Chapter 1

THE HUMANITIES:
AN INTRODUCTION

THE HUMANITIES: A STUDY OF VALUES

In the medieval period, the word *humanities* distinguished that which pertained to humans from that which pertained to God. Mathematics, the sciences, the arts, and philosophy were humanities: They had to do with humans. Theology and related studies were the subjects of divinity: They had to do with God. This distinction does not have the importance it once did. Today we think of the humanities as those broad areas of human creativity and study that are distinct from mathematics and the "hard" sciences, mainly because in the humanities, strictly objective or scientific standards are not usually dominant.

The current separation between the humanities and the sciences reveals itself in a number of contemporary controversies. For example, the cloning of animals has been greeted by many people as a curiosity and a possible benefit for domestic animal farmers. Genetically altered wheat, soybeans, and other cereals have been heralded by many scientists as a breakthrough that will produce disease-resistant crops and therefore permit us to continue to increase the world food supply. On the other hand, some people resist such modifications and purchase food identified as not being genetically altered. Scientific research into the human genome has identified certain genes for inherited diseases, such as breast cancer or Alzheimer's disease,
That could be modified to protect individuals or their offspring. Genetic research also suggests that in a few years individuals will be able to “design” their children’s intelligence, their body shape, their height, their general appearance, and their physical ability.

Scientists provide the tools for these choices. Their values are centered in science in that they value the nature of their research and their capacity to make it work in a positive way. However, the impact on humanity of such a series of dramatic changes to life brings to the fore values that clash with one another. For example, is it a positive social value for couples to decide the sex of their offspring rather than following nature’s own direction? In this case, who should decide if “designing” one’s offspring is a positive value, the scientist or the humanist?

Even more profound is the question of cloning a human being. Once a sheep was cloned successfully, it was clear that this science would lead directly to the possibility of a cloned human being. Some proponents of cloning support the process because we could clone a child who dies in infancy or clone a genius who has given great gifts to the world. For these people, cloning is a positive value. For others, the very thought of cloning a person is repugnant on the basis of religious belief. For still others, the idea of human cloning is objectionable because it echoes the creation of an unnatural monster, and for them it is a negative value. Because this is a worldwide problem, local laws will have limited effect on establishing a clear position on the value of cloning of all sorts. The question of how we decide on such a controversial issue is at the heart of the humanities, and some observers have pointed to Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s famous novel, Frankenstein, Or the Modern Prometheus, which in some ways enacts the conflict among these values.

These examples demonstrate that the discoveries of scientists often have tremendous impact on the values of society. Yet some scientists have declared that they merely make the discoveries and that others—presumably politicians—must decide how the discoveries are to be used. It is this last statement that brings us closest to the importance of the humanities. If many scientists believe they cannot judge how their discoveries are to be used, then we must try to understand why they give that responsibility to others. This is not to say that scientists uniformly turn such decisions over to others, for many of them are humanists as well as scientists. But the fact remains that many governments have made use of great scientific achievements without pausing to ask the “achievers” if they approved of the way their discoveries were being used. The questions are, Who decides how to use such discoveries? On what grounds should their judgments be based?

Studying the behavior of neutrinos or string theory will not help us get closer to the answer. Such study is not related to the nature of humankind but to the nature of nature. What we need is a study that will get us closer to ourselves. It should be a study that explores the reaches of human feeling in relation to values—not only our own individual feelings and values but also the feelings and values of others. We need a study that will increase our sensitivity to ourselves, others, and the values in our world. To be sensitive is to perceive with insight. To be sensitive is also to feel and believe that things make a difference. Furthermore, it involves an awareness of those aspects
of values that cannot be measured by objective standards. To be sensitive is to respect the humanities, because, among other reasons, they help develop our sensitivity to values, to what is important to us as individuals.

There are numerous ways to approach the humanities. The way we have chosen here is the way of the arts. One of the contentions of this book is that values are clarified in enduring ways in the arts. Human beings have had the impulse to express their values since the earliest times. Ancient tools recovered from the most recent Ice Age, for example, have features designed to express an affection for beauty as well as to provide utility.

