



ANGELIZATION (3-5)

Electricity has made angels of us all—not angels in the Sunday school sense of being good or having wings, but spirit freed from flesh, capable of instant transportation anywhere.

The moment we pick up a phone, we're nowhere in space, everywhere in spirit. Nixon on TV is everywhere at once. That is Saint Augustine's definition of God: a Being whose center is everywhere, whose borders are nowhere.

When a clerk stops waiting on us to answer a phone, we accept this without protest, yet it violates one of our most precious values—barbershop democracy. We accept it because pure spirit now takes precedence over spirit in flesh.

I knew a Californian who read his poetry aloud at parties until his friends learned to silence him. But when he played recordings of these same poems, everyone listened.

In New Guinea, when villagers ignore their leader, the government may tape-record his orders. The next day the assembled community hears his voice coming to them from a radio he holds in his own hand. Then they obey him.

Among the Ojibwa Indians, young people eagerly listen to tape recordings of their grandparents' stories, though they don't want to listen to the grandparents telling the same stories in person.

I've seen people practically break down a door to get to a ringing phone, though the call was probably incidental. The phone is said to be the one thing that can interrupt intercourse.

I once saw a man passing a phone booth at the moment it rang. He hesitated & then, at the second ring, answered it. It couldn't possibly have been for him.

I copied down the numbers of several phones in Grand Central Station & Kennedy Airport, and called these numbers. Almost always someone answered. When I asked why they had answered, they said, "Because it rang."

Mordecai Richler tells how, when Lester Pearson took over as prime minister of Canada, he not only removed the emergency telephone linking his office with the White House, he concealed it so carelessly that when it rang one winter's morning in 1964, he couldn't find it. Paul Martin, then minister of external affairs, was with the prime minister at the time.

"My God," Martin exclaimed, "do you realize this could mean war?"

"No," Pearson replied. "They can't start a war if we don't answer it."

Some years ago in New Jersey, a mad sniper killed thirteen people, then barricaded himself in a house while he shot it out with the police. An enterprising reporter found out the phone number of the house and called. The killer put down his rifle and answered the phone. "What is it?" he asked. "I'm very busy."

More recently, a radio announcer called a bank that was being robbed. One of the robbers answered the phone & proceeded to give a radio interview, until he was interrupted by a policeman's shout: "Put up your hands! Put *down* that phone!" Putting up his hands meant being captured in flesh; putting down that phone meant being captured in spirit.

For Californians, February 9, 1971, was a day of combined cosmic and media theater. It began with an earthquake & included a total eclipse of the sun in the afternoon. Broadcasts throughout the day carried live conversations with astronauts on the moon, including a warning to one not to pick up a rock. Cardiograms

relayed to Houston indicated heart strain, something he himself didn't know.

That afternoon, in San Jose, a man successfully held up a TV bank, one of those drive-in banks with closed-circuit TV tellers. The robber pointed his gun at the TV set & warned he would start blasting away, so the bank paid off.

That night, on TV, an Air Force pilot said that air flak over Laos was "just like the Second World War movies on TV," and one newspaper reported that a welfare recipient, accused of wasting money on a color TV set, replied, "But I didn't want my children to grow up not knowing what color was."

A recent full-page magazine ad contained a photograph of a honeymoon lodge, complete with a heart-shaped, double-size tub surrounded by mirrors, and the caption: "We need mirrors to tell us we're really here. And the camera, courtesy of the thoughtful management, to remind us later when we try to recall just what it was like for those strangers ourselves."

In other words, for us, sexual experience is no longer the act but its mirrored or photographic image.

In the past, people called such images "unreal." The word "phony" comes from telephone: "He sounds like a phony to me." They experienced a great need to translate images back into flesh. Mark Twain made his living from public speaking; his readers wanted to see him. Dickens' fans flocked to hear him read works they already knew. Film stars were mobbed in public. Fans wanted to see the "real" Joan Crawford.

No more. TV stars walk the streets unmolested. People seem almost embarrassed to see them. They don't want to see Lorne Greene in a sports shirt on Maple Street. They expect him to stay in Bonanzaland, looking after those three boys, and they hurry home to watch him on TV.

