PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

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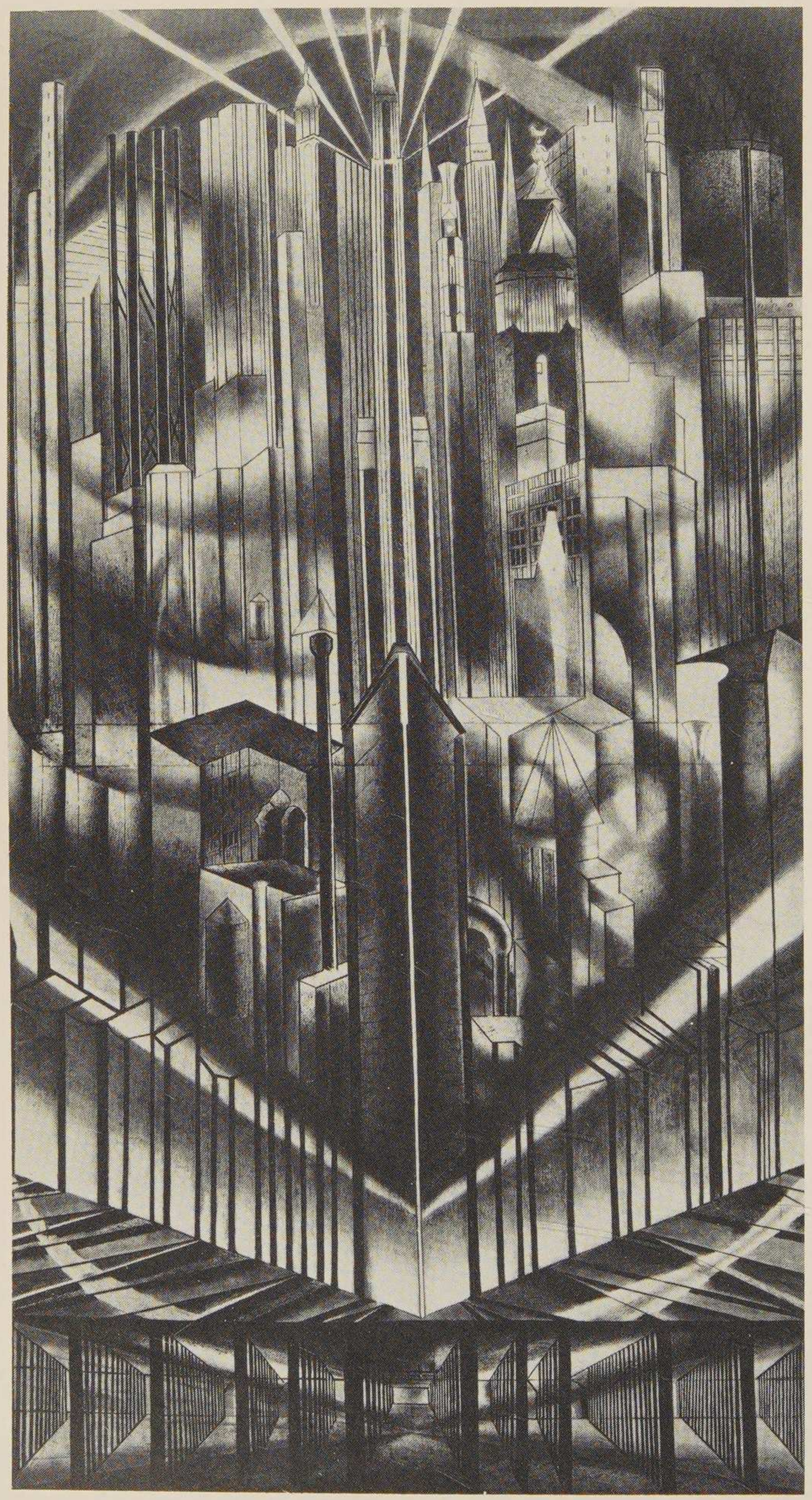
The Dream of Progress



VOLUME VI, NO. 2

THE DREAM OF PROGRESS

PARABOLA

MYTH AND THE QUEST FOR MEANING

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Cover: Victorin Making His Flight, Unknown artist, 18th c.. Frontispiece of Restif de la Bretonne, *La Décourverte australe, par un Homme-volant, ou le Dédale francais,* Volume I. Leipzig, 1781. Engraving, 6½ × 3¾". Rare Books and Manuscripts Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundation.

Inside Cover: Skyscrapers 1922, #3 of the series "New York Interpreted," by Joseph Stella. Oil on canvas, 54 × 99¾". Collection of The Newark Museum.

FOCUS

Arthur Amiotte's account of his first vision quest was published in PARABOLA, *(Vol. I, No. 3), under the title of "Eagles Fly Over." An artist, educator, and religious leader, Amiotte speaks eloquently for his people, the Lakota, for their art, and their traditions. He opened his recent talk on our Earth and Spirit series at the Museum of Natural History with the following poetic statement of what we felt to be the central idea of this issue on the Dream of Progress.*

PILLARS

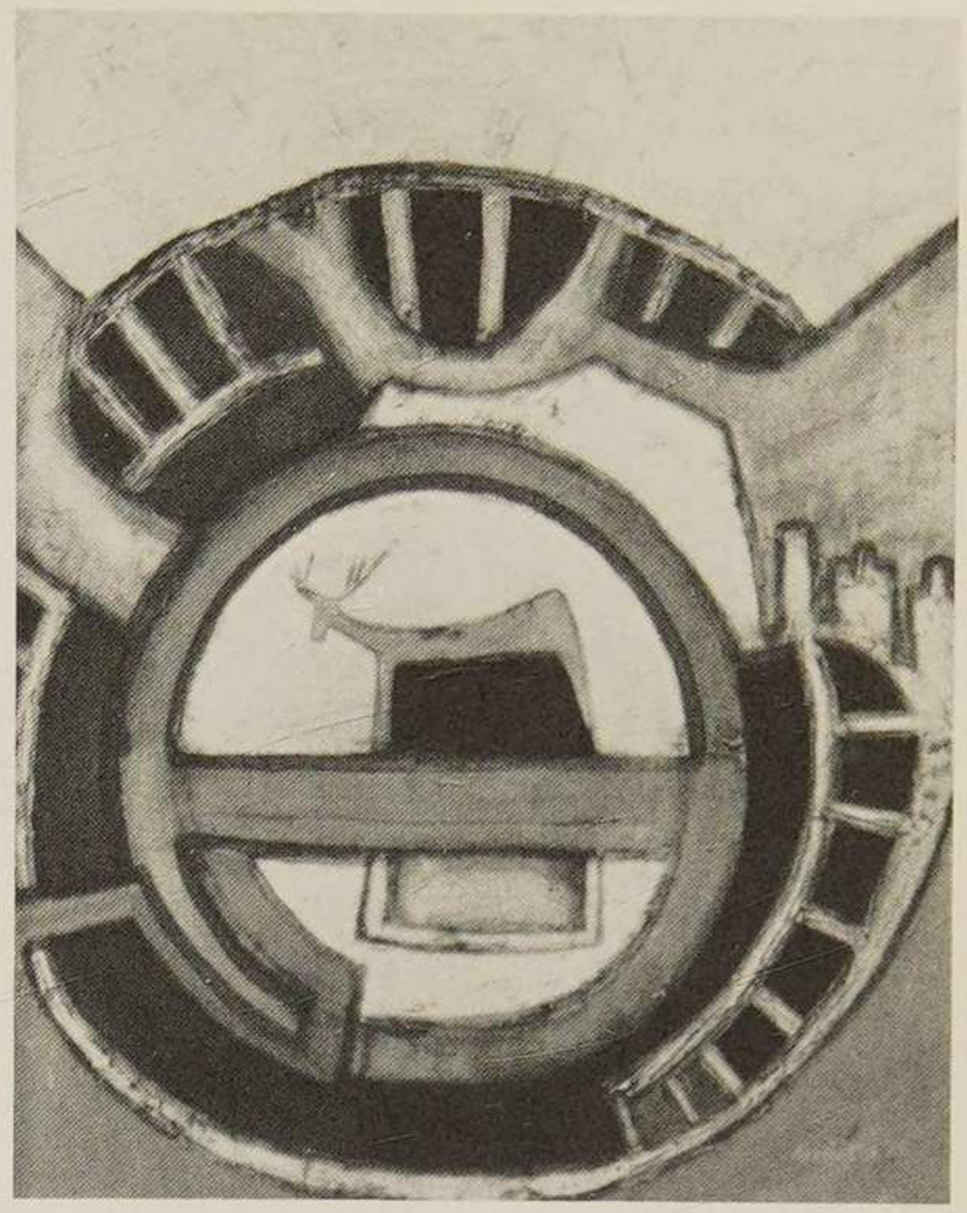
And there was in those days
the code of the ages
built upon the foundation
of clouds and dust
which gave entrance into this world
to other beings who told of
mists and mountains and sacred ways
and pillars to support the heavens
upon which nobility and dignity might
rest
in rituals begun as all things begin
and with a hope of never ending.

In those days
the code of the ages
was that of living
and making bread
kneading the clouds and dust and sweat
of the brow

into sacrificial loaves
broken before others
and placed upon the pillars in clearly
defined order
to be consumed by hungry gods
and transformed as love gifts into more
fertile soil, rain and progeny
to flower in rhythm and in
perpetual obeyance as it has
always been.

In these days
the code of the ages
lies misconstrued and unministered
no longer the clouds but only the dust
now seals the door
shutting out sacred beings
no longer able to tell of
ether and earth and sacred ways.
The pillars stand bare and barren, barely
holding aloft that which we now call sky
upon which in disarray lie dried tears
and ragged torn hearts offered without
ritual
for it all has ended as no one expected.

Ended as no one expected...?
perhaps not altogether—
maybe not yet for those who believe in
pillars and burnt offerings
in broken bread and torn ragged hearts:
not yet for those
who plant trees at the center
and raise their hands to that
which has remained heaven
who offer spirit beings not a door but a
ladder
to descend to the dirt
and mend the foundation of clouds and
dust,
to blend the mortar with
the blood of the innocent
and pour beneath the tree
that of the chastened
who seek restoration through immolation
that they may know the tree as a cane
and learn to lean not like an oak
but like a willow.



And in times to come
they shall speak no more of pillars
and perhaps not of bread and blood
and sacrifice, perhaps not even of clouds
and dust and rain and earth
because by then there may be none
of any of these, and no one to plant
the tree at the center, no one to offer
the rainbow ladder.

—Arthur Amiotte

Illustration by the author

"What is Man?"

by Kathleen Raine

What is Man?
The Sun's Light when he unfolds it
Depends on the Organ that Beholds it.

Blake

In considering education it is before all else necessary to ask that oldest of questions, "What is man?" We find the question in the Book of Job, who asks, "What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thy heart upon him?" (7:17) Job is quoting from a psalm (8:4) which reminds us of the paradox of human littleness and human greatness:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?
For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.
Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

St. Paul quotes this psalm in his Epistle to the Hebrews, in order to present to the Jews, familiar with the scriptures, the new concept of Jesus as the divine humanity incarnate; and all these texts look back, finally, to the first chapter of Genesis, where the creation of man is described:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him. (1:27)

—and the passage goes on to describe the dominion given to man over all living things on the earth.

When Job reminds God of his exaltation of man he does so in bitterness, complaining that man is a creature of dust who goes down to the grave unregarded. Nevertheless the theme which runs through the Bible, from Genesis to the Epistle to the Hebrews is man as the image of God, bearer of the divine imprint; Jesus, as the Son of Man, is the realization of the first-created humanity, the *anthropos*, as imagined by the Creator before the Fall; which Fall is the result of Adam's "sleep," a loss of consciousness, a "descent," as the Greeks would say, from a spiritual to a natural mode of consciousness, with a consequent self-identification not with the spiritual but with the natural body; which is, as Job complains, a thing of dust.

The Greeks too asked the question "what is man?"—the riddle of the Sphinx: "What is it that in the morning goes on four legs, at mid-day on two legs, and in the evening on three legs?"—a bitter evocation of the mortal worm who creeps from helpless infancy, through a brief and infirm prime, to the helplessness of infirm age. Oedipus guessed the riddle, and, by implication, acknowledged the truth of the Sphinx's description of man.

Which is of course the widely accepted view of mankind in modern secular societies. Week in week out the evolutionists describe natural man on the mass media; the schools assume the finality of the scientific description of reality, including natural man; (who dares question the infallibility of science—natural knowledge—or its pronouncements?) Thus in our secular society man the mortal worm is, paradoxically, denied the only dignity which properly belongs to us—our spiritual nature—and at the same time proclaimed as the lord of creation. Education of the mortal worm for a brief life on earth is inevitably therefore designed to fit men and women to the performance of tasks concerned with bodily life, tasks more or less skilled, but all alike directed to the production of material goods and the construction and control of machines, also utilized for material ends. Ultimately man becomes, within such an order, a replaceable spare part in the great machine a materialist society has constructed, with a built-in obsolescence after fifty or so years of efficient functioning. The modern state is a a self-perpetuating machine built to last longer than any individual lifetime, and we like to pretend that the state, or the world superstate, will last for ever—well, nearly for ever, and what difference is there between eternity and a very

long time indeed? The world will last our time, we shall not be here at the end; at most we wonder about our grandchildren, but who cares about their own progeny six generations hence? "They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it."(*Job* 4:20)

This is the implicit, and sometimes explicit view of the materialist Western society to which we belong, and it is difficult to remain totally untouched by the evolutionism of materialist science, which recognized only a material order, with humankind as part of that order—the most complex and "evolved" species which has produced man as the cleverest of the primates, by a process of "natural selection." This process may produce cleverer primates yet and (as many hopefully believe) is bound to do so, because evolution, guided though it is by blind chance, can result only in Utopia (Utopia, be it said, in the modern sense of the word, as a society in which all temporal mankind's aspirations and desires will be realized. The Catholic Thomas More would not have expected a society without any spiritual order to have any such result). In the modern Utopian dream, every disease will be "conquered," and so perhaps will death, and no one will go cold or hungry or unintegrated within the social structure; as for living, our machines will do that for us, thereby freeing us to enjoy this hell of spiritual meaninglessness for as long as we can endure it.

Utopians never give up their myth: the plain evidence goes to show that the English nation (to look no farther afield) simply cannot stand it, that the schoolchildren do not want to be trained for the kind of "jobs" that the machines provide, in the technological Utopia where thinking is something computers do, where "the brain" is synonymous with mind and thought. We have even had it claimed that a computer can write poems, and truth to say the examples given were all too like many produced by human beings who conceive themselves in terms of a mechanistic science.

Students engage in revolution, destruction making small demands in comparison with the complex programming of the University syllabus; besides satisfying some unformulated and baffled sense of frustration engendered by the secular society. The mass of mankind—the worker-ants—misled by the ever-present advertisements which tell us that Utopia is in every packet of this or that, grasp what they can, forever deceived by the trash of the machines which cheats their dreams of realization. Who can blame them that they are dissatisfied? Clever cynics who know about human dreams paint for them those desert islands, those far shores and clear Paradisal streams, unfelled trees, unbulldozed meadows, unravished Eves, that forever elude the purchasers of cigarettes and convenience foods, underwear and insurance policies, cosmetics made from slaughtered whales whose rotting carcases stink upon the real shores, and all the celestial omnibuses are driven on oil and coal and steel from Paradise Lost, and the tasteless bread and canned vegetables harvested from a waste land where the wild flowers and the bees are sprayed with poison, the rabbits, so popular on children's cot-covers, die of myxomatosis, and as the motorist fancies a tiger in his tank the real tigers of the earth are threatened with extermination. The world has never been more hideous, more uninhabitable, than the world created by an ideology which proclaims that this world is all, which gives to matter a primacy, an all-importance unknown to other civilizations. Decidedly the way to Utopia is long and hard for the last of the primates.

If man is indeed what Blake calls the mortal "worm of sixty winters" and "seventy inches long," born in a night to perish in a night, what can education be? In a world of pure materialism education can only be utilitarian, a training to fit the human spare part for the function it is to perform during its few useful years; after which there is nothing to expect but death and death is the end, as birth was the begin-

ning of life. The satisfaction of natural appetites is presumed to give the mortal worm, or naked ape, those satisfactions of which we are capable; including music, whose rhythms serve to stimulate or soothe, food and shelter, sensual pleasure, freedom from pain, hunger, cold, or the disorientation of those habits to which we are conditioned; "programmed," as it is nowadays called. And so, "distracted from distraction by distraction," as T.S. Eliot wrote of the dwellers in the waste land, we "get by." Drugs can alleviate whatever states of anxiety our souls may cause us, and there is yet another industry to cater for our inevitable dreams or daydreams: for these are an as yet unexplained flaw in the perfect adaptation and functioning of mortal life: mankind continues to imagine quite other things.

The Utopian view of humanity is of course untrue; untrue not because the deductions of science concerning natural law are incorrect within their own terms—the great merit of the scientific method is its respect for evidence and, in that sense, for truth—but untrue because the assumption—the premise of Western science, that nothing exists other than the quantifiable natural world, is false. Consciousness—to take the most obvious thing in the world—cannot, for example, be quantified, cannot be dealt with at all in terms of weight and measure, of those extensions in space or in time which are the only terms proper to material science. Mental and physical entities are incommensurable not because science has not "as yet" found a way of describing mental events in physical terms but because these belong to distinct orders. In measuring the brain waves of dreamers or of meditators scientists have not come one whit nearer to measuring the dreams of states of consciousness themselves, as such; nor can they ever do so within the terms of their proper field of knowledge. This is no reproach to natural science, which has its own field, and whose account of natural phenomena is impressive indeed—a field which rightly includes man's physical frame, its anatomy, physiology, and place within the natural universe.

But so overwhelmed are we by wave after wave of information about man's natural evolution and affinity with nature on the one side, and on the other medical explanations of whatever concerns the psyche, that we easily forget that man is *not* merely a clever primate; we forget that the brain is *not* the mind, that consciousness is *not* a property of the sense organs of which it makes use. We forget, in fact, that man is not a species of animal but a new kingdom, as distinct from the animal kingdom as mammals are distinct from rocks. Each kingdom, from the mineral to the vital, from the vital to the animate, from animal consciousness to the human kingdom of the Imagination, is subject to new laws proper to itself. This Teilhard de Chardin has made very clear to our generation, but still has not clearly enough reminded us that mankind, as human (for of course we share the laws of chemistry with the mineral world, the vital physiology with plants, and our bodily senses with the animals) is an invisible kingdom whose world is a mental world, subject to laws proper to itself which do not conform to the categories of time and space, or to any of the laws of "nature." Because this is in reality so, and equally so for atheists as for Christians, for Marxists as for Buddhists, the extreme picture of man as a spare part of his own machines can never altogether come about. We cannot altogether dehumanize ourselves. Whereas our opinions can make us very unhappy and raise in us all kinds of conflicts between what is so and what we opine to be so, they cannot alter the reality of what we are. We continue to be human, and insofar as we are human, we are spiritual beings.

Western materialism is an unprecedented departure from human culture, as it has existed and developed from the Stone Age to the present time. From the oldest examples of human art we see humankind seeking to express ideas, to discover a mental order; to explore our inner world in terms

of pantheons of "gods" who personify the qualities of human consciousness, our moods and modes of experience. From the earliest known human records we see humankind creating abstract patterns and forms not found in nature; gods of strange unnatural aspect—the more unnatural the more profoundly "human." Modern Amazonian savages asked Lévi-Strauss, that civilized Frenchman, why he and his kind did not paint their faces with abstract patterns in order (like the Amazonians) to affirm their humanity, their difference from the animals around them. They knew what Western anthropologists would seem to have forgotten, that to be human is, precisely, to live our myths, to live according to an inner order which is not natural, which is, in terms of natural law, unnatural. The distortions and deformations of the natural face and body, the paintings and tattooings practised by primitives from the land of El Dorado to Borneo or the Congo are supremely, specifically human, being expressions of a mental, an inner world, affirmed in opposition to, in challenge of, in affirmation against, a natural order. The pantheons of more advanced societies are more psychologically complex and subtle explorations of those inner regions of human consciousness. The familiar gods of Greece—still, in many respects, our own self-knowledge personified—are not mere moods and passions but intellections of great subtlety, related each to certain fields of knowledge. The Orphic theology in all its complexity of hierarchic relationship and causality is unsurpassed as an account of mankind's invisible worlds, a system no less elaborate in its structuring than the scientists' description of the kingdoms of nature. To name only one or two of the most obvious examples of the distinctness of these inner fields, Apollo is the principle of all mental clarity, knowledge of music and number, medicine, the ordering principle that belongs to the enlightened mind, to the rational; the changing moon-goddess to dark knowledge of the blood, to parturition, witchcraft, all kinds of feminine regions of experience. Dionysus is the genius of ecstatic possession by irrational states of consciousness, an exaltation unknown to the clear reason of Apollo's kingdom; while Ares takes over the warrior when, like the Irish Cuchullain, the battle-warp seizes him, his hair stands on end, his face is distorted with rage and his body filled with the berserk courage the Vikings delighted in, a transport of rage in which the warriors scarcely felt the wounds of battle. To each god his kingdom. In our own century these principles or energies of the psyche which materialist science had thought to dismiss as unrealities, or as primitive attempts by mankind to describe the "laws of nature," have been renamed by C.G. Jung the "archetypes" which are, as he says, self-portraits of the instincts. Jung was the tireless reminder of our forgetful age that the psyche is real; that it is also most dangerous. It is not from nature that this world stands in danger of destruction, but from the human mind which has invented hydrogen bombs and the ideologies in whose service such weapons may be used. If the most appalling apocalyptic prophecies are realized it will have been ourselves who have brought them about. The author of the Book of Revelation read only the possibilities within the inner worlds of mankind. We are inclined to read that book as a threat from an arbitrary and cruel (but fortunately, so the scientists reassure us, nonexistent) God: but read that terrifying book as the story of inner events within the human psyche reflected—as our thoughts inevitably must be—in the world of history—and we must tremble, not at what "God" might do to us, but at what we ourselves have it in us to do to ourselves and to our world. Is not that prophecy of poisoned seas and rivers, of Armageddon, of shelterless refugees, of destruction falling from the skies, already realized, not by some cosmic catastrophe or arbitrary act of "victimization," as it is called, of innocent humankind by a demon-god, but by the demons who inhabit the human soul?

All the great religious traditions have been attempts to cultivate the human soul.

Our materialist civilization has concerned itself with the well-being of the naked apes, with food and shelter and the learning of the skills necessary to the survival of the body; but any attempt to bring order to the inner worlds, to nourish the specifically human, has gone by default. Not altogether so, of course, for the past is still powerful and two thousand years of Christendom and all the wisdom of the Greek and the Hebrew traditions before that are still with us; or at least with the educated sections of society, who are less at the mercy of current ideologies. Pythagoras continues to impose upon the soul the order of the diatonic scale through such music as is still composed according to its laws. Christian art continues to remind us of the celestial hierarchies of angels, of the lives of saints lived in accordance with the laws not of nature but of the spirit; of the Christian myth of the birth of the divine principle into the world of generation, fully manifested in that sublime figure of Christ Pantocrator, the ruler of all, depicted in the dome of every Orthodox basilica; and whose suffering under the world rulers for whom man is natural man, the armed ape and the togaed ape, Western Catholicism, in the image of the Crucifix, has never allowed us to forget. For the struggle to rise from the natural to the human kingdom is hard and endless, and none of us has succeeded so well that we can afford to dismiss the symbol of the Crucifixion, which Utopians would like to banish from their brave new world; which is the hell of the human spirit whose kingdom, as it is said in the Christian Gospel, is "not of this world."

Let me remind you that we are still considering the question "What is man?" I have suggested that man is, in truth, not a mortal worm but a spiritual being, immaterial, immeasurable, who is never born and never dies, because spirit is not bounded or contained within the categories of the material world of time and space, of duration and extension. In this sense we are immortal, eternal, boundless within our own universe. Yet of the kingdom that is truly ours, specifically human, we have realized very little.

Nowadays the term "human" has been inverted to the point of signifying precisely what is least human in us, our bodily appetites and their gratification, and all that belongs to natural man; while the study of philosophy, for example, or the practice of some religious asceticism is considered "inhuman." Nothing in our "permissive" society is held to be more "human" than the act of sex; but Alexander the Great—Aristotle's pupil—said that man was never *less* human than in that act. He was not, of course, speaking of love, which is of the soul and has no necessary connection with the sexual instinct. Sex is an animal function, love a human experience. It is all too easy to revert to the animal which we, as humanity, must labor to transcend in order to come into even a small portion of our potential kingdom. The late Dr. Schumacher, who in his book, *Guide to the Perplexed*, made many things so clear, liked to quote Aquinas's words, "Even the least knowledge of things superior is of greater value than the most extensive knowledge of things inferior."

Having, therefore, reminded ourselves that humanity, insofar as we are human, is a kingdom not in nature, "not of this world," but an invisible inner universe, let us consider this universe a little more closely.

