardsley's essay and is doubtful about whether the definitional enterprise is helpful or even needed. His essay is full of critical questions and provocative examples suggesting difficulties with the central notions in Beardsley's definition, the aesthetic and artistic intention. He shows how difficult it is either to "distinguish the aesthetic from the arresting, exciting, soothing or exhilarating," (p. 204), or to "make correct inferences about intentions." (p. 206)

Also included in the volume are "The Object of Art," by David Konstan, "The Reality of Objects of Art," by John Hanke, "Art as Expression," by Jenefer Robinson, "Aesthetic Value in Nature and in the Arts," by Nelson Potter, "Music as Art," by Wilson Coker, and "On Restoration and Preservation of Painting and Sculpture" by F. David Martin. I found particularly interesting the following: Konstan's essay, which argues that the aesthetic is more properly located in the character of an autonomous tension-filled object than in aesthetic response or aesthetic intention; Kanke's criticism of the emphasis on intention and his defense of the notion that an artwork is simply "something

well-made by humans" (p. 81); Robinson's insightful rethinking of the concept of expression; and Potter's attempt to show that aesthetic value in nature and aesthetic value in artworks are very different.

This book is modestly priced, handsomely produced, and also includes three "photoessays" relating to the problems of definition, expression, and culture and art. I highly recommend it especially for teachers of courses in aesthetics who would like to show students the lively, not dreary character of contemporary aesthetics.

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Joseph H. Kupfer, *Experience as Art*, State University of New York Press, Albany (1983)

The subtitle of this book, *Aesthetics in Everyday Life*, indicates its scope and mission. Its seven chapters include a lucid exhibition of the aesthetic in the classroom, in contemporary violence, in sports, in sexuality, in the drama of decision making and, finally, in our attitudes towards death. Its author's mission is "to demonstrate how the aesthetic is instrumental for personal, social, even moral values." (192)

Kupfer's recurring theme is educating aesthetically, that is bringing

into awareness both the absence of the aesthetic in contemporary living as well as its potential so that individual and community life will be more responsive, autonomous, and integrated in its habits of thinking, acting, and feeling. His social vision is based on an analogy with an aesthetic object. An individual and a community, like good aesthetic objects, should be complete in themselves, complex, and distinctive, with each of their elements reciprocally modifying and enriching each other. Again, like aesthetic objects, individuals and communities exist for their own sakes, not for their extrinsic functions. Our experience of them is intrinsically valuable because it is "characterized by a certain sort of freedom and active receptivity." (71) In his effort to fully articulate this aesthetic analogy in everyday life, Kupfer takes as his intellectual patrons Dewey, very decidedly, Socrates, and Kant.

In reading this aesthetic of everyday life one would do well to reflect on the meaning of the frequently used term "aesthetic." Does the aesthetic include *any* felt quality or relation which a person responds to, discriminates, and integrates? What is the virtue of such an encompassing meaning of "aesthetic?" Some empirical claims deserve more serious reflection. What is the evidence that, fully considered, this is an age of violence? Kupfer is quick to place responsibility for individual moral failings, "because his environment has

failed to educate." (56) This one-sided emphasis on the failed responsibility of society, ignoring individual responsibility, corrodes Kupfer's commitment to individual autonomy. "How can individuals educate and integrate their own as well as their society's violent impulses and actions?" is a question more respectful of Kupfer's basic commitments.

Kupfer offers an aesthetic ideal for making and assessing decisions: "a highest degree of integration but not at the cost of complexity." (159) Freedom, the free play of imagination, which he takes to be integral to this aesthetic ideal requires an allowance for being "unconstrained by practical demands." (159) But since the aesthetic pervades everyday practical life for Kupfer, the conflicts and limits of this free play deserve more thorough attention than he gives it. What morally is the right balance of integration, complexity, and free play of imagination in actions for an individual and society? This is no easy matter to decide. Should moral ideals even over-ride aesthetic ones, as is so commonly assumed? The integration of the aesthetic, the moral, and the practical is one that Kupfer offers me more faith than argument. The complexity within violence, sexuality, and sports seems too rich and varied to be easily integrated in theory or practice. Kupfer's insightful analyses of

these complex everyday matters stimulated in me more free play of everyday and philosophical imagination than integration.

