

## WHAT SHALL WE LEARN TO PRAISE?

WE commonly avoid extended discussion of "art" in these pages for two reasons: first, because art criticism or appreciation requires specialized knowledge, and even if this were available, the absence of visual material would render it of questionable value to most readers; second, because of the feeling that "Art," however conceived, is not really a thing in itself and ought not to be reified—made into a "thing." This second reason seemed to have confirmation in the fact that, as Eric Havelock remarks in *Preface to Plato*, "neither 'art' nor 'artist,' as we use the words, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek." Not until Aristotle, Havelock says, was there any notion of the aesthetic as "a distinct discipline." It becomes desirable, then, to understand how the Greeks could produce so many beautiful objects without thinking and talking about art as we do. Were they "artists" without knowing it?

This question suffers from an air of condescension, suggesting that if the Greeks had been as clever as we are, they would have had language like ours and used it as we do. But who are we to be condescending toward the Greeks? So we start simply with the fact, noted by R. G. Collingwood in his *Principles of Art*: "If people have no word for a certain kind of thing it is because they are not aware of it as a distinct kind."

In an article in the May *Atlantic* Octavio Paz, the distinguished poet and writer of Mexico, proposes that the Greek attitude toward the beautiful was better, truer, and healthier than ours, and that it would be restoration and therapy for our civilization to return to their outlook. His article, "In Praise of Hands," honors the skilled craftsman as distinguished from the "fine arts" practitioner. Early in the discussion he traces the emergence of the "Art" idea:

Handcrafts belong to a world antedating the separation of the useful and the beautiful. Such a separation is more recent than is generally supposed. Many of the artifacts that find their way into our museums and private collections once belonged to that world in which beauty was not an isolated and autonomous value. Society was divided into two great realms, the profane and the sacred. In both, beauty was a subordinate quality: in the realm of the profane it was dependent upon an object's usefulness, and in the realm of the sacred it was dependent upon an object's magic power. A utensil, a talisman, a symbol: beauty was the aura surrounding the object, the result—almost invariably an unintentional one—of the secret relation between its form and its meaning. Form: the way in which a thing is made; meaning: the purpose for which it is made. Today all these objects, forcibly uprooted from their historical context, their specific function, and their original meaning, standing there before us in their glass display cases, strike our eyes as enigmatic divinities and command our adoration. Their transfer from the cathedral, the palace, the nomad's tent, the courtesan's boudoir, and the witch's cavern to the museum was a magico-religious transmutation. Objects became icons. This idolatry began in the Renaissance and from the seventeenth century onward has been one of the religions of the West (the other being politics).

It is plain that Paz regards the isolation of "art objects" from their historical context as a disaster. Their beauty was connected with their meaning, and the meaning related to transcendent and universal ideas. This derivation is now lost:

For us the art object is autonomous, self-sufficient reality and its ultimate meaning does not lie beyond the work but within it, in and of itself. It is a meaning beyond meaning: it refers to nothing whatever outside of itself. Like the Christian divinity, Jackson Pollock's paintings do not *mean*: they *are*.

The contrast with the past is sharpened by considering a statement about Indian art in a monograph by W. Norman Brown: "Sculpture was not meant to be a reminder of a human being or of an apotheosis of man, but of something

abstract, spiritual in its reality beyond apprehension by the senses, an ocular reference to universal knowledge that might somehow become comprehensible to humanity." A similar conception is conveyed by Laurence Binyon in *The Flight of the Dragon*:

Some of the finest Buddhist art is to be found in portraiture, both painted and sculptured. But it is to be noted that the portraiture of the kind so prevalent in Europe scarcely seems to exist. Most of these portraits were made after death, and partook of an ideal character, and only great personalities of saints, sages, and heroes seem to have been thought worthy of portrayal. It was the ideal embodied in the man, rather than his external features, which it was sought to represent. These Buddhist portraits are remarkable for contained intensity of expression; in them, too, the aim of rhythmical vitality is once again manifested.

Ordinary folk have no difficulty in understanding such statements, but what of the Jackson Pollock credo—"paintings do not *mean*: they *are*"? One can repeat the words, but since the quest for meaning cannot be suppressed, the mind probably just flattens out in trying to be content with this verbalism. Paz, an artist with words, says it very well:

Speculation on a pseudo-concept is even more boring than contemplation of a still life. The modern religion of art continually circles back on itself without ever finding the path to salvation: it keeps shifting back and forth from the negation of meaning for the sake of the object to the negation of the object for the sake of meaning.

