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Eulah C. Laucks, President
P.O. Box 5012
Santa Barbara, CA. 93108

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# VERNACULAR VALUES

left soft vernacular hard industrial right

*by Ivan Illich*

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## 2ND PART
## THE WAR AGAINST SUBSISTENCE

What may not be done is tabu; even more so what may not be thought. The unthinkable is a tabu of the second order. Ibn tells of a saintly Muslim who would have died rather than eat pork; he did die of hunger, with his dog watching beside him. Pork would have defiled his faith – eating the dog would have destroyed his self-image as a man. Succulent pork is forbidden; dog or clay or begonias are simply non-food. Old Mexicans, however, appreciated all three! Watch out for your begonias if you have a Mexican peasant for tea.

Just as the environment is divided by each society differently into food, poison and what is never considered as digestible, so issues are divided by us into those which are legitimate, those one leaves to the fascists, and those which nobody raises.. However, these latter are not actually illegitimate. But if you raise them, you risk being thought a fiend, or impossibly vain. The distinction between vernacular and industrial values is of this kind. With this essay, I want to draw this distinction into the realm of permissible discussion.

Since 1973, the annual commemoration of Yom Kippur reminds us of the war which triggered the energy crisis. But a more lasting effect of that war will be its impact on economic thought. Since then economists have begun to eat pork, to violate a tabu which had been implicit in formal economics. They add to the Gross National Product goods and services for which no salary is paid and to which no price tag is attached. One after another they reveal the good news that one-third, one-half or even two-thirds of all goods and services in late industrial societies are produced outside the market by housework, private study, commuting, shopping and other unpaid activities.

Economists can only deal with realms they can measure. For forays into the non-marketed, they need new sticks. To function where money is not the currency, the concepts must be *sui generis*. But to avoid splitting their science, the new tools must be consistent with the old. Pigou defined the shadow price as one such tool. It is the money needed to substitute through a good or service something which is now done without pay. The unpaid and, perhaps, even the priceless thus become consistent with the realm of commodities, enter a domain that can be operationalized, managed and bureaucratically developed. The unpaid becomes part of a shadow economy and is related to the wares in supermarkets, classrooms, and medical clinics as the wave to the particle – electrons are not intelligible unless one examines both theories.

Close analysis reveals that this shadow economy mirrors the formal economy. The two fields are in synergy, together constituting one whole. The shadow economy developed a complete range of parallel activities, following the brightly illuminated realm where labor, prices, needs and markets were increasingly managed as industrial production increased. Thus we see that the housework of a modern woman is as radically new as the wage-labor of her husband; the replacement of home-cooked food by restaurant delivery is as new as the definition of most basic needs in terms which correspond to the outputs of modern institutions.

I argue elsewhere that the new competence of some economists, enabling them to analyze this shady area, is more than an expansion of their conventional economic analysis – it is the discovery of new land which, like the industrial market, emerged for the first time in history only during the last two centuries. I feel sorrow for such economists who do not understand what they are doing. Their destiny is as sad as that of Columbus. With the compass, the new caravel designed to follow the route the compass opened, and his own flair as a mariner, he was able to hit on unexpected land. But he died, unaware that he had chanced on a hemisphere, firmly attached to the belief that he had reached the Indies.

*Made available by Valentina Borremans
TECNO-POLITICA, Cuernavaca, Mexico.

In an industrial world, the realm of shadow economics is comparable to the hidden side of the moon, also being explored for the first time. And the whole of this industrial reality is in turn complementary to a substantive domain which I call the vernacular reality, the domain of subsistence.

In terms of 20th century classical economics, both the shadow economy and the vernacular domain are outside the market, both are unpaid. Also, both are generally included in the so-called informal sector. And both are indistinctly viewed as contributions to "social reproduction." But what is most confusing in the analysis is the fact that the unpaid complement of wage-labor which, in its structure, is characteristic of industrial societies only, is often completely misunderstood as the survival of subsistence activities, which are characteristic of the vernacular societies and which may continue to exist in an industrial society.

Certain changes can now be discerned. The distinction between the market economy and its shadow weakens. The substitution of commodities for subsistence activities is not necessarily experienced as progress. Women ask whether the unearned consumption which accompanies homemaking is a privilege or whether they are actually forced into degrading work by the prevailing patterns of compulsory consumption. Students ask if they are in school to learn or to collaborate in their own stupefaction. Increasingly, the toil of consumption overshadows the relief consumption promised. The choice between labor-intensive consumption, perhaps less inhuman and less destructive, better organized, and modern forms of subsistence is personally known to more and more people. The choice corresponds to the difference between an expanding shadow economy and the recovery of the vernacular domain. But it is precisely this choice which is the most resistant blind spot of economics, as unpalatable as dog or clay. Perhaps the most unlikely candidate can help dispel some of the darkness. I propose to throw light on this issue through an examination of everyday speech. I shall proceed by contrasting the economic nature of this speech in industrial society with its counterpart in pre-industrial epochs. As I shall show, the distinction finds its origin in a little-known event which occurred at the end of the 15th century in Spain.

Early on August 3, 1492, Christopher Columbus sailed from Palos. The neighboring and much more important Cadíz was congested that year – it was the one port from which Jews were allowed to leave. Granada had been reconquered, and Jewish service was no longer needed for a struggle with Islam. Columbus headed for Cipangu, the name for Cathay (China) during the short reign of the long dead Tamerlane. He had calculated the earth's degree as equivalent to forty-five miles. This would place Eastern Asia 2,400 miles west of the Canaries, somewhere close to the Antilles in the Saragossa Sea. He had reduced the ocean to the range of the ships he could master. Columbus had on board an Arabic interpreter to enable him to speak to the great Khan. He set out to discover a route, not new land, not a new hemisphere.