On its own merits, but especially in light of the recent educational commission's report "A Nation at Risk" which charges that "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people" (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 4, 1983, p. 11), this book is timely and provocative.

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W. J. T. Mitchell (ed.), *The Language of Images*, 1980, PP. 307 ; *On Narrative*, 1981, PP. 270, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Both the Volumes are book forms of two special issues of the *Critical Inquiry* (Spring 1980 and Autumn 1980, Summer 1981 respectively) that evolved out of seminars organised by the University of Chicago on two dominantly notorious yet absorbingly interesting concepts of contemporary aesthetics and literary theory.

What is an image ? Derived from the Latin root 'imago' the word means literally a graphic, pictorial representation, a concrete material object and metaphorically extends to regions, such as mental, Verbal imagery, where pictures have no actual

existence. And what is the language of images ? The term language is interpreted in three different senses by the editor : 1) Language *about* images, the words we use to talk about the different visual experiences (or images), 2) images regarded *as* a language for their semantic, syntactic communicative power and 3) verbal language as system informed by images such as graphics, characters or scripts and metaphorically patterning presentation and representation. The volume treats imagery not as the subject of a verbal, narrative or temporalizing interpretation, but as itself the interpretive framework which spatializes the temporal arts of music and literature. Professor Mitchell writes : "One of the most striking features of the modern culture has been the intensive, almost compulsive collaboration between practitioners of the word and practitioners of the image..... (as) we inhabit a world which is so inundated with composite pictorial-verbal forms." (P.I) In spite of Professor Wellek's repeated warning that as painting and poetry communicate differently, because of the different media they use, no essentialist treatment of art in general is possible, the present volume seeks to set the Renaissance dictum (Aristotelian in origin) *ut pictura poesis* on a new ground of multidisciplinary and experimental researches . The essays included reflect upon the symbolic relationship between verbal and pictorial modern art and literature. They are united "by a concern with the rules for encoding and

deciphering imagery in the various arts and in the structure of perceptions and consciousness. They investigate the ways we interpret imagery, from representational or illusionistic picturing to abstract patterning... from imagery in literal sense to the various metaphoric extensions of the concept of imagery in literature, music and Psychology."

Including Professor Mitchell's own (editorial introduction and) essay "Spatial form in literature : Towards General Theory" there are fourteen essays in the volume all of which are excitingly interesting. Names that dazzle on the pages are Arnheim, Argan Searle and Gombrich where Mitchell himself along with Abel, Synder and Taylor is refreshingly impressive. Abel discovers new kinds of reciprocation between the verbal and visual arts that replace the Renaissance tradition. Nemerok correlates both the modes of cognition and expression with even the musical form. Argan is interested in the institutionalized unification of word and meaning. Gombrich demonstrates the borderlines between the visual image as an objective record and that as a subjective experience. Mitchell revives the classic issue of the formalist critic Joseph Frank and widens the scope of literary space to a general condition of reading and textuality, to the experience and analysis of literature.

The second volume marks a radical conceptual revolution in the term 'narrative' during a few decades past. From

the Aristotelian definition of 'narrative' as a mimesis of human action to its anthropological view as mythmaking and linguistic interpretation as a particular kind of discourse the term has undergone a connotative transformation that still waits for further metamorphosis and sharper interpretative strategy. The present volume sets a model for such further experiments. In the words of the editor "it dramatizes (and, we hope, clarifies) the most fundamental debates about the value and nature of narrative as a means by which human beings represent and structure the world." The contributors are the finest names in the history of contemporary theory—Hayden White, Jacques Derrida, Frank Kermode, Nelson Goodman, Seymour Chatman, Paul Ricoeur, Paul Hernadi, Robert Scholes and four others representing different schools and systems of 20th century science and philosophy : linguistics, analytic philosophy, existentialism, speech act theory, psychoanalysis and anthropology—all of them believing in two common points of unity that narrative is now rescued from the Aristotelian bondage in going far beyond the territory of literature and that 'narrative' is not simply a genre, it is a mode of knowledge.

