VOLUME XXXVI, NO. 21
MAY 25, 1983

A SOCIETY THAT FITS

THERE is basic intelligence behind the title of E.F. Schumacher's best-selling book, *Small Is Beautiful.* It has long had expression in many forms, from Aristotle to Leopold Kohr. One often comes across this insight by accident, as in the case of reading a book by Rex Tremlett, *Road to Ophir* (1956), the story of the writer's life as a mining engineer in Africa during the first half of this century. His feeling about "size" runs through the book, and he applied it to the practice of his profession. In one place, he tells about a job he worked on in Northern Rhodesia, for a company, as he later discovered, that was a subsidiary of De Beers, a holding of Sir Ernest Oppenheimer who controlled a vast industrial empire in South Africa—as Tremlett said, "just the type of industrial empire I most detested." He gave his view:

> Bigness, it seemed to me, was the root evil. I knew the arguments in favour of huge enterprises: union creates strength in adversity; amalgamations cut overheads and unify direction; mass production needs capital beyond the reach of individuals. If that was true, then I believed that the cure was worse than the disease. When industry becomes so large that it dominates the private lives of its workpeople and the policies of nations, then it is evil; no matter how benign the intention of its master.
>
> Anything which destroys individual responsibility and initiative is, to my mind, wrong.

How did he adjust his engineering practice to this principle? While in Uganda with a working crew, on an exploration for minerals near Mbarara, he gave thought to the onslaught of "civilization" on the life of the Ruandas who live in that region. His workers panicked when a large plane flew overhead, and he explained that there were white men in it.

> Their interest subsided with the words. It was just another example of European magic, incomprehensible and therefore not very interesting.
>
> "Yes," explained Mopembe [Tremlett's personal servant], who liked to be in on everything. "In Entebbe they have a big nest on the ground, where they come every day. In Tanganyika during the war with the Germans, my father used to say, those birds flew about and dropped very bad eggs, which killed people."
>
> He spat in the direction of the by now departed plane. I, too, disliked the bird. Some day, I thought, planes will land in places like this. From their cabins men will step, determined to organize everything. Clerks would creep about the land, gathering statistics; while, leading them, an economist gazed shrewdly at us, estimating our earning power in terms of man-hour productivity, so that when he created local industries to help us raise our incomes, he could import goods to sell us.
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> I was not against progress as such, or because it changed things: many things needed change: but because much of it had come too quickly. Trade must inevitably follow the flag, but the results of this had been happier for African peoples when colonial administrators (stiff-shirted and high-hatted although they may have been) had the power to vet all those who sought to establish trading centers, and to deport them summarily if they misbehaved themselves.
>
> To be of use, however, such ideas need to be practical and personally applied, and I had already decided that in my work in Uganda I had two loyalties. One was to Sir Robert [his employer]. The other was higher. The development of a country's natural resources was in itself good. If I found payable minerals here it would be to everyone's advantage to have them worked, especially to the local people. That is, if the minerals were not *too* payable.
>
> A few small mines, dotted about the veld like the ones at Sabie, were good things. The vast network of gold-mines and uranium plants surrounding Johannesburg had created such appalling degradation in the black people, and such unbridled avarice in the white, that it was about as evil a thing as man had ever done.
>
> I determined that if I found a mineral deposit in Uganda which appeared capable of supporting one large mine, or several scattered small ones, I would

report it. But if I found indications of another Witwatersrand or Northern Rhodesian copper belt, I would remain silent.

A contemporary socio-political philosopher, Leopold Kohr, author of *The Breakdown of Nations,* makes a principle of appropriate size. He calls it "The Law of Peripheral Neglect":

> For beyond a given distance, even the most concerned and benevolent government is bound to treat its receding regions with ever-increasing neglect. The law of peripheral neglect is the main argument for limiting the sway of central government, and for replacing the unitary state of a federal or confederal system of self-governing states, not by integrating but by duplicating the institutions of social life. Central governments tend to counteract the inexorable workings of this law by increasing the central powers of government, which simply increases authoritarianism and insensitive repression without diminishing the neglect of the periphery. . . . The answer to the world's economic and energy problem lies therefore not in the pooling of resources and increased vast-scale international cooperation and integration, but in reducing the size of society to a scale that can once again be handled with the available simpler food and energy resources: pedestrian power, intermediate technology, human senses instead of computers. Only in small societies can transport distances be reduced and traffic correspondingly slowed down to uncostly material-saving dimensions.

