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LOOKING AROUND—AND UP

IF you live in California, sooner or later you'll hear about the problem of water supply. And then, if you read about what has been done in the past to bring water to the dry regions of the state, and about what will have to be done in the future to serve both mid-state agriculture and the urban areas of Southern California, and recognize how complicated any solution—if there is a solution—may be, you might wonder if it would be a good idea to move to upstate New York, where there is plenty of water in lots of lakes, as a better place for your children or grandchildren to grow up. Of course, the winters in New York are very chilly and there might be other problems, such as the energy required to heat a home, which may be either too expensive or lacking, or both.

In short, wherever you turn, there are problems of management or mismanagement on a scale so large that the remedies, to the people now in charge, seem more threatening than a policy of drift. The brief explanation of this unhappy plight was put in a few words by Richard Goldsmith in the *Ecologist Quarterly:* "Unfortunately, the professional status, self-esteem and physical livelihood of practically everyone today are *dependent on the preservation of our industrial society, indeed on its further expansion,* and so long as this remains the case, policies that are likely to work must remain unacceptable."

The dimensions of the water problem in California are given in a skillfully compiled but nonetheless complicated article by Jonathan Kirsch in *New West* for Sept. 10. As this writer says:

> Today, we are facing a crisis in our supply of water that is potentially far more devastating than the current energy crisis or the last drought. Both the State Water Project and the federal Central Valley Project—the two huge feats of civic ambition and civil engineering that Literally created the state of California out of chaparral, salt flats and marshlands—are stalled and stagnating. In the next decade, our supply of water from groundwater pumping, the Owens Valley and the Colorado River may be sharply reduced or even wiped out.

Present anticipations by experts include the possibility that the next drought will be "a permanent one—a chronic shortage of water that will begin in 1985 or 1990 or 2000, . . . and continue until water is so precious and so expensive that we cannot afford to leave a wild river undammed."

The promotions, steals, and deals which over the past seventy-five years brought water to Los Angeles and the rest of Southern California have often been described. The *New West* writer summarizes them, then says:

> If the politics of water were brutal, the rewards were bountiful, even miraculous. And the greening of the Southern California suburbs is the least remarkable result. Much of the Central Valley, where three quarters of California's croplands are located, consisted of alkali flats, marshlands and prairie grasslands until irrigation water turned it into the most productive farming region in the world. California has been the nation's leading agricultural state for the last 25 years, with more irrigated land, a greater variety of produce, and a near monopoly in some seventeen crops, including lettuce, grapes, apricots, lemons, olives, almonds, figs, dates, avocados and garlic. Agriculture is a booming $10 billion-a-year industry—the largest in the California economy—and it feeds another $18 billion a year into the economy in the form of food processing, transportation and marketing. . . . Eighty-five per cent of our people live in the cities, but 85 per cent of our water is used on the farm.

After a heroic attempt to explain the complexities of water politics and the numerous "conflicts of interest" involved, Jonathan Kirsch says at the end:

> Of course, the deadlock over water development in California does not mean that the state is without a

> water policy. The failure to make a decision is a decision in itself. Today, because of the failure of leadership and the paralysis of the legislative process, it is the policy of California to allow the groundwater table to drop. It is the policy of California to allow the water quality and the wildlife of the Delta to decline. It is the policy of California to allow inflation to bloat the future cost of building a Delta facility, whether it is the peripheral canal or something else. Thanks to the politics of water, it is the policy of California to do nothing.

Well, suppose you take a position on some of the issues in the water problem and controversy, deciding to do what you can in the right direction: If you join some well-established conservation group, there may be other problems. One of these is illustrated in some editorial notes in the *July Audubon,* a leading conservationist magazine. *Audubon,* the editors report, "has been formally censured by the Washington Audubon Council, representing sixteen National Audubon Society chapters in that state and one in Idaho, for publishing two advertisements from Potlatch Corporation that opposed expansion of the National Wilderness Preservation System." The Washington members objected to "any advertisement which undercuts conservation policies adopted by the national board," and one of the magazine's readers said: "If we can't afford to produce a slick magazine without offensive advertising, then let's retrench." Another reader feared that "thousands of dollars from an advertiser might lead *Audubon* to tone down or scratch completely an article critical of their products or policies." The *Audubon's* editors ably defend themselves, declaring that the strength of the paper removes any such temptation, and that Potlatch is entitled to a hearing, even in the pages of a conservationist magazine. Finally, they say, "we can use every dollar of corporate advertising revenue, just as the National Audubon Society can use every dollar from corporate contributions or corporate memberships." In other words, if you have a cause to work for, you need an audible voice, and this means a magazine or bulletin with sufficient appeal to compete with numerous other claims on the attention of the reading public. So you sell advertising, sometimes to companies whose policies you do not admire. An unavoidable compromise, one could say. But something is still wrong.

