VOLUME XXX, NO. 14
APRIL 6, 1977

# INSTEAD OF ALGEBRA

THERE is a quality in human beings which seldom has adequate explanation—the resistance to being "taught." No one enjoys subjection to people who put on didactic airs. While the young may go to school willingly in order to enjoy the pleasures of sociability, the more teachers try to "teach," the less interesting they become. Children delight in finding things out, but seldom are these spontaneous interests met in school. There may be teachers, here and there, who know that real learning takes place only through independent discovery, and who give their best energies to making an environment hospitable to such happenings, but in general education is regarded as *instructing* the young. By an instinct which runs deeper than laziness or habits of inattention, the young resist.

A similar instinct in adults generates distrust of labels. A named thing is not necessarily a thing understood. Naming has a tendency to hide the need for understanding. Classification has its value, but skill in taxonomy makes no one wise. Simply to speak of a "subject" for study is often enough to blight the attraction of an area of experience. Analytical treatment has first to "kill" its material—make it passive for objective examination. Textbooks on psychology, especially, may for this reason repel the healthy-minded reader. All the things the psychologists talk about are a part of our experience, but labeling them can be a subjective disaster. There is a sense in which it becomes indecent to call the delighted response of a child to new kittens in the house an "affect." Not only is the map not the territory, but the entry on the map for the child's joy is a distorting representation of it. It is as though the scientific psychologist is unable to speak about life without defusing it of all vitality. He collects shadows, not realities. His books are pretentious albums of snapshots. The best psychologists are those who spend their lives trying to restore some life to their studies, bucking the cultural determinism of the language they have inherited.

There is a locker-room joke which vaguely parallels this situation. The story goes that a new member of a golf club was changing his clothes, and after listening for a while to the others talking and laughing, he became puzzled. One man would call out a number, and then the rest would burst into laughter. After this had happened several times, with different persons calling numbers, the new member asked a friend what was going on. "Oh," said the friend, "those are the numbers we've given to jokes we all know. Instead of telling the story all over again, we just call out the number. It saves a lot of time."

Too much of learning gives out numbers instead of generative conceptions. How could we avoid this "dead" language without taking up too much time? No formal definition can illuminate the quality of living speech. Illustrations might help, but could also be misleading. Ortega, however, has an excellent passage on this question in *The Idea of Principle in Leibnitz.* Speaking of the sort of language that remains alive, he says:

> These expressions are metaphors, but *the metaphor is the authentic naming of things,* and not the technical term of terminology. The term—in this sense not of concept but of the word that expresses it—the technical term is a dead word sterilized, aseptic, which by the same token has been converted into a symbol and has ceased to be actively naming, that is, carrying out by itself that operation and function which is "saying the thing" that we call *naming.* The true meaning of *name* is "that which serves to *call* someone." The word *calls* to a thing that is not there before us, and the thing runs to us like a dog, makes itself more or less apparent to us, comes to us, responds, makes itself manifest. Therefore the notion that the name *calls* to things arises from the primitive "animist" thinking in which

> everything has a soul, an innermost center, from which it hears, understands the call, responds and comes forth.
>
> The moment that a name is converted into a technical term, a change comes over it, and over our use of it. Far from telling us what the thing is, bringing it to us and making it visible, we must now seek the thing that the term expresses by other means, observing it closely, and only then do we understand the term. A terminology is the exact opposite of a language.

We should note, here, that while the spontaneous rejection of a dead "terminology" may be the reaction of the common man—and common student—a questioning of *why* he feels this way, with a resulting deliberate endeavor to restore life to language, are activities pursued only by very uncommon men (of whom Ortega is an example).

The denaturing of learning seems to be one of the consequences of self-consciousness. An account of how this happens is given by Owen Barfield in *Poetic Diction:*

> All literatures are, in their infancy, metrical, that is to say based on a more or less regularly recurring rhythm. Thus, . . . we are obliged to assume that the earliest verse-rhythms were "given" by Nature in the same way as the earliest "meaning." And this is comprehensible enough. Nature herself is perpetually rhythmic. Just as the myths still live on a ghostly life as fables after they have died as real meaning, so the old rhythmic human consciousness of Nature (it should rather be called a *participation* than a consciousness) lives on as the tradition of metrical form. We can only understand the origin of metre by going back to the ages when men were conscious, not merely in their heads but in the beating of their hearts and the pulsing of their blood—when thinking was not merely *of* Nature, but was Nature herself.
>
> It is only at a later stage that prose (=not-verse) comes naturally into being out of the growth of that rational principle which, with its sense-bound, abstract thoughts, divorces man's consciousness from the life of Nature.