The concept of progress in the arts is problematic. Who is to say whether the cave paintings (Figure 1-1) of 30,000 years ago that were discovered in present-day France are less excellent than the work of Picasso (see Figure 1-4)? Cave paintings were probably not made as works of art to be contemplated. To get to them in the caves is almost always difficult, and they are very difficult to see. They seem to have been made for some practical purpose, such as improving the prospects for the hunt. Yet the work reveals something about the power, grace, and beauty of this kind of animal. These cave paintings function now as works of art. From the beginning, our species instinctively had an interest in making revealing forms.

Among the numerous ways to approach the humanities, we have chosen the way of the arts because, as we shall try to elucidate, the arts clarify or reveal values. As we deepen our understanding of the arts, we necessarily deepen our understanding of values. We will study our experience with works of art as well as the values others associate with them, and in this process we will also educate ourselves about our own values.
Because a value is something that matters, engagement with art—the illumination of values—enriches the quality of our lives significantly. Moreover, the subject matter of art—what it is about—is not limited to the beautiful and the pleasant, the bright sides of life. Art may also include and help us understand the dark sides—the ugly, the painful, and the tragic. And when it does and when we get it, we are better able to come to grips with those dark sides of life.

Art brings us into direct communication with others. As Carlos Fuentes wrote in *The Buried Mirror*, “People and their cultures perish in isolation, but they are born or reborn in contact with other men and women of another culture, another creed, another race. If we do not recognize our humanity in others, we shall not recognize it in ourselves.” Art reveals the essence of our existence.

**Taste**

Taste is an exercise in the choice of values. People who have already made up their minds about what art they like or do not like defend their choices as an expression of their taste. Some opera buffs think Italian opera is uniformly superior to opera in English, French, or German. Others claim that any opera Mozart wrote is wonderful, but all others are impossible. All of us have various kinds of limitations about the arts. Some cannot stand opera at all. Some cannot look at a painting or sculpture of a nude figure without smirking. Some think any painting is magnificent as long as it has a sunset or a dramatic sea or a battle, or as long as it is abstract and goes well with the couch. Some people will read any book that deals with horse racing, or has a scientific angle, or discusses their current hobby.

The taste of the mass public shifts constantly. Movies, for example, survive or fail on the basis of the number of people they appeal to. A film is good if it makes money. Consequently, film producers make every effort to cash in on current popular tastes, often by making sequels until the public's taste changes—for example, the *Batman* series (1989, 1992, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2008).

One point our study of the humanities emphasizes is that commercial success is not the most important guide to excellence in the arts. The long-term success of works of art depends on their ability to interpret human experience at a level of complexity that warrants examination and reexamination. Many commercially successful works give us what we think we want rather than what we really need with reference to insight and understanding. By satisfying us in an immediate and superficial way, commercial art can dull us to the possibilities of more complex and more deeply satisfying art.

Everyone has limitations as a perceiver of art. Sometimes we defend ourselves against stretching our limitations by assuming that we have developed our taste and that any effort to change it is bad form. An old saying—"Matters of taste are not disputable"—can be credited with making many of us feel righteous about our own taste. What the saying means is that there is no accounting for what people like in the arts, for beauty is in the
eye of the beholder. Thus, there is no use in trying to educate anyone about
the arts. Obviously we disagree. We believe that all of us can and should be
educated about the arts and should learn to respond to as wide a variety of
the arts as possible: from jazz to string quartets, from Charlie Chaplin to
Steven Spielberg, from Lewis Carroll to T. S. Eliot, from folk art to Picasso.
Most of us defend our taste because anyone who challenges it challenges
our deep feelings. Anyone who tries to change our responses to art is really
trying to get inside our minds. If we fail to understand its purpose, this kind
of persuasion naturally arouses resistance.

