

## COMPREHENDING THE CONFUSION

How are people affected by what other people say? This is a question so enormous as to make attempts to answer it almost ridiculous. But such questions have not always been ridiculous. A few thousand years ago, what people said had a largely common origin and content. The great cultures of the past grew out a universally known oral literature—epic, poetry, and song. All the people used a common idiom and participated in the same vision. And as Ananda Coomaraswamy has remarked, "the traditional oral literatures interested not only all *classes*, but also all *ages* of the population."

In his *Preface to Plato*, a book devoted to the question we have raised, since it concerns the reasons for Plato's opposition to the poets, Eric Havelock gives a colorful illustration of what he terms "the Homeric state of mind," although he draws on the Arabs, not Greeks:

T. E. Lawrence, describing the muster of an expeditionary force of Arab warriors, observed the improvised verses which accompanied the line-up, and the rhythms which assisted the organization of the forward march. These procedures were not the result of some special addiction to heroism on the part of the Arabs; they were not Homeric in our narrow and emasculated sense, meaning simply romantic. Rather they were truly Homeric in their functional necessity. Here was a culture, strictly non-literate, as the Balkan cultures were not. The epic style was therefore a necessity for government and not just a means of recreation. Lawrence also noticed the educational system centered on the hearth by which this epic capacity was indoctrinated. Presumably as Arabia Deserta succumbs to literacy, these mechanisms will wither away. Only a few ballad-makers will survive, a vestigial remnant divorced from functional relationship to their community, and waiting for antiquarians to collect their songs under the impression that this is truly Homeric stuff.

What about the rest of us, who long ago submitted to literacy—literacy of a sort? Well, we (the common folk) lost our classical oral heritage,

acquired the ability to read directions in operator's manuals and the labels of merchandise. Literacy, as Karl Otten has said, "has not fulfilled expectations by producing happier and more effective citizens; on the contrary, it has created readers of the yellow press." Literacy joined with industrialization and the division of labor produces subdivided and mechanized humans. As Lazlo Moholy-Nagy said in *Vision in Motion*:

A wholesale literacy seemed at first to open new and happy vistas for everyone. But, paradoxically, mass distribution of schooling accomplished a negative miracle. The speedy dispensation of education for *immediate use* . . . provided the masses with a quick training but threw overboard its purpose namely, that "not knowledge but the power to *acquire* knowledge is the goal of education." (Pestalozzi.) Exactly this was circumvented. The masses received a training by verbalization, emphasizing the process of receiving instead of producing. The goal was not to express oneself, to think independently and be alert, but to "apply" education for running machines according to instruction.

The man or woman given this sort of education, Moholy-Nagy suggested, tends to see "everything in clichés."

His sensibility dulled, he loses the organic desire for self-expression even on a modest level. His natural longing for direct contact with the vital, creative forces of existence becomes transformed into the status of being well informed and well entertained. Typical examples are the radio quiz programs which offer cash to the best memorizer, the comic strips which deal in episodes without any psychological foundation; the round table discussions which always present both sides, with the wittiest and not the wisest drawing the applause; and—above all—the digest mania which tailors fiction and fact till they fit a prescribed number of pages and a predetermined attitude of a group financing the publication. In all these, the public is fed predigested pap by commentators as a substitute for independent thinking.

Ten years ago, a columnist, J.D.R. Bruckner, commented in the *Los Angeles Times* on the effect of the electronic media, amounting to a return to illiteracy:

Broadcasting in all its forms has allowed society to shift in a single generation from written to spoken word as the principal means of understanding. To most people books are vestigial. Since there are no new, commonly accepted forms to contain spoken expression, such as the verse forms which defined much primitive language, this shift to the spoken word has further eroded the stability of language itself.

The decay of stable meaning involves loss of individuality. It is not enough for words to have a recognizable surface meaning; language in all its complex relationships should convey the culture up from its past. People were once called literate not because they could read, but because they all read the same things and what they read became the common background of discourse. . . .

As common culture disintegrates and words lose their stability, the world becomes loud; periods of barbarism are always noisy. Governments, and businesses, use words, in advertising and in all kinds of political messages, to manipulate the mind. In a real sense the media become vehicles of confusion.

Well, this gives some idea of the obstacle course we have been over during the past two or three hundred years, with a sprint back to barbarism during recent decades. It amounts to a necessary preface to considering how we are affected by what people say.

