
Towards an 'Immutable Essence': Nature and Responsibility

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Launching the publication of his theory entitled *Relational Aesthetics* in 1998, Nicolas Bourriaud began with the following observation: "Artistic activity is a game, whose forms, patterns and functions develop and evolve according to periods and social contexts; *it is not an immutable essence.*"¹ This is one conception of the tendencies of contemporary artistic practice at the close of the last century and it is cited here because it concisely illustrates, at least with regards to fine art, the dichotomy between relativity on the one hand and immutability on the other. It further raises two self-evident points that can be elaborated: first, that definitions within "periods and social contexts" are never fixed, but necessarily shift and change in their relativity, resulting in further periods and contexts. Second, that within this relativity, authorship itself is questionable when works of art are defined by "periods and social contexts", for unless we choose to maintain that we are "rootless intelligences"² unaffected by any kind of local influence, we are in fact consumed by an interdependency that has gripped us from the moment we first breathed air. In synthesis, when an art object rests on such loose foundations and is prized at the level of fashion, where then does the *necessity* lie in its creation?

While it is fair to suppose for the reasons outlined above that art is indeed *not* an immutable essence, it has never stopped the artist from attempting to engage with it through means beyond the limiting mechanics of one specific artistic discipline alone. Yet what processes can the artist use to move towards an immutable essence and why should this be necessary? There is a tension that one encounters within artistic practice between the work's *originality* and *inheritance*. A work may be original in the sense that it is new or fresh, but this cannot be stretched to maintain that the work is not *derivative*, that it is "rootless". The cynical view may be to see this as a dead end; a cul-de-sac where we are cursed to reframe continually previous outmoded concepts as fashion dictates. But what of inheritance? The term, when used here, is not to be mistaken for *tradition* in the modernist sense, but rather the acceptance that artistic practice cannot be exclusively influenced through artistic channels alone, its processes instead shaped by every possible aspect of our lives. This is not merely a historical sensitivity, placing oneself within a tradition, but an

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Lyon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 11. [Emphasis is mine].

² The poet Gary Snyder observed of American society that "it operates under the delusion that we are each a kind of "solitary knower"—that we exist as *rootless intelligences* without layers of localized contexts." 'Tawny Grammar' in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 65.

appreciation of elements that dwell both within and without our person and are common to all.

T.S. Eliot once made the observation that our critical intuition is one where “we endeavour to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed.”³ While Eliot sought to establish an awareness of our creative traditions, the focus on tradition is nevertheless a linear approach, and one still maintained either consciously or unconsciously by critics and practitioners alike. Even Bourriaud, writing almost eighty years after the publication of ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1917), would maintain that “an artwork is a dot on a line.”⁴ There is scope for expansion on this. We can all accept that the barriers have been crumbling that delineate artistic media – such are, we are told, the times – but since these boundaries were born of the minds of our predecessors, then to be fed and maintained by our own, one may question whether they have ever truly existed at all. Tradition is based on such imagined things, for it is our *minds* that give them weight. It is in the same manner that we give a particular value capital to certain artworks and not to others; it is why some artists are successful and others never will be.⁵ To view art as any sort of linear process thus requires an abundance of faith in our own terms and definitions.

Jean-François Lyotard asserted that the postmodern has existed in all periods of artistic production as nascent and recurrent.⁶ Though the terrain of knowledge and information transfer continues to alter dramatically, deconstruction, derivation and appropriation have been taking place in the arts since time immemorial. The tension between originality and inheritance is not a new one: Chaucer drew his material from Boccaccio, Dante and Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* amongst others. Shakespeare took the story of Hamlet from Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum (History of the Danes)*, and numerous plays sprang from Plutarch’s *Lives*, as well as Raphael Holinshed’s history, the *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, a second edition having been published in 1587. Milton, most famously, took the Bible. When examined in this way, the transparency of tradition and originality is quickly revealed. No artist can be exempt because no single event of artistic creation can be isolated. It is our sincere efforts over history to believe that they *can* that has resulted in some of the more interesting artistic exploits throughout time, simply because certain individuals were able to see through the barriers that we were so eager to maintain.