The study of the arts can involve a multitude of factual information. The
dates of Beethoven’s birth and death and the dates of his important composi­
tions, as well as their key signatures and opus numbers, can be verified. We can
investigate the history of jazz and the claim of Jelly Roll Morton to have been
its “inventor.” We can decide who was or was not part of the Realistic school of
painting in mid-nineteenth-century France. We can make lists of the Impres­
sionist painters in late nineteenth-century France and those they influenced.
Oceans of facts attach to every art. But our interest is not in facts alone.

For us, the study of the arts penetrates beyond facts to the values that
evoke our feelings—the way a succession of Eric Clapton’s guitar chords
when he plays the blues can be electrifying or the way song lyrics can give
us a chill. In other words, we want to go beyond the facts about a work
of art and get to the values revealed in the work. How many times have
we all found ourselves liking something that, months or years before, we
could not stand? And how often do we find ourselves now disliking what
we previously judged a masterpiece? Generally, we can say the work of art
remains the same. It is we who change. We learn to recognize the values
illuminated in such works as well as to understand the ways in which this
is accomplished. Such development is the meaning of “education” in the
sense in which we have been using the term.

Responses to Art

Our responses to art usually involve processes so complex that they can
never be fully tracked down or analyzed. At first, they can only be hinted at
when we talk about them. However, further education in the arts permits us
to observe more closely and thereby respond more intensely to the content of
the work. This is true, we believe, even with “easy” art, such as exceptionally
beautiful works—for example, the Raphael (see Figure 14-10), Giorgione
(see Figure 2-17), Cézanne (see Figure 2-4), and O’Keeffe (see Figure 4-12).
Such gorgeous works generally are responded to with immediate satisfac­
tion. What more needs to be done? If art were only of the beautiful, text­
books such as this would never find many users. But we think more needs
to be done, even with the beautiful. We will begin, however, with three
works that obviously are not beautiful.

The Mexican painter David Alfaro Siqueiros’s Echo of a Scream (Figure 1-2)
is a highly emotional painting—in the sense that the work seems to demand
a strong emotional response. What we see is the huge head of a baby crying
FIGURE 1-2

Siqueiros, a famous Mexican muralist, fought during the Mexican Revolution and possessed a powerful political sensibility, much of which found its way into his art. He painted some of his works in prison, held there for his political convictions. In the 1930s he centered his attention on the Spanish Civil War, represented here.

and, then, as if issuing from its own mouth, the baby himself. What kinds of emotions do you find stirring in yourself as you look at this painting? What kinds of emotions do you feel are expressed in the painting? Your own emotional responses—such as shock, pity for the child, irritation at a destructive, mechanical society, or any other nameable emotion—do not sum up the painting. However, they are an important starting point, since Siqueiros paints in such a way as to evoke emotion, and our understanding of the painting increases as we examine the means by which this evocation is achieved.
PERCEPTION KEY *Echo of a Scream*

1. Identify the mechanical objects in the painting.
2. What is the condition of these objects? What is their relationship to the baby?
3. What are those strange round forms in the upper right corner?
4. How might your response differ if the angular lines were smoothed out?
5. What is the significance of the red cloth around the baby?
6. Why are the natural shapes in the painting, such as the forehead of the baby, distorted? Is awareness of such distortions crucial to a response to the painting?
7. What effect does the repetition of the baby’s head have on you?

Study another work, very close in temperament to Siqueiros’s painting: *The Eternal City* by the American painter Peter Blume (Figure 1-3). After attending carefully to the kinds of responses awakened by *The Eternal City*, take note of some background information about the painting that you may not know. The year of this painting is the same as that of *Echo of a Scream*: 1937. *The Eternal City* is a name reserved for only one city in the world—Rome. In 1937 the world was on the verge of world war: Fascists were in power in Italy and the Nazis in Germany. In the center of the painting is the Roman Forum, close to where Julius Caesar, the alleged tyrant, was murdered by Brutus. But here we see fascist Blackshirts, the modern tyrants, beating people. In a niche at the left is a figure of Christ, and beneath him (hard to see) is a crippled beggar woman. Near her are ruins of Roman statuary. The enlarged and distorted head, wriggling out like a jack-in-the-box, is that of Mussolini, the man who invented fascism and
the Blackshirts. Study the painting closely again. Has your response to the painting changed?

