

Topics

Re-Orientation

Newspeak

The English language service of China's news agency, Hsinhua, will begin on Jan. 1 to use a different system of transliterating Chinese names into the Roman alphabet. (The agency itself will thus become Xinhua.) This is a small external manifestation of an attempt at internal reform that may lead to the phoneticization and standardization of the Chinese language.

The new system of transliteration is more logical than the old Wade-Giles system, which was a godsend to linguistic snobs. They knew that Jenmin Jih Pao (People's Daily) was really pronounced Renmin Rihbao; now the rest of us will know, too. But even granting that Mao Zedong is closer to being right than Mao Tse-tung, and Beijing is better than Peking, this kind of reform is definitely jarring. Hardly had we gotten used to Teng Hsiao-ping than it, though certainly not he, is con-signed to the garbage can of history. Altogether now: Deng Xiaoping.

New Look

New York's Lyric Theater is having its first live show since 1933 — and it's not one of those seedy shows that have polluted the once Great White Way. This show is going on outside, with the cleaning of the theater's 43d Street facade. Making the Lyric a legitimate house again is part of the effort to revitalize Times Square. As a fascinated street audience watches, richly detailed, creamy marble and red brick are emerging from the Stygian soot.

When an architect named V. Hugo

Koehler designed the Lyric for the Shuberts in 1903, as a joint home for the American School of Opera and Mansfield's Dramatic Troupe, nothing was spared. An entrance on 42d Street

— for the prestige of the address — led to the main part of the building on 43d Street through an electric-lit tunnel that was a marvel of the new illumination. Inside, a Renaissance revival design of pastry-cook splendor was wreathed, garlanded and balustraded, with carved cornucopias and benign bursts of dramatists and musicians.

Right now, the drama is the contrast between the visible and invisible, as these details become luminously clear. The cleaning of the Lyric is the best magic show in town.

New Breed

Hard by a high-rise apartment complex in midtown there is a stand of trees on a plot no bigger than two elephant lengths. The planting was an effort by some enlightened builder to bring to the most urban of environments a touch of something different. And it worked — not only for residents and passersby but, more important, for the birds.

Every day about sunset, they flocked in, gathering on the branches for their happy hour, chattering, chattering. We always assumed they were swinging singles because we never saw a nest in the trees, not even what might pass for a bachelor's pad. Anyhow, in that neighborhood, a four-room nest would be astronomical. The

special thing about those birds, though, was that they never seemed to fly any higher than the high-rise. Maybe they were a new breed of bird, an urban breed, almost as earthbound as the rest of us.

New Deal

There is not a dime's worth of difference, George Wallace used to proclaim, between the Republican and Democratic parties. Both are now charging ahead to prove him right. First, the Republicans agreed to provide the names of well-heeled party members to a New York bank so it could try to sell them credit cards; the party would get \$2.50 for each taker. Not to be outdone, the Democrats are encouraging members to sign up for credit cards with an Arkansas bank; it would get a percentage, perhaps amounting to \$5, for each taker.

On the face of it, there seems to be nothing illegal about these deals. But they invoke a, well, carte blanche of bad taste, and what can be asked is why the parties, so comfortable with the idea of selling themselves, should stop at credit cards? Why not push private mints, tours, discount film developing, even those prime sale-by-mail items, magazines? The Republicans could scramble to offer their lists to publications like Nation's Business; the Democrats could rush over to do business with Popular Mechanics. And there is one magazine to which both parties could now offer themselves with equal comfort: Hustler.