The burden of originality is not so much that we isolate objects in order to enjoy them, but that we consequently isolate ourselves. When you remove originality from the equation, you are left with the artist, the processes involved in making work and the effects of the process. To discard originality is to discard the concept of ‘pure art’ – that is, ‘art for art’s sake’ – leaving the sinews of the whole endeavour exposed and, when one can no longer hide behind tradition or fashion, the artist is suddenly held accountable. He must

³ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *Selected Prose* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1953), 22.

⁴ Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 21.

⁵ Electronic correspondence with John Slyce.

⁶ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Postmodernism’ in *The Postmodern Explained: Correspondence 1982-1985* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 13.

now take responsibility for his intentions in making the work and reveal the need for its existence.

It can be no accident, then, that the two individuals within this study are outwardly of separate disciplines and cultures. Both are mindful of their intentions, materials and responsibilities. Both are rooted in their own distinct cultures, yet a humanity pervades their work that defies such boundaries. Other parallels will reveal themselves, but if an explanation for their discussion is necessary, it lies in the fact that they afford dramatic perspectives on the human condition through art forms that accomplish what individualistic art cannot, that is, utilise their inheritance through attitudes of humanism and responsibility for the purpose of approaching an “immutable essence” common to all humanity.

The Responsibility of the Artist

There are few areas within the humanities where a tendency towards responsibility and an immutable essence can be more keenly felt than within the heritage of Russian realism as distilled in the art of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. His Nobel Lecture of 1970 made explicit the philosophical currents that flowed through works such as *The First Circle* and *Cancer Ward* (both 1968) for the first time. Solzhenitsyn began by highlighting two possible directions for the artist:

One artist sees himself as the creator of an independent spiritual world; he hoists onto his shoulders the task of creating this world, of peopling it and of bearing the all-embracing responsibility for it, but he crumbles beneath it, for a mortal genius is not capable of bearing such a burden....

Another artist, recognising a higher power above, gladly works as a humble apprentice beneath God's heaven; then, however, his responsibility for everything that is written or drawn, for the souls which perceive his work, is more exacting than ever.⁷

Solzhenitsyn's comparison encompasses core themes within the creative process and produces a categorical assertion of a true *nature* of art, which, despite our definitions, traditions and moral relativity, remains nevertheless undefiled by such efforts. While Solzhenitsyn granted the artist the right to pursue his own 'pure art', he maintained that it was essentially a moral imperative that such artists be implored to acknowledge the *reality* of the world that would lead them towards an experience of 'true art', as Solzhenitsyn saw it, and their true responsibility as artists.

Solzhenitsyn's art was formed in the GULAG,⁸ and, as he stressed from the Nobel rostrum, it was formed by *others*: “As I stand here today, accompanied by the shadows of the fallen, with bowed head allowing others who were worthy earlier to precede me to this platform, as I stand here, how am I to

⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Nobel Lecture' in *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*, tr. Alexis Klimoff (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company Inc., 1973), 558.

⁸ The Chief Directorate of Corrective Labour Camps and Colonies (from the Russian: *Glavnoye Upravleniye Ispravitelno-trudovykh Lagerey i kolonii*). Anne Applebaum, *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2004), 67.