When power is united to size, the tendency to tyrannize becomes insistent because is it armed. A current example is given in an article on the pressure exerted on the smaller Persian Gulf states by Saudi Arabia (*Christian Science Monitor,* Feb. 15). The writer, Richard Feinberg, says:

> The Saudis are pressing their smaller neighbors to accept a security agreement which would require each government to "combat the activities that harm the security of any of the Gulf Cooperation states." Printed material, including pamphlets and posters, that criticized any of the ruling regimes would be prohibited. Interior ministries would exchange information on actual or potential dissenters and would share techniques for combating subversion. Universities and other cultural centers would have to inform all six governments before holding conferences. And security forces would have the right to pursue subversives across borders or to seek their extradition.

Fears generated by the Iranian revolution and Iran's war with Iraq, along with the rise of Muslim fundamentalism, the writer says, are behind the proposed agreement.

> However, Kuwait has so far refused to accede to Saudi pressures to sign this security agreement. The most liberal society in the regional Gulf Cooperation Council (which also includes Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates), Westernized Kuwait boasts an elected parliament, political pluralism, relatively enlightened attitudes toward women, and a benevolent welfare state that provides free education and health care and substantial subsidies for housing and food.
>
> The Saudi royal family fears that Kuwaiti liberalism could provide space for antimonarchical groups to organize and disseminate their views. Many Kuwaitis are alarmed at the potentially repressive aspects of the proposed security pact and view them as a Saudi design to stifle liberal influences in the Gulf. With a population (roughly nine million) about six times as large as Kuwait's, Saudi Arabia casts a long shadow across tiny Kuwait.

The U.S., Feinberg points out, supports Saudi diplomacy and is equipping America's Rapid Deployment Force to protect the Persian Gulf states, and he concludes: "It would be ironic if the U.S., blinded by its interests in Saudi Arabia, supported heavy-handed Saudi policies which unintentionally undermined stability in the weaker Gulf states."

There is no need to multiply examples of the unmanageability of bigness and its threat to other nations. The argument for bigness as a protection against the incursions of other powers loses all its strength when we recognize that those who have justified their military strength with this claim are precisely the nations, the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., most feared by the rest of the world.

Other arguments for bigness—the achievement of uniform efficiencies, economic clout, access to distant sources of supply and larger markets—are all concerned with a single goal: successful acquisition of *things.* The rules

adopted are the rules for controlling things, and if incidentally people are involved, they too are required to submit to the processes so successfully applied to things. In contrast, the argument for smallness, or rather, appropriate size, is in behalf of the conditions of moral freedom human initiative and independence, and the elimination or reduction of bureaucracy. The point is that the right size of a human association is the size that maximizes cooperation and minimizes external authority. This sort of balance is hospitable to human decencies, it gives room to the expression of moral impulses, and encourages a content of human life toward which we all, when in our right minds, aspire.

Who will contest the fact that the world is gradually succumbing to the forces of moral disaster? That our circumstances, however caused, invite evil behavior more than they do good? For evil behavior we have two remedies. One is exhortation to righteousness coupled with the threat of punishment. Neither works very well, mainly because both measures are administered by "other people." The second remedy is the creation of an environment which invites intelligence, self-help, resourcefulness, and invention—all qualities which are naturally associated with goodness and consideration for others. This association is especially clear in the writings of Schumacker. As we all know, efficient technical organization depends less and less on the ingenuity of humans and more and more on electronic and other devices. Clerks in stores are becoming less important; form letters are replacing human communication; signs attempt (unsuccessfully) the work of friendly explanation and dialogue. Our relations with "society" are increasingly relations with a great big machine.

Schumacher saw this clearly years ago. He wrote for *Resurgence* in 1975:

> One of our fundamental needs is to be able to act in accordance with our moral impulses. In a big organization our freedom to do this is inevitably severely restricted. Our primary duty is to stay within the rules and regulations, which, although contrived by human beings, are not themselves human beings. No matter how carefully drawn up, they lack the flexibility of the "human touch." . . .
>
> As a result, big organizations often behave very badly, very immorally, very stupidly and inhumanely, not because thc people inside them are any of these things but simply because the organization carries the load of bigness. . . .
>
> There are three things healthy people most need to do—to be creatively productive, to render service, and to act in accordance with their moral impulses. Frustration makes people unhappy and often unhealthy. It can make them violent or completely listless. It makes them feel insignificant or powerless.

Here, in ordinary words, is an account of the commonest psychological disorders in the modern world. Such people live in an environment which has been built up in total disregard of the moral and spontaneous needs of human beings. In consequence, the constraints on their lives are *demoralizing,* but not many realize what is wrong, and often they blame themselves. Schumacher continues.

> Too many people are imprisoned in organizations which, on account of their superhuman size, make people insignificant and powerless. If this is so—to the extent that this is so—people's power is frustrated and paralyzed. Neither the further development of this type of mechanization nor the streamlining and perfection of this type of organization can restore people's power and lead us out of our predicament. Decent survival now depends on redesigning technology and redesigning organizations.

