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ARTS OF WORDS

WHY are there no more storytellers? They exist hardly anywhere in the world, except, perhaps, in forgotten pockets, among people in handfuls whom history has passed by. "We are," wrote Barry Lopez (in the last December *Harper's*), offering partial explanation, "more accustomed now to thinking of 'the truth' as something that can be explicitly stated, rather than something that can be evoked in a metaphorical way outside science and Occidental culture." But truth, as something that can be relied upon in time of trouble, is never something that can be defined and nailed down. Neither is it, as Lopez adds, reducible to aphorism or formula, but "something alive and unpronounceable."

Has story truth in it? Even the storyteller may not be sure how much, but the compulsion is upon him to relate a tale he knows, either as something that happened to him or to someone he knew. Yet he has regard for truth. As Barry Lopez says:

> The storyteller knows that because different individuals grasp the story at different levels, the focus of his regard for truth must be the primary one—with who was there, what happened, when, where, and why things occurred. The story will then possess similar truth at other levels—the integrity inherent at the primary level of meaning will be conveyed everywhere else. As long as the storyteller accurately describes the order before him, it is even possible for the story to be more successful than the storyteller himself is able to imagine.

Walter Benjamin contributed to *Orient und Okzident* in 1936 a long review of the work of Nikolai Leskov, the last great Russian storyteller, who was a traveling representative in Russia of an English firm. He came to know the entirety of his country, with knowledge of all classes. Benjamin reviewed his books, showing their "story" character, and in one place draws on Herodotus to show what this means.

> The first storyteller of the Greeks was Herodotus. In the fourteenth chapter of the third book of his *Histories* there is a story from which much can be learned. It deals with Psammenitus.
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> When the Egyptian king Psammenitus had been beaten and captured by the Persian king Cambyses, Cambyses was bent on humbling his prisoner. He gave orders to place Psammenitus on the road along which the Persian triumphal procession was to pass. And he further arranged that the prisoner should see his daughter pass by as a maid going to the well with her pitcher. While all the Egyptians were lamenting and bewailing this spectacle, Psammenitus stood alone, mute and motionless, his eyes fixed on the ground and when presently he saw his son, who was being taken along in the procession to be executed, he likewise remained unmoved. But when afterwards he recognized one of his servants, an old, impoverished man, in the ranks of the prisoners, he beat his fists against his head and gave all the signs of deepest mourning.
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> From this story it may be seen what the nature of true storytelling is. The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender itself to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time. Thus Montaigne referred to this Egyptian king and asked himself why he mourned only when he caught sight of his servant. Montaigne answers: "Since he was already over-full of grief, it took only the smallest increase for it to burst through its dams." Thus Montaigne. But one could also say: The king was not moved by the fate of those of royal blood, for it is his own fate. Or: We are moved by much on the stage that does not move us in real life, to the king, this servant is only an actor. Or: Great grief is pent up and breaks forth only with relaxation. Seeing this servant was the relaxation. Herodotus offers no explanation. His report is the driest. That is why this story from ancient Egypt is still capable after thousands of years of arousing astonishment and thoughtfulness. It resembles the seeds of grain which have lain for centuries in the chambers of the pyramids shut up air-tight and have retained their germinative power to this day.

The story *uses* information but is not information, or is much more than information. Yet information has now largely replaced the story. Benjamin writes:

> Villemessant, the founder of *Le Figaro,* characterized the nature of information in a famous formulation. "To my readers," he used to say, "an attic fire in the Latin Quarter is more important than a revolution in Madrid." This makes strikingly clear that it is no longer intelligence coming from afar, but the information which supplies a handle for what is nearest that gets the readiest hearing. The intelligence that came from afar—whether the spatial kind from foreign countries or the temporal kind of tradition—possessed an authority which give it validity, even when it was not subject to verification. Information, however, lays claim to prompt verifiability. The prime requirement is that it appear "understandable in itself." Often it is no more exact than the intelligence of earlier centuries was. But while the latter was inclined to borrow from the miraculous, it is indispensable for information to sound plausible. Because of this it proves incompatible with storytelling. If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs.
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> Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits explanation. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.

Stories grow best, Benjamin says, in the milieu of work. The teller is himself a craftsman who finds the perfection of form by telling his stories again and again. There is a kind of wisdom in the omission of explanation, a wisdom that corresponds to the way we experience life. Life no more explains itself than the story. Yet somehow we learn something from it. "A proverb," Benjamin says, "is a ruin which stands on the site of an old story and in which a moral entwines about a happening like ivy round a wall."

