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Nonsense in the Classroom*

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"You have often heard the sound of two hands clapping; what is the sound of one hand clapping?" This is pure nonsense unless you understand it. If you wish to understand it you must not try; that is, you must understand that it really makes no difference whether you try or not try, for both are ways of trying. If you can manage that insight, then you must know that all of what you can do or not do is absolutely spontaneous despite your feeling that you are in control. Finally, you see that there is nothing at all to be done, for it is all done for you; everything is fully in accord with the Way of nature. You simply let it happen, including your feeling that it happens because you will it, and that's it, that's all there is to do.

If all of this sounds absurd, which it should be because it is; and if you feel slightly peeved at having your cortex tied in a knot, then you have sampled some of the fare which the young ingest as part of their daily sustenance. Not just the young, but more and more people of all ages are reaching toward esoteria in search of new meaning in life: a revitalizing of mind, sense, emotion and imagination, all of which seem to be engulfed in artificialities. The quest for a new realization is both real and urgent, a fact that cannot be denied by anyone in tune with the times. The search for new relationships with nature, for expansion of consciousness, and for revolutionary changes in the shape of human affairs is regarded as an absurdity only by the very naive. The collective thrust of the youth movement, which by now should be understood more as an emerging umwelt than a generational conspiracy, is changing our world and we are well beyond the point of no return. To the chagrin of many educators, the Zen-nonsense of the young has invaded the classroom. We can set up
formal barriers to discourage its entry; and because of a formidable arsenal of sanctions at our disposal we can seal off discourse, but the preoccupation remains, seething behind skeptical eyes that mirror the irrelevance they see.

But what does this word “relevance” mean? Many of our students are quick to reply: “It means discovering how to think instead of what to think. It means finding out how to be what one truly is without the phoniness usually attached to what one must be in order to matter in an equally phony society.” What an irony that any educator should recoil at the intrusion of such demands into his classroom. How distasteful, many would say, that having paid scholarly dues and earned a right to mortar boredom, I am not now allowed the privilege of pure disciplinary exercise. And, by the way, where are the campus ministers and counselors and why aren’t they handling these problems? The quick answer is that matters have literally gotten out of their hands.

Like it or not, the questions students are asking are here to stay. Attempts to relegate their existential concerns to one or another “expert” only deepen the despair with which they view archaic institutions. Of equal, if not greater importance, attempts to deflect their deep concerns show a callous insensitivity on our part and a disregard of what could be one of the most significant educational opportunities in history. We are actually witnessing a willingness on the part of students to explore a widening number of alternatives in how humans can know. Can it be that this ideal to which educators have long paid tribute has become, through approaching realization, a grizzly threat? If so, we must ask ourselves why; and undertake, with our students, a soul-searching quest for a release from hypocrisy.

There is little doubt that much demand for more relevance in education is related to a problem that, at first blush, seems less profound. For many young people, education is meaningless simply because their attendance has become a routinized aspect of getting through life. Attendance at the university, like a seat at the breakfast table, is simply a way of keeping body and soul together. The university is a stepping stone and a meal ticket. But, I said that this was a less profound problem at first blush. In reality, we encounter in these students an existential condition closely related to that of the Karma-ridden, Nirvana-seeking hippie. At the interface we find that they share the same intense feelings of frustration. There are wide differences in the degree to which these feelings are expressed, or even recognized, but the general mood of unhappiness has roots in existential concerns not unlike those voiced by the more articulate.

What I wish to imply is, I suppose, rather shocking. We should encourage more students to join the ranks of the articulate. Said another way, we should encourage the proliferation of long hair and
beards, wearing holes in clothes and the chanting of mantras in dead earnest instead of, as the case usually is, in keeping with fashion.

The picture I am trying to sketch is that of a burgeoning tide of change bearing down upon modern man and his institutions. Sooner or later educators must recognize that none of the traditional disciplines or departments should claim immunity or privileged sanctuary. In reality, none can. We are trapped, despite our wishes, by the very nature of the questions we may try to ignore. For the young have woven a clever fabric which, if not highly sophisticated or articulated, is nevertheless crudely insightful in an exciting way. From out of a hodgepodge of Zen Buddhism, Vedantic teachings, radical economics, utopian politics, sexual and racial liberation, neo-Freudianism, Jungian analysis, occult everything, synthesized music, Gestalt therapy, environmental concern, ecological awareness, organic gardening and assorted psychedelic irregularities, they are generating a new umwelt that could well serve a Promethean purpose for new directions in human knowledge. A decision by an educator that he has no obligation to relate his discipline to such an emporium of esoteria only deepens frustration. The effect is to widen the scope of student discontent, thereby driving the educator to seek even more effective means of shoring up his discipline. The circle is especially vicious for being so unnecessary.

