

Quadrille

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Bennington College
Bennington, Vermont

CONTINUOUSNESS AND STRIKING CHANGE

by Howard Nemerov

Address to the Trustees and Friends of Bennington College
(New York City, October 26)

I. Some of the things this talk is not, or is not intended to be:

1. It is not a fund-raising speech. Had the President and trustees wanted one of those, they would not have honored me with the invitation. They would have asked, perhaps, President Sachar of Brandeis, who on the evidence appears to know fund-raising tolerably well. I will say, though, that it is a salutary thing for the working teacher to have to contemplate money in relation to the schools, and I may have a remark or two to make about that contemplation later on.

2. It is not a speech about *human values*. Most of us, hearing the epithet "human values" spoken from the platform, clutch at our wallets, whether in alarm or resignation. The epithet is indeed revealing, for on the occasions of its being most solemnly invoked the values appealed to always turn out to be firmly related to fund-raising. Moreover, if a naughty world could possibly be made better by speeches about human values the job would surely have been done by now, or at least signs of the improve-



ment would have begun to be visible.

3. It is not a speech about what terrible shape the world is in. I take it we are all aware that the world is in terrible shape and getting both better and worse at every instant, both in the same ways and in different ways; that

the amazing advance of the physical sciences is destroying us and making us more comfortable; that art and literature are products of decadent self-indulgence, luxurious frivolities which nevertheless enshrine all that we are able to think of as wisdom; I take it we are aware of a host of such items of fashionable speech, all of them somehow or other connected with education, hence with fund-raising. . . . But I do you the honor of supposing you have your own views on the state of the world, and needn't hear any more of it from me.

I brought up these three lines I am not to follow in order to observe, first, that all three, whatever their other relations, are alike in at any rate this one respect, that they are spoken of publicly only in platitude, as if platitude were a language all its own, like French. Reading, in preparation for this evening, an enormous bundle of essays dealing with the state of education (*Daedalus*, 88.1) I made the disconcerting discovery that very learned, wise, and good men, confronting this theme, reduced themselves promptly to the making of helpless remarks indicating that they were, by and large and other things being equal, against sin. Here are a few examples.

"Culture is activity of thought, and receptiveness to beauty and humane feeling." "The merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth." "The valuable intellectual development is self-development." "Education with inert ideas is not only useless: it is, above all

things, harmful." "Every intellectual revolution which has ever stirred humanity into greatness has been a passionate protest against inert ideas." "We enunciate two intellectual commandments, 'Do not teach too many subjects,' and again, 'What you teach, teach thoroughly.'"

These impeccable sentiments do not come from the President of the local PTA, but are drawn from only the first few paragraphs of a rather celebrated lecture by Alfred North Whitehead. I don't think I disagree with a single one of them; they are all probably quite true, so true that one could weep great tears of boredom and impatience at the idea of having to repeat them. Must I repeat them? As some fellow said: why get up early in the morning to think the thoughts everyone thinks? But on the other hand, if I don't in one way and another repeat them, what is left to say? Kenneth Burke said on this point: the liar is the greatest perfectionist, he would even revise the truth.

For to announce boldly that I am not talking about fundraising, human values, or the terrible condition of the world, is a clear signal to you that I shall be talking about nothing else—indeed, what else is there? The education of the young is a specifically human value, it is intimately related to the perils of being in the world, and it does have to be paid for. What surprises me sometimes is that it does get paid for, in our country, so amply. From the side of school and teacher the amplitude is always insufficient, just because growing children always need new shoes; and yet a neutrally considering observer may find much that is admirable in the vast evidences available of disinterested benevolence on the part of ever so many people. It is as though education were implicitly being regarded as a kind of salvation; as though people give money to colleges as in other times they gave money to have masses said for the repose of their souls. I don't remember whether the money given for masses was tax-deductible or not, but the phrase disinterested benevolence still seems to me very largely applicable. For the education that is being paid for is scarcely required to justify itself in reckonable terms at all; and when it tries to do so, the justifying generally takes the form of platitude, as I said; or the purveying, as Thorstein Veblen said, of "ponderous vendible intangibles."

Maybe this is the difficulty that confronts even the learned, wise and good on occasions such as these, that they are being asked to deal in General Good, which Blake said was the refuge of the hypocrite, scoundrel and flatterer, adding proudly: to particularize is the alone distinction of merit. So I shall try to be a bit particular in what follows, dealing with the way education appears to one who does it day by day and year by year, so that the appearance offered necessarily differs from what one reads in catalogues and brochures. I am trying to sum up something of what I think I learned on the subject at, from, through, Bennington College and its people, and in dedicating these remarks to the hopeful future of the College I mean to express however inadequately my gratitude to the place that was for me, as the whaling ship was to Ishmael, my Yale College

and my Harvard.

The theme of these reflexions is ancient and new, ever with us and ever unresolved. It unites ever so many of the knowledges, but unites them chiefly by being a scandal and an absurdity to reason in all of them, and its applications might be made equally well whether we should consider our own lives, the course and career of the world itself, or the situation of the College to which in various ways we confess ourselves attached. I have called this theme Continuousness and Striking Change. My way of dealing with it in the classroom has typically been radical and digressive, rather than linear and argumentative, and I have not tried to do otherwise here. I present, to begin with, as though they are fugue subjects, three sentences, and I try to weave up their relations so that they shall say something about one another.

1. Human beings live by images; this word "image" is the original and true meaning of the word "idea."

2. For good or ill, education is a process trying to look like a result.

3. Education has to do with the transfer of knowledge, skill, and power, hopefully also of responsibility and what the tribe deems wisdom, down the generations; our unexpressed prayer, as teachers and as parents, is that by means of education this transfer may be accomplished with more friendliness and charm than it is in *King Lear*.

If you inspect the idea of "the generations" you find that like most abstract ordering ideas it is a bit confused. The confusion is over whether things called "generations" do or do not exist.

Within any family it is plain that generations do exist: there are usually three of them visible at the same time, and no one has much trouble distinguishing between them. In any larger community, though, of tribe or town or state, the idea of generations looks odd because people do not have babies on a single schedule, all at the same time and twenty-five years apart, but have babies any old time, in a random and disorderly manner. So the idea of "the generations," like many another idea, is a convenient fiction for viewing something continuous, something simultaneously streaming and particulate—like flame breaking into sparks, for instance, or like the jet of a fountain breaking into water drops—as though it were a series of discrete and ordered classes. From this fiction, both confusion and clarity are able to be obtained.

