6 August 1971, Volume 173, Number 3996

SCIENCE

Making Faces across the Gulf . . .

It is now some 12 years since C. P. Snow, in his Rede Lecture at Cambridge University, developed the theme of the "Two Cultures." As a novelist of distinction and a scientist of highly regarded reputation, Sir Charles was well qualified by experience across both areas to speak with reasoned authority.

If what he said in 1959 was pertinent—and not many denied it—how much more so it is today.

"In fact," he said then, "the separation between the scientists and non-scientists is much less bridgeable among the young than it was even 30 years ago. Thirty years ago the cultures had long ceased to speak to each other: but at least they managed a kind of frozen smile across the gulf. Now the politeness is gone, and they just make faces."

Closing the gap, he said, "is a necessity in the most abstract intellectual sense, as well as in the most practical. When these two senses have grown apart, then no society is going to be able to think with wisdom." As a scientist and as a humanist, Sir Charles could come to only one solution. "There is only one way to get out of all this: it is, of course, by rethinking our education."

The National Endowment for the Arts and the U.S. Office of Education, in their Artists-in-the-Schools Program, are attempting to work at least half of the problem. At the core of the program is the desire not to teach specific art disciplines—not to train painters and poets and sculptors—but to provide children at an early age with a feeling of esthetic sensibility, a way of absorbing creativity so that it colors an entire manner of experiencing, and reacting to, all of life.

A child so taught, were he to become a pure scientist, would have with him, always, a comprehension and an appreciation of the other "culture." It is not likely that he would reside complacently on one side of the "gulf of mutual incomprehension" of which Sir Charles spoke.

For one thing, he would know intimately, at the human level and in the course of his daily life, what sort of a person an artist is and from him what art is, how basic it is to the needs of and encouragement of life. For another, he would discover in the most refreshing sense the joy and sustenance engendered in that comprehension.

Through more than 300 professional dancers, musicians, poets, theater artists, film makers, painters, and sculptors, the Artists-in-the-Schools Program in the 1970–71 school year brought the essence of art as creativity to elementary and secondary school students in 31 states. Work is under way to expand the program next year to each of the 50 states.

Pure science and pure art may exist by themselves, but it is people they are for and people must have a comprehension of both to be whole. It is hardly possible to imagine a world totally without either art or science without projecting one uninhabitable for civilized human beings. Sir Charles's message is still clear—if the people who practice these indispensable disciplines don't learn to communicate more, there is the possibility that neither will be of much use to the totality of human beings.

There is, one would like to suggest, an "ecology" affecting the arts and sciences, the violation of which can be as harmful to civilization as any unbalancing of the natural order of things in the physical world.

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