The topic to which this paper was to be addressed concerned the integration of both cognitive and affective factors in learning. Toward this end my route may seem, to say the least, circuitous. My point, however, is more direct: the most effective way to utilize emotion in learning is to thrust at the heart of what supports all our knowledge. We do this by examining assumptions. Not just those which are prerequisite to framing scientific hypotheses, but those that lie at the very roots of how we experience the world. Interestingly enough, by examining the latter we become better able to appreciate the role played by the former and to see how arbitrary "objective" knowledge really is. In general, the attempt is to redirect inquiry toward "how" questions instead of "why" questions. Instead of pursuing factual information, the effort is to talk about what it means to say that something or other is a fact. Hopefully, one of the outcrops of this is to discover that "facts" are very tenuous things on which to hang existential hats; they may serve a practical purpose in inquiry and application, but to lose sight of the metaphorical nature of knowledge is to restrict possibilities for exploring other alternatives. The rule of thumb is relatively simple; we talk about how something can be understood rather than why it happened. The first alternative allows excursion into any realm of inquiry, including the most highly subjective; while the second tends to settle discourse into narrow cause and effect relationships.
What does all this have to do with emotion? My supposition is this: that to direct inquiry toward basic assumptions is to challenge the very foundations on which our world views are constructed. By inducing an experiential “rupture” in underlying assumptions, we also create a commotion among values and attitudes, most of which remain free from serious examination throughout a person’s life. The more one undertakes an examination of assumptions, values, and attitudes, the more likely it becomes that the metaphorical nature of knowledge is revealed.

A search for specific techniques that can be used in the classroom for including both cognitive and affective components in learning processes misses the point. Moreover, it promotes a mistaken epistemology by assuming that experience is, in reality, dichotomized in the ways our categorizations imply; that is, that intellect and emotion are actually independent functions. Once the dualism is accepted, however, the task of finding ways to facilitate integration takes on the appearance of a valid project.

As Lancelot Law Whyte suggested, the next development in man will be a discovery that intellect is a part-function in an organic system. What we call emotion is better understood as an organism’s way of organizing and coordinating specialized processes. To pretend that they are separate is to propose a foundation for living that is disruptive and ultimately destructive. Such a condition reaches crisis dimensions whenever intellect assumes the organizing role and attempts to impose its own requirements on the system of which it is a part.

This means that the judgments we make about the world are reflections of our existential state; they are value orientations from which attitudes and perceptions take shape. If the prevailing value-orientation is that more and more of life should coincide with the specialized, part-processes of intellect, then all of our relationships with man and the rest of nature are affected accordingly.

Seen in proper perspective, objective knowledge is a way of modeling organismic-environmental processes. It is strictly metaphorical in that a language is used to refer to experience. Subsequently, language is organized and meaningful only to the extent that it provides an adequate metaphor. However, when the primary object of our attention is language or objective knowledge generally, intellect becomes a metaphor for itself. A consequence is further specialization and sub-specialization, more and more sophisticated use of metaphor until our lives are literally preoccupied with the matrices produced. At that point we view the task of integrating knowledge, and finding within that labyrinth some room for emotion, as a very complex and difficult problem.

In essence, this is the shape of our current world view. We have
assumed, at a fundamental level of our existence, that the solution to complex problems is to be found by manipulating or “techniquing” the matrices which constitute the problem, not knowing that the consequences, which can have a certain practical and temporary appeal, increase the problem over the long run. The mistake we make in settling accounts prematurely is in assuming that a solution will always be couched in the same terms in which the problem is presented. At that point the effort can become as absurd as trying to put out a fire with buckets of gasoline.

