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THE PRESENT AND THE LONG VIEW

THE ancient Greeks, being human, were very like ourselves. Yet being Greeks, they were also quite different. For one thing, they managed to keep their technology at a manageable level. Their civilization had its flowerings, but it did not, as we recall, occur to Pericles to speak in his funeral oration of machinery or laborsaving devices in recounting the glories of Athens. Perhaps we should ask, as a scholar asked recently, why the Greeks developed as they did, and why, in contrast, "the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution made the Occident what it is now." This difference has been a source of pride to the modern world, but a few thousand years from now, when our machines have rusted away, we shall probably be forgotten while the Greeks are still well remembered.

Yet we are much like the Greeks in patterning our lives according to a tribal encyclopedia. The Greeks learned how to be good Greeks by listening to Homer, while we are instructed by television. Homer gave fairly complete directions on how a Greek ought to go about things—how to build a house, cook a meal, navigate, and fight a war. His epics became the manual of Greek culture, teaching both law and ethics. It was for this reason, as Eric Havelock remarks in *Preface to Plato*, that Plato dealt with Greek poetry and the poetic tradition "as though it were a kind of reference library or as a vast tractate in ethics and politics and warfare and the like, . . . reporting its immemorial function in Greek society down to his own day."

Why was Homer so effective in molding the Greek mind and character? Because the Greeks sang his verses to each other, endlessly. The Homeric literature was a total curriculum, the all-pervasive *paideia* which, as Havelock says, "cannot be narrowly identified with schools and schoolmasters or with teachers, as though these represented a unique source of indoctrination, as they do in a literate society." The transmission was virtually automatic:

> All memorisation of the poetised tradition depends on constant and reiterated recitation. You could not refer to a book or memorise from a book. Hence poetry exists and is effective as an educational instrument only as it is performed. Performance by a harpist for the benefit of a pupil is only part of the story. The pupil will grow up and perhaps forget. His living memory must at every turn be reinforced by social pressure. This is brought to bear in the adult context, when in private performance the poetic tradition is repeated at mess table and banquet and family ritual, and in public performance in the theatre and market-place. The recital by parents and elders, the repetition by children and adolescents, add themselves to the professional recitations by poets, rhapsodists and actors. The community has to enter into an unconscious conspiracy with itself to keep the tradition alive, to reinforce it in the collective memory of a society where collective memory is only the sum of individual memories, and these have to be continually recharged at all age levels.

How did a young Greek learn Homer?

> To identify with the performance as an actor does with his lines was the only way it could be done. You threw yourself into the situation of Achilles, you identified with his grief or his anger. You yourself became Achilles and so did the reciter to whom you listened. Thirty years later you could automatically quote what Achilles had said or what the poet had said about him. Such enormous powers of poetic memorisation could be purchased only at the cost of total loss of objectivity.

This was how the Greeks of the Heroic Age shaped their character, and why Plato became the determined enemy of the mimetic poets. They never gave the young Greeks a chance to think for themselves. Plato had Socrates say, over and over again: You can't call your soul your own unless you think about what is good to do and be, not just accept poetic direction blindly with a flood of emotional sanction. Socrates opposed this

hallowed process and lost his life for his pains. Plato created the forms of modern intellectuality by opposing it, but could not save Athens from decline. Not enough Greeks were ready for Plato's emancipating heresies. They *enjoyed* their Homeric moods and passions, losing themselves in the exploits of their great ancestors.

The Greeks had Homer to make up their minds. We have the advertising agencies and their television harps. Homer provided better programs, admirers of the Greeks will say, and he did indeed, but fifteen years ago, in *Understanding Media,* Marshall McLuhan warned that attempts at improving the TV programs entirely miss the point.

> Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content.

There is truth in the claim, even though it may not be the whole truth. Content is not a negligible matter, yet the fact remains that when you are watching a movie you don't have time to think. You'll miss something, maybe something good. The audio-visual impressions come at you in rapid succession and if you want to enjoy the show you just soak them up. The spectator is passive; he eagerly submits to the embrace of the film. Some embraces may be welcome—as for example, of the warm sunlight on a chilly morning, or the voice of a great singer adding vocal perfection to a song you enjoy. When people chant, "We shall overcome," you know what they mean and respond willingly to the longing of their hearts. But not all embraces invite with the same high intent. Some are seductions. So there is reason in McLuhan's argument:

> Subliminal and docile acceptance of media impact has made them prisons without walls for their human users. A. J. Liebling remarked in his book *The Press,* a man is not free if he cannot see where he is going, even if he has a gun to help him get there. . . . That our human senses of which all media are extensions, are also fixed charges on our personal energies, and that they also configure the awareness and experience of each one of us, may be perceived in another connection mentioned by the psychologist C. G. Jung:
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> "Every Roman was surrounded by slaves. The slave and his psychology flooded ancient Italy, and every Roman became inwardly, and of course unwittingly, a slave. Because living constantly in the atmosphere of slaves, he became infected through the unconscious with their psychology. No one can shield himself from such an influence."

