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Arts Trade Association Dinner: Speech Research (1963-1967): Article 03

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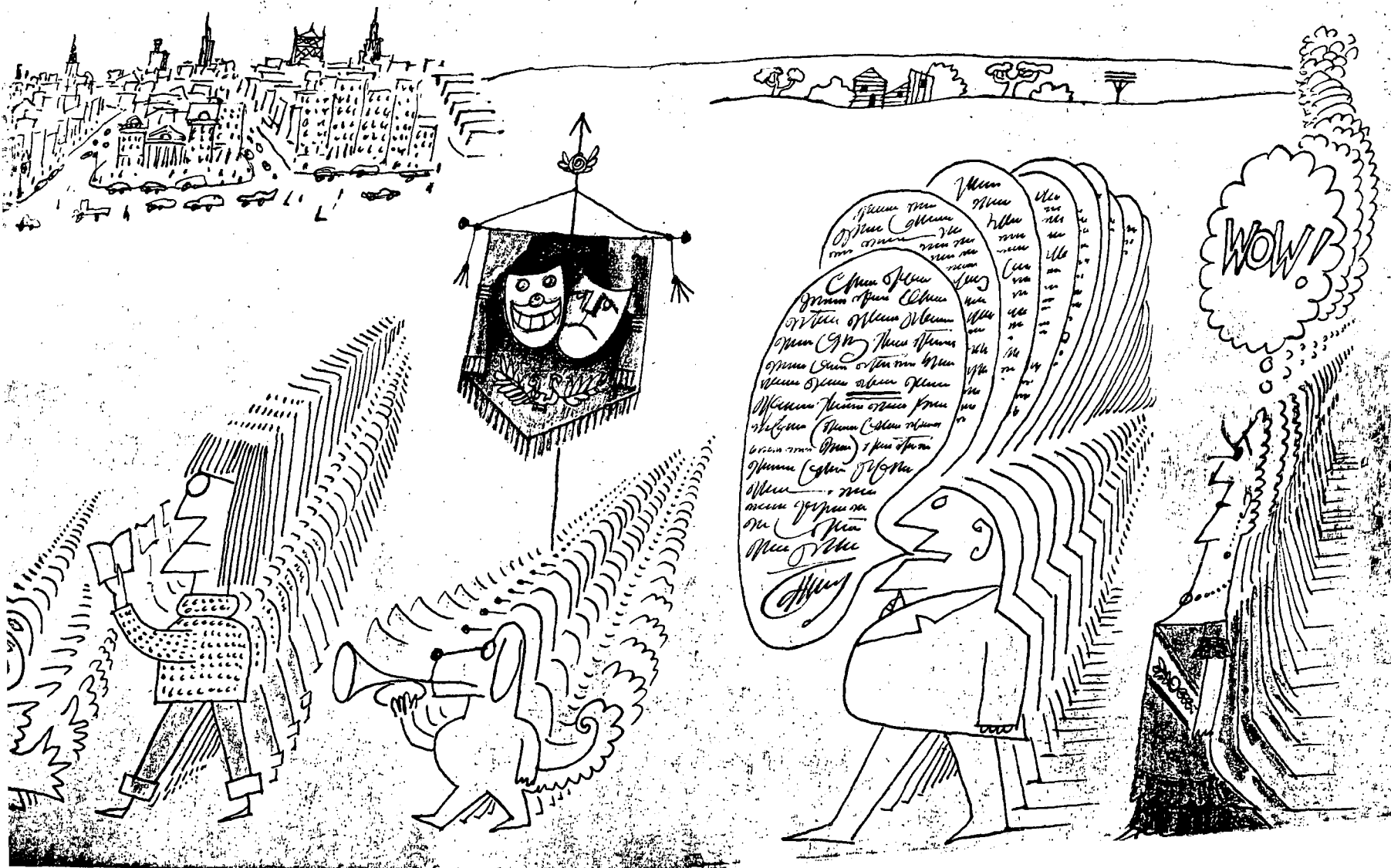
A Quantity of Culture

by Alvin Toffler

Painting, sculpture, music, theatre, books—all are booming as Americans develop, unexpectedly, a mass interest in the arts. Saul Steinberg's drawing appears to place him among those critics who regard this trend as a highly organized toying with Pegasus. The accompanying article, eschewing the argument as to whether the Muses can be democratized, merely measures the size and shape of the boom in culture.