> Seen in this way, the storyteller joins the ranks of the teachers and sages. He has counsel—not for a few situations but for many, like the sage. For it is granted to him to reach back to a whole lifetime (a life, incidentally, that comprises not only his own experience but no little of the experiences of others; what the storyteller knows from hearsay is added to his own).

The end of Benjamin's life made a story which is repeated by Hannah Arendt in her long introduction to *Illuminations,* Benjamin's book.

> On September 26, 1940, Walter Benjamin, who was about to emigrate to America, took his life at the Franco-Spanish border. There were various reasons for this. The Gestapo had confiscated his Paris apartment, which contained his library (he had been able to get "the more important half" out of Germany) and many of his manuscripts, and he had reason to be concerned also about the others which, through the good offices of George Bataille, had been placed in the Bibliotheque Nationale prior to his flight from Paris to Lourdes, in unoccupied France. How was he to live without a library, how could he earn a living without the extensive collection of quotations and excerpts among his manuscripts. . . . But the immediate occasion for Benjamin's suicide was an uncommon stroke of bad luck. . . . The small group of refugees that he had joined reached the Spanish border town only to learn that Spain had closed the border that same day and that the border officials did not honor visas made out in Marseilles. The refugees were supposed to return to France by the same route the next day. During the night Benjamin took his life, whereupon the border officials, upon whom this suicide had made an impression, allowed his companions to proceed to Portugal. . . . One day earlier Benjamin would have got through without any trouble; one day later the people in Marseilles would have known that for the time being it was impossible to pass through Spain. Only on that particular day was the catastrophe possible.

Barry Lopez speaks of the power of narrative "to nurture and heal," and of the dignity we gain "when we cease to demand the truth and realize that the best we can have of those substantial truths that guide our lives is metaphorical—a story." He concludes his *Harper's* article by saying: "Our national literatures should be important to us insofar as they sustain and heal."

Few national literatures now serve in this way. The reason seems clear: we no longer believe that wisdom exists. We have a literature that insists on facts, that disdains the "unpronounceable" and unexplained. We solicit the "facts" that we need to

"control our destiny," meaning by this the facts that will increase our control over nature, for we have no idea at all what our "destiny" should be, and prefer to think that we can make it up, *ad hoc,* as we go along. Our present way of planning the future turns on certain key objectives that we have come to regard as reasoned and satisfactory. Of these, as Joseph Wood Krutch put it in *Human Nature and the Human Condition:*

> The most obvious, of course, are "wealth," "power," "prosperity," "progress," and "welfare." This group reveals what we think we have achieved and relates to an aspect of our condition which we believe to be satisfactory. Hardly less obvious is another group composed of "adjustment," "security," and "peace of mind" which reveal quite as unmistakably what we feel still to be sought for.

How are these goals to be reached? The authorities in our civilization are businessmen and educators. The businessmen claim that giving people what they want—what they have been taught to desire—is the answer, and the educators sometimes seem to be saying the same thing. Again Mr. Krutch comes to the stand:

> The typical attitude is that revealed in the report of a New York State committee which advises that, since the so-called classic literature is disliked by present-day children and does not mean anything to them, it should be dropped from the schools in favor of easier reading matter. Some may think that the business of education is to see to it that the best that has been thought and said is meaningful rather than meaningless to those who have been schooled, but the current assumption is that the school should merely make more accessible what the uneducated can already understand without effort. . . . Though most educated people seem to be agreed that the "commercial" is one of the ugliest and most humiliating phenomena of our civilization, some of these same people do not seem to realize how close they have come to wanting to make "popular education" one long commercial designed to sell science, culture, and right political thinking to a public less and less willing to think at all about anything. . . .
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> Nothing more clearly distinguishes a method of education from a technique of indoctrination than the fact that education demands from the subject some effort, especially some effort of attention, while propaganda does not. The advertiser will go to any length to make everything easy. The educator will see to it that something is expected of his pupil. He knows that no one can learn anything worth knowing unless he is willing to learn, as well as willing to be taught. He knows that learning how to learn is more important than any specific thing he can communicate. And the grand question has now become whether or not the new techniques of mass communication inevitably and by their very nature weaken the power to learn at the same time they make being taught so easy.

This is no way to get literature that nurtures and heals.

