

WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH OUR LIVES?

IT is a curious contradiction of our times, when Freedom is everywhere declared to be the highest good, that men compete with one another in their devotion to freedom with doctrines of control and restraint. The ideal is served only by conflicting theories of its confinement. Freedom itself is not investigated. It remains abstract, with no inward qualities, something that remains as a residue after the approved system of controls has been applied.

For example, a man can earn the title of "liberal" only by declaring for the use of political power to assure all men their basic rights as human beings. There was a time when "liberal" meant that a man had embraced certain fundamental ideas concerning the nature and potentialities of man, but now it means advocacy of a benevolently inclined system of government. The "liberal" of today works for the political guarantee of all desirable social objectives, and his view of human nature is not regarded as of any importance. The system of laws is the thing. And if anyone should dare to assemble evidence of the failures of state power to accomplish these high aims, he is called a conservative or even condemned as a "reactionary."

On the other hand, those who argue the case for freedom from state interference contend for little more than legal protection for achieved inequity—the freedom to have and to hold. This argument, at the political level, requires its advocates to seal off in themselves the springs of normal human compassion. They seek permission for doing this from the "laws of nature," often becoming social Darwinists and believing quite sincerely that the possession of power is equivalent to moral right. Ethics, they are then able to say, can operate only in a context of "natural reality." We know what authoritative conceits result from this view, and the excesses of privilege to which it leads.

Certain mutilations of mind seem necessary to the pursuit of either side of this argument. Both contentions can appear rational only by ignoring the

facts and the values maintained by the other side, and when a man finds that his opponent will not even consider matters that would weaken his position, dialogue turns into expressions of contempt. There is no common ground.

The reduction of the idea of freedom to a merely political conception is one cause of the destruction of the common ground. Another factor of disintegration may be described as the *smorgasbord* theory of human good. This practical hedonism of Western life is so ingrained in us all that it is hardly questioned by even serious thinkers. The background of assumption in John Stuart Mill's essay on Liberty, for example, concerns the right of a man to do as he pleases, so long as he hurts no one else. This may be a reasonable basis for the making of laws, but how reasonable is it as a philosophy of life? Mill, we may assume, expected that higher objectives than mere self-enjoyment would be gained through family life and general cultural influences, but with the politicalization of modern thought these influences have waned almost to zero, and the right to do as one pleases is now taken for granted as an ethical principle.

It is not, Mill said, the business of the law to moralize. Law ought only to restrain men from harming one another. Most Westerners have read enough about the oppressions of theocracy to agree with him. The argument for the secular state is impressive. But the secular state which must control the unpredictable effects of rampant hedonism takes on endless responsibility. And in the present, with freedom meaning only the absence of coercive restraint, the idea of a population being able or willing to discipline itself is regarded as both romantic and irrelevant. Self-discipline is out of key with the hedonistic impulse, with the desire to *consume*—the very dynamic of modern progress. It is in basic conflict with the *smorgasbord* ideal.

Meanwhile, we need no volumes of statistics—no testimony from experts—to know that the free

actions of individuals simply in pursuit of what they want, now have consequences Mill hardly dreamed of. The pleasurable and self-satisfying activities of individuals and interest-groups have been armed with so much power that the single coercive function allowed by Mill to the State—"to prevent harm to others"—has grown into a monstrous task. As Wendell Berry said in "The Loss of the Future":

Because of the enormous increase in the economic and technological power of individuals, what once were private acts become public: the consequences are inevitably public. A man who uses a bulldozer can scarcely make a move that does not affect either his neighbors or his heirs. All his acts, so empowered, involve a tampering with the birthright of his race.

So, if the protection of society has to be accomplished on the basis declared by Mill, the individual can be sovereign no longer. He must be subjected to very nearly constant control, on Mill's own argument.

What has brought us to a situation in which the free exercise of power by individuals has become so widely threatening? It is too simple and also useless to explain that this is a result of "modern progress." It is rather a result of imagining that the fundamental questions of life have already been answered, and of proceeding to do whatever we want, on that assumption. Again, Mr. Berry's analysis applies:

Christianity and democracy are problematic. Since it may reasonably be doubted that either has been fully and fairly tried, they may even be considered experimental. They have so far produced more questions than answers. But they are commonly presented to the young as *solutions*—the packages in which all the problems of the human condition are neatly and finally tied up. Most Americans no doubt remember from their childhood the voices telling them: *All you have to do is vote. All you have to do is believe.* The problems of behavior and character and intelligence are all right, in their place. But what will lead the whole gang finally to the Promised Land, Heaven on earth, or earth in Heaven, is that pair of acts of brute faith. All that is needed is a consensus. The result is that the necessary stamina is not developed. The result is precocious disillusionment, weariness, cynicism, self-interest.

