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THE FACTS OF LIFE

YOU can start almost anywhere. While going by what you read to pick out the facts you think are important may be submitting to a preliminary filtering by other people, there will still be enormous variety to choose from. How is "importance" determined, these days? A great many of the issues are generated by the tension between economically motivated acts and programs and their actual or anticipated socio-moral effects. For example, in a recent VOW (*Voice of Women*) *Newsletter* (Toronto), a writer considered the implications of public reports on "the environmental and social impact of constructing the proposed MacKenzie Valley gas pipeline from the oil and gas fields of Prudhoe Bay (Alaska) and the MacKenzie River Valley to the United States and southern Canada."

> The issues surrounding the building of a pipeline are clear. Do the costs outweigh the benefits? Both the oil companies and to some extent the [Canadian] federal government, through the National Energy Board (NEB), have argued that the pipeline is in the public interest; that the benefits of avoiding an energy shortage in southern Canada and increasing our exports far outweigh the massive financial costs that surround the project.
>
> However, the oil companies and the NEB are over-estimating the growth in demand. They assume that people will continue to waste energy and that government policies will encourage this. They assume that OPEC prices will continue to rise despite the breakdown of the OPEC cartel and the predictions that international oil prices may have peaked.
>
> In fact, the MacKenzie Valley Pipeline, rather than bringing increased prosperity to Canada, as some of the oil companies claim, may only serve to drive up the exchange rate through massive inflows of foreign capital and hurt the export of Canadian goods.

This writer also points out that the lives of some 12,000 Dene Indians living in the north "would be irrevocably changed." The Indians don't want their lives changed, except for being bettered by settlement of their land claims. Happily, according to a later report, the NEB chose another route—paralleling the Alaskan Highway—to transmit natural gas to the U.S. But Indian land claims remain an issue affecting final approval.

Are there some general considerations that ought to be taken into account? Well, in a Meet the Press (NBC) program earlier this year, Ralph Nader, asked if there is really an "energy crisis," replied:

> There is not an energy crisis. There is an energy monopoly crisis, too many of the energy decisions are being made by a few large corporations instead of by a broader aggregate of consumer determinants. There is an energy waste crisis. We are the most wasteful country in the world.. . . . For example, solar energy has come a long way in the last three or four years. It is a highly practical way we can start using in our economic system, but it is not the form of energy that immediately results in profits to the energy monopolies that now want to sell us more coal and oil and gas and synthetic fuels at higher and higher prices.
>
> Those are the kinds of crises we are in. We are not in an energy supply crisis per se.

Obviously, more facts are required. And if you read Barry Commoner's *The Poverty of Power,* Robert Engler's *The Brotherhood of Oil,* and Amory Lovins' *The Road Not Taken,* you will in all probability agree that the Canadian *VOW Newsletter* and Mr. Nader are right in what they suggest.

As for the wasteful habits of Americans, there is this from a page in *Science* for May 20, devoted to "How Swedes Live Well While Consuming Less Energy":

> Energy usage for transportation is "remarkably lower" in Sweden than in the United States, primarily because cars are smaller, distances are shorter, and

> there is greater reliance on mass transit. These trends are encouraged by stiff taxes on gasoline (which now costs $1.50 a gallon) and heavy vehicles. . . . Swedish industry tends to be very conscious of the need to conserve energy, with groups functioning in almost every plant to scrutinize energy use and make proposals for savings. After the shock of the 1973 oil embargo, some companies took simple, inexpensive steps that cut energy use 20 to 25 per cent while the overall industry saving was perhaps 10 per cent. . . . The Swedes use less energy for residential and commercial space heating, largely because of energy-efficient construction techniques that are encouraged by building codes, loans, and subsidies.

How does one go about getting Americans to be as sensible as Swedes? Is there a fact or two that might help in this direction? Well, there are facts that have been determined by "thinkers," as distinguished from "researchers," which might serve. Wendell Berry wrote in *A Continuous Harmony:*

> According to the scheme of our present thinking, every human activity produces waste. This implies a profound contempt for correct discipline; it proposes, in the giddy faith of prodigals, that there can be production without fertility, abundance without thrift. We take and do not give back, and this causes waste. It is a hideous concept, and it is making the world hideous. It is consumption, a wasting disease. And this disease of our material economy becomes also the disease of our spiritual economy, and we have made a shoddy merchandise of our souls.