While every pantheon is a less or more perfect, a more or less crude and simple, or subtly complex representation of the structure of the human inner worlds, certain elements seem to recur and to represent the abiding structure of the psyche. The sphere quadrated by a six-armed cross, or the circle quadrated by a four-armed cross; fourness under many symbols—the four-faced gods of India; the four "sons" of the Egyptian Harpocrates; Jesus Christ with the four evangelists, the four "living creatures" of Ezekiel's fourfold Chariot of God, or the lion, eagle, ox, and angel of the book of Revelation. C.G. Jung in his Psychological Types has made the Four familiar as the "functions" of the human psyche, reason, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Blake, basing his symbol upon Ezekiel and St. John, describes the four "Zoas" or "living creatures" whose conflicts and rebellions form the drama of his Prophetic Books. These four are in every man; and Blake speaks of the Four Zoas as the four "faces" of the Universal Man; as the four rivers of Paradise; as four "worlds" or "universes"—distinct worlds, each with its own mode of knowledge, distinct and incommensurable, as feeling or intuition with reason, or sensation with the other three. Blake, at the end of the eighteenth century, had already diagnosed what he calls "the sickness of Albion"—that is, of the English national being—as the usurpation by the rational function—Urizen—of the throne and scepter of supremacy which properly belongs to the imagination, the "human existence itself" and divine *anthropos*, made in the image of God, which is above the Four. Urizen is the rational mind, basing its deductions upon what Blake calls a "ratio of the five senses," and his creation is scientific materialism. The rational mind is aware of no form of knowledge higher than itself, calling the Imagination "delusion and fancy." This spiritual sickness of the English nation Blake saw typified in those culture-heroes of science, Bacon, Newton, and Locke (to whose number others have since been added—Darwin, Huxley, Russell and so on) who share the false premise of all, that "matter," a substance existing apart from the mind which perceives it, is the only ground of the "real." Under the rule of Urizen, feeling becomes no longer a mode of knowledge, but a selfish emotion; while intuition, refusing the rule of Urizen, rebels in vain. Although Blake was well able to argue the case against rationalism in its own terms—and did so most trenchantly—his most powerful weapon was the depiction of man the rationalist, anxious and purblind, unable ever to complete his conquest of the rebellious energies of life; a foolish travesty of God the Father.

Blake describes the "sickness of Albion" under the usurping rule of Urizen as a "deadly sleep," using the Platonic term, which sees unconsciousness, oblivion of the

real, forgetfulness of the eternal worlds within, as the mark of the human condition described in the Jewish-Christian tradition as the Fall. Mankind is "fallen," specifically, from a human (imaginative) into a natural mode of consciousness. Thus understood the Fall has nothing to do with the commission of certain specific "sinful" acts, but in a descent from a higher state of being into a lower, from the Imagination to the natural body; as symbolized, in the Biblical story, by the eating of the apple of sexuality.

Every "revealed" tradition is agreed upon the essential structure of the human psyche, of that invisible inner universe which is the properly human kingdom, from which we have "fallen" into natural life; all holding our present state of consciousness as imperfect in relation to that which we essentially are, man as first created in the order of "origins," by which a temporal beginning in the sense of the scientific evolutionists is not of course meant, but rather the type, pattern, archetype of the *anthropos*, "made in the image of God," as described in the first chapter of Genesis. The "human," according to tradition, is not, as for our own society, natural man but the archetypal perfect humanity, of whom every average man is a more or less obscured and distorted image. Our own secular society has sought to make everyone happy by taking as the norm "fallen" man, Plato's dwellers in the Cave; but flattery of our fallen, or forgetful condition can only superficially and briefly deceive us into believing that all is well, that we are all we should be, since each of us carries within ourselves, however obscured, the image of the *anthropos*, called by the Hindus the Self, by the Buddhists the Buddha-nature, by the Jews Adam Kadmon, by the Christians Jesus the Christ, by Blake the Divine Humanity. Jung has chosen to use the Indian term, the Self (spelled with a capital in distinction from the individual selfhood, or empirical ego) as being perhaps the least localized name by which the God Within can be described and identified. The goal of human life is the total realization and attainment in our lives of this archetypal humanity, our true spiritual identity.

This is a goal few have attained. The Buddhist world holds that Prince Siddhartha attained perfect enlightenment; Christians believe that Jesus was the Christ, fully incarnating the archetypal first-created Son of God. The Hindu tradition holds that there have been several revelations of the divinity in human form; that whenever the world has fallen into spiritual darkness a new revelation of the divine Person has again made known to us our own forgotten reality. All traditions are agreed that the divine humanity, although the type of all humanity, has scarcely ever been realized: for the Christian world, once only; for the Jews, not yet but someday; no religious tradition flatters us, as do the Utopians, by allowing us to believe that we can come within reach, or barely within apprehension, of that which we essentially are. Human perfection is something scarcely ever attained, few attain enlightenment, few are saints. One of the most deplorable features of the secular West is the universal complacency of a mankind often barely human at all, in properly human terms. Many "primitive" races—many American Indians, or the illiterate country people still to be found here and there in the West of Ireland or of Scotland, live upon a higher and more properly human level than the sophisticated products of our technological culture. I do not doubt that many powerful Commissars could learn much of the real nature of humanity from village grandmothers with shawls over their heads and a corner of icons; icons which are, by definition, depictions of invisible spiritual essences. You find their depiction in the interior of any Orthodox church—in the Mother of God, the Pantocrator, angels, saints; or in Italy's pre-renaissance basilicas—in the Church of Saint Francis at Assisi, where the episodes of the saint's life Giotto has depicted are all of them spiritual events—dreams, visions, the casting out of demons, the beholding of the eternal Christ. In the secular world the facts that make up

our news, the events narrated as biography or as fiction—are all of the natural order; how few belong to this human order, which we of the West have so deeply betrayed.

If, then, in order to "educate" a human being it is first necessary to answer that old question "what is man?" are we to process, to condition, to "form," to "brainwash" natural mankind to fit human beings for a longer or shorter life span in the natural world and the performance of more or less skilled tasks in the great mechanism? Or ought we not rather to consider man's invisible kingdom, the boundless interior regions we inhabit, the almost unguessed, undiscerned spiritual regions within us, so close to childhood, but later only to be attained through aspirations and disciplines which have little to do with the amassing of facts or the learning of technical skills which passes for education in our secular society?

Blake called the Divine Humanity, the imprinted archetype, the Imagination. Imagination, he said, is "the true man," the unifying life of which the Four are the faculties, the instruments. Whereas the soul, with its fourfold universe, is individual, the Imagination is universal—the universal Self alike in all. The word Imagination suggests, in common parlance, the arts; and insofar as, in a normal society, music, painting, poetry, and architecture are depictions of mankind's inner worlds, the proper language of the soul, this is true; for whereas science measures the natural world, the arts alone can depict the inner world. Blake called music, painting, and poetry "man's three ways of conversing with Paradise which the Flood did not sweep away"—the "flood of the five senses" in which materialism drowns and submerges the world of Imagination. Yeats, writing of the soul's country, also saw the arts as its proper expression; we can only know its invisible nature through those forms in which it is embodied:

Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence.

How else can we know of those inner invisible forms otherwise than in their expression, their "monuments"? In the same poem Yeats renounces natural forms; he is speaking still of the forms of art:

Once out of nature, I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But from such forms as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold, and gold enamelling...

He is thinking of Byzantium, the civilization he held most fully to have expressed a collective human vision of the soul's invisible country, "the work of many that seems the work of one," and all in the service of their "invisible Master." That master is, of course, the archetype, the *anthropos*, the Divine Humanity, the Self, revealing itself through architecture and icon, down to the minute craftsmanship of ivory-carver and goldsmith.

But while it is true that the arts are the proper expression of the inner worlds, of mankind's imaginative self-knowledge, from the caves of Ajanta or Lascaux, to Santa Sophia and Chartres—we must remember that not all that goes by the name of art is an embodiment of inner reality. Plato condemned naturalism in art, the mere imitation of natural behavior. If the soul and its world—and, above that, the universal Imagination and its order—is not known, how can it be expressed? And that we live in an age of spiritual ignorance is everywhere evident in our art forms; which are for the most part self-portraits of states of ignorance not of knowledge. Imitative, naturalistic art of the kind fashionable in the nineteenth century was not always without some vision, some reflection of Paradise seen in the forms of nature; we think of Samuel Palmer, of Calvert, Constable, Turner, for whom nature is itself the glass in which Imagination beholds itself; but for many more, realistic depiction is mere trick photography of natural appearances; as is the "social realism" of Marxist materialism.

The newer fashions, from abstract impressionism to the present, proclaim art as

of "self-expression," sometimes glorified by the name "creativity"; American universities have classes in so-called "creative writing," and in our own schools there is endless talk of teaching children to express themselves "creatively." But self-expression is, unfortunately, very far from being an expression of imaginative vision and imaginative knowledge. The final result of this century's guiding principle in the arts of "breaking with the restriction of the past" in order to be totally "original" has been a school of scribbles whose total originality is total meaninglessness, and of striking uniformity. Such art and such verse expresses only the ignorance of its authors; expresses nothing at all. The only "originality" that has any value is a return to the origin, the lost knowledge of the Imagination.

The art of a secular society has suffered fatally from the identification of "knowledge" with natural science. It has been forgotten that there can be "knowledge," in any precise or universal sense, of the invisible worlds; knowledge no less absolute, no less exact, than science's knowledge of the natural universe. Therefore, whereas we know very well that in order to be a mathematician or a chemist we must study the laws of mathematics or of chemistry, we have forgotten that there is knowledge proper to the soul. It is true that the mathematical and chemical laws of nature are everywhere expressed in the world about us, but we do not for that reason expect our schoolchildren to go and find them out for themselves by observation or to practice "free expression" in chemistry, or to "liberate themselves" from traditional mathematics in order to become original astronomers or physicists. If Einstein's universe is a "liberation" from Newton's it presumes prior knowledge of Newton's. We have far too much respect for science to turn it, as we have turned the arts, into a children's play-ground. We cannot expect our children, our "young" poets and "young" painters, to discover for themselves the abiding order of the invisible worlds. Just as

those who study mathematics or chemistry or plant morphology respond with recognition to what they are taught, so, far from inhibiting talent and "creativity," knowledge of higher things can only awaken a similar response and widen the field of the individual imagination. But we have denied or forgotten that the invisible worlds can be fields of knowledge which can be taught and learned and transmitted and communicated. Other civilizations have taken this to be so as a matter of course. From Indian metaphysics, Platonic theology, Christian doctrine, down to the religiously preserved sacred stories of the most primitive tribes, every race has preserved its own embodiments of a "revealed" tradition concerning the inner nature of things, the order of the soul. These theologies, theogonies, sacred rites, and tribal myths are not pastimes or self-expression, they are the self-knowledge of the human psyche upon which alone a culture can be based, be that culture simple as that of the Bushman or metaphysically rich as Vedanta. It is we who are the barbarians—spiritual barbarians, that is—who lack this collective language, this shared knowledge, upon which the goldsmiths of Byzantium, the builders of Chartres, the musicians of the diatonic scale, the painters of Florence, down to Yeats and the poets of the Irish renaissance, drew.

My conclusion, then, is that our materialist secular society, well though it may educate in the natural sciences, altogether fails to educate the human soul, the invisible humanity which is, in Plato's words as well as Blake's, "the true man." We are simply not educated in these things which above all make us human. Those who inherit—who have not yet lost, under the cancerous impact of Western ideologies—some metaphysical, religious, and iconographic tradition, some language of symbolic images built up throughout a civilization, are fortunate indeed. For the rest of us, all is to be remade; not altogether as if it had never been, for in the relics, the survivals of the past, we can rediscover lost knowledge, piece by piece reconstructing something, perhaps, which will serve a broken culture without a tradition of its own. Reality is always and everywhere itself; but who shall say whether we can use the language of Christendom, of the Far East, of Islam (the last prophetic revelation), of Jungian psychology, of Kabbalah, of the American Indians? In all the arts there is a confusion of tongues. Blake knew everything except how to find symbolic or linguistic terms to communicate what he knew; he was eclectic in his symbols but orthodox in his Christian theology. Yeats's lifelong labor was to test, to discard or to retain, a great range of symbols and terms drawn from many traditions, Rosicrucian, Neoplatonic, Far Eastern. To recreate a common language for the communication of knowledge of spiritual realities, and of the invisible order of the psyche, is the problem now for any serious artist or poet, as it should be for educators. Yet the problem of language would resolve itself once these worlds were re-opened to our experience, for the knowledge itself is primary, the terms—symbols—secondary. This rediscovery, re-learning, is a long hard task—a lifelong task for those who undertake it; yet the most rewarding of all tasks, since it is a work of self-discovery which is at the same time a universal knowledge, "knowledge absolute" as the Vedas claim. So-called "creativity" and "self-expression" will not get us very far. The Grecian goldsmith, the Gothic sculptor, the painter of churches or elaborator of Islamic geometric patterns in a mosque were none of them "expressing themselves" in the modern sense of the term; far less breaking with the past, or being "revolutionary." They were making use of the shared knowledge of a spiritual tradition that illuminates their work, as it illuminated the inner lives of those who participated in its unity of culture. ◇

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Earth People *by David Price*

Here is the story of how the animals came out of the ground as told by N'ukkâiyalhá Kithaulhú, a Nambiquara Indian who lives in western Mato Grosso, Brazil.

Once upon a time, all the animals lived in an enormous hole in the ground. It was a huge pit—far across from rim to rim and very, very deep. A man who was called Master of the Animals took care of them.

One day he decided to go away for a while, and so he spoke to a shaman and told him what to do.

"When you are hungry for meat," he said, "just stand at the edge of the pit and whistle. A big, hefty game animal will come out for you to kill and eat. But don't do this too often or all the animals will come out and scatter throughout the land."

After the Master of the Animals had left, the shaman said to another man, "Let's go and have a look. I'm hungry for meat, and a nice fat game animal would really taste good!"

When they came to the pit, the shaman said to his companion, "Now watch this. All I have to do is whistle and an animal will come out—a boar, a tapir or an armadillo. You can kill whatever comes out."

But when he whistled, only a little snake slithered out. It was a toucan-snake, which has hardly any meat at all.

"This won't do!" the shaman exclaimed. "I'll whistle again and maybe a big animal like a boar, a tapir, a monkey, or an anteater will come out. Then we'll have lots of meat!"

So he stepped to the edge of the great pit and whistled again. And once again a toucan-snake came out.

"Is this all we're going to get?" he asked. "This is hardly worth killing."

But they killed it anyway. And then the companion said, "Why don't you keep trying until we get something good?"

"I don't know," the shaman answered doubtfully. "I think that might not be such a good idea. But since you ask, I will oblige." He whistled again and again and again.

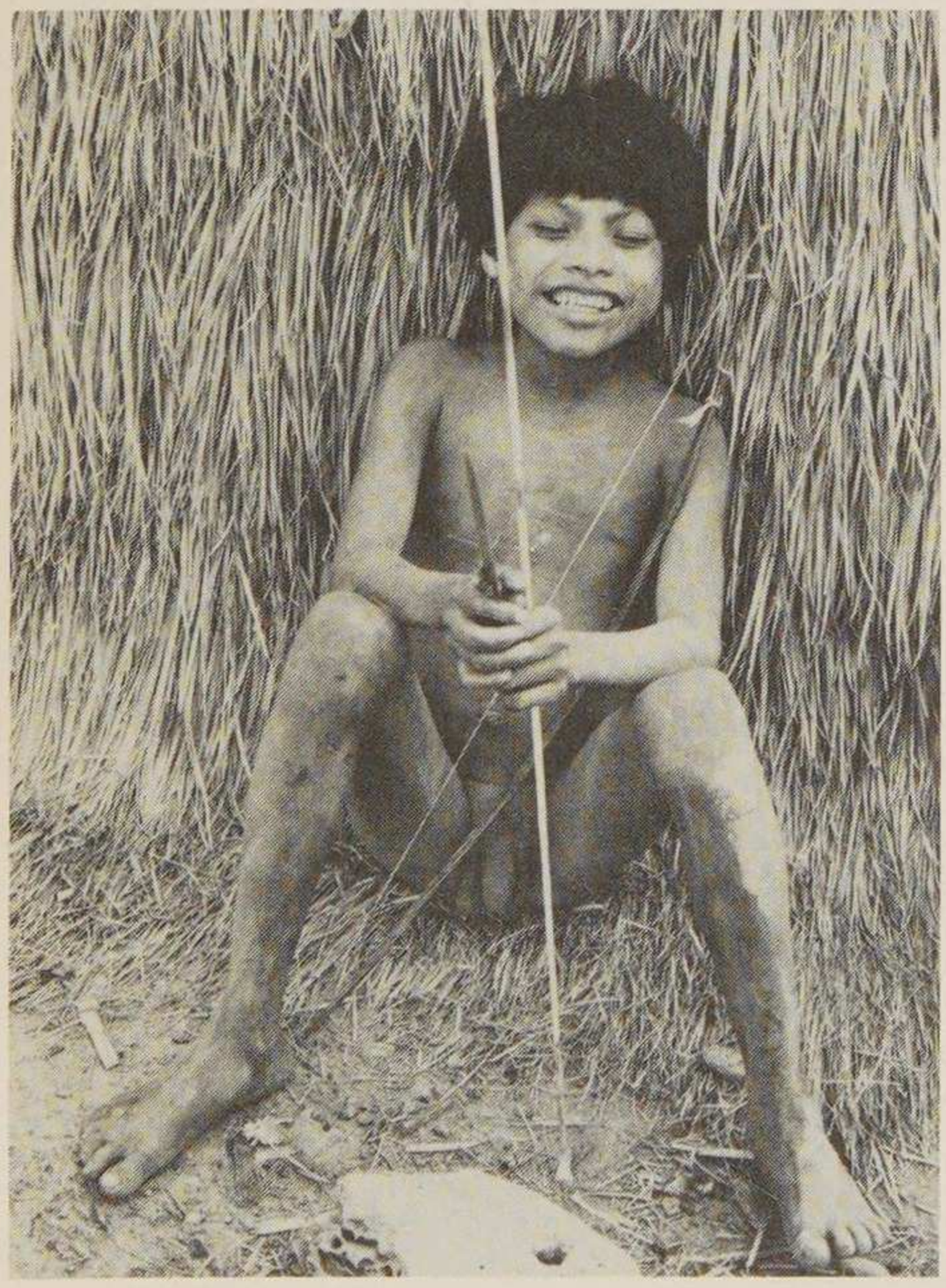
In a great rush, all the animals ran out of the pit. Out came the boar, the tapir, the monkey, and the armadillo. The shaman wanted to stop them, to keep them in one place, but there was no way. With a pounding of many hooves, they were gone.

Later, when the Master of the Animals was on his way home, an armadillo hurried across his path.

"What's this?" he said in surprise. "This isn't right at all." So he dug a hole and buried the armadillo in the ground. He put the monkeys up in the trees and brought the boars together in a dangerous herd. He made the tapir sleep by day and roam the forest by night.

When he got back to the pit he was really angry. He said to the shaman, "I told you how to take care of the animals, but you didn't listen. I left you with a good thing and you ruined it. From now on, the animals will be scattered over the face of the earth, and you will have to seek them out in order to kill them."

* * *



The Nambiquara sleep on the bare ground. This is the first thing foreigners notice about them. Brazilians and other Indians use hammocks or beds. The neighboring Pareci spend hundreds of hours preparing palm fibers, twining them into string, and knotting the string to make elegant, reticulated hammocks. A missionary once brought a Pareci hammock to a Nambiquara village and challenged the people to duplicate it. They examined it with interest and began twining palm fibers, but when they discovered how much work was involved, they quit. They would rather spend their nights snuggled up to the warm ashes of a dying fire than spend their days making hammocks.

The Pareci call the Nambiquara *Waikoákore*, or "Earth People." They call themselves *ánúsú*, which just means "people." They build their villages where there is fine, white sand, and we would find nothing unusual about their lying on it if only it were on the shore of an ocean.

A Nambiquara has no consciousness of belonging to any political entity larger than the cluster of neighboring villages where he and his kinsmen live. Such a cluster is not socially autonomous, however, for its members often marry people from other neighboring groups. Their marriages are supposed to establish ties that inhibit the outbreak of hostility, although marriages that fail to work out may, paradoxically, lead to feuds. Fifty years ago there were more than two dozen village clusters, each proud of its own, particular heritage. They gave each other nicknames that usually referred to some peculiarity of the region in which they lived—Jungle People, Savanna People, Alligator People, People of the Buriti Palm, People of the Pequi Fruit. Each village cluster lived in a territory of sixty-five to one hundred and seventy square kilometers containing both forest and savanna.

The Nambiquara are very aware of the relationship between plants, animals, and the soil they live on . They distinguish between "red-sand savanna," where there is only sparse, wiry grass; "white-sand savanna," where there is a scatter of low, gnarled trees; "red-sand forest," where trees are

small and close together; and gallery forest, where there is black, organic dirt. They also recognize that there is a special strip of vegetation at the edge of the forest that protects it from the encroachment of the savanna.

The Nambiquara take their living from the land by practicing two different kinds of economic activity that are opposed and, in many ways, contradictory. Their major source of protein is meat, which comes from hunting, and their major source of carbohydrates is corn, manioc, and other tubers which they grow in gardens.

They hunt deer and rheas in the savanna, boar and monkeys in the forest. Sometimes a man goes off for the day to hunt alone, and sometimes two men or more hunt together. A family may go away for several days, camping at night in hastily-built windscreens. People travel by a network of trails: strong clean trails worn deep in the ground that leave the village in every direction; long, steady paths that wind through the savanna; and barely discernible passages through the forest where the hunter soundlessly stalks his quarry. The Nambiquara hunter knows how to call birds until they come within reach of his arrows; he can use curare so that monkeys will fall to the ground and not hang where they die; and he lies in wait near mud holes where animals come for salt. When he shoots an animal, the arrow's sharp bamboo point makes a wound that bleeds freely, leaving tiny flecks of red by which he can track it until it drops, exhausted, to be finished off. Through a vast fund of knowledge about the habits of game animals and how to hunt them, the Nambiquara overcome the disadvantage of dependency on a dispersed resource.

Most of the vegetable foods eaten by the Nambiquara are raised in their gardens. They know that many wild plants are edible, but these form only a minor part of

their diet. It is easier to use vegetable foods that are not scattered, but grow abundantly in one place. The only soils that are rich enough for agriculture occur in the forest. Each year during the rainy season the men choose likely-looking areas and clear circular plots eighty meters or more in diameter. At the end of the dry season, they burn the trees as they lie and plant their crops among the charred trunks. When corn is ripe, in a few months, it is harvested and stored in granaries. Manioc bushes must grow for nearly a year before they produce tubers big enough to use. From then on, women go to the gardens and dig them every few days.

The practice of agriculture requires that people live near their gardens so that they can protect and care for them and harvest the food they produce. The Nambiquara do not like to live in the jungle, however, so they build their villages on the edge of the savanna and make their gardens in the nearby forest. A village consists of two or three thatched huts on a little patch of sand that is kept clear of weeds. Children play in the sand; manioc bread is baked in the sand; and when people die, they are buried in the sand. A place is considered a village only if

someone is buried there, and when people die far from an existing village, they are carried to a spot where the presence of nearby gardening lands means that a village can someday be founded. As a seed buried in the earth gives rise to a plant, the dead beneath the ground give rise to a community of the living.

Most jungle soils do not retain their fertility. Many of the nutrients available to garden plants come from the ashes in which they grow. Thus, only a single crop is grown in each place, and every year a new garden is cleared. Old gardens are allowed to revert to forest, and only after twenty years or more can they be cleared and planted again. In much less time than this, all of the good land within easy walking distance of the village is used up, and the villagers must move elsewhere. They may choose a former village site that was inhabited a long time ago, or they may choose a new spot where white-sand savanna meets black-dirt forest and there is a good supply of water. No matter where the village moves, the area will already be familiar to the villagers, for it is somewhere in the territory which they call home.

The search for meat is more successful if the hunter moves around; the raising of plants is more successful if the cultivator stays close to his gardens. The Nambiquara alternate these two activities, and over the course of the year they spend about half their time in the village and half on the trail. The combination of hunting with shifting, slash-and-burn agriculture is probably the only way that man can live in the tropical forest without irrevocably altering its fragile ecological balance.

The kinsmen who use a particular territory do not own the land, in a Western sense, but they have rights to all it produces. If attacked, they defend their homes and gardens, but not the places where they hunt. This does not mean that they own the land close to home more explicitly than the rest of their territory. It only indicates that they can fight for resources that are concentrated in one place, but not for those which are dispersed. The members of a local village cluster do not possess the land so much as they are possessed *by* it. They take their identity from the territory in which they were born. A Nambiquara does not become an Alligator Person because his father was an Alligator Person or his mother was an Alligator Person, but because he was born in the land of the Alligator People.

