

## THE PRICE OF SUBMISSION

THE cost of keeping up with the times, these days, seems very great. The reader of serious magazines—at least two of them are edited with great skill and an uncanny grasp of the directions of sophisticated interest—gains continuous instruction in the habits and eccentricities of the men who wield political power, and he is exposed to elaborately documented accounts of how he is being had by the creators and manipulators of public opinion. This sort of "keeping up" doubtless has some value, but if you take a deliberate vacation from such reading, the loss doesn't seem to matter very much. The Great Personalities of politics, after all, are *not* great personalities. What, one wonders, would really good magazines and newspapers be filled with, in a time like ours? And what, indeed, is a time like ours? Who decides such things?

What a spokesman for the drop-out generation said about the mass media could have much wider application:

When we bite into that first morning's bit of toasted bread and stare at our everyday reality of digestible events, who's to say we are not more addicted to this mental feast than we are to breakfast? And who's to say that the thing being devoured and the devourer are not one and the same, that we are not fodder for a greater feast called Media?

It's all a game, the mulberry bush of frantic fact, and we go round and round until we are hypnotized by the dynamics of it all or fall to the ground in a heap of exhaustion. . . .

What is real and what is not remains a mystery to us. For those of us who know, and they are few, the game is just that—unreal—and will remain so unless we ourselves catch these specters off camera, away from the game struct called media, in a private moment of nakedness where what they mean is what they say, and maybe then it will all be real.

What it all boils down to is one large pseudo-event. . . .

Serious writing, one supposes, is intended to do just that—tell us what these people say "off camera"—but in the end they don't say very much or mean very much, then, either. (The foregoing is by Allen Katzman in *East Village Other*, and is included in Jesse Kornbluth's book, *Notes from the New Underground*, Viking, 1968.)

What of literature? In these same "serious" magazines, the books that get attention and the most space often are hardly worth reading. Why, for example, has Chaim Potok's *The Chosen* won such small acclaim, while John Updike and Philip Roth are discussed almost endlessly? There is a sense in which the "media" McLuhan talks about seem to really control our minds. The "reality" they reflect sets the level of the novel's appeal. The "objective" and sensory point of view is always after the fact. All that Carlyle wrote, more than a hundred years ago, about the machine as a "metaphor" has come true. Empiricism in philosophy, mechanism in action, and external fact as the source of value were Carlyle's special targets. As Leo Marx puts it in *The Machine in the Garden*:

To account for a man's ideas and values only, or even chiefly, by the circumstances in which he lives is, according to Carlyle, to divest his thought of will, emotion, and creative power. If the mind is a reflex of what is, how can it possibly control circumstances? Control implies the power to compare what is with what may be. To Carlyle the empirical philosophy is negativistic and quietistic. "By arguing on the 'force of circumstances'," he says, "we have argued away all force from ourselves; and stand lashed together, uniform in dress and movement, like the rowers of some boundless galley." In transactions with the world outside, a mind so conceived responds like one cogged wheel turned by another. Used in this way the image of the machine connotes loss of inner freedom even as it provides outward power. "Practically considered," says Carlyle, "our creed is Fatalism; and, free in hand and foot, we are shackled in heart and soul with far straiter than feudal chains."

Carlyle argues his case with considerably more subtlety than recent critics of C. P. Snow's "Two Cultures" essay, but Carlyle, unfortunately, is seldom read today. Modern disdain for Carlyle and some other excellent writers of the past no doubt grows out of the feeling that they did not anticipate the conditions of modern life, with which we are confronted. Their realities, in short, are not ours. This is true enough, and often precisely their point. Carlyle was vastly suspicious of the utilitarian, environmentalist assumptions of popular Enlightenment philosophy, which led to increasing neglect of all that "cannot be treated mechanically." He rejected the easy assumption that "were the laws, the government, in good order, all were well with us; the rest would care for itself."

If the so-called "class" magazines are an index to informed opinion in the present, this assumption is now so well established that if a writer makes a name for himself with a novel, and then wishes to do something more "responsible" or "relevant," he often turns to a kind of impressionistic political reporting. Well, there is precedent of a sort for this. Tolstoy gave up and even denounced his art for missionary enterprise, although he set his sights far above anything that could be called "political" activity. And two other men of unusual character, while not novelists, felt compelled to oppose what seemed to them the political crimes of their day—Thoreau entered the lists against slavery, and Gandhi, with greater constancy, campaigned against war.

The reader discovers that both Tolstoy and Thoreau were driven to make themselves heard by a certain desperation. Tolstoy reveals this feeling in his *Confession*, Thoreau in *Civil Disobedience*, *Slavery in Massachusetts*, and in what he wrote and said about John Brown.

