

## ART IN PLAY-TIME

'THE Machine has no rights,' said the philosopher, 'let us exploit it.' Let it once be made the slave of all men and who knows what other Athens shall arise. It is a pity that this vision of happiness should ever have been called the Leisure State; for if there is one thing certain about Leisure States it is that nobody wants them. If men and women want leisure it is only in order to act in a way which pleases them. Play itself is activity, and, very often, the more it resembles hard work the more fun it provides. You may distinguish play from work as fun is distinguished from drudgery, but this is a bad distinction, for there is no reason why Mr. Selfrdge should not be right in saying, 'There is no fun like work.' Play is best distinguished from work as means is distinguished from end; play is for work and work is for the Last End, or is the Last End if we can call work that operation by which man apprehends God. Play is a sort of artificial work freely undertaken for the sake of more work afterwards. It is true that little children do not normally play games with any thought of working better when they leave off; but this is because, being little children, their play is their work, in much the same way as the play of lambs and kittens is the serious work of lambs and kittens. Play, in the sense of recreation, does not begin until responsible human work begins; until the 'age of reason.' Until then the child's play is just one of the ways by which it quite seriously adjusts itself to the Universe. Its play is all movement and mimicry. It cannot play without playing 'at' something, unless it simply jumps about. It is natural for children to dress up and jump about; it is also very useful. Happily they do not know the use of it.

Play must be interesting and delightful because play is recreation. We would all be bored to death by ever-

lasting 'bread and circuses,' but this is only because an everlasting recreation is a contradiction in terms. And if all recreation is delightful so also all delightful activity, including 'work,' is to some extent recreative. Formally, however, and according to our definition 'recreative work' is a contradiction in terms; whereas 'delightful work' is not. Delightful work is distinguished from 'play' as end from means; though if our work is delightful we need not bother much about recreation. Still, if a man who bangs nails all the week plays football on Saturday, this is evidently a means to his more perfect nail-banging in the following week. Football is recreation, nail-banging is not, even if the man likes banging nails just as much as kicking footballs; and we call the football 'play' and the nail-banging 'work.' Of course, work is not often as delightful as play. Delight leaves work when work is too easy or too difficult; when it takes too little out of a man or when it takes too much; when it turns him into a repetitive machine or a beast of burden. It is the hope of half the world that machinery one day will deliver man from both these evils; its efficiency will lighten his work, its speed will save him from boredom. Who would not be ashamed of being bored by a three-hour working day (or whatever else may be the expectation)?

But it is emphatically not the hope of Mr. Eric Gill or Mr. Graham Carey. They have made their view as clear as crystal in the two very forceful pamphlets which have provoked these remarks.<sup>1</sup> For them work is either 'art,' which is work fit for men, or it is a sort of mindless and irresponsible operation, which is not fit for men. Gill loves to quote Coomaraswamy, 'An artist is not a special sort of man, but every man is a special sort of artist.' For Gill art is simply skilful and responsible making, and since the only properly human way of making things is to make

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<sup>1</sup> *Work and Culture* by Eric Gill (\$0.50). *Pattern* by Graham Carey (\$0.75). (John Stevens, Newport, Rhode Island, U.S.A.)

them skilfully and responsibly, the only properly human makers are artists. Industrialism is simply inhuman. All men could and should be artists, for such is the nature of man. If in fact the artist is a very special sort of man, and the general run of men are in process of ceasing to exercise art, that is skill and invention, in their work, the result can only be a general loss of manhood, a sort of emasculation, for which no amount of leisure-time 'culture' can compensate. This, of course, is what most people will not accept, even if they agree with these two critics' analysis of the present state of things.

When a man knows that he could think and act a great deal more, for the better part of the day, than he is allowed to think and act, he may resign himself and be bored, or he may refuse to resign himself and rebel. In any case, he will try to be more of a man in his spare time. He will seek delightful and interesting, that is humanly satisfying, activity. He will look for something which might have been in his work, but is not in his work. He is not looking precisely for recreation, unless you can speak of being recreated to put up cheerfully with doing next to nothing in your work time. He is looking for a fully human activity. He is looking for his manhood. Let him find it in his spare time (now and still more a hundred years hence). In his off hours let him develop his rational nature in thought and speech and play and all manner of art. This is the familiar thesis. Here we are only concerned with art. Our question is: What will be the effect on that part of human life which we call Art of a very thorough use of machine power in production?