Leopold Kohr is especially apt at drawing lessons from history in support of this view. In *The City of Man* (published by the University of Puerto Rico in 1976), he took his own native community for an example:

> The basis of my theory is perhaps the fact that I was born and grew up in a very small country which had been sovereign until 160 years ago: Salzburg. Unfortunately, I have no picture on hand to advertise its assets. Alexander von Humboldt ranked it among the three most beautiful on earth. The rural population, that built this capital city of barely more than 30,000 for its own enjoyment, never numbered

more than 120,000, fewer than the people who live in Rio Piedras or Ponce [Puerto Rican cities]. Yet, singlehandedly they managed to adorn it with more than 30 magnificent churches, castles, and palaces standing in lilied ponds, and an amplitude of fountains, cafés, and inns. And such was their sophisticated taste, that they required a dozen theatres, a choir for every church, and an array of composers for every choir, so that it is not surprising that one of the local boys should have been Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. All this was the result of smallness, achieved with not an iota of foreign aid. And what a rich city they made it into. The same was, of course, true of Florence, Verona, Padua, or Venice, though Venice may be said to have been an empire at that time.

How could they all have developed in such splendor if small-scale self-sufficiency meant impoverishment? It is interconnection, integration, union, that spells impoverishment, as can be seen from a country such as our own IJnited States. It is immense. Yet, basically, it has only one opera, and that is on the verge of bankruptcy every year—the Metropolitan Opera of New York. In the unintegrated small-state world of the past, there was an opera in Salzburg. A hundred miles away, there was an opera, and theatres of course, in Innsbruck. Another sixty miles to the other sides there were operas and theatres in Munich and in Linz. And each of the small states in which they were located developed not in cooperation with each other, but in rivalry and competition each devoted only to its own communal splendor. So do not be under the illusion that their smallness caused them to be lacking in social riches.

Of course, individually, *incomes* then were very much lower—infinitely lower. But so was the *cost* of living. Hence even low incomes conveyed more than high incomes do now.

The people that Leopold Kohr is talking about had not, of course, been through the wars and depressions of the twentieth century. They were not conscious "communitarians" such as we find, today, but people who were able to do remarkably well in the circumstances of their time. Something, surely, is to be learned from them. But the most important thing of all to be learned is that there is absolutely no technological substitute for social forms which give room and encouragement to moral impulses. Today, the practice of the virtues requires virtual heroes, if we give virtue the broad and comprehensive meaning it should have. A good society is one that allows the moral qualities natural avenues of expression. Many of the present-day reformers have this well in mind, although they may say little about it in order to avoid sounding moralistic.

The objective, one could say, is to create an environment which elicits the kind of thinking the world so sorely needs—spontaneous thinking about the common good, on the part of people who go about their affairs and concerns as, say, Rex Tremlett pursued his mining enterprises. weighing the value of what he was doing, resolved to make it fit as well as he could the needs of human community. We need a society that does not stomp on such impulses, and people able to live with one another without the wary securities of heavy locks, fire arms, and guards—and without a great navy and army and all those nuclear warheads the daily papers describe. This is not possible through application of the cosmetic devices of industrial psychologists. As a British factory worker quoted by Schumacher says:

The factory I work in is part of one of those combines which seem to have an ambition to become the great provider, both in and out of work, for their employees. Recreational facilities abound; but the number of people using them is small in percentage. Perhaps others, like me, resent the gradual envelopment of recreation by the umbrella of factory life. Not only recreation, either. The firm has a mania to appear responsible. Fingers of charity stretch ever further into community life. The company bends over backwards to make amends for the lethargy that the factory has produced in the worker. The effect is treated while the cause is ignored. No wonder the worker is unappreciative.

It should be obvious—and is to a great many—that the time has come to reconstitute human society from the ground up, taking first into consideration our relation to the ground, the *land,* and the region in which we live. Nature has provided a matrix for healthful, productive, and self-sufficient regional life. In a pamphlet issued by the Planet Drum Foundation (P.O. Box 31215,

San Francisco, Calif. 94131), *Figures of Regulation,* Peter Berg draws on the past for instructions in future community life:

> Prior to the Industrial Revolution most decisions about activities that affected natural systems were guided by custom. The traditional hunting practices, agriculture, house designs and uses of tools that evolved in distinct regions over long periods of time were maintained not on the basis of discrete decisions but to be consistent with the "right way" to do things. It's not surprising that under analysis with contemporary criteria of efficiency and appropriateness these customs often yield the best way. After all, customs incorporate the intelligence and experience of many people over generations of dealing with those limits. Taken as a whole, a traditional culture's customs also represent sensitive understandings of the relationship between human needs and the requirements of the overall life-community. The practical evidence of this is that these cultures continue to exist and maintain themselves in their home regions.
>
> In order to restore and maintain bioregions we need to develop frame-works of understanding that are equivalent to customs but even more attentive to balance points between human needs and the requirements of the natural community that ultimately supports us.