**PERCEPTION KEY Siqueiros and Blume**

1. What common ingredients do you find in the Blume and Siqueiros paintings?
2. Is your reaction to the Blume similar to or distinct from your reaction to the Siqueiros?
3. Is the effect of the distortions similar or different?
4. How are colors used in each painting? Are the colors those of the natural world, or do they suggest an artificial environment? Are they distorted for effect?
5. With reference to the objects and events represented in each painting, do you think the paintings are comparable? If so, in what ways?
6. With the Blume, are there any natural objects in the painting that suggest the vitality of the Eternal City?

Before going on to the next painting, which is quite different in character, we should pause to make some observations about what we have done, however briefly, with the Blume. With added knowledge about its cultural and political implications—what we shall call the background of the painting—your responses to *The Eternal City* may have changed. Ideally, they should have become more focused, intense, and certain. Why? The painting is surely the same physical object you looked at originally. Nothing has changed in that object. Therefore, something has changed because something has been added to you, information that the general viewer of the painting in 1937 would have had and would have responded to more emotionally than viewers do now. Consider how a Fascist, on the one hand, or an Italian humanist and lover of Roman culture, on the other hand, would have reacted to this painting in 1937.

A full experience of this painting is not one thing or one system of things but an innumerable variety of things. Moreover, "knowledge about" a work of art can lead to "knowledge of" the work of art, which implies a richer experience. This is important as a basic principle, since it means that we can be educated about what is in a work of art, such as its shapes, objects, and structure, as well as what is external to a work, such as its political references. It means we can learn to respond more completely. It also means that artists such as Blume sometimes produce works that demand background information if we are to appreciate them fully. This is particularly true of art that refers to historical circumstances and personages. Sometimes we may find ourselves unable to respond successfully to a work of art because we lack the background knowledge the artist presupposes.

Picasso's *Guernica* (Figure 1-4), one of the most famous paintings of the twentieth century, is also dated 1937. Its title comes from the name of an old Spanish town that was bombed during the Spanish Civil War—the first aerial bombing of noncombatant civilians in modern warfare. Examine this painting carefully.
PERCEPTION KEY *Guernica*

1. Distortion is powerfully evident in this painting. How does its function differ from that of the distortion in Blume's or Siqueiros's paintings?
2. Describe the objects in the painting. What is their relationship to one another?
3. Why the prominence of the lightbulb?
4. There are large vertical rectangles on the left and right sides and a very large triangle in the center. Do these shapes provide a visual order to what would otherwise be sheer chaos? If so, how? As you think about this, compare one of many studies Picasso made for *Guernica* (Figure 1-5). Does the painting possess a stronger form than the study? If so, in what ways?
5. Because of reading habits in the West, we tend initially to focus on the left side of most paintings and then move to the right, especially when the work is very large. Is this the case with your perception of *Guernica*? In the organization or form of *Guernica* is there a countermovement that, once our vision has reached the right side, pulls us back to the left? If so, what shapes in the painting cause this countermovement? How do these left-right and right-left movements affect the balance of the painting? Note that the actual painting is over twenty-five feet wide.
6. The bull seems to be totally indifferent to the carnage. Do you think the bull may be a symbol? For example, could the bull represent the spirit of the Spanish people? Could the bull represent General Franco, the man who ordered the bombing? Or could the bull represent both? To answer these questions adequately, do you need further background information, or can you defend your answers by referring to what is in the painting, or do you need to use both?
7. The bombing of Guernica occurred during the day. Why did Picasso portray it as happening at night?
8. Which are more visually dominant, human beings or animals? If you were not told, would you know that this painting was a representation of an air raid?
9. Is the subject matter—what the work is about—of this painting war? Death? Suffering? Fascism? Or a combination?
The next painting (Figure 1-6), featured in “Experiencing: The Mona Lisa,” is by Leonardo da Vinci, arguably one of the greatest painters of the Italian Renaissance. Da Vinci is a household name in part because of this painting. Despite the lack of a political or historically relevant subject matter, the Mona Lisa, with its tense pose and enigmatic expression, has become possibly the most famous work of art in the West.

