

THE ART OF TOMORROW?

WHAT has happened to the arts? While large and impressively illustrated volumes are devoted to answering this question, here, for the sake of brevity and digestibility, we shall rely on the sharply etched accounts of a few perceptive individuals. For a beginning we go back to the reflections of a man who lived more than a century ago—Alexander Herzen (1812-1870), perhaps the most civilized revolutionary of his time. Reviewing an edition of his memoirs (in the *New Yorker* for Feb. 8, 1969), George Steiner said:

Herzen's memoirs have a twofold relevance. They document, with complete psychological fidelity, the condition of tragic liberalism. I mean by that that Herzen strove all his life for revolution but came to know that such revolution would spell ruin for the civilization he himself embodied. The impulses that made him a rebel, that drove him into exile and unbroken resistance to autocracy, were generous and deep-seated, but they reflected the idiom and intellectual values of a privileged, high-bourgeois culture. . . . What lay ahead was most likely a grey plateau, a mass society devoted to the crafts of survival. Herzen knew this, he sensed the philistinism, the vengeful monotonies that waited beyond the storm. Unlike so many New Left pundits and would-be bomb-throwers of today, Herzen never minimized the cost of social revolution in terms of culture. Stuffed into the dustbin of history would be not only injustice, exploitation, class snobberies, religious cant of every kind but a good measure of the fine arts, speculative insights, and inherited learning that were the peculiar glory of Western man. Herzen knew that the task of a radical intellectual elite was in a very precise sense suicidal. In preparing a society for revolution it was inevitably digging its own grave.

While Herzen's look into the future discerned the general state of art under communism, he could hardly have anticipated the crude controls that would be applied to Soviet artists in Stalin's time. Not even the most pessimistic of nineteenth-century radicals could imagine that the time would come when some bureaucrat in charge

of culture would instruct a Russian poet in the correct imagery for his verse. There was actually a case in which a poet who had written a line saying in effect: tears trickled down her cheeks as dew descends on a twig warmed by the morning sun—was told No! by the censor. The new spirit of Soviet man requires that he say: the tears furrowed their course down her cheeks, like a tractor!

But what of the high-bourgeois culture Herzen loved in other lands? Could it survive where no revolution by the proletariat occurred? It did for a time. But some of its transitions were recorded by Alfred Stieglitz, photographer and champion of the arts, in telling of an experience in New York in 1902 or 1903:

One day there was a great snowstorm. The Flat-Iron Building had been erected on 23rd Street, at the junction of Fifth Avenue and Broadway. I stood spellbound as I saw that building in that storm. I had watched the building in the course of its erection, but somehow it never occurred to me to photograph it in the stages of its evolution. But that particular snowy day, with the trees of Madison Square all covered with snow, fresh snow, I suddenly saw the Flat-Iron Building as I had never seen it before. It looked, from where I stood, as if it were moving toward me like the bow of a monster ocean steamer, a picture of the new America which was in the making. So day after day for several days, while the snow was still covering Madison Square Park, I made snapshots of the Flat-Iron Building. . . .

When I look back to those days, when the Flat-Iron Building in the snow storm, and in various lights, was such a passion of mine, I think of my father who met me one day while I was standing in the middle of the Fifth Avenue thoroughfare, photographing it. He said, "Alfred, how can you photograph that hideous building?" I remember my reply, "Why Pa, it is not hideous. That is the new America. It is to America what the Parthenon was to Greece." He was horrified. He had not seen the steel-work as the building had gone up, as it had started from the ground, and had also partly started from the

top. He had not seen the men working as I had seen them. He had not seen the seeming simplicity of that, to me, amazing structure, the lightness of the structure, combined with solidity.

He did admire the photograph I had made when I showed it to him. He remarked, "I do not see how you could have produced such a beautiful thing from such an ugly building."

And when I saw the Flat-Iron Building again, after many years of having seen other tall buildings in New York City suddenly shooting into the sky, the Woolworth Building and then still others, the Flat-Iron Building did seem rather ugly and unattractive to me. There was a certain gloom about it. It no longer seemed handsome to me; it no longer represented the coming age. (*Twice a Year*, 1946-47.)

There was a Whitmanesque strain in Stieglitz, and feelings prophetic of the Bauhaus. He was, you could say, one embodiment of the high-bourgeois culture Herzen mourned. In an appreciation at the time of his death in 1946, Paul Rosenfeld wrote:

A photographer from his youth, with the artist's love of sensuous and pictorial beauty, but with a powerful craving to live in the truth, Stieglitz had discovered the work of art to be a means of permitting the world to show itself in its true form. For him as for the Platonists, the human being learns to know the externalities of nature and her creatures through perceptions, but the deep-lying forces at work in her and them reveal themselves to the human being only in his inwardness, as subjective experiences. Art was nothing if not the expression of these perceptions suffused with the inwardly experienced, deeper secrets of things. But for art, the world possibly might wear an untrue face. . . .