A case for examination is what the President said last summer about the MX missile—which, he claimed, "is our optimum means" of guarding against "a pre-emptive Soviet attack." What is the MX? In the *Washington Spectator* for last Oct. 5, the editor, Tristram Coffin, quoted a columnist:

The MX, says Kilpatrick, "is an intercontinental ballistic missile bearing a fantastic nuclear warhead." The missile itself is 71 feet long; it weighs 190,000 pounds." Two hundred such missiles would be hauled through a rectangular area of 45,000 square miles, halting at each of 23 huge hardened shelters. The idea is to confuse the Soviets if, and this is a very big if indeed, they decide to strike the U.S. (The Soviets look on the MX as a possible first-strike

weapon against them. Many experts believe we are frightening the USSR with our brandishing of the MX and space-age missiles, and this creates a greater danger for us.) . . . .

The cost in land, water, and power is almost immeasurable.

In one year alone, 37 billion gallons of water would be needed in the construction, an average of 20 billion gallons a year for ten years, plus two to four billion gallons to serve construction workers and their families. This drain in the water supply comes at a time when the West is running out of water. . . . The area in which the MX would travel is "the driest region of the country, and water is the limiting factor of everything that exists here, from sagebrush to pronghorn antelope to humans," says the Sierra Club. The MX would create a serious loss of irrigation farming in the West, a serious rise in food bills and a rippling effect throughout the nation's economy.

The MX would use 8.9 million cubic yards of concrete, or twice the amount used to build the huge Hoover Dam. Kilpatrick adds another dimension, "Electric power is also limited (here). At its peak, the (MX) system demands the power resources for a city of 180,000."

The arguments for the MX missile may be of interest to those who suppose that a life preserved by nuclear war will be worth living, but here we are interested in the response of the American people to such appeals. A large number of them think, for various reasons, the MX program is a horrible mistake, but the point to be especially noticed is that, as the Center for Defense Information says, "Military spending is first of all a political instrument in the hands of American leaders." This means that opinions about such matters are shaped, not really in behalf of national defense, but to serve the interests of politicians who want to win elections. The *facts* of defense—if they are in any sense facts—are entirely secondary. Weapons are chosen in response to an unnatural excitement about the threat of a foreign power, an emotion being continually whipped up by the print and electronic media. As Robert Lasch, a Pulitzer-prize-winning editor, has put it:

For more than 30 years we have gone through intermittent orgies, usually in election years, of hating the Russians. . . . The media convert themselves into a voluntary propaganda machine. Politicians outbid each other in escalating the arms budget and applying a discredited foreign policy around the world.

In short, if you want to inform yourself about the issues the Executive and the Congress are deciding, there's not much use is listening to what they say. You have to read the critical analysts who write for small-circulation papers, and even then there is so much guesswork and speculation that your original hunches may prove the best guide.

The newspapers and the newscasters don't seriously discuss issues, but make drama out of what politicians say about them. As the Center for Defense Information puts it: "Military budgets are formed and shaped by the American political process. There is little that is indisputably rational or inevitable about them."

Tristram Coffin ends his useful compilation with a quotation from Rep. Lee Hamilton of Indiana:

What role should the U.S. play in the world? Rhetoric about "not being pushed around"—all too common in Presidential campaigns—may draw applause on the stump, but it does not help to answer the fundamental question. . . . What is the mission of a superpower in the last 20 years of the century? What face should the American superpower present to the world?

The question seems to have substance, but in the terms asked it is almost entirely without meaning. A nation-state is created to serve the national interest, and the national interest is the interest of its economic empire. Morality, as a roster of our various allies will reveal, has practically nothing to do with the case, although now and then the *appearance* of morality counts for something, politically speaking. In short, we shouldn't dissipate our energies preaching what the State should do, as if it could. The task is rather to generate more decisive strength in

individuals and those small social alliances that are *capable* of moral behavior.

Meanwhile, what has happened to the "Great Refusal" spoken of by Herbert Marcuse more than fifteen years ago in *One-Dimensional Man*? If we turn to the anarchists—who are the most determined refusers of all, and probably the most consistent—we find them saying that the radical concepts and language of past generations are no longer of any utility. Murray Bookchin, writing in his publication, *Comment* (P.O. Box 158, Burlington, Vermont 05402), points out the far-reaching character of the change:

What lies on the horizon is not the class struggle as we have known it in the metaphors of proletarian socialism—Socialist or Anarchist. The monumental crisis bourgeois society has created in the form of disequilibrium between humanity and nature, a crisis that has telescoped an entire geological epoch into a mere century; the expansive notion of human freedom that has given rise to feminism in all its forms, the hollowing out of the human community and citizenship that threatens the very claims of individuality, subjectivity, and democratic consciousness, perhaps the greatest claim the bourgeois epoch has made for itself as a force for progress; the terrifying sense of powerlessness in the face of ever-greater urban, corporate, and political gigantism; the steady demobilization of the political electorate in a waning era of institutional republicanism—all of these sweeping regressions have rendered an economic interpretation of social phenomena, a traditional "class analysis," and largely conventional political strategies in the forms of electoral politics and party structures grossly inadequate. . . .

