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SOCIETY BY DESIGN

BREAD LABOR: I

WORK, to some, suggests drudgery—the prostitution of oneself in order to earn a living—something one must do. For others this a gross misuse of the term. Work for the latter is the productive and creative activity that makes human life possible. When the necessary work of the world is shared by all its people, there need be no painful toil. Work is an interesting and tremendously exciting learning tool—when undertaken voluntarily and in amounts that do not cripple the spirit.

The term, Bread Labor, was coined in the last century by Bondaref and brought to prominence by Tolstoy and Gandhi. It refers to the basic work that is necessary for subsistence. Bread is here a symbol and stands for more than the baking of bread. It means all needed work, whether food-raising and preparation, the making of clothing and shelter, or the caring for children.

Work is one of our most useful learning tools. It is drudgery that needs eliminating, not work. Example is extremely important to the child in its growth; at this time few children in this culture grow up seeing people do work that they enjoy. Children love to imitate adults at work. We do them a great disservice when (1) we work where they cannot see us (at the office or the shop); (2) we do work that we neither enjoy nor believe in; (3) we talk of work as something to avoid. I have been privileged to grow up among people who enjoyed working with their hands, their minds, and their bodies. There were not many of these people, but there were enough so that as a child I could see that it wasn't all one way in the world. There were three people in particular whom I admired for their sensitivity to the world, their intellectual acuity, their work with their hands and their dedication to a better society: (1) Morris Mitchell, who as president of the Putney Graduate School of Education blended cabinet-making and gardening with his leadership of the school; (2) Walter Clark, co-founder of the North Country School, who was equally at home in the classroom, workshop, garden or sugar bush; (3) Scott Nearing, who at 99 was still splitting his own firewood and who had blended writing and lecturing with gardening and building over a long and full life. All three of these people were examples to me of responsible adult living—examples showing that work could be enjoyable and that the great pioneering ahead of us lies in the search for a better way of life for humanity. I met these people during and after graduate school and wish that such examples could have come earlier in life.

It is important for confidence and well-being to feel needed and useful. This is true for people of all ages. Mostly it is the young and the old that are neglected. In our fear of over-working them (or by our attitudes toward work such as supposing that not needing to work is a superior position), we've gone from the extreme of exploiting child labor in the mills and mines to no work—and from the workhouse for the aged to the retirement home. These are both extremes that ignore the wishes and needs of those involved. Work is one of the main means whereby a child learns, grows, feels a sense of belonging and of being a useful member of society. For the older person, having work that fits one's nature and capacity gives a sense of purpose and belongingness that is of extreme importance in declining years.

The classic attitude toward hard work is that it is a necessary evil and that, perhaps (under extremely suspect egalitarian thought), it ought to be shared—done out of duty—but is definitely *not* something to be enjoyed. But what if we have

been on the wrong track? What if work, the meeting of mundane needs, is an important element in understanding ourselves and our world? What if creativity, to be valuable and not dilettante, must be based on work?

> But what men have made of the promised land—the granted land—is enough to make the gods blush. The child who breaks a toy, the animal who lays waste its pasture and muddies its drinking water, the bird that fouls its nest, are no stupider. Oh, the squalid approach to our towns. Ugliness, discord, stench! I think of the gardens our city belts might become with the help of a little understanding and love—I think of what leisure might be! And work, work itself, redeemed, retrieved from its primal curse. (André Gide.)

The problem with meditation, Zen, etc.—in the modern movement—is that it ignores work—loving, positive, productive work. This is our greatest need. Not TM, not TV, not sports, not art, but work—creatively performed. Work (like schooling) has been poisoned by being demanded. When work is chosen voluntarily it can be at varying times a stimulant to thought, an insight into the meaning of life, a time for meditation. Thoughtless, mechanical drudgery dulls the mind whereas work that is chosen can be a freeing activity.

There is an important level on which work is often misunderstood. Some learn to do it well, efficiently. The dutifully do their share of bread labor—but they consider it less important than art, thought, research or creative action. I protest. Bread labor is a primary activity of life equal to or above these other things in importance. With out our labor, they would not exist. The role work play in putting us in mental contact with primary forces I also neglected.

The morality behind the concept of bread labor is the there is a basic amount of primary work to be done. Where it is spread out evenly among the whole populace no one suffers from over-work—and all have the benefits of feeling that they are doing their share as part of a working team to make society function. Some cannot work—they are too old, too young, or too sick. This is natural. Such people are dependents. But what able-bodied person wishes to think of himself as dependent or parasitic, in capable of carrying his own load?

