



Letter to the Editor

From Martin Levy

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Richard House and the book under review in the previous issue, *The Metric Society*, address a problem that is much older than many readers might think. Thomas Carlyle and Charles Dickens were among many Victorians who also expressed their concern about the urge to reduce complex mental and social experiences to numbers. Is *Hard Times* still taught in schools? The response of a recent vox pop with my sons and other teenagers suggests that it is not. Or if it is, that young people are not absorbing Dickens' message with enthusiasm. Dickens,

with some hyperbole, called those 'who see figures and averages, and nothing else' the 'representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of [the] time'. And, during the 1960s, similar sentiments were voiced by the so-called anti-psychiatrists. But the problem remains. What is it in many of us that insists on treating people and their experiences as abstractions? Richard blames neo-liberalism, but that can't be sufficient.