One must realize the entirely new conditions this constellation of circumstances has produced for radicalism, the extent to which they redefine the revolutionary project theoretically and practically. The technical progress that Socialism once regarded as decisive to humanity's domination of nature and as preconditions of human freedom have now become essential in sophisticating the domination of human by human. . . . The growing recognition that the proletariat has become—and probably has always been—an organ of capitalist society, not a revolutionary agent gestating within its womb, has raised anew the problem of the "revolutionary agent" in an entirely new and non-Marxian form. Finally,

the need for the revolutionary project to view itself as a *cultural* project (or counterculture, if you will) that encompasses the needs of human subjectivity, the empowerment of the individual, the aestheticization of the revolutionary ideal has led, in turn, to a need to reconsider the structural nature, internal relations, and institutional forms of a revolutionary movement that will compensate, if only in part, for the cultural, subjective, and social negation of the public and private sphere. Indeed, we must redefine the very meaning of the word "Left" today. We must ask if radicalism can be reduced to a crude form of social democracy that operates within the established order to acquire mass, mindless constituencies, or if it must advance a far-reaching revolutionary challenge to desocialization and to every aspect of domination, be it in everyday life or in the broader arena of the coming historic epoch.

What Bookchin would like to see is "the fostering and the development of popular assemblies in urban areas and townships," leading to "a Confederation of Municipalities that would interlink these assemblies within larger urban communities and ultimately between municipalities as a conscious radical counterthrust to state and national governments." What would such an association insist upon?

The rewriting of all city and town charters to elect, with the right to recall and rotate, communal deputies from the assemblies who would be empowered exclusively with administrative rather than policy-making powers. These new charters, standing in flat contradiction to the Federal "constitution," would give the municipalities the right to municipalize industry, land, and retail outlets, to determine a society's needs and meet them, and finally, supplant the national institutions of the state by the truly confederal institutions of local communities.

This sounds Jeffersonian enough to be appealing to a lot of people, but there are other ways of looking at such matters. In a recent British publication, *The Crisis and Future of the Left* (Pluto Press, £1.50), the editor of this compilation (report of a big debate), Peter Hain, remarks that "the far left's total rejection of parliament neglects the reality that it is almost universally *seen* by the population as the legitimate, democratic vehicle for political consent

and change." An anarchist reviewer in *Peace News* for last September 5 is obliged to agree. That is the way the great majority of people in England—and America, too—view their legislatures. Accordingly, the reviewer, Keith Motherson, says:

We anarchists have simply refused to acknowledge our share in the disasters of history, or the reasons for these. We've failed to develop a solid approach to winning and establishing a clearly perceived legitimacy. We've failed to consider how people can mutually inspire and embolden each other (and reassure others) by moving in orderly, mutually coordinated ways through thorough-going agreements. We've failed to consider how social innovations can work with the grain of many existing institutions, the better to develop new institutions, and let others wither organically (cf "abolition" from on high). Perhaps this points to the need for some kind of anarchist electoralism which seeks to register legitimacy but never actually to inhabit and operate the offices of power—merely to delegitimise the use of violence by *all* parties. Perhaps, too, following April Carter and Michael Randle, we need to revalidate the concept of true authority. If it is violent, it isn't authority, it's tyranny, force, or dictatorship, etc., therefore we owe it no obedience. If it's true authority it doesn't seek to constrain or threaten our freedom, and we will probably choose to give it our support.

We have quoted these anarchist writers at some length to show how radical thought is being reordered, how it is responding to the psychosocial changes of the present, and how it is evolving a fresh conceptual vocabulary that seems more in touch with the ways other people are thinking. For the most part, all those "other people" are not political in habits of mind. They are more like the women described by Audrey Wise in her pamphlet, *Women and the Struggle for Workers Control*:

Because of their discontinuous work lives and because they are expected to relate primarily to people and only secondarily to work (wage work), women are not "geared like a cog" quite so successfully as male workers on the whole. They simply will persist in feeling that "whether Johnny has measles" is more important than anything else, and this gives rise to the familiar accusations that women are "unreliable"

at work, that they are not "ambitious," "won't take responsibility," etc.

