

A BRIEF COMPARISON

THE arguments about teaching and the schools, about the importance of fostering "creativity" and self-expression, go on and on, and one sometimes wonders if it might be better simply to look at the practice of past cultures or civilizations, the ones to which we turn when seeking the greatest human expressions of art and literature. How did *those* people shape such high abilities? Or, perhaps more significantly, how did the artists think about what they were doing?

It seems of some importance, as Eric Havelock points out (in *Preface to Plato*), that "neither 'art' nor 'artist,' *as we use the words*, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek." Turning to the East, we find Marco Pallis speaking of the fact that among the Tibetans there is little except a few household articles that can be described as "folk art." (*Peaks and Lamas*, 1939.) The point is that *all* the people have the same essentially good taste:

Only in village songs and dances can the typical signs of folk art be recognized. In the case of the other arts, even ordinary farmers possess many objects which do not differ in any essential respect from those of the aristocracy, though naturally they are rougher in execution and employ less precious materials. This is perhaps the most convincing evidence of how real and universal Tibetan culture has been, and how thoroughly it has permeated the whole of society. Many a rough fellow whom we met showed that he could look for just the right points in a rug or a teapot, with a sureness of judgment that few of our own educated folk could emulate.

No more than the ancient Greeks would the Tibetan artists of the 1930s refer to "art." The translation of Plato's *techne* as "art" distorts its meaning, as scholars have pointed out. The Greeks had no idea of what we call "aesthetics" until Aristotle, and the artists Pallis encountered in Tibet seemed similarly innocent of this conception. He says:

In talking with artists or about them, the language currently used has a curiously utilitarian ring, that gives no inkling of the existence of any theory of aesthetics; it is doubtful whether such does indeed exist consciously, even in the background, so that the translation of many of those terms which are the stock-in-trade of criticism among us, is no light task. For instance, "Art" itself has no equivalent term. They do not group all the arts under one head as we do. The nearest word that I can find is "Science of Construction," which can be made to cover all the applied arts, including architecture, but hardly takes in painting. Genius, originality, inventive power—though we know the Tibetans to possess all these unconsciously—are words foreign to them. They will speak of a beautiful woman or a fine horse, but will rarely apply these adjectives to inanimate objects. For a genius, one can only say "an exceedingly capable man," underlining the technical side of his skill, rather than his gift of design.

When one considers the majestic strength and beauty of Buddhist art, to be seen throughout the Far East, the attitude of these Tibetan artists toward what we call "creativity" may seem strange indeed. As Pallis relates:

The metaphor of "Creation" is one which they do not use, not even in respect of the world itself: applied on the cosmic scale, they think of it as "manifestation in form," never in the sense of making something of nothing. As to originality and invention, most artists, but especially painters and sculptors, might even feel rather hurt at being suspected, as they would think, of irreverent self-assertion. They always conceive of everything that they value, including ethics and art, under the guise of knowledge which is susceptible of being communicated through a chain of teachers and pupils. What the latter learn they adapt capably or incapably, that is all. The former are often the ones to whom we, viewing only the results, apply the term "original"; but, whether they really deserve it or not—many certainly do, though they do not know it—they one and all maintain that they are simply carrying out, not inventing, designs prescribed by the tradition handed down to them.

While visiting the large abbey of Likbir in Ladak, in northern India, close to the Tibetan border, Pallis had an experience which showed how Buddhist painters (who are called "Writers of Gods") think of their work. He admired a particularly fine *t'hanka* (a hanging wall painting, done on silk) and wished to buy it, but the owner was away. Seeing his disappointment, a friendly monk brought him a book, saying: "Here is another *Lamrim* (text on "Grades in the Way"), just the same as the picture; you can buy this if you like, instead." He saw no difference between a picture and a book, "so long as the doctrine set forth were the same."

For the Tibetans, the arts are all servants of Doctrine—"collaborating towards one end," which is "to prepare the mind for metaphysical realization, to spur it to pierce the veil of the finite and to seek Deliverance in Knowledge, that is, identification with the Supreme and Infinite Reality." Art is concerned with form. "Once it has helped to pilot the mind up to the frontier between Form and the next stage, the world of Non-form, its task is over—he who penetrates to the beyond has no more use for art." But in the world of form—where we now live the value of art is immeasurable:

Whether painting is chosen, or the casting of images, or the written word, or gesture, or the science of sound—called by the Indians *Mantra*—or the public mystery plays—. . . whether any of these methods be preferred separately or the whole gamut of the arts be called into play at once, the end is the same, namely the attainment of metaphysical knowledge. To one man one method is profitable, to his neighbor a second, according to their several mentalities. That which harmonizes with metaphysical truth and leads naturally towards it, is good art, that which is seen to be inartistic betrays thereby its incompatibility with the truth and its defectiveness as a means; it contains contradictory implications which, if followed step by step, would lead logically to chaos. Whether our standards of beauty or ugliness amount to much the same as this in practice, is not quite certain. My own belief is that they do; but the Tibetan artist expresses these things differently.

