

BEFORE THE STORM

THE Copernican Revolution had one enormous and far-reaching effect: It established beyond all equivocation and debate what can be said about *objects*, and how it should be said. It supplied the rules for studying objects and demonstrated their validity in practice. The completion of these rules by Isaac Newton and their acceptance by modern man, however, took place behind the screen of other issues. As John W. Draper put it in his *History of the Conflict between Science and Religion*:

So, uncondemned, and indeed unobserved, in this clamor of fighting sects [the controversies of the Reformation], Newton's grand theory established itself. Its philosophical significance was infinitely more momentous than the dogmas that these persons were quarreling about. It not only accepted the heliocentric theory and the laws discovered by Kepler, but it proved that, no matter what might be the weight of opposing ecclesiastical authority, the sun *must* be the center of our system, and that Kepler's laws are the result of a mathematical necessity. It is impossible that they should be other than they are.

The basic discoveries took place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and ever since we have been defining objects and putting things in their place. The excitement of this activity became the sustaining moral energy of Western civilization. As Alexander Pope put it: "God said, Let Newton be! and all was light."

But the light we have from definition of the shape, size, motions, and history of objects, we find, illumines no uniquely human purposes. The great question of the twentieth century, What do these objects *mean*?—to which practically all our answers are in terms of definitions of the objects themselves—has not been met to anyone's satisfaction, with the result that the quest for meaning has been gradually changing its focus. So the great question is now in process of becoming, *What can be said about subjects?*—since it is clear that the true meanings of objects, should they be discoverable at all, will depend, largely or in part,

upon the nature of the subjects for whom the meanings exist.

But like the Copernican Revolution, this enormous switch takes time. Inquiring minds bred in methods that exhibit casual contempt for philosophical abstractions (which are not worth *studied* contempt) do not suddenly embrace introspective wonderings—not openly, at any rate. They court problems of the nature of man warily, developing a style intended to give assurance that they are not abandoning the objectifying victories of the scientific revolution. They are peeling the onion of the self, and studying the layers, skin by skin, being in no hurry to reach a center which, *ex hypothesi*, will disclose absolutely nothing.

Yet in this process, fronts are developing. One of these fronts is the issue of "Creativity." Somewhere along the radius which runs inward—toward the abstraction of "bare subjectivity"—is a point where creativity, originality, invention, and the mysterious fabrication of meaning seem to begin. What, we are asking, are the subtle circumstances under which these wonderful activities take place? What are the secrets of the self in transformation? Can we find words or concepts to give some account of the *functions* which go on in these private areas of human beings? Can there be practice of some science, here?

We should note that the science of our time, which began with a proud certainty of dealing with the "real" materials and forces of the natural world, has already become a discipline concerned with analogues and abstractions of form. Disdainful of the idea of a *ding an sich*, and impotent to deal with such rarefied notions, anyhow, our science concentrates with ever greater refinement on the processes which all objects reveal, and since these, like the universe itself, are infinite for all practical purposes, there is apparently no end to what can be found out by studying the procession of forms.

Nature, while essentially mysterious, is not inhospitable to the human hunger to know. No matter how you look at Nature, with whatever initial assumptions, She turns up interesting things for you to see. And the new science of today, which has become very loose in the matter of assumptions, is discovering endless parallels in the multitudinous ways that Nature performs her work. Today the focus of science is on, not the ultimate units, but the constant forms, in natural phenomena. And the comprehensive abstraction which lies behind all variations of form is *structure*.

But the real interest of the time the need-interest—is in subjects. So the question arises: who among us has never given up on the promise of subjectivity? The answer is—the artist. And, by what seems more than coincidence, the artist increasingly communicates his findings in terms of form, or, more fundamentally, *structure*. He, too, has graduated from the naïve enthusiasm that once attended the representation of "objects." He too has taken flight from the definition of mere particulars. If the art of our time can be said to have had an evolution, it might be claimed that, like science, it has moved from attention to external objects to the underlying principles of objects, and then to the inner relation of subjects to objects. This is of course too easy a generalization. Artists have always been attracted to all three of these modes of work, involuntarily and of necessity. Yet for an account of the self-conscious development of art, there is some truth in speaking of these progressions.

So, in a world which is beginning to realize the importance of asking about subjects—people, not objects, *hurt*, and need help—the artist is recognized not only as a maker of objects but as in some sense an understander of subjects. Whatever else you say about the artist, it remains true that he acts as an individual subject. He is not ever the member of a team. He may have friends among other artists, and they may do generous things for one another, but the authentic creative act is singular, wonderful, and free. (What singular means, here, and how the creative individual is subtly joined to others in feeling, may be weighed, but not allowed to blur the artist's individuality as an actor who in some crucial

sense always stands alone.) While scientific knowledge is public and additive, artistic knowledge is private and unduplicatable. From the realities of this comparison comes the suggestion that if scientific and artistic insight can somehow be joined, we may be able to say some single important thing about both ourselves and the world.