From what has been said about stories, there seems a certain resemblance between the timelessness of a good story and the same quality in poetry. Why it is that the great ideas of scriptures seem always to take the form and measures of verse? What *is* poetry? Avoiding any attempt at formal definition, we go to Paul Valéry for an answer. In *The Art of Poetry* (1938) Valéry wrote:

> Poetry is an art of language. But language is a practical creation. It may be observed that in all communication between men, certainty comes from practical acts and from the verification which practical acts give us. *I ask you for a light, You give me a light:* you have understood me.
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> But in asking me for a light, you were able to speak those few unimportant words with a certain intonation, a certain tone of voice, a certain inflection, a certain languor or briskness perceptible to me. I have understood your words, since without even thinking I handed you what you asked for—a light. But the matter does not end there. The strange thing: the sound and as it were the features of your little sentence come back to me, echo within me, as though they were pleased to be there, I, too, like to hear myself repeat this little phrase, which has almost lost its meaning, which has stopped being of use, and which can yet go on living, though with quite another life. It has acquired a value, and has acquired it *at the expense of its finite significance.* It has created the need to be heard again. . . . Here we are on the very threshold of the poetic state. This tiny experience will help us to the discovery of more than one truth.
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> It has shown us that language can produce effects of two quite different kinds. One of them tends to bring about the complete negation of

language itself. I speak to you, and if you have understood my words, those very words are abolished. If you have understood, it means that the words have vanished from your minds and are replaced by their counterpart. . . . Consequently, the perfection of a discourse whose sole aim is comprehension obviously consists in the ease with which the forms forming it are transformed into something quite different. . . . In other terms, in practical or abstract uses of language, the form—that is the physical, concrete part, the very act of speech—does not last; it has done its work; it does not outlive understanding; it dissolves in the light; it has acted; it has done its work; it has brought about understanding; it has lived.

But on the other hand, the moment this concrete form takes on, by an effect of its own, such importance that it asserts itself and makes itself, as it were, respected; and not only remarked and respected, but desired and therefore repeated—then something new happens: we are insensibly transformed and ready to live, breathe, and think in accordance with a rule and under laws which are no longer of the practical order—that is, nothing that may occur in this state will be resolved, finished, or abolished by a specific act. We are entering the poetic universe. . . . The poem ... does not die for having lived, it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been.

The poem, in short, while words on paper, or the sound of a voice, is in a cipher which means more than the words can say. Its utterance has octaves and harmonics which may touch the garment hem of the unutterable. It has a mantic aspect which may go beyond the poet's understanding, although not, perhaps, beyond his intention.

These works of the mind—stories and poems—and myths and allegories—make a revelation of the nature of mind, of man. They may construct a tangent which touches the region of wisdom, although it cannot take us there except in wordless wonder.

Yet where such possibilities are contemplated, there is the susceptibility to intoxication to guard against. This need has attention in No. 5 of *Temenos,* a journal published in England "devoted to the arts of the imagination." In a notice of *The Eloquence of Symbols,* first volume of a series to be brought out by Oxford University Press of the collected works of Edgar Wind, a scholar who for years taught in American colleges and universities, and in later years held the Chair of the History of Art at Oxford University, the reviewer, John Allitt, quotes from Wind:

What seems to Plato to be really dangerous about artistic creation and enjoyment, what makes it the antithesis of philosophical reflection, is the suppression of self-consciousness in the action of the moment, the complete identification with what is depicted. That is why, in making the value of an action depend on whether it is guided by the Idea (that is, by philosophical awareness), he condemns mimesis as the source of all that is worthless. But that does not prevent him from praising it as a means of preparing for future education, at the stage when reflection has not yet begun, that is to say, as a means of influencing the very young, always with the proviso that it must not be left uncontrolled.

Commenting, Prof. Allitt says:

The whole section reads like a cautionary tale to the swings of the pendulum experienced in Western art since the Renaissance; surely it unmasks the visual world of the television-video world which now surrounds us from school to pension.

Temenos, as the editors say, "has from its inception set out to call into question the failed and sterile premises of contemporary culture in the field of the arts," having as its purpose "to challenge current fashions and opinions which are the expression of materialism—in whatever guise—in the name of those permanent values which have always informed life and art alike during periods in which humanity has been willing to reach beyond merely mundane concerns." *Temenos,* from the Greek, means the vestibule of the temple, or the fane. This magazine gives expression to the strong counter-current in serious thought now emerging to oppose the tendencies Mr. Krutch took up arms against in what we have already quoted. In America *Temenos* is distributed by the Lindisfarne Press, RD2, West Stockbridge, Mass. 01966. (Subscription is $11.00, postpaid.)