Custom—the right sort of custom—becomes a living element in the psychological environment. It represents a major part of what people can do for other people, establishing the cultural atmosphere of the common life. This is indeed where we all need to begin—no doubt in small ways at the start, since, in the case of most of us, that is all we are able to do. Yet the attitude of making a beginning becomes in principle a custom, if we keep at it. Peter Berg says in conclusion:

> The transition toward a society that fits in with natural processes of the biosphere requires a practical counter-ethic to immediate economic gain. The goal of reinhabitation, becoming full members of the life community where we live, gives substance to the otherwise amorphous shape of post-industrial society.

REVIEW
TWO TRANSITIONS

ANTI-NATION is the title of a book which came out in Canada in 1978, by Fred Knelman. The publisher is Mosaic Press, Box 1032, Oakville, Ontario, L6J E59, Canada. Prof. Knelman writes about the changes which are required for "Transition to Sustainability." His work is of interest in showing that there now exists a plateau of mature thinking concerned with these changes. By "anti-nation" he means a nation which no longer has sovereignty in the familiar meaning of the term. He writes mainly about Canada, but suggests that Canadian problems are similar to those of the world, "and if solutions and resolutions can be discovered here we will have provided a model for the survival of the planet." Knelman draws on many sources, including E. F. Schumacher, Hazel Henderton, Amory Lovins, Jacques Ellul, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, and Lewis Mumford, saying: "The emerging consensus on sustainability is a form of cultural evolution whereby small social changes, i.e., more highly evolved sub-systems or groups, become a precursor for a new society."

The book deals with the argument about steady-state versus growth, compares the renewable and non-renewable sources of energy in Canada, and offers a program for transition to an economic steady state as the basis for a sustainable, no-growth society. In his conclusion Knelman says:

> By anti-nation we mean a nation-state, i.e., a social, political, economic, territorial and psychological community, organized and directed on lines directly opposite to those which characterize nationalism. . . . Anti-nation is a set of policies and priorities which are geared internally to national ecological sanity and externally to global ecological sanity.
>
> Anti-nation is a concept of a state in which all the norms of nationhood are eliminated or inverted. To understand the opposite we must elucidate that to which it is opposed. A nation-state is characterized by the privilege of closed boundaries and the means to enforce authority and sovereignty. It is founded on the notion of power as the exclusive instrument of purpose. It has both symbolic and real tools to exercise this national right, all the way from flag and anthems to intelligence (spy) agencies and armies. It is founded on mistrust.

He draws this contrast:

> What will be the more detailed characteristics of an anti-nation? The total restructuring of the four basic sub-systems will be involved—politics, economics, technology and culture. . . .
>
> In many ways the politics of anti-nation are non-politics, mainly in their rejection of traditional parties, constituencies decision-making and power. This new politics will involve profound changes in internal and external postures and policies. Politics and economics are inseparable. The major aim for anti-nation is to redirect our political economy to higher social purpose, and break the locked-in malfunction which leads to the exclusive ends of increased growth and power.

The author is uncompromising on the issue of war-making:

> On the question of military power, Canada, as an anti-nation, should be the first political state to totally disavow military power and to avow moral power. This means both offensive and defensive aspects of the military since much of the contemporary military technology blurs the distinction between the two. Nuclear power has rendered war obsolescent, in that nobody can win, although unfortunately not obsolete. We have to help make it extinct. . . . Canada should become the first political entity dedicated in its internal and external policies to total and complete disarmament—not just by word but by deed. We should disband all our armed forces, army, navy and air force.

As for the opposition to such extraordinary changes, he finds "three dominant collective barriers to the transition to sustainability."

> These are (1) the existing inventory of attitudes and behavior of the public; (2) the existing inventory of institutions and their behavioral modes, and (3) the existing inventory of hardware. The transitional path must attend to the detailed replacement of these consumption and waste-oriented inventories with conserver-orientations. The limiting barriers tend to be social rather than technical. The rate of replacement is limited by both the physical limits of

> replacement and the limits on the rates of communication, information and education.