The artist may therefore regard himself as an inventor of glosses upon the Doctrine, a mediator between its pure thought and the intelligence of dwellers within the world of sense. He is an alchemist who, having been vouchsafed a vision of the truth through direct intuition, transmutes it, insulating it in a symbolic envelope, so that eyes, which cannot look upon its naked intensity, may gradually become fortified through constant contemplation of the symbol, even to bearing the sight of the thing symbolized.

The contrast between East and West in the conception of art—what it is, what it is for—seems clear enough. Pallis puts it well: "Where we tend to stress the individuality of the artist . . . and are inclined to think first of all of design as the expression of individual genius, the Tibetan relies on finding a constant supply of artists who, when they do not feel capable of aspiring to great heights in their compositions, can always play for safety by falling back on adequate, time-honoured models, to be varied according to taste." The Tibetan point of view, he remarks, "is seen to be the exact reverse of that current among us in modern times."

In the East, the ideal is the faithful transmission of sacred tradition, while the West, during recent centuries, has been almost wholly engaged in a deliberate *break* with tradition. Dostoevsky's Ivan in *The Brothers Karamazov* may be taken as a symbol of that break, the Grand Inquisitor as representative of the tradition which the modern world determined to leave behind. In Dostoevsky's story, the Jesus of whom a Tibetan monk said, when told about him by Pallis, "Oh, but he is a very Buddha!" returns to fifteenth-century Spain and walks among the people of Seville.

The crowd weeps and kisses the earth under His feet. Children throw flowers before Him, sing, and cry hosannah. "It is He—it is He!" all repeat. "It must be He, it can be no one but Him!" . . . the mother of [a] dead child throws herself at His feet with a wail. "If it is thou, raise my child!" she cries holding out her hands to Him. The procession halts, the coffin is laid on the steps at His Feet. He looks with compassion, and His lips once more softly

pronounce "Maiden, arise!" and the maiden arises. . .

There are cries, sobs, confusion among the people, and at that moment the cardinal himself, the Grand Inquisitor, passes by the cathedral. . . . He sees everything; he sees them set the coffin down at His feet, sees the child rise up, and his face darkens. He knits his thick grey brows and his eyes gleam with sinister fire. He holds out his finger and bids the guards take Him. And such is his power, so completely are the people cowed into submission and trembling obedience to him, that the crowd immediately makes way for the guards, and in the midst of death-like silence they lay hands on Him and lead Him away. The crowd instantly bows down to the earth, like one man, before the old inquisitor. He blesses the people in silence and passes on. The guards lead their prisoner to the close, gloomy vaulted prison in the ancient palace of the Holy Inquisition and shut him in it.

From such scenes as this—although this one never took place—a mighty surge of resistance and rebellion overtook the European world and spread to America, arming generation after generation of lovers of freedom with credos of denial and skepticism, and in the name of Nature they proclaimed affirmations of Materialism. Nature can do everything! they said—What need have we of either God or his Book? We have all the truth we need in our own hearts, the artists declared. *We are the creators!* Andre Malraux captured this spirit in *The Voices of Silence*:

I name that man an artist who *creates* forms, be he an ambassador like Rubens, an image-maker like Gislebert of Autun, an *ignotus* like the Masters of Chartres, an illuminator like Limbourg, a king's friend like Velazquez, a *rentier* like Cézanne, a man possessed like Van Gogh or a vagabond like Gauguin. . . . Every great style of the past impresses us as being a special interpretation of the world, but this collective conquest is obviously a sum total of the individual conquests that have gone to its making. . . . Once we realize how all-important is the significance of style, we understand why every artist of genius—whether like Gauguin and Cézanne he makes himself a recluse, or like Van Gogh a missionary, or like young Tintoretto exhibits his canvasses in a booth on the Rialto—becomes a transformer of the meaning of the world, which he masters by reducing it to forms he has selected or invented, just as the philosopher

reduces it to concepts and the physicist to laws. And he attains this mastery not through his visual experience of the world itself, but by a victory over one of the forms of an immediate predecessor that he has taken over and transmitted in the crucible of genius. . . .

It is as a creative act that the great work appeals to us, and a great artist is not autonomous because he is original, but *vice versa*; hence his august solitude. . . . Each of the masterpieces is a purification of the world, but their common message is that of their existence, and the victory of each individual artist over his servitude, spreading like ripples on the sea of time, implements art's eternal victory over the human situation.

