

Pictures, Symbols, and Signs

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insistence that cartoons are not simply frivolous forms of drawings intended for children echoes the call by other readings in this chapter to take images seriously as a form of communication. He suggests that in a visual and "increasingly symbol-oriented" world, comics and iconography could approach a universal language. In fact, it is the very simplicity of comics that may make them an ideal medium through which to introduce composition students to the logic of hybrid rhetorical forms and to impress on them the considerable rhetorical power of abstraction.

Art historian Barbara Stafford labels "Visual Pragmatism for a Virtual World," her introductory chapter to the volume *Good Looking*, a manifesto. Stafford's arguments provide a fitting end to this section examining the image and its rhetoric: Stafford urges humanities scholars still unwilling to regard the visual as anything but ancillary and superficial to think differently about images or become academically anachronistic. In the wake of the visual blitz effected by technology's ubiquity, her appeal rings even more insistently. Stafford's strong language challenges students and teachers of both the visual and the verbal to abandon concepts that only work to impede our ability to function intelligently in this visual world. Stafford, most importantly, challenges teachers to reconceptualize education, to remake our curricula. Her stance toward the visual in our culture is thus, above all, a practical one because she faces the implications of visual technology's explosion head on. Stafford argues for more interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary study, as does the cumulative argument weaving through the other articles collected here. "I believe," she says, "we must finally renounce the institutionalized notion that only the 'pure' study of anything, including images . . . is admirable." The question remaining is whether or not the practitioners of these inherited practices and disciplines are prepared to face such a new reality.

Simple line drawings can give visible shape to patterns of forces or other structural qualities. The drawings in the preceding chapter described the nature of a good or bad marriage or of democracy or of youth as conceived by the person who drew them. Highly abstract social or psychological configurations appeared in visible shape. However, images can also depict the things of our environment themselves, for example, a husband and a wife or a town meeting in a democracy. They commonly do so in a style that is more abstract than the way these persons, objects, or happenings would register on a photographic plate. Images, then, regard the world in two opposite directions. They hover somewhere above the realm of "practical" things and below the disembodied forces animating these things. They can be said to mediate between the two.

THREE FUNCTIONS OF IMAGES

In order to clarify and compare various relations of images to their referents I shall distinguish between three functions performed by images. Images can serve as pictures or as symbols; they can also be used as mere signs. This sort of distinction has been made by many writers on the subject. Some have used the same terms or similar ones, but the meanings they have given them overlap complexly with the distinctions I need for our purpose. Instead of analyzing these similarities and differences, I shall try to define the three terms so tangibly that the reader will know what I mean by them.

The three terms—picture, symbol, sign—do not stand for kinds of images. They rather describe three functions fulfilled by images. A particular image may be used for each of these functions and will often serve more than one at the same time. As a rule, the image itself does not tell which function

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*The drawings and chapter mentioned in this selection can be found in the original volume from which this chapter is reprinted.

is intended. A triangle may be a sign of danger or a picture of a mountain or a symbol of hierarchy. We need to know how well or badly various kinds of images fulfill these functions.

An image serves merely as a *sign* to the extent to which it stands for a particular content without reflecting its characteristics visually. In the strictest sense it is perhaps impossible for a visual thing to be nothing but a sign. Portrayal tends to slip in. The letters of the alphabet used in algebra come close to being pure signs. But even they stand for discrete entities by being discrete entities: a and b portray twoness. Otherwise, however, they do not resemble the things they represent in any way, because further specification would distract from the generality of the proposition. On the other hand, signs possess visual characteristics derived from requirements other than those of portrayal, that is to say, they appear as they do for good reasons. The 1926 international convention on road signs decided that all traffic signs warning of danger should be given a triangular shape. Perhaps the sharpness of a triangle makes it look a bit more like danger than would, say, a circle, but its shape was chosen mainly because it is easily identified in itself and distinguished from other signs. In written language, the variety of letter groups used to designate words serves similar purposes of identification and distinction, and therefore letters and words are, to this extent, signs. Many words fail to fulfill their function well because languages are not created rationally but grow informally and produce accidental, arbitrary, adulterated shapes. Words can be ambiguous; for example, *pupil* refers to schoolchildren and to holes in the eyes, since the original connotation of smallness has been split up into different meanings. Apart from such imperfections, however, the characteristics of signs tend to be selected in such a way as to serve their function. In this sense, they are not arbitrary. The previously mentioned "innate releasing mechanisms" in biology are signs. Konrad Lorenz says of these visual releasers that their simplicity of shape and color makes them distinct in appearance and "improbable" in occurrence, that is, unlikely to be confused with other things visible in the environment.