On the other side of the ledger:

> There is an intimate and reinforcing mechanism between decentralizing decision-making and human self-realization and self-fulfillment. . . . People decoupled from grids and meters can become human rather than alienated consumers, managing their own homes and lives. People decoupled from the medical bureaucracy can also become more humanized. People managing their own bodies, education and habitats will be essentially less alienated than those who are cogs in the complex dehumanized systems of health, education and energy.

The author makes direct critical attack on the market system and nuclear sources of power. We now have, as Hazel Henderson has said, an "entropy state" whose order is disorder.

> This is a state of unmanageability wherein the costs of transactions (management) of every kind exceed the total value of production, i.e., the cost of bureaucratization exceeds the value produced. . . . The result is not merely stagnation but deterioration, a structural and system state of crisis. The body politic and economic is suffering a terminal disease, not properly diagnosed or treated. The real "tragedy of the commons" may well be psychological, i.e., "problems that are everybody's are nobody's. The market which is no longer free even under rampant capitalism cannot properly allocate scarce resources. This means traditional or neo-traditional economic theory is itself in crisis. Profit usually means that someone profits, while society pays, i.e., it does not reflect real costs or real values.

The body of this book is devoted to the remedies or changes that are needed, for both Canada and the world. Already some of these changes are under way, which gives the author's claims some solidity. In regard to nuclear power, Knelman lists sixteen claims by its defenders (he calls them "myths") and briefly presents facts which show them to be false.

The point of giving attention to this book is not that things can be made to work out as the author proposes but that the analysis of the status quo and his alternative program seem remarkably complete. The issues are well joined.

Since we are on the subject of transitions, it seems appropriate to give attention to one of another sort which began in the nineteenth century, or much earlier, depending upon how history is read. This is the transition from incredulous unbelief to measured recognition on the part of at least *some* (distinguished) scientists that extra-sensory perception and other psychical capacities in humans are natural realities. Publication of *J.B. Rhine: On the Frontiers of Science* ($19.95—McFarland & Co., Jefferson, North Carolina), the work of colleagues and associates, including Mrs. Louisa E. Rhine, who gathered to honor him in the year of his death. Dr. Rhine lived to be eighty-five, and considerably more than half of these years were devoted to the several aspects of psychic research His achievement was to win respect for work in the area, by means of his meticulous care in research, the results he obtained, and his integrity as a man.

When did psychic research begin? In a musing evaluation of its findings and history (in *Philosophy* for October, 1940) Prof. H.H. Price (of Oxford University) proposed that it began with King Croesus of Lydia in the sixth century B.C. Tiring of the claims of the oracles and soothsayers of his kingdom, he set a competition for them, inviting them to guess what he was doing on a certain day. Only the Oracle of Delphi succeeded in divining the answer, specifying that on that day he had cooked a lamb and a tortoise in a brazen pot, naming both the ingredient and the utensil. But then, when Croesus asked the Oracle another question, he received only an ambiguous answer, which is about all contemporary psychic research can hope to expect, although, as William James declared, there is certainly *something* important behind the puzzling phenomena of Spiritualism and extra sensory perception.

In modern times, "scientific" investigation of the phenomena began in 1869 with the Report (a year later) of the London Dialectical Society, whose committee said that it found psychic happenings to be real (without imposture or

delusion) and worthy of "more serious attention." Except for the medical journals, the London press jeered at this conclusion, yet evidence of supernormal phenomena continued to appear, gaining the acknowledgement of a few eminent observers (among them scientists such as Sir William Crookes).

The first "wave" of phenomena began with the famous "Rochester rappings" of 1848 in Hydesville, New York, and another such wave came with World War I. Perhaps for this reason, the interest of J.B. Rhine, then a plant physiologist, turned to psychic research in 1923, as K. Ramakrishna Rao relates as editor of the book. Some years later (in 1927) Rhine was able to join William McDougall, pioneer psychologist in psychic research, at Duke University, and in 1934 his now famous book, *Extra-Sensory Perception,* appeared. Through the years other books and papers followed, reflecting the modes of investigation adopted by Dr. Rhine and his colleagues. While he began with studying the issues of post-mortem survival, he eventually left this area as unfruitful and devoted his attention to the demonstration of the psychic capacities of humans, as prior in importance to providing proofs of "immortality." Survival of death, he said, "depends on whether there is anything like a spirit in man at all."

This was the question, in terms of psychic or spiritual capacities in humans, to which he addressed his energies for the rest of his life. The book, *J.B. Rhine,* is a valuable account of his achievement in this direction, and includes a biographical sketch, note of the impact of his work at various levels, and a complete bibliography of his writings. J.B. Rhine was a landmark in the history of science, and so, in degree, is this book about him.