Structure and Artistic Form

The responses you have when you look at the Mona Lisa are probably different from those you have when viewing the other paintings in this chapter, but why? You might reply that the Mona Lisa is hypnotizing, a carefully structured painting depending on a subtle but basic geometric form, the triangle. Such structures, while operating subconsciously, are obvious on analysis. Like all structural elements of the artistic form of a painting, they affect us deeply even when we are not aware of them. We have the capacity to respond to pure form even in paintings in which objects and events are portrayed. Thus, responding to The Eternal City will involve responding not just to an interpretation of fascism taking hold in Italy but also to the sensuous surface of the painting. This is certainly true of Echo of a Scream; if you look again at that painting, you will see not only that its sensuous surface is interesting intrinsically but also that it deepens our response to what is represented. Because we often respond to artistic form without being conscious that it is affecting us, it is of first importance that the painter makes the structure interesting. Consider the contrast between the simplicity of the structure of the Mona Lisa and the urgent complexity of the structures of the Siqueiros and the Blume.
The Mona Lisa

1. Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* is one of the most famous paintings in the history of art. What, in your opinion, makes this painting noteworthy?

2. Because this painting is so familiar, it has sometimes been treated as if it were a cliché. In several cases, it has been treated with satirical scorn. Why would any artist want to make fun of this painting? Is it a cliché, or are you able to look at it as if for the first time?

3. Unlike the works of Siqueiros, Blume, and Picasso, this painting has no obvious connections to historical circumstances that might intrude on your responses to its formal qualities. How does a lack of context affect your understanding of the painting?

4. It has been pointed out that the landscape on the left and the landscape on the right are totally different. If that judgment is correct, why do you think Leonardo made such a decision? What moods do the landscapes suggest?

5. The woman portrayed may be Lisa Gherardini del Giocondo, the wife of a local businessman, and the painting has long been known in Italy as *La Gioconda*. Is it necessary to your sense of participation that we know who the sitter is, or that we know that Leonardo kept this painting with him throughout his life and took it wherever he went?

Experiencing a painting as frequently reproduced as *Mona Lisa*, which is visited by millions of people every year at the Louvre in Paris, takes most of us some special effort. Unless we study the painting as if it were new to us, we will simply see it as an icon of high culture rather than as a painting with a formal power and a lasting value. Because it is used in advertisements, on mouse pads, playing cards, jigsaw puzzles, and a host of other banal locations, we might see this as a cliché, an overworked image.

However, we are also fortunate in that we see the painting as itself, apart from any social or historical events, and in a location that is almost magical or mythical. The landscape may be unreal, fantastic, and suggestive of a world of mystical opportunity. Certainly it emphasizes mystery. Whoever this woman is, she is concentrating in an unusual fashion on the viewer, whether we imagine it is we or it is Leonardo whom she contemplates. A study of her expression reminds us that for generations the “Gioconda smile” has teased authors and critics with its mystery. Is she making an erotic suggestion in that smile, or is it a smile of self-satisfaction? Or is it a smile of tolerance, suggesting that she is just waiting for this sitting to be done? Her expression has been the most intriguing of virtually any portrait subject in any museum in the world. It is no surprise, then, that Leonardo kept this for himself, although we must wonder whether or not he was commissioned for the painting and that for some reason did not want to deliver it.