Why should art have become a "modern religion"? Paz believes that this happened as a way of filling the void left by the decline of Christianity. Along with politics, the religion of art sprang from the ruins of Western religion:

Art inherited from the religion that had gone before, the power of consecrating things and imparting a sort of eternity to them: museums are our places of worship and the objects exhibited in them are beyond history; politics, or, to be more precise, revolution, meanwhile co-opted the other function of religion: changing man and society. Art was a spiritual heroism: revolution was the building of a universal church. The mission of the artist was to transmute the object; that of the revolutionary leader

was to transform human nature. Picasso and Stalin. The process has been a twofold one: in the sphere of politics ideas were converted into ideologies and ideologies into idolatries; art objects in turn were made idols, and these idols transformed into ideas. We gaze upon works of art with the same reverent awe—though with fewer spiritual rewards—with which the sage of antiquity contemplated the starry sky above. . . .

Paz sees in the return to handcrafts in both the United States and Europe "a sign of health—like the return to Thoreau and Blake." He finds it a part of the rebellion "against the abstract religion of progress and the quantitative vision of man and nature." The pursuit of honest craftsmanship, he says, amounts to a revival of the human scale. The crafted object makes no pretentious claims for itself; it is useful, beautiful—and mortal. And he sees everywhere the rebirth of handcrafts that were threatened with total displacement by industrial production. It is, he thinks, an expression of the growing determination to remain human.

I am naturally not maintaining that craftsmen's workshops are the very image of perfection. But their imperfection is that of men, not of systems. Because of its physical size and the number of people constituting it, a community of craftsmen favors democratic ways of living together; its organization is a hierarchy based not on power but degrees of skill: masters, journeymen, apprentices. Finally, craftwork is a labor that leaves room both for carefree diversion and for creativity. After having taught us a lesson in sensibility and the free play of the imagination, craftwork also teaches us a lesson in social organization.

It is difficult to resist the common sense of Octavio Paz. It is time, he seems to be saying, to put an end to the cult of "art" and to return to the natural roots of the beautiful in human experience. The crafts represent and are such roots.

But what about the "sacred" aspect of art—or the art which emerges naturally with response to the longing to represent transcendent meanings? Finding or restoring *these* roots is a much more difficult undertaking. In the *Spring American Scholar* Wilhelmina Van Ness, writing on "The

Tragic Dilemma of Modern Art," observes that American civilization has long ignored the "stored traditional wisdom of the world," and now that America's "success" is held in grave question, it will be no easy task to reverse our settled habits and begin to give attention to ancient conceptions—"because there are real and metaphysical barriers that separate everyone living in the world today from this past." This writer looks more closely at the moral consequences of the rootlessness of modern art of which Paz spoke. She also takes Picasso as the type and symbol of the modern artist:

The dominant trends of modern and contemporary fine art in both Europe and America have been necessarily trivial, banal and comedic. No one has expressed this more plainly and truthfully than the greatest and most gifted modern artist, Pablo Picasso. Picasso's art touched every modern base briefly, and the artist mastered each of his phases in proportion to the degree of time and energy that each "experiment" warranted. Picasso was too spectacular and too complete a talent to brood over partial modern experiments or to deceive himself or others into believing that any one of the incomplete, fragmented segments of modern art was a viable totality. Picasso's works expressed, fully participated in, and caricatured the depth and extent of the tragic absurdity of the modern tradition; the ignorance and forgetfulness of cultural and human identity that was being accelerated within it; and the barbarism, banality and superficiality of the "culture" that remained when these crucial identities were gone.

What had happened; how did it happen? Why? Twenty years ago, in an essay on the meaning of modern art included in his book, *In the Name of Sanity*, Lewis Mumford proposed that by using the same brutal means to oppose dictators like Hitler and Stalin, Western nations "have increasingly taken on their inhuman or irrational characteristics." He saw this tendency reflected in Dadaism, an anti-art movement which was "a retreat into the formless, the lifeless, the disorganized, the dehumanized: the world of nonsignificance, as close as possible to blank non-existence." Mumford, too, links art and politics, declaring that in both "we have reached the last

blank wall of meaninglessness: the complete negation of all human values and purposes." Mumford ended this critique and explanation with an appeal to the artist:

If he is not to betray his art as well as his humanity, he must not think that nausea and vomit are the ultimate realities of our time. Those obscenities are indeed a part of the actual world we are conditioned to; but they do not belong to the potential world of the creator and transvaluer who brings forth out of his own depths new forms and values that point to new destinations. The artist, too, has the responsibility to be sane, the duty to be whole and balanced, the obligation to overcome or transform the demonic and to release the more human and divine elements in his own soul; in short, the artist has the task of nourishing and developing every intuition of love and of finding images through which they can become visible. If all he can say in his pictures is, "This is the end"—let it be the end and let him say no more about it. Let him be silent until he has recovered the capacity to conjure up once more, however timidly at first, a world of fine perceptions and rich feeling, of values that sustain life and coherent forms that re-enforce the sense of human mastery.

