

The Gesture of Balance

BY MORRIS BERMAN

In Morris Berman's book, Coming to Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West, from which this story is excerpted, he painstakingly reexamines western history from the perspective of the human body. By treating history as an abstract study of ideas and events, he says, we have missed the whole truth of human existence: the human drama is somatic; how individuals and societies have dealt with the ontological dilemma of bodily existence has led to the war, religious conflict, and genocide we read about in history books. Ideas take their breath from the body, not the other way around.

At the core of Berman's thesis is the idea of "the basic fault." At some point in the development of a human being he or she experiences a fundamental rupture in primal harmony. Different schools of thought emphasize different traumas — birth, discontinuity with the mother, emergence of ego consciousness, etc. — but all of them agree that an "abyss" or "gap" opens up in the soul between self and other. Author John Fowles calls this emptiness the "nemo," which he describes as an anti-ego, a state of being nobody. Fowles says, "All our acts are partly devised to fill or to mark the emptiness we feel at the core." As Berman says, on some level we all know about this longing for primary satisfaction: "it is the common somatic heritage we all share."

Illustrations by Hal Robins

Drawing largely on the work of a group of French scholars and the British "object-relations school," Berman shows how much of culture is a product of how individuals and groups deal with the nemo. The key concept here is that of "transitional objects" (TO) — "objects that are not part of the infant's body yet are not fully recognized as belonging to external reality" — which are used to assuage the emptiness. In our longing for the return to primary unity, culture itself becomes a transitional object.

For Berman, the major somatic drama of the last 2,000 years can be seen in the cycles of heresy vs. orthodoxy that characterize much of western history. At certain times in history — as with the Gnostics during the time of Christ, the Cathars in the 12th century, or the occult sciences of the Renaissance, for example — a peaking of somatic energy has occurred. These ecstatic traditions, based on what Berman calls "the ascent structure," take their power from the deep human need and ability to experience truth directly through the body. After a century or so this somatic energy is typically co-opted by an orthodoxy that seeks to replace direct experience with symbolic experience of truth. Thus Jewish Gnosticism led to Christianity as a world religion, and the magical experimentation of the Renaissance finally resulted in a rigid scientific world view. But underlying these cycles is the deepest truth, what Berman calls the "ultimate heresy": to acknowledge that the only truth is the human need for truth, which is rooted in our somatic structure.

The "gesture of balance" Berman is calling for in this essay is to abandon the pursuit of ecstatic ascent, and the ideologies this generates, and instead to live directly with our bodily reality. Followers of Buddhism will find familiar territory covered here, as will poets, who have put bodily experience into language over millenia. But Berman is trying to speak about a "paradigm beyond paradigm" in language historians and other scholars, as well as the general public, can understand. His work is a bridge — to a culture that integrates thinking and feeling, mind and body, rather than one that seeks, at terrible human cost, to keep them apart.

Coming To Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West was published in May of 1989 by Simon & Schuster. Morris Berman is also author of The Reenchantment of the World (Bantam Books, 1984). —Jeanne Carstensen



THE LINCHPIN of the Western reality system is the split between "heaven" and "earth," a split that is nothing more than a projection of the basic fault, and that can only be bridged by an ascent structure, an ecstatic journey capable of traversing transitional space. The religion or philosophy or social system that then gets organized around that vertical journey (or journeyer) then acts as a Transitional

Object that holds the culture together for the next few hundred years. There is another alternative to recycling the ascent structure one more time, and that is to finally abandon it once and for all. This means, at least initially on the individual level, learning to live with the Abyss; recognizing the gap for what it is. Far more important than finding a new paradigm (TO) is coming face to face with the immense yearning that underlies the need for paradigm itself. This means exploring what we fear most, viz., the empty space or silence that exists between concepts and paradigms, never in them. We are indeed in a system-break, and the temptation to stuff the gap is very strong; but the "road less traveled," which is that of looking at the nature of paradigm itself, is the truly exciting and liberatory path here. There can be no healing of our culture and ourselves without taking this option, and it will not go away, whether we miss it on this "round" or not. Nothing less is at stake than the chance to be finally, fully human, and since that is our destiny, the latest heresy or paradigm-shift is simply not going to cut it.