> Those who live without working are either beggars or thieves. (Proudhon.)

> The present position which we, the educated and well-to-do classes occupy, is that of the old man of the sea, riding on the poor man's back; only unlike the old man of the sea, we are very sorry for the poor man, very sorry; and we will do almost anything for the poor man's relief, we will not only supply him with food sufficient to keep him on his legs, but we will teach and instruct him and point out the beauties of the landscape: we will discourse sweet music to him and give him an abundance of good advice: Yes, we will do almost anything for the poor man, anything but get off his back. (Tolstoy.)

Gandhi built bread labor into his daily life as a basic element. He would voluntarily choose to do the most avoided work, that of the lowest class—sweeping the dung from the streets and emptying the privies. He felt that if we want to have a classless society where all are equal, then the freest, the wealthiest, the strongest, the wisest and the most respected, should take up, voluntarily, the most despised work. This would help to remove class prejudice and raise work from being despised to something that is sought after.

If we want others to work *for* us so that we do not have to work, we exploit them and support violence in a very basic way. It is an ugly, destructive, parasitic existence.

> No order of society can last in which one man says to another, "You work and toil, and earn bread, and I will eat it. (Lincoln.)

Somehow we *must* find a way to develop a society of people who refuse to live at the expense of others, be they nearby or living half a world away.

I use the term prostitution to mean the selling of one's self. For too long it has connoted merely the selling of one's sex. Equally evil is the selling of one's brain, one's creative talent, one's labor, If

it wrong to give sexually without love, it is equally wrong to give of one's muscle, thought, time and talent without love of the activity they are applied to. When we don't like what we are doing yet continue doing it for pay, that is prostitution. By far the most common practice is the selling of one's labor. It has become the norm and as such is especially dangerous as an atmosphere which affects the growing child. The first step to improvement is to recognize the extent to which we prostitute ourselves. It is so much healthier for a child to see a parent recognizing that his way of living is wrong, and seeking a remedy, than it is for the parent to rationalize it, thereby encouraging the child to follow the same pattern. For many, it will be necessary to continue their existing level of prostitution into the future. But if we look at our lives honestly, we may speed the time when such self-exploitation is no longer necessary. If we can reduce the amount we sell ourselves a little more each month, and each year, we will come to a time when rather than selling ourselves 100% of the working day it will be only 70%, or 50% or 30%. Such improvements will be of momentous importance to the individual and to society. The goal we seek will then be clear. Our effort will give added purpose to life.

There are two ways in which this improvement can be made (other than by finding a new job). One is to find a way of growing and learning in our present work. Try to work at those aspects of it you most believe in. Try to reduce the time and apply the saved hours to work that you enjoy and feel is worth while. If we all sell ourselves as little as possible, this will have a great positive effect on the world around us. Imagine being able to face your kids honestly, having them know you cannot be bought—that there are those who do *not* have a price. The ultimate goal in this is to stop being prostitutes and mercenaries—offering bodies and brains for hire.

We all agree that slavery—the selling of people—is wrong. If this is so, isn't it equally wrong to sell one's self? Employers make it so easy: Pleasant working space, interesting companions, large salary, pension and insurance plans, short hours, long holidays, stock options, bonuses, opportunities for advancement—and Muzak to boot. But it remains prostitution if it is not work that you feel good about doing, that you do only for the pay and the benefits.

One reason for living simply is that by working only to produce primary needs, fewer hours have to be spent in production. If all able-bodied people contribute their share of effort, the hours for all will become short indeed—and the time spent in selling one's self will be reduced accordingly. When we add the desire of many to do more of their own work in the extra time—building their house, growing their food, being their own mechanics, sewing—this further reduces the number of hours needed for contribution to the common labor pool.

Some may get the impression from what I say that life is all hard work. No, life is a beautiful thing and if the world's need for labor were distributed fairly, work would become a beautiful and exciting part of life. Happiness reduces the amount of effort needed to do any job. Baking bread under the right conditions can be a joyful experience. But under pressure of too much work, too low a return, in alien conditions and using ingredients of questionable quality, baking becomes drudgery.

Scott Nearing reasoned that if every able-bodied adult would contribute four hours a day of bread labor, the world's work could get done. Four hours seemed to him a generous amount of time. Gandhi thought that two hours a day would be enough to supply all basic needs. (Modern tools have increased production considerably since these estimates were made.)