His project, however, was quite unreasonable. No learned man of the early Renaissance doubted that the earth was a globe – some believing that it rested at the center of the universe, and some that it whirled in its sphere. But not since Eratosthenes had anyone underestimated its size as badly as Columbus. In 255, Eratosthenes of Cyrene measured the distance from the great library that he directed in Alexandria to Syene (now the site of the Aswan dam) as 500 miles. He measured the distance using the camel caravan's remarkably steady gait from sunrise to sunset as his "rod." He had observed that on the day of the summer solstice, the rays of the sun fell vertically at Syene, and seven degrees off the vertical at Alexandria. From this he calculated the earth's circumference to about 5 percent of its real dimension.

When Columbus sought Isabella's support for his venture, she asked Talavera, the sage, to evaluate its feasibility. An expert commission reported that the West-to-the-Orient project lacked a firm foundation. Educated authorities believed its goal to be uncertain or impossible. The proposed voyage would require three years; it was doubtful that even the newest kind of ship, the caravel – designed for distant explorations – could ever return. The oceans were neither as small nor as navigable as Columbus supposed. And it was hardly likely that God would have allowed any uninhabited lands of real value to be concealed from his people for so many centuries. Initially, then, the queen rejected Columbus; reason and bureaucratic expertise supported her. Later, swayed by zealous Franciscan friars, she retracted her earlier decision and signed her "stipulations" with Columbus. She, who had driven Islam from Europe, could not refuse her Admiral who wanted to plant the Cross beyond the Ocean Seas. And, as we shall see, the decision for colonial conquest overseas implied the challenge of a new war at home – the invasion of her own people's vernacular domain, the opening of a five-century war against vernacular subsistence, the ravages of which we now begin to fathom.

For five weeks Columbus sailed well-known waters. He put in at the Canary Islands to repair the rudder of the Pinta, to replace the lateen sail of the Niña, and to pursue a mysterious affair with Dona Beatriz de Peraza. Only on September 10, two days out of the Canaries, he picked up the Easterlies, tradewinds on which he chanced, and which carried him rapidly across the ocean. In October, he came upon land that neither he nor the queen's counselors had expected. In his diary entry for October 13, 1492, he beautifully described the song of the nightingale that welcomed him on Santo Domingo, though such birds never lived there. Columbus was and remained *gran marinero y mediocre cosmógrafo*. To the end of his life he remained convinced of having found what he had sought – a Spanish nightingale on the shores of China.

Let me now move from the reasonably well known to the unreasonably overlooked – from Columbus, immediately associated with 1492, to Elio Antonio de Nebrija, outside of Spain almost forgotten. During the time Columbus cruised southwest through recognizable Portuguese waters and harbors, in Spain the fundamental engineering of a new social reality was proposed to the queen. While Columbus sailed for foreign lands to seek the familiar – gold, subjects, nightingales – in Spain Nebrija advocates the reduction of the queen's subjects to an entirely new type of dependence. He presents her with a new weapon, grammar, to be wielded by a new kind of mercenary, the *letrado*.

I was deeply moved when I felt Nebrija's **Gramatica Castellana** in my hands – a quarto volume of five signatures set in Gothic letters. The epigraphy is printed in red, and a blank page precedes the Introduction:

> *A la muy alta e assi esclarecida princesa dona Isabela la tercera deste nombre Reina i senora natural de espana e las islas de nuestro mar. Comienza la gramatica que nuevamenta hizo el maestro Antonio de Nebrixa sobre la lengua castellana, e pone primero el prólogo. Léelo en buena hora.*

The Conqueror of Granada receives a petition, similar to many others. But unlike the request of Columbus, who wanted resources to establish a new route to the China of Marco Polo, that of Nebrija urges the queen to invade a new domain at home. He offers Isabella a tool to colonize the language spoken by her own subjects; he wants her to replace the people's speech by the imposition of the queen's *lengua* – *her* language, *her* tongue.

I shall translate and comment on sections of the six-page introduction to Nebrija's grammar. Remember, then, that the colophon of the **Gramática Castellana** notes that it came off the press in Salamanca on the 18th of August, just fifteen days after Columbus had sailed.

> My Illustrious Queen. Whenever I ponder over the tokens of the past that have been preserved in writing, I am forced to the very same conclusion. Language has always been the consort of empire, and forever shall remain its mate. Together they come into being, together they grow and flower, and together they decline.

To understand what *la lengua*, "language," meant for Nebrija, it is necessary to know who he was. Antonio Martinez de la Cala, a *converso*, descendant of Jewish converts, had decided at age nineteen that Latin, at least on the Iberian peninsula, had become so corrupted that one could say it had died of neglect. Thus Spain was left without a language (*una lengua*) worthy of the name. The languages of Scripture – Greek, Latin, Hebrew – clearly were something other than the speech of the people. Nebrija then went to Italy where, in his opinion, Latin was least corrupted. When he returned to Spain, his contemporary Hernan Nunez wrote that it was like Orpheus bringing Euridice back from Hades. During the next twenty years, Nebrija dedicated himself to the renewal of classical grammar and rhetoric. The first full book printed in Salamanca was his Latin grammar (1482).

When he reached his forties and began to age – as he puts it – he discovered that he could make a language out of the speech forms he daily encountered in Spain – to engineer, to synthesize chemically, a language. He then wrote his Spanish grammar, the first in any modern European tongue. The *converso* uses his classical formation to extend the juridic category of *consuetudo hispaniae* to the realm of language. Throughout the Iberian peninsula, crowds speaking various languages gather for pogroms against the Jewish outsider at the very moment when the cosmopolitan *converso* offers his services to the Crown – the creation of one language suitable for use wherever the sword could carry it.