To the unprepared visitor it was a strange scene. In one corner Mrs. Glyde Scribner, a Minnetonka, Minnesota, pharmacist, hurled a lump of red clay fiercely to the floor, picked it up tenderly, examined it, then slammed it to the ground once more. Again and again she repeated this procedure until, winded, she set the shapeless mass on a high table in front of her, beamed at it, and caught her breath. This performance—known to sculptors as “wedging” clay—occasioned no surprise among the dozen other people in the room, for they, like Mrs. Scribner, had all come to the Minnetonka Center of Arts and Education for an evening of ceramic sculpture. There, while a radio tuned to WLOL-FM filled the room with the strains of Bach's *Cantata No. 140*, they molded and modeled statues, plaques, and birdbaths under the watchful eye of an instructor borrowed from the College of St. Catherine in nearby St. Paul.

To the Minnetonka Center, founded in 1951 and currently housed in a small stucco-and-frame building set by the side of a tree-lined road, come over 600 suburbanites



to paint, sculpt, study creative writing, and, in general, pursue the arts. They include doctors, dentists, retired executives, a smattering of elderly spinsters, and, of course, the energetic Mrs. Scribner.

About a mile down the road from the center is a somewhat less elevated establishment—a beer joint. Its façade wears two large metal signs proclaiming it to be “Minnetonka’s Fun Spot.” Inside, a customer can not only drink Hamm’s beer and listen to an earsplitting jukebox, he can buy original oil paintings from those on display on the walls for prices as high as \$350.

These two institutions, each in its own modest way, symbolize a major transformation in the tastes and interests of Americans. A generation ago H. L. Mencken could characterize vast stretches of the U.S. as a “Sahara of the Bozart” and Carol Kennicott, repining, found that to be “artistic” or “highbrow” along Main Street was considered “priggish and of dubious virtue.” Now the U.S. is experiencing a cultural surge of truly unprecedented proportions, which began shortly after World War II, gathered momentum during the early 1950’s, and, in the last few years, has washed into the least likely corners of the land. Naturally, observers of American culture are eager to understand the meaning of this movement. Among cultural critics and social historians a vehement discussion is raging as to whether the new interest in the arts is good, bad, or merely superficial. The pessimists seem to dominate the discussion: Dwight Macdonald deplors “Masscult” and “its bastard, Midcult” as corrupters of taste; Ernest van den Haag believes that popular approval has become “the only moral and aesthetic standard most people recognize”; Harold Schonberg, ~~the music critic, thinks that the popularization of culture~~ exalts the second and third rate at the expense of true excellence. Edward Shils of the University of Chicago is more optimistic, holding that “discrimination in a small minority . . . is as acutely perceptive as it ever was” and that “the prospects for superior culture seem to be reasonably good.”

We don’t intend to get into the argument but, while it rages, merely to record some of the statistics and factual material about this cultural upsurge in the U.S.—how “big” it is, how it is organized, what it costs. It is even coloring management decisions. Whatever its meaning, this phenomenon has had a remarkable effect upon this fruitful and unpredictable continent.