Mr. McLuhan didn't go on with these warnings, or at least he didn't take them much further, but fortunately others have been assuming the Platonic obligation. *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* appeared two years ago and is currently being serialized by *Mother Earth News.* The author, Jerry Mander, seems fully equipped to continue the warnings. He begins the second of the four arguments by saying that "television has been used to re-create human beings into a new form that matches the artificial commercial environment."

How, in the first place, did the natural environment get transformed into a commercial one? Mr. Mander's prose is biting:

> To the capitalist, profit-oriented mind, there is no outrage so great as the existence of some unmediated nook or cranny of creation which has not been converted into a new form that can be sold for money. This is because in the act of converting the natural into the artificial, something with no inherent economic value becomes "productive" in the capitalist sense. . . .
>
> A second element in the creation of commercial value is scarcity, the separation of people from whatever they might want or need. In artificial environments, where humans are separated from the sources of their survival, everything obtains a condition of relative scarcity and therefore value.
>
> There is the old story of the native living on a Pacific island, relaxing in a house on the beach, picking fruit from a tree and spearing fish in the water. A businessman arrives on the island, buys all

> the land, cuts down the trees and builds a factory. Then he hires the native to work in it for money so that some day the native can afford canned fruit and fish from the mainland, a nice little cinder-block house near the beach with a view of the water, and weekends off to enjoy it.
>
> The moment people move off the land which has directly supported them, the necessities of life are removed from individual control. The things people could formerly produce for their survival must now be paid for.
>
> You may be living on the exact spot where a fruit tree once fed people. Now the fruit comes from five hundred miles away and costs thirty-five cents apiece. It is in the separation that the opportunity for profit resides.
>
> When the basic necessities are not scarce—in those places where food is still wild and abundant, for example—economic value can only be applied to new items. Candy bars, bottled or chemical milk, canned tuna, electrical appliances and Coca-Cola have all been intensively marketed in countries new to the market system. Because these products hadn't existed in those places before, they are automatically relatively scarce and potentially valuable.

The whole story of what Mr. Mander has to say about the transformation of the environment is implicit in these few words. We inhabit a changed, artificial world—a coarser, simpler one, in which we are told what we can have and how much it will cost. No ingenuity is required—only money. Advertising, the author points out, instructs us in how to recreate ourselves to fit into this environment. Advertising is the great rationalizer of the artificial environment. Jerry Mander is a common-sense psychologist who needs only ordinary language to show how advertising works:

> Advertising exists only to purvey what people don't need. Whatever people do need they will find without advertising if it is available. This is so obvious and simple that it continues to stagger my mind that the ad industry has succeeded in muddying the point.
>
> No single issue gets advertisers screaming louder than this one. They speak about how they are only fulfilling the needs of the people by providing an information service about where and how people can achieve satisfaction for their needs. Advertising is only a public service, they insist.
>
> Speaking privately, however, and to their corporate clients, advertisers sell their services on the basis of how well they are able to create needs where there were none before. . . .
>
> Consider the list of the top twenty-five advertisers in the United States. They sell the following products: soaps, detergents, cosmetics, drugs, chemicals, processed foods, tobacco, alcohol, cars, and sodas, all of which exist in a realm beyond need. If they were needed, they would not be advertised. . . .
>
> The goal of all advertising is discontent, or, to put it another way, an internal scarcity of contentment. This must be continually created, even at the moment when one has finally bought something. . . . The ideal world for advertisers would be one in which whatever is bought is used only once and tossed aside. Many new products have been designed to fit such a world.

The role of television is to persuade us to remake ourselves so that this world functions smoothly, satisfying ever-increasing wants:

> We have had to re-create ourselves to fit. We have had to reshape our very personalities to be competitive, aggressive, mentally fast, charming and manipulative. These qualities succeed in today's world and offer survival and some measure of satisfaction within the cycle of work-consume, work-consume, work-consume. As for any dormant anxieties or unreconstructed internal wilderness, these may be smoothed over by compulsive working, compulsive eating, compulsive buying, compulsive sex, and then our brands of some: alcohol, Librium, Valium, Thorazine, marijuana and television.

