Buried deep in this site, so deep few have read it, are excerpts from a book I was working on in the 1990s, when I was still in my 30s. The working title was *Zeitgeber*, ie Time-giver. It was written mainly for my own consumption, a kind of extended pep-talk, and I was aware at the time it was unpublishable in the mainstream. Like everything I have written since. This was many years before I set up a website, so none of these things were even self-published at the time. But you can see how it was formative for me, and how it was very successful on its own terms, giving me a sort of self-created platform from which to launch my crusade. It was a kind of extended personal manifesto, with no need or desire to edit or modulate.

Today I reread it for the first time in years, and I realized that now that my crusade is starting to get some wind beneath it, actually reaching a considerable audience, I should top-list passages from this old book, which I think are just as timely now as they were then, perhaps even moreso.

Some of you may be surprised to find my writing style was denser and more scholarly back then, but I remind you of several things: one, again I was writing for myself, so simplifying or streamlining for mass consumption was no part of it. Two, I was closer to college and therefore to my sources, which tended to be dense, scholarly, or old-fashioned. Three, although I had little hope of publication, this was a book I was pretending to write, not just an off-the-cuff essay, written on the run, as it were. I took the time to polish things up a bit back then, for my own eye if for no one else's. I have given most of that up for efficiency, now just publishing everything as a first draft. Besides, I know that modern audiences for the most part don't respond to language like that, anymore than they respond to poetry, so any effort in that direction is wasted. They appreciate more my blistering directness, and I have found that comes through best in a first draft.

ZEITGEBER

(TIME GIVER)

ON RESETTING THE ART-HISTORICAL CLOCK
AND ON BEING AN ARTIST IN THE 21st CENTURY

Z

Zeitgeber \'tsit-ga-ber\ *n* [G, fr. *zeit* time (fr. OHG *zit*) + *geber*, lit., giver, donor, fr. *geben* to give, fr. OHG *geban*; akin to OE *giefan* to give -- more at TIDE, GIVE] (1968): an environmental agent or event (as the occurrence of light or dark) that provides the stimulus setting or resetting a biological clock of an organism.

The twentieth century has been as a long flight on a fast plane travelling some low-level synchronous orbit, moving always east to west, against the rotation of the earth, and we are blinded by the sun forever in our face. Suffering chronic aesthetic jet-lag and burned corneas, we cannot see where to go, in any sense of the word. What is needed is an artistic Zeitgeber.

Preface

There is only one beauty, the beauty of truth revealing itself.
Auguste Rodin[1]

This book is, on the face of it, a how-to book: how to be an artist. But to my mind the term "artist" signifies more than one who draws or paints or sculpts. And it signifies more than one who has good ideas or who is sensitive or expressive. For me an artist is *both* the master of a craft and the sharer of strong emotions. To be the master of a craft you must have a fair amount of natural talent and the patience and perseverance to develop that talent into a high level of skill. In order to share strong emotions you must a) have them, and b) know how to express them through your chosen craft. This knowledge of how to express yourself is not so much learned as it is discovered. Your ability to comprehend and express your emotions increases with every bit of useful information you manage to pick up, whether that information is intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, spiritual, what have you. Any progress or enlightenment you achieve in any area will enhance and illuminate your artistic abilities.

Therefore a book on how to be an artist must engage the reader, the artist, as a whole person, not just as some disembodied groveler for technical secrets. For this reason, I try to share with you not only what it is to draw and paint and sculpt, but what it is to be an artist. No doubt many will find this old-fashioned, presumptuous, or otherwise offensive. I can only answer, quoting Thoreau, that "I trust none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do some good to him it fits."

As your sartorial advisor, my first warning is to avoid the greatcloak, the overcoat with hood, the fur-trimmed mukluk with sealskin earflaps: however great your talent, you cannot hide in your art. That is, no matter how much evidence you collect that the world is a nasty, clueless, inspirational void best left on the other side of a high hedge, you better be prepared to answer some questions—at least for yourself—or the wolves will get you the moment you step outside the studio. For talent and depth, even together, aren't enough. You also need courage. And while I can't give you the first two, I can help with the third, simply by telling you a few things. This is what a real education does, in my opinion: not tell you how to do something, but gird you to do what you already know.

[1]Paul Gsell, *L'Art* (Conversations with Auguste Rodin), p. 42.