In other words, an elaborate scheme of indoctrination has persuaded all these people of the essential righteousness of the *smorgasbord* version of the good life. One source of indoctrination has been the Christian teaching that the exploitation of nature for human ends is "God's will." As the American historian, Lynn White, Jr., pointed out in a recent paper, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" (*Science*, March 10, 1967), for centuries Western man has ravaged nature, taken whatever he wanted, on the theory that the world and everything in it was put there by the Deity simply for his enjoyment. As Prof. White says, "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feeling of natural objects." This mood was naturally hospitable to the Baconian explanation of knowledge as the means to power. So, we have been justified by both our religion and our scientific theory of knowledge in taking, making, and doing what we want, because we are able to do it. Further, our success in all this is also held to be proof of our virtue. Prof. White writes:

Our daily habits of action, for example, are dominated by an implicit faith in perpetual progress which was unknown either to Greco-Roman antiquity or to the Orient. It is rooted in, and is indefensible apart from, Judeo-Christian teleology. The fact that Communists share it merely helps to show what can be demonstrated on many other grounds: that Marxism like Islam, is a Judeo-Christian heresy. We continue to live, as we have lived for about 1700 years, very largely in a context of Christian axioms. . . .

Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecological crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious. We must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.

That Americans willingly accepted the counsel, "All you have to do is believe," has melancholy confirmation from the realization that if the destructive effects of the exploitation of nature were not now visibly accumulating, all about, entirely justifying the expression "ecological crisis," the criticisms of Prof. White would fall on deaf ears.

There are, in short, no theoretical checks on the *smorgasbord* view of life, only the practical ones arising out of disaster. We have been practicing a "no control" philosophy—no control, that is, until enough people complain that you are hurting them, and are powerful enough to get a law passed to stop you; and no control, again, in the exploitation of the natural environment until nature begins to fight back.

There are other sources of the indoctrination in the *smorgasbord* theory. How many books and articles, during the past twenty years, have asserted that the enormous diversity of products now offered the public is proof that freedom is a peculiarly American achievement? That we can have endless "individuality" by buying whatever material distinctions we happen to like? It is of course un-American to call this "materialism." The proof of the superiority of our way of life lies exactly in this overwhelming evidence that what we want, we *get*. When the President of the *Reader's Digest* suppressed a book exposing the lies in modern advertising, he gave as reason that "advertising is good for business and business is good for the country." Advertising is the proud menu in the *smorgasbord* theory of life.

So, to reach a summary conclusion, after a century or so of identifying moral limits with legal limits, we have reached the point where legal limits have no resemblance to that fine permissiveness which Mill so admired. We are in the presence, in short, of the breakdown and failure of the prevailing theory of the nature of man. What is that theory? It is the theory of theologically licensed and technologically implemented hedonism. It doesn't work. The deal we thought we made—"all you have to do is believe, all you have to do is vote"—is a failure. Despite all our manipulative know-how, our awesome power to destroy, we have yet to find out what our lives are *for*.

Yet we still have sufficient moral instinct to recognize those who are and have been the good men among us. What have these men been like? First of all, they were or are obviously devoid of self-interest. They weren't opposed to "happiness," but said little to indicate that they found the meaning of life in "the pursuit of happiness." The very best of

men, by common tradition and common agreement, have all been of some sort of avataric persuasion. They all embodied some aspect of the Bodhisattvic ideal. They undertook some Promethean mission. They were altruists every one. Self-realization was for them no private delight, no isolating splendor.

They identified themselves with other men whose self-understanding was obscured by the burdens and necessities of earthly existence, or distorted by inherited doctrines of easy ways to salvation. From the days of the Buddha to the Italian Renaissance, they have insisted on one fundamental truth—that a man has to save himself, and that he can do this only by knowing himself. The language may vary widely, but the communication is the same.

This is the idea which bubbles up in heroic men throughout history. It was the teaching of Pico della Mirandola, at the time of the Revival of Learning, quite clear in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*—to which later doctrines of both Humanism and Liberalism may be traced. It is the radical content of the thought of men such as Ortega y Gasset and Jean-Paul Sartre.

