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THE STUDY OF ART

[This article by Robert Jay Wolff is based on a paper read before the National Association of Independent Schools, in March, 1967, and upon some other, earlier published material. The full title is "The Revolt of the Senses and the Study of Art."]

FOR the past many decades the American educational establishment, taken as a whole, has been invaded by innovations of all sorts, representing many diverse and often conflicting concepts, demanding different scholastic climates and conditions, emphasizing different aspects of human development and seeking a variety of educational goals. However, despite all this diversity, there has been until recently an almost unanimous consensus at all levels—with the possible exception of the kindergarten area—that the complex sensory apparatus that a student brings to school along with his mind is adequately nourished and developed in the gymnasium and playing fields. This consensus assumed that educational responsibility for the development of the sensory faculties was of no concern to anyone outside the department of physical education. But the education of sensory intelligence, as we are finding out, is not simply a matter of physical health and bodily coordination in intelligent and competitive patterns. Sensory intelligence demands tangible, self-identifying achievement in the exercise of æsthetically perceptive skills—skills which if neglected leave a self-enclosed human condition with only one way out through the circuitous path of sheer mental activity.

The idea that a program of compulsory physical exercise can effectively offset the self-annihilating effects of a day devoted to unrelieved academic abstractions for some reason is proving less effective than it was supposed to be. There is a growing army of young people who are asserting that a few turns around the track and a cold shower are not enough. An unfortunate few have experimented with drugs to restore and stimulate their deadened sensibilities. The vast majority who feel the same need are asking if not demanding vast educational reform. They seem to be seeking a new activist role in their own education. They seem to be asking to be allowed the freedom of self-generated thought and action.

One has only to attend the art galleries, or read the books, or listen to the music, or attend the plays and happenings of young artists and writers, or observe the unrest and agitation on college campuses to realize that some kind of revolt is taking place. Certainly it could hardly be called an intellectual revolt. Stanley Kauffmann has described it as "compassionate nihilism" perpetrated by "ideological dropouts." True enough. But can we stop there and simply say, "Back you go to academic sanity and discipline, and let's have no more nonsense." No doubt the old scholastic strong arm will still work when energetically applied. The only trouble here is that this revolt seems to go sizzling on no matter how often it is disciplined and quelled. In fact, it seems to increase in intensity the more that cold reasoning is applied to it. Moreover the bitterness and contempt that typify the attitude of the rebel toward authority's corrective attempts reflect his disgust with the failure to deal with him as a whole person whose sensibilities as well as whose intellect stand in dire need of educational nourishment. If the epithet "ideological dropout" can be flung at him from our side of the fence, I would find it understandable if he flings back at us an indictment of sensory idiocy.

When I speak of the revolt of the senses I do not mean a revolt against the physical cruelties and sufferings of our times but rather against a famine of the senses resulting from the domination of an over-indulgent mechanistic environment and of an almost hypnotic, thought-controlling educational process. The far-out fringe of the

revolt breaks loose from conventional routine, which it considers a respectable form of self-annihilation, and reaches for self-discovery in the closed-off world of the hipster. The young avant-garde artists of the revolt put on happenings that shock and jolt and screech. In music, the theater and the arts it would seem that the Dada movement of the 1920s after all these years has returned to infuriate, bedevil and shock the deadened sensibilities of another era of cruel and complacent objectivity. But this time there is a difference. Dada was meant to be a grim, contemptuous joke on society. Our new young people are not laughing. They are serious and purposeful and, it would seem, even hopeful. Certainly this brash new art, if you can call it that, is a brave and liberating effort. No doubt, sooner or later it will join Dada on the shelf of celebrated historical oddities. But it does not seem to care about museum immortality. It does not even claim to be art. It thinks of itself as something more urgent.

Whatever one may think of these new developments, they raise a challenging question that cannot be evaded: Can art as we have known it, re-examined, re-defined and re-projected as a compelling educational discipline, provide the self-inspired, self-led, self-believing creative action that our scholastic tradition has seldom tolerated?

Of course, this is not the first time this question has been raised. The Bauhaus at Weimar and at Dessau, and finally in Chicago under Moholy-Nagy in 1937, was perhaps the first major manifestation of education dedicated to the development of human wholeness. I consider my years of collaboration with Moholy-Nagy and Gyorgy Kepes at the School of Design in Chicago, later known as the Institute of Design, one of the most fruitful and informative periods of my life. Moholy brought with him to Chicago certain principles set down by Walter Gropius at the Bauhaus, calling for the simultaneous development and education of the intellectual and sensory faculties, and the search for a balanced and enriching interaction between both. Moholy, who today is sometimes thought of as one of the tyrants of disciplined formalism, insisted upon shaking up the sensibilities of the first-year students in Basic Design by requiring tasks of them that would raise eyebrows even in today's most liberal educational circles. One of the problems was to build an odor-detection machine. Of course the assumption here was not that a sharpened sense of smell had its uses in design. Behind the project was the thought that sensory intelligence involves more than one faculty, that it thrives on the health and interaction of all the senses. And besides it was a demanding and fascinating creative task to invent and build an odor-identification machine that would work. If you don't believe it, try to some time.