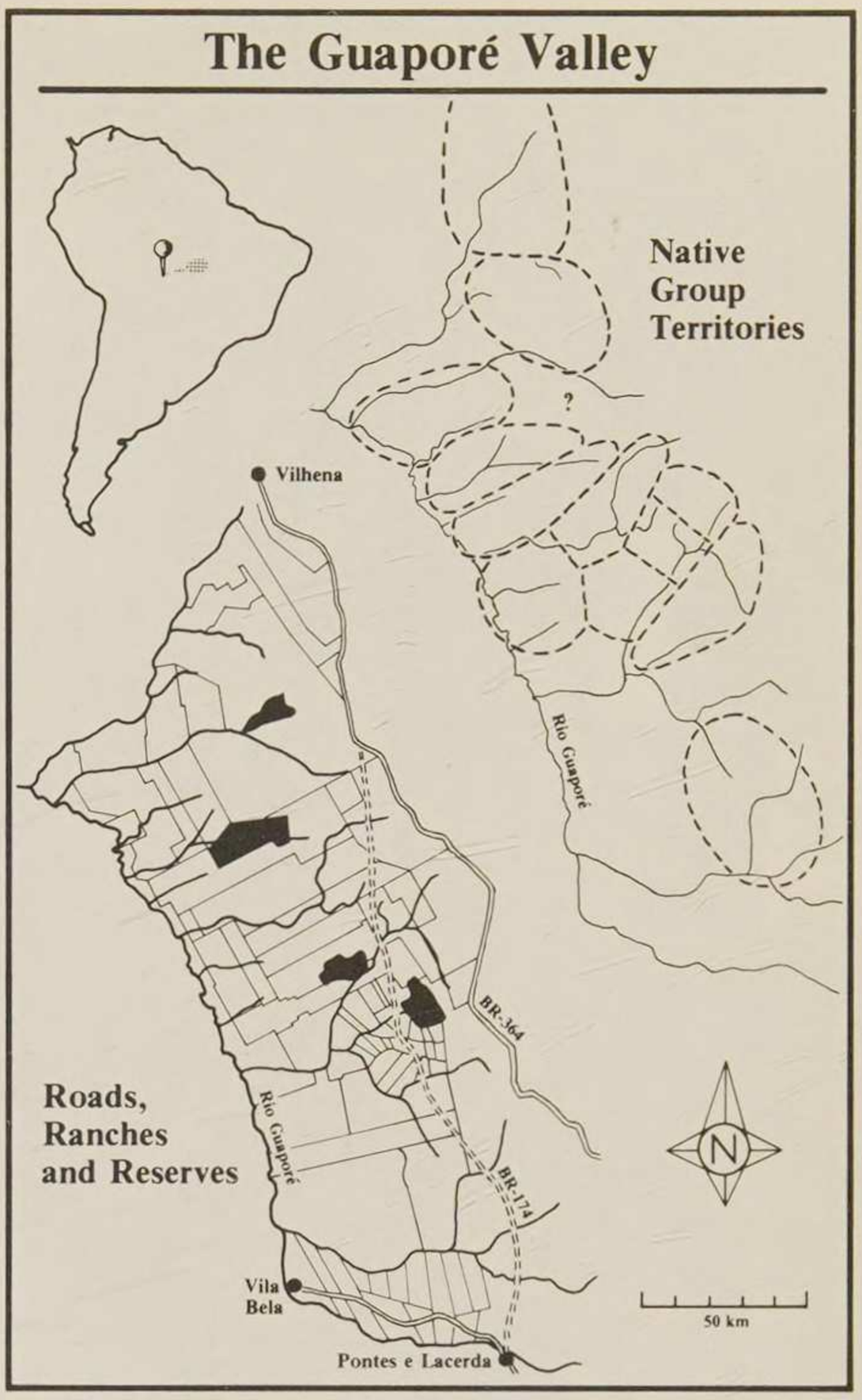
The Nambiquara region is now being taken over by people who use the land in an entirely different way. This conquest began long ago but was given impetus by a gravel-surfaced road built through the area in 1960. Lands where the Indians have lived for centuries were sold by the state as if unencumbered. The new owners are wealthy individuals and corporation that can benefit from fiscal incentives offered by the Brazilian government to those who will invest in the "development" of the Brazilian interior. They brought thousands of laborers into the region to clear the forest. Some of the tropical hardwoods found their way to the lumbermills, but most of the trees were felled and burned. Then grass was planted and cattle were put out to pasture. Barbed-wire fences keep them from scattering. Unlike the wild animals that supply meat to the Indians, beef cattle can be contained within a restricted area and "harvested." Grasslands, like forests, can sustain themselves by mulching their roots with decaying organic matter. But the desire to maximize short-term profits leads ranchers to put too many cattle on the land, which jeopardizes long-term productivity. Since the ranchers own the land itself and not just what it produces, they can do what they please with it, even though they may, finally, destroy it.

The presence of Indians has been inconvenient for the ranchers because Article 198 of the Brazilian Constitution says that lands inhabited by Indians are the inalienable property of the federal government. Unfortunately, the interests of the ranchers have played a greater role in shaping Brazilian policy toward the Nambiquara than has the

national constitution. Nearly thirty different local groups, each with its own territory, were conceptually lumped together as a single "tribe" called "Nambiquara." In 1968 a large reservation was established to serve as a future homeland for all these Nambiquara Indians. It was in the highest, driest, most useless part of the region and contained the territories of three Nambiquara-speaking groups as well as that of a completely unrelated "tribe" called Salumá. The area most coveted by investors was a broad valley extending for nearly 250 kilometers along the northeastern side of the Guaporé River. The Guaporé Valley contained the biggest forest and the best soil in the region. It also contained a dozen different Nambiquara groups. An attempt was made, beginning in 1973, to move these groups to the reservation. Ultimately, four different groups were moved, but after periods ranging from a few months to six years, they all returned to their homes in the Guaporé.

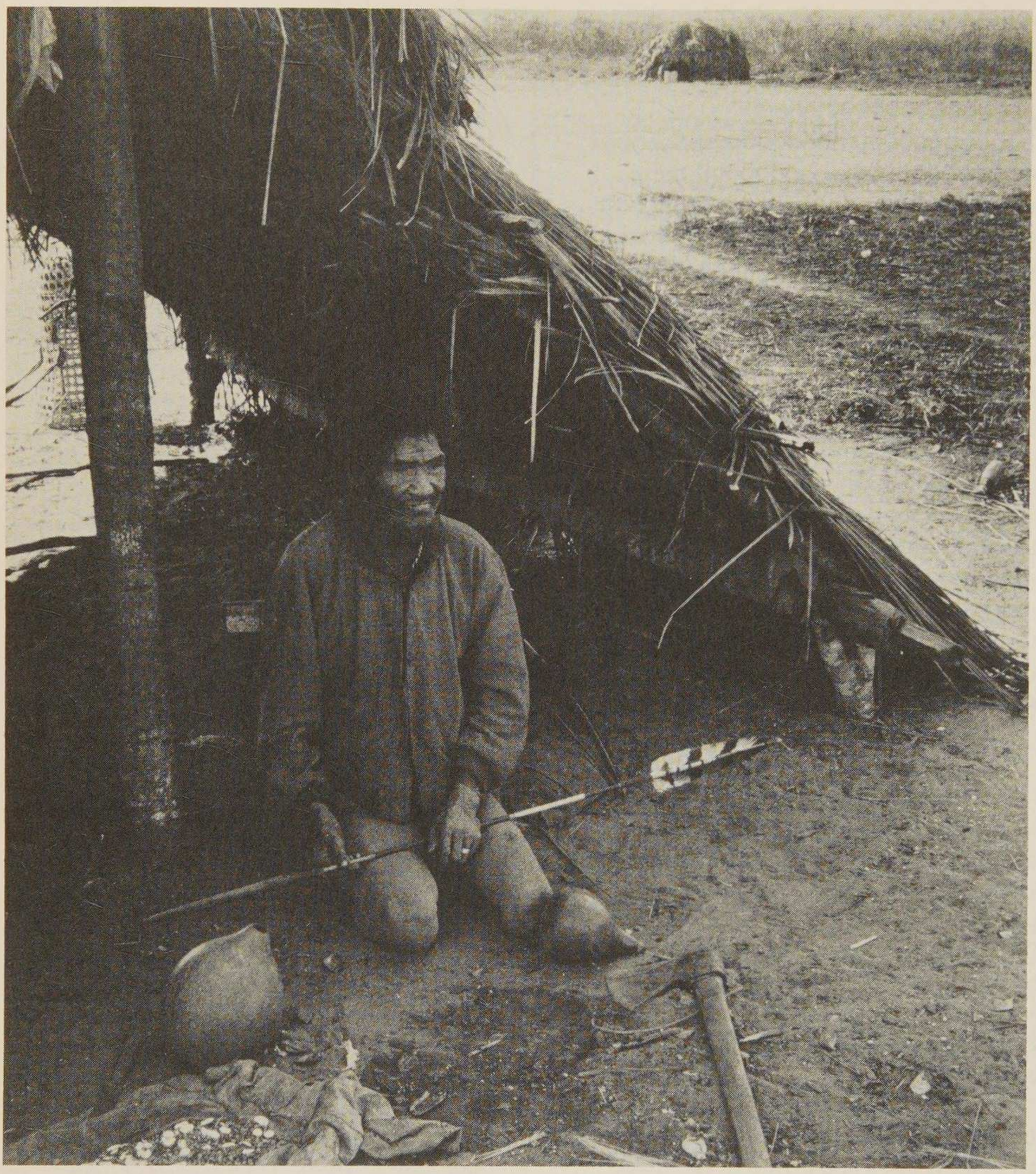
The failure of these people to adjust to life on the reservation was attributed to their inability, as forest dwellers, to adapt to the arid savanna. In 1975 an attempt was made to concentrate all the Indians dispersed throughout the Valley in a reasonably large, relatively unspoiled area at its southern end. This effort was opposed by ranchers who owned property in the area, and the five groups that were moved there also returned home.

Finally, the Brazilian authorities decided that it would be necessary to make a small reserve for each group in the place where it actually lived. Well over half the Guaporé Valley had already been deforested. But in 1979, four small areas ranging between ten and twenty-two square kilometers were surveyed. These areas included the villages currently occupied by the survivors of seven local groups. They do not include space enough to hunt nor the raw materials needed for making bows and arrows. They do not include sufficient land so that villages can move far enough to maintain the environmental balance. And for five other groups, no land at all has been set aside.



The wave of immigrants brought the Nambiquara new diseases which they had no idea how to treat. They had excellent techniques for dealing with the illnesses that traditionally afflicted them. But they did not know what to do about diseases such as malaria, measles, influenza, or tuberculosis. The population plummeted. Over the past five years, three-quarters of the Indians who died in the Guaporé Valley were under the age of fifteen, and thirty per cent of the babies born did not survive their first year.

The Brazilian agency in charge of Indian affairs is called Funai, an acronym for National Indian Foundation. It is in an anomalous position as an arm of the Brazilian government that is supposed to assist the victims of Brazilian expansion. Still, if it



were located in the governmental hierarchy so as to make it proof against outside interests, and if it were composed of professionals with a career commitment to the organization, it might do its job reasonably well. Unfortunately, however, this is not the case. It is subordinated to the Ministry of the Interior, whose primary interest is national "development." It has too many office workers and too few people in the field. Most of its budget is used to pay the salaries of Brazilians rather than help Indians, and the disbursement of funds is interrupted during the first four months of every year, while the previous year's expenditures are audited. From 1975 through 1979, more than half the deaths among Guaporé Valley Indians occurred during these months.

The situation would be even worse except for the dedication of two Indian Agents, Sílbene de Almeida and Marcelo dos Santos, who have persevered in spite of the shortcomings of the agency they work for. They have managed to hold the death rate down to 5.7 per hundred per year. They have headed off violent clashes with cattle ranchers. The are working with the Indians to find a new subsistence base before the game animals have all disappeared. They have done everything in their power to make it clear to their superiors that the Indians need a more adequate system of reservations.

But the Brazilian government is now planning to undertake an enormous "development" project that will affect the Nambiquara and more than thirty other native societies. The project, called Polonoroeste, is to be implemented in an area of 410,000 square kilometers extending between Cuibá and Porto Velho, the capitals of Mato Grosso and Rondonia. A 1500-kilometer asphalt road connecting these cities will pass directly through the Guaporé Valley. A system of gravel-surfaced lateral roads will be built, organized colonizations will be undertaken, silos and mills for collecting and processing agricultural produce will be set up, and technical expertise will be put at the disposal of agricultural developers. These plans take no more notice of the Indians who legitimately own much of the land than of the animals in the forest.

Project Polonoroeste is expected to cost more than one and one quarter billion dollars. Brazil has asked the World Bank to finance a third of this amount. The World Bank knows that the project will cause property values to soar, placing even greater pressure on Indian lands, and that hordes of settlers will bring more Western diseases. Since the Bank does not want to be seen as an accessory to genocide, it made financing of the Polonoroeste Project contingent on Brazil's commitment to provide adequate safeguards for the Indians. At first, Brazil rejected this condition as an invasion of its internal affairs. Later however, it agreed to have the Funai develop a special program for the Indians in the project area.

A recently-appointed president of the Funai, Adhemar Ribeiro da Silva, had attempted, during his first few months in office, to make the agency into a more effective guardian of Indian rights. Suddenly, however, he and other top men were replaced by a group of military officers. The new president, Col. Joâo Carlos Nobre da Veiga, previously headed the security and information service of the Rio Doce mining conglomerate. Other members of his staff had prior experience in military intelligence, and within a year it was announced that the much-feared CSN (National Security Council) and SNI (National Information Service) would henceforth participate in work undertaken by the Funai. Members of the technical staff who were deeply committed to the welfare of the Indians were harassed until they resigned in protest or signed petitions which led to their dismissal. More than fifty career Indian specialists were eliminated in this way. The directors of the Funai justified the purge by suggesting that the employees who were fired had been agents of "international communism."

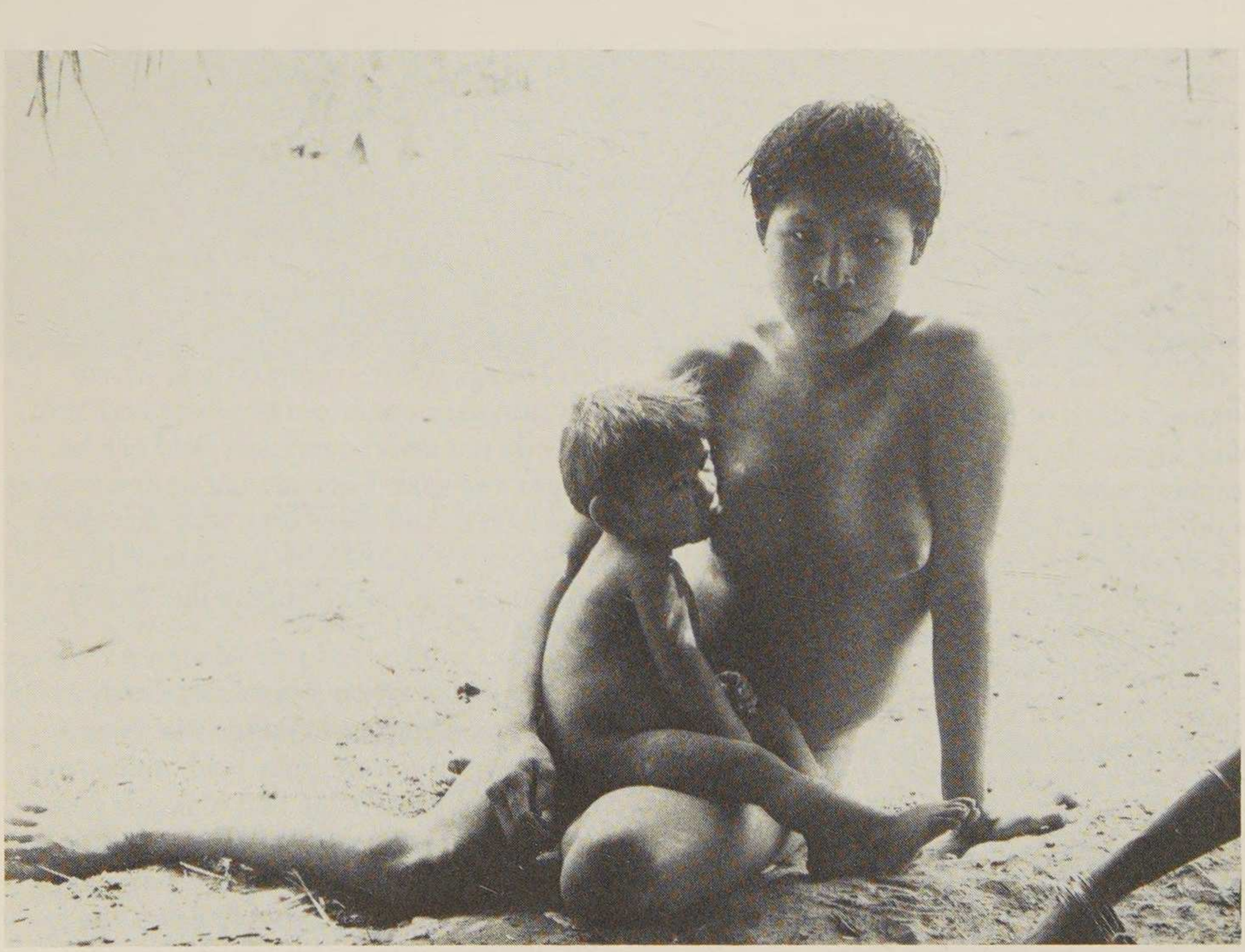
There are 600 Nambiquara and more than 7,000 other Indians in the Polonoroeste area. They are all threatened with extinction because they stand in the way of "development." They do not see the menace bearing down on them. They cannot believe that strangers have rights to land where they and their ancestors have always lived. They do not understand how land can be bought and sold. They are not united among themselves. And there is no way that they can resist domination by a nation of 120 million people, backed up by the World Bank.

Ironically, when Western society crushes a tribal people such as the Nambiquara to appropriate their land, it destroys the body of knowledge that makes it possible for a stable human population to live on that land without upsetting the ecological balance. This body of knowledge is the result of innumerable observations, made

over the course of thousands of years. It is a practical knowledge, full of details useful in hunting and gardening. But it also contains powerful statements of general principle, such as the story of how the animals came out of the ground.

This myth is not merely a naive attempt to explain why different animals have different characteristics. It is a broad generalization about the natural order and its implications for human economic behavior. It states that game animals are a dispersed resource that people can only exploit by seeking them out in their own habitat. It illustrates the nature of a dispersed resource by contrasting the distribution of animals in the real world with a hypothetical situation in which they all live at a single location. It suggests that human beings should be content with their place in nature, and not seek to dominate other species. Those who disturb nature's equilibrium for short-term advantage will only decrease its bounty in the end. This is a moral that the supporters of Project Polonoroeste would do well to consider. If the World Bank funds the Project without insisting on adequate safeguards for the Indians, a complex web of life will be destroyed, together with the only people who understand it. The Bank apparently hopes to realize a good return on its investment, even if this brings disaster to the native population and jeopardizes Brazil's long-term interests by promoting a non-sustainable use of resources.

The Indians live close to the earth and take only what they need to subsist, while modern technology can produce a surplus and turn a profit. But for how long? When the Guaporé Valley becomes an arid, sandy waste, the Nambiquara myth will have a final, tragic meaning. "I left you with a good thing," said the Master of the Animals, "and you ruined it." ◇



The Crab Feast *by David Malouf*

I

There is no getting closer
than this. My tongue slips into
the furthest, sweetest corner
of you. I know all

now, all your secrets.
When the shell
cracked there was nothing
between us. I taste moonlight
transformed into flesh
and the gas bubbles rising
off sewage. I go down
under mangrove roots and berries, under the moon's

ashes; it is cool
down there. I always knew that there was more
to the Bay than its glitters,
knew if you existed

I could also
enter it; I'd caught so deeply all
your habits, knowing the ways
we differ I'd come to think we must be one.

I took you
to me. Prepared
a new habitat under the coral
reef of my ribs. You hang there, broken like the
    sun.

II

Noon that blinding glass did not reveal us
as we were. It cast up variant selves
more real than
reflections, forms

with a life of their own,
stalk eye a periscope
that determined horizons, Doulton claws
that could snap off a thumb.
I liked that. Hence the deep afternoons
with pole and net, the deeper
nights when I went down after the tropic
sun. Hence too the Latin

names, a dangerous clawhold. I wanted the whole
    of you, raw poundage
in defiance of breathlessness
or the power of verbal charms,
on my palm, on my tongue.

III

This is the Place. I come back
nightly to find it
—still, sleepy, sunlit, presided over

by old timers, waterbirds whose one
thin leg props up clouds,
the ruck of open water

ahead, and the hours
of deepening blue on blue the land wades into after
noon.
These then the perspectives:

matchwood pier, a brackish estuary
that flows on into
the sun, a rip of light over the dunes.

I enter. It is all
around me, the wash
of air, clear-spirit country. It goes on

all day like this. The tide
hovers and withdraws. Under the sun, under the
moon's
cross-currents, shadows

fall into place
and are gathered to the dark. This hunt
is ritual, all the parties to it lost. Even the breaths

we draw between cries
are fixed terms in what is celebrated,
the spaces in a net.

Among mangrove trunks the fire-
flies like small hot love-crazed
planets switch on,

switch off. They too
have caught something. A chunk of solid midnight
thrashes in the star-knots of their mesh.

IV

You scared me with your stillness and I scared
myself. Knowing
that everything, even the footsoles of the dead,
where your small mouths
nudged them, would feed

the airy process of it.
The back of my head
was open to the dream
dark your body moves in. I hunted you

like a favourite colour,
indigo, to learn
how changeable we are, what rainbows
we harbour with us

and how I should die, cast wheezing into
a cauldron of fog.
That was the plan:
to push on through

the spectrum to that perfect
primary death colour, out
into silence and a landscape
of endings, with the brute sky pumping red.

V

I watch at a distance
of centuries, in the morning
light of another planet
or the earliest gloom

of this one, your backward
submarine retreat,
as hoovering across
the seabed—courtly,

elate, iron-plated—
you practice the Dance.
I watch and am shut out.
the terrible privacies!

You move slow motion sideways,
an unsteady astronaut:
step and counter
step, then the clash,

soundless, of tank engagement;
you might be angels
in the only condition
our senses reach them in. I observe

your weightless, clumsy-tender
release. I observe
the rules: Cut off
here in the dimension

of pure humanity, my need for air
a limiting factor,
I look through into
your life. Its mysteries

disarm me. Turning
away a second time
to earth, to air, I leave you
to your slow-fangled order,

taking with me
more than I came for
and less. You move back into
my head. No, it does not finish here.

VI

We were horizons
of each other's consciousness. All transactions
at this distance are small,
blurred, uninsistent. Drawn

by unlikeness, I grew
like you, or dreamed I did, sharing your cautious
sideways grip on things, not to be broken,
your smokiness of blood, as kin

to dragons we guarded
in the gloom of mangrove trunks
our hoard. I crossed the limits
into alien territory. One of us

will die of this, I told myself; and one of us
did. The other
swam off to lick warm stones and sulk with clouds
    along a shoreline;
regretting the deep

shelves and downward spaces,
breathing easy,
but knowing something more
was owed and would take place. I go down

in the dark to that encounter, the sun
at my back. On the sea-bed
your eyes on their sticks
click white in the flattened shadow of my head.

VII

A dreamy phosphorescence
paddles towards me. The moon drowses,
feeds, its belly white, its tough shell
black. We are afloat

together. You are
my counterweight there, I hang above you
in sunlight and a balance
is struck. No, the end

will not be like this.
We belong to different orders, and are trapped
by what we chose. Our kinship
is metaphorical, but no less deadly for all that,

old Dreadnought; as if I wore
black and carried death clenched in my fist. I do
wear black. My hand is open. It is my teeth
that seek you in the dark. And I approach bearing a
death.

VIII

It was always like this: you
broken before me,
beautiful in all
the order of your parts, an anatomy lesson,

the simple continent
our bodies broke away from.
Because you are so open, because
the whole of your life

is laid out here, a chamber
to be entered and stripped. You have nothing
to hide. That sort of power
kills us, for whom

moonlight, the concept blue
are intolerably complex as
our cells are, each an open universe
expanding beyond us, the tug

of immortality.
We shall reach it and still die.
I will be
broken after you, that was the bargain,

all this
a compact between us, who love
our privacies. I play
my part. Bent over you I dip my hand

in the bowl, I shake my cuffs, out in the open
and lost. Deep down
I am with you in the dark. The secret flesh of
my tongue enters a claw.

Because you are so open. Because you are.

IX

It is your weight
that hangs upon me. How
to deal with it. Hooded, claws locked
to your body like a star

you drag me under
the light of this occasion
to others. I've dreamed this once
too often. So this

is what it is to drown, this suffocating
torpor, giving up to
the drugs of, the drug of
the moon. Here in your kingdom

I feel night harden over
my skull. That we should have come
so far out of the dark
together. I try to drown

well, I hold my breath,
no thrashing. Blue, majestic,
you blaze in my thoughts. Displacing more
than your real weight, making less

than the ususal disturbance,
you plunge and take me with you.
I go out
in silence, in full view

of waiters; having learned
this much at least, to die true
to my kind—upright, smiling—
and like you, beyond speech.