We should interrupt the development of this criticism to note—at least in passing—that one often encounters artists to whom these broad and apparently all-encompassing generalizations do not apply. That is, wherever there are human beings in whom certain spontaneous ardors have not died away, there will be audible cries of the heart, and the flow, however confined or limited, of synthesizing and humanizing ideas, with touches of feeling and goodness to which we eagerly respond. Even in very bad schools some good teachers persist in their efforts; corrupt governments sometimes tolerate the presence of a few honest men, and poor plays may be given moments of high drama by excellent actors. A civilization sliding to disaster may still reveal bulwarks of decency with here and there some heroic resistance to the general trend. Since in this discussion we do not attempt to name names or give examples, the generalizations quoted may seem to obliterate the possibility of wonderful exceptions. Yet these exceptions, like the positive

values behind the criticisms offered, exist as countervailing energies and signs.

Returning, then, to the *American Scholar* article: Wilhelmina Van Ness provides an account of the cultural milieu which seems to her responsible for the impoverishment of the arts:

There are certain physical and spiritual facts at the heart of this world that cannot be ignored, however hard one may wish or try to ignore them. The capacity of human beings to desire truth, and to be oriented toward it is as precious a social resource as it is an aesthetic one. One of the most consistently vicious features of twentieth-century culture is that it has almost wholly incapacitated modern and contemporary men from being able to desire directly or orient themselves toward truth. Indirect, teasing propaganda forms and variations have to a great extent become the environment, and are gradually creating a closed information system that outside and sometimes higher stimulæ are being increasingly prevented from entering. These stimulæ, the infinite variety of perceived natural phenomena, and the contradictions and correspondences they invoked, were the traditional sources of art, and their literal disappearance is a major cause of the plight of art in this century. . . .

It became aesthetically and psychologically necessary for artists to justify the only art that could be created in the modern environment and the aesthetic and behavioral regressions into primitivism, madness and childishness that it often depicted and represented, as bizarre forms of progress. . . . News, history and pre-eminently the future were used to justify and rationalize intrinsically degraded and inhumane art forms—forms that artists necessarily used to avoid committing themselves to direct, tragic and profoundly pessimistic assessments of modern and contemporary trends. This fundamental intellectual defensiveness and dishonesty forced militant twentieth-century intellectuals and artists repeatedly to define *regressive* aesthetic and social manifestations as *progressive*.

In consequence:

All modern and contemporary art, technological and social forms, have been, for a variety of reasons, profoundly nonsupportive of human needs and values. Human needs to admire and enjoy have been systematically ignored, and values have been abandoned or deferred to the judgments of history and the future. This consistent absence of value and

support for people living in the present has provoked a pertinent distrust of artists and of modern and contemporary art forms. . . .

The dominant subjects and obsessions of artists and intellectuals in the twentieth century have been social, in the broadest meaning of the word, not aesthetic, and they have helped art to die. Nietzsche once said "The artist chooses his subjects. That is his mode of praising." A major cause of the modern artist's tragedy is precisely the awkward array of social subjects that has been left to him to praise in this century. The absolute ideals of truth, the good, the beautiful and nature literally belong to past ages of belief and are conspicuously absent today. The most effective modern and contemporary artists have not tried to revive or evoke them.

This is a devastating indictment, and the question must be: To what extent is the individual artist accountable for the flaws, weaknesses, and compromises with which "Modern Art" is here charged? Lewis Mumford wrote twenty years ago: "Let us not reproach the artist for telling us this message, which we have not the sensitivity to record or the courage to tell ourselves: the message that the future, on the terms that it presents itself to us now, has become formless, valueless, meaningless." Mumford, however, had reference to the stark realism of certain artists who painted symbols of nothingness, "true revelations of our purposeless mechanisms and our mechanized purposes, this constant fixation on what is violent, dehumanized, infernal." He was not speaking kindly of self-indulgent collaborators with the empty and inane, but of artists who exhibited themselves as victims. They are like Captain Ahab who, at the climax of his pursuit of the White Whale and his own self-destruction, cried: "All my means are sane; my motives and object, mad." They try to speak for us all.

Manifestly, new ancestors for the civilization and the arts of the future must be found. Octavio Paz probably has the best plan for the restoration of the "profane" arts. It is not, of course, "his" plan, but a spontaneous change already under way—the revival of the handcrafts in various parts

of the world, stubbornly, happily, persistently, by a new generation that is busily acquiring standards and disciplines out of the grain of practical experience. But the sacred arts—what can be done about those?

Here the revival will almost certainly come toward the end rather than at the beginning of a cycle of renewal. Art, said Laurence Binyon, following the Greeks, connects the idea of beauty with the idea of order. "For art," he continues, "is essentially a conquest of matter by the spirit; in Bacon's phrase it is a subjecting of things to the mind, as opposed to science, which is a subjecting of the mind to things." And where in the modern world can we recognize expressions of the spirit with sufficient strength to reverse the direction of thought and action of the past three hundred years?