For example, if you can't mix colors just by trying to mix colors, I can't teach you how. Color mixing, like everything else important in art, is not a science but a talent. Beyond the learning of a few commonsense facts, art technique is mostly intuited. Like a baby learning to talk, an artist simply does what he can, and takes it as far as possible. All I can do is encourage you to try, mainly by tempting you with what others have achieved when they tried, and then by encouraging you to trust the eye you already have.

Of course, human potential is not all instinctive. The sort of courage I am talking about depends, in large part, on knowledge. Knowledge that transcends technique—wide-ranging knowledge. For instance, a sensitive, sincere master of a craft (should one somehow be spontaneously created by a flash of lightning or the collision of matter and anti-matter) will nonetheless feel completely overwhelmed and out of place in modern America if he or she does not have a fairly good understanding of art history and the present state of art, such as it is. Not that this understanding will mollify his or her feelings of alienation: these feelings may in fact increase. But such an understanding will allow an artist to deal positively with these feelings—to rechannel them back into an art that can effectively deal with both internal and external pressures.

And so I include chapters not only on art supplies, techniques, and museum copywork, but also, and perhaps more to the point, on art education, art history, and the critics. In short, I mean to tell you everything I know about the subject of art that seems important (and that comes to mind). What appeals to you, you can keep. The rest I will still have for my own purposes. This is how I see my role as an author.

Ten or fifteen years ago I was in desperate need of some good advice. I never got it. For the most part, my need remains. But to the extent that I have answered my own questions, I mean to answer some of yours. In a sense this book is a letter back in time. J. D. Salinger's character Seymour tells his younger brother Buddy to think of the book he most wants to read, and to write that book.[1] As far as memory serves me, this is the book I wanted to read fifteen years ago. If you and I have convergent tastes in literature, then you are in luck: you won't have to write this book in fifteen years.

[1]In "Seymour an Introduction," in *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour an Introduction*, Bantam edition, p. 161.

From Chapter One:

An Historical Overview

Great art is so rarely produced because it is so rarely encouraged and so rarely attempted. Our schools and other institutions do not so much encourage high ideals as squash them. We cannot make great artists but we can certainly destroy them. And our society is doing so with terrible efficiency. Contemporary art has become like Lewis Carroll's four branches of Arithmetic: "Ambition, Distraction, Uglification, and Derision." In the avant garde, any idea of excellence is dismissed as a bourgeois conspiracy or as a reactionary alliance with all the anti-populist politics of history. And even where pockets of residual craftsmanship remain, mostly among the atavistic followers of a Classicism of some sort or another, this respect for tradition (which admittedly requires a great deal of effort to maintain) has become an end in itself. The idea of excellence in such circles no longer has any art-historical resonances or other personal, psychological, emotional, or cultural echoes. It is an excellence strictly of brushwork or color. *Tout le monde* is now a formalist, Santa Fe as well as New York City.

Art is now bipolar. The magnetic north is owned by the Moderns; the weaker south by the Realists. Both markets have varying financial strengths, but they have sectioned art into two non-viable theoretical organisms, neither of which can possibly generate any real art. The experiments of the avant garde have led them to the land of Pure Expression, where the visual image has become superfluous. In theory this was supposed to liberate them from the visual images of the past. In actuality it has also

liberated them from any sort of meaningful visual communication. It has proved impossible to express either idea or emotion without mastering a technical craft. Few theorists would contend that music can be played on no instrument, or on a non-instrument. And yet it is now commonplace to believe that visual art can or should be expressed without conventions, or through critically deconstructed conventions—which are equivalent to pianos without keys, or without fingers. Whatever one may think about pre-20th century art forms, at least Leonardo didn't have to explain his paintings verbally; or Rodin act out his sculptures to make them understood; or Van Gogh look to the critics to clarify his intentions.

Outside the avant garde all is an arid formalism of one sort or another. Contemporary formalist painting in the vein of Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Jasper Johns, or Cy Twombly is Modern but no longer cutting edge. It is possible to lump this field in with contemporary Realism, for they are both abstract: even the landscape and portrait painters of the Southwest are more interested in brushstoke and color and edge than they are in any emotional or ideational content. For all these painters the medium is the message—*trompe l'oeil* and vast monochrome surfaces define the opposite limits of artistic ingenuity. The Realists and the Formalists are both caught on the surface, mistaking paint for a painting.