It is also the idea which gives space and moral dimensions to the meaning of freedom. The man who regulates himself, who through reflection fills out his conception of what he must do with his life, seldom has much to say about coercion or social restraint. These measures are for lapses from the active human condition. They do not touch the content of the self-development of man. The principles of self-development can have play in human community only in inverse proportion to the principles of external control.

Men are far from perfect, to be sure, and no doubt need some external control, but what would you think of a theory of economic enterprise which was entirely devoted to the details of receivership in bankruptcy? A conception of social organization which concentrates on the behavior of men who fail to control themselves, and thus become a threat to others, is comparable in content.

Because of the obsessive preoccupation of Western thought with political theory, we are impoverished in philosophy for whole human beings.

We have little to say to one another about what we ought to be doing before the constraints of law have reason to be applied. Such thinking belongs to a universe of discourse that is hardly known to us today. How would we now answer or discuss the idea of law, of codes of control, as Thoreau regarded them? Thoreau, whatever else he was, can be called a philosopher of the whole man. He said in his second letter to Harrison Blake:

When, in the progress of a life, a man swerves, though only by an angle infinitely small, from his proper and allotted path (and this is never done quite unconsciously even at first; in fact, that was his broad and scarlet sin,—ah, he knew of it more than he can tell), then the drama of his life turns to tragedy, and makes haste to its fifth act. When once we thus fall behind ourselves, there is no accounting for the obstacles which rise up in our path, and no one is so wise to advise, and no one so powerful to aid us while we abide on that ground. . . . For such the Decalogue was made, and other far more voluminous and terrible codes.

Is this too "metaphysical" an analysis? Well, if it is, it also has the virtue of anticipating the laggard pragmatic analysis, which can be completed only after the demonstrations of historical failure. No doubt Thoreau had a moral psychology as basis for this letter. What was it? How did he know it was true? Is enough evidence in as yet to give his conclusion "scientific" support? Or shall we wait for some more convincing and even more terrible verdict from history?

Only very slowly do we learn from history. There is a parallel between what Thoreau said in his letter to Harrison Blake and what Milton Mayer learned a hundred years later in Communist Central Europe. We quote from Mayer's book, *What Can a Man Do?* (1964):

East of Pest, in Hungary, there still stands a large area of wretched barracks where the capital's unemployed lived, bred and died. Directly across the street a large area of handsome apartment blocks is occupied by people who once lived across the street, and they are all employed. "Between 1918 and 1938," the Communist Mayor of Banska Bystrica, in Slovakia, told us, "one hundred forty thousand out of three million Slovaks emigrated to look for work. Today we need twenty thousand more workers in this

one county alone than we can find." What did the church say to the unemployed in Banska or Pest between 1918 and 1938?

"Our brothers freeze and starve." "I am not a Communist, I am a Christian," says Josef Hromadka. "But I know that it is we, we Christians alone, who are responsible for Communism. We had a burden to discharge in the world, and Jesus Christ left us no room to wonder what it was. We failed. We 'said, and did not.' And now another power has arisen to take up this burden. Remember that the Communists once were Christians. If they do not believe in a just God, whose fault is it?" Hromadka is not talking in Princeton, where he once served so comfortably, but in Prague, where he serves perhaps less comfortably, as dean of the Comenius Theological Faculty. All over Eastern Europe one hears the same agonized words from churchmen: "The atheists had to come to teach us the social gospel."

So, from the apparently inadequate Decalogue they passed to "other and far more voluminous codes." And perhaps still worse ones exist, to give structure to more abhorrent moral vacuums than the one the European Communists filled. There is still the fateful question: What shall we do with our lives?

REVIEW

ALL THE YOUNG MEN . . .

THE October issue of *Antioch Notes* is devoted to an essay by Edward E. Booher on the responsibilities of business. Besides being a graduate and trustee of Antioch College, Mr. Booher is President of the McGraw-Hill Book Company, one of the larger publishing organizations in the United States. His subject is the failure of the business community to communicate with the present generation of college students. Unlike some other business executives, he knows that this breakdown is not a problem that public relations experts can be expected to solve. It is not a situation that will be helped by dressing business up with a few fringe humanitarian activities and then bragging about them to the young. He knows far better than this. He ends by asking: "How long, O Lord, will too many of us in business continue to be blind to the obvious? There isn't too much time to wait."

Such a man deserves a hearing. Yet he probably won't be taken seriously by very many because of the widely held stereotype about business in general. The ridiculous claims made for the "free enterprise system" have been repeated *ad nauseam* for so long that people of intelligence hardly expect anything more from businessmen than some kind of special pleading. Businessmen, when they address the public, find it extremely difficult to suppress their proprietary air. They can't seem to discuss issues or problems except on the assumption that the economic functions they perform are really more important than anything anybody else does. So a certain tired petulance usually comes out in their utterances. You get the impression that they think of their practical necessities as the natural principles of any social order—an occupational egotism which creates the proprietary air and makes the young indifferent to what businessmen say.