divine and express what *they* would have wished to say?"⁹ For the number of times that Lev Tolstoy's influence has been commented on in the criticism surrounding Solzhenitsyn's work, the Count's views on art, for all the intellection and learning that he could muster, can only pale in comparison to the accumulated experiences wrought by what has evidently come to be regarded as a cultural crucible of modern Russia. Quite contrary to Tolstoy, who proudly provided answers, Solzhenitsyn, with modesty, examined the world through questions.¹⁰ These questions centred around a rigorous self-examination, but also extended to the concept of artistic creation as a whole. Within Solzhenitsyn's Orthodox spirituality, the ability to create art was nothing less than a gift, an innate vocation that compelled the artist to take up his duties as "a humble apprentice beneath God's heaven". By comparison, while Tolstoy battled against Tsarist censorship by putting forth the view, superficially similar to Solzhenitsyn's, that "Art transmitting feelings flowing from the religious perception of our time...should be acknowledged, highly valued and encouraged",¹¹ he concluded his argument by simply replacing one censorious teleology with another: stipulating that any art that did not conform to such "feelings", "should be acknowledged as bad art, deserving not to be encouraged, but driven out, denied and despised...".¹²

As we have already seen, Solzhenitsyn chose instead to acknowledge the freedom of the artist to choose his own path; yet to have been denied his freedom for so long, it was a subject that underwent Solzhenitsyn's closest scrutiny. In his 'Letter to the Fourth Congress of Soviet Writers' in 1972, Solzhenitsyn wrote that literature which "does not warn in time against threatening moral and social dangers—such literature does not deserve the name of literature; it is only a façade."¹³ Furthermore, if the artist retreats into "his self-made worlds or the spaces of his subjective whims, he *can* surrender the real world into the hands of men who are mercenary, if not worthless, if not insane."¹⁴

Upon his emergence from the Soviet prison complex, Solzhenitsyn grew increasingly disillusioned by the outside world, and the West in particular, in which he and his comrades had placed so much hope.

Why is it that societies which have been benumbed for half a century by lies they have been forced to swallow, find within themselves a certain lucidity of heart and soul which enables them to see things in their true perspective and to perceive the real meaning of events; whereas societies with access to every kind of information suddenly plunge into lethargy, into a kind of mass blindness, a kind of voluntary self-deception?¹⁵

⁹ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Nobel Lecture', 561.

¹⁰ Kathryn B. Feuer, 'Solzhenitsyn and the Legacy of Tolstoy' in *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company Inc., 1973), 140.

¹¹ Lev Tolstoy, *What is Art?* tr. A. Maude (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 234.

¹² *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Sobranie sochinenii*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Posev Verlag, 1970), VI, 9.

¹⁴ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Nobel Lecture', 568.

¹⁵ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, *Warning to the Western World* (London: Bodley Head Ltd., 1976), 29. While the advent of totalitarianism that Solzhenitsyn envisaged for the West failed to materialise, echoes of his warning persist around our own contemporary society. In the words of Edward Said: "Crucial policy questions affecting human existence are best left to 'experts', specialists who talk about their speciality only, ... 'insiders', people (usually men) who are endowed with the special privilege of knowing how things really work, and more important, of being close to power.

Heinrich Böll, who proposed Solzhenitsyn for the Nobel Prize, made the observation that Solzhenitsyn is an author essentially concerned with suffering.¹⁶ Beyond the need for happiness that arises from it, there can be no concept that is more universal for mankind. Solzhenitsyn's art is indeed the product of what has been in his case a most potent and tangible suffering at the hands of warfare, incarceration, cancer and exile respectively. While this has produced a "lucidity of heart and soul" within the author, he has himself admitted that perhaps such things must be directly experienced in order to be understood. Can art and literature "perform a miracle" and "overcome man's detrimental peculiarity of learning from personal experience so that the experience of other people passes him by in vain"?¹⁷ Can any work of art ultimately escape the constraints of subjectivity? Can a communication of suffering lead to the *transcendence* of suffering?