All art is a revolt against man's fate.

Another note is sounded by Rilke, who wrote in *Worpswede* (1903) of those lonely spirits who see their task "to be the understanding of Nature, so that they may take their place somewhere in her great design."

And the whole of humanity comes nearer to Nature in these isolated and lonely ones. It is not the least and is, perhaps, the peculiar value of art, that it is the medium in which man and landscape, form world, meet and find one another. In actuality they live beside one another, scarcely knowing aught of one another, and in the picture, the piece of architecture, the symphony, in a word, in art, they seem to come together in a higher, prophetic truth, to rely upon one another, and it is as if, by completing one another, they become that perfect unity, which is the very essence of a work of art.

From this point of view the theme and purpose of all art would seem to lie in the reconciliation of the Individual and the All, and the moment of exaltation, the artistically important Moment, would seem to be that in which the two scales of the balance counterpoise one another. And, indeed, it would be very tempting to show this relationship in various works of art; to show how a symphony mingles the voices of a stormy day with the tumult in our blood, how a building owes its character half to us and half to the forest.

The contrast grows, although, at the same time, there are resonances which unite East and West. The West, it seems plain, thinks of art as a means of finding unity *within* the world, as the climactic achievement of those who, through their

straining efforts, as Rilke said, will bring the whole of humanity "nearer to Nature." The East, secure in its transcendental tradition, declares true unity to be *beyond* the world, above the illusions of form. The service of art is to bring us to the threshold of the world of Non-Form, with all its splendors of formal representation only symbols of what lies beyond. The Buddhist artist cares nothing for his personal self-expression. To give the great tradition fitting embodiment is his self-effacing role. He does not seek to create, but to transmit.

But what, one wonders, of the first Buddhist artists of many centuries ago, those who established the now conventional forms, afterward so carefully and conscientiously repeated, by their successors? Did these originators combine the fire of the West with the faithfulness of the East? And is this the sort of synthesis that may some day again be achieved, after the West has evolved a transcendental metaphysics worthy of the same devotion? Western culture is not without prophetic intimations of the goal of self-effacing labors for the artist. Both Valéry and T. S. Eliot wrote contemptuously of the coarse shell of personality, and how the artist must get beyond it in order to be free.

And what, in the East, of the excesses of symbolism, pious or otherwise? On this question a lame at Likhir spoke with balance and sophistication:

We are quite ready to admit that superstition—again I use it in its precise sense of something left over, a symbol which has continued in use after its original meaning has been forgotten—is to be found among us. The best cure for that, is not misapplied invective against idolatry, but an exposition of the meaning of the symbol, so that men may again use it intelligently. When that meaning cannot be recovered, certainly let the outworn practice be discontinued. But may I also suggest that deification of race, or the nation, now so prevalent in many Western countries, is a serious and destructive form of idolatry? To read eternal qualities into things so utterly temporal is a symptom of low intellectuality. Idols can be made of Work and Service too, when

they are taken out of their place in the hierarchy and exalted above thought. This results in a restless and ultimately self-destroying world—cold comfort for humanity. I can improve on your original test of idolatry: I would define it as an upsetting of the natural hierarchy, to the over-valuing of what is lower and the underrating of what is higher. Whoever holds to this principle, is in no danger of misusing myths or of sacrificing to false gods, from the State or his own Ego, downwards.

It is as though the East now waits for the West to recover from its technological and egotistical manias and begin to turn its maturing energies and inventive spirit to discoveries and constructions that will violate neither the being of nature nor the spirit of man. When this occurs, the ancient wisdom religions of the East may be reborn in a West redeemed by individual self-understanding, having learned that the one cannot be accomplished without the other.

In the East, today, thoughtful visitors seem to encounter mainly preservers, not the creative spirit which brought its incomparable art into being. Yet preservation is not a negligible service to the world. Laurence Binyon, in his exquisite study of Eastern art, *The Flight of the Dragon*, tells how it has been done:

In China and Japan everything was systematized to an extraordinary extent. There was a way for doing everything, or rather sixteen, or thirty-six, or some other consecrated number of ways, each distinct and defined and each with a name. . . . For the landscape painter there are sixteen ways of drawing the wrinkles or curvatures of mountains, corresponding to different types of geological formation, and each way has its own name. Some wrinkles are like hemp fibres, others like the veins of a lotus, others again like the impressions of raindrops, or like scattered brushwood, or like alum crystals. Some are as if cut with a large axe, others as if cut with a small axe.

