



The world contracted to a recognizable image

at the small end of an illness
there was a picture
probably Japanese
which filled my eye

an idiotic picture
except it was all I recognized
the wall lived for me in that picture
I clung to it as a fly

—WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS



FRAGMENT ON

MAN AND THE SYSTEM

Billy Klüver

Our concept of reality has its origin in a series of basic decisions we make about the nature of the world. The total reality we experience relies thus on our own commitments in order to become meaningful. This total reality consists in a large part of organized systems which show us how to act, what to expect and which insulate us against the chaos of an unorganized world by imposing order. The systematization of our reality is necessary, since pure chaos or randomness could only describe a one-dimensional world. Whether a system is religious, psychological, scientific, technological, social or moral, a painting or a poem, they all originate in a nonrational act of man and are only relevant because of our basic commitment to them.

The total reality of each man changes with time, not necessarily in a predetermined way. The systems change and grow with our new insights and as we develop new methods to describe the systems. Sometimes a system becomes obsolete as a result of the introduction of a new set of basic decisions. Sometimes a system may become false to us as we discover that the system contains arbitrariness or myths.

Although the total reality of each man is different, the interactions between men and between men and the world result in a convergence of the individual systems into general systems which are necessary in order to establish communication. The general systems will demand the same type of commitment as do the individual systems. If we do not accept the basic decisions of a general system, it is not part of our reality. The general systems are thus part of a general reality which is a product of our accumulated knowledge and of our concept of how the general systems should serve the individual best.

A general system can never control or direct the growth and change of the individual reality according to a pre-determined scheme. In order to do so, the general system would have to have the capacity to anticipate and fashion every change in the individual realities which support it. Such a control is impossible since each man's concept of reality will develop more rapidly than the common reality of the general system. The total reality of each man does not depend on the presence of general systems in order to be meaningful. A theoretical possibility may exist: that one man can be controlled by a given, external system (a machine). However, the economic effort involved would make such a venture meaningless. It is, of course, also possible that the realities of two persons can coalesce to such an extent that they can control each other.

Even though man is free in relation to the general system, the system will interfere with his individual reality. In the case of a conflict, the general system may destroy the individual or it may put rigid limits on his actions. It would be possible to look upon this destruction of the individual as an act for which man had no responsibility if there existed a given or *a priori* general system. But an absolute system, by the nature of man's relation to the system, can be only individual.

The general systems are products of men and man has the capability to analyze, understand and direct them. Since the interaction between man and the general system is inevitable, man has the responsibility to shape them in such a way that the general systems correspond as closely as possible to the requirements of the individual realities. Furthermore, man has the definite responsibility to minimize the possible present or future destructive interference the general system may have with the individual. These responsibilities rest with every man, since we are all committed to the general systems as well as to the individual reality. However, the responsibilities rest heavier with those individuals who have a greater understanding of an insight into the nature of the continuous interchange between the realities of men and the reality of the general system, and of their convergence into a total reality of man.

In this country, at present, the artistic and intellectual growth is a magnificent confirmation of man's independence