At the same time, the special pleading of ideologues is as bad or worse. A more far-reaching mood of proprietorship pervades the arguments made for political systems. The monopoly on human hope claimed by the seekers for power excites as much or more suspicion among the young, since the scene of current history is already filled with examples of the inefficiencies and breakdowns of the exercise of state power. So there is a general moral bankruptcy today among all the makers of "claims."

This is the negative legacy of the present to the young, the generation most articulately represented by the students. The *ad hoc*, programless character of their activities must be recognized as a direct outcome of the pretensions and rigidities of existing institutions. The students are looking for fields of operations where they can go to work on the constructive side of long-term social change, and they find the greatest resistance to whatever they try to do in the big institutions—in government, industry, and the enormous state universities. What then are they to do? They need help, but they will not accept it from older people who speak as advocates and apologists for massive and immovable institutions. The help can come only from people who speak as human beings.

The value of Mr. Booher's essay lies in his awareness of the actual terms of the problem. The gap between businessmen and students is not, as he points out, only a matter of the dissatisfactions of the New Left, but also exists for "the serious moderates who are interested in a peaceful, civilized world and basic improvement in the values men live by." Mr. Booher seems to be looking for other businessmen with similar interests. He is not unwilling to recognize the most important fact about today's youth:

. . . virtually all of the young men and women I know not only strongly disapprove of war, but they suspect—even denounce—it as being the product of something called the industrial-military complex and

thus impute to the institution of business the characteristics of destruction and inhumanity.

Unlike college students of my own generation who misunderstood and mistrusted business because they felt that the industrial community was incapable of providing a viable economy, the present generation are not talking about economic viability, nor are they critical of industry's economic competence. The vast majority of today's college students (not all, but most) are part of an affluent middle-class society, a rich society resulting largely from a national program of massive education and from the application of creative innovation. . . . Industry's economic competence is taken for granted.

What, then, are they questioning? I believe they are questioning the basic values, or rather, the lack of an expression of values, on the part of many, if not most, businessmen of my generation, other than the usual regard for growth and profits. It is, in my opinion, our failure as businessmen to recognize and emphasize individual rights and the need to improve the quality of society that closes channels of communication between us and the generation whose support we need and must have. Somehow we in the industrial world have become so busy getting and spending that we have overlooked those imperfections in our great society that have recently manifested themselves in the inner cities, in education, and in developing areas and countries outside the United States. Our young people who are aware of the imperfections also know our apparent unconcern.

There is considerably more, here, than the conventional businessman's assent to "cultural values," which leads, most of the time, only to substantial contributions to foundations which are themselves little more than conservative overseers of conventional ways of doing things. It isn't just the money accumulated by business which is needed to solve the problems of modern society. These problems will never be solved by money alone, as Amitai Etzioni's paper in last summer's *The Public Interest* made clear. If businessmen want to go to work to improve the condition of the world, they will not do it by bankrolling specialists who have no particular competence in understanding human problems. They will have to *give themselves*. If they expect to start better schools and colleges, they will have to learn to *teach* in them. If they are going to honor values,

they will have to discover the values anew for themselves. The problems we have now cannot be dealt with by hired men.

We have only one small quarrel to pick with what Mr. Booher says. He speaks of businessmen needing to have channels of communication with "the generation whose support we need and must have." It might be better to put this the other way around—to say that the young who will make and live in tomorrow's world will be able to make it a lot better if they get the support *they* "need and must have" from present-day businessmen. The economic activity is not all that important; it only seems so because of the exaggerated material ends of our acquisitive society. These ends are what we must find ways to scale down and correct, if we are serious about a renewal of values. All that any economic activity can do, at its very best, is to free men for the essentially human callings of their lives. Industrialists and businessmen work hard, it is true, but they are *not* the makers of civilization. They are only its hewers of wood and drawers of water, to draw an odd parallel. Delusions about the importance of commercial and industrial activity are partly responsible for the arrogance and amorality of the "industrial-military complex."