Binyon also says:

The finest of the Buddhist paintings have in an extraordinary degree the faculty of drawing the spectator out of himself and his own preoccupations into their own ideal atmosphere. In so much of the nominally religious painting of Europe the sacred personages are intent upon impressing the spectator;

they beckon and point, open their arms, smile, persuade; but I fear that too often we are only provoked to resistance or reduced to indifference.

Everybody must have noticed how, in ordinary life, the sight of any one absorbed in work or contemplation, self-forgetful and lost to consciousness of his surroundings, exercises a compelling charm. Perhaps it is that we feel the suggestion of something greater than the individual possessing him, or it is a hint of the great coordination of life in which each one of us plays his part.

How might such things be "taught"? The question can hardly be taken seriously. While all human beings have the capacity to give form to the things of the world, not all have the hunger to use this capacity, which as yet awakens in but few. To encourage this awakening may be thought of as an art of teaching, but far more fundamentally it is the gift of the surrounding culture. Schools are social and cultural expressions which seldom rise above the level of their times, and the few that do survive only if they have a nourishment that comes from some rare individual—such as, say, an A. S. Neill—and are modest enough to absorb and reflect his quality. The inspiration which leads to great art is essentially paradoxical. It makes use of the distinct individuality of the artist, then goes beyond it. Preoccupation with "self"-expression may prove a barrier.

REVIEW

A FEW ENCOURAGEMENTS

THIS department has few more depressing tasks than the reading of what are called "exchanges"—the papers we get without charge, in exchange for MANAS. But then, we get our greatest encouragement, too, from reading these examples of serious journalism in this country (and England). The depression comes in two ways. First, there are the countless bad things happening, so effectively reported in papers like the *Nation* and the *Progressive*. But the really depressing element in a great many stories is the apparent assumption that correction of the bad things is a natural function of government, suggesting that people must get together and make the government do what it ought to do.

For example, an article in the February *Progressive* relates that the Food and Drug Administration has announced that the food additive, nitrite, is now known to cause cancer. But the FDA is not rushing to ban nitrites from use as a meat preservative. After publication of the findings of a researcher at MIT—that nitrites cause lymphatic cancer in rats—the FDA declared that the experiments would have to be reviewed again and again. "Why," the *Progressive* writer, Larry Light, asks, "all this mincing caution?"

Neither the public nor Congress, it seems, is ready for such Spartan measures:

The answer is that the FDA is still smarting from the spanking it received in 1977, when it attempted to knock the low-calorie artificial sweetener, saccharin, off the market after it was identified as a carcinogen. The outcry that arose from a nation of dieters hooked on their Tab was deafening. Congress, hip-deep in a flood of angry constituent mail, voted to delay a saccharin prohibition for eighteen months.

While public protest on the nitrite issue has been muted—most people don't know what nitrite is anyway—the once-burned-twice-shy FDA was wary of a new controversy. After all, once consumers realized that their bacon, hot dogs, and bologna might look and taste odd once the additive was removed,

they might take to the ramparts as they did for Sugar-Free Diet Pepsi.

Substitutes are being developed for nitrite as a preservative, but this is apparently no solution:

The industry's real reason for clinging to nitrite is its effect on color and taste. The industry fears a sales drop. When the department of Agriculture approved nitrite for meat in 1925, it was as a red coloring agent, not a preservative.

The article concludes:

Still, the FDA has the power to pull nitrite from the market today under the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1907 and several other laws mandating that the nation's food supply remain pure. But given a gun-shy FDA and an aggressive unchallenged meat industry, chances are we will continue to have nitrite on our dinner tables for some time to come.

Stories like this will go on and on. They are shocking, and in the past we have read hundreds of stories like this one, all of them shocking. Back in 1958 MANAS reviewed a *Nation* article by David Cort in which he said:

. . . the 1951-52 Congressional investigation fully brought out that the current infatuation with chemicals often approaches homicidal insanity. Apart from pesticides, a very few examples, out of many, would include: That the flour industry for thirty years used nitrogen bichloride, called Agene, which causes hysteria in dogs. That the poison, parphenetyl, was used for fifty years as a sweetening agent. That lithium chloride killed some people before it was removed from the market. . . . That women were permanently blinded by an eyelash preparation using pyrogalllic acid. And so on. And on.

Books may make an even stronger impact on readers—see, for example, Leonard Wickenden's *Our Daily Poison* (Devin-Adair), and then read James Turner's *The Chemical Feast* (a Nader report published by Grossman) for a realistic estimate of what can be expected of agencies such as the FDA, with even the best of staffing. The watchdog theory of control doesn't work—no more than the adversary method of establishing justice.

