VOLUME XXV, NO. 6
FEBRUARY 9, 1972

DOORWAYS TO ART

I AM going to speak about painting because, being a painter, it is the form of art I know best. First I want to say that painting a painting and truly enjoying the sight of a painting have to have much in common. In one way these are two separate experiences, but in another more important way they share the same experience. Actually, it takes two creative exertions to bring a work of art to life; that is, the act of projecting it *and* the act of receiving it. Indeed, this merging of the doing with the absorption of what has been done is the first doorway to art. It is in fact the essence of the creative act, for it is in the interplay and balancing of doing and seeing, and seeing and doing, that a painter makes his painting grow from nothing to a meaningful whole. In this sense, he is alternately the creator and the creative viewer while his painting is in progress, projecting his marks and his brush strokes, then pausing to view and to receive the impact of what has been done before returning to creative action.

In a sense, paintings are painted by the painting as well as by the painter. For as the painting grows from one stage to another it provides increasing clues as to its ultimate character, and it is from these clues that the painter proceeds, charting the precarious course that finally leads to bringing together all the elements into a total phenomenon. Now this could not be accomplished were the creative efforts of the painter a matter of continuous action. In other words, without the contemplative pause, without inspired receptivity, without eyes that take as well as give, you would not have works of art. And without these faculties you would have no one to enjoy and appreciate them.

The common notion that all creativity stops when the artist completes the work and lays down his brush, and that appreciation from this point on is a matter of cultural and intellectual enlightenment: this notion has blocked more doorways to art than any other. For unless one brings to a painting something of the creative exertion of the artist, the painting remains frozen and meaningless.

I don't think it matters too much whether a first reaction to art is positive or negative, just so there is a reaction. I have heard people indicate a deeper and more personal involvement with the art they insist they hate than with the pretty and undisturbing prints that become unnoticed and remote fixtures on the domestic wall. I was alerted at an early age, seventeen to be exact, to the human foible of mistaking attraction for repulsion and sentiment for love. Like most boys of that age, I was devoted to a young lady and was given every reason to believe that she was equally devoted to me. We had a mutual friend, a young man whom I considered a harmless fool but for whom my lady developed a positive loathing. I remember even defending the fellow against the violence of her attacks. To this day, the fact that she eventually married the boy still gives me pause.

I suppose the moral of this story lies in the simple truth that one has to know oneself before one can be sure about the integrity of one's opinions about other things. For it is possible to think you are interested in matters that, in truth, bore you, to be sentimental about things which actually leave you cold or negative about things that stir you at heart. With all our concern for universal education and intellectual enlightenment, we sometimes forget that knowledge without knowingness, that learning without long and patient exposure to the thing to be learned, can become the refuge of the lazy mind and the timid spirit. Over the years, as a teacher of art supposedly with expert information to convey to knowledge-hungry students, I have been

consistently stymied by the expectations of young people who think of art education as an easy shortcut to æsthetic experience. I can best demonstrate the exasperating nature of this dilemma by an incident that occurred in one of our Basic Design workshops at Brooklyn College. One day after a long discussion of a certain aspect of design, the class was assigned a work problem based upon the elements discussed. After an hour I noticed a young man who was reading a book. When I asked why he was not working he said that since he understood everything perfectly well, he could see no reason for going through extra motions just to prove it to me. For students who tend to lean too heavily on expert opinion, here is proof of the hazards you face when your teachers become too clear about things.

One day, several years ago, when I was pondering the difficulties involved in attempting to open doorways to art, I turned the clock back to my own student days when life was a succession of new and wondrous revelations and where, one after the other, new doorways to art were magically swinging open. I hoped that if I could rediscover how it all happened to me, I might find clues that would help others. I recalled the years I spent in Paris as a student of sculpture. My mornings were spent at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Every afternoon I would cross to the right bank of the Seine and head for the Louvre. I would hurry through the long corridors housing the master paintings of Western Art to stairs which led me to my destination—the far corner of the basement where the stone carvings of Archaic Greece were placed. My obsessive love for these austere monuments blinded me to everything else. For many months, day after day, I would pass masterpieces by Rubens, Claude de Lorraine, Ingres, and all the others with merely a glance here and there as I made my way to my basement paradise.

This went on for some time until one day I stopped in front of a still life by the eighteenth-century painter Chardin and found to my astonishment that it suddenly came to life for me. As time went on my dash through the corridors slowed down to an ambling walk and one by one I discovered the miracles of the painter's art that had till then been obscured to me by impatience, unfamiliarity, and indifference. I have never lost the magic of these first revealing experiences and I am sure that their deep impact was prepared by the many months of casual exposure my daily journeys to the basement provided. Had I been stopped in my tracks as I hurried by these works and been forced by some earnest teacher to shed my indifference to Rubens through expert elucidation, before I was ready for it, I am sure the doorway to this master would have remained closed to me for many more years, if not forever.

