

*'If I have been imitative, that is a valid criticism'.*

J. Johannsen

*'Drink cranberry juice for breakfast; it's modern to be different'.*

U.S.A. advertisement

Among the younger generation there is a sort of bitterness. A resentment, that the work of the pioneers is over now. As if they were unwilling to play a lesser part themselves. The romance of revolution is appealing, certainly. But the revolution finished twenty years ago. And *still* the young men of today behave like revolutionaries. Their attitude suggests that they have illimitable resistance to overcome — that they are pioneers fighting for a new-found cause.

There is a curious naïvete about their whole behaviour. As if they thought the only advances that were worth while were those made by inventors. The idea, all. And its development, nothing. An attitude we should ascribe to children, if we did not know whom it concerned.

Certainly it's always fun to play at soldiers. But there's no time for fun when there is serious work to do. The work of this generation, and of succeeding generations, will be work of refinement. Work that must proceed slowly, doggedly, methodically. There are no longer battles to be fought. And yet our young men are being trained to fight them. They are absorbing all the attitudes of the previous generation — they are being armed with the same weapons that their fathers fought with. The story of the pioneer years is too fascinating — too captivating. Our students learn it, absorb it, and then try to live it themselves.

The action of the pioneers produced such wonderful results, that we can't believe that equally wonderful results *can* be got by any other method. We imagine that there is one way to struggle for modern architecture — and that is the way used by the pioneers. We are learning as a son learns from his father. Not to progress, but to be the same. But for what we have to do, we are learning wrongly.

We learn to admire the great figures. And with our admiration grows the idea that each one of us might too, someday, be a great figure of this sort.

At the beginning, the revolution was the work of a very few. And it is of the few that we are conscious. We learn to hero-worship. Probably we choose our particular favourite from among the giants. And the whole time we are absorbing the idea of architecture as the work of individuals. An idea that comes down to us from the renaissance.

The cult of the hero, of the great man. Monographs are written — we hear of the building as a personal monument to its architect — all the buildings we ever get to know are by a handful of individuals.

In schools the competitive spirit is fostered, even if unconsciously. 'Your building is rather like Smith's', your colleagues remark smilingly. And next time you rack your brains so as to be different from the others. You develop a personal style. After seeing the styles of the master-pioneers you have the impression that every architect must have his style — at least if he is to be great.

*The great architect.* The most damaging idea in modern architecture.

It is teaching that nourishes this idea. The attitude of magazines. The intellectual climate. You are taught to be extreme — told to follow a master (as if you wouldn't anyway). You are convinced that the only way to bring architecture to the world, is to bulldoze your way through the Philistines, flying your personal flag.

The architecture of the individual. An idea five hundred years old. The idea of men who had only just found their individuality — their personal liberty — their character as men.

And if it is education that is at fault in this, how can it be remedied?

Is the fault in what is taught? Or in the way it is taught? (Careful. Are you sure there is a difference?)

Well, what *is* taught, exactly? And how? 'Look at the work of x, of y, of z. This is modern architecture. Now you go and do the same'. Day after day we look at the same work of the same few pioneers. That is what and how we are taught architecture. Of course it is not put over, crude, like that. In fact our teachers are convinced of their broadmindedness. They are showing us the good architecture of the last fifty years, making but few remarks, letting us see the various manifestos that were published: And we are allowed to draw our own conclusions. Indeed we are asked to do so. Nothing is forced upon us. Because that is the whole point of this particularly liberal system of education. A mockery. We are shown things in a way that influences our architectural character as stringently as if it were a set of rules. We are not taught to be free, but are constrained to be like our teachers. The materials we use may well be different, our way of planning may not be the same, but everything we do we *shall do with the spirit of pioneers*. And it is a spirit that is *no longer* any good to us, now.

Why do we continue to be convinced that this education is a liberal one, when it moulds us as surely as the severest doctrine. Of course it moulds us. Any system of education will mould us in this way. We cannot be taught to be unbiased. If the education is liberal, we shall not be free, but liberal. We shall not be free from bias, but biased towards freedom. Automatically we are slaves to the system of our teachers.

And the time for being liberal is over. Unless we want to submit to visual anarchy, we must face the future. And the facts. That, however we teach, we are teaching *something*. What is the 'something' to be, now?

We must take the accent off the pioneers. Students have become pioneer conscious. When modern architecture is shown to them, it should be shown as something accomplished. Not as 'Look, isn't it wonderful that we have achieved this — here is how we did it'. If what there *is not* were shown to them, it would be clear that what we need, now, are refinements; not a further wave of pioneers.

When you show students the work of the Chicago school, don't do it with cries of admiration, pointing at what it superseded; do it pointing at what came after, at the refinements made, at *further* refinements that can still be made.

And similarly, when you make the facts of the renaissance available to students, the accent should not be on the work of 1430, 'Wasn't it a remarkable change from gothic', but on the high renaissance,

'Wasn't it a remarkable development from Brunelleschi'. The development of the Parthenon from Selinus and Agrigentum. The development of Rheims from St. Denis.