No one on any of the contemporary art paths seems to remember that creation is synthesis, not analysis. Art is not whittling down, sectioning off—disallowing representation, or dismissing content. It is not the glorification of partialities, neither formless content or contentless form. Nor is it substitution—calling journalism painting, or acting sculpture, or politics art. If you have mastered many crafts, then mix your media, by all means. But if you can't paint, don't prop up your painting with a verbal cue, or even worse, a theory—bolstering, as it were, one disability with another. As Nietzsche said of Wagner, "where he lacks a capacity, he invents a principle." Or as Camus said, "He who has no character *must* have a theory."

Despite the ever-increasing futility of all possible futures, we are told there is no going back. The bridge behind us has been washed out, it is said. While this is a relief to some, who understandably prefer to make no direct comparisons to the past (better to live on an island, up a tree, on a skinny limb, than to have to suffer Michelangelo's shadow), it leaves us in a tight spot. Fortunately, those with long enough legs or high enough boots don't require a road; they can strike out cross country.

This divergence of craftsmanship and content, of feeling and execution, is only one of many. Another important schism has been caused by the market. Art is now a big business. A large percentage of the "artwork" produced in this country is market-driven and therefore hardly deserving of the title. There is nothing wrong with this decoration: our houses need color co-ordination and critical justification (or undercutting) as much as our cars need gas, some would say. But it seems to me that, after decades of all-inclusiveness in the name of equality, a few of our definitions need tightening up. The definition of Art is more critically in need of refinement than any other of the sloppy definitions our heritage (or lack of one, in this half-century) has passed down to us. If the anti-academic movement in art that has predominated since the time of the Impressionists has had anything positive to add to the definition of artist (and it has had very little), it is that the artist should not be the agent of the aristocracy or even of the bourgeoisie. He or she should be a worker of independence and self-expression—at best visionary; at least, sincere. This was originally the meaning of *ars gratia artis*: art for the sake of self-expression as opposed to art for the sake of decoration, or for the sake of financial gain, or (most importantly in the historical context) for the sake of illustrating a religious or political belief.

This last aspect is worth noting, for it is rarely mentioned that the Modern movement began, at least in its roots in the nineteenth century, as a reaction against external influences on the artist, particularly political ones. This is poignant if not tragic, seeing that the contemporary artist, even when he escapes being crushed by economic considerations, ends up being completely overwhelmed by political ones. The artists of the avant garde, supposedly freed in this century by their protectors—the critic, the

academic, and the museum curator—from the mundane concerns of "pleasing the customer," have found themselves shackled by the political obligations owed to those self-same protectors. These artists have bought their "freedom" at a usurious rate by buying into a game whose rules are made by other people. Yet no one cares to admit that it is no more virtuous to pander to the critics, curators, and academics than it is to pander to the market directly, by kneeling to the desires of the galleries and buyers. In both instances the artist has sold his creative autonomy to buy a starting position and a salary. And in both instances control of the artist's agenda has passed into the hands of non-artists.

The influential power of art and artists has long been recognized, and for just as long it has been co-opted by those who wanted to make use of it. For most of the Christian history of Europe this co-option was carried on by the clergy and the aristocracy. Kings and Popes controlled artists as they controlled everything else, with little room for dissent. But as this control began to weaken during the Reformation, and to break down altogether during the Enlightenment, artists were not the only ones to find themselves with more autonomy. Highly politicized factions fought for power and attempted, as one might expect, to enlist the help of the artists of the time. For example, in France during the reign of Louis XV the progressive cause was championed by, among others, the encyclopedist and art critic Denis Diderot. Diderot was one of the first art critics to successfully press his own agenda. As a writer himself Diderot was sympathetic to the role of the artist. Yet he judged art mainly in terms of its usefulness to the state (though his definition of "state" might be different from the King's). He critiqued the nudes of Boucher, for example, not by artistic standards, which would be, I should think, the beauty and depth, the expressive power, Boucher shares of his relationship with his subject (his model) and his craft. He critiqued the nudes on the morals, or lack of morals, such works might instill. And even in the realm of morals, Diderot's interest was mainly political. I quote him from the Salon of 1761: "This man picks up his brush only to show me breasts and buttocks. I am delighted to see them but I cannot bear having them pointed out to me." This statement may not seem, at first glance, to be egregiously out of order (or, in the case of Boucher, false—Boucher's depth of emotion is not astonishing, and almost all he had to offer the viewer was nudity). But Diderot's flippant dismissal of viable artistic subject matter (yes, breasts and buttocks are, and always will be, beautiful) in favor of prudery or some other political or moral method of judging a painting, instituted by the critic, has led to all sorts of trouble.

