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LANGUAGE AS TRANSFORMER

THE most informing way of understanding how humans make their language and how language then makes humans is by the study of Emerson's section on the subject in his essay on "Nature." Originally, he says, we developed our language from the analogy of nature with our lives. Nature supplies the encyclopedia of the raw materials of meaning. We find parallels in nature with our own behavior and experience, make these parallels into words, and so evolve a vocabulary of rich imagery. He says:

> This immediate dependence of language upon nature, this conversion of an outward phenomenon into a type of somewhat in human life, never loses its power to affect us. It is this which gives that piquancy to the conversation of a strong-natured farmer or backwoodsman, which all men relish.

With this as foundation, Emerson gives his theory of the decline of both humans and language:

> A man's power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth, and his desire to communicate it without loss. The corruption of man is followed by the corruption of language. When simplicity of character and the sovereignty of ideas is broken up by the prevalence of secondary desires, the desire for riches, of pleasure, of powers, and of praise,—and duplicity and falsehood take the place of simplicity and truth, the power over nature as an interpreter of the will, is in a degree lost; new imagery ceases to be created, and old words are perverted to stand for things which are not; a paper currency is employed, when there is no bullion in the vaults. In due time, the fraud is manifest, and words lose all power to stimulate the understanding or the affections. Hundreds of writers may be found in every long-civilized nation, who for a short time believe, and make others believe, that they see and utter truths, who do not of themselves clothe one word in its natural garment, but who feed unconsciously on the language created by the primary writers of the country, those, namely, who hold primarily on nature.

While Emerson goes on, his analysis is complete at this point. He has supplied the framework for consideration of a paper sent to us recently by a reader. The author is Carol Cohn, the title of her paper, "Sex and Death in the National World of Defense Intellectuals." In the summer of 1984 she was one of ten women college teachers who attended a summer workshop on nuclear weapons, nuclear strategic doctrine, and arms control, taught by "defense intellectuals." As a research fellow of the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age, an affiliate of the Harvard Medical School, she "listened to men engage in dispassionate discussion of nuclear war."

> I found myself aghast, but morbidly fascinated—not by nuclear weaponry, or by images of nuclear destruction, but by the extraordinary abstraction and removal from what I knew as reality that characterized the professional discourse. I became obsessed by the question, "How can they think this way?" At the end of the summer program, when I was offered the opportunity to stay on at the university's center on defense technology, I jumped at the chance to find out.

In the year she spent immersed in the world of defense intellectuals she did find out. But in listening to these men argue and discuss, learning their language and absorbing their "information," she found that her own thinking was changing. "I had to confront a new question: How can I think this way? How can any of us?"

She learned the language of strategic analysis.

> I found, however, that the better I got at engaging in this discourse, the more impossible it became for me to express my own ideas, my own values. . . . at the same time as the language gave me access to things I had never been able to speak about before, it radically excluded others. I could not use the language to express my concerns, because it was conceptually impossible. This language does not

allow certain questions to be asked, certain values to be expressed.

To pick a bald example: the word "peace" is not a part of this discourse. As close as one can come is "strategic stability," a term that refers to a balance of numbers and types of weapons systems—not the political, social, economic, and psychological conditions implied by the word "peace."

Not only is there no word signifying peace in this discourse, but the word "peace" itself cannot be used. To speak it is to immediately brand oneself as a soft-headed activist, instead of an expert, a professional to be taken seriously.

If I was unable to speak my concerns in this language, more disturbing still was that I began to also find it hard even to keep them in my own head. I had gone to the Center expecting abstract and sanitized discussions of nuclear war, and had readied myself to replace my words for theirs to be ever vigilant against slipping into the never-never land of abstraction. But no matter how prepared I was, no matter how firm my commitment to staying aware of the reality behind the words, over and over I found I *couldn't* stay connected, couldn't keep human lives as my reference point. I found I could go for days speaking about nuclear weapons without once thinking about the people who would be incinerated by them.

The intellectual conferees had actually altered the field of discourse and shut out the terms that she had hoped to introduce.

It is tempting to attribute this problem to qualities of the language, the words themselves—the abstractions, the euphemisms, the sanitized, friendly, sexy acronyms. Then all we would need to do is change the words, make them more vivid; get the military planners to say "mass murder" instead of "collateral damage," and their thinking would change.

The problem, however, is not only that defense intellectuals use abstract terminology that removes them from the realities of which they speak. There is no reality of which they speak. Or, rather, the "reality" of which they speak is itself a world of abstractions. Deterrence theory, and much of strategic doctrine altogether, was invented largely by mathematicians, economists, and a few political scientists. It was invented to hold together abstractly, its validity judged by its internal logic. Questions of the correspondence to observable reality were not the issue. These abstract systems were developed as a way to make it possible to "think about the unthinkable"—not as a way to describe, or codify, relations on the ground. . . .