This is no subject for predictions. But if the longings implicit in Wilhelmina Van Ness's essay can be identified, she is appealing for a great religio-philosophical renaissance from whose energies art forms will flower as easily as children sing. There are already some premonitory signs of such a renaissance. We have a few great essayists among us, who understand both the past and the present, and whose insight is beginning to restore the hopes of an age that has lost its sense of meaning. To know and understand the present is to become able to reach beyond it—to *go on*. What is our greatest present need? For human spirits of the capacity of Tolstoy, Thoreau, and Blake; for another Dostoevsky, for individuals strong in both vision and principle, like Tom Paine. If we can shape a matrix hospitable to the presence of such humans, and they are born among us, then the arts can indeed be left to their own autonomous burgeoning, since there will be so much living good in the world for them to praise.

## *REVIEW*

### CRITICAL RAMBLE

THE book that has just come in for review—Franz Kafka's *The Castle* (Schocken paperback, \$2.45)—reminds us in a devious way of George Dennison's *The Lives of Children*; or rather, of José, the boy whom Dennison hoped to teach to read. José's trouble was that he didn't want to learn to read, but "to *have already learned* to read." That is our problem. We should like to have *already* read Kafka's *Castle*.

Tortuous frustration is the theme, and whether the book be read as symbolic of unsuccessful attempts at religious fulfillment or as an allegory of the bottomless bog of bureaucracy, it seems longer than necessary (nearly 400 pages). *The Trial* has more holding power through suspense. We read both these books by Kafka years ago, and resist reading them again, while readily admitting their power as prolonged fantasies which intensify the feelings men have about the labyrinth they make of life. No doubt Kafka's great preoccupation with the writer's art gave him this effectiveness. He even accused himself of being heartless because of his "fixation upon letters."

In the foreword Thomas Mann explains why he calls Kafka a "religious humorist":

. . . the book is inexhaustible in its devices to explain and illustrate its central theme: the grotesque unconnection between the human being and the transcendental; the incommensurability of the divine, the strange, uncanny, demonic illogicality, the "ungetatable" remoteness, cruelty, yes, wickedness, by any human standards, of the "Castle"; in other words of the powers above. In every shade and tone, with employment of every possible device, the theme is played upon. It is the most patient, obstinate, desperate "wrestling with the angel" that ever happened; and the strangest, boldest, most novel thing about it is that it is done with *humor*, in a spirit of reverent satire which leaves utterly unchallenged the *fact* of the divine Absolute. This is what makes Kafka a religious humorist; that he does not, as literature is prone to do, treat of the incomprehensible, the incommensurable, the

humanly unassessable transcendent world in a style either grandiose, ecstatic, or hyper-emotional. No, he sees and depicts it as an Austrian "department"; as a magnification of a petty, obstinate, inaccessible, unaccountable bureaucracy; a mammoth establishment of documents and procedures headed by some darkly responsible official hierarchy. Sees it, then, as I have said, with the eye of a satirist; yet at the same time with utter sincerity, faith, and submissiveness, wrestling unintermittently to win inside the incomprehensible kingdom of grace, while employing satire instead of pathos, as his technique.

If the technique is expert enough, does this make the book a worthy enterprise? There is surely a sense in which the transcendent is inaccessible, concealed from view except for haloed signs or echoes of its off-stage presence beyond the entries and exits of ordinary life. But satire is hardly the instrument to set those resonances ringing, and how can a man mock at his deepest hopes? But perhaps Kafka was only mocking at himself—at what he felt to be the weakness of his will.

Yet it is well to have read Kafka, since the mood he creates may accurately consolidate and project certain nuances of our age—its mastery of the trivial and its lack of classic resolve. Thinking about the "quest" side of the book, we recalled a story by Olive Schreiner, "The Hunter," in her book, *Dreams*, also concerned with reaching after the inaccessible and transcendent. Why is the spirit of this story so alien to Kafka? All his life the Hunter longs for sight of a great white bird which nested somewhere near the top of a craggy mountain. When an old man, he determines that he will risk climbing the mountain, hoping for even a glimpse of the bird. As he struggles up the peak he is beset by storms. His energies flag while the footings of the path grow ever more perilous. Yet, urged by the vision of the bird, he drives himself on, gaining momentary sense of hidden radiance, of barely perceptible gleams. Finally, the mountain overcomes him. Still far from the top he falls exhausted, and now his age exacts its penalty. His breath fails and he sinks into death. But just then, from somewhere high

above him, a delicately fashioned feather, pure white, luminous with promise, flutters down to rest upon his breast.