Remembering how the life in these masterworks was revealed to me by sheer exposure and prolonged contact, when I was wondering, not long ago, what to do about the indifference of many art students to the great works of the past, it occurred to me that they may actually be relying on educational concepts to replace personal insight—that they may, in fact, know "too much" about things to which they have never, in reality, been exposed. I thought that if I could simulate the conditions of my youthful experience in the Louvre, I might hope for similar results. However, I could hardly force students to take a daily walk in Central or Prospect Park, following a path that would lead through one door of either the Brooklyn or Metropolitan museum and out the other end. The best solution that came to mind was a plan to require all Art students to spend one full day a week in one of our major art museums. They would be clocked in at nine in the morning and clocked out at four in the afternoon. There would be no instruction, no guided tours. They would be on their own, free to spend their time as they pleased, as long as they stayed on the premises. They could even sleep if they could find some suitable corner for the purpose. The one objective would be, not to teach them about art, but to put them in direct and prolonged contact with works of art. For this

they would receive two credits towards the Baccalaureate degree with no questions asked. For a while I played with the idea of proposing this plan for academic approval. I still may, some day, when higher education gets around to giving as much thought to the conditions under which knowledge can be fruitfully absorbed as it does today to knowledge alone.

So far I have tried to identify three essential doorways to art: the first is a searching, self-propelled, and courageous approach to new or unfamiliar works with no status-quo straps to hang on to, and with no stubborn preferences to provide retreat. The second is continuous exposure, no matter whether this exposure induces revulsion, indifference, or even boredom. The third is to know oneself and to distrust opinions, particularly one's own, that have not been confirmed by well-tested and patient personal experience.

These are basic. There are other conditions where the matter of optical as well as psychological attitudes can help or hinder the perceptive approaches to art. It is an old and well-established truth that the functional efficiency of any living organism deteriorates with disuse, that the less we exercise a given faculty the more faulty its performance becomes. I would not say that the human eye is physically failing in this sense, but that there is evidence that the common faculty of independent perceptivity in these times is functionally very much less than it could be. This would seem a curious and paradoxical phenomenon when one considers the fact that the eye today is being subjected to more sheer physical exercise, more optical gymnastics, than ever before in human history. When one compares the daily routine of the average pair of eyes with that of other times, this fact becomes quite obvious. The typical city housewife in one single shopping trip, whether by car or on foot, is probably subjected to more optical exercise than her counterpart of any past era experienced in a whole month. When she crosses the street she must see in all directions at once. Getting through the crowds of the subways and department stores requires the visual alertness of a talented halfback. She can go nowhere where her eyes are not overwhelmed by billboards, advertising posters, endless merchandising displays of all sorts. At home, when her eyes are not leaping through the pages of our practically textless picture magazines and tabloid newspapers, they are working on the images of the television screens. One would think that all this would be enough to keep the perceptive powers of the eye alive and keen. Curiously enough, it does not, and in fact tends to produce the opposite result.

I believe one hopeful sign lies in the recent tremendous increase in the ranks of amateur photographers. For photography can be a wonderful therapy for the perceptively lazy eye and can force it to actually see what it looks at. People often ask me why we include photography in the art curriculum of Brooklyn College. My answer is always that I can think of no better way of breaking through stereotyped art fixations than by taking a fresh and invigorating look at the world through the lens of a camera.

Anyone who has ever used a camera, even in the most casual sense, at one time or another has been surprised by a snapshot of a very familiar scene or face that gives it an entirely fresh and unexpected and almost unfamiliar appearance. I once tried to explain this as follows:

> Photography strengthens our visual powers not by changing familiar things but by giving us a chance to see the thing in terms of itself. But often in photography things do not seem as familiar as they should, for there are factors here which prevent the easy identification that is made in everyday life. At this point we can ask ourselves whether the camera has distorted life or whether it is seeing it with a frankness our eyes have never known. We expect photography to record the everyday world exactly as it exists, and it does this for us. Yet the camera with artless detachment and uncompromising truthfulness can render this world unfamiliar. Obviously something is wrong somewhere. In our search for the

> error, we can eliminate the camera. It is within ourselves that we must look for the answer.
>
> How are we to determine the factor which makes the photographic record so different from the familiar impressions of our smugly trusted eyes? Perhaps the answer is this: the camera sees as well as looks; we look but do not always see. Familiarity does not necessarily imply seeing. More often, it is the point in the course of contact where the human eye is relieved of further search. We look at an object not to see it but to identify it. The incentive which impels us to look does not often demand more than perception of abbreviations. The conclusion is that our familiar world is not the real world. This will be a difficult admission for most people to make.