We have for review *Structure in Art and in Science*, edited by Gyorgy Kepes, which presents the testimony of both scientists and artists on what they think they have in common, or what they care about most, or think they *know* (George Braziller, 1965, \$12.50). This book is one of a series called "Vision and Value," in which there are to be six volumes, three being now available (the other two in print are *Education of Vision* and *The Nature and Art of Motion*).

The contributors of the thirteen essays in this volume range over a wide territory in the study of structure. The editor, Gyorgy Kepes, a painter and designer, at present is professor of visual design at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is the author of *Language of Vision*, a kind of bible for people in the designing field, and *The New Landscape in Art and Science*.

Two essays early in the book, the scientific part, state the general problem. Cyril Stanley Smith, a metallurgist, offers a guided tour of the world of crystalline forms. The vast competence of this specialist makes you feel at home in the caverns of microscopy. The reader is instructed in regularity, recurring pattern, and the ways in which regularity and pattern are interrupted by the intrusive forces of other regularities and patterns. Then, at the end, he turns from specialist into a generalist:

Do not these simple structures of crystals and the simpler ones of bubbles graphically illustrate some important features of the world and our appreciation of it, aesthetically as well as intellectually? . . . Everything that we can see, everything that we can understand, is related to structure, and, as the *Gestalt* psychologists have so beautifully shown, perception itself is in patterns, not fragments. All awareness or mental activity seems to involve the comparison of a sensed thought pattern with a pre-existing one, a pattern formed in the brain's physical structure by biological inheritance

and the imprint of experience. Could it be that æsthetic enjoyment is the result of the formation of a kind of moiré pattern between a newly sensed experience and the old; between the different parts of a sensed pattern transposed in space and in orientation and with variations in scale and time by the marvelous properties of the brain. . . . The very nature of life is pattern-matching. . . . There is a kind of indeterminacy (quite different in essence from the famous principle of Heisenberg but just as effective in limiting our knowledge of nature), which lies in the fact that we can neither consciously sense nor think of very much at any one moment. Understanding can only come from a roving viewpoint. . . .

The elimination of the extraneous, in both experiment and theory, has been the veritable basis of all scientific advance since the seventeenth century, and has led us to a point where practically everything above the atom is understood "in principle." Sooner or later, however, science in its advance will have exhausted the supply of problems that involve only those aspects of nature that can be freshly studied in simple isolation. The great need now is for concern with systems of greater complexity, for methods of dealing with complicated nature as it exists. The artist has long been making meaningful and communicable statements, if not always precise ones, about complex things. If new methods, which will surely owe something to æsthetics, should enable the scientist to move into more complex fields, his area of interest will approach that of the humanist, and science may even once more blend smoothly into the whole range of human activity.

Such determination to see things whole—or "wholer"—and at the same time the recognition that this means a much more difficult task than analysis of simple objects in isolation, fits with other parts of the book. It fits, for example, with Buckminster Fuller's reasoned announcement that the "*universe does not have a shape.*" You can't look at the universe all over, all at once. Anyhow, "Universe structures most frequently consist of the *physical interrelationship of non-simultaneous events.*" Therefore, "a single, simultaneous, static model of universe, is both inherently 'nonexistent,' 'conceptually impossible,' as well as 'unnecessary.'" Mr. Fuller advises:

Do not waste your time, as man has been doing for ages trying to think of a unit shape "outside of which there must be something," or "within which, at

the center, there must be a smaller something." All the words in the dictionary do not make one sentence, all the words cannot be simultaneously considered, *yet* each of the words is valid as a tool of communication; and some words combine in a structure of meaning.

Here, in brief, is a capsule account of how "science" comes about. The isolated "facts" are all "out there," in the universe, and you pick the ones that interest you, or that you think important, and make your sentence or proposition. Then you test it, and if you happen to be right—if your words go with your facts—you have a bit of science to add to all the rest. And this, in turn, fits with the thinking of the artist, Delacroix. H. L. C. Jaffe, writing on "Syntactic Structure in the Visual Arts," repeats from Baudelaire the principle of Delacroix: "Nature is only a dictionary . . . but no one has ever considered a dictionary a composition in the poetic sense of the word." Jaffe quotes from Baudelaire:

Exterior nature only furnishes the artist with an endlessly recurring occasion to cultivate this germ; she is only an incoherent accumulation of material that the artist is invited to associate and put in order, an incitement, a rouser to his sleeping faculties. Precisely speaking there is in nature neither line nor color. It is man who creates line and color. These are two abstractions which draw their nobility from the same origin.