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that the narrow motives of business ("getting and spending") are alone responsible for the ills of the modern world. Artists and writers have given us skillful portraits of the moral decay of the times, but little positive inspiration. The conception of man provided by the modern novel has been mainly of man in wretchedness and defeat. One finds little of the promise of human greatness—not even minor distinctions—in the characterizations of, say, Dos Passos and O'Hara. We are victims all, these and other writers seem to say. And if you long for positive vigor, it has to be sought in the circumscribed theatre of men at war. Consider, for example, the models provided in *The Naked and the Dead* and *From Here to Eternity*—or, more recently, in books like *Valhalla*, *The Hill*, and *Cool Hand Luke*. These

books are gripping, and they sell well, but their excitement comes from human behavior in coarsened and almost sub-human circumstances. What thoughts about man do such uses of the story-teller's art give the reader? Holden Caulfield, the youthful Quixote invented by J. D. Salinger, is hardly man enough to redirect the depressive tendencies of a literature which finds dramatic intensity only by reverting to barbarism. And who else has written antidotes to all this, except for the curiously Byzantine Herman Hesse, whose appeal to the young may reflect their starved longings more than the moral power found in this writer?

Herbert Marcuse contends that the Great Refusal of artists and intellectuals cannot be heard through the din of the technological society, but the fact may be that it is simply too long since they have spoken in heroic accents. We have self-critical testimony on this decline from both Picasso and Marc Chagall, and among writers there is the searching commentary of Storm Jameson, Benjamin De Mott, Earl Rovit, Wylie Sypher, and doubtless many others. Nor can science claim immunity to this general criticism. In the October issue of *Today's Education* (journal of the NEA), Barry Commoner, a leading biologist, objects to the claim that the competence of science is owed to its freedom from value judgment. The practice of science, he maintains, has become dangerously incompetent through neglect of values:

We used to be told that nuclear testing was perfectly harmless. Only now, long after the damage has been done, do we know differently. We produced power plants and automobiles that enveloped our cities in smog—before anyone understood its harmful effects on health.

We synthesized and disseminated new insecticides—before anyone learned that they also kill birds and might be harmful to people.

We produced detergents and put billions of pounds of them into our surface waters—before we realized that they would pollute our water supplies because they do not break down in our disposal systems.

To the assertion that the rational method of scientists fits them to deal with the new problems created by technology, Dr. Commoner makes this reply:

In my view this argument has a basic flaw—the resolution of every social issue imposed on us by modern scientific progress can be shown to require a decision based on value judgments rather than on objective scientific laws.

The balance of his article assembles evidence showing the confusion produced by "value free" science.

There really aren't any "innocents" in our society, if we look at the performance of its conventional subdivisions. In other words, it is a waste of time and emotion to look around for scapegoats. Finding them is too easy. Every sort of diagnostician or prosecuting attorney can put together a convincing indictment, these days. What we need is not more prosecutions, but new beginnings. Why couldn't businessmen like Mr. Booher get centers of free education going, and get scientists like Dr. Commoner to teach in them, along with men like William Arrowsmith and others who have been saying what needs to be said about the follies and mistakes of modern education for a long time? What better investment could there be for the usufruct of the affluent society?

COMMENTARY **WORLD OF THE CREATOR**

THE identification of Dadaist and Surrealist currents in present-day experimentation in the arts (see *Frontiers*) recalls Lewis Mumford's impassioned appeal (in *In the Name of Sanity*) for a restoration of the humane and the compassionate to the arts. Mumford wrote:

The glorification of brutality characterizes all the arts today: both highbrow and lowbrow have become connoisseurs of violence. . . . As if the cult of violence were not a sufficient threat to our rationality, indeed, to our very humanity, the painting of our time discloses still another danger: the surrender to the accidental and the denial of the possibility of coherence and intelligibility: what one might call the devaluation of all values and the emptying out of all meanings.

Without denying the meaning of such works as bitter revelations of the inhumanity of the man-made environment, Mumford says of the modern artist:

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

An extended discussion of Dadaism and Futurism is available in *Vision in Motion* by Lazlo Moholy-Nagy (Theobald, Chicago, 1947), which

chronicles the desperation of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century artists and writers, from Lautréamont to Gertrude Stein. After long quotation from Whitman's *Respondez* (in *Leaves of Grass*) he gives a portion of Marinetti's *Futuristic Manifesto* and comments:

While this manifesto at first glance appears somewhat similar to the *Respondez* of Whitman, nevertheless there is an unmistakable difference. Behind Whitman's poem there was the fighter for a good cause; for the exploited and betrayed. Behind Marinetti's manifesto stood a man, fed not on life but on literature, the superman ("Ueberschensch") ideal of Nietzsche.