The price tag

To start at the least qualitative point (the dollar sign), the sheer expenditure on cultural activities is impressive. Nobody can say with precision where the lines of culture begin and where they end. But within an area of rough agreement the figures are startling. For example, Americans in 1960 spent nearly \$300 million just to operate their 620 art museums. How much more they poured into their 3,300 historical, scientific, and other non-art museums is an unknown but clearly sizable sum. Americans also laid out over \$300 million to run their public libraries. They spent some \$200 million to buy paintings, prints, color reproductions, and art materials for professional and amateur fine-arts use. They bought \$90 million worth of recordings of classical music; they also spent \$590 million for musical instruments and \$26 million to operate their symphony orchestras—not counting those connected with schools and colleges. Their bill for books ran to at least \$1 billion, a figure large enough to leave

an impressive sum even after subtracting all the textbooks, westerns, and whodunits. They spent about \$375 million at theatre, opera, and concert-hall box offices.

Exactly how much more they spent for art and music education in the schools, or for watercolor instruction and ballet lessons outside the schools, is impossible to know. And no one knows how many millions are being spent to run the literally hundreds of art centers, like the one in Minnetonka, that have sprouted up in wild profusion across the nation in the past decade. Americans spent or donated, all together, a rock-bottom minimum of \$3 billion for culture last year, a figure that excludes public funds and business gifts. The significant point is that this sum is 70 per cent more than the comparable estimate for ten years ago.

All this has meant profitable times for those companies that directly feed the appetite for the arts (musical-instrument makers, for example). But many companies that never thought of themselves as having any business with culture are surprised to discover that they have become patrons of the arts. Others find the yearning for culture affecting decisions in the fields of personnel recruiting and plant location. Many job applicants not only want to know what fringe benefits go with the job, they want to know what cultural advantages there will be for them and their children in the community. In trying to attract personnel, says J. C. Whitaker, a director of the R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. in Winston-Salem, “we make it a point to mention the many cultural groups in our city.” In Cincinnati, Procter & Gamble mails a booklet describing local cultural events to young men it is seeking to recruit. I.B.M.’s choice of Rochester, Minnesota, San Jose, California, and Westchester, New York, as locations for new installations was influenced by the existence of lively cultural institutions in these places. Pat Touchae, a former mayor of Waterloo, Iowa, remembers that a couple of years ago his town “tried like the dickens to attract a certain industry here and it ended up in another Iowa city where there was a well-developed cultural program, including an art gallery and theatre.” Since then, Waterloo has worked hard to develop local cultural activities.

The concrete expression

The most conspicuous expressions of America’s new culture consciousness are the structures now abuilding in many cities to house cultural institutions. New York, of course, is building its \$142-million Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts to house the Metropolitan Opera, the New York Philharmonic, the Juilliard School of Music, and other institutions. St. Paul is close to realizing its goal of \$2,500,000 for a handsome new downtown arts-and-science building. These are only two examples among impressive projects that include a new \$24-million Music Center in Los Angeles, a cultural center based around Wayne State University in Detroit, a \$500,000 arts center in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Museums, starting up at an average rate of one every four days for the last twenty-nine years, now number 3,900. In 1932 there were twelve museums in the U.S. for each million of population. Today there are twenty-two. The increase in the number of museums reflects “demand” as measured by attendance. A survey of twenty-one museums showed their combined 1958 attendance to be 19,370,000. By 1960 this had climbed more than 10 per cent to 21,360,000. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in

New York chalked up a 17 per cent increase between 1958 and 1960. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, devoted largely to abstract art, opened its doors in 1959 and was jammed by 939,000 visitors in its first year; some days the queues stretched for blocks. When the Detroit Institute of Arts unveiled its magnificent exhibition of Flemish masterpieces last winter, it clocked 105,000 viewers, 60,000 of whom paid admission for the privilege of viewing the van Eycks and van der Weydens.

Libraries, too, are doing a thriving business. The number of volumes in public libraries has increased from 143 million in 1950 to 210 million in 1960. Nor were these volumes just gathering dust. Total public-library circulation reached 677 million volumes in 1958, and has been going up ever since. And readers were buying as well as borrowing, as the \$1 billion spent for books attests. At the rate that book buying has been increasing, according to a study prepared for the Book Manufacturers' Institute, Americans will be purchasing—and presumably reading—1.2 billion books a year by 1965.