Nebrija created two rule books, both at the service of the queen's regime. First, he wrote a grammar. Now grammars were not new. The most perfect of them, unknown to Nebrija, was already two thousand years old – Panini's grammar of Sanskrit. This was an attempt to describe a dead language, to be taught only to a very few. This is the goal pursued by Prakrit grammarians in India, and Latin or Greek grammarians in the West. Nebrija's work, however, was written as a tool for conquest abroad and a weapon to suppress untutored speech at home.

While he worked on his grammar, Nebrija also wrote a dictionary that, to this day, remains the single best source on Old Spanish. The two attempts made in our lifetime to supersede him both failed. Gili Gaya's **Tesauro Lexicográfico**, begun in 1947, foundered on the letter E, and R.S. Boggs (**Tentative Dictionary of Medieval Spanish**) remains, since 1946, an often copied draft. Nebrija's dictionary appeared the year after his grammar, and already contained evidence of the New World – the first Americanism, *canoa* (canoe), appeared.

Now note what Nebrija thinks about Castilian.

> Castilian went through its infancy at the time of the judges . . . it waxed in strength under Alfonso the Learned. It was he who collected law and history books in Greek and Latin and had them translated.

Indeed, Alfonso (1221 - 1284) was the first European monarch to use the vulgar or vernacular tongue of the scribes as his chancery language. His intent was to demonstrate that he was not one of the Latin kings. Like a caliph, he ordered his courtiers to undertake pilgrimages through Muslim and Christian books, and transform them into treasures that, because of their very language, would be a valuable inheritance to leave his kingdom. Incidentally, most of his translators were Jews from Toledo. And these Jews – whose own language was Old Castilian – preferred to translate the oriental languages into the vernacular rather than into Latin, the sacred language of the Church.

Nebrija points out to the queen that Alfonso had left solid tokens of Old Spanish; in addition, he had worked toward the transformation of vernacular speech into language proper through using it to make laws, to record history, and to translate from the classics.

He continues:

> This our language followed our soldiers whom we sent abroad to rule. It spread to Aragon, to Navarra, even to Italy . . . the scattered bits and pieces of Spain were thus gathered and joined into one single kingdom.

Nebrija here reminds the queen of the new pact possible between sword and book. He proposes a covenant between two spheres, both within the secular realm of the Crown, a covenant distinct from the medieval pact between Emperor and Pope, which had been a covenant bridging the secular and the sacred. He proposes a pact, not of sword and cloth – each sovereign in its own sphere – but of sword and expertise, encompassing the engine of conquest abroad and a system of scientific control of diversity within the entire kingdom. And he knows well whom he addresses: the wife of Ferdinand of Aragon, a woman he once praised as the most enlightened of all men (sic). He is aware that she reads Cicero, Seneca, and Livy in the original for her own pleasure; and that she possesses a sensibility that unites the physical and spiritual into what she herself called "good taste." Indeed, historians claim that she is the first to use this expression. Together with Ferdinand, she was trying to give shape to the chaotic Castile they had inherited; together they were creating Renaissance institutions of government, institutions apt for the making of a modern state, and yet, something better than a nation of lawyers. Nebrija calls to their minds a concept that, to this day, is powerful in Spanish – *armas y letras*. He speaks about the marriage of empire and language, addressing the sovereign who had just recently – and for a painfully short time – seized from the Church the Inquisition, in order to use it as a secular instrument of royal power. The monarchy used it to gain economic control of the grandees, and to replace noblemen by the *letrados* of Nebrija on the governing councils of the kingdom. This was the monarchy that transformed the older advisory bodies into bureaucratic organizations of civil servants, institutions fit only for the execution of royal policies. These secretaries or ministries of "experts," under the court ceremonial of the Hapsburgs, were later assigned a ritual role in processions and receptions incomparable to any other secular bureaucracy since the times of Byzantium.

Very astutely, Nebrija's argument reminds the queen that a new union of *armas y letras*, complementary to that of church and state, was essential to gather and join the scattered pieces of Spain into a single absolute kingdom.

This unified and sovereign body will be of such shape and inner cohesion that centuries will be unable to undo it. Now that the Church has been purified, and we are thus reconciled to God [does he think of the work of his contemporary, Torquemada?], now that the enemies of the Faith have been subdued by our arms [he refers to the apogee of the Reconquista], now that just laws are being enforced, enabling all of us to live as equals [perhaps having in mind the Hermandades], what else remains but the flowering of the peaceful arts. And among the arts, foremost are those of language, which sets us apart from wild animals; language, which is the unique distinction of man, the means for the kind of understanding which can be surpassed only by contemplation.

Here, we distinctly hear the appeal of the humanist to the prince, requesting him to defend the realm of civilized Christians against the domain of the wild. "The wild man's inability to speak is part of the Wild Man Myth whenever we meet him during the middle ages . . . in a morally ordered world, to be wild is to be incoherent mute . . . sinful and accursed." Formerly, the heathen was to be brought into the fold through baptism; henceforth, through language. Language now needs tutors.

Nebrija then points out:

> So far, this our language has been left loose and unruly and, therefore, in just a few centuries this language has changed beyond recognition. If we were to compare what we speak today with the language spoken five hundred years ago, we would notice a difference and a diversity that could not be any greater if these were two alien tongues.

Nebrija describes the evolution and extension of vernacular tongues, of the *lengua vulgar*, through time. He refers to the untutored speech of Castile – different from that of Aragon and Navarra, regions where soldiers had recently introduced Castilian – but a speech also different from the older Castilian into which Alfonso's monks and Jews had translated the Greek classics from their Arabic versions. In the fifteenth century people felt and lived their languages otherwise than we do today. The study of Columbus' language made by Menendez Pidal helps us to understand this. Columbus, originally a cloth merchant from Genoa, had as his first language Genovese, a dialect still not standardized today. He learned to write business letters in Latin, albeit a barbarous variety. After being shipwrecked in Portugal, he married a Portuguese and probably forgot most of his Italian. He spoke, but never wrote a word of Portuguese. During his nine years in Lisbon, he took up writing in Spanish. But he never used his brilliant mind to learn Spanish well, and always wrote it in a hybrid, Portuguese-mannered style. His Spanish is not Castilian but is rich in simple words picked up all over the peninsula. In spite of some syntactical monstrosities, he handles this language in a lively, expressive, and precise fashion. Columbus, then, wrote in two languages he did not speak, and spoke several. None of this seems to have been problematic for his contemporaries. However, it is also true that none of these were languages in the eyes of Nebrija.