Cyril Smith's report on how crystal formations look under the microscope is followed by an equally fascinating account, not of how the eye sees, but of human attempts to explain seeing. We still don't understand it. Richard Held, of the psychology department at M.I.T., in "Object and Effigy," makes a historical summary of theories of vision, all of which remained in serious trouble because of the assumptions they began with about seeing. What, finally, seems to be the case is that "something" in the seeing subject contributes enormously to "pattern recognition," but how this works remains a mystery. As Mr. Held concludes:

The powers of pattern recognition are nowhere more evident than in recognition of speech and handwriting. Despite the enormous variability in physical properties, recognition of such linguistic entities by an adult familiar with his language is almost instantaneous and rarely in error. We cannot

conclude that this ability is acquired through a long period of education during which all the variant forms become associated with the correct response. To some extent, every instance of speech or handwriting is unique. For that matter, every instance of a tree, or even of a given perspective of a tree, is unique. The commonly used explanation that similarity of instances is the source of a common response to disparate stimulation simply begs the issue. We are forced to conclude that having been presented with a relatively small sample of instances, the system can recognize an unlimited set. And such constructive power must entail a set of principles in operation intrinsic to the human nervous system.

Linguists, under the leadership of N. Chomsky, have made considerable progress in defining the principles required for use of language. Little progress has been made in this direction for perception in general. Nevertheless, the arguments are convincing that the workings of such principles determine both what information from the environment will be utilized and how it will be classified in the form of perception. Consequently, the identity and continuity of objects can be regarded as the outcome of this processing rather than as its cause. . . .

Here is a nice funding of the philosophical confusions of solipsism and a transfer of the mess to the psychology of perception. Obviously, there is more in the subject than just the eye. A man sees what his pattern-recognizing department tells him to see, and little else.

In such cases, he may recognize what he is doing, or he may not. Which are the "wholes," the "real" things, he ought to see? I. A. Richards waxes eloquent on this point:

I have been hoping to remind you that the physicist succeeds because he can ignore so much. What Whitehead used to call "essential neglect" enables him to set himself far simpler tasks. The student of meaning cannot do that. One of his worst difficulties, in fact, is that he is always so strongly tempted to try to do it, to try, by drastic simplifications, to get himself a more manageable undertaking. In recent decades the most famous of these attempts has been Behaviorism. In spite of all that has been learned from the Behaviorists, it may be suggested that what Behaviorism has chiefly demonstrated—through these 40 years—is its insufficiency. To substitute Behavior for Meaning

has been to miss the point—the point at which really vital progress can and must be made. I am reminded of Oppenheimer's fine cry: "It is the business of science to be wrong!" Behaviorism has discovered a great deal in detail about behavior but in general has it not shown just this: that the key problems are beyond it?

It will make this a little solider, perhaps, if I juxtapose now two pronouncements: one from B. F. Skinner, the other from Noam Chomsky's review of Skinner's book, *Verbal Behavior*.

Here is Skinner: "Hundreds of puzzling questions and obscure propositions about verbal behavior may be dismissed while the new questions and propositions which arise to take their place are susceptible to experimental check as part of a more unified pattern."

Here is Chomsky on that:

"The questions to which Skinner has addressed his speculations are hopelessly premature. It is futile to enquire into the causation of verbal behavior until much more is known about the specific character of this behavior; and there is little point in speculating about the process of acquisition without much better understanding of what is acquired."

What may strike us first is the extreme confidence of both pronouncements. How, for example, does Skinner know what these questions and propositions are that are being "dismissed" if they are so puzzling and obscure? And in what sense do the new questions and propositions take their place? Do they attempt the same tasks, for example? To change the subject is often a way of dodging an inquiry.

Chomsky, in turn, according to Richards, is hung up in methodological rigor, and this, he thinks, is "as though a student of physical vision were to say: 'Don't let's bother about the eye and how it works and all that! What we care about is WHAT we see, not HOW'."

In short, so far as science is concerned, this book is about the complications which result from letting the human subject begin to have a part in the proceedings, yet at the same time there is rich promise of a light that did not exist before, even though this light, like all things having to do with subjects, varies with individual human beings. I. A. Richards is the man to make this point, since he has

been all his life concerned with meaning, and there is no meaning without light from subjects. The most important communications contribute to learning capacity, which, he says, is "the ability to *inquire*, ability to *compare*, ability to *select on the basis of comparing*, ability to *try out*, ability to *see what the outcome of the trial is*, ability to *change one's mind* through seeing why and how the view taken has been wrong." He adds. "It is these abilities rather than the mere reproduction of received impressions that we need to cultivate."

