

PHASE 2

by

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Being a 16mm print of
A Motion Picture Designed and
Produced by the Author
With a Written Prologue and
Epilogue

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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N O T E

The motion picture forming part of this thesis may be obtained through Simon Fraser University's Interlibrary Loan Service under call number LB 1044 F5.

PROLOGUE

The heart and major part of this thesis is a motion picture entitled Phase 2. I believe it may be considered both a work of art and an instrument for scientific investigation. In neither instance is the discussion which follows to be taken as a surrogate or an explanation of the event which is the motion picture itself. There are several reasons for this. The major thrust behind the author's energies has been a creative one, not an analytic one, and it is the product of that activity, namely the film itself, which ought to be weighed. Secondly, according to a well known adage, "a poem doesn't mean; it is", and similarly the kind of import a motion picture generates is not really translatable into the literary medium.

As for the film being an instrument of scientific investigation, it is not within the parameters of this thesis to discuss its effectiveness as such. That inquiry will be undertaken elsewhere by another researcher. What I do wish to discuss in the remainder of this prologue is the origin of the conception which led to the film's construction and how, specifically I tried to achieve the end described. Then, in the epilogue, I would like to explore in general terms the implications of this kind of film-making and the place of such events in today's world.

ORIGINS

Long ago Dewey laid the ground work for a transactional theory of communication consonant with a pluralistic universe.¹ Long neglected, this type of approach has recently been receiving attention again. The theory has been suggested by Piaget² and Hall³ that vision and other species of mental activity are synthesized and that the older notion that a stable, uniform "reality" is recorded on a passive visual receptor system is no longer adequate. Richards⁴ has suggested that all species of mental activity deeply resemble one another and that what they have in common is the feed-forward characteristic; the necessary precondition for the possibility of meaningful feedback.

Hall, however, suggests that there are great differences both intra- and inter-culturally in the way vision for example, is synthesized. The problem has been that an instrument which is at once precultural enough in its appearance to preclude the imposition of formal categories by it on the observer and that at the same time enjoys those characteristics necessary for scientific research and control, did not exist. The lack of such an instrument has meant that any notions concerning the effects of cultural differences in structuring different perceptual worlds have had to remain largely conjectural. We know little of the differences,

similarities and distances between these worlds. Such understanding would not only be novel; it could be fundamental to the extent of having the broadest possible implications. And if we are now on the verge of becoming a "global village" such understanding may be essential. In part then, the object of this thesis was to produce an instrument that might make the development of such understanding possible.

In the Fall of 1967 colleagues and associates of the Behavioural Science Foundations, Simon Fraser University⁵ discussed with the author the design describing the general nature of such an instrument. The author developed the specific system from which the instrument has been constructed.

NATURE OF THE INSTRUMENT

In terms of the observer, the instrument is a screen containing a projected image, i.e. a motion picture. The only constant element available to the observer and possibly subject to differing cultural interpretation are the four sides of the screen itself. The projected image may be discussed with respect to the following; Basic Symbol; Composition; Sharpness of Delineation (focus); Colour, Texture; and Sequence.

Basic Symbol - The basic form used in the film is a changing circle. The use of the circle as a precultural datum is

justified on the following grounds. It has been shown⁶ that children from completely different ethnic and cultural backgrounds pass through the same stages in learning how to draw. Significantly, it has also been shown that ape artists also pass through those same stages.⁷ At a certain point, of course, the child leaves the ape behind. This occurs when the child attempts representational drawing, usually, at first, of a face. The highest point an ape reaches before the child leaves him behind is the composition of a circle filled with coloured dots on a square or rectangular piece of paper.⁸ Hence the choice for the basic symbol.

Composition - The location of the circle changes; the size of the circle changes and the number of the circles changes, i.e. it is variously singular or plural.

Sharpness of Delineation (focus) - The extent to which the circle is differentiated from the background is constantly changing. At times it appears completely distinct; at others completely homogeneous. This is also true independently with respect to colour and texture, discussed below.

Colour - The colour is both constantly changing and sometimes extremely intense. Some colours are present that are not normally open to experience.

Texture - Unlike most projected colour there are occasional scenes with definite and changing texture.

Sequence - The sequence was designed to achieve the maximum amount of flow from image to image. This was done so that no particular image could be given a misleading or undue importance.

