

## THE QUESTION OF "WHOLENESS"

IN his *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse contended that technological progress and the homogenization of culture were responsible for the ineffectuality of what he terms the Great Refusal—the resistance of literature and the arts to the ugliness and injustice of the status quo. In a society in which everything is converted into a "commodity" and sold on the market, even "protest" loses its impact. The radical publishes a book and becomes "successful," his work being displayed in the paperback stands along with low-priced editions of the classics. True, people may now have more opportunity for "education," with the classics coming to life in this way and gaining wide distribution; but Marcuse says:

. . . they come to life as other than themselves; they are deprived of their antagonistic force, of the estrangement which was the very dimension of their truth. The intent and function of these works have thus fundamentally changed. If they once stood in contradiction to the status quo, this contradiction is now flattened out.

Marcuse finds in dadaism and surrealism what can be regarded as acts of desperation: because the artist's communication of his sense of estrangement has been made impossible by the spreading imperialism of technological "rationality," he uses dadaism to break with communication itself; and with surrealism he tries to recapture through his distortions what utilitarian functionalism has denied. When everything has been made manageable and finite, the only escape may seem a kind of madness.

Whatever the validity of Marcuse's analysis—and parts of it seem indisputable the fact of the diminishing impact of criticism is beyond question. In the *Saturday Review* for Dec. 9, Jonathan Kozol tells about a book published in 1969 called *Poverty and Mental Retardation*, by Roger Hurley. This is a subject of particular interest to

Kozol, since he works as a teacher and reformer in education in a Boston ghetto. This book, which has a preface by Senator Kennedy and was praised in a long review by Robert Coles, "describes the degree to which poverty in the United States cripples its victims, not only culturally and psychologically but also physically." Hurley supplies ample documentation for the frequency of nutritional damage, brain injury, retardation, and infant death among poor children. After several paragraphs of summary and quotation, Kozol says:

The book is devastating; more devastating still, however, is the manner in which the book is handled and contained. It comes to the public with a number of endorsements from respected scholars and from well-known politicians. Its statements are well-documented, and its conclusions are, in general, accepted. It is reviewed and praised, sold in the bookstores, talked about for a certain time among intelligent people, held in respect by many, discussed again in certain places, and adopted in a few cases as a text for certain areas of study. *It does not make a perceptible difference in the life of anybody:* not when it appears, not when it is reviewed, not when it is reprinted, not when it is adopted as a college textbook, not when it is deposited into a special, neat-and-clean compartment of contemporary literature labeled as "important commentary on a serious social issue."

The same process functions to absorb and neutralize all kinds of books and studies and reports on subjects of a grim and terrifying character, which are published, briefly applauded, and then tucked away into our ethical memory each year. We hear, we read, we think, we listen, and at length we comprehend. Then we begin the process of assimilation and absorption of the troubling substance, of the possibilities for action, into the fabric of concern and "manageable unrest," the mood that it is our habit, purpose, or compulsion to sustain. Two years after we read another book on the same subject. It receives the same attention; it is handled and contained in just the same way.

This analysis becomes for Kozol the foundation for a criticism of the free schools, which move from "cause" to "cause," he says, in much the same fashion. His article is long and valuable, and at the end he speaks of the immeasurable need for people to "find one solid core of concrete action and specific dedication in one neighborhood or in one city, with just one group of children and with just one group of loyalties and with one deep dream of love and transformation." Those, he says, who have been trained for so long to be "nonstop consumers" must pause and teach themselves how to be loyal to one thing that they believe in.

There could hardly be wiser counsel. It is wise not only in showing what is most obviously needed, but also in placing responsibility on individuals and not on "the system." No doubt the system is at fault and ought to be changed. But even though we know little about changing ourselves, that little is far more than we know about changing a "system." And in the long run, we shall change the system only by changing ourselves, since the other approaches all require creating a new system to replace the old one, and then, if we have remained the same, the new system falls to the level of the old one.

Yet there are other ways of defining what has gone wrong. The problem, as set by Jonathan Kozol, is the inconsequential influence of truly important books. They have too little effect. They are read and talked about, but the interest in their contents is soon displaced by something "new." One must keep up with the latest thing in criticism. Musing on such matters in the days after World War I, when there was so much inflation of European currency, George Russell contributed to the *Irish Statesman* a brief article called "A Gold Standard for Literature." The more you inflate a currency, he said, the more worthless it becomes. He then applied this principle to literature, proposing that far too many books were being published, with the effect of a similar degradation of literature. Before printing,

he suggested, something like a gold standard governed the issuance of books. Only the very best were published, since copying by scribes was expensive, making books veritable treasures. And while printing brought the opportunity for reading to a great many more people, it also created the likelihood that worthless books would appear. And when poor books outnumber by far the good ones, the ones worth reading may be hidden beneath a never-ending avalanche of words. So, Russell proposes:

Literature has suffered so much from inflation that in my opinion it can only be saved by a return to a gold standard. This deflation of literary currency will, of course, throw an immense number of people out of employment. But we can only secure the salvation of literature by martyrdoms. Literature has less and less effect the more it is multiplied. Even a century and a half ago writers like Rousseau, Voltaire or Byron, none of whom could be called concentrated, had yet an effect on European thought which no writer since has equalled. Books then were not so many or so cheaply acquired that words became powerless through over-multiplication. If Bernard Shaw had lived at the time of Voltaire he would, in the sphere of the mind, have been the peer of Frederick the Great or Napoleon in the external world of deeds and affairs. He would probably have awed Frederick more even than Voltaire did. It is impossible to imagine a literary man, no matter of what magnitude, exerting today the influence writers had a hundred and fifty years ago. The currency they trade with has been inflated. What is to be done? Return to a gold standard. Deflate the currency of literature; insist that every writer shall be his own printer and publisher. Only real genius, the men who must speak or die, will face the hard labour and survive. They will be forced to concentrate. . . .

The ancient artists imagined in terms of their material, and their materials were precious to them. It must have been so with Blake. Words became precious things to him, and they glowed with gold and flame on his pages, as they well might, because his sentences were fiery particles of spirit. Of course hardly anybody could live by literature if this method was adopted. But is it right that anybody should live by literature? Is it not better that they should have some other employment so that their art might be entirely disinterested? One of the ancient sages concentrated a whole philosophy of disinterestedness in a single sentence: "Let the motive for action be in

the action itself, and not in the event." That is, be artist, poet, musician, philosopher because you live to paint, sing or think, and to do so is your happiness. If you think of fame, large circulations, income, you must be deflected from disinterestedness.

Russell concluded:

I have not the least hope that anything I say will bring about a deflation of literary currency. It will come about through necessity. The forests out of which paper is made are rapidly being cut down. In a hundred years paper will be so costly that it cannot be used except for precious thoughts. We will come back again to a gold standard in literature, and Patanjali, the sage, who wrote a treatise on concentration, will be the most honoured philosopher in the universities, and the literature of intensities will be the only literature which will be published. I would like to live in the future which I have conjured up. I could have boiled down this essay to a single sentence.

It seems reasonable to say that in the future which Russell "conjured up," there would not be the sort of problems described by Roger Hurley, since men would long since have learned the fallacy in pretending or hoping to deal with moral issues in terms of technological solutions. Ghettos, in short, would not exist. And it is also reasonable to say that as people little by little withdraw nourishment from the kind of society we have now, and do what they can to bring *that* kind of a future into being, little by little the society will *change*.

Meanwhile, it is wrong to suppose that the ills of the present afflict only the ghettos. And technological progress has been a factor in other sorts of inflation. Consider what is happening—has happened—to higher education. In the same issue of *Saturday Review* along with Jonathan Kozol's article, Warren Bennis, who has just completed his first year as president of the University of Cincinnati, tells how little his job has permitted him to do to improve education at that institution. The University of Cincinnati, with more than 36,000 students, is the second largest urban multiversity in the country. For this and other reasons, Mr. Bennis reports:

All our major institutions, but particularly the university, are afflicted with a threefold sense of loss: loss of community, loss of purpose, and loss of power.

He finds his time taken up with the endless trivia of administration; this is natural and inevitable, one might say, since—

The University of Cincinnati, with a staff of 6,000, is the second largest employer (after General Electric) in Greater Cincinnati. It is in the hotel business (high-rise dorms housing 4,000 students), the restaurant business (ten, all told), the investment business (a \$53-million endowment portfolio) and must manage a total plant bigger than many utilities.

Its situation is complicated because it is extremely labor-intensive (instructional compensation is 84 per cent of the budget) and extremely vulnerable to inflation (our costs rise at an annual rate of 12 per cent, versus inflation's recent average of 4 per cent). And, unlike industry, it has not increased "productivity" (only the construction industry matches education's failure to increase its productivity in twenty-five years). It is complicated further by being almost uniquely "flat" in its managerial structure. That structure is not "transitive," as it is in business, where executives can expect an orderly rise from step one to step two as their experience and abilities merit. In the university the final locus of power is really the individual professor, who can be "transitive" only to the extent of heading his department; he advances along a *competence* hierarchy, not a *power* hierarchy—one that confers influence and status but not the ability to issue orders or to confer emoluments. In sum, it is society's closest realization of the pure model of anarchy; i.e., the locus of decision making is the individual.

One sees how uneasily the idea of a university rests within the idiom of business management, yet that appears to be the only way that Mr. Bennis can tell us about his troubles. The whole affair seems a contradiction in terms. So it is no wonder that every morning he has to answer some hundred and fifty letters, many of which are not even remotely connected with teaching and learning; and he is constantly sought out by subordinates and others who want him to become involved in or settle their problems, many of which, again, have little or nothing to do with education.