Now, if this is true, and if we approach painting and sculpture and art in general with the same abbreviated and predisposed look-see with which we habitually view and identify the objects and people of our everyday world, it is no wonder that the visual richness and profundity of unfamiliar works of art remain a mystery. This is not to say that a clear and searching and optically perceptive eye alone can bring a work of art to life. But it is certain that it helps and that without it any effort to this end would be futile.

Habits of seeing are hard to break or change and one cannot suddenly transform, on quick demand, an habitually cold and indifferent eye into an eager and perceptive one. The best photographers and, for that matter, the most gifted artists, do not turn on a special visual intensity when they work, and like a hot-water tap, turn it off when the job is done. In fact it is the other way around. For you can be sure that the finest of photography or the greatest of painting is the climactic result of a lifetime of a ceaseless, exuberant, and inexhaustible visual curiosity and acuity. Certainly this is one attribute that anyone can share with the artist, for we are all born with the same optical equipment, and it does not take special education or technical skill to operate it. Without this attribute the world and its art is only half seen, resulting in visual experience that is aimless and without substance, and aesthetic opinion that is wishful and without integrity. In approaching a painting such as, for example, one of Picasso's early Cubist masterpieces with eyes habituated to a daily routine of abbreviated perception, it is no wonder that the classic clarity of form and structure here should appear as a tangle of obscure nonsense.

Despite the broad, stylistic diversity of modern painting, there is one basic objective that is common to all schools: that is, the effort, to a greater or less degree, to bring all the separate elements in a painting under the dominance of a total image of unity. This integration of local units into the dominating singularity of wholeness is indeed the final essence of the esthetic experience. Yet this unity is never wholly explicit and self-evident in the finished work. The correlation of the parts into a whole has to be made over and over again by every eye that views it.

This brings us to another doorway to art, the one that perhaps is the most difficult of all to open. Let us suppose that by practice, by daily habit and inclination, one's eyes are trained to absorb automatically, clearly and exactly whatever they look at. Suppose at this point, with this unfailing ability to see clearly, we were confronted for the first time with the challenge of enveloping and absorbing in its entirety the monumental work of Picasso known as Guernica. This is a mural painting of enormous size, symbolizing the agony of Spain during its Civil War. Let us say that we bring our new faculty of sheer optical clarity to focus upon this huge canvas. What happens? We absorb each local detail one by one. We become completely familiar with the drawing of the bull, the image of the mother and the dead child, the presence of the light bulb, and all the other individual details. Like the scientist who observes and collects his data piecemeal, but who never correlates it into a large and significant concept, we are left here with many clear views of a multiplicity of pieces without ever getting near the quintessence of the matter, which lies in its total impact, in an all-embracing wholeness into which

the parts all but dissolve. In fact we are suddenly required to transform our highly sharpened focal clarity into a larger, an all-enveloping vision, where focal clarity indeed becomes an obstruction. In short, we are asked first to develop the kind of focal intensity that plainly sees the tree but in doing so must ignore the forest, and then we are asked to visually encompass the forest which automatically fuzzes out the tree. It could be asked, why bother going to the trouble of viewing the tree through a telescope if this actually hinders us in the main business of seeing the forest? The only answer to this is that the sight of the forest would be meaningless and confusing had we never seen a tree. Indeed, the more we cherish the sight of the tree the greater will be our delight in the sight of the forest.

The last and most important doorway leads to the great works of art which men of the past have left us. On this point I want to read to you the words of the great French novelist and philosopher of art, André Malraux:

> If the great artist's way of seeing is quite different from that of the ordinary man, the reason is that his faculty of sight has been educated, from its earliest days, by paintings and statues; by the world of art. It is a revealing fact that every artist, when asked how his vocation came to him, invariably traces it back to the emotion experienced at his contact with some specific work of art. A writer traces his vocation back to the reading of a certain poem or a novel; . . . . . a musician, to a concert he attended; a painter, to a painting he once saw. . . . What makes the artist is the circumstance that in his youth he was more deeply moved by his first sight of works of art than by that of the things which they portray.
>
> No artist's career is the direct outcome of his childhood drawings. Artists do not stem from their childhood, but from their conflict with the mature achievements of other artists not from their own formless world, but from their struggle with the forms which others have imposed on life.
>
> In their earlier days, Michelangelo, El Greco and Rembrandt imitated; so did Raphael, Velasquez and Goya, Delacroix, Manet and Cézanne; the list is endless. Whenever we have records enabling us to trace the origins of a painter's, a sculptor's, any artist's work, we trace it not to a sudden vision or uprush of emotion (subsequently given form), but to the vision, the passionate emotion, or the serenity, of another artist. During periods where all previous works are disdained, genius lapses; no man can build on the void, and a civilization that breaks with the styles at its disposal, soon finds itself empty-handed.