COMMENTARY
PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

IT is of particular interest that J. B. Rhine (see page 8) decided to focus his work in parapsychology on the psychic capacities of humans, instead of trying to demonstrate human survival of death, on the ground that survival "depends on whether there is anything like a spirit in man at all." Other researchers have also found the Spiritualistic evidence for survival inconclusive, as for example the British philosopher C.E.M. Joad, who, after attending a series of seances, decided that "if ghosts have souls, they certainly have no brains." He added: "The view that those of us who survive undergo a softening of our cerebral tissues seems to me a gloomy one." This seems not unlike the conclusion of Henry Price, who gave as his theory of hauntings (in *Fifty Years of Psychic Research*) that "An emanation of our ego or personality, or a part of our intelligence, persists after death and can be picked up by a suitable mind attuned to that emanation."

Ghosts, in other words, are but psychic fragments. Interestingly, this view fits with the explanation of psychic phenomena given some seventeen hundred years ago by Plotinus in his *Enneads.* Writing in the *Proceedings* of the London Society for Psychical Research (1927, 393-413), G. W. Lambert remarked that anyone "who adopts Plotinus' far-reaching theory of the nature of man's psychical constitution, with its immense range and organic structure, will find that it throws new light on many current problems," showing the extreme difficulty of establishing the identity of "communicators." It is as though mediums get in touch with parts of a disintegrating psyche, with little to suggest the reality of a surviving intelligent soul.

The comment of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, the Russian woman who in 1875 launched the Theosophical Movement in the United States, is also of interest. She began by defending mediums from charges of fraud, saying that the phenomena were genuine, and that they should be recognized as evidence of the play of forces unknown to physical science, although they might not supply proof of immortality. Yet non-believers in Spiritualism, she said, would nonetheless be no longer able to remain materialists and would develop open minds. In later years she gave her own explanation of mediumistic phenomena in a book titled *The Key to Theosophy* (1889), still in print and available from the Theosophy Company in Los Angeles. She, like Dr. Rhine many years later, devoted all her energies to showing the psychic and spiritual potentialies of the living.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

FORTY-NINTH IN LITERACY

IN the Winter *Dædalus* sixteen contributors discuss "reading" from various points of view. The opinions of publishers and booksellers are well represented, leading to conclusions discouraging to people who read good books, when they can find them. (One would have to turn time back nearly a century to hope to find, in some half-concealed place, the bookstore of his dreams.) The gloomiest item in this issue of *Dædalus* is the current report on "functional literacy," supplied by Elizabeth Hardwick:

> Figures about illiteracy among us may stun the mind of one looking out on a street filled with automobiles, hearing the planes whining down to the airports, knowing of sonics and stereophonics and miraculous little chips. We are, in literacy, forty-ninth among the 158 members of the United Nations, and that means 60 millions among us, including 47 per cent of black youth, do not, cannot read. This fact seems to call up an ancient rural folk living in brutal, repetitive isolation, centuries past, one day like the next, the hut, the unlettered darkness. But that is not true, the illiterate are of course utterly contemporary in outlook and experience of life, and their plight is like some crippling or myopia, personalized yet hidden, at least in some part of its manifestation. The scandal of it, surrounded by words like priorities, tax base, overcrowding, unfortunate methods of instruction, and the easy absorption of the figures without alarm would seem to indicate one of those shiftings in our apprehension of national destiny.

Miss Hardwick turns to her own experience as a teacher, finding in literature students attitudes as bad or worse than "illiteracy," since they are unaware of the presumptions of their naive conceit.

> In the latitudinarian air of the classroom, and no doubt elsewhere, there is the tendency among readers to populate works with themselves, their friends. There is too much self-esteem and too little surrender. So the students say this novel, with its diversions, "drags," and Chekhov doesn't make a "real point," and Jane Austin is often silly, meaning that, in their view, the throb of afternoon calls, the bow at the ball, cannot bear the intentions attributed to them by the characters and, along the way of course, by Jane Austin herself. The personalization of fiction, the reduction of it to the boundaries of the reading self, often one who has lived for only a few decades in the twentieth century, is an intensive democratization not quite so felicitous for literature as one might have predicted. It bears some relation to the deformations of Socialist Realism—that is, the inclination in this case, unconscious and without ideology, to impose current conditions upon the recalcitrant past. . . .
>
> So, psychologically nothing is to be accepted as given, created, composed, in accordance to the truth and imagination of its own terms.

Miss Hardwick's delicacy is that of the good writer. She ends by recalling Marcel Proust's remark that reading is an initiation which should not be made into a discipline: "Reading is at the threshold of the spiritual life; it can introduce us to it; does not constitute it."

