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THE SHY DIGNITIES

THE most exquisite experiences—and sometimes, paradoxically, the most unifying—come to people when they are by themselves. It is from these unique realizations that we get a feeling of who we are, and then, after reflection, a sense of what we want or ought to do. All sorts of "ingredients" go into such experiences, and these may be learnedly catalogued, but there is no reliable formula for producing that base-line feeling of egoity which cannot be explained, but which explains as nothing else will. An experience shaped by formula is second-hand, as artificial as manipulated emotion. The need, in first things, to be by oneself and do for oneself is so profound in human beings that the most value-charged word in our language is devoted to the positive pole of the state of being alone. *Freedom* means to be able to act alone, to make your thoughts and alliances by yourself.

Is it true that no man can be led into freedom? It seems so. The freedom someone else gives him isn't his. Or if it is, he had it before it was given to him; it just didn't show. Yet in relation to some practical confinement, like being unjustly in prison, an ennobling transaction may have taken place between the man who is freed and the one who frees him. In the freeing act there was a conjunction or overlap of selves—the emancipator freed himself in the other man. He only *seemed* to free another. The really good thing that happened was a man freeing himself.

This is the proposition: People neither give nor receive anything of human value to one another except by abolishing the otherness of the other. This eliminates in principle all the sticky questions of obligation and gratitude. Gratitude embarrasses a self-aware and self-reliant man, just as blaming others does not come naturally to him. Yet gratitude and obligation are not unreal. They are morally necessary and operative exactly to the extent that the idea of otherness affects behavior, and the relationships of difference need accommodation. It is a plain fact that the greatest love needs no declaration. Every word said about such love becomes a limitation, almost a denial, although it must be added that we seem to find this out only after talking about love.

There is no end to this onslaught of ambiguity in final things. A man, for example, couldn't be by himself if he were *really* by himself. He is by himself only for the purpose of deciding how he is united, or will reunite, with everything else. When a man says *Leave me alone!* he means, Relate to me at another distance.

So aloneness has its indispensable constellation of paradoxes. A man learns the meaning of going out into the world from being alone. We need, it is clear, a special sort of language for considering such gamuts of meaning.

There is an order of experience which comes to children when they are alone, called by present-day psychologists the "I-am-me" experience. In a paper in the *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* for the Winter of 1964, Herbert Spiegelberg assembles several reports of this experience. One is by Jean Paul Richter:

> I shall never forget what I have never revealed to anyone, the phenomenon which accompanied the birth of my consciousness of self and of which I can specify both the place and the time. One morning, as a very young child, I was standing in our front door and was looking over to the wood pile on the left, when suddenly the inner vision "I am a me" shot down before me like a flash of lightning from the sky, and ever since it has remained with me luminously: at that moment my ego had seen itself for the first time, and forever. One can hardly conceive of deceptions of memory in this case, since no one else's reporting could mix additions with such an occurrence, which happened merely in the curtained holy of holies of

man and whose novelty alone had lent permanence to such everyday concomitants.

Sartre is quoted as remarking: "Everyone in his childhood has been able to observe the accidental and shattering apparition of the consciousness of self." A long passage describes the similar experience of a little girl in Richard Hughes' story, A *High Wind in Jamaica.* Dr. Spiegelberg wrote to the author and got this reply:

> You have of course guessed right: the whole incident is based on the memory of my own childhood. . . . I was ... around six or seven years. Oddly enough, when I was writing the book I recollected it as happening to me just as casually as to Emily; but today I can't help wondering whether it wasn't triggered by another incident I now recall separately: the almost unbearable spectacle of a cat playing with a live mouse. For sympathetically I identified myself with the hopeless, tortured mouse; and it could be the discovery that I wasn't the mouse after all led on to the question, "Well, in that case who am I?" and so to the discovery that I was "me."

Well, in the common meaning of the term, these people were alone. But in its uncommon meaning they participated in the rich content of a self knowing itself while being in the world. Yet what Dr. Spiegelberg says seems accurate:

> . . . the "I-am-me" experience, whether sudden or gradually developed, has to do with the sense of "being it," or being the inescapable very me-myself, right now and here. As such the experience has no primary reference to past and future phases in its development nor to other comparable selves. This is, as it were, an experience of self-identity in depth rather than in temporal length and social breadth.