We don't mean to let our enthusiasm for this book suggest that it makes a coherent, "new" way of looking at the world. It is filled with the bewilderments of divorce from the familiar. We have tried to extricate one or two common themes, but as a whole the book is likely to make the reader feel like a college youth who starts out with a freshman's confidence that he is going to learn all about everything, but finds that at the top of the pyramid of modern knowledge, all is uncertainty and demand for radical change.

The æsthetic axis of the book moves from Buckminster Fuller's heady mystique to the warm humanism of the architects (the city is "a big house lived in by us all"—Alison and Peter Smithson), to the passionate functionalism of Nervi, and reaches a climax in Richard Lippold's Upanishad for Western man. With an argument that is both æsthetically satisfying and logically severe, he maintains that "only paradox is 'real,'" and "all other 'reality,' or form, is illusion." Mr. Lippold is a sculptor and teacher whose essay, "Illusion and Structure," represents a twentieth-century homecoming for the inward intelligence as the real man. He writes:

It can almost be said that this age of disillusion is in reality an age of dissolution. The rapid succession of theories destroyed by science has left even the scientist with grave doubts as to the meaning of anything beyond its own momentary mention. A young Nobel Prize scientist, still in his twenties, speaking recently at an M.I.T. symposium, said that things were happening so fast in physics these days that he could not understand what the "younger" men were talking about.

On what is this dissolution based? Insofar as I, as a layman, can understand it (although as an artist I

have long "known" it), what seems to have happened to an understanding of the structure of matter (the same process applies to psychic, social, and philosophical structures as well) is that with every effort to describe it from one point of view, a new point of view manifests itself.

What then is stable, or "real"? The subject, since he is the constant in all this changing scene and transforming enterprise. What is the object? The object is where the subject looks, and its qualities are determined by how he looks, its meaning by why. The predispositions of the "where" and "how" of the looking are the current questions of both scientific and artistic inquiry. The scientists now work on this problem with a kind of second-sighted "objectivity" while the artists, as always, "learn by doing." You might say that the artist is trying to register in time some momentary mark of the timeless, to report some glancing blow, while the scientist is trying to generalize from carefully selected marks in finite experience, moving from one set of marks to another, increasingly in the direction of the subject, hoping to arrive at some constants, some realities that have in them timeless meanings for humans. So far, between scientists and artists, there have been only accidental or intuitive mergers, but at least they are becoming friends. At least they have had some success in developing common terms of communication. When they get a common grammar, the new "Copernican" revolution will be at hand.

REVIEW

ART AND HUMAN DESTINY

THE title of Colin Wilson's book, *The Strength to Dream*, elicits an intuitive response from those who still believe that "goodness," "truth," and "beauty" suggest a destiny which cannot be thwarted by the juggernaut of impersonal computers. And Lillian Smith's article, "Poets among the Demagogues" (*Saturday Review*, Oct. 2), not only discusses the relationship of "art" to human fulfillment, but is itself a work of art. Mrs. Smith uses the poet to represent the creative imagination in each human being, and relates this to the idea of the "non-poet," the non-creator—the demagogue, who substitutes manipulation for creativity:

I want to discuss the poet in a world filled with demagogues. I want to stress the power of the poetic spirit in a time of clamor and hate and anarchic confusion. The demagogues are everywhere: not only in Selma, Alabama, and Neshoba County, Mississippi, not only on the streets of Birmingham and Harlem and in sheriffs' offices and governors' mansions, but in the United Nations, in new countries and old, new institutions and old. Of them all, perhaps the most dangerous demagogues are those that crouch in our own minds whispering lies at a time when we so desperately need to hear the poet's deep truths. For we have desperate and difficult problems to deal with: problems that reach inside our homes and our hearts and pull us to the ends of the earth; problems that won't leave us alone; problems that shock us and frighten us.

The appeal of the demagogue is based upon the argument from continual emergency, a state of affairs so desperate that any form of "high-level" thinking must be shelved for the permanent duration of crisis. The enemy, for the demagogue, is clearly discernible, and this enemy has many befuddled allies who insist that reason can prevail in the settlement of human disputes. Of course, only the demagogue-realist can tell when things are really far beyond such a point. The enemy, on this view, is also supported by those who favor open-mindedness. As Mrs. Smith puts it: " 'What a terrible time we live in,' the demagogue shouts.

'Come with me and we'll go back to the old way, the good old times that never existed. Just follow me, we'll somehow get there'."

Yet there is still the inchoate hunger of men everywhere, however malleable to the demagogue's wishes, to become more human, which is simply, in this case, to be hopeful. We try, at least at times, to get beyond the reach of our political manipulators, as Jesus admonished his disciples to turn their backs upon the publicans and Pharisees, and it is "the poet in us" which looks beyond the details of conflict to the total picture of human life as affording vistas of opportunity in even the worst of times. It is the poet in us who can "grasp the splinters and bend them into a new wholeness that does not yet exist; it is his job to think not in years but in spans of thousands of years; his job to measure the slow movement of the human spirit evolving; his to see that the moment is close for all mankind to make another big leap forward; it is his job to scoop up the debris of our times and show us the giant outlines of the human spirit becoming more able to relate to the unknown and the unseen."

