

Art and Therapy.

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Man's position within society, (or society as a human context), may be imagined as follows: a tissue swinging with information. The threads of such a tissue then appear as channels through which informations flow, and where they cross there appear traffic jams of informations. The threads may be called "media", and their crossings "intellects" or "minds". This effort of imagination, (which is greater than might appear at first glance), will provide a useful model for understanding the present situation.

The model will show that some of our problems are false ones. For instance: Is man a function of society or is it the other way round? What is the relation between "individual" and "collective" consciousness? Is culture a product of the mind, or mind a product of a culture? All those problems concerning the "dialectics between man and society" are seen to be empty of meaning, if transferred to the model. The model consists of threads, (media), and the hand which penetrates it seizes nothing but the threads: they are what is "concrete" about it. The crossing of the threads (the individuals), and the whole tissue, (society), are not "concrete", but are forms which the threads, (the "concrete field of relations"), assumes. In fact: the model is one of a field of relations, and is meant to show that "man" and "society" are reifications: the dialectics between them is shown to be an "abstract" problem.

This throws a specific light upon a true problem: the one posed by memory. It is central in various contexts. For instance: In Socratic philosophy memory is a store for ideas, and thus the place of salvation from errors provoked by "mere appearances". In Judaism memory is the place where the dead live, and thus of immortality. In psychology memory is the place where experience is or is not digested, and thus the place of therapeutical intervention aiming at healing indigestion. In cybernetics memory is a store of available information, and artificial memories may be constructed to compete with human ones and to surpass them in various aspects. And there are other contexts in which memory is a central problem.

The model here proposed restates the problem. It shows man and society to be traffic jams of information, which means memories on two levels. It is founded on a negative anthropology: man is conceived of as a point of coincidence of informations, (a "hook for relations"), and not as a something, (a "mind", a "thinking thing", a "soul" or whatever). Thus the problem of memory becomes the existential problem: man is conceived to exist as a method of receiving, storing and emitting information. Which does not, of course, exclude that Socratic, Jewish, psychological, cybernetic and other criteria, (like genetic, historical ones and so forth), be applied to man conceived thus.

Man conceived as a knot of informations implies that the problem of codes becomes central. Codes are systems of symbols. The informations received by a memory, stored within it and emitted from it are coded. They consist of ordered symbols. A given memory, be it an individual one or society as a whole, cannot store an information coded in a code which is not contained in its program. The tissue of society swings with informations which are coded in accordance with the program of that society, and society will reject any information for the code of which it is not programmed, as a "noise". The problem is this: how do codes come about, how are men and how is society being programmed?

Codes may be observed to emerge all over the tissue of society like mushrooms after a rain: Mr. Morse proposes a code, and a number of threads will carry informations thus coded. Or: an artist proposes a new system of symbols, in his effort to utter the heretoforth unutterable, (according to an esthetic theory dear to Romanticism), and a new tendency within the arts is born. But this is not what is meant, if the origin of codes is in question: this coming and going away of the innumerable special codes which order the discourses of science, technology, politics, the arts and so forth in various regions of the social tissue. What is meant is the origin of those codes which program the whole of society, and thus provide it with meaningful information. The basic codes.

To speak of "original codes" is nonsense, because each code presupposes an earlier one, (the Morse code presupposes the English language which presupposes an earlier language and so forth). But one may speak of "basic codes" if one means a type of code of which the actual codes are members. One criterium to distinguish between basic codes is the dimensions within which they order their symbols: linear, surface, spatial, temporal codes and the various combinations permitted by those dimensions. Each basic code may organize symbols of very heterogeneous character: thus linear codes may consist of knots, (Incaic codes), balls, (the abacus), numbers, (arithmetical notations), letters, (the alphabet), and so forth. Still: all informations coded in one basic code have a common character. Thus all linearly coded informations are "read", (the eye follows a line while decoding them), and this is why for instance movies have a character different from photograph albums although their symbols, (pictures), are comparable: films are basically linear.