Filled with this craving to live in the truth, with the sense of art's meaning and the knowledge that the inner truth speaks a different dialect in every age and clime, Stieglitz for almost fifty years strove to present and naturalize, protect and further, the new and therefore needy art of his own age and that of his own nation. In countless startling exhibitions and with cumulative effect, he presented to an indifferent public and championed before it a vast range of plastic art stretching from the pictorial photography of the 1900's—Steichen's, Gertrude Kaesebier's, Clarence White's, Paul Strand's and his own—onward through the watercolors of Cézanne, the oils and sculptures of Matisse and Picasso, to the work of

modern Americans such as Marin, Hartley, O'Keeffe, Demuth, Lachaise, down to the latest oil by a still unappreciated great colorist, Arthur Dove.

That is one side of the picture. It helps us to understand why art, for a great many people, seemed to take the place of religion, and why artists, sometimes unwillingly, were made to assume the role of priests. Stieglitz, Paul Rosenfeld said, "created a sort of spiritual climate in which it was possible for artists to give their best by holding all things to their fairest level, as he did while affirming the value of true art and standing up to the American world day after day for its sake."

The responsibility was great—greater, in fact, than ordinary humans could bear in the rapidly changing world. Less than ten years later Lewis Mumford, writing of art in *In the Name of Sanity*, spoke of artists who were concentrating all their energy and talent "on only one end: a retreat, not only from the surface world of visible buildings and bodies, but a retreat from any kind of symbol that could, by its very organization, be interpreted as having a connection with organized form: a retreat into the formless, the lifeless, the disorganized, the dehumanized: the world of nonsignificance, as close as possible to blank nonexistence." Mumford cautioned his readers:

Let us not reproach the artist for telling us this message, which we have not the sensitivity to record or the courage to tell to ourselves: the message that the future, on the terms that it presents itself to us now, has become formless, valueless, meaningless: that in this irrational age, governed by absolute violence and pathological hate, our whole civilization might vanish from the face of the earth as completely as images of any sort have vanished from these pictures: as dismayingly as that little isle in the Pacific vanished from the surface of the ocean under the explosion of the hydrogen bomb.

Mumford finds the writers of the nineteenth century prophets of twentieth-century failure, recalling from Melville's *Moby Dick* Captain Ahab's flash of lucidity: "All my means are sane; my motives and object mad."

A world filled with such horrors—more apparent to artists than to others by reason of their heightened sensibility—leaves them without hitching posts or havens. With religion in fragments, politics in the hands of war colleges and generals, and cultural tradition trivialized and exploited by entertainers, the artists lacked nourishment from their times. Surveying the scene in the London *Times Literary Supplement* (March 23, 1967), Alfred Alvarez wrote:

Certainly, for the past forty years or more, the history of the arts could be written in terms of the continually accelerating change from one style to another. The machinery of communications and publicity is now so efficient that we go through styles in the arts as quickly as we go through socks; so quickly, in fact, that there seem no longer any real styles at all. Instead there are fashions, idiosyncrasies, group mannerisms and obsessions. But all these are different from any genuine style, which in the past has always been an expression of a certain fundamental coherence, an agreement about the ways random experience can be made sense of.

Mr. Alvarez scolds the artists, then offers a challenge:

Artists usually talk of their alienation in a world without values with a sob in their throats. This seems to me as inappropriate as the tone of those protest songs about nuclear weapons where the singer invariably manages to imply that the H-bomb has been invented solely to get at him. As I see it, the failure of all traditions and beliefs is not an excuse for the failure of the arts, it is their greatest challenge—or irritant. . . . the modern artist is like every other creative figure in history: he knows what he knows, he has his own vision steady within him, and every new work is an attempt to reveal a little more of it. What sets the contemporary artist apart from his predecessors is his lack of external standards by which to judge his reality. He has not only to launch his craft and control it, he has also to make his own compass.

How many artists are equal to this? Who among them are sufficiently aware to know what must be done? Herzen looked to the future and saw a dull monotone of utilitarian activity, the people submerged in the practical materialism of everyday necessity. What he could not see was

the sickening superficiality of an over-fed and over-indulged West which would set the tone of what writers would still refer to as civilization. Herzen died in 1870, but ten years or so later, another Russian, Lev Tolstoy, would undertake the personal change in outlook—the finding of a compass—that would not merely alter his art but cause him almost to abandon it. As he said in 1894, in his Introduction to the works of Guy de Maupassant, recalling his first reading of a story by the French writer:

That time (1881) was for me a period of most ardent reconstruction of my whole outlook on life, and in this reconstruction the activity called the fine arts, to which I had formerly devoted all my powers, had not only lost the importance I formerly attributed to it, but had become simply obnoxious to me on account of the unnatural position it had hitherto occupied in my life, as it generally does in the estimation of the people of the well-to-do classes.