In *The Unsettling of America,* Wendell Berry looks at organizational conservation in another way. He quotes a Vermonter, David Budbill, who says:

> Down-country people come up here, buy a 30-acre meadow, then when you ask them what they plan to *do* with it they look at you like you're some kind of war criminal and say, "Why, nothing! We want to leave *it just* the way it is!" They think they're protecting the environment, even though they've forgotten, or never knew, that nature abhors a vacuum. . . . They treat the land like any other possession, object, they own, set it aside, watch it, passively, not wanting to, nay! thinking it abhorrent, to engage in a living relationship with it. . . .
>
> The Audubon types (I'm a member of Audubon) are fighting . . . terribly hard to zone trailers out of areas like this, put them in trailer parks or eliminate them altogether. Well, a trailer is the only living space a working man around here can afford. And if he, say, inherits three acres from a parent and wants to put a trailer on it, the eco-folks would like to say no, which is a dandy way to ghettoize the poor. . . . Their view of the natural world is so delicate and precious, terrarium-like, picture-windowish. I know nature is precious and delicate. I also know it is incredibly tough and resilient, has unbelievable power to respond to and flourish with kindly use. . . .
>
> I don't care about the landscape if I am to be excluded from it. Why should I? In *Audubon* magazine almost always the beautiful pictures are without man; the ugly ones with him. I keep wanting to write to them and say, "Look! my name is David Budbill and I belong to the chain of being too, as a participant not an observer (nature is not television!) and the question isn't to use or not to use but rather *how* to use.

Speaking generally of the conservation movement, which had its origin many years ago, Wendell Berry says:

> These people were effective in their way and within their limits, and they started the era of wilderness conservation. The results will give us abundant reasons for gratitude as long as we have sense enough to preserve them. But wilderness

> conservation did little to prepare us either to understand or to oppose the general mayhem of the all-outdoors that the industrial revolution has finally imposed on us. . . . If the resolve to explore, enjoy, and protect does not create a moral energy that will define and enforce responsible use, then organized conservation will prove ultimately futile. And this, again, will be a failure of character.
>
> Although responsible use may be defined, advocated, and to some extent required by organizations, it cannot be implemented or enacted by them. It cannot be effectively enforced by them. The use of the world is finally a personal matter, and the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons. That is the possibility of the world's health will have to be defined in the characters of persons as clearly and as urgently as the possibility of personal "success" is now so defined. Organizations may promote this sort of forbearance and care, but they cannot provide it.

This is the day of organization—what but technological organization could place a man on the moon?—and of reliance on its power and authority. It is the method of science applied to collective human endeavor. But its awesome achievements are increasingly irrelevant. In the face of the water problem in the Southwest, organization is impotent. It knows nothing of Berry's rule—that "the world can be preserved in health only by the forbearance and care of a multitude of persons."

In *Harper's* for September, the editor, Lewis Lapham, mourns the loss of moral imagination, now replaced by the conformities of organization men. He wonders about the capacity for self-recognition of "the anxious cabinet officials who carry out the business of state in rooms furnished with portraits of Jefferson and Lincoln."

> The calm face of departed greatness smiles down from the walls, and meanwhile, thirty miles off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, the nuclear submarines (either our own or somebody else's) glide serenely to and fro, bearing in their holds the fire of the sun. The more frightened people become, the more they must console themselves with statistics and memorandums, with interminable debates and novels of ever-increasing bulk and celebrity. . . . If the world can end in fire, then it is intolerable to think that the fire can be brought down from heaven or Colorado by men as nondescript as President Carter, President Brezhnev, or Cyrus Vance. Surely they must be divine, or at least comparable to those who went with Odysseus to Troy, and so the literary as well as the political press does what it can to provide trappings of significance. To suggest that we live in a world without statesmen or novelists of stature constitutes an act of social atheism.

What of the places of higher learning? Mr. Lapham remarks:

> Confronted by what they perceived to be the totalitarian state of modern science, a good many writers went into exile, fleeing across the border to the universities, taking with them what they could salvage of their childhood memory and their patents of sensibility. Numerous other writers tried to imitate the scientific methodologies, constructing jargons in the manner of those Polynesians in the great South Sea who worship the broken machinery that washes up on the beach. But the scientific technique (no matter how thoroughly indexed) fails to replace the lost sight of the imagination. They lower their instruments into the depths, and they get back nothing more than a few ambiguous readings from the floor of the sea. Their systems analysis cannot account for the German officers who sent the cattle trains to Auschwitz and yet, being in many other ways exemplary husbands and fathers, would have dismissed an adjutant for committing the indiscretion of adultery.