In other words, M. Malraux is telling us that art does not start with a lovely sunset or a beautiful girl. Art starts with art. So, in closing, I want you to know that the next time you visit a museum or open an art book I would be happy to think that some of you will remember what I have tried to say today and that you will linger on a little longer than you intended.

ROBERT JAY WOLFF

New Preston, Conn.

REVIEW
COUNTER CULTURE ESSAYS

THE diverse materials collected by Theodore Roszak in *Sources*, "An Anthology of Materials Useful for Preserving Personal Sanity while Braving the Great Technological Wilderness" (Harper Colophon Book, 1972, $2.95), are numerous enough for the reader to pick according to his taste and still have a plentiful supply of good and sometimes extremely choice reading. Roszak, as will be remembered, wrote *The Making of a Counter Culture* several years ago. The present collection amounts to a progress report on efforts in this direction. The selections have been limited to contemporaries as a means of avoiding "an ancestry too vast for reckoning." Buber is probably the oldest contributor.

The book has five sections, presenting essays which deal with the Person, the Body, Community, the Whole Earth, and the idea of Transcendence. Some of the contributors, besides the few we plan to quote, are Thomas Merton, A. H. Maslow, Paul Goodman, E. F. Schumacher, Wendell Berry, L. L. Whyte, and Harold Goddard. There are forty-two in all. Instead of a bibliography a section called "Survival Kit" lists various groups and publications which play a part in counter-culture activities. *Sources* has 572 pages and is illustrated with interesting photographs. There is also some poetry.

What is this book, really? It is a thoughtful attempt to locate and identify the underlying currents of moral strength and intellectual clarity in the tumultuous tide of change in which we are all involved. For basic orientation the editor quotes from Dwight Macdonald's *The Root Is Man* the passage on the need for a new political vocabulary, in which Macdonald urges that conscience and ethics, rather than science and the "laws of history," must now be man's guides. Obliged to name but one "hero" with whom Roszak identifies the most, we should say William Blake, who refused to separate individual and social salvation. An especially valuable portion of Harold Goddard's (Pendle Hill) essay on Blake is included. Roszak contributes an introduction to each contribution, which helps to weave a unity for the contents.

Since this is a book concerned with new beginnings, the editor has not included any of the "nightmare" critiques of the civilization which counter-culture proponents hope to leave behind. However, in his own introductory essay, Mr. Roszak pays his respects to the technological dogma of "Progress" which goads the present society on:

> The scientists and promethean engineers, these lieutenants of the technocracy have done the most to transform our culture into the push-button Tower of Babel we inhabit. They have habituated us to apocalyptic vistas. Nothing too big, too bizarre, too mind-boggling to be dared. Matter, we have learned, is a vibrant jelly of energy; the universe a burst balloon of galactic fragments; thought itself a mere feedback in the cerebral electronics; life a chemical code soon to be deciphered; all seeming law nothing but the large-scale likelihoods of basic chaos. No absolutes. Nothing sacred. Any day now homunculus in a test tube—cyborgs made to order—interstellar tourism—the doomsday bomb. Why not? What is possible is mandatory. . . .
>
> Anything goes—but where anything goes nothing counts. No natural standard gives discipline. Mephisto's strategy with Faust: to make absence of restraint matter more than presence of purpose; to make liberation nihilism's bait. Until at last, even the man in the street takes the unthinkable in his stride, perhaps tries his own hand at a Faustian turn or two. Was not Buchenwald administered by bank clerks—by *good* bank clerks, responsible employees with clean fingernails? And My Lai massacred by last year's high-school basketball stars: nice boys, "not at all like that . . . really"? Listen as you pass along the streets, watch the front pages of newspapers. Salesgirls and mechanics banter glibly during coffee break about universal extermination—school kids pass jokes about the death of God ("No, God is not dead; he is alive and hiding out in Argentina")—real estate speculators take out property options on Mars—pop singers exhaust all the rhymes for "alienation"—ladies in the laundromat exchange information on brain transplantation while folding

sheets—movie stars tell the world how to live with the bomb—

"And what rough beast . . . slouches toward Bethlehem to be born . . .?"