THE SELF-SUFFICIENT IMAGE (6-7)

Older people still experience the need to translate images into observed reality. When they travel, they want to see the Eiffel Tower or Grand Canyon exactly as they saw them first on posters. An American tourist in sneakers can cover the Louvre in six minutes, since there are only about seven things he recognizes—Winged Victory, Mona Lisa, etc.—and therefore wants to see. He can tell the cab driver to wait. Similarly, he can cover eleven capitals in two weeks, convinced he has missed nothing.

He does more than see the real Eiffel Tower. He photographs it exactly as he

knows it from posters. Better still, he has someone photograph him in front of it. Back home, that photograph reaffirms his identity within that scene.

This need to translate images into objective reality has been a hidden factor in advertising: encountering only the image, people felt the need to acquire the product, not for its own sake but to complete & validate the ad. Similarly, they translated political images into votes.

Unlike their parents, the young are less anxious to validate images by reference back to observable reality. That need arose largely from conditions unique to literacy, and literacy exercises little control in their lives.

Today's images are often self-sufficient. We now have ads that give more satisfaction than their products. Conceivably there doesn't even have to be a product. Sometimes when we try to purchase a product advertised on TV, we're told, "It's not yet in distribution," which probably means not yet in existence since consumer interest is often tested prior to production.

In government this is called a "press leak," though it's obviously not a "leak," having been planted in the news to test public response. In other words, it's possible to achieve the effect of a product or act without having either.

"Oh, what a beautiful baby!" exclaimed a neighbor.

"That's nothing," replied the mother. "You should see his photograph!"

YOU CAN'T SAY "NO" PICTORIALLY (159-160)

It's easy to say "No" verbally. Words are neutral symbols which stand for a reality but do not resemble that reality.

A picture, however, often resembles reality, especially when that picture moves. This makes pictorial media enormously persuasive. It requires an act of will to disbelieve what one sees & an even greater will to accept the reverse of what one sees.

The New Guinea government circulated large posters that said: Protect Our Rare Birdwing Butterflies; and beneath this, pictures of the butterflies in question, along with the warning: "\$200 fine for collecting; \$20 penalty per specimen in possession thereof." Villagers immediately collected these butterflies & took them to agricultural officers for payment.

A common beer ad in New Guinea shows a foaming glass with the caption: Be Specific, Say South Pacific. When the sale of beer was permitted to indigenes, the London Missionary Society posted identical ads, except for the caption: Say No. Beer sales immediately increased. Drinkers ordered No.

The government produced a film called *Stori Bilong Stilman*, which showed a village youth committing five thefts. In the last, while an accomplice distracts a shopkeeper, the thief fills a bag & then the two go outside where they happily eat the pilfered food & divide the stolen money. Audiences were delighted. The thief, of course, was arrested & taken to jail, but the message was clear: stealing is fun, easy, rewarding & this is the way it's done.

I suspect crime increased wherever the film was shown. I do know that the lead actor was soon in prison, convicted of precisely the crime he played in the last scene.

There seemed to be one example, however, that contradicted this theory that one can't say "No" pictorially. It was a most effective sign, seen everywhere throughout the Territory, depicting a human hand, & meaning *Imtam but*, taboo, private. At first I thought it meant Do Not Touch & depicted a hand laid on, the idea being Don't Do This. But a hand is a visual pun: in outline or silhouette, palm & back are identical. These warning signs didn't show hands touching forbidden objects; they threatened trespassers. Villagers perceived them as palms thrust into the faces of intruders, like the hand of a traffic policeman.

Could this explain hands painted by Paleolithic artists on the walls of cave sanctuaries? The hand motif was also prevalent in North American Indian art, especially on masks & shields

UNHOUSED (182-185)

Paul Radin spoke of native autobiographies, but the term should be used with caution. Pre-literate peoples don't write books or make films. We may train them to do so, but we must always ask: at this point, are they still members of their old culture or have they become, in this particular area at least, members of our culture?