To the extent to which images are signs they can serve only as indirect media, for they operate as mere references to the things for which they stand. They are not analogues, and therefore they cannot be used as media for thought in their own right. This will become evident in the discussion of numerals and verbal languages, which are the sign media *par excellence*.

Images are pictures to the extent to which they portray things located at a lower level of abstractness than they are themselves. They do their work by grasping and rendering some relevant qualities—shape, color, movement—of the objects or activities they depict. Pictures are not mere replicas, by which I mean faithful copies that differ from the model only by random imperfections.

A picture can dwell at the most varied levels of abstractness. A photograph or a Dutch landscape of the seventeenth century may be quite lifelike and yet select, arrange, and almost unnoticeably stylize its subject in such a way that it focuses on some of the subject's essence. On the other hand, a totally non-mimetic geometrical pattern by Mondrian may be intended as

a picture of the turmoil of New York's Broadway. A child may capture the character of a human figure or a tree by a few highly abstract circles, ovals, or straight lines.

Abstractness is a means by which the picture interprets what it portrays. This precious accomplishment is ignored if one pretends that an abbreviated representation invites the beholder to fill in the missing realistic detail. If this were true, a simply drawn cartoon or caricature would produce a particularly active response of this kind. The assertion is based on no evidence; it is simply inferred from the traditional notion that perception consists in a complete recording of the visual field and that therefore a percept of "incomplete" material will be completed by the mind from the stores of past experience. If this were so, all pictures would be transformed subjectively by the beholder into mechanically faithful replicas. The "incompleteness" would be remedied. But abstractness is not incompleteness. A picture is a statement about visual qualities, and such a statement can be complete at any level of abstractness. To be sure, when the picture is incomplete, imprecise, or ambiguous with regard to these abstract qualities, the observer is called upon to make his own decisions about what he sees. (This is true, for instance, for the inkblots of the Rorschach Test or the pictures of the Thematic Apperception Test, used by psychologists to induce subjective interpretations.)

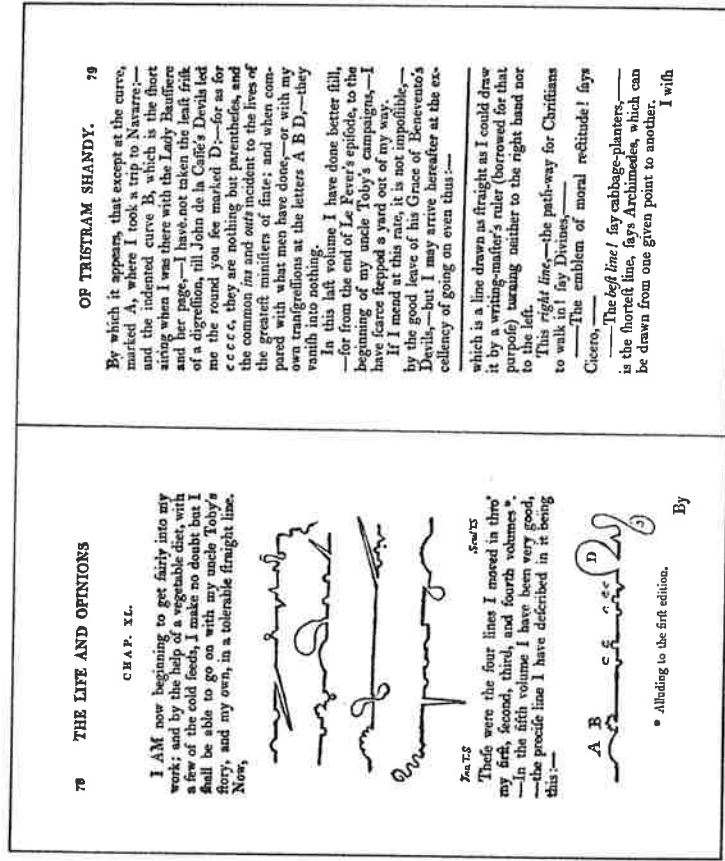
Fortunately, "completion" by "imagination" is all but impossible and the desire to attempt it quite rare. A cartoon is seen at exactly the level at which it is drawn. Its forceful liveliness does not derive from supplements contributed by the observer but is made possible, on the contrary, by the intense visual dynamics of simplified line and color. It is true that the abstract style of such pictures removes their subject matter from physical reality. Human traits and impulses appear, unencumbered by physical matter and free from the tyranny of gravitation and bodily frailty. A blow on the head is an abstract assault responded to by an equally abstract expression of distress. In other words, the pictorial interpretation emphasizes the generic qualities with which all thinking is concerned—a kind of unreality quite different from that of miraculous, superhuman tales, which are generally represented with material bodies whereas the former extract constituent forces from physical substance.