The process is complete, from the advertiser's point of view, when we have entirely made ourselves over into commodity selves, a psychic synthesis of nothing but advertised products, having to be renewed daily and hourly—complete, that is, when our attributes, motives, and objectives add up to what the psychiatrist's case book identifies as a psychopathic personality.

There is a great deal more of analysis in Jerry Mander's book, showing how people are helped to convert themselves into ideal moving parts to

keep the machine of commodity manufacture and consumption running smoothly, and how the various segments of industry and commerce and government combine to lubricate the process. It is not, the author says, a plot or conspiracy, but simply the way in which business cunning improves on what comes naturally to the acquisitive, exploitive outlook. (The original publisher of *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* is William Morrow and the book is available in paperback at $4.95.)

How can we break this spell? After all, what other description of what has happened will serve as well as the idea that we have been hypnotized by a false conception of human life, human good, and human progress? There is not much use in applying to the universities for immunizing protection. As McLuhan remarks in *Understanding Media*, "it has been the role of the intelligentsia to act as liaison and as mediators between old and new power groups." He reminds us that Greek slaves "were for long the educators and confidential clerks of the Roman power," pointing out that it is this servile role "that the educator has continued to play in the Western world until the present moment." (See Clark Kerr on the "Multiversity.") There are of course wonderful and glorious exceptions—men and women often named in these pages—but when these modern Socratics seek recruits among their colleagues, they are asked, as Jesus was asked by the Inquisitor: ". . . are there many like thee? And couldst thou believe for one moment that men, too, could face such temptation?"

Yet the exceptions exist, and they may be more numerous than we suppose, to be found in all walks of life, not in any one trade, caste, or profession. Socratics at heart, yet they see that the people of the modern world have need to taste and enjoy the simplicities of a natural life before they will turn away from the compulsive stimuli which the illusion of technological progress provides. The immunity sought has a practical side. Socrates counselled, "Think for yourself," but modern man needs to regain the competence to *act* for himself—to do those everyday things which maintain a normal existence on earth. The restoration of this competence is now the primary requirement of the distorted and improverished lives of people who live in technological societies. Only by this means can the spell be broken, which would at least open the way to independent thought.

There is, however, a danger that decentralization and the beginnings of local autonomy—the present-day terms for return to a more natural life—will be infiltrated by the techniques of mass production, with consequent loss of essential purpose, the defeat, that is, of self-reliance and individual ingenuity. Musing about such problems, a man who has taken part in the practical as well as the planning side of the decentralist movement over a period of forty years, Peter van Dresser, of Santa Fe, New Mexico, said in a recent report (*Indigenous Solar Architecture and the Regionalist Vision*)*:*

> In recent years I have watched and participated in the remarkable evolution of a "folk" or indigenous solar architecture in New Mexico—particularly northern mountainous New Mexico. The experience has strengthened my belief that, first, this approach to habitat may offer the only viable, long-term global solution to the over-riding complex of shelter and energy demands most of mankind is facing; and second, that this approach can reach anything like its full potential only within economic communities adapted to its technical and logistic requirements.

In other words, the change must come mainly through reliance on *local* resources and capacities. Otherwise, "the solar technology we develop will remain over-costly, accessible only to a relatively small segment of our population, and disappointingly modest in its impact on the total energy-consumption patterns of our society." Mr. van Dresser continues his analysis:

> The more we substitute prefabrication, factory production, and massive transportation for the labor- and skill-intensive utilization of local renewable and abundant resources, the more we intensify the whole vast energy-consumptive syndrome of centralized

factory complexes, extractive and refining industries, giant transport, and megalopolitan population morasses (which we still miscall, through some cultural lag, "cities"!) . . . .

What we have to visualize is a gradual restructuring of our production-distribution-consumption system into smaller, more compact, more self-contained, more efficient and balanced units, which also coincide with humanly-scaled communities. Technology, social effort, and manpower within such units must be more devoted to supplying basic needs for good living by skilled, versatile, and scientific use of local renewable resources, and less burdened with supporting a dinosauric, energy-gluttonous continental supply apparatus. . . .

In more familiar terms, this means a renaissance and regeneration of the whole range of smaller urban places—villages, towns, minor cities—throughout the nation, with efficient, appropriately scaled industries and technologies serving local and regional needs. It means an enrichment and diversification of country life in the localities and regions surrounding such urban places—more intensive agriculture, polyculture, aquaculture, greenhouse culture. It means extensive reforestation and the skillful management of community forests for building material, industrial needs, energy, for embellishment of the landscape. It means a drastic reduction in passenger-miles and ton-miles of dysfunctional and stultifying commuting and hauling, and a corresponding reduction in the drain on our dwindling deposits of iron, copper, petrofuel and the like. It means a gradual but cumulative release of human effort from punchcard jobs in vast offices, warehouses and plants to personal craftsmanship, artisanship and skilled technical work.

