VOLUME XXIII, NO. 8
FEBRUARY 25, 1970

ILL WITHOUT PRESCRIPTION

A SERIOUS inquiry into the role and influence of the arts in the United States ought to be preceded by a leisurely tour of the country. There was once a time when travelling across the continent assured rich diversity of visual experience, with engaging variety in the ways and habitations of men as well as dramatic changes in the landscape. Today such a trip does little more than test one's endurance of monotony. The country seems almost covered up. Every town looks like every other, and cities are places to avoid. Writing in the *American Scholar* for the spring of 1965, Joseph Wood Krutch recorded his impressions of a bus ride from Los Angeles to San Francisco. This is what Anglo man has made of California, once the state of legendary romance and universal attraction:

> I got the most extensive view I ever had of what is now commonly called Sloburbs. Also the fullest realization of their horror. Nowhere are they worse than in the Los Angeles area, and nowhere are they more extensive. For several hours the same dismal scenes change so little that it is hard to believe that one is moving at all. Gas station, motel, car lot, bar, hamburger stand; then gas station, motel, car lot, bar, and hamburger stand all over again, all bathed in the hellish glow of neon. . . .
>
> Tucson, where I now live, is no exception. . . . as I drove home the other day through spreading ugliness I was amazed again that this sort of anti-city could be so characterless. Everything looks impoverished, random, unrelated to everything else, as though it had no memory of yesterday and no expectation of tomorrow. . . . Poverty, I reminded myself, creates slums and slums can be even uglier. But I wondered if ever before in history a prosperous people had consented to live in communities so devoid of every grace and dignity, so slumlike in everything except the money they represent. They are something new and almost uniquely unattractive—neither country nor village nor town nor city—just an agglomeration without plan, without any sense of unity or direction, as though even offices and shops were thought of as (like nearly everything else in our civilization) disposable and therefore not worth considering from any standpoint except the make-do of the moment. . . .
>
> Why should an abundant society be content to accept communities so obviously the antithesis of that "gracious living" that the service magazines talk about and declare to be nowadays open to all?

This, then, is the vast artifact left in evidence of the doings and progress of the Great Society. Yet if you consult any one of the technically lavish magazines devoted to the arts, you will learn that never have they flourished in our society as they do today. A young painter can now sometimes make a living by selling his work, and collectors are no longer limited to the very rich. Yet we are all surrounded and inescapably invaded by ugliness. We may be, as Mr. Krutch says, "prosperous," but we can't change the face of the social community with money. Nobody has enough, and anyhow, money will only make a few show places look slick, not really beautiful. Prosperity—or what we call prosperity—is not the remedy for the barrenness Mr. Krutch describes. As a deputy-secretary in the Department of Commerce, Herbert Hollomon, remarked a couple of years ago: "Today you and I can buy a house, but we cannot buy an attractive city; you and I can buy a car but we cannot buy an efficient highway; you and I can pay tuition for a son to go to college but we cannot buy an educational system." What we need, in other words, is not for sale. Conceivably, it might be had for love, but many people regard this as a somewhat devious and even unAmerican idea. If you really need love in America it costs $25.00 an hour from an accredited therapist, and our political constituencies are certainly not ready to retain Rogerian psychologists for the towns and cities of the land. (Not while we are determined to make-do with more and better trained police and additional urban renewal programs.)

Yet if you read other magazines—not just the art magazines—you share in the general knowledge that artists and other creative people have penetrated into every productive branch of the technological society and that everything modern man buys has been vastly improved by art-conscious planners and designers. Both universities and the larger museums sponsor a variety of collaborative programs encouraging and instructing in the symbiosis of art and industry. Everybody is learning the importance of Art, these days; only life remains ugly and mean.

Plainly, we need a Tolstoy for the shock value of his extremist criticism; a Blake, for renewal of the synthesis of his Fourfold Vision; and a Lafcadio Hearn for his lucid and friendly persuasions. But could such men, one wonders, get published in these expensive magazines? Is there an audience today for classical and moral simplicities? Tolstoy might declare something naive to the effect that the role of art is to make the common life harmonious, uplifting, and beautiful, and wholly neglect the fascinations of complex neurotic ills. After all, Tolstoy's austere thinking doesn't fit in at all well with what people say about the arts, nowadays. Of course, he was against war, and that was good . . . but artists aren't supposed to be *reformers!* Yet there is a sense in which great artists have always caused reforms, if only as inevitable side-effects of their vision, since great vision invariably breaks out of past captivities of form and technique.