Now it is true enough that the editors of our best modern magazines sometimes seem touched by desperation, causing them to give a little attention to Tolstoy and Thoreau, but if these men speak best to our condition, why not study them

more thoroughly, and not only in desperation? Conceivably, they embody general excellences which, if more widely emulated by modern writers and thinkers, could make desperation less the order of the day.

We have for quotation some material which might contribute to the foundation of another sort of literary criticism, establish sounder canons of good literature, and, finally, stir into circulation far better ideas about man and future human possibility. Such criticism might begin to reverse the trend so perceptively described by Storm Jameson three years ago in the *American Scholar* (Winter, 1965-66).

Miss Jameson wrote at length about the apparent capitulation of modern writers to the threat of the electronic media and, by extension, the computer:

There are two sorts of possible communication. There is the communication of information, which television in one way and the computer in others can deliver with incomparable speed and efficiency. And there is communication of a profound insight into the human condition. I am sure, in the marrow of my writer's bones, that this will not be provided by even the most advanced machines. . . .

Obviously, as the machines are further developed and as we deepen our understanding of linguistics, the usefulness of autonomous translation will increase. But no writer believes that the computer can be programmed to imitate completely the way our minds use language. A first-class human translator draws subconsciously on a vast hinterland of ambiguities of sense and sensation. The process is one of unimaginable delicacy. But why speculate on the intellectual and artistic bankruptcy that would be implied by an attempt to transfer to an electronic brain this particular aspect of consciousness? . . .

Nevertheless I think of the computer and its yet unrealized potentialities with discomfort and an equivocal sense of being spiritually diminished. And this is not, not in any degree, started up by puerile nonsense about computer poetry and paintings. Its roots are deeper—in an impotent and less than half-conscious resentment of the god in the machine. A manmade god, but overwhelmingly powerful. Endowed by human ingenuity with inhuman powers.

An inhuman power—one felt as inhuman—breeds submission, apathy, boredom or rebellion. The literary rebel who can imagine no other way of outwitting it will turn nihilist. You can see this happening at the moment in the novel, on two levels. On the sophisticated level of the *nouveau roman*, and in the growth, or irruption into daylight, of the pornographic novel. The first is an urbane, highly intellectual and fragile growth. Its most self-explanatory practitioner, Alain Robbe-Grillet, sees human beings as a kaleidoscope of moods, and communion between them little more coherent than a conversation on crossed telephone wires; to pass judgment on their acts, thoughts, feelings, is senseless or impossible. This irrational philosophy lays an ax to the roots of any intelligible vision of reality, so that by an ironical paradox the New Novelists devalue man, rob him of his identity, as fatally as does the most menacing product of technology.

We attempted to suggest, earlier, that there have been numerous versions of this submission, notably in the editorial direction of serious magazines and in the focus of literary criticism.

What would deserve attention in the sort of criticism and appreciation we are arguing for? Well, let us take the now least defensible aspect of Carlyle's work—his "hero-worship"—and see what Thoreau had to say about it. In his only piece of literary criticism, Thoreau wrote of Carlyle's book, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*:

No doubt Carlyle has a propensity to *exaggerate* the heroic in history, that is, he creates you an ideal hero rather than another thing: he has most of that material. This we allow in all its senses, and in one narrower sense it is not so convenient. Yet what were history if he did not exaggerate it? How comes it that history never has to wait for facts, but for a man to write it? The ages may go on forgetting the facts never so long, he can remember two for every one forgotten. The musty records of history, like the catacombs, contain the perishable remains, but only in the breast of genius are embalmed the souls of heroes. There is very little of what is called criticism here it is love and reverence, rather, which deal with qualities not relatively, but absolutely great; for whatever is admirable in a man is something infinite, to which we cannot set bounds. These sentiments allow the mortal to die, the immortal and divine to survive.

What is to be said of an age which fails to recognize or to take seriously this humanistic necessity for exaggeration in literature? Without this awareness, sober conscientiousness is bound to be reductive and stultifying, and freedom will have no way of distinguishing itself from careless and formless abandon. Without a vision of man, the virtues either become piddling or take on reverse meanings.

Thoreau continues:

Exaggeration! was ever any virtue attributed to a man without exaggeration? was ever any vice, without infinite exaggeration? Do we not exaggerate ourselves to ourselves for the actual men we are? Are we not all great men? Yet what are we actually to speak of? We live by exaggeration. What else is it to anticipate more than we enjoy? The lightning is an exaggeration of the light. Exaggerated history is poetry, and truth referred to a new standard. To a small man every greater is an exaggeration. He who cannot exaggerate is not qualified to utter truth. No truth, we think, was ever expressed but with this sort of emphasis, so that for the time there seemed to be no other. Moreover, you must speak loud to those who are hard of hearing, and so you acquire a habit of shouting to those who are not.