It means of course a really major and effective use of solar energy. I believe, along with Odum and others, that in quantitive terms the principal medium for this use will be growing plants—in fields, greenhouses, algae ponds, woodlands and forests. The transmuted solar energy from such sources will supply the bulk of the needs of such coming "biotechnic" economies for food, shelter, industrial materials, and energy. But within such economies we can expect also a rich proliferation of indigenous solar architecture. Such an architecture will bring into being buildings which are not merely "passive" in the thermodynamic sense, but are frugal in their use of high energy materials and are harmonious with the region and the human spirit. In such economies, released from the burden of maintaining our present megatechnic superstructure, manpower, skill and time will be available to manipulate with care and skill the abundant local resources of stone, earth, and native timber into beautiful functional structures. In such economies, the "solar age" will come into its own.

In such an environment, people will not only be better able to pursue self-knowledge, in response to the Socratic injunction, but will have selves worth knowing.

REVIEW
WEST COAST AMERICANA

TEN years ago a contributor to the "Children" page suggested that history ought to be taught out of pamphlet bibliographies which would give the titles of really distinguished books—not predigested texts—making what connections are needed in a few paragraphs. One such bibliography was described—*Vision of America*, put together by Hugh Fox, who was then teaching American history at the University College in East Lansing, Mich. Mr. Fox began with the Indians instead of telling about the English Puritans and Pilgrims. Columbus didn't make the first chapter—the Indians were here first, and had been here for thousands of years. (One of the several charms of James Truslow Adams' *Epic of America* is that he starts out with the Indians seeing the white sails of the *Santa Maria* coming toward them on the horizon.)

In an interview which appears in *City Miner* (a San Francisco magazine), Bob Callahan, founder of Turtle Island Press (in Berkeley), describes a book that sounds as though it should be on everyone's list for American history—*A Geographical Sketch of Early Man in America* by Carl O. Sauer. Who is Sauer? He was one of the founders of the Geography Department of the University of California at Berkeley. As a *historical* geographer, Callahan says, Sauer gave primary attention to the impact of human culture on the natural landscape.

> He would look at a given landscape, say the prairie plains for example, and say it couldn't have always been this way, these plains look to me like the result of human fires. Sauer built like Sherlock Holmes from individual stems of grass until he was able to make educated guesses on what the earlier landscape must have looked like. . . . He documented, with a very sympathetic intelligence, the fact that 95% of all the major food crops in the world were domesticated in prehistoric times. And the sophistication of the native intelligence that created this cornucopia is still astounding. All we have done is technologically sophisticate the reproduction systems from that time. We haven't really created anything new.

One's understanding of North American history "grows by quantum leaps and bounds," Callahan says, from reading Sauer. Readers "will see, for the first time, a continuity and huge stages in American history they don't know even existed." For one thing, the crops the native Americans knew how to grow enabled the European colonists to survive. And maize, beans, and squash all came to Europe through the colonies. The potato came from Peru, and "the only reason people in Ireland survived during the Great Famine was because Americans sent them corn." Callahan continues:

> And to complete the picture, after the Asiatic migrations and the development of agriculture, came the introduction of European plantation ideas from which we get all our political and racist notions. That's also where we get our class structures and exploitation that the Marxists feed on every day. The fourth and last period, which is still contemporaneous with us, is the development of the factory system. A factory system which, though it came from Europe, was largely undeveloped until it grew in America. America is the great industrial power of the world and probably always will be. So those are the four major stages of American history. And Sauer, more or less, gave us this map. Without Sauer you get no better than—say—forty per cent of the whole text.

This way of thinking about the past might go far in loosening up people's preconceptions, and it could also be made into a fresh beginning for children in the study of American history. Sauer, as it happens, has done a book "for children ten years and older" on the big-regions of America—*Man in Nature* which Callahan's Turtle Island Press (2845 Buena Vista Way, Berkeley, Calif. 94708) has put back into print ($7.95). It was first published in 1939. Also by Sauer is *Northern Mist* (Turtle Island, $3.50), which traces pre-Columbian migrations to the New World—Irish monks before the Vikings.