These somewhat erratic wonderings about the arts were brought on by a recent interchange in the *Saturday Review* concerning one of the so-called "popular" arts—the movies. *SR* for Dec. 27 presents four essays by under-thirty writers on current innovations in film-making, contributors who agree that today "film is the art that matters." One of these writers, Stephen Koch, declares that the novel has exhausted its inspiration and that "the great tradition of modernist prose in English comes to an end in the work of Samuel Beckett." The extreme self-consciousness of the psychological novel, he says, neither gets nor deserves attention:

> The hero of contemporary fiction is the Nowhere Man, and his locale is the Nowhere Land, where he makes all his Nowhere plans for Nobody. The Anguished Self is placeless and spaceless, and his art merely presents us year after year with a chronicle of self-humiliation, self-doubt, self-hatred, and (not to put too fine a point upon it) masochism in a scale that I'm sure has been scarcely imagined since the fifteenth century. The heart of the narrative is action, while our ideal seriousness is an account of impotence and the incapacity to act. That paradox has a certain richness, but it seems to me that its possibilities are utterly exhausted by Beckett's genius, and that we should take our greatest living writer seriously when he says it's time to put it to rest. In any event, it has stopped being interesting. Like some incorrigibly self-destructive friend, who first startles us with a sense of emotional urgency, whose situation then moves and even exalts us, but slowly begins to be an irritation because we've been to this same nowhere so many times before, our fiction has turned into one great big bore.
>
> Mainstream modernism has died of complications implicit in a surfeit of subjectivity; it has died, literally, of inaction. But that's where movies come in. If the heart of narrative is action, the camera eye, poor, mindless fool, can't help but record those physical spaces, real spaces, real time within which action becomes more real.

After this, the argument for the importance of film grows elaborate; a key sentence, however, is: "The dreamer's wondering and perplexed absorption in the world—*his* world—is film's forte." And there is no question about the power of film to give factitious objectivity to inner imaginings and to lead the spectator into worlds of extraordinary fantasy. Here, rational checks and balances have no function and absorption becomes total. When you go to the movies you put your imagination aside and let the medium—which means the director, technicians, and actors—do all the work. It is an electronic seance. And since, as Mr. Koch says, the novel is no longer "interesting," why not?

Already the novel, Mr. Koch claims, has lost many of the young to the movies; and this is not,

he holds, because movies are "easy," but because the psychological novel is dull. This is the statement which brings objection from R. P. Dickey, who teaches English in a Colorado State college in Pueblo. Mr. Dickey writes in the *SR* for Jan. 24:

> . . . unfortunately for Mr. Koch's argument, it is fairly obvious that a story on film, good or bad, tends to be "easier" than a story in print, good or bad, because of two inherent limitations in the film medium itself. A film viewer responds under two tyrannies from which the reader is free: (1) *His rate of consumption of the images is controlled by someone else.* The reader can stop, go back, mull over, muse upon, argue with, underline, and annotate whatever passage he so desires. (2) *The images he perceives are dictated to him with radical exactitude.* The reader is given certain words that describe, say, a room. He must use his memory and, more importantly, his imagination to get that room; he must, in short, work to get that room. The film viewer, on the other hand, is given the electronic-celluloid image of the room (exactly the same room as hundreds of thousands or millions of other viewers are given).
>
> The first limitation helps lead to a general diminution of the powers of the mind, the second to a flabbiness and deadening of the human imagination.

This communication seemed too important to let pass without notice. These are matters which, for all his exciting rhetoric, Marshall McLuhan wholly neglects, or translates as merely confinement and limitation. Yet they are obviously considerations vital to the responsible use of all communication media. There are moments when McLuhan seems to regard the total saturation (domination) of the human being by flooding sense impressions as some kind of experiential highest good. It may be acknowledged that complete absorption in a spectacle is on some occasions a natural part of human experience, but an absorption which prevents reflective thinking, conceived of as either a weapon or a tool, seems an instrument of more use to gods or demons than to men. By this we mean that total absorption in some bargain-basement spectacle put together by people with tickets to sell or an axe to grind might be very destructive for human psyches, and especially for young ones.

Questions of this order do not appear to matter to even the most serious of the film-makers. They seem out to dazzle, to wow, to *capture* the minds of their audience. They seek a triumph of manipulative effects. At best, they are concerned as technicians with the endless subtleties in the modes of sensory perception, with the impact of what they throw on the screen, or with interpreting superficial fashions in æsthetic theory. The field does have unlimited relativities to exploit, so there will always be something "new" to do. Camera techniques not only permit an almost cubist analysis of the objective world; they easily lend psychological processes a fanciful objective structure, and this latter attainment becomes a pseudo-philosophical justification of film. Mr. Koch makes this argument:

> But it isn't enough to argue that film's organization of time and space gives this "objective" medium its "subjective" strength, since the point of art is something more than merely to set up a strong analogy to people's actual emotional lives. It is also a matter of endowing time and space with an autonomous life of their own. In *Psycho,* when Anthony Perkins stabs the girl in that now classical shower stall, the hundred-odd separate shots that electrify the two minutes or so of her death show us not what the girl is seeing in her terror, nor what the murderer is seeing in his frenzy; they flash before us the spectacle of space terrorized, time in terror.

