

FROM CRUCIFIXION TO

CYBERNETIC ACUPUNCTURE

by paul ryan

In the current cacophony, the crucifix re-emerges for many as a meaningful symbol. The Christ of the Gospels understood how his crucifixion would function as an attractor. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all things to me". The universal experience of suffering misunderstanding and abuse in spite of maintaining "good intentions", finds ready referencing in a man of love hanging on a cross of contradiction.

It is well to look at the structural stability of the crucifix itself. The totally non-foetal openness of the figure *depends* for its openness on being nailed hands and feet to the cross. By contrast, as discussed above, the Buddha lotus position maintains a self-referencing stability in the balanced positioning of the legs. This enables the hands to open to the other without stigmata.

We can note also that the cross itself is a homeomorph of the x/y coordinates of Euclidean space. Nails maintain a man at the center.

This pattern of man depending on a fixed relation to an "external" object for his psychic stability has recurring homeomorphs in the West. It is a pattern that seems to have much to do with Western man's ability to tolerate and desire technological development. The emotional "software" set of a man driving his car, a set configured by the advertising chreods* of capitalism, can be taken as a homeomorph of Christ on the Cross.

In our current state of disillusionment with "technological progress", we might say that Evil Knievel, leaping across a private canyon on a jet-propelled motorcycle because life is boring, is a technological *reductio ab absurdum* of Christ on the Cross.

Fuller's dictum, "reform the environment, don't reform man", moves in a similar hardware—software vein. Fuller's great utopian vision depends for its stability on the stability of his geometric structures. Re-engineer the environment, and man's ability to get along with his fellow man will be stabilized in utopian fashion. In his vision there is little appreciation of the need to restructure the primitive emotions.

This Christian code has its consequence in the realm of intimacy. Love becomes impossible without taking the cross into the realm of the intimate. In his book *Maria Cross*, Conor Cruise O'Brien skillfully describes this phenomenon in terms of the imaginative patterns of eight Catholic writers, including Mauriac, Bernanos, Greene, O'Faolain, Claudelle and Bloy. With appropriate qualifications about generalizing, O'Brien nevertheless articulates the central theme of their writing as follows. "Woman is the cross". Then more precisely, "Woman becomes mother and that is the cross". Charges of male chauvinism are readily acknowledged. All the writers are male. Patterns of crucifying the beloved in the realm of intimacy are mutual. We know not how not to cause pain.

*Chreods—Structures which describe and support a process.

Referencing pain is a most difficult process. Neurologically, no nerve net is exempt from pain. Physicians tell us that amputees cannot think of their pain without imagining the missing limb. The wounds of life are extremely difficult to understand in terms of source of affliction. Yet the signal system of pain is part of our experience. We tend to hold onto our pain as a way to ground our knowledge of our experience. We know because it hurts, and perhaps the remembrance of the hurt will enable us to avoid a recurring hurt.

The cross is a crude referencing system for pain. A wooden image of a double bind. As a compelling chreod, however, it tends to attract all phantom pain in search of referencing. People fall into patterns of trading on pain. Pain is reified and dealt by pain merchants.

This distortion has its converse in what the psychiatric profession refers to as sado-masochism. People refusing to resign themselves passively to an impoverished realm of crucified intimacy will strike out or invite being struck. The cross becomes transformed into a club. In McLuhan's exquisite phrase—"violence is a lust for compensatory feedback".

*"Christian Wars they tell the sin
No one managed to save him."*

Bob Lenox—*Train* album

The man was overdosed on love.
Nobody could handle it.

ACUPUNCTURE

Acupuncture is a Chinese medical therapy antedating Christianity by about two thousand years. The theory is that pathologies in the body result from disequilibrium with the universe. The equilibrium of the body is normally maintained by 365 channels that pass through the body and correspond to the harmony in the universe. These channels also correspond to 365 points related to the body's neural network known to the practitioners of acupuncture. Different pathologies are healed by the tender and attentive insertion of pins into the appropriate set of points on the body at the appropriate time. This results in a gestalt of neural excitement that cleanses the pathology and realigns the body with the harmony of the universe. Note that the human body is not considered as "central" but as "part of" the universe.

The self-processing through videotape discussed earlier allows one to think of self not as center on a private axis, but as part of a trial and error nexus of shifting information pathways. This is true in terms beyond the actual contexts in which taping of "self" is done.

continued

Being present to yourself on tape is not simply a matter of "seeing" yourself doing this or that—it is a neural phenomenon. This is a perception that McLuhan repeatedly tried to get across, especially to those who thought the difference between film and TV was only a matter of scale. TV is no more a visual medium because you see an image, than perfume is a visual because you can see it in the bottle. Electricity is an extension of the central nervous system. The TV image is an electric image, that "imbues the soulskin . . . sob consciously". It is like a pointillist painting—dots on a screen, similar to the points on the body known to the practitioners of acupuncture. As the hands relate to working clay, so the nervous system properly responds to the video mosaic through a "Lekton dance".* The basic motif of the dance is participation through imitation or converse response to the image. Variations become increasingly possible as one comes to know one's own and others' repertory of neural gestalts.