Shall we blame Kafka for not being Olive Schreiner, because her ending is much more unforgettable than his? This would have no more reason than insisting that present-day poets write with the grand affirmative emotion of Walt Whitman. It can't be done; the nourishment for such works is not in the world, these days. Yet the matter is worth thinking about. It is a question, perhaps, of how much we can expect from the artist: should he try to alter or merely reflect his times? Ought he to accept from Shelley the poet's revolutionary role, to be the legislator of the future? Or take from Solzhenitsyn the responsibility of becoming a "second government"? Or, like the dramatists of the Absurd, abstract scenes from our actionless lives, and then explain in lucid prefaces that what they really intend is an invitation to the audience to *prove* these absurdities false. To "say it isn't so."

What *is* Kafka's ending? The book does not reveal it, since the author died of consumption at forty-one, leaving the final chapter unwritten. K., a surveyor, has come on assignment for certain work in the region ruled by the authorities of the Castle. He makes his coming known, then questions arise. Is he really the surveyor? Was he actually sent for? Such matters are clouded. K. cannot obtain recognition. These frustrations go on and on. K. is rebuffed again and again, and if a mild encouragement occurs, it is always followed by another failure. K. is depleted by all this; he ages and suffers ill. The story breaks off, but the ending intended is not unknown, since Kafka, Thomas Mann relates, described it to his friends: Finally K. lies on his deathbed, with villagers standing about:

. . . at the very last moment, an order comes down from the Castle: to the effect that while K. has no legal claim to live in the community, yet the permission is nevertheless granted; not in consideration of his honest efforts, but owing to "certain auxiliary circumstances," it is

permitted to him to settle in the village and work there. So, at last, the grace is vouchsafed.

The theme of senselessness prevails even in "fulfillment." We shall *never* understand how these things work, Kafka seems to say.

Books like this one may generate a preference for prefaces. Sometimes an explanation seems essential to understanding what a work intends or is about. In his introduction to the published version of *Rose Tattoo*, Tennessee Williams, who wrote *A Streetcar Named Desire*, said:

The great and only possible dignity of man lies in his power deliberately to choose certain moral values by which to live as steadfastly as if he, too, like a character in a play, were immured against the corrupting rush of time. Snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting is the great magic trick of human existence. As far as we know, as far as there exists any kind of empiric evidence, there is no way to beat the game of *being* against *non-being*, in which non-being is the predestined victor on realistic levels.

Well, if dignity lies in "snatching the eternal out of the desperately fleeting," why don't these writers put at least a little of this idea into their books and plays? If it can be done in essays, why not in art? Is the triumph of non-being the only compelling theme? Why should artists allow the empirics so dominant a voice?

And why are caricature and satire such as Kafka's celebrated with such elaborate piety by literary people? To explain why the Greeks found their classical drama so ennobling, Tennessee Williams proposed that in those days the "audiences knew, instinctively or by training, that the created world of the play is removed from that element which makes people *little* and their emotions fairly inconsequential." The literary and art forms of today seem fashioned almost entirely of precisely the element which the Greek dramatists rejected as useless or obstructive to their purposes.

Consider James Joyce's *Ulysses* as an example. In the *Atlantic* for May, William Kennedy describes the goings-on in Dublin last year at the Fourth International James Joyce

Symposium, the first three being held in 1967, 1969, and 1971. (Item: during 1970 works published on Joyce included "155 books, articles, or complete issues of magazines, with American scholarship dominating.") At this fourth symposium, a total of 176 scholars took ship or plane for Dublin, again two thirds of them from the United States. You can read all about it in the *Atlantic* if you feel the need. The sense of these meetings seems well condensed in a quotation from Leslie Fiedler, who attended the 1969 get-together of Joyce Scholars.

It happened at The Bailey, where a group of Joyceans were gathered for drink and talk and a young Irishman suddenly rose up and told them: "I am an illegitimate grandson of James Joyce, and I want to tell you that he would spit on every one of you."

Said Fiedler: "Ah, the young man was wrong, alas, since I fear that Joyce would have approved rather than spit upon even what is worst about us and our deliberations. . . . He would have relished the endless *pilpul*, the Talmudic exegesis, in which the sacred is profaned without any feelings of guilt. He would have rejoiced, after all, at the soulless industry which has grown up around his tortured and obsessive works."

Why, one wonders, knowing this, did Mr. Fiedler go to Dublin?

## COMMENTARY TWO PERSPECTIVES

SOME months ago, in the hope of being better informed, we sent off for a copy of the *Annals* for November, 1973, entirely devoted to "The Energy Crisis: Reality or Myth." Despite our good intentions, we have nothing to report. We got as far as the first footnote to the editors' Preface, which imparted a certain disenchantment with the next 168 pages. The footnote says: "It should be noted that neither the editors nor the contributors consider a national return to a much simpler life with attendant substantial reductions in energy use—to be a viable, serious alternative to continued high energy use."