It was hardly coincidence that Callahan learned about Edgar Anderson from reading Sauer. He says:

> He [Anderson] was a botanist who became enchanted with an historical vision, the vision of origins. He was a botanist who realized that botany alone might provide historical clues to understanding the past. Botanical survivals might well last long after the time that wooden houses, and initial cultures, and originating languages had all since disappeared. Anderson was also interested in plant migrations, which brought him into the field in which Carl Sauer was already working.

In a book by Anderson, *Plants, Man and Life* (University of California Press, 1969), fortunately at hand, we found a fascinating passage quoted by the

author from the economic botanist, Oakes Ames, which shows how plants may throw light on puzzles and mysteries of human migration. The question of where the American Indians came from is far from settled, it seems, although Sauer speaks only of Asian migrations. The following is from Ames's *Economic Annuals and Human Cultures:*

> Far be it from me the botanist to dispute the theories based on sound anthropological evidence of man's origin or arrival in America. No doubt the migrations and discoveries surmised by anthropologists all took place, as did the recorded discoveries of Magellan, De Soto, Hudson, and others. Nevertheless, the hypothesis based on the evidence presented by the enumeration of economic annuals shows that it would have been impossible for wandering tribes, starting from Bering Strait, to travel more than five thousand miles to tropical South America, and discover there the ancestors of a number of useful American plants, and within a period of two or even ten thousand years develop them to the state of perfection they had attained as proved by the pre-historic remains of 1000 B.C. When observed by the first European explorers in 1492, all of these economic species had been diversified and greatly ameliorated, and some of them had been rendered adaptable to every climate from south of the equator to Canada. They had been rendered dependent on man; they had been so deeply rooted in tribal history that their origin was attributed to the gods. This is too great a task to assign a primitive people in the time allotted. . . .
>
> Biological evidence indicated that man, evolving with his food plants, developed horticulture and agriculture in both hemispheres at a time which may well have reached far back into the Pleistocene.

Well, where *did* the inhabitants of the Americas originally come from? Perhaps some of them came from Asia by another route, as Thor Heyerdahl maintains, and made his Kon-Tiki voyage to demonstrate, but another possibility was suggested by Ignatius Donnelly in *Atlantis,* in which he too made use of botanical evidence, along with cultural and archaeological remains linking the peoples of the New World with Africa and Europe.

Callahan is a new sort of publisher—a writer determined to put into print the sort of books he wants to read himself. He founded Turtle Island Press in 1971 and began issuing works by Sauer and Jaime de Angulo, the latter a Spaniard who was born and raised in Paris, coming to the West Coast when he was eighteen, where he became "an authority, a friend, and an interpreter of native California literature and tradition." Callahan told his interviewer:

> You know these three men—Carl Sauer, Edgar Anderson, Jaime de Angulo—form a kind of a triumvirate over our press, these are the three distinctly American intelligences that Turtle Island was more or less built upon. Not so much as a western press, but an alternative American press, with a very active and strong interest in pre-historic America. These three men opened up my sense of where the New World might actually be found.

What good news it is that publishers like this exist at all!

Well, there is another such publisher we are able to report on here—Noel Young, of Capra Press in Santa Barbara, who also issues books because they contain material he wants to see in print. The books of these presses are "regional," yet, as Bob Callahan says, the publishers are more "alternative American" than anything else. They are certainly a promising alternative to "the eight giant houses" that agents and authors are said to clamor after, and who have been compared to "the seven sisters of the oil business" by one of their number.

A recent offering by Capra Press is a beautiful little paperback, *House of Three Turkeys: Anasazi Redoubt,* with photographs by Dave Bohn, text by Stephen Jett ($3.95). The best description of this book is provided in the first paragraph of the Foreword:

> The face of northeastern Arizona is creased by canyons. Across the pinon-clad Defiance Plateau cuts a winding gorge whose middle reaches are especially twisted and shadowed. On the outside of meanders, shallow caverns have been worn into the seamed, crossbedded sandstone walls. In one of these caves—a sheer fifty feet or more above the rocky streambed—is a silent hamlet, the blocks of its ancient houses flung into frozen composure down a sloping ledge. . . . Three Turkey House, the most perfect small cliff dwelling in the Southwest.

The story and mystery of this settlement—including eighteen almost perfectly preserved rooms, seven hundred years old, is told in choice pictures and words.

COMMENTARY
PAST AND FUTURE

IN the book edited by J. Baldwin and Stewart Brand, *Soft-Tech* (see Frontiers), Brand says at the end:

> I'm convinced that no one should ever try to inspire anyone else. . . . Soft Tech goes astray when it tries to proselytize. It's not a religion but a practice, and as such it is easily imitated when it goes well. And an imitator, who can have his or her own ideas, is a far healthier creature to have in the world than a convert.
>
> Marshall McLuhan's best line, I believe, is his remark somewhere that knowledge does not change behavior—experience does. This book is merely knowledge.