Here is an image to unite the two contrary aspects of "the generations." In a length of rope marked in segments A, B, C, all the fibers making up the rope at A are also present at B; and all the fibers making up the rope at C are also present at B. But no fiber present at A is also present at A is also present at C, and no fiber present at C

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BENNINGTON BEGINS CAPITAL FUNDS CAMPAIGN

Bennington College's Capital Funds Campaign began officially this fall with dinners in New York and Boston and a concert in Washington, D.C. These were the first in a series of dinners and gatherings planned in major cities throughout the country in coming months.

Nearly 400 persons attended the New York dinner, October 26 at the Hotel Pierre. Howard Nemerov, poet and teacher at Bennington from 1948 until 1966, was the main speaker (a transcript appears in this issue). Oscar M. Ruebhausen, chairman of the Board of Trustees from 1957 until this September, served as master of ceremonies and gave a short talk on the history of the College. Mrs. Richard S. Emmet, of Glen Head, L.I., was introduced at the dinner as new Board chairman, and President Bloustein outlined the planned development program.

Following the dinner Robertson Ward, the Chicago architect designing the major new buildings for Bennington College, gave a presentation of plans and diagrams showing possible spatial solutions to the specific architectural problems at Bennington.

Franklin Ford, Dean of Faculty at Harvard and a member of the Bennington Board of Trustees since 1962, was the main speaker in Boston on November 2. The dinner, in the Harvard Club, attracted more than 200 alumnae, husbands and friends of the College. Mrs. Emmet was again

introduced and shared with Mary (Eddison) Welch '40, the duties of master of ceremonies. Speakers also included President Bloustein and Kathleen (Harriman) Mortimer '40. Mr. Ward's exhibit was made available to the guests during the cocktail hour.

The Washington concert, performed by Lionel Nowak, piano, and Orrea Pernel, violin, in the Presidential Suite of the Smithsonian Science and Technology Institute, attracted about 100 guests. Miss Pernel has been a member of the College's music faculty since 1943, and Mr. Nowak since 1948. In addition to the teaching of music, Mr. Nowak has served for the past year and a half as the College's Director of Development. They played works by Schubert, Nowak and Esther (Williamson) Ballou, Bennington, '37. After the concert President Bloustein defended the role of the small liberal arts college in America against recent "predictions of its imminent and financial bankruptcy."

In making a case for "education on a human scale," President Bloustein argued against "the chorus of doom-sayers who have predicted the withering away of the liberal arts college on education grounds" and affirmed that Bennington will "maintain its character as a small undergraduate college dedicated primarily to individualized teaching of liberal arts and sciences."

The role of the small college in America today, he said,

is of even greater importance during the present "dramatic shift of the center of gravity in American higher education" from liberal arts education to specialization.

"We believe the essential goal of education is the development of a humane style of life, which alone gives meaning to knowledge and skill," he said. "This goal must not be subverted in an increasingly specialized and technologically-oriented age."

"There's a special kind of maturation, a special kind of humanizing, a special kind of civilizing that takes place in the liberal arts college," he said.

"Thus, in a time when subject matter and technique have assumed academic preeminence, we still insist on breadth of perspective and the inculcation of humane values as primary education goals," he continued. "In a time when educational method is attuned to the needs of masses of students, we still insist on maintaining a small and flexible academic community in which the individual student can be the measure and controlling force of her own education; in a time when faculty have grown increasingly aloof from the undergraduate, we still insist on a faculty which finds its essential fulfillment in undergraduate teaching."

Mr. Bloustein also emphasized the economic soundness of the small independent college in the face of recent predictions by McGeorge Bundy, President of the Ford Foun-



Editorial Note

Quadrille is published at Bennington College six times a year during term. It is designed to reflect the views and opinions of students, faculty, administration, alumnae, trustees, parents of students, and friends of the College. It is distributed to all the constituencies, and is intended primarily as a monthly paper in which members of the Greater College Community may expound, publicly, on topical issues.

The editors of *Quadrille* invite articles, statements, opinion and comment, letters to the editors, photographs and graphics, and reviews from members of all the constituencies.

This is a special issue, devoted entirely to the Capital Funds Program. For that reason no Alumnae news, articles or letters to the editors have been included, but will appear in the January issue of *Quadrille*.

