

The Real Experiment (1983)

*Guide: "There are no pictures here."
"I see," said the blind man.*

Western art actually has two avant-garde histories: one of artlike art and the other of lifelike art. They've been lumped together as parts of a succession of movements fervently committed to innovation, but they represent fundamentally contrasting philosophies of reality.

A supposed conflict between art and life has been a theme in Western art at least since ancient Rome, resolved, if at all, in the dialectics of the artlike artwork—as, for example, in Robert Rauschenberg's statement: "Painting is related to art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"

Simplistically put, artlike art holds that art is separate from life and everything else, whereas lifelike art holds that art is connected to life and everything else. In other words, there is art at the service of art and art at the service of life. The maker of artlike art tends to be a specialist; the maker of lifelike art, a generalist.

The usual questions of subject matter and style become relevant once you accept certain cultural givens, like the specialist notion of "art," the substitutions of "poetry" and "music," and the notions of "exhibit," "audience," "creativity," and "esthetic value." These are normally taken for granted. But Western culture appears to be changing so markedly that these givens are at best uncertain. What if they weren't "givens"? What if I had only a vague idea about "art" but didn't know the conventions that told me when I was in its presence or was making it? What if I were digging a hole—would that be art? What if I didn't know about audiences and publicity? What if I were to just go shop-

ping? Would that not be art? What if I didn't realize that art happened at certain times and in certain places? What if I were to lie awake imagining things in bed at 4 A.M.? Would that be the wrong place and the wrong time for art? What if I weren't aware that art was considered more marvelous than life? What if I didn't know an artist was meant to "create" art? What if I were to think art was just paying attention? What if I were to forget to think about art constantly? Could I still make, do, engage in art? Would I be doing something else? Would that be okay?

Of the two, artlike art and lifelike art, avant-garde artlike art occupies the attention of the majority of artists and the public. It is usually seen as serious and as a part of the mainstream Western art-historical tradition, in which mind is separate from body, individual is separate from people, civilization is separate from nature, and each art is separate from the other. Despite the occasional socio-cultural and spiritual interpretations of this art, artists in this tradition have tended to see their work as engaged in a professional dialogue, one art gesture responding to a previous one, and so forth.

Avant-garde artlike art is supported, tardily but steadily, by high culture's institutions, the galleries, museums, concert halls, theaters, schools, government agencies, and professional journals. These share the same separating point of view about art and life: that art could vanquish life's problems as long as it was far enough away from life so as not to be confused by it and sucked back into its mire. These institutions need artists whose work is artlike.

Avant-garde artlike art basically believes in (or does not eliminate) the continuity of the traditionally separate genres of visual art, music, dance, literature, theater, and so forth. The combinations of these genres that are commonplace in dance, film, and particularly opera are hierarchic arrangements, with one of the genres (dance, say, or music) presiding over the others and all the genres identifiably distinct, though interrelated. Either singly, or in satellite order, they need, and get the support of, galleries, museums, concert halls, theaters, schools, government agencies, and professional journals. Hands in gloves.

There is no essential difference between a Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin painting hung in a museum and a Frank Stella painting hung in a museum. Similarly, there is no essential difference between the music of Mozart in a concert hall and the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen in a concert hall. Museum and concert hall embed the works

equally in late Western cultural history. Every time you walk into a museum or concert hall, it instantly triggers references to that history, and if you don't know much about it, you will miss much of the meaning of the art.

Call the museums, concert halls, theaters, journals, and so forth frames of mind. These frames of mind are what give the Chardin, Stella, Mozart, and Stockhausen their meaning. That is what tradition is, and it is the real content of the works. In fact, museums, concert halls, and theaters needn't have a thing in them; they are still the signs for art. Like the dog in Ivan Pavlov's conditioned-reflex experiment, we spontaneously salivate a million artworks when they are even mentioned.