We need reports such as this one in the *Progressive*, but even more we need the kind of thinking and information provided by journals like the *New Ecologist* (published in England). An article in the Nov.-Dec. 1978 issue, "The National Cancer Institute and the Fifty-Year Cover-up," begins with a quotation from Dr. William Howard Hay, who said in 1927:

Think back over the years of cancer research, of the millions spent, the time consumed, the pains expended . . . and where are we today? Isn't it time to take stock of our basic concept to see if there isn't something radically wrong to account for the years of utter and complete failure to date? . . . Cancer has been consistently on the increase. . . . Is it possible that the cause of cancer is our departure from natural foods?

A concluding passage from this article:

Evidence is now accumulating which suggests that total avoidance of all medical therapy prolongs the patient's life. In 1975, researchers at Oxford University did a study of no treatment versus single-agent chemotherapy versus multiple chemotherapy; in an article published in *Lancet* they reported their conclusion that *no treatment* proved a significantly better policy for patients' survival and for quality of remaining life.

Until a century ago physicians the world over were linking diet to disease, often treating patients with their nutritional needs and metabolic wholeness in mind. More recently, however, a widespread misunderstanding has become dominant, as our modern, "scientific" technocracy began to teach that diet is not worth serious consideration in the genesis or treatment of disease. At present anyone who questions that view is liable to be branded a "quack" or worse and is punished by professional ostracism or even criminal prosecution.

A recent government pamphlet *Cancer* insists "useless treatments by diet . . . offered by quacks, seriously endanger the lives of cancer patients." In the light of the uselessness of medical therapy this quote might be amended to read ". . . treatment by diets seriously endangers the vested interests of the NCI (National Cancer Institute) and our medical technocracy."

What is the use of going to "government" for help in situations of this sort? An official can only

ask some "authority" what to do, and we know what any conventional authority is likely to say! The folly of expecting any pioneering reform from government may be one of the most important lessons for people to learn at the present time. For example, the lead story in the *Texas Observer* (by Ray Reece) for Jan. 19 begins:

Independent solar entrepreneurs in Texas, like their counterparts elsewhere, have been leaders in the development of low-cost, high-efficiency solar energy devices, yet their survival is in doubt, for reasons that have precious little to do with their abilities or efficiencies and a great deal to do with the deliberate decisions of government policymakers. Since 1973 the independents have been fighting an uphill battle against a federal solar development program favoring large aerospace and energy corporations, utilities, and allied universities as the prime recipients of solar research and development contracts.

This tilt toward big business has come at the expense not only of the small entrepreneur, but also of the consumer.

The *Texas Observer* writer spells all this out in seven long pages.

From *Acorn* for December-January, 1978-79, by Walter Goldschmidt:

American society was built on the assumption that the populations would consist largely of independent entrepreneurs, artisans, self-employed professionals and, above all, independent farmers. Industrialization has effectively eroded this concept for urban populations. The independent family farmer has been an important leaven, preserving the quintessential independence of spirit that has characterized American culture. The study of Anin and Dinuba [two California towns, compared in Walter Goldschmidt's 1947 book, *As Ye Sow*] has shown what effect corporate and largescale control can have on rural community life. . .

Is this an inevitable development? Is it possible that there is no stemming the tide of evolution toward corporate control of agriculture? There is no real evidence that this is the case. Government policies with respect to tax laws, agricultural subsidies and farm labor have been potent forces affecting the growth of large-scale and corporate farming. This growth cannot therefore be said to be natural, it is the result of force feeding, of the injection of fiscal hormones, if you will. If the growth of corporate

farming can be force-fed, so too can the time-honored tradition of American life.

How, one wonders, do you "force-feed" the tradition of independence and self-reliance? Its best nourishment may be simply for government to get out of the way, while making access to the land possible for all.

Green Revolution for last December is entirely devoted to "What To Do About Inflation." The contents of these more than thirty pages seem summed up in a box headed: THE MIRACLE CAN HAPPEN IF—followed by a few conditions, the first of which is: If—"Consumers recognize that the government cannot make the necessary changes." The rest of the advice seems equally sound.

Only a comparatively few people are reached by these excellent publications. But if those few begin to do what is in their power, what they achieve, on even a small scale, is likely to be impressive.

COMMENTARY

POLITICAL AND ACQUISITIVE SOCIETY

THE idea that home education for children is "elitist" (see page 8) grows out of the belief that in a democratic society the public schools are good enough and citizens ought not to seek something more "exclusive" for their children. But what if the schools are becoming bad for all children? If the average or typical diet of American children results in sugar addiction and malnutrition, should individual parents make no efforts to improve what their children eat? Is good health elitist, too?