The need of the arts for a high vision of man is evident from Moholy-Nagy's summary of this aspect of art history.

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

IN THE SCHOOLS, IN THE WORLD

THE shock-value of Jonathan Kozol's *Death at an Early Age* (Bantam, 95 cents) has made it a best-seller. As most readers know, this is the story of a young teacher's experiences in a ghetto public school in Boston. The book exposes the cruelest forms of bland, institutionalized prejudice—worse, if that is possible, than open and avowed racism because of the hypocritical rationalizing that is involved. The Preface is by Robert Coles, who says:

Death at an Early Age is not a long book. Its content can be easily summarized, but the heartbreaking story that it tells has to be read, and cannot be distilled into a review. Mr. Kozol entered the Boston schools as a substitute teacher in 1964, and the next spring he was summarily dismissed. Very simply, his book tells what happened in between, to him as a teacher and to the children, mostly Negro, he tried so hard to help and befriend. What emerges is an unsparing picture of American education as it exists today in the ghettos of our major northern cities.

The book evoked the following from Erik Erikson:

Some day, maybe, there will exist a well-informed, well-considered, and yet fervent public conviction that the most deadly of all possible sins is the mutilation of a child's spirit for such mutilation undercuts the life principle of trust, without which every human act, may it feel ever so good and seem ever so right, is prone to perversion by destructive forms of conscientiousness.

There is a sense in which books about crimes against children are privileged in our society. While the Boston school authorities may have been able to make up "reasons" for getting rid of Mr. Kozol, the country at large does not accept them, and the defenselessness of these children brings a horror that cannot be relieved by any kind of argument. Studies of the effects of prejudice on the lives of adults, while they have an influence, are often somewhat nullified in effect by

timeworn rebuttals appealing to self-interest, but these arguments can hardly be directed against *children*, with the result that Mr. Kozol's book, and the similar book noticed here last week—Herbert Kohl's *36 Children*—have stirred the national conscience.

Already other books are appearing to drive home the lesson of what Mr. Kozol has revealed. One of these is *Pygmalion in the Classroom*, by Robert Rosenthal, a Harvard psychologist, and Lenore F. Jacobsen, a school principal. This book reports experiments carried on in a school in South San Francisco. The authors found that what a teacher is led to expect of the children in a class has a noticeable effect on the quality of the children's work. A teacher with optimistic expectations gets better work. The authors conclude:

To summarize our speculations, we may say that by what she said, how and why she said it, her facial expressions postures and perhaps by her touch, the teacher may have communicated to the children of the experimental group that she expected improved intellectual performance. Such communications, together with possible changes in teaching techniques may have helped the child learn by changing his self-concept, his expectations of his own behavior, and his motivations, as well as his cognitive style and skills.

The shaping of teacher attitudes by established institutions is shown by an article in the September *Trans-action*. Titled "How Teachers Learn to Help Children Fail," it describes the experiences of a new teacher in a New York City slum school. Filled at first with enthusiasm and high resolve, this teacher gradually accepted the explanation of the institution for the characteristic failure of many of the children. Data for the report, collected by a Hunter College project, included several tape-recorded accounts by new teachers of their first-semester teaching experiences in schools with high Negro or Puerto Rican enrollment. The *Trans-action* article, by Estelle Fuchs, transcribes the report of one of these young teachers, illustrating, as Miss Fuchs says, "how the slum school gradually instills, in even the best-intentioned teacher, the prevailing

rationale for its own failure: The idea that even in the slum, it is the child and the family who fail, but never the school." This downgrading "rationale" is inevitably conveyed to the children, who soon become aware of the labels placed upon them, so that "their pattern for achievement in later years is influenced by their feelings of success or failure in early school experiences." Miss Fuchs says in summary:

How well our teacher has internalized the attitudes that deficits of the children themselves explain their failure in school! How normal she now considers the administrative upheavals and their effects upon teachers and children! How perfectly ordinary she considers the "tracking" of youngsters so early in their years!

The teacher of class 1-5 has been socialized by the school to accept its structure and values. Despite her sincerity and warmth and obvious concern for the children, this teacher is not likely to change the forecast of failure for most of these children—because she has come to accept the very structural and attitudinal factors that make failure nearly certain. In addition, with all her good intentions, she has come to operate as an agent determining the life chances of the children in her class—by distributing them among the ranked classes in the grade.