If we were all to set aside a piece of time each day to contribute to the world's labor pool, using it in the most efficient way to produce necessities we cannot or prefer not to make at home—dental instruments, jet airplanes oil refineries, steel mills,

etc.—I believe these things could be supplied with between one and two hours per day from us all. Many jobs which are drudgery when done for long hours become interesting and enjoyable when done on a shorter work schedule. If it were found that 400 hours per year would suffice to meet all our needs, two good things would happen:

(1) The labor pool would be increased greatly by former dependents who would now be able to take their place and do their share of the work. Children would be able to take part in the world's work much earlier. Would this be exploitation? No! The trouble with child labor in the early days of industrialization was the misuse of children—over-work, inhuman conditions, poor food, danger (physical, moral, and spiritual). In revulsion society over-reacted with stringent child labor laws. The result was throwing the baby out with the bath. Work is a primary tool for growth and now children are denied this opportunity for learning. If the world's work could be brought close to one hour per day per person, we would be less shocked at the idea of children being allowed to do the work of their choice.

(2) If we have 400 hours to contribute to society yearly, we may choose to work 40 hours a week for ten weeks and have our service completed for that year or, we might prefer to work four hours a day for one quarter of the year. Many would find it interesting to work at different tasks each year. I would enjoy spending ten weeks in a shoe factory one year, working in a print shop another, packing fish another, harvesting seaweed, driving a truck, working on an automotive assembly line, driving a snow plow, being a fire lookout. None of these jobs is so demanding of skill that a person cannot be useful at them in a ten-week stint as a laborer. Jobs requiring more skill will require more stability. This could be balanced with a credit system, with the less desirable jobs giving higher credit.

There is no need to be fixed in location as we do our year's labor. One year I might be on a Finnish farm, another in a Korean pottery, another in a forestry project in Malaya. The possibilities are limitless—if we design ways to make it work.

Some will worry about too many people and too little pay in this system, but if the pay were to remain constant as the hours decrease, who would complain?

The reasoning in support of one hour a day of efficient production at bread labor is based on three premises: (1) That all able-bodied people work—no exceptions. This means that bankers and brokers, presidents and professors all do their stint. (2) That this is not all the bread labor needed, but only the organized, scheduled time that is demanded of all. You will contribute other bread labor at your own pace when you cultivate your garden, knit your socks, or build your home. (3) When we are working only a few hours at a stretch our production per hour will be much higher than normal, thus reducing the number of hours needed.

Imagine a world in which nobody is for hire—where nobody works for pay, nearly all work being done for the enjoyment of it, for the feeling of being useful, for the desire to learn. Everyone would be required to do his own work (or convince others to trade labor with him). Doctors would sweep their own floors, bankers would wash their own windows (not in the bank but at home). Princes? they wouldn't exist outside of the story books. (Inherited position would have no place in any decent society I can imagine.) The director of General Motors would change his own oil.

Commonly workers can be divided into bosses and those being bossed (often both hats are worn by the same person with the boss in turn having his boss). I'm suggesting a society in which no one is permanently in a role of authority. If this sounds like industrial chaos, it is not. It is an attempt to design work situations that encourage the fullest human development of the work forces. Direction and supervision are necessary in many activities, but this does not mean that these functions need always to be

performed by the same people. When we realize that we have as great a need for fully developed people as we do for efficient factory production, we will be more ready to share the roles necessary for efficient work. An exciting by-product of this is that a happier, more developed citizenry will be a more productive one with less malingering and less sabotage. This greater sharing of authority and direction will increase respect for the work of the person in charge.

Once we move in the direction of neither bossing nor being bossed, we either take a great loss in income or we find in ourselves a growing interest in simplicity, knowledge, and skill; to the extent that something is simple and easy to make, it becomes easier to have and therefore more available.

If no one would work *for* another, what would the effect be morally, economically, socially? Buckminster Fuller made the often misunderstood statement that nobody should work for a living (the accent should be placed on the word living, not on work). Work most certainly would be done, but not by coercion and not by bribery. It would be done because it is enjoyed. There would be no close relationship between work and income. People would work for satisfaction and not for pay. But if no one would work *for* another, if no one would work for hire, many people would have to start working for themselves. If all refused to work for the rich, their money would become useless and they would have to work for themselves. By this means a class society based on economics would disappear. We usually think of the redistribution of wealth coming about by taxation or by revolution. But imagine social change coming about by an educated, responsible, population of people who would refuse to work for the rich. This would result in a democratic, non-violent, social revolution. (Even Croesus would have to count all that gold himself.)