The accent on origins in history has made us aware of the beginnings, always. And this was interesting to the students of the 1920's. But what is interesting to us is development, refinement. In our schools the accent should be on the growth of the high periods — the classical phase — the moment when the culture flowered. If we are to do this for our culture, it is *this* that our students must absorb.

And if we are to succeed in taking our culture to a high point, we must give up our tortured search for novelty. The work of the pioneers was characterised by its newness. One artist did not differ from another in his way of tackling details, but in his whole *idea*. Today, no longer with good reason, this attitude persists. As if by a back door, the feeling has crept in that it is the originality of the man that matters. That, once he has had his original idea, others can use it almost as well as he. So now every worker tries desperately to find something different — a gimmick — a proof to the world that his ideas are fresh and new.

Once there was a need for newness. When things were bad, something new and good was put in place of them. But now that we have the something good, why do we want to throw it away — instead of using it. What the pioneers have made available to us, we must make available to the world. We do not need to be ashamed of their ideas — ashamed that we ourselves are not the great originators. We have in our hands the fundament of a culture. People who have been visually stupid for generations, can be made to see. But not if we decline the responsibility. Not if we prefer, pettily, to invent for ourselves. Like children who want to have their own way of doing things — who are ashamed to learn. We can use the results of the revolution, not to make a few pictures that will hang obscurely, but to surround a civilization with objects that are easy on the eye.

Mondrian's paintings are valuable, certainly. But they can easily be copied. Do not hoodwink yourselves into thinking that because renaissance masterpieces could not be copied, Mondrian's cannot be copied either. The significance of his pictures lies not in themselves — not in that they are unique the way the Mona Lisa is — but in that they were the first. His paintings should occupy the same position in our galleries that Watt's steam engine does in the museum. We are proud to have the relic of a great pioneer, but the relic is not inimitable. It can be imitated and developed. In the



1920's originality was at a premium. But now it is refinement that we demand.

Because of the ease with which his paintings might be copied, artists have been badly scared. They have shied away from the fact, have buried themselves in the search for originality. (Think of the disgrace of making a painting that might be said to be like Mondrian). 'At all costs we must have something different — and then something different from *that* — etc., etc.' As if Watt's successors had gone mad in their search for a new kind of power. 'Steam engines are no good — they have been discovered already. To make us famous too, we must invent a new kind of engine'. And the steam engine would never have been of any use — it would never even have been developed.

The same disease has attacked the whole western world. Newness at all costs. Originality at any price. 'Have you *really* still got last year's model?'.

Perhaps this year's doesn't even work as well — but it is *different*. And that's why I've got it.

The designer has become one of a team of 'Ideas Boys'. He is paid according to the originality of his ideas. A trend fostered by advertising. The ever increasing speed of the fashion cycle. The only useful (saleable) kinds of development are originality and novelty.

And yet this search for novelty is not heart-felt. People do not *have* a wild desire for newness, when it is not imposed on them. People do not get dissatisfied with things simply because they are not new. They get dissatisfied with things because they are not good. *Then* they want a change. The sky is much the same as it was fifty thousand years ago. And still it is agreeable to look at. Wild flowers have hardly changed, and still we pay attention to them. Novelty is not essential. And just so in the things we make. Things that are *well* designed have not been subject to the search for novelty. Bricks, the knife and fork, the sheet of paper, coins. Imagine if everything we made were as well done as the round roman coin. We could be satisfied. There would be no need to throw away last year's model. (And no wish, either).

Certainly it is reasonable to condemn some of the objects of the 'thirties, sometimes. We condemn them because they did not work. They were the prototypes. But there is no sense in condemning them as if we were revolutionaries — it is senseless to condemn the 'twenties in the same way that *they* condemned the nineteenth century. As if we were the pioneers of a new movement. And this is the heart of the matter. Our younger generation would

dearly *like* to be the pioneers of a new movement. The angry young men. Convinced that the only way in which they can establish their ideas is by extremism. They exaggerate. They make figures of themselves. They try to establish themselves as individuals with something new to 'say'.

The method of the pioneers, exactly. But their enthusiasm is misplaced. The revolution was over twenty years ago. Our work must supercede the work of the 'thirties, it is true. But in a different way from that in which *it* superceded earlier work.

Now that the revolution is quite over our method will be different. We shall no longer need to resort to extremism. And not everything we do will be 'new'. *that* work was done years ago.

The search for newness looks at first as though it were a search for better things. As if, somehow, we could make *better* objects than Brancusi. Better and different. But this is not our job at all. Our's is to bring up the standard of the bad. To consolidate matters. To make sure the culture pattern is an overall one — no longer only for the gifted few.

But in the very thought of preparing for the future, lies a difficulty. The trouble of our own self-consciousness. When, in the middle-ages, every workman had the same background and similar ideas, nobody bothered about the obvious fact that he conformed — no-one was anxious lest he lose his individuality. Because the men of *that* time were not examining their own society in an agony of apprehension — were not trying consciously to form a living culture. *Their* culture grew up quite naturally. While with us the process has become a conscious one. We are too much aware that the culture of coming generations lies in our hands.