Each basic code projects a specific universe of meaning, which is a universe within which the meaning of the symbols are related to each other as the symbols themselves are related to each other within the code. Linear codes for instance project universa which have a linear, processual, progressive structure, whilst surface codes project universa which have a scenic, synoptic, circular structure. But although each basic code pro-

jects the type of universum it is meaning, it also establishes a feed back between itself and its universum: it verifies and falsifies itself within that universum, it takes the universum back under certain conditions, it re-projects it under different forms, and it may exhaust itself within it, (which means: it may exhaust its universum). Thus the basic code does not "transcend" its universum in an aprioristic, Kantian, sense: it feeds it and feeds on it.

That this is so may be observed within the actual tissue of communications, although very rarely. For instance: linear codes came about within Occidental communications during the fourth millenium BC as pictographic writing in Mesopotamia, developed into hieroglyphs, ideograms, alphabets, Arabic ciphers, logical notations, scientific symbols and so forth, projected, rectified and took back a number of universa of meaning, and are now about to exhaust themselves and the universa they mean, and to be substituted by a new basic code, namely the code of technomages.

Western society is programmed for linear codes, for "texts", as far as those informations are concerned which are characteristically Occidental, (although its threads carry other codes as well). One may observe, at present, how the tissue of Western society is about to dissolve itself. One can see how islands emerge within the tissue, islands which vibrate with codes which are not linear, (like TV, the traffic code and the code^{of} shop windows), and how those islands spread within the tissue and corrode it like cancer. Occidental communications are unable to absorb those islands, to store their informations in Occidental memory, because it is not programmed for them. On the other hand the islands are perfectly capable of absorbing Western communications, (of translating scripts into films, newspapers into TV programs and written orders into traffic signs), because their basic codes are programs for the absorption and transformation of texts.

This description of the present situation may be restated after a change of view point as follows: Those who participate in Western civilisation are memories programmed for texts, and for some other codes more ancient than linear ones, and thus not typically Western. But they are incapable of digesting the continuous stream of informations which inundates them coming from the cancerous islands, because they are not programmed for the codes of those islands. Thus this sort of information is not being stored by them, it flows through them, the information knots which they are begin to un-knot, and they dissolve. No longer are they being programmed for communication, but by communication. This un-knotting of individual knots and the consequent loosening of the threads which mediate between the knots is usually called "massification".

The new islands which emerge are about to reformulate the

unknotting individuals into a new kind of tissue, a new kind of collective memory quite unlike Western civilisation, and which we call, for lack of a deeper understanding of what is happening, "mass civilisation". In fact, what is happening at present may be described as a mass translation from linear codes into technoimages, which means that the world is rapidly becoming a universe for which we, who have gone to school, are not correctly programmed and which has therefore no meaning for us.

The image proposed in this essay shows that "Occidental man" and "Occidental society" are functions of a concrete field of relations which are linearly coded media, and that they are empty concepts outside that field of relations. In other words, the image shows that the term "Occidental" means a program for linear informations. Since, as was said before, the terms "code" and "memory" have an existential meaning in the model here proposed, it is more convenient to say "faith" instead of "program", and "Occident" will then mean faith into a universe which may be mediated, ("explained", "calculated", "conceived"), by linear texts.

This faith, (which we do not have, but which has us), is the belief that to be is to become, that time is a univocal flux of irrevocable instances, that experience may be analyzed into clear and distinct elements, that to live is to advance toward death, in short: that the meaning of the world and of life in it is structured as are written lines. He who is held by such a faith exists historically, which means that he believes the world to happen, and that he can make things happen.