We are not quite sure what all this means, but the *power* of the film-maker is certainly formidable. Men of power have obligations. In an effort to get at the role of film, and to do its possibilities justice, one might say that among literary forms it could be compared with the expression we identify as *Revelation.* A revelation comes to us with imperial demands. It has onset, not invitation. It does not invoke reason, questioning, or criticism. It knows not doubt. It is vast affirmation, the thunder and lightning of speech, a volcano of assertion. If certainties have any natural claim on the human

mind, Revelation is the form of that claim. It is the communication of what is beyond dispute. When the sun appears from behind a dark cloud, you don't conjecture about its presence. The sun's "I am that I am" shines without qualification. Revelation is of this order; so also in lesser ways the dithyramb, the elegy, the ode. The form meets authentic need. Who would want to rewrite the Sermon on the Mount as reasoned "argument"?

Film, then, pre-empts the form of affirmation. No doubt in the hands of an artist it can be made only to intimate, but intoxication and the awful power to invade, to compel, to absorb are always there, potentially the virtual climax of its techniques. Its communications, as Prof. Dickey shows, are certainly not like a book. The conditions of exposure to film impressions are like the intimate relations of an embrace—needing the psychological circumstances of total trust.

It seems clear that a thoroughly godlike ethic ought to oversee all use of film because of the way filmic imagery suspends the critical faculties and generates a surrogate emotional life. There may be a sense in which we are here to soak up totalities, to absorb absolute affirmations. But which ones? By what means? And who decides and selects? The technique of sensory saturation prevents such questions from coming up. Ignoring them, McLuhan talks about the heavy burden of having to read printed type, line by line. A similar case could be made against walking: you *plod* along, putting one foot in front of the other. Driving is better than walking; movies are better than books. Q.E.D.

It seems obvious—to return to Mr. Krutch's observations about his bus ride to San Francisco—that we have developed a culture which, since it has never seriously considered such questions about the ethics or morality of "influence," is too much based upon stimulating people to react to momentary stimuli, to follow impulses which promise various emotional rewards. The entire profession of advertising—the mainspring of economic progress—is based on human susceptibilities to such appeals. And the facilities arranged for the purpose of servicing these impulses make the scenery Mr. Krutch saw out the window of his bus. It was the visual feedback from the habits of people who think mainly about what they want and how they feel, and little else, with no attention given to how this behavior may look from the outside.

So also, curiously enough, with Mr. Koch's quite legitimate criticism of the novel—the middle-class psychological novel which is no longer "interesting." These people are vastly preoccupied with *themselves.* They have exactly the ill Tolstoy described in his *Confession,* but know nothing of the heroic steps he took to find a remedy. Their self-pity is boring, Koch says, and indeed it is. So go to the movies, and see the same people turned inside out.

This is not to suggest there have never been films worth seeing, that the electronic media are worthless. It is rather, however, to insist that, whatever the merits of occasional movies and TV shows, there is something intrinsically wrong with the cultural pursuits of a civilization which in precisely those areas where it is supposed to *shine*—in its common life, on its public streets and places, wherever the luster of democracy and its commitment to mutual good should be most apparent—exhibits only tiresome mediocrity and imitation for the masses, and, in the coterie corners, a sophisticated identification of the artistic with the neuroses of self-defeat.

Who shall be held accountable for all this? It would be a waste of time to add to the number of indictments already available. There is only one theory of accountability capable of bringing natural health to culture, and that is the accountability of the individual to himself. The good society is always one with a considerable number of people who live by this rule, generating the field of active social value through the temper and example of their lives. There has never been, incidentally, any great art save in the work of men who made great demands on themselves. This

amounts to declaring an ennobling conception of man, and we may doubt that a humane culture can exist without the voluntary pursuit of an uncompromised ideal. Surely man as victim is not a theme with any survival value for the arts.

But how can anyone seriously propose the heroic mode for art forms? Vision in the arts is something spontaneous and unpredictable—the contribution of the Muse. It does not appear in response to the prescription of a well-considered tract. Art *flowers;* it is not planned. And if the culture has not the soil for a flowering, what can anyone do? Possibly, those who would serve the arts might find their most useful employment in attempting to enrich the soil. There can be no rule in find their most useful employment in attempting to enrich the soil. There can be no rule in such things, yet there are artists who are doing this—who are "lost" and have disappeared, people say, but the truth may be that they have been "found" for more essential tasks—they work to end the divorce between art and life. To live to celebrate the springs of the spontaneously good in ordinary existence may be the most direct way to rebirth for the human community, and the first if not the only heroic thing possible, today.