In its first years the school occupied a huge, high-walled space that at one time had been the baking headquarters of a bankrupt chain of bakery stores. We were able to partition off the various subject-matter areas but only achieved visual separations, the ceiling being too high to provide auditory privacy. This situation did not stop Moholy from giving a seminar on modern poetry where he played recordings of his friend Kurt Schwitters screeching and moaning the hair-raising gibberish of Dada poetry. All this while on the other side of the wall students with ruling pens and straight edges were struggling with the meticulous and rational language of architecture.

In addition to the auditory stimulus provided by Kurt Schwitters, Moholy brought in John Cage, who was then a young and unknown composer of musical sounds that made the then outrageous Bela Bartok sound like Brahms. Once a week Cage collected the thirty-three young people who made up the entire student body and organized them into one of the strangest and, in a way, one of the most exciting orchestras I have ever listened to. Bottles and plates and pots and pans were used. Pieces of scrap metal giving off an endless variety of pitch and tone were carefully selected to merge with the soprano of glassware

and the baritone of the iron skillet. The sound when Cage turned on the full orchestra could be heard up and down Ontario Street in the spring when the windows were open. And yet this was not just a noise-making free-for-all. The students responded to Cage's inspired teaching (and it was teaching in the best sense of the word) with the excitement that comes with the discovery of a new sensory dimension. There was no need in this old bakery for a drug to heighten and stimulate sense perception. The curriculum provided for that.

Do not think that I am proposing these educational adventures of another day as a blueprint for present-day practice. I have recalled them only to underline the proposition that the arts as a creative discipline have a serious if not crucial job to do at all levels of learning today. I even like to think that perhaps the young arts of the happening, of environmental sculpture, of activities involving the self-aware participation of all, and the elimination of the passive audience, might carry on with the kind of thing that was abandoned in Chicago over twenty-five years ago.

Of course, I am not unaware that activities that are associated with the visual and performing arts in one form or another have gradually found a place today on the campuses of most colleges and secondary schools. Some schools like Andover have pioneered in making the practice and study of art a major school activity. And although my firsthand knowledge is slight, I know from the few schools I have visited and from widely published reports from all over the country that an art boom is on. And I repeat, this is a most cheering development. Still I think the question must be raised as to what specifically the boom is all about. I have the impression in some instances that the sponsors of certain new and expensive art activities are rather Victorian in their enthusiasm and outlook, insofar as they think of the study of art as pure cultural ornamentation, reminiscent of the days when water-color painting was a kind of necessary social amenity in the lives of well-born young ladies. Moreover, there seems to be a widespread tendency to think of an art program in broad simplistic terms. Art, one asks, what is it after all? It is picture-making in watercolor and oils. It is portrait-modeling or figure-carving in stone or wood. It is printing from wood-cuts or even perhaps etching or lithography. Provide studios and equipment and a couple of qualified young M.F.A.s and there you have it. I do not say that these activities do not have their eventual place in the over-all pattern of art studies. But I think we have to question when and where they make educational sense.

I realize that there are many questions to be asked and answered, objectives to be defined, special conditions to be identified and methods and means to be examined before one can say what should be done or should not be done. The counterpart at the other pole of art as an identifying ornament of the cultivated classes is the blind, dogmatic view that there is an ideal kind of workshop program, integrated from A to Z, universally applicable and therapeutically if not vocationally effective wherever applied and under all circumstances. Somewhere in between is the happy-go-lucky, know-nothing approach which offers nothing more than a kind of policed puttering around.

I am not going to presume to tell you what I think ought to be done. I am aware that as far as curricular planning goes this is a highly controversial subject and solutions can only be arrived at empirically, in terms of local scholastic objectives and in terms acceptable to each special academic climate. Still, in all cases we are dealing with common, human sensory and perceptive faculties that demand nourishment, exercise and development without exception.

There is nothing new or revolutionary in suggesting that a basic activity, involving a planned program of inventive visual and manual building, shaping, structuring and image-making, relevantly combined with lively and selective references to the art, architecture and design of the past and present, should be an integral and

necessary part of the curricular plan of every secondary school, large or small, rich or poor, classic or Baroque. Certainly I do not see how those programs that reach for the complex skills of painting and sculpture can circumvent this kind of preparation.