When people do work they like, it is doubly efficient, for we then have a happier society with a better quality of work being done.

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(*To be concluded*)

REVIEW
DIAGNOSIS AND ONE CURE

READING a book like *State of the World—1984* (Norton, $15.95), written and edited by Lester R. Brown and associates of the Worldwatch Institute, makes one realize how much the human world has changed during the past hundred years or so. While wars, events, and national policies in one country have always had their effect on neighboring lands, the interplay of socio-economic forces was often unperceived. Indeed the ripple of disturbance and spreading troubles caused by the wars of conquest of the Roman legions often returned by a circuitous route to bring invasions on other Roman frontiers, and as Frederick J. Teggart points out in *Rome and China* (1941), twenty-seven of the total of forty uprisings which harassed Roman administrators "are to be attributed to the influence of events in the 'Western Regions'" of China. This sort of historical causation remained virtually unknown until Teggart's research. Both the Chinese and the Romans were quite unaware of the returning effects of their military decisions, and the latter concluded from their experience that their immediate neighbors were "actuated by an unalterable disposition to maraud."

Today, however, the interdependence of all parts of the world is no longer concealed. This is now widely understood, so that a discussion of "Progress Toward a Sustainable Society," on which *State of the World* reports, cannot be based on anything less than analysis of conditions throughout the world. This volume is the first of a series of such reports, which are to come out every year. Among the subjects treated are population growth in relation to economic growth or decline, the worldwide attempt to reduce dependence on petroleum, the problems of soil conservation, the need for protecting forests, progress in recycling, assessment of the economics of nuclear power, the various sources of renewable energy (wind and solar resources, geothermal energy), what is happening and perhaps ought to happen to the automobile, alternative fuel prospects, various aspects of world food supply, and problems of soil conservation. In his Foreword, Lester Brown, president of Worldwatch Institute, says:

> The *State of the World—1984* tries to measure progress toward sustainability and determine why some countries are doing better on a given front than others. Is progress due to the play of market forces, tax incentives, public education, government regulation, the emergence of a new technology, or intelligent leadership? We try to convey what is working and why. We see the report as a vehicle for quickly disseminating news of innovative initiatives—whether it be Sweden's national plan to use reverse vending machines to recycle aluminum beverage containers, Thailand's innovative family planning incentives, or California's policies to spur a massive breakthrough in wind electrical generation.

The report is intended to serve the needs of policy makers, yet it is of interest to all those who concern themselves with the problems and needs of the world. The chapter, "Reassessing the Economics of Nuclear Power," is soberly written, but the facts scream from the pages, permitting the summary statement: "Cold economics is now doing to nuclear power what thousands of demonstrators never could." On cars: "The number of four-cylinder automobile engines jumped from less than 10 per cent of the U.S. market during the mid-seventies to 41 per cent in 1982." Item: An American consulting firm has designed a four-passenger car that will get 200 miles per gallon of gas, and the Japanese are now making small vehicles that average better than so miles to the gallon and producing more than a million of them a year. Possibly the most interesting and encouraging chapter is titled "Developing Renewable Energy." Experimental windmill installations in the state of California have developed so rapidly that the manufacturing industry has been left behind, with imported machines from Belgium and the Netherlands filling the gap between demand and supply. Enthusiasts have likened the rush to wind power to the gold rush of 1849.

> Much of the early work in developing wind farms in California is being carried out by small innovative firms formed specifically to tap this power source. The companies have contracts to supply wind-generated electricity at the same price it would cost the utility to get the power from another source. . . . The small wind energy entrepreneurs typically raise their own financing through limited partnerships and lease the land on which the machines are constructed.

From a concluding section on the promise of renewable energy:

> Dozens of communities around the world have taken the initiative to develop their own renewable energy and conservation plans. This approach helps bypass the barriers posed by existing institutions that are reluctant to try something different—often the chief problem in getting a new energy source established. Energy programs in which individuals assume much of the responsibility for needed changes have generally proved more successful than those run by distant bureaucracies. . . .
>
> Fifty years from now historians will look back at the world's heavy reliance on one fuel as an unhealthy anomaly born of decades of low oil prices. In the future, differences in climate, natural resources, economic systems, and social outlook will determine which energy sources are used where. Some countries will depend on five or six major sources of energy—true energy security. As energy supply patterns change, so will economies and societies. Industries will tend to locate near large rivers, geothermal deposits, and other "lodes" of renewable energy since these fuels are less portable than oil. New patterns of employment, new designs for cities, and a revitalized rural sector could all emerge with renewable energy development. . . . And renewable energy offers people striving for self-sufficiency the chance to take more direct control of their energy supply.