What does the end of the ascent dynamic really involve? At first glance, it would seem to imply that everything that is meaningful to us would be lost; and indeed, a very good case contrary to what I am advocating can be made. Thus the Jungian analyst H. G. Baynes said that the argument against ascent experience is analogous to the attempt to put out the sun because it gives some people distorted vision. Ecstatic energy, he said, is our "real gold"; we need to learn how to navigate the territory, not to declare that it shouldn't exist.

Certainly, the cognitive insight of ascent experience is earth-shattering; people who have it emerge wondering where they have been all their lives. Purely intellectual or analytical knowing is revealed as being hopelessly incomplete. Life takes on a vivid quality, for one becomes concerned with things that really matter; it is no longer a question of filling up seventy-odd years with "interesting projects" (more often, not so interesting). The event is so numinous, so meaningful, that one's relationship to the world, and to oneself, will never be the same, and thus to talk of abandoning this kind of experience would seem to be, as Baynes said, a great mistake.

The problem is that the very strength of the ascent tradition, viz.,

From *Coming To Our Senses* by Morris Berman. Copyright © 1989 by Morris Berman. Reprinted by permission of Simon & Schuster.

the granting of revealed (i.e., certain) knowledge, is also its weakness. The Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, once wrote:

*In my solitude
I have seen things very clearly
that were not true.*

The "clarity" of archetypal energy is just a bit too wonderful. It is simply too easy to get a "message from God" and be off and running with it. For example, on July 7, 1986, Juan Gonzales, a Cuban refugee who happened to be living in New York and, at the time, riding the Staten Island ferry, killed two people and wounded nine others with a sword in an attack he said was ordered by God. Gonzales said that he was specifically ordered to take control of the ferry in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This sort of "amazing grace" gives one moment to pause; and if it occurs as a mass phenomenon, we are in very deep trouble.

I know one man who had an ascent experience in a technological context, and now believes that only technology can save us. In California, I met another man who came down off his ecstasy with the belief that he had been contacted by UFOs, and that his job was now to prepare the planet for its salvation via extraterrestrial visitors. My own experience came through a particular type of body meditation; hence, this book. So I am in the position of arguing that the energy of the universe originates in the body, and is generated as a field between bodies, but how can I be sure this is right? It may be much more complicated than this. In certain Oriental traditions, for example, the world is seen as pervaded by a life force — *ch'i, ki, prana*, etc. — and the body is regarded as merely a talented receptacle or "accumulator" for such energy. My approach of the nemo or gap, of Winnicott and Lacan, may be much too narrow, although I admit I have said more than just this. But my point here is that if I decide that ascent experience is the last word, then I can create a religion out of the body and be done with all other alternatives. I may be a lot more harmless than Juan Gonzales, but — if I am going to base everything on revelation — not a whole lot less rigid. Ascent experience is perhaps not as enlightened as it would at first seem.

This issue is the subject of two very important books on heresy, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* and Jacob Needleman's *Lost Christianity*. Both authors recognize the "problem" of the Self/Other dynamic, and how it has gotten translated over the centuries into the social arena as the bitter and recurrent struggle of heresy vs. orthodoxy. They suggest that ecstatic dissolution of the Self may not be the best way out of this (binary) game. For Eco, only humor can cut through the blind assurance of revealed experience; it throws us back on ourselves, gives us some psychic

distance from the things we are so certain of. (Can you imagine someone like Jerry Falwell poking fun at his own religion? How refreshing — and spiritual — this would be.) I have called this talent "reflexivity," and shall say more about it below (it is not the same thing as cultural relativism); but it is important to note that for Eco this reflexivity, this ability to see ourselves in a state of need and commitment, to actually observe it, is the ultimate heresy, much more heretical than any new revelation, any new paradigm. Eco's fictional spokesman, William of Baskerville, tells his assistant, Adso, that the devil is essentially "faith without smile," and adds:

Fear prophets, Adso, and those prepared to die for the truth, for as a rule they make many others die with them. . . . Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth . . . because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from the insane passion for the truth.