STAFF

Editor—Laurence J. Hyman

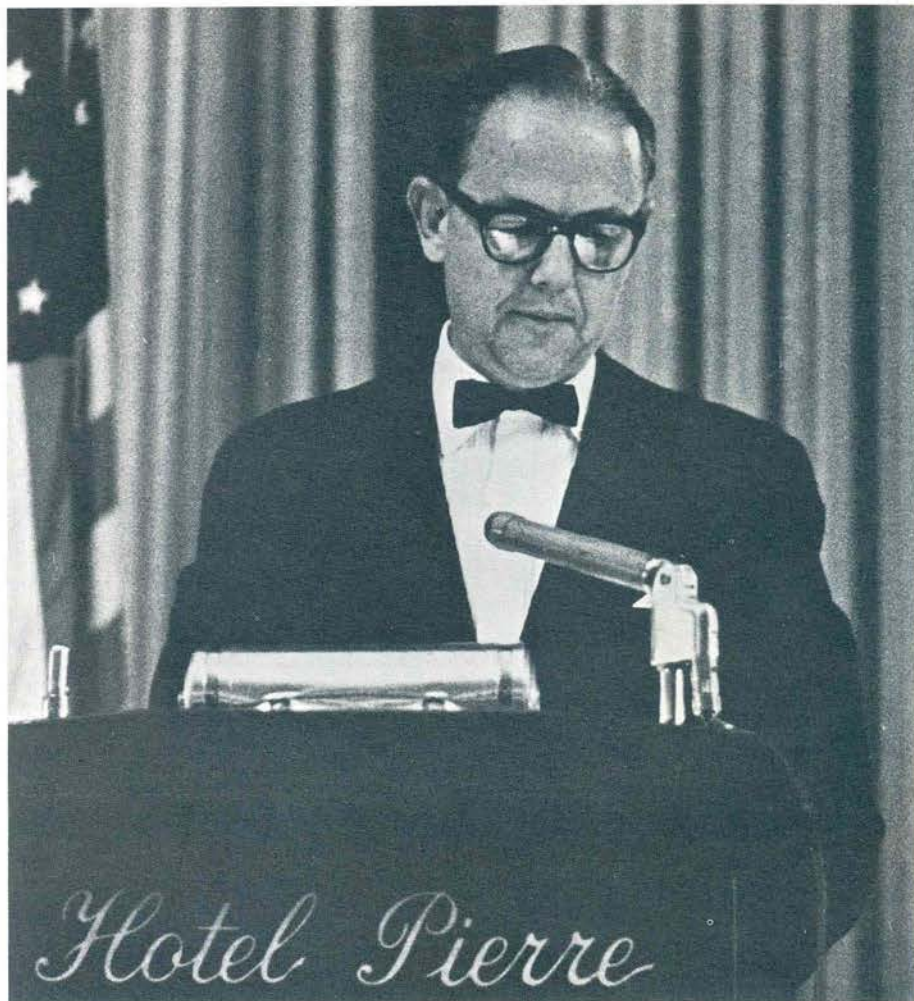
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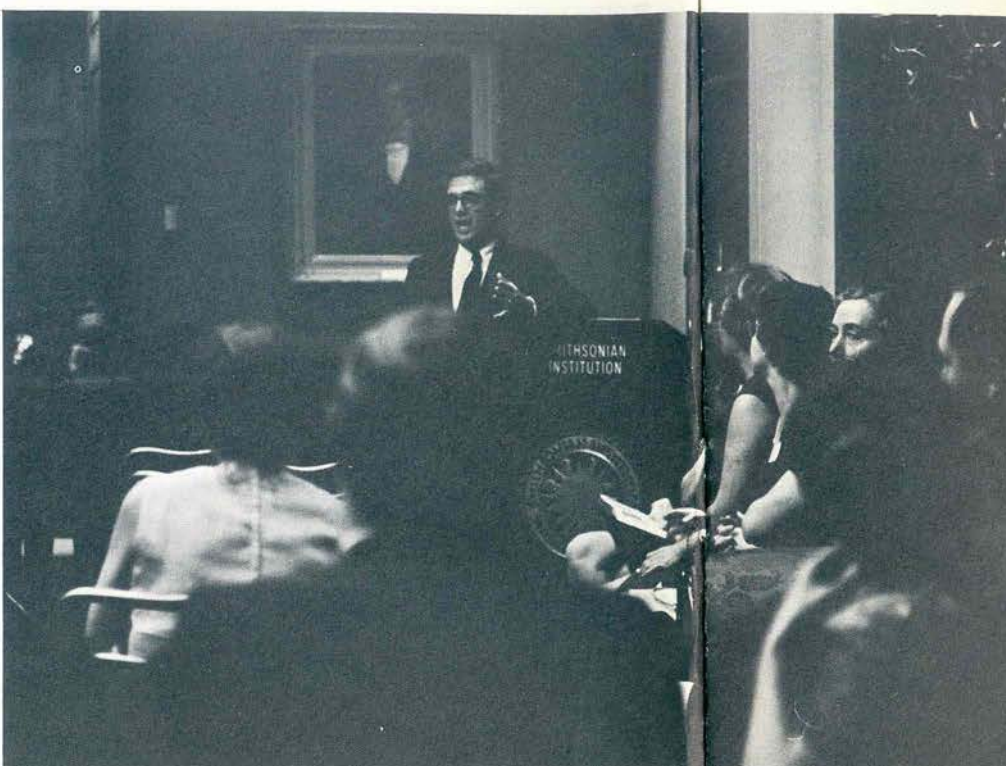
—Drawings by Peggy Kohn

—Photographs by Laurence J. Hyman





Above left: President Bloustein speaking in Washington. Far left: Mrs. Bloustein and Robertson Ward, architect for new buildings (in Boston). Left: Lydia (Stokes) Katzenbach '45 and Kathleen (Harriman) Mortimer '40 (in Washington). Above: Oscar Ruebhausen, out-going chairman of the Board of Trustees (in New York).





dation and others, that it faced "imminent bankruptcy." He urged that the success of Bennington's capital funds program would assure its educational and financial viability in coming years.

"Bennington College opened its doors in 1932 in the teeth of a national depression," he said. "This year we have opened a national capital funds program in the teeth of predictions that our existence is foredoomed to failure. We are confident that the success of our modest Capital Campaign will assure continuing education vitality and financial stability."

The Capital Funds Campaign is designed to finance the gradual expansion of Bennington College, with an increase in student enrollment from 350 to about 500 in 1970. It will allow the construction of new facilities at the College, representing the first major building since the College's opening in 1932. Included in the building program are new student houses, a science building, visual and performing arts buildings, and alterations and renovations to existing buildings.