In an "Overview" by Leslie Brown at the beginning of the book, the general stress is on the need to recognize planetary needs and the requirement that in making decisions we must now think beyond the demands of our immediate wants and objectives. The importance of maintaining the right balance between agricultural lands and forest cover is not yet understood:

> Efforts to protect the world's forests are not faring well. Each year they shrink by an area roughly the size of Hungary. In the great majority of Third World countries deforestation is a serious matter—one with long-term economic and ecologic consequences. One notable exception to this generalization is South Korea, which has successfully reforested its once denuded mountains and hills, planting in trees an area two-thirds that in rice, the country's food staple. Although national successes are rare, there are scores of promising initiatives, such as in the Indian state of Gujarat, that must be multiplied many times if future firewood needs are to be assured.

The processes of soil erosion, Brown says, have "now reached epidemic proportions," with no major country, either industrial or developing, responding effectively to this "threat to sustainable agriculture." Close to half the world's cropland is losing topsoil at a debilitating rate.

> In part, the contrasting awareness of oil and soil depletion is the understandable product of differing levels of information. The world oil crisis received a great deal of attention largely because oil is a widely traded commodity, with most countries being importers. With soil, however, the crisis is a quiet one. Estimates are regularly made for oil reserves, adjusting annually both for depletion through production and new discoveries. Such a procedure does not exist for world soil reserves. Indeed, not until topsoil has largely disappeared and food shortages or even famine have developed does this loss become apparent.

Figures are given which show that "over one-third of U.S. cropland was losing more than five tons of topsoil per acre," while in India it is estimated that 6 billion tons of soil are eroded from India's cropland each year, which means that "60 per cent of the cropland is eroding excessively."

There is this prophetic comment on the diminishing supply of petroleum:

> As the age of oil slowly recedes, governments everywhere will be faced with difficult choices in the use of dwindling supplies. In industrial societies the question may eventually become a choice between public and private transportation, with the more efficient rail system expanding at the expense of oil-

> dependent road transport. For many Third World countries still in the early stages of developments, the adjustments will come in the form of conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in exchange for continued financing of development. Increasingly, Third World governments will have to choose between fuel for private automobiles and fuel for cooking, or whether to use precious gasoline in cars or in irrigation pumps and tractors. Unless governments develop policies that channel scarce oil supplies to the most essential uses, affluent motorists could easily outbid farmers.

What may be regarded as a flaw in this generally useful, informing, and intelligently edited book is that it doesn't seem pessimistic enough. The grounds for pessimism are there, in the text, but the writers seem a bit too gentle in describing their implications. There is a reason for this. The book, as explained, is put together for policy-makers, and people who gain such jobs are likely to be more or less comfortable with the status quo, not realizing the crying need for institutional change and reform. Yet this may become evident to the careful reader, and *State of the World* should be of great service in this way.

Meanwhile, another book, *Living Lean*, by two housewives in their thirties, both matured members of the hippie generation, if read at the same time, might supply a balance that readers who are not policy-makers long for—what, after all, can *they* do about the stupidities and follies of states? *Living Lean* (Larson, Burdett, N.Y. 14818, $8.95) is an engaging treatise on what they *can* do. Both books restore both economics and ecology to their originally combined meaning (both coming from the same Greek root of "housekeeping") and instruct in domestic science, one on a planetary, the other on a personal scale. *Living Lean* is by two women who, though poor, determined to be civilized and to enjoy a way of life created by their own ingenuity. They are far better managers than the audience to which *State of the World* is addressed, and if their policies, in principle, were made the foundation of reform in the ways of states we should all be out of most of our troubles at least within fifty years. There are chapters on kitchen gardening, cooking, sewing, shopping, scrounging, swapping, and saving money, starting with a penny piggy bank. The book is about survival with grace and fun, and will probably have more lasting effect on its readers than *State of the World.* Yet both are *good* books.

COMMENTARY
A PLATONIC GOAL

IN the concluding quotation from Christopher Lasch in "Children" (see p. 8), he speaks of "making the workplace more joyous and playful, even if this means challenging the basic premises of our society." That this should appear in the same issue as William Coperthwaite's article on "Bread Labor" is a happy coincidence, since his discussion spells out one way of challenging those basic premises. It is natural to feel a bit shocked by what he says, yet equally natural to recognize, after reflection, the profound change for the better in human life that would result from his proposal.