For Jacob Needleman, the real Christianity that got lost and buried somewhere in the first century A.D. was not that of Gnostic ascent, but this same type of reflexive ability — what he calls, following Gurdjieff, "self-remembering." It is, he says, the experience of yourself, *not* the experience of God. Needleman may be correct, historically speaking (I personally tend to doubt it), but he does quote Meister Eckhart in his defense to good effect:

Aware of it or not, people have wanted to have the "great" experiences . . . and this is nothing but self-will. . . . There are thousands who have died and gone to heaven who never gave up their own wills.

"One longs . . . for God, or for Meaning . . ." writes Needleman, "and does not see that the longing itself is the beginning of the answer one is seeking." Ecstasy can bind communities together, he points out but to what end? We have pursued mystical love, he says, whereas what we need is "ontological love."

This is the crucial point — that true enlightenment is to really know, really feel, your ontological dilemma, your somatic nature. The mystic seeks to go up; the ultimate heresy, to my mind, is to go across, or even down. I recall how, a few years ago, I did a two-week meditation retreat with a former Theravada Buddhist monk, and asked him, in the course of it, where ecstatic experience, or Great Mother consciousness, fit into the whole thing. "Oh," he said with a wave of his hand, "in Buddhism, that is regarded as a very *low* form of consciousness." He went on to say that ascent was regarded in his tradition as *mara* — an obstruction to enlightenment. In the same way, Needleman characterizes ecstasy as a form



True enlightenment is to really know, really feel, your ontological dilemma, your somatic nature. The mystic seeks to go up; the ultimate heresy, to my mind, is to go across, or even down.

of bondage. The real goal of a spiritual tradition should not be ascent, but openness, vulnerability, and this does not require great experiences but, on the contrary, very ordinary ones. Charisma is *easy*; presence, self-remembering, is terribly difficult, and where the real work lies. "The highest art," goes an old Tibetan saying, "is the art of living an ordinary life in an extraordinary manner." That this could become the modality of an entire society is an inspiring possibility.

Of course, ascent experience, and what it carries with it, won't go away by fiat, so in this sense Baynes is right — we shall have to learn to navigate the territory. For at least since the binary worldview of Neolithic civilization, we are wired up in a Self/Other dynamic that pulls us toward transcendence, with all its brilliant and destructive possibilities. Yet a much deeper life lies beyond that of the ascent structure, which is finally about salvation, or redemption; for the ultimate heresy is not about redemption but, as I said earlier, about the redemption from redemption itself. It is to be able to live in life as it presents itself, not to search for a world beyond. (Politically, of course, this is very often not possible; but it could be argued that our political forms, and messes, are themselves the results of binary thinking and the ascent mentality.)

The shift away from ascent, and toward bodily presence in the world, implies certain things that go with the territory, as it were. The first of these is an end to the binary contrast mode of consciousness and personality structure. This *seems* inherent, but it is not; it is a Neolithic artifact, a translation of Tame vs. Wild into Self vs. Other and earth vs. heaven. Beneath the dualistic layer of the human psyche is a kaleidoscopic one that I suspect hunter-gatherer cultures possessed, and that is very much about finding ecstasy in details. The American anthropologist, Stanley Diamond, notes that "primitive" life is characterized by direct engagement with nature and bodily functions. The "sense of reality," he writes, "is heightened to the point where it sometimes seems to 'blaze.'" There is no ascent in this "ecstasy"; *all* of life is sacred, not just "heaven." The structure is horizontal rather than vertical, and it has a much greater "feminine" element in it than does our present consciousness. Vertical structures all have a Grail quest behind them; they are all a form of male heroics. So most of our history has been a kind of unnecessary artifact. Self/Other opposition, binary structure, Transitional Objects, heresy vs. orthodoxy, ecstatic experience vs. "ordinary" life — all of this may be adventitious, in the last analysis, and certainly not part of "human nature." That meaning for us occurs only by means of conflict, or dialectics, may

*An idea is
something you have;
an ideology, something
that has you.*



only reflect a very shallow notion of meaning. This "meaning" is dependent on a mind/body split; without that dichotomous game, most of our history would simply vanish into thin air, since so much of it is about the hero's journey to heal that gap. But journeys are for the most part undertaken out of restlessness; some sort of lack, or need, is typically present. Things are "not right" here, there is something better to be found somewhere else. Vision-quests and ecstatic journeys were perhaps absent from hunter-gatherer societies, or, if present, probably received much less emphasis until the advent of the Neolithic age. Instead, life was its own purpose. Ecstasy is necessary only in a bifurcated world; the hero makes sense only in a religious (binary-mythic) context.