Who could make better explanation, also, of the power of Tolstoy's writing? But for defense of Tolstoy's book, *What Is Art?*, we choose Lafcadio Hearn. In a lecture to his students at the University of Tokyo (printed in *Talks to Writers*, Dodd, Mead, 1927), Hearn said:

One of the most important things for a literary student to learn is not to allow his judgment to be formed by other people's opinions. I have to lecture you hoping that you will keep to this rule even in regard to my own opinion. Do not think that something is good or bad, merely because I say so, but try to find out for yourself by unprejudiced reading and thinking whether I am right or wrong. In the case of Tolstoy, the criticisms have been so fierce and in some respects so well founded, that even I hesitated for a moment to buy the book. But I suspected very soon that any book capable of making half the world angry on the subject of art must be a book of great power. Indeed, it is rather a good sign that a man is worth something, when thousands of people abuse him simply for his opinions. And now, having read the book, I find that I was quite right in my

reflections. It is a very great book but you must be prepared for startling errors in it, extraordinary misjudgments, things that really deserve harsh criticism. Many great thinkers are as weak in some one direction as they happen to be strong in another. Ruskin, who could not really understand Greek art, and who resembled Tolstoi in many ways, was a man of this kind, inclined to abuse what he did not understand, Japanese art not less than Greek art. About Greek art one of his judgments dearly proves the limitation of his faculty. He said that the Venus de Medici was a very uninteresting little person. Tolstoi has said more extraordinary things than that; he has no liking for Shakespeare, for Dante, for other men whose fame has been established for centuries. He denies at once whole schools of literature, whole schools of painting and whole schools of music. If the wrong things he has said were picked out of his book and printed on a page all by themselves (this has been done by some critics), you would think after reading that page that Tolstoi had become suddenly insane. But you must not mind these blemishes. Certain giants must never be judged by their errors, but only by their strength, and in spite of all faults the book is a book which will make anybody think in a new and generous way. Moreover, it is utterly sincere and unselfish—the author denouncing even his own work, the wonderful books of his youth, which won for him the very highest place among modern novelists. These, he now tells us, are not works of art.

Well, this is only the beginning of Hearn's criticism and appreciation of Tolstoy, and he goes on to examine, weigh, and agree or disagree in particular; but mostly he agrees, and with the unblinking honesty of a man who was himself a distinguished writer and artist, as well as a teacher, he says at the end:

But the reforms advised [by Tolstoi] are at present, of course, impossible. Although I believe Tolstoi is perfectly right, I could not lecture to you—I could not fulfill my duties in this university—by strictly observing his principles. Were I to do that, I should be obliged to tell you that hundreds of books famous in English literature are essentially bad books, and that you ought not to read them at all; whereas I am engaged for the purpose of pointing out to you the literary merits of those very books.

It is important, of course, to note that neither Thoreau nor Hearn, when writing as critic, is ever

loosely "uncritical." They are specific in their fault-finding, but both choose to write of men about whom there are far more important things to say. And there is that natural generosity of the critic who is himself an accomplished artist and knows that no one short of a hypothetical universal genius can see in all directions with the same unvarying clarity.

This, one could say, is the sort of "objectivity" that is proper in contemplating works of the mind. We have one more quotation, taken from Rollo May's contribution to *Readings in Humanistic Psychology* (reviewed last week), illustrating further the generosity which good critics must practice. The point, here, is that this is a necessity of historical understanding as well as "generosity." With Thoreau, they feel the need to "speak loud to those who are hard of hearing." May says:

The existentialists are devoted to discovering the *basic human condition, and what constitutes it*. Often they go to extremes in their statements, as in Sartre's statement of "unconditioned humanism." When he writes, "Freedom is existence and in it existence precedes essence," he is saying that there would be no truth or science or morality or anything else if we leave existing man out. (I don't agree, incidentally, with such an extreme statement; it seems to me the *structure* in which we human beings find ourselves must be brought into the picture.)

The existentialists, as I see modern history, are the shock troops of the humanistic movement. Like all shock troops, they swing high, wide and handsome, often speak rashly and leave others to do the consolidating. Modern existentialism has a special "crisis basis" which also adds to the confusion. This partly comes from the fact that existential thinkers from Socrates to Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche have believed that life itself is fundamentally critical. But the special point here is that contemporary existentialism was born in our age in which the human being has been all but annihilated by mechanical process in science and industrialism.

In the long run it may turn out that the aggressive, shock troop function of the existentialists will have been as important for the humanistic

movement in psychology as it has been in theology, literature, and other aspects of our culture.

There seems here a clear grasp of what Thoreau saw as the necessity for "exaggeration," and what Hearn understood as the need to recognize the great by their strengths, not by their defects. There is some legitimacy in the fact that such lines of balance and restorative conception concerning the nature of man now come to us more frequently from *healers* than from literary people. Rollo May is a psychotherapist. And it cannot be coincidence that the vision of man is least marred, today, as it is seen by men who have undergone the most desperation—whether personally, as with Viktor Frankl, in German death camps, or through experience, as healers, of the spreading tragedy of mental and emotional disorder that is already a major symbol of these times.