This faith, which has produced us, (knotted the knots we are), has projected various universa of meaning ever since it established itself as "Western society", it has verified and falsified those universa, and it has taken them back one by one. For instance the universe of Greek philosophy, of Judaism, of Christianity, of Humanism and of Marxism. In spite of the obvious differences between those universa they are all based on the same faith: in linear progress. From the appearances toward the ideas, from the world toward God, from sin toward salvation, from animality toward humanity, from alienation toward communism. In the course of Western history, (which is the only true history there is, because it is the only linear program ever evolved), this basic faith has enmeshed itself within those universa, has fallen into various contradictions, had to change the universa to adapt them to its fundamental structure, had to mix those universa in various ways, had to take them back for unsurmountable inadequacies, and they now float, in the form of more or less empty ideologies, like clouds about the tissue of Western communications and render its vision nebulous.

Now this process of secretion of ideologies is definitely over at present. The universe of the sciences is the last possible uni-

verse of meaning for the Occidental program. It is a universe within which our faith does not fall into contradictions, because it is structured fully in clear and distinct lines, (by logics and mathematics). Everything that is contained within Occidental program as a virtuality becomes "reality" within that universe: it is Occidental faith become "real". Therefore it cannot be taken back: if it were, nothing would remain of the faith which sustains us. If we were to lose faith into the universe of science, we could no longer believe in anything at all. However: we cannot but lose ~~the~~ faith in the texts, propositions, calculations of science, because the universe they mean has become transparent for the faith which projects it. We can now see on the bottom of the universe of science precisely the faith which projected it, and scientific research now is discovering nothing but that faith behind the appearances it is analyzing. Which means that the faith which sustains us is about to exhaust itself, or: that Western program is about to become void through total realisation.

Thus the model here proposed shows the present crisis to be one of faith: it shows that our existence as Westerners is about to decompose, to unknot, because the program which sustains us has become empty. In other words: the crisis is due to the fact that the world and life in it is becoming devoid of meaning. All the other symptoms of our crisis, like our passive incapability of absorbing messages coming from the mass media, the consequent dissolution of the social tissue, the increasing feeling of solitude, the decadence of the so-called "values", are seen to be epiphenomena of this loss of a fundamental program. It is the loss of faith which devours us from within and makes us fall apart, and all the symptoms of external decomposition are nothing but obvious consequences of this process of inner excavation.

However: the abyss into which we are falling is also an opening toward an existence beyond Western program, beyond the faith in linear progress. It permits to visualize life after the "end of history", one no longer programmed by texts. It is true: those generations which were still programmed by schools instead of by TV, and which had to learn how to spell instead of learning how to obey traffic signs, will never be able to step into the country of post-historical existence. Like Moses, they are condemned to look into the Promised Land without being permitted to penetrate it. Because they are the prisoners of a faith they no longer believe in. But the new, and no longer really alphabetized, generations, are jumping, quite obviously, over the abyss which separates us older ones from post-historical existence. They are daring what the first writers of linear texts in Mesopotamia dared to do: they are abandoning an empty faith for a new one, the virtualities of which they cannot yet even imagine. As for us: we are the true founders of the new faith, one we cannot believe in, faithless founders of religions.

The jump into a new form of existence, into a new type of universe of meaning with quite different values than ours, is a dangerous undertaking, because one may fall into the pit while jumping. The dangerous pit is what is called "totalitarian perfection". To visualize this danger, a second model may be imagined: a complex apparatus equipped with innumerable gadgets like cybernetic memories, computers and tapes, and inhabited by millions of operators who are born within it, function within it and shall die within it, and which devours Western history on its left side, to vomit it transformed into mass culture on its right side. The apparatus should be imagined as a gigantic translating machine which recodifies linear information into techno-image information. Now this apparatus is the pit into which we are being sucked in at present, because it stands on the border between the tissue of Western communications and its cancerous islands of the first model imagined. From the point of view of Western civilization it is the aim of Western history: it is what history tends to, (Platonic Utopia, Jewish Messianism, the Society of the Saints, the Communist Society and so forth). From the point of view of post-history the apparatus is the mouth which transforms history into raw material for programs by swallowing it up and thus making a "pre-text" of the whole of history in the true sense of the term "pre-text".