This is why New Age "paradigm-shift" finally won't work; no matter how radically different the content might be (and I am very skeptical on this point anyway), the form is really identical. Paradigm-shift is still part of the salvation mentality, a patriarchal mind-set that tells the hero to persevere, find a new form of consciousness that will give him redemption. The awareness that this whole structure is an illusion is the heresy Needleman and Eco are talking about, the real heresy we need to embrace.

Horizontal consciousness, as well as reflexivity, also implies a society of tools rather than worldviews. The minute anything — science, feminism, Buddhism, holism, whatever — starts to take on the character-

istics of a cosmology, it should be discarded. *How* things are held in the mind is infinitely more important than *what* is in the mind, including this statement itself. For there is a big difference between ideas and ideology. An idea is something you have; an ideology, something that has you. All of these beliefs, techniques, and ideologies are useful; but they are not "true." What is true is our need to stuff the gap, our longing, our drive to create worldviews out of tools so we can be "safe." At least, that is true right now. My guess is that there is a deeper truth, one that could be part of a new culture. This deeper truth is that we really *don't* need to stuff the gap, etc., so that we can be "safe." In this new culture we would observe this need for "safety," but would refuse to give in to it. Safety would come from the body, not from this or that system.

I do not mean to imply by all this that future consciousness would consist in permanent suspended animation, or hanging out in transitional space. Given enough somatic (ontological) security, this might be possible; but a complete *via negativa* is not an answer, and it certainly isn't very complex. The whole notion of "empty space" has its limits, and some form of coding is always necessary for social and psychological life. The argument for the "paradigm of no paradigm" can only be pushed so far; in recent times, Krishnamurti was the great exponent of this, and he became, in fact, the anti-guru guru. In his book *Lying Down*, Marco Vassi pegs the prob-

lem of this argument very astutely. It is all, says Vassi, negative intelligence. In denouncing all methods and worldviews, Krishnamurti failed to come up with any positive alternative. Year after year, says Vassi, Krishnamurti would chide his aging fans for having made no breakthrough in terms of their attachments, but he categorically refused to discuss how such a breakthrough might be made. In actual fact, Krishnamurti, as a guru, was the last version of the male heroic structure. As Vassi says, "his mission, ironically, may turn out to have been something like that of a Moses for the horizontal paradigm."

Part of our goal, undoubtedly, is to learn what it means to live without paradigm, but I also sense a much more complex possibility, viz., developing a radical new code that is itself about coding, and is not merely a shift in coding. This is where reflexivity — the awareness of coding as coding, or Gurdjieff's "self-remembering" on a cultural scale — becomes so important. Christianity, Catharism (and romantic love), science, and even cybernetic holism (nature seen as information exchange) are all heuristically valuable, but they are not "true." Only our need for truth is true, and the problem arises when any one of these tools, or codes, is mapped onto our entire ontology. Reflexivity is about the breaking away from this vertical, binary pathology, for it does not (necessarily) say, "Have no codes," but only requires a deliberate awareness of constructing and using a code, and the having of that awareness as part of your code.

Writers such as Gregory Bateson and Henri Atlan are in the vanguard of this, but my favorite remains the late great teller of tales, Jorge Luis Borges. In one short story, "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius," he describes a country that chooses a different reality every day (no repeats allowed). One day they are mystics, another, mechanists, another, something else. No one in this country is allowed to publish a book unless they also include in it its counterbook, which is the argument based on opposing premises. Such a life would undoubtedly be a bit too hectic for most of us, but I believe it is a valuable model to contemplate.