So lately we have been reading, instead, S.P.R. Charter's brief essay, "Energy and the Goodlife" (available from Man on Earth, Olema, Calif. 94950), which suggests another conception of "viability." Mr. Charter has some questions:

At a time in the very recent past within the memory and experience of us all, when many, many considered energy resources to be virtually limitless, did we exert ourselves toward the goodlife? We had many opportunities and necessities for such exertions. Yet, when we thought we had endless quantities of energy, did the bombings cease? did the napalmings, the defoliations, the contaminations and the pollutions cease? Did our educational structures, and the individuals they enclosed, strive toward grandeur of the mind and the spirit of Man? When did we ever use our huge technology, fueled by seemingly endless reservoirs of energy, only for the good? Why should we believe now that if we were only given endless energy we will now seek to use it more wisely? What has changed in our perspectives? . . .

We are informed by E. W. Pfeiffer that reprints of the article he and A. H. Westing wrote for *Environment* for last November, on the effects in Vietnam of bombing and defoliation, are now available in quantity. These two American scientists toured North Vietnam and traveled south as far as Da Nang in South Vietnam, inspecting the ravages of the countryside. Their article is long and detailed, and includes

recommendations for restoration. Write to Dr. Pfeiffer at the Department of Zoology, University of Missoula, Montana 59801, enclosing postage.

*Announcement:* Copies of back issues of MANAS may now be ordered from Xerox University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves IN BEHALF OF TEACHERS

THE point of James Cass's article on education in the *Saturday Review/World* for April 6 is that reforms in public education have little effect unless they originate with teachers.

Most of the innovative programs of the Fifties and Sixties were developed outside the schools and introduced into the classroom from above. New curricula in math or science were adopted, and teachers were sent to indoctrination shops where they could master the intricacies of classroom use. New administrative patterns and shiny new instructional technologies were introduced, and teachers were expected to adapt to the demands of progress. It was an age of instant reform. And the ultimate effort to impose change from outside the school was the development of "teacher-proof" curricula that attempted to bypass completely the alleged incompetence of the great majority of teachers.

Some changes resulted from the multiplicity of efforts to innovate over the years, but the record was spotty, and all too often it was the form and rhetoric of change that emerged rather than the substance.

This is background for Mr. Cass's report on *The Power to Change*, the first two of seven volumes concerned with change in elementary schools, reporting research headed by John L. Goodlad, dean of the Graduate School of Education of the University of California in Los Angeles. Teachers themselves, the study finds, are the sources of effective change, and the school principal is the key to making it possible. After preliminary study of some two hundred and sixty elementary class rooms in various regions, "Goodlad and his colleagues discovered that in virtually every school there is a nucleus of teachers profoundly concerned with improving the educational process, who are hungry for ideas and eager to learn what is going on around the country." These individuals, however, are held back and discouraged by The System. Therefore, says Mr. Cass, summarizing Goodlad's findings,

the single school, with the principal as the key agent for change, becomes the crucial factor in successful innovation. The objective is to provide an

environment within which the pervasive desire for improvement can be supported and the natural creativity of a high proportion of the teachers can be released. But this is not a new prescription for instant change. Neither individuals nor institutions alter their behavior or their traditional perspectives overnight. It is a long-term process. Experience indicates that three to five years is a reasonable time within which to expect achievement of productive change in the schools. The evidence indicates, nevertheless, that a supportive environment for those engaged in educational reform will pay off handsomely in bringing the realities of the classroom closer to the rhetoric of education.

*The Third Side of the Desk* by Hannah Hess gives the dramatic support of individual experience to Dr. Goodlad's conclusion about the importance of the school principal. After a long fight to secure a new principal for PS 83 in New York City, Mrs. Hess, a parent, and a small nucleus of teachers transformed the school into a wonderful place.

Similar discoveries in England have a longer history. The achievements of the English Infants Schools, as John Blackie says in *Inside the Primary School* (Schocken, 1971), were very largely due to the freedom of teachers and of the principal, who is rather a head teacher. Once he is appointed, the head teacher "has almost complete freedom in deciding how his school is to be run." England has no heavy-handed central educational authority, supervision of the schools being in the hands of local government. "Many American exchange teachers," Blackie remarks, "are bewildered when they are not handed a 'programme' for their classes, and even English people are frequently astonished when they realize how little general direction there is in the English schools."