Lewis Lapham writes as the editor of a literary magazine, judging the weaknesses or failure of the higher learning in terms of its lack of imagination and moral blindness. In his latest book, *Mind and Nature,* Gregory Bateson makes an equally strong indictment. He speaks as a teacher, a professor, and a member of the Board of Regents of the University of California:

> At the meeting of the Committee on Educational Policy, July 20, 1978, I remarked that current educational processes are a *"rip off"* from the point of view of the student. The present note is to explain this view.
>
> It is a matter of obsolescence. While much that universities teach today is new and up to date, the presupposition or premises upon which all our teaching is based are ancient and, I assert, obsolete.
>
> I refer to such notions as:

a. The Cartesian dualism separating "mind" and "matter."

b. The strange physicalism of the metaphors which we use to describe and explain mental phenomena—"power," "tension," "energy," "social forces," etc.

c. Our anti-aesthetic assumption, borrowed from the emphasis which Bacon, Locke, and Newton long ago gave to the physical sciences, viz. that all phenomena (including the mental) can and shall be studied and *evaluated* in quantitative terms.

The view of the world the latent and partly *unconscious* epistemology which such ideas together generate is out of date in three different ways:

a. Pragmatically, it is clear that these premises and their corollaries lead to greed, monstrous overgrowth, war, tyranny, and pollution. In this sense, *our* premises are daily demonstrated false, and the students are half aware of this.

b. Intellectually, the premises are obsolete in that systems theory, cybernetics, holistic medicine, ecology, and gestalt psychology offer demonstrably better ways of understanding the world of biology and behaviour.

c. As a base for *religion*, such premises as I have mentioned, became *clearly intolerable and therefore obsolete* about 100 years ago. In the aftermath of Darwinian evolution, this was stated rather clearly by such thinkers as Samuel Butler and Kropotkin. But already in the eighteenth century, William Blake saw that the philosophy of Locke and Newton could only generate "dark Satanic mills." . . .

So, in the world of 1978, we try to run a university and to maintain standards of excellence in the face of growing *distrust, vulgarity, insanity, exploitation of resources, victimization of persons,* and *quick commercialism.* The screaming voices of greed, frustration, fear, and hate.

It is understandable that the Board of Regents concentrates attention upon matters which can be handled at a superficial level, avoiding the swamps of all sorts of extremism. But I still think that the facts of deep obsolescence will, in the end, compel attention.

Quite plainly, Gregory Bateson is no organization man, and one who would be an unwelcome maverick on any highly placed board of regents. He got there owing to a maverick among politicians, California's Governor Brown, who appointed him. What effect he will have on the board—if any, and if he is still there—no one can tell, but his exposure of the consequences of mechanistic assumptions and organizational technique may stand for the extraordinary self-consciousness now coming into the world. It is this that we need to recognize and understand. The real proposition before us is the one affirmed by Wendell Berry: "The use of the world is finally a personal matter."

This ever growing awareness may be taken as a sign that the time has come for human beings to take charge of their behavior, first individually, then collectively, in relation to the planet where they live. We may actually be growing up, which is a way of describing people who begin to see things whole; either that, or the sum total of our activities, armed by our Faustian powers, may have reached a point where the effects of what we do are forcing themselves into the open. Probably both things are happening. In any event, the shock of recognizing present widespread disaster after generations of specialist mismanagement by experts, going on over our heads, is difficult to bear.

But how much better it is to *know* that things have got to change—better than confidently going on as we have in the past. Waking up may be painful, but this is the beginning of learning to live in a larger sense. And from that beginning we have opportunity to make history in another way. There are far worse situations in which to awake. Suppose, for example, the moment of enlightenment had come after you had taken a post in Hitler's Storm Troopers, and all your children were in the Jugend, learning to be healthy and obedient and to salute. Or suppose it had come when you were a crew member of the *Enola Gay*, on the way to drop an atom bomb on Hiroshima and not able to change anything or even get off.