Commenting on self-awareness, Lawrence Durrell writes:

Civilizations die in the measure that they become conscious of themselves. They realize, they lose heart, the propulsion of the unconscious motive is no longer there. Desperately they begin to copy themselves in the mirror. It is no use.

"Truth disappears with the telling of it," he adds; "It can only be conveyed, not stated." "Losing heart" is certainly a possibility, but I am not sure it is inevitable, especially if — for the first time in history

— we would develop (or grow into) a culture that would accept the fact that the truth can only be conveyed (not stated), and that unconscious process must be allowed to remain unconscious. For reflexivity does not mean making everything conscious; it should include the notion that the code, of which you are aware, is fed by sources that lend themselves only to indirect awareness. This too facilitates the habit of not mistaking tools for worldviews, for one's worldview, in effect, becomes Mystery: there is some sort of larger process operating that we cannot directly apprehend, but that permeates our bodies and moves toward healing. Einstein's question remains the crucial one: "Is the universe friendly?" (What do you think?)

This whole subject of coding, and the coding of coding, is addressed from another angle (that of the history of music) by Jacques Attali in his book *Noise*. By "noise" Attali means what I have called silence, i.e., the space between codes. Attali calls for a new form of self-conscious coding which he refers to as "composition," and which could be truly liberatory. Both the history of Western music and that of Western political formations have been characterized by epochs, system-breaks and paradigm-shifts, he says, of new codes violently rupturing and replacing old ones (no surprise there). Attali believes that the next code, "composition," might just be decentralized, independent, and, in effect, radically democratic. Composition, he says,

proposes a radical social model, one in which the body is treated as capable not only of production and consumption, but also of autonomous pleasure. This network differs from all those preceding it. . . .

What may be arising now, he says, is not a new music (read: paradigm), but a new way of *making* music (read: reflexivity). Composition means that

we create our own relation with the world and try to tie other people into the meaning we thus create. . . . Doing solely for the sake of doing, without trying artificially to recreate the old codes in order to reinsert communication into them. Inventing new codes, inventing the message at the same time as the language. Playing for one's own pleasure, which alone can create the conditions for new communication. A concept such as this seems natural in the context of music. But it reaches far beyond that; it relates to the emergence of the free act; self-transcendence, pleasure in being instead of having. . . . [I]t is at the same time the inevitable result of the pulverization of the networks, without which it cannot come to pass, and a herald of a new form of socialization,

for which self-management is only a very partial designation.

Attali's approach is very similar to Vassi's critique of Krishnamurti. "Announcing the void," he says, "... is blasphemy. But blasphemy is not a plan, any more than noise is a code." Composition is really about the trust in direct experience, about taking pleasure in the body, and about creating an exchange between bodies. It "is inscribed not in a repetitive world, but in the permanent fragility of meaning. . . . It is also the only utopia that is not a mask for pessimism." Our ultimate goal, he concludes, is to transform "the world into an art form and life into a shifting pleasure." This is the ultimate heresy, then, and a possible outcome of a history of ascent, of system-breaks and paradigm-shifts that are exciting on one level, tedious on another: life characterized by so much somatic security, so much incarnation, that the need for "truth" is far less important than the need for love; and finally, not really in conflict with it. Incarnation means living *in* life, not transcending it. The last paradigm-shift has to be a shift to a world in which paradigm-shifts become unnecessary, if not actually banal.