REVIEW
VOLUNTEER PHILOSOPHERS

THE need of both detachment and involvement for effective work in any area—whether in art or in life—is a paradox which submits to no formula for resolution. Final questions of meaning or aim play a part in making the two attitudes work together without contradiction, and such questions are best dealt with by feelings of direction rather than concrete replies. This is a way of saying that it is necessary to *feel* the value of the involvement in order to measure its worth, and then to seek a stance which makes comparative judgment possible. For every involvement is inevitably some kind of confinement; every act is a rejection of all its alternatives.

Plato's allegory of the Cave can be regarded as an archetype of the interplay of detachment and involvement (confinement) in human decision. Balance between the two situations cannot be achieved without psychological and moral strain, and' it is through the longing to avoid the pressure of continuous decision that the externalizing formulas of organized religion become popular. It seems quite apparent that the power of convention and of all forms of simplifying certainty grows out of the unwillingness of people to admit the failure of formulas on which many of the decisions of their lives have been based.

Some "men of action," for example, are contemptuous of the idea of detachment. If you tell such a man about Thoreau, he will say, "But what did he ever *do?"* If you ask him to acquaint himself with scholarly theories, he will refuse to concern himself with ideas spun out in ivory towers. Some of the time, of course, he is absolutely right. A clock that has stopped is "right" twice a day. The fact is that detachment and involvement are no more than formal distinctions, taking on discernible meaning only in concrete situations, and through the vision and objectives of the human beings who choose between being now detached and now involved.

A blinding involvement, for example, is broadly illustrated in American history by what Arthur M. Schlesinger called the conversion of "the pursuit of happiness" into "the happiness of pursuit." Or by Captain Ahab's brooding recognition that while his means were rational, his ends were insane. A moment of lucid detachment enabled Ahab to see this. If it had lasted more than a moment, he might not have been victimized by his involvement. A more contemplative comparison is given by Aldo Leopold (in *A Sand County Almanac*)*:*

> To the laborer in the sweat of his labor, the raw stuff on his anvil is an adversary to be conquered. So was wilderness an adversary to the pioneer.
>
> But to the laborer in repose, that same raw stuff is something to be loved and cherished, because it gives definition and meaning to his life.

Philosophers are men for whom detachment is an occupational necessity, yet unless other men learn its importance—unless, that is, they also succeed as *teachers*—they suffer the indifference and contempt of their fellows. In such inverted times, the philosopher who attempts to teach usually pays a double penalty for his pains—he is rejected by both the ignorant mob and the self-serving élite. And when practical indifference to both philosophy and religion becomes a general intellectual convention—as has been the case throughout the involvement of the West in scientific enterprises—then the philosophic calling must seek small hospitalities among men for whom detachment is, so to speak, a secular endowment. This is doubtless the reason for the emergence of a philosophic tendency among artists and writers during the past hundred years. The vast ferment identified as "modernism"—see *The Modern Tradition* by Ellman and Feidelson—involves a quest that can only be identified as philosophical in its deepest roots. But when artists and writers volunteer as philosophers, they take on the Promethean burden, and they are not

really prepared for this ordeal. Witness the agony of Nietzsche, who was really more artist than anything else.

Yet the philosophic motive in the artist continually seeks the foreground in his life, since he has been among the first to sense the bankruptcy of thought and culture in our times. A discussion of technology and art, by Jonathan Benthall, in *Studio International* for last December illustrates the rare detachment achieved by the artist and the philosophic reflections which result. Early in this article, which seeks connections between art and ecology, Mr. Benthall says:

> Nowadays most of us in the West live by a hotchpotch of utilitarian moral beliefs. Literature, with a few exceptions, has tended to reflect states of human centerlessness, rather than map new centers of significance for human life. How *can* we make up our minds about the optimum ecological use of material resources—when most of us have no idea what, if anything, makes life worth living at all? Yet a social critic and anthropologist like Dr. Edmund Leach tells us that science has put man in the position of a god. Science (the argument goes) has now made possible many things that were in the past beyond man's control; so we must be quite calm and unsuperstitious, and make the wisest possible decisions about our future.
>
> The actual situation is that man's quasi-divine powers are being usurped by politicians, bureaucrats, military strategists and corporation men, against whose pressures only a minority of scientists and technologists are prepared to make a stand.

These clarifying perceptions and judgments are in support of the view "that the balanced use of material resources will be hard to achieve for a society that lacks belief in nonmaterial ends." Since the artist is not primarily engaged in the pursuit of material ends, this failure in the achievement of balance becomes apparent to him. Thus the artist, broadly defined, finds a philosophic role thrust upon him:

> I use the word artist simply to mean someone of superior imagination or clairvoyance which is expressed through some medium or other. In the act of coordinating his technical resources he has to coordinate his own instincts and intelligence—that is, his psychological resources; and to do this can be to enact new possible meanings for human life.