The arresting quality of the painting is in part, to be sure, because of the enigmatic expression on her face, but the form of the painting is also arresting. Leonardo

(continued)
has posed her so that her head is the top of an isosceles triangle in which her face glows in contrast with her dark clothing. Her hands, expressive and radiant, create a strong diagonal leading to the base of the triangle. Her shoulders are turned at a significant angle so that her pose is not really comfortable, not easy to maintain for a long time—should you try to adopt the pose yourself you would see. However, her position is visually arresting because it imparts a tension to the entire painting that contributes to our response to it as a powerful object.

The most savage satirical treatment of this painting is the Dadaist Marcel Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, (Figure 14-14). By parodying this work, Duchamp thumbed his nose at high culture in 1919, after World War I, and after the *Mona Lisa* had assumed its role as an epitome of high art. His work was an expression of disgust at the middle and upper classes that had gone so enthusiastically into a war of attrition that had brought Europe to the verge of self-destruction.

The composition of any painting can be analyzed because any painting has to be organized: Parts have to be interrelated. Moreover, it is important to think carefully about the composition of individual paintings. This is particularly true of paintings one does not respond to immediately—of "difficult" or apparently uninteresting paintings. Often the analysis of structure can help us gain access to such paintings so that they become genuinely exciting.

**PERCEPTION KEY The Eternal City**

1. Sketch the basic shapes of the painting.
2. Do these shapes relate to one another in such a way as to help reveal the obscenity of fascism? If so, how?

*Artistic form* is a composition or structure that makes something—a subject matter—more meaningful. The Siqueiros, Blume, and Picasso reveal something about the horrors of war and fascism. But what does the *Mona Lisa* reveal? Perhaps just the form and structure? For us, structures or forms that do not give us insight are not artistic forms. Some will argue the point. This major question will be pursued throughout the text.

**Perception**

We are not likely to respond sensitively to a work of art that we do not perceive properly. What is less obvious is what we referred to previously—the fact that we can often give our attention to a work of art and still not really perceive very much. The reason for this should be clear from our previous discussion. Frequently, we need to know something about the background of a work of art that would aid our perception. Anyone who did not know something about the history of Rome, or who Christ was, or what fascism was, or what Mussolini meant to the world would have a difficult time making sense of *The Eternal City*. But it is also true that anyone who could
not perceive Blume's composition might have a completely superficial response to the painting. Such a person could indeed know all about the background and understand the symbolic statements made by the painting, but that is only part of the painting. From seeing what da Vinci can do with form, structure, pose, and expression, you can understand that the formal qualities of a painting are neither accidental nor unimportant. In Blume's painting, the form focuses attention and organizes our perceptions by establishing the relationships between the parts.

Composition is basic to all the arts. To perceive any work of art adequately, we must perceive its structure. Examine the following poem—"l(a)—by e. e. cummings. It is unusual in its form and its effects.

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At first this poem looks like a strange kind of code, like an Egyptian hieroglyph. But it is not a code—it is more like a Japanese haiku, a poem that sets a scene or paints a picture and then waits for us to get it. And to "get it" requires sensitive perception.

PERCEPTION KEY "l(a"

1. Study the poem carefully until you begin to make out the words. What are they?
2. One part of the poem refers to an emotion; the other describes an event. What is the relationship between them?
3. Is the shape of the poem important to the meaning of the poem?
4. Why are the words of the poem difficult to perceive? Is that difficulty important to the poem?
5. Does the poem evoke an image or images?
6. With the emphasis on letters in the poem, is the use of the lowercase for the poet's name fitting?
7. Once you have perceived the words and imagery of the poem, does your response change? Compare your analysis of the poem with ours, which follows.