This is quite a profound alienation from the capitalist system, yet it is virtually ignored by socialists. Women are in fact deeply alienated from many of the uses to which technology is put. They say, "Who wants to go to the moon—what about more houses . . .?" They have tremendous radical potential which is almost untapped, and which would become of great importance if and when we really start to challenge, not only the ownership, but also the *purpose of production*.

These are ways in which people said to be "on the left" are redefining issues and moving toward the development of a common language that others can understand. This, surely, is one of the ways in which what people say will begin to have a legitimate and desired effect on other people. They will begin to make sense to one another.

One thing more. In *On Revolution* (Viking, 1963), Hannah Arendt wrote perceptively about "the fallacy which was bound to becloud the whole issue of action in the thinking of the men of the revolutions." Speaking of America's Founding Fathers, she said:

It was in the nature of their experiences to see the phenomenon of action exclusively in the image of tearing down and building up. Although they had known public freedom and public happiness, in dream or in reality, prior to the revolution, the impact of revolutionary experience had overruled all notions of a freedom which was not preceded by liberation, which did not derive its pathos from the act of liberation.

Increasingly, these days, it is recognized that "liberation" is not a military or overtly revolutionary project, but a psychological undertaking, and that each one must go his own pace. The "tearing down" is now a personal project which must precede the external "withering away."

## REVIEW

### "IF WE HAD BEEN LEFT ALONE"

READERS with a particular interest in the underpinnings of environmental concern may enjoy looking through *A Search for Environmental Ethics—An Initial Bibliography*, published last year by the Smithsonian Institution. (\$8.95.) There isn't much you can say in review of a bibliography except to tell something about the books listed, which in this case would be like a recital of the names of old friends. While the coverage is said to begin with publications appearing at the end of World War II, we notice from the index that there are two references to George Perkins Marsh, who was the author of *Man and Nature*, a nineteenth-century classic to whom Stewart Udall devotes a chapter in *The Quiet Crisis*.

Open the *Bibliography* at random anywhere and you find a book you've read or want to read. For example, entry No. 255 is Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, with wonderful material on Thomas Carlyle, who, writing 150 years ago, anticipated even the most perceptive present-day ecological writers, at least in their philosophical broodings, and went beyond most others. Then, No. 2 is Hartley Alexander's *The World's Rim*, a book with extraordinary insight into the feeling of American Indians for the natural world and the oneness of life. On the same page with Fairfield Osborne's *Our Plundered Planet* is William Ophuls' *Ecology and the Politics of Scarcity*. Lynn White is there, and Lewis Thomas, and Ralph Nader's study group volumes; and toward the end is Cedric Wright's *Words of the Earth*. In fact, whatever title you think of, it is sure to be among the 435 books and articles listed.

Before we leave the subject of bibliographies, a new publication may be mentioned—A *Thoreau Iconography* by Thomas Blanding and Walter Harding, issued as Thoreau Society Booklet 30—price unknown. While an iconography is not the same as a bibliography, they seem somehow

related. At any rate, this slim pamphlet answers the question: "What did Henry David Thoreau look like?", with eighteen plates providing drawings, busts, medallions, and daguerreotypes of the man, nearly all of them confirming the fidelity of a sketch on the wall of the MANAS editorial office, showing Thoreau with birds cozily nesting in his hair. In the daguerreotypes, his hair always has its own unruly notion of composition.

One genial friend of Thoreau, Daniel Ricketson, sketched him several times, although not very well. Ricketson had read *Walden* and corresponded with him, then met him on Christmas Day of 1854, recalling afterward:

"So unlike my ideal Thoreau, whom I had fancied, from the robust nature of his mind and habits of life, to be a man of unusual vigor and size, that I did not suspect, although I had expected him in the morning, that the slight, quaint-looking person before me was the Walden philosopher. There are few persons who had previously read his works that were not disappointed by his personal appearance."

However, the writers say, Ricketson's disappointment was soon forgotten as he got to know the man. But his drawings are little more than caricatures. The best pictures are the daguerreotypes which show him with his familiar chin-whiskers-only beard of the 1850s. The last likeness was taken in 1861, a year before he died, when his consumption was advanced. Sadness seems to have overtaken him, and in this picture he wears a full beard. In any event, lovers of Thoreau will enjoy having these pictures around. A publisher's announcement tells who printed the *Iconography*, how many, and remarks that the Thoreau Society is an informal gathering of students and followers of Henry David Thoreau, giving the address of the secretary-treasurer, Walter Harding, as State University, Geneseo, New York 14454.