Of course eighteenth-century France was preoccupied with an egalitarianism we now take for granted, and the voice of the common man was only beginning to be heard. It is not surprising that Diderot would speak for the common interest as against the sensibilities of a court painter. But my point is that he was setting a dangerous precedent by choosing art criticism as a voice for his political complaints. Art, properly understood, cannot be so worldly. It cannot take requests, either from the aristocrats or the democrats. It will not give up its secrets to the Enlightenment, or to Science, or to the demands of any Program, any more than will God or Being or Instinct or the Unconscious. It is individual effort, the cry of the Id, shaped by the Ego perhaps, but best left alone by the Ego-ideal. It cannot be enlisted in a cause, no matter how worthy, without being corrupted beyond all recognition.

Furthermore, with his critical method Diderot popularized the idea that educated non-artists were better able to judge art than artists. Otis Fellows, in his book on Diderot, says "Diderot believed that art should not be judged solely on its technical aspects. He felt that other considerations should be taken into account—the subject matter in general, the delineation of character, the psychological shadings. All of them, we are told, a man of letters can weigh as well as and perhaps better than the artist himself." Under the mistaken impression that artists judge art "solely on its technical aspects," Diderot believed that the "universal" education of a literary man could be an improvement on such judgment. But what artist, worthy of the name, has ever been simply a technician? In the very admission that what is being judged is art (rather than illustration or craft, say) is contained the idea that artist knows something beyond technique. In order to accept Diderot's assertion, you must believe that the artist is

responsible only for putting the paint on the canvas: any meaning the painting has is accidental, fortuitous, or divinely caused. The artist therefore gets no credit for it. If he cannot verbally explain his non-verbal processes, he must not understand them, and therefore is only some kind of idiot-agent. The meaning, and so the worth, of the painting is left up to the judgment of those who had nothing to do with its creation. The critics, despite their creative ineptitude, claim to have an insight into this mystery that the artists themselves cannot match. In the end the whole claim is preposterous, and artists have been forced to fight, against ever-growing odds, what is clearly an attempt at creative coercion.

Although the aristocracy Diderot was attacking soon became obsolete, his method of criticism has endured. Politics has changed but art still suffers. And it suffers more under our strict egalitarianism than it has since the darkest recesses of medievalism. The artist is still expected to meet the demands of the non-artist. But now the non-artist is not King or Pope, he is the common man, the businessman, the media man, the scholar man. We are all common men now. The artist is a decorator man. I do not mean to be a snob: it is not that the Pope was a better overseer to art than the Modern critic or client—in many ways he was more demanding and intrusive, rarely in a constructive way. But Michelangelo and Leonardo had the principle and the backbone to stand up to Princes and Popes where the contemporary artist cannot even stand up to a relatively powerless gallery owner or magazine editor. We have reached the point where even the philistines of the avant garde, in whom one would expect at least the pretension of eminence, have instead betrayed themselves as the final conquest of our nation of shopkeepers. Modern art has become, as Robert Hughes calls it, a "wholly monetized art," monetized being an adjective whose meaning the lowliest French peasant would have understood.

After Diderot, of course, *le deluge*. Subsequent to an initial spate of high-sounding rhetoric, it became clear that *liberte* meant for the French peasant and *sans culotte* what freedom now means for the modern democrat—the freedom to imitate the worst instincts of the ruling class: the shallow materialism, the pervasive desire for comfort and security, the narrow complacency, the lurid fascination with sex and violence while propagandizing chastity and peace. There was no pretense then that art had anything to do with the Revolution, except as a political tool, or that it might or should survive, for its own sake, in a progressive world; just as there is little pretense now that art, as an extraordinary expression of individual passion, has any place in the socialized, mechanized, centralized future of the Left, or the capitalized, mechanized, centralized future of the Right. Alexandre Kojève, a well-known Hegelian, has admitted as much: the loss of great art and artists is a necessary cost of a triumphant *egalité*, he tells us.

Nor is Kojève alone in thinking so. Most social critics on the left have given art a low priority in their restructuring wishlist, and even those who want to keep a place for it have been forced to dramatically redefine it in hyper-egalitarian terms [see The Getty, in Chapter 2], so that it would be unrecognizable to Michelangelo or even van Gogh. Art has been bartered off as a cost of modern democracy or socialism by non-artists based on the flimsiest of *post hoc* arguments, with only the most cursory of cost-benefit analyses (to put it in their own terms), and with no vote.