How is a reform like that to be arranged? Such things *can't* be arranged. Coperthwaite has proposed a Platonic goal—the goal each one defines for himself and then begins to live up to as best he can. The realization of a good society has never been a "managerial" problem and cannot be accomplished by managerial means. It is done by individual striving and exemplification. Only when this is generally understood will we stop wasting our time on political "arrangements."

Meanwhile, we have another quotation from Lasch that had to be edited out of the "Children" article for lack of space, finding room for it here:

> In most jobs, work long ago lost the qualities of playfulness and craftsmanship. It no longer satisfies what John Dewey called "the unconquerable impulse towards experiences enjoyable in themselves." Today work is strictly a means to an end—profits for the capitalist, wages for the worker. The taste for beauty and the instinct of workmanship no longer find satisfaction in the workplace and are therefore forced to seek other outlets. People who work at jobs deliberately divested of every challenge to ingenuity and imagination are encouraged to become consumers of beautiful objects, to cultivate an appreciation of great art and great music, to surround themselves with reproductions of great paintings and recordings of symphonic masterpieces. If they prefer the deadening drumbeat of rock-and-roll, this is not necessarily because serious music, so-called, is inherently unpopular but because it has become so closely identified not just with leisure but with the leisure class. Great works of art have increasingly taken on quality of collectors' items.

By such means culture is pulled out of shape and loses its character. Then we get used to the distortions and suppose they are natural and necessary. They are neither.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
ART IN AMERICA

IN *Harper's* for last February, Christopher Lasch asked the question: "Why do the arts in general lead such a precarious existence in America?" He went on: "Why is the audience for good music so limited, in spite of radio, and records and all the other marvels of mass communication?"

His article, "The Degradation of Work and the Apotheosis of Art," is worth reading, like most or all of what Lasch writes, for the answers provided—we'll give his conclusion later—but his question stirs comparisons with what others have said or suggested. Years ago we printed here the comment of a specialist in children's art who, after contrasting the far superior work of Japanese children with drawings by children of the same age in America, said that the reason was that Japanese adults and parents respected and took seriously the spontaneous efforts of the young, giving the right sort of encouragement, while American parents are at best condescending, critical, unable to see the quality and value in childish work.

A comment on what adult Americans think of art is found in one of Dwight Macdonald's essays on the mass society. "Our homes," he said, "our cities, our landscapes are designed for profit or practicality but not generally for beauty; we think it odd that a man should devote his life to writing poems but natural that he should devote it to inducing children to breakfast on Crunchies instead of Krispies. . . ." This, in turn, recalls the measured comment of George Steiner (*Salmagundi*, Fall-Winter, 1980-81)

> That there should be halls of fame for baseball players but no complete editions of classic American authors, that an American university of accredited standing should, very recently, have dismissed thirty tenured teachers on grounds of utmost fiscal crisis while flying its football squads to Hawaii for a single game; that the athlete and the broker, the plumber and the pop-star should earn far more than the pedagogue—these are facts for which we can cite parallels in other societies, even in Periclean Athens or the Florence of Galileo. What we cannot parallel is the American resolve to proclaim and institutionalize the valuations which underlie such facts. It is the sovereign candor of American philistinism which numbs a European sensibility; it is the frank and sometimes sophisticated articulation of a fundamentally, of an ontologically *immanent* economy of human purpose.

Steiner turns the totalitarian practice of censorship around to make his point:

> To imprison a man because he quotes *Richard III* during the 1937 purges, to arrest him in Prague today because he is giving a seminar on Kant, is to gauge accurately the status of great literature and philosophy. It is to honor perversely, but to honor nevertheless, the obsession that is truth.
>
> What text, what painting, what symphony could shake the edifice of American politics? What act of abstract thought really matters at all? Who *cares?*

Another comparison—we're not sure of how much weight it should have—is suggested in a *Nation* book review by Edmund White, in which he remarks that "France's most popular television program" is the Friday night prime-time literary talk show, *Apostrophes*. Could that happen in America?