Learning to speak the language reveals something about how thinking can become more abstract, more focussed on parts disembedded from their context, more attentive to the survival of weapons than the survival of human beings. That is, it reveals something about the process of the mind's militarization—and the way in which that process may be undergone by man or woman, hawk or dove.

So, in conclusion, Carol Cohn says that "learning the language is a transformative, rather than an additive, process." You do not just add to your vocabulary but "enter a mode of thinking," thinking not only about weapons but also military and political power, which becomes a closed system from which there is no escape save by refusing to use the language. Finally, she says:

Thus, those of us who find U.S. nuclear policy desperately misguided appear to face a serious quandary. If we refuse to learn the language, we are virtually guaranteed that our voices will remain outside the "politically relevant" spectrum of opinion. Yet, if we do learn and speak it, we not only severely limit what we can say, but we also invite the transformation, the militarization, of our own thinking.

With that sort of dilemma before us, would—or should—any of us bother to learn the language of these intellectuals? It sounds like a "damned if you do and damned if you don't" proposition. Yet Carol Cohn, having herself learned the language, thinks it would be worth while for at least some to learn it—that it might be possible to expose their language for what it is, showing that it is not, after all, what they claim—simply "objective and realistic." As she put it:

Much of their claim to legitimacy, then, is a claim to objectivity born of technical expertise and to the disciplined purging of the emotional valence that might threaten their objectivity. But if the smooth, shiny surface of their discourse—its abstraction and technical jargon—appear at first to support these claims, a look just below the surface does not. There we find strong currents of homoerotic excitement, heterosexual domination, the drive toward

> competency and mastery, the pleasures of membership in an elite and privileged group, of the ultimate importance and meaning of membership in the priesthood, and the thrilling power of becoming Death, the shatterer of worlds. How is it possible to point to the pursuers of these values, these experiences, as paragons of cool-headed objectivity? I do not wish here to discuss or judge the holding of "objectivity" as an epistemological goal. I would simply point out that as defense intellectuals rest their claims to legitimacy on the untainted rationality of their discourse, their projects fail according to their own criteria. Deconstructing strategic discourses's claims to rationality is, then, in and of itself, an important way to challenge its hegemony as the sole legitimate language for public debate about nuclear policy. . . . As part of our reconstructive project, we must recognize and develop alternative conceptions of rationality, we must invent compelling alternative visions of possible futures, and we must create rich and imaginative alternative voices—diverse voices whose conversations with each other will invent a future in which there *is* a future.

One value of Carol Cohn's study is that it shows we all are capable of creating facsimile worlds by means of our imagery and thinking. Logical minds merely make those facsimiles more tightly constructed, more effectively prisons which limit our thinking.

In his essay, *Standing by Words* (1979), Wendell Berry says:

> My impression is that we have seen, for perhaps a hundred and fifty years, a gradual increase in language that is either meaningless or destructive of meaning. And I believe that this increasing unreliability of language parallels the increasing disintegration, over the same period, of persons and communities.
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> My concern is for the *accountability* of language—hence, for the accountability of the users of language. To deal with this matter I will use a pair of economic concepts: *internal accounting,* which considers costs and benefits in reference only to the interest of the money-making enterprise itself; and *external accounting,* which considers the costs and benefits to the "larger community.". . . .
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> It will be found, I believe, that the accounting will be poor—incomprehensible or unreliable—if it attempts to be purely internal or purely external. One of the primary obligations of language is to connect and balance the two kinds of accounting.

The accounting of the tough-minded defense intellectual has no relation to the realities of the human being, his interests, his concerns, his hopes and fears. As Carol Cohn explains:

> Entering the world of defense intellectuals was, to put it bluntly, a bizarre experience. Bizarre because it is a world where men spend their days calmly and matter-of-factly discussing nuclear weapons, nuclear strategy, and nuclear war. The discussions are carefully and intricately reasoned, seemingly occurring without any sense of horror, urgency, or moral outrage—in fact, there seems to be no graphic reality behind the words, as they speak of "first strikes," "counterforce exchanges," and "limited nuclear war," or as they debate the comparative values of a "minimum deterrent posture" versus a "nuclear war-fighting capability."
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> Yet what is striking about the men themselves is not, as the content of their conversations might suggest, their cold-bloodedness. Rather it is that they are a group of men unusually endowed with charm, humor, intelligence, concern, and decency. Reader, I liked them. At least I liked many of them. The attempt to understand how such decent men could contribute to an endeavor that I see as so fundamentally destructive became a continuing obsession for me, a lens through which I came to examine all of my experiences in their world. . . . What hit me first was the elaborate use of abstraction and euphemism, of words so bland that they never forced the speaker or enabled the listener to touch the realities of nuclear holocaust behind the words.
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> Anyone who has seen pictures of Hiroshima burn victims, or tried to imagine the pain of hundreds of glass shards blasted into flesh, may at first find it perverse beyond imagination to hear a class of nuclear devices matter-of-factly referred to as "clean bombs." "Clean bombs" are nuclear devices that are largely fusion, rather than fission; they therefore release a higher quantity of their energy not as radiation, but a blast, as destructive power. This language has enormous destructive power, but without emotional fallout; without the emotional fallout that would result if it were clear one was talking about plans for mass murder, mangled bodies, human suffering. Defense analysts don't talk about incinerating cities: they talk about "countervalue attacks." Human death, in nuclear parlance, is most often referred to as "collateral damage"; for, as one

> defense analyst said, with just the right touch of irony in his voice and twinkle in his eye, "the Air Force doesn't target people, it targets shoe factories."
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> It is a world that is in some sense complete unto itself, it even includes death and loss. But it is weapons, not humans, that get "killed." "Fratricide" occurs when one of your warheads "kills" another one of your own warheads. There is much discussion of "vulnerability" and "survivability," but it is about the vulnerability and survival of weapons systems, not people.

The internal accounting system of the defense analysts takes into consideration only weapons systems, not people. The analysts have become specialists with a language of their own, which only they can speak with confidence and security. The modern world has put these people in charge of our policy.

Why does the modern world do things like that? Where has our judgment gone, our sense of the fitness of things? Berry makes the answer clear. We no longer have standards which inform our decisions. We have put "can do" in the place of "why do." We have become intoxicated by manipulative power, seduced by the wild freedom of irresponsibility gained by the isolated specialist. The modern poet, Berry suggests, is susceptible to these tendencies.

> The specialist poet, for instance, degrades the subject into "subject matter" or raw material, so that the subject exists for the poem's sake, is *subjected* to the poem, in the same way as industrial specialists see trees or ore-bearing rocks as raw material subjected to their manufactured end-products. Quantity thus begins to dominate the work of the specialist poet at its source. Like an industrialist, he is interested in the subjects of the world for the sake of what they can be made to produce. He mines his experience for subject matter. The first aim of the propriety of the old poets, by contrast, was to make the language true to its subject—to see that it told the truth. That is why they invoked the Muse. The truth the poet chose as his subject was perceived as superior to his powers—and, by clear implication, to his occasion and purpose.

In short, the specialist, poet or defense analyst, "does not propose any fidelity between words and speakers or words and things or words and acts." But the true poet, the true man, is unable to speak at all, "in even the most casual conversation, without some informing sense of what would be best to say—that is, without some sort of *standard."* Berry adds:

> And I do not believe that it is possible to act on the basis of a "tentative" or "provisional" conclusion. We may know that we are forming a conclusion on the basis of provisional or insufficient knowledge—that is a part of what we understand as the tragedy of our condition. But we must act, nevertheless, on the basis of final conclusions, because we know that actions, occurring in time, are irrevocable. That is another part of our tragedy. People who make a conventional agreement that all conclusions are provisional—a convention almost invariably implied by academic uses of the word "objectivity"—characteristically talk but do not act. Or they do not act deliberately, though time and materiality carry them into action of a sort, willy-nilly.
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> And there are times, according to the only reliable ethics we have, when one is required to tell the truth, whatever the urgings of purpose, audience, and situation. Ethics requires this because, in terms of the practical realities of our lives, the truth is safer than falsehood. To ignore this is simply to put language at the service of purpose—*any* purpose.

We have come a long way from Emerson, with whom we began, but have reached him again at the end. Wise men, he said, "pierce this rotten diction" and use their words to describe the realities they know. This is the only remedy available for the corruption of language.

REVIEW
HOW THINGS CONNECT

WENDELL BERRY'S new book, containing fourteen essays written from 1982 to 1986, is titled *Home Economics.* It is published by North Point Press in paperback at $9.95. These essays provide various examples of Berry's mode of writing, which is frequently in a kind of code—a cipher made up in order to provide the tensions which he wishes to discuss. In one essay, done in 1983, called "Two Economies," he means by this the "Great Economy," which might be explained as the balance of nature, and the "little economy," constituted by human economic enterprise. It is the task of the architects of this human economy to harmonize its structure with the Great Economy, but they seldom recognize the importance of the assignment. With this as his code, Berry writes:

> The fowls of the air and the lilies of the field live within the Great Economy entirely by nature, whereas humans, though entirely dependent on it, must live in it partly by artifice. The birds can live in the Great Economy only as birds, the flowers only as flowers, the humans only as humans. The humans, unlike wild creatures, may choose not to live in it—or rather since no creature can escape it, they may choose to act as if they do not, or they may choose to try to live in it on their own terms. If humans choose to live in the Great Economy on its terms, then they must live in harmony with it, maintaining it in trust and learning to consider the lives of the wild creatures.