That seems exactly the sort of thinking publishers ought to do, these days. The idea is to get a lot of good things going, *independently*. After a while there is no hopeless conflict between independence and cooperation.

One story (by Ken Butti and John Perlin) in *Soft-Tech*—"Solar Water Heaters in California, 1891-1939"—tells how two Californians bought the patents to a solar water heater designed in 1891 by a Baltimore man and in 1895 began making them. By 1897, 30 per cent of the homes in Pasadena had solar water heaters. Then came improvements by a man named Frank Walker, who got water hot earlier in the morning, and soon after solar heating was put on a full industrial basis by William Bailey. Bailey devised a heat-holding storage tank and called his company Day and Night. He had sold over 4,000 of his units by the end of World War One.

Solar heating was put out of business when low-cost natural gas became available. Now it is coming back, and the text and illustrations of past experience in *Soft-Tech* (reprinted from *CoEvolution Quarterly*) demonstrate the good sense of the turn-of-the-century pioneers.

Another chapter tells about a contractor-developer in Davis, California, who is building "low-cost" family homes featuring alternative energy and conservation, with land available for gardens. This developer, Mike Corbett, was able to organize a small group of investors to finance the project, which is going well. "Fully 40% of the total area of Village Homes is in green belts, more than any conventionally developed subdivision in existence." A sensible building code in Davis helped to make the project possible—a notable community achievement.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ANOTHER AUTOBIOGRAPHY

IN *Twice a Year*—a book which was issued serially by Dorothy Norman in the 1940s—we found an autobiographical note by Niccolo Tucci, a writer whom we have admired for many years. (See his report on a visit, with members of his family, to the home of Dr. Albert Einstein in Princeton, in the *New Yorker* for Nov. 22, 1947.) Speaking of Tucci back in 1948, a MANAS reviewer said that he wrote "with the simplicity possible only to a man who has no or few illusions, yet is not a disillusioned man." The autobiographical note, appended to a story published in *Twice a Year*, begins:

> I was born on May 1st, 1908, in Lugano, Switzerland, of an Italian father and a Russian mother, and am by nationality a planetarian. From my father I learned the rules of morphology, syntax, logical and grammatical analysis in Italian; I also learned the names of most flowers in Latin according to the classification of Linnaeus and I learned all about their social standing and gossip (what flowers have pollen relations with what other flowers, whether openly or secretly, that is phanerogamae or cryptogamae, which ones are reliable and which ones venomous, and for this kind of knowledge he used the botanical social register known as the key of Eulerus); he further taught me to obey all constituted authorities starting with his own and then all the way up to God, and allowed me to get there by any of the given church-channels.

You can see why Mr. Tucci seemed a subject deserving further investigation. While he obviously had a proper education from his conscientious father, what makes him interesting was what he learned on his own:

> But what my father really taught me, very much against his intentions, and in spite of the fact that he had taken great precautions not to let me have that knowledge, was that he himself hardly believed any of the things he wanted me to believe, with due exception for botanical and grammatical knowledge, in both of which he had great faith. From my mother I learned German, French and a bit of Russian, plus a great deal of history, mythology, table manners and formulas of social hypocrisy, written and oral. I also learned that discipline is a sacred thing, especially when it is senseless, and that parents are always right, because they have been wrong too long as children and must take their revenge before it is too late. I further learned that the past is infinitely better than the present, and that the future should reproduce the past; that the feudal system was the only real form of liberty, that people should keep their place, especially those who have none anyway, that people who don't wash their hands are socialists, and that there is, if not God, at least something very mysterious and important which is nobler than us human beings but then also that it takes very little indeed to be nobler than we are so I never knew how flattering this was to God.

This prose is so delicately good—so closely related to all children and all selves—that we must break in now and then, just to slow things down and to be sure Mr. Tucci is thoroughly appreciated. He goes on:

> Later she made a few additions to her knowledge (a thing my father never had to do) and taught me that of course the rain is paid for by the Bolsheviks, but authority is not always a good thing and people who are not born may at times exist just as much as those who are. She taught me that Jews are as good as the Gentiles, a notion which was inborn in me and strengthened by the illiterate peasants around me, who were highly civilized people. But alas, she too tried to spare me a certain part of the knowledge she secretly carried in her heart, and that was the only knowledge I really inherited from her and cherish: namely that she thought discipline was foul and ancestors can be as thankless as posterity; that nobody knows anything at all and that the world is a grand place but baffling, very baffling indeed.