Deflation is surely the answer here, too, and it would undoubtedly put a lot of people out of work. And again, it won't happen, save from some other version of the "necessity" George Russell spoke of as compelling a reduction in the number of books. Mr. Bennis hopes to solve his problem—he has to *try*, since he is one of the country's leading management theorists—by hiring a gaggle of vice presidents who are specialists in being competent at the routine tasks of the office of a university president. This, Mr. Bennis believes, will free him to think about the things he ought to be thinking about. Well, he'd better be careful about that, or he may find himself cutting the university up into little pieces.

There is a sense, of course, in which he and all other administrators of institutions which have become too large, and lost their sense of purpose, are saddled with impossible jobs. Sisyphus-type jobs. Such jobs belong only in myths, where men can learn from them; not in life, where men can only be defeated by them.

Our subject is still education, or self-improvement, and we must, apparently, turn away from places like universities in order to get back to the enduring questions. All these places which serve as schools, from universities down to the kindergartens of the time, speak much, these days, of developing "whole human beings." If this is the ideal, then it is indeed necessary to turn away from an idea of education which is focussed in so much externality. For there is nothing in any curriculum that we know of that even hints at the possibility of a disciplined approach to wholeness in human beings. But in the book we quoted from earlier, by George Russell, *The Living Torch* (edited by Monk Gibbon, Macmillan, 1938), we keep coming across passages that seem profoundly instructive on this subject. How, for example, would a whole man use language? Russell writes about this. In one place he objects to some verse by Robert Graves in which the poet "puts into iambs an imaginary letter from one

soldier to another." Russell doesn't think poetry comes naturally to men in barracks, and he says:

I ask, should not officers in the British or any other Army of our times be made to speak in prose, as undoubtedly they do? I will be told that nobody speaks in verse, and that this would rule out the use of metrics altogether. But no. The heart in love, in imagination, in meditation mounts at times to an ecstasy where its being has become musical. Carlyle quotes a German mystic, who said: "If we think deeply we think musically." The pattern of sound, the recurrent beat of verse echo that inner music. In all languages where poetry has been written there has been pattern, rhythm, echo, measure or recurrent beat, and what would be unreal if it was merely the speech of lip or brain becomes most sincere when we feel it the expression of intense spiritual or emotional life. We need not discuss the psychology of this, whether the inner nature subdues the outer nature, whenever flesh is melted into soul, the soul imposes on the body some image or echo of itself, as a ray of the Logos, of the Mind which made music and harmony in the universe. We need not enter upon difficult or unprovable speculation. It is certain that metrics as a mode of speech correspond to something in the soul. But if we say this we are impelled to deny the fitness of verse as utterance of any feeling, imagination or reverie which has not originated in the magic fountain. To clothe thought, however subtle, memories of perception, however vivid, in a verse form is to clothe them with artifice, to be somewhat insincere and pretentious. . . .

He quotes Yeats, then Wordsworth, to show the natural flow of their lines, then observes:

Shakespeare makes Titania speak in beautiful verse because it is fitting, but Bottom talks good prose. The great artist had an instinct what emotions echoed the starry dance and what emotions were earthbound and must plod in other fashion. Should not the artists now cast off rhyme and measured beat where it appears artificial, just as the artists after West cast off the classical convention in the painting of battlepieces? Perhaps the Free Verse exists for that no-man's-land between the ecstasy of pure poetry and prose, a form which can pass into music, measured beat, rhyme or regular stress when the emotion is so intense that it cannot express itself without them. . . . I swear a vendetta against any emotion which does not wear garments proper to it.

When it comes to whole men or whole human beings, such matters have a great deal of importance. They have to do with the spontaneous integrities of expression. A natural honesty is involved, and the poetic sensibility is here seen to be more than a matter of versification. When Thoreau, as Emerson tells us, refused to write reports of his observations for the Natural History Society, on the ground, as he explained, that "To detach the description from its connections in my mind would make it no longer true or valuable to me: and they do not wish what belongs to it"—he was standing on his integrity as a knowing human being, a man in his wholeness, and he refused to subdivide his thought in behalf of a science partial to "description" only.

There is more in Russell's book on a related subject, although one of greater complexity. In an essay which deals with William Blake's *Prophetic Books*, Russell begins with a comparison:

The lyrical poetry has had many lovers. Will those who read with delight the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience*, where every song has its own light, enter into the darkness of the *Prophetic Books*, where they must kindle their own light if the palace chambers of Blake's marvellous fantasy are to seem brilliant, as they undoubtedly were to the seer? In this world we can see by another light than any we kindle. In the mystical world none can see who does not kindle a light of his own, and it may be doubted whether any mystic made comprehension of his vision more difficult than Blake.

