

## Introduction: Art and the Third Stage of Meaning

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In an often quoted passage from chapter 9 of *Topics in Education*, Lonergan writes pointedly about the relevance of art to daily living.

What I want to communicate in this talk about art is the notion that art is relevant to concrete living, that it is an exploration of the potentialities of concrete living. That exploration is extremely important in our age, when philosophers for at least two centuries, through doctrines on politics, economics, education, and through ever further doctrines, having been trying to remake man, and have done not a little to make human life unlivable.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, art remains a neglected zone in Lonergan studies. We can partly attribute this outcome to the shortage of material in Lonergan's published work on art and the related field of aesthetics.<sup>2</sup> Leaving aside suggestive comments and contexts, we can count *Insight*, chapter 6, section 2, "The Aesthetic Pattern of Experience,"<sup>3</sup> *Insight*, chapter 17, section 1, concerning mystery, *Method in Theology*, chapter 3, section 3, "Art,"<sup>4</sup> and the aforementioned chapter 9 of *Topics in Education*<sup>5</sup> as the body of published writing explicitly devoted to art and aesthetics.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lonergan, *Topics in Education, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 10, ed. Robert Doran and Frederick Crowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) (hereafter, *CWL* 10, p. 232).

<sup>2</sup> Besides chapter 9 of *Topics in Education*, there are sections on art in *Insight* and *Method*.

<sup>3</sup> *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 3, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (5<sup>th</sup> ed. rev. and augmented) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992) (hereafter, *CWL* 3), 207-09.

<sup>4</sup> *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1972), 61-64. The whole of chapter 3, sections 1-6, provides a context of which section 3 is a component. So, for instance, the discussion of section 1 on intersubjectivity and intersubjective meaning is relevant to a discussion of acting; the discussion of symbols in section 4 is relevant to poetry and visual art; section 5 on linguistic

However, Lonergan had a deep interest in art that manifested itself early in his intellectual history. His interest in art is apparent, for example, in the detailed knowledge and appreciation of architecture in an early occasional article, “The College Chapel.”<sup>7</sup> One might say that art appears, in fact, to have been his first philosophic love. “The aesthetic side was my formation at Loyola. ... I remember Bolland [one of Lonergan’s teachers at Heythrop] asking me if I had any interest in philosophy. I said: I’m very interested in Butcher’s *The Theory of Art*. ... That was the opening. That had a fuller development later on.”<sup>8</sup> We might well wonder what he had in mind by the fuller development. I might add his early concern for the distorted rhythms of modern industrial-commercial life, in which, he contended, humans lack “a saving contact with the organic life of nature and its rhythms.”<sup>9</sup> And in a similar vein, there is the ecstatic lifting up of his economic writing with its sly reference to Tennyson:

The general idea of value coincides with the idea of the good, of excellence.

This excellence may pertain to an object in itself, rise from its isolation from other things, and remain despite utter uselessness. Such is the *absolute value* of truth, of noble and heroic deeds, of the flower in the crannied wall.<sup>10</sup>

As my initial quotation richly demonstrates, the relative paucity of material does not mean that Lonergan lacked a viewpoint on art and aesthetics or thought them peripheral to his concerns. Lonergan’s

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meaning is relevant to all the forms that use words; and in section 6 Lonergan writes that incarnate meaning “may be transposed to a character or characters in a story or a play, to a Hamlet or Tartuffe or Don Juan.” *Method*, 73.

<sup>5</sup> *CWL* 10, 208-32.

<sup>6</sup> Detailed study of these sources may be found in Joanne O’Neill, “The Sacred in Art: An Interpretive Study of Lonergan on Art and Religion” (Memorial University M.A Dissertation in Religious Studies, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Lonergan, *Shorter Papers, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 20, ed. Robert Croken, Robert Doran, and H. Daniel Monsour (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007)(hereafter, *CWL* 20), 60-63. The article was written in 1933.

<sup>8</sup> An interview with Lonergan published in *Curiosity at the Center of One’s Life* (Montreal: Thomas More Institute, 1987), 421.

<sup>9</sup> “Review of George Boyle, *Democracy’s Second Chance*,” *CWL* 20, at 157 (written in 1942).