Back to bibliographies, or rather, to some of the things that bibliographies, however complete, cannot do for the reader. One of them is illustrated by a passage from a book found by a MANAS reader in Japan—*The Three-Cornered*

*World*, written in 1906. The author, Natsume Soseki, was one of the first of the talented Japanese sent by the government to visit England and study English literature. Later Soseki wrote of the invasion of Japan by railroads, telling how a young Japanese artist is affected by these iron monsters—an intrusion of the sort that made Thoreau exclaim, "We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us."

Thoreau was more tolerant, later, in *Walden*, but he might still have agreed with Natsume Soseki, who said:

Anywhere that you can find a railway train must be classed as the world of reality, for there is nothing more typical of twentieth-century civilization. It is an unsympathetic and heartless contraption which rumbles along carrying hundreds of people crammed together in one box. It takes them all at a uniform speed to the same station, and then proceeds to lavish the benefits of steam upon every one of them without exception. People are said to board and travel by train, but I call it being loaded and transported. Nothing shows greater contempt for individuality than the train. Modern civilization uses every possible means to develop individuality, and having done so, tries everything in its power to stamp it out. It allots a few square yards to each person, and tells him that he is free to lead his life as he pleases within that area. At the same time it erects railings around him, and threatens him with all sorts of dire consequences if he should dare to take but one step beyond their compass. It is only natural that the man who has freedom within the confines of his allocated plot, should desire to have freedom to do as he wishes outside it too. Civilization's pitiable subjects are forever snapping and snarling at imprisoning bars, for they have been made as fierce as tigers by the gift of liberty, but have been thrown into a cage to preserve universal peace. This, however, is not a true peace. It is the peace of the tiger in the menagerie who lies glowering at those who have come to look at him. If just one bar is ever taken out of the cage, the world will erupt into chaos and a second French Revolution will ensue. Even now there are constant individual revolts. That great North-European writer, Ibsen, has cited in detail the circumstances which will lead to this outbreak. Whenever I see the violent way in which a train runs along, indiscriminately regarding all human beings as so much freight, I look at the individuals cooped up in the carriages, and at

the iron monster itself which cares nothing at all for individuality, and I think, "Look out, look out, or you'll find yourself in trouble." The railway train which blunders ahead blindly into the pitch darkness is one example of the very obvious dangers which abound in modern civilization.

Well, you may say, it isn't really that bad, and think of the practical advantages of rapid transit. That may be sensible advice—we should all *think* about those advantages and the extent to which their reality is only a state of mind. If our feelings about a quiet, graceful life, and the pleasure of a leisurely walk or ride in a horse-drawn carriage were more important to us than the need to be always in a hurry, then this writer's arguments might not seem weak or extravagant. This is one of the contributions of the artist. Through his imaginative power, he enables us to feel in other ways.

Thirty years later, another Japanese writer, Junichiro Tanizaki, wrote even more persuasively on what Japan might have been like "if we in the Orient had developed our own science." He went on:

Suppose for instance we had developed our own physics and chemistry: would not the techniques and industries based on them have taken a different form, would not our myriads of everyday gadgets, our medicines, the products of our industrial art—would they not have suited our national temper better than they do? . . .

The Westerners have been able to move forward in ordered steps, while we have met a superior civilization and have had to surrender to it, and we have had to leave a road we have followed for thousands of years. The missteps and inconveniences this has caused have, I think, been many. If we had been left alone we might not be much further along than we were five hundred years ago. . . . But we would have gone in a direction that suited us. We would have gone ahead very slowly, and yet it is not impossible that we would one day have discovered our own substitute for the trolley, the radio, the airplane of today. They would have been no borrowed gadgets, they would have been the tools of our culture, suited to us.

To illustrate, Tanizaki muses about the qualities of paper:

Western paper is to us no more than something to be used, but the texture of Chinese and Japanese paper gives us a certain feeling of warmth, of calm and repose. Even the same white could as well be one color for Western paper and another for our own. Western paper turns away the light, while our paper seems to take it in, to envelop it gently, like the soft surface of a first snowfall. It gives off no sound when it is crumpled or folded, it is quiet and pliant to the touch as the leaf of a tree.

How do "environmental ethics" come into this? If pace of development and natural inclination—the values here spoken of so graciously—have to do with ethics, then letting people alone—to grow or change, or not to change, in their own way—is certainly an ethical consideration. For hundreds of years we of the West have been "civilizing" the heathen, and sometimes the heathen prove able to outdo us at our own silly games, as people in Detroit are regretfully aware. *Laissez faire* may have a better meaning than that given it by Adam Smith.