So the poet, in these terms, is not simply the man who makes verse; he speaks to us from visions which arise in the vaulting imagination of the spirit. Teilhard de Chardin, both scientist and rethinker of religion, was also a poet who wrote:

It is because the earth is round that we have become human: you see, we could not get away, we could not help but rub against each other; and this rubbing polished our minds, sent the mental temperature up; in such heat minds became flexible, moved with speed; became involved and convoluted and related in ten billion ways.

Unfortunately, many contemporary representatives of art and literature seem to be failing in their poetic task. Mrs. Smith continues:

What are novelists and dramatists saying about this tremendous thing that is happening to us? I'm afraid they are saying almost nothing. Most are still talking the old nihilisms of the nineteenth century redressed in new clothes; most are still fixated on narcissistic problems that have sloshed over from

Victorian days; most are still moaning about the human condition, the tragic absurdity of man's plight, the hideous lack of cosmic purpose; most mistake an earth-size movement for no motion at all. I cannot think of one who is creating characters who might have qualities needed for this adventurous age. What has Albee given us? Genet? Sartre? Mailer? Self-absorbed, most cannot tear their eyes from their own small depravities. So they are giving us fragmented sketches of sick people; they hold before us in play and story a never-ending bleak view of miserable, lost, lonely schizophrenics. Of course we should look with compassion at our sick and lost ones—young and old—but they should not be presented to us in drama and novel as though they are the whole of contemporary life, as though they are all we have to count on for the future.

Turning big issues into small ones because, however talented, they are not poet enough to grasp the vastness of contemporary possibilities—what could be more dangerous today? Turning small issues into large. Here is where poets reduce themselves to demagogues. By using the big distortion they become guilty of arousing needless fear and despair; they force their listeners into dead ends that don't exist, sealing the present tight with their own anxieties they declare, "This age has no exit." They treat *hope* as the only four-letter word you must never be caught using.

I do not want to be misunderstood: it is not the presence of splintered, sick, empty people in books and on stage that is wrong; it is acting as if there is nobody else in the world; it is the omission, the absence of context, that so dangerously distorts things.

We cannot act as if this is all, as if there is nothing more to count on; how do we dare when here we are in the midst of the greatest transformation the human race has ever experienced? How can it be carried through unless the young believe in it, unless they feel it in the big? Unless they sense an exalted purpose behind this amazing evolution of the spirit? We know man's evolution is now in his own hands, we know from here on out it is up to him; from here on out he makes the decisions; he has stepped out (or God has let him step out) of natural law—not into chaos but into a new creativity that must find its needed forms. But do the young know this?

We return to an analytic passage in the appendix to Colin Wilson's *The Strength to Dream*:

Art is naturally concerned with man in his existential aspect, not in his scientific aspect. For the scientist, questions about man's stature and significance, suffering and power, are not really scientific questions; consequently, he is inclined to regard art as an inferior recreation. Unfortunately, the artist has come to accept the scientist's view of himself. The result I contend, is that art in the twentieth century—literary art in particular—has ceased to take itself seriously as the primary instrument of existential philosophy. It has ceased to regard itself as an instrument for *human destiny*. Science is the attempt to discern the order that underlies the chaos of nature; art is the attempt to discern the order that underlies the chaos of man. At its best, it evokes unifying emotions, it makes the reader see the world momentarily as a unity.

But first and foremost, art and existentialism are identified in this: they deal with the question of man's stature: is he a god or a worm?

Mrs. Smith expresses the same fundamental exaltation of "the poet in us" in her concluding paragraph of "Poets among the Demagogues":

Perhaps we should not leave it all to great poets and artists; perhaps this new age is challenging every one of us as persons to find poetic truth, to look into Orphic depths, to span with our own imagination great segments of time and space and people. Perhaps it is not only our moral natures but our creative imaginations that are being challenged today; perhaps it is the sum total of our own personal victories as creators that will determine what the future of mankind will be. This "perhaps" is exciting to me, for here is where we exist, here is a battle we may win. And if the poet in us wins, we shall see that the human condition is not a neolithic stone to which we are tied down but a condition of continuous change taking place inside and outside the human spirit.

COMMENTARY

ORDERING AND KNOWING

THE definitions of science and art given by Colin Wilson (see Review) seem so apt, and so closely related to the content of this week's lead article, that there is reason to repeat them here, to make them easier to remember:

Science is the attempt to discern the order that underlies the chaos of nature; art is the attempt to discern the order that underlies the chaos of man.