Avant-garde lifelike art, in contrast, concerns an intermittent minority (Futurists, Dadas, Gutai, Happeners, Fluxartists, Earthworkers, Body artists, Provos, postal artists, noise musicians, performance poets, shamanistic artists, Conceptualists). Avant-garde lifelike art is not nearly as serious as avant-garde artlike art. Often it is quite humorous. It isn't very interested in the great Western tradition, either, since it tends to mix things up: body with mind, individual with people in general, civilization with nature, and so on. Thus it mixes up the traditional art genres or avoids them entirely—for example, a mechanical fiddle playing around the clock to a cow in a barnyard. Or going to the laundromat. Despite formalist and idealist interpretations of art, lifelike art makers' principal dialogue is not with art but with everything else, one event suggesting another. If you don't know much about life, you'll miss much of the meaning of the lifelike art that's born of it. Indeed, it's never certain if an artist who creates avant-garde lifelike art is an artist.

For these reasons, avant-garde lifelike art has never fit into traditional arts institutions, even when they offered their support. These institutions "frame" lifelike art right out of life into art (more or less ineptly, at that). "Look," I remember a critic exclaiming once as we walked by a vacant lot full of scattered rags and boxes, "how that extends the gestural painting of the fifties!" He wanted to cart the whole mess to a museum. But life bracketed by the physical and cultural frames of art quickly becomes trivialized life at the service of high art's presumed greater value. The critic wanted everyone to see

the garbage as he did, through art history; not as urban dirt, not as a playground for kids and a home for rats, not as rags blowing about in the wind, boxes rotting in the rain. Avant-garde lifelike art does very well in such real-life circumstances. It is not a "thing" like a piece of music or a sculpture that is put into a special art container or setting. It is inseparable from real life.

The root message of all artlike art is separateness and specialness; and the corresponding one of all lifelike art is connectedness and wide-angle awareness. Artlike art's message is appropriately conveyed by the separate, bound "work"; the message of lifelike art is appropriately conveyed by a process of events that has no definite outline. For each kind of art, the conveyance itself is the message, regardless of the details. Artlike art sends its message on a one-way street: from the artist to us. Lifelike art's message is sent on a feedback loop: from the artist to us (including machines, animals, nature) and around again to the artist. You can't "talk back" to, and thus change, an artlike artwork; but "conversation" is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing.

It should be easy to distinguish the two avant-gardes, since they have such different ways of being in the world and in art. And now is probably as good a time as any for a cordial parting of the ways. Once you step aside from the traditional view of the arts, and there is no longer any conflict or competition, the word *avant-garde* sounds like a romantic vestige of battles fought to win prizes no longer desirable to an artist committed to living attentively. For instance, achieving a respected place in a museum or opera house nowadays may be flattering, but it is pointless, because it reframes the lifework as conventional art. By dropping thoughts of avant-gardism (a military metaphor at that) and competition with traditional modern art, we become free to recall some of the moves toward a lifelike art practiced not too long ago.

There was Body art, Multimedia and mass-media art, closed-circuit video and electric-light art, computer art, junk art, herbal art, zoo art, earth art, art to be eaten, and art that chemically changed or disappeared. We encountered art that emitted sound in response to our body heat and brain waves. We were invited to participate in Environments that could be altered and re-created by each of us. We were presented with idea art to be read and were encouraged to complete the artist's initiating propositions in our minds. We were sent to

the deserts, pointed to the sky, and submerged in water. We went to "school" where statistics, graphs, and maps instructed us in science, ecology, and sexual mores. We attended, and took part in, ritualistic performances, slice-of-life performances, meditational performances, and political performances. And we saw art emptied of everything except ourselves—who became the art by default.

The importance of these innovations was not just that they increased art-making possibilities enormously. All that refuse, technology, plant life, and hardware; all those intimate treatments of the artist's body; all those excursions along the highways and out into the countryside—all referred us again and again to their sources in the real world. It was those domains outside the world of art that compelled our fresh attention. It was the street, with its vital activity; the body, with its sweat and digestive noises; the mind, with its furious productions, that excited everyone.

The implications of it all weren't so apparent in the 1960s. But hindsight and more experience make it possible today to summarize the characteristics of an emerging lifelike art:

1. The key experiment was not simply the invention of new art genres by which the period is usually known but the recognition of the secularization of the entire art situation: genre, frame, public, and purpose.