It would be droll if it weren't so tragic that Modern Art, cobbled together by the greatest minds of contemporary social theory as an answer to the "elitist" art of the past, appeals to the masses not at all. Those such as Clement Greenberg [see Chapter Four] attempt transcend this embarrassing snaggle with an elitism all their own, implying that the kitsch-loving masses don't know what's good for them; but surely someone in some conference room or university cubicle must be abashed to find that the new art is not only an aesthetic but a social failure. It is as if the social democrats have opted for Nietzsche's "last man" (his modern "herd animal," to replace his classical beast, the Christian), knowing full well the consequences, and without consulting the people themselves—who may or may not be content with

merely smiling and blinking. Perhaps some have already begun to notice that we are building the future too small, hemming ourselves in unnecessarily, washing away three babies for every tubful of water.

If you think I am making a case for the political Right, you are wrong. Unlike Hilton Kramer, I have never expected the Republican Party to be any help at all, and so I am not disappointed when it isn't. It is conservative only in an economic sense. The only thing the modern Right is interesting in conserving is l*aissez faire* capitalism, all other concerns being secondary. It would be oxymoronic for the Right to even have a position on Art: it might sooner have a position on Astrology (and did, apparently, during the Reagan years). That it does have a position on the National Endowment for the Arts is neither here nor there in this context (I address the NEA in another chapter). It has an opinion on art funding, but that is a question of economics, you see. In the view of the Right, people have the unalienable right to make unequal amounts of money, money that should not be redistributed lest the profit motive fail and the economy collapse. But there can be no philosophical convergence of art and economics. Artists know, with Thoreau, that "Trade curses everything it handles. You could be dealing in messages from Heaven and the whole curse of trade would attach to the business."

No one, Right or Left, has apparently noticed that while Marx and Locke have been duking it out over who gets what and how much property; while Nature, laid out on a cold slab, decomposes as the kids and grandkids bicker over the will, civilization has been dissipating, its existence ever more tenuous and imaginary. Bereft of leadership and inspiration (because no one much believes in such things anymore) our children, and not just our children, are adrift in a miasma of infinite freedom and zero responsibility, a chaotic sea in which the only boat afloat is the economy. Inwardly, we are even now living off *aes alienum*, another's brass, taking, even stealing, what little enrichment we have from a source that is, like the earth itself, finite. Art history is not resource that can survive unlimited assault, and our pails are already coming up dry from the well.

Dandy, you say, but what does this have to do with art? Everything, I say. Art is not created in a vacuum. An inartistic milieu discourages art, obviously; but not so much in our case, I am arguing, from lack of public funding, as from a complete philosophic and social reverse, suffered mostly in the last hundred years. A reverse that has little or nothing to do with the philosophic and social culprits that have taken all the blame up to now, namely democracy, Christianity, and science.

Let me take the first one first. As the French Revolution—the culmination of the work of Diderot and the other encyclopedists, of Rousseau, Voltaire and many others—was a turning point in history for liberté and egalité, all to the good. But its successes and its excesses did nothing for the democratization of art. This is because no one has ever been able to say how art can be positively democratized. Our democratic experiment here in the United States has been extraordinarily successful in many ways, but no one can argue that art has prospered here (except, for a while, financially). All the persuasive arguments up to now, foremost among them Nietzsche's, have said that art could not be democratized. But these arguments only addressed the incompatibility of art with the democratic state. And art is incompatible with the demands of *any* state, as Nietzsche himself said. Art is incompatible with the demands of any group or any authority outside the artist's creative mind. So it is not art and democracy that are incompatible, but art and the politics of the group, of whatever kind. To successfully democratize art is simply to maximize its opportunities, and then to leave it alone. It is to allow that the artist can come from anywhere, regardless of background, and to encourage without prejudice those with talent. But our democracy has not been satisfied with giving such a valuable political gift. Modern democratic practice has gone beyond the equalization of opportunity to the mandated equality of achievement. We have decided to understand Thomas Jefferson's "all men are created equal" to mean that every man or woman must remain equal at all times, and that all products of their efforts, whether of imagination or toil, must be given equal consideration. In the field of art,

this has come to mean that every creation is equally artistic by definition: "artistic" has come to mean simply "creative." But "creativeness" is judged only by quantity; "art" used to be judged by quality.