In this poem a word is interrupted by parentheses: "l one l iness"—a feeling we have all experienced. Because of its isolating, biting power, we ordinarily do not like this feeling. Then, inside the parentheses, there is a phrase, "a leaf falls," the description of an event. In poetry such a description is usually called an image. In this poem the image illustrates the idea
or theme of loneliness, melding the specific with the abstract. But how is this melding accomplished? First of all, notice the devices that symbolize or represent oneness, an emblem of loneliness. The poem begins with the letter “I,” which in the typeface used in the original poem looks like the number “one.” Even the parenthesis separating the “a” from the “I” helps accent the isolation of the “I.” Then there is the “le,” which is the singular article in French. The idea of one is doubled by repetition in the “ll” figure. Then cummings brazenly writes “one” and follows it by “I” and then the ultimate “iness.” Furthermore, in the original edition the poem is number one of the collection. Also notice how these representations of oneness are wedded to the image: “a leaf falls.”

As you look at the poem, your eye follows a downward path that swirls in a pattern similar to the diagram in Figure 1-7. This is merely following the parentheses and consonants. As you follow the vowels as well, you see curves that become spirals, and the image is indeed much like that of a leaf actually falling. This accounts for the long, thin look of the poem. Now, go back to the poem and reread it. Has your response changed? If so, how?

Of course, most poems do not work in quite this way. Most poems do not rely on the way they look on the page, although this is one of the most important strategies cummings uses. But what most poets are concerned with is the way the images or verbal pictures fit into the totality of the poem, how they make us experience the whole poem more intensely. In cummings’ poem the single, falling, dying leaf—one out of so many—is perfect for helping us understand loneliness from a dying person’s point of view. People are like leaves in that they are countless when they are alive and together. But like leaves, they die singly. And when one person separates himself or herself from the community of friends, that person is as alone as the separate leaf.

**Abstract Ideas and Concrete Images**

“l(a” presents an abstract idea fused with a concrete image or word picture. It is concrete because what is described is a physical event—a falling leaf. Loneliness, on the other hand, is abstract. Take an abstract idea: love, hate, indecision, arrogance, jealousy, ambition, justice, civil rights, prejudice, revenge, revolution, coyness, insanity, or any other. Then link it with some physical object or event that you think expresses the abstract idea. “Expresses” here means simply making us see the object as portraying—and thus helping us understand—the abstract idea. Of course, you need not follow cummings’ style of splitting words and using parentheses. You may use any way of lining up the letters and words that you think is interesting.

In *Paradise Lost*, John Milton describes hell as a place with “Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death.” Now, neither you nor the poet has ever seen “shades of death,” although the idea is in Psalm 23, “the valley of the shadow of death.” Milton gets away with it because he has linked the abstract idea of shades of death to so many concrete images.
in this single line. He is giving us images that suggest the mood of hell just as much as they describe the landscape, and we realize that he gives us so many topographic details in order to get us ready for the last detail—the abstract idea of shades of death.

There is much more to be said about poetry, of course, but on a preliminary level poetry worked in much the same way in the seventeenth-century England of Milton as it does in contemporary America. The same principles are at work: Described objects or events are used as a means of bringing abstract ideas to life. The descriptions take on a wider and deeper significance—wider in the sense that the descriptions are connected with the larger scope of abstract ideas, deeper in the sense that because of these descriptions the abstract ideas become vividly focused and more meaningful. Thus, cummings' poem gives us insight—a penetrating understanding—into what we all must face: the isolating loneliness of our death.

The following poem is highly complex: the memory of an older culture (simplicity, in this poem) and the consideration of a newer culture (complexity). It is an African poem by the contemporary Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara; and knowing that it is African, we can begin to appreciate the extreme complexity of Okara's feelings about the clash of the old and new cultures. He symbolizes the clash in terms of music, and he opposes two musical instruments: the drum and the piano. They stand respectively for the African and the European cultures. But even beyond the musical images that abound in this poem, look closely at the images of nature, the pictures of the panther and leopard, and see how Okara imagines them.