But why, in any event, should we turn to the past—in this case to writers of the past—for help? A reply by Arthur Morgan may supply justification:

A person without history or knowledge of the past must see the world as commonplace because, except at extreme times, he is going to live among commonplace people who have come to that conclusion . . . The only way to get the sum and substance of human experience is to reach out beyond the years we have into the years of the past, into the significant experiences of the human race.

## *REVIEW*

### THE EXPERIENCES OF JIM PECK

GRAYING American radicals for whom Gene Debs is more than a name in a book, and who cherish memories of the Wobblies which are not entirely second hand, will take particular pleasure in reading James Peck's new book, *Underdogs Vs Uppergods*, just published by Greenleaf Books, Canterbury, New Hampshire. It is a clean piece of mimeo production, side-stitched, and sells at \$1.50. Jim Peck acquired his point of view toward the social struggle from experiences as an ordinary seaman, beginning in 1934, and he has ever since maintained a militant working-class attitude that resembles the old Wobbly spirit. For courage and an integrity which follows its own light, this spirit is hard to beat. In Peck, it is joined with an uncompromising conception of nonviolence that is Gandhian in origin. These are the qualities which make his story worth reading. The book reports a continuation of a vital current in American history that, except for Peck and its expression by Ammon Hennacy, seems to have almost completely disappeared.

This book has another and equally important relevance. Two weeks ago we reviewed here Lawrence S. Wittner's *Rebels Against War—The American Peace Movement, 1941-1960* (Columbia University Press), calling it an accurate and detailed account of war resistance during World War II and after. Wittner's book is a work of exemplary scholarship. Peck's book also covers the major events of the same period, but *from the inside*. In short, Jim Peck was actively engaged in the events which Prof. Wittner tells about in such detail. The Wittner book will probably gain more readers, being the product of a university press, but Peck's book could make Wittner's reader feel and understand far more of what these struggles meant to the men who carried them on. Both, in other words, should be read.

The following is Jim Peck's account of the life of the eighteen hunger-striking C.O.'s in Danbury

(Connecticut) federal prison who in 1943 were protesting racial segregation in the prison mess hall:

The first day of hunger striking is the worst. You develop a dull headache which gradually gets worse. You drink water hourly but by evening you feel nauseous. . . . On the second day the headache is gone and thereafter you feel better. . . .

To enliven the evening bull sessions we engaged in long arguments. Religion and decentralism were favorite subjects. The decentralists became known as Borsodi-ites because we had read several of Borsodi's books from the prison library and debated his plan for making the home a self-sufficient production unit.

Our decentralists argued that centralized government and mass production corporations became so big that their absolute power cannot be challenged. They insisted that democracy can be realized only in a decentralist society, which enables people in the localities to exert control.

We unionists would retort that centralization is a technological development which is here to stay. We said the fight for democracy must be pressed within the existing framework by working in the labor movement. When the decentralists described the small communities they planned to create, the rest of us would boo and shout: "Come to the cities and fight the bosses! Don't bury your head in the sand!" . . .

One of the strikers, Lowell Naeve, proposed that we issue a hand lettered paper for circulation among ourselves. By General vote the paper was named The Clink. Our stock of newsprint came from Time, Inc.—thanks to the discovery that ink could be removed from the pages of Life by washing them in the sink. Each striker edited one to four issues, published at irregular intervals. Since there were four artists among us, the paper was amply illustrated with drawings and cartoons. Reading The Clink became one of the best breaks in the routine of segregation. We passed it back and forth with ingenious devices. There was no need for special stunts to boost circulation, but we published a number of special issues including a Debs edition, an anti-war issue, and one that described a strike by the hacks (wholly imaginary) in sympathy with us. The Clink was the only free press in Danbury. The authorities never found out about it.

Naeve, an anarchist, was an unusual character. When he was a boy he built a contraption to play

several musical instruments simultaneously, and got billed in a vaudeville show. Tired of school, he left home and made his way first to the west coast, then to Mexico City. Odd jobs enabled him to eat and paint. He returned to the United States in time to clash with the draft law. Opposed to any kind of regimentation he refused to register and was sent to Danbury for a year. In jail he refused to work and spurned his good-time because he would not sign papers.

The conscientious objectors won the strike. The warden finally agreed that blacks and whites could eat with each other in prison. Jim Peck comments:

Danbury thus became the first Federal prison to abolish jim-crow seating. CO's in several other prisons made similar attacks on segregation, with varying results. It seems to me that the campaign against racial segregation may be counted as one of the most important accomplishments of CO's in World War II. The change was particularly appropriate in the so-called correctional institutions like Danbury which claimed to rehabilitate men for the outside world and at the same time enforced segregation.

