

Book Reviews

WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY

Run, Computer, Run

The Mythology of Educational Innovation. By Anthony G. Oettinger, with the collaboration of Sema Marks. (Harvard Studies in Technology and Society.) Pp. xx + 302. (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; Oxford University Press: London, August 1969.) 58s.

THE National Council of Educational Technology is the United Kingdom body whose duty it is to see what can be done to use new technologies in education and training in order to make learning and teaching more effective. Work has been done on television, on "learning packages", and on other devices; but the major project which it has taken on board has been the application of the computer to education. A series of studies culminated in a proposal by a committee, which I had the honour to chair, that a coordinated programme of development should be begun in Britain. Its conclusion was that computer-aided instruction was on its way. The job was partly to develop computer techniques to make them satisfactory, but above all to integrate c.a.i. (as it is called) into the education process in a humanizing as well as an efficient way.

This book by Dr Oettinger and Miss Marks is part of a project on technology and society now under way at Harvard. It is, in essence, a long pamphlet, written for persuasive purposes, as the absence of an index shows (surely an odd omission in a publication by a university press). It has, as is fairly typical of some American books, a grotesque and fulsome list of indebtedness, as though the authors had crossed the Polar Ice Cap on hands and knees rather than written an essay. Their thesis is a simple one. It is that the days of innovation in a technological sense in education are only just beginning and that they will go much further. This innovation holds out bright hopes for education. "One immediate interesting consequence of these visions is that they leave no obvious intellectual need for the separation of children in grades or for other forms of lockstep. The child can progress through the system as rapidly as he is able or wishes to. Another interesting feature of the system is that it relieves the school of what is the bulk of its concern today, namely the abstract and the verbal. The school may concentrate instead on the concrete, the social, and the human" (page 8).

But to achieve anything like this, a great deal of costly effort is necessary. (My own studies have shown that new techniques in education are invariably cost raising; one hope of founding NCET was that its efforts would save part of the educational budget—it is a false hope.) Above all, it needs sensitive, intelligent and well educated teachers, always scarce. Any move, too, to self-study methods of education might be helpful to the gifted and highly motivated, and bad for the less gifted working class child. Oettinger's description of the problems, and what the computer can do, has been superseded by NCET's studies, but it is still a useful survey.

His useful contribution is to be found in the description of the sheer technical primitiveness of most educational

technology. I have seen TV in schools, for example, where the small screens and bad sound were not helped by badly adjusted sets with slipping images. And, in America especially, the poor quality of the material transmitted has to be seen to be believed. In the American colony of Samoa much of the instruction is by television. On Margaret Mead's island the culture is being destroyed by these dim technological teachers as surely as napalm and high explosive have destroyed the Vietnamese culture.

Oettinger also quite rightly points out that systems analysis, which is supposed to be a prerequisite to the reconstruction of education to make it possible to use educational technology, is a subtle and difficult process, not capable of short-term use in so complex a field.

The most fundamental point is, however, a simple one. American education is fairly rigid and unimaginative. A growing number of persons wish to change it. (English education is also rigid and unimaginative—but not to the same extent or in the same way as in America, I would venture to assert.) America being America, a technological breakthrough is a good thing, whereas an ideological change would be resisted. But technological change is only beneficial when it leads to better education. To get a better education requires a profound ideological change by teachers, administrators and parents. We have seen such a change here in England in many of our primary schools, without extra money and without technological help. The Americans want to buy change by spending money on computers. They can't.

JOHN VAIZEY

PSYCHOANALYSIS EXPLAINED

The Logic of Explanation in Psychoanalysis

By Michael Sherwood. Pp. x + 276. (Academic Press: New York and London, April 1969.) 89s.

DR SHERWOOD treats his subject by examining one of Freud's own published cases, that of the "rat man", as a paradigm of psychoanalytic explanation. His concern is to see how the logic of explanation displayed in this case compares with that of more accepted scientific explanation. Thus, given the repute and general nature of the case, he is not concerned with its truth, its detailed accuracy, nor the refinements later analysts might wish to add. His contribution is not to psychoanalysis but to its (non-psycho-)analytic philosophy.

The author's method is first to give a general analysis of scientific explanation, leaning heavily on such standard works as that of Nagel, and then to consider theoretical objections to applying this analysis to explanations of human behaviour. These disposed of, he presents the selected case in some detail, with enough background in the history and Freudian theory and terminology to make the case intelligible to outsiders. The thesis is then considered and rejected that there is here a "separate domain" of actions, to be explained in terms of reasons, distinct in category from that of, for example, bodily movement, to be explained in terms of causes. (Not, of course, that Sherwood denies the obvious and important distinctions between actions and movements.) Finally, the importance of psychoanalytic narrative is brought out and the contextual character of its explanation stressed, along with the (rather overstated) inadequacy of the hypothetico-deductive model developed largely from explanation in the physical sciences.

The book is undeniably useful, even at the rather elementary level it aims to treat the subject. Level-headed and philosophically well versed treatments of psychoanalysis are rare enough to be very welcome. The general level of the subject is shown by the abysmal arguments Sherwood feels obliged to refute to make what should be a plain case for applying scientific method