An image acts as a *symbol* to the extent to which it portrays things which are at a higher level of abstractness than is the symbol itself. A symbol gives a particular shape to types of things or constellations of forces. Any image is, of course, a particular thing, and by standing for a kind of thing it serves as a symbol, e.g., if it presents a dog in order to show what the concept *dog* is. In principle, any specimen or replica of a specimen can serve as a symbol, if somebody chooses to use it that way. But in such cases, the image leaves the effort of abstracting entirely to the user. It does not help him by focusing on relevant features. Works of art do better. For example, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's murals in the town hall of Siena symbolize the ideas of good and bad government by showing scenes of struggle and of prosperous harmony; and being works of art, they do so by inventing, selecting and shaping these

scenes in ways that display the relevant qualities more purely than random views of town and country life would. Or, to use another example, Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII is a picture of the king, but it also serves as a symbol of kingship and of qualities such as brutality, strength, exuberance, which are located at a higher level of abstraction than is the painting. The painting, in turn, is more abstract than the visual appearance of the king in flesh and blood because it sharpens the formal features of shape and color which are analogues of the symbolized qualities.

Symbolic functions can also be fulfilled by highly abstract images. The amateur drawings I discussed in the preceding chapter gave visible geometrical shape to the dynamic patterns characterizing ideas or institutions. The arrows by which physicists depict vectors show relevant qualities of forces, namely, their strength, direction, sense, and point of application. Musical notation operates partly by means of symbols; that is, it represents the pitch level of sounds by the structurally analogous location of the notes on the staff. In a similar way, drawings can symbolize a state of mind by translating some of its dynamic properties into visible patterns. Figure 1 shows a page from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, depicting the hero's straightforward intention modulated by a more or less erratic spirit.

FIGURE 1.



IMAGES TO SUIT THEIR FUNCTIONS

Since images can be made at any level of abstraction, it is worth asking how well different degrees of abstractness suit the three functions here under discussion. I will limit myself to a few examples taken from the two extremities of the scale of abstraction. How about highly realistic images? As mentioned before, mere replicas may be useful as raw material for cognition but are produced by cognitive acts of the lowest order and do not, by themselves, guide understanding. Paradoxically, they may even make identification difficult, because to identify an object means to recognize some of its salient structural features. A mechanically produced replica may hide or distort these features. One of the reasons why persons brought up in cultures that are unacquainted with photography have trouble with our snapshots is that the realistic and accidental detail and partial shapelessness of such images do not help perception. It is a problem we shall meet again when we look at the so-called visual aids in education. Faithfulness and realism are terms to be used with caution because a bona fide likeness may fail to present the beholder with the essential features of the objects represented.

The human mind can be forced to produce replicas of things, but it is not naturally geared to it. Since perception is concerned with the grasping of significant form, the mind finds it hard to produce images devoid of that formal virtue. In fact, it is by the structural properties of lines and colors that even some "material" desires are best satisfied. For example, the mechanical faithfulness of artless color photography or painting is not the surest way of arousing sexual stimulation through the sense of sight. Sensuous pleasure is aroused more effectively by the smoothness of swelling curves, the tension animating the shapes of breasts and thighs. Without the dominance of these expressive forces the picture is reduced to the presentation of pure matter. To offer matter devoid of form, which is the perceptual carrier of meaning, is pornography in the only valid sense of the word, namely, a breach of man's duty to perceive the world intelligently. A harlot (Greek, *pornē*) is a person who offers body without spirit.

As symbols, fairly realistic images have the advantage of giving flesh and blood to the structural skeletons of ideas. They convey a sense of lifelike presence, which is often desirable. But they may be inefficient otherwise because the objects they represent are, after all, only part-time symbols. A newspaper reported that one day, some time ago, the Reverend January of the Zion Hill Baptist Church in Detroit took his four-year-old son, Stanley, to view a large mural, which had just been painted in the auditorium of a local school. "I see a train," said Stanley. "That track," said the Reverend January, "is the future coming toward us. The train is this country's unity, far off but bearing down on us." "No," said Stanley, "it's a train."

