They had traveled a long way. Their horses bore marks of the journey; flanks caked with mud, manes matted with dust. At last, the end was near. Dismounting, the pair walked the final few yards on foot. At the edge of the cliff, they paused and gazed upon the scene below. The younger of the two, tugging at his partner's arm, broke the silence.

"Behold," he said, gesturing at the view that lay before them, "Yon lies the field of curriculum. So vast and inviting. Such a worthy object of contemplation. So ready for the harvest, ripe for the hands of willing workers. But wait! What's this? Can it be? Why is there not more movement? Why does it lie so still? Tell me, good father, is it... is it alive? Or is it... could it be... (gulp!)... dead?"

I.

The introductory vignette is sheer hokum, of course, inspired at some subconscious level, I suspect, by memory traces left over from viewing Star Wars a couple of years ago. The speaker's query, however, is not a figment of my imagination. Oddly enough, a question very much like the one raised by our fictitious traveler has been preying on our collective mind of late, or so it would seem if we were to judge by the writings of several educators, including at least two who have had the honor of addressing this division of AERA in recent years.

To the best of my knowledge, my former colleague, Joseph Schwab, was the first one within the recent past to raise this ominous query. (The adjective ominous seems necessary because, through our exposure to B-
rated movies and other forms of melodrama, we have come to expect the worst when circumstances require determining whether death is apparent or real.) Actually, Schwab answered the question without even bothering to ask it in the opening lines of his widely read essay “The Practical: A Language for Curriculum.” The year was 1970. Herewith, Schwab’s delivery of the bad news.

“I shall have three points,” he began, innocently enough. “The first is this: The field of curriculum is moribund. It is unable by its present methods and principles to continue its work and contribute significantly to the advancement of education” (Schwab 1978, p. 287).

For all its starkness, Schwab’s health bulletin did contain a ray of hope, though its light was faint indeed. As we know, the word moribund allows within its meaning the possibility of a miraculous recovery, but, as we also know, the chances of that happening are mighty slim. In short, the message could hardly be called optimistic. The field of curriculum may not have been completely gone at the time Schwab took its pulse, but if we were to believe his prognosis, its end was close at hand.

Just how close the end really was back in 1970 has been brought into question by subsequent readings of the vital signs. Consider, for example, Dwayne Huebner’s address to this division six years after Schwab’s gloomy pronouncement. Huebner’s debt to Schwab’s initial pessimism was made explicit in the title of his paper—“The Moribund Curriculum Field: Its Wake and Our Work” (1976). But the title also revealed Huebner’s basic uncertainty about whether the patient was yet alive or had long since crossed the bar. For if the field was in fact still moribund, as Huebner described it, why talk about a wake? A death watch, perhaps. Even a vigil might sound all right. But “The Moribund Curriculum: Its Wake . . .”? That did seem to be rushing things, or so I felt on first pondering the meaning of Huebner’s title.

In the body of his paper, Huebner went on to clarify the matter somewhat, though there, too, a trace of ambiguity continued to nag the close reader. For example, toward the end of his remarks Huebner emphatically declared, “The curriculum field of the past one hundred years is not just moribund; for all practical purposes it is dead” (p. 165).

“Fair enough,” the consciousness behind my skimming eye replied, “time to exchange the physician for the mortician.” “But wait a minute,” a reflective thought broke in, “what about the maddening phrase ‘for all practical purposes’? What does that mean? Is Huebner, with that qualifier, trying to make the distinction we hear so much of these days: that between real death and clinical death? Is he saying that the curriculum field has no more brain activity, but with artificial help its heart beats on?”

Almost as if he had heard my question, Huebner proceeded to speak like a man who had surreptitiously pulled the plug. The telltale sign of his guilt was a sudden switch in verb tense, from present to past. He turned to the question of why the field of curriculum died. He went on to assure his readers that there could be no hope of a renascence. The only consolation he offered to those who grieved was some vague talk about the possibility of a reincarnation, but to follow these thoughts would take us deeper into the
body of his thesis than present purposes allow. This passing comment on his paper is merely intended to show that Huebner, like Schwab, found it useful to muse on the question of whether the curriculum field was alive or dead. Also like Schwab, he arrived, with some waffling, I fear, at a gloomy conclusion.