In short, some Rubicons have been crossed, but other choices are now before us, and still

others lie in the future. It is the waking up that counts, and since moving large numbers of people to act on the sudden awakenings of a few is not only impractical, but may even be immoral, then the important thing is to take into account the uncrossed Rubicons which are ahead. The people who do this are the only ones able to open up avenues of change for themselves and others. Those others exist. They have always existed, but today they are more numerous, and many of them are looking around. We have a letter from a reader in the East that helps us to realize this. He writes in response to something quoted from Edgar Anderson (MANAS, June 20) about how hard it is for the big-machine-operating prairie farmer to *look up* and around—to see the sweep and swell of the land, the arch of the sky, and the air masses which make the weather. He might as well be shut in at a factory bench. Our reader says:

> I am a retired dairy farmer from central New York. My operation was mechanized "up to the hilt." Although I'm not a prairie farmer, what Edgar Anderson said expressed in far better wording than I could construct the feelings that used to run through my mind while out in the field operating power machinery. In a sense I felt trapped in what I was doing, but saw no alternative to it, as I had to remain competitive in order to provide for my family and educate my children. But even though "looking down" was a requisite of what I was doing, I made a conscious effort to occasionally "look up," and I feel that that was a sort of salvation that enabled me to keep going.

REVIEW
PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

LLOYD KAHN'S *Shelter II* continues the comprehensive coverage provided in *Shelter* (1974) of "world-wide housing techniques." It is also "a basic manual of design and construction for the first-time house-builder." This book is much more than a coffee table item, although it does very well in that role. It has the deliberated intensity of an author long engaged in the transitional thinking and acting of the time. People who are wondering what they should do about a place to live will delight in this study of what others in the same frame of mind have done. Throughout the book, the time-verified methods of traditional home-builders are pictured and explained, while the alternatives of present-day innovators are described and evaluated. It is a book which may keep would-be change-agents and pioneers from making naive and costly mistakes, and its impartiality is a lesson in the way sensible judgment about building projects is formed. (The price is $9.50; distributed by Random House.)

The historical notes are thorough. If you want to know what a Nebraska soddy looked like, three of them are shown by photographs taken nearly a hundred years ago, with quotations from people that lived in them. The idea of building homes out of sod was probably copied by the Mormons from the plains Indians and then borrowed from the Mormons by the Nebraska settlers. The picture of a well-organized soddy homestead, complete with furniture, a mule team, and the farmer and his wife, must have been either seen or possessed by Grant Wood before he composed "American Gothic."

Domes have their innings—several sorts are shown—with data on costs. Domes provide certain economies but the materials required cost more than conventional structures. Interestingly, polyurethane foam domes (which are very light) were made in 1970 for the homeless victims of the earthquake in Turkey by a German firm which flew the materials to the ravaged area and in two days produced dozens of dwellings for occupation while more permanent homes were being built. "Two inflatable positive molds were used; after spraying, the plastic was allowed to harden for 30 minutes, then removed. Doors and windows were then cut in, and the domes were carried to their sites by 10-15 men."

The yurts improvised as temporary dwellings by the Hoedad tree-planters of Oregon have two pages, showing construction and the finished product. When salvaged materials are used, a yurt of 16 feet in diameter costs less than $200.

Skipping around, you come upon fine drawings of thatched English cottages, a page on the principles of construction of greenhouses, the text of Hammurabi's Building Code—and a long account of termites, what they are, the various kinds, how they attack wood homes, and how to keep them away or repair their excavations. What people in city slums can do to transform their surroundings by rebuilding their homes (apartment houses as well as single family dwellings) is illustrated by fourteen pages on the restoration of derelict structures in Cambridge, Mass., and the South Bronx of New York. The projects of the Bronx People's Development Corporation are described in detail, showing people at work on various jobs. A long section on house construction goes step by step (with diagrams) for the beginning carpenter. At the end Lloyd Kahn pays his critical respects to Gerard O'Neill's monstrous dream of satellite space colonies: "It's time to stop wasting precious planetary resources cluttering space and defiling the moon, to stop making 200,000 mile journeys in search of new frontiers to exploit when we could be making better use of what we have right here. It's time for us to get back down to earth."

Tools for a Change, the proceedings of an Appropriate Technology Forum put on by the School of Business Administration, University of Massachusetts, shows what can be done in behalf

of the future by an educational institution which has on its staff people eager to turn their energies in this direction. The book gives informative insight into the new thinking going on in the Northeast. A chapter devoted to the results of the Forum concludes