There is then a sense that the work itself, a relative art form like any other, must rest on its ideals, indeed its ideals are its responsibility: the purpose of "true art" for Solzhenitsyn is nothing short of the unification of humanity beneath the banner of a unified Truth, Goodness and Beauty, engaging at once with the present, yet also with what Solzhenitsyn referred to in no uncertain terms as the "Eternal." The Japanese thinker Soetsu Yanagi, in paraphrasing Lao Tzu, reflected that it is in immoral times that the need for a moralist arises ("...we, mankind, have paid an unreasonably expensive bill to get a Socrates").¹⁸ Dissatisfied as we are with the world, we need our heroes, and one might be tempted to interpret Solzhenitsyn's philosophy in such a manner: conceived as a necessary product of suffering, his art looks to provide us with a means to rise above it through morality, towards a more harmonious world. It is by appealing to a very concrete *nature* of art that Solzhenitsyn attempts to do this, and must therefore require investigation into what a nature of art might entail.

The Nature of Art

On the back cover of Yanagi's translated major writings, *The Unknown Craftsman* (1972), there appears a review by the American Craft Council's journal, *Craft Horizons*, that reads thus: "Yanagi pinpoints qualities of 'true' beauty with an authority that hardly allows us to differ. *As does Solzhenitsyn, he feels that beauty is a real entity and not different from truth.*"¹⁹ It seems exemplary of the common humanity within their work that two individuals from such diverse backgrounds and disciplines could be so casually compared.

Humanistic culture in general has acted in tacit compliance with this anti-democratic view, the more regrettably since...so-called policy issues can hardly be said to enhance human community." Edward Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community' in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: The New Press, 2002), 136.

¹⁶ Heinrich Böll interviewed by Werner Koch. West German Radio, Third Program, and *Sonntags Journal*, No. 42 (17-18 October 1970), 27.

¹⁷ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Nobel Lecture', 565.

¹⁸ Soetsu Yanagi, 'The Responsibility of the Craftsman' in *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty* (Tokyo: Kodansha International Ltd., 1972), 217.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, back cover. [Emphasis is mine].

“Art is not defiled by our efforts, neither does it thereby depart from its true nature.” But what is the *truth of beauty*? Seemingly by chance, works come into being that manage to communicate something irrefutable, unequivocal, despite the infinite systems of thought and prejudice that the human mind, in experiencing them, can yield. As Solzhenitsyn would say, such a work “bears within itself its own verification”, while “artificial and forced concepts do not survive their trial by images; both image and concept crumble and turn out feeble, pale and unconvincing.”²⁰

Time and again, there appear those individuals who we perceive as heroes—we see their work and begin to relate to them, we become inspired by them. But how often, on closer examination, do these artists turn out to be something other than what we *thought* they were? Those whose images and ideas, at first so beautiful, in fact mask a darker reality of suffering from which such apparent heroes know not the means of escape.²¹ When we see the artist not as image, but stripped of his work, does this not change our perception of his images when we return to them? Can the two, artist and work, really be so easily separated, or explained away as some form of tragic expression? If we do indeed feel moved by such works, and perceive a beauty within them, perhaps we should examine just what it is that we are moved by; if we would stand by our sentiments to such a degree that we would be able to trade places with that artist, to live and suffer as he has, to die as martyrs to that cause. Of course, if we can isolate artworks in order to enjoy them, it ceases to be our problem; it ceases to be our fault.

Perhaps taking responsibility may not be enough. It is from Soetsu Yanagi’s discussion of simple folkcrafts that the problem of such personality in individual artworks can begin to be addressed:

“...‘Individualistic beauty’ is lower than beauty that transcends the individual. To the latter type folkcraft belongs, whereas the individual artist is often so wrapped up in himself and his expression that he goes against the laws of nature. This can also be explained by the fact that the power of the individual is weaker than that of tradition. Personality, however great, is nothing compared with nature.”²²

The path of the individual artist is isolation—their legacy is an illusion. But what then is one left with should we remove the individual from the work? By acknowledging originality as a loose foundation for making work, and then consequently discarding the necessity of establishing an individual identity, one is simply left with the tools and materials of the practice—the *process* of it. Taking Yanagi’s lead, we might further hazard to attempt a definition of the irrefutable, unequivocal object that Solzhenitsyn touched on previously, albeit within the context of folkcraft.

²⁰ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, ‘Nobel Lecture’, 560.