It is natural to wonder a great deal about these two modes of knowing, to make comparisons between them, and to seek an appropriate way of synthesizing their fruit. Philosophical religion—a happier phrase than "religious philosophy"—may be the place of synthesis, but not, certainly, a synthesis gained by mere verbalization. Science and art are callings—*vocations*—which demand the utmost in human commitment. Until now, it may be, we have had our "truths" of synthesis too cheaply, as though they could be served up for the asking. Neither science nor art is known in this way; much less, therefore, the synthesis of the two.

There is certainly art in science—recognizably present, it may be, in those moments of insight into some fundamental natural process, which, once attained, make all the rest of discovery but verification and detail. And there is science in art—in the longing for fidelity, for impartial visioning, and in the symbolically faithful representation of what is seen. It is a matter of finding wholes in parts, and realizing the hierarchies of being in the world, and of meaning in ourselves. Man is the part which has the potentiality of the whole, and out of that potentiality comes the intellectual yearning of science and the aspiration of art.

Mrs. Jean Gregg, executive director of Crenshaw Neighbors, Inc. (see MANAS for Oct.20), writes to point out that the work of this group for a "balanced community" is not an effort

of Caucasians alone: "Crenshaw Neighbors' charter members were, a third of them, Negro. And I guess that our total membership now has about the same percentage, plus some Oriental families. . . . Two out of five officers are Negro, and Mr. Nakada on our Board is Japanese-American."

Mrs. Gregg notes that Caucasians can do the most in maintaining integrated communities since they, by "moving out," create the problem of resegregation, "and it is only Caucasians moving in who can stop it." "But," she adds, "we would not really have a vital organization if we did not have the interest and concern and support of our Negro residents, and we wouldn't have a vital community if we were working and thinking separately. In fact, the big thing we have to offer is a community where it is possible to know many people without making racial distinctions, and of course we all work together."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

THE MOTHERING ONE: I

THE recent convulsions of our society: the "Riots in Watts," make it even more imperative for us to examine the conditions of our human relations—to discover their flaws and to cure them. Many people are writing about the political and sociological causes of this debacle. I'm writing about some of the psychological ones. I think there's a close connection between Watts, Vietnam, all other ills of the body politic, and the way each of us has been treated and treats each other. I think we can change; some of the damage can be repaired.

I must begin with myself. For twenty-one years I've been a mother. My first child, a son, was born in 1944. My seventh child, a son, was born in 1957. I began to learn how to be a "Mothering One" about six years ago. I think my last two children have had near-adequate Mothering from the time they were quite small. The Mothering of the other five has been progressively better, but they all have had to be compensated for the ignorance, hostility and other personal problems that were thrust upon me and, in turn, upon them.

I began my career of being a mother with the best intentions and a rather high intellectual understanding of the needs of children. It wasn't enough. With my own growth I've inflicted fewer and fewer psychic wounds upon my children. But the wounds are there. When I began to discover them (the psychic wounds), I knew I had to do something about them. This led me to psychiatric help, psychological studies, and an exploration of Mothering—of what it can really mean and what compensations can be made for early deprivations.

The uncharted area is still vast. I am sure I have discovered only a few islands. But I think I've come far enough to write of some of the discoveries. The freedom, creativity, and

enthusiasm for life my children now have demonstrate to me there is validity in them. The communication we have with one another, my own new ease with my children and my friends, my own new enthusiasms, are other indications.

Every exploration begins with questions. Here are some I began with: Why can some human beings suffer grave deprivation, anguish, injustice, and still remain loving, caring persons while others cannot? Is there such a thing as rehabilitation, compensation, the recreation of a damaged personality? What, if anything, can be done about those of us who mutilate because we feel mutilated, who hate because we feel self-hatred, who destroy because our own self-esteem has been destroyed? Are there any remedies an individual can apply to himself or to another?

I think there are. I offer some ideas which have been successful in my own experience and in the experiences of some others. I know they work with people who suffer from neurotic problems. I believe they might prove effective even in psychopathic cases—if we knew how to implement them. But I cannot state too urgently that the more serious disorders require professional psychiatric help.

Important studies have revealed that there are stages of needs in the development of sentient beings which, if missed, warp their personalities. No matter how well-fed or warm he is kept, a dog that has no human contact between six and thirteen weeks will never be a human-oriented dog. A puppy that is kept in total darkness for the first eight months of its life will never see properly—even though the physical condition of his eyes is perfect. Most of us are aware that a baby who was not held enough, cuddled enough, touched enough, goes through life touch-hungry, doubting the virtue of his own body, often seeking to prove his desirability by erratic sexual behaviour. Or, he may totally withdraw from human contact.

In some way or another, everyone alive missed the satisfaction of some critical need.