The managers of the human economy commonly regard "the wild creatures" as either utilities or nuisances whose presence on earth is entirely ours to control. We therefore do as we please with them, without any sense of having disturbed the natural order. Berry looks at the matter differently:

> The problem seems to be that a human economy cannot prescribe the terms of its own success. In a time when we wish to believe that humans are sole authors of the truth that truth is relative, and that value judgments are all subjective, it is hard to say that a human economy can be wrong, and yet we have good, sound, practical reasons for saying so. It is indeed possible for a human economy to be wrong—not relatively wrong, in the sense of being "out of adjustment," or unfair to the definition of its own purposes—but wrong absolutely and according to practical measures. Of course, if we see the human economy as the *only* economy, we will see its errors as political failures, and we will continue to talk about "recovery." It is only when we think of the little human economy in relation to the Great Economy that we begin to understand our errors for what they are and to see the qualitative meanings of our quantitative measures. If we see the industrial economy in terms of the Great Economy, then we begin to see industrial wastes and losses not as "trade-offs" or "necessary risks" but as costs that, like all costs, are chargeable to somebody sometime.
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> That we can prescribe the terms of our own success, that we can live outside or in ignorance of the Great Economy are the greatest errors. They condemn us to a life without a standard, wavering in inescapable bewilderment from paltry self-satisfaction to paltry self-dissatisfaction. But since we have no place to live but in the Great Economy, whether or not we know that and act accordingly is the critical question, not about the economy merely, but about life itself.

Here the depths of Berry's analysis begins to become apparent. He is pointing to the possibility of a larger meaning to life in the universe—something we stopped thinking about as childish about a hundred years ago. He adds up the consequences of what we have been doing during that time, taking the sum as evidence that we have been making terrible mistakes. How long will it take for the rest of us to come around to that view? He goes on:

> It is possible to make a little economy, such as our present one, that is so short-sighted and in which accounting is of so short a term as to give the impression that vices are necessary and practically justifiable. When we make our economy a little wheel turning in opposition to what we call "nature," then we set up competitiveness as the ruling principle in our explanation of reality and in our understanding of economy; we make it, willy-nilly, a virtue. But competitiveness as a ruling principle and a virtue, imposes a logic that is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to control. That logic explains why our cars and our clothes are shoddily made, why our "wastes" are toxic, and why our "defensive" weapons are suicidal; it explains why it is so difficult for us to draw a line between "free enterprise" and crime. If our economic ideal is maximum profit with minimum responsibility, why should we be surprised to find our corporations so frequently in court and robbery on the increase? Why should we be surprised to find that medicine has become an exploitive industry, profitable in direct proportion to its hurry and its mechanical indifference? People who pay for shoddy products or careless services and people who are robbed outright are equally victims of theft, the

only difference being that the robbers outright are not guilty of fraud.

In his preface to this book, Berry says that its content is an argument he has been carrying on for twenty years. The subject is the fact and faith "that things connect—that we are wholly dependent on a pattern, an all-inclusive form, that we partly understand. The argument, therefore, is an effort to describe responsibility." Surely it is time to attend to this argument.

In 1984 he wrote an essay called "The Loss of the University" in which he said:

> The thing being made in a university is humanity. Given the current influence of universities, this is merely inevitable. But what universities, at least the public-supported ones, are *mandated* to make or to help make is human beings in the fullest sense of those words—not just trained workers or knowledgeable citizens but responsible heirs and members of human culture. If the proper work of the university is only to equip people to fulfill private ambitions, then how do we justify public support? If it is only to prepare citizens to fulfill public responsibilities, then how do we justify the teaching of arts and sciences? The common denominator has to be larger than either career preparation or preparation for citizenship. Underlying the idea of a university—the bringing together, the combining into one, of all the disciplines—is the idea that good work and good citizenship are the inevitable by-products of the making of a good—that is, a fully developed—human being. This, as I understand it, is the definition of the name *university*.