Lola Szladits, writer and librarian, muses on the decision of the New York Public Library—the big one at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street—to call itself "The House of Answers"—"a slogan to define its mission." She finds the words diminishing, although in tune with the times. She comments:

> Today it is possibly true that the need for and interest in the humanities are on the wane. It cannot be quantified, but it is visible both in the quality and quantity of readers and their work. Fields tend to become narrower, restricted, as some studies are, to major authors or major trends. There is a marked tendency to turn out whatever work is required in the fastest possible time. An old-fashioned humanist has trouble understanding research today: instant answers to instant questions. Research—and it cannot be stressed sufficiently—is not identical with information, and in its long-term duration, includes contemplation and articulation.

The librarians themselves are joining the crowd of pseudo-scholars:

> In articles written by librarians, the layman might notice certain characteristics: survival of libraries themselves is questioned, and such terms as "libraries of last resort" have crept into the language. (There are also "user-friendly" computers.) The

> direction's in which libraries might go are described as "warehouses of knowledge" or "the information marketplace"—of which the library may become an extension. These articles ask whether librarians should try to transform their libraries into businesses, and whether businessmen should not try to get into the library business themselves.

She points out that some businessmen already have done this, as shown by the explosion of "computer software." Miss Szladits concludes:

> I submit that to be well informed is not synonymous with being well educated. Experience does not equal education. Informed opinion is not the same as an educated view. Mysteries of the act of creation cannot be penetrated through the use of a machine. Understanding and interpretation of history require more than data in statistical tables, and balanced minds are better than balanced budgets.

Meanwhile, what is happening to bookstores? The general bookstore, like the general practitioner of medicine, is a thing of the past. Chains and specialty shops have taken over. Two big chains (Walden and Dalton), we learn from Walter Powell, "now account for about 20 per cent of all book sales in the United States," and *Publishers Weekly* is using Dalton's list of best sellers as the best available figures on sales nationwide. This writer concludes:

> If our nation's cities and college towns cannot support a locally owned, high-quality general bookstore, we lose one more institution that through the years has helped to bind the social fabric together. General bookstores offer readers a means of staying in contact with public issues. As Edward Shils eloquently noted two decades ago: "A good bookshop blows the breeze of contemporaneity on one; it puts one 'in touch'; it permits first contacts and offers prospects of greater intensity." Such a bookstore permits a sharing of newly fashioned works of literature and new ideas. Chain stores and specialty shops cannot replace the function of the general bookstore.

We need, Mr. Powell concludes, to "develop new ways to insure the survival of high-quality independent bookstores." But how? Locate them in annexes adjoining the barns of organic farms? Sooner or later, the people might go there looking for what they want.

One writer, Benjamin Compaine, celebrates the "new literacy" of the young, by which he means that they "assimilate great amounts of information rapidly from a video screen," proposing that an "oral" generation may also learn to absorb content at a faster rate from speech, with greater skill—or literacy—and with "enjoyment equal to our pleasure in reading words from a book." He does not mention that the absorption is likely to be wholly uncritical. Such learning seems no more than an additive process, with no reflection, since there is no time for that. And this writer also declares that we should not "fear" the new literacy, which is inevitable anyway. Perhaps Mr. Compaigne can be persuaded to read Neil Postman's *The Disappearance of Childhood,* written for those who think that television is a great educational force.

There is this general comment by another contributor Dan Lacy:

> There can be no question that audiovisual media have extended and enlarged, for untold numbers of people, an awareness of other lands, other times, other ideas than their own. So, too, has the computer given us powers without which modern society could not operate, and has enhanced immeasurably the capacity of human intelligence to analyze and organize experience.
>
> But neither provides what reading offers as a bridge to the universe of experience beyond our daily ambit. The one can bathe us directly in the unexamined flow of experience, but without the processes of abstraction and organization that give it meaning. The other can give a command over discrete facts scraped bare of penumbral meaning, but does not provide the holistic gathering of experience or endow it with a human conceptual structure.

FRONTIERS

Progress Report

IN December, 1981, some English women established a peace camp at Greenham Commons, the town where the decision-makers of NATO had planned to install a base for launching Cruise missiles for nuclear attack of Soviet Russia. This activity attracted little attention until a year later, when newspapers published pictures of thousands of ladies from all walks of life, locked arm in arm round the base. In the *IFOR Report* for February, Joe Peacock provides background on this stirring event. (IFOR stands for the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Christian pacifist organization with members around the world.)