The warden never admitted that we won the strike. He told visitors that our action had nothing to do with the change in policy. In fact, he said, he would have acted sooner if the strike had not tied his hands. One of the prime stupidities of the prison system is the reluctance of the authorities to grant reasonable requests even in fulfillment of pledges. Our experience was that we had to fight for everything.

Jim Peck was an active participant in a number of the acts of civil disobedience which have shaped and given moral coloring to the peace movement since the end of World War II. He was one of eleven persons who, led by Lawrence Scott, in 1957 trespassed on the federal territory of the nuclear testing area in Nevada. The group was at once arrested. One aspect of the incident is of particular interest:

The attitude of the guards seemed one of fear for a completely unfamiliar situation, coupled with lack of understanding of nonviolence. The same attitude had been exhibited by the sheriff and the highway police in meetings the day before with Muste and our attorney, Francis Heisler. One of the officials, after listening attentively to Muste, had sighed with relief

and commented: "You mean then that there really isn't going to be a riot."

A year later, having experience as a seaman, Peck volunteered for the crew of the *Golden Rule*, the 30-foot ketch that Bert Bigelow and Bill Huntington planned to sail into the nuclear bomb-testing zone in the Pacific ocean. Peck was not, however, a Quaker, and so did not qualify until later, when need for more men with sailing experience made a place for him. On its second attempt to reach the testing area, the pacifist craft was overtaken six miles out by Coast Guard cutters in "hot pursuit," and towed back to Honolulu. This time the crew did 60 days in jail.

Peck's first Freedom Ride was in 1947, when a bus trip into the upper South was sponsored by CORE and the Fellowship of Reconciliation as a means of testing observance of the 1946 Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in interstate travel. While the trip showed that drivers and passengers were ready to accept desegregation, some sluggings and arrests occurred and not many southern blacks flocked to follow the example of the volunteers.

Such adventures, however, were not called "Freedom Rides" until fourteen years later, when CORE leaders thought of the term and planned to test the Supreme Court decision in the Bruce Boynton case, which had extended the 1946 ruling to outlaw segregation in waiting and restrooms, restaurants, and other facilities along the way in interstate travel. This time the Deep South was also a target, the route being from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans. Calling Peck's story of what happened to the black and white participants in this challenge to prejudice a blow-by-blow report would be entirely accurate. Violence against the Freedom Riders began in South Carolina. John Lewis, a black divinity student, and Albert Bigelow, commander of the *Golden Rule*, were the first to be beaten. The climax of violence against the riders came in Birmingham, where they were attacked by men armed with pipes. Peck was a hospital case and another rider,

Walter Bergman, a retired professor, died later from a crushing blow on the head. The attack came after the bus itself had been demolished by an incendiary bomb which set it on fire. By this time reporters, sent from other parts of the country, were in Birmingham to cover the story. They started asking questions as soon as Peck recovered consciousness:

"Was the Freedom Ride worth it? Would you do it again?" These two questions were tossed at me . . . by reporters as I lay on an operating table in Hillman Clinic, Birmingham, Alabama, waiting for the doctor to finish sewing 53 stitches in my face and head. I had been beaten almost to death by a Birmingham mob for the "crime" of trying to eat with Charles Person, a black, at the Trailways terminal lunchroom. I had a throbbing headache, I was weak from loss of blood, and I felt nauseous—not so much from physical pain as from utter disgust at the exhibition I had just experienced.

Still, I said yes to the reporters' questions.

Since the Freedom Ride bus was no more, and Greyhound would not carry the Riders, the lamed and bandaged group finished the trip to New Orleans by plane.

There is no feeling of hate or anger in this book, and no disdain for people who disagree with the writer. Jim Peck is a single-minded man who stands with the underdog and expects no "system" to relieve the injustice and poverty suffered by the poor. It is not entirely clear how he expects the changes he hopes for to come, but meanwhile he is doing what he thinks is the best thing to make plain what is wrong. The book closes with a record of his various arrests. There are only a few years between 1935 and 1968 when he didn't have any.

## *COMMENTARY*

### UNSETTLED QUESTIONS

THE extent to which the problems created by technology complicate, if they do not compromise, well-intentioned thinking is illustrated by Jim Peck's championship of Centralization (see Review) as the only framework in which effective social reforms can be won. Peck is also a champion of non-violence, and may be called Gandhian in this respect, yet he is not Gandhian in accepting the centralizing effect of technological development and regarding the city as the chief theater of constructive social action.

He would probably argue that decentralizing reform might work in India, which has a "rural civilization," but that in the West technology has gone too far for hope of decentralization.

So the struggle for power remains, but ought, it is said, to be pursued non-violently.

It is necessary to ask whether this is really possible, or only something that many Western radicals *hope* is possible, since, given an advanced industrial society, there seems nothing else to attempt.

