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T H E

G E N E R A T I O N

S E R I E S

W A Y N E

E A S T C O T T

THE HIDDEN DIMENSION: AN APPRECIATION OF THE ART OF WAYNE EASTCOTT

Wayne Eastcott's art, like that of many contemporary artists, began as a reaction. The adulation given in Canada to the Group of Seven seemed over-done. The landscape as an artistic medium also seemed almost obsessive. Clearly, it is within such a reactionary scene in Canada that artists on the west coast like B.C. Binning, Roy Kiyooka, Tony Onley, Jack Shadbolt and Gordon Smith led the way into abstractionist art. Already during the 1950's in New York, abstractionism had become significant as a movement. The search for pure abstraction, looking deeper than obvious content, developed experimentation everywhere and anywhere. Further investigation led into the drug culture, a new interest in Zen, and also much discussion on introspection such as the I Ching. Questions such as, why do I paint?, what is truthful?, intensified the desire to transcend the superficial and to penetrate the deep issues of reality. How could the artist tap into deeper levels than the superficial images and visions of the eye?

Wayne Eastcott himself had tried yoga, eastern mysticism, Zen, and other quests. Eventually in 1966-67 he became a Christian. Christian art friends encouraged him to go deeper in his quest for the significance of the image. Meanwhile, he had developed his own techniques of using Xerox images on silk-screening, etching and engraving. In 1968 he received a Canada Council art grant from the Canadian Government for his work in establishing Xerox copying as a printmaking process. At the same time, the Xerox company gave him \$20,000 worth of equipment. Since then, Wayne has become Canada's most technically accomplished Xerox-grams," Dan Flavin's "Fluorescent icons," Eastcott has pioneered "Xerography." All of these are diverse efforts to bring technology into the service of art. This marriage of the machine and the imagination seems unlikely, yet this is what Eastcott had determined to do.

THREE STAGES OF THE ARTIST'S DEVELOPMENT

In attempting to do so, Eastcott's art may be traceable through three stages. As one might suspect, this first stage was merely experiment, openly crude and unrefined. For he simply took multiple images of small objects such as aspirin tablets or metal springs, and produced them directly on to Xerox paper.

The second stage was the further advance that he made with his technical skill, so that by multiple processes he created superimposed images, with colour separation. At this stage, art critics began to take notice of him, and had his prints shown in such cities as Toronto and Tokyo. He was recognized with the award of membership to the Royal Canadian Academy of Art. Artist friends like Alan Wood began to push him further as a professional artist urging him to deal with things not currently popular, to taking "risks" and to dig deeper.

So by the mid-seventies, he had established himself technically as an artist. By 1979 when he first exhibited in Tokyo with the support of the Canadian Ambassador there, he was no longer a Xerox artist, but a technically accomplished artist who happened to use Xerox copying in his art. But spiritually, he was still wrestling with how to give union to the machine and the imagination. Subliminally, he was fascinated with the beautiful faces of women. But they were always the fantasies of television, cinema and *Vogue* magazine, separating beauty as an abstraction from the sensuality of the real and the individual. For he merely cut out his scarlet-lipped girls from the lipstick ads, and overlaid them with the harsh-headed logical language of the computer and the Xerox copier. Their dehumanization was complete, for their beauty merely peeled off like a print that could cover any mask. For it was just make-up that made them the central images of a technological world.

I sense that Wayne Eastcott is now in a third stage of his art. He is no longer pre-occupied with his technical skills. He no longer needs to, and indeed he sees the danger artistically of allowing technique to dominate and obsess him. To remain a creative artist, he sees that his technique must remain simply as a tool and no more. So from the experimentation

of technique, he is now moving more and more into the imaginative use of his images. These he plans in sequence, seeing not one but five or more pieces of art at once, rather like the unity of the triptych in medieval art. Two or even four years are therefore not too long for him to have as a gestation period, in order to reflect and to think out his sequences. First there is thought, then the imagining, then its rational impact, followed by the mixing of colours, and finally the crystallizing of the images.