Our speech, Barfield suggests, was once spontaneous response to the flow of life, a natural poetry, one could say. Metaphors were not metaphors, in those days, but the true names of things. But with the emergence of what we term "objective consciousness," another sort of speech supervenes. As Barfield says:

> It [self-consciousness] shuts off the human ego from the living meaning in the outer world, which it is forever "murdering to dissect," and encloses that same ego in the network of its own, now abstract, thoughts. And it is just in the course of that very shutting off that the ego itself stirs and awakes to conscious existence. . . . Isolated thus, suspended as it were, *in vacuo,* and hermetically sealed from truth and life, not only the proper name, but the very ego itself, of which that is but the symbol, pines and dwindles away before our eyes to a thin nothing—a mere inductive abstraction from tabulated card-indexed behaviour, whose causes lie elsewhere.
>
> Now although, without the rational principle, neither truth nor knowledge could ever have been, but only Life itself, yet that principle alone cannot add one iota to knowledge. It can clear up obscurities, it can measure and enumerate with greater and ever greater precision. . . . But in no sense can it be said to *expand* consciousness. Only the poetic can do this: only poesy, pouring into language its creative intuitions, can preserve its living meaning and prevent it from crystallizing into a kind of algebra. . .

What Mr. Barfield is getting at here (in a book written in 1928) is that the names of things and the myths from which meanings are derived were once unmediated readings of experience. Ancient speech, said Shelley, borrowing a phrase from Bacon, was made of the "footsteps of nature," and this, Barfield says, is "the answer."

> It is these "footsteps of nature" whose noise we hear alike in primitive language and in the finest metaphors of poets. Men do not *invent* those mysterious relations between external objects, and between objects and feelings or ideas which it is the function of poetry to reveal. These relations exist independently, not indeed of Thought, but of any individual thinker. . . . The language of primitive men reports them as direct perceptual experience. The speaker has observed a unity, and is not therefore himself conscious of *relation.* But we, in the development of consciousness have lost the power to see this one as one. Our sophistication, like Odin's, has cost us an eye; and now it is the language of poets, insofar as they create true metaphors, which must *restore* this unity conceptually, after it has been lost from perception. Thus the "before

> unapprehended" relationships of which Shelley spoke, are in a sense "forgotten" relationships. For though they were never yet apprehended, they were at one time seen. And imagination can see them again.

The difficulty, of course, in a labor of this sort—this "seeing them again"—is that the writers who engage in the task defined by Mr. Barfield have at the same time to create the taste receptive to their work. In a culture which for more than a hundred years has been convinced that only technical words are accurate, reliable, and good to use, the restoration of living language is hardly possible without a radically reformed conception of knowledge. Moreover, any such reform can hardly take place until there is restored self-reliance on the part of people generally. Only essentially original language authenticated in personal experience by the one who uses it has true vitality. Ortega saw this early in life, and in a long footnote in *The Idea of Principle in Leibnitz* put on record the trials he had endured in his effort *to* show the way to a language that is based, not on borrowed abstractions, but on independent thinking and naming. He said:

> To think that for more than 30 years—it is quickly said—I had, day after day, to endure *in silence, never broken,* when many pseudo-intellectuals of my country disqualified my ideas because I "wrote only in metaphors," they said. This made them conclude and proclaim triumphantly that my writings were not philosophy. It is clear that fortunately they were not, if philosophy is something they have the capacity to set aside. Certainly, I carried to an extreme the hiding of the definitive dialectic musculature of my thought, as nature takes care to cover fiber, nerve and tendon with the ectodermic literature of the skin where it took great pains in placing the *stratum lucidum.* It seems impossible that concerning my writings—whose importance, apart from this question, I recognize as scant—no one has made the generous observation, which is also irrefutable, that in them it is not a matter of something given as philosophy which turns out to be literature, but on the contrary, of something presented as literature which results in philosophy.

Why did the academics object to Ortega's reliance on metaphor? What seems to be wrong with literature which has philosophic content? His critics said that he was not "systematic." His expositions were not formal. He skips around; he makes jokes; he does not seem entirely serious in what he says. These charges are all true, accomplishing, one could say, his vindication. Ortega promises no certainty; like Plato, he seems to feel that the certainties that can be set down in books are of an inferior sort. He quotes approvingly the comparison of Plato with Aristotle offered by Descartes:

> In the Preface to his [Descartes'] *Principles of Philosophy* he says that Plato "confessed frankly not having been able to find anything certain, and he contented himself with writing the things that seemed true to him, imagining for this some principles by which he tried to give reason for other things; whereas Aristotle was less sincere, and although he was Plato's disciple for twenty years and had no other principles than those he got from Plato, he completely changed the manner of stating them and set them forth as sure and certain without giving the slightest inkling that he never esteemed them as such." The thing is highly important. Descartes was not content with declaring Aristotle's doctrines erroneous, but classed him formally as a falsifier and disingenuous. How can one help pausing at such an enormity? If it is anything, history is an effort to understand human deeds and events. Here is a human occurrence of the highest rank, because of him who says it, because of him of whom it is said, and because of what is said.