This aversion to the idea of quality is a symptom of every modern skill, artistic or not, and it threatens to undermine our ability to define ourselves at all. I am not sure, however, that there is any strict correlation between this modern phenomenon and democracy. Periclean Athens was a democracy, in a limited sense, but it did not treat quality as a pathology. And Christianity, a religion in which pride is the ultimate sin (as it is in our modern democratic state), never sanctioned a belief in the final equality of souls. For Jesus, the value of this life was, in large part, to allow for the separation of the wheat from the chaff, every tree that failed to bear fruit being thrown into the fire. This is hardly a complacent egalitarianism. But Christianity has rightly been seen as being democratic because its foundations rest on a conversion of the lower classes and a spiritual empowerment of the individual. The reason democracy and the highest expectations for and of the individual *seem* mutually exclusive is that Peter and Paul all but ditched the latter in order to found their religion. There is an early separation between Jesus and Christianity. Jesus never would have sanctioned the historical use of Christianity by the church to repress the lower classes by further limiting the importance of the individual. This history has been trenchantly anti-democratic, elitist in the worst sense, as in fascist. For fifteen hundred years the European peasantry was spoon-fed only the most self-negating, unempowering, mind-numbing parts of the Bible, all stress being put on abnegation rather than affirmation. Somehow Jesus' "glad tidings" of a spiritual journey of infinite wonder open to all, of a "heavenly kingdom within you," lost something in the translation from Hebrew to Greek to Latin to the modern European languages, and by the time the German or French or Italian laborer heard of it, this fabulous journey promised only to carry him from the depths of despair to the glories of resignation. If this fabulous journey sounds familiar, it should: we are still traveling it. The low ceiling of American spiritual expectation, inherited from this debased religion, was accurately measured by Thoreau a hundred and fifty years ago, and is now lower still. We have become as spiritual hunchbacks in order to live in the homes of our own making. Soon we may be crawling on all fours, or be permanently supine.

One of the failings of modern thought is its inability to differentiate between two types of "elitism." It has been a semantic failure that we have continued to use the same word for such different meanings. Jesus' recognition of an elite—his insistence on a recognizable difference in the quality of personal spirit based on word and deed—affirmed individuality and responsibility and was democratic in the best sense, in that it denied the privilege of a ruling class based on wealth or birth or other worldly power. But elitism as political privilege and the right to use other human being as means aims for just the opposite state of human affairs. It is anti-democratic, with no belief in the right of the individual to self-rule. Its centralization tends to monopolize power, and this worldly power is based solely on previous access to power. It systematically denies the possibility of progress because it does not allow for the revival of leadership by the infusion of fresh talent. In this way it can be seen that democracy is, at least potentially, much closer to a meritocracy than all the old forms of rule. Equal opportunity maximizes the talent pool and great potential is not lost by being born to poverty or to racial or sexual "inferiority."

Besides, art demonstrably *is* elitist in the first sense. And should be. As science is, and business, and sport, and education itself. No one seems surprised that the best scientists get paid the most for research, or that the best businesspeople get promoted, or that the best basketball players are the ones who get hired by the NBA. Why should art alone be expected to be not only equal access, but equal time? Why does the NEA itself still charge the arts in America, which have fallen so low that expectations themselves are now almost zero, with being elitist? Great art is exceptional; that is, it is the exception, as everything great is. Great art was, and always will be, created by an artistic elite,

whether in an aristocracy or a democracy. To deny this is to misunderstand the word exceptional. And it is to misunderstand the value of exceptional things, to all people in a society.

But in our modern democratic states such an understanding of our situation does not satisfy us. We demand the right to self-rule while at the same time throwing out all the rules for governing ourselves. We are anti-elitist in both senses. We are selfish with no proper hierarchy of selves. We have no spiritual goals, and our selves, newly freed by the political successes of our day, are adrift. We have kept only the coziest parts of the Bible to help us sleep at night and jettisoned any difficult "moralism" that might demand anything from us. We have done the same thing with democracy, playing down any notions of individual responsibility (which are surely as central as any democratic tenet) while playing up the "rights" of each and all to every fruit of civilization, earned or not, including any label one might desire, whether it be athlete, scholar, or artist. Our meritocracy is unrealized because we find true merit distasteful: it does not play to our vain glorification of small deeds. Add to this Science's complicity, with its purposeful, but unsubstantiated, de-spiritualizing of the world, and you have an excuse for such relativism. For if it all doesn't matter anyway, why not select only the chummiest, tastiest, mushiest ideas of history and ditch the rest?