One of the foundations of any viable society of the future is the broad principle of decentralization—decentralization of power and of population. It is not of course a new principle, as George Woodcock, who writes on this subject, points out. Widely spread small communities were once the natural arrangement for living, so that the idea of "decentralization" as a necessary reform could hardly occur to anyone until after the establishment of the centralized political state and the vast unification of power that came with the rise of industrialism. Then decentralization became the cry of the anarchists and utopian socialists—not, of course, of the Marxists. Intentional communities were formed according to the plans of various economic theorists, but as Woodcock notes, few if any of them are still in existence:

> Only the religious communities of this era, which had a purpose outside mere social theory, survived; even today the Mennonite communities of Canada keep so closely to their ideals of communitarian autonomy that they are leaving the country to find in South America a region where they can be free to educate their children as they wish. The secular communities all vanished; the main lesson their failure taught was that decentralist organization must reach down to the roots of the present, to the needs of the actual human beings who participate, and not upward into the collapsing dream structures of a Utopian future. . . .
>
> The crisis of the Indian struggle for independence caused Gandhi to preach the need to build society upon the foundation of the village. The bitter repressions of Tsarist Russia led Peter Kropotkin to develop his theories of a decentralized society integrating industry and agriculture, manual and mental skills. World War II led to considerable community movement among both British and American pacifists, seeking to create cells of sane living in the interstices of a belligerent world, and an even larger movement of decentralism and communitarianism has arisen in North America in contradiction to the society that can wage a war like that in Vietnam. Today it is likely that more people than ever before are consciously engaged in some kind of decentralist venture which expresses not merely rebellion against monolithic authoritarianism, but also faith in the possibility of a new, cellular kind of society in which at every level the participation in decision-making envisaged by nineteenth-century anarchists like Proudhon and Kropotkin will be developed.

Bill Voyd, a spokesman for Drop City, a geodesic dome community in Colorado, offers what amounts to confirming testimony:

> The greatest impact of communal life on the artist is the realization that all community activity is equal, that digging a ditch carries no less status than erecting a sculpture; in fact the individual often discovers he is happier digging a ditch, sculpting a ditch. Life forms and art forms begin to interact. The identity of the artist becomes irrelevant in relation to the scale of values employed, because the communal context of the work of art removes it from the market place; the artist seeks to work within a system that allows the broadest possible participation of the community. The artist's experience becomes a shared experience.

This paper tells how the Drop City communitarians learned to build their own houses and the larger, community structures.

A rather profound passage from R. D. Laing's *The Politics of Experience* explores the confusion about both madness and sanity in a world which has lost touch with the inwardness of meaning and attempts to define "reality" in wholly external terms. Too often, Laing shows, the hunger for an authentic inner life is misinterpreted as madness, while the world's treatment of people who give expression to this longing may sometimes drive them to personal disaster.

Ronald Sampson's contribution, "The Vanity of Humanism," is concerned with the impotence of scientific humanism to move men to take the steps necessary to change the world into a better place. The assessment of what is wrong is well within the competence of the rational faculty, but diagnosis is not enough. We see and know that "hatred, cruelty, intolerance and indifference to human misery are evil," but why, then, have men

not acted upon this knowledge? Why is there not that absolute devotion to good which rises in men who have resources deeper than the power of reason? Yet reason, after all, can be made to go further. It can say, after reference to the course of human experience, that—

> the true form of conduct, which will promote man's genuine interests, is the opposite of self-interest. It consists in finding the meaning of one's life, not in the quest for wealth, power and prestige but in engaging in activities prompted by consideration of the needs of one's fellows. And this policy, although productive of great and enduring satisfaction, does not appear to come naturally and easily to man, although it is certainly possible for him to achieve it. The former metaphysic is the law of power and/or violence and leads to evil; the latter is the law of love and equality and leads to good. And the meaning of every individual's life consists in the choice which he is of necessity required to make between these alternatives.

So the question remains: Why should a man do what is difficult for him to do? Why should he prefer "the good" to his own, immediate interest? Mr. Sampson, a Tolstoyan in religion, speaks of the will of God. Others might think of Deity as the One Self, and seek that larger self within as the basis for the course which the mind recommends but human nature resists. Nearly at the end of the book comes Goddard's discussion of Blake's conception of Fourfold Vision, which might be another way of speaking of the same foundation for transcendent decision and action.

In any event, one feels that the ingredients or materials out of which a better future may be shaped are suggested in this book, however much refining they may need.

COMMENTARY
A COMMON QUESTION

INTERESTINGLY enough, three of the articles in this week s issue focus on the same question or problem. Mr. Wolff wonders how students can be led to feel the inspiration of great works of art—by what alchemy or benevolent conspiracy they can be ignited by the spark which stirs the creative spirit? This, he would doubtless agree, is the primary task of the teacher, yet one for which no method or formula exists.