The goal of the campaign also includes \$4,750,000 for

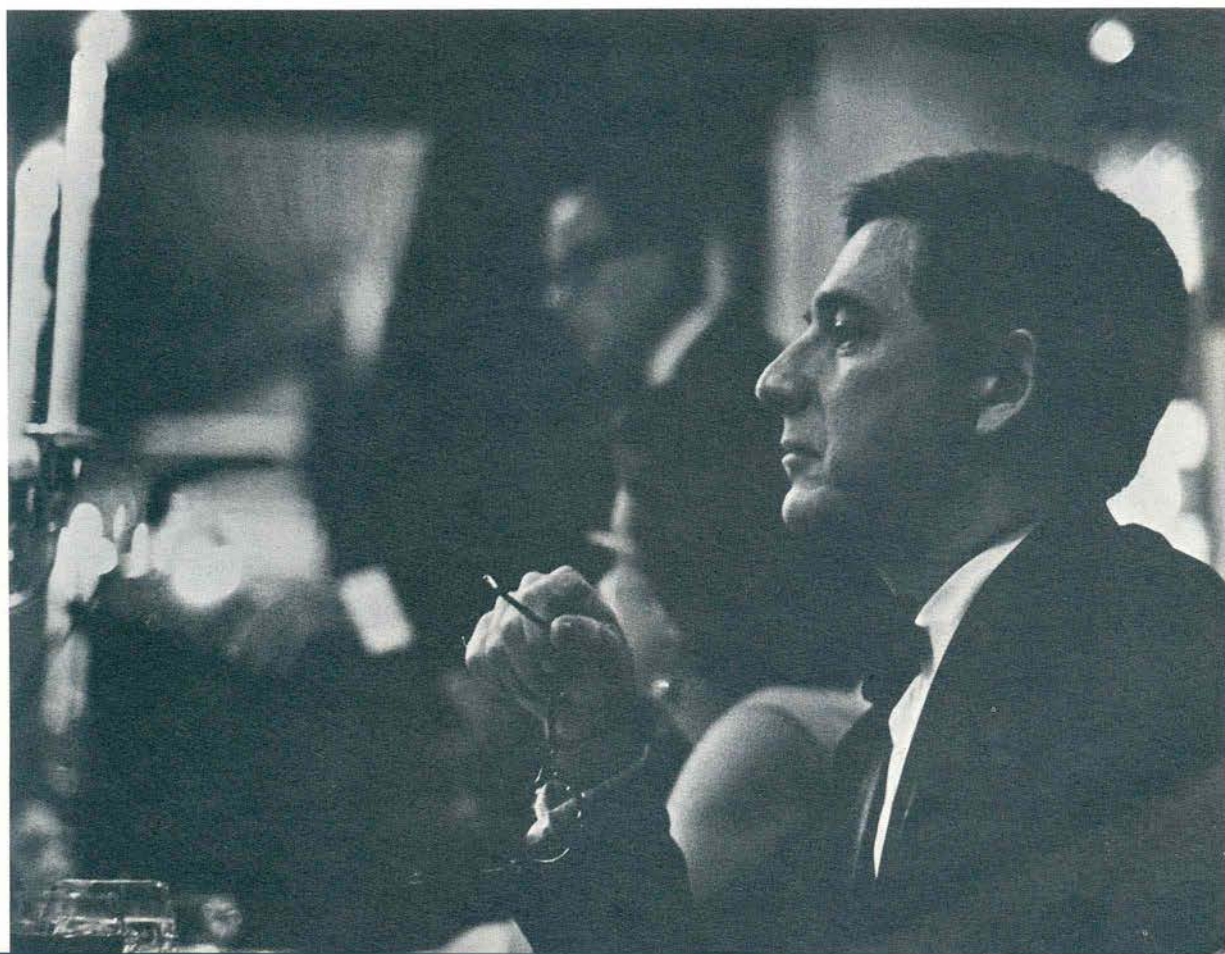


Above left: President Bloustein (in Boston). Left: Kathleen (Harriman) Mortimer '40 (in Boston) and, above, Jerome Newman (in New York), co-chairmen of Capital Campaign. Above right: Lionel Nowak, Director of Development (in Boston). Right: President Bloustein (in New York).

endowment. Bennington College opened its doors with no endowment and today has only a \$2 million endowment, one-tenth to one-twentieth the endowment of other colleges of similar size. As a result, it has had to rely almost solely on annual gifts to make up the difference between student fees and actual costs. The increased endowment, even though still far short of the national average, will enable the College to increase faculty salaries and to offer larger amounts of scholarship aid, thereby attracting students from a wider variety of economic backgrounds.

About 40% of the total goal of \$11.2 million has already been raised, President Bloustein said.

Heading the Capital Campaign are co-chairmen Jerome Newman and Kathleen (Harriman) Mortimer. The campaign events are being handled on a regional basis, and co-chairmen for arrangements at the New York dinner were Sara Jane (Troy) Schiffer, '43, Janet (Wells) Sherwin, '57, and Betty (Harrington) Dickinson, '43. Dorothy (Coffin) Harvi, '42, was in charge of the Boston dinner and Margaret (Suter) Rood, '36, planned the evening in Washington.





Educational Diversity and Bennington College

by Franklin Ford

address at the Boston dinner, November 2

My assignment tonight, as I understand it, is to suggest something about higher education in this country, specifically as it relates to Bennington, Bennington's needs and Bennington's promise, as background for talking about the college—something we shall all be doing in different ways and different settings very frequently in the months ahead.

I think the best way for me to start is with a pledge of allegiance to diversity, as we encounter it in American education. I suspect Americans tend to be nonchalant about that diversity. We take it for granted. Yet the pluralism of the American college system, if not exactly planned, today reflects a conscious, continuing preference, a choice of this alternative to other systems found in highly educated countries elsewhere in the world. Contrast it, for example, with the centralized system of academies, institutes and graded universities in the Soviet Union. Or, more familiar to most of us, the also very centralized, pyramidal system of France. The American system is obviously not like either. It is at its worst a clutter, at its best an intriguing and valuable tapestry.

Now, admittedly, such a system has to accept the charge of considerable unevenness. Some years ago, just before the Second World War, an essentially friendly, albeit slightly waspish, English commentator remarked, "If you were to draw up a list of the twenty best colleges and universities in the world, America would have more than its share. If you were to draw up a list of the fifty worst, America would have them all." I don't believe that that's

in fact true any more, partly because of vigorous competition in many other countries for places in the bottom fifty. But the fact that we are a bewildering country of literally countless colleges and universities is the first point I should make in seeking to move in on the special role of Bennington.

All colleges and universities are open to criticism, simply because they are human institutions, but also, I think, because education is peculiarly vulnerable to measurements of the obvious gap between the ideal and the real. Education is by definition an idealizing activity. It is by its very nature critical. Hence, we spend a great deal of our time talking about things we don't do as well as we



should or don't do at all, and may have to be encouraged from time to time to take note of what's going reasonably well—and then try to do still better. In any case, it seems to me Americans by and large have an interesting range of choices when they start thinking about colleges.

Most of us tend to talk about them by categories. We talk about state universities, about big "university-colleges" (prestigious or not), about junior community colleges, about liberal arts colleges (frequently calling them "good liberal arts colleges," which I should suppose is somewhat insulting if you're at the receiving end). Such categories are complicated enough in this country, but I suggest they are not fully adequate to cover the range of variety we face. For me at least, the real interest lies in the absolute individuality of any institution that is worth discussing. The University of Michigan is not *the* state university, as some kind of abstraction, nor is the University of California. Each has a powerful personality and great values to offer certain kinds of students looking for certain kinds of things. I might also point out that, except in Damon Runyon's accounts of football games as seen through the eyes of Broadway bookies, there are really no Harvards and Yales. The institutions are not plural, and I've had some reason in the last few days to reflect that at least one of them can be quite singular. In any case, Bennington, I feel sure we all agree, cannot be classified simply as a "high-tuition well-known Eastern women's college."

Well then, what are we to say of Bennington's personality? What is the individualism that attracts and holds our affection and, in our more solemn moments, suggests a special role or mission? I would be inclined to be quite skeptical (vicariously) and put the question back to myself: Is there anything at all special about it, except that you're attached to it? I am ready to argue that there *are* some specifics that give Bennington its personality and its worth and that help to explain why people who have no institutional connection with the place have already shown their interest in the present Capital Campaign.