REVIEW
SURVIVING COMMUNITIES

A NEW book about intentional communities—*Seeds of Tomorrow* (Harper & Row, 1984, $10.95 in paperback) by Cris and Oliver Popenoe—recalls the half dozen or so books on this subject that MANAS has noticed or reviewed in the past. The first in importance is Charles Nordhoff's classic study, *Communistic Societies of the United States,* published by John Lane in London in 1875 (afterward available in reprints). Nordhoff was thorough, spending months living in many of the communities he visited, reporting on their origins and sustaining ideas, the problems that developed, and their degree of "success" or failure. Then, in 1941, V. F. Calverton offered *Where Angels Feared to Tread* (Bobbs-Merrill). While intentional communities often seem a uniquely American phenomenon, they were numerous enough in England during the nineteenth century for Dennis Hardy to write *Alternative Communities in Nineteenth Century England* (Longman, 1980), in which the author tells the story of Robert Owen and his attempt to found a community in the United States (New Harmony). This book is useful in giving the back-to-the-land thinking of figures such as Peter Kropotkin, John Ruskin, and Leo Tolstoy. Hardy, however, remarks:

> The intensity of community formation in the new lands—where, according to Ralph Waldo Emerson, there was a time when "not a reading man but has a draft of a new community in his waistcoat pocket"—far exceeded that in any of the European countries. Numbers involved have been put as high as 100,000 participants, with as many as 300 communities. European influence in these developments was not insignificant, and the view is generally taken that although "the communitarian idea came to the fullest flower in the New World . . . its seeds were brought from the Old." What is more, the seeds had been carried across the Atlantic for many years before the nineteenth century—initially by religious groups from Central and Western Europe, in search of a more tolerant environment.

Among books devoted to a single nineteenth-century community in North America. Thomas A. Robertson's *Southwest Utopia* (Ward Ritchie, Los Angeles, 1947) is probably the most fascinating. An American engineer, Albert Kimsey Owen, got the idea of starting an ideal socialist society on the shore of Topolobampo Bay, a Mexican mainland region opposite the tip of Baja California. In 1886, the Credit Foncier Colony was planted in the Mexican State of Sinaloa, and in the course of five years five hundred men, women, and children came from the United States to join the colony. The author spent his childhood there and relates his memories of the trials of the colonists, among them the digging by hand of a canal seven miles long, 25 feet wide and 15 feet deep to bring water to the parched fields of the Colony farmers. Money was scarce, hardships many, and the Mexican Revolution administered the *coup de grace* to the remains of the Colony in 1910. However, the tale of their struggle, with morale maintained mainly by the women, is inspiring.

One other book, *Pioneer in Community* by Watson Thompson, published by Ryerson Press in Toronto, in 1948, is a tribute to Henri Lassere, a Swiss who gave his life to working for the communitarian ideal. He was a lawyer who specialized in the legal problems of cooperatives, and after founding a colony near Geneva, an agricultural project which lasted only eighteen months, came to Canada in 1921 at the age of nearly fifty. There he corresponded with members of the Llano Colony, founded by Job Harriman in California, which moved to Louisiana in 1917. Lassere visited Llano in 1926. He is now remembered chiefly for the wisdom of his comments on the problems of Llano and on communities in general. He also corresponded with Eberhard Arnold, leader of the Cotswold Bruderhof in England. He died in 1945.

The concise survey of past and present community movements which the Popenoes provide in their introduction to *Seeds of*

Tomorrow is especially valuable to the general reader. They say:

> Communities such as the ones we are writing about have existed throughout history. Most have had a spiritual basis. Since the early nineteenth century, however, a number have developed along secular lines, usually following an ideology of communalism or anarchism. All forms of communities share a belief that the larger society is failing to deal adequately with the important issues of people's relationships to each other, to their work, and to the world around them. Some communities are concerned primarily with the inner development of their members; others are very much involved in the work of the world. There have been times when communities were the isolated repositories of some of the important values of civilization, and other times when they acted as agents of social change.
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> The world is again in a period of social chaos. We are witnessing an explosive growth of human population accompanied by an unparalleled destruction of our natural environment. The economic ramifications, for those of us in the affluent industrialized nations, suggest that sooner or later we will need to learn to live lives of voluntary simplicity because we will run out of the resources that we have so selfishly squandered. Seers from Nostradamus to Edgar Cayce have predicted that catastrophes will occur around the end of the twentieth century either as the result of cosmic changes, or of our inability to control the vast powers that our technology has unleashed.
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> Perhaps because of this, intentional communities assume greater importance. The 1960s saw a flowering of communes in the West associated mainly with the counter culture and the alienation of young people. Most of these communes lasted only a few years at best, but they were a part of the growing experience of a generation and they remain a part of our consciousness.