Every human has the same opportunities for autodidaction that Tucci had as a child and growing youth. Why, one wonders, are they so neglected? Happily, he continues:

> However, I was also provided with a formal education which enabled me to get some of the most irrefutable nonsense of the world through the living channels of tutors, Kinder-frauleins and school-teachers, and it taught me to think of them exactly what they all knew of themselves and tried to forget and to keep hidden from others. My education covered several countries and years, I lived through

> two wars without fighting in any but found myself affected with a strange ailment called War Weariness Without a War, to the scientists: W.W.W.W. Which has destroyed whatever faith I had in people and things, and is the main cause of my present and future poverty.

We make a paragraph beginning here:

> This is all. Volumes of lies about me are to be found in the files of the municipalities of Florence, Italy, Rome Italy, and in those of the Immigration and Naturalization Division of the Department of Justice in N.Y. City. To complete my life-history I must add that my life went through that of one Laura Rusconi of Florence in the year 1936, with consequences for both of us that may be described as a treaty of mutual aid and assistance, of better understanding between the race of men and that of women, followed by a conspiracy to engage in the production of posterity, so that we may have someone to forget us when we are both gone. We have two specimens of posterity, and time grows in them and around them at terrific speed.

There is a concluding sentence addressed to the editor of *Twice a Year*, who wanted to know something about her contributor's works. He said:

> I see that you ask about achievements, too. I write stories to describe my failure and my ignorance and the failure and ignorance of many others, always using the present indicative (or if you prefer, the first person) out of politeness. (N.T.)

We began reading and watching for Niccolo Tucci after seeing his material in Dwight Macdonald's *Politics*, published during the war. After our recent discovery of the account of his life in *Twice a Year*, we looked up what had appeared about and by him in MANAS, funding an explanation of those "lies" about him in the files of the Immigration and Naturalization Division of the Department of Justice. Apparently, there are reasons of state why the Justice Department finds it impossible to dispense justice. Mr. Tucci came to the United States in 1936 and was employed by the Italian consulate. He worked with fascist propaganda, which proved quite effective as a reverse form of education. By 1941 he had turned into a determined anti-fascist, and as a sort of bonus he became critical of all forms of statism, a persuasion he made no attempt to conceal. He came to believe, he said, "in an extremely decentralized democratic form of government in which the state does not scare the individual into obedience but leaves intact the dignity of the individual." In 1948 he applied to the Immigration Service for naturalization as a citizen of the United States, submitting in evidence various writings, including (to be fair) a speech he had made in 1939, reflecting what were then his muddled fascist views, and also later expressions of opinion, such as his *Politics* articles. His petition for naturalization was denied by a federal court in New York, which held that Tucci was "contemptuous of some of our national and political beliefs."

Commenting on the decision of the court (in the *Nation* for Sept. 25, 1948), Gaetano Salvemini, a professor at Columbia University, said:

> After working for three years or so with the official Enemies of Fascism in Washington, he [Tucci] realized that the great difference between the nobodies [representatives of "The State"] of Washington and those of Rome consisted in this: that in Washington they spoke English and in Rome Italian. The only things the Washington officials really dreaded were criticism and maturity of mind. They believed themselves mature because they had stopped asking questions a child would ask. When he saw this, he resigned from his post and decided that from that day on he would speak and write only from the level of his own perplexity and ignorance. "If those who are now leading the world happily to its ruin are the adults, I would be less ashamed to be seen in a baby carriage on Fifth Avenue, sucking my left toe, than in an official care of the United Nations."

Whether or not Tucci ever made it as an American citizen, we don't know. We kind of hope he did. Meanwhile, it is impossible not to agree with Salvemini, who said of Tucci's opinions: "One can say everything about those ideas except that they are those of a Fascist."

FRONTIERS

What the Davids Are Doing

LAST fall a report by the Center for Economic Alternatives warned that food prices will continue to go up. In the *Washington Spectator* for Sept. 1, Tristram Coffin noted that a Senate Nutrition Committee had found that U.S. families with incomes of $9,200 "are spending about 40% of their income for food." The food bill for all Americans in 1976 was in the neighborhood of $70 billion more than they paid in 1972. The food economy, according to the Center, is increasingly under the control of large agri-business units and has become "industrialized, corporatized, integrated and concentrated." This means higher prices with little relation to costs, the report suggests.