First, I should want to stress the college as a community, a community small enough to be comprehensible, but large enough to be complicated and hence interesting. It includes within its confines a wide variety of points of view that nevertheless encounter each other on a stage that can be covered by the normal range of a pair of human eyes. And beyond that, it is a community which is quite self-conscious about being a community, and seeks to learn by being one.

I should interject here that I've often been impressed by the performance of Bennington graduates I knew as students—and many others I have known since—specifically the ease with which they assume community responsibility wherever they go after college. It is doubtless one

of the things they've learned best because they were least aware they were learning it. It *is* something I think the college gives its graduates and I invite you to look around among those you know and ask yourself if you don't agree.

Second, there is Bennington's strong pride in innovation. Indeed, innovation—if this is not too paradoxical—has become Bennington's principal tradition after thirty-five years, a part of what I would call the institution's "higher conservatism." It is not something that ought to be exaggerated or treated as though it applies to everything the College does. Some of the best things any college does are bound to be very old, since the basic values of the education are themselves old.



It is all too easy to assume, if you're not looking around the horizon very much, that everything one does in such a community is unique or innovative. Bennington did not, although I should be glad for present purposes if it had, invent individual and small group instruction. If it were to claim that honor, universities as distant and as ivy-encrusted as Oxford would, I think, complain. Nor did it invent student government or even large-scale student participation in government. If you've read accounts of medieval universities such as Paris and Bologna, you know that the students for long periods ran them—and ran them extremely badly. Bennington did, however, unquestionably pioneer in this country the integration of the arts, visual and performing, into recognized programs of college instruction leading to recognized degrees.

Another thing it did, something I suspect is less often remembered in the community and may be in danger of being forgotten completely, was to emphasize through its divisional structure the relationship among various fields within broad areas of knowledge. Let me illustrate simply by pointing out that, in the Social Science Division, stu-

dents and teachers alike are, and have been for many years, encouraged to think about the relationship among, say, philosophy, history and psychology. Bennington was in doing this quite unself-consciously at a time (and I'm speaking here primarily of the 1930's and 40's) when the emphasis in most institutions was on "disciplines" and on the importance of dividing disciplines one from another.

But essentially, it seems to me, the important thing is not so much to tally particulars as to emphasize the hospitality to experimentation that is part of the spirit of the place. That, I should say, is in fact its sovereign spirit—and it is a spirit of very great importance to the country and to the world.

Not all the trial balloons that are sent up will stay up: they never have and they never will. But that should not be a cause for excessive worry, if only because one also learns from failure. More important, I think Bennington is resilient enough, sufficiently accustomed to seeing trial balloons go up and some of them come down, so that it can take chances that bigger, older or less secure places (and I can't think of any institution which meets all three of those specifications) would be more reluctant to take because of the large investment they involve. In other words, in an academic flotilla which includes some very large, deep-keeled ships, it is important to have scouting sloops that can do the interesting investigations over long, uncharted expanses of the sea.

A reasonably small college community then, and a home of innovation in all but the fundamentals where there is neither need to innovate nor justifiable desire to do so. What else is Bennington? Well, a college for women. I want to be extremely careful here because I'd like to avoid the fate I once heard befall an elder colleague across the river, one of the nicest and most sincere men I have ever dealt with but one who had a tendency to step into rhetorical trouble as one might innocently step down a well shaft. On this occasion he was explaining his great interest in another women's college and having almost apologized (because, as he said, he was no feminist), he wound up with a ringing affirmation which pretty well precluded any orderly discourse from there on: "What it all comes down to is that there just are a lot more interesting things you can do with women than with men." Quite seriously, and I am now speaking only of higher education, there are.

Let me illustrate at least three respects in which I think Bennington can capitalize on the fact that it is a women's college. First of all, because a higher proportion of female undergraduates will go directly from college to family life or to short terms of business or professional life—in any case not on to advanced professional training—there is salutary pressure on the College to keep thinking of what the *undergraduate* experience can and should mean on its

own terms. Most American colleges, men's, women's or coeducational, are concerned about that at the moment. Most of us are trying, but the preoccupation comes naturally to a good women's college. Here I think Bennington can continue to give leadership in the design of a wide variety of undergraduate programs which really do make sense in their own terms.

Secondly, education on the college level for women invites direct attack on some very deep cultural prejudices in our society. I have in mind specifically the pseudo-humanistic prejudice against science. If one considers the contribution science has made to the humanities over the centuries, the contribution it made to original notions of "humanity," it seems almost ludicrous for us to have to argue about this as we enter the last third of the twentieth century. Yet it is important that we do so, it is important that we make clear that illiteracy with respect to science—I mean simply ignorance of how a scientist defines and tackles a problem—constitutes a real deficiency for the would-be educated person. I can't think of any place better to test this and indeed to make progress with it than in a college such as Bennington, where all of the old shibboleths are present, naturally, but where a flexible faculty-student approach now seems ready to take on this issue.

There is one other thing about a women's college which seems to me worth capitalizing on. As I believe those who have dealt with their own children of the two sexes will confirm, college-age women are by and large less timid than male students at the same stage of development. I mean this in the best sense: less timid because they seem less afraid of going out on a limb, being called wrong, even being proven wrong. There is a chance to get a class of young women involved and committed in a way which is very difficult to duplicate with either men or women in a co-educational class. I think co-education, where established, has certain values of its own but I don't favor it, as some of you know, in Bennington's case. Instead, let us capitalize on the positive values to be found in a women's college as it tackles other forms of experimentation.

Let me conclude by returning to my opening remarks about diversity in American education. It should be emphasized that such diversity does not prevent our colleges and universities from communicating and learning from each other. As a trustee, I hope and believe Bennington will remain open to ideas coming from outside that beautiful corner of Vermont. On the other hand, I'm sure that the export rate too will remain high. I cannot imagine a better investment in the enterprise of keeping American higher education thinking, trying things, looking ahead, than the capital drive on which Bennington College has now embarked.

BENNINGTON COLLEGE WINTER LECTURE SERIES

The annual Bennington Winter Lecture Series will be held January 8, January 29, and February 19 in the Lower Lobby of the Bennington College Office at The Martin Foundation in New York City. This year's series will feature members of the College's division of language and literature.

On January 8, Nicholas Delbanco will read from his works in progress.

On January 29, Stanley Edgar Hyman will speak on "Iago: Some Approaches to Motivation," five critical views of motivation. The audience is advised to reread *Othello*.