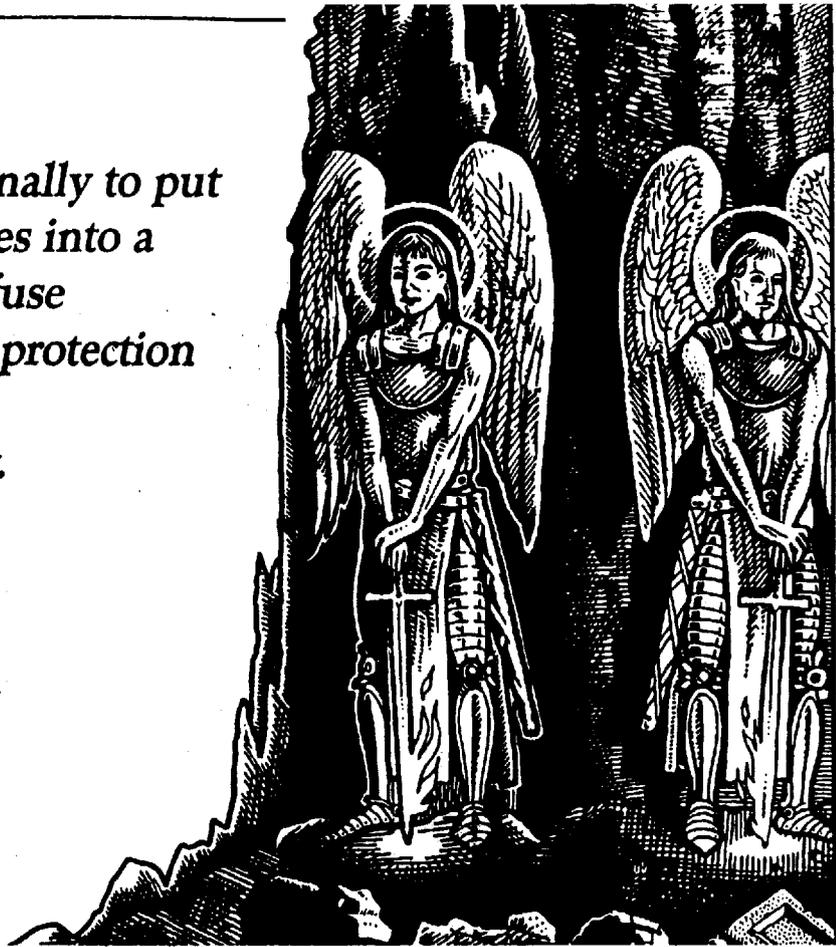
Reflexivity, then, or perhaps what amounts to Jacob Needleman's notion of "ontological love," opens the door to composition, or what Dorothy Dinnerstein, in her brilliant essay, "The Mermaid and the Minotaur," refers to as "enterprise." I think this is similar to what I referred to, early on, as the "cosmological urge," which should be understood as not having any edge of desperation attached to it. In terms of how we have lived on the planet, at least ninety-five percent of our experience has not been about gap-stuffing and the search for Transitional Objects, and this raises the question of what future alternatives might consist of. The idea here is not to return to some "primitive," hunter-gatherer state, but rather to explore the possibilities of a life grounded in somatic integrity. In his book *Life Against Death*, Norman Brown raised just this question; but, as Dorothy Dinnerstein notes, Brown fell into the error of regarding all enterprise — the attempt to comprehend the world, or even involve oneself in it — as the attempt of the infant to console itself for the loss of the Primary Unity, or kinesthetic wholeness. All of culture is thus seen as a form of substitute satisfaction. What Dinnerstein argues is that we have to distinguish between enterprise and driven behavior. Enterprise, says Dinnerstein, is actually a healthy thing, a primary satisfaction rather than a secondary one. The problem, she says, lies not in enterprise per se but in the situation in which the kinesthetic is renounced to the point that the visual is needed to fulfill compensatory functions. Brown, Rôheim, Balint, Merleau-Ponty, Wallon, and Lacan were guilty

of what might be called "universalization" — they zeroed in so completely on this one tendency that they mistakenly turned it into the whole of the human condition, and thereby skewed the meaning of human effort. All of these writers, Dinnerstein essentially says, were correct insofar as they recognized that we ruin enterprise by trying to get it to replace a Primary Unity we originally lost, but incorrect insofar as they argued that this is embedded in the structure of the human psyche (or body) itself and that one cannot relate to the world, and to our loss, in a different way. There is a way of going about enterprise, particularly as it applies to creativity, in which the activity is *preceded* by wholeness, rather than being a frantic attempt to achieve it. This frantic approach to life, says Dinnerstein, is not inevitable; we really don't have to spend our lives chasing ecstasy in an effort to shut down the nemo. It is in fact possible to embrace enterprise, the cosmological urge, Attali's "composition," and the like in terms of a living out of the ebb and flow of union and separation.