Except for Descartes' careless description of Plato's method—"imagining for this some principles by which he tried to give reason for other things"—this seems accurate enough. Aristotle did write with an air of certainty, while Plato is the master of doubting. Yet, curiously, the Platonic mode of thinking became the foundation for the Western mind. Plato is still studied fruitfully today, while Aristotle is increasingly regarded as the propagandist of unreliable certainties.

Plato was not much concerned with what could be declared with finality, which seemed to him only secondary (public) truth. His interest was rather in those questions in which the whole life of a man is involved, and which could not be neatly isolated in propositional form. Simply

because the ultimate issues of existence turn on feelings and deep convictions which are hardly understood by any of us, Plato often addressed his readers in the form of myths which had no exact meaning, yet would reach in and stir the imagination. The response might be different in each case, but this was no objection for Plato. In a rather remarkable book, *The Myths of Plato* (London: Macmillan, 1905), J. A. Stewart says:

> He [Plato] appeals to that major part of man's nature which is not articulate and logical, but feels, and wills, and acts—to that part which cannot explain what a thing is, or how it happens, but feels that the thing is good or bad, and expresses itself, not scientifically in "existential" or "theoretic judgments," but practically in "value judgments"—or rather "value-feelings," . . . In appealing, through the recital of dreams, to that major part of us which feels "values," which wills and acts, Plato indeed goes down to the bedrock of human nature. At that depth man is more at one with Universal Nature—more in her secret, as it were—than he is at the level of his "higher" faculties, where he lives in a conceptual world of his own making which he is always endeavouring to "think." And after all, however high he may rise as a "thinker," it is only of "values" that he genuinely thinks; and the ground of all "values"—*the Value of Life itself*—was apprehended before the dawn of thinking. It is good, Plato will have us believe, to appeal sometimes from the world of the senses and scientific understanding, which is "too much with us," to this deep-lying part of human nature, as to an oracle. The responses of the oracle are not given in articulate language which the scientific understanding can interpret, they come as dreams, and must be received as dreams, without thought of doctrinal interpretation. Their ultimate meaning is the "feeling" which fills us in beholding them; and when we wake from them, we see our daily concerns and all things temporal with purged eyes.

The myth, then, through Plato's art, supplies a kind of grammar to the voice of Nature. By the invitation and participation of its hearer, myth may generate moods molten with seminal meaning. Within every human being there are elevations where vision and dignity unite, and where, at climactic moments, nature effortlessly shapes a "peak experience." Long before Dr. Maslow gave us this term, J. A. Stewart wrote about the source of Transcendental Feeling, saying:

> When these natural moods are experienced, we feel "That which was, and is, and ever shall be" overshadowing us, and familiar things—the stars and the lilac bloom—become suddenly strange and wonderful, for our eyes are opened to see that they declare its presence.

This is an awakening which has little or no dependence on intellectual processes involving conceptualization. It is not so much thinking as the noetic stance which provides substance for thinking. The myth, in Plato's hands, is an incarnation in literature of the drama of the Mysteries, which in his time were losing their power over the feeling life of the people. What had been a collective act of regeneration was reshaped by him into individual encounter. "Plato," Stewart remarks, "compares that enthusiastic Philosophy, of which myth is the vehicle, to the Mysteries. The devout went to Eleusis, not to get doctrine out of allegorical representations, but to have their souls purified by the awe of the 'Blessed Sights' presented in the acted Myth."

It is the *sense* of the world of experience that is conveyed by myth—not in words, but in those feelings and actions which are central to life and too powerful for any ordinary language to contain. Some reflection of this original sense is captured in every great "story," and since a good story is free of any didactic intent, the intermediary function of the story-teller gives no offense. He does not instruct, but invites to a celebration. Stewart's grasp of the natural part played in human life by great myths seems superbly clear:

> Judged by the standard of positive science the matter of the context supplied from the dream-world by the mythopoeic fancy is in itself, of course, worthless, but the mind is enlarged by the mere contemplation of it, the habit of looking for a context in which to receive the sense-given is acquired, and matter satisfactory to science is easily received when it afterwards presents itself. The conceptual context of science thus gradually comes to occupy the place once filled by the fantastical context of the dream-

world. But this is not the only respect in which the mythopoeic fancy serves the development of man.