Tolstoy did not think much of Maupassant, finding him enormously talented and sincere, but lacking in a moral relation to his subject. In Tolstoy's view—

The cement which binds any artistic production into one whole and therefore produces the illusion of being a reflection of life, is not the unity of persons or situations, but the unity of the author's independent moral relation to his subject. In reality, when we read or look at the artistic production of a new author the fundamental question that arises in our soul is always of this kind: "Well, what sort of a man are you? Wherein are you different from all the people I know, and what can you tell me that is new about how we must look at this life of ours?"

This is not an argument but a statement of fact, difficult to dispute. But the consequences for Tolstoy made him extremely unpopular among the literati. The work of art, he maintained, should communicate a feeling that works for the good of mankind. The great artist is one who does this well. The work of art, he declared, if good, will be widely understood. Tolstoy's translator, Aylmer Maude, says the novelist once told him "that the sign of any great philosophy is that it generalizes a wide range of important ideas so that it can be explained to any intelligent boy of twelve

in a quarter of an hour." This could please but few, and Lafcadio Hearn, after reading Tolstoy's *What Is Art?* (1898), thought there were so many wrong things in it that if they were all put together they would make the reader suppose that Tolstoy "had suddenly become insane." But then Hearn says:

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.

Tolstoy found his compass, but at a cost not many have been able to tolerate. Tolstoy, in effect, became a philistine from the luxuriously humanist point of view.

This is the contention of Martin Green in *The Challenge of the Mahatmas*, a book by a literary man who dares to take seriously the summary disposition of the arts by both Tolstoy and Gandhi. For the West, the arts had become elaborate specialties requiring at least a comfortable background for their enjoyment, if not for their practice. While Gandhi's thinking seemed to many to leave out art entirely—Tagore broke with him on this idea—Mr. Green proposes that actually Gandhi restored art to everyday life:

. . . Gandhi said the work of spinning composed his soul to peace like a prayer—it even restored his bodily health; aesthetically, he found its music beautiful—which meant, since Gandhi was always realistic, that he found it very ugly when the wheel was not working right; historically, he said that the spinning of the wheel was in the reverse direction to the turning of the world during the last three hundred years of history—that each man, as he spun, was setting the globe spinning back in the reverse toward health and peace.

Now comes what seems the key idea in Mr. Green's essay:

These ideas, as you hear them from me, are little more than conceits. If you had heard them from

Gandhi, they would all be magnificent symbols. The difference would have been that they would have come in the context of his incomparable manifold of activity and charged with his phenomenal forcefulness of will, but most of all they would have been different because Gandhi's reality is all one. It is not divided up among political and aesthetic and economic. All his symbols are resonant in all those dimensions.

Gandhi told Tagore "that the poet seemed to be satisfied with beautiful words and song, when India was a house on fire where people were dying of hunger," and Green comments that even great modern art "has very little to do with beauty, or with inspiration, in that major meaning of the term that relates to serving mankind." The art of the West, he says, even while declaring against imperialism, has participated in it. Its protest "is also a mode of operation of modern civilization . . . destructive, in its anger against our society," and not "on the side of health."

Yet Gandhian simplicities do not appeal to the West. Mr. Green adds:

This kind of art is to our taste rather philistine. This is true even in the case of genius—the case of Tolstoy's late work. It lacks the freedom and vigor and boldness, as art, to which we are accustomed—a freedom which derives from the separation of art from the rest of life to be a whole kingdom in itself, where the whole range of human energies and ambitions act themselves out.

Gandhi's art was implicit in his way of life, occasionally becoming explicit in an expression of taste. At the opening of Benares Hindu University in 1916, when he saw the jeweled Indian princes on the platform beside him, he said: "I'm sure it is not the desire of the King-Emperor or Lord Hardinge that in order to show the truest loyalty to our King-Emperor, it is necessary to ransack our jewelry boxes and to appear bedecked from head to toe." As Mr. Green says:

He was of course invoking their sense of the plainness and manliness of style of the English themselves—they would never appear bedecked, or have jewel boxes to ransack. And in 1927 in *Young India* he attacked the treasures of the temples and the princes' palaces: "If you gave me a contract for

furnishing all the rich palaces, I should give you the same thing for one-tenth of the money, and give you more comfort and fresh air, and secure a certificate from the best artists in India that I had furnished your houses in the most artistic manner possible.

We recognize in passages like this a hero of taste, not merely of politics.