The doctrine and validity of waste is written into the bylaws of our commercial life. Planned obsolescence is a familiar industrial principle, and Mr. Berry finds waste the rule in modern farming:

> According to the industrial vision of it, the life of the farm does not rise and fall in the turning cycle of the year; it goes on in a straight line from one harvest to another. This, in the long run, may well be more productive of waste than of anything else. It wastes the soil. It wastes the animal manures and other organic residues that industrialized agriculture frequently fails to return to the soil. And what may be our largest agricultural waste is not usually recognized as such, but is thought to be both an urban product and an urban problem: the tons of garbage and sewage that are burned or buried or flushed into the rivers. This, like all waste, is the abuse of a resource. It was ecological stupidity of exactly this kind that destroyed Rome. The chemist Justus von Liebig wrote that "the sewers of the immense metropolis engulfed in the course of centuries the prosperity of Roman peasants. The Roman Campagna would no longer yield the means of feeding her population; these same sewers devoured the wealth of Sicily, Sardinia and the fertile lands of the coast of Africa."

Well, if you own stock in the oil companies and need to live on the dividends, you might agree with all this but wonder what you should do besides what you are doing. And if you own no stock at all but have four children and work for an oil company, you might wonder in the same way. And wonder, finally, if the whole thing we call "the economy" will have to collapse before there can be a large-scale change of direction. As Aldo Leopold pointed out long ago, people who believe that their wellbeing and survival depend upon the money game are just not able to see when the time has come for change.

So there are facts for people who can see and facts for those who can't. The actual case is probably as John Seymour put it a while back in *Resurgence:*

> One day the oil will run out. The supply of cheap chemicals and machines will dry up. Then we will have to get people out on the land again, and if we fail the people who live in the cities will starve. They won't just starve, they will die of starvation. It is as simple as that. I have seen a map of my part of the country [England] printed in 1850. There are four times as many houses marked on it as there are marked on the modern map. This countryside used to be populated—it held a thriving (if poor) community, as a talk with any of the very old people round about here will tell. Now it is empty—a country of empty "holiday homes," a few old retired people, a few aging farmers whose children have been forced to go off to the city, and a handful—a growing handful—of people like us. The new settlers—the advanced guard of the people who are going to resettle the land and make it alive and fruitful again and producing food for people to eat.

In this article Mr. Seymour campaigns vigorously for reform in the Planning Laws of Britain—even to the extent of proposing a

National Society for this purpose. The rule would be "planning laws to suit us—to suit man and womankind."

> And we want it built into these laws that every person has the right to build his own home—and workshop—on his own land. If he can get some land, that is—at the moment that has to be left to the individual. If you can't get a bit of land then you can't build a house on it and that is that. But to achieve that every person has a right to build his own home if he can get some land—that would be an enormous step forward.

Of course, this isn't at all the sort of "planning" we are familiar with and know how to do. Our methods of planning are distinguished by the fact that they hardly ever work, and sometimes work in reverse. To be completely convinced of this, one need only read Charles Abrams' *The City Is the Frontier* (Harper & Row, 1965) in which, speaking of the urban renewal program which generated so much of the contemporary interest in planning, he says:

> 1. It overemphasizes slum clearance and lacks an adequate program for those it evicts and for those who live in the slums it proposes tearing down. It makes no provision for rehousing these people except in cities.
>
> 2. It relies almost exclusively on the speculative profit motive for the clearance of these slums and the rebuilding of slum neighborhoods. Some of the projects cannot show a profit and should be developed for other purposes—more parks, playgrounds, etc.
>
> 3. It deals primarily with only one aspect of the city's predicament, i.e., housing and slums, while it ignores others—poverty, social unrest, school problems, racial frictions, physical obsolescence, spatial restrictions, decline of its economic base, and lack of financial resources to cope with its major difficulties. The poverty program is only a feeble start toward grappling with a few of these problems.
>
> If the program continued its demolitions until every slum has been leveled, the housing problem would become incomparably worse and the housing conditions of low-income people would be aggravated with each demolition. The answer to a city's blight is not its destruction (without providing alternative shelter), but the removal of the causes and the improvement of the city so that it will become part of the better society.