It is certainly clear from Gandhi's writings (even from what is quoted in this week's Frontiers) that he did not equate the triumph of non-violence with the establishment of benevolent, centralized, political power. Yet without it, how is any measure of significant change to be accomplished in the Western world? This is the question endlessly debated (though often only by implication) in the modern Peace Movement, with every possible variation of both sides of the argument at Danbury prison, described by Jim Peck, which took place in 1943 between the "decentralists" and the "unionist" hunger-striking C.O.'s

The issue seems fundamental, but whether its terms are fundamental is something that only time will tell. The debate has something in common

with the "Two Cultures" controversy begun by C. P. Snow, and is certainly back of the polemics aroused by George Benello's paper, "Wasteland culture" (*Our Generation*, September, 1968).

Other questions arise. Is there a kind of technology which would not bring into play the mindless imperatives condemned by Jacques Ellul? Should elementary discussion of both technology and economics take place, with people like Gandhi, E. F. Schumacher, Walter Weisskopf, and the Japanese writer Tanizaki given close attention? Could Buckminster Fuller be persuaded to take part? Should the fundamental character of humanized economics have consideration before we stipulate that "centralization is here to stay"?

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves DESIGN DEPARTMENT

[This is the concluding part of an article on teaching design by Robert Jay Wolff. It first appeared in the *College Art Journal* for the Summer of 1948 (Vol. VII, No. 4), a time when the earlier experimental efforts of pioneer movements like the Bauhaus and the School of Design in Chicago began to influence the programs of conventional institutions throughout the United States.]

### II

AT a recent conference of art educators a well-known teacher of industrial design gave a significant lecture in which he brilliantly identified himself with all the technical and æsthetic concepts that are associated today with what is vaguely understood to be modern. All the appropriate origins were acknowledged, including the Bauhaus. However, during the question period, when he was asked what attitude he takes when integrity of design collides with salesmanship, he could only answer that we must be practical and, without question, assist big industries to make a profit on their huge investments.

Here, it seems, we have found in some strange way the ability to comfortably split ourselves and yet survive with honor. As a well-known architect and educator pointed out at this very conference in the speaker's presence, this is a form of schizophrenia that often can be found hiding behind a façade of incorruptible ideals. It is a good guess that the source of the disease, at least in the field of design, lies in moral cowardice.

Here is the crux of the teacher's problem. Can we say that the æsthetic discipline is sturdy enough in itself and that we are not charging windmills when we try to determine degrees of human significance on the basis of formal aspects and modes of expression alone. Before we can settle back into the doubtful security of æsthetic choices there is the more difficult job of

establishing fundamental principles that will serve the integrity of any style in any age. The teacher is mistaken who believes that this integrity can be woven into a workshop program merely by means of exercises wisely concocted to bring out certain desirable plastic forms.

Recently, in a basic design workshop at Brooklyn College, a problem was given to introduce beginning-students to the envelopment and organization of space by linear means, both two- and three-dimensional. There was no way that the student could circumvent the objective since the discipline controlling vulgarization of the line was implicit in the limitations of the problem. One student who had shown considerable ability produced a particularly good result. The lines were clean and well constructed, the spaces planned with imagination and a feeling for architectonic relationships. However, at the edge of the board he had signed his name. His signature was a studied imitation of the flashy prototypes found on comic strips. The line swirled and curled and ended with a long and strident flourish. I asked the young man why he chose this signature. He said that he thought it was effective and professional looking. I asked him to write his name as he ordinarily does. Then I asked him to compare the two. I asked him whether he intended to use a special set of values for his professional life, and whether he, as a human being, would want to be like his professional signature. He answered that it had never occurred to him that there was any connection between these matters. As the term progressed he discarded his pretentious signature and his work gained in intensity and sincerity.

We are all faced with the fact that the visual world which man has fashioned has lost much of its old power to deceive and divert us into forgetfulness. We cannot continue to separate actualities from "visualities." We are, or soon will be, people in the process of self-modification for the purpose of continued existence and we will not be easily distracted or even amused by artistic

fiddling born of the very ethical vacuum from which we are trying to extricate ourselves. For we must believe that we human beings in this age of crisis will strive to renovate the values by which we live. We can believe this because the need for these values is no longer an arbitrary matter based on a free choice between good and evil. It has become finally a biological necessity.

This is a hopeful and exciting premise and a challenge to educators in every field. For if we make this the basis of our departure, our work in design will be within the stream of all that is most vital in the contemporary human effort. We can stop drifting in that endless sea of indifferent acceptances which encompass everything that flatters and tickles us, unconcerned with how it serves us and unworried by its total meaninglessness. We can be done with this because we will have the key to what is basic to our need.

