

TECHNIQUE AND INNER FORM*

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EXTERNAL and internal form cannot be separated; they are one. External form unfolds from the center of a work of art; the whole inner substance, when objectified, is nothing more than the external form.

An old misconception of this simple truth has given us the phrase "to read between the lines." When we attempt to do this we believe that we are penetrating deeper into an art than the myopic person who stops short at the surface. Those who rely on such an approach resort to an easy substitute for reading what lies in the lines themselves, being unable to get much from what is actually written down. If we permit ourselves the liberty to read between the lines we may easily find just the opposite of what is in them. The unity of a work of art needs to be supplemented by no profound interpretations; it is all there in the lines, not between them—in the external form, which is the only natural embodiment of the form of the work at the center.

The means of objectifying works of art are tangible sounds, colors, metals, etc., and their attributes. The strength, the singular energy of these means lies precisely in the degree of perfection to which they develop all that is contained in the internal substance. Art is the result of converting internal substance into external form by tangible means; when this has been accomplished, the internal form finally consists of nothing more or less than the external form.

Such absolute values as a work of art possesses exist in the mind of the artist while he is still concerned with its conception. Once externalized, the composition immediately takes on a relative value for the audience. Art is, in a sense, an agreement established between creator and spectator. A musical, pictorial or poetic work may affect one person profoundly and another not at all but

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everyone who listens to or looks at something that has been created establishes a relationship between himself and the object.

However, the varying degrees of mutual understanding between spectator and author leave the work of art unaffected in respect to one matter, the interpenetration of its external and internal form. To try to separate these is like trying to put a fine scalpel between sense and technique—an operation which would enable us to believe that Stravinsky might express his meaning within the technique of Beethoven. Technique is nothing more than the vivid result of a particular idea. If the idea changes, the technique is compelled to change with it. Technique is, in fact, the idea itself converted into a stable value. When a new technique is imposed on us we may be sure that an irresistible idea has also been imposed—an idea that has not heretofore belonged to us, that has in no sense been ours. Those who borrow technique have no ideas of their own, or else they have been obliterated by the borrowing. In the art of music they should confine themselves to the role of performers; they have nothing but the ability to perform—very literally—the work of others.

Our music schools have a large supply of the technique of other people. Students are artificially put through someone else's process, Beethoven's, Debussy's or Schönberg's. But Beethoven, Debussy and Schönberg are valuable precisely because their work has been evolved by no such unauthentic means.

It is only authentic work that has validity or any inherent reason for being. Validity in art might be defined as the result of a vital interest on the part of the author which is transmitted to the person to whom he addresses himself. It is obviously impossible to extract something vital from an already exhausted process. After a unique creation there remains no margin of vitality; Palestrina exhausted Palestrina, Wagner exhausted Wagner and Debussy exhausted Debussy.

A student of the scientific world must know all previous steps and discoveries in order to verify a contemporary experiment; in industry, the inventor and the engineer must know everything that has already been found and achieved in their field in order to improve on it. In art, one must know all previous discoveries and processes as a safeguard against the danger of repetition.

It will be readily granted, for example, that to avoid repeating or falling under the influence of Bach, he should be comprehended, rather than ignored, as part of the world we inherit. No personal vitality of any significance will suffer by such contact.

The creative artist is a condenser of the energies in the universe he inherits. He is an individual who, in addition to his own vital qualities, has the imperative ability to express them. His works are an influence on the time to which they are addressed. The Greeks were benefited by their Parthenon and the Aztecs by their pyramids because these were products created out of their own vitality—a vitality restored to them by their artists in a new and stable form. It is impossible to conceive of the Greeks expressing their internal sense by carefully borrowing the external forms of the Aztecs or the Egyptians.



When man first made music it was out of a spontaneous necessity that resulted and was satisfied in musical terms. Later music developed into a custom, thus meeting a permanent demand. It was after this happened that it became a product—and then there arose all the problems of *producing* music. Facing the need for a more developed music, the musician sought increasing knowledge of those elements and processes required to solve the initial necessity adequately.

Thus music became the solution of a problem. A problem of production, exactly like the problem of clothes for man. At first protection of the body was a necessity; clothes satisfied that. An instinct led the primitive to devise cloth, to prepare leather, etc. Clothing became a custom that required a continuous production. Then man sought the fundamental elements and processes to satisfy this demand—he invented weapons with which to kill animals, ways of putting together vegetable material, of preparing and making it into thread, of weaving, and then of designing his clothes. Thus they became the solution of his problem.

The problem of making music comprises, as does every other, first, a knowledge of its elements, then the setting of the problem and finally, its solution. In any authentic solution of the artistic

problem, the conversion of its physical elements (exterior), into a work of art is accomplished by an individual (interior) energy. Art is always an individual phenomenon, making of interior and exterior an indissoluble entity. An algebraic problem is different in that both the elements and the solution are external phenomena independent of the individual.

Moreover, while an algebraic equation is always solved in the same way, in music the same problem meets no single and inevitable solution. It is possible to obtain, nevertheless, if not identical, at least similar solutions in music. Indeed elaborate systems have been devised to realize this very purpose.

Musical usages have been passed on from generation to generation. Even in primitive society the teaching of music to meet a social demand has been imperative. The young were taught the musical elements, to set their problems (which were nearly always of a magical character), and to solve them. They could be trained to do the last because it made little difference that there had been previous similar solutions.

Now, in our time, the young apprentice is deliberately taught to do the same three things. But should we not realize that our condition has changed? A great deal has been written, we possess a great accumulation of music. We neither need nor want much more of the same. That different people can obtain similar results no longer interests us.

Instead therefore of teaching our apprentice today the same three things, let us concentrate on the first two. Let him see the elements of the problem; secondly let him be helped to set it for himself, to perceive the different forms possible and to visualize the different results. But let him in no way be taught to solve the problem. The known devices and rules for solution lead to results that are too much alike and therefore useless.

Let the young apprentice be simply put in a workshop. Here emphasis should be laid on his knowledge of the tools and materials. He should be shown what has been possible with them up to the present, what has been achieved with them. The potentialities of the materials and the use of the tools are infinite.

Thus only can our new musical problems be solved in the direction of the unlimited.