MELIKAPHKHAZ #61 :: Prepared for SFPA by Lon Atkins, 9942 Voyager Circle,

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Today's date is November 6, 1977. This magazine heartily endorses ZEN AND

THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE. (Thank you, Stven.)

Japanese thought, more than any other nationality I've yet observed, seems most concerned with underlying form. Those of you who've read ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE will recognize the concept of underlying form. Pirsig calls it the "classic mode of understanding."

The direction I want to go here is toward esthetics. For you who've not yet read the book, let me illustrate the direction by quoting Pirsig.

"There is a classic esthetic which romantics often miss because of its subtlety. The classic style is straightforward, unadorned, unemotional, economical, and carefully proportioned. Its purpose is not to inspire emotionally, but to bring order out of chaos and make free the unknown known. It is not an esthetically free and natural style. It is esthetically restrained. Everything is under control. Its value is measured in terms of the skill with which this control is maintained."

With this description, Pirsig isolates a kind of pure thought-beauty. The Japanese define their esthetics almost exactly as Pirsig does. I've been aware of this kind of beauty for a long time, as have we all. In my case, the fascination was manifested as a love of math, logic, relationship. Chess, physics. computers. Even poetry, though this transcends classic esthetics.

The Japanese game of Go is an extraordinarily clarified form of this esthete. The stones may only be placed on a predefined set of geometric points. Their relationship is what decides the game. Within this relationship two forces strive, each to contain the other. The patterns produced in this striving reflect Japanese esthetics well.

One need not even know the game to see the geometric patterns. To see the underlying form, one needs knowledge of the game. It is the very simplest to learn of all the great games. The use of this simplicity in classic esthetics I'll return to later.

Go may be envisioned as a growing force field. The element of growth is much more important in Go than in chess. As a chess game progesses, the pieces develop and expand their scope. The interplay of forces increases. Soon, however, exchanges and pawn-locks diminish the number of force interplays. A strong chess player takes one of two routes: he focuses the forces at his disposal to create a breakthroughof catastrophic proportions or he uses this same focusing mechanism to establish and maintain a significant superiority in opportunity. This last style is called "strategic" and often results in endgames. Both styles may transpose into each other anytime.

If chess is characterized by a focusing, Go is characterized by a dispersion. A unit is added to the board, adding force, with each move. The battlefield is wide and deep. The effort to exert maximum control over such a large area produces dispersed patterns with many local nodes of power. The shape and placement of these local nodes relates to the larger issue of board control. In the meaningful growth of local patterns is the greater pattern — the beauty.

strong player choses to fight his local battles in such a way as to increase his total board control. Each stone does this. Note that the apprehension of overall structure is more important than winning every local battle. Pattern is crucial. Pattern can control the board, impose an order, meet

critical proportions, waste no stone, define its system.

A beautiful game is economical. The pattern established to win is restrained and effective. It has not given itself to local indulgencies, but has arrived straightaway at global control. The more beautiful games are more so.

I like Go. I see in the game a statement that amplifies Pirsig's paragraph. In the classic esthete, beauty increases as the significance of the statement about the structure contained within the structure grows.

By this, I mean that the organization of the classic statement is itself the mode of communication. Pirsig said something like this. Classic beauty is concerned with structure, and the best structure is that which says the most.

This concern with structure means that classic beauty clusters to the extremes -- generalizations and significant special cases. These are the areas of interest in a structure. The literature of Go illustrates these areas at great length.

There is another point here that needs to be made. The beauty in a structure is that which transcends the specific structure choosen. One may need the illustration to illustrate the greater thought, but it is that greater thought that determines the beauty and meaning.

Because of this, structure in art tends to be economical when expressing the classic esthete, inorder to minimize diversion from the beauty itself. It is degree of control that determines economy of structure.

That was my first stopping point. Getting there allows me to get at another question that's bothered me for years -- a question that has poked up its head in discussions of rock'n'roll versus the more formal musics; a question that appears in comics versus literature debates; a question that asks if Chandler's THE LONG GCODBYE is just detective fiction while Mailer's AN AMERICAN DREAM is Literature.

This question relates to structure. I most often see it as an assumption that sophistication of structure is an indication of artistic value. The simple chords and direct words of 8ob Dylan's songs are used as evidence that he is himself simple -- and that his work is simple, trite, "just posture."

All this comes out of the importance of structure to the classic esthete. Structure is the mode of expression. Sophistication of structure extends along a very lengthy axis. The technicians of centuries have extended it by their labors toward technique and its perfection.