I've recorded life histories extracted from informants. I've encouraged those who were literate to write their own. Since around 1960, I've put cameras in a variety of hands. The results generally tell more about the medium employed than about the cultural background of the author or cameraman.

In each case I had hoped the informant would present his own culture in a fresh

way & perhaps even use the medium itself in a new way. I was wrong. What I saw was literacy & film. These media swallow culture. The old culture was there all right, but no more than residue at the bottom of a barrel. I think it requires enormous sophistication—media sophistication—before anyone can use print or film to preserve & present one's cultural heritage, even one's cultural present. The extraordinary sensitive autobiographies & films now coming out of Africa, come from men of the utmost media sophistication, men unhoused in any single culture or medium.

In New Guinea, we obtained about 70 films made by indigenes. Cameramen ranged in background from isolated Biama to Port Moresby students. Among isolated villagers, we ourselves became the subjects most frequently photographed, perhaps out of courtesy, more probably because we were the most visible objects in their environment. When we left cameras behind for them to use, they were generally ignored.

In Port Moresby, however, our cameras were in much demand. The subjects most favored were friends & cars. Cameramen might zoom & pan on scenery, but with friends & cars, they held the camera steady, preferably on a tripod: the cars they filmed were parked, the friends immobile. In other words, movie cameras were used like still cameras.

Four indigenes who worked with us (two in Port Moresby, one in the Sepik & one in the Highlands) became enthusiastic & competent filmmakers. They observed us closely, learned quickly & made films similar to the ones we were producing. None attempted to make the sort of dramatic films they saw in theaters, but I think if we had been shooting drama, they would have imitated this as well. In Angoram, we were asked to film dramatic skits staged by students & I noted that several skits might have been inspired by films.

I carefully screened films made by indigenous DIES cameramen. In only one did I see anything even remotely suggesting a nonWestern approach: a film on a *lakatoi*, a sailing ship, was exceptionally tactile, favoring close-ups of surfaces & bindings.

Western audiences delight in stories about natives who use modern media in curious ways, their errors being both humorous & profound, suddenly illuminating the very nature of the media themselves.

Even when these stories are true, I think their importance is exaggerated. Surely the significant point is that media permit little experimentation & only a person of enormous power & sophistication is capable of escaping their binding power. A very naive person may stumble across some interesting technique, though I think

such stories are told more frequently than documented. The trend is otherwise.

New Guineans who may someday produce unique film statements, drawing upon their heritage & their contemporary lives, are almost certain to be men who were first dislodged from their native culture & then, by choice, returned to it, having acquired in the interval a knowledge of several media.

MISANTHROPOLOGY (188-191)

Some years ago, Oliver LaFarge published a short story about an ethnologist who, as a young man, financed his studies among American Indians by collecting their treasures for museums. Over the years, his love of subject deepened to the point of identity, and toward the end of his life, he devoted much cunning to removing these pieces from museum storage & sending them back to their heirs. His actions came to light after his death when the Indian heirs again offered these pieces for sale.

The story is true. I knew him well. The dilemma he faced, anthropologists are only beginning to acknowledge. The truth is, though native informants may have liked anthropologists personally, they often distrusted their motives. Some suspected profits from books; others noted it was a paid job.

But what disturbed most was the feeling that when their dances & tales were filmed, taped & written down, they were stolen from them as surely as their lands & furs were taken away. When they saw their sacred treasures under glass, heard their songs on radio, watched their dances on TV, they not only objected to errors they spotted, they felt robbed. None of this had anything to do with them. They felt used. And they were.

The world's largest collection of primitive art was put together by a man of great wealth & acquisitiveness who personally inked catalogue numbers on every specimen he bought, then stored these treasures in an inaccessible warehouse. The moment he catalogued a piece, it became his.

Anthropology, as an offspring of colonialism, reflects what Levi-Strauss calls "a state of affairs in which one part of mankind treats the other as object." The search for self-knowledge, which Montaigne linked to the annihilation of prejudice, has never been a dominant theme in 20th century anthropology. Not really. The trend has been toward the manipulation of people in the very course of studying them.