So also with the "Children" article, which reaches its keynote in the consideration of Ortega's thoughts about teaching. Statistics doubtless have some value in relation to educational undertakings, but statistics will almost certainly drop out, because of their infrequent appearance, those qualities of the self-starting, self-educating individual who ought to be the model for all teaching enterprises. Nor are the "norms" of good teaching accessible to computer techniques. Only the external symmetries of a teaching activity are susceptible to tabulation, never its essence. "What did the teacher say or do the twenty-first time that he failed to do the first twenty times?" For after the twenty-first time, the student's face lit up with the thrill of comprehension.

Then, in this week's Review, there is the question raised in the quotation from Ronald Sampson. What will make a man choose the better instead of the dearer? Out of what reservoir of resolve comes the motivation which makes heroes, or even martyrs, if need be? Is there any rational ground for expecting the extraordinary from human beings?

It has been centuries since such matters have been seriously inquired into. But is a man set off from others of his time by courage, vision, and determination to be condemned as an "aristocrat"? Because he is *different?*

No one can pursue the study of either history or biography without realizing that such differences lay the foundations for civilization. Without men who are "different," there would have been no Periclean Athens, no Florence of the Medicis, no Elizabethan England, nor any Founding Fathers and United States of America. How does a society make a place for such men?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE PROBLEM AND THE IDEAL

THE Lockean view that the mind of the small child is *tabula rasa*—a blank slate to be written upon by his teachers—has extraordinary staying power. This attitude toward children seems to be taken for granted as an assumption that needs no argument or defense, since no alternative is conceivable. In consequence, immeasurable and indeed impossible responsibilities are heaped upon both parents and teachers, who have the obligation of instructing the young concerning the nature of "the world." What else is there to do?

This obligation does of course exist. And to some extent the child is indeed a plastic recipient of impressions which shape his outlook and the way he begins to cope with the world around him. These two factors—the "empty" child and the "full" curriculum—in the educational equation are undoubtedly real. Yet what if there is a third factor—a *tertium quid*—of even greater importance, one that is commonly ignored for the reason that there is little or no theoretical basis for acknowledging its existence? There is, it must be admitted, some sort of "token" admission of a third factor. We have moral but no theoretical grounds for the admission. We have a splendid educational rhetoric which declares that each child is *unique.* We also have many resources for believing that children are spontaneously "creative" and might remain so into adulthood if they were not victimized by the dull routines of conventional schooling and the stultifying influences of a vast socializing process which makes hardly any distinction between the ideal of "equality" and the blight of mediocrity.

Why do we call our recognition of some of the splendors and potentialities of childhood only a "token" admission? Because, in the clash of interest between the determination to instruct the child in the nature of the modern world and the wish to "bring out" his creative qualities, this idea of his having a distinctive individuality lacks muscle. What is to be expected of this unique endowment? The idea is abstract and gets little practical attention. Only the really *heroic* children break through the barrage of well-intentioned conditioning conducted by people who feel it their duty to tell the young as much as possible about the world as it now seems, in terms of up-to-date information.

It is true enough that the world is changing and that educational communications need revision from time to time. Atlases go out of date at a shocking rate and political alignments around the world lack weekly or even overnight stability. The larger, more significant changes going on also need attention, and can be in some measure described, yet even here, in a period of history as turbulent as the present, the interpretations that can be offered must inevitably vary. The fact is that no single human being can possibly penetrate the welter and confusion of the present socio-historical transition to discern what is "really" happening, except in the grossest empirical terms, and nearly everyone has to fall back on impressionistic insights which may or may not have validity. In addition, even the most sophisticated world picture that can be achieved by cosmopolitan generalization may not be at all the world which the young person will enter and have to cope with. As Harold Taylor remarks in *The World as Teacher:*

> We have within our fifty states a fascinating assortment of underdeveloped countries, pre-industrial societies, post-industrial urban centers, bad housing, ghettos, rural slums, wealthy suburbs, beautiful farms, bad schools, good schools, mediocre universities, great ones, anti-intellectuals, poets, philistines, dancers, surf-riders, television programs, research centers, think tanks, anti-think tanks, rebels, conformists, mass culture and high art, all of which has to be seen to be believed and which is, in a curious way, the wonder of the world.

Some children, when they grow up, are going to look more and more for safe niches and cozy nooks, and may in fact need this sort of refuge, being able to do their best and be of the most use

if they can find one. Some may want and need a sharp focus on a small area, others a wide focus which takes in a large range of experience. These differences are real and for the most part quite unpredictable. People—adults as well as children—have enormously different potential radii of natural and constructive action. This is by no means a matter of which radius is "best," but of the wonderful variety in human life and of the subtle diversities in human possibility. You wouldn't want a great school teacher to try to be a politician, or a natural-born house-builder to spend his life clerking in a bank, or even to become a "great financier."