> The success of the October 14, 1978 Northeast Regional Appropriate Technology Forum should come as no surprise to people familiar with appropriate technology development in the Northeast. The people engaged in a.t.-related activities here are (by-and-large) serious, conscientious and sophisticated. Furthermore, as Pat Lewis Sackrey indicated in her remarks closing the Forum: "(People here) are more desperate than those in most of the other regions." This sense of urgency, however, did not mean that people perceive the National Science Foundation [which funded the Forum] as a panacea, just as that urgency insures that the a.t. community sees the Foundation as something more than another bureaucratic ogre. . . . the Northeast a.t. community is looking forward to NSF involvement in a.t. so long as it retains respect for what must remain a decentralized movement of social and technological problem-solving.
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> Many of the hopes and fears that northeasterners engaged in a.t. activity have in regard to NSF participation in a.t. can be found in this document. The need for research and information sharing is clear, just as there is evidence that the a.t. understands the NSF's charter. The fears are there too—dependency on government, formation of new elites, inaccessible and irrelevant research—and they must be addressed if NSF is to successfully assist a.t. development. The Forum staff and the School of Business Administration at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst therefore urges you to carefully consider the ideas presented here. . . .

While the proposals and recommendations of the forum groups on such issues as energy, agriculture, housing, transport, waste utilization, economics, and education are of interest, the "background papers" by contributors with specialized knowledge seem the most valuable part of the book. In an introductory paper on Appropriate Technology and the Structure of Economic Enterprise, Carter Henderson surveys the trend among large corporations now getting interested in new sorts of technology, such as devices for capturing solar energy, wind power, and development of biomass as an energy source.

On the spread of small-scale agriculture, he says:

> A recent report by the Worldwatch Institute . . . noted that last year, 32 million American households—about 43% of all U.S. families—raised more than 114 billion worth of fruits and vegetables on an area equivalent to approximately seven million acres in their backyards, city lots, and apartment balconies.

And on do-it-yourself construction:

> The building, rescue and repair of homes is also attracting manufacturers of appropriate technology designed to help people do much of this work themselves.
>
> In 1950 . . . two out of three American families could afford to buy a single-family home of their own compared to only about two out of five today. The reason is that the median price of a single family home has gone up from $36,400 in 1971 to close to $60,000 today. As a result, more and more Americans are fixing up their own homes, and buying older, run-down houses and saving them. Of the roughly $30 billion spent on home remodeling last year, nearly half was done by do-it-yourselfers.

The paralyzing effects of inflation give special importance to Robert Swann's discussion of the community land trust. A great many people would like to go back to the land, but can't afford it at today's prices. The land trust would help to make possible a redistribution of population on the land. As Swann says:

> If we look at farming in its present state, it is clear that one of the major reasons why young people are discouraged from becoming farmers is the fact that arable land cannot be purchased for its agricultural value. Usually the price of farmland (including wood lots) is two, three, or four times its *productive* value because prices are set for actual or potential *development* value. No one can buy a house lot and then afford to grow corn on it!

The community land trust would acquire land and hold it in trust for those who want to live on and work it productively and organically. Swann, with Gandhi and Schumacher, believes that the

trusteeship idea needs to be applied in all directions—to industry as well as land:

> The development of appropriate technology in the Northeast, as elsewhere in the U. S., will depend in part on the establishment of appropriate institutions for ownership of land and natural resources as well as in industry and business. Until economic problems, such as land speculation, are addressed by new institutions such as community land trusts operating under the trustee principle, it will be difficult for more than a small minority of farmers to shift from destructive farming practices to appropriate technologies such as organic or biodynamic farming. For the same reason, low cost housing which utilizes solar or other alternative energy sources will be difficult to achieve until access to low-cost land through community land trusts is made available. An example of such low-cost housing on community land trust land is presently being developed by the H.O.M.E. cooperative near Bangor. It utilizes both solar and wood heat and provides good housing at a cost which an average Maine family can afford.

A sidelight on the economic effects of the spread of appropriate technology is given by Carter Henderson. While he says that the interest of big business in this area may be all to the good, the development of smaller enterprises in appropriate technology puts far more people to work:

> A study released earlier this year [1978] by a subcommittee of the House Committee on Small Business . . . documented the fact that of the 9.6 million new jobs created in this country between 1969 and 1976, the Fortune 1000 largest industrial corporations accounted for less than 1% with small business responsible for most of the rest. . . . Small businesses already are important factors in the five appropriate technology fields I've just mentioned—solar, biomass, do-it-yourself gardening and construction, fish farming and holistic health care.

These are signs of the gathering strength of the change going on.