What we need is a 180-degree reversal in approach. Instead of working from the top down, as it were, we work from the bottom up. It is here that we find the most accessible avenue for appealing to students’ interests. It also happens that we can utilize the emerging ethos of the youth movement as a principal raw material. In brief, we direct inquiry to the heart of the most basic, and often as not, the most unexamined assumptions a person holds. The intent, as I have said, is to provide the means for introducing a “rupture” in one’s world view, which might mean nothing more than creating a vague doubt that the way one sees the world is actually as settled as he thinks. How one does this is, of course, a very personal consideration that must be fashioned to a particular setting and situation. The important thing to remember is that every discipline or way of knowing is fair game.

My own research with ways to encourage this type of inquiry among students has shown that reactions often vary from a vague awareness that something “interesting” is being discovered to an almost startling discovery by a student that he is immersed in a universe that is kaleidoscopic, slightly frightening, but totally amazing. I have also found that students who “catch on” (or who had already caught on before) tend to become deeply interested in what others are thinking and feeling; they are curious to know how the world appears through different sets of eyes.

In discussion groups, consequently, the tone of dialogue often approaches that of a sensitivity group. Frequently, students report having kept a disheveled roommate awake half of a night trying to share with him some highly charged, cosmological insight. On the other hand, there are always some students who confess total bafflement. Seeing some of their peers enthusiastically carrying on inquiry tends to compound their sense of frustration. It will be interesting and important to see what changes, if any, occur with these students over an extended period of time. Will there be, for example, a delayed-reaction “ah-ha” experience? It should be understood that I am not proposing a strict methodology for understanding the kinds of inquiries to which I refer. For my own purposes I am continuing to develop specific pedagogical devices, but they cannot always be transferred directly to other settings and situations. What I am pro-
posing is the adoption of a general framework within which a wide variety of inquiries can occur. Whether or not the framework should be recommended for each and every class a person takes or, on the other hand, provided for in specially designated areas, is an important but difficult problem. In terms of the current structure of most universities, the restrictive nature of curricula and a wide disparity of professorial views, I tend to think we must rely upon the latter. If so, we can find herein a valuable opportunity for undergirding one of the most fragile parts of higher education. Specifically, I am talking about the current status of general education on university campuses. It appears that wherever general education is surviving these days it is under attack, and often for good reason. One need only peruse articles written by generalists to discover an overdetermined preoccupation with a defense of liberal studies at the expense of producing positive proposals. As more and more emphasis is placed upon specialized skills, and as increasing numbers of departments demand the glamor of advanced degree programs, we can expect general education to come under heavier fire. After all, there are only so many resources to go around. If general education is to not just survive, but to perform a vital function, a common interest must be sought sufficient to muster a united effort. It will not be enough to experiment with calculated reorganizations or reforms, if by that we mean simply stirring the pot a different way. What is needed is a bold new awareness of human potentialities, limited only by our capacity to entertain mystery in the midst of objective knowledge and to admit risk-taking as a part of what must be done.

The contribution that general education can make is not interdisciplinary. It must be meta-disciplinary, meaning that sheer speculation, dabbling in mysticism, and unabashed innovation becomes the general rule. It is here that we can find today's students ready and willing. It should also be here that the strongest vote of confidence is forthcoming from disciplines and departments. Ironically, an accusation that such dabbling is going on is often used as a principal argument for the demise of general education. What is required, as Aldous Huxley said, and as I am trying to show, is an understanding that what one knows depends upon his state of being.

If we are troubled by growing anti-intellectualism among the young, we have largely ourselves to blame. After all, have we really been asking important questions? Have we really dared to make the university a forum where one can become totally involved? If we are dismayed at a lack of enthusiasm for traditional studies, we can at least be honest about our own misgivings. Can we admit, for example, that there is nothing very exciting about a great mass of dusty, over-cerebralized research journals yellowing on library shelves? For our own sake, as well as our students', we should stop pretending that
simply to anticipate a day when a millennial synthesizer will “pull it all together” is sufficient justification and adequate compensation for a lifetime spent upon trivia.