His capacities and his freedom from typical involvement define the larger potentialities of art:

> The artist, then, is likely to become the "minister" of a higher ecology of his own making. Art has always conveyed that the physical factors in life—continuity and growth, the struggle for survival, the satisfaction of basic drives, and so on—have an element in them which is more than physical. The social sciences are quite inadequate to give an account of the full significance of these non-physical factors. One sociologist has written that the field of urban sociology "is a major battlefield for those who stress the impact on urban life of 'objective conditions'—the external environment, population structure and the like—and those who emphasize the role of cultural or social values as a key determinant of the so-called objective conditions and of human action in general." This dilemma, if resoluble at all, is unlikely to be resolved within a sociological framework; it is classically the field of the artist.

Strengthened by the riches of his subjective life, the artist recognizes that "objective conditions" are often defined by mere convention, by unimaginative consensus, and that the poet's insight may be more "real" than the physicist's rules of order. To show the unreliability of any arbitrary division between the "natural" and the "artificial," Benthall quotes a profound observation from Merleau-Ponty:

> It is impossible with man to superimpose a first layer of behavior that one calls "natural" and a fabricated cultural or spiritual world. All is fabricated and all is natural with man, so to speak, in the sense that there is no word or conduct which does not owe something to simple biological being and which at the same time does not steal away from the simplicity of animal life, and divert vital behaviour from its path, by a sort of escape, and by a genius for the equivocal, which could serve to define man. Already the simple presence of a living being transforms the physical world, makes "foodstuffs" appear here, elsewhere a "hiding place," gives to "stimuli" a meaning that they did not have. Even more so does the presence of a man in the animal world.

From this we see how recurring aspects of the solipsist dilemma are bound to invade and shake nearly all forms of habitual certainty, compelling us to ask, again and again, what *is* the world in itself, whose specifications we are continually revising to suit new interests, needs, as well as prejudice and convenience? The artist, holding himself aloof from such necessities, sees what is going on, finding, perhaps, more productive desperations to engage his talents.

But who among men are least tortured by solipsist uncertainties? Least shaken by great changes in definitions of the world? Perhaps such vague matters can only be guessed at, but the most stable among mankind seem usually to be those who feel in themselves a vastly inclusive identity. There may in fact be no intellectual solution for the ambiguities described by Merleau-Ponty, but only the resolution of beinghood practiced in all ages by lovers of life. There is not such a great difference between such persons and Mr. Benthall's idea of the artist, which he repeats in his closing paragraph:

> In this article I have argued the relevance of ecology to the artist, and of the artist to ecology. It would be presumptuous to go further and recommend lines of development, this is up to the individual imagination. Lastly, it should be stressed that though the word "artist" has been used in this article, and defined as someone of "superior" faculties, this is not to deny that there is an artist in everyone. It is hard to find another word to mean simply someone who takes an uncommon responsibility for what he does.

COMMENTARY
AN EVOLUTION OF LANGUAGE?

AS one reads along, it is natural to look for unifying ideas that may help to give a permanent order to matters not yet clearly understood. In this issue, for example, there are conceptions spoken of which seem to have a basic resemblance to each other; and are these, one wonders, facets of a common reality? Walter Lippmann refers to the need of people to have "a steady light of their own"; Joan Baez observes that her clearest vision seems to come when she feels herself "most clearly connected with all the rest of humanity"; and Jonathan Benthall, seeking for what may be generic in the artist, speaks of "someone who takes an uncommon responsibility for what he does."

Do these qualities lie along a single scale, an order which exists but has had no attention? We know about I.Q.'s and other measures of intellectual skill or the capacity to manipulate symbols, but there is only small correlation between such ability and "a steady light" or "uncommon responsibility." These matters are as obscure as they were more than two thousand years ago, when Socrates began his inquiry into the question of whether or not virtue could be taught.

Actually, the idea of "virtue" has practically no currency today, having been for centuries identified with tiresome moralizing, and the word itself is completely out of style. Perhaps we should look for an acceptable synonym, since we have little or no language with which to frame deliberations concerning a vast area of subjective life—what used to be called the moral life.

Yet this is not altogether the case. Perhaps the language now being evolved by some of the humanistic psychologists will eventually give us tools for inquiry into the mysteries of characterological education. An article by A. H. Maslow in the Fall 1969 issue of the new journal, *Transpersonal Psychology* ($7.50 a year, 2637 Marshall Drive, Palo Alto, Calif. 94303)—a study of two levels of "self-actualizing people"—suggests two stages of reality on a scale of subjective development. The values on that scale might be closely related to those mentioned in our first paragraph.

