

Rediscovering Depth

Trees versus Technology

by Alan Harris

I HAD BEEN WORKING at my computer a couple of days ago for quite a long stretch when I decided to go outside for a walk around the neighborhood. Exercise and fresh air, even in the winter, are more a necessity than a luxury, according to many folks. As I walked out of our court, I noticed for the first time in many years that when I looked at the trees, bare against the late afternoon sky, the ones in the background appeared to move at a different rate than the trees in the foreground. I had rediscovered depth.

I surmised that my long period at the computer screen had been all two-dimensional, and that the outdoors with its three dimensions was therefore a surprise to the eye. But it made me consider that perhaps our technology in general, also, is only two-dimensional, like a flat bar chart on a piece of paper. It deals with only the trivialities of life, and leaves completely untouched the depths of it.

How easy it is to build a factory or an airplane or a bridge, when you compare this with the birth of a baby or the discovery of a new way of life. The first requires a lot of effort, planning, manipulation of people and funds, and so forth--yet it's quite easy once the details are attended to. But the deeper marvels of life are so subtle that no amount of effort, planning, or manipulation can bring them about or put them to rest (depending on their quality). They flow naturally and must be dealt with naturally.

No foolproof method has been developed for creating a new human being. It happens when it happens. No one can prescribe a new way of life for another person and make it work--growth has to come from inside the other person, as the result of pain, insight, perception, fear, and love. These changes come about like the movement of the slower trees in the background. So simple, so natural, and yet so profound.

We may play with our technology, work with it, live with it, and seem to grow with it, but the real growth in our lives happens when we put aside our clever braininess and walk outside into the profundities of a late winter afternoon.