COMMENTARY
PAUL GOODMAN'S DIAGNOSIS

THIS week's lead article seems to end on a melancholy note, with no more promise than that found in the possibility that there are a great many people in the state of mind described by the retired dairy farmer in New York. Thinking about this, we recalled one of Paul Goodman's last books—*The New Reformation,* in which he considered the human condition in the last half of the twentieth century, musing about what people might be able to do as a means of bettering it. After remarking that, so far as education is concerned, curriculum is not the issue—the world is the curriculum, there to be used by teachers who know what they are about—he said: "whatever a child turns to is potentially educative and, with good management, one thing leads to another." He added: "Even skills that are considered essential prerequisites, like reading, will be learned spontaneously in normal urban and suburban conditions." Then he said:

> But humane culture is not what is obviously there for a child, and in our times it is usually lacking. Decently confused, parents go easy on moral instruction. In the environment there is little of a proud tradition, with heroes and martyrs. There is a plethora of concerts and records, art museums and planetariums, children's encyclopedias, and academic courses in art appreciation and general science, but the disinterested ideals of science and art are hardly mentioned, and do not seem to operate publicly. The sacredness of those ideals no longer exists even on college campuses. As we have seen, almost no young person of college age believes there are autonomous professionals or has heard of such a thing. Great souls of the past do not speak to a young persons as persons like himself once he learns their language, nor does he bother to learn their language. The old conflicts of history do not seem to have been human conflicts, so they too are of no interest.

This seems a penetratingly accurate diagnosis, which helps to explain why the dairy farmer felt so alone and powerless. It also suggests what sort of explorations and reflections are called for on the part of the rest of us. Needed is the recreation of the atmosphere of vision and striving, almost gone from the everyday life of our society.

Goodman proposes (or implies) a widely acceptable non-sectarian task. He had the happy faculty of putting such things clearly and invitingly. For doing it well, however, a lot of preparation is required.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves

ARCHITECTS OF THE JUNKYARD MIND

THE analyses and criticisms of present-day education go on and on. Much of this commentary, seeking background cultural causes of the decline in learning, focuses on television as the prime offender. In the *Atlantic* for September, Neil Postman considers the "bad manners" of high school students, saying that while elementary teachers may make an effort to teach children good manners, "it is astonishing how this effort is diminished at higher levels." Prolonged exposure to the media is one explanation. The adults, he says, in school "ought to be concerned with teaching youth a standard of civilized action."

> The most civilized high school class I have ever seen was one in which students and teacher said "Good morning" to each other and in which the students stood up when they had something to say. The teacher, moreover, thanked each student for any contribution made to the class, did not sit with his feet on the desk, and did not interrupt a student unless he asked permission to do so. The students, in turn did not interrupt each other, or chew gum, or read comic books when they were bored. To avoid being a burden to others when one is bored is the essence of civilized behavior.

Those who consider such matters "superficial," Mr. Postman says, may be underestimating the power of television and radio "to teach how one is to conduct oneself in public."

> In a general sense, the media "unprepare" the young for behavior in groups. A young man who goes through the day with a radio affixed to his ear is learning to be indifferent to any shared sound. A young woman who can turn off a television program that does not suit her needs at the moment is learning impatience with any stimulus that is not responsive to her interests.
>
> But school is not a radio station or a television program. It is a social situation requiring the subordination of one's own impulses and interests to those of the group.

Mr. Postman gives some attention to the "good" programs:

> One of the more serious difficulties teachers now face in the classroom results from the fact that their students suffer media-shortened attention spans and have become accustomed, also through intense media exposure, to novelty variety, and entertainment. Some teachers have made desperate attempts to keep their students "tuned in" by fashioning their classes along the lines of *Sesame Street* or the *Tonight* show. They tell jokes. They change the pace. They show films, play records, and avoid *anything* that would take more than eight minutes. Although their motivation is understandable, this is what their students least need. However difficult it may be, the teacher must try to achieve student attention and even enthusiasm through the attraction of ideas, not razzmatazz. Those who think I am speaking here in favor of "dull" classes may themselves, through media exposure, have lost an understanding of the potential for excitement contained in an idea. The media (one prays) are not so powerful that they can obliterate in the young, particularly in the adolescent, what William James referred to as a "theoretic instinct": a need to know reasons, causes, abstract conceptions. Such an "instinct" can be seen in its earliest stages in what he calls the "sporadic metaphysical inquiries of children as to who made God, and why they have five fingers. . . ." But it takes a more compelling and sustained form in adolescence, and may certainly be developed by teachers if they are willing to stand fast and resist the seductions of our media environment.

This, we should note, is expecting a great deal of teachers. They are supposed to overcome seductions to which the young are exposed every day, for hours at a time, and to correct habits deliberately fostered by the media. We can of course *ask* this of teachers, and there will be some who make heroic efforts without being asked, but what they do is likely to benefit mainly a similar few among the students. What else, then, can be done?