It seems reasonable to say that these forms of the "I-am-me" experience are distinct and memorable because of the strong self-consciousness of the writers who report them, and that, as Sartre says, they come to everyone, although doubtless in varying degrees of intensity. They may be mixed with other ideas, yet still become the essential ground of the conception of self and exercise a continuous influence on all later thought and decisions. The purity of the experience, however, may make for deliberate and *conscious* self-reference—rare among men, yet probably the basis of all growth in freedom.

One may think that this coming to self-awareness is a prerequisite of coming to self-determination. In a conversation with Martin Buber a few years ago, Carl Rogers said:

> It seems to me that one of the most important types of meeting or relationship is the person's relationship to himself. . . . there are some very vivid moments in which the individual is meeting some aspect of himself, a feeling which he has never recognized before, something of a meaning in himself that he has never known before. It could be any kind of thing. It may be his intense feeling, or the terrible hurt he has felt, or something quite positive like his courage, and so on. But at any rate, in these moments, it seems to me there is something that partakes of the same quality that I understand in a real meeting relationship. He is in his feeling and his feeling is in him. It is something that suffuses him. He has never experienced it before.

An illustration of what may come to a man, for the formation of resolve, when he consults with himself, was given in Arthur Morgan's report of his reflections on "Necessity" on a cold night in Minnesota in 1902. (MANAS, Sept. 4.) There he schemed out a foundation of judgment and aspiration for his life that he has never had to revise.

When you go looking for examples of such self-and-life illuminations, they don't seem easy to find. The literature of existential psychotherapy is full of illustrations of a sort, but these are mainly of people climbing out of psychological ditches. Yet they may be useful in an age which in itself is a pretty deep ditch. There is this case reported by Dr. Rogers:

> I think of another person, this time a young woman graduate student, who was deeply disturbed and on the borderline of a psychotic break. Yet after a number of interviews in which she talked very critically about all the people who had failed to give her what she needed, she finally concluded: "Well, with that sort of foundation, well, it's really up to *me.* I mean it seems to be really apparent that I can't depend upon someone else to *give* me an education." And then she added very softly: "I'll really have to get

> it myself." She goes on to explore this experience of important and responsible choice. She finds it a frightening experience and yet one which gives her a feeling of strength. A force seems to surge up within her which is big and strong, and yet she also feels very much alone and sort of cut off from support. She adds, "I am going to begin to do more things that I know how to do."

Well, you don't have to be a psychiatrist to recognize this as a classical statement of the human condition. Is there any better way to describe how we all feel, especially during a cycle of growth—feeling strength, yet feeling alone and "sort of cut off from support"?

There probably isn't any real human growth which doesn't begin with lonely self-reference. The entire profession of "non-directive" therapy rests its case on this idea. You obstruct a man's growth when you tell him what to do.

However, not telling him *anything* is hardly a workable formula, either. Teaching is the mutual presence which unites the sight of teacher and learner—a facet of their selves—in the right way. Buber called this the "I-thou" relationship. A lot of the time it involves communication by keeping still. Even heroes, apparently, need this kind of help from more experienced heroes. In the third discourse of the *Bhagavad-Gita,* Arjuna asks Krishna for the kind of help that can't be given:

> If according to thy opinion, O giver of all that men ask, knowledge is superior to the practice of deeds, why dost thou urge me to engage in an undertaking so dreadful as this? Thou as it were with doubtful speech, confuses my reason; wherefore choose one method amongst them by which I may obtain happiness and explain it to me.

Krishna makes long answers to Arjuna's questions along this line, about just what he ought to do, but they don't really get through until Arjuna realizes Krishna is always talking about self-reference. All good advice remains ambiguous until it is taken, and it isn't ever really taken, but recreated by an enriching act of self-reference. A man who acts out an idea that does not come from self-reference just puts off the crisis of lonely decision. And while a teacher may watch this happen, he will not encourage it. The pace of human growth is involved. The wisest of men seem to press others on to growth only by silence.

This seems an absolutely unqualified truth about all human beings. It applies to terribly sick little boys like "Dibs," and it applies to heroic princes like Arjuna. Growth is born in the womb of the silences of the teacher. Yet no one learns without a teacher—without, that is, being in the world. A teacher's silence has shape and symmetry; so do the silences behind the noisy world.

Is there a "systematic" way of arranging the subtleties of this paradox? Can they be put into an order or progression? Well, a lot of people have tried. The entire literature of mysticism is such an attempt. The avalanche of papers on Phenomenology, today, represents a current effort in this direction. But the "clearer" such discussions are, the poorer they may be, as manuals of self-reference. Success—if there is any at all—depends upon preserving a suitable ambiguity in everything that is said, for the minute ambiguity is left out, theology results. (Theology means, here, getting "truth" without creating it yourself; it means assembling what is supposed to be self-knowledge without developing it out of self-reference.)