**PIANO AND DRUMS**

When at break of day at a riverside
I hear jungle drums telegraphing
the mystic rhythm, urgent, raw
like bleeding flesh, speaking of
primal youth and the beginning,
I see the panther ready to pounce,
the leopard snarling about to leap
and the hunters crouch with spears poised;
And my blood ripples, turns torrent,
topples the years and at once I'm
in my mother's lap a suckling;
at once I'm walking simple
paths with no innovations,
rugged, fashioned with the naked
warmth of hurrying feet and groping hearts
in green leaves and wild flowers pulsing.
Then I hear a wailing piano
solo speaking of complex ways
in tear-furrowed concerto;
of far-away lands
and new horizons with
coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint,
crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth
of its complexities, it ends in the middle
of a phrase at a daggerpoint.
And I lost in the morning mist
of an age at a riverside keep
wandering in the mystic rhythm
of jungle drums and the concerto.

PERCEPTION KEY "Piano and Drums"

1. What are the most important physical objects in the poem? What cultural significance do they have?
2. Why do you think Okara chose the drum and the piano to help reveal the clash between the two cultures? Where are his allegiances?

Such a poem speaks directly to legions of the current generation of Africans. But consider some points in light of what we have said earlier. In order to perceive the kind of emotional struggle that Okara talks about—the subject matter of the poem—we need to know something about Africa and the struggle African nations have in modernizing themselves along the lines of more technologically advanced nations. We also need to know something of the history of Africa and the fact that European nations, such as Britain in the case of Nigeria, once controlled much of Africa. Knowing these things, we know then that there is no thought of the "I" of the poem accepting the "complex ways" of the new culture without qualification. The "I" does not think of the culture of the piano as manifestly superior to the culture of the drum. That is why the labyrinth of complexities ends at a "daggerpoint." The new culture is a mixed blessing.

We have argued that the perception of a work of art is aided by background information and that sensitive perception must be aware of form, at least implicitly. But we believe there is much more to sensitive perception. Somehow the form of a work of art is an artistic form that clarifies or reveals values, and our response is intensified by our awareness of those revealed values. But how does artistic form do this? And how does this awareness come to us? In the next chapter we shall consider these questions, and in doing so, we will also raise that most important question: What is a work of art? Once we have examined each of the arts, it will be clear, we hope, that the principles developed in these opening chapters are equally applicable to all the arts.

Participate and analyze and participate again with Edward Hopper's Early Sunday Morning (Figure 1-8).

PERCEPTION KEY Early Sunday Morning

1. What is the subject matter of this painting?
2. Back up your judgment with reference to as many relevant details as possible before reading further.
On one level the subject matter is a city street scene. But on a more basic level, we think, the subject matter is loneliness. Packed human habitation is portrayed, but no human being is in sight (incidentally but noteworthy, a human figure originally placed behind one of the windows was painted out). We seem to be at the scene alone on New York's Seventh Avenue. We seem to be strangely located across the street at about the level of the second-story windows. Loneliness is usually accompanied by anxiety. And anxiety is expressed by the silent windows, especially the ominous dark storefronts, the mysterious translucent lighting, and the strange dark rectangle (what is it?) on the upper right. The street and buildings, despite their rectilinear format, seem to lean slightly downhill to the left, pushed by the shadows, especially the unexplainable weird flaglike one wrapping over the second window on the left of the second story. Even the bright barber pole is tilted to the left, the tilt accentuated by the uprightness of the door and window frames in the background and the wonderfully painted toadlike fire hydrant. These subtle oddities of the scene accent our "iness"—our separateness.

**Summary**

Unlike scientists, humanists generally do not use strictly objective standards. The arts reveal values; other humanities study values. Artistic form refers to the structure or organization of a work of art. Values are clarified or revealed...
by a work of art. Judging from the most ancient efforts to make things, we can assert that the arts represent one of the most basic of human activities. They satisfy a need to explore and express the values that link us together. By observing our responses to a work of art and examining the means by which the artist evokes those responses, we can deepen our understanding of art. Our approach to the humanities is through the arts, and our taste in art connects with our deep feelings. Yet our taste is continually improved by experience and education. Background information about a work of art and increased sensitivity to its artistic form intensify our responses.