There is no doubt that each of us parents has deprived our children in some ignorant way. Most of us, in varying degrees, carry burdens of doubt, self-hatred, and despair. Some of us have suffered so keenly, were so wounded in our growth efforts, that we can neither accept ourselves nor others. Only some form of destruction seems to gratify us. Can anything be done in later life to compensate for the loss of a vital stage of experience?

I think so.

But first we must recognize the tragic quality of our situation. A growth-stage lost is lost. The loss is irretrievable. When we are adult, we cannot have the experience we needed at three. Nor can we give the experience to another adult in three-year-old terms. We must give and accept compensation on adult terms. We must deal with a problem as it exists now—whether it manifests itself in depressions, compulsive acts, or more devastating behavior.

If the reason a person hates, destroys, or mutilates springs from a default of being loved and loving others, compensation for that default can begin now.

We begin, of course, with ourselves. We begin knowing we weren't loved enough nor well and that we are incapable of loving well. We can know something went wrong somewhere and that something sometimes makes us feel irrationally hostile, insecure, depressed, afraid. We don't have to know precisely what it was, though with some psychological knowledge, we usually don't have far to look.

Few children of my generation were given demand feedings, held enough, indulged enough. Few of our parents were able to let us grow in our own way, unimpeded by standards they set for us. Few of us received enough approval for simply being. So, we missed critical experiences in our development. It is now cliché among my generation to fix the blame for our sufferings on our parents. That's where the "blame" belongs, all

right, and this blame-fixing does have some virtue. It relieves us temporarily of some anxieties. We aren't inherently "depraved" or "wicked." Someone else made us so. Blame-fixing is a healthy stage—so long as we don't stay in it. If we do, it becomes a vice, closing off our growth. The self-pity becomes nauseating, the whining endless. It means we're asking for an infantile form of gratification unavailable to us at our present stage.

There comes a time when we cannot blame our mothers or our fathers or our teachers or whoever lived with us during these important periods. For we begin to perceive the magnitude of the problems they had to solve and how rudimentary the tools they were given for solution: *i.e.*, moralistic injunctions, abstract principles of good and evil, faulty notions about the Will. We recognize how they suffered, how little mature understanding was given them, how little knowledge of the subtle psyche and its needs. We may realize how immature they were when we were born, how culturally bound, how atomistic. If we're lucky, we may be able to appreciate the efforts they made to do the best they knew how.

Once we stop taking our parents' behavior personally; once we begin to perceive the human-relationship chain of cause and effect, action and reaction, we gain the strength to become aware of our own inadequacies in fulfilling these same needs in our children. And we learn to do this without indulging in orgies of self-punishment and guilt-feelings. Guilt-feelings only add to our present sorrows. They do not mitigate them. We are not "guilty" for what happened in the past. We are responsible for what happens today, for the actions we take within our present understanding. We need all our energies to divest ourselves of our ignorance. Indeed, we might well change the old adage to read: "The ignorance of the parents is visited upon the children endlessly unless . . ."—and this is a profound "unless"—we are able to make a radical break with the past.

One way to make this break is to learn a new role, the role of "The Mothering One." This role is not limited to mothers, nor to women. It is a condition of being and acting in relation to oneself and to others which I believe would be beneficial to the entire human race.

I was struck by a sentence in Walter Pater's Conclusion to his book, *The Renaissance*, and "renaissance" is an accurate description of what happens when one turns in this new direction. "What we have to do," wrote Walter Pater, "is to be forever curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions, never acquiescing in a facile orthodoxy . . . of our own (or anyone else's)."

In the concluding part of this essay, I will try to describe what I mean by "curiously testing new opinions and courting new impressions."

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FRONTIERS

What Is "Psychotherapy"?

FOR the general reader, the value of a book like *Fundamentals of Psychotherapy*, by Glen A. Holland (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), is likely to lie in the light it throws on the "mystery" of the therapeutic approach. The therapist is a person who is professionally devoted to communicating with other people in a way that actually affects how they think and what they do. He starts out with some theory of how to go about this work, but his skill and practical understanding come mainly from experience. He makes a number of first-hand discoveries about the dynamics of human behavior, enabling him to use the language of his profession with a sense of reality for the meanings of its terms. Other men who do the same work have a similar sense of the meanings of this language—which is nonetheless subject to constant revision—and this has the effect of creating an air of mystery for people without the conscious experience out of which the language has grown.

In part, this situation may be illustrated by quoting something Dr. Holland says about children:

. . . the child is usually much less interested in *what* an adult has to say than the adult is in saying it. He may have any number of reasons for wanting to talk, he seldom has much reason for wanting to listen. His tolerance for listening is consequently limited. In fact his tolerance, *per se*, for conversation, is limited. He soon exhausts his own reasons for wanting to talk. He exhausts them even more readily if his communicative attempts "fall on deaf ears," because the adult is more concerned with what *he* wants to communicate to the child rather than with what the child is trying to communicate to him. For most children in most contact with adults, conversation is a losing game in which he *does not* get what he wants and *does* get much that he *does not want*.