Ever since this pit-like apparatus began to function properly, (in Soviet Russia, in Fascist Germany), and ever since it became anonymous, (in the so-called "Free World" after the second war), its sucking effect became more and more irresistible for anything that happened. Every event, every action and passion, tends at present toward the apparatus, even if it may believe itself to "protest" against the apparatus. Not only in the sense that every historical event is bound to become a techno-image, (a TV program, a film, an image on a box of corn flakes), but in the far more dramatic sense that every commitment is at present bound to be a commitment in favor of the apparatus, (the buddhist monk burning himself to death is committed to a newsreel, and the philosopher of the New Left is committed to an illustrated magazine, whatever else they themselves might believe to be doing). In this sense we are living in the fullness of the times: everything that happens now is final, because the apparatus is there to transform it into the eternal repetition of programs to be irradiated of which Nietzsche said that it is the same as the Will toward Power. We are, all of us, raw material for this idiotic, eternally repetitious Will toward Power, whatever we might be doing, whether we call this Will the "totalitarian apparatus", or whether we call it "technocratic perfection". Now this is the model of the dangerous pit over which we must jump if we want to penetrate the land of a new type of meaning. Between ourselves and a meaningful life stands the apparatus.

It is in this context that the activity called "art", (and which shall not be defined here), must be seen, if one is to seize the problem of commitment which artists are facing at present. During Modern age it was possible to advance various theories as to what "art" is about: for instance it was held to provide society with models for experiencing the world, or to be the avant-garde of revolutionary changes by projecting dreams which might become real, or again to be the articulation of deep-seated but unconscious social consensus. And it was possible to distinguish between various artistic tendencies, for instance: those committed to a religious, political or ethical cause, those which offered themselves for sale, and those which thought that art is done for its own sake. All those theories and catalogues are no longer valid. Whatever "artistic" activity might mean, it is, like any activity, bound to produce pretexts for the apparatus and be committed to it. Whatever art critics, politicians, ministeries of culture or artists themselves might say, "art" in the sense which Modern age gave it is both impossible and undesirable in the present situation. Impossible, because the tendency toward the all-devouring apparatus cannot be resisted, and every resistance results in a further enrichment of the apparatus. And undesirable, because, if undertaken within closed circuits, (exhibitions, concert halls and so forth), it masks true tendencies, and if undertaken within the mass media it masks the true function of the apparatus.

But if "art" in the modern sense of that term is over and done with, a new type of activity is coming about which might also be called "art", because it has some family resemblance with "Modern art", and which is extremely important. Namely that activity by which the manipulation of the new basic codes is being learned. It is similar to what used to be called "art", in that it involves a technique of handling symbols. But it is an activity radically different from "Modern art" in that it does not involve any "work", (any change of material), and thus does not result in an object. And it is extremely important because if it were successful, if the new basic codes were indeed mastered, the apparatus which stands between ourselves and a new form of existence would be turned around like a glove, and instead of making us function for its sake would serve as an instrument for us to reach the other side of the abyss.

The new codes, (usually, but wrongly, called the "audiovisual" ones), have a deceiving similarity with some traditional codes, for instance with painting, the theater and music. The similarity is deceiving because, unlike traditional codes, they do not mean, (mediate with), the context of concrete experience, but they mean, (mediate with), texts. For instance a photograph does not mean a scene, (like a painting does), but a series of concepts which the photographer has formed. Or a movie

does not mean an action, (a "drama"), like a theatrical play does, but a film script. This is a profound difference: traditional codes mediate between man and a reality from which he has become alienated, and the new codes mediate between man and his texts from which he has become alienated. Traditional codes are therapies against the loss of faith in reality, and the new codes may be therapies against the loss of faith in linear, historical programs. Man makes images, dances and sculpts in an effort to substitute the lost real world by an imaginary world. He may use the new codes to substitute for a lost world of explanations and calculation. But the new codes work exactly the other way round at present: instead of being manipulated to overcome the crisis of loss of faith in linear programs, they are manipulated in order to alienate humanity even further. They can do so because we are not programmed for them, and they are thus opaque to any meaning: they do not mediate but cover.