Crescendo

Americans were listening, as well, in a cultivated way. According to Helen Thompson, executive secretary of the American Symphony Orchestra League, the increase in symphony attendance in recent years has been nothing short of "phenomenal." Attendance at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, for example, rose from 300,000 to 700,000 a year in the last decade. With this kind of encouragement, new orchestras have formed at a rapid rate and old ones have increased the length of their seasons. In 1950 there were approximately 800 orchestras in the U.S.; today there are 1,200, and most of the new ones have cropped up in cities with 50,000 population or less. In all, these orchestras played about 7,800 performances last year before an estimated total attendance of ten million.

The Metropolitan Opera Association (whose 1961-62 season was saved by the intervention of the Secretary of Labor) last year played to over 96 per cent of capacity, during a lengthened season in New York, and played to virtually 100 per cent of capacity during its nine-city tour of places like Birmingham, Alabama, and Bloomington, Indiana. There are now in the U.S. 750 opera-producing groups, either professional or amateur. The Detroit Opera Theatre, started only two years ago, was successful in staging opera in English, including such infrequently performed works as Douglas Moore's *Galantry*, and Donizetti's *The Night Bell*. The Dallas Civic Opera Co., founded in 1957, will put on six performances this season in a 4,200-seat hall.

At the same time, Americans were thronging record stores, buying last year 25 million long-playing disks of what not long ago was derisively termed "longhair stuff." This represented a 78 per cent increase over the comparable figure only three years ago. Moreover, the Fifties saw a spectacular rise in amateur music making. The number of instrumentalists soared, and the dollar volume of instrument sales was up 150 per cent.

A newer wave of mass interest has shaken the world of painting and sculpture. Ten years ago there were about 150 art galleries in New York and perhaps an equal number spread thinly across the country, nearly all in the larger cities. Today there are over 300 galleries in New York alone, and nobody has counted the hundreds that have popped up in places like Flint, Michigan, and Quincy, Illinois. In Phoenix, Arizona, according to Dr. F. M.

Hinkhouse, director of the Phoenix Art Museum, there were two galleries in 1950, four in 1955. The four did a combined business estimated at \$100,000. Today, says Dr. Hinkhouse, there are at least fifteen galleries with an estimated volume of \$1,500,000.

Galleries range from old and richly impressive Fifty-seventh Street emporiums like Knoedler's to a new kind of suburban or semi-suburban gallery like Detroit's Raven Gallery, which opened its doors in July, 1960. The Raven is a store-front operation nestling in a quiet residential neighborhood. Started on a shoestring of \$5,000 by a former printer named Herbert Cohen, the gallery sells sculpture and paintings for from \$10 to as much as \$2,300, all the work of Michigan artists. To attract the public, Cohen stages chamber-music recitals and discussions on cultural subjects for broadcast on WQRS, a local FM station. He serves patrons pastries and coffee. In its first year the Raven had 40,000 visitors.

The National Art Materials Trade Association estimates that the number of Sunday painters rose from 30 million in 1950 to 40 million in 1960—although this would seem to be one of the Unknowable Statistics discussed in an article on page 146. The breadth and variety of the amateur movement are illustrated by what happened in 1957 when a young woman producer suggested that KQED, a San Francisco educational TV station, air a half-hour program about Japanese brush painting. Since it was to be a "how-to" program, she thought of selling brush-painting kits to interested viewers. Accordingly, she bought 300 sets and exhibited them at the end of the program. "Frankly," says James Day, general manager of the station, "I was skeptical. I told her I hoped she had made arrangements to return all the sets she couldn't sell." The program has since been sold to fifty-three other TV channels around the country, and 14,000 sets have been sold at \$3 each.