In 1977 and again in 1978, William Pinar of the University of Rochester delivered two papers at the annual meeting of the AERA, each of which helped to keep alive the question of the curriculum field's state of health. In the first of these, entitled "The Reconceptualization of Curriculum Studies," Pinar (1978b) referred specifically to the earlier observations of Schwab and Huebner, though in doing so he seemed as confused as I have been about their final judgment. When it came to reporting on what Schwab and Huebner had said, Pinar could not decide whether or not a definitive judgment had been reached. So he decided to play it safe by noting that the traditional curriculum field had been declared "terminally ill or already deceased" (italics mine, p. 207).

As for himself, however, Pinar seemed resigned to the more severe of the two judgments, for in the sentence immediately following the one with the ambiguous "or," he referred to the field's "demise." He then talked about an "heir to the field," thus introducing thoughts of wills, last testaments, and the like. Such talk leaves little doubt that Pinar either believed the end was past, or, like Huebner's wake, was rushing things a bit. Whichever interpretation we accept, Pinar's 1977 pronouncements could hardly be called gay-spirited. If not overtly mournful, they were at least draped in black.

By last year, however, in his state-of-the-art address to Division B of the AERA, Pinar (1978a) was in a more cheerful mood. In his remarks he made no mention of death and dying. Instead, he described the state of the field as being, "fragmented and arrested." "The state of the field is arrest," he reiterated in his concluding paragraph, thus seeming to abandon all reference to the earlier worry. Yet, for me, its echo could be heard in that final judgment, for is there not something deathlike in the word arrest?
Perhaps I have become hypersensitive to such imagery through exposure to the views already discussed, but Pinar's words suggest the most final of all diagnoses: a cardiac arrest. Thus, the thanatotic fantasy, which Pinar had entertained earlier and which seems to have captured the imagination of Schwab, Huebner, and others, was gone perhaps, but not forgotten.

My impatience with this lugubrious talk about the curriculum field's last gasps should be obvious by now. In fact, if my impatience had a voice of its own, and if it were allowed to join the morbid musing long enough to have its say, it would sound something like this: "Away vultures, away! No more black garb and muted organ music. Let's pull back the velvet drapes and let some light in. The place reeks of calla lilies and smelling salts!"

"All right, all right," a calmer voice from somewhere else inside of me intones. "Settle down now, no need to be distraught. Your vexation comes through loud and clear. But what is not so clear is what really upsets you. Is it the deathbed imagery itself with its gloom and doom? Or is it the message that imagery is intended to convey? Are you seeking to defend the counterclaim that the field of curriculum is alive and well? Is that it?"
“No, that is not it,” I reply, the real me speaking now. “I have no desire to debate the messengers of gloom in their own terms. I shall leave that task to more official conveyors of good cheer, such as the officers of professional societies or the authors of textbooks that deal with curricular matters.”

Incidentally, one of the latter was apparently so worried about the negative effect the Schwabian diagnosis might have upon budding young teachers enrolled in education courses that he decided to end his book with an explicit rejoinder to that view. “All in all,” he assured his readers in the last sentence of the text, “there is plenty of evidence that the curriculum field is not moribund, but very much alive and well” (McNeil 1977, p. 323). Can’t you just hear the students in Education 101 heaving a massive sigh of relief as they read those parting words?

Regrettably, perhaps, for those who seek some bucking up, no such Panglossian heartiness guides my pen. Rather, I insist the terms themselves, the illness metaphor and all the ratiocinations that trail in its wake (no pun intended), are either silly or misleading or both. In fact, my complaint goes deeper than that. Truth be known, I am unhappy with those who speak as though there were such a thing as a field of curriculum. But talk about that deeper complaint can come later. First, some comments about the business of what-ever-it-is being ill. At the risk of sounding like a teacher of English, which I am not and never was, allow me to remind us all that when we speak of the curriculum field’s health, we are already guilty of a faux pas in the minds of sentinels who guard against lapses of grammatical or linguistic propriety. We have committed a mixed metaphor! Just think of the fun our linguistic watchdogs can have with us now.