If it prepares the way for the exercise of the scientific understanding, it also indicates limits within which that exercise must be confined. This it does by supplying an emotional context, if the phrase may be used, along with the fantastical context. The visions of the mythopoeic fancy are received by the Self of ordinary consciousness with a strange surmise of the existence, in another world, of another Self which, while it reveals itself in these visions, has a deep secret which it will not disclose. It is good that a man should thus be made to feel in his heart how small a part of him his head is—that the Scientific Understanding should be reminded that it is not the Reason—the Part, that it is not the Whole Man. Herein chiefly lies the present value of Myth (or of its equivalent, Poetry, Music, or whatever else) for civilised man.

Plato wanted his readers to become attentive, once more, to the "footsteps of nature," and the pathway he chose for this return was the poetry of myth. It is a route now sought by many travelers, yet one where each person is on his own.

# *REVIEW*
## GETTING TO KNOW BETTER

IN a time of widespread certainties, people know, or think they know, what to do. In a time of multiplying misfortunes, people begin to catalog the things they ought not to do, or to stop doing. A book which deals effectively with such changes in attitude, and their historical consequences, is *A Place of Power: The American Episode in Human Evolution* (Goodyear Publishing Co., 1976, $10.95) by Walt Anderson. A quotation by the author from Allen Wheelis gives in effect the reason for this book. Dr. Wheelis said in *The End of the Modern Age:*

> Since man became a historical being each age has been able to recognize the certainties of the past as mistaken, often as absurd. Eternal verities prove both transient and untrue. We look back and see that they were held by a particular people with unique mores living on a limited segment of earth during a certain period of time, and that whatever apparent validity they had was bound to those circumstances. What was self-evident truth to them is seen by us to be arbitrary, culturally relative, derived from needs and fears.

To be a "historical being" is practically the same thing as being a "social being," one who shares Vico's belief that the social world is the work of men. History, from this point of view, is written to guide or assist social beings in improving the design of their world and *A Place of Power* is such a history book. Its stance of disillusionment—which becomes a kind of enlightenment—is that of informed ecological insight. The author thinks highly of Lewis Mumford, Robert Heilbroner, and A. H. Maslow, which gives some idea of how he goes back over American history to show the psychological and practical causes of present-day confusions and messes. The idea is that we have developed great power over our environment, and need now to stop misusing it, turning our energies and capacities in a better direction. Therefore social, which is to say, political, decisions lie before us. In his concluding chapter Mr. Anderson writes:

> There is just the possibility that we may now be starting to develop a better understanding of what human beings need so we can create social arrangements more enriching to human life. It is appropriate and probably not accidental that we turn to this emerging consciousness at the same time that we confront some of the ecological consequences of our past over-emphasis on production and consumption of material goods.
>
> American history has been pervaded by a sense of limitlessness: first limitless expanses of land and then, as the frontiers ran out, limitless possibilities of urban growth, productivity, technology, and energy. The lesson we are being forced to learn from ecological crisis is that there are limits: limits to how much the human population can increase, limits to the manageability of urban growth, limits on converting new land to agricultural use, limits to the quantities of waste that can be dumped into the air and water and onto the land, limits to resources, limits to energy. . . .
>
> Let me make it clear that I am not suggesting we counsel the poor to be happy with their lot. We cannot deny the pre-eminence of simple physiological needs: the hungry need food and the homeless need shelter. I am saying that our overstuffed society would do well to reconsider its priorities and pay more attention to politics as a way of creating or allowing to come into being, social arrangements aimed directly at satisfying higher human needs. If we can do so our sudden encounter with natural limits becomes not the end of the world but the beginning of a new phase of cultural evolution.

One might respond to this recommendation by sending up danger signals—pointing out the folly of forgetting the importance of the First Amendment—except for the fact that Mr. Anderson seems to expand the meaning of politics to include a caring attitude toward the whole universe, which is certainly not politics as we know it. Politics, as familiarly defined, is the intentional use of power, and caring is something quite different, although it is likely to have a profound effect on all political acts.

Let us go back to the key quotation from Allen Wheelis. Since man became a historical being, he says, we have discovered that our "certainties" don't remain certain. One of these certainties is illustrated by the fact that from the eighteenth century on, we have used strenuous political means to establish what were believed to be better conditions for all. Ideally, the political means is the use of power for the common good. We must now, Mr. Anderson's book makes plain, reconsider our definition of the common good. But should we not also examine what can be accomplished by power, and consider what power can and cannot do for any version of the common good?

Moreover, since modern history, as we write and read it, has been almost entirely political, what Wheelis says about the eternal verities applies mainly to our changing ideological persuasions. The modern world has paid little or no attention to the verities honored in ancient times. We have not been fooled by the *Gita* or misled by Lao tse.