The ability to control these elements of perception within the parameters of the motion picture medium to this extent has been accomplished by the use of thin film emulsions. The refraction characteristics of specific gammas were determined and were transferred and recorded on 16mm colour motion picture film stock by the use of special lenses.

EPILOGUE

A Speculative Exploration

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.⁹

If there is one phrase which might categorize the twentieth century, and particularly the last two decades of it, it is "things fall apart". The most widely differing people in the most widely varying pursuits seem aware of the underlying current of change. But there is no agreement on what its significance is or whether it is positive or negative. This epilogue is devoted to a discussion of this change in the largest possible terms, and to the relevance of the motion picture Phase 2 to that change. It should be borne in mind that this is not and cannot be the rigorous defense of a discovered "truth". Indeed, if what I am about to present is at all valid as a description, the notion of truth as either something categorical or discovered is no longer adequate. Rather, this is in the nature of a speculation, warrantable only by our experiences and judgements.

If we take the very longest possible look at our Western civilization we can, in rough outline, discern four or five very major events.

They could be listed as follows:

The Founding of the Roman Empire

The Triumph of Christianity

The Renaissance

The Industrial Revolution

Our Present Situation

The emergence of each of these events could also be described as a fracture period; an old way of organizing the world dissolved and was supplanted by a new one. Now this is not the best or the only list that could be developed. Detailed historical accuracy is not the point. All I am suggesting is:

1. During certain periods, change is much more rapid than during others;
2. There have been periods when change was not only rapid but was disproportionately significant in terms of its effect on later human institutions and habits;
3. We are in the midst of such a period today.

Next I would like to suggest that it may be fruitful to characterize all previous Western historical eras as organized around one of the three following concerns:

The Tribal

The Religious (universalist)

The Ideological

The utility of such broad distinctions is not based directly in military, economic or social considerations as such. Rather, it derives from asking what, at any particular time and place, gave a man his identity and his sense of personal worth? What entity or agency organized his world?

In other words, the key to the meaning of the world was provided by one of these three agencies. Which one, or which version of which one, was used is a function of time and place. The point, however, is that it is the change from one agency to another, or the change from one version of an agency to a different version, that accompanies and defines a fracture period.

The kind of change we are concerned with is most rapid in today's North America, and it is notorious that among the element of the population most representative of this change, the youth, there is little idealism (in the philosophic sense) and less ideology. This brings us abruptly to the question: if the age of ideology is finished what is next? Now it is true that certain sections of today's youth are attempting, apparently with limited success, to reconstruct the tribal agency. Others are re-examining the religious formulation, though the religions they are investigating are mainly oriental and not the traditional western ones. But I do not believe this is where the mainstream is heading, and to understand where that is, it is first necessary to take another look at the old agencies.

The old agencies are at root all the same. The answers that a tribe, a universalist religion or an ideology gives to the needs for identity and worth are basically the same in each instance. Each provides a key to the meaning of history and the meaning of the world, and each does it in such a way as to provide the individual believer and the group with ontological certainty. Ontological certainty is usually, and perhaps necessarily, accompanied by assumptions which imply, infer or maintain that the world is structured by a condition of ontological priority.¹⁰ The process of acquiring that answer and of living it out may be the most general (and therefore the most significant) behaviour pattern concerning human beings that can be described with any uniformity. Those assumptions are most easily discernible in the case of the universalist religions and in the ideological agencies. It is surely no profound insight to point out that the Marxist, the Christian, the logical positivist and countless other denominations of true believers are literally convinced that they have found, "the Truth" whether it has been vouchsafed them by history, god or the laws of logic. Yet the banality of this observation should not blind us to the significance of the fact that all such agencies have in common the requisite for certitude of ontological priority. Such certitude, once provided and acquired, can be seen as one of the major ingredients in most of the

dangerous polarizations of recent years. And once a man has grown incapable of believing he has found "the Truth", whatever that may be, he may undergo a painful process of withdrawal (e.g. Sartre and Nausea) which may not be unlike that of an addict without his drug. The notorious absurdity of this situation, or as it is otherwise called, the problem of ontological uncertainty, remains for many an unsolved problem. It may be that the mistake those who "aren't with it" have been making is to look for or expect another certainty, instead of changing their ontology.

