

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "ART MEANS WORK"?
(A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THE A.I.M. STATEMENT)

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Feldman's statement of values and commitment, "Art in the Mainstream" (1982a), reacquaints us with a crucial ideological concept, work.

Art means work. Over and above creativity, self-expression and communication, art is a type of work. This is what art has been from the beginning. This is what art is from childhood to old age.

Through art, our students learn the meaning and joy of work--work done to the best of one's ability, for its own sake, for the satisfaction of a job well done. There is a desperate need in our society for a revival of the idea of good work. Work for personal fulfillment; work for social recognition; work for economic development.

Work is one of the noblest expressions of the human spirit, and art is the visible evidence of work carried to the highest possible level. Today we hear much about productivity and workmanship. Both of those concepts have their roots in art. We are dedicated to the idea that art is the best way for every young person to learn the value of work.

What is work? And how is it that art is called the best example of good work? To seek the meaning of work in other than dictionary definitions or the artistic process (Day, 1982), we need to look at work as it exists within social life, in its contextual relationship to other meanings and values in everyday existence.

WORK AS CRAFT AND WORK AS LABOR

Work is purposeful action, guided by the intelligence. Humans have always done things to maintain themselves; they have always made things. What, then, is "good work"? With the rise of the industrial economy, work has become differentiated according to its social and economic exchange value. In his critical analysis of work in the twentieth century, Harry Braverman (1974) shows that this differentiation results in two meanings of work: work as craft and work as labor.

Work as craft is exemplified by the style of living of the self-employed proprietor in charge of the entire process of production, e.g. the life of the artist, artisan, craftman, farmer, tradesman, or professional. Each of these individuals makes a useful commodity that is sold for its value to its purchaser. By and large, divisions in the process of production are between individual makers, that is, different people do different craft specialties.

On the other hand, there is work as labor, exemplified by the wage-earner who sells his or her labor power for a period of time. In work as labor, the process of production is divided requiring the laborer to fragment his or her intelligence and sensibility into separated mental or manual skills. Individual laborers neither know of nor control the entire production process. Further, the process of production orders specific skills hierarchically; mental skills, such as designing or managing, are paid more than are manual skills, such as assembly or typing. Whether one is a manual or mental laborer, the fragmentation of the production process pro-

hibits the individual from achieving that unified intelligence and control which typifies work as craft.

Educational practice has historically, derived its models of organization from industrial management practices (Nasaw, 1979); so it is not surprising that the concept of work as labor is evident in schooling practices (editor's note; refer to Beyer in this issue). The implicit fragmentation of individual intelligence into bits of mind and body skills can be seen in the logic behind behavioral and performance objectives. Art educators have been as likely as other educators to rely on this model, even while their discourse and theory talk in terms of work as craft. It is that contradiction between practice and rhetoric that I want to draw attention to here. I think that the notion of "good work" presented in the A.I.M. Statement perpetuates that contradiction.

The A.I.M. Statement draws upon the middle-class American belief in the Work Ethic - person's moral and social commitment to gainful and productive contribution within the world of economic exchange. The character of work is defined by this ethical commitment as well as in the style of living exemplified in the activity called art. Although art is associated with a model of work as craft, in the practice of many public schools, art is probably closer to the model of work as labor.

The model of work as labor dominates in common sense understanding in most people's everyday life, and in most educational practice. I do not refute that art exemplifies work as craft. But I do refute the simplistic notion that work as craft serves an "antidote" to work as labor, which the A.I.M. Statement seem to imply. To simply posit work as craft as the answer to the inadequacies of work as labor is to underestimate the ideo-

logical dominance of work as labor, and its connections to the common sense understanding of the Work Ethic.

ART AS WORK AND ART AS PLAY

The A.I.M. Statement's focus on art as work reflects the desire to improve the current status of art in the school curriculum. Its devalued position has resulted from defining art as opposite to work (work as labor). For those whose everyday reality is a job structured by work as labor, even the experience of work as craft (art) takes place outside of job time, within the space of leisure time pursuits including hobbies and entertainments. Art is not work (as labor); it must be--even in its sense of work as craft--play. The roots of our economic, social and ethical reality intrinsically designate a secondary place to culture (art) in the "natural" order of things. Work signifies the primacy of meeting life's economic necessities. Play signifies what one does for its own sake and for pleasure and is separate from the necessity of survival. Our common sense understanding of the secondary value of culture is based on the idea of the surplus of production; culture is produced when the necessities of life have been met and there are still resources, time and human energy left for something more. We are taught this ideology from earliest childhood: "First do your work, then you can play."