White questions the authority for modern historiographers. Turner and Schafer suggest that wishes, fantasies and dreams are the mainsprings of human action and, therefore, the sources of art. For Turner cultural performances generated by ritual are narratives. Paul

Ricoeur presents a Heideggerian concepts of "narrative time" by suggesting that all narratives reflect the existential nature of time and confirm the analysis of time as a structure of existence. Chatman's view of narrative as a discourse distinguishes between a sequence of events and the discourse which presents them. All discourse involves time while the internal structure of all narratives is temporal. Goodman is unwilling to accept the characterization of narrative as the peculiarly temporal species of discourse citing examples from painting which tells a story but has no temporal sequence. The difference between narratives and descriptions is not a matter of kind but of degree. While agreeing partially with Goodman Kermode suggests that narrative is a product of two interwoven processes—the presentation of a fable and its progressive interpretation. Derrida rejects the genre-concept of narrative on the basis of his 'law of impurity'. A text's being literary and of a particular genre simultaneously includes and excludes the trait by which it is that kind. Therefore there is the problem of identification.

One might notice, while enjoying very well the intellectual flight of the authors in their theoretical imagination, a laconia of a sort of practical guidance as to distinguish clearly the narrative from the nonnarrative and secondly, lack of a precise sense of knowledge of which narrative is a mode. What exactly is the

kind of knowledge we get when we apply the concept of narrative to the real world? But perhaps, the lack of this precision is the very essence of the grandeur of the concept that the varieties of investigations undertaken in the volume exhibit.

Professor Mitcheel must be complimented for presenting us the volumes that look spectacular and contain miracles.

A. C. Sukla

John Skorupski, *Symbol and Theory : A Philosophical Study of Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology*, Cambridge university Press, London, Pbk, 1983, PP. XV + 265.

The very title of the book suggests the multidisciplinary status of the author's probe into the concept of 'symbol' that has been constantly troubling philosophers, social anthropologists and literary theorists and practioners as well as the visual artists and the critics of the arts. Recently Hazard Adams has brought out a marvellous book *Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic* with the University of Florida Press which exhaustively deals with the concept of symbol in literature right from the writings of Kant to the present day existentialist—Paul Ricoeur. The central focus of the present work under review is on what is called the intellectualist conception of religion and magic in traditional cultures. The author examines i) how this conception can be made plausible and how it relates to

various philosophical issues involved in the understanding of traditional cultures and ii) the alternative conceptions of the nature of religion and magic to be found in social anthropology that take the idea of symbolic meaning as their key interpretative concept.

The book has three parts : I. The Framework of Belief, II. Ritual Action and III. The Framework of Belief : Intellectualism with an appendix on Relativism and Rational Belief. The first part traces and assesses the meaning of 'ritual belief' and its relation to 'ritual action' as approached conflictly by several powerful thinkers such as Wittgenstein and Durkheim. The second part analyzes critically the concept of ritual as a symbolic and communicative action with ample illustrations from the actual rituals and the writings of Durkheim and Frazer. The third part concentrating upon the relation between scientific and traditional modes of thought demonstrates the way ideas from recent philosophy of science have affected the intellectualist comparison of these two kinds of thought offering finally an account of 'traditional' (or primitive) religious beliefs as resulting from this 'intellectualist' approach. The Princi-

pal authors invoked in this part are Durkheim, Horton and Lévy-Bruhad.

What is remarkable about the book is not any decisive conclusion that the author proposes to offer. It is rather the masterly conceptual control over the theories he analyzes which impresses the reader highly. The thesis, though an interdisciplinary work, is more philosophical than anthropological as more reflective than experimental simply because the author is a philosopher and not a sociologist to base his observations on fieldworks. Skorupski deserves our high admiration for two distinct qualities : he makes us aware of the vast area and critical implication of the concept and function of symbol and secondly, intensifies his researches within a framework the limits of which he decides very wisely. Therefore, the elimination of the context of structural theories of myth from the book enhances its depth and intensity without any damage of dignity in any case.

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