The difficulties that arise in setting up such a program of basic visual studies seem to center more in the matter of teaching than in learning. Obviously, trained artists are needed. But trained artists often have a curious limitation when they face up to a non-vocational educational task. The young Master of Fine Arts, to say nothing of the older professional, is very jealous of his professional identity and reluctant to surrender it to any situation. When he teaches, what is done must reflect his own expert professionalism. This failing, if I can call it that, results in a plethora of framed and pedestaled ineptitudes, and in the self-deflating frustration of all but a handful of naturally gifted students. The hope here is that any effort of this kind, even the most dismal, will somehow bring the victim to at least an understanding if not an appreciation of art. It is my impression that the reverse is true and that when an art teacher sets unprepared teenagers on this kind of collision course with sophisticated art forms he ends by implanting in most of them a lifelong conviction that art and the world of inventive doing is alien territory.

The issue boils down to this: art and the so-called educative process—where do they meet? Is the teaching of art an informative tunnel between those who know and those who do not? Between the expert and the innocent? What is it that the art teacher knows and the student does not know? And after that question is settled, who will ask what is it that the student knows and the teacher has forgotten?

As art teachers what are we teaching? I am a painter and a teacher. Do I teach people how to paint? What is "to paint"? I paint but I can't tell you what it is. I mix color and apply it to a surface. That is all I can say that is specific. To give existence to a dead surface is fulfilling beyond anything that I know. Can I lead others to this same experience? I am a teacher and this is expected of me. I begin by mixing colors and applying them to a given surface and then—and then what?

What is the force that brings into identical existence the self and the beyond-self? What is it that fuses the propulsion that makes the mark with the mark itself? It is easy to take a tool, a piece of chalk, a dab of paint and make a mark, even an exquisite mark. But to what end and out of what necessity is this taught? Is the mark made out of the need of the marker or in the service of the appraiser of the mark? If the goal is social service, then the study of art becomes a discipline in prescribed forms of conventional communication and the only satisfaction that a student can aspire to is the nodding of all the heads that would turn away at the sight of the unfamiliar, the unidentified. The criterion of achievement would be in the facility to do as others expect of you and to find a cow-like contentment in being able to retreat from the terrible vacuum within to the dubious security of gregarious achievement.

The tragic fallacy of this highly socialized educational goal is that it is the surest way to postpone, if not eradicate, the real purpose of any educative process, which is to induce independent integrity and equilibrium in the individual, and the courage to seek organic identity with things outside of himself.

The problem of the teacher is essentially the same as the painter's. It is not so much a matter of setting down creditable forms or of teaching people how to paint them. The first job is to forget about art and art forms and to bring the individual back to himself, back to his own eyes, his own sensibilities, his own insights, his own environment.

Teachers sometimes forget that students are growing as they learn and that the extent of the growing process cannot always be measured by

the success of the learning process. On the contrary, there are many times when the learning process is temporarily throttled by the accelerated development of the individual. In my own teaching experience I have found that signs of failure, frustration and discouragement have often proved to be a turning point and an omen of renewed creative vigor and achievement. The conventional educational procedure involves automatic failure at this point when, as a matter of fact, these difficulties could indicate progress and promise. I have often had occasion to advise students whose work suddenly seems to fall apart, to take heart, that in one important sense they may be farther along than many of the defter ones whose facility has not as yet gone through the fire of self-questioning and doubt. Painters know this phenomenon well. Educators sometimes seem to forget it.

Again the question—art and teaching, where do they meet? Does art derive only from art, and does education merely pick and distribute the full-grown fruits of professional achievement? Or, on the contrary, do both involve a continuing search for those particular and unpredictable tangibles that will answer the deep and immediate needs of a growing, self-questioning personality? Education by prescribed concept is so deeply rooted in our thinking that even our creative people—painters, craftsmen, composers—become frozen by it when confronted with a teaching task. Students are so inured to the system from early childhood on that only by long and convincing demonstration can they be persuaded that the practice of art by prescription is as misleading and unrewarding as existence by prescription would be and is. The art teacher is asked how, then, can he justify his position? What, if not transferable information, has he to give? There is an answer to this. There are memories to be recalled, a forgotten existence to be revived, old and unexpressed aspirations to be activated.