No one can possibly know about all these worlds, or teach much about them. For the skills of a particular calling, you go to a specialist—someone who knows those skills and can help you develop them—but for "general education" or, as we say, "preparation for life," children need far more to learn something about themselves and about understanding and meeting any sort of experience. If they do learn these things, they may appear to know about "the world," but that is chiefly because of a competence which has quite other foundations. We shall never tire of quoting John Holt's reply to a former pupil, now a college student, who had written him enviously, saying that he had "everything all taped." Holt quickly set her straight:

> "You could not possibly be more mistaken. The difference between you and me is not that I have everything all taped it's that I know I don't and I don't expect to and I don't need to. I expect to live my entire life about as ignorant and uncertain and confused as I am now, and I have learned to live with this, not to worry about it. I have learned to swim in uncertainty the way a fish swims in water."

How does a person get to have that sort of understanding? We know very little about it; nobody can write an acceptable "manual" about matters of such subtlety, so that this crucially important question is likely to be ignored. Eventually, one might be able to put Plato in the curriculum, but then a Socrates would be needed on the faculty, and the Socrateses of today, if they exist, may not have any teaching credentials and are probably out there on the street corner, along with the charlatans and the ne'er-do-wells; and even if you could identify them they might not be willing to teach in any kind of school. . . .

Well, finding good teachers should not be quite that difficult, but it may be a problem. And such people often have problems of their own. Bronson Alcott had a *terrible* time just trying for opportunities to teach the children of his contemporaries.

Speaking of Bronson Alcott returns us to the question of the unpredictable potentialities of the young, since being with small children absolutely convinced Alcott of the idea of pre-existence. These children, he was sure, were none of them starting from scratch. They all had an unknown history, a treasury of experience and innate capacity garnered somewhere else, and it was this, he believed, that he saw flower anew, as he worked with them as a teacher.

What else is there to explain the marked differences in personal discipline, in the capacity for reflection and the exercise of judgment, and in the all-important *hunger to know* that become evident in children, sometimes at a fairly early age? Environmental influences added to the accidents of gene arrangement are hardly enough to throw light on this question.

The best brief essay we know of on the responsibility of the teacher is based upon observation of dramatic differences of this sort. This is Ortega y Gasset's introductory chapter to his recently published book, *Some Lessons in Metaphysics* (Norton), which has little to do with "metaphysics," but is all about teaching. In this discussion of some twenty pages, Ortega summarily rejects the idea that the job of the teacher is to "transmit the cultural heritage." A heritage accepted at the hands of others, he says, is always secondhand. It has no life in it. It is hearsay. And students are usually all too eager to be told what they should think, how they should

believe. What they get in this way cannot be termed "knowledge." Much of it may be only the prejudices of an age, and even the latest word about current happenings and the most exhaustive analyses of cultural change may be only the most up-to-date prejudices—views that will be discarded within a generation. Ortega considers this problem by comparing the usual desire of a person to get "an education" with the quite different determination to *know*. As Ortega puts it:

> It is enough to compare the approach of a man who is going to study an already existing science with the approach of a man who feels a real, sincere, and genuine need for it. The former will tend not to question the content of the science, not to criticize it; on the contrary, he will tend to comfort himself by thinking the content of the science which already exists has a defined value, is pure truth. What he seeks is simply to assimilate it as it already is. On the other hand, the man who is needful of a science, he who feels the profound necessity of truth, will approach this bit of ready-made knowledge with caution, full of suspicion, submitting it to criticism, even assuming in advance that what the book says is not true. In short, for the very reason that he needs, with such deep anguish to know, he will think that this knowledge does not exist, an d he will manage to unmake what is presented as already made. It is men like this who are constantly correcting, renewing, recreating science.

These are the men, then, who are truly educated, and only they; and it must be admitted that they educate themselves. But *they*, Ortega at once adds, do not make the task and the problem of education. They are the extraordinary exceptions, the one-in-a-thousand sort of students, who will overturn the assumptions of an age, revolutionize idea-systems, shatter time-honored beliefs, and often become responsible for the most far-reaching reforms. No, education cannot contemplate such persons as constituting its daily problems. It is all those others—those who, alas, are perfectly willing to have the traditions of the past "transmitted" to them, and who expect nothing else—who constitute the everyday material that teachers work with and are expected to improve.

What then should the teacher do? First of all, he must not deceive himself. If he only transmits tradition he is a fraud. And if he has good instincts he will feel like a fraud until he begins to see that his highest mission is to inspire, to whatever extent he can, *the hunger to know*. The rare ones who are already afflicted with this longing may not constitute the problem of education, but they certainly represent its *ideal*.