“A sick and dying field?” someone snickers, “How would you find out if a field were alive or dead? By putting your ear to the ground? By keeping an eye out for the heaving of turf that comes with frost or by sniffing the rising vapors that the poet transforms into the breath of spring? Do living things, like earthworms and crickets, quit a dead field, or does life attack it more virulently after death than before, like maggots hungrily devouring carrion?”

We might, with effort, prevent our puckish questioner from getting after us that way. Perhaps if we were pontifical enough at the start, such quirky thoughts would never enter his head. But he does have a point. It is a bit of a trial, you must admit, trying to be serious about a sick field.

And the hidden humor concealed in the mixed metaphor and lying ready for use by the first critic who comes along is only the beginning of what we must contend with if we expect our listeners to accept such an image as more than a piece of rhetoric, a casual ornament of speech, and a rather shopworn one at that. Having introduced the thought of illness, we are practically forced to follow where it leads, regardless of whether or not movement in that direction is heuristically valuable.

And where does the thought of a sick field take us? Consider, as a start, all the associated worries and unanswered questions that crowd the mind and press for answers at the mere suggestion of someone or something (even a field) being terminally ill. “How did it get that way?” we ask. “Who is qualified to make the judgment?” “What is to be done about burial?” “Is
there anything to be bequeathed?” And on and on our thoughts race, hardly knowing when or where to stop.

Of course, the skilled user of a metaphor does know where to stop, and the three authors I have mentioned all seem to use the device skillfully and with good taste. None, for example, gets into the nitty-gritty of what to do with the remains. All have the good sense to say nothing about the graveside ceremony.

Nonetheless, I cannot help wondering whether some of the metaphor-inspired questions they raise are worth asking. Take, as an example, Pinar’s talk about an heir to the field. Such talk fits perfectly, of course, within the mental set created by thoughts of moribundity. But is that what those of us who care about the curriculum of our schools should be worrying about? I wonder. Remove the metaphor, and the question of who shall be the heir goes with it.

Even more important, perhaps, than the danger of being led to unproductive questions is the associated possibility of the metaphor dictating harmful attitudes about the real world. For example, the deathbed image seems to encourage a feeling of there being a sharp break between the present and the past, a sense, in other words, of historical discontinuity. Now none of our three authors explicitly condoned such an attitude, and I suspect all three would strongly oppose its creation, but, in a sense, the deathbed metaphor did the dirty work without their complicity.

Schwab, for example, tells us that he recoils at the thought of counting all the people and books devoted to restating the Tyler rationale or the case for behavioral objectives or the virtues and vices of John Dewey. “Me too,” I want to reply, “Enough, already.” At the same time, I have this nagging unease about saying that we’ve heard enough about Tyler or behavioral objectives or Dewey: in doing so within the context of the “dead field” frame of mind, we encourage those who might heed our words to turn away completely from a contemplation of, and a building upon, our own past. The temperament of educators is notoriously fickle already, without our acting in ways that might make it more so.

My unease must not be understood to be an argument against using metaphors to enlighten educational thought. I love metaphors. They are, if I may speak metaphorically on their behalf, among our most useful tools of thought. But, like all tools, they can be abused and do damage when used improperly. And that’s what worries me.

I have no real proof, I must admit, that all this talk about the demise of the curriculum field has done any harm to anyone or anything. Quite possibly it has not. Yet when it continues for almost an entire decade, when a prominent textbook writer feels obliged to assure his readers that the field is alive and well, and when I feel my own thinking pulled along by the sheer drama of the question, I begin to wonder whether it’s time to end such talk.

I have the same feeling, as I have already said, about the other half of the mixed metaphor, the idea of there being such a thing as a curriculum field. But I hesitate to talk in public about my misgivings, for fear of being run out of town on a pole. Even the slightest hint of an attack on such a
time-honored way of thinking is bound to rub a lot of people the wrong way. It probably sounds to them as though I were out to rob folks of something of value, something that gives them status.