²¹ From personal experience, examining biographical material on Mark Rothko was revelatory in this regard. I had every wish to hold Rothko’s work close to my heart—he was perhaps my late step-father’s most cherished artist—yet one’s sentiments and reality do not always match. The biographical material was James Breslin’s *Mark Rothko: A Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

²² Soetsu Yanagi, ‘The Way of Craftsmanship’ in *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, 199.

Yanagi attributed three characteristics to authentic work: that it is natural; that it is useful; that it is made by hand. For anyone who has experienced such an object in the flesh (and this does not include the museum cabinet), they may have found it to yield a peculiar experience in the union of form, function and tradition (by which we mean here *cultural inheritance*). It is peculiar, because it is unfamiliar—one could not maintain that one comes across such items very often in a post-industrial society. To be *natural*, the object must also be uncontrived, for surely that is, by definition, what ‘natural’ means. As human beings, it might be reasonable to put forward the view that we are of nature; yet most of what we produce is contrived. In other words, what we produce is *artificial*. Because it is our habit to find something “that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed” —because we prefer our “self-made worlds” and spaces of our “subjective whims” —we simply have no experience, never mind the habit, of creating and experiencing natural objects.

It is interesting that this essay is actually a very good example of the core issues under discussion. There are no original thoughts within this work; it is simply a representation of material acquired during attempts to gain an education over the last several years. In reality, it is a work of *convenience* rather than *necessity*—a chance to take stock of ideas perhaps, but little more. But we like to leave a mark. As Solzhenitsyn observed, why must we support the establishment of identity, the craving for the ‘new’ and revolution in a world where nothing has ever changed, where the lessons of history are never learnt and the same mistakes are made again and again?

Writing on the ‘Responsibility of the Craftsman’, Yanagi chose the example of Sung dynasty Chinese pottery: “Everyone knows that Sung pottery is without signatures. One of the essential causes of the beauty of Sung pots lies in their anonymity. The objects themselves are better assurance than any signature could give.”²³ Certainly one seems to learn more about oneself through the investigation of established forms and methods: a successful process yields a successful result and a poor process yields a poor result, nothing more, nothing less. Otherwise, we may continue to bluff our way along in the hope that someday, someone will take notice. But what have they really taken notice of, and how long can that last?

Shoji Hamada, a younger potter within Yanagi’s circle, when asked by someone why he had built himself a huge kiln that could hold ten thousand pots when surely a small kiln would suffice, answered with the following:

If a kiln is small, I might be able to control it completely, that is to say, my own self can become a controller, a master of the kiln. But man’s own self is but a small thing after all. When I work at the large kiln, the power of my own self becomes so feeble that it cannot control it adequately. It means that for the large kiln, the power that is beyond me is necessary. Without the mercy of such invisible power I cannot get good pieces. One of the reasons why I wanted to have a large kiln is because I want to be a potter, if I may, who works more in grace than in his own power. You know nearly all the best old pots were done in huge kilns.²⁴

²³ Sōetsu Yanagi, ‘The Responsibility of the Craftsman’ in *The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty*, 223.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 224.

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Afterward

When examining this project as whole, there are notable discrepancies between the intentions of my original abstract, and the resulting article. I would like to take this opportunity to redress this divergence.

By in large, the same topics are under discussion. For example, I intended to address “questions surrounding the division between “crafts” and “fine art” in aesthetic terms, and “work” and “art” in a more general political and cultural sense”. I began to notice as I wrote the article that I was restricting myself within a historical narrative; I felt that it distracted attention from the real point of the piece, which, in the true spirit of *Humanitas*, is an honest investigation of pre-conceived notions of reality. I began to feel certain that a personal investigation, beginning from my own experience, would not only help to enforce the points I was trying to make within the work, but also be truer to the intentions of my original proposal and the ethos of my target journal.