There is a sense in which every valiant effort to describe or illustrate the resolution of ambiguity, without trying to resolve it *for* the reader, gives off sparks. The help isn't in the text, but in the sparks. Otherwise all these matters would have been settled long ago. You can't really point to the place where the sparks come from. But there are books people keep on going back to because of their sparks. Plotinus is a writer who gives off sparks, but the reader must provide his own subjective region of visibility before the sparks will show.

Yet there *must* be stages in such undertakings, even if the higher they go, the less

intellectually satisfactory the account of them. Plato expressed himself definitely about people who suppose they can reveal the upper reaches of self-reference by writing books:

> Such writers can in my opinion have no real acquaintance with the subject. I certainly have composed no work in regard to it, nor shall I ever do so in future, for there is no way of putting it in words like other studies. Acquaintance with it must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining.

Objectively, this says you have to find out for yourself. You have to be by yourself, yet also need teachers and friends. But the teacher teaches by helping you to remain *free.* This is the sum of his art. A man may learn from other men, but he has to increase his freedom in doing it. He can't make self-reference except under the conditions which permit it—the radical paling, at will, of the biases of objectivity, while preserving its "openings." He has to create those conditions himself, and he has to do it without really "knowing how." Yet all men hunch this necessity of their being, hence their blazing determination to be free.

So, in a world where confinements are everywhere, injustice the rule, and practical needs both exaggerated and denied, the struggle for freedom becomes the engrossing passion of human life, its rhetoric obsessive. Yet won for anything less than acts of self-reference, freedom cannot either satisfy or last. For all the lesser freedoms are subordinate and instrumental to this one. They either subserve its ends or become barriers to recognition of its importance. All the lesser freedoms are permissive for self-reference—the human act that is only symbolized by all other acts of freedom.

These other acts do not really make men free. Turning Socrates out of jail and spilling the hemlock on the floor wouldn't have made him any freer than he was. It would have made *Athens* freer, but this couldn't happen unless the Athenians discovered through their own self-reference that they couldn't be free without freeing Socrates. That had been Socrates' point all along. He was a shining light in his time, and is for our time, too, because he understood that his self-reference as a citizen of Athens, which had given him life and love, required him to identify with his city even though it was about to kill him. Even his death became an act of self-reference. It said something about his identity. And his last words were an explanation of the self-reference that convinced him that death could not touch his inner being. His friends *felt* for him, but they couldn't really identify with the immortal Socrates, so they wept. Their tears, one might say, were a melancholy gesture toward the distant and fading goals which Socrates seemed to have reached. Tears at least grasp the fact that goals exist.

Few men have made a general self-reference with the clarity—and beauty—of which Walt Whitman now and then became capable. Under the title, "To Him That Was Crucified," he wrote:

> My spirit to yours, dear brother; Do not mind because many, sounding your name, do not understand you;
>
> I do not sound your name, but I understand you, (there are others also);
>
> I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you, and to salute those who are with you, before and since—and those to come also,
>
> That we all labor together, transmitting the same charge and succession;
>
> We few, equals, indifferent of lands, indifferent of times;
>
> We, enclosers of all continents, all castes—allowers of all theologies,
>
> Compassionators, perceivers, rapport of men,
>
> We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the disputers, nor anything that is asserted;
>
> We hear the bawling and the din—we are reach'd at by divisions, jealousies, recriminations on every side,

> They close peremptorily upon us, to surround us, my comrade,
>
> Yet we walk upheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and down, till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the diverse eras,
>
> Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races, ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers, as we are.

Whitman was not Christ. He wasn't even a Christian. But in what he says the spirit of self-reference throws off sparks. But why, we must ask in our pain—why is his truth, if it is so high, not mighty as well? That's what we demand of the truth—that it be mighty. Only mighty truth, we say, can set men free. So we look for the might elsewhere, to strengthen our puny, borrowed verities.

It may be that truths of a final sort have might only when they no longer need it. Or that it isn't really truth except when known from self-reference—which is truth individually created.

This is like saying that a man's only light comes from himself, and how can you tell people that, when all they have to do is push a button? This is hardly a time to tell people that there's no use in pushing buttons—not when there are all those good books with sparks in them to read. And how can you organize a revolution if at the same time you argue that a man can be free in jail?