Theatres everywhere

The Broadway theatre may be somewhat anemic, but elsewhere a very vigorous theatre has sprung up. New York's off-Broadway playhouses have grown from a handful in 1950 to thirty-two last year, when, according to Paul Libin of the League of Off-Broadway Theaters and Producers, they took in an estimated \$3 million from nearly one million patrons. Outside New York, professional resident acting companies have been formed in cities like Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, Houston, Washington, San Francisco. According to *Variety*, there are also now about 5,000 nonprofessional theatre groups in the U.S., plus approximately the same number of college theatres, and perhaps 15,000 more groups in clubs, churches, schools, and even prisons.

In the late Forties there were about a dozen movie houses—half of them in New York—that regularly showed so-called art films, foreign films, movie classics, and experimental shorts. Since then the audience for these has snowballed to the point at which today it supports an "art circuit" of some 500 theatres from Trenton, New Jersey, to Tempe, Arizona. The quality of films shown in the art circuit is uneven, and many "art houses" mix what the trade calls "exploitation films" in with their art. But the rise of the art film—most of its footage imported—is highly significant, coming, as it did, during a decade that saw over-all movie attendance drop from 60 million a week to 40 million.

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Drowning in Phony Statistics continued

United States. It is difficult to conduct such a survey because of . . . the widespread occurrence in individual homes, factories, wholesale and retail outlets, government stores, etc. . . . and the difficulty in appraising the actual loss in the value of the article . . ." Having confirmed my impression that we were talking about something Unknowable, my correspondent then confused me by adding: "We selected the figures of \$200 million to \$500 million because they appeared to us to be the most realistic of the estimates available. To our knowledge these figures were used originally by Dr. G. R. Ferguson, Geigy Agricultural Chemicals, Saw Mill River Road, Ardsley, New York."

I wrote to Dr. Ferguson on March 22, and in his reply he told me that he had mentioned these figures in a June, 1950, address to the Chemical Specialties Manufacturers Association. The reprint that he enclosed showed, however, that he had used the \$200-million to \$500-million range to refer to damage done by *all* insects, not just moths, and it also showed that he had confessed an inability "to locate reliable information in the literature as to the relative proportion of damage caused by the different species of fabric pests. . ." Dr. Ferguson nevertheless added a valuable clue to the origins of the figures themselves. He said that they had appeared in a book on mothproofing, by R. W. Moncrieff, who indicated in a footnote that *his* source was a 1941 article, "Testing of mothproofing preparations and identification of moth defects," by H. H. Mosher, in the *American Dyestuff Reporter*, published by the American Association of Textile Chemists and Colorists.

Now certain that I was hot on the scent of the figures, I wrote to this publication on April 3, enclosing a check for 50 cents and asking for either a copy of the issue or tear sheets of the article. On May 8 I wrote again, noting pointedly that the association had cashed my check but had not sent me the article. I am still awaiting a reply to that letter.

Excessive drinking and moths bring the total of all the drags on the economy to \$133,813,824,000. This is more than 25 per cent of the G.N.P., and we are—according to the phony-statistics men—just dribbling it away. The list could, of course, be expanded considerably, and it may even be possible to get the total to something more than the G.N.P.

However, anyone compiling such a list would run a considerable risk. There are a lot of people around who would take it seriously.

END

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their culture at home. Witness the rise of FM radio stations, more than half of which are devoted almost entirely to broadcasting classical music, discussions of art, literature, and similar subjects. There are today over 400 FM stations of this type with a large and faithful body of listeners. WFMT in Chicago, which doesn't hesitate to broadcast all four and a half hours of Wagner's *Parsifal* without interruption for commercials, in 1958 broke into the "Top Ten" list of Chicago stations as rated by the number of listeners. Today WFMT has a list of 25,000 subscribers who pay \$5 a year for a monthly program guide that tells them when they can hear a performance of a suite by Telemann or a reading of T.S. Eliot's poetry.