Dislike of individual pursuit of excellence seems rooted in a politicalized conception of human life. It suggests that the only values to which people should aspire are those obtained by political action. If a good education for the young can't be obtained by changing governmental policy, then we should content ourselves with what we have—anti-human though on occasion it may be.

This is Statism with a vengeance. It proposes that ethical obligation obtains its norms from political theory and implies that a good is not a good unless provided or sanctioned by the State.

An interesting footnote to the controversy over the treaty with Panama about the operation and ultimate ownership of the Canal is provided by the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* for May 13. It seems that in 1977 the water in Lake Gatun (vital to canal operations) dropped so low that major shippers were obliged to send their cargo around the Horn—a detour of 10,000 miles! The *Guardian* writer, Margot Hornblower, says:

The incident shocked canal operators, but not the scientists who have been studying its watershed. Over the last 25 years, 35 per cent of the dense tropical forests above the canal have been burned for farms and pastures. Without forests to soak up rain and hold the soil together, the balance of nature is giving way to floods, droughts, and massive erosion. A recent State Department report concludes: "By the time the United States transfers the canal to Panama,

the canal may have become a worthless ditch, a colossal monument to resource mismanagement."

The rest of the article is devoted to the worldwide effects of loss of rainforests—half of which have disappeared since 1950. This is, scientists say, "an unprecedented ecological disaster with economic repercussions as serious as the oil crisis." Rainforest land is no good for agriculture, but this was ignored: "Whether it is Guatemala, where 40 per cent of agricultural land has been destroyed by erosion, or India, where massive floods have occurred, or the Philippines, where timber products are now imported instead of exported—the pattern is similar around the world." Governments allow the forests to be cut down, and a few years later the soil is exhausted. The sun bakes the land to a hard crust. The forest cover is gone. What, eventually, will the third of the world's population which depends upon firewood for cooking and heating do to stay alive? It is estimated (by the World Bank) that 50 million acres of trees must be planted in the next 25 years to meet "basic firewood needs."

CHILDREN

. . . and Ourselves

BIRTH OF A MOVEMENT

THE argument about compulsory attendance at public schools continues. In *Mother Jones* for April, Michael Harris writes about deschooling—or unschooling, as John Holt calls it—as a movement now getting under way. He asks: "Is Compulsory Education an Idea Whose Time Has Gone?" Reporting on the problems of several parents who have taken their children out of school and begun to teach them at home—some successfully—he quotes one parent who finally went to court and won (see "Children" for Feb. 14):

According to Peter Perchemlides, the family's dispute with the Amhurst [Mass.] schools centered on "the hidden curriculum, the dominant cultural ideology that comes across. The schools monopolize learning and are afraid of other ideas and values. Most people won't accept an alternative," he observes, "until it is accepted by the high priests of the profession."

The Amhurst school superintendent maintained that the Perchemlides' plan for home education of their youngest son was not "equal" to the school curriculum, although, at the trial, Perchemlides presented affidavits from two professors of education stating that the family's program was better than the local school's. The court vindicated the parents:

During the waning days of 1978, the superior court ruled in Sue and Peter's favor, saying that the interests of the state do not go so far as to give it a monopoly on education.

"Parents have rights further than those explicit in the Constitution," the court decision said, "among them, the right of parents to educate their children in the manner they choose."

Another case reported in *Mother Jones* is of interest:

Around the same time, in the tiny northern Iowa corn and cow town of Decora, Robert and Linda Sessions won a more technical legal victory, one which may nevertheless provide great relief to other deschoolers in similar situations. Like many other states, Iowa allows alternative education where the educational programs are "equivalent" to those

provided by the public schools. The Sessions family devised a home-study plan for their child, but the local school board denied the couple's request to tutor the youngster at home.

When the State Board of Education upheld the local board's decision, Linda and Robert took the matter to court. The local court ruled against the family, but an appeals court later ruled in their favor. In its decision, the court set an important precedent for future freedom-of-education suits by invoking a time-honored principle of criminal trials: removing the "burden of proof" from the defendant. In the matter of equivalency of home-education plans, the court said, the burden of proof is not on home educators to show that their instruction programs are equivalent to those of the public schools. Rather, the burden of proof is on the state to demonstrate that the programs are not adequate.

For evidence that something like an "unschooling movement" is shaping up, there is the report by John Holt of the wide interest shown in a TV program in which he explained why he is opposing compulsory public education. In No. 8 of his newsletter, *Growing Without Schooling*, he begins:

In GWS#7 I said that we had received 2700 letters as a result of the TV show with Phil Donahue, and might get 1000 more. The total is now about 7500, and though the flood has slowed down a good deal, it has not stopped.