<sup>10</sup> *CWL* 21, at 30-31 (emphasis in original). The full poem is as follows: “Flower in the crannied wall, / I pluck you out of the crannies, / I hold you here, root and all, in my hand, / Little flower – but if I could understand / What you are, root and all, and all in all / I should know what God and man is.” Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Selected Poetry*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge, 1995), 65.

philosophy and theology are integral and, even if clues occur less frequently than, for instance, on Trinitarian theology or epistemology, there is a rich aesthetics and theory of art in his work, which I find more promising than Heidegger's aesthetic project, despite his refined aesthetic sense.<sup>11</sup>

Liberty is a central theme in Lonergan's writing on art and aesthetics. In *Insight* he writes: "But man's artistry testifies to his freedom."<sup>12</sup> In *Topics in Education* we find: "The artist withdraws from the ready-made world, but that withdrawal has its significance. It is a withdrawal from practical living to explore possibilities of fuller living in a richer world."<sup>13</sup> Finally, in *Method* he writes of the subject in the aesthetic pattern of experience becoming "just himself: emergent, ecstatic, originating freedom."<sup>14</sup> This theme is the topic of our lead article, "Aesthetics, Art, Liberty, and the Ultimate," by Alexandra Gillis. In her intimate account Gillis beautifully evokes the ultimate ground and significance of an aesthetically mediated liberty.

As subjects in the aesthetic pattern become just themselves, and art is a concrete expression of that freedom, so art has its function in history. "There is such a thing as progress, and its principle is liberty."<sup>15</sup> It is fitting, then, that Lonergan's chapter on "Art" in *Topics in Education* comes immediately before the final chapter on "History." Lonergan's appreciation of the function of art and aesthetics in history is worth exploring. Lonergan refers to Bruno Snell's *The Discovery of the Mind*<sup>16</sup> and to Snell's recognition of the function of literature in preparing the emergence of philosophy in Athens in the work of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.<sup>17</sup> There is, then, an aesthetic preparation of human experience and expression relevant to the emergence of stages of meaning in history, and so Lonergan writes in *Method*: "With Giambattista Vico, then, we hold for the priority of poetry."<sup>18</sup> As Homer, Sappho, Hesiod,

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger's aesthetics is caught in counter-positional confusion about what an 'aesthetic thing' is and what 'truth' is. On the 'aesthetic thing' see Philip McShane's article below on pages 59-60 and *Insight*, *CWL* 3, chapter 8, as well as *CWL* 10, 223-232.

<sup>12</sup> *CWL* 3, 209.

<sup>13</sup> *CWL* 10, 217.

<sup>14</sup> *Method*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> *CWL* 3, 259.

<sup>16</sup> Bruno Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960); for Lonergan's references to Snell in *Method*, see the following footnote.

<sup>17</sup> Lonergan's analysis of Snell plays a significant part of his account of stages of meaning in *Method*. See especially pages 90-93, but also pages 97, 98, 173, 260 and 304.

<sup>18</sup> *Method*, 73. Also of relevance is this passage from chapter 11: "Human knowing and feeling are incomplete without expression. The development, then, of symbols, of the arts, of a literature is intrinsic to human advance."

and the Greek dramatists developed a sophistication of symbol and expression that made possible that remarkable turn to mind in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, so too the art of the last two centuries, in its exploratory and innovative expressions, intimates an emergence of the hoped-for third stage of meaning resplendent in the fruits of self-appropriated creativity and a matching linguistic feed-back.

This zone is rich in possibilities and I can touch on only a few highlights. There are the non-linguistic shifts and advances in dance, visual art, and music. The beginning of the last century brought forth the emergence in both popular and serious dance of a proliferation of new forms, from the shock of Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* through the jazz dance, pioneered by Katherine Dunham and Jack Cole and popularized by Bob Fosse, to contemporary hip hop. In serious music the shift out of the classical tradition that began with Beethoven's late string quartets and piano sonatas has led a tonal and compositional revolution still in progress. In popular music, while the world's folk forms have endured, they have been joined by a glorious proliferation of new popular genres such as blues, jazz, tango, fado, and rock, to name but a few. More recently, world music blends the different ethnic and national forms to signal the emergence of a global sound consciousness. Jazz itself has evolved in its 100 year history from a popular form played in clubs to a serious 'high' art incorporating European classical and African influences and elements. In the visual arts there is a trajectory of innovation from the Impressionists, through Cubism, Abstract Expressionism, and Conceptual Art to a contemporary culture where film and video technologies and performance art stand alongside traditional plastic arts.

Turning to linguistic forms, just as in the ancient 'Greek discovery of mind,' so also in contemporary times, literature plays a midwife role in the development of symbol and expression, a development relevant in our own age to the gradual emergence of a third stage of meaning. I think here of the stream of consciousness revolution that emerged in full dress with James Joyce, Marcel Proust, and Virginia Woolf, a revolution adopted in various ways by a coterie of twentieth century writers such as Henry Miller, Anaïs Nin, Julio Cortázar, César Vallejo, Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll, Yukio Mishima, and Haruki Murakami among many others.<sup>19</sup> Among songwriters, Bob Dylan is an outstanding linguistic innovator who blends traditional music forms with stream of consciousness techniques and the literary influences of Blake, T. S. Elliot, the French Symbolists, and the folk and blues lyric that

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Already we have drawn the reader's attention to a rich but concise illustration of this by Bruno Snell in his *The Discovery of the Mind.*" *Method*, 303-4.