Despite current rhetoric, there is no point in talking about how education will be saved; that is, unless one is so short sighted and presumptuous as to define education as something that occurs exclusively in universities. Even at that there is little question that universities will survive in some form or another. The important question is whether or not the university will undertake the responsibility for bringing about imaginative new developments in its possible evolution. What this will be or should be can only be speculative at this point, but it must be imaginative speculation. It must be imaginative to the extent of attracting teachers as well as students, and encouraging their enlistment in a community of shared interests. As I have said, central among these interests can be a venture into a new humanism, released from the prejudices of the past that have clouded our vision and held from us the view of man as an integral part of nature that extends to we know not where. Perhaps this will mean the creation of a new interface—one that has yet to develop fully because we have not yet realized the extent to which our pre-conceived notions of open-mindedness are, in themselves, actually perception-binding assumptions. The interface I suggest is between more or less traditional forms of inquiry included in university curricula, such as one usually finds in the sciences and humanities, and much less traditional areas of inquiry heretofore relegated to religionists and mystics: persons standing on the outer fringes of Western societies uttering apparent irrelevancies and contributing nothing in the way of social or cultural progress. We must see, however, that the irrelevance of the mystic is related not so much to the substance of his experiences or the content of what he attempts to articulate, as to the countervailing force of popular notions concerning “social and cultural progress.” With increasing alarm over man’s mishandling of social and environmental ecologies, it becomes ever more likely that these notions must change. It is with no small degree of irony that some scientists, for example, in attempting to locate a philosophical backdrop from which they can frame ecological inquiry, are turning to the esoteria of mysticism and mythology, there to find world views that fire the imagination and furnish spiritual assurance in their quest for a science equal to our existential and environmental crises.

I think it is entirely possible that the growing interest in Eastern thought, attempts to renew and invigorate psychoanalysis, a reexamination of the role of myth in our lives, and countless other efforts to relate man to the world in a holistic manner are showing the way toward an integration of many facets and styles of human inquiry. It is incumbent upon educators to seize the opportunity of producing
this integration and to rely upon the excitement it provides in planning our educational ventures. Let there be no mistaking that most students are eager to join us on this journey. More than that, if we allow, they will lead the way. They may lack the precise articulation that we prefer, and they may initially bring to bear upon the enterprise nothing more than a vague, intuitive sense that things somehow "hang together," but that is all right. For now at least, that is enough. For it is likely that the earthy, sense-expanding preoccupations of the young can serve the same purpose for inquiry that the forward thrusting strokes of the artist's brush serves for predicting the shape of tomorrow. As Kenneth Boulding observed: "In these days the arts may have beaten the sciences to this desert of mutual unintelligibility, but that may be merely because the swift intuitions of art reach the future faster than the plodding leg work of the scientists." This means that educators, instead of despairing over the self-oriented, who-am-I concerns of the young, regard this as a rich opportunity to offer their services as steersmen and as resource personnel. Instead of discouraging their efforts to turn almost every classroom experience into an arena for self-exploration, we should accept the challenge as an open invitation to deal with basic questions of value and ways of knowing. Regardless of the subject matter, whether it is chemistry, mathematics, political science, auto mechanics, or English literature, an inquiry into how we know can inevitably lead to an examination of basic assumptions and values. Isn't this what we want? Isn't this an opportunity to put a discipline into perspective and to encourage innovation within that field as a result of having discovered new sets of alternatives and new possibilities for knowledge?

Again, this means seeing knowledge as metaphor, but this is not to discredit human intelligence and to render as futile any attempt to abstract nature's principles. If anything, it has a way of extending, almost infinitely, one's utter amazement regarding human potentialities.

In my own efforts to bring all of this down to the level of actual classroom experiences, I have chosen to undertake what some may view as a very risky business. I offer it here as an example of a direction which our efforts can take. I openly advocate revolution; not in the sense of forcefully overthrowing existing institutions, but in the sense of violating what is perhaps the most cherished and jealously guarded possession in the history of man. I attack a feeling; the one that lies behind a person's eyes, about midway between the ears. It is through reliance upon this feeling one is able to say: "I am. I just know that I am!"

For many people an undertaking such as this will appear to be an extremely exotic and presumptuous affair. Specifically, the most
frequent charge is that the degree of abstraction involved removes discourse to a hopelessly ethereal level having little to do with the practicalities of everyday life. This is, of course, a major challenge: to show that a reevaluation of the very core of one’s feeling of reality is, in relative terms, a subject for concrete analysis. If the project proves difficult, as it usually does, it is largely because man’s perception of himself has, for centuries, been shaped to a different mold. A suggestion that the “I-feeling” is the result of a particular perspective one can take towards himself, but that it has no inherent priority in a hierarchy of realities, strikes at the heart of what seems to be most real because of its overwhelming apparent.