For example, *do you remember a summer day long ago when you were slowly following a narrow path through the tall weeds? Do you remember your thoughts as your feet touched the dry, scrubby earth? Do you remember the small piece of bark that lay under your foot as you stepped forward? Do you remember pressing down with all your strength? Do you recall the fervor with which you sensed that you would never lose that instant? Do you remember that you were eight years old? And do you remember that you dared not tell this nonsense to your elders?*

And do you remember snapping your fingers and wondering what happens to the sounds? One by one. Here now—now gone. But when is now? Now is gone before you can catch it. Snap faster. Snapsnapsnap. Bring them all together so now will last long enough to touch. Do you remember how troubled you were? And do you remember how the laughter of the grownups put a stop to this silliness, and how you were then rewarded for shaking hands properly with Uncle Henry?

And what about the study of art? Are there proper kinds of art that can be taught like handshaking? Or are insights and exertions involved here that require something more than lessons in the artistic proprieties? Is the act of combining points of reference in space into a greater single image merely one of the ready-made rituals of art history?

Or could it also be one answer to the snapping fingers of a child who questions the nature of space and time, and the wonder and terror of being alive and alone?

In the face of a world which stakes its salvation on the objective blueprint and the materialist prescription, perhaps here we have new hope of reviving, in those we chance to guide, thought that is whole-beinged, and achievement, great or small, based on this and this alone.

ROBERT JAY WOLFF

REVIEW
ANATOMY OF POLITICAL EVIL

EARLY in *The First Circle* (Bantam, $1.25), Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn constructs the scene of a midnight visit by Victor Abakumov, Minister of State Security, to Stalin's residence, to report and receive instruction. After an account of the paralyzing fear felt by the secret police chief as he waits to be conducted into the Leader's presence, and then some questions concerning recent arrests, Solzhenitsyn establishes what must have been the mood of all such meetings:

> As he sucked his pipe and looked at this red-cheeked, well-nourished, bold young fellow with the burning ears, Stalin was thinking what he always thought when he saw his eager, engratiating subordinates.
>
> His first thought always was: how far can this person be trusted? And his second: has not the moment come for this person to be liquidated?
>
> Stalin knew all about Abakumov's secret wealth. But he was in no hurry to punish him. Stalin liked the fact that Abakumov was that kind of person. Self-seeking people are easier to understand and easier to manage. Most of all, Stalin was wary of people committed to staying poor, like Bukharin. He did not understand their motives.
>
> But he could not trust even this understandable Abakumov. Mistrust was Iosif Djugashvili's determining trait. Distrust was his world view. . . .
>
> Cocking his head far to one side, he glared malevolently at his minister. "And what are you doing about security for Party executives?"
>
> With his open notebook, Abakumov sat erect in his chair, facing the Leader—he did not stand, knowing that Stalin appreciated immobility in those he was talking to—and with complete readiness he began to speak of things he had never intended to mention. An immediate response was essential in a meeting with Stalin; he interpreted any kind of hesitation as confirmation of evil thoughts.
>
> "Iosif Vissarionovich," began Abakumov in a voice trembling with injured feelings. "That's why we exist, our whole ministry, so that you, Iosif Vissarionovich, can work undisturbed, can think and guide our country."
>
> Stalin had said "security for Party executives," but Abakumov knew that he wanted an answer only about himself.
>
> "Every day I conduct checks, make arrests, investigate cases."

The interrogation of the head of the MGB goes on and on. Abakumov walks the tight rope with balances that have for him become second nature—never denying the threat of treasonable activity, but always declaring the increasing vigilance of his ministry.

> "That's a fault of mine, Iosif Vissarionovich," Abakumov added, growing bold now that his ears were cool again. "I just can't be complacent."
>
> Stalin lightly knocked his pipe on the ashtray. "And what about the mood of the young people?"
>
> Question followed question like knives, and all it took was one mistake. If you were to answer "Good," that would be political blindness. If you said "Bad," you did not believe in the future. Abakumov gestured expressively with his hands and said nothing.
>
> Stalin did not wait for a reply. He said with conviction, gripping his pipe, "We must pay more attention to the young people. We must be particularly intolerant toward the faults of the young people. . . . We must intensify our watch over the moods of the students! We must uproot not only individuals but entire groups! And we must take advantage of the full measure of punishment the law allows us—twenty-five years, not ten! Ten years—that's like school, not prison. You can give school-children ten. But anyone who has hair on his face—twenty-five! They're young, they'll survive."
>
> Abakumov wrote assiduously. . . .

When Abakumov pleads for the restoration of capital punishment, Stalin promises that his tireless prosecutors can have it back soon, as "a good educational measure." Then he asks his Minister of Security: "Aren't you afraid you'll be the first one we shoot?" Trembling, Abakumov says, "If I deserve it . . . if it's necessary."

> "Correct!" Stalin said with a smile of goodwill, as if to approve his quickness of wit. "When you deserve it, we will shoot you."

He ends the interview by telling Abakumov of his plans for big, new investigations requiring more staff to "carry out the same measures as in 1937."