Think of them all—curriculum designers, curriculum developers, curriculum evaluators, professors of curriculum, curricularists (a generic term that Pinar seems to have invented to cover just about everybody), and plain old curriculum persons (the tag Huebner seems to prefer) with its down-home flavor and explicit appeal to our antisexist sentiments—what in heaven's name would all those folks do if it were discovered that there was no such thing as a field of curriculum? Talk about the hullabaloo triggered by the announcement that the emperor had no clothes! Declaring curriculum a nonfield would have even worse effects. Such a declaration would send shock waves throughout the pedagogical kingdom. "Besides," the wounded would complain, "no one seems to be toying with the idea of depriving psychologists or historians or physicists or mathematicians of their fields. Why, then, pick on the poor old curriculum workers?"

Fair enough, I'm willing to drop the issue. I'm not looking for a fight. So keep your field, curriculum people. Enjoy it. But remember, it exists only in your head. It is a figure of speech, not a territory to be defended; a mental fiction, not something that can truly be trespassed by poachers.

We know these things, of course, and therefore there is no need to say them. Yet as I read the papers by Schwab, Huebner, and Pinar, I noticed how natural it seemed for them to elaborate on the field metaphor and how easily my own imagination was engaged by their elaboration. Schwab complained about curriculum workers "fleeing the field," and I began to wonder if they were wayward sons or runaway slaves. Huebner pleaded for a "return to our roots" and a vision of migrant laborers distracted momentarily by an airplane overhead arose before my mind's eye. Pinar, convinced that the present owners of the land were dead or nearly so, mumbled something about becoming heir to the property; and in the darker regions of my mind, where the memory of a country kitchen still survives, I saw a younger me edging nervously toward the corner in which the shotgun is kept. Field. Fieldhands. Property. Heirs. Metaphors all, and all, like my dimly remembered firearm in the kitchen, to be handled with care.

So much, then, for the dangers of talking about the dead or dying curriculum field. If these words of mine are of any help in ridding us of such talk, I shall be pleased. Yet my remarks, even if successful, cannot end here, for still to be addressed is the important question of what stirred such talk in the first place. What, in other words, is the reality behind the metaphor?

II.

My answer to that question begins in full agreement with the trio whose ideas I have been discussing. For though I do not fully share Schwab's or Huebner's or Pinar's view of the matter, I do agree with all three that there
CURRICULUM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

is something out there to be viewed, something worth pondering and discussing. That something, and on this the four of us also seem to agree, has chiefly to do with the intellectual outlook and occupational activity of those people who are or have been professionally engaged in speaking and writing about the curriculum of schools and closely related topics. This is a rather long-winded and loose definition of the "reality" in which we are jointly interested, but anything more precise begins to exclude things that I believe all four of us want to discuss. Also, I admit to sharing in the general confusion over what to call all those people who have something important to say about curricular matters, but rather than offering yet another neologism to pin on that amorphous glob, I shall dodge the issue.

Now when it comes to saying what it is about the outlook and activity of these speakers and writers and practitioners that is worth pondering and discussing, Schwab, Huebner, Pinar, and I begin to drift apart, not only them from me but each from the other. Yet even then I suspect we might still be in enough agreement to speak in a single voice on one additional point, which is that some important changes seem to be occurring within our loosely defined reality. More precisely, a growing number of people within my unlabeled glob seem to be unhappy about what other members of the glob, perhaps the majority, are doing or have done. Our reality, in other words, is permeated by a widespread spirit of discontent.

Why this is so, and what, if anything, can or should be done about it, are the two most important questions to ask. I suspect that Schwab, Huebner, and Pinar would agree. Beyond this point, however, the four of us seem to part company. But rather than attempting any further specification of the differences between my view and theirs, I would prefer to concentrate on what I perceive to be true and my own interpretation of that perception. Disagreements with others will likely be evident in my discussion, so I won't bother to point them out.

If, as I claim, a spirit of discontent is sufficiently widespread to be commented upon by almost any thoughtful observer, then this must mean there is a potentially identifiable person or, more likely, group of persons responsible for generating and disseminating it. Who are they? Who are these people whom I have labeled "Discontents" in the title of this paper? And what are they discontented about?