How do the communes of the 60s and the present differ from those of the nineteenth century? A hundred years ago, if they had a religious background, there was usually a Christian coloring; if secular, the thinking was socialist, although with anarchist undertones. Today the religious feeling is likely to have a Hindu, Buddhist, or Tibetan tantric Buddhist vocabulary, while the secular groups are pragmatically communitarian and anti-industrial rather than anti-capitalist, although the ways of free enterprise are in no way admired. But all these groups seem to be becoming increasingly "American," whatever their origin, as the years go by. This means that there is more and more of an American "temper," which takes the place of Oriental mannerisms. Americans manage to do this to whatever "influence" arrives on our shores. Take Freudianism, for example. Freud was a pessimist who called for "sublimation." America turned him into some kind of optimistic hedonist who relieved their consciences of the oppression which came from puritanical condemnation of having a good time.

Americans are likely to have their communities go into business and are sometimes able to do well. The Ananda community, for example, which grew out of Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship, is now established in Nevada County, California, with other centers in various parts of the state. At present, the Popenoes say, there are 27 businesses at Ananda, together grossing about $2 million a year. Among them is a book store in Palo Alto, a large market, a health food store, a publishing business, a record company, and a restaurant. Some of the businesses are community-owned, some privately owned. Yogananda, founder of the original Self-Realization Fellowship in Los Angeles, a long-haired, plump, and handsome man who confessed himself "to be the last of a line of six great religious leaders, including Krishna and Christ," died in 1952. An American, Donald Walters, a "novice monk" active in Fellowship organization work, became the moving spirit, taking the name Kriyananda.

A great deal of common sense seems to attend the efforts of the members. There is a no-drugs, no-alcohol policy, but smoking and meat-eating may be pursued in private. The idea is to make individual development and cooperation mutually supportive. The members are mostly vegetarian. Today the main community has about

250 adults and 70 children. Over a hundred live in the community, of whom a third are monastic (celibate monks). Kriyananda is author of *Cooperative Communities,* which embodies his ideas of community government. "A system," he says, "can facilitate the expression of goodness in people; it cannot create goodness." The members hope to establish more branch communities with schools for the children. (A book that might be useful in thinking about how Americans have adapted the original inspiration of the group to their own outlook would be *Hinduisim Invades America* by Wendell Thomas, which has a chapter on Yogananda.)

The Renaissance Community, in Gill, Massachusetts, is a 1960s commune that "survived." The chief guide is *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ.* Biodynamic French intensive organic gardening enables them to grow three crops a year in Massachusetts. The members call their establishment the 2001 Center, "a self-sufficient community environment where people from different backgrounds can live together and learn about each other" and unfold their creative energies in "an atmosphere of love, joy, and wisdom." They say:

> We are incorporating as much alternative energy as possible, including passive solar design, underground design, gravity fed water with wind powered pumps and wood heating. Yet at the same time we are growing an awareness of true spiritual technology, where through meditation and living communally in a close attunement with nature we are learning to be self-sufficient within ourselves exploring the beauty of unlimited human potential that exists in each of us, to care for the earth, to love ourselves and others and to be truly sensitive.

Despite various setbacks, the Renaissance Community is, the Popenoes say, "unarguably a success."

Another community in America that has attention is the Abode of the Message in New York, where followers of Inayat Khan, a Sufi teacher, took over an old Shaker settlement known as Mount Lebanon. Their practices, according to the Popenoes, parallel those of the Shakers in some ways, "particularly the ideals of simplicity, work, perfection, daily prayer, whirling and dancing.;' There are 60 adults at the Abode, and 20 children. The atmosphere is free, "the keynote is discretion and consideration of other people."

Other American communities described include the Farm, which has a thousand acres south of Nashville Tenn., populated by matured "hippies" who are vegetarians and raise food, make food products to sell, and operate a number of businesses, also an international aid organization called Plenty. There are 550 members who work 1750 acres. The founder, Steven Gaskin, says: "The reason we exist at all, is that there is a lot of work to be done that nobody's doing. There are a few other groups like ours, but it's fallen to us because you guys with the neckties just aren't doing it."

Also well characterized are the Zen Center in Los Angeles, the Rochester Folk Art Guild, and Stelle, south of Chicago, with 125 members, a brotherhood with plans for surviving an ultimate disaster that is expected. The text followed by Stelleans is *The Ultimate Frontier.* They develop alternative technologies, educate their own children, and pursue basic energy research. The rest of the book is about communities in other parts of the world. The accounts seem impartial and become intensely interesting. Almost wholly absent is emphasis on the "cult" atmosphere. This may prove a pleasant relief for the reader of such books.