Solzhenitsyn's portraiture of prison officials, underling secret police, and state employees is so vivid and compelling that the reader begins to recognize that the power of a man like Stalin is almost entirely dependent on an obedient and fearful bureaucracy to execute his inhuman commands. Not the ideology, but the supply of rigid-minded believers in authoritarian simplifications of it, creates unspeakable political tyranny. "Correctness" in league with timidity stamps out humanity as though it were an infectious disease. A combination of fear, loyalty, and self-interest makes it totally impossible for Abakumov and all those who work under him to submit to a kindly impulse or to question a decision of State. The cumulative effects of this attitude unite in time to become an all-pervasive fluid in which the Soviet penal system—and to some degree the civil society—floats, turning the routine cruelties practiced against the prisoners who are the heroes of this story into the most natural thing in the world—at least, to the officials who are immediately responsible.

This all-penetrating flow of "pure" political evil is the constant oppressor of Stalin's victims in the prisons—which have become climactic models of the administration of absolute distrust. While lesser degrees of this evil are found everywhere, its concentrated expression in the aftermath of the Communist revolution seems paralleled only by the most virulent forms of anti-Semitism and the heresy hunting of medieval religion. Why this should have happened in Russia is something of a historical mystery. Letting it remain so is preferable to glib explanations. All the twentieth-century powers have given evidence of demonic tendencies beneath the surface, and the best use of a book like *The First Circle* is to learn from it something about the heroic potentialities of men under stress—something not limited to *Russian* human nature, but concerning the potentialities that lie within us all.

Many of the political prisoners whose life-stories are told by Solzhenitsyn are being punished for their decency and honesty. Some of them are convinced communists who cannot understand why the one true system deals with them so harshly. They still defend the administration which has condemned them to long prison terms. Strange debates ensue among the prisoners because of these conceptions. Yet to the police and the prison administrators, the fact that a man has been sentenced is evidence enough of his irrevocable guilt. There was Rubin, for example:

> Major Myshin hated Rubin and was collecting defamatory evidence against him. When he had first come to Mavrino [the prison] and learned that Rubin, a former Communist, had been bragging that he was still a Communist at heart, in spite of prison, Myshin called him in to chat about life in general and about working together in particular. But they did not reach an understanding. Myshin put the question to Rubin m precisely the way it was supposed to be done at Instruction sessions:
>
> "If you are a Soviet, then you will help us.
>
> "If you don't help us, then you are not a Soviet.
>
> "If you are not a Soviet, then you are anti-Soviet and deserve an additional term."
>
> But Rubin asked, "How am I supposed to write denunciations, in ink or pencil?"
>
> "Well, ink would be better," Myshin advised.
>
> "Yes, but you see, I have already proved my devotion to Soviet authority in blood, and I don't need to demonstrate it in ink."
>
> In this way Rubin immediately revealed to the major his dishonesty and his hypocrisy.
>
> The major called him in once again. On that occasion Rubin had excused himself by saying—it was obviously a dodge—that political confidence had been withheld from him since he had been imprisoned and while this continued he could not cooperate with the security officer.
>
> From that time on Myshin collected whatever he could against Rubin.

Another man in Mavrino, a scientific technologist, was requested to work on special devices for surveillance, such as a hidden microphone to pick up conversation on park benches. People talk carelessly there, thinking themselves alone. There was that, and also a special camera to fit into door-frames that would photograph all who go through. The head of the special equipment section of State Security offered the prisoner, Gerasimovich, an early release if he would work on such devices for Beria. These thoughts went through the prisoner's mind:

> Every law of the cruel land of the *zeks* [prisoners' slang for themselves] told Gerasimovich that it was just as ridiculous to take pity on the thriving, myopic, unbroken, unwhipped people outside as to refuse to slaughter a pig for bacon. Those who were free lacked the immortal soul the zeks had earned in their endless prison terms. They made stupid and greedy use of the freedom they were allowed to enjoy. They besmirched themselves with petty schemes, base acts.

Gerasimovich, whose wife was ailing, longed to see her before she died. Yet he refused to do the work.

> "My reasons? Why do you ask? I can't do it. I wouldn't be able to cope with it," Gerasimovich replied very quietly, his voice almost inaudible. . . .
>
> "You've just got out of the habit of doing important work that's why you're timid," Oskolupov said, trying to persuade him. "Who else but you is there? Very well, I'll let you think it over."
>
> Gerasimovich kept silent, his small hand pressed against his forehead.
>
> "But what is there to think over? It's right in your field."
>
> Gerasimovich could have remained silent. He could have bluffed. He could have accepted the assignment and then failed to do it, according to the zek rule. But Gerasimovich stood up. He glared contemptuously at the fat, doublechinned mug in a general's astrakhan hat.
>
> "No! That's *not* my field!" he said in a clear high voice. "Putting people in prison is not my field! I don't set traps for human beings! It's bad enough that they put *us* in prison. . . ."