During the past fourteen years there has been a new development in this hospitable atmosphere of the English educational scene—the emergence of Teachers' Centers. Teachers' Centers are places which teachers can call their own, where they can get together, compare notes, work up classroom materials, relax, talk about education, devise programs for their own benefit, and do whatever they think good to improve their work and enlarge their capacities. In 1969 there were in England a handful

of such centers. Today there are more than 600. *Teachers' Centres* (Agathon, 1974, \$6.95), edited by Robert Thornbury, presents discussions of these "teaching laboratories" by four participants. It took time, but the Teachers' Centers have "changed the concept of teacher training" in England. The story of the development of these centers is inextricably entangled with British institutional forms, not easy for the American reader to understand, but the facts are there, spiced with dry British asides on bureaucracy. A concluding comment by one of the contributors, Geoffrey Matthews:

Teachers' centres are here to stay. The Nuffield areas have grouped themselves into regions, and national conferences continue without any impetus from HQ. . . .

Curriculum development in this country is taking place more slowly than in Scotland (where there is more control) and faster than in the States (where perhaps there is more inertia). Our brand of educational anarchy ensures freedom for those who want to do nothing, and stay in the nineteenth century, as well as for those who want to experiment. But this price for freedom is worth paying; the important thing is that the teacher can think if he wants to. Curriculum Development and Teacher Education become two phases for the same thing, and our schools can be kept alive by continuous development of the curriculum with local inspiration. The key to this, of course, is the active teachers' centre.

In a foreword to this book, Edward Yeomans, director of the Greater Boston Teachers' Center, says:

The handful of teachers' centers now operating in this country [the U.S.] are still at the stage of being experiments supported by foundations rather than by school systems. The investment in traditional methods of "in-service training" is substantial, and it will take a few years of further experimentation before the idea of the teachers' center becomes adapted to our environment. Part of the process of adaptation will have to be a growing impatience with the kinds of experiences that are offered to at are offered to teachers under the demeaning heading of in-service *training*. Professional growth requires skills, and these can be acquired by training. But there is much more to good teaching than a set of skills and recipes. That other dimension requires a commitment to learning on the part of the adult, an

understanding of the variety of ways in which children learn including the non-cognitive ways; and an appreciation of the differences among individual children in their interests and capacities at each stage of their growth.

Teachers' Centers will not guarantee this change in point of view, but they will help us to nourish it wherever it appears.

An extract from what is apparently a book—*School Science and Mathematics*—since it begins on page 300—sent to us by a reader, makes occasion for recalling a phrase used by Mr. Cass: the "natural creativity" of teachers. Dozens of books on "creativity" have appeared in recent years. Myles Greene, who writes "On Defining Creativity," would terminate these pretentious efforts:

Creativity is a matrix of something within us, and identifiable social, psychological, and intellectual process is no the creativity itself. Where creativity rises out of relationships with others, the terms that describe this creative relationship tell us little about the essential nature of creativity itself. Even a precise science like mathematics does not attempt to define all its terms, and similarly, should not creativity be taken as an undefined term?

After showing by examples that attempts at definition only describe varying circumstances under which originality may appear, Greene says:

Creativity is by its nature illusive, undefinable, and cannot be easily reduced to a check list type of analysis given by many of those attempting to define it. That which is creative is determined to be so by a judgment reflecting personal values, and it is misleading to reduce a subjective concept such as creativity to objective process, "scientifically" observed, classified, and codified. Terms such as "combining things in new ways" or "structure" or "sensitivity" or "relationship" or "pattern" or "learning direction" or "independent creative learner" are impressive and suggest a scientific objectivity, but they can be conceived and used in the minds of non-creative persons.

The question remains: What is Creativity?

Its meaning is as elusive—or as plain—as the idea of the Self.

## *FRONTIERS*

### The General Delusion

IT is commonly said that even the most sagacious legislators are unable to devise laws that a perverse human ingenuity cannot get around. It should follow, then, that no matter how firmly fixed a cultural delusion, there will always be someone able to see through it and expose its wrong. This is a comment inspired by the latest publication of the Center for Intercultural Documentation—CIDOC—in Cuernavaca, Mexico: the first draft of *Hygienic Nemesis* by Ivan Illich. Mr. Illich is a man of many talents, but the capacity for revealing generalization is his most notable skill.

What is "Hygienic Nemesis"? Hygiene is the discipline of maintaining health, and Nemesis is the Greek goddess in charge of retribution for offenses against the laws of life and the moral order. In Illich's book, *Hygienic Nemesis* is the over-all, psycho-cultural backlash of the entire environment, bringing, in this case, blindly supine acceptance by the people of the misconceptions of their teachers, managers, doctors, and scientific authorities concerning the nature of man and what he must do in order to be well. *Hygienic Nemesis* is the preliminary result of a series of CIDOC discussions of the socio-psychological effects or accompaniments of modern medicine and "technological" theories of health. Illich says in a foreword that he hopes its publication as a draft will lead to various other contributions to be printed in more final form. Of medicine, the ostensible "target" of this criticism, he writes:

. . . in our seminar more than once we asked ourselves: why dwell on the futility or cruelty of medicine, which disproportionately causes the suffering of the rich, if the major imminent threat is apocalyptic hunger? In this context I have always pointed out that the purpose of our seminar was not an indictment of medicine, but use of the medical paradigm for the illustration of a more general delusion. It is my hypothesis that it is a delusion that more than a small fraction of the food on which people live can come to them from beyond their

physical horizon, just as it is a delusion that more than a tiny fraction of their crisis assistance when they are affected by sickness (not to speak of their health care), can come to them from the medical profession.

