

9.x.'69

Intro to reading list

Adams, Agassiz, James: what are they doing when they put things together into a pattern? Agassiz is a botanist & biologist who starts out by classifying, but is not content; he wants them to be teleological. (Darwin was disturbed by the specie of barnacle in which the female carried the male about in a sort of pouch. This did not fit his structure, in which the Victorian family could be traced straight back through evolution. He also attempted to prove experimentally that the ? plant had a nervous system, because he wanted everything to have a nervous system.) Darwin, & James as well, funked it where sex was concerned. The Victorians could handle prostitutes & natives, but not ladies! Note Darwin's difficulty in dealing with the question of whether women blush from the neck downwards. You won't get sexual information from the Victorians, only symbols that deflect from it. (Some in novels, particularly Gothick.) Note also that Darwin refused Marx's invitation to have the second part of Das Kapital dedicated to him because he thought it was atheistic.

We are concerned with two things: (1) how we move into the second half of the 20th Cent - what sort of systems do we make - do we need the methodology of synthesis? Can we live with things "side by side" or do we have to put them together?

Mumford: concerned with the meeting points between a "vitalistic" tradition & machine technology. What happens, he suggests, is the city. We also will be interested in the city as a synthesis, a structure.

Wright: an architect who had read Emerson, Thoreau et al., extracted certain principles from them, & fused them into building techniques.

Goodman: a psychologist who tries to examine certain social structures from a non-committed, "psychology & happiness" point of view. Non-authoritarian, anarchist.

McLuhan: we are concerned with his principle that any alteration in the environment changes it completely. This applies also to sensory alterations in the human body.

Brown: revisionist-Freudian - expands the "polymorphous-perverse" into a basic principal.

Fuller: the only one in the list who is an engineer; but he applies engineering principles to the universe (the tetrahedron). (All these men are putting things together to make models which are predictive. Things develop so rapidly in America, they say, that you'd better be able to predict the future quickly. Certain institutions, such as the Hudson Institute, are set up to do just that. Such projections tend to be self-fulfilling; Kahn has tremendous power. Also true of Freud, Jung - postulate the id & people develop neuroses to suit it.) Fuller wants to use engineering systems in the best possible way - geared to human happiness.

Cage: breaks the causality barrier in music. Most music,

even post-Wagnarian, is based on cause-&-effect structure. (Even Schönberg's Op. 23 is structured like a Bach suite.) "Music is a combination of sound & silence in any condition." Cage says, "Listen." There is perhaps a distinctively American urgg to take things to logical extremes very quickly. (Cf. Andy Warhol.) Notations raises the problem, how do you create a visual structure which can be translated into sound? Music doesn't have to have a score - see Milton Babbitt, who works directly with computer-synthesizer.

Pound: Cantos date back before 1st WW; in them he selects from a range of American, European & African cultures information he requires to suggest possibilities of a culture (παιδεία). It takes from China, late C18 America, Frabemius's (?) books on Nigeria, & constructs an open ended structure. Like Cage's music, it points to the fact that there are open-ended & closed structures. A closed structure tends to be authoritarian; an open structure varies according to the info you put into it.

Olsen: the Maximus Poems are just that: the poet continually makes the poem of his life, with the info he requires.

Duncan: Bending the Bow contains 34 "Passages", open-ended, which transmute his reading into possibilities for a viable culture.

Williams: Patterson can be compared with the info in Mumford. A series of complete structures within an incomplete structure. (As in our lives* every now & again you make your mind up, though not finally.) But note that these structures are not authoritarian.

Ginsberg: poetry as "counter-magic" to counteract the persuasive propaganda that makes people do ridiculous things such as kill each other. He inherits Whitman's "adhesiveness".

Mills: a post-Marxist thinker. Seeks for what is valid for the reconstruction of capitalist society, short of revolution.

Kahn: seeks for ways whereby capitalism can modify itself so as to create human happiness. Creates "Scenarios" of basic information to be used by the power structure. The "final computer": will result in a pyramidal (not circular) structure of leisure.

Iron Mountain: scenario suggesting how capitalism can survive by suppressing dissenters, not allowing them to alter the structure.

Weiner: Cybernetics suggests that with the coming of computer technology, human beings can at last become human. Marx suggests that what stops people from being human is that they are used as exhaustive labour machinery. W. believes that technology can free him; but he also believes in the 2nd law of thermodynamics, that there is a tendency to chaos in the universe. Like Fuller, he describes earth as a spaceship, but a deteriorating spaceship. (Note that if you believe in the 2nd Law of T., you believe that the whole universe is a closed structure. Perhaps the only closed structure that is non-ideological.)