Art may come under 'work' or under 'play,' as we have defined them, but in itself and in general it is simply the right way to make things or the things thus rightly made. Making rightly implies intelligence of the end and choice of means, and therefore art is a properly personal business. All art as such is personally made, and no art as such is machine-made. What sort of personal, that is responsible,

loving and intelligent making can we reasonably expect from people in their plentiful spare time, after they have briefly helped the machines to turn out and distribute all the necessities and most of the luxuries of life? It would be silly to start making all these over again by hand; at least it would look silly (even if it were not forbidden as anti-social); and the race as a whole dislikes looking silly. So there will be nothing left to make but 'fine' art. Now a man may make 'fine' art simply for the joy of making, of realising a form in matter; or for some purpose outside the thing thus made, whether this purpose be to 'fix' some vision or merely to please. Aristotle calls poetry 'a mode of imitation'; Eric Gill calls it simply the best way of saying anything, of communicating with language. Each touches a true aspect of 'fine art.' It is imitation and communication. The proper joy of the artist comes from imitation, from an exact expression of his mental image; and this expression is also communication even if nobody but the artist sees, reads, hears his work; for, if it succeeds, it is always a new thing, a surprise for its own maker. But how far will it succeed if the artist's only motive in working be the sheer delight of imitating his mental image; if the whole purpose of art be the joy which comes of its process? If the artist is simply playing to please himself or others? This is art for art's sake (or entertainment's) and as such, and only as such, it cannot live because it starts from nothing but itself. It grows out of thin air. It might live, indeed, as a game lives, sporadically and within the limitations of a game; if it comes as the by-product of a happy mind, like dancing, or as a recreation like football. It cannot live purely on its own. If people do not love something else they will not trouble to express themselves; for the expressible 'they' is what they know and love. If a man decides to make things for the sheer fun of making *anything*, his art will be still-born. Alive art is a by-product of vision, that is of intelligence and imagery which a man wants to impress on wood, metal, paint, sound;

either for the use of the body (pots and pans), or for the use of the soul; and if for the soul then either to amuse and refresh it, or to reveal reality to it in some way. The art that makes pots and pans we may expect to die in Utopia. The art that is done to amuse the maker and others we may expect to live a highly galvanised life in the hands of those who will control or contribute to the amusement industry of the future. But in view of the certainly tremendous advertising and reproductive power of this industry it does not seem likely that the general run of men and women will be able to resist its appeal sufficiently to produce a recreative art of their own. In fact it seems most unlikely; especially if we consider the appeal of games; for if every man who is 'full of images,' as Durer said, is a potential artist, he is *ipso facto* a potential player of cricket and football. It does not seem to be realised how near to each other are art and play. Yet it is certain that a man may want to play football not just for the exercise, nor for the mere joy of doing something difficult well, but also, and perhaps above all, for the sheer beauty of the game, to the end that he may create patterns of movement and contemplate them. All good players are thus far contemplatives; and when (afterwards) they speak of a 'beautiful game' they mean what they say. The 'beauty' of good batting is not a metaphor; and it is called forth by a conflict and opposition more apparent and therefore more obviously exciting than any you are likely to get in following an artistic hobby. No, the people of Utopia for the most part will probably not amuse themselves painting, and singing songs. There will be plenty of pictures and songs ready made and plenty of games.

So we are left with the finest of fine arts, the work of the man who wants neither simply to entertain nor simply to 'express himself,' but to reveal or suggest truth in symbols; who, like Mortal Beauty,

. . . . keeps warm  
Men's wits to the things that are . . . .

This sort of artist is not just an entertainer or an exhibitionist. His art may be delightful to make and entertaining to hear or see, but it is motivated by something other than the delight of self-expression and entertainment. It deals with an object which it strives to fix and reveal, the temporal *object* of Proust or Joyce, the eternal object of Dante. Why should it die out? A sense of futility might be the death of it, indeed, if the temporal alone is realised. But suppose mankind keeps its metaphysical eyes open? Is it really true that a future Dante simply could not *act* in the environment of the future? Is 'fine' art something that cannot live in a 'machine to live in'? Perhaps . . . for, though art itself is as incalculable as the imagination it springs from, conditions may arise which will not favour imagination. But these are uncertainties. What is at least very probable is that the mass of people are never going to be artists in this sense of the word. In the wonder-working days of old 'Dukes were three a penny,' but is it likely that in the craft-less future poets and painters will flourish by the million? It is not likely; unless something very odd happens to the race in the meantime. More leisure and more education, alone, are not enough, it seems. And if the people are not going to be artists in this sense, in the mechanised Utopia, then they are not going to be artists at all. To this conclusion our reasoning takes us; pointing to an art-less culture without hammer or sickle. Yet Man will remain, and the incalculable freedom of Man's mind.

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