X

No I am not ashamed
of our likeness, of what is in it that betrays me,
a smell of salt

backwaters, a native
grasp on the gist
of things, our local patch

of not-quite-solid earth from which the vast swing
of the sky
is trackable. Night
comes on and I am caught

with a whole life on my hands,
in my mouth raw words,
the taste of so much air, so much water,

flesh. It was never to be weighed,
this dull shore and its landscape, water
poised above water

and all its swarming creatures, against the kingdom
of cloud castles
we build with our breath.
But words made you

a fact in my head. You were
myself in another species, brute
blue, a bolt of lightning, maybe God.

Now all has been made plain
between us, the weights are equal, though the sky
tilts, and the sun

with a splash I do not hear breaks into
the dark. We are one at last. Assembled here
out of earth, water, air

to a love feast. You lie open
before me. I am ready.
Begin.

EPICYCLE

The Origin of the Bone Game

Terry Tafoya learned this story from his Twana relatives at Skokomish, a coastal reservation near Olympia, Washington. He tells us:

They are all fervent bone game players and rasp out their songs throughout the night and on until nearly noon. I confess I stagger out to the tepee about six in the morning, not caring at that point who wins.

The bone game is played throughout British Columbia and the Pacific Northwest. To be accurate, the Plateau Indians more often call the game "stick game," and the Plains Indians in Montana call it "hand game." There are other stories, of course, about why the bones are usually of deer or cougar (with the exception of the gambling bones made of human shins that a certain Lummi Indian woman has), and of those who played this game after it was given, such as rabbit the cheater, and others. Songs differ from tribe to tribe, but it is always played the same way.

Long ago when the world was new, before Coyote had painted sparrow-hawk red, or dressed the small waterbugs with hard coats of green and black, the animal people grew forgetful of their responsibilities. They forgot the ceremonies of the First Foods, and did not respect the many laws of the Creator. They would steal one another's songs; sometimes they would steal the feathers of the Eagle and soar into the air, or steal the skin of the salmon and swim away. Greed, anger, jealousy and hate ate into their souls like a dry rot, and the Creator grew angry at the failings of His children.

And so it was rain fell from the sky as seldom as prayers drifted up to the air. The Creator punished those below with drought, and all the water began to grow as crusted and dusty as many hearts had become. Around them the animal people watched with hungry eyes as their food began to die. And though the ironwood blossomed a pitiful paper thinness, the salmon did not return with the Spring. Hunger began to claw at their insides and they began to look at one another with strange, mad eyes. Wolf was the first one to kill and eat of poor deer's flesh, and many are the stories of this time when brother ate sister, husband ate wife, and mothers devoured their own children as famine swept forth like a chill wind from the west.

Finally, in desperation, the animal people called again upon the Creator.

"Help us!" they pleaded. "We can't go on like this, never knowing who will die next to be the meal of another!"

And so it was that the Creator took pity upon His people, and spoke to them, showing them small rods of polished bone. "There will be a contest," He said, "this contest will be the bone game," and He held up one small rod of bone that was marked with a black stripe in the center, and a matching bone that shined dully with no mark at all. "The one with the stripe is the male bone," He explained, "and the one without a stripe is the female bone. You must guess which hand hides the female bone." Two sets of bones

were there, and eleven carved sticks of curious design. "When you guess correctly, and point to the hand that hides the unmarked bone, you will win a counting stick, and when you have won all the sticks, you will have won the game." And so it is today on our reservations, we play this game, gambling sometimes for thousands of dollars in games that can last past sunset and sunrise. But the first game was not played for money.

"The animal people will play against the human people," directed the Creator. "But you do not gamble with small stakes.... you gamble for your lives, for the winner will eat the loser."

Now the animal people and the human people took their place in two long lines, facing one another with a silence dark and hungry. With this game songs are sung as the bones are hidden, and the animal people began, each one with a different song.

"Ho!" cried rabbit, and pointed to the right hand of a man. And won a stick. On they sang.

"Ho!" cried deer, and pointed to the left hand of a woman. And won a stick. On they sang, and stick after stick did the humans lose, for the spirit powers of the animal people were so great they did not guess at all, but read the minds of the human people. Just so, our old people stand at the back these days and tremble their outstretched hands, sending out their own spirit power to discover the unmarked bone.

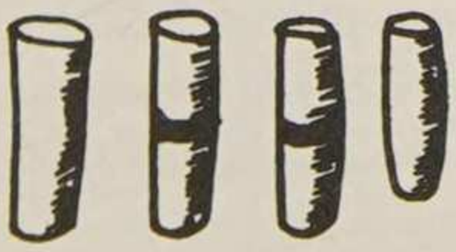
"Ho!" and another stick was gone, "Ho!" and yet another, until the only stick that remained to the humans was the Kick stick, and the oldest man held it dearly, knowing that this wooden thinness was all that stood between their children and the hunger of the animal people. To lose this last stick was to lose the lives of not only their children, but all human children to come. And the animal people smiled sharp smiles.

"Help us, Creator," prayed the human people, "if you will give us the power to win this game, we will always obey your laws. We will give our thanks for your many gifts and hold our hearts open to you." And as they prayed, they began to sing a new song, and the words of this song said that the Creator was coming, and that their hearts were changing. Softly this song grew in strength and power to the sound of drums and beating sticks.

"Ho!" called the humans. And a stick was theirs.

"Ho!" called the humans and pointed, and another stick was there. Stick after stick did the human people win, until finally...all the sticks were theirs.

And that is why even today, humans eat animals, but very seldom do animals eat human beings.



"Because you have lost this contest," began the Creator, "you animal people must also share your songs with the human people." Just so. And that is why even today when our Indian people make their spirit quest, it is usually the song and power of an animal person that is received.

—Retold and illustrated by Terry Tafoya

Chinua Achebe: At the Crossroads

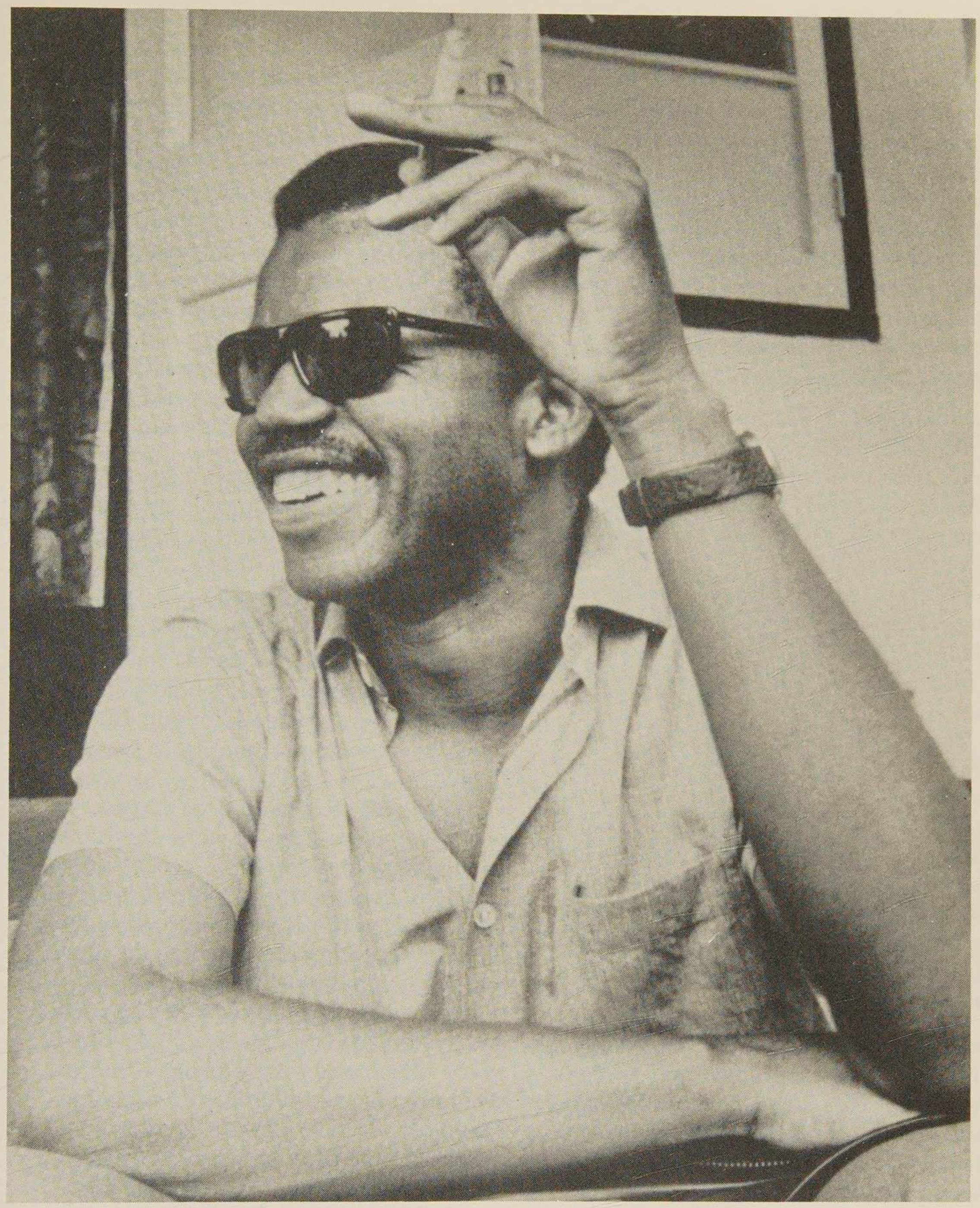
An interview by Jonathan Cott

Born in 1930 in Ogidi, Eastern Nigeria, of devout Christian parents who baptized him Albert Chinualumogu, Chinua Achebe "dropped the tribute to Victorian England," as he puts it, when he went to university, and took his first name from his last. "On one arm of the cross," he remembers in his autobiographical essay "Named for Victoria," "we sang hymns and read the Bible night and day. On the other, my father's brother and his family, blinded by heathenism, offered food to idols.... If anyone likes to believe that I was torn by spiritual agonies or stretched on the rack of my ambivalence, he certainly may suit himself. I do not remember any undue distress. What I do remember was a fascination for the ritual and the life on the other arm of the crossroads. And I believe two things were in my favor—that curiosity and the little distance imposed between me and it by the accident of my birth. The distance becomes not a separation but a bringing together like the necessary backward step which a judicious viewer may take in order to see a canvas steadily and fully." It is this canvas that Achebe brilliantly creates and displays for us in his four novels—Things Fall Apart, No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God, *and* A Man of the People.

Achebe informs us that his mother and elder sister used to tell him tales when he was a child—folk stories that had "the immemorial quality of the sky and the forests and the rivers." And like other West African writers such as Amos Tutuolo, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, and Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe has drawn literary sustenance from folk tales as well as from legends, jokes, riddles, and, especially, proverbs. "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten," he tells us in Things Fall Apart.

"Our ancestors," Achebe affirms, "created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose (including, no doubt, the excitation of wonder and pure delight).... Their artists lived and moved and had their being in society and created their works for the good of that society ....In a recent anthology, a Hausa folk tale, having recounted the usual fabulous incidents, ends with these words: 'They all came and they lived happily together. He had several sons and daughters who grew up and helped in raising the standard of education of the country.' As I said elsewhere, if you consider this ending a naive anticlimax, then you cannot know very much about Africa."

Today, as Nigeria (the most populous and one of the most prosperous countries in Africa) becomes increasingly developed economically and technologically, we are continually reminded in Achebe's writings that as we inevitably move forward, we must at the same time remember where we began;



DIANA DAVIES

and that if the adults forget, then the children and the stories they like best will remind them.

Chinua Achebe is currently head of the Department of English at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The recipient of many awards, including an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from Dartmouth College, he has traveled and lectured in countries all over the world. As unafraid and unashamed of gentleness as of strength, he has a bearing and voice that bespeak an unusual mixture of quietness, intensity, humor, and commitment. Our conversation took place in London in the summer of 1980.

JONATHAN COTT *In your fable* How the Leopard Got His Claws, *you first describe the animals of the world at peace with one another. "They sat," you write, "on log benches in the village square. As they rested they told stories and drank palm wine." But later, after selfishness and cowardice have upset the animals' communal harmony, the leopard—now forced into the role of violent avenger—says: "From today I shall rule the forest with terror. The life of our village is ended."*

This reminds me of the conclusion of A Man of the People, *in which you write: "The owner was the village, and the village had a mind; it could say no to sacrilege. But in the affairs of the nation there was no owner, the laws of the village became powerless." It seems to me that the idea of the "village"—connected as it is with the notions of the possibilities of community, truthful language, and the attainment of real individuality—is central to all your work.*

CHINUA ACHEBE My world—the one that interests me more than any other—is the world of the village. It is one, not the only, reality, but it's the one that the Igbo people, who are my people, have preferred to all others. It was as if they had a choice of creating empire or cities or large communities and they looked at them and said, "No, we think that what is safest and best is a system in which everybody knows everybody else." In other words, a village. So you'll find that, politically, the Igbos preferred the small community; they had nothing to do—until recently—with kings and kingdoms.

Now I'm quite convinced that this was a conscious choice. Some people look at the Igbos and assert that they didn't evolve to the stage of having kings and kingdoms. But this isn't true—the Igbos have a name for "king," they have names for all the paraphernalia of kingship—it isn't as if they didn't know about kings. I think it's simply that, looking at the way the world operates, they seemed to have said to themselves, "Of all the possible political systems, we shall insist on the one where there are only so many people." So that when a man got up to talk to his fellows they knew who he was, they knew exactly whether he was a thief, an honest man, or whatever. In a city of eight million people, you can't know your neighbor. And that means you have to set up a system of representation: you choose a delegate to speak for you. But the Igbos didn't want someone else to speak for them.

The Igbos are so ambitious that everyone wants to be a king, in fact—this is the strange thing about it. And I'm not being facetious, because what happened at the end of the Biafran war is that somebody in the Nigerian government thought of the idea of letting the Igbos have chiefs.

This is the same thing the British tried and failed to do. But this time it worked. In every village now there's a king—they call themselves *kings*—these are illiterate traders who made money at the Onitsha market! So the Igbos now have 600 chiefs or more throughout Igboland. And we are a people who are reputed, who are *famous* throughout the world, for not having kings. I'm saying it to make the suggestion that there must obviously have been a predilection in our character for ruling others, and it was that instinct, if you like, that the culture was fighting. I think a good culture fights against the instincts of destruction. And this held as long as we had the initiative to control our own history. In recent times this has changed, and the situation is different. Now, the kings we have today

aren't going to do any harm, they have no real power, they're really clowns. But the fact is that in the Igbo language, "King" means enemy. The culture was right.

And this is quite central to my fiction and to my analysis of the problems of creating a new nation today. Obviously, we can't go back to the system in which every man is turning up at the village square—that's in the past. But we have to find a way of dealing with the problems created by the fact that somebody says he's speaking on your behalf, but you don't know who he is. This is one of the problems of the modern world.

J.C. *In* Arrow of God *you write: "The festival brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbor and look to his left and see a god standing there." So your idea of the village seems to include the possibility not only of political participation but of a spiritual one as well.*

C.A. Definitely, you're absolutely right. It's a world of men and women and children and spirits and deities and animals and nature ...and men and women both living and dead—this is very important—a community of the living and the dead and the unborn. So it is both material and spiritual, and whatever you did in the village took this into account. Our life was never compartmentalized in the way that it has become today. We talk about politics, economics, religion. But in the traditional society all these things were linked together—there was no such thing as an irreligious man. In fact, we don't even have a word for religion in Igbo. It's simply *life.*

J.C. *As a person who grew up with the values of village and who now lives in a country that is rapidly being modernized, you seem to be in the position of someone who has found himself standing at the crossroads.*

C.A. Those who live at the crossroads are very lucky, and it seems to me that there will never be this kind of opportunity again. My generation belongs to a group whose fathers...my father, for instance, although a converted Christian, was really a member of the traditional society—he was already full-grown in the traditions of Igbo life when he decided to become a Christian; so he knew all about our culture. My children, however, belong to the world culture to which American children belong. They went to school in America for several years and liked the same kind of music that children in America and England enjoy. But I'm in between these two. And we can talk about "transitions"—it's a cliché, since every day's a transition—but I think that I'm much more a part of a transitional generation than any other. And this is very exciting. Of course it carries its penalties, since you're in no-man's land, you're like the bat in the folk tale—neither bird nor mammal—and one can get lost, not being one or the other. This is what we are, we can't do anything about it. But it does help if you have the kind of temperament I have, which tries to recover something from our past. So you have one foot in the past—my father's tradition—and also one in the present—where you try to interpret the past for the present.

J.C. *The sociologist Philip Slater has written about the difference he sees between the "community" and the "network." By the former he means the people whom we live with, and by the latter he is referring to the people we communicate with professionally throughout our own particular country or even throughout the world—just as you have a readership and attend conferences in many different countries.*

C.A. I think there's a certain strength in being able to have one foot in the network and another foot in the community. But if one forgets one's foot in the community—and that is quite possible—one can get carried away into the network system. And this is a real problem for us—for the African intellectual, the African writer. I've sometimes complained about African writers who blindly follow Western fashions with regard to what an author should be writing, saying, or even looking like...what ideas he should be expressing, what attitudes he should be having towards his community, and so on—all taken from the West—while we forget about the other part of our nature which has its roots in the community. So I think we have the responsibility to be both in the community and in the network. This is a challenge—it's very exciting and also very perilous.

J.C. *You yourself are at the crossroads on many levels—spiritual, political, intellectual—and you have chosen to write for both adults and children. It's as if you've decided to balance and integrate all of these levels and activities.*

C.A. Yes, I do that consciously. I think this is the most important and fascinating thing about our life—the crossroad. This is where the spirits meet the humans, the water meets the land, the child meets the adult—these are the zones of power, and I think this is really where stories are created. The middle of the day is a very potent hour in our folklore—noon. This is the time when morning merges into afternoon, and that is the moment when spirits are abroad. When the adults go to the farm and leave the children at home, then the spirits can come into the village.

I've talked about the "crossroad hour" in one of my poems—this hour when the spirits appear—and it is this transitional period that manifests, I think, the great creative potential. It's an area of tension and conflict. So I deliberately go out of my way to cultivate the crossroad mythology, if you like, because I think it's full of power and possibility.

J.C. *In* Things Fall Apart, *Okonkwo tells his son Nwoye "masculine" stories of violence and bloodshed, but the boy prefers the tales his mother tells him about Tortoise the trickster, about the bird who challenged the whole world to a wrestling contest and was finally thrown by a cat, and about the quarrel between Earth and Sky—stories for "foolish women and children," as Okonkwo thinks of them. But in* No Longer at Ease, *Nwoye—now the father of the protagonist Obi—forbids the telling of folk tales to his son because he has become a Christian and doesn't want to disseminate what he now thinks of as "heathen" stories. All of this reminds me of the constant attacks against fairy stories in Europe by Enlightenment spokesmen and by any number of rigid moralists and educators during the past two centuries.*

C.A. I think that stories are the very center, the very heart of our civilization and culture. And to me it's interesting that the man who thinks he's strong wants to forbid stories, whether it's Okonkwo forbidding the stories of gentleness, or whether, later on, it's a Christian who, so self-satisfied in the rightness and superiority of his faith, would forbid the pagan stories. It is there in those despised areas that the strength of the civilization resides—not in the masculine strength of Okonkwo, nor in the self-righteous strength of the Christian faith. The stone which the builders reject becomes a cornerstone of the house. So I think a writer instinctively gravitates towards that "weakness," if you like; he will leave the "masculine" military strength and go for love, for gentleness. Because unless we cultivate gentleness, we will be destroyed. And this is why you have poets and storytellers, this is their function.

J.C. *The psychologist James Hillman has talked of the importance of "restorying the adult."*

C.A. This is what I've been trying to say when I talk about weakness and strength. You see, "restorying the adult" is a very interesting phrase because what, in fact, is the adult as distinct from the child? The adult is someone who has seen it all, nothing is new to him. Such a man is to be pitied. The child, on the other hand, is new in the world, and everything is possible to him. The imagination hasn't been dulled by use and experience. Therefore, when you restory the adult, what you do is you give him back some of that energy and optimism of the child, that ability to be open and to expect anything. The adult has become dull and routine, mechanical, he can't be lifted. It's as if he's weighted down by his experience and his possessions, all the junk he's assembled and accumulated. And the child can still fly, you see. Therefore the story belongs to the child because the story's about flying.

J.C. *In your autobiographical essay "Named for Victoria," you've mentioned that, like Nwoye, you were told stories by your mother and older sister. So you were lucky enough to be "storied" at an early age.*

C.A. I was very lucky, but I would say that that was traditional. Any child growing up at that time, unless he was particularly unlucky, would as part of his education be told stories. It doesn't happen anymore. The stories are now read in books, and very rarely is there a situation in which the mother will sit down night after night with her family and tell stories, with the young children falling asleep to them. The pace of life has altered. Again, this is what I meant by saying that our generation is unique. And I was lucky to have been part of the very tail-end of that older tradition. Perhaps we may not be able to revive it, but at least we can make sure that the kind of stories that our children read carry something of the aura of the tales our mothers and sisters told us.

J.C. *In traditional oral societies, the storyteller would employ intonation, gestures, eye contact, pantomime, acrobatics, and occasionally costumes, masks, and props in his or her dramatic presentation.*

C.A. Yes, that's right and the loss is enormous. And all I'm saying is that, rather than lose everything, we should value the written story, which is certainly better than no story at all. It's impossible in the modern world to have the traditional storytelling. But I think that perhaps in the home we should not give up so quickly. I find, for instance, that when I write a new children's story the best thing I can do is to tell it to my children, and I get remarkable feedback that way. My youngest child, incidentally, writes stories of her own!...But the storyteller today has to find a new medium rather than regret the passing of the past. Television is there, we can't do anything about it, so some of us should use this medium, we should do stories for television.

J.C. *You've often stated that stories impart important messages to use and that they are repositories of human experience and wisdom. Your children's stories are, of course, excellent examples of this notion.*

C.A. I realize that this is an area where there is some kind of uneasiness between us and the Western reader concerning just how much of a "message" is suitable for a story. I'm not talking about "preaching," which isn't the same thing as telling a story. But to say that a good story is weakened because it conveys a moral point of view is absurd because in my view all the great stories do convey such a point of view. A tale may be fascinating, amusing—creating laughter and delight and so forth—but at its base is a sustaining morality, and I think this is very important.

Going back to the Igbo culture, the relationship between art and morality is very close, and there's no embarrassment at all in linking the two, as there would be in Western culture. The earth goddess Ala—the most powerful deity of the Igbo pantheon—is also the goddess of the arts and of morality. I would say that Ala is even more powerful than the supreme god because of her closeness to us: the earth is where our crops lie, where we live, and where we die. And any very serious offense is called an abomination—the literal translation of "abomination" in Igbo is *nso ani* (*nso* = taboo, *ani* = earth)—*that which the earth forbids*. That's what you say for the worst kinds of crimes like murder and rape. But Ala is also, as I said, the goddess of art.

My concern is that stories are not only retrieved and kept alive but also added to, just as they always were, and I think this is really what a living traditional storyteller would do. I loved the stories my mother and elder sister told me, but there were always little changes here and there. And this was part of the entertainment—you hear a tale a hundred times, but each day there was one additional little twist, which was expected.

There's that combination of stability and change. You mustn't change it so much that you don't recognize it—that would be unacceptable. The child wouldn't accept tinkering with the folk tale to the extent that it becomes something else. But little twists now and then...yes.

J.C. *It's strange but obvious that it is children—the seemingly least significant members of society—who are given stories about the most important matters—selfishness, pride, greed, the meaning of life and death.*

C.A. That's right, and this is wonderful for children. I think the adult sometimes loses sight of the nature of stories. But these great fundamental issues have never changed and never will. I mean, children always ask the same questions: Who made the world? How come some people are suffering? Who made death? And to think that we have somehow moved on to more "adult" subject matters is simply self-deception. What we do, of course, is quite often get trapped in trivia...we get carried away. But the basic questions are still the same, and this is what children's stories particularly deal with.

I think that mankind's greatest blessing is language. And this is why the storyteller is a high priest and why he is so concerned about language and about using it with respect. Language is under great stress in the modern world, it's under seige. All kinds of people—advertisers, politicians, priests, technocrats—these are the strong people today, while the storyteller represents the weakness we were talking about. But of course every poet is aware of this problem ....And this is where children come into it, too, because you can't fool around with children—you have to be honest with language: cleverness won't do.

We lose belief at our cost. Lines from an Eskimo poem called "Magic Words": "That was the time when words were like magic./The human mind had mysterious powers./A word spoken by chance/might have strange consequences./It would suddenly come alive/and what people wanted to happen could happen—/all you had to do was say it," take you right back to the beginning of things. "And God said: 'Let there be light'"—he didn't do anything, he just said it. And you can also look at the Aborigines in Australia who are somehow closer to the beginning than ourselves: you

have the same feeling there that the word has power.