COMMENTARY
THE STORY OF OUR LIVES

WHILE the lyrical qualities Paul Valéry speaks of (see page 7) as belonging to poetry are indeed the external signs of the poetic, Valéry omits to remark that it is the ideas to be conveyed which demand those lyrical qualities, or the words in which they are naturally embodied. It is these ideas which leave literal meaning behind, since they have in them the quality of the eternal, of meanings which have more than finite significance.

So with the story. The particulars of a story are important only because they are borrowed from events in order to provide the conditions of a drama—as in the case of the agony produced in Psammenitus in the tale told by Herodotus, quoted by Walter Benjamin on page 1. History is the recounting of events, but a story is the pursuit of meaning, and that meaning is not *in* the story, although that a meaning exists is suggested. Are stories, then, better than history?

Which would you rather read—or have—the *Bhagavad-Gita* or the history of India in all its endless detail? A scholarly Indian might say that the *Gita* is infinitely more preferable, since the *Gita* is the story of Man, told in the classical sequence of decision-making by Arjuna, the prince who stands for man in the *Mahabharata.* Arjuna, the Indian might explain, represents all humans; the decisions which he made we all have to make. Why get lost in the details of kingdom after kingdom when we have in the *Gita* the distillation of all human experience?

Yet Arjuna is not only an archetype. He was also a particular prince who took part in a great war, and who happened to be victorious. And we, who are living particular lives at a particular moment of history—we have decisions to make which are far from clearly marked as to their meaning. So we neglect the stories and study history, hoping that it will tell us what we want to know.

But history does not help us unless we read the stories, too. Information, we might say, is only the raw material of stories. Yet we can hardly do without it. But history remains essentially meaningless unless we learn how to relate it to the real story of our lives.

The next issue of MANAS will be dated September 4.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
HISTORY AND ECOLOGY

SOME fifteen years ago in this space we told about a pamphlet, *Vision of America,* prepared by Hugh Fox (then of University College in East Lansing, Mich.) to help high school teachers with teaching history. For example, in American history, he would begin, not with Columbus, but with the people who lived here before Columbus. Of these Amerindians he said:

> They felt themselves to be a part of nature. They lived with nature; they participated in the "feelings" of the animals that surrounded them. The spirit world had as much or more importance to them than the material world. The Shaman (Medicine Man) served as an important intermediary between the spirit and the material world, but everyone had some contact with this spirit world. By putting on a mask representing a particular animal, an individual created a kinship with the animal. All nature was really "one"—only the surfaces were different.

But Columbus, after he arrived, wrote to the king of Spain that the New World could become a great source of gold and an unlimited supply of *slaves!*

What was the impact of the white explorers on the people of the New World? In *Ancient Life in the American Southwest,* Edgar Hewett says:

> The European brought to the Indian world (America) a densely materialistic mind developed by ages of experience in human society that could have no other destiny than that which has overtaken it. It was a racial mind formed by immemorial strife in a restricted environment—an environment which fostered distrust, war, destruction, armament for offense and defense. All this was accelerated by the discovery and use of metals. In the chaotic ethnic conditions of ancient Europe, kingship, overloading, dynastic government, were inevitable, and individual freedom well-nigh impossible. European nations developed one common characteristic, that of using force for all purposes.

In 1883, in a letter to the celebrants of the 333rd anniversary of the founding of Santa Fe, New Mexico, Walt Whitman wrote:

> The seething materialistic and business vortices of the United States, in their present devouring relations, controlling and belittling everything else, are, in my opinion, but a vast and indispensable state in the New World's development, and are certainly to be followed by something different—at least by immense modifications. Character, literature, a society worthy of the name, are yet to be established, through a Nationality of the noblest, spiritual, heroic and democratic attributes—not one of which at present definitely exists—entirely different from the past, though unerringly founded on it and to justify it.