The First Circle takes its title from the least oppressive of Dante's hells where the pagan philosophers were kept. Mavrino was a prison for political offenders of marked intellectual or scientific ability. They had better food than the men in the camps, did no manual labor, and developed sophisticated technology for the Soviet Union. But whatever the few privileges these men enjoyed, the basic rules of Soviet prisons still applied. Mavrino was a terrible place. Yet the men who found their way there were among the most skilled and intelligent that the nation produced. How this came about is described in Solzhenitsyn's enormously moving book, and with the exquisite sense of reality possible to a writer who had himself been a political prisoner confined in such places for many years. His work is proscribed in Russia today.

COMMENTARY
THE TERRIBLE FORMULAS

Is there, one wonders, any relation between the cultural processes which get people ready to be bureaucrats in Mavrino-type prisons (see Review) and an education which gets people habituated to accept an "existence by prescription" (see page 8)?

The whole idea of the "correct formula" is at issue in such a question.

Obviously, we need some correct formulas. How to bake bread, how to make steel, how to deal to the best possible advantage with all the stable materials and reliable conditions which occur in nature depends upon having or learning the correct formulas.

We are talking, of course, about formulas that can be verified. You taste the bread, you test the steel. These and a lot of other things we know relate to closed systems. Even a human being is partly a closed system. His body, as Walter B. Cannon showed, is a marvel of homeostatic equilibrium. Satisfy all the body's deficiency-needs and it runs with astonishing efficiency so long as the endocrine glands are in order and the man doesn't mess it up too much with foolish interference.

The natural order and needs of the rest of the human being are not so clear. Whatever the rest of a man includes, premature certainties about it seem to have caused most of the extreme troubles people endure. For example, if you look up the various references to "terror" in history and literature, you find that terror as a means of making people behave in a certain way commonly originates with religious or political authorities who claim to know absolutely what is good for man as a spiritual or as a social being. Those who don't accept the correct formula for a classless society have to be reconstructed, and if persuasion won't do it, terror becomes the correct formula for *those* people. Then there are large-scale impersonal instruments like nuclear warheads which, as we say, are useful for keeping the correct balance of terror going in the world.

Well, we don't know what the correct formula for the good life of the whole man is, and those who do—if they exist—are probably keeping still about it. Socrates waited until he was eighty before he even hinted a little, and then he became *very* unpopular. Anyhow, it seems more important to try to figure out how to develop a population that simply wouldn't stand for the use of terror to promote a formula that some people claim is the best in the world but a lot of others know isn't working very well.

How *do* you begin to get people like that?

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
THE PROMISE OF THE VERY YOUNG

YEARS ago a Scandinavian scholar showed from study of a wide collection of subjects that most peoples' "philosophies" take shape during adolescence, and that while their concepts and forms of expression may later gain in subtlety and refinement, there is seldom any basic change of view. It is probably true that a great many people don't change. Yet some do. A dramatic illustration of this is Tolstoy's *My Confession,* one of the most exciting as well as searing accounts of philosophic self-transformation to be found in all literature. Should we say, then, that the attitudes and opinions a man holds before pursuing any serious self-questioning do not represent what he is made of, but only an inventory of the raw materials out of which, sooner or later, he may begin to make himself?

How might this apply to children? It doesn't, very well. A child is busy assembling his "givens." The first task of education is to help the child to assemble them as well as he can. Conflicting theories of human nature bring some confusion to this. Erik Erikson, after reviewing the idea of what is "given" according to the Hindu traditions in which Gandhi was raised—the "givens" being tendencies brought forward from another life, and the *dharma* of one's natural calling—shows in *Gandhi's Truth* how other theories of determination have a similar role for us:

> We in the West are proudly overcoming all ideas of predestination. But we would still insist that child training can do no more than underscore what is given—that is, in an epigenetic development fixed by evolution. And we certainly sense in any seminar—clinical or historical—how we continue to project ideas of doom and predestination either on hereditary or constitutional givers, on early experience and irreversible trauma, or on cultural and economic deprivation—that is, on a past, as dim as it is fateful. And let us face it: "deep down" nobody in his right mind *can* visualize his own existence without assuming that he has always lived and will live hereafter; and the religious world-views of old only endowed this psychological given with images and ideas which could be shared, transmitted, and ritualized.