So much for government planning. But suppose the government really had enough power to do such things *right*: What would this mean? Forty years ago Walter Lippmann addressed himself to this question (in the *Atlantic* in 1937), concluding:

> All the books which recommend the establishment of a planned economy in a civilian society paint an entrancing vision of what a benevolent despotism could do. They ask—never very clearly, to be sure—that somehow the people surrender the planning of their existence to "engineers," "experts," and "technologists," to leaders, saviors, heroes. This is the political premise of the whole collectivist philosophy: that the dictators will be patriotic or class-conscious, whichever term seems more eulogistic to the orator. It is the premise, too, of the whole philosophy of regulation by the state, currently regarded as progressivism. Though it is disguised by the illusion that a bureaucracy accountable to a majority of voters, and susceptible to the pressure of organized minorities, is not exercising compulsion, it is evident that the more varied and comprehensive the regulation becomes, the more the state becomes a despotic power as against the individual. For the fragment of control over the government that one man exercises through his vote is in no effective sense proportionate to the authority exercised over him by the government.
>
> Benevolent despots might indeed be found. On the other hand, they might not be. They may appear at one time; they may not appear at another. The people, unless they choose to face the machine guns on the barricades, can take no steps to see to it that benevolent despots are selected and the malevolent cashiered. They cannot select their despots. The despots must select themselves, and, no matter whether they are good or bad, they will continue in office so long as they can suppress rebellion and escape assassination.
>
> Thus, by a kind of tragic irony, the search for security and a rational society, if it seeks salvation through political authority, ends in the most irrational form of government imaginable—in the dictatorship of casual oligarchs, who have no hereditary title, no constitutional origin or responsibility, and who cannot be replaced except by violence.

Well, considering the magnitude of present socio-economic problems and the urgency of the need for radical change in policies, could anything short of despotic power make headway against them?

Two examples of the sort of thing any "benevolent" authority determined upon change will be up against are at hand. In the *Nation* for May 18, Ronald Taylor describes what he calls "tax-shelter" farmers, individuals who have discovered the special consideration given to farmers in relation to taxes, and who invest heavily in farm properties in order to write off various agricultural costs against gross income, thus becoming subject only to tax on capital gains. As the *Nation* writer says:

> Until the 1950s, these tax laws were not widely recognized as loopholes by outsiders. But about then sharp accountants and lawyers prowling the tax codes for their wealthy clients moved from oil-drilling tax shelters into real estate and then into farming. By 1968 the IRS was reporting to Congress that of the 3 million farm income tax returns filed in 1965, 680,000 showed *losses offsetting outside income.* That year 17,587 corporations filed farm income tax returns, reporting $4.3 billion in gross income, but only 9,200 showed $188 million in taxable profits.

These "farmers" who profit from legislation meant to encourage family farm undertakings originate in places as far away from the growing fields as New York City and Hawaii, and the money they make in this way, comes, as usual, out of the prices people pay for food in the stores.

The other example, also having to do with land, is set out in the recently published three-volume study, *Promised Lands,* filled with encyclopedic information about how land hustlers mislead and in effect rob the public. Anthony Wolff gives the reason for this treatise in the *Saturday Review* for June 11:

> The persistent willingness of many otherwise prudent citizens to buy, sight unseen, homesites in far-off land subdivisions attests both to the sleight-of-tongue skills of the sellers and the talent for self-delusion of the buyers. In recent years, numerous exposes, investigations, and well-publicized court actions have uncovered the tricks of the land-hustlers' trade and put suckers on fair notice. Still, the buying and selling continue, while effective legislation to protect both the land and the consumer lags far behind.

Now people can read all about the fancy thievery of real estate promotions, just as we can read about tax-shelter farmers in the *Nation* and the fiasco of urban renewal in books by Charles Abrams. But how could people read everything they need to know to be properly informed about *all* the ways they are invaded by the plans and devices of self-interest? Even a despot with plenty of plumber-type assistants would find it impossible to keep up with all this mischief. There are so many dreadful facts. Are these the reasons why so many people look to Washington for a miracle-worker, and keep on hoping that if not the President, then maybe the *next* President, will have the solution we need?

Is there some simple fact of life that *is* being consistently ignored? One important fact, after an introduction of suitable length, is proposed by Wendell Berry:

> Across the whole range of politics now (and I suppose always) you find people willing to act on the assumption that there is some simple abstraction that will explain and solve the problems of the world, and who go direct from the discovery of the abstraction to the forming of an organization to promote it. In my opinion those people are all about equally dangerous, and I don't believe anything they say. What I hold out for is the possibility that a man can live decently *without* knowing all the answers, or believing that he does—can live decently even in the understanding that life is unspeakably complex and unspeakably subtle in its complexity. The decency, I think, would be in acting out of the awareness that personal acts of compassion, love, humility, honesty are better, and more adequate responses than any public abstraction or theory or organization. What is wrong with our cities—and I don't see how you can have a great civilization without great cities—may be that the mode of life in them has become almost inescapably organizational.
>
> It used to be that every time I heard of some public action somewhere to promote some cause I believed in, I would be full of guilt because I wasn't

> there. If they were marching in Washington to protest the war, and if I deplored the war, then how could my absence from Washington be anything but a sin? That was the organizational protestant conscience: in order to believe in my virtue I needed some organization to pat me on the head and tell me I was virtuous. But if I can't promote what I hope for in Port Royal, Ky., then why go to Washington to promote it?
>
> What succeeds in Port Royal succeeds in the world.