He then turns to the specialization that is characteristic of the modern university, examining the specialization in, say, English:

> That the common tongue should become the exclusive specialty of a department is therefore a tragedy, and not just for the university and its worldly place; it is a tragedy for the common tongue. It means that the common tongue, so far as the university is concerned, *ceases* to be the common tongue; it becomes merely one tongue within a confusion of tongues. Our language and literature cease to be seen as occurring in the world, and begin to be seen as occurring within their university department and within themselves. Literature ceases to be the meeting ground of all readers of the common tongue and becomes only the occasion of a deafening clatter *about* literature. Teachers and students read the great songs and stories to learn *about* them, not to learn *from* them. The texts are tracked as by the passing of an army of ants, but the power of songs and stories to affect life is still little acknowledged, apparently because it is little felt.

What would Berry do instead of what the universities are doing? The only answer to this question is: Read him and see. He once taught English in a university.

There is no topic of importance which he neglects in this book. In 1984 he wrote on "Property, Patriotism, and National Defense," remarking at the beginning that we are asked not simply to "die in defense of our country," but to "accept and condone the deaths of virtually the whole population of our country, of our political and religious principles, and of our land itself, as a reasonable cost of national defense." Then he says:

> That a nation should purchase at an exorbitant price and then rely upon a form of defense inescapably fatal to itself is, of course, absurd; that good citizenship should be defined as willing acceptance of such a form of defense can only be ruinous of the political health of that nation. To ask intelligent citizens to believe an argument that in its essentials is not arguable and to approve results that are not imaginably good (and in the strict sense are not imaginable at all) is to drive wedges of disbelief and dislike between those citizens and their government. Thus the effect of such a form of defense is ruinous, whether or not it is ever used.
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> The absurdity of the argument lies in a little-noted law of the nature of technology—that, past a certain power and scale, we de not dictate our terms to the tools we use, rather the tools dictate their terms to us. Past a certain power and scale, we may choose the means but not the ends. We may choose nuclear weaponry as a form of defense, but that is the last of our "free choices" with regard to nuclear weaponry. By that choice we largely abandon ourselves to terms and results dictated by the nature of nuclear weapons. To take up weapons has, of course, always been a limiting choice, but never before has the choice been made by so few with such fatal implications for so many and so much. Once we have chosen to rely on such weapons, the only free choice we have left is to change our minds, to choose not to rely on them.

This is the kind of thinking Berry does in *Home Economics*. We recommend it to all.

COMMENTARY
THE "WONDERBOX"

A READER has sent us a copy of an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* for last September 24 by Ned Temko, a staff writer, about the collaboration of a black woman in South Africa, Dailinah Khoza, with one of the world's richest women, Bridgett Oppenheimer, to produce in quantity a cooking gadget called the "Wonderbox." The project began in 1976, sparked by Mrs. Oppenheimer and some Johannesburg women. The wife of a Capetown clergyman, the story relates, showed the women what looked like an ordinary cardboard box. Inside were what seemed to be two cotton pillows, but actually they were contained wads of finely ground plastic foam. Temho writes:

> The idea behind the contraption was simple and straightforward: to allow Africa's impoverished to bring to a boil a staple dinner of cornmeal or rice, with the occasional bit of meat, before heading off for a day's work, and then immediately place the pot inside the closed plastic-foam pillow, where it would continue to cook throughout the day without fire, fuel, or labor. By late afternoon it would be completely cooked, with nutrients safely trapped inside.
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> "I was as skeptical as everyone else at the beginning," says Mrs. Khoza, at the Women for Peace's Center of Concern, a small cottage on a low-lying fringe of Brenthurst.

Brenthurst, Temko says, is "fifty acres of mansion, gardens, and private security guards on the edge of Johannesburg," best known as the home of the Oppenheimers. Mrs. Oppenheimer learned about the "wonderbox," saw that it worked, and recognized its possibilities. Mrs. Khoza says:

> "I was then working as a typist at Women for Peace, however, and I knew I wanted to do much more than type. So, with Mrs. Oppenheimer, I looked into the idea, and then we set out to promote it."

Temko continues:

> The journey, it turned out, would be full of potholes. In their first visits to remote rural areas of South Africa, to tribal "homelands" and to neighboring states, it sometimes seemed that the skeptics would carry the day. Some women, not understanding the principle involved, would happily place a pot of unheated—certainly unboiled—stew in the Wonderbox, only to return to find the concoction unaltered. Others tried to put the Wonderbox directly in their cooking fires, with predictable results. At one demonstration in a drought-parched rural settlement, the two women hit a dead end: no water. (Now they bring their own.). . . .
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> But slowly and surely, in a region where people of all races often share a shortage of fuel, free time, . . . the idea caught on. The first takers, Mrs. Khoza recalls, were mostly white farm families who in time would purchase armloads of Wonderboxes for their black laborers. Now, many of the community groups who invite the "Wonderbox Team" in its traveling minibus for demonstrations in Church and Town Halls are black. (There is a one-month waiting list.)
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> Individual women, often black, write or phone in with requests for Wonderboxes. Some now contract for the equivalent of the Wonderbox—the Magimix, identical to the original except that the outer box is made of wood, not cardboard.