Yet, somehow, you have to do both; the argument, that is, must be made. Somehow, the ideal of pure self-reference has to be kept the brightest light of all, even while flying the pennants of some symbolic or "practical" freedom in a current crusade.

This is perhaps the hardest task and deepest responsibility of the revolutionary—to learn how to tell a man "what to do," yet not interfere with his freedom to be by himself and decide for himself. For if he believes that you can *really* tell him what to do, why should he bother to ask himself? How, in other words, do you prevent the battle for freedom from being lost at the beginning? How do you keep it from turning into just another symbolic struggle with only symbolic rewards?

It doesn't really matter that you happen to be right. You are, of course, right, or you wouldn't dare to explain and organize the potentialities and hopes of other human beings. Being right doesn't really matter, however, because in order to help other people you have to make their ignorance and limitations your own. How else will you know when to talk and when to keep still? If you talk all the time the people will only rely on you.

Yet men are sometimes able to lead other men without this sort of betrayal. When this happens, the leaders always take the burden of the failures on themselves. It is the only way to defend those shy dignities of the human being which cannot be described, which appear unannounced, and quickly wither in the presence of a determined and unambiguous righteousness. It is on the presence of these dignities, so long in growing from fragility to strength, that all human good depends.

REVIEW
THE COMPLEAT HAERETIC

WILLIAM BLAKE was a man of whom we might say that he accepted the full responsibility of being human—which is to study its tensions at first hand and to seek all the longed-for balances within oneself. There seem to have been very few such men—Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Thoreau are among them. This bearing of one's own burdens—and not only bearing them, but going out to meet them—is probably the main qualification of genius. A true genius uses the same raw materials that other men use, but he makes out of them independent creations which stand of their own strength.

What were Blake's raw materials? Christianity, Milton, Boehme, the "satanic mills" of early industrialism, and the crisis of Revolution. While other men looked for straightforward answers to their problems, Blake strove after the synthesizing vision that could see behind the dilemmas which became evident when these problems were recognized in all their dimensions. He developed a scheme of explanation that threw light on every aspect of human life. In the second chapter of *Blake's Humanism* (Manchester University, 1968, 55 shillings), the author, John Beer, gives the key:

> Blake's humanism is idiosyncratic: it rests on the presupposition that all men possess an eternal form which subsists in the interplay between vision and desire. Eternal Man exists primarily by those two faculties, which nourish his genius and promote his generosity. But men as we know them have fallen from this estate. As a result the fruitful dialectic between Vision and Desire is replaced by a warring and fruitless dialectic between Reason and Energy.

Blake's refusal to externalize any of these forces—he finds them all in man—gives his work its heroic character. What is Lucifer but the force of desire, violating the static heavenly harmony? It is the will to *be*. And what is the resulting rush of individuality—the insistence on self, the primordial alienation of self-consciousness—but an act of separation from the passive order in the One, bringing incessant conflict and the birth of all evil?

Then comes rational analysis of a world of assertive individuals: men see the evil and resolve to control it. They make *laws.* They know from personal experience what evil is like, and they try to bottle it up; evil is denounced and outlawed. But the evil does not go. With all this attention, it multiplies. Meanwhile, the longing to *be* loses its original significance of primeval desire and spawns only mindless energy—typified in the "blind force" of physics. Men make political and technological systems to contain and exploit this force, but the systems are partisan—they take no account of the versatile longings which are now shut out by partial understanding and severe control, so there must be uprising and revolution.

Resolution for this desperate and inconclusive struggle lies, for Blake, in a vision of the radical unity behind all the aspects of manifold life. He is devoted to the synthesis, the liberty that revolution strives to obtain but cannot possess without the vision which knows how to balance contending forces. Mr. Beer says of Blake's early poem, *The French Revolution:*

> To begin with, the poem is written in favour not of revolution but of liberty. The distinction is important. As he had pointed out in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, however, the flames of energy were at least better than the dark restraints of Reason; in a world devoid of Vision they were bound to rise up continually and eventually to prevail. Behind the revolutionary events there lay a "mental" struggle—a struggle devoted to the achievement of true mental liberty, which would be, not a political order, but a visionary order with necessary political and social consequences.

It is one thing to be against injustice, another to possess Vision. Men who fight for justice, but lack vision, "will be as cruel in the cause of liberty and reason as the King has been in the cause of tyranny." But this lies in the future. They do not know that they will become tyrants. And when their cruelty becomes manifest, they find "reasons"

which make it necessary. Then desire again rises and the cycle is repeated. But if Vision had been present, there would have been balance and harmony in each phase of development. Vision sees the one in the many. It denies the separation of parts from the whole. It lives in the splendor of the One invisibly uniting the many.