It must be pointed out, though, that Science's place of distinction in this muddle is based on absolutely nothing. Science has never proved a link between how? and why? Science spends all its time and money answering the question how? not why? It collects all its data on how? not why? One of its premises is that why? is not a valid, and certainly not a scientific, question. But then it presumes, once it has found out how? that it knows why?, too. Ask Science why? and it will say with great authority, with many a successful how? to back it up, "there is no reason." Not "we don't know the reason," but "there is no reason"; believing, no doubt, that why? would have shown up on its screens with how? had it been there. But this is specious. To understand the mechanics of the universe is not to understand its purpose or its teleology. Science may deny that the universe is in any sense purposeful, but this denial is just as unprovable, scientifically, as religion's assertion that the universe is purposeful. The atheist's belief is insupportable to exactly the extent that the theist's is. Existence may not prove Essence, but it certainly cannot disprove it. It is odd that Science would exhibit its inconsistency by having an opinion at all. It is expected that religion (and art and philosophy) might make assertions that are empirically untestable, for it believes in other tests; and only Science can be categorically wrong on this subject.

I know I must seem far afield and almost laughably all-embracing in my concerns here. It is considered terribly unmodern to write so broadly, but I remind any skeptics of what van Gogh once said in a letter to his friend and fellow painter Bernard:

You see, my dear comrade, that Giotto and Cimabue, as well as Holbein and van Dyck, lived in an obeliscal—excuse the word—solidly framed society, architecturally constructed, in which each individual was stone, and all the stones clung together, forming a monumental society. When the socialists construct their logical social edifice—which they are still pretty far from doing—I am sure mankind will see a reincarnation of this society. But, you know, we are in the midst of downright *laissez-aller* and anarchy. We artists, who love order and symmetry, isolate ourselves and are working to define only one thing.

I almost have to rub my hands together and chuckle when I think of the number of art mavens who will blink and stutter to see one of the (supposed) fathers of Modernism saying such things; but that would delay my point, that being that artists need a groundwork as much as anyone, if not more, and that the reconsideration of some of the topics I am reconsidering might be a necessary step in the rejuvenation of the artistic psyche. Far be it from me to propose some sort of Freudian makeover, or regimen for artistic mental health. But I do think I can suggest that the sort of curriculum now predominating,

which is to say, no curriculum (or to be even more existentially precise, the noncurriculum) can lead to only more chaos, more groping, more breast beating. And once we start to rebuild our education system —our system in general, which we are "still pretty far from doing"—I think we are going to have to admit that specialization, the narrowing of an individual's scope to increase his or her skill, has been a disaster, especially from a humanistic or spiritualistic standpoint. It's efficiency can be argued to some extent in business. But in art, where efficiency means nothing, it has only ended up giving us smaller artists. The artistic temperament, I would argue, is most often that of a generalist. An artist's most important skill, once technique is mastered, is making connections—doing the spiritual addition, as it were, and showing us the hidden sum. Not consciously, of course, and not nearly as prosaically as I just put it, but in effect this is what he does. Van Gogh may have felt isolated by the uncommon strength of his emotions, his intellect, and his compassion. And he may have concentrated on painting as his "one thing." But anyone who has read his letters knows that his concerns were as far ranging as it was possible to be. The artist cannot hope to reach emotional complexity or maturity without a rather wide-ranging curiosity, and so it is my guess that, like van Gogh, and like Leonardo, and like every great artist, the young artist hopefully reading this book really is interested in a thousand different topics, and only needs to see my example, as I gambol willy-nilly through every subject that enters my head, to believe that it may be possible to do this successfully—that is, without either coming to a dead stop, literally or figuratively, or ending up in the poor house or the loonybin.