THE ARTIST'S CONSCIOUS SYMBOLISM

In my discussions with the artist, it is fair perhaps to report first of all upon what he sees he is doing consciously. Then perhaps I can dare to go further and comment theologically on what I see to be the significance of his work, certainly now and perhaps also in the future.

Clearly, Wayne Eastcott is deeply aware of the impact of technology upon society. His reading of books by Jacques Ellul such as, *The Technological Society*, the *Meaning of the City*, or Hans Rookmaaker's comments on modern art, have educated him in this area. He sees the dehumanization of mankind most deeply in the *Vogue* masks of beautiful women. He also sees the alienation of the city, with its technology, not only in his own use of Xerography, but also as healing images such as the frequent motif that he has adopted of the surgical operation. Thus also his computer images are ambiguous, revealing both good and evil.

He recognizes this present world is a created world of treescapes and landscapes especially, but also slum clearance is expressive of redemptive efforts within it. Clearly, there is not such dichotomy for Eastcott as there was for William Cowper when he nearly separated his images in the ditty: "God made the country, but man made the town."

Creation for Eastcott is represented both by the computer and the landscape, both by the city and the sea. He also realizes that the same laws that first established and subsequently still maintain the cosmos, are also those laws discoverable and utilized by man in this electronic age. Thus he uses these two matrices of the computer and of the land-

scape to symbolize these two realities of man and nature. There are fields in which to see played out other elements of creation.

The flux of life is oscillatory, for today we live with a greater amplitude of emotions between melancholy and joy. We daily experience both lows and highs. It is less easy therefore to live with fixed conclusions. So the sequence of prints is open-ended, with no finale. Yet to the man of faith as Eastcott himself is, the ambiguity grows less with the maturing of faith, suggesting an increasing stability. Thus the earlier years are the darkest, not because technology is evil, but because darkness suggests for him the dominance of the secular and the technical. It is constructed with the lightness of the fifth print (of the Generation series), where peace and serenity dominate the emotions, and the seascape prevails over the affairs of man. Colours are thus dominated by blacks and whites to arouse subliminal reflections and moods.

A further symbolism is used by the artist in his vertical and horizontal frames. The vertical format is the more active and vibrant, and extroverted type of art. The horizontal format is more passive, either for evil or for good. It encourages a more contemplative mood, reaching its climax in the fifth image, where lightness and horizontality together, exemplified by the sea, are profoundly restful.

The response of the artist is to take us further, deeper and in more detail, within the symbolism we have glimpsed so far.

The five pieces have a linear tonal direction reading from left to right. The left one (Generation One) being the darkest and the right one (Generation Five) being the lightest. This shift from darkness to light is meant to signify progression: from ignorance to knowledge; from alienation to revelation; from a state of depression to one of enlightenment; from evil to salvation; from a lack of understanding of God in the universe, to an acceptance of Christ Jesus both in a personal sense and in a universal sense of "God in all of creation."

This five print series can be seen as the beginning of a series of cycles from darkness to light, to darkness to light etc. as man goes throughout the various phases of acceptance and rejection of God's part in creation and of his or her life in particular. But the dark tones

(rejection) will of course, become increasingly lighter and the light tones (exuberant joy) will become deeper and more substantial. That is to say, the cyclical effect will diminish and the pieces of art (that is man's life and understanding) will become stable and strong, replete in richness, variation, and fullness. Thus they are not so manic-depressive but steadfast in knowledge and realization.

In the *first* print (Generation One) the computer, or printed circuit image, is the strongest and most obvious. The colour is somewhat harsh and the paper is black. Indeed, this piece is the darkest of them all. This is to signify the state of man's fullest dependence upon technology and in his literal search for man-made truths. The circuit was chosen as an image because, it is highly technical and it is typical of man's contemporary search for truth. But it also demonstrates, even though unwittingly so, the obedience necessary to God's rules in creation. This is true even if this is not always recognized by man himself.

The secondary images of the mechanical aspect are the strong, diagonal lines running from upper left to lower right; this is the most noticeable in the centre of the piece. This is in fact an escalator, although it is so reduced that it becomes useful in the whole piece, not so much as a concrete image but as a mechanical structure which actually supports the diagrammatic structure of the circuit. Thus it provides a three-dimensional perspective.