My answer to the first of these key questions is aided by spreading out that map of the United States and Western Europe that most of us memorized as children and that we continue to keep tucked away in our heads for just such an occasion. On it I locate three centers of activity from which the clearest, or at least the loudest, expressions of discontent seem to emanate. Two of these are in England, and the third is in the United States.

The precise location of one of the British centers I would place at the Institute of Education of the University of London. The other I would place, with somewhat less confidence, at the University of East Anglia. The American center is not as easy to pinpoint, beyond saying that it lies somewhere west of New York City and east of the Mississippi. If I had to stick a tack in a map to give this center a home, I suppose I would close my eyes and aim for Hershey, Pennsylvania, or thereabouts. But don't ask me
why I chose that location. Hershey just feels right. Perhaps it has something to do with my childhood love of chocolate, I'm not sure.

From each of these three centers, I see, in my mind's eye, lines, many of them transatlantic, connecting individuals from far-flung spots to one or another of the nuclei, thus forming three webs of overlapping and crisscrossing strands. Finally, I also envision a scattering of single, unconnected dots representing individuals who seem to be unaffiliated with any of the three centers of activity, but whose voices are clearly part of the general chorus of discontent. These solitary dots are too numerous and widespread to arrange mentally, so I will simply ask that you pepper to taste your own imaginary map.

My justification for thinking of the Discontents as being concentrated in this way rests on the fact that each of the three centers has spawned one or more edited volumes containing collections of essays that share a more or less common outlook on educational matters. As the best single example of the work emanating from each location, I would nominate Knowledge and Control (1971), edited by Michael F. D. Young of the University of London, Beyond the Numbers Game (1977), edited by David Hamilton of the University of East Anglia and four other British educationists, and Curriculum Theorizing (1975), edited by William Pinar of the University of Rochester (a bit north and west of Hershey). These three volumes, though representative, do not begin to exhaust the list that could be compiled for each cluster. They should suffice, however, to give some bibliographic justification for the divisions.

By mentioning specific books I do not mean to imply, of course, that an intellectual affiliation with any of the three clusters is necessarily defined by authorship in one or more of its publications. Some contributors to the volumes associated with one of the clusters would doubtlessly complain about being identified with the dominant perspective of the book in question. Others whose writings do not appear there might well seek to be so identified. For these reasons, it makes little sense to attempt a roster of who is in or out of any of the three foci of activity.

For similar reasons, I think it unwise to name the individuals whose work is salient within the total corpus of writings that deal with curricular matters but who would not appear on any one of the three rosters were I to attempt them—the solitary dots on our mental map. Suffice it to say that the group would include individuals as physically separate as Joseph Schwab in California and Ulf Lundgren in Sweden, and as ideologically distant as Elliot Eisner and Henry Levin, both of Stanford University.

As I tune in, figuratively speaking, to the chorus of complaints issuing from both the clusters and the individuals, what sounds at first like a cacophonous babble later becomes slightly melodious. The same note is struck by more than one person, motifs issuing from one location are picked up in another and contrapuntal harmonies emerge. The sense of listening to a babble never disappears completely, but, later, portions of the sound become familiar enough to hum to oneself. These humable passages, at least the ones that I have managed to select, comprise a sort of litany, containing the following set of verses (to be authentic, you should chant them, I suppose, in a minor key):
• The Tyler rationale is out-of-date, and we have little or nothing to replace it with.

• Our present ways of thinking and talking about schools and schooling do not do justice to the complexity and dignity of the human condition.

• The control of the curriculum is in the hands of technologists, test makers, textbook publishers, and school administrators.

• Our schools are losing sight of humanistic values and goals.

• Curriculum workers have little to offer teachers that is of direct help to them.

• The aesthetic, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of the educational experience are being ignored.

• Our schools are damaging to many students, particularly to children of the poor and oppressed minorities.

• The Tyler rationale is out-of-date, etc.