What is this need in which ethical and biological compulsions are so intimately intermixed? Has it anything to do with the new and irresistible curve that will bring next year's streamlined model to the peak of self-intoxicated design? Has it anything to do with the advertising design that overwhelms us from billboards, magazines and newspapers inviting us to satisfy the greedy side of our worldly ambitions by partaking of wares appropriately designed for this purpose? Is this need found in the considerations which motivate the design of our household objects, our interior spaces, our towns and cities? Is there even an echo of it in the lush panorama of motion picture and television production which unravels endlessly before our eyes?

What is this need that we feel so deeply and which we have so carelessly ignored? Actually it is easily defined. It is the need of a complex organism, the human organism, to maintain itself in health and vitality; to avoid self-destruction and to seek, therefore, conditions of peace; to strive for certain standards in the conduct of life so that it may reproduce its own kind without fear. It is

finally the need for happiness and the creative power that human happiness generates.

Against these simple and basic demands stands an environment largely antithetical to them, an environment composed of social, psychological and physical elements which exist for every reason but the one of satisfying these demands. The gap between what we have and what we need is great. But if we do not lose sight of either, knowing and never forgetting the full meaning of what we have and striving within the limits of our field of design for the furtherance of what we need, then we can be sure that we will not be immobilized by the inertia of perpetual negative acceptances. Without this understanding the teacher's profession places itself in the cynical safety of office-holding.

No one of us is going to solve and correct this dilemma singlehanded. But design is making and will continue to make its contribution to the fundamental well-being of the human organism. If we teachers of design make this the guiding principle of our approach to our subject, our students and ourselves, we will be doing our full share.

What does this approach demand of us? First it demands an understanding of the human beings we are attempting to guide. It demands a realistic grasp of the values and standards which they bring to us and a critical and selective examination of the environment and society out of which these values and standards have grown. It demands that we find and extend those directions in art and design which have an imperative integrity and which provide us with visible and tangible evidence that the substance of our highest aspirations need not remain forever merely a matter of recorded opinion. It demands of the teacher that he face the fact that the progressive educator cannot pretend that the healthy innocence of the primary school child persists beyond adolescence and that the *laissez faire* of the kindergarten will have the same wholesome results in the high school and college. In other

words, there comes a point in the education of young people when one has to count with the impact on them of the outside world and to devise ways and means to counteract its worst influences and make full use of its best. Teachers of art and design who allow their own indecision to hide within the free-for-all of undirected self-expression or within the tyranny of marketability, rationalize their evasion of their heaviest responsibility, which lies not alone in purely technical and æsthetic matters, but before these in the human attitudes which are crystallized through technical means and æsthetic expression. Before technics, and before æsthetic preferences are brought to bear, fundamental decisions are made which are determined by our way of life. These decisions affect the design of everything we touch. We cannot, therefore, evade this basic evaluation without becoming professional dabblers in art, whose products, no matter how technically expert or how æsthetically compelling, have little meaning in our lives.

ROBERT JAY WOLFF

New Preston, Conn.

## *FRONTIERS*

### Two Indian Leaders

AT least two voices in present-day India seem to speak out of the same vision that is found so abundantly in the works of Gandhi. There may be others who have this quality, but concerning Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan there can be no doubt. Discussions by these two in the February Sarva Seva Sangh *News Letter* go to the core of the problems of modern India, and apply with almost equal clarity to the rest of the world. Many people today speak of the *complexity* of modern problems, insisting that technology has changed in fundamental ways the major issues in human life. This may be nonsense. The complexity may itself result from prolonged failure to recognize the simplicity of what needs to be done.

Take the issues of education, now producing intensified criticism all over the world. In the eyes of a man like Vinoba, the problems of education have been vastly exacerbated by an almost omnipresent moral ambiguity which pervades the attitudes of most of those concerned, and it is this which may explain why the endless "analysis" of education is productive of so little discernible result. In this issue of the *News Letter*, Vinoba says:

Education in its present form is absolutely useless. It exists only on account of the attraction for jobs. Had it not been for the lure of jobs none would be interested to learn. Out of the population of 500 million there are now 5 million Government employees in the country and 30 million matriculates are awaiting employment. And Government, in spite of its best efforts, cannot create three hundred thousand vacancies every year.

The violence that prevails today has its roots mainly in economic factors. The only remedy for it lies in doing away with concentrated wealth in the society. Even the administrative power and later on the military power too should not be concentrated in a few hands. Nowadays military power is too much concentrated due to imaginary fears of invasion. If all these three oppressive forces could be removed, then the cause for tension or violence would

disappear. But violence will continue even if any one of them persists.

I do not take these violent irruptions seriously. For I know that violence will not end until we remove the causes.

Let alone the memory of Gandhi. We don't gain anything if by remembering him we feel that if Gandhiji were alive today he would have checked the violence. The present situation, however, would lead to this depressing conclusion: When a person of Gandhi's eminence could not stop this violence, how could we ordinary mortals do it?