FRONTIERS

The Business and Crimes of War

HOUSMANS is a London book store which also does some publishing. All the profits realized on the store's sales go to support the British *Peace News,* an excellent pacifist weekly with an international circulation that has been published for many years. One of the items offered by Housmans is a handy *World Peace Diary* which comes out every year. The diary is "vest-pocket" in size and has space for a day's entries per page; one with smaller capacity has space for a week's entries on two facing pages. In the front are listed all the major peace groups and organizations, and at the back is a 16-page world atlas in color. There are tabular pages for accounts and room for notes. Bound in attractive blue fabricoid, the two diaries are priced at $1.50 and $1.00. Housmans' address is 5 Caledonian Road, Kings Cross, London, NISI DX, England.

It might be a good idea to get on the Housmans mailing list, since the store frequently offers desirable book bargains with an emphasis on peace themes. Along with the current list and the sample diary came a copy of Housmans' latest pamphlet, *Britain and the Death Trade* by Joseph Camilleri, which sells in the U.S. at 35 cents. Apparently, trade in modern weapons is now an important element in the British economy. While governments do not willingly disclose their dealings in the arms trade, the author of this pamphlet has managed to dig out essential information. He says that since the end of the second world war, the sale of weapons to the "developing" countries has become a means of winning the friendship of their military leaders, so that the major powers have found this an easy way to gain influence. The rapid obsolescence of military equipment also makes for a large supply of somewhat dated weaponry which can be disposed of by the most "advanced" powers. Finally, Mr. Camilleri says:

> A third factor which has dramatically affected the arms trade is the entry of the Soviet Union and the United States into the picture. The American case is particularly relevant in this regard, for the United States, especially since the Kennedy Administration, has attempted to offset its large balance of payments deficit by an increase in sales, as opposed to gifts, of military equipment. This American policy has in turn generated a need on the part of the major European powers to compete with the United States in the field of advanced technology (e.g. aircraft, electronics, computers). What better way to finance research for the development of modern weapons systems than by finding new markets in the Third World?

This analysis is devoted mainly to British operations, since the British seem to be getting the lion's share of the business. Readers not already sufficiently horrified by the activities of all governments in such directions would do well to secure the pamphlet for a gruesome assemblage of figures. One consideration, however, is of general interest. The new countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are nearly all trying to imitate the large industrial nations, which means they are seeking power, and, as the author says, "military hardware is a major symbol of power." Thus the slim resources of these new countries are being spent on non-productive monstrosities such as tanks and military aircraft. Mr. Camilleri continues:

> An even more harmful consequence of the arms trade has been the introduction of weapons into areas and situations characterized by actual or potential conflict. It is, of course, a well-known fact that the greatest number of conflicts in the post-war period has occurred in the Third World. The nature of these conflicts has been and remains extremely varied, but there is one constant factor: almost all the weapons have been supplied from the arsenals of the major powers.
>
> In this regard, Britain must bear a large share of the responsibility for providing much of the military hardware used by India and Pakistan in the 1965 war. At the outbreak of hostilities, 70% of India's air force had been supplied by Britain. It included 220 jet fighters and 68 British jet bombers. Similarly with Pakistan, Britain had delivered some 50 Canberra bombers which constituted 25% of the entire Pakistan air force. On the Indian side, the 1965 war was fought with an armed division equipped with

> Centurions. With the exception of one submarine, the navies of both countries were of British origin.

Meanwhile, in the United States, opposition to the Vietnam war keeps on growing. In a column urging total amnesty for deserters from the army and convicted draft resisters, D. J. R. Bruckner, in the Los Angeles *Times* for Jan. 3, quotes a recent statement by Senator George S. McGovern, in which he said that "except for Adolph Hitler's extermination of the Jewish people, the American bombardment of defenseless peasants in Indochina is the most barbaric act of modern times." No one knows exactly how many draft offenders there are for the reason that there is no count on the persons who did not register or left the country. There are, however, some figures which are used:

> The usual estimate is that up to 70,000 men have fled the country to avoid the draft. The desertion rate during this war is double that of World War II. The Pentagon estimates that there are more than 35,000 deserters at large. In 1971 the government obtained more than 4,500 indictments against men refusing to be drafted; this is the most intensive campaign for this offense since 1944. There are federal fugitive warrants outstanding on 4,000 draft evaders. This situation has developed in spite of the fact that rules defining legitimate conscientious objection have been liberalized considerably; in the last four years 183,000 men have been excused from service as conscientious objectors.

That is a record for war resistance. There is another sort of record in the Far East:

> At least 450,000 Asian civilians have died in this conflict; more than 1 million have been wounded, and 10 million turned into refugees. The United States has dropped 6 million tons of bombs on the four tiny countries caught up in this war, three times the total tonnage used in World War II. We have developed dozens of new, torturous antipersonnel bombs which are dropped daily on civilians.

Never was there such great need for peacemakers in the world.