This disagreement between father and son arose because a train is not a full-time symbol. It is a piece of railway equipment, first of all, and acts as a symbol only by moonlighting—as an avocation, not advertised and therefore not necessarily recognized by the four-year-olds of our time nor by quite a

few of their elders. The more lifelike a piece of sculpture or painting, the more difficult may the artist find it to make his point symbolically. Courbet's painting, *L'Atelier*, of 1855, presented groups of realistically painted persons surrounding the artist himself at work in his studio. The painting was subtitled *une allégorie réelle* and intended to show on one side the people of the practical life and on the other those concerned with feeling and thought, both equally arrested in a state of dreamlike suspension, while the painter alone, vigorously at work on a canvas, held the center as the only person actively dealing with reality. Werner Hofmann, in an extensive analysis of this painting, mentions that "the realists felt the allegorical implications to be superfluous, the symbolists thought them out of keeping with the very robustness of the style." Only by a careful and unprejudiced examination of the whole painting will the viewer come to realize that, for example, the nude woman watching the artist at work in his studio is not only his model, at the realistic level of the representation, but also the muse, the traditional allegory of truth, the fullness of life, all at the same time.

The dilemma becomes particularly poignant when an artist aspires to fantasy and deeper meaning but lacks the pictorial imagination to make such qualities visible. Examples can be found among the more pedestrian Surrealists. There is a painting by René Magritte showing a tediously painted tobacco pipe on empty ground and the inscription: *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*. Unfortunately a pipe is all it is. A similar problem arises from the unskillful use of *objets trouvés* in collages or sculpture. The beholder is confronted with the untransfigured presence of refuse. What he sees may inspire him to think, but the thought is not in the work. Yet, Picasso can evoke the very nature of a bull's head by simply combining the handlebar and the saddle of an old bicycle.

The more particular a concept, the greater the competition among its traits for the attention of the user. This becomes evident when traffic signs, posters, and similar pictorial indicators try to symbolize a limited point by means of a complex image. Martin Krampen has pointed to the example of a snail used in an older pictographic traffic sign to call for a reduction of speed. The fairly lifelike picture of the snail may indeed engage the driver's mind more vividly than the message "Reduce Speed," but Krampen notes that a snail is not only slow but also slimy, easily frightened, etc. Of course, the highway setting helps in picking out the relevant aspect, but the image itself offers no guidance for the selection.

The specificity of an image also calls for correspondingly specific knowledge in the person who is to understand it. Rudolf Modley notes that a traffic sign showing a pedestrian in Western clothing may be puzzling or unwelcome to drivers in a non-Western country and that the picture of an old-fashioned locomotive may let a driver of the young generation expect a museum of historical railroad engines rather than a crossing. Specific characterization can make it easier to identify the particular kind of thing if it is known to the observer but harder to draw forth a more abstract meaning.

At the other extremity of the scale of abstraction are highly stylized, often purely geometrical shapes. They have the advantage of singling out

particular properties with precision. A simple arrow concentrates more efficiently on pointing than does a realistically drawn Victorian hand with fingernails, sleeve, cuff, and buttons. The arrow is also more nearly a full-time symbol and therefore invites the beholder to treat it as a statement rather than a piece of the practical world. However, highly abstract concepts, although narrow in intention, are broad in extension, that is, they can refer to many things. A drawing of two overlapping circles may be a picture of some physical object such as a new type of pretzel or eyeglasses. It may be the ground-plan for a two-ring circus. It may also be a symbol of a good marriage or the brotherhood of nations. Still more generically, it may be meant to show the logical relation of any two overlapping concepts. Which of these meanings is aimed at, only the context can reveal.

This creates a problem in a civilization which constantly throws things together that do not belong together or puts them in places contradictory to their function. All the mobility, transportation, transmission, and communication in our century removes things from their natural location and thereby interferes with their identification and efficiency. An apple makes its point more easily when seen in an orchard or fruit store. Placed in the company of hundreds of other household items, or advertised in the midst of heterogeneous matter, or talked about in places that have no relevance to fruit, the apple must make a much greater effort to be recognized and responded to. A palace or church crowning a hilltop town or introduced by an imposing vista, a triumphal arch placed at the crossing of a star of avenues are defined and helped by their location; whereas a traditional church building buried among New York skyscrapers not only receives no help but is refuted and derided by its setting. We pay for lack of redundancy in the environment by spending a greater effort on identifying the particular item or on making it identifiable.