The approach I have found most useful is to direct inquiry toward the transactional nature of experience and to show how the self is an integral aspect of the organismic-environmental processes that are apparently, but only apparently, external to the perceiving organism. When the self is perceived narrowly and located experientially within the confines of the skin, the result is an “I” that William James aptly characterized as “a noun of position.” A second task is to show how the feeling of “I am” can be seen as a tool or prosthetic device, useful enough as a highly complex expression of organism-environment relationships, but dysfunctional to an extreme when reified and isolated from the rest of nature. When reification occurs, man’s relationship with nature, including other people, becomes exploitative.

It is at this point that educational interests and endeavors can converge toward a unifying concern: that what one knows or can know indeed depends upon his state of being. Concerning this, however, educators, seduced by and overdependent upon scientific methodology, have been especially myopic. We have grown accustomed to the idea that if different states of being exist they are either pathological or supernatural; the former being thought of as a sickness meriting objective scrutiny, and the latter a crudity characterizing the prescientific mind. Also, instead of seeing that knowing and valuing are two ways of looking at the same process—two sides of the same coin—we insist that value must be established on the basis of what we know, which is blatant evaluation. On the other hand we imply that there are, nevertheless, certain immutable, a priori values lying at the foundations of human existence that provide constant direction to life. This is more than just a contradiction in terms, it is a definite epistemological barrier to the further evolution of man. The next development in man, if there is to be one, will be a rearrangement in his understanding of himself such that knowing and valuing, and identity and uniqueness are not seen to depend upon an isolated and encapsulated “I am.” Nor will they be seen as requiring a constant posture of defense against presumed forces which threaten the most cherished value of modern man: the notion that he has an independent self to defend.
One way of understanding man's prevailing sense of identity, as Philip Wylie suggests in his book *The Magic Animal*, is to see it based upon a sort of fourth dimensional territorial imperative. That is, our nervous system, in addition to mapping three dimensional space and providing models of the environment within which life is sustained, also maps a fourth dimension: time (what Bergson referred to as a sense of "duration"). Metaphorically, we can locate within our memories generalized experiences and images which serve as boundary markers in much the same way that we identify environmental space to which we lay claim. Experiences that threaten the integrity of our fourth dimensional "dreamland" may precipitate well-known defensive measures. Said another way, an experience that is not in keeping with what we claim as an aspect of our identity may create a situation similar to what Leon Festinger has called, "cognitive dissonance." Faced with an experience that produces dissonance, we must either reshape the externally perceived event, internally modify our own assumptions about the event, or simply leave the field by taking flight.

What I am suggesting is that, unless and until we undertake a total reevaluation of our assumptions about who and what we are, we cannot expect anything very revolutionary to occur in education or the rest of our human affairs. Unknowingly, the changes we seek are, often as not tainted by the deeply embedded assumption that our inner selves are islands of stability in the midst of a changing environment. Accordingly, our best efforts to be innovative, to find some method or device for producing a bold new pedagogy, turn out to be old wine in new wineskins: a reshaping of the environment that only recapitulates erroneous assumptions.

This is why I am suggesting that educators open their doors wide to the esoteric and erotic preoccupations of many students. If we fear that by so doing we will neglect other aspects of scholarship and inquiry, then we have failed to see that cosmic mindedness, rather than a threat to objective knowing, is in fact a mind-blowing invitation to know all that one wishes and can. If anything, the mystic is in a better position than others to see that logic and reason are infinitely flexible tools; that the limits to what one can know are defined more in terms of his assumptions than in terms of what is potentially available for analysis. In other words, standards of academic excellence should be established in regard to the questions one can ask, instead of just the answers he can supply. We must stress the point that simply being able to ask a question is the largest part of knowing, for answers lie hidden in the question itself. If one wishes to anticipate the kind of answer he will discover he need only ask himself the reason for asking. Valuing is knowing. Accordingly, our inability to perceive new horizons in educational methodology, processes, and goals is intimately tied to the way we view ourselves. By our own fruits we
reveal our self-understanding. In fact, the whole environment is a mirror that reflects the human condition. If we wish to brighten the image it is not enough to wipe the mirror, we must also clear our eyes.