Where is Port Royal? In Kentucky, where Wendell Berry has a farm. But *what* is Port Royal? It is the sort of place where a human being finds himself able to exercise control over his own life and over enough of his decisions to make him feel disinclined to look outside the ranges of his own action for an explanation of what he needs to do, and what is right and what is wrong.

What is the meaning of Port Royal? It stands for the circumstances appropriate to human life. Mr. Berry is suggesting that we have allowed ourselves to drift out of touch with the circumstances appropriate to our lives, and that nothing—absolutely nothing—will work well for us until we get back in touch with them again.

It will almost certainly take time. The early Americans managed to take care of their political responsibilities in one town meeting a year. That, apparently, was enough. How did town meetings develop? According to one historian (Edward Channing), they "grew by the exercise of English common sense combined with the circumstances of the place." We now have circumstances in which common sense can't by any stretch of the imagination be made to work. How many messes do we need to endure—how many books and articles about messes, past, present, and to come, must we read—in order to become convinced of this?

REVIEW
SAD THOUGHTS ABOUT A CAREER

WRITERS, like other people, need to make a living somehow, but we sometimes wonder if it is not a mistake to expect and try to do it from what they write. Coleridge was convinced of this, and as authorities go he is rather high on the ladder of achievement. Herbert Read agreed with him and decided to arrange his life so as not to depend on his writing for income. Poets long ago resigned themselves to this rule out of necessity, since hardly more than a dozen of them have book sales sufficient to buy food and lodging. Well, suppose you are a critic—what then?

Judith Crist, one of the editors of the *Saturday Review,* did two pages of movie criticism in the *SR* for May 14. This is not a field we keep up with, but the level of her comment seems good. There is this paragraph, for example, on a Swedish film, Bo Widerberg's *Man on the Roof:*

> Widerberg's film is, on the whole, an excellent police procedural, its detailing of a grim profession reflecting the drab underside of society. But it is saturated, as the books have been, with the exploration of a society gone gray, its institutions bureaucratized, the desperation's quiet shattered by the explosion of passion. Widerberg, who hitherto has coated his works with a lyric beauty somehow appropriate to time past . . . looks upon the realities of contemporary life with a clear and thoughtful eye, slighting no facet of his characters while tightening their movement toward the explosive climax of the drama.

By Simone Weil's canon, this is a good film and the review good criticism. While writers, she said, don't have to teach morality, "they do have to express the human condition. And nothing concerns human life so essentially, for every man at every moment, as good and evil." Of greater interest, here, however, is Judith Crist's opening remark explaining what it means to her to be a film critic: "Our *raison d'être,* after all, in devotion to a medium primarily concerned with the manufacture of commercial trash, is that the best is yet to come."

What about that as a career for a writer? People who pick films to go to of an evening are doubtless grateful for the help of such writers, but Coleridge's advice still seems highly relevant. In the matter of a livelihood, there ought to be an alternative to "devotion to a medium primarily concerned with the manufacture of trash." How much trash can you inspect professionally, week after week, year after year, without having your perceptions dulled, your conceptions compromised?

The justifying piety that "the best is yet to come" recalls those "idealistic" bureaucrats who hung onto their jobs in Washington, tolerating horror after horror of the Vietnam war, hoping, as they explained, to do some good by remaining close to the seats of power. And when they finally quit, it was to creep silently away. They had been hireling participants in a dirty game too long to make a fuss about their reasons for leaving. Could there be a more precise formula for maintaining public opinion in its usual state of apathy?

By turning back one page in the same issue of the *Saturday Review,* you find a somewhat parallel discussion of the everyday fate of an editor who works for a successful publishing concern. William Cole, who conducts the department, Trade Winds, observes that being a book editor is a pleasant job which pays fairly well, but adds that "there are always problems."

> Any decent editor I've ever known finds his loyalties divided from time to time: Which is more important, an author who is a friend or the publisher who pays your salary? Publishing is a business, and the moneymen make the final decisions. And sometimes the decisions of an editorial board, to whom your projects are submitted, may seem capricious. You are not really your own man. With your own imprint you can get around these problems.