How can a man know these things? In Vision, through the power of imagination. Blake's sense of reality is in this vision of the eternal man who knows the relations of all his potentialities, and who "falls" only from forgetting them. Fallen man is divine man asleep, forgetful of his true nature. All these things take place, for Blake, *within* man. The vast panorama of the universe and even of history is no more than involuntary projection—the Mahamaya.

Blake had help from Swedenborg:

> Blake took over and developed Swedenborg's hint that the Fall was a division *within* man rather than a separation from something outside him. In a Fall which takes place by such division, *all* the powers are correspondingly diminished, withering in their isolation from the synthesizing whole which would allow them all to grow together and nourish one another. Nor is it simply a matter of "human" powers. Since according to Blake, "all deities reside in the human breast," the process of the Fall involves the "deities" themselves. If God casts out Satan he will himself be diminished by the loss: it will appear to Satan equally that God has been cast out.

These personifications are none of them wholly evil or good. Good is vision, evil its absence or loss. Understanding this interplay in life and consciousness *is* the vision, is the good. Blindness to this larger meaning creates all the dark shadows of life. When Blake says:

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour

he means exactly that. It is not just "poetry." He means that all the world is really *in* a "grain of sand," even if to see it there requires a powerful imagination. And each moment of time is a revelation of eternity for the man who experiences that moment as reaching continuously and infinitely in both directions.

Art, for Blake, is the means by which a man exhibits his vision, lives by it, and reveals his grasp of the golden unities which bring all diversities and all opposing forces under one high vault of meaning. True art, in his view, must be an uncompromised act of the imagination. He would take little from nature, which he found static and deceiving compared to works of the human mind. Blake's allegories are all his own. He borrows nothing without changing it. Even to Milton, whom he much admired, he gave another incarnation in which he, Blake, playing Milton, repaired the philosophical mistakes of the earlier poet.

Most of us are drawn first to Blake by the pure, limpid beauty of his lyrics. Who could resist the songs of this man, which march, dance, trip, and thunder into the mind? Then, one finds, Blake goes beyond innocence to depths that are far from clear. Blake jostles, then devastates the meaning of conventional beliefs. He delights the rebel, but then, the rebel finds, would give him reasons for generosity and self-control. Back of Blake's personally constructed myths one senses the "awful symmetry" which he not only relies upon, but presses into flashing, momentary visibility through all the devices of his art.

What is this symmetry? What does Blake want to say—and in order to say worked furiously at drawings and engravings and poetry all his life? Here is a man who is a Plotinus among artists, yet with an irrepressible love of life that winds like an impetuous vine through and around everything he builds.

To learn well his language, to read correctly all his allegories, you would have to give half a lifetime to studying Blake. Mr. Beer seems to have done this, and thus to have enriched the experience of Blake for many readers. But Blake does something better for any reader who grasps a little of what the poet is struggling to accomplish.

Blake makes the reader want to develop a "fourfold vision" of his own. And the reader might do this for himself in the time it would take to reach to the bottom of Blake's last allegorical obscurity. The rare merit of *Blake's Humanism* is to stir the reader with this invitation.

Blake is truly a poet for our time. At the beginning of the epoch of revolution, he kept crying out, What deep secrets are you forgetting, in this struggle to be free? What new chains will you forge with this brave, new dispensation? Whose blood will the sharp, condemning edges of your fine abstractions draw? There is never a moment of history when these questions can be ignored.

COMMENTARY
THE GARMENT AND THE MAN

WILLIAM BLAKE (see Review] was at odds with his time, as such a man would be at odds with any time when the prevailing belief is that human nature, as Mr. Beer puts it, "is ultimately something which can be grasped as a single entity." Man, for Blake, is a being of unresolved forces, and the imbalances in him will continue until he stops imagining that the struggle goes on outside himself. The conflict must be dealt with, but not as a resolution of forces in the world. For Blake, cosmology and psychology are virtually a single topic. External happenings in the universe are the projection of the inner drama of man, whose responsibility thereby becomes Promethean. As Mr. Beer says:

