



BLUEPRINT FOR A CREATIVE REORIENTATION

By James Harithas

A work of art involves human processes and technologies which interact systematically; its purpose is to make visible a system by using an idea, action, event or object as a means of communication.

The assumption that the artist makes "something out of nothing" is crucial to an understanding of the creative act. In other words, this means that the creative act has its source in a meta-communicative process which is an internal pre-condition for creating and not subject to the caprices of memory.

This process begins with a closed system which one can perhaps analogize to the mind of the child before birth, and consists of neurological rhythms or vibrations whose source of energy is innate to the mind. (I. Rice Pereira theorizes that these resources are light radiation functioning at the nuclear level; another explanation is that they are electro-chemical or electro-magnetic changes.)¹ It is important to emphasize, contrary to the presupposition of a dichotomy of mind and matter, that the meta-communicative process is an integral part of nature like anything else. In the artist, it is a condition in which memory reverses itself, bypassing or clearing past experience and emotional debris, and reprograms itself on a new, synergetic level. The artist's mind is like an analogue computer functioning through changing programs. The metaphysical concept of rebirth also can be construed to be a kind of reprogramming.

The meta-communicative process gives access to a meta-communicative state, which relates to C. G. Jung's collective unconscious. This infolding condition reveals itself through a given set of expressive forms or symbols or through feelings.

Because modern western civilization discourages any profound concern with the inner-life, the artist protects himself by some ancillary behavior, which may be termed ritual integration, so that access to the meta-state is not accompanied by excessively abnormal or mentally dangerous stress or trauma. Either he recodes his behavior or withdraws emotionally for periods of time.

There is a parallel between John Locke's concept of mind as "tabula rasa" and St. John of the Cross' commitment to total faith; both are similar to the meta-state (as is the Buddhist Nirvana) and point to a kind of source condition which is the site of creative expression. In the artist, the mind's normally degenerating condition is reversed by the stable, negentropic effects of the meta-communicative state. Chemical meta-state, like those induced by LSD or Peyote, fall short of this experience to the degree that their disorienting effects trigger extraneous or entropic neurophysiological reactions.

While meta-state is the condition for creating and infuses the work of art with its own resonance or life-quality, it may or may not be content. We define content by the measurable forms which characterize the work of art, e.g., space-frame, time-pattern, color-structure; it is not the subject matter or message usually independently overlaid on content. Content is expressed through geometric and non-geometric configurations (for example, Tony Smith's polyhedral sculpture vs. Jackson Pollock's organic, overall skein-painting) and through processes obtained through advanced technology or through mental operations alone (Frank Gillette's multi-monitor video matrices vs. Bruce Nauman's conceptual, body events.)

Given the meta-processes and the tools, the artist transforms his own experience in or with nature into an appreciable work of art which is something more than a symbol, a model used to aid perception, a fetishe or a talisman. A work of art is the expression of a unified, finite system and as Paul Weiss correctly states; "... systems are products of our experience with nature, and not mental constructs. . ."² A system is composed of rule-governed elements. For example, the behavior of color is restricted by the geometric structures which characterize different artistic styles. A video image is restricted by the capabilities of the hardware and the informational approach of the artist.

Even so, this system—the work of art—is an entity still without a functional identity, i.e., it is art but without its full meaning as such. This can only be introduced into it by the spectator who instills meaning into the work of art through his response (feedback) to it—"validity is a function of belief." Response is simultaneously intellectual, i.e., aesthetic, historical, sociological; and emotional, i.e., pleasure, pain, joy. It is the psychological equivalent to what Norbert Weiner calls "control by information feedback."

Marcel Duchamp lives on. An art work not only involves the spectator in the final drama of its realization but makes him responsible for the last move. In this sense, the artist is medium, the spectator is message—and not an object of that message.

Since a work of art is an interface, a two-way communication between artist and spectator, then it too must be a cybernetic or informational discipline. Outside of Duchamp, this fact has been virtually ignored by art historians and aesthetic philosophers. For example, Susanne K. Langer's conclusion that art is "a final symbolic form making revelation of truths about actual life," idealizes the conceptual process and assigns a passive or reflective role to the spectator. This approach fails to accept the conceptual process as a prerequisite for content or the final work of art as a paradigm of interdependent, two-way actions between artist and spectator.

¹ Arthur Koestler and J. R. Smythies, *Beyond Reductionism*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, p. 10.

² Rice Pereira, *The Transcendental Formal Logic of the Infinite*, I. Rice Pereira, N.Y., 1966, p. 80.

Editorial Note: James Harithas is the director of the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, N.Y. The following essay is taken from the Everson's Frank Gillette catalog which is available through the museum.