2. The critical move in the experiment was the shift of art away from its familiar contexts, the studios, museums, concert halls, theaters, etc., to anywhere else in the real world.

3. Various performative modes became the effective way to deal with this shift to the actual environment. Performing was doing something, not acting in theater—moving furniture, for example, just to do it, or because you were changing apartments.

4. The structural models for the experiment were real (not merely implicit) processes: for example, seasonal changes; food that is grown, prepared, eaten, digested, and composted; thoughts that are transmitted, converted, and put into action.

5. The possible boundaries between lifelike art and the rest of life were kept intentionally blurred. Where the art was located, where

life was, and when one or the other "began" and "ended" were of no importance. Such distinctions were merely provisional.

6. The typical art public and critic used to going to exhibitions, concerts, and plays became irrelevant. Instead, there were small groups of travelers to far-off sites, participants in organized events, thinkers on commuter trains, and artists in their art by themselves. The emerging public for this lifelike art was no longer ideal and unified but was diversified, mobile, and particular in interests, like people in the real world.

7. Lifelike art did not merely label life as art. It was continuous with that life, inflecting, probing, testing, and even suffering it, but always attentively. (That's the source of its humor; when you look closely at your suffering, it can be pretty funny . . .)

8. The purpose of lifelike art was therapeutic: to reintegrate the piecemeal reality we take for granted. Not just intellectually, but directly, as experience—in this moment, in this house, at this kitchen sink . . .

A prescription didn't exist then. There were writings and manifestos, of course (by George Brecht, John Cage, Robert Filliou, Al Hansen, Dick Higgins, Michael Kirby, Jean-Jacques Lebel, George Maciunas, Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Wolf Vostell, me, and, somewhat later, Jerome Rothenberg), but they were not cohesive, nor were they always carried out in practice. That would have been too tall an order. Even if artists intuited what had to be done, the prospect of a clean break from everything in the high-arts world was not only frightening but unclear in method. The Western tradition in which artists were trained, and still are trained, provoked none of the key questions; neither did it provide alternative models.

Few availed themselves of detailed studies of non-Western cultures. Only the "arts" of these cultures were admired. Thus mistakes in interpretation were made. African carved figures, for instance, were seen through Cubist eyes as intensely expressive geometric *sculpture*; they were not seriously understood as a part of religious practice and a belief system quite different from ours—one that had no sculpture

as such. I'm not saying that what the Cubists saw and wanted to use was not valuable to the art of their time. I'm saying that certain non-Western cosmologies might have given us, in the late fifties and early sixties, an integrative alternative to our society of overspecialization. If we had studied more carefully the role of so-called art in cultures that usually didn't have a word for it, what was happening under our noses would have been clearer. Well, we weren't curious enough. Instead, we found that nonart could be transformed into high art on the Western model simply by framing it properly.

It follows that the easiest and most common course taken then was Duchamp's. We selected some aspect of nonart—stones from a riverbed, factory sounds, a tank of fish, ourselves—and put it, them, us on exhibit or on a stage.

The second course was slightly bolder. We selected certain nonart sites—a forest, a garage, a basement, a dead-end street—and then found ready made, or constructed, the equivalents of galleries, concert stages, and so forth. In these spaces that signified art we presented something more or less lifelike that only minimally engaged the surrounding environment.

The third course, not rare but less noticeable because it ignored publicity, was a sort of proto-conceptual art. We bracketed life with all that we knew about high art but restricted the art we made to our imagination. Whenever we found something interesting, we conceived an artwork. We saw people crossing the street, and they became modern dance. A family squabble was a modern play. A cliff face was modern sculpture. We entered into the "art" or not, as we wished.

But the problem was that these experiments concentrated mostly on enlarging the range of usable genres. I remember vividly both the excitement of feeling that the entire world was available for our art and the snags we got caught on trying to take in that world. We were so green then. We couldn't bypass the framing devices, perceptual clichés, and values of traditional modern art.