In fact it may be said that the apparatus stands between ourselves and a meaningful life because it transcodes the codes which have exhausted their meanings into codes which are opaque to meaning. The totalitarian state is an abyss because instead of giving meaning to the world and to life it spouts symbols which cover up the world and do not permit to see what stands behind them. It is in this sense of covering up, of not mediating, that the apparatus may be said to be lying: demagoguery is programming in codes which cannot be seen through.

"Art" as that activity which learns how to manipulate the new codes is a therapy against demagoguery, because it is an effort to project new universa of meaning by manipulating the new codes. But it is much more than therapy against demagoguery: it is therapy against the loss of faith of which we are suffering and which menaces us with dissolution. It is one of the very few, if not the only therapy against the mortal disease which corrodes us from within: loss of meaning. But it is very difficult to see this, if one looks at what the "artists" in this sense are doing at present. They seem to be stuttering, or emitting stupid or meaningless statements, or be engaged in formalistic exercises. If one observes a video manipulator, or a designer of posters, or a manufacturer of models of concepts, what one sees does not look at all like an effort to heal us from loss of meaning, but like the opposite: meaningless gestures. And the situation is aggravated by the fact that people committed to that sort of activity seem to have to have sold out to the apparatus, whilst those who persist in the impossible and futile endeavor to make "art" in the old sense seem to be heroically resisting the apparatus.

Now this difficulty of ours to evaluate what is happening about us is characteristic of our crisis. We have no categories with

which we might judge the new phenomena originating about us, because all our categories come from our linear program. Thus if somebody is well paid by the apparatus, (like a public relations manipulator), we automatically believe that he has "sold out", whilst the unemployed "artist" in the old sense looks to us as if he were suffering for an honest commitment. In fact, of course, the well paid manipulator may help us much more than the unemployed artist to turn the apparatus around and make it a tool for projections of meaning. The reason for this confusion is that it is difficult for us to distinguish between a functionaire of the apparatus and one who tries to turn the apparatus around from within the apparatus. Between a technocrat and a "homo ludens".

This inadequacy of our categories with regard to what is new has, however, even more disturbing aspects. When we watch the activities of manipulating the new codes and call it "artistic", (video art, art departments in publicity firms, cinema and photography as an art and so forth), we press it into a category which falsifies it. Because, although there is a family resemblance between this activity and Modern art, there is also a similarity between it and Modern politics, modern science, modern philosophy, and even modern religion. He who experiments with the photographic code looks for new meanings which cover the fields of all those disciplines separated in Modern thinking. But if one calls him an "artist", he will try to adjust to that category and thus fail in his effort to give a new type of meaning to the symbols he is handling. Thus there is the danger that we project empty categories like "art", "science" and "philosophy" upon the new phenomena and thus destroy them. Let us call the experiments with the new codes "art", if we cannot help it, but let us not forget that if it is art, it is it in a sense for which we are not yet programmed.

The purpose which I have pursued in this talk is a double one: ~~xxx~~ I intended to propose to you two models which might help us to formulate a diagnosis of our situation, and I intended to suggest one possible therapy: we must learn how to manipulate the new codes if life has to have meaning after the loss of faith in historical existence. The therapy is called "art" in a new sense. It is the method how to learn to project meaning through the new type of symbols, instead of through "les chiffres et les lettres". Thus what is here called "art" is to substitute for traditional schools, including the schools of art, by programming future generations for a life after the death of what we call Occidental civilisation. The new artists, be they ever so idiotic and stuttering as were the first writers of cuneiform texts, are our only valid teachers. And they are idiotic and stuttering for us, not for the young who can no longer spell, although they know how to drive motor cycles. The post-historical generations.