A highly abstract design that bears little or no obvious resemblance to its referent must be restricted to a unique application or rely heavily on explanatory context. It is the context that will decide whether a cross is to be read as a religious or an arithmetical sign or symbol or whether no semantic function at all is intended, as in the crossbars of a window. It may take a powerful and prolonged effort to endow a simple design with a particular meaning, and even the most determined indoctrination may not exclude unwelcome associations. I remember that when Hitler visited Mussolini's Rome and the whole city was suddenly covered with Nazi flags an Italian girl exclaimed in horror: "Rome is crawling with black spiders."

The simple design of the swastika was sufficiently free of other associations to make it acceptable as a carrier of a new meaning. The imposition was so effective that in time the emblem came visually to contain and exude a highly emotional connotation it did not possess before. To be sure, the design was extremely well chosen. It met the ethological requirements of distinctness and striking simplicity. It conveyed the dynamics of the "Movement" by its tilted orientation in space. The black figure in a white and red setting helped revive the colors of the German Empire and thereby appealed to nationalism. In the Nazi flag, red became the color of revolution, and the black was

frightening like the storm-troopers' shirts. The swastika had the straight-edged angularity of Prussian efficiency, and its clean geometry was, ironically, in keeping with the modern taste for functional design. For the educated, there was also the reference to the Aryan race evoked by the symbol from India. The pressures of the social context did the rest. No wonder a recent writer, Jay Doblin, has credited Hitler, "the frustrated artist," with having become "the trademark designer of the century."

WHAT TRADEMARKS CAN TELL

Commercial trademark designers cannot rely on the powerful social forces that were at Hitler's command. What makes their task all the more difficult is that in most cases they cannot make their designs self-explanatory. The taste and style of our time associates successful business with clean-cut, starkly reduced shape, and the disorder and rapidity of modern living calls for stimuli of split-second efficiency. The problem is that a pattern of high abstractness fails to specify its referent, whereas the identification of a particular company, brand, institution, idea, is the purpose of advertising. Doblin cites experiments to show that the "logotype," that is, the verbal name or slogan presented in commercial design, is identified by consumers more readily than the trademark. In fact, the presence of the trademark may decrease the number of correct responses to the logotype. Doblin concludes that "from a communications viewpoint a trademark, for most companies, is not only a waste of time but can actually become a detriment." Whatever the validity of this argument, it illustrates the peculiar character of highly abstract patterns.

The inability of such patterns to specify a particular application brings to mind similar findings in experiments on the meaning of music. For example, in order to determine whether the "intentions of composers" can be gathered from their works, Melvin G. Rigg played a number of recordings, taken mostly from classical opera, and asked listeners to match them with descriptions listed on a questionnaire as to their generic mood (sorrowful, joyful), their overall subject category (death, religion, love, etc.), and their specific program (farewell, prayer, Good Friday music, spinning song, moonlight, etc.). The listeners did well at the highest level of abstraction but poorly at the lowest. To conclude from that, as Rigg did, "that the intentions of composers usually do not 'get over' in any specific way to the cultural strata of our population" is to misinterpret the nature of music and its relation to specific program content. The cognitive virtue of music derives precisely from the high level of abstractness at which it depicts patterns of forces. These patterns in themselves do not point to any particular "application" but can be made to interpret such instances. Program music, the portrayal of narrative subject matter by sounds, has never been more than an awkward curiosity, exactly because it attempts to depict a particular content through a generic medium. Inversely, in an opera or as accompaniment to a theater play or film, music serves to give shape to the generic inherent in the particular. In the words of Schopenhauer, "music demonstrates here its power and higher aptitude by offering the deepest,

ultimate, and most secret revelations about the feelings expressed in the words or the action which the opera represents, and discloses their proper and true essence. Music acquaints us with the intimate soul of the happenings and events of which the stage gives us no more than the husk and body."

Visual images have similar virtues and weaknesses. Just as Saint-Saëns' music cannot hope to identify *Omphale's Spinning Wheel*, trademarks and other such emblems cannot identify a particular product or producer. Identification can only be obtained by what the men in the trade call "strong penetration," that is, insistent re-inforcement of the association of signifier and referent, as exemplified by religious emblems (Cross, Star of David), flag designs (Canada's maple leaf, Japan's rising sun), or the Red Cross. Therefore, to test the value of trademarks independently of the context that ties them to their owners is like evaluating a diagram on the classroom blackboard without reference to the professor's explanatory speech.