Here is what I mean. In the first example (the Duchamp model) we were drastically limited to what actually could fit into museums, theaters, and so on and to what actually could be managed in them. The Los Angeles freeways at rush hour, or airplane trips to various cities, or telephone calls made from our bedrooms, or long medita-

tional disciplines and personal ordeals simply couldn't fit. We were always obliged to put on a *show*. So most of life was excluded for the sake of high art.

In the second example (making galleries, stages, and so forth in the midst of life), we couldn't escape the habit of audiences that still came to see what we were doing (or to participate a little), just as they had always come to the standard exhibitions, concerts, plays, dances, and films. All the traditional esthetic habits of detached spectatorship, the usual hour or so of attention after dinner, all the expectations based on what they had learned about the arts were brought to the new situation intact. It was a little like slumming.

The third example (discovering high art everywhere) was the most sophisticated release from the tangible side of normal art production. It tacitly acknowledged that culture, like reality, is created in the mind and can be de-created. It was cheap and flexible and left nothing behind. Yet for all that, the artist doing this kind of mental framing was like the critic who saw Action painting in a rubble-strewn lot: that critic was an art lover who couldn't say good-bye to tradition. The connection the critic made was witty at the time, but with one foot in straight art and one foot in life, it was self-canceling.

In each of these steps toward a lifelike art, if the genre was strikingly fresh, the frame, the public, and the purpose of our choices were still typical of artlike art. It wasn't enough to discover that an elevator ride or a sandwich could be art; we had to ask where that art belonged, whom it was for, and why. The philosophical sense of what was happening was unclear to most of us, and the impression left upon the curious and interested was one of novelty rather than of a shift to a radically different worldview in which reality was a "seamless fabric."

So it was necessary to change the whole situation, not just the genre, which was the easiest part to change. It took some years to iron things out. Many lifelike artists continued to put together more or less artified packages of elements drawn from the everyday environment (most effectively from the political arena); a second generation has conventionalized this route into acceptable arts festivals, exhibitions, multimedia poetry readings, new-wave concerts, TV shows, and big-time show-biz performances. But for those artists tracking the "real thing," the investigation had to lead away from the traditional community of the fine arts as well as from the traditional community of the commercial arts.

Here is a real event that took place in 1975. An artist named Raivo Puusemp (who had begun in New York as a Conceptualist working at the socio-metric edge of the genre) ran for mayor in Rosendale, New York, and was elected. Although he lived there at the time, he was not a native or long-term resident of Rosendale and was considered a "political unknown."

Rosendale Village, a community of fifteen hundred people established in the seventeenth century, was in financial trouble, had serious water supply and sewage problems, and couldn't govern itself. Its only realistic solution had been known for some time: to disincorporate and become part of the geographically larger Rosendale Township. But disincorporation was an emotionally charged issue for many in the village; with no other alternatives apparent, bills went unpaid, sewage backed up into houses and polluted the local stream, and human initiative seemed paralyzed. Puusemp, who had been an art instructor in the area and was director of instructional resources at nearby Ulster Community College, believed he could do something positive about the village's problems. He would apply to Rosendale what he had been doing as an artist in group dynamics and predictive behavior. He would consider the project an artwork in the form of a political problem.

So he ran, successfully, for the office of mayor. His campaign didn't mention art. Nor did it mention disincorporation. Instead, it proposed an upbeat community involvement in the political process "that accentuated the positive" (as local newspapers described it).

During the next two years, Puusemp and his associate Mark Pheelan, who was elected on the same ticket as trustee, guided Rosendale to its survival through dissolution. In a booklet published in 1980, entitled "Beyond Art: Dissolution of Rosendale, N.Y.," Puusemp documented the steps of that process through official records, legal letters, public notices, minutes of village meetings, referenda, and many accounts in area newspapers, which followed the events with great interest.