The problem is discussed more broadly in *Working Papers* for July-August, by Christopher Jencks, one of the editors. His proposal is limited to the publishing and broadcasting of news, and how it might be bettered by removing the profit motive. He has some practical suggestions, but

his criticisms of existing policy show how difficult any such reform would be:

> Profit-oriented news media are concerned with maximizing advertising revenue. To accomplish this they tinker endlessly with both the format and substance of the news in order to attract the largest and most affluent audience they can. Such efforts appear quite successful; if public enlightenment depended simply on getting as many people as possible to read newspapers and watch television news, there would not be much basis for complaint against the existing system.

Defenders of this system, of course, argue that the people buy or listen to what they want, and that this is the democratic rule. There is some truth in this, but a truth perverted by the obvious way in which the mass media cater to human weakness, carefully avoiding any program that would demand intellectual effort. As Jencks says:

> Most of us read newspapers and watch television while we are half awake in the morning or after a tiring day's work. Our appetite for difficult ideas or moral ambiguity is even lower than usual at these times. . . .
>
> An organization that collects and distributes the news therefore faces an uncomfortable choice. One alternative is to ask as little as possible of its audience, maximizing its size but losing its respect. Television networks have gone this route and have learned to live with the fact that even the most assiduous viewers have a low opinion of the medium. Newspaper chains, which seldom care about the respect of local readers and usually see each local paper as a "profit center" rather than a community service, tend to go the same route.

Mr. Jencks gives the rationale of this general policy:

> Those who manage the news media justify this approach by arguing that the public is divided into two distinct groups: a small number of "intellectuals" who want detailed information, careful analysis, and moral challenge, and a much larger group of "ordinary people" who want quick summaries, simple concepts, and moral reassurance. Defenders of the present system then describe their critics as elitists who don't understand ordinary folks. But this argument is too simple. Eggheads and yahoos certainly exist. For the most part, though, this is a schism within the mind of each reader or viewer.

In other words, readers and viewers need to be given more of a choice. And there are a few newspapers (named by Jencks) which provide it, showing that it can be done.

Managers of businesses, whether in industry or communications, may think of themselves as responsible to their stockholders—and they arc but they are equally responsible to the population at large. What sort of citizens do the young fed on a continual diet of television tend to become? What sort of parents will they be, later on? What sort of human beings? It is not the habit of very many businessmen to raise this question, but little change can be expected in the cultural kitchen-midden that surrounds modern education until it becomes a central consideration in what "free enterprisers" set out to do.

For a conclusion we turn to an address before the graduating class of a southern prep school, Sewanee Academy, by the book critic of the *Wall Street Journal,* Edmund Fuller. He made the usual encouraging remarks, but his warning is more to the point. He began:

> Some people have said that yours will be the best-educated generation in the history of the world. To agree with that would strike the hearty, congratulatory note considered appropriate to occasions of this kind. Unfortunately, it is not true.
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> It is not so much a lie as an error arising from a confusion of terms. Simply in living, outside of school, you are exposed to more kinds of information, more masses of data, more multimedia stimuli, than any generation that has gone before you. The trouble is, all this that is poured on you, especially through the potent medium of television, is fragmentary, unorganized, and, worst of all, is unevaluated information. It may have a bearing upon education, but it is not education in itself. It is more likely to hamper than to aid real education. It can lead to the junkyard mind more easily than it can contribute to the comprehensive intelligence. . . .
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> It is possible that you may become the best-informed generation in history—*quantitatively.* It is also frighteningly possible that you could turn out to be one of the worst educated generations—*qualitatively.*

FRONTIERS

The Spectrum of Change

IN the *Ecologist* for May-June, Edward Goldsmith points out that while a steady-state (no-growth) economy is absolutely necessary to general survival, a number of other basic changes are required for its support. We'll need another kind of agriculture to make farmers independent of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, another kind of diet to reduce the ever-growing cost of hospital and health care, and perhaps most of all need social attitudes which will put a stop to "the growing hordes of criminals, delinquents, vandals, baby-bashers, wife-batterers, alcoholics and drug-addicts generated by the cumulative impact of industrial activities."

Motivation in life is at the root of such change. Goldsmith recalls Karl Polanyi's denunciation of the "obsolete market mentality" and his insistence that economic enterprise become a part of and controlled by social intelligence—not a separate and self-contained sphere of action. No doubt most of the steady-state advocates recognize this and take it somewhat for granted, but the importance of thinking the reform through at all levels needs deliberate attention. The very fabric of human society must be rewoven in terms of human value and need.