Continuing to develop his petition, he introduces the crucial element of his argument: *La lengua suelta y fuera de regla*, the unbound and ungoverned speech in which people actually live and manage their lives, has become a challenge to the Crown. He now interprets an unproblematic historical fact as a problem for the architects of a new kind of polity – the modern state.

> Your Majesty, it has been my constant desire to see our nation become great, and to provide the men of my tongue with books worthy of their leisure. Presently, they waste their time on novels and fancy stories full of lies.

Nebrija proposes to regularize language to stop people from wasting time on frivolous reading, *"quando la emprenta aun no informaba la lengua de los libros."* And Nebrija is not the only late fifteenth-century person concerned with the "waste" of leisure time made possible through the inventions of paper and movable type. Ignatius of Loyola, twenty-nine years later, while convalescing in Pamplona with a leg shattered by a cannonball, came to believe that he had disastrously wasted his youth. At thirty, he looked back on his life as one filled with "the vanities of the world . . .", whose leisure had included the reading of vernacular trash.

Nebrija argues for standardizing a living language for the benefit of its printed form. This argument is also made in our generation, but the end now is different. Our contemporaries believe that standardized language is a necessary condition to teach people to read, indispensable for the distribution of printed books. The argument in 1492 is the opposite: Nebrija is upset because people who speak in dozens of distinct vernacular tongues have become the victims of a reading epidemic. They waste their leisure, throwing away their time on books that circulate outside of any possible bureaucratic control. A manuscript was so precious and rare that authorities could often suppress the work of an author by literally seizing all the copies. Manuscripts could sometimes be extirpated by the roots. Not so books. Even with the small editions of two hundred to less than a thousand copies – typical for the first generation of print – it would never be possible to confiscate an entire run. Printed books called for the exercise of censorship through an **Index of Forbidden Books**. Books could only be proscribed, not destroyed. But Nebrija's proposal appeared more than fifty years before the **Index** was published in 1559. And he wishes to achieve control over the printed word on a much deeper level than what the Church later attempted through proscription. He wants to replace the people's vernacular by the grammarian's language. The humanist proposes the standardization of colloquial language to remove the new technology of printing from the vernacular domain – to prevent people from printing and reading in the various languages that, up to that time, they had only spoken. By this monopoly over an official and taught language, he proposes to suppress wild, untaught vernacular reading.

To grasp the full significance of Nebrija's argument – the argument that compulsory education in a standardized national tongue is necessary to stop people from wanton reading that gives them an easy pleasure – one must remember the status of print at that time. Nebrija was born before the appearance of movable type. He was thirteen when the first movable stock came into use. His conscious adult life coincides with the Incunabula. When printing was in its twenty-fifth year, he published his Latin grammar; when it was in its thirty-fifth year, his Spanish grammar. Nebrija could recall the time before print, as I can the time before television. Nebrija's text, on which I am commenting, was by coincidence published the year Thomas Caxton died. And Caxton's work itself furthers our understanding of the vernacular book.

Thomas Caxton was an English cloth merchant living in the Netherlands. He took up translating, and then apprenticed himself to a printer. After publishing a few books in English, he took his press to England in 1476. By the time he died (1491), he had published forty translations into English, and nearly everything available in English vernacular literature, with the notable exception of William Langland's **Piers Plowman**. I have often wondered if he left this important work off his list because of the challenge it might present to one of his best sellers – **The Art and Crafte to Knowe Well to Dye**. This volume of his Westminster Press belongs to the first series of self-help books. Whatever would train for a society well informed and well mannered, whatever would lead to behavior gentle and devout, was gathered in small folios and quartos of neat Gothic print – instructions on everything from manipulating a knife to conducting a conversation, from the art of weeping to the art of playing chess to that of dying. Before 1500, no less than 100 editions of this last book appeared. It is a self-instruction manual, showing one how to prepare to die with dignity and without the intervention of physician or clergy.

Four categories of books first appeared in the peoples' languages: vernacular, native literature; translations from French and Latin; devotional books; and already there were the how-to-do-it manuals that made teachers unnecessary. Printed books in Latin were of a different sort, comprising textbooks, rituals, and lawbooks – books at the service of professional clergymen and teachers. From the very beginning, printed books were of two kinds: those which readers independently chose for their pleasure, and those professionally prescribed for the reader's own good. It is estimated that before 1500, more than seventeen hundred presses in almost three hundred European towns had produced one or more books. Almost forty thousand editions were published during the fifteenth century, comprising somewhere between fifteen and twenty million copies. About one-third of these were published in the various vernacular languages of Europe. This portion of printed books is the source of Nebrija's concern.

To appreciate more fully his worry about the freedom to read, one must remember that reading in his time was not silent. Silent reading is a recent invention. Augustine was already a great author and the Bishop of Hippo when he found that it could be done. In his **Confessions**, he describes the discovery. During the night, charity forbade him to disturb his fellow monks with noises he made while reading. But curiosity impelled him to pick up a book. So, he learned to read in silence, an art that he had observed in only one man, his teacher, Ambrose of Milan. Ambrose practiced the art of silent reading because otherwise people would have gathered around him and would have interrupted him with their queries on the text. Loud reading was the link between classical learning and popular culture.