First, Puusemp persuaded residents of Rosendale to face their own disastrous condition and to see that if they did face it, they could not only save the village but also reduce local taxes and costs. Residents

got their first look at the line-by-line expenses of running a village government and saw precisely how much they could save by handling their affairs responsibly. Taxes, administrative procedures, services, and the police force were reorganized. Village assets were identified, assessed, and reviewed for possible liquidation and revenues. The water and sewage problems were solved when voters approved a bond issue and the village received federal and state assistance. Eventually residents saw that the inevitable next step for Rosendale was to cease being a separate entity. The moment at last was right, and they voted to dissolve.

Townpeople didn't discover, through their mayor, a new solution to their problems. They knew what their solution was. Neither did he urge them, romantically, to stick to their independence at a time when this would have been clearly futile. He came to Rosendale, detached from its history and personalities, and made it possible for everyone to see what had to be done. The vote to dissolve was theirs, not his.

But it must be added that besides helping the village to put its practical affairs in order, Puusemp was able to reduce long-standing factionalism and to reassure townpeople that dissolution did not have to mean the loss of neighborhood and community (as some had feared). Through the process of coming to grips with the village's troubles and deciding to dissolve, they spent more time together and assumed more conscious responsibility for their community than they had for a long time. In this small saga it was crucial that although Puusemp had approached the survival problem of Rosendale with a Conceptual artist's theory of social behavior in mind, he applied that theory in day-by-day human terms.

With the task accomplished, he felt that his usefulness had ended (and that the artwork was complete). He submitted his resignation as mayor for reasons of family health, and Mark Phelan succeeded him. The documents indicate that the news of his resignation was received sadly in the town. Puusemp left amid expressions of public appreciation and settled with his family in Utah, where today he is a marketer of ski resorts and travel tours. He says that he hardly ever thinks of art anymore but that the Rosendale project was significant for everything he did subsequently.

The story of Rosendale, New York, might never have been published if Puusemp's friend the performance artist Paul McCarthy hadn't urged him to publish it. McCarthy was right in supposing that

artists would welcome an account of what Puusemp had done; since the booklet appeared, it has been quietly making the rounds of those trying to break out of the conventions of their training.

The sequence of events in Rosendale, unlike so many innovative works of art of the sixties and seventies, was not simply a novel art event (or genre) that was otherwise encased in perfectly normal high-art contexts. Its genre was unusual, but so were its frame, its public, and its purpose. None of these resembled what we had come to recognize as art. That's why it is exemplary.

The genre was the village and its survival problems. The frame was concentrated in a geographical place, Rosendale, New York, and spread outward to Rosendale Township and Ulster County. The public, more properly the participants, were the townspeople, Mayor Puusemp, county officials, lawyers, representatives of the federal government, and the publishers and readers of area newspapers. The purpose, like that I have suggested for such art, was therapeutic: to cure a local illness and allow village life, and Puusemp's life, to go on more constructively.

Taken together, these four characteristics of lifelike art—the what, where, who, and why—make up what I call the whole situation, or as much of it as can be identified at present. Anyone can see that the four parts merge and that the artist merges with the artwork and those who participate in it. And the "work"—the "work" merges with its surroundings and doesn't really exist by itself.

If we look at the dissolution of Rosendale for a minute as if it were just another artwork, one of its most liberating implications for artists is the absence of the image of the famous artist at work. This most cherished of Western dreams—fame—has not come up yet in this essay, but here is the appropriate place. At no time did Puusemp announce that he was an artist and that he considered his term as mayor of a troubled village to be an artwork. Nor is it likely that his booklet would have been printed without Paul McCarthy's urging.

The reason this artistic submergence is so crucial should be self-evident. In practical terms, what's the point of saying you're an artist who is making art out of a village's troubles? You would confuse people, they might feel insulted, and you would never become mayor. But more basically, it is in the nature of lifelike art to reduce and

eliminate the fame associated with rock stars, socialites, and short-term politicians. If you view the world as a unity, with all things connected, including yourself and your work, then being celebrated with the exaggerated attention and flattery that go with stardom almost invariably leads to self-importance, separation, and, in time, isolation. We don't yet know how to honor someone, or to be honored, without ego getting in the way. It is enough to speculate here that the dissolution of Rosendale Village for the sake of its continued life was equivalent to the dissolution of Raivo Prousemp's political art career for the sake of his life.