Returning to the present, Mr. Lasch has this paragraph:

> The fiscal crisis in education reminds us, in case we had forgotten during the boom years after World War II, that the fine arts rank very low on the scale of American priorities. In the expansive educational climate of the Fifties and Sixties, the arts enjoyed a brief period of public favor. But the taxpayers' revolt, the shrinking tax base out of which education is supported, the end of the baby boom, and a series of deep cuts in federal spending have combined to force deep economies on the schools; and in this climate of retrenchment, luxuries and frills are naturally the first to be dropped from the curriculum. It doesn't do much good for friends of the arts to protest that they are a necessity, not a frill. Such arguments are likely to make little impression on hard-pressed school boards hoping to rescue what they consider absolutely essential to the educational enterprise and confronted, moreover, with a powerful if misguided movement demanding a return to basics.

On the subject of "Art" a return to basics would be very much in order, and for us this means going back to the Greeks. According to Eric Havelock (in a long note at the end of the second chapter of his *Preface to Plato*), modern scholars mistakenly assume that " 'art' must have meant to Plato much what it means to us," when the fact is that "neither 'art' nor 'artist,' as we use the words, is translatable into archaic or high-classical Greek." The possibility of "aesthetics" as a distinct discipline did not exist for Plato; this idea began with Aristotle—more's the pity, one may think. The word the Greeks used for what we think of as artistic skill was *techné,* which had, so to say, a humbler meaning. Phidias would be called a stonecutter instead of an *artist.* Art, in short, had not been reified, not yet been isolated from the activities and crafts of everyday life. It seems likely that the beauty of objects made by the Greeks was the result of their effort to do everything as well as possible, and not isolating visual or oral (song) excellence and giving it artificial institutional status. Lasch shows that placing art in a special cultural category has had a bad effect in modern times, saying:

> The decline in the quality of artistic production has occurred at the very same time that art has come to be taken more seriously than ever before. In modern society, art is not an object of indifference. In some quarters, at least, it is an object of worship. It has come to enjoy the esteem formerly reserved for religion. Indeed, the difficulty may be not that art isn't taken seriously but that it is taken more seriously than is good for it. It has been cut off from the rest of life and put on a pedestal. It has been relegated to the museum and to the concert hall (and the concert hall, as has been pointed out, has become a museum in its own right), not because it is considered unimportant but because its adoration can best take place in an atmosphere uncontaminated by everyday concerns.

That the separation of art from life withers the art and infects the artist with egoism is Wendell Berry's contention, and the broad effects of this—what can we call it but corruption?—are much more widely felt than we suppose. But, as Lasch goes on to show, "the creation of a broader audience for the arts would not restore the connections between art and everyday life, on which the vitality of art depends."

> Works of art, as Dewey put it, "idealize qualities found in common experience." When they lose touch with common experience, they become hermetic and self-referential, obsessed with originality at the expense of communicability, indifferent to anything beyond the artist's private, subjective, and idiosyncratic perception of reality. . . .
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> The task is not to create larger numbers of enlightened consumers of culture, but to end the segregation of art and to achieve a new integration of art and everyday life. Instead of encouraging people to make better use of their leisure time, friends of the arts should think about making the workplace more joyous and playful, even if this means challenging the basic premises of our society.

And, of course, it means exactly that.

FRONTIERS

Notes on Technology, China, Russia

IN his (1949) letter to Walter Paepcke, providing a plan for the Aspen Institute, Ortega concluded with an obscure compliment to technology. People talk too much of "Spirit," he said, seeming "to forget that it cannot exist without the so-called matter." This was in justification of the importance of architectural features he had recommended for a large meeting place at Aspen, which was to be low in cost, and so arranged that the people could all see one another. "This humble physical detail," he said, "is *vital* to the project."

Various "physical details" are the subject of an article by J. Baldwin in the first 1984 issue of *Annals of Earth Stewardship.* He speaks first of the many failures of exported technologies which lack the required support systems. "We see large-scale destruction of a traditional architecture that required little power or fuel, and its replacement with modern architecture which requires lots of both."

> The problem is that the introduction of a technology without the so-called infrastructure to support it is likely to be doomed. Think of how vulnerable your own home would be if there were no hardware stores, lumber yards, furnace repair shops or power company repair teams. What would you do if the water suddenly stopped appearing at the faucet, or your toilet refused to flush? Think of how serious this would become if all your neighbors had the same problems! Unless you have actually lived under conditions of insecure supply, you may not realize how dependent your way of life is upon a complex system of support.

Another problem at home is the inadequacy of both parts and whole units for replacement. Baldwin needed a new hot water heater for his trailer, but the one shipped to him had different mounting holes, pipes, and wires. "What should have been an hour's work with a wrench took an entire day and specialized tools. If we had been living thousands of miles from a well stocked plumbing supply, we would not have been able to use the heater at all."