A woman active in the demonstration from the beginning said that many of the women in the camp "didn't feel we had enough experience or understanding of situations around us to express our opinions, but gradually we gained confidence, and that chain reaction has continued." A camp leaflet explained: "For centuries, women have watched men go off to war; now women are leaving home for peace." Joe Peacock relates:

> Planning for a December 12 demonstration at the Greenham Common base began in early autumn. December 12 has a special meaning for Greenham Common, as it is the anniversary of the day in 1979 when NATO ministers approved the decision to deploy 572 Cruise and Pershing Missiles in Europe, beginning in Britain. Modelled on last year's Festival and on women's actions at the Pentagon in the US, the action was divided into separate phases of protest and resistance: *Embrace the Base on Sunday. Close the Base on Monday.* When the day finally came, no one knew whether there would really be enough women to surround the entire nine-mile perimeter of the base, and the women were instructed to bring along scarves, wood, or ribbons to extend their arms. Among the first arrivals were six busloads of women from Edinburgh, Scotland, who had set off at 10 pm the night before. It was snowing hard when they arrived and the organizers feared that many people would be put off from coming to the demonstration. But by noon the weather had cleared somewhat and the area was becoming jammed with more than 60 coaches and thousands of cars. Some people had to walk three miles to reach the base. For the organizers, the turnout was a complete surprise. They had hoped for 12,000; they got over 30,000.

All along the nine-foot fence around the base the women hung posters, baby pictures, balloons, peace poems, baby clothes, Teddy bears, and webs of yarn. "Wool webs have been used to entangle machinery, to string supine protesters together, and to baffle police officers trained to make baton charges but not to unpick knitting." This light-hearted policy, a woman said, "unlocks people's fears." On New Year's day forty-four women occupied a Cruise Missile bunker by throwing blankets over the barbed wire and climbing into the base. They burst into song before they were arrested and carried away. The women said they were responding to speeded-up construction work at the base and rumors in the press about Cruise Missile installation being moved up to April. These ladies and their "politics of whimsy," Peacock predicted, are not going to quit.

This is a time of converging themes in behalf of change. In the Winter 1981 *CoEvolution Quarterly* Peter Berg (of the Planet Drum Foundation) sounds a keynote:

> We have to cross over from economics to ecologies and we have to do it soon. . . . The shape of a transformed society isn't difficult to imagine: responsive to the biosphere through the use of alternative energy, appropriate technology, and sustainable agriculture; smaller political units defined by natural borders rather than straight lines, filling in the qualities of mutual aid, direct democracy, and opportunities for personal creativity and freedom that are nearly absent now. The problem is recognizing how and where this is currently happening on a level that includes all the varied segments of a whole society from construction workers to scientists, and believing it can happen wherever you are.

Today the people of natural regions are making themselves heard:

> The fight by minority peoples in Europe—the Basques, Bretons, Catalonians, Cornish, Welsh, and twenty more—to win political recognition contains this vision of transformation. One wouldn't know this from news reports about them in London or Paris (or

> the U.S.) where they are pictured as incomprehensible or awkward. . . . But the appeal of political groups representing these minorities continues to spread among all age and professional segments within their unrecognized borders, and nation-states are reluctantly bending. Spain yielded to home rule referenda which Basques and Catalonians passed last year. (One third of the Basque representatives were outright separatists who consider this a first step toward eventually establishing their own state of Euskadi.) England's slipping hold on Ulster encouraged the formation of home rule groups in Cornwall and Northumbria, adding to those already active in Wales and Scotland. The French government is studying decentralization partly to accommodate the clamor of Bretons, Corsicans, and Occitanians.

More than "nationalism" sparks these movements. The people, Berg says, "have the regional perspective about energy questions that is essential for conceiving workable alternatives to fossil and nuclear fuels." The editor of Catalan ecology journal is quoted as saying:

> It's not the culture alone that will permit independence or autonomy or decentralization, it's the energy model which will create the capacity to decentralize. If Catalonia rejects the hard energy industrial model, it will not only change the energy plan but the whole concept of use of natural resources as well. Even the idea of national parks, which is an industrial idea, can change. Catalonia itself would be a national park!

Speaking of the United States, Peter Berg proposa new meaning for the term "native":

> *Native* now must mean someone who is aware of being borne by the natural systems and life-community of a bioregion and identifies with the reinhabitation of a naturally defined nation of the planet. . . . Water diversion schemes will foster alliances between city dwellers, farmers, ecology activists and small town residents, as is currently happening in Northern California. . . . Bio-regional congresses like the Ozarks Area (Community Congress formed to represent Ozarkia, can map reinhabitory political strategies to introduce and steer these platforms.

Elsewhere in the magazine the comment of a Nigerian woman, Fatima Omo-Fadaka, on the struggle of the Biafrans in her country, makes the central point:

> We had to go through a civil war to understand that a central government cannot decentralize anything. . . . So you have to make bioregions. But not from within the central government. You have to get the movement going within the bioregions and then change the government.