Habitual reading in a loud voice produces social effects. It is an extraordinarily effective way of teaching the art to those who look over the reader's shoulder; rather than being confined to a sublime or sublimated form of self-satisfaction, it promotes community intercourse; it actively leads to common digestion of and comment on the passages read. In most of the languages of India, the verb that translates into "reading" has a meaning close to "sounding." The same verb makes the book and the vina sound. To read and to play a musical instrument are perceived as parallel activities. The current, simpleminded, internationally accepted definition of literacy obscures an alternate approach to book, print, and reading. If reading were conceived primarily as a social activity as, for example, competence in playing the guitar, fewer readers could mean a much broader access to books and literature.

Reading aloud was common in Europe before Nebrija's time. Print multiplied and spread opportunities for this infectious reading in an epidemic manner. Further, the line between literate and illiterate was different from what we recognize now. Literate was he who had been taught Latin. The great mass of people, thoroughly conversant with the vernacular literature of their region, either did not know how to read and write, had picked it up on their own, had been instructed as accountants, had left the clergy or, even if they knew it, hardly used their Latin. This held true for the poor and for many nobles, especially women. And we sometimes forget that even today the rich, many professionals, and high-level bureaucrats have assistants report a verbal digest of documents and information, while they call on secretaries to write what they dictate.

To the queen, Nebrija's proposed enterprise must have seemed even more improbable than Columbus' project. But, ultimately, it turned out to be more fundamental than the New World for the rise of the Hapsburg Empire. Nebrija clearly showed the way to prevent the free and anarchic development of printing technology, and exactly how to transform it into the evolving national state's instrument of bureaucratic control.

Today, we generally act on the assumption that books could not be printed and would not be read in any number if they were written in a vernacular language free from the constraints of an official grammar. Equally, we assume that people could not learn to read and write their own tongue unless they are taught in the same manner as students were traditionally taught Latin. Let us listen again to Nebrija.

> By means of my grammar, they shall learn artificial Castilian, not difficult to do, since it is built up on the base of a language they know; and, then, Latin will come easily. . .

Nebrija already considers the vernacular as a raw material from which his Castilian art can be produced, a resource to be mined, not unlike the Brazilwood and human chattel that, Columbus sadly concluded, were the only resources of value or importance in Cuba.

Nebrija does not seek to teach grammar that people learn to read. Rather, he implores Isabella to give him the power and authority to stem the anarchic spread of reading by the use of his grammar.

> Presently, they waste their leisure on novels and fancy stories full of lies. I have decided, therefore, that my most urgent task is to transform Castilian speech into an artifact so that whatever henceforth shall be written in this language may be of one standard tenor.

Nebrija frankly states what he wants to do and even provides the outline of his incredible project. He deliberately turns the mate of empire into its slave. Here the first modern language expert advises the Crown on the way to make, out of a people's speech and lives, tools that befit the state and its pursuits. Nebrija's grammar is conceived by him as a pillar of the nation-state. Through it, the state is seen, from its very beginning, as an aggressively productive agency. The new state takes from people the words on which they subsist, and transforms them into the standardized language which henceforth they are compelled to use, each one at the level of education that has been institutionally imputed to him. Henceforth, people will have to rely on the language they receive from above, rather than to develop a tongue in common with one another. The switch from the vernacular to an officially taught mother tongue is perhaps the most significant – and, therefore, least researched – event in the coming of a commodity-intensive society. The radical change from the vernacular to taught language foreshadows the switch from breast to bottle, from subsistence to welfare, from production for use to production for market, from expectations divided between state and church to a world where the Church is marginal, religion is privatized, and the state assumes the maternal functions heretofore claimed only by the Church. Formerly, there had been no salvation outside the Church; now, there would be no reading, no writing – if possible, no speaking – outside the educational sphere. People would have to be reborn out of the monarch's womb, and be nourished at her breast.

Both the citizen of the modern state and his state-provided language come into being for the first time – both are without precedent anywhere in history.

But dependence on a formal, bureaucratic institution to obtain for every individual a service that is as necessary as breast milk for human subsistence, while radically new and without parallel outside of Europe, was not a break with Europe's past. Rather, this was a logical step forward – a process first legitimated in the Christian Church evolved into an accepted and expected temporal function of the secular state. Institutional maternity has a unique European history since the third century. In this sense, it is indeed true that Europe is the Church and the Church is Europe. Nebrija and universal education in the modern state cannot be understood without a close knowledge of the Church, insofar as this institution is represented as a mother.

From the very earliest days, the Church is called "mother". Marcion the Gnostic uses this designation in 144. At first, the community of the faithful is meant to be mother to the new members whom communion, that is, the fact of celebrating community, engenders. Soon, however, the Church becomes a mother outside of whose bosom it is hardly worthwhile to be called human or to be alive. But the origins of the Church's self-understanding as mother have been little researched. One can often find comments about the role of mother goddesses in the various religions scattered throughout the Roman Empire at the time Christianity began to spread. But the fact that no previous community had ever been called mother has yet to be noticed and studied. We know that the image of the Church as mother comes from Syria, and that it flourished in the third century in North Africa. On a beautiful mosaic near Tripoli, where the claim is first expressed, both the invisible community and the visible building are represented as mother. And Rome is the last place where the metaphor is applied to the Church. The female personification of an institution did not fit the Roman style; the idea is first taken up only late in the fourth century in a poem by Pope Damasus.

This early Christian notion of the Church as mother has no historical precedent. No direct gnostic or pagan influence, nor any direct relationship to the Roman mother cult has thus far been proven. The description of the Church's maternity is, however, quite explicit. The Church conceives, bears, and gives birth to her sons and daughters. She may have a miscarriage. She raises her children to her breast to nourish them with the milk of faith. In this early period, the institutional trait is clearly present, but the maternal authority exercised by the Church through her bishops and the ritual treatment of the Church building as a female entity are still balanced by the insistence on the motherly quality of God's love, and of the mutual love of His children in baptism. Later, the image of the Church as a prototype of the authoritarian and possessive mother becomes dominant in the middle ages. The popes then insist on an understanding of the Church as *Mater*, *Magistra*, and *Domina* – mother, authoritative teacher, sovereign. Thus Gregory VII (1073-1085) names her in the struggle with the emperor Henry IV.