What were we, in short, before we became "historical" beings? Answering this question requires a look at the old traditional societies with their "static," hierarchical arrangements, and people to whom it never occurred to set about changing them. What did those people have that we seem to lack? We *know* what we have that they lacked, and have been bragging about it for a long time, but let us turn the equation around. One could put together a rather lovely mosaic of customs, attitudes, and practices, taken from various past societies, which might come quite close to approximating the sort of foundation Mr. Anderson believes we must achieve for a livable future. One of these attitudes was briefly put by Coomaraswamy in *The Bugbear of Literacy:*

> . . . if there are any occupations not consistent with human dignity, or manufactures however profitable that are not of *real* goods, such occupations and manufactures must be abandoned by any society that has in view the dignity of all its members. It is only when measured in terms of dignity and not in terms of comfort that a "standard of living" can properly be called high.

This sense of dignity was a part of the common nourishment in many of the ancient societies; no doubt there can be a politics consistent with it, but can any sort of politics *supply* it? Why not admit that we know very little about such cultural evolutions? What, for example, would you do, "politically," to produce the quality of life which the following quotation (found in *Rain* for January) suggests:

> . . . I was in the courtyard of a place called McCord's Zulu Hospital, an institution of about 200 beds in Durban, South Africa. The wards and balconies opened onto a courtyard filled with flowering trees and warm subtropical air. Suddenly a single soprano voice soared from one of the wards, wavered, and was joined and sustained by a chorus of women's voices and rose again. After a moment a great deep harmonic swelled: the men's ward had joined in. And for the next ten minutes, the whole hospital sang. Someone translated for me. The Zulu song was about the pain of being ill, the loneliness and fear of being in the hospital, and the goodness of being with the people—other patients—for sharing and support. Every day at twilight, I learned, the whole hospital sang—all the patients and some of the staff. . . . At intervals since, I have tried to imagine patients so sustaining themselves in a hospital in Boston. I cannot. (*Self-Help and Health.*)

A "moral" from Coomaraswamy:

> How can the world be given back its meaning? Not, of course, by a return to the outward forms of the Middle Ages, nor, on the other hand, by assimilation to any surviving, Oriental or other, pattern of life. But why not by a recognition of the principles on which the patterns were based?

How, it might be asked, does one recognize or identify such "principles," and how do they become persuasive?

There are no easy answers to this question, but asking it at least points to what we may need above all. We can easily say, however, what stands in the way of openness to such principles: the habit of pretentious, strident justification of short-term ends—the way politicians win elections, nowadays—closes people's minds. Mr. Anderson makes this clear:

> Abroad we set up military and economic establishments in foreign countries and then regard attacks on them as acts of war or terrorism. At home we build towns in flood plains and then when the inevitable floods come they are "mad rampages of nature." Massive assaults on ecosystems are unfailingly described as "internal improvements," and the destruction of entire species for the shallowest of human purposes is justified as economic necessity. There is also the simple absence of knowledge of how nature is managed and used. Millions of Americans living in highly artificial environments and remote from the sources of their own biological sustenance actually do not know how they are kept alive or understand the extent and costs of the environmental manipulations of which they are a part.

This is all going to change, how rapidly no one knows, how painfully no one imagines. Mr. Anderson's *A Place of Power* makes a good introduction to understanding a process of change already begun.

# *COMMENTARY*
## ORAL LITERATURE

THE book by Ananda Coomaraswamy quoted in Review (page 3), *The Bugbear of Literacy* (London: Dobson, Ltd., 1949), is a brief but telling defense of the unlettered peoples of the world. In behalf of these people, who now belong mostly to the past, Coomaraswamy quotes the scholar, G. L. Kittredge, adding some comment:

> "It requires a combined effort of the reason and the imagination to conceive a poet as a person who cannot write, singing or reciting his verses to an audience that cannot read. . . . The ability of the oral tradition to transmit great masses of verse for hundreds of years is proved and admitted. . . . To this oral literature, as the French call it, education is no friend. Culture destroys it, sometimes with amazing rapidity. *When a nation begins to read . . . what was once the possession of the folk as a whole, becomes the heritage of the illiterate only, and soon, unless it is gathered up by the antiquary, vanishes altogether."* Mark, too, that this oral literature once belonged "to the whole people . . . the community whose intellectual interests are the same from the top of the social structure to the bottom," while in the reading society it is accessible only to antiquaries, and is no longer bound up with everyday life. A point of further importance is this: that the traditional oral literatures interested not only all *classes,* but also all *ages* of the population; while the books that are nowadays written expressly "for children" are such as no mature mind could tolerate, it is now only the comic strips that appeal alike to children who have been given nothing better and at the same time to "adults" who have never grown up.