Of these letters, about half expressed some kind of sympathy and support, from mild to ecstatic. Perhaps 1000 or so said they definitely wanted to subscribe to GWS. (Had I guessed how much mail there would be, I would have tried to give the price on the air! [The price for six issues is \$10—write GWS, 308 Boylston St., Boston, Mass. 02116.] Another 1000 seemed strongly interested. . . .

Only eight letters were critical and/or hostile, and none of them were what you could call hate mail. Of the eight, four or five did not so much defend the schools as criticize me for not trying to make them better.

Hundreds of the supporting letters (and about four of the critical) were from teachers or ex-teachers. Some of the latter had retired, many had quit in despair and disgust, or been fired. Many of those who are still teaching said things like "I work in the schools, and I know what they're like, and I don't want that for my child."

Only one letter strongly defended the schools.

Why are so many people upset about the schools? In the first place, they are too big, obliging

administrators to "process" too many children. Even well-intentioned administrators are unable to change the inevitable realities of "mass" education. It's something like having a small business grow into a large one. There comes a time when you have to put in a time-clock. This weakens the quality of human relations. You have to make more rules. A point is reached where the elements of human nature can be recognized only in statistical terms. Then people are treated like numbers. When face-to-face relationships are no longer possible, statistics and "averages" take over in decision-making.

It's much worse when this happens to schools. Good teachers may make heroic efforts against the depersonalizing effect of numbers, but individuals can only do so much. That's why they get disgusted. The wonder is that a few good things do happen, sometimes, even in big schools. But the dimensions are against such happy results. Bigness, in order to survive, must resort to system. A system treats everyone in the same way, which is a very bad policy in any kind of teaching. The survival requirements of the system become more important than anything else.

Basically, John Holt is inviting parents to take back some of the responsibilities they have delegated to the State. He is arguing that those ready to take on the education of their children—and these are parents who may have widely differing reasons for wanting to do so—should not be prevented by any kind of law. *Growing Without Schooling* is filled with the adventures and achievements of people who are struggling for the right to teach their own children.

This is a movement in key with the best common sense of the times. It is obvious that the tyrannical power of the nation-state has grown up because so many people have first allowed and then expected government to take care of problems which are not really the affair of government and which government is poor at for a number of reasons. Sound judgment at the time of the founding of the country put religion out of the reach of government. Eventually we may see the sense of putting education out of the reach of government. Gandhi believed that the State should have no authority over

education. Some parents now feel this way, and these are the ones ready for what John Holt has to say. It goes without saying that the public schools would get better if attending them was completely voluntary.

Some of Holt's critics claim that home education is "elitist" since it can be carried out only by educated parents with leisure time. This may be true—although there are notable exceptions—but is there really anything wrong with people having both education and leisure showing how much better home education can be? After all, the schools are there for those who want and need them, and it seems obvious that transition to a decentralized, self-reliant society must be gradual because of the innumerable psychological as well as other changes which are involved.

But recognition of the individuality of children is *not* elitist. No natural reality of life is elitist, unless nature should be condemned as elitist. If the fact that social or moral advance always represents a break with majority practice requires that the pioneers be labeled elitist, so be it. But it seems futile to attempt to preserve a system bad for everybody on equalitarian grounds. Refusing to settle for mediocrity is not snobbish, nor is it a crime. And there is no such thing as a spontaneous mass movement away from mediocrity. Individuals must lead.

More from *Mother Jones*:

"There is great irony here," Holt observes. "On a typical day in Boston, for example, about 30 per cent of the 65,000 youngsters registered in the public schools are missing. Most of them are poor, they stay away because they hate school and they can see that even if they haven't got much else to do with their time, school is wasting it. The schools do nothing to get them back. The irony is that if you are this kind of kid you can skip school all years long, and nobody will pay any attention. But if you try to *take* your children out of the schools, the schools are likely to begin shouting about courts and jails.

Holt is in the East. According to *Mother Jones*, a Western deschooler, Ed Nagel, can be reached at the National Association for the Legal Support of Alternative Schools, P.O. Box 2893, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501.

FRONTIERS

A Tool for Finding Tools

VALENTINA BORRE MANS, founder of CIDOC in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in 1964, has prepared for publication by R. R. Bowker a *Reference Guide to Convivial Tools*. A draft of this unusual bibliography is now being circulated for prepublication criticism and suggestion. What are convivial tools? They are tools which free individuals instead of converting them into machine-tenders. They are tools which do not require elaborate organization for their effective use. A convivial tool may be a language school, or it may be a hydraulic ram. The idea has this explanation by Ivan Illich, long an associate of Valentina Borremans: "Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his vision. Industrial tools deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others. Most tools today cannot be used in a convivial fashion."