Nebrija's introduction is addressed to a queen intent on building a modern state. And his argument implies that, institutionally, the state must now assume the universally maternal functions heretofore claimed only by the Church. *Educatio*, as a function first institutionalized at the bosom of Mother Church, becomes a function of the Crown in the process of the modern state's formation.

*Educatio prolis* is a term that in Latin grammar calls for a female subject. It designates the feeding and nurturing in which mothers engage, be they bitch, sow, or woman. Among humans only women educate. And they educate only infants, which etymologically means those who are yet without speech. To educate has etymologically nothing to do with "drawing out" as pedagogical folklore would have it. Pestalozzi should have heeded Cicero: educit obstetrix – educat nutrix: the midwife draws – the nurse nurtures, because men do neither in Latin. They engage in *docentia* (teaching) and *instructio* (instruction). The first men who attributed to themselves educational functions were early bishops who led their flocks to the *alma ubera* (milk-brimming breasts) of Mother Church from which they were never to be weaned. This is why they, like their secular successors, call the faithful *alumni* – which means sucklings or suckers, and nothing else. It is this transfer of woman's functions to specialized institutional spheres governed by clergies that Nebrija helped to bring about. In the process the state acquired the function of a many-uddered provider of distinct forms of sustenance, each corresponding to a separate basic need, and each guarded and managed by the clergy, always male in the higher reaches of the hierarchy.

Actually, when Nebrija proposes to transform Castilian into an artifact, as necessary for the queen's subjects as faith for the Christian, he appeals to the hermetic tradition. In the language of his time, the two words he uses – *reducir* and *artificio* – have both an ordinary and a technical meaning. In the latter case, they belong to a language of alchemy.

According to Nebrija's own dictionary, *reducir* in fifteenth-century Spanish means "to change", "to bring into obeisance," and "to civilize." In this last sense, the Jesuits later understood the **Reducciones de Paraguay**. In addition, *reductio* – throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries – means one of the seven stages by which ordinary elements of nature are transmuted into the philosopher's stone, into the panacea that, by touch, turns everything into gold. Here, *reductio* designates the fourth of seven grades of sublimation. It designates the crucial test that must be passed by grey matter to be promoted from the primary to the secondary grades of enlightenment. In the first four grades, raw nature is successively liquefied, purified, and evaporated. In the fourth grade, that of *reductio*, it is nourished on philosopher's milk. If it takes to this substance, which will occur only if the first three processes have completely voided its unruly and raw nature, the

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chrysosperm, the sperm of gold hidden in its depth, can be brought forth. This is *educatio*. During the following three stages, the alchemist can coagulate his *alumnus* – the substance he has fed with his milk – into the philosopher's stone. The precise language used here is a bit posterior to Nebrija. It is taken almost literally from Paracelsus, another man born within a year of the publication of the Gramatica Castellana.

Now let us return to the text. Nebrija develops his argument:

> I have decided to transform Castilian into an artifact so that whatever shall be written henceforth in this language shall be of one standard tenor, one coinage that can outlast the times. Greek and Latin have been governed by art, and thus have kept their uniformity throughout the ages. Unless the like of this be done for our language, in vain Your Majesty's chroniclers . . . shall praise your deeds. Your labor will not last more than a few years, and we shall continue to feed on Castilian translations of foreign tales about our own kings. Either your feats will fade with the language or they will roam among aliens abroad, homeless, without a dwelling in which they can settle.

The Roman Empire could be governed through the Latin of its elite. But the traditional, separate elite language used in former empires for keeping records, maintaining international relations, and advancing learning – like Persian, Arabic, Latin, or Frankish – is insufficient to realize the aspirations of nationalistic monarchies. The modern European state cannot function in the world of the vernacular. The new national state needs an *artificio*, unlike the perennial Latin of diplomacy and the perishable Castilian of Alfonso the Learned. This kind of polity requires a standard language understood by all those subject to its laws and for whom the tales written at the monarch's behest (that is, propaganda) are destined.

However, Nebrija does not suggest that Latin be abandoned. On the contrary, the neo-Latin renaissance in Spain owed its existence largely to his grammar, dictionary, and textbooks. But his important innovation was to lay the foundation for a linguistic ideal without precedent: the creation of a society in which the universal ruler's bureaucrats, soldiers, merchants, and peasants all pretend to speak one language, a language the poor are presumed to understand and to obey. Nebrija established the notion of a kind of ordinary language that itself is sufficient to place each man in his assigned place on the pyramid that education in a mother tongue necessarily constructs. In his argument, he insists that Isabella's claim to historical fame depends on forging a language of propaganda – universal and fixed like Latin, yet capable of penetrating every village and farm, to reduce subjects into modern citizens.

How times had changed since Dante! For Dante, a language that had to be learned, to be spoken according to a grammar, was inevitably a dead tongue. For him, such a language was fit only for schoolmen, whom he cynically called *inventores grammaticae facultatis*. What for Dante was dead and useless, Nebrija recommends as a tool. One was interested in vital exchange, the other in universal conquest, in a language that by rule would coin words as incorruptible as the stones of a palace:

> Your Majesty, I want to lay the foundations for the dwelling in which your fame can settle. I want to do for our language what Zeno has done for Greek, and Crates for Latin. I do not doubt that their betters have come to succeed them. But the fact that their pupils have improved on them does not detract from their or, I should say, from our glory – to be the inventors of a necessary craft just when the time for such invention was ripe. Trust me, Your Majesty, no craft has ever arrived more timely than grammar for the Castilian tongue at this time.