These are statements which challenge the modern idea of progress at its roots, making Illich the opponent of practically all doctrines of material Utopia. His position seems to be that to expect science to alter the existential human situation (except for the worse) is massive and destructive self-deception. He is, then, an uncompromising critic of the modern theory of man, engaged in accumulating documentary evidence of its dehumanizing effects. The evidence is of many sorts, often indicating that a distorted conception of the human being multiplies institutional causes of other ills, which must then be "treated" with quack remedies accomplishing still further mutilations of both body and psyche. In any event, he maintains that the sort of "progress" that is claimed for modern medicine has seriously unprogressive effects on the great mass of its supposed beneficiaries. More than what people do, Illich examines what they think:

A morbid society thrives on the wanton proliferation of social pathology. If there is agreement that all people are born in need of multiple therapy, then the health, education and welfare of the population can be measured by the amount of therapy dispensed. If people are born with open-ended needs for education, psychotherapy, conscientization, immunization, and crisis assistance, then concern with their management obscures any and all concern for the viability of the fundamental dynamics of society. Good pupils make good patients.

First they conceive envy for those who get professional services—a process often called modernization of attitudes. In 1960, 96 per cent of Chilean mothers breast-fed their babies beyond the first year. By 1970 only 6 per cent did so, and only 20 per cent nurse their babies for as long as two months. Chilean women went through a period of intense political indoctrination, and 84 per cent of human breast milk remained unrealized as a result of this social programme. The milk of about 32,000 Chilean cows would be required to compensate for that loss, which resulted from concern for the

mother's health and the child's more complete formula. As the bottle became a status symbol new medical attention was necessary because of new illnesses among children who had been denied the breast and because of the very incompetence of the mothers to deal with them. The changed attitudes toward food under the impact of changes in the ideology of health ought to constitute an important area of research in the next few years.

This is but one of the many angles of approach reported in this volume. Actually, Illich is a modern Savonarola campaigning for radical change from the platform of an idiosyncratic personal religious humanism. The occasion for this study is given in his first few sentences:

Unyielding anomalies are surfacing in the health care systems of the poor and the rich nations alike. Suffering increases with the progress of medicine. I believe that only hygienic nemesis can explain this fact.

He derived the name for these developments from two mythic figures, Nemesis and Hygiea, mainly to avoid using the modern jargon which might have referred to them as "operant frustration" or part of the tide of "post-industrial disservice society."

I discarded such backhanded compliments to Forrester, Skinner and Bell for two reasons. Calling on ancestral gods helps to avoid mocking contemporary professors, and mythological resonances constantly remind that my framework of analysis is foreign to their logic and ethos.

This seems especially important to point out. Other feelings, more natural and spontaneously compassionate than those of "contemporary professors" need to undergird every aspect of the project of rehumanization. Ivan Illich, one might say, is accomplishing at the psycho-social level what Ralph Nader has been doing in relation to technological abuse and the responsibilities of citizenship. Both seem utterly devoted, devoid of self-interest, and remarkably effective in what they attempt.

Has criticism of *them* any importance? It seems more pertinent to say that if we had a few more such crusaders—individuals combining

comparable energy, moral intelligence, and unremitting effort—the world would probably become a far better place. One might add only that other aspects of our lives require attention. Illich, for example, is devoted to showing us how to escape from the wiles and traps of Technology's Grand Inquisitor, whose promises are false. His (Illich's) underlying theme seems to be that we must resign ourselves to our natural human lot, which brings to each one a portion of pain and suffering—call them the trials of the soul—from which, through courage and inner growth, we may arise wiser and better men. There is deep truth in these ideas, but we note in the text—and elsewhere in Illich's writings—an antipathy toward Prometheus, whom Illich condemns for trying to make "heroes" out of men by giving them the heavenly fire. He calls this aspiration "radical greed." True enough, the fire made men moral agents, capable of both good and evil, of both the godlike and the diabolical: it made them *free*. That, too, is our existential reality, which no amount of "resignation" can erase. Pertinently, it was his expectation of the heroic in human behavior that brought to Jesus the most furious denunciations of the Inquisitor. Will Ivan Illich be able to carry through to completion the great emancipations he has at heart without the help of a determined band of Prometheans?