J.C. *I wanted to ask you about your first children's book,* Chike and the River. *The name Chike has* chi *in it, and so does your first name, Chinua. About* chi, *you've written: "There are two clearly distinct meanings of the word* chi *in Igbo. The first is often translated as god, guardian angel, personal spirit, soul, spirit double, etc. The second meaning is day, or daylight, but is most commonly used for those transitional periods between day and night or night and day. . . . In a general way we may visualize a person's* chi *as his other identity in spiritland —his* spirit being *complementing his terrestrial* human being*; for nothing can stand alone, there must always be another thing standing beside it."*

C.A. When we talk about *chi*, we're talking about the individual spirit, and so you find the word in all kinds of combinations. Chinwe, which is my wife's name, means "*Chi* owns me"; mine is Chinua, which is a shortened form of an expression that means "May a *chi* fight for me." Chike is a shortened form of Chinweike, which means "She has the strength or the power." And that's what that little character has—he has the power.

J.C. *In "The Flute" and* The Drum, *you also suggest that one shouldn't tamper or fool around with the spirit world.*

C.A. The question of frontiers is very important—you must not overstep them—and those frontiers are set up in every space and time: there's even a frontier to ambition. One of the most typical Igbo tales is about a proud wrestler who has thrown every challenger in the world, and so he decides to go and wrestle in the land of the spirits. A very good wrestler would have a man playing the flute for him—singing his praises on the flute—so his praise-singer begs him not to go the the spirit world. But he says, No, I'm bored, there's nobody in the world who can challenge me, I must go there. So they go. And when they arrive there the spirits come out to wrestle with him—one after the other—and he beats them all. And then he begins to boast. He says, What sort of spirit world is this, the famous spirit world, can't you find somebody who can give me a proper fight, is there nobody else? The spirits have a consultation and tell him, Well, there is somebody, but we think you shouldn't fight him. He responds, No, if there is anybody at all here now, I must wrestle with him. And this person is his *chi*—his personal spirit—and when he comes out he's very unimpressive, as you would expect, very weak and hungry-looking, thin as a rope. Who is this? the wrestler asks. They tell him that this is the man who will challenge him, and he laughs. But his *chi* moves towards him and with one finger picks him up and smashes him on the ground. And that's the end of our great wrestler.

We create these tales and fables, like God creating man in his image. These folk tales aren't just decorative things, they tell us so much about the people who make them. And when told to children, they're intended for their safety, for their survival in the world.

J.C. *Chike goes from his village to Onitsha, a famous market town which you've written about elsewhere, stating that "it sits at the crossroads of the world. . . . Because it sees everything, Onitsha*

has come to distrust single-mindedness. It can be opposite things at once. It was both a cradle of Christianity in Igboland and a veritable fortress of 'pagan' revanchism." It was always the "market-place of the world," a place where "riverain folk and the dwellers of the hinterland forests met in guarded, somewhat uneasy, commerce; old-time farmers met new, urban retail traders of known and outlandish wares." And it always attracted "the exceptional, the colorful, and the bizarre."

C.A. It's almost a mythical city, with all those extraordinary people, not the least of them Dr. James Stuart-Young—a scholar, mystic, and trader—a crazy Englishman who arrived, it seemed, from nowhere and who claimed to be a Ph. D. And he was an egalitarian! In those days he fought on the side of the people against the big British and French commercial concerns—multinational, as we now call them. He was a one-man band who lived and died in Onitsha. I saw him once when I was a child—a tall, bald-headed Englishman....I loved Onitsha then and I love it still. It's different now, of course, since it was bombed, and it's been rebuilt, but it's still very vital. And I think that this vitality is the main quality of the "crossroads."

Chike was my first children's book. I enjoy writing for children, it's very important for me. It's a challenge which I like to take on now and again because it requires a different kind of mind from me when I'm doing it—I have to get into the mind of a child totally, and I find that very rewarding. I think everybody should do that, not necessarily through writing a story, but we should return to childhood again and again. And when you write for children it's not just a matter of putting yourself in the shoes of a child—I think you have to be a child for the duration.

J.C. *It seems that, in the African tradition, the infant is generally thought of not as a kind of* tabula rasa *but rather as a little messenger whose presence is a gift from the other world.*

C.A. I think that the idea of the child as messenger is certainly prevalent. My wife has been doing some work on the notion that children are supposed to be born, to die, to come back, and to repeat cycles of birth and death—this is a very common and popular belief among the Igbos. It was meant to explain the high rate of infant mortality, of course, in the past. And in doing this research she's encountered stories about how children come from the world of over there into the world of men. It's very interesting to discover the attributes they're supposed to come with. The fact is that there's a bargain made, there's a discussion concerning what you'd like to be and what you'd like to do that takes place before the child comes over here. So the child is not a *tabula rasa*, he or she is someone who has already negotiated *over there* its entire destiny. And the child comes to the borderline, and there is somebody there—perhaps a group of people—who tries to talk him or her out of what he or she has agreed to be—they want to discourage the child from aspiring too greatly. So what I am saying is that the child comes with a whole realm of experience. Of course, these are really metaphors for explaining reality. But a child isn't a clean slate, it's got all its genes from its ancestors—what he or she is going to be

is more or less fixed in the genes, among other things.

I believe that in bringing up children it's the adult who learns. As a parent I know that, and so this leads to a humility. I think this is very real. Now, that's not permissiveness, that's not to say you must never correct a child, because we're not talking about the years of experience the child cannot possibly have. But if you accept that the child comes from somewhere else, you can renew your acquaintanceship with that world through the child. I think this is a very good way of putting it because these are metaphors for our experience. We really don't know. We're simply trying to use words as images to convey vague but insistent notions that visit us.

In the past, our people, when a child was born, would go to a diviner, to find out which of the ancestors it was who had come again. They went back and said, "Well, who's this newcomer, this man's father or this man's grandfather?" So this child was not new. And once they established who the child was, they gave him all that respect. I don't know how it operates, I don't know whether it means that this is exactly the same person or just somebody who has aspects of the character. This is a mystery to me and it must remain a mystery to us. But I'm saying that, as a metaphor, people do come around in that way—children are supposed to be reincarnations of their grandfathers, not of their fathers. And quite often there *is* a very close relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren.

I have a poem called "The Generation Gap," which talks about that specifically, in terms of the pattern of the coming and going of the moon. There's usually some friction between father and son and that would explain why there should be complicity between the child and the grandfather—they have one common enemy [laughing].

J.C. *The Ijo of the Niger Delta have a proverb that goes: "He's of goblin ancestry who knows not whence he came." And this might imply that there is and should be a connection not only between grandfather and grandchild but also between the adult and his sense of his own childhood, since both connect one to one's past.*

C.A. Yes, that's right, because if there is a constant coming or going between us and the world of the ancestors, which is what my people believe, then it's in fact the child who can tell you about that world since it's coming from there—it's not the old man who's *going* there but the child who's *coming* from there.

J.C. *In all your work, the grandfather casts his shadow on the grandchild, the village on the city, and the pagan tradition on the Christian one.*

C.A. The duality. Things come in twos. "Wherever something stands, something else will stand beside it"—this is another very powerful Igbo statement. It's absolutely true, and it's when someone refuses to see the "other" that you have problems. ◇

The preceding is adapted from a book on children's literature by Jonathan Cott, to be published by Random House.

Elephantiasis

by Dino Buzzati, translated by Lawrence Venuti

illustration by Michael Emerson

It is amusing to think how long mankind has trembled with the fear of atomic destruction, while it continued to produce in always more imposing quantities (believing it was dealing with something innocuous) what today, in the year 2007, is monstrously threatening its very existence.

The present author is not a physicist or a chemist; he therefore cannot enter deeply into the technical details of the tremendous phenomenon which is commonly called elephantiasis of things, or the cancer of matter (besides, it has remained for the most part mysterious to the specialists themselves).

Research for the production of so-called plastic materials, which showed characteristics useful to man but not found in the materials afforded by nature and traditional techniques, dates back to the beginning of the century.

An historic step forward on this path was the invention of polymers, which gave rise to an impressive industrial development beginning with the second world war (1939-1945).

Brilliant chemists vied in the creation of new, relatively cheap substances which could replace iron, wood, leather, cloth, ceramic, and glass, and which in fact proved to be even more practical and advantageous in use.

Polymers and analogous substances are characterized by the complexity and largeness of their molecules. Each molecule contains not a very small number of atoms, as, for example, a molecule of water or carbon monoxide, but rather hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of atoms. Many of my readers will perhaps recall certain quaint models of these very molecules in the old industrial exhibitions in the forties and fifties. They looked like constructions for children, with hundreds of varicolored little balls that represented atoms and were joined together by small rods to form fantastic towers and labyrinthine filigrees.

Such molecules were in turn regrouped in complicated systems. And from them emerged substances hard like iron but at the same time elastic like rubber, malleable like clay but light as a feather.

The variety of ingenious combinations had no limits. And it seemed to inaugurate a new, auspicious era. Engineers, architects, furniture makers, surgeons, manufacturers of apparatus and utensils of every kind, tailors, shoemakers, perfumers could all say to the chemist: such and such a substance would come in very handy for me; and after a little while the chemist provided it for them.

As time passed, plastics were turned into kitchen utensils, household tools and sports equipment, clothing, footwear; and also into auto bodies, tires, airplane fuselages, ship hulls; and then into the very engines for these vehicles, bridges, houses, factories, skyscrapers. Everything was reduced to half of its initial cost, then to a third, a tenth, a hundredth.

Sporadic incidents occurred here and there throughout the world to create sud-

den doubts and worries. But they were lost in the immensity of the favorable overall view.

Here is a very small example: in 1947, an elegant little table made of a single piece of crimson plastic was displayed in the window of a New York shop. Having come to do the cleaning one morning, the usual workers found, in place of the table, a kind of ball, slightly larger than an ordinary boccia ball, the same color as the table. What had happened? Scientists gave elaborate explanations which were not entirely convincing. In plain words, for unknown reasons the equilibrium of the molecules, artificially joined among themselves in a dizzying play of relations, was broken. The material of the table then rapidly contracted, reducing itself to its smallest dimensions.

Problems of a different kind appeared in the sixties: what could be done with the tools, utensils, coverings, the most varied plastic objects which were now worn out or degraded from use, or superseded by new and improved products? They could not be destroyed, or burned, or transformed, like paper, into new products. As is known, there were several international meetings at various levels, until a treaty was passed in 1975 at the conference in Lima, establishing special zones in the oceans where properly weighted plastic detritus had to be sunk. The unsigned states, among which was Italy, preferred to resolve the problem by piling up the debris to form artificial hills, or rather mountains. Ski races (on snow which is itself made of plastic) are periodically held on the northerly slope of so-called Monte Falso, between Ferrara and Malalbergo, a mountain which has already reached a height of 350 meters from the base and continues to rise rapidly.

Still, no one, or almost no one (at the congress of industrial chemistry in Toronto years ago, there was an alarmist report by one studious Pole who was judged a visionary)—almost no one foresaw the onset of that structural degeneration or, more exactly, autopolymerization, or plasticoma, which for the past six months has been spreading panic throughout the world.

The nightmare is all the greater because up to now neither the cause nor the mechanics of the phenomenon was understood. Among the various hypotheses is one that the Earth, in its journey through the cosmos, entered a zone where presently unknown influences operate, and these influences brought about the scourge. After our planet leaves this disastrous area, the malady, so to speak, will be arrested. And this is our only remaining hope.

It is difficult to establish the beginning of the tragedy with precision. Almost simultaneously, in localities very distant from each other, the first enigmatic symptoms occurred. Of the numerous warning signs, I cite four which had a vast echo in the press, radio, and TV.

Last February 12th, in broad daylight, on the superhighway between Sasso Marconi and Pian del Voglio, a car made by the Byas company, famous, it should be noted, for the sturdiness of its plastic body under any test, instantly swelled while it was proceeding at more than 110 kilometers per hour. As a result, it obstructed all three lanes and slammed into the back of a truck that was proceeding in the same direction. There were four deaths. Those who rushed to help found instead of an automobile an enormous, horrible mass, completely contorted, which someone compared to a mammoth mollusk and which was writhing slowly among the flames of the burning gas, expanding and thickening more and more.

The next day, in a movie theater in Georgeville, Louisiana, the film—made of "verene," a recently produced polymer—unexpectedly clogged the projector, visibly assuming the thickness of a flaccid girder, totally filling the booth where the projectionist was crushed, and then overflowing outside, into the auditorium and the street.

In the same week, the Japanese passenger ship *Hainichi Maru*, off Hokkaido, multiplied its dimensions in a few moments to the point that its sides rose forty meters

above water-level. And since the total weight did not change, the stability of the ship decreased. It capsized, and of the eight hundred people on board, not even half were able to get to safety.

On February 27th, the bridge at Barelena in southern Tanzania suddenly arched, and its structures, entirely made of plastic, burst into what we may call disordered swellings which, pressing one on top of the other, formed a shapeless blackish mass that blocked the underlying wadi in the space of a few hours.

Notwithstanding the photographic documentation, which appeared in the dailies and on television, most people did not believe the incidents, or at least did not realize their exceptional nature and sinister significance. They were spoken of as "explosions" "landslides," and "volcanic eruptions."

There was no other alarming episode in the next three months. After which the infection struck violently again, spreading in an epidemic flash to every corner of the world.

Is it necessary to report what has recently occurred in America, Asia, Australia, and Africa? Is not what happened here in Milan enough?

It was on last June 5th that, in the Magenta-Sempione zone, innumerable objects and supplies of plastic materials, especially those made of "lurone," began to rise and expand. In this case, the process was slow. The handle of a common table knife has taken a week to assume a diameter of ten centimeters.

At first, there were only amazement and hilarity, then uneasiness and fright. Today, terror is unleashed.

Qualified people attempt to quiet the public, explaining that the problem is a matter of a unique chemical reaction, because of which the atoms and molecules, instead of contracting as in the cited case of the little table, suddenly become separated from each other, with the result that an object as big as a cake of soap can be magnified to the dimensions of a barrel, and beyond.

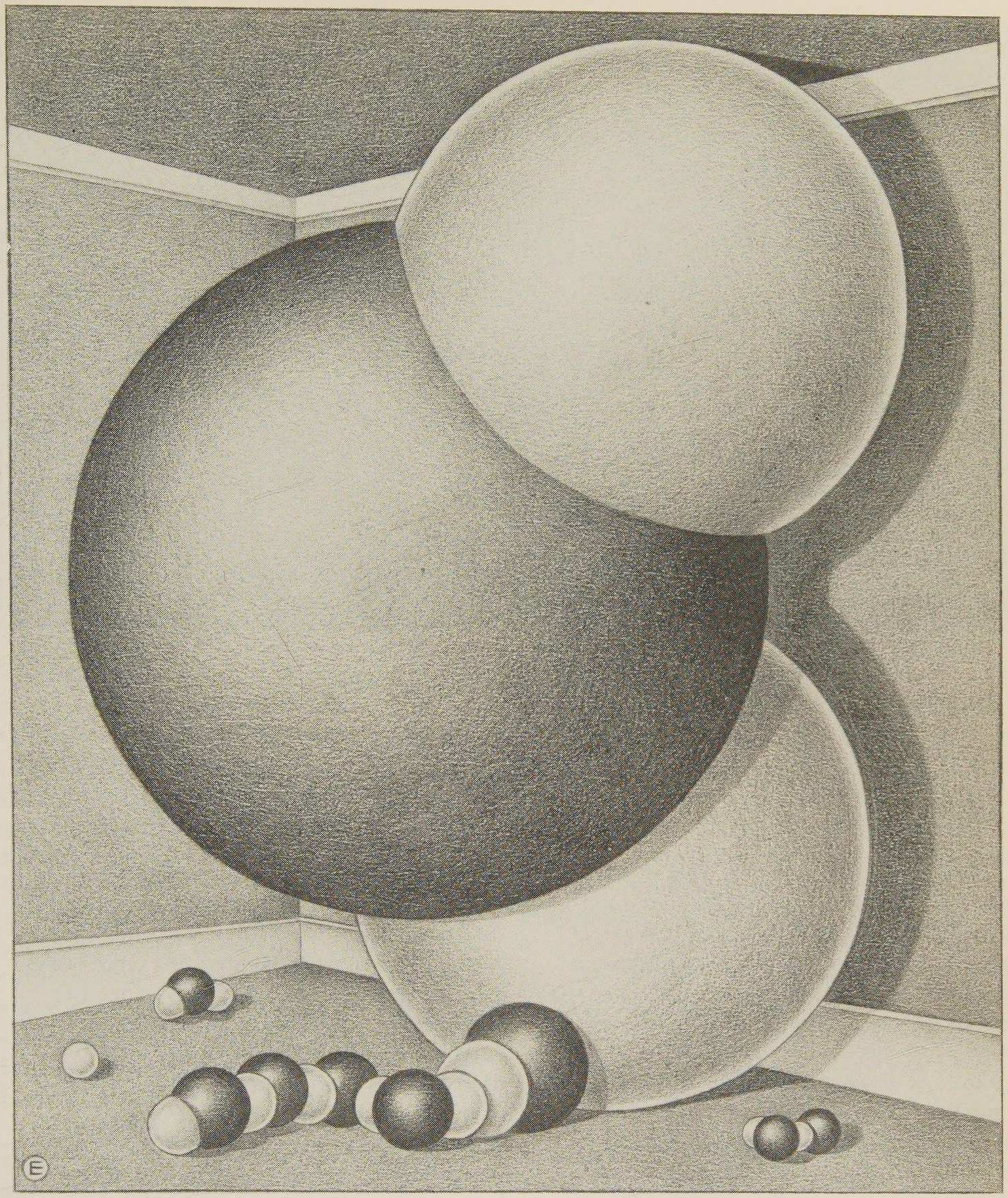
Imagine that your child's doll grew beyond measure, reaching the size of an elephant. The chair, television set, refrigerator, window frames, elevator car all swell in proportion. Families are compelled to leave their houses, invaded by those terrifying things. A demoniacal force, one would say, is exerting internal pressure, inflating them endlessly. And it does not help to cut them up, nor do corrosive acids, flamethrowers, and explosives have any effect. The fragments subsequently swell up into visually repellent shapes, form masses, push, unhinge every obstacle. The walls of houses crack, and from the crevices, beds, couches, household goods, clothes erupt and ooze.

Only the old houses provided with wooden furnishings are still inhabitable—and only where the lodgers, having acted on the announcement in time, were able to get rid of every object made with the damned polymers.

As is easy to imagine, the situation of everyone whose internal organs or bones have been replaced with plastic facsimiles is extremely painful. In Milan alone, they number over fifty thousand. Without advance warning of any kind, those artifical organs swell enormously in the space of a few brief seconds, tearing apart the wretched people from the inside out. The victims already exceed six thousand.

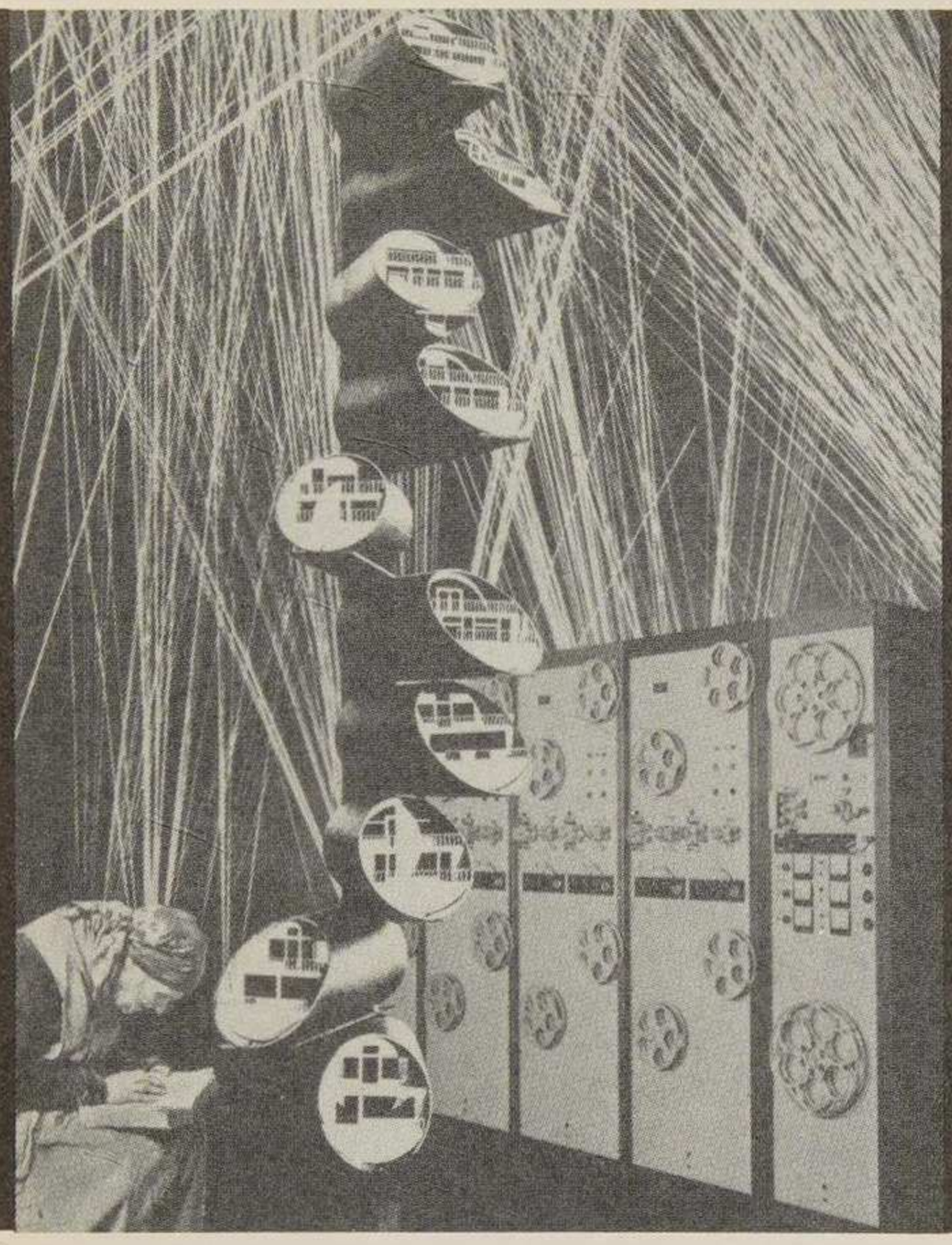
But the most horrifying spectacle is offered by the buildings constructed with plastic materials. The huge municipal auditorium, about one kilometer south of the abbey of Chiaravalle, has now become a monster that raises its swollen hump on the horizon of the devastated city. For a couple of days, like an immeasurable chewing gum bubble, its top has been expanding into the shape of a mushroom and perilously dangles on one side, exactly in line with the abbey, which by tomorrow might be entirely buried.

Day after day, inevitably, public services also dwindle. The telephones were first knocked out. Then the electricity



went. Now even the water-works stop, choked here and there by vile excrescences. Crazed mobs wander around, not knowing where to find refuge. Immense camps of fugitives spread into the remaining fields.

Day after day, hour after hour, the sirens of fire engines, of cars and heliambulances, become more infrequent, the shouts and prayers become more faint. And the most terrifying thing is perhaps the tomb-like silence, in which the universal tumor proliferates and invades, annihilating man's happy paradise. ◇



Progress and Evolution

A Reappraisal from the Traditional Perspective

by Seyyed Hossein Nasr

Illustrations by Sätty

There is little doubt that the idea of human progress, as it has come to be understood since the eighteenth century in Europe, is one that is confined to Western philosophy, especially in the form of the wedding of the idea of progress with material evolution. Moreover, this idea is a latecomer upon the scene of Western civilization, although some have tried to find its roots among the Greeks. Traditional Western man, like his fellow human beings in various Eastern civilizations, saw the flow of time in a downward rather than an upward direction—whether this was conceived of as cycles, as among the ancient Greeks and Romans, or in a linear fashion, as in the Judaeo-Christian traditions. Nor was the moving force of history seen in purely materialistic terms except in rare instances, such as in remote antiquity. But even in such cases the concepts involved were very different from those held today, since the ancients did not have the conception or even the word for matter as this term is used today. For most pre-modern peoples of the West, the moving forces which governed human existence and its history were in any case non-material, whether these forces were seen as *moira* or *dyké* by the Greeks, or the Will of God and various angelic hierarchies in Judaism and Christianity.

As for the non-Western world, among all of the civilizations which this world embraces, the perfection of the human state has always been seen as being at the beginning or the origin, which is of course also reflected perpetually in the ever-present now. The perfect state of things, for both individual and collective man, has been envisaged as being at the time of the first

Emperor in the Far East, or at the beginning of the last Golden Age or Krta Yuga in Hinduism, and the like. Likewise in Islam, which is closer to the Judaeo-Christian traditions, perfection is associated with the Origin. The most perfect man is the Prophet of Islam and the most perfect society that of Medina. Even in cases where perfection has been described as belonging to the future, it has always been associated with another Divine intervention in human history: with the coming of the Saoshyant in Zoroastrianism, or the Kali Avatara in Hinduism, or the Mahdi in Islam. The traditional East joined the traditional West in distinguishing clearly between a messianic vision based on Divine Agencies and a messianism which is reduced to purely human proportions.