The expert is always in a hurry, but his belief in progress gives him the language of humility. The academic adventurer pushes his government to adopt his idea now, under threat of failure to achieve its imperial designs. This is the time!

> Our language has indeed just now reached a height from which we must fear more that we sink, than we can ever hope to rise.

Nebrija's last paragraph in the introduction exudes eloquence. Evidently the teacher of rhetoric knew what he taught. Nebrija has explained his project; given the queen logical reasons to accept it; frightened her with what would happen if she were not to heed him; now, finally, like Columbus, he appeals to her sense of a manifest destiny.

> Now, Your Majesty, let me come to the last advantage that you shall gain from my grammar. For the purpose, recall the time when I presented you with a draft of this book earlier this year in Salamanca. At this time, you asked me what end such a grammar could possibly serve. Upon this, the Bishop of Avila interrupted to answer in my stead. What he said was this: "Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need; the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished; and the need for the language we shall bring with us." My grammar shall serve to impart to them the Castilian tongue, as we have used grammar to teach Latin to our young.

We can attempt a reconstruction of what happened at Salamanca when Nebrija handed the queen a draft of his forthcoming book. The queen praised the humanist for having provided the Castilian tongue with what had been reserved to the languages of Scripture – Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. (It is surprising and significant that the *converso*, in the year of Granada, does not mention the Arabic of the Koran!) But while Isabella was able to grasp the achievement of her *letrado* – the description of a living tongue as rules of grammar

– she was unable to see any practical purpose in such an undertaking. For her, grammar was an instrument designed solely for use by teachers. She believed, however, that the vernacular simply could not be taught. In her royal view of linguistics, every subject of her many kingdoms was so made by nature that during his lifetime he would reach perfect dominion over his tongue on his own. In this version of "majestic linguistics," the vernacular is the subject's domain. By the very nature of things, the vernacular is beyond the reach of the Spanish Monarch's authority. But the ruler forging the nation state is unable to see the logic inherent in the project. Isabella's initial rejection underscores the originality of Nebrija's proposal.

This discussion of Nebrija's draft about the need for instruction to speak one's mother tongue must have taken place in the months around March, 1492, the same time Columbus argued his project with the queen. At first, Isabella refused Columbus on the advice of technical counsel – he had miscalculated the circumference of the globe. But Nebrija's proposal she rejected out of a different motive: from royal respect for the autonomy of her subject's tongues. This respect of the Crown for the juridic autonomy of each village, of the *fuero del pueblo*, the judgment by peers, was perceived by people and sovereign as the fundamental freedom of Christians engaged in the reconquest of Spain. Nebrija argues against this traditional and typically Iberic prejudice of Isabella – the notion that the Crown cannot encroach on the variety of customs in the kingdoms – and calls up the image of a new, universal mission for a modern Crown.

Ultimately, Columbus won out because his Franciscan friends presented him to the queen as a man driven by God to serve her mystical mission. Nebrija proceeds in the same fashion. First, he argues that the vernacular must be replaced by an *artificio* to give the monarch's power increased range and duration; then, to cultivate the arts by decision of the court; also, to guard the established order against the threat presented by wanton reading and printing. But he concludes his petition with an appeal to "the Grace of Granada" – the queen's destiny, not just to conquer, but to civilize the whole world.

Both Columbus and Nebrija offer their services to a new kind of empire builder. But Columbus proposes only to use the recently created caravels to the limit of their range for the expansion of royal power in what would become New Spain. Nebrija is more basic – he argues the use of his grammar for the expansion of the queen's power in a totally new sphere: state control over the shape of people's everyday subsistence. In effect, Nebrija drafts the declaration of war against subsistence which the new state was organizing to fight. He intends the teaching of a mother tongue – the first invented part of universal education.

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The 3rd Part of "Vernacular Values" will appear in a subsequent Mailing.

MANAS

MARCH 26, 1980

## EXCELLENCE-TO-LIVE-WITH

THERE are works which, when they are discovered, displace all other intentions of the reviewer. One such book (which deserves this honorable title despite its few pages and pamphlet binding) is the catalog of an exhibition of ceramics by Tom Marsh—very nearly the most charming example of the printer's craft that we have seen in years. This latter virtue, of course, simply reflects the excellence of the contents—color reproductions of pots of such diverse beauty that the distinction between fine art and artisanship is abolished. If it is ever abolished for good our culture may have reached some kind of plateau in both achievement and appreciation.

The potter says in a foreword:

> While I am indeed honored by the invitation to exhibit and by the printing of this catalog, I would remind the viewer that a gallery and a book are unnatural environments for these pots. Their natural habitat is the hearth and hand. Hopefully, work from recent years speaks of the serenity of Gibson Hollow. Finally, however, if pots are strong and healthy they will stand on their own and speak of the love, the joy and the serenity of their making and of their maker.

Gibson Hollow, in Indiana, is where Tom Marsh lives, and the exhibition was at the University of Louisville, in Kentucky, where he teaches.

We quoted from the potter in order to agree with the idea that "a gallery and a book are unnatural environments for these pots," and then to disagree. Museums and galleries are contrived and second class frameworks for the experience of beauty. The place where beauty is generated or occurs is the scene of everyday life. That's where it ought to be seen and to collect examples of it elsewhere is "unnatural." This was André Malraux's view, expressed in *The Voices of Silence*. Among the Chinese, he said, "A painting was not exhibited, but unfurled before an art-lover in a fitting state of grace; its function was to deepen and enhance his communion with the universe." So also with the beauty of objects made to be used. Their state of grace is in their use, from which their loveliness should never be isolated.