But the small, independent publisher also has problems, the chief one being survival.

Mr. Cole has other comments:

> And there are specialists in cookbooks, how to's, music books, detective stories, paperback originals—you name it. Brilliant as many of these people are, they can get lost in the shuffle. Most established publishers have been taken over by huge corporations, and with such behemoths, the bottom line is what everyone is looking for (the old story of artist versus businessmen), and personal relationships between author and publisher disappear.

So there is a trash problem here, too, and according to some people it keeps on getting worse. Of course, all such melancholy reports need occasional punctuation with the glorious exceptions. Good books are often neglected and forgotten, but *really* good books seem to make their way against all odds. Ortega's books made their way, and so did Lewis Mumford's, and the extraordinary value of Abraham Maslow's works eventually broke him out of the confinements of the textbook and university press category and into trade editions which ran into many thousands. So, when a genius or almost-genius comes along, the system bends and submits. It is comforting to know that this is possible.

A much tougher sort of criticism, aimed at television, is made by Ivan Illich. He has declared that he will never again appear on TV. In an interview (with a television writer) in *Human Behavior* for last February, he explained why by telling how he felt when interviewed back in 1968 by Hugh Downs on the "Today" show:

> "I decided never to do it again, not even with so correct and humane a person as Mr. Downs, because I came to the conviction that I cannot use network television without stepping up on a demagogical pulpit millions of times higher than the audience.
>
> "My conversation with Mr. Downs had a single message. 'Watch out! Illich's sensible, ordinary language statements are now being sent out, simultaneously to 10 million people!' And this simultaneous invasion of 10 million privacies contradicted what I was saying about socially shared blind spots. I was helping create just such a blind spot by falsely implying that what I was saying, on television, was automatically more important than an ordinary conversation simply because it *was* on television."

This seems about the most devastating example that could be supplied of the reality behind Marshall McLuhan's once familiar epigram, "The medium is the message."

Dr. Illich went on, characterizing the occasion in a way that, while it may seem indelicate to some, makes his point absolutely clear:

> "Mr. Downs was professionally interested in me," Illich continues, "but not personally. He was faking interest the way a whore fakes love. He was using our personal technique of a conversation between two people to communicate to millions. We were both, therefore, intellectual pornographers—highclass callboys—giving an exhibition for the voyeurs. Worst of all, I was doing an *impersonation of myself!"*

Illich suddenly thrust his face close to the reporter's, grinning maniacally.

> "You see what I do?" he cried. "This is what the camera does. This is how it looks at me. Close up. . . . But my words with Downs were not those which I would have spoken with anyone at a distance of less than three feet. To see and hear me speak those words at a closer distance alters intent, just as it would at a greater distance. It manipulates. It edits. Always on television, I tried to make sure I would not be edited. But camera angles and positions are intrinsic editing. So, I do no more television."

Almost certainly, Ivan Illich would never engage in television "criticism," either. What sort of world would it be, one wonders, with no television of the sort Illich condemns, no "trash" of the sort Judith Crist must endure, and no books put out simply to make money for conglomerates whose principles are selected and whose policies are controlled by the bottom line?

Sometimes people think they can escape all this ugliness by becoming a scholar in a university. That might work for some, but reading the serious critics of higher education will give you pause. There are still glorious exceptions—the few rare individuals able to command the system to retreat—*but* we are talking about the prospects of the rank and file of thinkers and writers in our

society. A "professional," that is. Time was, of course, when "professional" meant mainly high standards of both excellence and responsibility, and it may still mean this for the pure and the good. But the hope of freedom, integrity, and a decent living from an academic career is a dream by no means encouraged by the most distinguished scholars of our time. Addressing the New Orleans meeting of the American Council for Education in 1966, William Arrowsmith said:

> Teaching, I repeat, is not honored among us either because its function is grossly misconceived or its cultural value is not understood. The reason is the overwhelming positivism of our technocratic society and the arrogance of scholarship. Behind the disregard of the teacher lies the transparent sickness of the humanities in the university and in American life generally. Indeed, nothing more vividly illustrates the myopia of academic humanism than its failure to realize that the fate of any true culture is revealed in the value it sets upon the teacher and the way it defines him. . . .

What is the alternative? Mr. Arrowsmith gave the example of Socrates, who had no institutional haven, but "took to the streets." There freedom seems unlimited, although the security on the streets of the life of a Socrates may be wondered about. There is also the problem of the company you have there. Once in a great while you may actually find a Socrates in the streets, but you have to be able to identify him among all the charlatans, demagogues, and frauds who work both the avenues and the alleys. Even the very bright Athenians made a terrible mistake.