Barbara Herrnstein Smith will discuss, on February 19, the challenge to traditional conception of poetic form that are implied in certain developments in contemporary poetry.

All lectures will begin at 8.00 p.m. There will be a discussion period after each talk, followed by a coffee hour. Tickets are available through the New York Office, 26 West 56th Street (212-246-4357).

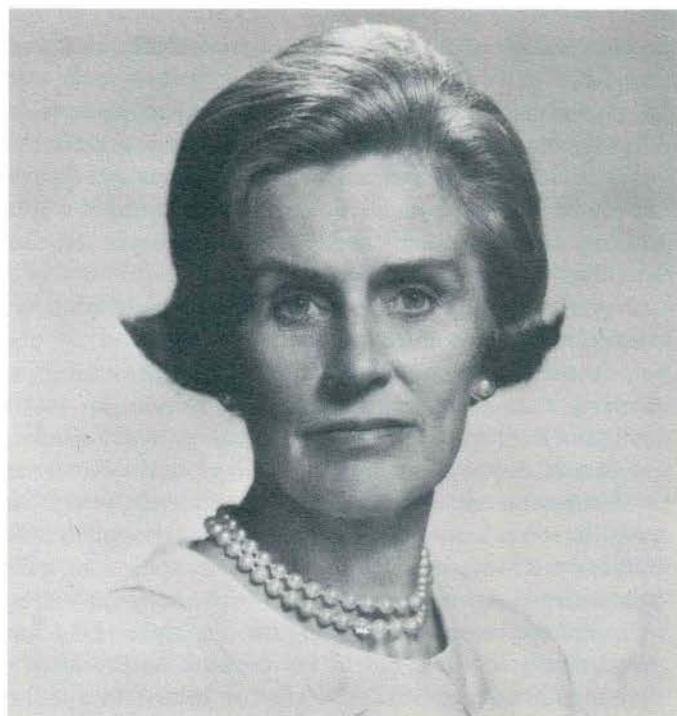


SPACES OPEN FOR SPRING '68 ADMISSION

There will be between 25-30 places open at the College at the beginning of the Spring term.

This information has been sent out to secondary schools. We print it here for your information, and to pass along to anyone you might consider eligible.

11



BACHRACH

Mrs. Richard S. Emmet chosen Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Mrs. Richard S. Emmet, of Glen Head, Long Island, has been elected chairman of the Bennington College Board of Trustees. She succeeds Oscar M. Ruebhausen, of New York City, who served as chairman of the thirty-eight member board for ten years. Mrs. Emmet has been a trustee of Bennington College since 1950 and was chairman of the board in 1956-57. She has also been vice-chairman of the Educational Policies Committee and served on the development planning committee.

Mrs. Emmet was born in Seattle, Washington, and attended school there and in the northwest. When she was eighteen, she became assistant fiction editor for *Collier's* magazine and has published short stories in a variety of magazines. She is married to Richard S. Emmet, senior partner in Emmet, Marvin and Martin, a New York law firm. They have two children; Mrs. Emmet also has two children by a previous marriage.

In addition to her work as a Bennington trustee, Mrs. Emmet has been active on committees and boards of various musical and social service organizations in New York City and Long Island, especially the Association for the Aid of Crippled Children. She is a member of the Colony Club of New York and honorary secretary of the Meadow Brook Hounds of Long Island.

is also present at A. This sounds paradoxical—as if there should be twice as many fibers at least at B as at the other two—but the paradox is easily resolved upon the consideration that A and B and C are three points arbitrarily selected from among an infinitude of the same, and that this infinitude of points is, as beforesaid, the mind's way of dealing with continuous and streaming and yet somehow sparkling things.

Never minding exceptions, the student population of a college changes completely every fifth year, and the division into four classes makes the idea of "generations" particularly though of course artificially convincing in this instance. The student population, which is to say the largest part of the population of the college, and what it says it is substantively about, changes completely every fifth year; nevertheless, and despite what the linguistic philosopher might wish to say to us about it, something called "the college" exists. The President of Bennington College, as a philosopher trained in linguistic analysis, may have grave doubts of this, but in his capacity as President of Bennington College he is compelled to behave in a million and one ways as though something called "the college" massively and undeniably existed.

Like the idea of "the generations," then, the idea of a college contains ingenious confusions which may be used to enlighten or obscure. The students at any time composing the college are always in the same range of ages, roughly seventeen to twenty-two, while the faculty and administration occupy a much larger range from the middle twenties to the middle sixties. Also, the displacement and replacement of students appears to the faculty and administration as fairly regular, but for the student the distribution of changes in faculty and administration appears as random and disorderly, so that in the eyes of each group the other looks permanent, but in a different way. To the student, viewing a career of possibly forty years through an aperture just four years across, the faculty and administration may appear as implacably permanent as, perhaps, olders always appear to youngers; as if they were always there, had always been there, would always be there, and were unchanging. But to the teacher the students look equally permanent, though with something of the anonymous permanence of nature herself—if it is not the same swallows that return in the spring, it might as well be—until he makes the surprised observation that they are, after all, getting younger every year.

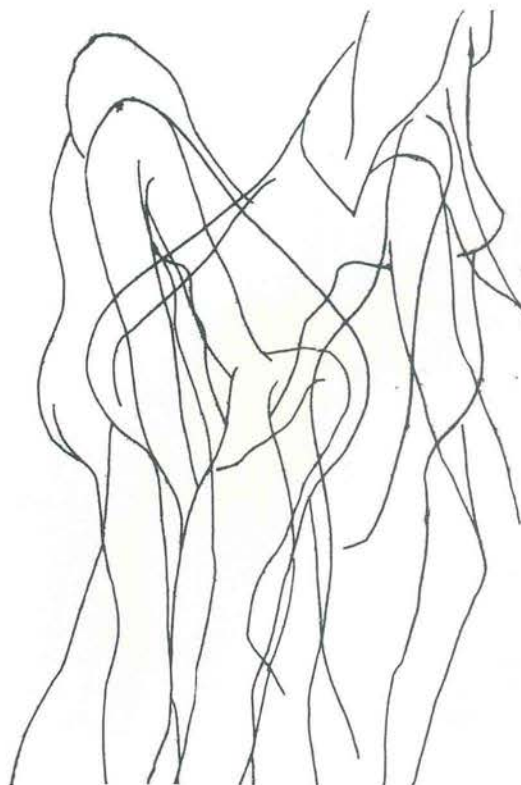
What I mean is that knowledge itself, which looks so permanent and so formidable is in the same case.