Now consider a different example of lifelike art, one that was self-transforming and private. The Rosendale story began with political commitment and ended with personal reevaluation. This second activity began with subjective preoccupation and ended with a nearly mystical sense of nature. All of us are part herd animal and part lone wolf, so the two events should form a nice relationship, each illuminating the other. Since each was unmarked at the time as art of any kind, it is understandable that the artist of this work chooses to be nameless, simply to better emphasize the experiential aspect of what went on.

Each day of a week around 3 P.M., when the wind rose on the dunes, a woman took a walk and watched her tracks blow away behind her. Every evening she wrote an account of her walk in a journal. To begin each successive day, she read her journal story and then tried to repeat exactly what had happened. She described this experience, in turn, as faithfully as possible, until the week had elapsed. Half in jest she wrote in one passage, "I wanted to see if I could stop change."

Her journal entries were rich in details, including not only the facts of footsteps up and down the dunes, the blowing sand, the color of the sky, the time taken, the distance covered, and so forth, but her feelings as well. She described the sense of breaking the earth, of disturbing the immaculate and fragile crusts of glass particles; she wrote of her secret pleasure in making her marks in that remote realm free of others; she accepted with satisfaction the absorption of her tracks back into the earth as if they were herself.

There was also fear. She was afraid of the imbalance and disorientation she experienced in a vast space defined by rhythms but not

by boundaries. She was afraid of being lost. Now and then she was dizzy. The sting of the sand on her skin seemed an attack on her person. She was afraid, above all, of the vastness of nature and its indifference. Gripped so during these times, the woman often found herself walking nearly backward, with her head turned around, her eyes holding on to the last shallow craters of her steps before they were obliterated.

On the second day, for instance, she found it difficult to repeat what she had done and felt the day before. She thought that her path was different (the dunes, of course, had changed). Nevertheless, she persevered. She noticed that she was scuffing the sand in an effort to impress upon it her determination. Several times she reread her journal. It felt more and more "like a script to learn." She walked with purpose, looking not out but back "to confirm that my tracks were still there." She wrote of the "absurdity" of her whole plan, and of trying to laugh at herself. There was an unmistakable defiance in her outing that afternoon.

During the next days she developed a fascination for the job of recreating her yesterdays, especially since the effort made her more attentive to the unavoidable facts of change.

On Thursday I came upon a small depression with beach roses growing up the dune slope. I picked a few and twisted their short stems into my waist scarf. At the same time I was practicing at being lost as I had been on Wednesday. But on Wednesday I had been anxious to reach my house before dark; on Thursday I felt a child's delight at discovering the roses. Both feelings were in me at once. Now, on Friday, I couldn't find the roses, and I was again lost!

Once for an hour or so she believed she had really done what she set out to do; to stop change by reenacting her journal entry of the day before, which described a particularly fulfilling experience toward the end of the afternoon, rich with observations of plant life, insects, birds, and a magnificent sunset. This time she followed the earlier description of her movements: the exact way she had placed her feet, how she had leaned into the dunes, rolling down them like a child in a game, her head turned toward the sun, seeing everything again through the intense colorless light. She absorbed and radiated a transcendence she

associated with certain deserted seacoasts in late summer. She wrote that she was sure time had stopped.

The following day she intended to try again, but the wind died. Long lines of her footprints stretched across the dunes undisturbed, along with those of literally hundreds of animals. She felt alone in a crowd. "My tracks didn't belong there; I was an intruder," she wrote. She went through the motions and emotions of her previous bliss to little avail. The silence made her aware of the dragging of her feet in the sand, and of the hollow sound of her breath. Birds she couldn't see screeched everywhere. She noticed her shadow shrinking and elongating as she walked up and down the dunes. The journal entry for that day emphasized that she felt alien. "I was impatient to be finished. . . . Around 6 P.M., flocks of terns attacked and retreated and attacked, swooping to within a few yards of my head. . . . I kept looking at the length of my stride, counting my steps for no reason. I was terribly aware of time."