This is why I have chosen to take risks in education and to deal with subject matter that sometimes leads to considerable anxiety. In some cases students have found themselves unable to attend to other classes because their encounter with Suzuki, Whitehead, Huxley, Meister Eckhart or St. John of the Cross has become an obsession. At the very least, a student may be fearful because he is unable to fit the class into a familiar category, thereby creating apprehension about what he must do to earn a passing mark. My anxiety results from having assumed that to encourage such psychological crises is right.

My entire case rests on yet another assumption which is, perhaps, the largest of all: that man's scientific, technological, and other cultural achievements are Janus-faced accomplishments. They resolve certain issues related to the human condition and, simultaneously, create the possibility for their own transcendence. To date, man has succeeded in conquering most, if not all, of the major impediments to insuring biological survival on this globe. A principal asset in having arrived at this point has been the illusion that the "I" is a concrete entity to be maintained and continuously reified, even beyond death. What was to this point an asset, however, has now become a decrement. For central to maintaining the I-illusion is a continuation of exploitative relationships with people and things. This means that our sense of identity, our feeling of "reality" depends upon maintaining a minimum of control both environmentally and interpersonally.

By control I do not mean only, or even most importantly, a sort of political privilege; rather, control is experienced. It is a conclusion one can draw whenever one elicits a response from someone or something else that conforms to his notion—his identity boundaries—of who and what he is. Control is sought even in the most innocent-appearing transactions perhaps involving little more than the feeling of recognition one gets from having been granted eye contact by another person. Unfortunately, our culture demands much more: a person must achieve the kind of recognitions that are tied to status, accumulation of goods and services, adequacy in social interaction, and even physical appearance. However, as the sheer weight of our numbers increases and presses us from every side, let us be forewarned that we are making human interaction an economic problem: the scarce resource is interpersonal recognition and the conclusion one can draw, that he has managed a degree of control.

The experience of cognitive dissonance, mentioned previously, is perhaps a better illustration of what I mean by control, or more precisely, a lack of control. The attempt on the part of an organism to repair dissonance in experience can be a project of major dimensions,
since prolonged dissonance will lead to a crisis in identity—a feeling that one is on the brink of non-existence. Research concerning behavior under conditions of sensory and social deprivation tend to confirm this. Under such conditions, individuals will attempt to create “artificial” forms of sensory or social stimulation in order to maintain a certain level of sensory activity. The prisoner in solitary confinement, for example, engages in soliloquy, or self-interaction, in an attempt to maintain a semblance of social stimulation. Over an extended period of time the effectiveness of soliloquy undergoes attrition due to the absence of actual social reinforcements. It is at this point that a person experiences the choking uncertainty of his own reality; without human intervention he undergoes psychological changes which, however abnormal in terms of his usual mode of existence, are nevertheless perfectly “normal” or consistent within the frame of his new ecological context. From the depths of his more primitive, but not forgotten, genetic endowment emerge psycho-physiological adjustments that shape his existence to the frame of his present condition. Like Rudolph Hess, surrounded by the walls of Spandau Prison, he takes to barking at the moon in search of, and in resignation to, new meanings and new relationships. All this is to say that, for modern man, maintenance of the I-feeling has become a project of large importance. Even physical death is feared not so much in anticipation of bodily deterioration as in dread of disappearance: simply not existing. For most people it is frightening to imagine “things going on” when one isn’t around to observe them. Somehow, it would seem terribly unfair.

At this point my efforts encounter a considerable philosophical and pedagogical challenge, which is to persuade students that we have not been the victims of a monstrous trick. Instead, the development of an encapsulated “I-feeling” is to be seen as a perfectly natural organismic appendage—a vehicle for continued evolution. But it is only a vehicle and not a stopping place as we currently assume. The next significant development in man will be a radical modification in the way man defines and senses his identity. In casting off his protective armor, man will not need to defend the integrity of his identity as if the reality of his being stood or fell on the basis of its continuous reification. Instead, man will see his identity as a trick of mirrors; that who and what he is is defined at each moment by a changing ecological context. He will see that every attempt to impose upon the context of the moment his preconceptions about who he is, generated and carried over from previous contexts, amounts to psychological pollution. In other words, if one errs by basing his identity exclusively upon memory, then each moment with its ecological uniqueness will be disrupted by the intrusion of elements having little if any relevance to the present context. Each person who attempts to utilize present contexts to reify his memory-based identity distorts the con-
text according to his need in relation to the urgency with which he seeks self-reification.