According to Temko, the Wonderbox project is now flowering. Handicapped or unemployed women assemble the cardboard boxes, feed the plastic foam into a grinding machine, sew the flame-resistant cotton pillows. "The end product, sold at cost, currently goes for 15 rend ($7.50)." Temko continues:

> Mrs. Khoza—along with Mrs. Oppenheimer, during the roughly six months each year which she spends at Brenthurst—have been traveling not only by minibus throughout South Africa, but also by executive jet to neighboring Botswana, and, in blissful defiance of regional political conflict, to Zimbabwe and Mozambique.
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> Alongside the Wonderbox they now offer a low-priced, high-protein suggestion of what to put in it: a variety of recipes based on the soy bean, a relatively inflation-proof commodity that can still be bought for about 30 cents a pound here.

Mrs. Khoza says:

> "I think the most important thing about the Wonderbox is that it has helped to bring people together. It addresses concerns that are common to all of us: energy, food, labor. For me, for Mrs.

> Oppenheimer, too. . . . I think she could not survive without the Wonderbox! This simple thing has always cut through the tension between people. In a way, it is an excuse to go out and see, meet, communicate, with our fellow human beings."

Here, we could say, we have an example of what, in this week's Review, Wendell Berry speaks of as the blending of the human economy with the Great Economy. Both Mrs. Khoza and Mrs. Oppenheimer have chosen to act in harmony with the Great Economy, bringing, through the tool of a practical device, a harmony with human needs. This device, when understood and applied, eases the lives of countless working people and lightens household burdens. While the injustice of misapplications of the human economy now prevails in South Africa, these two women do not see the human economy as the *only* economy. While they cannot now, by themselves, change the circumstances of the human economy, they found themselves able to use its mechanisms in a way that serves the general good, and in a way that brings people together.

"When we started demonstrating the Wonderbox about ten years ago," Mrs. Khoza said, "people thought we were crazy! Now we can hardly keep up with the demand: about 1,000 Wonderboxes each week!"

Some day—no one knows when—we shall all live under the terms of the Great Economy, the first principle of which is the satisfaction of need. That, indeed, is the meaning of *economy,* not the making of money.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ON OPENINGS

IN a book published by Harper & Row seventeen years ago, *On Understanding Violence Philosophically and Other Essays*, which we wish we had known about sooner, the author, J. Glenn Gray, considers critically the formal education of the present, saying:

> Everyone realizes that formal education today has assumed a role unparalleled in previous eras. At the same time we have never been more dissatisfied with the kind of education we are getting and giving. Our dissatisfaction lies not so much with the transmission of information and even of knowledge as it does with our apparent inability to get below the surface of sense and intellect in order to form the dispositions of our youth. In old-fashioned language the failure is one in education of character. Or in my terminology, it represents failure to instill in young people the capacity to act in contrast to behaving, or a capacity to discipline their emotions in contrast to indulging their passions. It is difficult to know how much formal schooling can remedy this failure in a time when powerful social pressures militate against individual action and discipline of the emotions. Yet there is a kind of despairing faith that education holds the keys to salvation from our troubles.
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> For this faith to become less desperate, we must seek to narrow the cleavage between formal schooling and informal education, or between learning in the schools and experience in the wider society. Our school systems will have to bridge this cleavage between formal schooling and informal education, or between learning in the schools and experience in the wider society. Our school systems will have to bridge this cleavage by conceiving education in a more inclusive and activist, in less bookish and abstract fashion, than we have hitherto done. . . .
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> Basic to all this is the ancient but ever neglected idea of Aristotle that you make a child brave, generous, kind, temperate, and just by providing repeated opportunities for performing brave generous, kind, temperate, and just deeds and not by giving him lectures on ethics. . . . Education is the acquiring a second nature which brings one into attunement with oneself, with society, and with the world of nature.

In speaking of the gap between "learning in the schools and experience in the wider society," Gray adopts the mode if not the language of Paul Goodman, John Holt, and a handful of other teachers, including A.H. Maslow. Maslow, it will be recalled, said that "if one wants to learn all sorts of automatic habits in driving, responding to a red light signal or something of the sort, then conditioning is of consequence," since it is extremely useful in a technological society.