The wind blew again on the sixth and seventh days. Oddly, she said, she could not remember most of the details of her walks, only that what happened seemed very clear and matter-of-fact. Her remarks were concise: "I walked without fatigue or hurry. I saw the sand blowing off the tops of the dunes. The gray sky lay flat against the horizon. I ate an apple I brought with me."

Only one segment of her journal was particular, however. Repeating the depressing events and mood of the fifth day was problematical. The wind had erased her earlier footprints, and she couldn't hear anything beyond her immediate body. The terns seemed to have vanished. She tried to restore her feeling of disconnectedness, tried over and over to walk in the same nervous manner. And to some degree, she wrote, she succeeded as an actor might "become" a role. "I carried out the forms of my walk and my daydreams yesterday, but I was outside of them watching." In a postscript she noted with some irony that "relating to the repetitions of the previous days was a little like relating to a third cousin twice removed."

The sun appeared intermittently between the clouds, and the woman unbuttoned and buttoned her sweater with the rise and fall of the temperature. She was aware of the dunes extending everywhere, always moving. She was able to see them literally flowing to the east,

as masses of sand were blown up one side of a crest and dumped down the other. Once she stood still for some minutes and was buried to her ankles. Another time she allowed herself to be pushed along a dune's lip by the wind at her back and by millions of granules eroding under her feet. "The dunes, too, move in rest."

Her journal entry on the last night concluded: "I ate dinner about 8 o'clock, and now I'm going to bed."

What does this add up to? For the art buff, who might at least accept the practicality of Puusemp's efforts as mayor of a small village, the dune walks have no apparent conclusion. They were unobserved, their transformations of the normal were not notably inventive, and one is left with the woman merely going to bed. There is the point. She went to bed qualitatively changed. The meaning of her week was internalized; it was "experienced meaning," in the phrase of the psychologist Sheila Bob, not just intellectual meaning. It was manifest in her self-image, and possibly in her subsequent behavior, not in an objective artwork. The reader may say, "so what, everything has meaning—my lunch, your remarks, last year's weather reports." And again that's the point! If only we paid attention; but we don't. Exercises of the sort the woman designed for herself may make this attention possible.

The event described took place around the same year as the Rosendale dissolution. Like it, the woman's experiences bear no resemblance to the artlike arts. The genre was a succession of treks over some sand dunes. Overlapping the genre, the frame was an amorphous area of these dunes stretching for miles, certain prevailing weather conditions, a seven-day duration, and the fixed point of the woman's house not far away. Overlapping the genre and frame was an audience of one (if we can use that word *audience* at all): the woman observing herself carrying out a project she had planned. And the purpose, overlapping everything else, was self-knowledge.

Now, to go on analyzing the imprecise parts of an imprecise whole would become tedious. I've gone this far to show how the last generation's most experimental art (experimental because it was lifelike) often stopped short of realizing its vision because it still clung to habits associated with artlike art. I wanted to specify which habits these were

and to describe two lifelike artworks that weren't clinging to such habits.

With this in mind, I'd like to acknowledge a question that many will want to ask about an art that is like life. The question is misleading, but it comes up frequently, out of habit. It is this: if lifelike art doesn't resemble art as we've known it, but resembles real life, what then makes it art? Wouldn't it be perfectly reasonable to say that what happened in Rosendale was simply the politics of a small town, and the dune treks were simply a series of nature walks? Saying this wouldn't necessarily disparage either of them; it would only distinguish them from what art is and does. That sounds fair enough, if by art we still mean artlike art. We'd have to agree, in that case, that there is nothing in particular that makes the two events art. They are really two life situations, which might be more appropriately studied by the social sciences, if they were to be studied at all.