<sup>19</sup> It is almost redundant to list writers influenced by stream of consciousness technique, as it has become a standard element in the contemporary writer's toolbox. What is interesting in the list is the global reach of the influence.

revolutionized popular lyric. In this issue Glenn Hughes discusses eloquently the meaning of Dylan's poetry in music and situates it in the broader context of Lonergan's philosophy of art, in particular, the context of Lonergan's notion of "ulterior significance." Pat Brown, responding to Hughes' article, uses the occasion to explore in a novel and distinctive fashion how themes and notions in Lonergan's philosophy of art extend in surprising ways into the whole of his thought, further illuminating Lonergan's aesthetic analysis and its radical philosophical and theological implications. Their exchange took place at the meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association in November 2010.

The importance of linguistic innovation as an essential component in the emergence of the third stage of meaning in history is relevant to appreciating Philip McShane's expansive article, "Aesthetic Loneliness and the Heart of Science." The article is a revision of his keynote address for the "International Conference of the Liberal Arts" which took place at the end of September 2010 in St. Thomas University, Fredericton, New Brunswick. As such, it was McShane's version of a popular address. Atypically, at the conference he read the text verbatim.

Many have been put off by McShane's persistence in the use of Joycean language and his own creative neologisms. Perhaps that instinctive reaction results in part from the unconscious assumption that present language is a fixed rather than an organically and historically developing reality—a fact famously and luminously illustrated by Joyce's "Oxen of the Sun" chapter in *Ulysses*. We tend to view language from the limited perspective of the synchronic slice we happen to be born into rather than from the sweeping diachronic perspective revealed by the whole history of human speaking and writing. Yet to allude to another Canadian intellectual innovator, Marshall McLuhan, there is a sense in which 'the medium is the message.'

Lonergan is quite explicit about the fact that "the interpenetration of knowledge and expression implies a solidarity, almost a fusion, of the development of knowledge and the development of language."<sup>20</sup> Perhaps no one has paid more sustained attention to the radical implications of that position concerning "the development of language" than McShane. The development of the "startlingly strange" knowledge that is self-appropriation requires a corresponding development of language that will be equally strange or startling. And it is no exaggeration to say that we cannot yet adequately envision that "fusion."<sup>21</sup> How do we explicitly incorporate a linguistic feedback expression adequate to self-

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<sup>20</sup> *Insight*, CWL 3, at 577.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth noting that McShane's naming of a whole line of future potential development in the human sciences as "fusionism" is not his own neologism, but simply a bow to Lonergan's own position on the matter. See generally Philip McShane, *Sane Economics and Fusionism* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2010).

appropriated expression in the third stage of meaning? Will it include the advances in symbolic and aesthetic form that have been recasting our conversation in the last two centuries? Whether McShane is more Joyce than Dylan in this development I cannot say, but it seems to me that the academic discourse of the third stage of meaning will slowly move towards interiorly differentiated consciousness that is prepared by the symbolic and linguistic innovations of our best contemporary artists and thinkers. It will not be a minor tweak to traditional forms typified in the peer-reviewed standard of the presently-constituted academic article. There will be pleasant surprises and unpleasant conflicts.

Turning to the content of McShane's article, I cannot help but think we are witness to a wonderful, hopeful sublation of the problem of C. P. Snow's 'two cultures,' a problem neatly touched on recently by Hugo Meynell in his article "Consilience of Los and Urizen: Insight and Oversight in William Blake."<sup>22</sup> McShane's persistent criticism of the Lonergan movement has been most evident in his insistence on the appropriation of the theoretical habit, but as this article makes plain, the personal appropriation of our aesthetic sensibility is of equal significance in an authentic appropriation of the meaning of Lonergan's leap to the third stage of meaning.

Finally, as this journal is dedicated to the task of beginning a functional specialist approach, it should be noted that none of the articles in this issue has made the shift fully and explicitly into the functional specialist expression that would be the cosmopolitan norm in the third stage. Bruce Anderson's article, "The Evident Need for Specialization in Visual Art Studies," however, addresses the need for this as it applies to studies in art, adopting McShane's pragmatically-recommended minimalist approach. As the participants in the SGEME Functional Specialization Seminars<sup>23</sup> have realized, it is a steep climb to adequate third-stage meaning and expression. Our next issue, volume 7, will take up the theme of ethics. It will be followed by a series of volumes resulting from the efforts of the successive functional specialties seminars. Volume 8 will start the series with an issue on Functional Research, followed by issues on Functional Interpretation and Functional History, all presently in various stages of completion.

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<sup>22</sup> Meynell's essay will appear in *The Lonergan Review*, vol. 3 (2011).

<sup>23</sup> The Functional Specialization Seminars can be found at <http://www.sgeme.org/BlogEngine/default.aspx>.