I note here briefly, as a point of perspective, that the classic esthete considers technique alone as bankruptcy.

be clear that structure itself is not unique to the clasic esthete. Everything may have some structure read into it. The romantic esthete uses structure as a method of containment. Structure affords an approach, both for the artist and the partaker.

In this sense, structure is a frame. What it bears is the esthetic content. The implicit content is classic beauty. The adornment is romantic content. To return to the game of Go, which I set up as an example of classic esthetics, we may find an element of romantic esthetics as well.

This occurs within the context of the game itself. It concerns the players and their circumstances. (A good example of how this is may be found in Nobel Laureate Y. Kawabata's THE MASTER OF GO.) The game becomes an expression of deeper conflicts. Human ones. If it contains classic beauty, so much the better. At the time of creation, it was a romantic work.

The romantic content that structure bears is emotion, sensory stimulation, physiclogical response -- and dreams. The core of this admits to no structure. It pertains to state. And what is not obvious outside of the romantic context: that the relationships between these states are themselves states.

of the romatic esthete is transcendent of these states in the same manner that the classic esthete transcends structure.

Now it happens that in the romantic expression, structure may easily be subordinated to content of adornment, for this content is where the principle beauty being developed lies. When this happens, the structure is often routine, worn and familiar.

impede romantic expression at all. But it provides the classic critics a target they cannot resist. Thus comes the unidimensional evaluation. A classic evaluation of a romantic work is meaningless. (As is the obverse.)

To continue with Japanese analogs, let us go to Zen. I won't presume to tell vou what Zen is, because I can't. The dictionary and encyclopedia will fail, for they will describe the outward manifestations only. (And perhaps give a few koans.)

I pick Zen because I doubt that you will attack its existence. Yet I also doubt that anyone in SFPA, even George, will claim to understand it. Are we Zen masters?

My efforts to penetrate Zen began about six years ago. They spaned an intense period of fifteen months and then subsided into an interest more reflective than active. What I did find was an understanding of Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty.

No. not an understanding. A clarification; an elevation. Whereas before I had related Heisenburg to wave mechanics, and thence to all physical science and its logical mechanisms, now I saw the Uncertainty Principle as a consequence of the anima.

You see, Heisenburg had recognized the limitations of structure in dealing with the universe. His was different from Lobachevskv's approach. Where Lobachevshy used logic itself in postulating a non-Eulidean geometry, Heisenburg went straight to the heart of the matter and dismissed structure itself. Structure has its absolute limits.

Zen also cuts against the romantic esthetic. It uses the same relentless primitivism to pound emotion and sensation into mirage. In the end. Zen must reestablish the very things it destroys. To use Pirsig's terms, Quality is that thing which Zen will show us after it has demolished those constructions that blind us.

This Zen interlude has been more for me than for you. For that, I must apologize. The point I meant to get at is just that neither a classic or romantic esthete alone can explain (or encompass) the world of art, of beauty.

Each is incomplete.

That incomparably-patterned championship game of Go finds its highest beauty in the playing, and that entails the great application of both worlds.

The weakness in its retelling is the absence of romantic beauty, for records are dry. A pure romantic sees a jumble of black and white stones.

And so a pure classicist casts his eye upon a poem and sees a meter and rhyme structure that has long been established. It offers no new insights into form, and the classicist rejects it as a work of perhaps historical, but little present, interest.

old. Yet I read the sonnet, not for form, but for its other meaning.

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temporate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:
Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;
And every fair from fair sometimes declines,
By chance of nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Here, too, is where the classic and romantic meet.

And now, the funnies:

Q: How does Sauron keep his troops informed of the chain of command?

A: Orc charts.

Is art merely an extension of the classic esthete?

Is it the classic esthete which sees economy of expression as a virtue?

The mathematicians call it "elegance."

If this is so, expression in the shortest permissable form is the ultimate.

But art never says it as concisely as a hierarchal logic diagram,

does it?

Or does it?

You know that art deals with emotion. Emotion owes no allegiance to logic, does it?

Then, perhaps, if art must express itself through inventions of logic —— like words —— it is a high act of creation to plant emotion in the interstices of our logical matrices so that it blooms forth in the garden of understanding.

Some such flowers bloom brighter than others.

They have delved deeper into the nourishing interstices. They glow with a greater concentration of meaning.

Is this not elegance?

Is this not art?

-LON