After Gandhi met with George V in 1931, reporters asked him if he did not feel underdressed in his loincloth and shawl. "No," he replied, "his Majesty was wearing enough for both of us." Mr. Green reaches this conclusion:

The world of art is, from Tolstoy's and Gandhi's point of view, a culture in complicity with empire, although against its own intentions, because such culture absorbs all that energy that might go into effective resistance. . . . Modernism in the arts expresses, in its symbolic way, a profound and energetic resistance to modern civilization; at the level of intention it rejects empire, but only at the level of intention and symbolism.

Art, for these two—Tolstoy and Gandhi—was not a thing in itself, but a part of life, the grace and natural taste of existence.

REVIEW

TWO FRESH STARTS

Two books that would be good to read together are William Barrett's *The Illusion of Technique* and a collection edited by three men, Jacob Needleman, A. K. Bierman, and James A. Gould—*Religion for a New Generation*. They are of course very different books which explore different regions of experience, yet they have one thing in common—a starting point. There is a sense in which both express the necessity to go back to square one in considering the meaning of our lives.

The Illusion of Technique (Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978, \$12.95) is the work of only one man, a professor of philosophy, but it has the distinctive virtues of clarity of thought and lucid expression. Mr. Barrett is not only thoroughly familiar with the Western philosophic tradition, he is also a writer and literary critic who wants to be understood. The reader may wonder about the wisdom of looking at the modern world and its problems through a single writer's eyes, but find consolation in reflecting that Mr. Barrett is a fair-minded thinker, and in the strong possibility that his judgments have a balance that would take the reader years to acquire for himself. Reading him carefully produces trust.

What is his book about? It is about the limits of the scientific method and the logic on which it is based. In short, reliance on technique will not bring us to the truth we want and now seem rather desperately to need. While there can be no pursuit of truth without technique, technique is also truth's greatest enemy, through the delusions of certainty it may produce.

Discussion focuses on the thought of Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, and Ludwig Wittgenstein, bringing this comment at the end of the first chapter:

So far we have found no decisive relation between logic and the separate philosophies of these three men, and it might seem therefore that we were

making out the development of modern logic to be an unimportant matter. On the contrary—and we must insist on this strongly—the development of this logic has been of enormous philosophical significance. Only that significance has not come in the shape of some earlier dreams. Logic has not provided a key to traditional philosophical problems, like matter and mind as Russell dreamed. It does not liquidate ethics, aesthetics, or metaphysics, as the more aggressive positivists once hoped. Its value has turned out at once more limited and yet sweeping in its consequences. It is the only one of the modern sciences that has produced its own critique, in the Kantian sense of that word—that is to say, it has shown its own limits. And in showing the limits of its formal systems, it shows the limits of the techniques and the machines that man may design.

The chapter in which the failure of logic is logically demonstrated is of particular interest, drawing on the "limitative" theorems of Godel and others. It amounts to showing that while machines may run well for a time, and mathematics may open the way to practical discoveries, the perfect machine or the ideal mathematical system does not and will never exist. Humans, in short, cannot be eliminated. Mr. Barrett writes:

"Man is condemned to be free," Sartre has remarked in commenting upon the various devices and deceptions by which we try to evade the burden of freedom in our life. A whole generation of mathematicians labored to abolish their subject by turning it over to the mechanism of axioms. The mechanization failed; and the mathematician, to borrow Sartre's apt phrase, is now condemned to be free. "Mathematical thinking is, and must remain, essentially creative," mathematician-logician E. L. Post sums up in commenting upon the various limitative proofs that modern logic has produced.

These "limitative theorems" should in fact be called "liberating theorems." They show us that human creativity exceeds any mechanism in which it might seek to contain its own constructs. We are always more than any machine we may construct.

This is a way of saying that reductionism does not work in theory. Truth cannot be reduced to the endless manipulation of impeccable assumptions. Sooner or later the system will break down. At the end of his book Mr. Barrett

shows that reduction to technique fails in practice as well as in theory. Regarding the world as a machine, and humans as parts, or little microcosmic machines, leads to one breakdown after another. Machines are means, not ends, and they are unable to generate ends out of their mechanistic processes. Physical action does not secrete meaning. Preoccupation with means on the assumption that, sooner or later, when we know how to do everything, we will *have* everything and *know* everything, has brought the modern world to the brink of disaster. As the author says:

Two centuries ago, a century ago, men thought of themselves as the masters of history, today we are more likely to think of ourselves as its victims. The literature of the twentieth century is largely a lamentation for ourselves as victims. And in nothing are we more victims than in this: that we have to cope with the same life as humankind in the past but without its most potent means of doing so. We cannot will back a faith that has been lost. We shall have to live back into that way of being in whose ambience the religious once drew breath.