Concerning the seeking of power by well-intentioned leaders in India, Vinoba said:

On the attainment of independence the best among the leaders of the Congress joined the Government. Suppose Pandit Nehru had followed Gandhiji's advice and remained outside the government, allowing others to go in his place? How much more work could he have done then! By his joining the Government his entire strength was bogged down and others became his rivals for power.

If Gandhiji's suggestion had been given a trial, the power of the Government would have waned and that of the people would have become more dominant. This did not happen. The Congress chose to join the Government. The result was that the Congress which had secured a unique place in the world's history of freedom struggles, became weak, which was most unfortunate for the country. The responsibility that has at present fallen on the shoulders of the Sarva Seva Sangh should have, according to Gandhi, fallen on the Congress. What a popular force the Congress would have been then! Compared to the Congress the Sarva Seva Sangh is very small, yet it has now gained some recognition in the country.

A passage from Gandhi, quoted in the *News Letter*, illustrates the fundamental ground of this sort of thinking. Gandhi said:

We are the inheritors of a rural civilization. The vastness of our country, the vastness of the population, the situation and climate of the country have, in my opinion, destined it for a rural civilization. Its defects are well known, but not one of them is irremediable. To uproot it and substitute for it an urban civilization seems to be an impossibility unless we are prepared by some drastic means to reduce the population from three hundred million to three, or say even thirty. I can, therefore,

suggest remedies on the assumption that we must perpetuate the present rural civilization, and endeavor to get rid of its acknowledged defects.

This can only be done if the youth of the country will settle down to village life. And if they will do this, they must reconstruct their life and pass every day of their vacation in the villages surrounding their colleges or high schools, and those who have finished their education or are not receiving any, should think of settling down in villages. Let them penetrate the villages and find an unlimited scope for service, research, and true knowledge. Professors would do well not to burden either boys or girls with literary studies during the vacation, but prescribe to them educative outings in the villages. Vacations must be utilized for recreation, never for memorizing books.

Jayaprakash Narayan's contribution is also on education. After citing a recent comment to the effect that higher education in India has undergone little change in an entire century, he notes that the "coma" which overtook Indian resourcefulness during British rule still persists in both education and land reform, save for the Bhoodan movement inaugurated by Vinoba. Turning to the current "youth revolt" in India, he says:

While our young men strike a number of revolutionary poses, rend the sky with revolutionary slogans, beat up bus conductors and policemen, burn cars and lorries, and commit other acts of a similar nature, they remain conservatives at heart when it comes to more serious things such as caste feelings and behavior, taking of dowry in marriage, and, if they come from land-owning families, in their treatment of under-tenants and laborers.

The word revolution is bandied about too freely in this country, but it comes in borrowed concepts and phrases, and therefore does not touch the core of our lives. Gandhiji's success, and now Vinobaji's, show that if revolution has to come, it has to come from the depths of our own history and culture and in forms that are indigenous.

The time has arrived when it has become urgent, if educational reform and progress have to be achieved, to find out what has been obstructing the implementation of the recommendations of successive commissions and committees. The answer may be found in the working of the political system, in the indifference of the academic community, and in the

materialistic attitude of society at large towards education.

For parents and guardians, and no less the students themselves, education is nothing more than a passport to gainful employment. Even the teaching community looks upon its profession merely as a means to livelihood. Often a bright young man chooses the profession only after he has failed to get into more prestigious branches of government service. Lastly, politicians also look upon education not as a vital means to national development, but merely as a tool providing them with handles of power and opportunities for patronage.

Later in this article he says:

My humble suggestions are based on the assumption that in every situation, no matter how depressing, there are found a few spirits in all sections of society who remain undismayed and are prepared to act. It is to such persons among the community, the teachers, the students and the politicians that I wish to address myself.

These "few spirits" are people of a certain sort who are found all over the world, and with them, and not in the seats of power, may lie the hope of the world. It is of interest that the American educator, Harold Taylor, strikes the same note in an article in the *Humanist* for January/February:

The education of teachers lies at the heart of everything that matters in the life of the world's people. We who are teachers have a chance we have never had before to teach and learn on a world scale, and to join forces with a world community of those who have the good of humanity at heart. . . .

It is with this common good that I am concerned; this is the heart of the matter. There exists beneath the surface of the visible world society an inner community of persons—peasants, teachers, doctors, scientists, poets, lawyers, architects, men of religion, writers, readers, students, lovers, composers and others, linked together intuitively by common concerns and interests, and reaching out to each other across the divisions of the world and its governments. That community has within it a kind of power, a growing sense of unity, a common culture coalescing into new forms which add the flavor of regional differences to a newly developing heritage of man. The teacher and the student are at the center of this new community. . . .

Perhaps the most important realization of our time is concerned with the *reality* of this "inner community," and its need to recognize itself and its saving role, which must remain independent of the maneuvers and illusions of power.