Meanwhile arable land is said to be diminishing. "The Department of Agriculture estimates that 3 million acres of farm land are being lost every year to urbanization, and pond, lake and reservoir cover." Other factors contributing to high food prices are listed by the *Spectator:*

> A falling off of farm production and rising costs for machinery, petroleum-based fertilizer, energy and feed. The Center says, "Our highly-touted mechanized agriculture is extremely inefficient. U.S. corn requires 50 times as much fossil energy as Mexican corn for the same crop yield."
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> Concentration in the processing and selling of food, and the tendency to charge as much as the traffic will bear. The Federal Trade Commission claims that in 1972, thirteen food manufacturing industries overcharged consumers $2.1 billion.
>
> Increased sales of "convenience foods," which are more expensive and often less nutritious.

In a television program late last year, Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland declared that the United States is "on a collision course with disaster" because high grain prices have led to wasteful use of farm lands and bad production habits. "Water supplies," he said, "are being reduced and the erosion of American farmland today is probably at a record high." (*Christian Science Monitor,* Nov. 28, 1978.)

This is the Goliath level of human affairs. If you read enough of such reports, it becomes possible to understand why there are so many mindless events, these days—assassinations and suicides among them. It is all too easy to add to the senseless but painful facts. For example, in *Food First* there is this at the end of Chapter One:

> A study of Colombia in 1960 showed that while farmers owning up to about thirteen acres farmed two thirds of their land, the largest farmers, controlling 70 per cent of the agricultural surface, actually cultivated only 6 per cent of their land. Although Colombia is an extreme example, this pattern is found throughout Latin America. Only 14 per cent of Ecuador's tillable land is cultivated.
>
> In addition, corporations often keep large tracts out of production or use them for open-pit mining and operations, such as tin dredging in Malaya, that destroy the top soil, making land unfit for farming unless expensive reclamation is undertaken. Bauxite, copper, and oil companies decrease the potential food acreage by holding large areas of land thought to have reserves of those natural resources.
>
> This widespread wastage of agricultural land, especially by large holders, lends credence to the estimate, confirmed by several studies, that only about 44 per cent of the world's potentially arable land is actually cultivated.

Well, let's suppose—just suppose—that everyone in the country knew as much about what the Goliaths of the world, and especially those at home, are doing as, say, Ralph Nader knows: What would be likely to happen? Who could contain all that rage?

In other words, a point is reached in reading about the Goliaths when the multiplying disquieting facts become intolerable. For most of us, that is, hope must remain tempered by ignorance or the social processes we depend upon would either collapse or be torn down. There is, however, one healthful alternative: to read about what the Davids are doing, even though, these days, they may be off in odd corners of the world, practicing their slingshot marksmanship and

instructing a few friends and relations in the saving-remnant arts.

For a start there is *Soft-Tech*, a large Penguin book edited by J. Baldwin and Stewart Brand ($5), which has nine chapters—on tools, inventions, solar heat, wind power, transport, steam, biofuels, home and farm construction, and integrated systems. Since the modern world is soon likely to be a disintegrated system, the last chapter needs attention first. (The others deal with the parts and processes of integrated-systems.) Featured is an account by John Todd of the work of the New Alchemy Institute. Mr. Todd calls it a "tentative, small-scale approach to the future of humanity." At the New Alchemy headquarters on Cape Cod the pioneers of this venture are building "arks"—more or less self-sufficient bioshelters, solar-heated and wind-powered, with intensive garden/farm agriculture and a fish-raising installation. Mr. Todd tells why they are doing this:

> Several years ago I suggested that modern societies by nature would be in opposition to utilizing small-scale, wholistically derived big-technologies in designing communities of the future. At that time it was necessary to justify our research on the grounds that it behooves a mature society to explore diverse strategies for the future simultaneously so that when decisions are in order there are a variety of options to select from. This perspective, while central to our thinking, has been transcended recently by a growing awareness that new strategies for the future are required immediately and urgently. In part this realization is arising out of a waning confidence in the ability of science and technology to salvage an industrialized growth-oriented society in an ultimately finite world. It is becoming apparent that a science of steady states is needed to prepare us for the future. It will be different from the one we know, having been created within a framework of ethical and moral considerations. There is emerging a widespread interest in building a future in which the majority of people are participants rather than spectators.

A wide stretch of territory separates the giants of agribusiness from the band of Davids on Cape Cod, and a few other places, but if you read papers like *People and Energy*, which has a page in each issue telling about groups around the country that have found "appropriate alternatives," or like *Working Papers* (September/October 1978), which reports on small Nebraska farmers who are learning to adopt solar devices and to compost manure from their stock, you realize that the number of "participants" is getting larger every day.