In curious confirmation of what Erikson says here, Bertrand Russell, the toughest of the tough-minded Western thinkers, tells (in *Education and the Good Life*) of encountering this "deep down" reality in his own son:

> I find my boy still hardly able to grasp that there was a time when he did not exist, if I talk to him about the building of the Pyramids or some such topic, he always wants to know what he was doing then, and is merely puzzled when he is told he did not exist. Sooner or later he will want to know what "being born" means, and then we shall tell him.

Apparently, Mr. Russell was quite sure *he* knew.

An article by Maya Pines in the *New York Times Magazine* for July 6 gives the contemporary view of child educators on how the givens of human ability are acquired, or at least profoundly affected, during the first three years of a child's life. Workers in the Head Start program became convinced that these early years are more important than any other time. This general view had been gaining strength since publication in 1964 by Benjamin Bloom of *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics,* based on the findings of "a thousand different studies" made by various persons during the past fifty years, all suggesting the crucial importance of early development. Bloom, Miss Pines says, felt able to declare that by the age of four a child's I.Q. "becomes so stable that it is a fairly accurate indicator of his I.Q. at seventeen." A wave of further research resulted from such testimony, generating what Jerome Brunner has called "the growth sciences." The *Times* writer continues:

> This composite discipline concentrates on the period other researchers had chronically neglected because the child seemed so inaccessible—the time between his fifth day of life, when the newborn usually leaves the hospital, and his entry into nursery school at three. Abandoning their rats, pigeons and other experimental subjects, including older children,

> hundreds of scientists are now focusing on the young child's mind—encouraged by the influx of Government funds for programs to stop the epidemic of school failure among the children of the poor, and by some new developments in psychology itself.

Bloom's conclusion, now shared by many researchers, is that human intelligence grows most rapidly before the age of four, and that this is also the time when the environment can influence it most easily. Since Bloom maintained that later on "more and more powerful forces are required to produce a given amount of change in a child's intelligence, if it can be produced at all," and also that "the emotional cost of this change is increasingly severe," the insistence that Head Start programs begin earlier has been widely endorsed by persons active in the growth sciences. As Miss Pines puts it:

> If their research confirms that the first three years of life largely determine a human being's future competence, these years can no longer be left to chance, they believe. Thus armies of tutors could be sent into the homes of disadvantaged infants, and thousands of expectant parents enrolled in crash programs to teach them modern child-rearing. We may be witnessing the end of society's traditional laissez-faire about the earliest years of a human being's life.

The body of Miss Pines's article presents much evidence to support this contention, tracing exceptionally developed three-year-olds to the attentions of exceptional mothers, and showing that it is possible to lift the performance of deprived children through intensively educative care. One encouraging finding of such studies is the way in which many mothers rapidly increase their own effectiveness as teachers when given some help in this direction.

The significance of all this seems to be twofold. First, the needs of children are being found out by intimately direct means which cannot help but generate tenderness and open-hearted and resolving love in those who do the work. Yet at the theoretical level there seems a built-in anxiety-factor in the idea that the scope of the child's future development is virtually decided by the time he is three or four. Since poor economic circumstances are directly related to stunted development in babies—where will working mothers get the time to give their children proper care?—the deterministic implications found in this research may lead to one more front of moral desperation and a cry for sudden "mass" remedies. Yet we know from experience that, most of all in education, "mass" methods and "crash programs" bring the attenuation of love. Statistics are much better at defining failure than prescribing remedies. Nor can one pass easily from an indignant to a teaching state of mind. Finally, without wishing to minimize the urgency of the human need involved, one may still ask whether it is a good idea to speak so confidently of *producing* changes in the intelligence of children. A better language might speak of *inviting* its expression.

FRONTIERS

A Verdict of Writers

IF the legendary but probably nonexistent "impartial observer"—who has nonetheless to be invented, like certain metaphysical necessities—were to inspect the front-page headlines of any large newspaper on any day in the present, he could hardly avoid the conclusion that our world is a planet beset by continuous nightmares. Even if, refusing to judge by superficial impressions, he did some first-hand research, going into small towns and the homes of various sorts of people, he would find that the isolated and still surviving balances of serenity, happiness, and hope are growing less and less. While the selective concerns of the commercial press are far from an accurate reflection of the quality of human life, they do define certain unmistakable "trends," somewhat as boils or other erupting sores on the surface of the body betray an underlying infection.

One ought of course to investigate further. The pages of the *Saturday Review* afford a better and clearer reflection of our life and times. Writers, after all, are professional "mirrors." The explorations of understanding make up their business, and good writers are recognized by their refusal to submit to a wide variety of conventional limits to the terms of explanation. In some measure, at least, a good writer dares to make up his own rules, and by adhering to them produces interesting and often very important reading. The most responsible writers function as the eyes and ears and sometimes even the sensitive consciences of other men. So, in any magazine which collects in various forms the work of a number of skillful and thoughtful writers, some of them men of highly independent mind, there are bound to be insights which will, on occasion, run together to shape coherent, unified judgments of great lucidity and strength.