> . . . those who wish to claim Blake for the liberal humanist position will be constantly bewildered by the stringency of his standards of "humanity." True humanity, according to him, is not to be found by taking the average of the mass of mankind as we know them. Rather, it is glimpsed whenever a man, anywhere, lives by his own inner vision. From the fullness of that vision the majority of men have fallen away. If Blake refuses to acknowledge the existence of original sin, his belief in the loss of original vision provides him with a no less exacting yardstick for the judgment of human conduct. . . .
>
> This is no ordinary view of man; it begins by looking beneath the carapace of social behavior in each human being to discover the energies which animate, the vision which controls. The point where reason and energy rise from their normal, unawakened state, touch one another and merge into an inter-animating vision and desire is for Blake the central "humanity" in each man. We cannot begin to understand his attitude unless we grasp the firmness of this belief that behind the characteristics of each man there exist the lineaments of the "eternal man," most nearly apprehended when we see him possessed by his energies or radiant with his own imagination but even then glimpsed only fleetingly. . . .
>
> The paradox is that for Blake the "genius" that is in every man and is therefore eternal and universal also makes man unique. When he thought about social and political questions it was the eternal man that was most present to him, the eternal humanity which stood in judgment on all acts of inhumanity and injustice and deplored society's failure to allow individual self-fulfillment.

Blake's charge against Satan has direct application to all statistical judgments of man's nature:

> Truly My Satan, thou art but a Dunce
> And dost not know the Garment from the Man
> Every harlot was a Virgin once. . . .

He looks at the secret, undiminished possibilities of all human beings. It is his vision of the Real.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THAT WHOLE VAST OTHER WORLD

AT the end of the "Children" article for Sept. 18, Robert Jay Wolff talks about ways to lift the eyes of a talented, would-be cartoonist—a high school boy with a gift for image-making—to wider possibilities in art:

> Show him (but only once) drawings by Toulouse Lautrec and some of the lighter advertisements by Paul Rand. And don't fail to mention that Rand does pretty well financially. Show him a few of the best in children's book illustrations. Point out how the character of the line in all these works differs. Convince him that a potential cartoonist does himself an injustice not to at least examine the possibilities in linear expression beyond his cherished Superman convention.

This is a development by Mr. Wolff of something said earlier to prospective design teachers: ". . . it would be misleading to allow you to expect a ready student acceptance without knowledge of the primary content of your subject, which is not design but the human being who is reaching

This idea applies in all directions. Take for example the quotation from Walter Gropius, with which Mr. Wolff concluded:

> Our ambition [at the Bauhaus] was to rouse the creative artist from his other-worldliness and re-integrate him into the workaday world of realities, and at the same time to broaden and humanize the rigid, almost exclusively material, mind of the business man. Thus our informing conception of the unity of all design in relation to life was in diametrical opposition to that of "art for art's sake" and the even more dangerous philosophy it sprang from: business as an end in itself.

That purpose *was* the Bauhaus, you could say. Gropius took two abstractions, art and industry, the one afflicted by a sterile egotism, the other prolific of endless and unnecessary ugliness, and married them in the workshop. The theoretical incompatibility of the two views at the level of occupational egotism was dissolved in the wonderful if finite reality of making things for both use and delight.

Each Bauhaus class or department started out with two teachers—an industrial mechanic and an artist. The mechanic didn't understand art and the artist didn't know production, so both were needed for the project. After a couple of years, the Bauhaus developed teachers who knew both, and industrial design, you could say, was in viable birth.

An educational by-product of this union was a conscious patience on the part of the teachers—and, no doubt, in the generation of designers who came after. They had to learn to regard the businessmen they encountered as human beings, instead of as personifications of ignoble commerce and satanic mills.

Great things resulted, but also a lot of compromises. Businessmen, for example, discovered that things easy on the eye sell better than ugly ones. There's nothing wrong with that, but moving merchandise is hardly the purpose of art, and something rather awful happens to art when it is limited to this meretricious function.

The union of art and industry did not, after all, put an end to the cash-in propensities of human nature, nor the bad things that happen in both art and industry. But there were good things, too, and these are behind a lot of the maturities one occasionally encounters in both art and industry. Because they *are* maturities, we don't notice them much. They are like good health.

The problems the Bauhaus set out to solve have not disappeared; they still exist, but are pushed by designer-solutions into new forms. Evil is still around. The egotism in the abstractions of specialists still makes it hard to absorb and obliterate evil in living forms. But the perceptive modern designer knows that it can be done.

We have another story about a student and a teacher in a design school, to contrast with Mr. Wolff's generalized example of the budding

cartoonist. This teacher called his course three-dimensional design. As often happens, some of his students had barely enough to live on while going to school. So the teacher, being a practicing designer with contacts in industry, would sometimes try to get a commission for a talented young man. This brought problems.