Russell puzzles at length over this, wishing he knew more of the sources of Blake's visions—as we all may do—but here we are mainly concerned with Russell's statement that "In the mystical world none can see who does not kindle a light of his own." There seems a profound and wider truth here, one that has close connection with the idea of human wholeness. Whether or not the "mystical world" is spoken of, it is surely the case that a human being becomes whole in direct proportion to the light that he has kindled for himself to see by. Wholeness is not a matter of curriculum or environment at all, nor any "school," but has to do with how a person orders

his life and converts it into a learning process. The more one knows about "wholeness," the less likely is he to talk about it as something that can be contributed or given, or made the fruit of some conditioning process. Growth into wholeness is the opposite of conditioning, and is no more easily taught than the "virtue" into which Plato spent his life inquiring. Wholeness is something that human beings accomplish, not schools; and the best settings for such accomplishments are probably places where a vast modesty is found in relation to all such subjects. It is even likely that true wholeness takes immediate flight from any and all pretentious institutions.

Who are instructors in wholeness? Some are named by Russell in this book, but naming them is not knowing them. MANAS, for example, has had Russell's books in its library for twenty years! But of America he says this:

In Emerson, in Whitman, and in Thoreau more, I think, than in any of their European contemporaries do we find the dawning of something which might be spoken of as cosmic or planetary consciousness, a mood fitting for so gigantic a nation which it may return to, but which, after these pioneers had spoken, never again inspired American genius. After these men come a lesser brood of psychologists and philosophers like William James, Henry Adams, Santayana and Dewey; novelists like Howells, Upton Sinclair, Jack London, Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson; poets like Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsay, Frost and Robinson, all men of some force and talent but no sky-touching genius, no one even who burrows so deeply as our James Joyce. Ireland with four million people has produced a literature at least as important as the United States with a hundred and ten million people.

Whether we agree or not with this estimate, the question of the sources of wholeness is at least dealt with by Russell; it is not, after all, such a big jump to Russell from Thoreau.

## *REVIEW*

### THE FACES OF CIVILIZATION

AN approved and doubtless useful means of getting acquainted with ourselves is to read books which reflect the stereotypes of human behavior—not the statistical "averages" of what people do, but the profiles of some aspect of their lives, as they are seen in what men desire, buy, build, and seem to enjoy, as a total population. Such portraits are seldom flattering. They can be quite horrifying. And the question of their appropriate use in literature is an open one. Consider for example the appalling skill of Peter Ustinov in the opening paragraphs of his novel *Krumnagel*:

The City stood, a set of mislaid dentures, somewhere near the middle of nothing. There was no discernible reason why it should have been built there rather than anywhere else, no great river, no range of protective mountains, not so much as an inflection in the ground. Some pioneer or other must have dropped his knapsack there out of weariness, or else a horse had died, and the City had grown from this negligible seed like a tree, or a disease.

It was impossible to say whether it had grown too fast to acquire suburbs, or whether it was composed of nothing but suburbs; it came to the same. There were, as is usual in such places which freckle the great flat face of the Middle West, rather more secondhand vehicles for sale than potential purchasers, and puritanism notwithstanding, come nightfall, the neon signs blinked, twinkled and insinuated like prostitutes muttering to the passing trade. Then the sky would be red with hellfire, a sign as clear as the star which summoned the wise men to Bethlehem that the electric oasis in the desert of oil and wheat was bubbling with the murky spring of life, and loneliness need not be.

During the day it was different. There were touching attempts at style, as though history had been speeded up like a tape recorder, and all evolution had been squeezed into the paltry half century of the City's existence. The state legislature—for the City was also the capital of the state, although not the largest agglomeration—was housed in a passable imitation of the Parthenon, whereas the local armory was conceived in the manner of a medieval fort, revised by a toy manufacturer. Some of the more venerable skyscrapers were evidently inspired by

organ pipes, and their perilous heights were peppered with gargoyles, while Pre-Raphaelite mosaics with satanic undertones and morally elevated overtones abounded at a lower level. It was, in short, a city indistinguishable from many others, whose inhabitants, seeing poetry and enlightenment in places where strangers saw but monotony and grayness, considered it was a great place to live and rear children in, despite marijuana, race riots, university upheavals, a relatively high murder rate, and worse—to the morally inclined—a relatively high rape rate.

Well, with this as a setting you know pretty much what to expect in the way of a novel, even though Mr. Ustinov is expert at devising surprises. But no matter, since here we are concerned with the idea of such profiles. There are other things in the city, but the profile cannot reveal them. The overwhelming American talent for superficial achievement keeps them underground.