The color blue a lady is wearing may be experienced by an observer as an essential feature of her personality; but that color by itself may in no way invoke the image of the lady. Thus, a good trademark can strengthen the individual character of its wearer by a striking sensory supplement without evoking that reference by itself. When I meet the trademark designed by Francesco Sargola for the International Wool Secretariat (Figure 2) I may not identify it, because its supple, flexible, smooth shapes portray a very generic quality. It has an elegance deliberately chosen to counteract the connotation of stodgy tweeds, but it is not specific to wool. In the proper context, the simple design focuses on these essential and desirable properties in a tangible, concentrated fashion, helpful to the intended message.

A good modern trademark interprets the character of its wearer by associating it with sharply defined patterns of visual forces. The well-known emblem of the Chase Manhattan Bank designed by Chermayeff and Geismar may serve as an example (Figure 3). The inner square and the outer octagon produce a centrically symmetrical figure, conveying the sense of repose, compactness, solidity. Closed like a fortress against interference and untouched by the changes and vicissitudes of time, the little monument is built of sturdy



FIGURE 2.

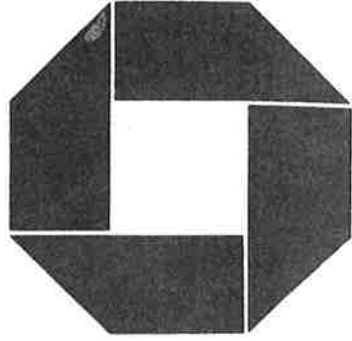


FIGURE 3.

blocks defined by parallel straight edges and simple angles. At the same time, it has the necessary vitality and goal-directedness. The pointed units contribute dynamic forces which, however, do not displace the figure as a whole but are confined within the stable, directionless framework. The antagonistic movements compensate each other to an overall enlivened stillness or add up to the steady, contained rotation of a motor. Furthermore, the four components are tightly fitted into the whole but at the same time preserve an integrity of their own, thus showing multiplicity of initiative, executed by elements, whose individuality is limited, however, to a difference of position in the whole. In addition, the figure is usefully ambiguous in the connection of the four elements. Seen as right-angular blocks with a corner clipped off, the four fit each other like bricks in a wall. Seen as four symmetrical prisms they overlap each other and thereby interlock. The delicate balance between adjoining each other and interacting with each other by cooperative clasp further illustrates the nature of the internal organization.

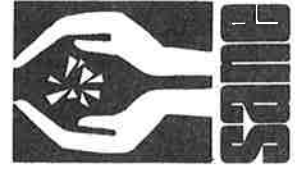
To some extent, so highly abstract an image will always have the chill of remoteness. It cannot give the sensuous fluffiness of wool conveyed by a good color photograph or realistic painting. It cannot show the bustle of the bank, its people, its splendid halls. On the other hand, it need not limit itself to the mere identification of relevant structural properties. Any design has dynamic qualities, which contribute to characterizing the object. Simple shapes can evoke the expressive qualities of suppleness or vitality or harmony. This sort of evocation is indispensable in art. The emblems here discussed dwell curiously between art and the cognitive functions of mere identification and distinction. An emblem may be a perfectly acceptable analogue of the referent for which it stands, and yet it may not intend to evoke its dynamic impact or not succeed in doing it.

This is particularly evident when the referent has strong emotional connotations. Figures 4 and 5 give two examples, the one Ernst Roch's proposal of an emblem for the Canadian World's Fair of 1967, the other designed by Saul Bass for the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. Both are most distinctive and display attractive intelligence in reducing the objects they depict to simply defined visual patterns. Roch's design, in which Leonardo's famous

FIGURE 4.



FIGURE 5.



drawing of the Vitruvian man reverberates, was intended to illustrate the theme of the exhibition: Man and His World. Bass shows protective hands trying to contain an atomic explosion. While both designs focus on essential elements of their subject matter with great precision, Roch's terrestrial globe does not attempt to convey a sense of vastness, and there is no real reaching, embracing, or upholding in the arms, no power in the straddled legs. Similarly in the Bass emblem, the exploding fragments have little destructive power, and the hands may not look actively protective to some observers.