> But in terms of becoming a better person, in terms of self-development and self-fulfillment, or in terms of "becoming fully human," the greatest learning experiences are very different.
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> In my life, such experiences have been far more important than classes, listening to lectures, memorizing the branches of the twelve cranial nerves and dissecting a human brain, or memorizing the insertions of the muscles or the kinds of things that one does in medical schools in biology courses, or other such courses.
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> Far more important for me have been such experiences as having a child. Our first baby changed me as a psychologist. It made the behaviorism I had been so enthusiastic about look so foolish that I could not stomach it any more. It was impossible.

John Holt would never talk about his "college education" except to say that it taught him nothing of importance that what he learned was from life, not from schooling—and Paul Goodman wrote at length about the importance of "incidental" or "accidental" education. This is the wholly unplanned but vital curriculum of life itself.

Toward the end of his chapter, Glenn Gray muses:

> The ideas of reducing the gap between schooling and education, of habituating or attuning our young to "living into" the social and natural environment, and of instilling the conception of joy as an origin of action—taken together, these ideas amount to a near reversal of our usual perspectives on the world. I am quite aware of this, and also of the fact that profounder reflection on my part would bring forth other "solutions" equally difficult to put into practice. I agree with Nietzsche that man's nature is as yet undetermined and that there is much still uncanny about human existence. Our present modes of life, so

> different from those of previous generations, will doubtless bring to light facets of human nature none of us has learned to anticipate.
>
> Nevertheless, the only quality that is needed in order to counter present and future discouragement is courage. Courage is a laughing virtue, not simply a grim and tenacious enduring. The courageous are not given to self-pity, which is a widespread disease of our time. That courage which is other than physical bravery welcomes reflection on every aspect of existence, the dreadful no less than the wonderful. And contrary to popular notions, reflection can inspire cheerfulness rather than gloom.

It happens that the lead article in the Summer *Teachers College Record,* "Breaking with Everyday Experience," by Robert Floden, Margaret Buchmann, and John Schwille, is devoted to the contention that schools should help the children to "break" out of the familiar routines of learning and to see the world in a variety of ways, not their own.

> Schools are responsible for giving children the capacity to break with everyday experience. Their charge to promote equality of opportunity depends on helping students develop breadth of vision. Through promoting disciplinary understanding, schools can provide students with concepts and criteria for challenging the taken-for-granted and selecting more appropriate patterns of thought and action. To carry out these responsibilities, schools cannot rely on content and methods of learning derived from everyday experience. . . . To have more equal opportunities children must imagine selves and futures not determined by their immediate environment and ascribed characteristics. No matter how much a school is able to raise a student's achievement test scores, the increase does little to equalize opportunities unless students can see and act on the possibilities created.

Conventional diversities within the spread of ordinary possibilities differentiate children's expectations:

> These expectations are not the same for all children. Some see themselves progressing through high school, university, and professional school, imagining vacations in the Caribbean and a condominium in the Rockies, others plan to escape from school at the earliest opportunity, to save their overtime pay for a new rifle and deer hunting trips on the weekend. Some envision campaign contributions to officials who will protect their interests; others expect to give their votes to whichever party will keep their streets free of snow; some do not vote at all, having learned from experience that life is hard and that they will have no chance.

But is it realistic to expect that "breaks" from the conventional middle-class curriculum in the schools of the time can actually alter these expectations? And what about the few students who will engineer their own sorts of breaks as genuine innovators, radical reformers, and inventors of new and better ways of doing things? No variations in the curriculum are likely to free such minds from the usual motivations; they will do it themselves, usually at the cost of some pain and a series of disappointments. These writers seem to load the schools with far greater responsibility than any conventional institution can possibly cope with or manage. Children are not "made" by their schooling; they make themselves, and the most the schools can do is to leave openings of independent thinking and action. It is not, after all, the business of the schools to try to prepare a generation of revolutionists; no administrator or teacher knows enough to attempt that. Having some "breaks" in the curriculum may indeed open the way to some changes in one's life, but they may prove scary to children with wholly conventional minds. If we knew more about what children bring with them—how they become different from one another in innate character—we might be able to deal more constructively with such possibilities. But genius is still a complete mystery to both educators and psychologists, and will probably remain so for a long time to come.