To discuss the idea of human progress through material evolution in Western philosophy is therefore to deal with a recent phenomenon in Western intellectual history. It is also to deal with an idea which is confined to modern civilization as it developed in the West, although it has spread during the past century beyond this geographical area. The ideas and concepts which served as the background for the rise of the typically modern idea of human progress through material evolution are, however, somewhat older. Some reach back to the origins of the Western tradition, although these ideas were in every case distorted and even subverted to make it possible for the idea of progress based on material factors to be created from them.

Perhaps the most basic factor which gave rise to the modern idea of human progress through material evolution was that reduction of man to the purely human which took place in the Renaissance. Traditional Christianity saw man as a being born for immortality, born to go beyond himself; for, as St. Augustine had stated, to be human is to be more than merely human. This also means that to seek to be purely human is to fall below the human level to the subhuman level, as the history of the modern world has demonstrated so clearly. The Renaissance humanism, which is still spoken of in glowing terms in certain quarters, bound man to the earthly level, and in doing so imprisoned his aspirations for perfection by limiting them to this world.*

Until that time, and of course for a short period afterwards (since no major change of this order can come about so abruptly) progress had been associated with the perfection of the human soul and the perfection of society, with the kingdom of God to be established on earth, with the coming of the Messiah and the new Jerusalem. Renaissance and post-Renaissance humanism and secularism made the traditional idea of the progress of the human soul towards its perfection (which resulted in its ultimate wedding with the Spirit) and the actual reality of the eschatological events associated with the descent of the Celestial Jerusalem and the coming of the Messiah, even more "far-fetched" and inaccessible, until both were reduced to the category of illusion, superstition, or some form of psychological subjectivism. But the imprint of the idea of progress and perfection in human nature was too profound to be obliterated so easily. Man still lived and breathed with these ideas in his heart and soul.

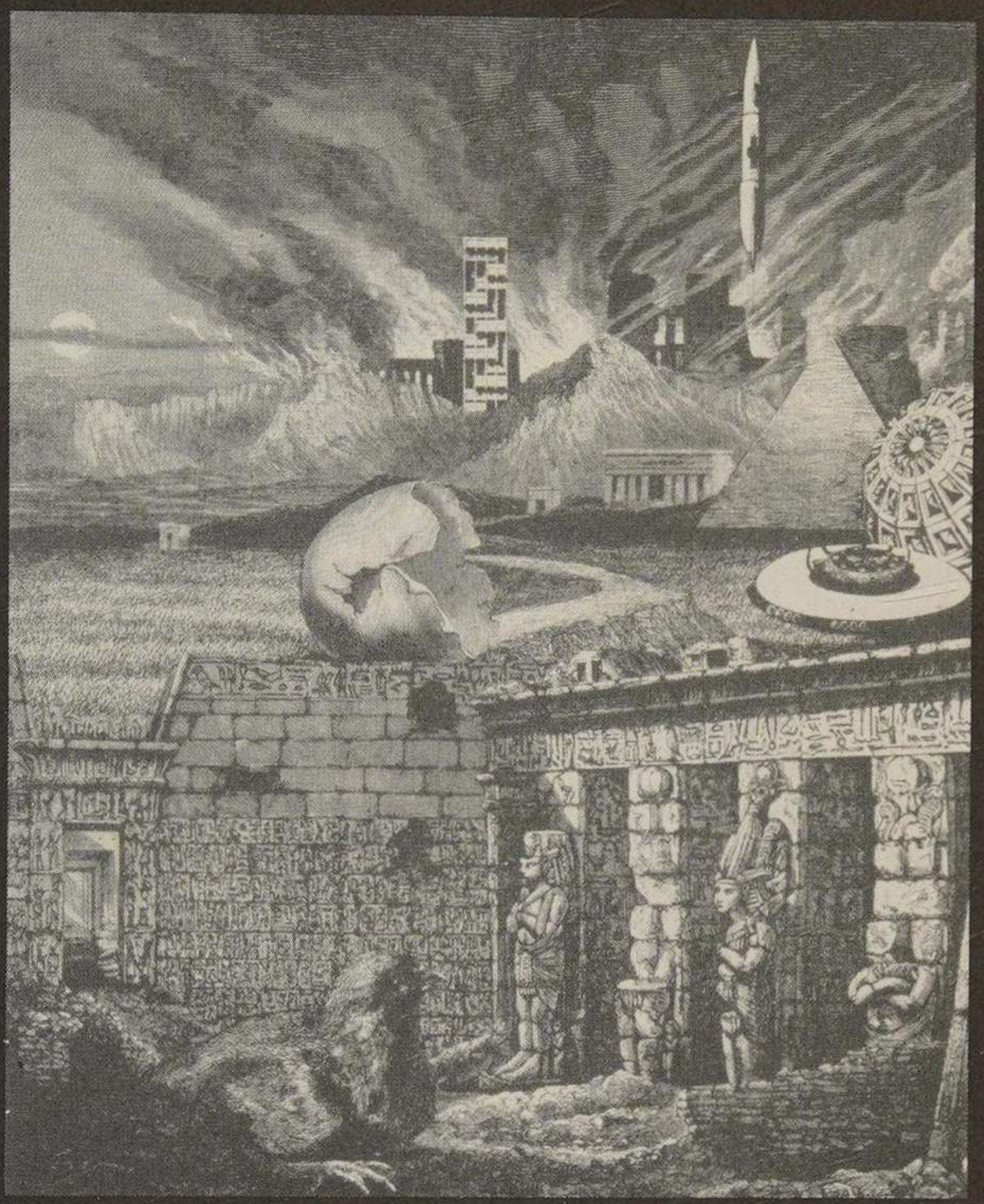
Meanwhile, the conquest of the New World, Africa, and Asia was bringing great wealth into Europe and creating a new mercantile society which saw, in its power to manipulate the world, the possibility of perfecting it in a material and economic sense. Certain forms of Protestant theology in fact saw moral virtue in economic activity and were associated with the rise of capitalism and its well-known link, until very recent times, with the idea of material progress.

*On the significance of this event which, from the traditional point of view, implied a new "fall" for man, see F. Schuon, *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, trans. by Lord Northbourn, London, 1965; especially pp. 28ff.

With this new confidence gained by European man in his ability to conquer the world and to remold it, the human background was prepared for the transfer of the idea of perfection and the progress of the soul from its upward, vertical dimension towards God to a purely this-worldly and temporal one. These ideas, thus suppressed, had to find an outlet in the world view of modern man, since they were so deeply ingrained in the human soul. The natural outlet was provided by this exceptional chapter of European history during which, despite incessant wars between Catholics and Protestants, Spain and England, England and France, etc., European man as a whole found himself mastering the earth rapidly and being able to mold the destiny of humanity. It took but a single step to see, in this very process of the expansion of European civilization and the amassing of wealth which accrued from it, the road to human progress and the confirmation of the secularized conception of man which had made such a domination possible in the first place. Had not Europe rejected its own traditional civilization, it would not have been able to develop all the means and techniques which made the conquest of non-European civilizations possible. This success was due to the secularization of man, and in turn hastened the process of secularization and this-worldliness by encouraging human beings to devote all their energies to worldly activities, as the hereafter became more and more a distant concept or belief rather than an immediate reality. Moreover, the belief in human progress in history provided a goal which aroused men's fervor and faith and even sought to satisfy their religious needs. Perhaps there is no modern ideology which has played as great a role in replacing religion and, as a pseudo-religion, attracting the ultimate adherence of human beings as the idea of progress, which later became wed to evolutionism.

Another element of great importance, whose secularization and distortion contributed a great deal to the rise of the idea of human progress through material evolution, was the Christian doctrine of incarnation and the linear conception of history associated with it, and especially with the type of Christology adopted by the Western Church. For Christianity, the Truth entered into history, into the stream of time and, through this event, time and change gained significance beyond the domain of time itself. In other religions also, time is of course of significance. What human beings do affects their immortal souls and the state of their being in the worlds which lie beyond time. Whether the world is seen as *māyā* as in Hinduism, or as mirrors reflecting God's Names and Qualities as in Islam, there is not the concern in these religions with the "historicity" of the incarnation of the Truth in the way that one finds it in Christianity. This statement would also include Zoroastrianism, although it sees time itself as an angel; and it would hold true even in later developments of the religion in the form of Zurvanism, where Zurvan or "boundless time" is seen as the principle of the Universe.

As long as the integral Christian tradition was alive, in which Christ was seen as the eternally present Logos and not only as an "historical personality," the doctrine of incarnation was preserved from desecration, distortion, and perversion, but as suprasensible levels of being began to lose their reality for Western man and Christianity became bound solely to an historic event, history itself became impregnated with ultimate significance affecting the Truth as such. The Aristotelian Averroism of the Latin Scholastics, as well as the Enlightenment view of European man and his position in human history, were also to play a crucial role in this process. From this position there was but a single step to take to arrive at nineteenth-century European philosophy, which with Hegel converted the philosophy of history practically into theology itself. The secularization of the Christian concept of incarnation removed Christ in one degree or another from the center of the arena of the historical and cosmic drama, but preserved the idea of the ultimate significance of temporal change



for human existence. Belief in human progress through temporal and historical change replaced to a large extent the central role occupied by the doctrine of incarnation in traditional Christian theology. One cannot imagine a philosophy which makes changes in human history the ultimate determining factor of human destiny, and even of the Truth Itself, arising anywhere but in a world in which the historical flux had been impregnated with theological significance to an extraordinary degree. In a way Hegelianism and Marxism could have arisen only in a world whose background was Christian, and Marxism could only be a Christian heresy as far as its philosophical aspect is concerned; although its concern with every aspect of life makes it in a sense a parody of Judaism, with its aN-embracing notion of Divine Law as incorporated in the Talmud.

As for the linear conception of time which is to be found in traditional Christian sources such as St. Augustine, it saw history as a single line or movement punctuated by

that one great event which was the descent of the Logos or the Son into time. Time had three points of reference: the creation of Adam, the coming of Christ, and the end of the world associated with his second coming. History had a direction and moved like an arrow towards that target which is described so powerfully in the *Revelation of John*. There was no cyclic conception of rejuvenation, gradual decay, and decomposition, followed by a new period of rejuvenation resulting from a new intervention by Heaven upon the human plane, as one finds in so many Oriental religions. Nor was there an emphasis upon the cycles of prophecy, as we see in Islam, although the more metaphysical and esoteric forms of Christianity were certainly aware of the everlasting and ever-present nature of the Logos. But as these more profound teachings became less accessible and theology more rationalistic, it became easier for the secularistic thinkers to take the one step needed to convert the Christian conception of linear time to the idea of continuous and linear human progress, and the popular idea that things simply *must* become better every day simply because time moves on. As the Celestial Jerusalem became replaced by a vaguely defined perfect society in the future, the Christian conception of linear time became replaced by the secular one, which kept the idea of the linear character of time moving towards the goal of perfection in some undefined future, but rejected the trans-historical significance of historical events as envisaged by Christianity. In a sense historicism, and the idea of progress associated with it in many philosophical schools, is the result of the secularization and perversion of a particular type of Christology adopted by the mainstream of Western Christianity.

It is in this context that one must understand the rise of the idea of utopianism, which is another important element among the array of factors and forces that gave rise to the idea of progress in the modern West. Traditional teachings had always been aware of the ideal and perfect society, whether it was the *Civitas dei* of St. Augustine or the *al-madīñat al-fāḍilah* of al-Fārābī, not to speak of Plato's well-known description of the perfect state described in the *Republic*, which antedates both. But in a profound sense these "cities" were not of this world, at least not in the ordinary sense of the term "world." The word *utopia* itself, used by Sir Thomas More as the title of his famous work, reveals the metaphysical origin of this concept. Utopia means literally nowhere (*u* which implies negation and *topos*, space, in Greek). It is the land that is beyond physical space, in the eighth clime as the Muslim philosophers would say. It belonged to the spiritual world, and was not realizable on earth unless it were to be the descent of this celestial city upon the earthly plane.

The secularization which took place in the West after the Middle Ages gradually transformed the idea of utopia to create utopianism in its modern sense. In this transformation, messianic ideas emanating from Judaism, and to a certain extent Christianity, were also to play an important role. Through this religious zeal to establish a perfect order on earth, the already secularized notion of utopianism gained much momentum and became a major force in Western society. It is not accidental that the most dogmatic ideology based on the idea of inevitable human progress to issue from the West, namely Marxism, was to combine a psuedo-religious fervor deriving in many ways from a subversion of messianic ideas with utopianism. The role of the messiah in establishing the kingdom of God on earth became converted into that of the revolutionary in bringing about the perfect social order through revolutionary and violent means. In this way also religious eschatology was converted, or rather perverted, into the secular vision of the perfect order established by means of human progress through material evolution or revolution, for both views existed among the Western philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

As far as material evolution is concerned, it too is the result of transforma-

tions which began during the Renaissance and reached their peak in the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, although the evolutionary idea itself was not to appear until two centuries later. The science of the Renaissance was still medieval science based on symbolism, correspondence between various levels of being, concern with the totality and the whole rather than parts, and other features associated with the traditional sciences. The scientists of the age were concerned with Hermeticism and Kabbalistic sciences, and sciences associated with names such as Marciglio Ficino, Pico della Mirandola, Nicolas Flamel, and even Leonardo Da Vinci and Giordano Bruno recall more holistic sciences of nature than the mechanism which came to the fore in the seventeenth century.

Yet, it was during this period that the cosmos was becoming gradually desacralized, following upon the nominalistic perspective of the late Middle Ages which was depleting the cosmos of its sacred presence. This was also the period of the eclipse of a serious philosophy based on certainty and the vision of Being. The result was the quest after a new science and a new philosophy, the science based on a mechanistic conception of the Universe as developed by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, and the philosophy upon the certainty of one's individual consciousness divorced from the world of extension or "matter," as developed by Descartes. The two went hand in hand in creating a view of things in which the knowing subject, or the mind, was totally other than the known object or "matter," which then became reduced to a pure "it" or "thing" in a mechanistic world where quantitative laws were to explain the functioning of all things.

This new transformation of the European mentality was itself responsible for the birth of the very concept of "matter" as it is known to modern man today. Neither the ancients nor the medieval people had the conception of matter which is taken for granted now, nor in fact do those sections of the human race even today who have not been affected by the influence of modernism. Neither the Greek *hylé*, the Sanskrit *Prakṛti*, the Arabic *māddah*, nor even the Latin *materia* means matter in the modern sense. It was the seventeenth-century scientific revolution, combined with the philosophical changes associated with Cartesianism, which made possible the very idea of something being "material" and materialism in its current sense. Even the so-called materialistic philosophers of the Hellenistic period or the Hindu atomists cannot be considered, strictly speaking, as materialists, since the modern concept of matter had no meaning for them.

Although the birth of mechanistic science and a purely material conception of the world is associated with the seventeenth century, the world view of this period, including the eighteenth century, was still a static one. Even radically materialistic philosophers such as La Mettrie envisaged the material world as a static order, with change occurring within it, but not with the directed movement which would be associated later with the idea of evolution. This latter idea was to come not from the domain of physics but the temporalization of the ancient philosophical idea of the "great chain of being," which was applied to the world of living things, and was the paradigm through which natural historians since Aristotle had explained the chain of life relating the creatures of the three kingdoms to each other and to the whole of creation.

Traditional man saw a scale of perfection in existence ranging from the angels to the dust beneath the feet of earthly creatures. As long as there remained alive, on the one hand, the intuition of the world of Platonic Ideas, and on the other, the living faith in a Divine Being who created and ordained all things, man had no problem in envisaging this "chain of being" in a "spatial" manner so that the hierarchy of the planes of being was a living reality for him here and now. This static vision of the cosmos did not of course preclude the possibility of cosmic rhythms stated explicitly by the Greek philosophers and alluded to by certain Jewish and Christian sages; but such

a vision did definitely preclude the possibility of a gradual growth in time from one state of being to another. Such a growth was possible inwardly in the life of man, but not for the species as a whole.

The eclipse of faith, the spread of secularism, the loss of intellectual intuition, and the mechanization of the cosmos combined to make the hierarchy of universal existence appear as unreal. Having lost the vision of the Immutable, Western man could not but turn to the parody of the concept of the chain of being in time. The vertical "great chain of being" was made into something horizontal and temporal, resulting in the birth of the idea of evolution. Wallace and Darwin did not induce the theory of evolution from their observations. Rather, in a world in which the Divinity had been either denied or relegated to the role of the maker of the clock, and where sapiential wisdom based on the contemplation of the higher states of being had become practically inaccessible in the West, the theory of evolution seemed the best way of providing a background for the study of the amazing diversity of life forms without having to turn to the creative power of God. The theory of evolution soon turned to a dogma, precisely because it rapidly replaced religious faith and provided what appeared to be a "scientific" crutch for the soul to enable it to forget God. It has therefore survived to this day, not as a theory but as a dogma, among many scientists whose world view would crumble if they were but to take evolution for what it is—namely, a convenient philosophical and rationalistic scheme to enable man to create the illusion of a purely closed Universe around himself. That is also why logical and scientific arguments against it have been treated not at all rationally and scientifically, but with a violence and passion that reveals the pseudo-religious role played by the theory of evolution among its exponents.

This loss of the vision of the Immutable was to generalize the idea of evolution and extend it far beyond the domain of biology. At the same time, Hegelian dialectic was introducing change and becoming into the heart of reality as it was conceived by nineteenth-century European man. It did not take much to transform Hegel's idealism into materialism, considering how prevalent were the various materialistic schools at that time. The new form of materialism announced by Marx, however, differed from its predecessors in its insistence upon the dialectical process to which was grafted the idea of progress whose development has been already mentioned. In the crucible of nineteenth-century European thought, the strands of the ideas of human progress, materialism, and evolution became welded together under the general banner of human progress through material evolution. Of course there were major differences of view among Marx and his followers, the French exponents of progress, the English evolutionists—not all of whom were "materialists" strictly speaking—and others. But these were all variations upon the same themes of central concern which had grown out of the experience and thought of postmedieval European civilization, and which had reached a point of view that was totally different from that of other civilizations in either East or West.

During the nineteenth century, Christian theology remained in general opposed to this amalgamation of ideas and forces outlined above, especially the theory of evolution and materialism. But as it was not able to marshal evidence of a truly intellectual—rather than simply rational or sentimental—order, it fought a continuously defensive battle. The opposition to these forces and ideas usually remained on the emotional level often associated with various fundamentalist positions bereft of intellectual substance. Nevertheless evolutionary concepts remained for the most part outside the citadel of Christianity.

One had to wait for the twentieth century to witness a fusion—which can also be called a perversion—of these ideas with Christian theology itself, of which perhaps the most radical and extreme example is Teilhardism. This phenomenon is particularly strange in that the idea of progress

itself has ceased to attract the attention of the most perceptive of Western thinkers of several decades, and many people in the West seek to rediscover the nature of man beyond the image of the evolving mammal, striving through evolution to higher states of consciousness or a more perfect society as presented in the nineteenth century. It is a paradox that at the moment when the idea of progress through material evolution is itself becoming a victim of historic change and going out of vogue, the force of religion, which had for so long resisted this idea, is becoming influenced by its theses. The direction of life of contemporary man itself will be determined by the degree to which he is able to distinguish once again between the immutable and the changing, the permanent and the transient, and the apparent in contrast to the real progress available and possible for man as a being who, no matter how much he changes, remains in the depth of his being the same creature he has always been and will always be, a being born for the immortal empyrean of the Spirit. ◇

EPICYCLE

Solomon and the Vulture

One day Allah sent Azrail to the Emperor Solomon telling him that he had come to take his life. Solomon was a ruler who had great power and also the ability to understand a great many things about life. When Azrail told him that he had come for his life, Solomon said, "Very well, but who is going to rule after I am dead? Will the ruler who comes after me be a good one or a bad one? I have lived for five hundred years. How can I leave my realm without knowing what the world will be like after I die? I am entitled to know this."

Azrail thought him right and went back to Allah and repeated to him what Solomon had said. Allah listened to Azrail's report and said this: "I shall give him forty more days of life. Go and tell him that in that time he must find out what has happened in the past. Why should he want to live longer? When he sees what has happened in the past, maybe he will change his mind."

Azrail returned to Solomon and told him that he had been given forty more days by Allah. "During these forty days, you are to travel around the world to find out what has happened in all of the past."

Solomon consulted with his wise men about which creature had the longest life span in the world. He was told that the Ak Baba, the vulture, was the creature that lived longest. Solomon went out and found a vulture that was fifteen hundred years old. Solomon said to the vulture, "I have lived five hundred years, and Allah has given me forty more days of life. During this time, I must find out what has happened during the past. Can you tell me this?"

To this the vulture said, "I have lived only fifteen hundred years. Go and talk to my brother, who is two thousand years old and lives on the other side of yonder mountain."

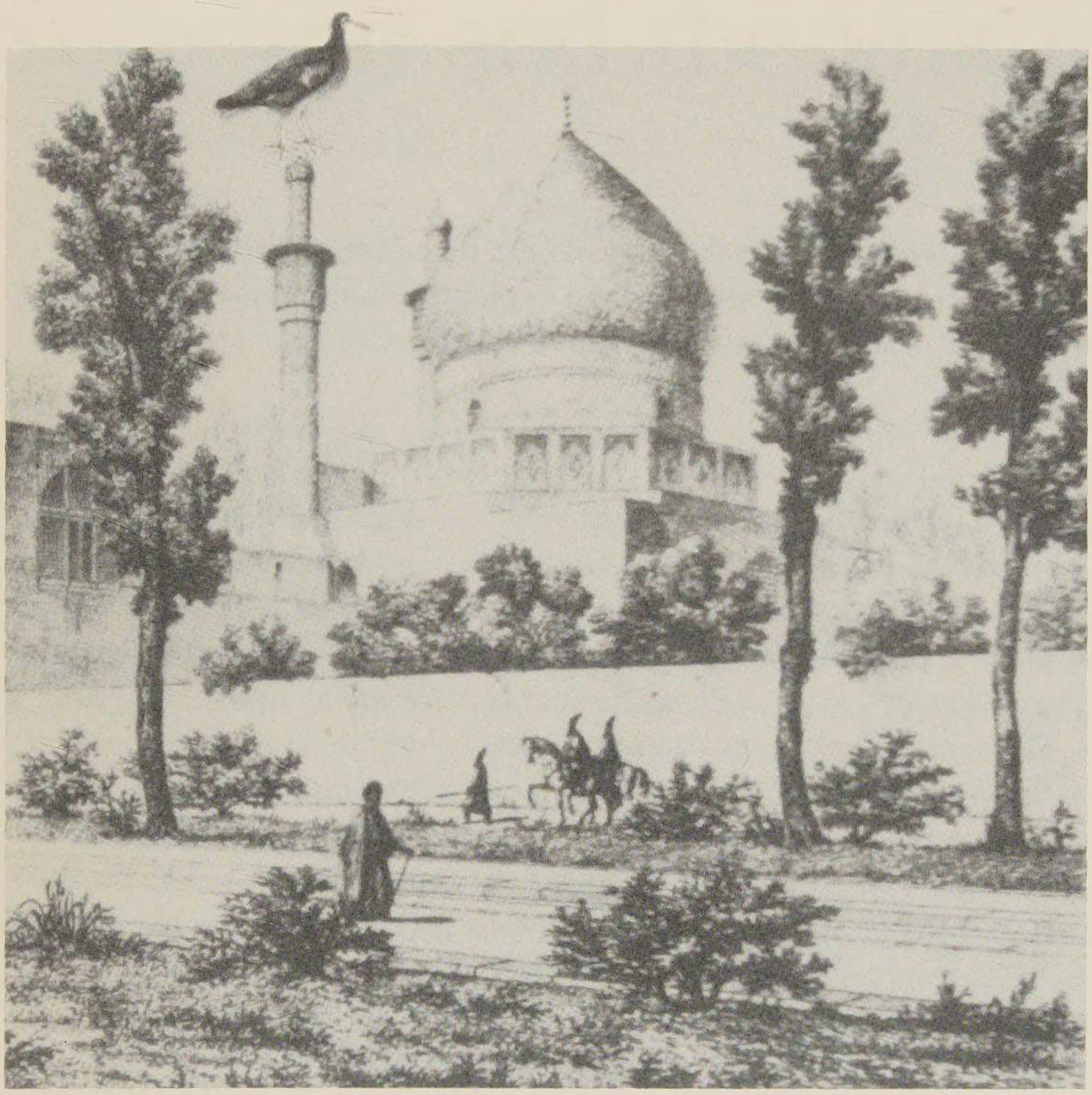
Solomon went around the mountain and there he found the vulture that he was looking for. He asked the vulture about the past, but this vulture said to him, "I am only two thousand years old, but I have a friend who is a vulture who lives at the river here who is two thousand and five hundred years old. Go and talk to him."