How shall we characterize this? A similar approach to the notion of enterprise is present in certain schools of Buddhism. The Pali word *jivitindriya*, which is sometimes translated as "vitality" or "life principle," is used to stand for the energy that remains in the human being after enlightenment occurs, i.e., after fear, hatred, and delusion are eliminated from the human soul. It is said to arise at the moment of conception and depart at the moment of death. It is a *positive* force, according to the Pali texts. In a similar vein, American Indians often spoke of a "gesture of balance." To clutch at Transitional Objects, regardless of what form they may take, is to lose balance, whereas real liberation is about resiliency, not about "truth." The gesture of balance *should* be a given; my own experience is that unless one works at it, it only emerges at the oddest moments: a joke someone cracks in a railway compartment, at which everyone smiles simultaneously; a simple look of understanding between yourself and a stranger who stops you and asks for the time; the moment you catch yourself, as it were, staring absentmindedly out of the window on a gray Sunday morning, having momentarily forgotten about your coffee and the crossword puzzle you were working on. At such moments, life is neither *this* nor *that*; it just *is*. This is body time, not ego time; the interaction of your Being with reality. What will you remember at the moment of your death? Will it be the moment on the train, or when you interacted with a stranger, or when you looked out of the window on that dull, gray Sunday long ago? What does it mean to be alive right — *now*?

There is only one hope for our situation, and that is that the gesture of balance once again become a way of life; that Self and Other be seen as interrelat-

We are asked finally to put our entire bodies into a situation; to refuse numbness and protection in favor of risk and immediacy.



ed aspects of something larger, rather than as opponents. It is a long shot, because this is a still small voice that seems "romantic," or even weak, whereas what is paraded as strength is really a wall of tension, built on a Self/Other opposition. This latter, however, is not a gesture of balance, but rather one of desperation; but it is generally hard to see that. And it is difficult to imagine an entire culture moving in this direction; you can't find the State of Grace anywhere on a map of the known world. But just possibly there is an evolutionary trend here, literally in terms of our own survival, with more and more of us opting for exploration, "enterprise," and some form of reflexivity, rather than for the safety of rote or revealed knowledge and familiar formulas.

A unique opportunity is thus available to us now, perhaps for the first time in our history, and that is to intervene in our own evolution in a creative, and reflexive, way. To come back to John Fowles, he may have put this possibility most clearly when he wrote:

The nemo is an evolutionary force, as necessary as the ego. The ego is certainty, what I am; the nemo is potentiality, what I am not. But instead of utilizing the nemo as we would utilize any other force, we allow ourselves to be terrified by it, as primitive man was terrified by light-

ning. We run screaming from this mysterious shape in the middle of our town, even though the real terror is not in itself, but in our terror at it.

The ability to utilize the basic fault creatively is as much an evolutionary option as our history of using it destructively. We are not condemned to the nemo and a whole array of substitute satisfactions. No matter how likely a scenario this is, it is simply not inevitable. It is not so much a matter of mastering the terror Fowles speaks of as being able, for starters, to observe it in a neutral fashion. This one tiny (non)-heroic act then opens the door to the world of enterprise, *jīvitindriya*, the going out to the world in a spirit of aliveness and curiosity rather than one of need and desperation. And this act is heroic, not in the ascent or vision-quest sense of the word, but in the sense of something at once necessary and private and extremely difficult, because it requires doing the one thing that we seek to avoid at all costs: we are asked finally to put our entire bodies into a situation; to refuse numbness and protection in favor of risk and immediacy. That is the ultimate meaning of human life on this planet, the hidden history which, down through the ages, the human race has struggled with, and the destiny and choice which now, after all these millenia, stares us uncompromisingly in the face. ■

**SPECIAL INAUGURAL REPRINT ISSUE: INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT TOOLS
AND IDEAS Whole Earth Review Dedicated to the Incoming Administration 20 January
1996 - Link Page**

[Previous](#) [Social Security Numbers: And Other Telling Information \(Fall 1989\)](#)

[Next](#) [Living in the Office \(Summer 1989\),](#)

[Return to Electronic Index Page](#)