The social implications of this organization of human activity are immense. The hierarchical relationships of work and play, or economic value and cultural value, translate into patterns of social organization and cultural dominance. Groups who are able to achieve mastery over economic necessity are those who are more likely to engage in cultural activity. The more one's life is free from economic necessity, the more one is free to engage in those activities which are playful. In turn, the education

of different classes reflects the extent to which their lifestyle is seen to be devoted to work activity (meeting economic necessity) or play (cultural activity).

Certain aesthetic theories, eg. Schiller's, define art and aesthetic experience as play, as distinguished from work (Hein, 1968). Such theories typically view aesthetic experience as activity for its own sake, pleasurable in and of itself. The problem with such a theory is its inadequacy to account for the social and economic privileges that enable a lifestyle focused upon aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience seen as play tends to exclude aesthetic experience related to a lifestyle concerned with meeting economic necessity. As the basis for art education, aesthetic play theories have demonstrated their problematic nature: in schools where social and economic conditions are adequate, art as play is permitted. But it is not surprising that art as play is considered useless and even impertinent to those groups whose lives are more closely tied to a laboring existence. Art as play may be a fine model for those groups who are able to achieve the required distance from economic necessity, but it can also be a theory that effectively disenfranchises those groups who are unable to achieve that distance.

The work - play division is also manifest in the hierarchy of the individual arts. Crafts are placed at the bottom and the fine arts at the top: those arts more closely related to practical needs are considered less aesthetically valuable than those objects whose function is more closely related to contemplation, purely aesthetic pleasure, and other activities that require a situation far removed from survival concerns. As times have become less prosperous, it is no wonder that art education based on a play

theory seems expendable. Economic necessity comes first and culture comes second in that "natural" order of common sense understanding. And in times such as these, the decisions between those groups who can afford art as play and those who cannot, become more rigidly drawn.

PERPETUATING OLD CONTRADICTIONS

In A.I.M.'s praises of "workmanship and productivity" and "good work that serves both the individual and the economy" are imbedded the ideological dilemma of craft and labor that has been discussed above. Here is the same contradiction that has existed in art instruction since it was first introduced into the public school curriculum more than a century ago. The A.I.M. Statement sees work as "done to the best of one's ability, for its own sake, for the satisfaction of a job well done ... for personal fulfillment." But it also seeks work as "for social recognition" and for "economic development", and for "serving the goals of productivity and workmanship that are lamentedly lacking in current industrial circumstances." As the society and political economy are now organized, I find it impossible to imagine how we can expect all individuals to have equal access to work that offers personal development. That ideal has been invoked before in art education, in the persuasive rhetoric that brought art - as manual training - into the public schools of the late nineteenth century. Educational leaders-cum-businessmen of that time saw art as a way of disciplining and training a skilled workforce of industrial laborers. Their romantic rhetoric emphasized the fostering of a generation of ethical, disciplined, self-reliant artisans. In practice their approach to education resulted in the first generations of increasingly specialized, dependent wage earners-cum-consumers. It is disappointing and alarming to see Feldman's nostalgic invo-

cation of those past goals as a model for today's art education. Feldman had admitted elsewhere that his ideas derive from those of such early industrial-age romantics as John Ruskin (1982b). But I would remind Feldman that the historical, social and class circumstances of Ruskin's prescriptions may not pertain to those of this post-industrial age. We must consider Ruskin's ideas within the social and class context that afforded him a lifestyle of relative comfort and freedom from economic necessity. That qualification extends to the ideas and projects of Ruskin's followers, such as William Morris, and in America, Gustav Stickley. Their experiments in trying to combine the ideals of work as craft with commercial success in an economy based on work as labor ended in failure. The fine materials and workmanship and the stylistic characteristics of their aesthetic, were attractive to and affordable for only a small group of upper-class clientele.

Our society is at a different social and historical moment. To simply reiterate a simplistic myth of the early industrial age - even with heart-felt commitment - is not going to provide us with a realistic understanding of the social and economic context of art education today. We cannot afford to follow a romanticized model of an idyllic world that imagines everyone can achieve the ideal of work as craft. The challenge before us is to find, and then develop practices from, a meaning of good work that realistically considers the social and economic structure - and the ideological dynamic - in which art education functions today.

The A.I.M. Statement's endorsement of good work is significant; not as a guide that shows us a clear direction to follow, but for its manifestation of the social and economic contradictions that must be critically addressed if we are to forge a path toward realistic and effective art education for this society. It is that these contradictions have been

exposed and my critical reflection prodded that I am most appreciative.

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