Solomon went to the place where the vulture of two thousand and five hundred years lived and explained to him his mission. "O vulture, tell me what remarkable experiences you have had in your life."

The bird said, "In my long life I had a series of memorable experiences, and I will tell you of the most important of these. Once I was caught up in a terrible winter during which I almost starved to death. During this winter I landed one day on top of a minaret which was made of gold. When I looked down, I saw that there was a service in progress in the mosque to which the minaret was attached. Men with white beards were sitting in the front row. Ones with black beards were standing behind them in a row, and the shaven men were in the rear. When they finished praying, the congregation looked up and saw me standing on the minaret. One of them said, 'Poor bird. He is perhaps hungry. Let us kill an ox and give it to him to eat.' They killed an ox and gave it to me to eat. After eating it I was happy and I flew away.

"One hundred years later there was another terrible winter. I flew to a strange country during that winter and I landed on the silver minaret of a mosque, and there I looked down and saw that a service was in progress. Black-bearded men were standing in the front row. White-bearded men were behind them, and the shaven ones were at the rear. When the service was over they looked up and saw me, and one of them said, 'This poor bird must be hungry. Let us kill a sheep and give it to him.' They killed the sheep and gave it to me. I ate it and flew away.

"One hundred years later there was another long and terrible winter. This time I found a mosque with a minaret that had a bronze top. I landed on the top of the minaret and looked down. I saw a service in progress. Shaven men were in the front; black-



bearded ones were behind them; and the white-bearded men were at the rear. When the service was over the people saw me there on the minaret. In great excitement they said, one to another, 'Look, there is a bird on the minaret. Bring a gun and let us shoot it.' Everyone went home for his gun. When I realized that I was in danger, I flew away and thus saved my life.

"As you can see from this, the world does not get any better. After you die it will be a worse place than when you lived in it. Go back to your kingdom and accept Allah's will."

Acknowledgment: From Tales Alive in Turkey *by Warren S. Walker and Ahmet E. Uysal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966). Reprinted by permission of the authors.*

Towards a New Perspective:

Human Life as Earth's Voice

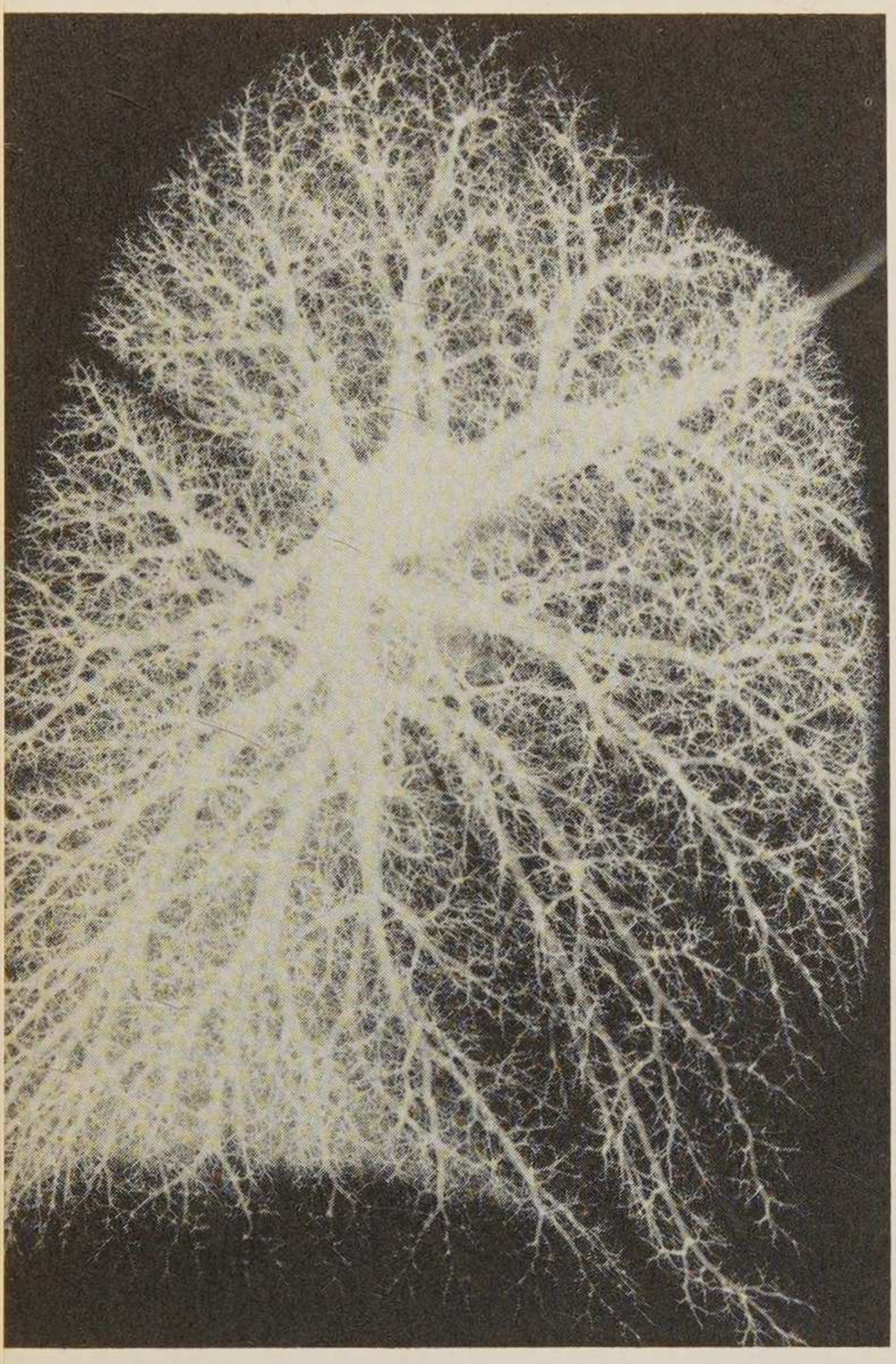
by David Leeming

Man is that being in whom the earth becomes conscious of itself.

Thomas Berry, "The Ecological Age"

As we move into the 1980s we are faced with serious threats to what we have come to think of as our permanent "way of life." Tensions between the energy-deprived, the energy producers, and the energy consumers increase daily and threaten access to the dwindling resources on which our civilization has come to depend. Our cities, once the proud focal points of that civilization, have in many cases deteriorated to the extent that they are focal points of crime and violence. The family structure, so much a part of our idealized image of moral and economic stability, appears to be losing its holding power. Our educational system, the central instrument by which upward mobility was to have been forever maintained, has all too often been a microcosmic version of a general stagnation and disintegration. In the face of all this the great institutions of religion, government, and law, to which we have committed a great portion of our moral and physical liberty in the interest of a general orderly process, have not only been unable to provide solutions to our problems but have often contributed to them. What, we find ourselves asking, has happened to our system, and what can we do to avoid self-destruction?

To begin to answer these questions it may be necessary first to confront the essential fact that our way of life takes its intellectual justification not, as we would like to think, from the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, the Upanishads, the Koran, the Bill of Rights, or even the ideal of proletarian revolution, but from reductionist scientific method and classical economics. This is why our system looks primarily to economists and scientists to keep itself going and why, not surprisingly, our politicians and other "experts" tell us that what we *need* to solve our problems is *more* of what we have already had: more facts, more energy, more spending, more economic growth, more prosperity, more goods, more mobility, and so on. But are they right? Is it possible that we need, rather, to reconsider our basic needs themselves? Perhaps we need most of all a politics and education of reconceptualization which will replace the economist's list of needs with a list that economists, by the very nature of their discipline, cannot take into account in their statistics—intangible needs such as love, harmony, peace of mind, mystery, ritual, needs of which religious sages and many psychologists have long spoken, needs that transcend the inevitable entropic process within particular systems of organization. Could it be that our faith —our inner unquestioning psychic energy —has been for too long centered in a pseudo-myth of objectivity and reductionist rationalism which could take us only so far and no farther? Is it possible that what in our schools, our businesses, our politics, and



X-ray of a human lung

our families should have been tools for the expansion of consciousness have become instead false gods who, having gained our unquestioning, unthinking allegiance, are drawing us on to certain destruction?

Consider some direct products of the pseudo-myth that has in fact been the catalytic center of our world view, at least since the age of Descartes. The world is losing cropland at a rate of almost sixty thousand square kilometers or the equivalent of two Belgiums per year. Twenty *million* square kilometers are on the brink of destruction. At the present rate, one half of the world's remaining cropland will disappear in the next twenty years.

In the 1960s the United States alone lost seventy-five thousand square kilometers of usable land to industry and urbanization—this in a world plagued by famine and drought. Forests are also being destroyed. Most important to our climatic stability, at present rates of destruction, there will be *no* tropical forest left *in the world* in twenty-five years except for a few preserves. Twenty-five thousand species of plants and more than a thousand species of animals and fishes are on the brink of extinction. And one could go on and on, mentioning, for instance, that the United States with six per cent of the world's population uses one-half of its energy. The reality described in these statistics is the direct result of a world view which puts progress before common sense, which is willing to gamble literally everything in the name of economic growth and a doubtful future paradise. This world view, of course, pervades the education we give to our children. It is there when we say *Walden* is a wonderful book but for heaven's sake don't confuse it with reality, when we say you need to get that degree in order to "get ahead." Get ahead of whom? Someone else presumably. Education always educates people to a prevailing world view.

The end results are inevitable. Consider again what our "educated" experts of various political persuasions propose as solutions to our problems: more energy—much of it atomic—more defense spending to protect what we have, or more collectivization, or more individualism, or more capital investment. Always, we are told we need more, whether communist more, capitalist more, socialist more, liberal more, conservative more, radical more, Republican more, or Democratic more. Always and everywhere the commitment is to growth based on various interpretations of the same traditional economics and science, or on attempts to get around the harsh realities of economics and science by the very means created by those disciplines. The point is, the old so-called solutions to our problems are in fact barriers to solutions.

There is the old conservatism, which creates a barrier of retrenchment based on a

perversion of traditional values of ownership and individualism; its most obvious results are isolationism, jingoism, and prejudice. The old radicalism, on the other hand, is a perversion of the ideal of community. Blinded by its own theories and a commitment to them at whatever the cost, it creates a barrier built of the rubble of things destroyed. One day history may well reveal the radical left as simply a mask for a misguided Judaeo-Christian millennial tradition which fails to see that, by definition, if there *is* such a thing as eternity, the here and now must be a part of it. It is the old liberalism—the path of moderation—that is the barrier most difficult for most of us in the Western world to get around. But it, too, finally, like conservatism and radicalism, is founded on the false intellectual premise that given enough information, we, as beings somehow objectively separate from

Aerial view of the Colorado River delta, Gulf of California

the rest of Creation, can fully understand that Creation and eventually have something for nothing. Again, a quick look at our cities, our schools, our families, and our nations—all in the West basically committed to the liberal philosophy—will show that our problems have not been and cannot be solved by the old liberalism, not for more than a relatively small minority at a given time. One could even argue that it is the liberal philosophy, the one most committed to traditional rationalism and classical economics, which is most responsible for the world's being in the situation in which it now finds itself.

What, then, do we do? We can choose a self-pitying despair, or a comfortable and fashionable cynicism, or even a soporific hedonism. Alternatively, we can step into the eternity that was always there and allow ourselves to be struck by its ultimately meaningful patterns and by our place *in* them. We can make that step by replacing the limited laws of reductionism with the universal laws of harmony, mystery, and ritual. For the fact of the matter is, the laws of harmony, mystery, and ritual *are* the laws on which the universe is constituted, and it is the laws of classical science and economics which are off the track—illusory fantasies which can be useful in a limited arena but which, when used beyond their proper limits, can only lead us to the ultimate derailment.

Ironically, science itself, early in this century, spawned the rather embarrassing series of discoveries, in the areas of what we now call relativity physics and quantum mechanics, that forced a questioning of the intellectual premises of the Western world view. The central vision of the "new science" is of a cosmic network of interrelated energy events and patterns—a holistic system which becomes aware of itself by means of one of its integral microcosmic parts, the human consciousness. As the physicist Henry Stapp has written, "(physical nature) is not a structure built out of independently analyzable entities, but rather a web of relationships between elements whose meanings arise wholly from their relationships to the whole." And, to quote Geoffrey Chew, "...the existence of consciousness, along with all other aspects of nature, is necessary for self-consistency of the whole."

This becomes clear if we think of the single cell. The cell is a microcosm, containing the potential for the component parts of the whole system. Each being—whether plant or animal—can be thought of as a cell of the whole system. This, of course, applies to man as much as to anything else. Each cell, though a microcosm, has one or more potentialities more fully developed than others. But it still has, in lesser development, the potential for all the others. Man is a highly complex cell—perhaps the most complex one. It may be that his most developed aspect is his consciousness and his ability to expand the range of that consciousness. Certainly he is more conscious than, say, the horse or the plant or the photon, though those "cells" too must be considered to have some consciousness in the sense at least of microcosmic potential. The existence of conscious intelligence in a microcosm—mankind—indicates, of course, that the system as a whole —the macrocosm—must itself be conscious and intelligent. Man, as part of the system, can only contain what the system contains. Furthermore, if each cell has a primary function in the whole body, the function of man must be to make the system—of which he is a part—conscious of itself. This essentially organic and ecological and finally "religious" view of existence is radically different from the Cartesian/Newtonian or "classical" view, in which man is a separate and objective observer of facts and phenomena making up an ultimately fully understandable universe. It is the very basis of the emerging new age, the Age of Ecology. Our job is to catch up with the philosophical implications of the new science and the new age and apply them to the lives we live.

We must apply them, for example, to education. What could be more absurd than to teach the young according to a model of reality which we know to be misleading if not false? Yet we all know the problem that presents itself here; we all know how difficult it is to resist the roulette wheel—the one more time, one more chance syndrome. We have given our lives to the old world view. Can we desert it now? How will our children get into college if we teach them according to a new model—a new value system? How will they get jobs? What will our friends think? To these questions there is no easy answer. To break the habit of the old law we must suffer the pain of birth which accompanies the death of that habit, and doubt will always play a role in such a birth. To help us through the pain and to provide direction, we require the assistance of prophets willing to make the lonely journey. And we in the modern world continue to have those wise men and women in relative plenty. We also require something less tangible, and surely the key here is the spirit of a "religious" world view to which many of us still pay lip service if not life service. Most of us, in fact, can probably recognize the similarity between the familiar religious truisms and the startling utterances of the new scientists, enough of us perhaps to make a prophetic and significant shift to a non-contradictory, new and yet familiar value system based on harmony, mystery, and ritual. Erwin Schrodinger, the great biophysicist, speaks of harmony when he says: "Inconceivable as it seems to ordinary reason, you—and all other conscious beings as such—are all in all. Hence this life of yours which you are living is not merely a piece of the entire existence, but is in a certain sense the whole." And the astronomer Fred Hoyle speaks of it too: "Present day developments in cosmology are coming to suggest rather insistently that everyday conditions could not persist but for the distant parts of the Universe, that all our ideas of space and geometry would become entirely invalid if the distant parts of the Universe were taken away. Our everyday experience down to the smallest detail seems to be so closely integrated to the grand-scale features of the Universe that it is well-nigh impossible to contemplate the two being separated."

As for mystery, we face it in the fact, that as biologist Lewis Thomas tells us, "We violate probability, by our nature." Universal ritual is experienced when we feel the significance of each form and action in a world of cycles and patterns in cosmic dance. Here are vestments, ceremonies, and processions which (if only we will look) make it possible for us to break through the barriers of the moment and of a millennial future to an ever-present eternity—an eternity which reveals itself when we meditate on the universal ritual celebrated everywhere, and at all times: in a prelude by Bach, in the birth of a child, in the eternal journey of the hero.

And then, the young themselves have already helped us to begin to break the habit of the old law. Though frequently misguided—like all explorers—the children who with their new life styles and values challenged the establishment in the '60s and '70s were radically closer to the viewpoint of the prophets of old, and of the prophets of the new science, than is our still dominant technocratic reductionism. Consider the youth-inspired ecological movement which would preserve our planet but which many people look upon as a meddlesome threat to "progress." Ecology is the study of relationships between organisms and their environments; the study of microcosms within macrocosms. In spirit the ecological movement can take us beyond simple biological relationships to those between such microcosms and macrocosms as cell in body, man in nature, government in nation, child in family, student in class. A loss of ecological equilibrium occurs in any of these relationships when the microcosm denies or abuses its role as microcosm and through self-indulgence becomes no longer cognizant of the holiness or significance of

the overall system or its part *in* the system. This is precisely a description of our world situation, and in some sense the children of the '60s and '70s who turned to Zen and flowers and long hair knew that.

Our present world view is based on classical economics and the old Cartesian/Newtonian world view. We act "objectively" as if information and reality were the same thing, as if explanation and description were the same thing. We act as if the Universe made no "common sense." We accept the law of gravity as if *it* were reality and treat the wonder of flowing water as if *it* were of only *poetic* importance. How easy it is to pollute such water!

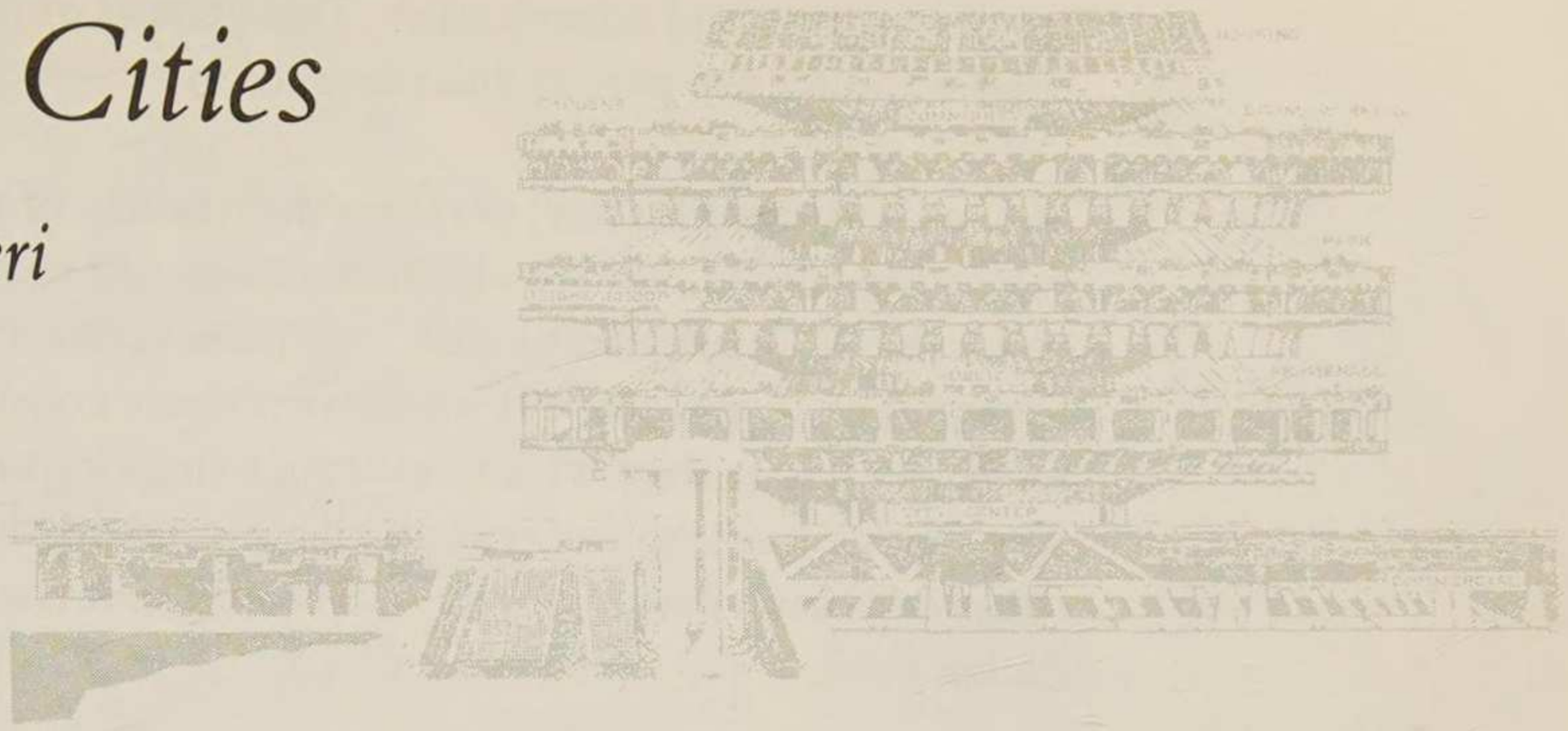
If we are to survive, the new Age of Ecology will be centered in our recognition of the all-encompassing organic pattern in which nothing—including ourselves— exists independently or self-sufficiently. The recognition of human consciousness as part of the equations of the new science literally pulled the rug out from under classical science, but it restored to all of us our role as participators rather than mere observers in Creation; it restored mystery to us—relieved us of the burden of having to be all-knowing by no longer allowing us the illusion of standing back from a picture of which we, like everything else, are an integral part. A new approach will have to begin, then, from the nature of human consciousness itself and its relation to the all-encompassing ritual. It follows that any new education for the new age will have to be in the broad sense ecological, which is to say, "religious." Means will have to be found to break through the old expert/specialization syndrome that grew out of old law. Schools will have to be at once mind schools, spirit schools, and trade schools; composting and waste re-cycling will have to be as important as math and English, and indeed will be understandable only in terms of their holy relation one with the other.

This does not mean that reason, technology, scientific method, Newtonian mechanics, and classical economics will have no place in our society and our education. What it does mean is that they will have to be used and taught in proper perspective, against the background of higher laws, laws which are traditionally associated with myth and religion and which we now know to be the true laws of the Universe. It is we rationalists who have been out of step and who must now get back in. And this is not a question of what would be pleasant; it is a question of survival, of being at one with the environment—whether that is seen as Nature or, ultimately, God. Unless we can fall in with the laws of harmony, mystery, and ritual, and unless we can find ways of instilling these laws in our children within the next two decades, we will simply not survive. We are, after all, a speck of dust in the immensity of the cosmos, and life is precariously supported here. There is nothing more to be taken from the environment under the old rationalist system without opening up political or ecological Pandora's boxes of unimaginable horror. The time of our dancing to a different step from the infinite has come to an end.

If all of this seems alarmist on one hand and idealistic on the other, remember again that we are talking about survival and remember that the human species, unlike any other, possesses the twin gifts of consciousness and the ability to articulate that consciousness: Man is that being in whom Creation becomes conscious of itself. *How* conscious is to some extent up to us. ◇

Earthly Cities

by Paolo Soleri



A true experience is suffered information. There is a price tag attached to any learning process: time, effort, difficulty, danger, emotional load, etc. Therefore, there is a definite religious side to learning which must be reflected by the sources learning springs from: a reverential fitness within the larger reality, the building within the town, the town within nature. This, though simple to state and possibly to understand, is enormously difficult to achieve. It ultimately demands a whole range of accomplishments capable of contradicting one another and yet remaining coherently co-present, an achievement possible only in the context of a strong human-social-cultural ethos.

If the city is to be what it is meant to be, the most comprehensive structure for learning, the function of which is a growing understanding guiding man toward a greater sensibility and consequently, creativity, then nothing is more urgent for man's destiny than this focusing of his efforts on the transformation of his communities into ecologically-oriented cityscapes, those media that have consumed themselves into messages. Since this new orientation has a spiritual-sacramental undertone, the ecological orientation becomes a theological reality, a theo-ecological thrust. We come full circle, then, where communication as mass-media finds reason to exist because the information caused by it is momentous to the masses, us. They are, that is to say, saturated and quivering with the imponderable, the mysterious...the divine.

* * *

The mass-energy universe is a knot which unravels in space and time at the direction of life: In no way can life do without the energizing of the physical universe. The consumption of matter into spirit is just that, a consumption, and by it, a transfiguration.

For three or four thousand millions of years, life has been nipping away at the earth, constructing for itself ever more miraculous abodes. Complexity is explosively affirming its own power to synthesize spirit. The Urban Effect presides over this process of

interiorization and sensitization. This genesis of the divine is the tidal wave we are part of and partaker in.

We, as sensitized matter, perform the miracle of sanctifying that which we behold, but we also mismanage our power when we work in our "equipment yards" where reverence is conspicuously absent. The sacred space is where reverence constructs the future more and better than where reverence sings nostalgia for the past. The Gothic masterpiece is as much a successful challenge to the stony and brute nature of physical reality as it is a hymn to the Father God.

Practical man is constantly bruised in his encounters with reality since reality is not practical but real. The scars left by those encounters litter the past and will eventually bury contemporary man because by giving to Caesar so much (everything) nothing is left for God. We need to reconnect matter to spirit, Caesar to grace, since we are an unbreakable mix of matter and spirit.