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Along with a new public interest have come changes in the relationship of the universities to the arts, in the basic attitudes of cultural institutions toward the public, and in the economic underpinning of the cultural machinery. Not only has there been a proliferation of college courses in art, music, drama, and kindred subjects, but since the end of the war hundreds of professional artists, musicians, poets, and sculptors have found their way onto college faculties. On many campuses now it is not uncommon to find a "resident artist" or a "resident composer." One of the most important results of this change has been to connect the campus with the cultural institutions of the surrounding community. Stanford Professor Sandor Salgo directs the Bach Festival in Carmel and the community orchestras of Marin County and San Jose. The famed Actor's Workshop in San Francisco was started by two members of the faculty of San Francisco State College, and in Los Angeles the faculty and graduates of the College of Fine Arts of U.C.L.A. have been responsible for sparking about a dozen community theatre groups. This interaction is even more evident in small cities. For example, the cultural bootstrap operation in Waterloo (pop.: 72,000) has been prodded along by State College of Iowa faculty members who staff the art course in the city-run recreation center and provide professional guidance for the Waterloo Symphony Orchestra, the choral association, and the chamber-music organization.

Merchandising culture

The cultural institutions themselves, in a radical turn-about in their basic posture toward the public, have become almost as "sales-minded" as business. Whereas before the war many had a take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward the public, today they are busily and consciously trying to create new "demand" for culture. The Metropolitan Opera Guild this year is presenting special performances of an abridged *Così fan Tutte* in junior and senior high schools throughout the New York area. Symphonies have stepped up their special performances—pop concerts, suburban concerts, children's concerts. Libraries have multiplied the number of "book-mobiles," which extend lending facilities to remote districts.

The change in stance is most sharply evident in museums. Today art is being transported out of the museum buildings to places where larger numbers of people can enjoy them. The Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, for example, maintains a rotating collection of paintings in the busy terminal at Love Field. The Boston Museum of Fine Arts circulated over 62,000 color slides to art clubs, individuals, and classes last year—about three times as many as ten years before. The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond has been a leader in finding new ways to build the culture audience. It not only opened its doors at night for those who cannot conveniently visit the museum during the day, it put the world's first "artmobile" on the road, touring with a changing exhibition of paintings and sculpture.

Passing the hat

It was almost inevitable, with the American penchant for organizing, that people would begin to coordinate all this activity. And so they have: "arts councils" have sprung up in many communities. Today there are more than forty cities in the U.S., from Albany to Santa Barbara, in each of which the major local cultural organizations have banded together in loose federations. Some hundred other cities are considering organizing arts councils. How they work can be

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A Quantity of Culture continued

illustrated by the experience of the St. Paul Council of Arts and Sciences. In 1951 an interim committee formed from the Civic Opera Association, the Science Museum, a civic orchestra, the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art, and the Schubert Club (which brings touring musical artists to St. Paul) sat down to tackle certain problems they all shared. First, working closely with Frank Marzitelli, the city commissioner responsible for libraries, museums, and auditoriums, the group was successful in having a \$1,700,000-bond-issue proposal included in an omnibus bond resolution placed before the voters in 1953. The \$1,700,000 was to pay for construction of a downtown arts and science center that would house the museum, concert and rehearsal facilities, gallery exhibition space, classrooms, and offices. In 1954 the interim committee dissolved and a permanent arts council was organized with a full-time director. It helps iron out scheduling conflicts among its affiliates, it maintains a master mailing list of 7,000 names for all its groups, and it runs special membership drives for them. When St. Paul's orchestra group came to it for special assistance, the council helped devise a program that would supplement existing cultural activities rather than attempt to compete with the services of the first-class symphony orchestra in nearby Minneapolis. The St. Paul orchestra reconstituted itself on a non-professional basis; it set out to help create three local youth orchestras and it put on a series of educational-TV musical broadcasts.