The most obvious omission is that of any reference to Native American culture. Native American culture is indeed something that I have personal experience of and in many ways is entirely relevant to the spirit of this article. However, while Native American crafts contain all the virtues that Sōetsu Yanagi has so eloquently described within his studies of folkcraft, the Native American culture is so entwined with the history, politics and economics of the United States that it seemed my allocated word limit could do the subject little justice. After five hundred years of exploitation and cross-cultural fertilisation, the culture of the Native tribes is a topic all its own.

As I mention within the piece, it was in fact an excerpt from a book review that led me to write the paper that you see here. That a comparison between the Russian writer Alexandr Solzhenitsyn and the Japanese philosopher-aesthete Sōetsu Yanagi is at first so apparently *odd* in fact speaks volumes about what I perceive as a “common humanity” within their respective philosophies. Both of these thinkers have influenced my own practical work over the years in a direct way and so it seemed only natural that my discussion, beginning from my own experiences, should be formed around them.

I can only hope that limiting the scope of my article in this way has added something to it.

Matthew Brack

Original Article Proposal

The publication to which I will be submitting my article is *Humanitas*, a scholarly journal published by the National Humanities Institute in Washington, DC.

Humanitas exists to challenge “uncritical assumptions” and confront an “unwillingness genuinely to consider unaccustomed ideas” in the field of

humanistic studies.²⁵ *Humanitas* identifies the need to dissolve the partisan disposition common to academia and institutions through an acceptance of one's own obscurities and an empathy for other systems of thought. This empathy is my core link with this publication, for only the widest possible view on any subject matter will allow for one's ideas and methods to emerge clear and verified having been tested against all available knowledge on the subject—both supportive and contradictory.

My topic aims to explore and assess the validity of aesthetic artistic motivation in our society. In a broader sense it aims to engage with our very understanding of culture and its legitimacy; not to deconstruct it in a superficial way, leaving nothing, but to examine the root cause of many of our assumptions in the hope of finding alternatives. As such, my article looks to engage with sociology, anthropology and historical sources as well as aesthetics. Whilst orientating myself around a focused case study—the dichotomy between European American and Native American culture in the American West—this inter-disciplinary approach serves to highlight more universal experiences within actual human life, lending itself well to the *Humanitas* ethos.

My decision to seek publication in a journal outside of the fine arts was perhaps a necessary one. When attempting to substantiate the very validity of “fine art” as a truly worthwhile, illuminating exercise, an objective approach from outside its established community appears to offer an invaluable degree of flexibility with which to engage in this task. *Humanitas* would seem to provide a free base from which to remove the carpet from beneath my own views and allow for examination before it is either put back, or replaced. In the same manner that a work will always be assumed to be “art” within the gallery context, fine art publications still lie within their own community and cater to its needs. If one begins to challenge the very usefulness of creating fine art, then you are quickly at the community's perimeter. The fine artist must work on the supposition that their work, in some manner, is valid and necessary. If one cannot relate to that experience, then one is probably not a fine artist.

Notably for an academic journal, *Humanitas* is not afraid to reference popular culture or revisit material that many might already have shelved as cliché. The opening paragraph of Anthony Harrigan's essay “History, the Past, and the Inner Life” illustrates this well, while also providing a succinct example of the critical perspective found in *Humanitas*:

A character in Michael Crichton's scientific mystery novel *Timeline* employs the term “temporal provincials” to describe people who believe only the present time matters. In the view of these people, he says, the past has no meaning, studying history is as pointless as learning Morse Code or how to drive a horse-drawn wagon. They don't understand that everything we know and do today is derived from events and discoveries of the near and distant past.²⁶

²⁵ *Humanitas*, 6, No. 1 (Fall 1992/Winter 1993)

²⁶ *Humanitas*, 17, Nos. 1&2 (2004)

It seems self-evident that *Humanitas* and those who read it would rather the humanistic scholar erred on the side of intellectual daring than seek comfort in the safety of established notions of academic scholarship.