Mr. Arrowsmith concludes:

> At present the universities are as uncongenial to teaching as the Mohave desert to a clutch of Druid priests. If you want to restore a Druid priesthood, you cannot do it by offering prizes for Druid-of-the-year. If you want Druids, you must grow forests. There is no other way of going about it.

Broadly interpreted, this indicates that, unless one is a genius, the advice of Coleridge remains good counsel to consider when pondering an intellectual career.

COMMENTARY
ON SAVING THE WORLD

THERE are diverse ways of saying the same thing. "What succeeds in Port Royal succeeds in the world," Wendell Berry declares (see page 7). *Sarvodaya* for May-June quotes the reply of Gandhi to an American reporter who asked about the relevance of hand spinning for America:

> "I do feel that it has a message for the U.S.A. and the whole world," Gandhi replied. "But it cannot be until India has demonstrated to the world that it has made the spinning wheel its own, which it has not done today. If India becomes the slave of the machine, then, I say, heaven save the world!"

In *Meditations on Quixote,* Ortega wrote in 1914:

> When shall we open our minds to the conviction that the ultimate reality of the world is neither matter nor spirit, but a perspective? God is perspective and hierarchy; Satan's sin was an error of perspective. . . . The intuition of higher values fertilizes our contact with lesser ones, and love for what is near and small makes the sublime real and effective within our hearts. For the person for whom small things do not exist, the great is not great.
>
> We must try to find for our circumstance, such as it is, and precisely in its very limitation and peculiarity, its appropriate place in the immense perspective of the world. . . . In short, the reabsorption of circumstance is the concrete destiny of man.
>
> My natural exit toward the universe is through the mountain passes of the Guadarrama or the plain of Ontigola. This sector of circumstantial reality forms the other half of my person; only through it can I integrate myself and be fully myself. . . .
>
> I am myself plus my circumstance, and if I do not save it, I cannot save myself.

Yet when Wendell Berry says that personal acts "are better, and more adequate responses than any public abstraction or theory or organization," he does not mean that public or group actions should be ignored. The issue is one of priorities, of what comes first, of where and how the abstractions obtain their legitimacy. Wendell Berry has served as chairman of the Kentucky chapter of the Sierra Club and is publicly active in various ways, but he is effective because of what Port Royal means to him.

CHILDREN
. . . and Ourselves
NOTES ON THE ARTS

A READER'S request for material on "æsthetics" stirs various recollections concerned with attitudes toward "art," along with the dilemma of where to begin. It recalls, for example, the remark of a Canadian teacher who reported that some of his colleagues thought "Poetry is unworthy of a grown man's efforts." And a teacher who worked for years in Japan said that Japanese children's drawings are much better—more mature—than the work of American children because Japanese adults honor the arts and this respect is sensed by the children, who work more seriously. They are not made to feel that drawing is something they will "outgrow."

If you look at the other side of the picture—at the sectarian snobbishness of the art coteries of today, and the fussy playing with words of so much modern poetry—you wonder who is at fault. A few years ago a Canadian teacher, Eli Bornstein, wrote:

> There is a tendency in current Art Education to . . . run blindly and frantically after the rapidly changing fashions in art. . . . It is a hopeless pursuit of an impossible goal. Fashion by its very nature is mere change for the sake of change. . . . Art Education is surely in danger of processing students as consumers of what is "new" even if that is in essence anti-art, non-art, or devoid of anything relating to art. In other words, we are brought full cycle and Art Education becomes pursuit of conformity.

So perhaps the indifference or contempt of the philistine man in the street has some justification. Tolstoy might have thought so.

Another approach would be to read for a while in Macneile Dixon's *Civilization and the Arts* and return to art education in another mood. Then there is this, for example, in a book called *Piano: Guided Sight-Reading* by Leonhard Deutch:

> The famous Hungarian and Slovak gypsies have a century-old musical tradition. This colorful folk has brought forth numerous excellent instrumentalists, notably violinists. They learn to play much as an infant learns to walk—without teaching methods, lessons or drills. No written music is used. The youngster is merely given a small fiddle and allowed to join the gypsy band. He gets no explanations or corrections. He causes no disturbance, for his timid efforts are scarcely audible. He listens; he tries to play simultaneously what he hears, and gradually succeeds in finding the right notes and producing a good tone. Within a few years he has developed into a full-fledged member of the band with complete command of his instrument.
>
> Are these gypsy children particularly gifted? No, almost any child could accomplish what they do. They respond to a sure and natural way of teaching. The band acts as teacher talking to the pupil in the direct language of music. The novice, by joining the band, is immediately placed in the most helpful musical atmosphere and psychological situation; thus, from the beginning, he finds the right approach to musical activity.