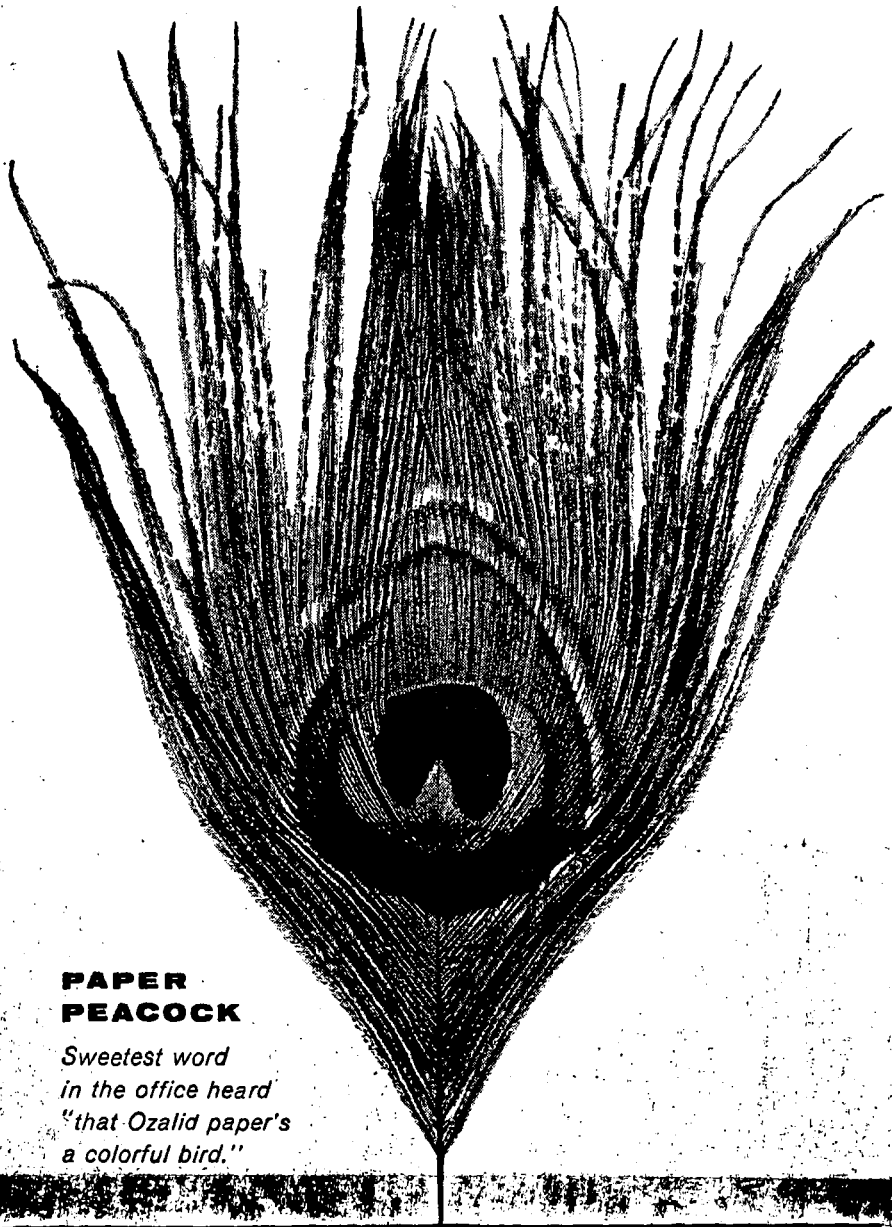
But the most significant aspect of the council's work is its passing of the hat. The technique, used by arts councils in at least half a dozen cities, could remake the financial foundation of the arts in America. Most cultural organizations run deficits, and St. Paul's organizations were no exception. They would regularly conduct individual fund-raising campaigns, usually with amateurish enthusiasm but with wholly unprofessional methods. These campaigns netted the organizations in the St. Paul council a combined total of only \$42,700 in 1958.