John McKnight writes in *Resurgence* for July-August on the aged—how their capacities, judgment, and maturity are being wasted by a society that makes them nonproductive and dependent. They are, so to speak, "put away." There is really no place for grandparents in the single-family dwellings of enormous developments such as Leavittown, Oak Park, and Lakewood, as sociologists noted some twenty-five years ago. Family continuity and the interdependence of generations are things of the past.

Not only do the old have much to give, they also have needs. Mr. McKnight says:

> If those who wish to "serve" old people want to deal with a real problem, they might consider the fact that in 1950, for every SIX people who were receiving social security, a hundred people were paid workers. In 1978, for every thirty people receiving social security, there are a hundred paid workers. By the year 2030, when people who are now thirteen years old will be sixty-five, present projections indicate that for every person receiving social security there will be two persons working for an income.

It won't work, of course. The economy will break down long before that. In a revealing column in the *Christian Science Monitor* (Jan. 25, 1979) Joseph Harsch pointed out that while in 1968 the federal budget of the United States reached a Vietnam war peak, so that defense and non-defense federal costs represented four fifths of the total, today these costs are only two fifths of the total. Where does the rest of the money go? Harsch says:

> The great expansion has been in the sums of money which the federal government collects, and then gives to someone else to spend. There are three main categories here. First, dating from the New Deal days of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, are the social security pensions. Second are the results of Lyndon Johnson's "great society" programs. Third is Richard Nixon's "revenue sharing."
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> In the budget these are called "payments for individuals and grants." They include medicare and medicaid, social security payments, and the manifold forms of payments which the federal government makes to states, cities, and other branches of local government—so numerous that cities and states hire specialists to tell them what untapped sources of wealth lie around Washington for the expert to find.
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> At the peak of the Vietnam war these "payments for individuals and grants" were less than the combined costs of the federal government, defense, and service of the debt. These three dropped back after 1968, but payments to individuals and grants never did.
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> Another way of stating all this is that, beginning with 1968, the largest single activity of the federal government has been to collect sums of money which are then handed to others to spend. It spends for itself and its own purposes under $250 billion. It collects and gives to others nearly $300 billion.

One can hardly blame the government for this. The aging and retired *had* to be provided for, and their families and communities had no use or place for them. But obviously, a contracting or steady-state economy cannot permit such vast outlays of funds, even if our "growth" economy may seem to do so, while it lasts a little longer. Moreover, we now have a "growth" industry—John McKnight calls it an "oldhood industry"—with an enormous staff to look after all those old people, whose number is growing as the population ages. McKnight says:

> We cannot afford the oldhood industry because it disables Old Grandma. Instead, we need a genuine anti-age policy. Policies that use age to separate people into three categories of youth, middle age, and old in order to meet the needs of a growth-oriented caring economy should be systematically dismantled. The age-oriented service industries break families, neighborhoods, community and decimate the caring capacities of human beings.

This writer concludes:

> A recent study in a Chicago neighborhood examined the cause of death recorded on death certificates in 1900 and 1975. In 1975, the death certificates said more people died of heart disease, stroke and cancer. In 1900, the death certificates said the majority of the people died of old age.
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> When our death certificates once again say that most died of old age, it will be a good indicator that we have liberated ourselves from the oldhood industry. If we can live with death, we can focus on how "old" can be a valued celebration of our capacities and our mortality.

There is something disheartening about analyses which focus on federal policy. When something goes wrong at that level, it seems plain that little short of breakdown or ultimate disaster will get things going in the opposite direction. Smaller population groups have a better chance to initiate constructive change. Last July a weekly paper in Southern California, the *Topanga* (Canyon) *Messenger* began a series (by Pacific News Service) on how several "American communities have taken innovative, sometimes daring, approaches to solving the energy crisis that has gripped urban America."

> While each community devised plans unique to its problems and circumstances, the solutions have some things in common: in each case, city politics, with broad citizen support, have been the vehicle for change in each case, certain individuals with expertise and vision have been crucial to the success of the plan; and each community has tapped into local energy sources not previously exploited. Most significantly, these communities have all turned from a passive "leave it to Uncle Sam" approach to an aggressive "let's do it ourselves" stance.

One of these cities, Seattle, Wash., which has a third largest municipally owned utility in the country, worked out a plan which set aside the nuclear option and concentrated on conservation, fast-growing wood fuel, and combinations of solar collectors with hydro-power. The other city, Hartford, Connecticut, has started an intensive gardening program (to lessen food transport costs) with introduction of greenhouses and numerous community garden plots. The unemployed youth of the city are being put to work to grow food for the city's low-income population, and under way is an infant industry to develop into a manufacturing center of various solar appliances. The establishment of small community canneries will seek to reduce food costs for local residents.