The students, he found, feared being corrupted by the commercial world. Good, he said; the danger exists. The students talked a great deal about their "integrity." But when it came to a job like designing a sign, their measurements and execution were sometimes so faulty that the product was a practical failure. It didn't work. It didn't fit. Holding a tee-square firmly while using it had not become a part of the students' "integrity."

In this case, the teacher was one of those designers mentioned by Mr. Wolff—he had been, until middle life, one of those "financially successful specialists" who sickened at what he was doing and had begun again, from the beginning, to practice a freer art. He was now a free-lance designer—as well as a man who loved to teach—and the "integrity" of his work made its own claims on the architects and others who gave him commissions.

Artists never get to practice their art in a perfect world. A world constructed to suit artists and other human beings in their present condition would be a world pulled badly out of shape. How much, exactly, of what Austin Warren says of Protestant ethics applies to the "liberated" artist?

> Much of the falsity of the Protestant ethics lies in just what . . . it has prided itself on: its concern with self and subjectivity. Concern with *my* motives, *my* intentions, *my* conscience is always in danger of becoming more concerned with me than with . . . my neighbor, with that whole vast other world. Egoism—refined subjectivity—is morally more dangerous partly because more subtle, than plain frank egotism or selfishness. . . .

So the designer, like the teacher of design, needs to think through, as well as he can, his relationship "with that whole vast other world." Is he going to help it, or wait for it to supply him with a perfect environment for his "creativity"? Is his integrity confronted by alienating abstractions, or by individual humans with various sorts of imperfections, longings, and integrities of their own?

Not only the student of design, but all students, come to the place where they must understand, not simply what they are learning to do, but the human beings with whom and for whom they expect to be doing it. If they go out into the world prejudging that world by intolerant abstractions, the relationship will be one of strain and conflict from beginning to end. A man can often make something good out of the strain and conflict between human beings. They are the facts of life. But when abstractions of self-righteousness and egoistical judgment separate people, there is no way under heaven in which the creative act, the synthesis of mutual understanding, can bring them together. An education which neglects this synthesis is no education at all.

FRONTIERS

Visual Intelligence

THE expression, "visual intelligence," is burdened with an incommensurable component in the term "intelligence." Intelligence represents the act and starting-point of inquiry, and this means, axiomatically, the defeat of its definition. It would be only a shallow shifting of scenery to maintain that the adjective "visual" gets us out of this dilemma. Intelligence remains itself, however modified, and if intelligence is the means to all definition, it can offer only circular accounts of itself.

Yet *visual* intelligence has an objective aspect. Only a little contact with designers makes certain realities of visual intelligence unavoidable. Design in terms of practical givens—site and budget for a house, plus the client's yearnings—the white space of a page for an advertisement—the parameters of need and feasibility in a planned community—all such projecting, before it is begun, requires a "pregnancy" on the part of the designer. He has to give himself up to the potential being of the project. He must endure a travail, find a way to *identify*, by means of the roving antennae of his imagination, with the unborn whole that is to be conjured into being. He is allotted some parts, many or few, and limits for the project. These must be absorbed, caught up, vitally incorporated in a scheme of more dimensions than can be set down in precise notation. The plan comes afterward, of course. In fact, making the plan is an act of imperialism, a technical ravaging of the dream by finite necessity.

Yet to the sensibility of the layman the finished product seems just great. The work of a fine architect is a whole-making splendor. His visual intelligence is manifest in the fitness of the realized design. But how did the designer conceive it? What feeling has he about space—the space he creates by putting things into it? How does he achieve a living distribution of the organs of the whole?

We might try an "anti-environment" for considering this question. When, for example, should a designer refuse to design?

In 1960, the social reformer, Danilo Dolci, called a conference of sociologists at the small town of Palma—population, 20,000—on the coast of Sicily. Palma is the very model of everything a human community ought not to be. The dwellings are nearly all infected with rats and mice. Three quarters of the children have tapeworms. Each room in the town, on the average, is occupied by five persons. Some 90 per cent of the houses have no water, and 86 per cent are without toilets. Illiteracy, in 1960, was 64 per cent. Infectious disease was the rule, not the exception. Once, back in 1666, Palma had a hospital.