In this discussion, Dr. Maslow distinguishes between self-actualizing individuals who have "little or no experiences of transcendence, and those in whom transcendent experiencing was important and even central." The following is taken from the generalized account of the latter:

> They (the transcenders) speak easily, normally, naturally and unconsciously the language of Being (B-language), the language of poets, of mystics, of seers, of profoundly religious men, of men who live at the Platonic-idea level or at the Spinozistic level, under the aspect of eternity. Therefore, they should better understand parables, figures of speech, paradoxes, music, art, non-verbal communications, etc. . . . They perceive unitively or sacrally (*i.e.*, the sacred within the secular), or they see the sacredness in all things *at the same time* that they also see them at the practical, everyday D-level. [D-level means the level of the satisfaction of practical deficiencies.] They can sacralize everything at will; *i.e.*, perceive it under the aspect of eternity. This ability is in *addition* to—not mutually exclusive with—good reality-testing within the D-realm. . . .
>
> They seem somehow to recognize each other, and to come to almost instant intimacy and mutual understanding even upon first meeting. They can then communicate not only in all the verbal ways but also in the non-verbal ways as well. . . .
>
> They are *more* holistic about the world than are the "healthy" or practical self-actualizers (who are also holistic in the same sense). Mankind is one and the cosmos is one, and such concepts as the "national interest" or "the religion of my fathers" or "different grades of people or of IQ" either cease to exist or are easily transcended. If we accept as the ultimate political necessities (as well as today the most urgent ones), to think of all men as brothers, to think of national sovereignties (the right to make war) as a form of stupidity or immaturity, then transcenders think this way more *easily*, more reflexly, more naturally. Thinking in our "normal" stupid or immature way is for them an *effort*, even though they can do it.

> The deep conflicts over the "elitism" that is inherent in *any* doctrine of self-actualization—they are after all superior people whenever comparisons are made—is more easily solved—or at least managed—by the transcenders than by the merely healthy self-actualizers. This is made possible because they can more easily live in both the D- and B-realms simultaneously, that they can sacralize everybody so much more easily . . . This sacredness of every person and even of every living thing, even of non-living things that are beautiful, etc., is so easily and directly perceived in its reality by every transcender that he can hardly forget it for a moment. . . .
>
> It follows from theory that transcenders should be more "reconciled with evil" in the sense of understanding its occasional inevitability and necessity in the larger holistic sense, *i.e.*, "from above," in a godlike or Olympian sense. Since this implies a better understanding of it, it should generate *both* a greater compassion with it *and* a less ambivalent and a more unyielding fight against it.

It seems fair to say that the conceptual language we need is coming along.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
VARIOUS BOOKS

BOOKS about "teaching" are now coming out with such frequency that it is hardly possible to keep track of them. The best of them, curiously enough, seem to be about the worst situations. We are thinking of books like Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age,* Herbert Kohl's *36 Children,* James Herndon's *The Way it Spozed To Be,* George Dennison's *The Lives of Children,* and one or two others of similar impact. From these books the reader learns to feel something of the calculated cruelty experienced by hundreds of thousands of children, every day of their lives. There is some shock value in this reading, contributing one more provocative to recognizing the fundamental changes that very nearly all of us need to institute in the direction and conduct of our lives. For such books tend to show that there are no "specific" remedies for the conditions they describe, since these conditions result from causes of great generality in widespread human attitudes.

The contribution of John Holt has been a little different. He reveals that beneath the polite manners and comparative comfort of middle-class life a similar persecution of the young is going on. No one really escapes, although the middle-class young are miserable without knowing why. Many of them revolt against inauthenticity they feel rather than understand. To older people it seems a senseless defection, yet the ill they are reacting against is very real.

In the ghetto the young experience ordered and enforced *unfairness* as a way of life. In the setting of middle-class affluence, a visionless mediocrity is praised by a hackneyed rhetoric that can no longer be believed. A culture devoid of vision provides the young with no inner protection against the centrifuge of random impulse, and conventions which have fallen to ordering only petty satisfactions are restraints without dignity of purpose. Aimlessness, then, is at the root of the prevailing problems in the schools for the middle-class young.