This brings us to our second book, but we should say, first, that we have given only the bare bones of Mr. Barrett's volume, which deserves first-hand investigation. The illusion of technique pervades all that we attempt, as he shows. He takes the reader on a cultural tour, which becomes a philosophic inquiry, and finally a religious obligation.

Religion for a New Generation (Macmillan, 1977) might be described as a smorgasbord of the old and the new, except for the fact that sandwiched in is some extraordinary material which deserves more respectful description. There is Freud on religion and some sophisticated homilies by a follower of the Hare Krishna Movement; Dostoevsky's "Grand Inquisitor" and a determined advocate of Christianity as the one true religion; Karl Marx on religion and St. Augustine on "Sin." A Maoist proposes that political ideology can take the place of religion and an astronaut advocates psychic research as the way to truth. Unexpected contributors are E. F.

Schumacher, A. H. Maslow, and Garrett Hardin. John Dewey discusses what religion is, and Lewis Thomas wonders about the meaning of death. Heinrich Zimmer writes about the Bodhisattva, Simone Weil muses on the nature of evil.

Some democratic principle may be served by putting all these writers together in a single volume of close to six hundred pages, but the reader may decide that he should be able to find out more for himself by a less eclectic approach. All those well-chosen words and ably argued contentions—what does one do with them? Are we too well served by such books?

Perhaps the book will prove most useful, not to seekers, but to diagnosticians. The best explanation—if not justification—of the collection is in the introductory essay by Jacob Needleman, who says at the beginning: "Both within and outside of the sciences a new sense of the unknown has appeared. The unknown is ourselves." This is indeed the question in the air, and Mr. Needleman contemplates it with appropriate reserve:

How will we respond to this invitation from the unknown? That is the question I wish to open in this book. I do not think it is a simple question, nor that the answer will necessarily be comforting. We may find that while something is now possible for us that has not been possible since the onset of the scientific revolution, something as well is demanded of us which is equally unprecedented. Some new effort within ourselves, some change of attitude so revolutionary and so uncompromising that it may very simply prove to be beyond us.

After speaking of the flood of Eastern teachings and cults now rapidly spreading throughout the West—teachings which, with some reason, are claimed to provide balance to the externalities of modern life—Mr. Needleman offers his warning:

We are so accustomed to believe that great truths need only to be put before us and they will have a beneficent effect. But I wonder if there is not something exceedingly naive in this assumption, some naive estimation of our unaided ability to *be* what we know, some failure to realize how swift and

subtle is the passage from seeing the darkness to dreaming of light.

This is Mr. Needleman's version of the "illusion of technique." Logic and language have persuaded us that we can know things simply by thinking them. And this has affected everything but how we live our lives. The truth is supposed to *move* us, but we have remained static. As this writer says:

In any event, the great traditions make no such easy assumption about man's ability to digest the truth. From one point of view, in fact, sacred tradition can even be defined as the science of transmitting truth by degrees so that it can enter correctly and harmoniously into the human psyche. To this end, tradition both withholds and reveals at the same time. Transmission of truth is always understood in this way. There is always a "secret." Because there is always that in man, in ourselves, which seeks only to believe and explain and to manipulate, rather than understand. We are calling that part of ourselves "the dreamer," but it has many names in the traditions, chief among which is "the ego."

The idea we have of truth, Mr. Needleman seems to be saying, is only a dream, but he might add that such dreams are what we have to work with. Getting beyond the dreams would be reaching into things-in-themselves, and this is hardly the work of the mind, but of our *being*. Yet we are at least able to say these things to ourselves, by using the mind. The mind is the tool we have for looking around. When we know how to put more of our being into our thoughts, we may learn far more about both ourselves and the world.

COMMENTARY

FORM AND CONTENT

A *PASSAGE* in a book by Kenneth Brower—who is the son of David grower, of Friends of the Earth—can do double duty here on the subject of this week's lead. It illustrates spontaneous art in two ways: first, as an example of splendid prose, and second, in what is said about the art of the Indians of the Northwest Coast. Here the author tells about some country:

British Columbia's coast range is a nine-hundred-mile fold in the Earth's crust. Vancouver Island and the Queen Charlottes are parts of a parallel seaward fold, most of it submerged. Both folds—the entire Inside Passage province—were covered by the Cordilleran ice sheet, which in grinding its way over George's country carved the final touches upon it. The glaciers were enormous, and so are the land seascapes they left behind. . . .