What has this to do with note-reading for the piano? Everything, the author believes. His book is devoted to showing how this principle of community influence is applied for piano pupils.

The principle is a familiar one. As John Holt points out, children learn to speak "by hearing speech all around them." The best way to learn to read is exactly the same:

> When I was a kid, I taught myself to read, as a great many children do. Nobody taught me, nobody helped me very much or read aloud to me. . . . What children need is exposure to a lot of *print.* Not pictures, but print. They need to bathe their eyes in print, as they bathed their ears in talk when they were smaller.

It helps for parents to take evident pleasure in reading and talking about what they read. Then children learn to read because they want to, not because they are *supposed* to. Good teaching is seldom more than encouragement of natural learning, as in the case of learning to talk:

> Children get ready to speak by hearing speech all around them. The important thing about that speech is that the adults are, for the most part, riot

talking in order to *give* children a model. They are talking to each other because they have things to say.

The arts flower in homes and communities where drawing, singing, and dancing are the spontaneous expression of people to whom symbolic modes of communication come naturally.

Who started all this and what keeps it going? Originally it was the philosophers. In his preface to *Choreutics* (Macdonald and Evans, London, 1966), Rudolf Laban says:

> *"Choreosophia"*—an ancient Greek word, from *choros*, meaning circle, and *sophia,* meaning knowledge or wisdom—is the nearest term I have discovered with which to express the essential ideas of this book. These ideas concern the wisdom to be found through the study of all the phenomena of circles existing in nature and in life. The term was used in Plato's time by the disciples and followers of Pythagoras. Although there is little real knowledge of the work of Pythagoras, we do know that about 540 B.C. he founded a philosophical and religious colony in Sicily, in which the cult of the Muses, the divine protectorates of the arts, seems to have played an important part. . . . Plato, in his *Timaeus.* and other contemporaries and disciples of the great philosopher give us a more exhaustive picture of the knowledge accumulated in the Pythagorean community, but this knowledge derives from even more remote times. The wisdom of circles is as old as the hills. It is founded on a conception of life and the becoming aware of it which has its roots in magic and which was shared by peoples in early stages of civilization.

Choreology, the logic or the science of circles, begins as geometry but grows into much more:

> It was a kind of grammar and syntax of the language of movement, dealing not only with the outer form of movement, but also with its mental and emotional content. This was based on the belief that motion and emotion, form and content, body and mind, are inseparably united. Finally, . . . choreutics may be explained as the practical study of the various forms of (more or less) harmonised movement.

In short, the dance. The books of Laban seem forbidding until you get into them. No pictures, just diagrams. He was in charge of choreography and ballet of the State Opera in Berlin, but fled to Paris in 1937, his life and achievements shattered by the Nazi regime. Finding friends in England in 1939, he started working on his books at nearly sixty years of age, and publication of *The Mastery of Movement on the Stage* was not until 1950. Anyone seriously interested in the part played by the arts in human life will find Laban's books good reading. The author says:

> The static artist creates works which can be seen as a whole and be taken in at a glance by looking at the drawings, pictures, sculptures, and buildings his genius has produced. The effects on the onlooker of a work of static art is genuinely different from the effect on the spectator of a theatrical performance. In a picture the mind of the onlooker is invited to go its own way. Memories and association of ideas conduce to a contemplative mood and meditative inner activity. The audience at a play, a mime, or a ballet has no opportunity for contemplation. The spectator's mind is forcibly submerged by the flow of the ever-changing happenings which, given a real inner participation on his part, leaves no time for the elaborate cogitation and meditation, both possible and natural, when viewing, say, a picture, or some scene of natural beauty. . . . Mime based on mobile effort-thinking is the basic theatrical art. . . .

Long thoughts about the responsibility of artists grow out of this sort of analysis.

FRONTIERS

"Until We Do"

AN ardent desire to take an active part in the intermediate technology movement can lead to confusing if not frustrating situations. What does one *do* in the few hours a day left after making a living?

For some this is no problem. They are already working on an active or a passive solar heated house, have experiments in organic gardening going in a vacant lot, or happily own a piece of land just right for siting a windmill. But for others who join one of the multiplying groups devoted to implementing the Schumacher program, there is the puzzling fact that no one seems able to tell them what to do, and their warm resolve may tend to wither on the vine. The only solution we know of is to start right out in some direction: if, say, you like to read, begin by trying to understand the difference between intermediate technology and other reforms or social changes. Figure out why is it that so obviously admirable an idea can be at the same time so intangible and slippery.