Constance Melaro's *Bitter Harvest* (1965) describes almost nothing but disorder in the lives of high school students. It records unrelieved discouragement, and the diagnosis of the preface—that the ills of the young "have resulted from putting into nationwide practice a host of half-digested John Deweyanisms"—cannot be taken seriously. One wonders why such books get written or published. A substantially better book is Deborah James's *The Taming* (McGraw-Hill, 1969), the report of a woman who taught in a middle-class high school for ten years and then quit in order to evaluate and report on her experiences. Measured dissatisfaction was the cause of this reflective, quietly concerned woman's retirement from the teaching scene. She wrote the book for two reasons: To judge the meaning of her teaching experience and to provide a factual account of what "teaching" is like to persons planning to enter this profession. She says in her preface:

> Today the school is the father of our youth. Changes in our society have gradually and continually given a greater burden to the school in shaping the individual. As parents have become more loving and less demanding of their children, the school has become the stern parent, requiring the individual to conform and to measure up to the standards set by our society. It is the school that does the taming. Forced by law and custom to attend school for many years of their lives whether or not they have any desire to learn, many of the students in our schools feel trapped as, indeed, they are.
>
> As the writing of this book progressed, I became aware of the basic power of the system, which was impossible to see in the midst of the confusion and pressure which constitute a teacher's life. I hope this view will help you to find greater depth in your teaching experience and to maintain the elements in the system which are strong in the midst of the change our schools are facing.

The book offers a great deal of description of classroom happenings, along with useful generalization like the following:

> Teachers also develop discussion questions that are so good they work year after year. One of my favorites, "If a student in this class were to be suddenly switched with a savage from the Congo, which would adjust better?" guaranteed a good discussion on the nature of intelligence, for example.
>
> Students enjoy discussion classes, especially if the material discussed is a dialogue, i.e., an interchange of ideas and experiences rather than an examination of knowledge in which the teacher expects a right answer. Even though I considered my ability to develop good discussion classes my weakest skill in teaching, the students ranked discussions as contributing the most to their learning when I asked them to rank our various classroom procedures in order of merit. The problem of depending too much on discussion classes is that such discussions may descend to the level of what I call "yak" classes. These are classes where students sit around and exchange ignorance. To make a discussion vital, the material must relate to the experience of the students, but often their experience is so limited that the discussion makes no progress in the development of new ideas.

Schools Without Scholars by John Keats (Houghton Mifflin, 1958), sets out to do one simple thing—tell how exceptional parents in an exceptional community united their efforts to improve the education their children were getting in the public schools. The author is a journalist and a parent. There is a lot more in this book than the story of the accomplishments of the Citizens' Council on the Public Schools, formed by aroused parents in the town of New Canaan, Conn., but this is what the reader will remember. A quotation from the report of the Educational Objectives Committee of the Council briefly suggests what happened:

> The quality of our children's spoken English was disquieting. Oral English seemed in some cases to be treated too much as a subject apart which you can spend a day on here or a week on there. In fact, of course, every time a child opens his mouth . . . an exercise in oral English is under way. The quality of English spoken by each child, and therefore heard by every other child, tended to be juvenile and mumbly, often sloppy in both pronunciation and grammar as well as in choice of words. This went largely uncorrected. Children learn by imitation, and they imitate the speech they hear. . . . About written work, we felt . . . not enough in quantity or high enough standard of performance seemed to be asked of the children . . . . The prevalent use of multiple-choice tests deprives the children of still another chance to learn how to write intelligibly and think clearly. Essay questions, frequently asked, would give a practice in critical thinking and fluent use of language for which there is no substitute. . . . We cannot . . . resist commenting on the number of pages in the series of grammar texts now used which are devoted to watering grammar down through what could be called life-adjustment subjects.

And so on, throughout the curriculum. A great many changes were planned and carried out, with noticeably satisfactory results. Incidentally, this report reminds us of the casual explanation given by a teacher of history in one of California's state colleges, when asked why he was teaching a survey course of Western civilization. This was, he said, the only way he could think of to get the reading of some great literature into the college curriculum.

FRONTIERS

The Steady Light

THE lead article in MANAS for last Dec. 10, What Price 'Communications'?" examined the overload of responsibility that has been heaped by democratic society on the communications media, turning them into the principal means of adult education. It also demonstrated the inadequacy of the muckraker theory of truth as the basis of social control. It suggested that the exposé techniques of even a Ralph Nader—whose integrity and intent are beyond question—could be of little aid in correcting the malpractices of the communications industry. Watchdog methods are applicable only to the grosser offenses against the public good. To legislate and enforce "morality" in the use of subtle things like words is simply not possible, and attempting it only gives *carte blanche* to all word-merchants who are cleverer than the law-makers.