If we knew how to interrupt the processes of civilization, we might learn to become civil to one another, and to other peoples of the world. No more Ugly Americans. An Englishman who was feeling pretty grimy after listening to the deliberations of the Paris Peace Conference following World War I—in which he had bravely fought—took the advice of T. E. Lawrence, who felt the same way, and went to live with an Arab tribe which tended herds on the borders of the Sahara. There, he said, "with a sensation akin to ecstasy, I discovered that it was less difficult to be sincere here than at home. . . . I felt obliged to put my faith in something more reliable than man. In Europe or America there were telephones, radios, something alive within reach which could be summoned. But in the Sahara there was nothing like that."

Does the Sahara contribute to environmental ethics?



**COMMENTARY**  
**WHAT SCHUMACHER WAS TALKING**  
**ABOUT**

IN this week's lead, the quotations from Moholy-Nagy and J. D. Bruckner tell what has happened to our country. These are ills no politician can do anything about. The things that, in political terms, we are proud of—our power, our wealth, the multiplicity of things we enjoy—are the other face of what is wrong with us. The things that need to be done are not things that anyone can be compelled to do—they are things that humans do spontaneously when they are in good mental and moral health, things simply shut out for people who are moved by the forces these writers describe. They can't exist for long in the atmosphere of a world where acquisition, compulsion, and manipulation are the rules by which people live—a lot of the time by which they are *made* to live. The good in them has little chance to come out. The lubricants and encouragements, save for occasional lip-service to "ideals," are all on the other side.

The remedy is simple enough. The need is for pioneers who will begin to create, on whatever scale is possible for them, circumstances which open the way to spontaneous decencies, where natural friendliness can have expression, and which are hospitable to an intellectual life that stirs the imagination. That is all we really need. The practical arrangements we want and give so much verbal attention to cannot possibly come into being without the work of such pioneers who see what needs to be done and get busy doing it—not because they want to "change" other people, but because it is the right way to live.

This was really about all E. F. Schumacher was talking about, and it was a part of his genius to be able to invent a language—a new economic language—that people could understand and respond to.

It means the development of other forms of entertainment, a new kind of press,

uninstitutionalized schools that depend upon resourceful improvisations and teachers' inventions, and churches which are not repositories of "truth"—who is so wise as to know the "truth"?—but centers of fellowship in exploration. It means factories and stores addressed to needs instead of markets, and people who set out to enjoy what they work at and give support to others who feel the same way about what they do. It is all very impractical, except that it *works*. Anyone can find examples simply by looking around.

## CHILDREN ... and Ourselves THOR AND LOKI

ONCE in a while you come across a boy or a girl who has been brought up on the myths—stories of the Greek gods and heroes, about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, or about Asgard and the gods of the North. A certain healthy-mindedness seems to result from knowing these tales. The child is a spontaneous polytheist, delighting in one pantheon after another. Was it Goethe who remarks somewhere that the old pagan religions taught men to look up, to feel stirring in themselves the potentialities of the gods, instead of bowing their heads in sin and shame?

The Greeks obtained the heroic mould of their history from the songs of Homer, learned in their youth, and something like that ennobling influence is the heritage of every child. We may require a tribe of men and women suckled on those outworn creeds to make the changes the world will sooner or later have to embrace. Thoughts of this sort were inspired by a handsome book from England—*God & Heroes from Viking Mythology*, by Brian Branston, with illustrations by Giovanni Caselli (Peter Lowe, Eurobrook Ltd., 1978, £4.50). The book is listed as a "juvenile," but adults will have a hard time putting it down. These twenty-eight tales of the doings of the Æsir and their favorite humans, the heroes, are told by Odin, the All-Father. To Odin, who masquerades as three sages, comes a king of Sweden who wants to know why bad things have been happening to his kingdom. A strange, dark, brown-eyed and purple-haired woman had hitched a sizeable portion of his kingdom to her team of four supernatural oxen and dragged it out to sea as a great island. Wanting to find out how such things worked, the King decided to visit Asgard, where Odin and the other gods lived, and after years of search he came upon a great castle.

The interior of the hall was vast, indeed part of it appeared to be a battle-plain with a battle in full progress. The tumult and shouting were frightening. King Gylfi was forced every now and then to cringe, expecting to be hit by a stray arrow or spear. He now knew exactly where he was, in Valhalla, home of the valiant dead, but the hurrying guard gave him no chance for further questions.

He was conducted to a lofty chamber at the end of which were three imposing personages seated on thrones.

He broke the silence by asking, "What may be your lordship's names?"

"High," said one.

"Just as High," said another.

"The Third," said the last.

Knowing himself to be at last in Asgard and in the presence of the Æsir, King Gylfi felt embarrassed not to say apprehensive.

High said, "What is your business?"