A consequence of man's need to define each ecological setting as a self-reifying or "I"-reinforcing situation is a driving preoccupation to be in control of things, to be able to twist and turn other things and people until they reflect characteristics consistent with one's need to feel "real." In this regard, it is possible to view the history of man's psycho-social development alongside the history of his cultural and technological achievements, and as two sides of the same coin. Both can be seen as aspects of the same underlying evolutionary process. This process to date has been toward the achievement of greater and greater organismic-environmental adjustment. The sense of "I-am," instead of reflecting the highest achievement in nature, is simply another of its marvelous machinations, a means for change and continued evolution. At the point where man was able to see himself as an object, and to develop a sense of "I," a qualitative change in evolution took place. Man's need to achieve control over nature and himself, and thereby to pursue the ever-retreating confirmation of the "I's" reality, was nature's turning back upon itself and rearranging the framework for future development. Ironically, man has never been anything besides an inseparable position in nature's patterns, but for a season he needed to believe otherwise. After eating of the Tree of Knowledge his expulsion from Eden was necessary lest he eat also of the Tree of Life and become one with the gods. It was necessary because an illusion of separateness was necessary if there was to be any history of mankind. Without something to be done, without a driving sense that something is to be accomplished, there is no plot and, therefore, no drama.

Herein lies man's greatest task: to achieve a new sense of identity that is free of compulsion and urgency; to redefine identity in terms of a unique ecological position one occupies instead of as a project one is given to perpetually convince both himself and others that his "I-feeling" is existentially "real." He must come to understand in every fiber of his body that his experience of life is shared by all others; yet, that he alone occupies a unique position in nature that assures, in the midst of sameness, an eternal difference.

To repeat, as population continues to increase, as man continues to cling to an outmoded identity, the allocation of recognition sufficient to reinforce his I-illusion becomes a problem of scarcities. As shocking as it may sound, the chief question confronting man is how long he can maintain the value of concrete identities for all while progressively denying more and more culturally prescribed accesses to its attainment. There is simply not enough recognition to go around. Either the cultural context must be changed to provide more opportunity for identity reinforcements—in which case the content of
modern culture is apt to become unbearably trite—or man must undergo a spiritual rebirth.

My prescription is clear and I have no hesitancy in offering it as a general recommendation. Man must take in his own hands the responsibility for affecting a next development in his own evolution. No small portion of this development must be undertaken by those involved in education; but prevailing educational institutions, including values, attitudes and expectations, cannot facilitate the change.

Unfortunately, the role that education can and must adopt is so unusual that few are likely to take it seriously. The role must be for education to become an appendage of organismic-environmental evolution, and that will require a major change in attitudes and perceptions. In short, it must combine the characteristics of a Zen monastery with the scholarly discipline of a sciencing society. This cannot begin until those who are in a position to affect innovation are willing and able to undergo their own experience of rebirth: a rejuvenation of insight that invites the planets to nestle within their cortex and which teases the nervous system out of its illusory bag of skin to dwell among the lilies. In sum, it all depends upon a deep, soul shattering realization that the "I" is, indeed, a noun of position.

All of this is very poetic. No doubt, to the practical-minded educator there seems to be little that can be directly translated into the dynamics of educational encounters. I confess that the hardest part of this essay is to convince one that a way for affecting translation is closer than he thinks. A way will be seen as soon as one attains a slight readjustment in perception and the way he feels his world. The first step is to understand in a profound way how ideas, and their etchings in the environment called technology, are extensions of organism-environment processes, and that there is a continuum from the processes that involve basic molecular and biochemical activities to our greatest cultural and technological achievements. In a very real sense, what man shapes with his hands constitutes a miraculous new development in evolution that man has not fully appreciated or understood. He has added, via technology and his crafts, a new layer to his brain: a layer that slows the speed at which ideas come and go. By shaping an idea in the world, by projecting an idea outward and having it take form, the environment itself serves as an extension of cortical tissue. As in all transactions, the interplay is complete; as a part of the organism that created it, ideas projected onto the environment not only change the nature of the environment, they also modify ongoing behavior. The shape of the environment, therefore, is both a reflection of and a principal ingredient in the human situation at any moment in time. Stated simply, what man thinks and feels is largely a consequence of the context in which he is embedded. Man does not ordinarily regard windows, machines, trees, rooftops and coke bottles as as-
pects of his nervous system; but aspects they are. The fact that they are seen as irrelevant to what he thinks and feels puts him at the mercy of their influence. No better example of this can be found than the school classroom. Although educators and students often strive for flexibility and expansiveness in behavior, they fail to appreciate how unlikely this is when the surroundings are rigidly contradictory. The very linearity of chairs, blackboards, windows, doors, and the blazing sterility of fluorescent lighting work against inventiveness and creativity. In a similar way, the assumptions which faculty and students alike bring to bear upon the educative process also prohibit plasticity in ideas. Until these assumptions are made conscious and evaluated, until they are seen as vestiges of the Euclidian molds in which they were cast, they will continue to function as cognitive and emotional blinders. Try as one may, the fruits of his creative efforts are predestined to fit a matrix consistent with the past.