Doubtlessly, there are other lines that should be inserted, and I may not have gotten the words exactly right in the ones I have given, but the sense is there. Furthermore, though no single contributor to the writings from which I have culled the above list would be likely to nod in agreement to the total set of assertions, I would bet that the majority of the Discontents would go along with most of them. In fact, there may be no one who could not find something, perhaps even a great deal, to agree with on that list, which may not mean that the list itself is defective as a portrayal of the complaints to be found in the curricular writings I have studied, but that there is a bit of discontent in us all.

Our probable agreement with some of the items on the list also means that the total set of complaints cannot be discarded as crank letters. In fact, I fear that my flippant use of the liturgical imagery may already have created the impression that I believe these complaints are not to be taken seriously. If so, I must hasten to correct it, for my wisecrack about the complaints forming a litany was merely a crude attempt to inject a note of levity in a topic that might otherwise become intolerably grave. In truth, I see most of the items pointing to serious problems that are worthy of our genuine concern.

Because these individual problems are too numerous to treat in a single essay and the proposed solutions put forth in the writings in question are even more so, I shall now concentrate on what I perceive to be the two most general suggestions for change emanating from the Discontents. The first has to do with a proposed shift in scholarly allegiances from one intellectual tradition to one or more others. The second has to do with a proposed change in the relationship between those who talk and write about curricular matters and those who are closer to educational practice, including, especially among the latter, classroom teachers. After describing each of these sets of suggestions more fully, I will close with a few caveats of my own.
The proposed shift in scholarly allegiance is away from what is increasingly referred to as "mainstream social science," a term that is usually intended to be interpreted pejoratively, and toward a wide assortment of intellectual traditions that have not heretofore been drawn upon heavily by persons interested in educational and curricular topics. These comprise, in the main, existential, phenomenological, and Marxist thought, but they also include, somewhat less prominently, the contributions of literary critics, psychoanalysts, and even a philosopher of science or two. The key ideas being drawn upon are distinctly European in flavor, with French and German influences predominating. Besides Marx and Freud, others that are frequently cited in this literature include Heidegger, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty; Sartre, Schutz, Gramsci, Polanyi, and Habermas. Taken as a whole, the ideological bias of the sources drawn upon most heavily is decidedly left of center. The major argument in support of drawing upon these new sources of ideas (new for educators, that is) is, as I understand it, that they are more helpful in thinking about and understanding the richness and complexity of educational phenomena than are the intellectual frameworks that have till now dominated educational thought. So much then for a thumbnail sketch of the first major proposal that flows from the writings of the Discontents.

The second proposal, that having to do with a change in the relationship between those who talk and write about curricular matters—let's call them the academics—and those who are closer to educational practice—the practitioners—is really split into two subproposals that move in opposite directions. The first calls for a closer relationship between academics and practitioners; the second, for a more distant one. Though supporters of both subproposals can probably be found in all four quadrants of our imaginary curricular map, I see the argument for a closer relationship concentrated in our East Anglia center and that for a more distant relationship concentrated in London. I can't quite figure out how our Hershey, Pennsylvania, folks vote on this split (I suspect they are not certain either), so I'll just leave a question mark there.

The argument on behalf of a closer relationship between academics and practitioners is probably the easier of the two to understand, for it has been around a long time. Since at least the turn of the century, and probably long before that, both academics and practitioners have lamented the gap of communication and understanding that separates them and have sought, through various schemes, to close it. That desire is still very alive in many quarters.

The most recent set of suggestions for closing the gap requires giving teachers a greater sense of partnership in educational research undertakings, even making them the dominant partners. Teachers are to participate in defining the potential problems and to be active in all phases of the investigation, from data collection (usually by naturalistic observation) through analysis and interpretation. As might be expected from what has been said so far, they are also thought to be the chief beneficiaries of what is learned.
The last point raises a question that seems to be answered unsatisfactorily, if not actually dodged, by advocates of the let's-team-up-with-teachers proposal. This has to do with whether the only beneficiaries of a particular investigation are the teacher-participants (and to a lesser extent, presumably, the collaborating academics or research technicians) or whether it is hoped that nonparticipating teachers might also benefit indirectly through reading a report of the investigation in the form of a case study. In other words, are the outcomes of these efforts purely for local consumption or can they be generalized? On the basis of all I have read so far, I remain puzzled. On the one hand, the mere fact that a lot of the case study material has already been published makes it clear that persons other than the participants are expected to gain something from reading it, though that "something" may be nothing more than the technique of producing a case study. On the other hand, there is much talk among advocates of this position about helping teachers solve particular problems in real situations, together with derisive comments about more traditional research approaches that seek generalizations and principles that are trans-situational. Thus, this brief sketch of the argument for a closer working relationship between practitioners and academics closes on a note of ambiguity.