The sadly convincing part of this discussion is the day-to-day experience of the young teacher in talking with older teachers and in encounters with administrators. Her dream is worn away, she is made to "face facts," and there is little or nothing to reveal to her that the opinions she kept on hearing about the children were operating, all about her, as self-fulfilling prophecies. They made failure "nearly certain." Unfortunately, as with Mr. Kozol's book, the dramatic account of how the original intentions of this young teacher were dissipated "cannot be distilled into a review."

No more can the excitement of Herbert Kohl's *36 Children* be captured by a review, but there is a sense in which this book is the most important of all the current studies of ghetto education, since it gives so many examples of what imaginative teaching, friendliness, and simple affection can accomplish with youngsters who

have been dosed with feelings of inferiority by a public school system. Mr. Kohl discovered, evoked, and then fostered and developed unusual talents in many of these children—with tangible results in both literature and the arts. Examples are in his book. It might be added that the letters he now receives from former students are an especially delighting dimension of *36 Children*.

The achievements that reward open-minded and imaginative teaching of children who have been bureaucratically "rejected," while important for reform in education, may be even more significant in application to conflict situations in adult society. How many of the social problems of our time—and even international problems—could be made to dissolve by attitudes which expect the best instead of the worst from other people? To what extent do "the very structural and attitudinal factors" of the nation-state actually *cause* the failures of modern peoples to live with one another in peace?

Why wouldn't methods which work so effectively with children work equally well with grown-ups?

In case after case Mr. Kohl shows how low-grading assumptions about children destroy some of them and harden others into rebels who fill with contempt for the society which calls this "education." How much of the resentment and distrust abroad in the world is owed to similar crimes of "opinion"? The solution in the schools is immediate substitution of direct, intelligent, human relations for institutional relations. It would also work in the world, if people would only get at it.

FRONTIERS

Art and Ecstasy

THE coherence of a civilization depends either upon synthesizing ideas or upon the external controls of dominating institutions. There may be peace on the streets because the inhabitants of a city pursue coordination and interrelated ends, or because of the restraints of an efficient police force. When unifying ideas weaken, the external restraints grow strong, and finally, by reason of numerous imperceptible transfers of function, order is imagined to have no effective basis except in the power of rigid, uncompromising authority

Something like this process of externalization may also be recognized in cultural affairs. When high humanist vision gives way to lesser preoccupations, the arts become separate specialties; they develop coterie egotisms and private languages. The old ideals are redefined in terms of the excitement of special techniques, and the loss of vision is overlooked because of the intensities made possible by specialization. New academies may be established to maintain through organization what men once sought in an inner discipline and common striving, but then—because academies have to make definitions and espouse causes to justify their existence rebels soon arise to topple their authority. So dramatic innovation and incessant change become symbols of vigor in the arts. Such accelerations continue until the wild dynamics of change displace even the memory of art's transcendent aims; time itself is vanquished, not through realization of an aspect of eternity, but by the celebration of the passionate moment. Art loses its contemplative mode, and artists become specialist "performers."

How else are we to understand the present frantic pursuit of *ecstasy*? The idea is not to invite sensibility but to surround and capture it. No doubt the bliss which passes understanding has a part in human life, but if a drenching emotion is accepted as its æsthetic equivalent, what happens to the role of criticism? What is the defense of a

man of mind against all this imperialism of indiscriminated feeling?

The subtleties of the language of "high nirvana" are too easily degraded to the jargon of packaged "kicks." The art journalists invent new terms for the things the artists are doing, and within weeks or months the underground press proclaims a new razzle-dazzle that promises to bury all previous achievements in riotous intoxication. The good life, according to these people, is made up of an uninterrupted succession of McLuhanesque high-jinks. No wonder the politics of revel seems to many of the young the only antidote to the moral indifference of conventional political decision.

The plain fact is that these developments find us almost completely unready to understand them. A dutiful reverence for the arts—natural at a time when philosophy has long since abdicated—turns many otherwise intelligent men into patient endurers of activities which are in all ways bewildering to them. An ephemeral Dadaist jeer soon acquires the odor of sanctity if it is housed in a respected museum. And if rebellious artists go "too far," the respectable pillars of society can always write checks to support the more conservative academies, thinking that in this way they strengthen the "good" kind of culture. But they are still relying on other people's opinions and all that they accomplish is a small slow-down in the progress of confusion. Their fatal mistake has been to trust in experts and institutions for the preservation of the "finer things." As Wendell Berry put it: "Where there is no disciplined idealism the sense of the real is invaded by sentimentality or morbidity and by fraudulent discriminations."