From the above discussion it should emerge that anything that purported to be an answer - - a single perspective from a point of view on fixed ground - - anything of this sort would be fundamentally the same as the old agencies. What would be truly new would be a view that was not an answer, not fixed to a particular bias, interest or preference, yet still a view and not a revamped version of shoreless eclecticism.

What I am suggesting in this paper is that it is such a view that is the emergent intellectual current today, particularly in the younger generation in North America. That is not to say it would usually or ever be described by members of that generation in the terms I am using here. Rather it is usually experienced as an unconscious assumption, which infects the marrow of their lives.

Technically it differs from the old agencies in that it assumes a conditions of ontological parity as opposed to one of

ontological priority. This may be as basic a change in attitude towards the world and oneself as is possible within human parameters. What this change or new current could be called is open to a variety of responses. I have chosen to call it Phase 2, because in contrast, the fundamental assumptions of all previous western beliefs appear as a single manifestation.

Historically Phase 2 can be said to have begun with the Copernican revolution and the de-centralization of the homo-centric universe. The monumental work of Darwin followed and in the twentieth century the work of Einstein and Goedel were further major thrusts in the same direction. Contemporaneous with their work, Dewey and a theoretical physicist turned philosopher, G.H. Mead, developed the theoretical bases for a life style and/or philosophy congruent with the basic principle of ontological parity.

But though the ground work was laid, it took the great post World War II technological leap to finally fracture the old universe into a multi-verse of particulars. Typical art forms of the nineteenth century were the painting and the novel (written more for the eyes than the tongue, ie. book writing) -- things we would usually call objects. Dewey wrote that "every existence is an event",¹¹ but it has taken the era of television, happenings, motion picture, be-ins, slides, instant news and the ubiquitous transistor radio with its special program to make us aware of it. (The incredible

intensity of programs on "rock" or "acid-rock" stations does not appear to be widely understood. It may be worth noting that such programming is also almost completely non-linear. The reason for this may be to provide an audio world that can be picked up and dropped, or tuned into and out of, frequently and repeatedly without loss of meaning. In fact, it is much the way one would listen to a radio if he were to carry it down streets where it could often be drowned out by traffic sounds or temporarily disregarded for momentary conversation.)

Artists today are more interested in producing events than objects, and often the concern they do have with objects is one toward the end of producing an event. In a certain sense we've all become musicians.¹²

But the most interesting ramification of this change is not, for example, the type of thing artists produce, but the intended effect of the experience. If there is no longer one way of looking at the world, no longer "a reality" to intensify or elucidate, then everybody does, can and should structure his own experience. Accordingly, artists are becoming less concerned with presentations that say in effect "this is the way it is", or that can only be interpreted in a single way, and more interested in producing situations with many built in ambiguities and layers of possible interpretations so that the situation will have a latitude enabling

different members of the audience (and hopefully different communities in a global village) to each transact with it in his own way.

This is another way of describing the concept behind the design of the motion picture Phase 2.

If Phase 2 (as a social phenomenon) is not entirely evanescent, it is, I feel, such design characteristics we must explore, both artistically and scientifically, in the years to come.

NOTES

PROLOGUE

1. Dewey, J., Experience and Nature, New York, 1958
Chapter 5.
2. Inhelder, B. and Piaget, J. The Early Growth of
Logic in the Child, Classification and Seriation,
New York, Harper & Row, 1964.
3. Hall, E.T., The Hidden Dimension, New York, 1966,
Chapter VI and Chapter VII.
4. Richards, I.A. "The Secret of Feedforward", The
Saturday Review, February 3, 1968, pp. 14-17.
5. The colleagues and associates were:

Peter Faris
Dean A.R. MacKinnon
Joseph I. Kyle
Frederick J. Brown
Jan E. Fix
Vincent P. Houghton
6. Carrighar, Sally, Wild Heritage, London, 1965, p. 213.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

EPILOGUE

9. Yeats, W.B. "The Second Coming, The Collected Poems
of W.B. Yeats, New York, 1963, p. 184.
10. Buckler, J. Metaphysics of Natural Complexes. Columbia
University Press, New York, 1966.
11. Dewey, J. Experience and Nature, p. 71.
12. In this paragraph I am using the common sense meanings of
the words "object" and "event" to show how the import of
the earlier quote from Dewey is reflected in changing ar-
tistic concerns in everyday terms. -- W.F.