The Inside Passage is a country shaped by water. Water is responsible for its character, just as wind is responsible for the butte country of the Southwest, or meteors for the surface of the moon. Water, in one form or another, did all the work. Glacial ice carved the country steep. Heavy rainfall dark-greened it. Fog grooved the needles of the conifers and tipped the guard hairs of the wolves. Cold stream currents thickened the pelts of the mink and otter, fattened the grizzlies, streamlined and silvered the flanks of the trout, chambered the salmon's indomitable, homeward-leaping heart. The high annual precipitation sends the Douglas firs up to two hundred feet and more, broadens their boles to seventeen, furrows their bark, and then, after a millennium or so, undermines their roots, topples and sends them out to the Pacific, which soaks and rolls and deposits them, smooth and barkless, and colossal, in the beach windrows whose chips feed George's fire at night.

It is painful to stop quoting this, but we need room for what is said about the Indians:

The artists of the Northwest Coast were the finest in the Americas:

"To their taste or design in working figures upon their garments, corresponds their fondness for caning, in everything they make of wood," writes Captain Cook. "Nothing is without a kind of frieze-work, or the figure of some animal upon it." This North-western decoration, strong, animistic, stylized,

polychromatic, was several centuries ahead of its time. Rediscovered in the 1900s by men like Picasso, it had a delayed influence on the art of the world. The Indians achieved it without agriculture. Agriculture is the invention that is supposed to let a people lay in the food reserves that allow experimentation with art, and the coastal Indians practiced no agriculture at all, except for planting a little tobacco. . . .

They were fine basketmakers. They made ingenious fishhooks and harpoons. They wove excellent blankets from the wool of mountain goats. . . .

At the University of British Columbia there is a new art museum devoted almost entirely to the culture of the Northwest Coast. . . . We passed storage chests caned in geometrical designs and inlaid with mother of pearl. We passed bowls, food dishes, ladles, rattles, daggers, halibut clubs, headdresses, wool blankets, togas; none of it unadorned, as Captain Cook had observed. . . . The Northwestern artists liked to fill all available space, and they filled it most often with formalized eyes: eyes in the middle of an animal's chest, eyes marking its joints, eyes looking out from the least representational of the geometric designs.

The climax of this "art" experience was reached in the design of the canoes. The book we've been quoting is *The Starship and the Canoe* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), about a young man and his father, George and Freeman Dyson.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

BACKWARD NEW ENGLAND, TEXAS COMMON SENSE

IN 1977 two well-educated parents—Peter and Susan Perchemlides—planned a program of home education for their eight-year-old son. They had what seemed to them good reasons for removing the child from the public school in Amhurst, Mass., and teaching him themselves. They felt they were qualified to do so, and the curriculum they put together—which had to be submitted for approval to the Amhurst School Department—won high praise from a curriculum consultant who called it "the equivalent of a first-rate private academy both in its tutorial system and in . . . the curriculum."

But it wasn't good enough for the Amhurst School Department, which finally brought criminal proceedings against the parents for violating the Massachusetts truancy statute. Stephen Arons, who writes in detail about this action, comments in the *Saturday Review* for last Nov. 25:

It is ironic that this case should develop in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which considers itself the birthplace of universal education and the cradle of individual liberty in America. As the case moves beyond the personal struggle of one family and one school bureaucracy, it seems increasingly to ask whether something has happened in the development of public education to bring it into conflict with the principles of individual liberty and free and vigorous dissent upon which our Constitutional order rests.

Himself an attorney and a teacher of law, Mr. Arons notes that the criminal charges have been replaced by a civil suit, but says they could be renewed if the Perchemlides family loses in the trial. After review of the major cases which have restored the individual and family right to educate one's own children for "religious" reasons, he points out that this family challenges on secular or humanist grounds the right of the state to dictate the terms of education. At issue in this case is the power of the Amhurst school authorities to claim

"absolute discretion" in passing on home education plans. They rejected these parents' plan and values as "pet educational theories." Mr. Arons gives the views of the Perchemlides:

Peter Perchemlides, after trying for 18 months to influence Richard's public school education, and serving on numerous public school planning committees, believes he sees the predominant values in the hidden curriculum of the Amhurst public schools. They are conformity, anti-intellectualism, passivity, alienation, classism, and hierarchy. . . .

In Susan Perchemlides' view, the public schools "break down and categorize curriculum, and they break down and categorize the children, too." It is tracking in disguise, a means of defining a child in a limited sphere and then working to internalize that image in the child's mind.

John Holt will probably have interesting things to say about this case in *Growing Without Schooling*.

Another sort of rebellion is proceeding in Dallas, Texas, where teachers are now being hired by the Dallas Independent School District according to their tested ability to use words and numbers. In the *Atlantic* for last December, Richard Mitchell describes the work of John Santillo, who hires the teachers for the District:

Skill in words and numbers, thinks Santillo, does not alone make a good teacher, but the lack of it will almost surely make a bad one.