This reduction of expressive dynamics to a mere hint may be exactly appropriate. The principal function of an emblem is not that of a work of art. A painting or piece of sculpture is intended to evoke the impact of a configuration of forces, and the references to the subject matter of a work are only a means to that end. Inversely a design, meant to serve identification and distinction, uses dynamic expression mainly for this principal purpose; just as the three strokes of the Chinese character for "mountain" hint not only at peaks but also at their rising and thereby make the reference a bit more lively. Of course, even the most sober and neutral design can unleash violent passion through the meaning associated with it. But the dynamics inherent in a visual object—in a Baroque painting, for instance—is one thing; the emotions released by it—such as by hammer and sickle—are quite another.

EXPERIENCE INTERACTING WITH IDEAS

Pictorial analogues, I said earlier, fulfill a mediating position between the world of sensory experience and the disembodied forces underlying the objects and events of that experience. A portrait by Rembrandt is a picture, interpreting a particular inhabitant of Amsterdam as a kind of person, characterized by a particular pattern of physical and psychical forces—a man, let us say, battered but upright, vigilant but thoughtful. At the same time, the unknown man from a past century is of lasting interest as a symbol because his image gives animated appearance to those more abstract qualities of oppression and resistance, outward-directedness and inner containment. The same is true for a good "abstract," i.e., non-mimetic work of art. Since it does not portray the external shape of physical objects, it is closer to the pure forces it presents symbolically; but it portrays at the same time the inherent nature of the things and events of the world and thereby maintains its relevance to human life on earth. In sum, every pictorial analogue performs the task of reasoning by fusing sensory appearance and generic concepts into one unified cognitive statement.

How essential it is that these two aspects of the image should complement each other constantly, not only in the arts but everywhere in human thinking, has been pointed out by Goethe in an eloquent passage of his *Theory of Color*:

With regard to figurative speech and indirect expression, poetry has great advantage over all the other ways of language. It can use any image, any relation to suit its own character and convenience. It compares the spiritual with the physical and vice versa: thought with

lightning, lightning with thought, whereby the interdependence of the matters of our world [das Wechseln der Weltgegenstände] is expressed in the best way. Philosophy, too, in its climactic moments, needs indirect expressions and figurative speech, as witnessed by its use of symbolism, which we have often mentioned, both censuring and defending it. Unfortunately, history tells us that the philosophical schools, depending on the manner and approach of their founders and principal teachers, suffer from employing one-sided symbols in order to express and master the whole. In particular, some of them insist on describing the physical by spiritual symbols while others want physical symbols for the spiritual. In this fashion, subjects are never worked through; instead, a disjunction comes about in what is to be represented and defined and therefore also a discrepancy among those concerned with it. In consequence, ill will is created on both sides and a partisan spirit establishes itself.

There are paintings and sculptures that portray figures, objects, actions in a more or less realistic style, but indicate that they are not to be taken at their face value. They make no sense as reports on what goes on in life on earth, but are intended primarily as symbolic vehicles of ideas. The beholder is overcome by the uncanny feeling of which Hegel speaks with regard to the symbolism of ancient oriental art: "Wir fühlen, dass wir unter Aufgeben wandeln" (We have the sensation of wandering among tasks.) Since the picture does not simply interpret life, the beholder faces the task of telling what it symbolizes. Picasso's early painting *La Vie* is called by Wilhelm Boeck a tribute to the secularized philosophical symbolism of art around the turn of the century. Boeck describes this representation of "Life" as follows:

A barefoot woman is standing at the right, her serious face in profile, with a sleeping infant in the folds of her draped garment. At the left stands the graceful nude of a young couple, seeking each other's protection as though suddenly frightened; the man is larger, with the high forehead of an intellectual, the tender woman is all devotion. They face the mother but their glance is turned inward; engrossed in their own destiny, they do not see her, although the index finger of the man's sensitive left hand points emphatically to the child. Behind the foreground figures we see two painted studies: the lower one shows a squatting nude lost in a reverie; the upper one, a seated couple whose attitude echoes that of the couple standing in the foreground.

Clearly, the painter has undertaken to represent an idea of the kind directly expressed as a theoretical schema, for example, in Keats' sonnet *The Human Seasons* or in the riddle of the Sphinx ("What creature goes on four feet in the morning, on two at noonday, on three in the evening?") Clearly also, the painter treads on dangerous ground. Explicitly symbolical representations are common in all cultures. But since they take their principal cue from an idea, the style of the presentation must warn the beholder that he is not in the realm of earthly happenings. On the other hand, in this twilight area between diagram and art, there is always the risk of ideas coercing the life of the image.