FRONTIERS

What Peacework Does

THE New England monthly journal, *Peacework*, issued by the American Friends Service Committee (2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02140) is fifteen years old this year, and in a recent number the editor, Pat Farren, wrote about its objectives and work. He said:

> *Peacework*, readers should note, only scratches the surface of movement news. Because we attempt to be inclusive, readers should not assume that our coverage is anywhere near exhaustive. There is far more grassroots energy "out there" than we can convey, many more initiatives worthy of consideration, untold stories of principled witness and gentle sacrifice, proposals that need study, fledgling organizations anxious for support. Beyond that, the area where *Peacework* and most US alternative press organs may be most deficient is in international coverage, news about the struggles and realities of our sisters and brothers beyond our geographical and cultural borders. . . .
>
> *Peacework* is within the strong tradition of New England publications stemming all the way back to William Lloyd Garrison's *Non-Resistant* of a century and a half ago, periodicals that chronicle the history of activism, raise issues, network, point the ways ahead.

In the lead article (for June), the poet, Denise Levertov, considers the contribution of the alternative press, asking:

> What is it that the alternative press does, and how does it resemble what strong personal testimonies do? The difference between it and the major media is not only that, generally speaking, the larger media are so slanted, so unreliable. It is that the best of the alternative press represents a depth of coverage, a selectivity of focus, and a personal concern and commitment.
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> However, there is more than one kind, one level, of alternative source. When I read, for instance, the *Nation*, what I get is some news that was not in the daily paper and probably not on the radio either, plus additional information that clarifies events which *were* reported—stories that lay behind "the facts," and intelligent analyses of their implications. But when I turn to *Sojourners*, the *National Catholic Reporter*, or *Peacework*, I move to a deeper level, and receive something further: a sense of community. I get news not only of the crises, the disasters that threaten, the various kinds of oppression that surround us everywhere on the planet, but of what people are *doing* about them: small groups of people just as powerless, as individuals, as I or any one of us, but empowered by a spirit of mutual aid.

In a review a writer in *Peacework* says:

> Citizen groups have helped cancel more than 100 planned nuclear reactors during the past 15 years and "are becoming more assertive at the state and local levels as nuclear reactors are targeted for economic, safety, environmental and health reasons," according to a report published by Public Citizen.
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> According to the report, *Shutdown Strategies: Citizens Efforts to Close Nuclear Plants*, at least four factors explain this:
>
> (1) Fewer than 20 plants are still under construction and no new ones are planned, allowing citizen groups to focus attention on existing plants; (2) Rising costs of nuclear plants plus advances in energy-efficient technologies have made nuclear plants uneconomical, (3) Increasing concern over the types and location of "high-" and "low-level" nuclear waste dumps has sparked increased opposition to nuclear power; and (4) increasing evidence that a Chernobyl-scale accident can happen in the US has convinced many that the reactors should be closed.
>
> The efforts discussed in the report focus on state and local decision-makers, as opposed to the federal government, where, "for the most part, the Reagan administration and Congress remain unwavering supporters of the nuclear industry." . . . The report, which includes more than 50 case studies, is $25 from Public Citizen, Critical Mass Energy Project, 215 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Washington, DC 20003.

In a section devoted to letters from readers, subscribers to *Peacework* tell how they fit their work for peace and justice into already busy lives. A Vermont woman, Alice Cook Bassett, writes:

> As a state legislator, I sometimes envy my friends who are able to spend more time on the biggest issues facing our world. So I sigh, then go on taking as many opportunities I can to speak out. A recent trip to Central America has brought many chances to speak about my experiences, sometimes just for a few minutes. . . . thanks to a supportive husband who took care of my invalid father for me, I

participated in the April Mobilization for Justice and Peace in Washington. A one-minute report to the Vermont General Assembly when I got back sowed some seeds, I think. Who knows how seeds are persuaded to grow? We can only keep on planting them, and hope.

Another woman, Sheila Parks, a Pennsylvanian, says:

How do I squeeze my activism into my life? I do not. In 1978 I left my job as a college professor to become a fulltime, unpaid peace activist. Today I live simply, supporting myself by substitute teaching. I am happier than I have ever been, and that has grown every year. My regrets are that I waited so long to drop out and, really, that I ever went to graduate school and worked for an advanced degree. I feel I wasted at least ten years of my life in such pursuits.

Finding a balance between healing and working on myself and healing and working on the world is very important in my life. I know that both are an integral part of peace work. My relationships are better and more intimate than ever and I have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances. I take time to smell the flowers, walk in the woods, laugh, spend time with myself and others relaxing. This kind of balance also makes my peace work better.

In a review of M. Scott Peck's *The Different Drum*, a book issued by Simon and Schuster on peace-making and community-making, Tom Atlee writes at the end:

We should use community-building to support each other, to become more efficient, to draw broader public participation and to empower people. With community-building, we can nurture more wholesome lives for ourselves, strengthen our integrity as a movement, and inspire ever more imaginative strategy and tactics.

Subscription to *Peacework* is $7 a year.