I don't refer to the close link between British anthropologists & the Colonial Office, or to American anthropologists working on CIA counterinsurgency projects. That was mere Winnie-the-Pooh.

I refer to the anthropologist's role as translator. Humane translation preserves & presents. Paul Radin insisted that the only acceptable ethnology was the life history, self-told by members of indigenous society. But those who undertook such efforts found themselves far removed from the main stream of anthropology.

Even the concept of relativism has become, in the words of Stanley Diamond, "a perspective congenial in an imperial civilization convinced of its power. Every primitive or archaic culture is conceived as a human possibility that can be 'tasted'; it is, after all, harmless. We, at our leisure, convert the experience of other cultures into a kind of sport, just as Thorstein Veblen's modern hunter mimics, and trivializes, what was once a way of life. Relativism is the bad faith of the conqueror, who has become secure enough to travel anywhere."

Clothing themselves in liberal platitudes & employing what they called "scientific methodologies," anthropologists translated other cultures into unreadable jargon & statistics, almost none of it translatable back into life energy. They erased cultures with irrelevancy & dullness. A few ended up talking to each other in a language known only to themselves, about subjects having no existence outside their closed circle. Little wonder informants felt shut out.

This was not true of a handful of reports published around the turn of the century. Publications of the Bureau of American Ethnology contained detailed, matter-of-fact, accurate descriptions of Zuni ceremonies, Hopi pottery designs, etc. These are used today as reference works by the Zuni & Hopi in their efforts to keep alive their heritage.

Almost nothing published in the last fifty years could serve that end. These later reports aren't repositories of knowledge; they're graves. No retrieval from them is possible.

Between 1946 & 1965, a typical research project began with a government grant & the assembly of an interdisciplinary team. Ideally, this included a psychologist, economist, etc., that is, representatives of categories meaningful to our culture, though alien to the culture studied. Generally no one was invited to participate who had shown prior interest in the subject, say someone who had learned the language of the subject group. The thought of including someone from the subject group itself never occurred.

If it was American Indians, reservations were taken as geographical locales, though for many Indians, social drinking-dancing clubs, which cut across Reservation lines & centered in cities, were primary. Time categories were based on government budgets, not indigenous calendars.

Every category came from the dominant culture. The indigenous culture wasn't preserved & presented: it was swallowed.

By the time administrators, missionaries, social workers & anthropologists got through with indigenous peoples, most were eager to forget their pasts. When "Dead Birds," a superb film on tribal warfare in New Guinea, was shown at the Administrative College, Boroko, one student angrily turned off the projector: "What right does anyone have to record what we choose to forget?" His statement was applauded.

The dilemma I faced in New Guinea was this: I had been asked to find more effective uses for electronic media, yet I viewed these media with distrust. I had been employed by government administrators who, however well-intentioned, sought to use these media for human control. They viewed media as neutral tools & they viewed themselves as men who could be trusted to use them humanely. I saw the problem otherwise.

I think media are so powerful they swallow cultures. I think of them as invisible environments which surround & destroy old environments. Sensitivity to problems of culture conflict & conquest becomes meaningless here, for media play no favorites: they conquer all cultures. One may pretend that media preserve & present the old by recording it on film & tape, but that is mere distraction, a sleight-of-hand possible when people keep their eyes focused on content.

I felt like an environmentalist hired to discover more effective uses of DDT. There seemed no way to reach those who needed this information most. Even students at the University of Papua and New Guinea, though often sophisticated about the uses of media for political ends, still naively thought that when their images & words appeared within the media, this gave them public identity & power. They failed to grasp that this merely acknowledged their existence within these new environments; it is no way guaranteed them creative roles there. What was everywhere needed was the sort of media sophistication which comes only with detachment, dislocation, study. Such sophistication is not easily achieved.

I therefore decided that both the written report & film I produced would be addressed to no particular audience. Like the cry, "Fire!" I hoped they would receive the widest possible circulation & not just be heard by arsonists. This meant

shunning "scholarly" publications, which have long since become a means of information control; it also meant avoiding conventional formats, another means of neutralizing information. Hence the format of this book.