Gylfi replied, "I am looking for someone who is very well-informed indeed; you might say the most well-informed being in earth or heaven. Is there anyone here of that nature?"

"You will be exceedingly fortunate to step away from here unharmed unless you are better informed than you appear to be now. What is it exactly that you want to know? Come forward and ask boldly," commanded High.

King Gylfi said, "Saving your worships' pardon, I want to know who is the foremost and oldest of the gods, I want to know what he was doing before heaven and earth were created, I want to know where the frost giants and fire giants came from, who created mankind, the sun, moon and stars and why the winds blow . . ."

Just-as-High interrupted, "It is obvious that you want to know the ins-and-outs of a lion's mouth and that's always a dangerous business."

The Third said "You'd better draw up a stool, for the relating of all this is going to take a long time."

And what King Gylfi found out you can now read for yourself.

This book, we think, ought to have equal time with the Garden of Eden story, not just to keep the young open-minded, but acquaint them with the magnificent imagery of the Norse myths. Pick up any textbook—*any* one of them—that children

are handed in school these days, and see how tame it is, how subversively *correct!* Then read how Odin got his wisdom, and the tale of his ring. Discover how the gods managed to tie up the Fenris Wolf, and how Thor got back his hammer which the Giants had stolen. Fierce and bloody these characters may be, but you can never forget their stories.

The adventures of Loki remind you of the Western Indian folk character, Old Man Coyote, an extraordinary mix of good and evil that must have been the formula for the first batch of human nature that the gods devised to get things going. People say to each other, "Think big!" but who can think big without metaphors of the sort that the myth-makers used for their language?

One time Loki, ill-humored because of insomnia cut off all the golden hair of Sif, Thor's wife, as she lay sleeping. She began to wake up, so he left her chamber quickly, leaving a sandal behind. She showed it to Thor, and he, recognizing it as Loki's, pursued and caught the mischievous deity and began to shake him to death. But when Loki promised to get even more beautiful hair for Sif from the elves, and special presents for Thor, Odin, and Frey, Thor relented and Loki went off to collect an obligation owed him by the elves. They made for Odin a spear that couldn't miss its mark, a ship for Frey that produced its own favorable winds, and an exquisite head of golden hair for Sif. Meeting Loki on his way back to Asgard with his treasures, an old dwarf claimed that he could make still better gifts, and Loki, proudly careless, bet his own head that this was impossible. Well, the old dwarf fashioned first a live boar with bristles of pure gold, then the gold ring called Draupnir, which spawned eight other rings like itself every ninth day, and then he made the weapon that would be known as Thor's Hammer. The old dwarf, named Brokk, returned with Loki to Asgard to see to the settlement of the bet, and to Loki's dismay, he won. The gods were quite pleased with the first set of gifts, but Odin decided

that nothing could rival Thor's Hammer, which would always hit its mark, and then fly back to his hand and which could be made tiny enough to hide under his shirt. Loki tried to buy his way out of the bet, but the dwarf, having suffered much from Loki's pranks, wanted his head. Loki took flight, but Thor cornered and brought him back, still angry at the theft of Sif's hair. So Loki, now quite desperate, thought of something:

When Brokk took up an axe and made ready to chop off Loki's head, the cunning one called on Odin as his blood-brother to witness that it was *only the head* that entered into the wager. Nobody had agreed to include the neck, and therefore Brokk must in no way injure Loki's neck. This might well be devious argument, but the gods believed they had to uphold it.

Brokk was not without resources. He decided to sew up Loki's fast-talking mouth, using his brother's magic awl to puncture Loki's very tough lips with holes for stitches.

The thong Brokk used to sew up Loki's lips was famous ever afterwards. It was called simply Vartari, The Thong and no matter how Loki jerked and tore at it, his mouth remained stitched tightly shut. It was many a long day before he managed to untie Vartari and tear the thong from the holes. Even then his lips were still so sore that he could hardly speak for months. And that, the gods thought, was a very great mercy.

The story of Sigurd, the Volsung dragon-slayer, is also in this book. No one should reach the age of ten without knowing this story.

## *FRONTIERS* Schools of the People

COMMUNITY action sometimes achieves high drama, as in the case of Bolinas, the coastal California town a little north of San Francisco that in the early 1970s got organized to oppose a state-sponsored sewage system that would have brought multiple disaster to the community. Orville Schell, a China scholar who lives there and took part in the struggle, tells the story in *The Town that Fought To Save Itself* (Pantheon, 1976). What began as the spontaneous response to a gigantic oil spill became a loosely organized drive to turn the town into "an ecologically viable community." In brief:

The town began to plan nonpolluting waste disposal systems, to experiment with new regulations to control runaway land speculation, to promote alternative energy sources such as the sun and the wind. But these bold innovations often brought fierce opposition from state, federal and county agencies. The townspeople had to fight to build ingenious forms of low-cost housing that violated the bureaucratic health codes. They organized against a massive highway-building program which would have led to an enormous development program.