Pynchon: Crying of Lot 49 has 2nd Law of T. built into it. What happens to human beings in structures? Woman motoring in Southern California sees town below her as a printed circuit.

Most people live in printed circuits. Suppose it is a dying circuit? (2nd Law of T.)

All this is very glib, because it omits the most important question: what is the structure of a synthesis itself? A sentence is linear. (Difference between sentence & language - Chomsky.) Language is signs that don't need sentences. Cf. Pound (fragments) & Wallace Stevens, who always writes in sentences. Pound seeks for nucleic information (ideograms) which are simultaneous, not narrative & lineal. (Like Messiaen's chords in the Turangalila Symphony, which should, ideally, be heard all at once.)

Descriptive Statements

Nietzsche: "There are no facts, only interpretations."

Heisenberg: "From the start we are involved in the argument between nature and man in which science plays only a part, so that the common division of the world into subject & object, inner world & outer world, body & soul, is no longer adequate & leads us into difficulties. Thus, even in science, the object of research is no longer nature itself, but man's investigation of nature."

Buckminster Fuller: "The poet is the man who puts things together."

John Cage, Imaginary Landscape No. 6 for 12 radios. Reflects not only on the nature of music, but on the nature of system-making in general: a rigid system & complete indeterminacy at the same time.

Charles Ives, Fourth of July. Note in score: "Mr. Price: Please do not try to make things nice. All the wrong notes are right." 1912.

Charlie Mingus: "There are no wrong notes."

Wittgenstein: Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. "It is the field of force of a word which is decisive." For word read any element of a sign system. Once your system is a field of action, it gives you system & freedom at the same time, in a non-authoritarian sense.

Zukovski: "The poet no less than the scientist works on the assumption that inert & live things & relations hold enough interest to keep him alive as a part of nature." Minimal engagement, no ideology. (But the live/inert dichotomy is no longer valid.) Pound, Joyce, Olsen, Cage, Xenakis, Boulez; Robbe-Grillet, Pynchon: concerned with forms as reflexive space-time fields. (Cf. Darwin's studies of fields & their unsettling effect on his contemporaries.) All the information plays into itself continually. Durations, intensities, densities, memory, senses, genetic action are all assumed. We want to find a way of getting the information that we have into the system without a selectivity which would omit some vital area. Historians do not have enough information to justify their generalizations. Food (the basic energy intake) & sex are omitted from "history". Any structure of cause & effect along lines is useless, or any structure with a single point of view, or with fixed absolutes. One must imagine a field of relations between everything. In all the arts, especially "happenings",

since 1950, there is an inclination to make assemblages of things. Psychologists now speak of the human being as an "event", like a happening: a continuous space-time field. In Allen Kaprow's happenings, you never know when they begin & when they stop. There comes a point of intensity of action when you know you are in the presence of something. You can find yourself within a structure & then "know". Norman Brown writes about what boundaries & limits are. We want fields of assemblage, of simultaneity, of multiple points of view. This does away with beliefs, scepticism, opinions. What one wants is knowledge. Korzybski calls space & time "a pathological semantic projection".

Weiner: "Physics now no longer claims to deal with what will happen always, but rather what will happen with overwhelming probability." Physics is now an open structure. An end of Aristotelian, Newtonian, & Christian thinking: i.e., systems of order which require an initial causal authority, with logical closed structures following from it. This means that the cosmos is not a power structure under single rule of any kind. (2nd Law of Thermodynamics implies that if any given system moves towards chaos, then chaos is the most probable nature of that system. (One of the signs of chaos is over-order. Some sociologists now describe America as the "over-ordered society". The over-structured person or society is maniacal.) Our problem is: what is the degree of stability short of rigidifying.

Korzybski: "'Space & time' can't be separated empirically, and so one must have a language of similar structure, of inter-related ordered events." "Einstein's theory, in contrast to Newton's theory, gives us such a language, similar in structure to the empirical facts as revealed by science & common experience. A map is not the territory it represents, but, if correct, it has a similar structure to the territory." If it were an exact representation, it would include itself. (Like the Quaker Oats box.)

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Heisenberg: "The interaction between observer & object causes uncontrollable & large changes in the system being observed, because of the discontinuous changes characteristic of atomic processes." It is impossible to observe anything fixed.