The so-called allegory travesties the task of the symbol by illustrating ideas through standardized clichés. Conceptual norm becomes poverty of imagination. Hence the chilling effect of overly cerebral novels, in which unconsummated theorems are draped over the characters as though they were the dummies of a dressmaker. Hence also the ludicrousness of schematic symbolism in some amateur art, cheap oratory, or dreams. Roger Fry has poked fun at the poor artistic quality of the dreams cited by the psychoanalyst Oskar Pfister, who wished to show that poetic inspiration derives from the same source as do dreams. Here is an example:

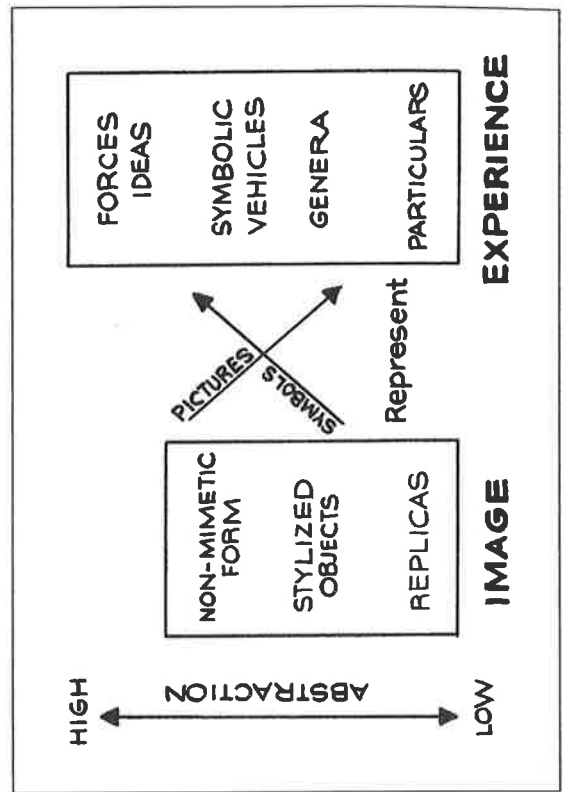
A youth is about to leap away from a female corpse onto a bridge lost in a sea of fog, in the midst of which Death is standing. Behind him the sun rises in bloodred splendor. On the right margin two pairs of hands are trying to recall or hold back the hurrying youth.

I suspect that the repulsiveness of amateur fantasy, which Freud noted in reactions to daydreams and cheap fiction, is aroused not so much because desires and fears are revealed in their nakedness, but because preconceived ideas and hackneyed imagery are permitted to interfere with the truthfulness of the statement. These products of the mind are cognitively unclear.

TWO SCALES OF ABSTRACTION

What I have tried to say about the functions of pictorial analogues is summed up in Figure 6. Pictures and symbols depict experience by means of images in two complementary ways. In a picture, the abstraction level of the image is higher than that of the experience it represents; in a symbol the opposite is the case.

FIGURE 6.



While every image connects two specific levels of the two scales, it is most desirable for the particular purposes of art that the whole range of both scales reverberate in each instance of pictorial representation. This means for the Image Scale that although a painting may be entirely "abstract" (non-mimetic), it needs to reflect some of the complexity of form by which realistic works depict the wealth of human experience. Inversely, a realistic portrayal, in order to be readable, generic, and expressive, must fit its presentation of objects to the pure forms, more directly embodied in non-mimetic art.

For the Experience Scale this condition demands that while focusing upon the ultimate forces inherent in existence, the mind view them as creating the richness of empirical manifestation; and vice versa, the teeming multiplicity of particular phenomena must be seen as organized by underlying general principles.

This doctrinaire demand will appear justified if one thinks of what happens when the two scales are not fully extended or not fully permeable. Under such pathological conditions, a scale is trimmed or cut through at some level, leaving the mind with a restricted range. Restriction to the bottom of the image scale may lead to the thoughtless imitation of natural objects. At the top end, isolation makes for a rigid geometry, orderly enough, but too impoverished to occupy the human brain, the most differentiated creation of nature. On the side of experience, limitation to the bottom of the scale makes for a materialistic, utilitarian outlook, unrelieved by guiding ideas. At the top we get anaemic speculation, the purely formal handling of theoretical propositions or norms.

Any such restriction of thought and expression weakens the validity of artistic statements. In an ideal civilization, no object is perceived and no action performed without an open-ended vista of analogues, which point to the most abstract guiding principles; and, inversely, when pure, generic shapes are handled, there reverberates in human reasoning the experience of particular existence, which gives substance to thought.

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