Some help concerning these matters may be gained from the Spring-Summer (1968) issue of *Arts in Society* (published by the University Extension, University of Wisconsin), which is devoted to the "Happening." The origin of the term is given by one contributor, Dick Higgins:

Most people who have seen or read about Happenings are aware that Allan Kaprow coined the term and was among the very first to do work in their vein. . . . it evolved through many artists' collages becoming increasingly inclusive of unusual materials, until a new word was needed, "assemblage." This trend did not stop there, but continued, until assemblages led to "environments," which completely surrounded the spectator, the point at which environments began. Then, ultimately, when these began to include live performers, still another word was needed, of which the most commonly used is "Happening," though there are others.

The editor of this issue of *Arts in Society*, Edward L. Kamarck, explains that the term, "Intermedia," is more representative of what the Happenings involve, and adds:

One limitation of "Happening" as a word is that while its use seems to imply a special mystique, one is hard put to identify any valid commonalities in the movement beyond an interest in breaking down the boundaries between the arts. As will be noted in the articles in this issue of *Arts in Society*, so-called "Happenings" represent a wide diversity of viewpoints, motives and credos—as well they might, when one considers the infinite variety of possibilities for combining two or more arts. It is true that Happenings have been strongly linked with the Surrealist and Dadaist tradition, but . . . most contemporary experimentation in the arts contains discernible overtones of that tradition.

There seems in this development a curious mixture of themes and intentions. Feelings of spontaneity and breakthrough are united with Dadaist expressions of alienation. There is psychic release, but hardly any reaching after vision. Kaprow, we are told, was enacting his daydreams "in a concrete and live context." For him this is said to mean "generating a sense of community and co-participation." Recalling a previous account of Happenings, Mr. Kamarck says that it provided "an exciting *tableau vivant* of arts revolutionaries—polemical, vainglorious, attitudinizing, and wildly romantic." He calls the entire tendency a "rising upheaval in the arts, which is threatening to alter traditional artist-audience relationships, expectations, and modes of perception and expression."

The present is certainly a time of "breakthrough," but we must ask ourselves what sort of breakthrough is possible in expressions which submit so readily to the moods of breakup and even blow-up? Just how does longing for community combine with symptoms of deep melancholia and rituals of nihilist rejection? What, in short, would be the art forms natural to a true community? What would be the comment of a Tolstoy or even a Lafcadio Hearn on the "Happening"?

Some history may have a value here. One of the articles in *Arts in Society* offers a summary of a recent work by Guillermo de Torre, devoted to the vanguard movement in literature and art. The reviewer says:

He [Torre] proves . . . refreshingly objective when he now stresses the importance of Italian Futurism and of Marinetti's example, as a publicist and a promoter of art-world scandals on the evolution of all later advance-guard movements which have similarly relied on nihilist or anarchist tactics to attract attention or to convince. Because Marinetti subsequently declared himself a believer in Mussolini's Fascism, such references to his importance in the history of advance-guard art remained for many years taboo. But now we may soon be sophisticated enough to tolerate similar references to the paradoxical relationship between even Nazism or Stalinism and Dada or Surrealism: after all, Hitler's extermination camps proved in many respects to be of almost the same nature as some of the imaginary establishments that the Marquis de Sade described in his writings which Dadaists and Surrealists have taught us to tolerate and accept as veritable classics. When he praises Hitler and Franco, Dali is thus more consistent than André Breton or Tristan Tzara.

In art and literature, the advance guard of the first quarter of our century, like the legendary sorcerer's apprentice, indeed prepared the way for political developments that were destined to put an end to all advance-guard activity in literature and the arts, when political extremists profited from the intellectual and moral confusion that the advance guard had created, often quite unwittingly, by failing to distinguish clearly between political and artistic revolution and by using politically revolutionary tactics all too frequently in its artistic manifestations

and scandals. We know, for instance, that the Paris police at one time seriously believed that the French Surrealists planned to blow up Notre Dame and a few other venerable monuments in a sudden outburst of anarchistic frenzy.

Well, history may repeat itself, but it never repeats itself exactly. The new ephemera of the "Happening" have obvious linkages with the "openness" to experience of the encounter group in psychotherapy, and other-themes of ecstatic release. The question is, how and to what extent are these tendencies more than desperate reaction to cultural exhaustion and disgust? If it be argued that uninhibited communications between people satisfy a deep and common need, there is still the possibility that such longings will be grossly distorted in the framework of a marketing psychology and the self-indulgent habits of the time. Can the rewards of euphoria and ecstasy be produced to order by performing artists and ingenious therapists, for people who haven't earned them? What would a "disciplined idealism" have to say about this?