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Max Planck: The Philosophy of Physics, 1936. Esp. Chap. 3. Scientific ideas, their origin & effects. "In principle, a physical event is inseparable from the measuring instrument, or the organ of sense that perceives it. And similarly, a science cannot be separated in principle from the investigators who pursue it. A physicist who studies experimentally some atomic process interferes with its course in proportion as he penetrates into its detail, and the physiologist who subdivides a living organism into its smallest parts injures or actually kills it. By the same token, the philosopher who, in examining a new idea confines himself to asking to what extent its meaning is evident a priori, hampers the further development of science. Hence, a positivism which rejects every transcendental idea is as one-sided as a metaphysics which scorns individual experience." Thus he postulates all these systems as equally valid methods of structuring: no hierarchy.

Wittgenstein: Op. cit. Seven basic propositions about human activity, with amplifications & analyses.

- 1 The world is everything that is the case.
- 1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things.
- 1.21 The world is determined by the facts, and by these being all the facts.
- 2.04 The totality of existent atomic facts is the world.
- 2.063 The total reality is the world.
- 2.1 We make ourselves pictures (Bilder) of facts.
- 2.15 . . . The connections of the elements of the picture is called its structure, and the possibility of this structure is called the form of representation of the picture.
- 2.21 The picture agrees with reality or not; it is right or wrong, true or false. (Cf. Buddhism)
- 2.224 It cannot be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false.
- 4.11 The totality of true propositions is the total natural science (or the totality of the natural sciences).
- 4.111 Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.
- 4.1121 Psychology is no nearer related to philosophy than is any other natural science.
- The theory of knowledge is the philosophy of psychology.
- 4.1122 The Darwinian theory has no more to do with philosophy than has any other hypothesis of natural science.
- 5.136 There is no causal nexus . . .
- 5.1361 The events of the future cannot be inferred from these ~~xxxxxxx~~ of the present.
- Superstition is the belief in the causal nexus.

Does M MISINTERPRET "INNER" TO "BE INSIDE MAN?"

- 5.1362 The freedom of the will consists in the fact that future actions cannot be known now. We could only know them if causality were an inner necessity, like that of logical deduction. (But perhaps, through training & education, it is. M.)

All this, of course, runs counter to Hegel, Darwin, Marx, Freud, & all those who construct grids of prediction, based on "history" & "evolution", or any other causal nexus

Korzybski on cause & effect: "a rash limiting generalization based on probability, usually described linearly." i.e., you cut out everything which won't fit the linear structure.

- 5.631 If I wrote a book "The world as I found it", I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. (Note that under certain drugs you can feel the presence of your liver, kidneys, etc.) i.e., no descriptive system may exclude the body. (Cf. Brown)

- 6.34 All propositions, such as the law of causation, the law of continuity in nature, the law of least expenditure in nature, etc., etc., all these are a priori intuitions of possible forms of the propositions of science. (One of the things that Darwin rejected was mutation leaps, i.e., catastrophism. Cf. Velakovsky. Darwin projected his own desire back into history; he wanted to feel himself a part of a meaningful teliology.)

6.341 Newtonian mechanics, for example, brings the description of the universe to a unified form. . . . All descriptions as systems are imposed unified forms. (Note that McLuhan relates reincarnation to the externalization of the central nervous system in electronic circuitry.)

Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations, Propositions 114~~115~~: One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the things, nature, over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. 115: A picture held us captive, and we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably. (So when Cage crosses the boundaries of causality in music, it reverberates from contemporary science & philosophy. There is, he says, no necessary succession or interaction of musical events.

But we are still faced with the question, is there some central urge in the human to perceive order? There is the central fact of the structure of our nervous systems (see Korzybski), i.e., the structure of synapses through which protein is pumped from nerve to nerve. The protein at these points is measurable. Protein has form; and there are elements (i.e., the boundary of chemical investigation). The structure of our nervous systems consists of ordered chains of events produced by the impact of external events on internal events. L.L. Whyt, Aspects of Form: human beings can do nothing except form, because they are formal structures. All energy is perceived as form; there is no formless energy, as far as we know. This is important for poetry, as Allen Ginsberg has discovered.

Konrad Lorenz: On Aggression: Two kinds of animal & human perception. (1) Gestalt, the visual perception of single completed configurations. (2) Mosaic, the perception of sharply defined parts. Gestalt is the necessary form of energy (Note the authoritarianism implied by experimentation, e.g. in Nazi concentration camps.) Mosaic is assemblage.

What is required: (1) A theory of cybernetics, i.e. the science of control & communication in systems. (human nervous system, complex electronic machine, poem, musical composition, city) Wiener supplies it quite well. (2) One needs to be aware of the chemical structure of energy (DNA), as the basis of life metamorphoses. (3) An analysis of consciousness. This is very difficult, particularly since we now know that the body doesn't change while asleep - even REM periods occur during wakefulness. The old-fashioned words for these states are only semantic games. We are ultimately concerned with the interaction of gestalt & mosaic.