Introduction: "concernin questions arty"

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Although it is only recently that studies of relations between the arts have acquired the nature of a "discipline," there is a long history of discussions of this kind. Indeed, tracing this heritage is a feature of many current interarts projects, and this sense of ancestry is possibly the surest sign that interarts has come of age as a discipline. Among these documents, the oldest would seem to be the saying of Simonides of Ceos (5th century B.C.), that poetry is a speaking picture and painting a mute poem, which in its "*ut pictura, poesis*" formulation by Horace in his *Art of Poetry* (c. 20 B.C.), has become a kind of slogan for the entire enterprise, especially by reason of the way that the expression and its implications were reclaimed and reinterpreted by G.E. Lessing in his equally classicist attempt to distinguish between the arts in his *Laocoön* (1766). Nor should one forget the witty contribution made in the Renaissance by Leonardo da Vinci who, detecting the way that Simonides's seemingly innocent equation involved a disability metaphor which served in effect to disadvantage the pictorial arts, emphasized the *paragone* or competitive aspect of interarts relations and argued that if painting is called "mute poetry," then poetry must be called "blind painting," going on to ask rhetorically which was the greater affliction.

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The Romantic and Victorian periods are of course replete with discussions of interarts relations, many significantly by multi-media artists like Blake, Morris and Rossetti; but perhaps it is in the 20th century, in a 1926 poem by e.e.cummings—also a multi-media artist—that one finds the most provocative and delightful syntheses of what the interarts debate did or could involve:

> mr youse needn't be so spry
> concernin questions arty
>
> each has his tastes but as for i
> i likes a certain party
>
> gimme the he-man's solid bliss
> for youse ideas i'll match youse
>
> a pretty girl who naked is
> is worth a million statues *

Not only does cummings here engage in a playful variation on the cliche that "one picture is worth a thousand words," not only does he enlist the equally formulaic argument that "about taste there can be no disputing," not only does he offer a living alternative to Lessing's marble model, and not only does he recast the Pygmalian myth in an earthy idiom, but he also draws attention to the long history of aligning the respective arts with different genders and levels of education and sophistication, thereby bringing into focus what contemporary theorists have identified as the primary significance and fuel of interarts debate: the extent to which arguments about the arts tend to be displaced discussions of other matters.

What has led to this modern perception has much to do with the way that the rationale for comparing the arts in itself has changed. That is, whereas in earlier periods what was seen to constitute the common ground was the "mimetic" impulse, today the linkage is found in the sense that all the arts are equally and only sign systems, with none of them having any or more direct access to "reality"—phenomenal or transcendental—than the others, and with no one art being more natural or more "artificial" than another. Symptomatic here is the way that the older recourse to generic categories like painting and poetry has been replaced with broader and more neutral terms like visual and verbal, or image and word. This does not mean, however, that the personal element or notion of reference have been totally abandoned but rather that much more attention is given to the role of the perceiver/viewer, whereby instead of being regarded as a debate about the way "things are"—or even perhaps about what "art is"—discussions of the arts are now approached in terms of what they tell us about who and how "we are."

What has also changed the kinds of arguments that are advanced is technology, which in effect has leveled the playing field by artificially compensating for what were previously seen as disabilities or media-innate limitations. Equally important, technology tended to shift attention away from concerns with individual talent to questions of available modes of production, and to the extent that technology reintroduced the notion of "craft" it also served to broaden the playing field. At the same time, as Walter Benjamin so perceptively observed in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," technology can be seen not only as the artist's friend but also the artist can be seen as technology's herald: "One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form" (Chap. 14).

This sense of collaboration is also everywhere evident in *Sunday in the Park*, the James Lapine and Stephen Sondheim musical which in itself could be described as a dramatizing of the central concerns of interarts theorizing. As George (the modern day descendant of Seurat) realizes, "Having just the vision's no solution / Everything depends on execution / The art of making art / Is putting it together," and the "it" involves not only talent and technology but a whole ensemble of factors:

> Lining up a prominent commission—
> And an exhibition in addition—
> Here a little dab of politician—
> There a little dab of publication—
> Till you have a balanced composition—

Yet as Dot, Seurat's "illiterate" wife, knows, the real secret of "putting it all together" is the human element or love—"We've always belonged together," she sings to George, and her daughter Marie emphasizes both the real and metaphoric connection between interarts relations and human relations when she in turn sings that the essence of life is "Children and Art."

Actually, this was also a key "romantic" perception of the otherwise somewhat "classical" Lessing, who wrote at the beginning of chapter two of his *Laocoön*: "Whether it be fact or fiction that Love inspired the first artistic effort in the fine arts, this much is certain: she never tired of guiding the hands of the old masters." In this way we might also return to Lessing's initial distinction between three kinds of responses to interarts relations—those of the amateur, the philosopher, and the critic—and suggest that when it comes to the arts, we are all *amateurs*—or should be.

It is for all these reasons, then, that *The Interarts Project* was chosen for the title of the present four-part volume—"interarts" rather than "interart" in order to emphasize that the synergism is never merely technical or two-dimensional if only because the reader/viewer constitutes a "third," and "project" because of its double-duty as a noun and a verb and accordingly its multiple connotations. For similar reasons, instead of grouping the contributions along the lines of two-art exchanges (i.e., music and literature, visual and verbal art), the series is organized in terms of key ways of addressing interarts relations in general: Part 1: "Establishing Frameworks"; Part 2: "Cultural Agendas": Part 3: "Representing Women"; Part 4: "Challenging the Mainstream."

With respect to the present issue, "Establishing Frameworks," what should probably be emphasized at the outset is that this objective is achieved in a somewhat ironic fashion—i. e., instead of any institutionalizing tendency, most of the essays are concerned with questioning and challenging traditional ways of classifying, ranking, and distinguishing among the arts. Indeed, many could be seen as taking their cue from the opening lines of Robert Frost's "Mending Wall," another document in the genealogy of interarts theorizing: "Something there is that doesn't like a wall / That wants it down." But just as Frost's speaker speculates about alternative ways of corresponding with his neighbor, so the essays in this issue are concerned with drafting new kinds of models and strategies, and collectively they suggest the range of possible ways of discussing interarts issues.

Thus three of the essays identify particularly fertile historical climates: the medieval period (Olson), the early 20th century (Hargrove), and the contemporary postmodernist ethos (Garrett-Petts & Lawrence). Two of the essays provide very different slants on multi-talented artists, both attempting to find an appropriate methodology, but with one looking for an underlying system (Hooper) whereas the other emphasizes that the essence of such artists lies in their resistance to grouping (Whitted). Another essay suggests the way that features of a visual genre can be extrapolated to foreground the distinguishing characteristics of a seemingly shapeless type of verbal art (Smith), while another explores the way that music operates in a multi-media production and completes the work of the visual and verbal arts (Brown). Employing an interdisciplinary approach, another essay identifies the human mind and body itself as the locus of interarts investigation (Watling).

What also tends ultimately to link all the essays is a sense that interarts theorizing is of practical importance and not merely an academic exercise, suggesting that while e. e. cummings's crude speaker may be objectionable in his macho, he does strike the right note when he argues that such debates need to be grounded in the "real" and that it is not merely specialists who might have something to say "concernin questions arty."

• Reproduced from e.e. cummings. *100 Selected Poems.* New York: Grove, 1959.