Few of the attributes of a good teacher can be specified, never mind measured, but skill in the use of words and numbers can be measured. All applicants for teaching positions in Dallas now take an exam designed to measure it. The Wesman Personnel Classification Test is not a test of intelligence or of knowledge. Many industries and business enterprises use it to predict success in almost any kind of work that isn't purely physical. They find it satisfactory.

Most of the teachers approve. Also the applicants for teaching jobs. Mr. Mitchell says that "one young woman about to be tested admitted that she was nervous, but said she could see no reason why a teacher should not be expected to demonstrate superior verbal and mathematical abilities." Another who had just

taken the test said she didn't mind: "Why should I? I'm supposed to be a teacher."

There were of course some union-type objections. But people in Dallas think their schools are getting better.

William Webster is in charge of research and evaluation for the Dallas School District. Mitchell gives his thinking:

Since the teacher corps in Dallas numbers about seventy-five hundred and seems unlikely to grow by much, and since five or six hundred are replaced every year, Webster reasoned that a significant improvement in the overall quality of instruction could be made in a few years through nothing more than judicious hiring.

"We know that grades don't mean anything," says Webster, and Santillo agrees that an applicant's transcript is almost worthless. No one at the DISD thinks colleges and schools of education can any longer be trusted. Elementary and secondary schools aren't the only ones with a system of social promotion.

There is this general comment about Dallas by the *Atlantic* writer:

Where other cities have civic pride, Dallas has what must be called municipal patriotism. In the classrooms of the DISD there are almost as many volunteers as there are teachers. The leading citizens, having once been scolded by a judge for failing to lead the way into integration, have formed a coalition with parents, teachers, and administrators called the Community Network for Public Education. Among its projects is the occasional sponsorship of a survey of public opinion about the schools. In spite of all the publicity about the test scores (could it be *because* of that publicity?), the latest survey shows some surprising increases in public approval. The percentage of parents who would recommend the schools to newcomers rose in one year from sixty-eight to eighty-one, and among parents in the almost completely black East Oak Cliff section that figure rose from seventy-five to an impressive ninety-one. Even confidence in the ability of teachers increased. . . .

If public school education is to be saved anywhere, it may be in Dallas. The people have an active and optimistic sense of community, a reasonable and realistic teachers' organization, an

administration with the resources to design the faculty of the future, and the will to do it all.

The capacity for engaging as well as accurate generalization is the endowment of a good writer. It is a pleasure to find a scientist of Rene Dubos' stature saying certain things so persuasively. He writes in the last Autumn *American Scholar*:

Human life is of course influenced by genetic and environmental factors, but the really interesting aspects of life—those that make humans so obviously different from animals—clearly transcend such primitive biological explanations. Behaviorists and sociobiologists can account for the animal aspects of human life but have little of interest to say concerning the choices that make us transcend our animality. Artists and other humanists are skilled in the perception and description of human traits but are no more able than scientists to predict what a particular person would like to become or wants to do at a particular time. All human beings live, as it were, in worlds of their own, never completely accessible to other persons.

Thus, human nature is not so simple that it can be reduced to the knowledge of twentieth-century scholars. . . . we are prone to suffer from a particular kind of infantilism that makes us regard the phenomena studied in our own discipline as the most important for the understanding of human nature. We tend to take a deterministic view of life and history because we overestimate the explanatory power of our knowledge while underestimating the freedom that humans enjoy in making choices and decisions.

Admittedly, free will cannot be proven, but this failure does not weigh much against the countless manifestations of freedom in everyday life. What Samuel Johnson wrote in 1778 is still just as true in 1978: "All theory is against freedom of the will, all experience for it."

FRONTIERS Divide and Survive

SINCE some readers may already suspect that MANAS is a magazine devoted to Salvation by Books—despite all that is said, on occasion, to the contrary—and since we have for this week's Frontiers another book to present, we hasten to say that it is like no other book anyone has composed on the subject of political economy. The author is Leopold Kohr, who wrote it—*The Breakdown of Nations*—twenty-five years ago. The nations, he maintained at that early date, are breaking down when they ought, for the sake of human—not national—survival, to be breaking up. While this thesis may now be coming into its own, the author is filled with practical doubts. In an afterword to the present edition (Macmillan, 1978, \$4-95) he writes:

Is my answer still an emphatic "NO" to the question whether I believe that the big powers will ever agree to their dismantlement merely because this would be the only way of saving the world from the atomic war into which their critical mass is inexorably pushing it?