A vast welter of data in evidence of this is provided in *Etc.* for September, 1969, a special issue devoted to the mass media. The chief contributors are Lee Loevinger and Nicholas Johnson, both with backgrounds in general semantics and experience as members of the Federal Communications Commission. Both are also prolific writers and speakers and *Etc.* gives bibliographies of their books and articles. Here we borrow from Mr. Loevinger's paper, "Mass versus Media—Who Controls?", part of a long quotation from Walter Lippmann on exaggerated expectations concerning the services of the press to a democratic society. While Lippmann wrote in 1929, his remarks, as Loevinger says, are as relevant today, and "as applicable to broadcasting as to the print media." Even at their best, Lippmann says, the newspapers cannot bear "the whole burden of popular sovereignty, to supply spontaneously the truth which democrats hope was inborn." He continues:

> We misunderstand the limited nature of news, the illimitable complexity of society; we overestimate our own endurance, public spirit, and all-round competence. We suppose an appetite for uninteresting truths which is not discovered by any honest analysis of our own tastes.
>
> If the newspapers then, are to be charged with the duty of translating the whole public life of mankind, so that every adult can arrive at an opinion on every moot topic, they fail, they are bound to fail, in any future one can conceive they will continue to fail. It is not possible to assume that a world carried on by division of labor and distribution of authority, can be governed by universal opinions in the whole population. Unconsciously the theory sets up the single reader as omni-competent, and puts upon the press the burden of accomplishing whatever representative government, industrial organization, and diplomacy have failed to accomplish. . . .
>
> The press has often mistakenly pretended that it could do just that. It has, at great moral cost to itself, encouraged a democracy still bound to its original premises, to expect newspapers to supply spontaneously for every organ of government, for every social problem, the machinery of information which these do not normally supply themselves. Institutions, having failed to supply themselves with instruments of knowledge, have become a bundle of "problems," which the population as a whole, reading the press as a whole, is supposed to solve. . . .
>
> The press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern society by episodes, incidents, and eruptions. It is only when they work by a steady light of their own, that the press, when it is turned upon them, reveals a situation intelligible enough for a popular decision. The trouble lies deeper than the press, and so does the remedy.

The project, then, is not to demand greater efficiency of journalistic watchdogs, but to figure out how the people and institutions of society can acquire a more "steady light of their own." Not many give attention to this. No specific answer will work, and non-specific solutions are too demanding. This steady light was what Gandhi was after with his basic education and constructive work program in India. It is commonly thought that there is little similarity between the problems of the Indian village and

those of the cities and towns of the United States because, by comparison, Americans have a lot of money, and up to a point this may be so; but the qualities the Sarvodaya workers endeavor to foster in the villages—foresight, self-reliance, cooperation and self-limitation, are needed everywhere in the world, and money will not buy them. If the current writings of E. F. Schumacher on practical aid to underdeveloped countries were studied with these universal needs in mind, the pertinence of the Gandhian approach for economically *over*-developed countries and their problems would become quite apparent. Gandhi and Schumacher write about *characterological* change through education. The long-term result of this kind of development is institutional infrastructure which has its own "steady light."

Money spent according to directives from experts in distant places cannot contribute to social reconstruction. The values of harmonious social life, growth, and peaceful relationships are held in solution in the ways and habits of people in home and community, and it is futile to seek for them elsewhere. The lives of men provide the fuel for the "steady light," and theories which neglect this primary reality can only falsify social problems. No people dependent on external power can ever be free, not because the external or central power is entirely bad—it has some uses—but because freedom is not an "arrangement" but a projection of human qualities. Paul Goodman is another of the few who keep repeating this fundamental truth. In a recent forum on "The Authentic Man," reported in the *Humanist* for January/February, Goodman rejects the solution of a super nation-state:

> That *isn't* the alternative. The alternative is the free federation of functioning groups. The reason the young are not anarchistic at present although some of them think they are is that you can't be an anarchist and be alienated. In order to be an anarchist, you have to be competent in the crafts, in the professions, and you also have to have trust in other human beings. Once you begin to call another guy a pig, then you can't be an anarchist any more. It requires trust in other human beings; otherwise, the level of violence will rise, and you will begin to get central violence, and then you're back to the old story. But you also have to have competence. One of the reasons I try to urge the young to become competent is in order to make anarchism possible. You can only have anarchism on the basis of workers' management. The anarchist unions are always composed of the watchmakers and lumbermen or the miner—people who don't need a boss. As soon as you have controllers, then you have a boss, and you can't have anarchism.

The spinning wheel was for Gandhi the symbol of self-reliance and freedom from subordination to industrial organization, and when this was mentioned, Joan Baez, another forum participant, asked:

> What equivalent do we Americans in this age find for that spinning wheel? What's the alternative? Obviously, it can't be a spinning wheel. This is a different country in a slightly different age. So what do we find that we can relate to, that we can organize with, that can grow?

Questions of this sort sound strange only because they are so seldom raised. Yet they are basic to finding a "steady light." Miss Baez' final comment was this:

> I feel that the clearest vision I ever get about myself—when I say clear vision it just means that I have a momentary peace with myself—is when I see myself most dearly connected with all the rest of humanity. And I feel that I see the necessity for people to be able to have vision—I don't mean being visionary—but I mean some kind of insight. And the way I feel about humanity in general is that people walk around blind. I don't feel as though it is enough if some of us are able to have some kind of vision, unless other people have that same thing.