But then, we have *reasons* for doing just that. Take for example the uses of history and biography. The best justification of this sort of reading was given by Arthur Morgan years ago. Most people, he pointed out, encounter only mediocrity throughout their whole lives. It will be natural for them to suppose that nothing better is available in experience or from their own activity. But then a book tells them that individuals like Leonardo, like Tom Paine, like Simone Weil, have lived and accomplished unforgettable things during a few short years of earthly existence. In biography these excellences have been carefully abstracted from the framework of their lives and "exhibited," however artfully. This service to the reader is not negligible, and who will call it unnatural?

Is it unnatural to "think"? Just thinking removes what we think about from the context of experience. Every generalization we make does something like that. So thinking courts deception. To think one thing is to ignore a host of other often related things which the thought leaves behind. But, we say, thinking is none the less worth doing because by thinking we give order to experience. Order stirs delight and leads to understanding. Of course, it may turn out to be the wrong order, and therefore some kind of seduction, but that's the chance we take in being human, in thinking. It is also the case that there is a kind of beauty which overcomes this hazard by the breadth of feeling it produces, which gives the experiencer of it an immunity to error—*if*, indeed, he does experience it, and not just amble by its presence.

What we are trying to get at is the importance of another kind of environment—one that is created in the mind—one for which we can pick and choose and give an ideal symmetry. The making of that environment is the art of life—self-justifying and self-authenticating. So our human institutions and customs are attempts to give external representation to that self-made environment of the mind. Most of the time they are only poor approximations. This failure, you could say, is built into the structure of institutions, which does not prevent them from being useful foci of the common human enterprise so long as you know that eventually they are bound to fail. Imperfection is written into the nature of things—*things*, that is. And the mind has the power to leave that imperfection behind. So there are exhibitions worth going to, concerts worth listening to, and history and biography worth reading—but only if one knows that the imperfections are always there and what it takes to leave them behind.

Plato set the example for this. He denounced books and then wrote fifty-six of them. It is a distinction of the mind that it has the power to create a form of the transcendently natural within the framework of the unnatural. We have in us a nature which makes this possible—risky, but possible.

Writing about Tom Marsh's work, Wendell Berry quotes from Synge's account of a visit (1898-1902) to the Aran islands. The Irish dramatist said:

> Every article on these islands has an almost personal character, which gives this simple life, where all art is unknown, something of the artistic beauty of medieval life. The curaghs and spinning wheels, the tiny wooden barrels that are still much used in the place of earthenware, the home-made cradles, churns, and baskets, are all full of individuality, and being made from materials that are common here, yet to some extent peculiar to the island, they seem to exist as a natural link between the people and the world that is about them.

Wasn't it completely natural for Synge to write this? The sight through his eyes both natural and unnatural? He finds a transcendence hidden in the natural—for him displayed—and suggests another order of the natural, to which the spectator must himself contribute. In turn, Berry says, in order to warn:

> Visitors to an anthropological exhibit in a museum must, unavoidably, gain a similar impression of the individuality of workmanship, the fineness of quality, often the beauty of ordinary utensils and tools of peasants or primitive people.

Or the same manner of thinking may be suggested by contact with some sort of folk art. But the condescension that is implicit, for us, in the terms "primitive," "peasant," and "folk" is both dangerously misleading and a measure of our alienation from such a possibility.

The knowledge so hard for us to realize and understand is that there have been times when there existed a workmanship at once ordinary and masterful. There have been times when the daily lives of ordinary people were touched everywhere by things excellently made. And so Synge could write of an Aran peasant's kitchen as "full of beauty and distinction."

One of the peculiar accomplishments of our own civilization is that it has made this idea of ordinary excellence seem paradoxical. We become aware of the need for a distinction which is unnatural and tragic; excellence-to-live-with as opposed to excellence-to-visit. American industrial society has been built upon the assumption that one lives with shoddy, goes (occasionally) to excellence. We generally feel that the beauty and distinction that Synge found in a peasant's kitchen can now be found only beyond the reach of ordinary life—in a museum or concert hall or library or, more pitiably and improbably, on TV.

Because he is, in such a time, a master potter, Tom Marsh's work is extraordinary. But I think his extraordinariness is not, in the usual sense, a part of his ambition. It is the result, simply, of devotion to his discipline and materials, not of the results of any heat in the Artistic Immortality Sweepstakes. By practicing a potentially usable art and by insisting on its usability, and the commonness and local peculiarity of its materials, he points it toward the older, finer, healthier sort of artistic success: that such excellent workmanship, such beauty and distinction, might again become ordinary.

These pots and cups and bowls are not busy calling attention to themselves as "art objects." Their preferred habitat is a kitchen, not a museum. They invite use. They are, indeed, beautiful. But theirs is a beauty associated with use, and to be used, not just viewed. Viewing, by itself, will misunderstand them—just as, by itself, it will misunderstand food.

It would be pleasant, now, to say: That's enough of thinking about the pots; turn the page and have a look at them. And there, in succeeding space, would be the pots—bowls, vases, plates, and pitchers—done in color by lithography, which seems by some magic to capture perfectly the patina, the restrained glow, the shapely wonder of objects made of clay and fired and glazed. But we can't say that. The narrow framework of an eight-page weekly won't permit it. We can't do here what *Fortune* magazine has done so well for many years. *Fortune* is prosperous, and papers like MANAS are not. We like to dream about the time to come when it will be possible to use the finest technology of the printer's craft to honor the beautiful for its own sake and not as an ingenious means of moving merchandise off someone's shelves.

But this may be a mere conceit. After all, some of our imperfect institutions—like the University of Louisville—are already doing this. Why not leave such celebrations to them?

A salutary text which may have bearing on these considerations is by Lao tse, who said:

> In ancient times those who knew how to practice Tao did not use it to enlighten the people, but rather to keep them ignorant. The difficulty of governing the people arises from their having too much knowledge.

Does he mean too much technology? An obscure moral for reviewers may be here.

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