The scholars and social scientists journeying to Palma for the conference encountered oppressive fecal odors a far distance from the town. This atmosphere, much stronger in the hall where the delegates met, made a contribution to every session. In his biography of Dolci, *Fire Under the Ashes* (Beacon, 1965), James McNeish tells how Dolci—who is an architect, a man of visual intelligence—conducted the conference:

> He spoke about waste, his perennial theme, and explained what he was trying to do at Partinico [his research headquarters in Sicily] and other centers. For Palma he proposed nothing. He merely stated. Afterwards people came up and asked what he intended doing about Palma. He replied, "Go and look at this place." The evasion infuriated many people, and, prodded by a situation which she felt to be a direct incitement to violence, Miss Nott [an English writer] was moved to say, in her frank, hearty way: "What would you do if you landed yourself in a revolutionary situation where nonviolence was impractical?" Dolci said he didn't understand. Daphne Phelps, whose Italian was fluent, repeated the question. He said he still didn't understand. Miss Nott demurred. Finally, Dolci said "Go and look at this place yourself." "I now see," she writes, "that Dolci could not have answered me in any other way. To have given an answer one way or another about the future, as it might be determined by his opponents, would be doing a kind of violence to that

present which he is trying to initiate. Though to outsiders Dolci can appear somewhat mysterious, I believe myself this is only because he is so obvious, so naïvely honest, and so consistent."

Visual intelligence?

Why not? Dolci was after a first-hand visual experience for others. He thought it might help to generate a solution. A seeing-feeling-smelling understanding of the problem of Palma was more important than blueprints by Dolci. His designer's instinct told him "that it is just as important that fifty men should get together and lay their own drain as it is that they should enjoy the benefits of sewerage."

Visual intelligence, whatever else it is, is the capacity for being-association with the ratios of whole-making. For the designer, this intuition of proportions projects itself visibly in some continuum. The nature of the continuum determines the preliminary exercises he initiates. Only for one kind of design is the continuum mainly spatial. The *intelligence* he uses is not essentially spatial; it just comes out that way in design involving space relations. Some designers are space-using technicians, but the root of whole-making ability goes far deeper. There are vital transfers proceeding beneath the surface which sometimes result in non-moralizing moral perception, as in Dolci, and can be recognized also in men like Moholy Nagy and Lewis Mumford. The idiom is now trans-visual, but their sense of the requirements of *living form* is plain enough. It seems a spontaneous—and also cultivated—grasp of how wholes come into being, and an agile capacity to look ahead from rung to rung of the spiralling processes of formation.

There is also some instruction on this subject in Thoreau—an irritating man for people who expect other men to complete projects and realize goals. Thoreau would have little of either, yet his skill at whatever he did is almost impudent. Often he just wouldn't bother to execute seminal conceptions—yet out of this unwillingness to get "involved" there flowered a special sort of "design." Incidentally, Thoreau sounded keynotes for various designing professions of the future—he offered rules that are now almost Biblical for the architect. Yet he would often drop his pencil in mid-air. It was time to go for a walk. "Go and look at this place yourself."

Thoreau can be called a distinguished naturalist. But when the Massachusetts Natural History Society asked him to write a memoir of his observations, he was not responsive. "Why should I?" he asked. "To detach the description from its connections in my mind would make it no longer true or valuable to me: and they do not wish what belongs to it." He was designing something else.

Thoreau revealed more of how he felt about such matters at the end of a long review of some zoological and botanical reports published on the order of the Massachusetts Legislature. These works had scientific merit and Thoreau complimented the authors, adding to their findings some of his own. Then he said at the end:

> These volumes deal much in measurements and minute descriptions, not interesting to the general reader, with only here and there a colored sentence to allure him, like those plants growing in dark forests, which bear only leaves without blossoms. But the ground was comparatively unbroken, and we will not complain of the pioneer, if he raises no flowers with his first crop. Let us not underrate the value of a fact it will one day flower into a truth. It is astonishing how few facts of importance are added in a century to the natural history of any animal. The natural history of man is still being gradually written. Men are knowing enough in their fashion. Every countryman and dairymaid knows that the coats of the fourth stomach of the calf will curdle milk, and what particular mushroom is a safe and nutritious diet. You cannot go into any field or wood, but it will seem as if every stone had been turned, and the bark on every tree ripped up. But, after all it is much easier to discover than to see when the cover is off. It has been well said that "the attitude of inspection is prone." Wisdom does not inspect, but behold. We must look a long time before we can see. . . .
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> The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper

> and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction, and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,—we cannot know truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom.

Perhaps we can say that in any exercise of the designing intelligence, a "more perfect Indian wisdom" has a part.