Is the generation that will accomplish—or begin—this great change yet to be born, or is it already going to school? Either way, we need now to rewrite history, revealing the past as now being discovered by ecologists and environmentalists, to develop a foundation for change. Some educators are already working along these lines. In *Children of the Green Earth* (P.O. Box 200, Langley, Wash. 98260), devoted to encouraging children to plant trees and supplying teachers with material for treeplanting outings with their classes, a writer says:

> When Columbus arrived in Haiti, it was entirely covered by forest. Haiti was once France's richest colony, exporter of indigo, sugar, coffee, sisal, tobacco, cotton, fruits, rum, mahogany, and perfume. By 1950, it was the most densely populated nation of the Americas and the continuing population increase since that time has forced more and more farmers to slash and burn mountainsides to open up new agricultural areas.
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> Haiti's slopes are very steep, and without trees to hold the soil in place when it rains, the water rushes down at great speeds carrying the precious topsoil into the river and eventually to the ocean. In most recent years, the situation has been worsened by the gathering of wood by discouraged farmers who are trying to make a living selling firewood and charcoal.
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> Until recently, reforestation efforts were not successful because the peasants would plant but not sustain the trees. . . . For farmers who live on the margin of existence, the long term assets of trees are less valuable than cash they can receive for charcoal.

Under a recent effort at reforestation, Gerald Murphy's Agroforestry project, Haitian farmers are encouraged to plant fast-growing trees that will produce charcoal in four years, along with other species. This seems to be working:

> Each farmer agrees to plant 500 trees. Until maturity the trees can be intercropped with traditional food plants. The lower branches can be pruned for fodder and trees can be thinned for construction purposes.
>
> One of the problems of past reforestation efforts concerned peasants' fears of the ambiguity of the ownership of the trees. In this project, it is made clear to those who participate in the planting that they are the sole owners of the trees.
>
> So far two million trees have been planted. The peasants have picked up on the possibility of tree-cropping so that the original incentives have been dropped. Other Caribbean nations have shown interest in trying out similar programs.

Another story in this paper is by a South African black man, eighty-two-old Robert Mazibuko, who conducts an African Tree Center. He learned what St. Barbe had done in Kenya and added tree-planting to his gardening project. He is most of all a teacher. He began asking the people, "Where do the rivers start?"

> They will say, "In the mountains." They will say, "Most of the trees are in the mountains." I will say, "See how the roots of the trees go down to the big lakes underneath and bring the water up. That's why you have water to drink. So let's go plant trees in the mountains, so the rivers are full of pure clean sweet water."

When he tells the people not to cut down trees, they look at him almost with contempt, saying, "We have never destroyed any trees."

> And it is true. No black people anywhere in the world have destroyed trees. We couldn't cut trees with our finger nails. We had no implements with which to destroy trees. Trees were our homes; we ate them; we made weapons out of them. Then the white man came. He brought the axe, the saw, the bulldozers, and he has eliminated every tree without thinking of what utility is this tree. He did this because he wanted to make a big town, a big road, a big factory, and because he is looking at trees in terms of money.
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> Now our mistake is that we kept too many animals. The white people should have realized that we are lovers of animals and given us a bigger portion of land or educated us not to keep too many animals instead of putting 2,000 people in 100 square miles with thousands and thousands of cattle. The land becomes a desert before you realize where you are and the cattle die like scraps because they have nothing to eat. . . . It is personal, honest education that Africa needs more than anything else.

Mazibuko may be written at P.O. Box 90, Plessislaer 4500, Natal, South Africa. Naturally, his African Tree Center needs funds to plant more trees.

As human attitudes change, a new sort of history is needed. This becomes evident from John F. Richards' long article, "Global Patterns of Land Conversion" in the last November *Environment.* His subtitle is "Documenting Environmental History." He says at the end:

> The great task for environmental historians is to record and analyze the effects of man's recently achieved control over the natural world. What is needed is a longer-term global, comparative historical perspective that treats the environment as a meaningful variable. . . . To be truly effective, a wide-angle global vision and long-term perspective must be supported by more precise and accurate data.

Here is a wide-open field for the new professionals of the future who are now still going to school. Wes Jackson is helping some of them to develop at the Land Institute in Salina, Kans. There should be dozens, scores, hundreds of such educational centers.

FRONTIERS

Here. . . and There

THE last December issue of *Peacework,* published by the American Friends Service Committee in New England (2161 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02140) starts out with this report:

> A Burlington, Vermont, jury found 26 protesters innocent of unlawful trespass charges on November 15, deliberating just over an hour before agreeing with the "defense of necessity," which argued that the Winooski 44 had occupied the offices of Senator Robert T. Stafford last March to resist the greater evil of US intervention in Central America.
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> Reported *The Burlington Free Press:* "Pandemonium broke out in the packed courtroom as the jury foreman announced that the first of the 26 defendants was found innocent. Stunned protesters embraced one another and wept."
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> Use of the defense of necessity is not often allowed by judges in political trials, though it has been advanced in numerous protest cases since the Vietnam era. The necessity defense is a part of the common law which excuses the acknowledged commission of a criminal act on the grounds of duress, that it was done for a higher purpose—such as a person breaking into a burning building to save a child trapped within.