Those who advocate a more distant relationship between practitioners and academics do so because it promises to afford those adopting it greater objectivity in their examination of educational and curricular matters. Until recently, so the argument goes, academics interested in the operations of our schools—educational psychologists, sociologists, historians, and the rest—have allowed their inquiries to be guided, if not dictated, by the needs and perceptions of practitioners themselves. Hog-tied, as it were, to the practitioner's view of things, the academic was not free to take a critical stance about the operation of the schools. As a consequence, the argument continues, most efforts at curricular or educational change or reform amounted to little more than tinkering with the system to make it work better. What is sought, therefore, is a perspective that allows those adopting it to see beyond the officially sanctioned view of schools and their operation.

The benefits that such a view might yield for practitioners themselves is not entirely clear from the argument itself, nor is it made clearer by the reports that claim to be the result of having adopted such a perspective. On the one hand, there is much vague talk about such a view being "liberating" or "emancipatory" for all who achieve it. This would include practitioners as well as their critics. On the other hand, in almost all the exemplary instances of having taken such a view that I have encountered, the practitioners are portrayed in a poor light. It could be argued that everyone benefits from having his mistakes pointed out and, less painfully, from having the mistakes of others laid bare for all to see. But somehow that argument leaves me with an uneasy feeling of the sort aroused by the parent who claims that the spanking about to be delivered will hurt the grown-up more than the child. So, like its predecessor, this brief sketch of
the proposal to back off from the world of educational practice, at least in the sense of terminating any "sweetheart" deals that may have come into being, also ends on a note of uncertainty.

The only question remaining, for which time is scant, has to do with my reactions to the two trends—the turning toward new intellectual traditions and the call for an altered relationship between practitioners and those of us who study what they do. What do I make of them?

A partial answer to that question has doubtlessly been revealed in much that I have said so far, for there is no such thing, I suspect, as a completely neutral description of anything, at least not of anything as complex as the phenomena under discussion. It should come as no surprise, then, if I were to sum up what has been revealed already and what has yet to come with the single wishy-washy word ambivalence. That's how I feel toward the Discontents. And, given the sheer bulk and complexity of the writings covered by my blanket term, what else could you expect?

On the positive side, there is something refreshing, even at times heady, about the attempt to gain a new perspective on educational matters by drawing upon intellectual traditions that heretofore have been overlooked or ignored. Thus, there is much about this body of writing that is intellectually stimulating and challenging. It is also better written, for the most part, than the average fare to be found within educational journals; faint praise, I realize, but still to be counted on the plus side.

But counterbalancing the refreshment that comes from the introduction of new ideas and the pleasure of readable prose is the annoyance created by too many signs of in-groupiness and too many lapses into a sophomoric profundity, characterized by half-baked thoughts and a vulgar display of partially digested knowledge. Terms like hegemony and hermeneutics get tossed around as though everybody but a fool is intimately familiar with their meaning. Lebenswelts and weltanschaungs and geisteswissenschaftens are plopped like German dumplings into the thin broth of Anglo-Saxon prose in the hope, I suppose, of thickening it. Buzz words from the writings of some of the European intellectuals I have named are inserted almost surreptitiously into the middle of sentences, like sly winks to the cognoscenti.

Again speaking positively, I certainly share what seems to be an almost universal rejection of the narrow-minded empiricism that has dominated educational inquiry throughout this century. I, too, have had my fill of studies whose triviality is cloaked by the mantle of scientistic mumbo-jumbo and all gussied up with numbers that add up to nothing. These we can do without.