The other main component in the first piece is the landscape element. This is accentuated by the layer of clear varnish that makes the images of trees etc. stand out mostly as a surface change from matt to gloss. That is to say, it is extremely subtle. This is a matrix of God's original creation that underlies all of man's world.

In the *second* print (Generation Two) the dominating, obvious image is the city slum, to represent the alienation of the City. There is a large white shape, not immediately recognizable at the bottom, with some hard, cut-out coloured pieces floating above. This print is far more subtle and complex than the first, though the first perhaps is the more profound. The dehumanization of the city is obvious. But the white shape at the bottom, slowly exposes itself to us as a skull. This can be read first as a death skull, then as a medically healing x-ray with the hand of the surgeon or healer above.

The second print represents how man has been created under God to have a mandate over technology, that is to say in the exercise of medicine. He is capable of greatness. The cut-out coloured pieces that seem at first to be cut-out patterns or perhaps floating mechanical parts soon reveal themselves to have some relation to a landscape, that is to say with the trees. Upon later examination of Generation Four, the fourth print shows the dominance of the landscape element and indicates that the cut-out, floating pieces are shapes which are based upon the spaces between the branches of the trees. Then in a very subtle way these shapes introduce the natural landscape to a mechanical world. Soon other natural elements such as the trees and the leaves begin to surface on the lower level of the left side, the lower right corner and the top centre.

The second print is still dark but it is emerging as the landscape awakens and some colour of light, or knowledge, is beginning to be evident. The structure in this print grows from within. For the x-ray photograph of the skull for example, shows a healing-rod vertically. There are three strong horizontal lines in white, which are the hand, the table edge, and the calipers holding the skull. That is to say, the structure is becoming more inherent and less obvious or imposed. The surface is developing a depth. The structure is functioning in an interpenetrating way, in and out, as well as having a vertical, up and down movement.

As in a triptych, the middle or *third* print (Generation Three) is somewhat of a focal piece for the five prints. The technological elements of the circuit, which are exactly the same as prints One, Three and Five, are starting to fade in importance. In contrast, the landscape elements are becoming increasingly dominant. However, this landscape is composed of the mechanical lines of technology (in the diagonal lines of the escalators running upper left and lower right). So the landscape is not free. This is the only piece that contains a figure of a human-being. This third print is on white paper (the first two being on black). The air is dark, melancholy, and introverted. There is a dominance of God's natural creation, but it is without colour. It is void of real life. It is a mask of life. But above is the rainbow of promise. For God has not forsaken his creation, even if man would wish or think

he would or has. The destructive urban environment of Print Two becomes in the third print a city of function and use. Noticeable is the hope reflected in the top half on pale blue, especially so in the right side. Note however, that this third element is exactly the same as the landscape element in Print One, but in this case it is much freer, even though it is made up of mechanical elements.

In the *fourth* print (Generation Four) the landscape element become full-blown. It is extravagant, extroverted, joyous and great! The final understanding of truth -- it is expressive of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is like Paul's revelation on the road to Damascus, where new understanding is given. The image has become covered with the full spectrum. Now the city has become a habitable place for man. This is the city from Print One, now transformed.

The skull which has a dual role in Print Two, now become in this piece (Print Four) the greenery of new growth. The structures, which are so obvious, now become underlying strength in tune with nature. Note how the blue-green divisions of the vertical centre cross one-third of the way down in horizontal lines.

In the *fifth* print (Generation Five) we have a conclusion to this series. Here all the ideas evident in the first four prints now reach a maturity.

This transition from Print Four to Print Five is that of exuberance of youth, so a new revelation, new response in conversion lead to maturity in the wisdom of understanding and truth. This is the lightest piece, the opposite of darkness, with the least contrast with the paper colour. For it has pale colours on white paper. It depicts a tranquility of understanding and assurance. The landscape has become the sea and its shore. Two horizontal lines form at right angles with the buildings to depict man's technology -- housing -- slum clearance -- in strong vertical lines. These two very strong elements of the buildings and the sea (natural and man-made landscape), form a stable and secure structure -- the "rock" of faith. Over all, is the electronic component of Prints One and Three, but in this print it is almost invisible; in fact, it is only a change in surface matt to gloss. The waves of colour that flow over Print Five are as fine and subtle as life, not "Black and White." The operating scene with

the surgeons, clamps and gowns are obvious just above the horizon line in the centre, with the nurses on the upper right.