Who did it? The people who live there—an interesting blend of farmers, fishermen, retirees, commuters (to San Francisco jobs), poets, artisans, and counter-cultural activists. In a full-length book filled with excitement, Orville Schell tells how. He begins with a statement of the normal circumstances which confront any town which decides to take some sort of action for the common good:

A town which is a community is a delicate organism. As yet, it has virtually no legal means at its disposal by which to protect itself from those who choose to search it out. Unlike an individual, it cannot sue for invasion of privacy. It cannot effectively determine how many people can live in it. It cannot even decide for itself the number of visitors with which it feels comfortable. The roads are there; anyone may travel on them. A commercial establishment is free to advertise the town's name and its desirable attributes in the hope of attracting people

to it in order to make money. If the people who call that town home find the influx of people, cars, and money unsettling, they have little recourse.

A town is public property not only for its residents, but for the world. In many ways, it is at the mercy of forces existing outside its boundaries, and of people whose names it does not know and whose faces its inhabitants will never see.

This was the situation which Lewis Mumford saw so clearly and described in *The City in History*, recalling that Jefferson had called the towns of America the *schools of the people*, and commenting that the failure of the Founding Fathers to incorporate the township in both the Federal and State Constitutions was a tragic oversight. "Thus," Mumford says, "the abstract political system of democracy lacked concrete organs."

The recovery of such organs is a task of the present, to which papers like *Self-Reliance*, *Rain*, and *CoEvolution Quarterly* are giving meticulous attention.

Less dramatic, perhaps, but more enduring, is the work of the Community Environmental Council of Santa Barbara, California, a group of community and ecologically minded individuals which also got under way as the result of a ghastly oil spill, ruining for a time many of the beautiful beaches of Santa Barbara. The C.E.C. conducts a number of basic educational programs in gardening and farming, featuring big-intensive methods, and has developed a large model farm, the Mesa Project, with classes to teach small-scale, big-intensive agriculture to students from less developed countries. A large recycling center with a staff of five accumulates a variety of usable rubbish as well as cans, bottles, and cardboard trash. Aluminum cans are paid for. The C.E.C. monthly *Members' Report*, with good circulation in the community, keeps citizens posted on current and new developments. It publishes useful information, such as an analysis of the potentialities of gasohol, which appeared in the issue for last October. Gasohol, as most people know, is a fuel mixture of 90% gasoline and 10%

ethyl alcohol (ethanol—distilled from grain and other biomass). The report includes the following questions and answers:

*Is it cheaper to produce alcohol than gasoline?*

The cost of gasohol currently is slightly higher than gasoline. As more efficient conversion plants are built and less expensive feeding stocks used, the price of ethanol should fall. Rising gasoline prices will also make the price of alcohol more attractive.

*Does the production of gasohol use up our food supply?*

Universal gasohol consumption could possibly use more than one third of our grain crop, which could increase prices of beef, pork, and poultry. But the increase in grain acreage could offset some of this price increase. Other crops—such as sugar cane, beets, potatoes, and even wood chips—may be used in the fermentation process, which would reduce the price impact on a single crop.

The vigor of community activities in Santa Barbara has made it possible for the C.E.C. to attract major speakers to its gatherings, which helps to strengthen and extend community participation. E. F. Schumacher talked there in 1977, and Sim Van der Ryn, formerly California State Architect, was another visitor. Last November, Willis Harman, long associated with the Stanford Research Institute, spoke before a large dinner meeting, stressing four far-reaching dilemmas which confront every industrial society. His statement of these dilemmas, described in detail in his book, *An Incomplete Guide to the Future*, "challenges the legitimacy of the basic goals and institutions of the present." They involve growth, control, distribution, and unemployment. He defines the first:

The growth dilemma besets not only this nation but the whole industrialized world—capitalist and socialist alike. The dilemma, simply stated, is that we cannot sustain the unregulated growth of the sort we have had in the past—but we cannot afford *not* to keep growing because of the massive economic consequences that would result from a halt to industrial growth. Stated more bluntly, the industrialized countries of the world are structured in such a way that their economies demand growth that

the world's finite resources can support only with increasing difficulty.

Recognizing the stark reality of such dilemmas is the first step for a country that needs to prepare itself to fight for the survival of its people.