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Our Adopted Sensibility

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Our Adopted Sensibility

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Most men would have no character at all if imitation were impossible. Great and small portions of agreeable character traits are daily adopted by each of us from personalities that cross our path. To live is to desire, to envy, and to strive for perfection. After two thousand years of experience, civilization seems to have developed in man only one thing: the added capacity to receive impressions."

Cover Page Footnote

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OUR ADOPTED SENSIBILITY

J. W. MILLER

Most men would have no character at all if imitation were impossible. Great and small portions of agreeable character traits are daily adopted by each of us from personalities that cross our path. To live is to desire, to envy, and to strive for perfection. After two thousand years of experience, civilization seems to have developed in man only one thing: the added capacity to receive impressions.

There is hardly an individual beyond a certain level of intelligence who does not spend his life searching for formulas or attitudes that will give meaning and unity to his life. The centuries of men that had their Plato, their Aristotle or their Pascal may have sat back in relief, in possession of a convenient pattern for living. But a century that has in its midst the intricate philosophic attitudes of ninety generations of philosophers, theologians and poets, together with a system of communication that consistently bombards it with the thoughts and experiences of a thousand real and imaginary people, may spend a frustrated lifetime constructing a synthesis on which to live and act.

The intellectual person, he who orders his life by taking counsel with himself, almost invariably becomes dissatisfied with his life as he lives it. In this era of mass culture, everyone reaches maturity conscious of being the protagonist in that most important of life chronicles, his own. He has read so many works of biography, has been so conditioned by the experience of others through the visual arts of television and the cinema, that he has picked out patterns of behavior and ideal ways of living from these media, and decided to fashion his life progress within and towards certain desirable goals. As his life is lived, instead of accepting as natural each event that occurs, the individual is uneasy and frustrated because he himself does not react, or is unable to react, as 'expectant' socialization has led him to believe best. Too many persons today have 'created' the story of their lives and become the star in them, have created and planned their lives from *unavoidable* secondary representations of life.

Renaissance man thrived at the tail-end of an oral-culture, and we now exist at the head of a new one. There is little doubt that our intellectuals would rather talk, listen and look, than read. Marshal McLuhan, who once spoke at this college, reports that when he gave an identical lecture to four similar groups of students, each receiving it via a different media (television, radio, personal contact and written), and later tested them for recall, the retention was highest in this respective order. The omnipresent mass media—television, newspapers, magazines, books, records and the cinema, saturate mankind with a plethora of

pre-digested ideas and experiences, inducing most to conform to an ideal of intellectual and physical well-being, and confusing the few singular personalities by their very variety of possible modes of existence.

The God-given intellects of men have caused the birth of an external environment which equals in disunity the blind movement of their own minds. It is time for a few one-eyed outcasts in a country of the blind to renounce this creation, and by means of intelligent selection wean from their daily presence the pleasures, conveniences and bogus necessities that have made contemplation impossible, appreciation furtive, and existence a grotesque mockery of perdition.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO SHUN

FRANK ARGENTO

A cigarette will be made with a filter at each end.

England will refuse a loan.

There will be a TV first—an *adult* children's program.

Someone will reach the moon and be greeted by John Foster Dulles.

"Wagon Train" will reach its destination.

Perry Como will run a four-minute-mile.

Ike will win the National Open.

Edward R. Murrow will visit Ed Sullivan's audience.

A nationally-known brewery will brew a "wet" ale.

TV will witness a gunfight between Matt Dillon and Wyatt Earp using Colt 45's at Club Oasis while Maverick and Cheyenne play Twenty-One before an audience of 26 Men.

There will be a new documentary TV program titled "Where Was I When You Were There."

A nationally-known watch company will make a pocket sundial.

Congress will investigate the sport of Tiddley-Winks as Big Business.

A nationally known soap company will make a soap that is more than 99 and 44/100% pure, that has flakes every color of the rainbow, and that with a little Moretoil will wash cleaner than New Tide.

Last but not least, someone will make the *perfect* mousetrap.