So we have all the elements of technology of man (of healing and medicine), the computer (representative of the universal of God's creation as used by man), the trauma and healing of fear and health, which is symbolized by the technology of the operating room, as well as by the slum buildings, their clearance, and their mass housing. In short, we have all the negative and positive fluctuating elements of this life, that are embodied in a calm, universally structured state. Likewise, we have the life of a mature Christian living amid all the turmoil in a tranquil but strong state, knowing that God is in control. For he is indeed in control, not only of one's own life but of all time and space, all nature and technology. It is all one's fears now working under God's direction and control. One's understanding of this may not be experienced yet, but one can work actively towards this, or passively at least accept the future prints that will develop this idea further.

It is also interesting to note the relationship between Prints One and Three, and Two and Four. They are, as it were, mirror images of each other, each reflecting two of many possible sides of growth. That is to say, sometimes the landscape surfaces are seen as evil, dark and foreboding, or they are seen as open and joyous, or perhaps deep and complex. At other times, technology surfaces as any or all of these things. The point is that all things are God's creation, but it is our understanding or perception of things that change. These two pairs of prints show the fluctuation of things, whereas Print Five is like a climax or rather the realization of this, and of its celebration.

AN OBSERVER'S REACTIONS

The first reaction of a casual observer may be one of impatience. Is the artist tricking us with too much imagery that we do not "understand," nor feel inclined to understand? One's senses are perhaps outraged by its absence of plain communication in a world already bizarre and topsy-turvy? Is it another of those things that suggest an absurd world? Life is already too complicated and stressful to fill one's home with such art.

Indeed, the second reaction may be one of deep disturbance. To cope with life one has to repress, not open up too much subliminally. This is not restful art, but is this the purpose of art, to put us to sleep with the familiar landmarks and values of the unexamined? Is not art really the restless striving for truth and reality as it really is? One can be assured of this; that whoever hangs up such art in their lounge will have conversation pieces to keep guests awake, if not also alarmed. But should art not bring comfort and hope as well as realism? Does an Andrew Wyeth or an Alex Colville not do so, with old values and roots as well? Do we really want the machine to join forces so deeply with our imagination? Is this not the fear, that 1984 is already upon us, no longer a George Orwell novel, but a stark reality?

A third reaction is that the power of Xerography has the ability to neutralize and bring to nothingness our physical sensations of reality. To those who wish to remain alive and be individuals, is there not even a sense of courage that Eastcott's images should be played out symphonically in colour and tone, so that we feel enveloped in images of acoustical splendour. Yet is the real person not stripped of sensuality and of individuality, and reduced to mere images? Is such not-being not a combination of "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance?"

I am not surprised if there are common reactions to this new form of art. But I don't believe the artist really intends to leave us with these emotions. I don't believe he is caressing cold and inanimate weapons of modern technology with the varnish of romanticism. I don't believe this is a variant of pop art, inconsequential and mere "happenings." But there is no question that he wants to arrest our attention to disturb us, and to explore the avenues to truth more deeply than what meets the eye. For as Blake said:

This Life's dim windows of the soul
Distorts the heavens from Pole to Pole,
And leads you to believe a lie
When you see with, not through, the eye.

Today, the TV camera would seduce us to live with fantasy not reality, by inducing us to "see with, not through the eye." But to see *through the eye* is to allow the soul of man to grasp the significance of

what is seen, to see it in all its relation to the totality of God's creation. For again says Blake, "All the world in a grain of sand," is the true way of seeing God's world.