A number of witnesses testified at the trial of the twenty-six to justify this comparison and to convey to the American public the measure of some of the horrors going on in Central America. One witness, "Gladys Doe" (a pseudonym), a refugee from El Salvador, described the murder of farmers in her village near Morazan, one of whom was her father, "who had no idea of what it means to be a guerilla." She told about the funeral of Archbishop Oscar Romero who was assassinated in 1980. Tens of thousands came to pay their respects. She said:

> When all were gathered loud shouts or explosions were heard and those near the door saw that uniformed government soldiers were firing into the crowd. Many were killed. I counted 27 bodies later but I'd seen many women running with their dead children. . . . Many people disappeared after that. Their homes were invaded and they were taken away. My fiance and I were to be married. He was walking down the street and armed men got out of a car and murdered and dismembered him with a knife. He was 21, a student. None of his family had the courage to claim his body because that makes one a marked person. My life was shattered but I met with others in his family so we could comfort each other the next few months.
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> While I was still in San Salvador living with a lady who dearly loved me, I received a threatening phone call. She came to warn me not to come home. They came to look for me but instead took one of the lady's two sons. He was 17, He was machine-gunned down outside the house. His intestines . . . he was disemboweled and the lady completely lost her mind. . . .

Gladys had been attending a nursing school. She escaped through Mexico and now works as a cleaning woman on Long Island.

She was only the first of a number of witnesses whose testimony was heard at the trial. One begins to understand the verdict of innocent by the defense of necessity. In his charge to the jury, the judge, Frank Mahady, had instructed: "You may consider if the government of the United States was violating international law." "This was the last thing the judge said to us," a juror remembered.

Those who want to keep in touch with grassroots expression in the Far East would find it useful to read regularly *Asian Action*—newsletter of the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (published by ACFOD, G.P.O. Box 2930, Bangkok 10501, Thailand.) The November-December 1984 issue is devoted to the relation between the struggle for justice and religion. In an article on this subject, Grant A. Olson remarks:

> Religion persists in playing an increasingly larger role in development and social change. The values of traditional societies have been maintained by a close affinity with their religious and cosmological beliefs. The vast majority of people in South and Southeast Asia live in the village setting; the language of the village is religious behavior, patterns are grounded in it. Typically, development plans which have not attempted to understand the

cultural values ethical systems, and beliefs of the local people are met with growing suspicion.

This contributor and others, with the help of the Hawaii Committee for the Humanities, arranged a conference to which they invited Sulak Sivaraksa, coordinator of ACFOD, Danilo Dolci, head of the Center for Study and Action in Palermo, Sicily, and Joanna Macy, author of *Dharma and Development,* on the Sarvodaya movement in Sri Lanka, and several other scholars. In the discussion an interesting contrast appeared:

> When expressing their views on community development both Dolci and Sulak ended up by drawing analogies about dams; they both have strong opinions about dam development projects. Sulak speaks of them with disgust and Dolci with triumph, which shows that even those working on more appropriate kinds of development can talk about the same thing and, depending on the context, can mean two entirely different things.

A dam may give you electricity, clean water, aid both fishing and agriculture, all of which have dollar value, but how, Sulak asked, can you evaluate in money the damages that result from the dam?

> Dolci, on the other hand, used a dam project with people in Sicily as a kind of "leverage" against the tight, centralized control of the mafia; he helped people band together to save their own values and sense of community, allowing them to call their own shots instead of being on the receiving end of those dealt out by the mafia.

The writer gives Sulak's broad and general point of view To those who want to help in community development, he says:

> "If you want to be with these people, you have to change your concepts from becoming scholars of books to becoming scholars of men. . . . When we went out, some scholars went out with us. . . . I sensed that those indigenous people don't have full trust in those scholars. They even asked me, "Why did they come?" . . . I think they have every right to ask, and I think this is good for the scholars to make them think whether they are scholars of books or scholars of men. Of course books are useful, if you want to get tenure or a promotion, but I think that wherever you are the first commitment must be to our fellow human beings, particularly for those who are struggling, who don't have tenure, who don't even have enough water."

The central theme of many of the articles in *Asian Action* is the question of how to help the Asian peoples to avoid the "Western pattern of development." The idea of spiritual welfare in contrast with material well-being is having more and more attention, as this paper shows, while there is natural stress on the importance of intermediate or appropriate technology.