But let's say that art is a weaving of meaning-making activity with any or all parts of our lives. (Though awkward and a mouthful, the statement emphasizes purposive and interpretive acts instead of mere routine behavior, whether such acts are politics or nature walks.) This definition shifts the model for art from the special history of the field to a broad terrain embracing not only lifelike art but religious, philosophical, scientific, and social/personal exploration. The grave concern of a growing number of speculative theologians, scientists, political thinkers, and new-age futurologists is to try to make sense out of the countless disconnected, and sometimes very dangerous, pieces of our culture and to rediscover the whole. Lifelike art can mean a way (one way) of sharing responsibility for what may be the world's most pressing problem.

In this holistic sense, the Rosendale events and the dune walks are art. If the definition still seems arbitrary, just remember that this "sense of the whole" evolved out of traditional art's roots. The artlike arts, responding to internal developments as well as to global pressures, produced a lifelike art. Lifelike art is art by parentage, and that is what causes it so many of the problems I mentioned before. It hasn't evolved long enough to be a mutant. Artists may have to remind themselves constantly to heed its essential nature: to be a means for integrating them/us into what the anthropologist Diane Rothenberg and the poet Jerome Rothenberg have called "the symposium of the whole." Ulti-

mately, the "art" of lifelike art may be as vestigial as our appendix; but for the present we may neither deny it nor glorify it.

What is at stake now is to understand that of all the integrative roles lifelike art can play (for example, in popular entertainment, education, communications, politics, or social organization), none is so crucial to our survival as the one that serves self-knowledge. Self-knowledge is where you start on the way to becoming "the whole," whether this process takes the form of social action or personal transformation. The expression "to know yourself," stated so flatly, is vague, encompassing anything from relatively light insights that come up in the course of a day to the hard and long process of existential comprehension that can slowly turn a person's life around. What I have in mind when I say "self-knowledge" is the latter. It is the passage of the separate self to the egoless self. Lifelike art in which nothing is separate is a training in letting go of the separate self. The *Rosendale* dissolution and the *diane* treks are not presented here as pinnacles of enlightenment (there probably are no such things); they are just steps along the way, and the artists' eyes may have opened up a little.

Self-knowledge is necessary and often painful work. But it is not new work, or the work of lifelike art alone. It has been at the core of artlike art as well. All those statements about art being a "calling," a "way of life," a "spiritual path," a "search for truth," a "revelation," the "conscience of the age," the "collective dream," the "forces of nature," an "archetypal act," and a "mythmaking" refer to the transcendental assumptions underlying artists' practice of art in the first place.

But we heard little of these vestiges of the seer role of art after World War II. Writings and daily talk about art during the sixties and seventies tended to become impersonal and quasi-intellectual, borrowing heavily from neo-Marxism, cultural structuralism, and semiotics. The practice of art seemed professionalistic, while on the popular, newsy level it seemed all about careerism. The suprapersonal implications of art making, however, were never absent from private conversations; they just dropped out of public discourse. Yet this is exactly the predicament artlike art is stuck in: its frames, physical and cultural,

have become so fixed and so confining that any residual "spirit" it might appeal to is virtually inaccessible.

Consider: if lifelike art restores the possibility of the practice of art as a practice of enlightenment, it complements what various psychotherapies and meditational disciplines have always done. Lifelike art can be thought of, not as a substitute for these, but as a direct way of placing them in a context of contemporary imagery, metaphor, and site. What occurred in Rosendale Village and on the dunes is normally excluded from the therapeutic session and from, say, the daily practice of *zazen* (the Japanese form of Buddhist sitting meditation), both of which are carried out under the guidance of a teacher. Lifelike art is self-conducted and self-responsible. Lifelike art can be, for therapy and meditation, a bridge into daily affairs. It is even possible that some lifelike art could become a discipline of healing and meditation as well. Something like this is already happening. If it develops more intentionally (and we don't know if it will), we may see the overall meaning of art change profoundly—from being an end to being a means, from holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm to demonstrating a way of living meaningfully in this one.

Suppose you telephone your own answering device and leave a message that you called—you might learn something about yourself.

Suppose you offer to sweep a friend's house, and then spread the gathered dust through your own place—you might learn something about friendship.

Suppose you watch a clear sky and wait for a cloud to form—you might learn something about nature. Suppose you wait longer, for the sky to clear—you might learn something else about yourself.