For one thing, intermediate technology, in "backward" rural areas, means the right sort of stepping up economic production, while in the over-developed countries it means figuring out how to step it down where it needs stepping down, and then doing one particular thing in some large or small practical way. Whatever you do will result from an unaccustomed mix of motive, understanding, and ingenious technique. Take electric lights. In some regions it seems a good thing to do without them; in other places where people, for the present at least, *have* to have them, it would be silly not to. And so on. Installing a compost toilet in a city flat may sound ridiculous, but not after you have read about how and why the people of the Adams-Morgan area (Local Self-Reliance Institute) in Washington, D.C., did it. Even so, it might be silly for others to do the same. Intermediate technology is the name of a way of thinking and then acting ingeniously and independently. It is no more programmatic than a sense of proportion or good taste.

Wondering about electricity (in *Rain* for last May), Tom Bender muses:

> To most of us night is a forgotten and foreign thing—darkness something to be shut out at its first approach with the flip of a night switch. Yet there is more than the fearfulness of night—there is the calm and peacefulness that we miss—resting, taking a deep breath and letting go of the tensions and the activity of the day. We lose our chance when we flip on the lights and let the day go charging on into the night. We lose the daybreak in the same act, not slept out as if we'd gone to bed when day ended. The electric light gave us more day, but too easy and too much light. . . .
>
> Our losses from a technology never lie on the same dimension as our gains. We see the gains because they're new, but they blind us to the slipping away of other things that may be of greater importance yet which never get measured in the balance.

This seems so important to understand that one may decide that he ought to just sit and think. But we can't afford to do only that, since there is such great need to get *something* good going. The countless people made impotent by the invasions of excessive technology may get their first impulse toward self-liberation from seeing the value of some very simple change. Talk often has no effect at all.

Intermediate technology means simply the application of both moral and practical wisdom to the uses of all our skills. The skills are obvious but the wisdom is slippery—it always has been and always will be. Hence the dilemma of people who have been habituated to think that action, to be effective, has to be programmed in some way. This is a form of the collectivist fallacy.

When it comes to rural need of intermediate technology, the good things that happen are often totally unpredictable. Richard Critchfield, author of *The Golden Bowl Be Broken* (who may know more about the tragedies of rural decay, poverty,

and need than any other writer), tells in the *Los Angeles Times* for March 13 about two good things which happened to the Brazilians of Guapira, a village seventy miles from Salvador, where the young people leave for the cities as soon as they are able. Guapira has "no electricity, telephones, public transportation, deep wells for drinking water, or health service." The people survive by herding cattle and raising manioc, a starchy root (the source of tapioca) from which they make flour. The refining of manioc to an edible condition (prussic acid must be eliminated) is drudgery done mostly by women and children. Since all drinking water comes from streams in the ravines, the people are infected by worms and schistosomiasis. "Tuberculosis is endemic."

The most prosperous farmer in Guapira cultivates twelve acres and expects all his five sons to migrate to Salvador. The village is dying, while Salvador is growing at the rate of seven per cent a year.

Then the two things happened:

> An ex-peace Corps man from Wisconsin, Daniel Johnson, moved in and settled down two years ago as part-owner of a 170-acre orange and cattle ranch near Guapira. To make a go of it until his orange trees mature and his herd grows, Johnson rented out his tractor to about 300 village families at $7 an hour. The result: The amount of land cultivated in manioc and other crops doubled; so did the family incomes.
>
> A Belgian priest, Padre Julian Claes, has just started a two-year agricultural high school, enrolling some of the youths from Guapira. His hope is that armed with modern farm technology they won't want to migrate to Salvador.

And not far away:

> Another priest, Padre Francisco Baturen, a Spanish Jesui has almost single-handedly saved Salvador's small fishing industry. Ten years ago he studied fishing techniques in Spain, returned to Brazil and moved to a fishing village Demonstrating that he himself could fish, he gradual] taught the fisherman to improve their hooks, nets and boats. Today they plan to build a pier, shipyard and school for navigation.

Mr. Critchfield concludes:

> Small is beautiful, but it seems to work only when it is small. The two million villages of the world, all of them Guapiras today or fast becoming that way, still remain the crux of the world poverty problem. But we have yet to learn how really to reach and help them. The rush to the cities will go on until we do.