In most cases, therefore, adult communication to children fails. But if there should be a group of people who are absolutely determined to learn how to be understood by

children, and who study how children think and feel, there would eventually develop a language about communicating with children which most adults, having never thought about this problem, would understand hardly at all. Here, essentially, is the origin of the "mystery" of psychotherapy.

Adults are no doubt more complicated than children, but the parallel holds. Initially, the therapist has the sole purpose of getting through to his patient. He must do this before he can practice any "therapy." Getting through, in fact, may itself have therapeutic value in that the patient may for the first time feel that he has been "recognized" as a human being. But of course much more is involved.

Another aspect of the "mystery" has to do with the attitude of the therapist toward the emotionally charged area suggested by the word "ought." Much of the disturbance in the lives of individuals—and much of the pain and unhappiness in the world at large—arises from the distance which separates what is from what people think *ought* to be. The therapist has discovered that sometimes the sense of "ought" is so overwhelming that it paralyzes human capacity to relate to others and to practical situations. Experience has shown that this pressure must be relieved before growth can take place. A casual observation of the work of the therapist may therefore lead to the impression that he is amoral—without standards. This is a conclusion reached by people who place a greater value on their own ideas of "ought" than upon the integrity of the decision-making process in other individuals.

The champions of "ought" are speech-makers, not teachers. They address crowds; they do not hold conversations during which an interplay of understanding takes place. They dictate behavior instead of fostering growth. They do not grasp the meaning of growth and refuse to investigate it, since this might defeat their purpose of imposing "oughts" on others.

They meet the problems of nonconformity with the solution of punishment.

The encounter of the therapist with his patient is usually the meeting of an educator with a victim of variously propagated "oughts" insisted upon by the authorities of the time. To release the patient from these pressures, so that he may in time make up his own list of oughts, to which he has some hope of responding in terms of growth, the therapist starts out the relationship with no feeling of "ought" at all. At first, the victim of authority-pressure seems to need help from another authority who relieves the pressure. The need for authority exists in inverse relation to maturity. Maturity is the goal, but in the case of individuals who have lost their autonomy, an authority who represents the promise of non-authority is apparently required to accomplish the release of the individual from fear or anxiety. This is the special function of the therapist. His aim is to help the patient to gain or regain for himself the autonomy of choosing his "oughts," which may now be scaled according to values reached by him as a subject rather than as an object. Health or recovery is held to be accomplished when the individual no longer needs the help of the non-authoritative authority of the therapist.

Dr. Holland's book is a kind of chart which leads the reader through the history of theory in relation to this process and acquaints him with the major areas of difficulty encountered by the therapist in endeavoring to help the patient to be "on his own." Fundamental to this relationship is the therapist's personal lack of infallibility and his manner of turning even his own limitations to the service of the patient.

It is of course vital to an understanding of psychotherapy to see it in a historical context. It becomes obvious that ideas of healing in relation to man's mental and emotional life are largely functions of the prevailing self-image held from epoch to epoch. Since the question of the self and of identity is at root a philosophical problem, by no means to be settled or "solved" according to

some objective frame of reference, the practice of psychotherapy floats in a sea of prevailing assumptions concerning the nature of human beings and what may be expected of them. It can be argued that psychotherapy represents an empirical approach in that it originated from the observation that many peoples' thinking about themselves was leading to personal disaster. Psychotherapy is therefore an attempt to criticize and replace self-images which turn out to be self-destructive. This attempt is very much affected by the framework of religious assumptions and all forms of moral judgment. In a world culture upheld by the kind of thinking pursued by, say, Emerson, concerning the self, the profile of psychotherapeutic practice might be very, very different from what it is today. Some therapists even maintain that psychoanalysis is a transition phenomenon, and that a society pervaded by educational instead of political conceptions of the good might find that the role of the analyst would be entirely replaced by a cultural atmosphere which suffuses the life of both young and old with self-images having natural growth-potentials in the direction of maturity. Meanwhile, the entire field of psychotherapy gives evidence of deep fertilization by a sense of philosophic need, although there is at the same time the ambivalence of men who try to think of themselves as "scientists," and are naturally reluctant to submit their profession to the responsibility of becoming "spiritual guides." But even here, as the lessons of experience multiply, it is being realized that the scientific rejection of authority over the decisions of others is probably the most important "spiritual" contribution one human being can make to another, when it takes place in an atmosphere of deep mutual regard.

These are some of the impressions gained or provoked by Dr. Holland's book.