Is this sophisticated writer advocating the abolition of written literature? Not in the least. His book is rather an attempt to wean the modern civilized races of an egotism based on merely technical "literacy," and to invite attention to what has been lost by mistaking the ability to read as a mark of cultivation.

Why does the man who heard the singing in the Zulu hospital say that he couldn't imagine the patients in a Boston hospital sustaining themselves in the same way? Because, no doubt, he knows that Bostonians lack the sensibility and spontaneous expressiveness that would make the singing possible. Many factors contributed to this decline, but one cause must have been the conversion of their speech into a technical terminology which "is the exact opposite of a language."

Thinking and feeling our way back to a living speech might incidentally cancel out the offenses against the young (in the name of education) that John Holt and Bruno Bettelheim refer to (see "Children").

We need to figure out how to make literacy (reading and writing) amplify instead of diminishing the qualities of civilization, but the first step is recognizing how they were lost. Here, of course, we haven't *explained* this loss, but only given an account of the effects of whatever it was that happened.

Interestingly, T. E. Lawrence observed that the muster of the Arab troops under his command in World War I was conducted by verses in an epic style. The Arabs were non-literate, and their speech was "Homeric" by necessity, since their education had been by learning Arab epics at the hearth. As the Arabs go the way of the West, these heroic forms of speech will doubtless wither. When will the West be able to export something worthy to take their place?

---

Incidentally, as an editorial footnote to Frontiers, we might say that MANAS has never released its mailing list to anyone else, on the ground that the names of subscribers have been entrusted to us for only one purpose—mailing them the magazine.

# CHILDREN
## . . . and Ourselves
### MUCH ADO ABOUT READING

YEARS ago, among theatrical people in New York, a story at the expense of the producer, David Belasco, went the rounds. It was that one matinée afternoon two women emerged from the theater after seeing one of his plays, and one of them said to the other, "Just think, they had *real sausages* on the table!"

A much worse offender is of course the Hollywood movie. Breathes there a youngster so lackluster in spirit who has not gone home from a film version of a much loved story—say *Tom Sawyer* or *Huckleberry Finn*—feeling resentful? His rights have been stolen by a bunch of experts. It isn't his story any more, but some kind of finished thing which no one would dare add to.

The good critics say pretty must the same things. Bruno Bettelheim is quoted by John Goldthwaite as pointing out that heavily illustrated picture books arrest the development of a child's imagination. He may "enjoy" the pictures, but he is not likely to make any of his own.

In the *New Schools Exchange Newsletter* for last December, John Holt has a similar objection to the way reading is taught to early graders:

> Our professional experts on reading and the "teaching" of reading have said a great many foolish things, but I don't know that any of them is more foolish than the notion that the way to get children "ready" to read is to show them a lot of books full of nothing but pictures and ask them a lot of silly questions about them. This is standard practice, almost everywhere, as far as I know.

What does Holt recommend? Not worrying too much about it, you could say. Anxiety about a child's reading ability may have a much worse effect on the child than a little benign neglect. Holt says:

> The proper analogy can be found, as is so often true, with children learning to speak—that extraordinarily intellectual feat that we all accomplish before adults got it into their heads that they could "teach" us. Children get ready to speak by hearing speech all around them. The important thing about that speech is that the adults are, for the most part, *not* talking in order to *give* the children a model. They are talking to each other because they have things to say.

So talking is pretty important to do, and the child does it. It comes naturally. Hardly any adults remember much about how they learned to read, but some do. Because he is a teacher, perhaps, John Holt remembers:

> When I was a kid, I taught myself to read, as a great many children do. Nobody taught me, and as far as I can remember, nobody helped me very much or read aloud to me. . . . One of the things that gave me great impetus to read was that in those days (long, long ago) children's books had very few pictures in them. There were illustrations here and there—magnificent ones—many of them painted by Andrew Wyeth's father, N. C. Wyeth. Pirates, knights, highland chiefs—marvelous pictures. But there weren't enough of them to give me any idea what the stories were about, so I realized that if I was going to find out what those pictures meant I was going to have to read the book. Which I learned to do. . .

The idea is to rely on normality and help it along:

> What children need in the way of reading readiness material is exposure to a lot of *print.* Not pictures, but print. They need to bathe their eyes in print, as they bathed their ears in talk when they were smaller. After a while these meaningless forms, curves, and squiggles begin to steady down, take shape, become recognizable, so that after a while children, without knowing what letters are, or words, begin to see that this letter appears *here,* and *here,* and that groups of letters appear here, and here. When they've learned to *see* the letters and the words, they are ready to ask themselves questions about what they mean and what they say, not before, just as, when I am learning a foreign language, there is no use in telling me that such and such a word means such and such until my ears have become sharp enough to pick it out from other people's talk.

