

## **PART ONE: THE AUDIENCE AND THE MYTH OF ENTERTAINMENT**

"The most important part about tomorrow is not the technology or the automation, but that man is going to come into entirely new relationships with his fellow men. He will retain much more in his everyday life of what we term the naïveté and idealism of the child. I think the way to see what tomorrow is going to look like is just to look at our children."

R. BUCKMINSTER FULLER

As a child of the New Age, for whom "nature" is the solar system and "reality" is an invisible environment of messages, I am naturally hypersensitive to the phenomenon of vision. I have come to understand that all language is but substitute vision and, as Teilhard de Chardin has observed, "The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within a cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen."<sup>1</sup>

It is that "something more" that has fascinated me since first I became aware of the limited range of ordinary consciousness, chiefly as manifested in the cinema. We are witnessing a metamorphosis in the nature of life on earth. Art, science, and metaphysics, separated for so long in the specialized world of Western man, are reconverging; the interface reveals a broader and deeper reality awaiting our investigation. An increasing number of humans are beginning to understand that man probably never has perceived reality at all, because he has not been able to perceive himself. The realization is not new; only the context is unique: a vast portion of our culture, free of the conditioning of and nostalgia for past environments, has intuited something fundamentally inadequate in prevailing attitudes toward the notion of reality.

<sup>1</sup>Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 31.

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In most languages of most cultures throughout history, seeing has been equated with understanding. The entire Indo-European linguistic system is filled with examples: *I see, ya vizhu, je vois*. Yet nearly twenty-four hundred years ago Plato asserted, "The world of our sight is like the habitation in prison."<sup>2</sup> Recent studies in anatomy, physiology, and anthropology have led to a similar conclusion.<sup>3</sup> We have come to see that we don't really see, that "reality" is more within than without. The objective and the subjective are one.

At the same time, science has taught that there is no purely physical reason for the disparity between apprehending and comprehending. We know, for example, that thirtyeight percent of fibers entering or leaving the central nervous system are in the optic nerve. It is estimated that as much as seventyfive percent of information entering the brain is from the eyes. Current research indicates approximately one hundred million sensors in the retina and only five million channels to the brain from the retina. There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that information processing is done in the eye before data are passed to the brain.<sup>4</sup>

The metaphysical space that separates father and son so dramatically in what we call the generation gap was manifested on a global scale on July 20, 1969. In television's elaborate movie-like subjective-camera "simulation" of the first moon landing, the history of subjective art with its emphasis on content came into total confrontation with the history of objective art and its emphasis on process. As we saw the event, reality was not half as "real" as the simulation because it was the reality of a process of perception. We were seeing nothing but videospace; the simulated reality turned out to be only the reality of a simulation. Objective awareness of a subjective process was all that mattered, and history's simulation suddenly became irrelevant. Thousands of years of theatrical

<sup>2</sup>Plato, *The Republic*, Book VIII, ca. 390 B.C.

<sup>3</sup>Extensive research on physiological conditioning is found in *The Influence of Culture on Visual Perception*, by Marshall H. Segall, Donald T. Campbell, and Melville J. Herskovits (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966).

<sup>4</sup>F. R. Sias, Jr., "The Eye as a Coding Mechanism," *Medical Electronic News*, quoted in: Nels Winkless and Paul Honore, "What Good Is a Baby?" *Proceedings of the AFIPS 1968 Fall Joint Computer Conference*.

tradition were demolished in two hours before an audience of four hundred million world persons.

In the ascending spiral of evolution each new generation absorbs the experiences of the previous level and expands upon them. Teilhard has termed this *hominization*, the process by which the original protohuman stock becomes increasingly more human, realizing more of its possibilities. This "consciousness expansion" has reached a velocity of evolutionary acceleration at which several transformations occur within the life-span of a single generation. Because of mankind's inevitable symbiosis with the mind-manifesting hallucinogens of the ecology on the one hand, and his organic partnership with machines on the other, an increasing number of the inhabitants of this planet live virtually in another world. The messages to be discussed in this book are of that world.

It is a world infinitely more natural and complete than that of commercial cinema or television, which is used to confirm the existing consciousness rather than to expand it. Art is the language through which we perceive new relationships at work in the environment, both physical and metaphysical. Indeed, art is the essential instrument in the very development of that consciousness. As Hermann Hesse observed, every important cultural gesture comes down to a morality, a model for human behavior concentrated into a gesture. Whitehead found it to be "the ultimate morality of the mind." Perhaps never before has a new model for human behavior been needed so urgently as today.

We who are about to inherit the earth from our fathers will receive it with a brave new design. We see the whole earth and thus we see the illusion that has characterized life upon it. We cannot accept the truths and values of a world in which we no longer live. We are a generation of desperadoes. We move across the landscape with bold abandon because we intuit that the birth certificate is the only credit card. The word "utopian" is not anathema to us because we know that the illusion can be shattered within our own lifetimes, that the industrial equation means practical utopianism for the first time in history.

Our grasp of these realities is inarticulate; we cannot speak it. We are haunted by our own disenchantment and alienation as much as our parents are offended by it. The human condition, as this millen

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nium draws to a close, is one of decreasing intervals between increasing emergencies until nothing but emergency exists. We have nothing to lose. Spiritually we have nothing to lose because there is only sorrow in the values of the past and we have no tears left. Physically we have nothing to lose because we know that wealth can neither be created nor spent, that it goes nowhere and always increases with use.

"In this century alone we have gone from less than one percent of humanity being able to survive in appreciable health and comfort to forty-four percent of humanity surviving at a standard of living unexperienced or undreamed of before. This utterly unpredicted synergistic success occurred within only two-thirds of a century despite continually decreasing metallic resources per each world person ... the world total of seventy billion dollars in mined gold represents only three one-thousandths of one percent of the value of the world's organized industrial production resources."<sup>5</sup>

Within the larger context of radical evolution there are many local revolutions. One of them is the revolution of expectations that burns in the minds of the new consciousness. Eskimo children who've never seen a wheeled vehicle can identify the types of aircraft flying over the North Pole. Young Dyaks in the longhouses of equatorial Borneo listen to the Beatles on transistor radios. Teenage Bedouins wandering the Sahara hear Nasser's radio telling how Vietnamese children are being slaughtered half the world away.<sup>6</sup>

Dylan swears he sees his reflection so high above the wall upon which he once drew conclusions. Seeing that reflection is the revolution. It tells us old reasons for doing things that no longer exist. "There's less to do because circumstances do it for us: the earth. Art has obscured the difference between art and life; now life will obscure the difference between life and art."<sup>7</sup> We no longer need to prove our right to live. We're struggling in the toil of old realities,

<sup>5</sup> R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969), pp. 82, 95.

<sup>6</sup> Ritchie Calder, "The Speed of Change," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (December, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> John Cage, *A Year from Monday* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), pp. 9, 19.

stranded from our conscience, doing our best to deny it. We are tragically in need of new vision: expanded cinema is the beginning of that vision. We shall be released. We will bring down the wall. We'll be reunited with our reflection.

I'm writing at the end of the era of cinema as we've known it, the beginning of an era of image-exchange between man and man. The cinema, said Godard, is truth twenty-four times a second. The truth is this: that with the possibility of each man on earth being born a physical success there is no archetypal Man whom one can use in the culturally elitist manner and each man becomes the subject of his own study. The historical preoccupation with finding the one idea that is Man will give way to the idea that earth is, and then to the idea of other earths.