But now it seems to me that in trying to say something rather simple, even simple-minded, about education, I have become merely confused and confusing. Simple things

often have that effect. And it is an effect thoroughly appropriate, being ridiculous, to the faculty member who has been teaching, day by day and year by year, for a fairly long time, and who now hears out of nowhere the voice of some Great Examiner: Justify education. Give twelve reasons for your answer, demonstrate in what ways one of the twelve will stand up to an instant's inspection, then try to say in as few of your own words as possible what in the world you think you have been doing all these years. Remember that people have actually paid you for doing it.

Upon hearing all this, even if only in his own head, the teacher may come to the surprised realization of the precariousness and contingency of all ideas of what an institution, not to mention his own function in it, "really is," or "really is like." And he may develop a wary respect for the linguistic philosopher, as he becomes aware how ever so much that seemed substantive and beyond doubt in his

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daily life as a teacher seems now to grow tenuous, ghostly, and full of unanswerable questions as soon as he stands back and tries to say what it is, this situation he has so long been in—and been upon the whole happy to be in—but which he is now contemplating from the outside and trying to be a little bit explicit about. Still, as he trains others to answer up when called on, so now he must try to answer up.

I have taught now for well above twenty years, eighteen of them at Bennington, and am surprised to find how very

little I know of what education is or how it works. The whole subject appears to me as a mystery full of mysteries, beginning with two especially that together define something like a contradiction in the whole enterprise: first, the child's learning of language; second, the formal learning that starts when the child goes off to school and continues through college, through graduate school, possibly even through his career as a teacher.

There are, however, some reasons for this ignorance of mine, which in the hope of being a trifle less ridiculous I shall call also this ignorance of ours. One of these reasons has rather conspicuously to do with Bennington College, where it is likelier than not that the young teacher will really be a beginner, unequipped with the formidable apparatus that the graduate school is said to provide. One young man of my acquaintance began his first class, which he had stayed up all night preparing, by telling his students everything he knew about the announced subject. This took thirty-two minutes. Another young man of my acquaintance, having asked his students to read the Book of Job, appeared in class armed with a telling question: What, he said, is the Book of Job really about? After a brief, puzzled silence, a snip of a girl with two pigtailed told him what the Book of Job was really about, and after a somewhat longer silence, something like the silence between verdict and sentence, he dismissed the class. Both of those young men recovered and went on to better things. I say no more of them. On-the-job training characterizes teaching at Bennington, and that is a particular reason for my thinking of education as a process trying to look like a result.

Other reasons for ignorance are perhaps more generally applicable. When you go into any field of activity as a young man there exists one supremely necessary though not sufficient condition of your doing so, which you don't at that time know about: it is that the field of activity exists, it is there, it is something people do in the world . . . and you may be doing it for no visibly better reason than that.

This has generally, and even more harshly, to do with the process of making it in the world somehow-anyhow. When you are young you rebel against it. Then you find that your only way of expressing your rebellion is in the world and through the world, not because you believe it to be better than you did before, but because you are forced to acknowledge that the world is there and that there is nothing that is not it. A quarter century later, after considerable hard work, you look round you and discover that you now are the world, that you represent it and are held responsible by young and rebellious people for its character, though its character is at best no better than it was when you were young.

A last reason for my knowing so little about education is exactly my having been in it, one way and the other, from the age of five to this pupil present. It is difficult if not impossible to see steadily and whole what you are inside of. Nor may I except the years of war from that pedagogical sequence, for it is certain that in the air force nine-tenths of life is divided between housekeeping and schooling, with one-tenth left over for the application of those complex instructions which the student had better hope were practical ones.

There was of course the change from being a student to being a teacher. But I have already suggested that such a change is more immediate at Bennington than at many places with somewhat different views of the teacher's qualification. A beginner at teaching—and I suspect this is true most everywhere, for any teacher must be a beginner for many years—has to be more of a student than he ever was before: he is suddenly become responsible for knowing something of a somewhat called *knowledge*, and transmitting a small fraction of it to his pupils; to think about the general aims and purposes of education at eight-thirty on a Monday morning would be his surest way to disaster. So he goes in there—teachers often say it that way, as if they were football players—he goes in there and teaches, say, something he has picked up of a currently modish way of viewing *Hamlet*, blithely unconscious, during those first years, that a decade later he will experience grave doubts whether that was knowledge or education at all, and will in any event be looking at the play in quite a different manner. It may or may not at that later time occur to him that if he then taught his pupils what he does not now believe to be true, and if he now teaches his pupils what he did not then believe to be true . . . well, it may or may not occur to him that jesting Pilate had a point. Meanwhile, at both ends of the decade the college catalogue will be found announcing in its grace way that he is teaching Shakespeare. Teaching Shakespeare, no doubt, how to do it better another time. But maybe Shakespeare had been a touch before-handed on this teaching about a process trying to look like a result—

At first from hour to hour we ripe and ripe,
And then from hour to hour we rot and rot,
And thereby hangs a tale.

The teacher tries to tell that tale with a certain consciousness of its being a tale, though not less vital and not less essential for being that. After many years of trying to teach the doctrine, in whatever field of study, of trying to become responsible for the doctrine in its forthrights and meanders and flat contradictions, it may come to him that what he hopes helplessly to teach, what he would most like to teach, is not a doctrine but a style, a way of being

in the world; and of this he says: Human beings live by images.

Human beings live by images, or try to; we can scarce do otherwise. The first business of learning is to bring to the fullest possible consciousness the fleeting, intuitional, provisional character of these images, which in the various fields of knowledge have such different names as metaphor, myth, history, faith, hypothesis, theory, law. The second business of learning is to see that the images remain instruments of vision both practical and speculative, without becoming fetishes and objects of supersititious worship. The third business of learning is now and then to provide fresh images.

That last happens rarely, so it is most important that we remind ourselves it does happen. And my three requirements of learning refer to the ideal world, which is maybe the only real world worth bothering about. In the everyday world which imposes itself on us as if it alone were real, we know too well the liability of the learned disciplines to idolatry, ritual behavior, and the abstract cruelties of doctrine, to which are made human sacrifices not the less fatal for being dull and prolonged rather than spectacular. William James said, in a conversation by chance preserved, "The natural enemy of any subject is the professor thereof." And many of us, as teachers, will surely have resembled, to our students, the monster in an old movie of which Bob Hope said, "Maybe it hasn't any teeth. But it could gum you to death."