This approach is practically the same as what goes on in the infant schools of England. According to Joseph Featherstone's account (in *Radical School Reform,* Gross), the children in these schools learn a great deal from each other. "They hang around library corners long before they can read, handling the books, looking at pictures, trying to find words they do know, listening and watching as the teacher hears other children's reading." The young learn from the older children and they all learn, each at his own pace, to read. Featherstone says:

> Increasingly in the good infant schools, there are no textbooks and no class readers. There are just books, in profusion. Instead of spending their scanty book money on 40 sets of everything, wise schools have purchased different sets of reading series, as well as a great many single books, at all levels of difficulty. Teachers arrange their classroom libraries, so they can direct students of different abilities to appropriate books, but in most cases a child can tackle anything he wants.

This is what John Holt is insisting on—*access* for the children. Use the signs along the streets and highways. There is too much talk, he thinks, about a "carefully planned, guided and enriched" curriculum:

> We take children out of and away from the great richness and variety of the world, and in its place we give them school subjects, the curriculum. Perhaps we may jazz it up with chicken bones, Cuisenaire rods, and all sorts of goodies from EDC. But the fact remains that instead of giving them access to more and more people, things, and experiences, we are cutting the world up into little hunks and giving it to the children according to this or that theory we have about what they need or can handle. I assert and insist that what they need is access to more and more of the real world; plenty of time and space to think about their experiences, to make fantasy and play and meaning out of them; plenty of people to answer their questions when they have them; road maps, guide books, advice, to make it easier for them to get where *they* want to go (not where we think they ought to go), and to find out what they want to find out. Finding ways to do this is not a small matter. The modern world is dangerous, confusing, not meant for children, not generally kindly to them. We have a great deal to learn about how to make the world more accessible to them, how to give them more freedom and competence in exploring it. It is not a small subject. But it is a very different thing indeed from designing nice little curricula.

John Holt speaks of fantasy. Without fantasy the lives of children—and of adults—become dull and sterile. Our modern world is a world without nourishment from fantasy—except for the science-fiction kind—and see what an unpleasant place it has become.

Lately we have come across a lovely book of fantasy for the young, *The Grey King* by Susan Cooper, with a story set in Wales. It starts you thinking about the wonder of lands where sleepy old legends have been kept alive for centuries, and perhaps longer. This is a heritage Americans are pretty much without unless they set out to find it, borrowing from the Greeks, the Norse, or perhaps from the American Indians. The name Susan Cooper seemed to ring a bell, so we looked her up in a back issue of MANAS—dated March 21, the first day of spring in 1973—finding quoted from her life of J. B. Priestley a fantastic dream (really a vision) he had more than thirty years ago, while living on the Isle of Wight. The dream proved an enrichment of his life, ever after. And so with the stories of magic and wonder for children.

Susan Cooper's story is about an English boy who goes for a visit to the country in Wales, to recover after a bad illness. A cousin is bringing him to his uncle's farm when the fantasy begins:

> Will gazed out at the mountains dark and distant, swinging into view as they drove along the road crossing the valley. Grey-white cloud hung ragged round the highest hills, their tops invisible behind the mist. He said, "The cloud's all tattered round the tops of the mountains. Perhaps it's breaking up."
>
> Rhys looked out casually. "The breath of the Grey King? No, I'm sorry to tell you, Will, that's supposed to be a bad sign."
>
> Will sat very still, a great rushing sound in his ears; he gripped the edge of his seat until the metal bit at his fingers. "What did you call it?"
>
> "The cloud? Oh, when it hangs like that we call it the breath of *Brenin Llwd.* The Grey King. He is supposed to live up there on the high land. It's just one of the old stories." Rhys glanced sideways at him and then braked suddenly; the Land-Rover slowed almost to a halt. "Will! Are you all right? White as a ghost, you look? . . . "
>
> "No. It was just—" Will was staring out at the grey mass of the hills. "It was just . . . the Grey King, the *Grey King* . . . it's part of something I used to know, something I was supposed to remember for always. . . . I thought I'd lost it. Perhaps—perhaps it's going to come back. . . ."

Anyone who recalls with pleasure Ann Clark's *Secret of the Andes* will enjoy *The Grey King.*

# *FRONTIERS*

## Another New Publisher

FEW publishers of magazines and newspapers say very much about their business practices and policies to readers.