Anyone who has searched even large libraries for books and articles written with this focus will recognize the need for such a bibliography. In his preface to Borremans' *Guide* Illich describes his quest for a two-volume annotated bibliography on windmills. Neither the reference section of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, the MIT System in Cambridge, nor the library of ERDA had it. Why? The interest in such matters began to be intense only in the 1970s; moreover, the initial studies on intermediate technology and alternative sources of energy were often published by amateurs and distributed for love. But now the literature exists and is growing by leaps. Publication of this *Guide* by Bowker (major source of reference materials) should put the items listed on the map for all libraries. It describes 858 volumes and articles that, in turn, list many more works on convivial alternatives to conventional modes of production. Convivial production is usually production for

use, not for sale, although there are common-sense exceptions.

Ivan Illich gives informing background in his preface:

How Valentina Borremans came to prepare this guide is probably best understood by reviewing her career. In 1961 she came from France to Mexico to direct a small research library on Social Change in Latin America. Starting with a few filing cabinets she built up four major research collections that are now a permanent part of the Colegio de Mexico. By 1964 Borremans and a group of her collaborators incorporated this library as Centro Intercultural de Documentacion, CIDOC, in Cuernavaca. During the next 12 years about 18,000 people came to read and study at the Center which Borremans directed. More than 300 titles were published by CIDOC. CIDOC was meant to be the inverse of a university: a library-centered place for advanced learning where courses grew out of self-organized reading, and all readers were equally empowered to organize their own seminars. This did work for almost a decade, but then success undermined the Center's purpose. Increasingly university teachers from foreign countries came to organize their own credit courses. Rather than allow CIDOC to become one more University, in 1976 Borremans closed the Center that she had founded and directed.

The *Guide*, Illich says, is intended to make it possible for librarians to provide access to materials on "possible alternatives to a society dominated by the industrial mode of production."

What sort of books are listed? Well, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is one, but the entries are mostly recent. For example, Michael Allaby's *Home Farm: Complete Food Self-Sufficiency* is described by quotation from an *Ecologist* review which says:

Covers the whole range of modern farming from giant agri-business enterprises to backyard small holdings and from greenhouses to roof gardens. An objective and detailed examination of the practices and malpractices of recent years, always with due consideration given to the pressures which shaped these events. . . . Includes a synopsis of farming activities in different regions of Britain and takes a look at future trends. . . . Well illustrated and contains a useful list of organizations, services and

literature. A good book to consult for those considering the possibilities of a rural way of life, for those wanting more information about the areas of self-sufficiency available to the urban dweller, or for those just wanting to be better informed about food production and farming.

Under Bicycles, along with five or six other titles, one finds Judith Glading's *Alternative Transportation Modes: Bikeway Planning and Design*, which covers every aspect of this subject. Then there is a study by Skip Laitner of *The Impact of Solar and Conservation Technologies upon Labor Demand*, which suggests that "solar technologies provide roughly 2.5 times more jobs per unit of energy than will nuclear." Lappé and Collins' *Food First* is of course included, and dozens of the various works reviewed in *Rain*. Two men, John and Gerry Archer, tell how they built an adobe dwelling (from scratch, knowing nothing of construction) in *Dirt Cheap*, published in Australia. The U.S. HEW has issued a translation of the *Barefoot Doctor's Manual* used throughout China. This book has 960 pages on body care, giving Western medical approaches as well as methods like acupuncture. There are 410 pages on Chinese herbs.

In a note on *Rainbook* Valentina Borremans says that this volume (put together by the editors of *Rain*), along with Peter Harper's "Directory" in *Radical Technology*, served as model for planning her *Guide*. In her Introduction she explains that she prepared the guide to help in three ways. First, requests from librarians around the world have made clear the need for reference collections on radical technology, and this book will enable them to get started. Then, libraries in poor countries can use the *Guide* for gathering materials sorely needed by their readers. (A "radical technologist" is concerned with the design and selection of tools that increase the ability of individuals to generate use-values, and which are in harmony with the environment.) Finally—

There is a third kind of user whom I have in mind: the individual researcher who has no access to any significant library at all. He might be a journalist in the Northeast of Brazil who wants to argue his case

against a new: power station, or the union member in Italy seeking a list of others who have organized worker control over jobs in a plastics plant. For the sake of these readers, I have made many exceptions to my general rule to include second-level reference tools guides to literature, to organized activities and to sources of documentation—and some other materials significant enough to retain their value as historical documents even though they have been replaced by more comprehensive new books.

Turning the pages of the *Guide* is something of an adventure.