Something like this happens in the pages of the *Saturday Review* for Nov. 8. Reading the issue straight through brings the impression that the world is in the grip of a terrible epidemic no longer in its early stage. The first article, "Can Anyone Run a City?", by Gus Tyler, tells how the best mayors in the country are quitting or not seeking re-election—they can't do the impossible, and good management of modern American cities has become impossible. The only hope is to start new ones—a plan requiring changes in attitude for which people are totally unprepared since it means jettisoning rules on which our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor are supposed to depend.

Two extremely well written "review-essays" deal directly or indirectly with three major socio-political disasters of the twentieth century—the German debacle, the French debacle, and the South African travesty of democratic government. In order to review William Shirer's *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, leading to the fall of France, David Schoenbrun recalls Shirer's *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, then dramatizes the greed, apathy, and indifference which attended these events, to say nothing of the numerous political miscalculations and the short-sightedness of decisions which now seem almost insane. From this review one also sees the unbroken extension into the present of the extraordinary blindness of our national policy-makers: "Among the few constants in human affairs are man's capacity for self-destruction and the fallibility of experts."

While the ruthlessness of the South African regime is muted by reflection in a book by that gentle and compassionate man, Alan Paton, Edward Callan's musing review of *For You Departed* distils but does not weaken a pain of continental dimensions. Paton suffered because he could do so little in behalf of racial justice; and where could such a man seek relief from realizing that behind his impotence lay the frozen self-righteousness of the many, and their hardened hearts? The reviewer finds in some words from Auden's *The Age of Anxiety* the prudential formula that first ignores and then condemns, eventually by the million:

If you ever see
A fuss forming in the far distance,
Lots of police, and a little group
In terrible trouble, don't try to
help . . .

Another darkened European scene has attention in John Hohenberg's "What It's Like To Be a Czech Newspaperman." The almost silenced humanism of the Czechs comes through in whispers in this low key report of private conversations with Prague journalists. Freedom is a secret behind the eyes, hope a startled facial expression, for the older Czechs, while the young, they fear, have now been lost to them forever. Who could measure all this indignity, or counsel its alternative in blood? In one part of the world, the important questions are smothered beneath an avalanche of conceits and trivialities, while in another raising the same questions will bring immediate isolation, imprisonn~entj or possibly death.

Norman Cousin's editorial, concerned with student unrest in the United States, makes this hardly avoidable comment: "Indeed, considering the human situation in the world today, the wonder is not that the campuses are in a state of unrest but that they should be able to function at all." What does the student of today see? He sees, says Mr. Cousins—

> a world divided into rigid sovereignties that admit no superior or objective judgment over their behavior, even though what they are doing is inimical to society as a whole. He sees the energies and resources of nations being diverted into ever-larger ways of expunging or cheapening human life. He sees people preoccupied and swollen with meaningless satisfactions. He sees concepts of human brotherhood and social justice held up by society as its animating ideals, but he finds that his own efforts to act on behalf of these concepts will put him in conflict with that same society. . . .

A letter-to-the-editor puts the common daily experience of a Mid-Western pastor in a few words:

> . . . the parish minister is completely submerged in such immediate and palpable realities as the angry American middle and its shameless and degrading self-pity, an all-pervading masculinity crisis, doctors not committed to health, lawyers who neglect justice, churches that cannot create good people, and schools that cannot create wise men. We struggle with the issues of overpopulation, poisoned air, polluted water, racism, meaningless work at every level, boredom, fear, alienation, and violence—all in the course of a day's work.

What is the point of weaving together these variously depressing reports? To see, for one thing, the unanimity of their suggestion. To recognize the agreement of their diagnosis. To know that we no longer live in the "Enlightenment," but in a very dark age. What "impartial observer" could fail to see this? The need, now, is to realize that our devastating critical techniques give no clues as to the modes of a normal, constructive life, and that the response which is as yet only symptomatic in the young will become emotional compulsion for more and more people, as time goes on. Abstracting futurists and systems planners to the contrary, human beings cannot bear a life of this sort and remain human beings. The steps that are not taken, now, through basic intelligence, will become desperate leaps of negation from the blind leadings of despair. Countervailing vision and hope cannot come from "organizations," but what cannot be accomplished by organizations remains possible for individuals; and what cannot be "planned" can still be grown by small groups and tested in life. The voices and acts of individuals are still the sources of renewal and growth.