The *Humanitas* mission is to revitalise the humanities. True to this, *Humanitas* acknowledges that such material can come from a wide variety of sources and expects to receive manuscripts that could not have been published without it. While *Humanitas* welcomes writing from many fields, it is also conscious of its readership, aiming to publish in each journal a selection of texts that might otherwise have been left scattered to other academic journals throughout the world, never reaching those who are truly interested in their content. *Humanitas* is therefore a facilitator for both its authors and readers, each sharing in a common vision to bring about a more genuine intellectual freedom.

Humanitas publishes a wide range of material both in terms of style and content. Articles range in length from 2,000 to 14,000 words and take the form of essays, book reviews, dialogues, personal reflections and even poetry. Often essays will be printed as part of a series (for example, three essays featured in "A Dialogue on Babbit and Lincoln")²⁷ while some articles stand alone as more isolated treatises within a *Humanitas* volume ("The Matrix, Liberal Education and Other Splinters in the Mind" alongside "Kafka's Afflicted Vision: a Literary-Theological Critique").²⁸

Not all articles are by established academics, and nor does *Humanitas* expect them to be, but all submissions that "fall within the editorial direction of the journal will be subject to customary academic review" nonetheless.²⁹ The submission that I wish to propose would therefore be submitted as a shorter, independent essay. The author of an unsolicited manuscript would necessarily be excluded from a "dialogue" or other essay series.

Humanitas volumes take the form of standard academic journals in an American house style: American punctuation (double quotation marks, punctuation marks inside quotation marks) and, of course, spelling. Elements that add a little individuality within this framework are running footlines (as opposed to headlines), replaced at the top of the page by a triple rule which is consistent throughout the volume. The choice of font appears to be a Palatino which has a distinct italic that is used for all article titles.³⁰ There is a notable use of marginal notes, appearing on the inside margin of each page. Interestingly, they seem rather arbitrary and unnecessary, though perhaps are intended as a tool for reader orientation within the text. There are footnotes rather than endnotes, and frequent use of subtitles, again perhaps

²⁷ *Humanitas*, 15, No. 1 (2002)

²⁸ *Humanitas*, 17, Nos. 1&2 (2004)

²⁹ <<http://www.nhinet.org/submissions.htm>> accessed 1 December, 2005.

³⁰ I have written this proposal and abstract in Palatino Linotype to illustrate and have attempted to emulate the *Humanitas* house style in every way possible. There was no style sheet.

to aid orientation. This orientation is an important point: *Humanitas* expresses a desire to see its articles heavily used to further others' research.

Original Abstract

This article begins in the American West as a focused study that sets out to explore the dichotomy between the overtly rational European modes of thought that arrived there in force during the nineteenth century, and the indigenous culture that received them.

From more archaic perspectives of the West such as Frederick Turner's "the outer edge of the wave—the meeting point between savagery and civilisation" to the concept that anyone living in that land intellectually, imaginatively, or morally might have equal claim to being a Native American, this enquiry opens the way towards broader questions concerning culture and human life.

In particular, this essay examines the aesthetics and tools of the Native and European American as expressions of their culture. Here two factors seem defining: an emphasis on *process* rather than result and the aesthetics of function, imbuing necessary work with a meaning relevant to all who experience it. It is at this stage that I would like to question how artists or artisans of European origin encountered and engaged with this paradigm, perhaps going so far as to embody the principles that might make an American "native" in that land.

For a society in continuous existential turmoil, this raises questions surrounding the division between "crafts" and "fine art" in aesthetic terms, and "work" and "art" in a more general political and cultural sense. Depending on how one defines creativity, is the Socialist ideal that the domain of privilege to think and act creatively should be available to all members of society an impossibility, or a freedom we have always had, the victim of what

Ivan Illich called “the 500-year war against subsistence”? In a society of isolation, can thinking and acting creatively in the fine arts bring the same benefit to society and the individual as common pottery created by an “unknown” craftsman?