An obvious way to escape the confines of our architecture is to avoid the classroom. Let inquiry take place anywhere. What is less obvious are ways to escape the confines of archaic assumptions that people bring with them regardless of the setting. This is a serious problem that few seem to recognize. It is a problem that must be engaged before any significant changes occur in regard to the increasing deterioration of social and natural environs. The assumption that the reality of man's "I," the validity of his existential being, depends upon achieving control over himself, others, and nature; the notion that individuality is assured through independence; the belief that without ongoing recognition and ingratiating social reinforcements man's soul will wither, must give way to startling new insights. Otherwise, all efforts to make things better only make them worse.

If a measure of these insights are to emerge within the present confines of formal education they must emerge despite an outmoded educational philosophy that is geared toward producing more of what has led man to his present state. This means engaging in subversion.

Under the facade of mortar board and gown there must be dedicated numbers of faculty and students working in concert to facilitate a new phase in their own evolution. They must be willing to undergo an existential reorientation such that the "I-feeling" that accompanied and propelled man into the twentieth century is put to rest. In its place arises a new sense of individuality; a seeing, thinking, and feeling that each person is an absolutely unique creature while inseparably rooted in a common ground of being. It must be understood that one's individuality is enhanced, not by withdrawal and self-assertion, but by drawing closer to nature and others the better to see reflected in them the features that are truly one's self. The more one becomes the other, the more he becomes what he is and can be. The greater his sense of unquestionable uniqueness, the greater his understanding that
his being is an act of grace, since there is no way to obtain what is freely given.

Here is a major project to be undertaken in education, but we must be forewarned that a search for the means to implement man's further evolution must range widely and direction must frequently be sought in strange quarters. If this means that the office of the university president becomes a shanty for a mid-day tea ceremony, then the president should serve. If it means that tunnel-visioned disciplinarians consort with incense burning yogis, then they should learn the full lotus. On the other hand, if it also means that connoisseurs of esoteria should peer through microscopes and fondle slide rules, then they should discover no less of nature as revealed by the scientist. Knowing takes many forms. If it means that all should learn ecology so well that an encapsulated "I" is suffocated under the sheer weight of expanded consciousness, then let the lessons begin.

A way of including emotional factors in the learning process is right under our noses. It is found in the tide of esoteria now sweeping the country, if we are only sensitive enough to discover in it a possibility, never before presented on such a large scale, of perceiving new dimensions to humanness. The mood for a change in man's consciousness is present, but it is essential that educators do their share in providing the resources and means for its articulation. We can begin by welcoming nonsense into our classrooms. For the nonsense of the new generation is, after all, based upon the most profound question men have ever asked: "Who am I?"

Let me anticipate a question. Some will ask: "How can such a proposal possibly have any relevance to my teaching interests?" A ready answer is that the relevance is already there if one uses some peripheral vision. For as I have tried to explain, the new insights beginning to dawn all center upon man and his symbiotic relationship with the rest of nature. What is required is not so much a reformation as a revolution, and the arena for struggle is one's own consciousness. To discover how one's particular discipline is related to the mystical vision is not an ephemeral luxury, it is a project of greatest importance ... for those who have eyes and can see; and for those who have ears and can hear.

* Dr. Williams initially prepared a version of this paper in response to a request to participate as an analyst in a discussion of "How Both Cognitive and Affective Experiences Can Be Integrated in the Learning Process" during the Twenty-sixth National Conference on Higher Education sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education in Chicago, March 14-17, 1971.