Ordinarily, we wouldn't pay much attention to such a book, yet Ustinov's description has a haunting quality, and reading in the December *Harper's* Daniel Lang's musings on the new unpopularity of scientists, the parallel between the two profiles seemed inescapable. The scientists, Mr. Lang reminds us, belong to that strange breed of men who brought us a decisive victory in World War II, and put us right at the top of the power pyramid:

In the time of which I speak, they were not only looked up to as the inventors of a successful secret weapon but they themselves seemed secret weapons—a hitherto undiscovered national resource, a fraternity of geniuses who could bail the country out of any crisis. It didn't matter that they spoke an unintelligible language or that some had the appearance of oddballs, like Einstein. They had met a payroll, so to speak, and that, it was emphasized, was the important thing to bear in mind. If they could bring off so formidable a feat as ending a war, then what problem could possibly stump them in the era of peace that was now at hand? In the years ahead, it seemed to many Americans, scientists would serve us all as oracles, as answer men, and the world would be a better place for it.

So scientists, who popularly include engineers and high-level technologists, were recast as

medicine men, the shamans of the tribe. They were now political figures, but, as Mr. Lang says, they had no constituencies. They were the people who "possessed the know-how for conquest"—that was their real meaning. That many of our scientists had a very different conception of themselves was ignored. And this explains why, Lang believes, the socially minded among them, campaigning vigorously after the war for international control of atomic energy, had so little effect. In those days Mr. Lang was a reporter and he kept close-track of the "impassioned crusade" of the leading scientists who maintained that never again should such a weapon be used. He says:

To their astonishment, it caused no widespread stir, very likely because it had nothing to do with changing our views. As long as we thought of scientists as ingenious warriors, the crusaders' warning, intended as a simple, direct call to self-preservation, came through as a confusing message. It seemed odd that they should be spreading it when they themselves had made it necessary. As far as the public was concerned scientists were trying to unsell their wares, a most peculiar enterprise, it may have appeared, that called for tolerance rather than serious attention. It was nice that our scientists had moral afterthoughts, but they had already done their thing. They had won a war and, as an extra dividend, thrown in an apparent monopoly of an unanswerable weapon. The more they trumpeted their note of belated idealism, the more it reminded the public of their wartime exploits. The failure of the scientists' campaign to catch fire was an important event. It lent an ordinary quality to the new nuclear age. Evidently, most people didn't see it in a momentous light. Unenlarged by its advent, our disposition was to settle down to our postwar lives. Scientists did the same. Some stayed on in their weapons-producing enclaves; others buried themselves in pure research, abjuring military assignments. As for the great majority of scientists, they went about their business, self-serving like the rest of us and seemingly unaware of their prominent connection with events that had yet to occur.

Little by little, their public status diminished as the advantage of being the only nation with the bomb fell away. Sputnik spurred a new scientific effort, but what the scientists had achieved now began to appear more in the light of a train of

endless problems. Meanwhile, the image of the "true" scientist as a weapons-producer was confirmed by a strange happening in connection with the Oppenheimer hearing. The German rocket engineer, Wernher Von Braun, was now a popular figure, and, as Lang says:

He was so venerated, in fact, that his opinions were sought on matters that had nothing to do with his specialty. In this regard, a Congressional committee invited his appraisal of Dr. Oppenheimer as a security risk. Dr. Oppenheimer, a basic researcher, was then in the toils of his celebrated, and losing, investigation as a suspected subversive. Dr. Von Braun didn't dodge the committee's question. An ex-Nazi, Von Braun unwaveringly vouched for Dr. Oppenheimer's patriotism.

Thus the political profile of how scientists are regarded by the policy-makers—the "security-managers"—of the nation. Of course, Lang exaggerates when he implies that Dr. Oppenheimer was identified as a "subversive." The Board which held the hearing unanimously agreed that Oppenheimer was a "loyal citizen," but did not reinstate his security clearance. He lost in the sense that he felt degraded, but his real offense, it seemed clear, was that he had shown no enthusiasm for pursuing development of the hydrogen bomb. Now the once-hero of the atom bomb had been made a defendant by the government, an action which, Lang suggests, "quite possibly made it quite respectable to be suspicious of scientists in general."

They are still remembered as the heroes of Hiroshima but much of their luster is gone. They were expected to turn the ensuing period of peace into yet another victory a different kind, but that hasn't happened. Instead, their talents appear to have accentuated the risky practices that rivalrous governments pursued in prenuclear times. Pending a favorable turn of events, our instinct is to mistrust scientific ventures. What will become of us when genetic engineering gets going? And the moon, our earliest satellite—isn't it merely a matter of time before its virgin soil is put to some angry use?

There are further questions:

Aren't ominous signs ever perceptible in the early stages of scientific discovery? Do individual

investigators ever break off their research when they see that it is headed for a dangerous future? Are the liabilities of technology the province of engineers alone? Was it beyond the powers, or interest, of pure researchers to foresee the ravages of chemical fertilizers and the other agents of our ecological difficulties?