All the same, and whatever our inadequacies, that world both real and ideal remains. I make of course no claim that its charm and kindness belong only or exclusively to Bennington, but it does seem to me true that at Bennington there has grown a style of teaching and a style of learning to go with it, that allow education to be on both sides amiable and humane. This has to do with my three sentences, which I shan't bother emphasizing again; but also, and probably even more, with a view of young people, both students and teachers, that quietly allows *their* powers—and with that also their errors—to be beneficent and a source of renewed strength to everyone.

What I have said so far of continuousness and striking change has, I think, some immediate consequences for Bennington College. The relation of these two ideas is also the relation of biographical and historical time in several ways. To put it as briefly as possible: a student whose views of the world are changing; a teacher whose views of the world are changing; a knowledge, which spatially regarded is always there and thus looks always the same, but which in time is always changing both in itself and in relation to student and teacher.

It is this last point that is most often talked of, and one of the things it is said to spell is the end of the small lib-

eral arts college, which will not be able to afford, it is said, either a sufficiently trained faculty or the enormously expensive equipment they are supposed to use in their researches. There is, we are told, a "knowledge explosion," and one result of it will be that the rich—that is, the universities—will get richer while the poor—the smaller colleges—will be left murmuring wistfully about liberal education. I shall try to say, while acknowledging some force to all that, why I think it is not necessarily so.

Probably there is a "knowledge explosion," or something like it. I've read up a symposium on the subject, and some of the contributors certainly believed we were in the midst of it. Curiously, the most enthusiastic writer in the group contended that Medieval History was the place where this explosion had hit hardest and made necessary the most fundamental revisions. The mathematician too thought his field exemplified something of the sort, but he was less happy about the results; strange and wonderful developments certainly existed, he said, and they were capable of resolving difficulties in any number of fields of study—but the people in those fields of study could not even find out about the strange and wonderful developments, much less master the techniques necessary for their application, because even mathematicians had become so specialized that they could not cover what was happening. He had appreciated, you see, that every increase in human knowledge is an exponential increase in human ignorance; what every discovery means on the debit side is that there are hundreds of millions of us who don't understand it, or even know about it.

The literary contributor was among the most doubtful of the lot. He didn't think that much of real importance had happened at all, and he shrewdly suggested a revision of terms: instead of a knowledge explosion, he said, we were in an information explosion. Not all of this information, he went on, was worth having, and some unreckonably large portion of it might be positively degrading.

I have to watch my own sympathies here, if only because no one over forty likes to hear of entire new fields of study that have come into existence too late for him, yet I think my literary colleague, Howard Mumford Jones, had a canny point in substituting information for knowledge. As to knowledge *explosion*, I had myself had occasion to remark that the cliché was apt enough if one read it literally: not that there was so much more real knowledge, but that what there was had blown apart, so that the number of bits and pieces made it seem like more knowledge. And I had devised my own term for what was happening: the nit-picking explosion, which means that in scholarly discourse you are liable increasingly to be confronted with things like this: "Dreher, for example, observed in 1948 that college students trained in music sweat more when

they listen to certain pieces than college students untrained in music." That is a real, not a made-up, example: see *American Scholar*, Spring, 1966, p. 326.

I suspect we owe this sort of stuff to accidental transmission from physics, a field of study where it seems perfectly true that a trivial observation may change the world. But it reminds me of Thoreau's saying that the mind is so delicate a thing we should be very careful what we put into it.

That, I suppose, is where a small college really comes in. Where, especially, Bennington College comes in.

The advantages of a university have been often enough spelled out. But with them go some parallel disadvantages. To benefit from the dynamism and demonism of knowledge, the university must keep up with the dynamism and demonism of knowledge. To train professionals in its graduate—and even undergraduate—departments, the university is obliged to keep the accelerating pace, and its hope must be to set that pace; that is, do what the others do, but faster. It is my observation that, along with many benefits, some having to do with scholarship and discovery, others having to do with money, there is this disadvantage: that university departments in training professionals become merely their own object. This is a sort of institutional law: after a certain point in size, speed, pressure, is passed, you do not teach the study of literature, you teach people to be literature teachers.

Bennington College, partly from its small size, partly from poverty, and partly also, I hope, from some imponderable virtue in its people, has never become subject to this sort of thing, and I trust that no expansion will ever make it subject to this sort of thing. While I should very much like to see the college established with enough money to make its continuance as permanent as human things can be, I should never wish it so rich—university rich, you may say—that it would as a routine be able to hire the big name, the man who has it made in his field, instead of the young unknown. For in such matters, to be able is to be willing, and even eager.

One particularly lovable thing about Bennington, to me, is the trust it puts in the young. No doubt it is delightful to be able to say that Bennington could secure to its faculty, and keep on its faculty for a period of years, a remarkable number of great men and men of renown. But it is to me of more moment to think of the people who came to Bennington in their twenties or earliest thirties, and made their way in their respective fields while working at the College. There are many examples. Nor is it shameful to be quite plain about the practical side of this situation, which is that the young and unknown are what Bennington can afford, for the world is made that way and Bennington College is one of the very rare places that was able to turn that disadvantage into a kind of triumph.

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A related advantage to that is Bennington's willingness to dispense with the PhD; from this, which admittedly involves judgment and a certain amount of risk, great benefits have come and may continue to come. Another related advantage is Bennington's insistence, in the appropriate fields, that the teacher be a practitioner as well as a professor of his subject. With these goes another advantage, that teachers hired by Bennington College do not look upon teaching with disdain or as antithetical to art or scholarship; on the contrary, it is characteristic for teachers at Bennington to regard their work and their teaching as aspects of the same thing. Universities may take a lofty and scornful view of that attitude as amateurish and dilettante—whereupon we are able to hold up, with a becoming smirk of false modesty, the achievements of such men as Kenneth Burke, Wallace Fowlie, William Troy, Stanley Edgar Hyman, Francis Ferguson, Ben Belitt—I speak only of the field of literature because I know it best—so many of which were done not merely while these men were at Bennington, but, we fairly say, *because* they were at Bennington: the substance and spirit of their teaching informed their books. So has it been, at Bennington College, and so may it continue to be. A former president of Bennington once said to me: "Always live for the spirit." In the immediate circumstances, what he meant was that we ought to have one more drink before going out to dinner. But I have remembered it as an adequate motto.



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