One other closely-related subject that I want to touch on here while I am being unattractively self-indulgent (and that I will come back to later) is that an artist's predisposition for the grandiose, the far-flung, the all-inclusive, and the world-saving is not something to be taken lightly. I don't say this as an excuse for my own intemperance (or I don't say it *only* as an excuse). Despite the fact that there are almost no social situations where the artistic temperament is seen as a plus-and I can understand this, none better—I think we all have to find some way, not only to tolerate, but to actually encourage the "grand schemer," obnoxious or no. For we are desperately in need of some grand schemes, our old ones having apparently failed us. I will say it because no one else seems willing to put himself in the situation of looking foolish enough to say it, but we need some risk taking in the area of the grand gesture, the big picture, the overall theory, and some risk-taking on a completely different order than what we have so far seen this century. The only way we can get beyond this intellectual chatter, this modern complaint about the smallness of everything, is to manage to put off scoffing for a moment at every large-intentioned person who tries to do anything. So far the only risk takers who have been given the benefit of the doubt have been the ones who have risked telling us that we don't really have what we think we have. Nietzsche and Freud, who told us this about religion, the Existentialists who told us this about essence and meaning, the positivists who told us this about certainty. I'm not saying any of these people were wrong. I am saying it is even more difficult, and risky, to rebuild, especially in a climate like ours where every great enterprise is seen as hopelessly pretentious and, most likely, monomaniacal. Not that there are many great enterprises being floated, that I am aware of, but it seems that those with any aspirations at all seem to be dismissed out of hand. And by out of hand I mean in such a way that it is made clear that these aspirations are culturally, or sociopolitically, in bad taste, categorically. The field of literature, for example, doesn't need too many careers like that of Salinger before it gets the hint. Great writers, that is, don't write seriously about religion anymore. The time of Thoreau and Carlyle is past. This is the Age of Reason, my friend.

All the arts must make room again for the grandiose, even at the risk of a level of pedantry. Did Thoreau always avoid pretension? Did Nietzsche? Of course not. Nietzsche didn't even try to, his point being that no great writer can, or even should. Let the artist pretend—for every child knows that art is pretending—and we will see how much of the show can stay on its legs. This is the measure of creativity.

Thus Democracy, Science, and Christianity need not be blamed for our current situation. Theoretically they all have as much to say against the present state of affairs as for it. It is the way we have chosen to translate our heritage that is the problem: what we have kept and what we have thrown out. As far as politics is the science of expediency, and as far as expediency defines our choices now instead of necessity or truth, politics is our problem. I hear now from all quarters that "everything is political," as if that were somehow the immutable state of human nature, or as if it were even a desirable state of affairs. It is neither. If it is true, and to a large extent it is true, it is true because we allow or prefer it to be. If we all, individually, stop discussing issues politically, they will stop being decided politically.

The problem with our democracy is that we underestimate our own power. We are so caught up in asserting our rights that we forget to exercise our power. We are so busy making therapeutic and materialistic demands on our government that we forget there is work to be done in governing, and that we must do it ourselves. If each person decides to reorder his or her life according to principle, then our government will be principled. If not, not. That is what self-government, democracy, means. Self-government is not just *laissez-faire* capitalism and the right to vote. It is more than some narrow Protestant work ethic and dragging ourselves to the polls every two years. We exhibit a frightening *laisser-aller* in our own spiritual menage. We seem content to let life live us as long as we can pay the bills and keep the TV in proper repair. But in a self-perpetuating democracy we cannot await our principles from our government, we must supply them to our government. If we, as artists, do not like the expectations we have from our government, or from our society, as being political and therefore unprincipled, we must foist our principled expectations onto the government, for she is us, and must hear. Our greatest mistake is silence.

The truth is that our institutions in the arts (and elsewhere) are not too democratic. They are not democratic enough. In theory, democracy guarantees not equality, but equal opportunity. The first principle of any government should be fairness. We need to decide whether we want from our democracy fairness and equal opportunity, or equality—which becomes in practice regulated mediocrity. Our modern society is proving, and nowhere so decisively as in the field of art, that we must choose one or the other. For equality, strictly observed, unfairly discriminates against excellence, and thereby destroys art—which must be extraordinary by definition.

As I see it, Nietzsche's foremost complaint against all modern cultures, democratic or not, was that all their institutions suppressed excellence. The church and state engendered resentment of the masses against its leaders, both in order to maximize their constituency (a hierarchy implies many levels of deferment; egalitarianism creates only one great underclass, and its custodians) and to protect their longevity (by undercutting popular support for their overthrow). This effectively turned nature on its head, leaving society's most creative and powerful members no outlet. Economic and political power could be subsumed by the church and the state, as they have been, and so they were allowed as lures to the talented, as the last arenas for distinction. But for Nietzsche, this was an empty lure, a hollow promise. The life of Croesus or of Paul was of no interest to one of his disposition. As Thoreau said, "Do not stay to become an overseer to the poor, but endeavor to become one of the worthies of the world."