These are natural inquiries, in terms of the profile. But you can't get answers from a profile. It's like a recording or a signboard. It is a generalization about behavior, not a human being you can talk to. Here and there an answer to such questions may be found, but these never get into the profile except as oddities or perhaps "visionary" ideas. Leonardo put away some of his military inventions; Diderot suppressed a manuscript he felt would undermine "morality"; Otto Hahn, discoverer of nuclear fission, refused to work for the Nazis. A mining engineer in Africa neglected to follow up a find which, he believed, would lead to a gold strike that would bring the worst devastations of civilization to a pleasant land and innocent people. We hear of such things, however, more or less by accident. In any event, they are not numerous enough to change the profile. And Oppenheimer's fate shows what happens to even a famous man and a "hero" when he tries to change it.

Doubtless we need the profiles for our instruction, but we must remember that they deal only with "mass" behavior. In that sense they are abstractions from reality, although "real" enough in their effect. But even Mr. Lang's impartial report gives us only the "public opinion" version of scientists like Oppenheimer, and we need to know quite a lot more, if only to retain our sanity and some hope. Incidentally, there is a fine life available—*The Story of J Robert Oppenheimer* (St. Martin's Press, 1969) by Denise Royal. Such reading doesn't change the record, but it restores the evidence of human presence in the world.



## *COMMENTARY*

### **A MISUSED ART**

How old is the conception of the "public" or of "public opinion"? Not much older, really, than the art of printing, we suspect. It is difficult to imagine human life without the advantages and hazards of the printed page. In those days men did not require numerous abstractions and generalizations about "other people" whom they had never met. Mostly, their ideas of other people were shaped by experience of those they knew; cities were small, and daily life for nearly everyone was the life of the face-to-face community.

With some few exceptions—such as in the case of kings and conquerors—people did not deal with and make up their minds according to "public images." Rulers did not have enormous staffs to handle "public relations." Such propaganda as existed was generated by priests and shamans, and this was a form of social control, but the highly developed techniques of objectifying mass human behavior and the formation of popular judgments based on the resulting abstractions had not yet been invented. There is a sense, therefore, in which people were more informed by first-hand experience concerning their day-to-day decisions.

There was much ignorance in those days, and little of the sophistication that now seems common, yet there might have been more knowledge about the matters people needed to know about for the choices that were before them, than there is today.

Comparisons like this one are really very puzzling. Isn't "image" politics just as bad, in some ways, as psychological control by witch-doctors? Are not the best men condemned again and again because they dare to deviate from media-created norms? Is not the public image of a human being who has the misfortune to become famous often the reverse of his most authentic qualities?

One thinks of Plato's warning, put in the mouth of Ammon, in his reproach to Thoth for inventing the art of writing: "You produce the illusion of wisdom," he said, "not truth." The truth in this warning is easily verified. The awesome power of the printed word to convince is well known.

Yet who would wish to abolish writing, or printing? Both give the opportunity for a greater consciousness; having gained it, we cannot turn back. Yet, judging from material in this week's lead and the Review article, our writing and publishing activities are hardly better guided than the labors of a guild of sorcerers' apprentices. The entire craft of communication needs instruction from Piaget.

# CHILDREN

## . . . and Ourselves

### INTRODUCTION TO PIAGET

A COUPLE of years ago, reviewing Jean Piaget's *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child* (Orion, 1970), we said that Piaget's name seemed better known than what he stood for. Now, having read Nathan Isaacs' *A Brief Introduction to Piaget* (Agathon, 1972, \$4.95), we have a better understanding of why. Piaget didn't write about education, but about how children think and how their minds grow as organisms of thought. To study Piaget one must be deeply serious, and, to apply what one learns from him in teaching, one must be original and inventive. He writes, in short, for committed and intelligent teachers and parents.

In his later years (he died in 1966), Nathan Isaacs was regarded as "a kind of elder statesman in the field of early childhood education" in England. He had for years collaborated with his wife, Susan Isaacs, an eminent child psychologist who wrote some of the classics of primary school education. Together they founded an experimental school, and most of Susan Isaacs' writing about education was founded on studies carried on at this school. (Susan Isaacs died in 1948.)

In the 1950's Isaacs came to appreciate the significance of Piaget's work for education. In this book, he becomes an interpreter of Piaget, and everyone who has struggled to understand the great French psychologist will be grateful for the clarity of this small volume. What are the essentials that one finds out from reading it?

