

## ***On Simplicity, Complexity and Human Design, a set of 13 metaphysical miniatures***

(0) **W**here the climax of complexity comes we can never know for sure, but natural movement always begins and ends *with simplicity*.

Draw a circle which is not surrounded by emptiness; speak a word which does not emerge from, and return to:—*nothing at all*.

(1) **W**ithout first grasping the difference between true *complexity* and mere *complicatedness*, how shall we ever find simplicity? How shall we ever know the joy of discovering for ourselves a route across an impossibly labyrinthine high mountain pass, of returning to a camp with nothing but a stream, a fire, and a roof made of stars?

(2) **C**omplicatedness is difficulty which serves no purpose and is therefore without reason or meaning; it is difficulty which is unnecessary.

Nothing else defeats the mind more quickly than having to deal with, on a day-to-day basis, unnecessary difficulty which goes unresolved. In any rigorously hierarchical social structure, whether it be a school, a symphonic orchestra, or large corporation, this is the single most important factor which frustrates the intelligence and creativity of the individual.

Remarkably, in this sense, complicatedness in Nature does not exist.

(3) **C**reating *an image* of what we think is simple, and then setting out to achieve it, is the surest route to more complicatedness. The best way to come to simplicity is by taking away, one by one—or all at once—the root causes of unnecessary difficulty. The most elegant, graceful movements in dance are the ones which have eliminated all unnecessary tension; The most powerful rhythms and sounds of an orchestra are made by the players who have done away with all the friction of unnecessary effort.

(4) **J**ust as water flows around all obstacles, intelligence naturally moves to resolve all unnecessary difficulties. Poor design imposes arbitrary blocks or dams or limits to the freedom of this flow.

(5) **A**s Complicatedness increases, it results in ever-more pressure and urgency to deal with its myriad unintended side-effects. The result is a complication cycle which only stops when the internal conflicts and contradictions become so great that it simply breaks apart.

If one, however, stops and steps out of the forward momentum of this complication cycle, it becomes possible to see that the encountered difficulties are indeed unnecessary.

In other words, complicatedness is best dealt with by at first:—*doing nothing*. This means that we suspend frequently habitual patterns of behavior what we long enough for the source of the difficulty to reveal itself.

Remarkably, our common tendency is to continue doing what we normally do only because we are for different (tacitly contradictory) reasons highly committed to doing so.

This is why doing nothing is frequently the very most difficult thing to do.

(6) **M**achines are built up of parts which ideally have clear, knowable, causal relationships with one another: turn gear *a*, and gear *b* turns twice as fast, which in turn, moves gear *c* twice as fast, and so on. The structure as a whole, as well as the parts upon which the whole depends, can be mapped in great detail. Indeed, they are normally generated by map-like designs. Most importantly, when the machine breaks down, through analysis of some kind, the part causing the problem can normally be pin-pointed and either replaced or fixed. Machines, however, become not complex but complicated—which in the sense we are using the term *is always bad*—once they have more gears than is strictly necessary to complete a given task.

Complication leads then to contradiction, which with machines, literally means two movements—or gears—which speak—or grind—*against one another*.

Creative design anticipates potential contradiction; Creative building and repair actualizes and maintains the design in daily life. Together, design, building and repair constitute a living whole which might be called *creative practice*.

All this means is that, anyone involved with design, ought best be concerned also with building and repair, and that anyone involved in building and repair, ought also be concerned with design.

This is what makes for the free flow of intelligence, and safeguards against the corruption which comes with unnecessary division and fragmentation.

(7) **C**omplicatedness is frequently the result of outmoded, inappropriate ways of thinking. The way of thinking which is the most inappropriate of all is the one which does not see, or worse, *simply tolerates*, unnecessary difficulty. From there, it is only a small step to the degeneration of *cults of collusion* which not only condone, but actually cultivate:—  
*Complicatedness*.

Who has not become dependent on a machine which we suspect has been deliberately designed to be hard to use and even harder to repair, and, once it fails completely, as we know it shall, becomes the designer's unjust gain and the user's recurrent frustration and loss?

(8) **C**omplexity is another word for simplicity unfolding in time.

(9) **A** melody, or a sentence, is not built up of parts like a wall is built up of bricks. The parts of a phrase unfold into a whole, while, at the same time, they enfold into themselves.

Fold into Fold, the parts reflect and refer to the whole, while the whole gives structure and coherence to the parts. All the same, it is the movement of the whole that is primary.

Important is that this movement can neither be seen nor studied merely on the printed, notated page.

(10) **T**he complementary back and forth of simplicity and complexity forms one of the most necessary of unities. Without the single drop of water, there is no river; without the river, no drop.

The thought which divides them is the same thought which creates arbitrary boundaries or dams, first within itself, and then in the world at large.

(11) **A**s a single thread becomes the braid which becomes the magnificent, finely woven tapestry, so too simplicity holds, or points to, that which becomes the *many*-fold or complex. In the same way, complexity enfolds, or points to, that which is *one*-fold or simple.

(12) **W**ith enough time, simplicity always unfolds—without limit—into natural complexity.

Sustain a simple single vowel sound for the duration of an entire breath, and you become aware of the complex weave of its overtones; Walk the simple, smooth, hard, white surface of high mountain spring snow, and you will discover an infinity of living textures beyond all compare.

Cliff Crego  
Hotel PANOPTICON basecamp  
The WALLOWAS,  
*Land of Winding Waters,*  
OREGON VIII.20.2025  
[cliff@picture-poems.com](mailto:cliff@picture-poems.com)