We are trying to stand outside ourselves — to *watch* ourselves speaking, as it were, and to decide from *outside* how to form the syllables (by watching the movements of the tongue, etc.). A thing that, as you know very well, we generally do from *inside* (by feeling the tongue against the teeth, etc.). And yet we sha'n't say that this self-examination from outside *cannot* be useful to us. Under certain circumstances a mirror might help teach us how to speak — it might show us how the tongue got caught behind the lower lip, for instance.

And anyway we can't escape the mirror. So it is up to us to use it, and to use it well. Even if this cultural introspection *is* unhealthy — what are we to do. At all events it cannot be avoided — it won't do just to bury our heads in the sand.

And when we look at the mess that threatens us, what are we to make of it. Will the mirror really help

us in our difficulties? What is it that makes a culture flourish? Certainly not a collection of brilliant individuals — this we find at the *beginning* of cultures — we must look for something else. If you like, a universal mediocrity (what a nasty way of putting it). We cannot produce, consciously, the few jewels that appear inevitably in every culture. But we *can* avoid the eyesores.

We cannot train for genius. But we can achieve a universal competence — a climate where there is no doubt about which way to do things. There is doubt only at the beginning and end of any culture. In the middle there is agreement.

It is agreement that we are struggling for.

The middle gothic churches are wonderful because not one man who was engaged on them dreamt that they might be different.

So it is agreement that we are after. An education that is uniform. That will eventually produce a generation of designers who all think the same.

And this is *not, not, not* to suppress the character of the man, it is *not* anti-humanist, it is *not* robbing man of his greatest gift, the gift of individual genius.

We are not killing the genius of the few that have it. We are making something of the great majority who don't. You can't take genius away from those that have it — but they are all too rare. They were responsible for the beginnings of our culture (just as Masaccio and Donatello were for their's): but such men are not sufficient to sustain it while it flourishes.

Now we must pay attention to the many — to the poor designers. We must give each a modicum of 'savoir faire'.

We are not anti-humanist. No-one will ever kill the genius of the few who have it. But we must care for those that have it not.

And the modicum of design ability that we can give *them* — will of necessity be uniform.

We cannot assure greatness. So there is no sense in trying to. A system of education that makes the young people 'individual conscious' cannot achieve our aims. Teach them not to be ashamed of uniformity.

Today it is groups that people follow, rather than the individual. Our students will find their strength as leaders when they are together. In agreement. It is then that the people pay attention. The leaders of taste are no longer solitary figures, as was once the case — now it is groups who lead the general fashion. The individual 'creative artist', as long as he continues to exist, will stand apart.

Most of those we teach will not be innovators; they will all think much the same — as they have been taught to think. And plainly it would be stupid to fill men, who are not greatly gifted, full of ideas of individuality. A few pioneers managed to make brilliant use of what they had as individuals. But if we gave every architect his head, if we let every one of them loose inside his individuality, certainly we should end up with a visual chaos. The work of un-gifted students, anxious to be different, should be sufficient warning to us.

Now we shall cater uniformly for the whole society. The days of the minority are over. And just as it is not for a privileged few that we shall work, neither will it be a cultured few who do the working. Architecture and design will pass out of the hands of individuals. And visual education too, will change accordingly. If we could achieve *one* way of thinking about design, how marvellous not only for designers, but for the whole society. Sometimes in the past there have been such occasions. Some societies have been lucky enough (have had highly enough developed cultures) for every member of them to enjoy the good things. Listening and looking gave pleasure, not to a privileged minority, but to the whole society.

Athens, in the 5th. century B.C.

Certain (so-called primitive) african tribes.

So if our culture is to reach maturity, we must not be afraid of uniformity. For where there is no uniformity there is nothing recognisable — a chaos. Indeed it is only uniformity that ever makes us speak of 'A culture' at all.

This is no attempt to mass-produce designers like so many milk bottles. Don't get a false impression.

Certainly standardisation belongs more to our culture than to any previous one. But mainly we are trying to get for ourselves what has been common to all the great cultures of the past (What *must* be common, in fact, to all cultures that deserve the name):

Agreement.

But finally our greatest trouble is that we are worried. And self-conscious. We can see too far. Our culture doesn't have a chance to grow up naturally. Although we can see our tongue caught behind the lip when we look in the mirror, what we don't realise is that it is only *because* we are looking in the mirror that the tongue gets caught at all. When I shut my eyes and do it without thinking, I can manage perfectly. If we could think less about our culture, it might reach maturity more quickly.

Cultures advance and change in leaps and bounds. We have just taken a considerable leap. So for a while things will be stationary. Stationary, while the newness is polished and refined — and standardised. While it is spread from the hundreds to the millions. Remember that for these millions, we want, not objects that are different, but objects that are better.

And when we teach, if we stop insisting (by implication even) that we are the heralds of a new culture, perhaps our students will not be self-conscious any more. If we let them accept, *naturally*, that they have arrived in the middle of a living culture, perhaps they will not think so much of originality, but will be prepared to take things as they are. To progress — not to get out of step — to help things develop.

Perhaps the solution to our chronic self-consciousness lies in the way we teach.