One solution, especially for export to developing countries, would be plain, sturdy, durable products that last.

> The lowly Citroen 2CV has been in production for 38 years without major change, though one could wish for easier maintenance accessibility and even less parts changes. The British Seagull outboard motor is a worldwide classic though certainly not flawless. But it could be. . . . Products could be specifically designed for tough "third world" use, with thorough research intended to match the product to the conditions under which it must serve. . . .
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> The People's Republic of China exports a fine, simple diesel engine that is adaptable to a wide variety of uses. It comes with an overhaul kit sufficient to rebuild the engine completely. Part of the good reputation comes from that kit. They doubtless could have increased short-term profit by leaving the kit out of the package, but the Chinese well realize that it takes time for a technology to become established away from its home territory. . . . All technologies are systems. When we don't export the support, *no* technology is appropriate. . . . It's time to demonstrate our ability to produce, in Bucky Fuller's words, "comprehensive, anticipatory, design."

In the spring *Report* of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (with headquarters in Holland—IFOR, Hof van Sonoy 15-17, 1811 LD Alkmaar, The Netherlands), Hannes de Graaf, past president, tells about his experience over thirty years visiting the Soviet Union. "I have learned," he says, "that 65 years of determined propaganda that Marxism-Leninism would become the sole creed of all the inhabitants of the USSR has failed to reach its goal."

> Such uniformity of belief will never be established: the Russians are continuing to live spiritually from the sources of Russian religion and Russian humanism. In 1982 Ju. N. Davydov, a Soviet philosopher, published a book called *The Ethics of Love and the Metaphysics of Selfishness.* The most remarkable thing about the book is Davydov's assertion that the moral philosophy of Dostoyevski and Tolstoy is superior to all modern moral philosophy because for them the principle of love is the only solid foundation of genuine morality. The

author did not attack Marxist ethics—he is really attacking Nietzschean and existentialist nihilism—but he does not refer to Marxist ethics and this omission caused the book to be severely criticized in *The Communist*, the journal of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the USSR.

The writer speaks with great respect of Andrei Sakharov, the famous physicist whose humanist expressions keep him in continual trouble with the Kremlin—he made a hunger strike earlier this year to protest persecution of his wife—noting that he draws on the living tradition of Russian humanism, including Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. The latter's friend, Vladimir Solovyev, was a philosopher who sought a reconciliation of rival classes in Russia.

Solovyev inspired such different personalities as Nicholas Berdyaev and Alexander Blok who, in their turn, took part in the impressive revival of the arts, letters, philosophy and religion which took place in the first decades of this century and is called the "Russian Renaissance." In his autobiography Berdyaev writes, "This was the period of the awakening of the original philosophical thought, the flowering of poetry, the revival of interest in religion. . . . We saw the glow of a glorious dawn." This renaissance ended in 1922, however, with the expulsion from the Soviet Union of a large group of artists, philosophers, outstanding men and women from the literary world and other intellectuals. Those who look on all history through the eyes of the victors or who think that ideas play little or no part in determining historical events may be surprised at the revival of the ideas of Solovyev and Berdyaev in contemporary Soviet Russia, and in the reawakening of religion there (which some dismiss as a fashion, though fashion, too, plays a role).

There is still another humanist tradition, which is different from the Dostoyevski-Tolstoy-Solovyev-Berdyaev type. I mean the nineteenth-century Populist movement and its successor, the party of the Socialist revolutionaries. Faith in human freedom was the cornerstone of populist humanism in spite of the positivist leaders such as Chernyshevsky. With Herzen, they believed that history follows no predetermined pattern, that neither the violent conflicts between nations nor the struggle for power of one class over another were inevitable. They believed in Socialism not because it was inevitable, and not even because it was effective, but because it was just. They believed that the only censors over individual action should be the individual conscience. They believed in a federation of socialized, self-governing units which offered the possibility of a free and democratic system in Russia. To their descendants in the 20th century, the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the dictatorship of the Communist Party (and not of the proletariat) seemed to be a cynical travesty of all their plans and hopes for Socialism. Against Lenin they quoted Herzen, who wrote, "You can t talk of human rights when you own human souls." They were expelled from the political scene and persecuted in the early twenties, but their ideas about Socialism with a human face have not been extinguished.

We and others speak often about the "other America," sometimes forgetting that there is another Russia, another Latin America, another Iran, and another Israel. Groups like the FOR are helping to keep alive and recognized these "other" identities.