When you have something to *sell,* you keep the tricks of the trade to yourself. The Jan. 5 Frontiers reported a pleasant exception, telling about Stu Chapman's report on the policies of his weekly, the *Mendocino Grapevine*—how he is coping with "success." Now we have another example of openness on the part of one of the new publishers—an explanation of how *Rain* (published monthly in Oregon) protects the privacy of its subscribers. On a page devoted to announcements, an editor said:

> You who've been subscribing to RAIN probably know we've exchanged our mailing list a few times with organizations/periodicals that we thought you might want to know more about. We've decided to stop doing that. Over the past two or three months we've gotten only complaints from our subscribers, not an indication that we're enriching anyone's life. No serious complaints, just ones like "Please don't sell your mailing list to any more kooky organizations" and "Here I am the victim of junk mail." . . . On the benefit side, we can count a few subscriptions from folks who saw RAIN because of our use of the other organization's list, but it's not worth it to us to be bothering our readers with unwanted mail.

Consistent with this policy was *Rain's* reply to an Oklahoma reader who wanted to know if there were other *Rain* subscribers in his state. *Rain* printed his address, giving the other Oklahomans freedom to respond, or not.

We—all of us—need to establish human relationships in which there is no more "'selling," and this is one way publications can help. A good rule for everyone interested in such goals would be to pick suppliers who don't try to "sell," and then, if all other things are equal, or even a little unequal, buy from them. A big step toward restoring community to human life might be made if enough people refused to submit to or use the "consumer" psychology.

This (January) issue of *Rain* reprints the second part of an article by E. F. Schumacher in which he talks about Selling's partner in crime—Big Production. If increased sales are the highest good, then more and faster production is the foundation of all achievement. Dr. Schumacher and a manufacturer of textile equipment were looking at a machine that would do practically *everything,* and Schumacher said, "Why don't you stop, call it a day?"

The textile machinery man was shocked. "You can't stop progress," he exclaimed. What, he wanted to know, could possibly be wrong with these magnificent improvements on textile machinery? The machine, Schumacher said, would cost half again as much more. When the machinery man pointed out, "The machine will be 50% dearer but at least 60% better," Schumacher replied:

> "Maybe, but also that much more *exclusive* to the rich and powerful. Have you ever reflected on the *political* effect of what you are doing?"
>
> Of course, he had never given it a thought. But he was much disturbed; he saw the point at once. "I *can't* stop," he pleaded.
>
> "Of course, you can't stop. But you can do something all the same: you can strive to create a counterweight, a counterforce, namely, efficient small-scale technology for the little people. What are you in fact doing for the little people?"
>
> "Nothing."
>
> I talked to him about what I call the "Law of the Disappearing Middle." In technical development, when it is drifting along, outside conscious control, all ambition and creative talent *goes to the frontier,* the only place considered prestigious and exciting.
>
> Development proceeds from Stage 1 to Stage 2, and when it moves on to Stage 3, Stage 2 drops out, when it moves on to Stage 4, Stage 3 drops out, and so on.
>
> It is difficult not to observe the process. The "better" becomes the enemy of the good and makes the good disappear *even if* most people cannot afford the better, for reasons of Money, Market, Management, or whatever it might be. Those who cannot afford to keep pace drop out and are left with

> nothing but Stage 1 technology. If, as a farmer, you cannot afford a tractor and a combine harvester, where can you get efficient animal-drawn equipment for these jobs—the kind of equipment I myself used thirty-five years ago? Hardly anywhere. *So you cannot stay in farming. . . .*
>
> The result of all this is a loss of freedom. The power of the rich and the powerful becomes ever more all-embracing and systematic. The free and independent "middle class," capable of challenging the monopolistic power of the rich disappears in step with the "disappearing middle" of technology. . . .
>
> What is the answer? The "Law of the Disappearing Middle" in technology has to be counteracted by conscious work namely, by development of "intermediate technology" striving for smallness, simplicity, capital-cheapness, non-violence.

These things may have been said before, but no one has put them so clearly, so indisputably, so persuasively, and without getting mad. Schumacher may get tired, but he doesn't get mad and he doesn't stop.

A letter in this issue of *Rain* gives the interesting intentions of Kirkpatrick Sale, who is working on a book:

> I want to show that a completely decentralized, communal society is not only necessary . . . but *possible* as well, that in fact people can live on what I want to call a *human scale* . . . that it is possible to design cities of a small size based on community living, in which such techniques as solar heating, recycling, composting toilets, etc., can be used to provide most of the element of self-sufficiency, that it is possible to establish workers' self-management over offices and factories and shops, running the economy in small units sufficient for a high level of material satisfaction with individual equality and without exploitation, hierarchy, pollution, etc.; and that it is possible to operate with direct, consensual democracy in small units, and that this is the only way to create the sense of participation necessary to end crime, anomie, loneliness, poverty and the like. In short, social, economic and political life on a human scale.

This may sound very pure and very wonderful, but all utopian dreams have these qualities, and what is actually accomplished in this direction would by no stretch of the imagination ever need to be undone.

The *Rain* ($10 for ten issues) address is 2270 N.W. Irving, Portland, OR. 97210.