"Putting on" the body of another through imitation of video image opens up the possibility of cybernetic acupuncture as a mode of stabilizing intimacy, as opposed to mutual crucifixion. Rather than a professional interpreting the bodies' pathology in terms of an abstract cosmology and piercing the nervous system to achieve homeostasis, it becomes possible to share psychic stability through an electric intercoupling of nerve nets. Patterning complementary neural gestalts, is, of course, a delicate procedure and requires proper mapping of the "relevant informational pathways", of which the "selves" are part. Any form of "standing outside self", of ecstasy such as this, needs the objective correlative of proper mapping if the system is to maintain homeostasis. This does not mean an abdication of uniqueness. Bateson, in discussing the relations between members of Alcoholics Anonymous and the "power greater than themselves", has the following passage critical to an understanding of cybernetic acupuncture.

"This Power is felt to be personal and to be intimately linked with each person. It is "God as you understand him to be". Cybernetically speaking, "my" relation to any larger system around me and including other things and persons will be different from "your" relation to some similar system around you. The relation "Part of" must necessarily and logically always be complementary but the meaning of the phrase "part of" will be different for every person. This difference will be especially important in systems containing more than one person. The system or "power" must necessarily appear different from where each person sits. Moreover, it is expectable that such systems, when they encounter each other, will recognize each other as systems in this sense. The "beauty" of the woods through which I walk is my recognition both of the individual trees and of the total ecology of the woods as systems. A similar esthetic recognition is still more striking when I talk with another person."

From "The Cybernetics of 'Self': A Theory of Alcoholism," by Gregory Bateson as printed in *PSYCHIATRY*, Feb., 1971, 35:1-18.

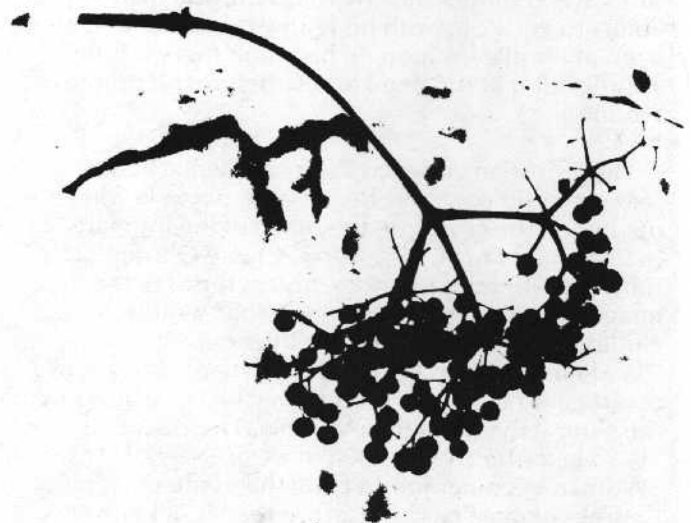
*Lekton—"that in the mind like a fist in the hand." See Avery Johnson's article "Infolding Paul Ryan" *Radical Software* #4, Summer 1971.

Given the syntax of kleinform, any "part" consciously participates in the process of balancing the whole through moving in complementary modes of containing, being contained or being uncontained. The aggregate of "parts contained" provides the system with the needed redundancy set.

In Thom's terms, we can be "figures of regulation" for each other within greater "figures of regulation". The limits of this procedure, simultaneously self-referencing and participatory, seem to be in the mutual knowledge of one's own and others' unique Lekton language. Kleinform can provide stable closed mappings of the particular system within which corridors this electric intercoupling might take place. Proper mappings are necessary, otherwise pathology contains pathology in subjectively self-correcting inspin. Proper mapping can insure a synapse of Lektons that include the signal system of "pain" in an ecstasy that converts with appropriate electric figures of regulation.

This putting on of another's pathology or disequilibrium to heal is not new. It is the traditional role of the shamen in tribal society. As anthropologist Ted Carpenter points out, the electric rock music of today enables musicians to take on the role of shamen. Elvis Presley put on for purging the most characteristic pathology of the late fifties. The pitch of the head, the slurred speech, the roll of the eyes and the body movements were quite similar to those found in any patient in a mental hospital suffering from catatonic schizophrenia.

Currently Joe Cocker bodily puts on what McLuhan calls the "spastic search for feedback" of a world crucified by its own meaningless industrial hardware. Working with the driving power of the rock music, Cocker shatters the hardware hold into rhythms of released fullness. Similarly, in what might have been a complex double bind crisis, I have known the cross to dissolve into ecstatic gestalts of cybernetic acupuncture.



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