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

What then is this theological perspective? But wait a minute! Is the union between art and theology not a strange one? No, I think it is a legitimate one. Perhaps three basic reasons should reassure us of this union as valid. First, the union between art and theology is because both are ecumenical, dealing with man as he is, a human being living today in a highly technicalized world. Second, both art and theology are concerned in peeling away the layers of conventionality and consensus, to penetrate the subterfuges and illusions, to gain deeper insight into truth. Just as the English novel has traditionally sought to penetrate beyond the caste system of social values and social barriers. Or as the French novel has peeled back the layers of personality, or like the Russian novel has even explored into the dark caverns of the soul and its passions. So modern art is engaged in the ruthless quest for the real. Theology likewise is concerned ultimately with God as the Way, the Truth and the Life. So both are concerned with the peeling back of the layers of reality.

Third, theology and art are both concerned to touch upon the mysteries of life and on the motives that we form in living. Unfortunately, the artist is often experimental, uncommitted; he or she looks through the eye and then sees nothing. That is why so much modern art is nihilistic. But when the artist combines theology and art even unconsciously so, the subliminal responses are very different. The dimorphic response of Wayne Eastcott is of this order, I believe. For he gives us hope, even when the realism is disturbing. What is this hope?

We shrink from accepting this inter-penetration of the technical with the natural world, which Wayne Eastcott consistently shows us. Yet we have always been familiar with the inter-penetration of life and matter in the biosphere, by the mediation of the atmosphere and sunlight. We are also told by Teilhard de Chardin and others of the reality of the "noosphere" or reality of mind that now also envelopes the world. Marxist philosophers go further, speaking of the "tech-

nosphere," that is, the interpenetration of technique and the natural environment of the world, that will eventually witness the ultimate triumph of man's dialectical materialism. In Eastcott's art this possibility is anticipated, and made visual before us.

This forces the Christian to also deepen his or her perspective and to recognize the inter-penetration of creation and redemption at deeper levels. Indeed, the mystery of this is intensified. For if Christ is the Saviour of the World and Redeemer of Man, he must be able to penetrate deeper than all man's efforts to re-direct the genetic code, to split the atom, to domesticate plants, to preserve endangered species, and to so transform the world's landscapes. If sin lies at the heart of all human endeavour and of all human creativity, so that all his expressions are ambiguous, for good and evil, then the presence of Christ must indeed be as the One in whom all things in all Creation co-inhere God as the Creator-Redeemer of Man, the Technician who must enter into, and encompass all that Eastcott's art reveals, and much, much more.

Indeed, even our neat theological categories of Creation and Redemption need revision, seeing the redemptive character of Creation, and the creative power of Redemption.

Modern literary scholarship sees Genesis 1 : 1 as a dependent clause: "When God began to create the heaven and the earth." That verse goes on to speak of it being the contrary of creation, as *tohu wa-ital*, that is to say, "without form and void." In the first three days God takes up the challenge of its formlessness, by ordaining bounds to establish structures. In the fourth through sixth days, he ordains replication to populate the void. Such then is the reality of Creation over chaos. If such is God's power at creation, what of sovereignty and redeeming grace over the powers of the technological world today and tomorrow? As Gerard Manley Hopkins saw it:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil ...

True, it is "smeared," and it "smells," of sin and death. But it is still God's world in its totality, as when the apostle saw it "groaning in travail, awaiting the redemption on the sons of God."

It is against this religious perspective that I have been profoundly moved to see and to respond to the imagery of Wayne Eastcott's prints. I can understand why he is hopeful of this technicalized world, where others see only 1984, and the abolition of man by the machine. He shows us then, both the darkness of such a secular world, gradually and hopefully transformed in the light, symphonic tones of what we can anticipate New Creation to be all about: total and complete. Of this the artist can only give us hints and glances. For who can describe the newness of the-not-yet, and the radical redemption of the has-been? So the artist portrays a skull, not a death skull, but the x-ray photograph, and the surgeon's calipers that promise healing by technical skill. The urban clearance also promises renewal of urban blight. The streets of downtown Manhattan, are also the branches of the life-giving tree.

Thus the inter-penetration of images, technical and natural, which first startled us, now re-assure us that if man itself can also give us promise of good and healing usage of technology, how much more profound must be the redemptive reality of God who has created both the natural world, and who had given the skills and mandate to rule over the earth? As the apostle argues, "Seeing then we have such hope, we use greatness of speech." This too, is the message that Wayne Eastcott conveys to me.

James M. Houston
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