At the same time, I suspect that the more extreme critics among our Discontents would not be satisfied with the elimination of trivial or poorly conducted empirical studies but, rather, would like to throw out both the baby and the bath. In this extreme view, all attempts at quantification are seen as violating the complexity of reality. From this perspective, science, with all its talk about reliability, objectivity, and the rest, is reduced to little more than vain posturing. I strongly disagree with this extreme view and find it troubling.
One of the things that troubles me most is that some extreme advocates of the antiscientific or antiempirical position continue to make claims about educational matters whose truth value could only be established, it seems to me, by using the methodology being rejected. When, for example, an author talks about American schools as being institutions in which intellectual development is arrested, he or she is under some obligation to substantiate such a sweeping charge. And two or three anecdotes involving teacher sadism, or some other kind of folly, will not do. Empirical claims demand empirical support. If the latter cannot be provided, the former should not be made. This allows plenty of room for personal impressions, conjectures, and other forms of guesswork that require some investigation by others or by the guesser at some later date. But some of the writings I have encountered, particularly by a few authors who claim to be taking a “liberated” and, hence, critical view of our educational enterprise, go far beyond such tentative pronouncements, while at the same time they appear to be thumbing their noses at the very procedures that might help to make their accusations stick. When that happens I get nervous.

Finally, I sense a youthfulness in this body of curricular writings that is at once bracing and disconcerting. I need hardly explain the bracing quality, for that is what youthfulness is all about. It’s full of life, feisty, and has a sparkle in its eye. What I find disconcerting about this quality, however, is that it seems to be conjoined with a spirit of intergenerational conflict that diminishes its initial attractiveness. Perhaps this, too, is an inevitable aspect of youthfulness, but I suspect it’s not. My suspicion returns my thoughts to the deathbed metaphor and to Pinar’s talk of becoming an heir. The occupant of that bed, come to think of it, cannot be just any aged person. It almost has to be a relative, and probably a parent at that. An ancient fantasy, Freud reminds us. As common as acne among the young. Enough talk about my own ambivalence. I suspect that many of the Discontents feel it as well.

Meanwhile, back on the cliff at the end of the trail, the older traveler turned and looked incredulously at his younger companion. “What’s got into you, son?” he asked. “That ain’t no field of curriculum. Them is plain old summer squash as far as the eye can see. Field of curriculum! Well, I never! All that university book-learning must have gone to your head. Well, you’re home now, son, so you can talk normal again. Just mind your words and speak up loud and clear. You should have plenty to talk about.”

After a long pause the older man again broke the silence. “Let’s go now,” he said.

The pair turned, walked back to their horses, remounted, and began the long descent into the valley. Neither spoke on the way down.

REFERENCES

HAMILTON, DAVID; MACDONALD, BARRY; KING, CHRISTINE; JENKINS, DAVID; and PARLETT, MALCOLM, eds. Beyond the numbers game: A reader in educational evaluation. Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 1977.
When Susan Sontag treated "illness as metaphor," she did so to clarify the perspectives through which we see tuberculosis and cancer. Not only have the traditional metaphors falsified the actualities of those diseases, she said, but in some fundamental way they are unjust. Philip Jackson examines death as metaphor for talking about curriculum; he also questions the notion of "field." His intention, too, appears to be to clarify; he wants to show the impact of reification, to break through various kinds of mystification, to recover a way of speaking that might make a difference in the schools. Displaying (with some delectation) the fictions created by the participants in the curricular debate, he does not penetrate the heart of the matter, or so it seems to me. Unlike Susan Sontag, he does not have a clear sense of the actuality the metaphors obscure, nor does he communicate a sense of his own evident commitment to effecting needed change. Instead, he implies that we are all actors in some strange fictional domain.

Something similar happens with respect to "Discontents." A reader is led to associate with Sigmund Freud's Civilization and Its Discontents and Freud's stress on the fragility of culture in the face of our "instinctual urgencies." That book ended with an attribution of the dejection of the modern age to the recognition that human beings had so perfected their techniques of mastery and control that they were in a position to "exterminate one another to the last man." But Jackson suggests that the "spirit of discontent" he finds in educational discussion has been concocted deliberately (in East Anglia, or in London, or in Hershey, ...