First, that Piaget gave little attention to teaching, but devoted himself to *testing* to find out how the minds of children grow. It remains for teachers to put to work what he found out. Of course, what he found out is already known to the intuitive teacher, the natural teacher, the Deweyites, and others, but Piaget's work makes the structural reality of human learning impossible to ignore. Obviously, this learning often has little to do with what happens in a school. As Nathan Isaacs says:

First and foremost, Piaget brings out all the *psychological* gulf between the true learning that is growth and the so-called learning which is mere verbal training, habit formation, or the mechanical mastery of skills and knacks. The former is our great human achievement, which starts practically from birth and in some degree goes on all our lives. Its main motor throughout is the child's own active doing, and learning from doing. Above all else, it is *cumulative*. That is, it forms a structure in the child's mind which he himself keeps building up. Each new level is only made possible by what has been built before, but then leads on to a further advance, and a greater and richer whole. The second kind of learning, on the other hand, has real value only as far as it provides *working means and tools* for the first type. If treated as an end in itself (whatever show it may make) it becomes worthless. Verbal "learning" can be "taught" by drilling and cramming at any time, but tends to be shed almost as soon as the cramming stops. Moreover, if it remains merely verbal, it is only a meaningless "act," even while it lasts. To *some* extent, of course, it can join up under favorable conditions with the "real" learning that goes on all the time, and to that extent it achieves true value; but how little that amounts to among average school-children is only too lamentably plain.

True learning is learning not only by doing but also by understanding. That however again means *genuine* understanding, which is intimately linked with doing and largely dependent upon this. As already emphasized, the child constructs in his mind in his first 18 months a basic working model of the world which he can then use for the assimilation of all his new experiences. That assimilation to what he already firmly holds is what brings the sense of understanding to him.

In the course of these further assimilations the original model is itself constantly extended and further filled in. At the same time its content is being sorted and grouped and *ordered* in diverse ways, by various kinds of likenesses and relationships. Furthermore, as "accommodation" operates, and shortcomings and errors come to light, the model gets revised and, where necessary, re-organized. Thus, if the conditions are right, it should steadily grow more comprehensive and better adapted to the real world, and this in turn should make it capable of ever more effective assimilation of new experience. Such assimilation can then more and more truly be called *integration*; that is, integration into an already existing organic scheme.

In this way, growth should of its own momentum lead to further growth. It will be seen how essential here is *continuity* of doing and experience. *All the way through, further integration can only be built on effective past integration.* To the extent to which the wrong kind of learning (that is, learning without doing and experiencing, without understanding and integration) intrudes into the process, continuity is broken. Thus the very power of future integration, and so of future true learning, is in some degree impaired.

This book is not Piaget made easy. Piaget cannot be made easy. But he can be made no more difficult than necessary, and this seems to be Nathan Isaacs' contribution. The foregoing is an abstract of what Piaget has found out through endless tests of children. What remains to be done—and no doubt is being done by good teachers everywhere—is to fill in the blanks, which includes recognizing what the child understands and finding ways to help him build on it, and being able to distinguish between parroted verbal facility and real understanding. The value of Piaget's studies is that they seem to "objectify" a universal subjective process. They make it real.

Isaacs points out that as a psychologist and scientist, Piaget has been intent on demonstrating the internal development of the child's mind, and his focus on the stages of its growth has sometimes led to the conclusion that the child's "environment" or what parent and teachers do is not important. Isaacs corrects this misconception. Piaget knew perfectly well that the process involves continual interchange with the environment, which may either help or hinder, but he was learning the structure of the child's mind, not making suggestions to teachers, save in general terms or by implication. This, at any rate, is what Isaacs seems to be saying.

Of this interchange, Isaacs says:

Stimuli are always acting both *on* the child and *in* him to draw him in all . . . directions, in the end he must decide which draw him most, but to begin with, he can become curious and interested about virtually any of them. That is the most precious first asset of the educational process. These interests should be so fostered that his world will continually enlarge all around him, whilst yet remaining one world. Such it is in very truth; education need not create or "teach" this, but only has to ensure that it is preserved. All

the child's natural learning by doing, experiencing and assimilating tends that way and makes it easy to help him, however widely and variously his vision may expand. On the other hand, we can also plan to break up his "one world," and the best recipe for this is undoubtedly to force on him all the discontinuities, the separate school subjects and the taught "lessons," of conventional schooling.

What, then, is the job of the teacher?

The child can only learn in the true sense by (a) starting from what he feels to be real problems, problems that he is interested in and *wants* to solve: (b) working on them himself and *trying* to solve them. It is not essential that he should discover them all for himself, though the more he does so, the better. There is nothing against their being raised by the teacher—as, in the case of arithmetic and measurement, they may often have to be—so long as they spring naturally out of present concrete situations and are *actively taken over by the children.* Moreover, the latter need not get very far with their own attempts at solutions provided they are "engaged" enough to make a real effort. The teacher must in fact know *when* to come in with help (usually just by some pointer toward the next step forward); not so soon that the children have not had a chance to make their own contribution, nor so late that they have become discouraged and bored. Most teachers, once this aim is clear to them, can usually feel their way to the right point of intervention. In any case if they are dealing with a group, the whole enquiry is a *joint* enterprise which they are merely leading and in which all take a hand, where they can or will. Thus the children themselves will fill each other's gaps and re-stimulate one another, yet will also find individual chances of relaxing, whilst the enterprise as a whole goes ahead.