In 1959 the council, under its executive director, Ralph Burgard, launched a joint fund-raising drive, modeling its techniques after the familiar community-chest pattern. A central budget committee, which included a bank vice president, an accountant, an attorney, and the vice president of an insurance company, was created to screen the requests and the budgets of each of the affiliates. First, solicitors quietly visited the major donors of the past and began signing them up. A week before public solicitation began, the council mailed out thousands of copies of a brochure explaining the purposes of the drive; then about 700 volunteers began knocking on doors of friends and neighbors and businesses. When the drive was over, the council had chalked up \$146,883 in contributions. The 1961 campaign target is \$176,000.

The corporate Maecenases

In Winston-Salem, which boasts one of the best and most active arts councils in the nation, businessmen have pitched enthusiastically into the job of joint fund raising for culture. Says one leader of the Winston-Salem council: "For years Western Electric, which employs more than 8,000 people down here, had not given a sou to the arts. Yet we found that the largest number of people at our cultural events were from the Western Electric Nike Zeus plant. So we went to them and told them we are providing a helluva lot of entertainment and personal advantages for their people, and we came

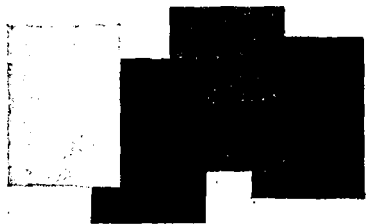
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A Quantity of Culture continued

away with a \$2,000 contribution to the arts council. Western Electric came through again this year. A lot of industries won't give a cent to a single art. But they'll give if the arts are coordinated on a community basis."

Perhaps even more important, from a long-range standpoint, than the increasing amount of money being raised is the broadening of the base of art patronage. In 1958 the St. Paul council's member groups drew all of their contributions from only 320 individuals and businesses. By 1960 this number had grown to 3,200. In Louisville, 1950 contributions came from 1,200 donors, the 1960 total came from 6,000.

A still small, but growing, part of the new patronage is coming from business, as the St. Paul and Winston-Salem examples indicate. In Cincinnati, one of the first cities to apply the united-fund principle to cultural-fund raising, direct business contributions to the fund have increased from \$225,000 in 1950 to \$319,000 in 1961, and the number of individual donors from 4,535 to 19,449. Ninety companies in Cincinnati donated an average of \$1.60 per employee. Thirty of them gave an average of \$2.64 per employee.

Another increasing source of support for the arts is foundations, which gave about \$34 million to the humanities last year. Usually their grants are intended as seed money to initiate a project or to stimulate the creation of new works, rather than to provide permanent operating funds.

Far more important, as of now, is the patronage bestowed by cities and states. Most of this support goes to libraries and museums, long accepted as institutions needing public money. Additional public funds flow into that part of the educational structure devoted to the arts. As the cultural audience has expanded, more and more cities and states are allocating funds to cultural activities that, some years ago, might have been considered outside the legitimate scope of public support. Thus last year Kentucky provided funds that enabled the Louisville Orchestra and the Louisville String Quartet to tour the state. The Kentucky State Division of Tourist and Travel Promotion is mounting art exhibits in state parks. Michigan recently created a state Cultural Commission to survey the state's artistic needs, and New

State, in a trail-blazing move, this year created a state arts council, with \$450,000 to spend on the arts. Grants have been made to underwrite state tours of the City Center Opera Company, the New York City Ballet Company, the Phoenix Theatre, and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra.

Dissemination or dilution?

In sum, the character and quality of American society are being drastically changed, in both their public and private aspects, by mass interest in cultural activities. Perhaps this change is implied in the term "democratic civilization," a condition to which Americans seem to be moving and which is far broader than political democracy. The lack of historical precedent may be one reason that the present trend occasions so much disquiet and acrimonious debate in sophisticated quarters.

Good or bad, the trend is probably irreversible. A generation hence, interest in music, painting, books will probably be even more widespread than at present. By then, perhaps, we will know whether culture has been disseminated, as the optimists believe, or diluted, as the pessimists say. Meanwhile, a lot of Americans are enjoying their exposure to the arts, and many of them, surely, will develop appreciative faculties as sound as those that characterized the small critical elite of recent centuries.

END