Yes! My answer is still: "NO." Were it otherwise, I would have written a new book, not an Afterword to an old one. True, smallness has now reached such acclaim that editorialists, economists, and politicians rarely miss a day without paying tribute to its beauty. Yet all this means is what a daily sprinkle of holy water means to the sinner: an attempt to gain benediction for going on sinning. In fact, when an idea becomes universally accepted and its apostles become campus gurus or make the front cover of *Time*, it usually means that the idea has reached the end of its career. . . . Or as Maynard Keynes told a doubting Thomas in the early 1930s: in twenty-five years, his theories would be accepted by every treasury in the world; but by then they would not only be obsolete but dangerous.

Well, I don't think the idea of the viability and superior value of the small social unit is either obsolete or dangerous. Nor that it ever will be.

Who is Leopold Kohr? He was born in a village suburb of Salzburg, Austria, in 1909, graduated as a lawyer, but gave up law for

political economy and finished earning his second degree in 1935. Now began his real education. In a rather exciting Foreword, Kirkpatrick Sale gives the highlights of his subsequent career:

Though Kohr's ideas were still incompletely formed, the struggles of the Spanish republicans seemed to speak of much of what Kohr held important, and so he spent the next six months there [in Spain], working as a freelance correspondent for a number of French and Swiss newspapers, armed with nothing but a Spanish dictionary and a copy of *Don Quixote*. "That's when it started," he remembers now. From visiting the independent separatist states of Catalonia and Aragon, from seeing how the Spanish anarchists operated small city-states in Alcoy and Caspe (I'll never forget reading the sign, Welcome to the Free Commune of Caspe), Kohr took away an understanding of the depth of European localism and an appreciation of the virtues of limited, self-contained government.

With Hitler's rise to power, he managed to get to New York, but wound up in Canada where he worked in the University of Toronto. In 1941 he wrote for *Commonweal* an article—the germ of his later book—arguing for the cantonization of Europe, as a return to the "small regional politics" of the past. "We have ridiculed the many little states," he said, and "now we are terrorized by their few successors."

Kohr taught at Rutgers for the next nine years, meanwhile developing the ideas for the book. The manuscript, when complete, did not interest any American publishers, nor those in England. Then, as Kirkpatrick Sale relates:

Kohr was discouraged, and on a junket to Oxford, sitting next to some unknown man at some unpromising lunch, he unburdened himself to his neighbor about the sorry fate of his manuscript: "the trouble with these publishers is that they cannot place me—they haven't met a legitimate anarchist in the past half century."

His companion looked suitably sympathetic and said, "Why don't you let me have a look at your manuscript? I am an anarchist myself—and also a publisher." He handed Kohr his business card: "Herbert Read, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London."

Herbert Read, of course, was easily the foremost anarchist thinker of the day—a fact which, Kohr later said, instantly "made me wish for the ground to open beneath my chair"—but he graciously offered to read the book and see what he could do. Dutifully Kohr sent the book, still dubious. Read got the point immediately and published the book straightaway in the fall of 1957.

Nothing dramatic happened as a result. Kohr was invited to teach at the University of Puerto Rico, where he spent the next nineteen years, turning out some distinguished works that attracted equally little attention. He wrote regularly for *Resurgence*, lectured around, did a column for a Puerto Rican newspaper, and retired in 1974.

Kirkpatrick Sale, who brought an old copy of *The Breakdown of Nations* to the editors at Dutton—which they seized and immediately put back into print—concludes his foreword:

Yet despite all that, Leopold Kohr remained virtually unknown, a prophet without honor except among a small and faithful band. He did gain an ardent and most vociferous circle of friends, including people like Herbert Read, Welsh nationalist Gwynfor Evans, American adman Howard Gossage, architect Richard Neutra, and Puerto Rican leader Jaime Benitez; and he did slowly win a most prestigious group of admirers, including some of the finest minds of our age, people like Fritz Schumacher, Ivan Illich, Kenneth Kaunda, and Danilo Dolci. But despite this, despite the importance of his contributions in a society bedeviled with bigness, despite his undoubted singularity in an era that makes celebrities even of weightlifters, he continued—and continues—to be a figure unrecognized in the larger world.

No matter. After his mandated retirement from Puerto Rico in 1974, Kohr accepted an offer to lecture in political philosophy at the University College of Wales in Aberystwyth, where he was able to cement his relations with the growing Welsh nationalist movement and work in support of its ideas of an independent and self-reliant small nation.

Along with *The Breakdown of Nations*, we especially recommend two other books by Leopold Kohr—*Development without Aid* (Christopher Davies, 1973, £2.50), and *The City of Man* (University of Puerto Rico, 1976, \$4.00).

Kohr is the man called by E. F. Schumacher, "A teacher from whom I have learned more than from anyone else."

Readers may notice that we have said practically nothing about the actual content of *Breakdown of Nations*. This is deliberate. We think that the book ought to be bought and read entire. It is a contribution not so much to economics as to civilization.