The point of Piaget's work, for educators, is the need to help the child gain *real* possession of what he wants and ought to know, as distinguished from various verbal and only apparent versions of knowledge.

## FRONTIERS

### Community Magazine Merger

THREE magazines devoted to communes and the community movement—*Alternatives*, *Communitarian*, and *Communitas*—have joined forces to produce one bi-monthly, *Communities*, the first issue of which was dated December, 1972. The editorial office is Alternatives Foundation, Route 1, Box 191, Oroville, Calif. 95965; the business office (for subscriptions) is Community Publications Cooperative, Box 426, Louisa, Virginia 23093. Single copies are a dollar and a year's subscription \$6.00. Five groups have made themselves responsible for the paper—the former staffs of *Alternatives* and *Communitas*, some people at the Twin Oaks Commune in Virginia, others at Walden Three in Providence, R.I., and the staff of *Community Market*.

One thing that is noticeable in this first issue of *Communities* is the diversity of temperaments and attitudes among those who are drawn to community life. Articles in this issue seem of particular value for readers who are thinking about social experiments in this direction. One discussion develops "community axioms" based on past and present experience—do's and don'ts. Another article considers "Selecting Members for Your Commune." There is a useful report on "public relations" by a man who has worked for two years in a twenty-five person community in Oregon. This writer, Peter Bergel, says in regard to the early days:

We had been making periodic trips up to the land to work on it and prepare some basic survival facilities prior to making the actual move in May-June 1970. We took care that each member of our group understood that in *any* contact with any person here, each was representing our group and that establishment of good local relations was of paramount importance. Often we took vital time away from our work to talk to individuals and newspapermen in order that they would understand clearly who we were and what we were trying to do, and most important, *that we intended to become a useful part of the local scene, not a threat to it.* It is

certainly true that many of our ideas are different from those of our neighbors; but with the basic understanding that we want to cooperate with people wherever possible, these head differences pale in importance.

Warm friendliness and cooperation were the results of this effort. Peter Bergel concludes:

Three things about our trip have helped immeasurably, I believe. (1) We work hard. Work is a universal language that transcends barriers of age, hair length, type of oral stimulant, and preferred beverage. (2) We do not take welfare or any other kind of government assistance. I believe people are much more ready to help us because they know they are not being asked to pay for our trip or for our support any other way. (3) We have handled the question of illegal drugs with a tremendous amount of care. This is a sacrifice, but again, it is necessary that media-induced paranoia about dope not be permitted to come between us and our neighbors and friends.

An article by a member of Twin Oaks—the six-year-old commune said to be modelled on B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*—will relieve the minds of those who have read Skinner's romance of behaviorist manipulation, since the mild sort of "positive reinforcement" practiced at Twin Oaks seems to involve nothing more machiavellian than chocolate chip cookies as a reward for conscientious labors instead of coffee breaks. These people are consciously trying to improve their habits, which should be no threat to anyone.

The existing communes or communities the editors have been able to find out about, throughout the United States, are all listed in this issue, both by States and alphabetically. We didn't count them all, but California has more than any other state, with thirty-eight. These lists will doubtless be brought up to date from time to time. The department, Grapevine, begun in *Communitas*, is continued in *Communities*. This has six pages of reports from existing groups, telling about their activities, hopes, and needs, and specifying the sort of new members that are wanted. Some of these reports sound wonderful, others wild. Another department, Reach, is meant to provide a link between communities and people

looking for communities to join. It invites letters from readers.

One good thing to know about is the publication *Community Market*, announced in *Communities*. Briefly:

*Community Market* is a catalog of goods and services produced by cooperative, communal, and collective groups around the country, working toward the common goal of a better world. . . . Buying through *Community Market* supports these groups and their purposes. Many of the participants in *CM* are small and struggling, often finding it difficult to break out of the "marketplace" of capitalism. We hope that through *Community Market* such groups will find a base of support that will allow them to prosper. We also hope that through the *Community Market Catalog* we will be able to make accessible to thousands of people the quality merchandise and publications of our participating groups, many of which are unique and highly creative. Through this catalog consumers and producers can cooperatively build a common bond and begin to create an alternative economy.

*Community Market* is now published by the North American Student Cooperative Organization. It costs a dollar and may be ordered from CPC in Louisa, Va.

According to the general editorial announcement of *Communities*:

In future issues we will continue the sections for promoting contacts between individuals and groups, for listings of resources, and for review of relevant literature. And we will continue the special feature section like this issue's commune directory. In the next few issues we are considering material on (1) legal problems of new communities, (2) land use and its availability, (3) cooperatives, and (4) news from abroad—Israel, Japan, Europe. . . . As a special bonus to our members, we will provide a copy of the new *Community Market Catalog* for 1973. . . .

Also planned is better communication among communes and communities through the newly formed *Community Publications Cooperative*, which will sponsor various publishing enterprises concerned with alternative ways of living.