If the steadfastness of life and the habit we have of being part of it explain the callousness we demonstrate toward life's constantly miraculous nature, they also suggest the immensity of the spiritual, sentient phenomenon which can take for granted the most improbable of things...consciousness itself and, what is more, its constant unfolding. Therefore, we are materially a walking, eating, sleeping, doing, struggling sacredness among the sacredness of the vegetal and animal kingdoms, a tiny tidal wave of sacredness pressing against the immensely large and relatively inert reality of mass-energy which composes the cosmos.

Contemporary man technologizes himself to death and then rushes to those sacred places and spaces where he can remotely observe a different man through some of the physical things he has left behind (or ahead). The different man, his ancestor, is the man of toil, slavery, heroism, idolatry, and faith. For each contemporary wanderer going into the wilderness, there are a thousand pilgrims going to the places of man. Even at this young evolutionary stage of the human species, the return to man is stronger than the return to nature. Already at this very early age of civilization there is, between man and pristine nature, the man of history whose call is at times nothing more than the crumbling stones and miserable shards of some historic and prehistoric garbage heaps. (One can say that, in most instances, cities would grow vertically above successive layers of litter and waste, the by-products of civilized man.) Beyond the ruins of his continuing hubris, documented in the remains of his cities, man has been reaching for sur-man in an effort to hold at bay and tame the fury of the non-living universe. He must remind himself that since life is the exception to the rule, the rule being non-life in the physical universe, he is perched

precariously on a tenuous limb surrounded by nothingness. His gods care, or so he thinks, for his tottering through the construction of the history of his being. Contemporary man avidly seeks the remaining documents which will communicate to him information on such construction.

On this journey through history, the journey contemporary man seeks to re-experience in his pilgrimage, man manipulates the physical world and produces all sorts of wares, small and large, private and public, lasting and ephemeral, humble and flamboyant, functional and symbolic. Those physical things make up the nest where his children learn what is normal or not, what is peer-grooming or not, what is customary or not, what is useful or not, what is respectable or not. The adult or the child-adult molds himself by molding the physical environment, and his matrix closely fits the physical matrix he inherited and the one he himself is altering by his being and doing.

The physical milieu, then, is a formidable teacher, a significant molder of ourselves, the sensuous receivers-intensifiers-transformers-transmitters. It does not simply inform us, it reaffirms our identity by the coordination and mediation of our being with our becoming. Therefore, the state of being, solicited by the information load of the physical milieu, is constantly stressed in the dynamics of becoming. That, by the way, is why we all agree on the evil nature of the squalid environment where the cruelty of man is made forceful by the mutuality of bricks and wood, stone and asphalt, litter and bareness, all organized to make bleak spaces anticipatory of bleak lives.

It is only logical that the pauperization of our soul and the soul of our society coincide with the pauperization of the environment. One is the cause and reflection of the other. Therefore, escape from the vicious circle that runs environmental squalor into spiritual squalor and fosters new degradation of the environment proposes the necessity of a radical shake-up, a breaking-up of

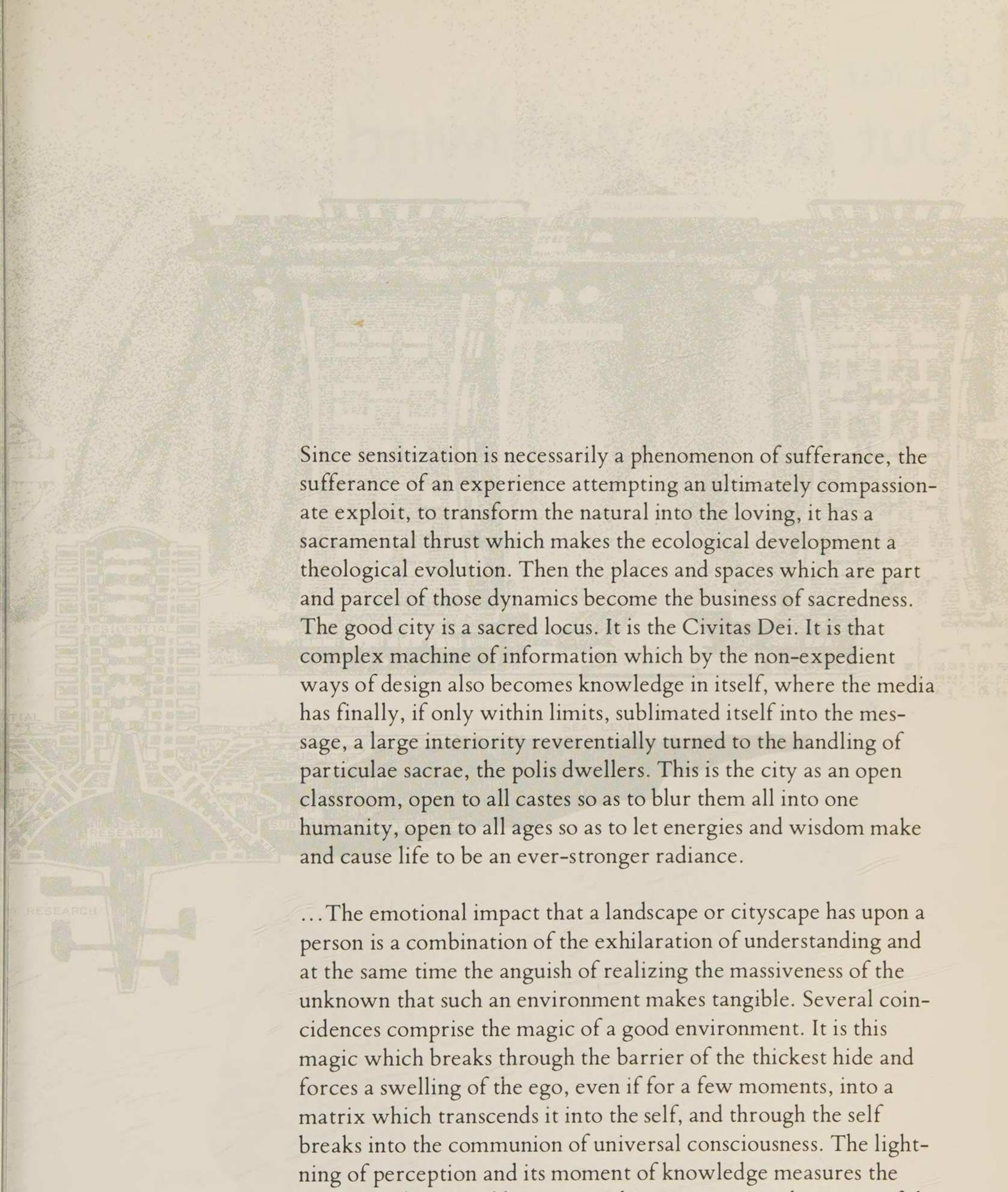
more things than one would like, so as to break the vicious circle and also break the reductionist bearing and the incantation of technology.

To stay out of the technological mystique without having to refute the usefulness of technology demands a better grasp of the learning process. What does make information come alive, so to speak, is that kind of processing which transforms it from an outer element into an inner energizer. The bread of information becomes the flesh of knowledge, that is to say, a parcel of the environment is interiorized.

This interiorization of the outer is the necessary step for reaching the hidden aims life has in the so-called inanimate world, appropriating some of its components (mass-energy) and energizing them to the point where they themselves begin to emanate a spiritual light. The spirit moves mountains but only in the factual sense of transforming (metamorphosizing) such mountains into the surmatter which is the stuff with which the spirit can support itself. For example, fertilizer products, which are made by the progressive removal of a ridge rich in minerals needed for plant growth, go into the making of grains and vegetables. These in turn feed animals, or man directly. There is then man's mind (and spirit) transforming the ridge into more of itself, the spirit. Another example is the marble of a quarry transformed into a temple. Here the energizing does not entail a transformation of matter into flesh. In both cases, it is right to say that what counts is what is inside ourselves. This inside is the lens which has the capacity to concentrate the spherical input of the outer into the self, its center, the knowledge center. It is an appropriation of that which is beyond the membrane-skin of our organic self by way of its interiorized and interiorizing power. The vibrant environment is that environment which the self interiorizes. The process, ultimately both ways, sees information become flesh and blood, knowledge, and conceptual (though not necessarily conscious) knowledge, something closer to an instinctual wisdom.

* * *

...If we take care of our environment because such care is imposed by edict, the result might be order in appearance, death in substance. If we take care of only that portion of our environment which we own, the environment will be like a sea of litter and dread dotted with small island utopias whose segregated order is the true origin of chaos. This is a pretty close description of the urban-suburban situation today. If we take care of the environment because we have a sense of reverence toward it, then the reverential fire will make the environment glow with the embers of the spirit.



Since sensitization is necessarily a phenomenon of sufferance, the sufferance of an experience attempting an ultimately compassionate exploit, to transform the natural into the loving, it has a sacramental thrust which makes the ecological development a theological evolution. Then the places and spaces which are part and parcel of those dynamics become the business of sacredness. The good city is a sacred locus. It is the Civitas Dei. It is that complex machine of information which by the non-expedient ways of design also becomes knowledge in itself, where the media has finally, if only within limits, sublimated itself into the message, a large interiority reverentially turned to the handling of particulae sacrae, the polis dwellers. This is the city as an open classroom, open to all castes so as to blur them all into one humanity, open to all ages so as to let energies and wisdom make and cause life to be an ever-stronger radiance.

...The emotional impact that a landscape or cityscape has upon a person is a combination of the exhilaration of understanding and at the same time the anguish of realizing the massiveness of the unknown that such an environment makes tangible. Several coincidences comprise the magic of a good environment. It is this magic which breaks through the barrier of the thickest hide and forces a swelling of the ego, even if for a few moments, into a matrix which transcends it into the self, and through the self breaks into the communion of universal consciousness. The lightning of perception and its moment of knowledge measures the length, in durational beats, passed in constructing the magic of the instant. In different measures of intensity all good environments operate transcendentally on the ego and therefore are information-communication, knowledge, and re-creation in one. ◇

EPICYCLE

Out of the Whirlwind

THEN THE LORD answered Job
out of the whirlwind:
"Who is this that darkens counsel
by words without knowledge?
Gird up your loins like a man,
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
when the morning stars sang together,
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

"Or who shut in the sea with doors,
when it burst forth from the womb;
when I made clouds its garment,
and thick darkness its swaddling band,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stayed'?

"Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place,
that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth,
and the wicked be shaken out of it?
It is changed like clay under the seal,
and it is dyed like a garment.
From the wicked their light is withheld,
and their uplifted arm is broken.


Dennis Gile 1984

"Have you entered into the springs of the sea,
or walked in the recesses of the deep?
Have the gates of death been revealed to you,
or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?
Have you comprehended the expanse of the earth?
Declare, if you know all this.

"Where is the way to the dwelling of light,
and where is the place of darkness,
that you may take it to its territory
and that you may discern the paths to its home?
You know, for you were born then,
and the number of your days is great!

"Have you entered the storehouses of the snow,
or have you seen the storehouses of the hail,
which I have reserved for the time of trouble,
for the day of battle and war?
What is the way to the place where the light is distributed,
or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth?

"Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain,
and a way for the thunderbolt,
to bring rain on a land where no man is,
on the desert in which there is no man;
to satisfy the waste and desolate land,
and to make the ground put forth grass?

"Has the rain a father,
or who has begotten the drops of dew?
From whose womb did the ice come forth,
and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?
The waters become hard like stone,
and the face of the deep is frozen.

"Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades,
or loose the cords of Orion?
Can you lead forth the Mazźaroth in their season,
or can you guide the Bear with its children?
Do you know the ordinances of the heaven?
can you establish their rule on the earth?

"Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,
that a flood of waters may cover you?
Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go
and say to you, 'Here we are'?
Who has put wisdom in the clouds,
or given understanding to the mists?
Who can number the clouds by wisdom?
Or who can tilt the waterskins of the heavens,
when the dust runs into a mass
and the clods cleave fast together?

"Can you hunt the prey for the lion,
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,
when they crouch in their dens,
or lie in wait in their covert?
Who provides for the raven its prey,
when its young ones cry to God,
and wander about for lack of food?

Then Job answered the Lord:
"I know that thou canst do all things,
and that no purpose of thine can be thwarted.
'Who is this that hides counsel
without knowledge?'
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.
'Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you, and you declare to me.'
I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees thee;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes."

—*Holy Bible.* Revised Standard Version.

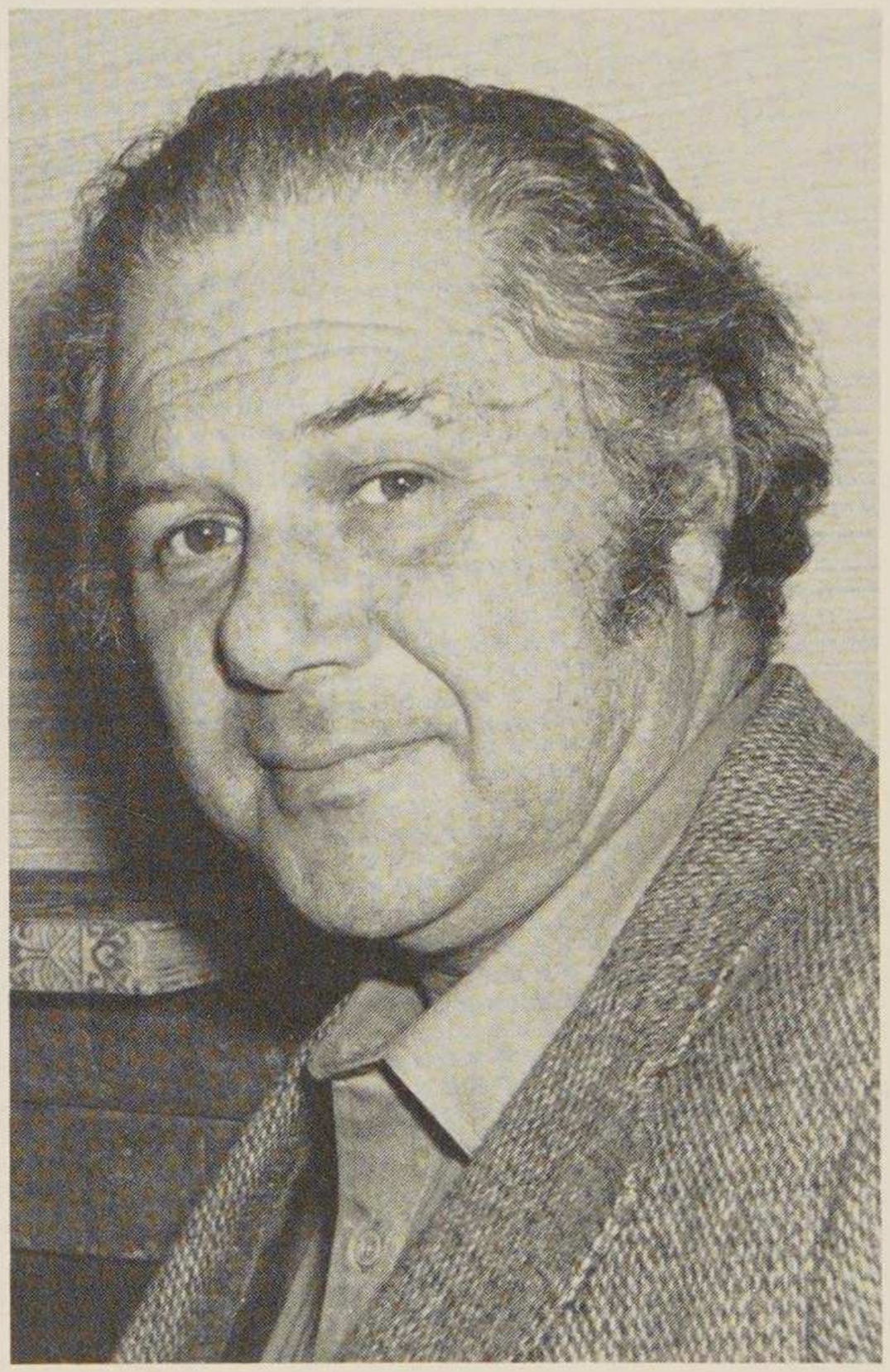
Illustration by Deanna Glad

In Search of Lost Christianity:

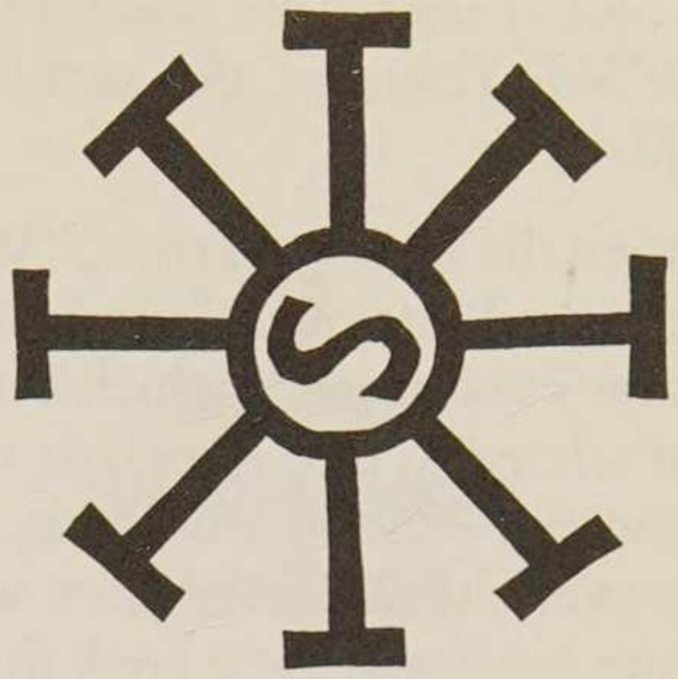
An Interview with Jacob Needleman

by John Loudon

I had reviewed Jacob Needleman's Lost Christianity *for* PARABOLA *(Vol. V, No. 4) and even though I thought that I had caught its meaning, the book—and the review—left me with all sorts of questions. Needleman told me that he had appreciated the review very much and would be glad to talk with me about the questions that the book had raised. So I went over to his comfortable two-story house near the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco for an interview. He welcomed me with a cup of coffee; then we sat down in the living room to begin our conversation in earnest. It seemed to flow along more smoothly than I'd expected, given our quite different perspectives, and did not so much finish as stop for each of us to catch our inquiring wind. But it was evident to us both that ours was a conversation barely begun, and I left with even more questions—but perhaps better ones—than I'd had when I'd come. For Needleman has the ability to ask the kind of unexpected, unconventional questions that force one's seeking to a different level, and he is more demanding, sometimes it seems impossibly demanding, of religious thinking and practice than most participants in the various traditions are. He is certainly true to his calling as a philosopher in his conviction that "the unexamined life is not worth living." He probes, he wonders, he pushes, he challenges us, and certainly himself, to see if the way we live, what we think and do, is really all we can hope for, aspire to. I expect the conversation to continue, not with the hope of arriving at final answers but of entering on a journey of discovery.*



JOHN LOUDON *In the beginning of* Lost Christianity, *you indicated that you were interested in the new movements within Christianity—the return to spirituality, the concern with prayer, the rediscovery of liturgy, the opening to Eastern religions, and so on—but that you weren't satisfied with what you actually discovered on closer investigation. What was the* more *that you were looking for?*



JACOB NEEDLEMAN What I had planned on doing was something like what I had done in *The New Religions*, which was about Eastern religions in America, but this time to focus on Western religions, especially Christianity. I kept running into people from the Judaeo-Christian tradition who were drawn to the mystical parts of their own Western teaching. But I couldn't understand what they were really looking for. People would say, "Oh yes, we're reading Meister Eckhart and doing what he speaks about." Or they would say, "Yes, we're putting the Kabbalah, the Zohar, into practice." But I have worked with these texts for many years, and with some idea of the direction they spoke about, and for me it was immensely difficult to begin to put them into practice, even though I was very drawn to them. So with these people I had a funny, almost allergic kind of reaction. "My God, what is going on here?" I didn't know what they were taking from these things. And I'd seen in the Eastern religions, in many cases, their ideas and methods were being appropriated for aims that were not really what they were intended for—sometimes therapeutic ends, sometimes to build a new kind of personal religion, which was to some extent invented, compromised, distorted. And I had the annoying feeling that this mystical or esoteric literature that was now coming to the surface again was also being mined for purposes for which it was not really intended. It seemed to me that the esoteric or mystical writings of Eastern and Western Christianity are our Orient, our Eastern dimension; and the same problems that we in the West were having with Eastern religions, like Buddhism, we were already starting to have with our own East, our own mysticism.

J.L. *What you're saying suggests to me two possible kinds of misappropriation. One kind would be interpreting mystical literature in a way that is just a more interesting variation on traditional exoteric Christianity, a way, a language that makes people feel they're making a really fresh departure, but in reality they're not doing anything much different from the mainstream. The other is using this literature in a therapeutic way, and almost as a way of avoiding the real challenge of the Christian teaching.*

J.N. Both of those are happening; and not just in others, but in ourselves. There's a third kind of misappropriation too, which cuts deeply into everyone's seeking. That is when you take what you like out of a tradition and leave out what you don't like and don't understand, and build up the things you choose into a religion which suits you. This may give you a kind of comfort, and even a way of functioning better, therapeutically or socially or ethically. But in a deeper sense it is what I understand to be the meaning of idolatry in *Isaiah* 44, when he says, "I cut down the cedar, I roast it." He cooks his food, and so forth, and with what's left of the wood he carves a likeness of himself and then worships it and says, "You are my God." It is a kind of creation of one's own religion, even though it looks as though it's made up of parts that come from or are revealed by a higher source.

J.L. *Part of the Christian tradition that is meant to offset that has been the teaching that the New Testament, say, is bigger than any individual interpreter, and in a sense interprets the interpreter. And even within the New Testament there are a lot of different teachings that tend to balance and correct one another. It seems pretty obvious, for instance, that Jerry Falwell-type Christians avoid a lot of the New Testament. I don't hear much TV preaching*

on the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor" doesn't go over too well. If you feel you have to be faithful to the whole New Testament, then such idolatry seems less likely.

J.N. But then the question arises, "What is the whole New Testament?" And you have to look at the conditions in which earlier Christians related to the Gospels or the New Testament—the way of living, the discipline, even the monastic rules; where the scripture itself was not a book that you took home and read when you felt like it, but it was part of a whole discipline, a whole way of living—the reading of scripture was just one element in a comprehensive moral and spiritual regime. Then listening to the Bible was part of a larger meditative work; and if you take away the activity that was required of the listener and just read the Bible, you are inviting all sorts of subjective intrusions. If the person reading is not open or present in a certain way, then the Bible by itself can't do anything.

J.L. *Even at that, though, there would have been various levels of involvement among Christians. There were the monks who went out into the desert and devoted themselves totally to their spiritual search. And then there were ordinary Christians—scribes and nurses, people with families and jobs. Do you think that the relation to Christian teaching, to the New Testament, etc., was all that different for people who led ordinary lives from how it is for such Christians today?*

J.N. I'm not sure. But what you're saying is important because it certainly raises the question of levels of Christianity. And the picture that you're painting is a picture of levels of Christianity. One doesn't want to say that someone sitting at home reading the Bible isn't relating to the Christian message; but the issue is, on what level that person is relating. And I would say that the average business or professional person, generally speaking, is probably relating to it at a somewhat lower level than the Father or the monk in the desert. That is one thing that I tried to raise in the book—this idea that there are levels of Christianity. This is something which in the Western world we just don't understand. Anyone who says he reads the Bible and gets turned on by it is supposed to be as much a Christian as Kierkegaard or someone like that, who has paid the price out of his own gut.

J.L. *It does seem that at least in the Churches there is—despite their hierarchical structure—a democratic instinct. They want to say that the housewife-mother of ten who goes to church on Sunday and prays the rosary all the way through, who doesn't necessarily understand much of what the Mass is supposed to be about but who leads a good life, is as good a Christian as the Trappist monk—and that she can "find salvation" as readily as the sophisticated seeker. There's something attractive about that.*

J.N. One of the hardest things to talk about in modern times is the possibility that there are levels, degrees, and that not everybody, or even not many, are going to go the whole distance. We do have a notion of democracy, which one would never want to get rid of. On the other hand, there is another sense of democracy which isn't necessarily very sensible. Take even the words of Jesus: "Many are called, but few are chosen" or "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, and some will be cast into the outer darkness." Or: "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Any of these statements gives you the impression that there is, at the very least, a level of Christianity which not everybody is going to be able, or even want, to come to. When you speak of salvation for the housewife-mother, or the business or professional person, you're speaking of religion functioning as a cultural force, as a moral force in society, a way of living that makes life at least to some extent decent and normal. And one step down from that you have a kind of barbarism, a community of animals, which is one of the problems of having no religion at all in a culture. But if you have a religious system to which millions of people can adhere, you

have a moral texture for a culture, and within that texture there may be other forms of the religion that only a few people participate in, or relatively few, and progressively fewer and fewer. And you have what you call an "inner circle," although that phrase conjures up the worst kind of elitist prejudices.

J.L. *Certainly there is a lot of literature about monasticism or the religious vocation that does suggest that it is for the chosen few. But there was the feeling that one function of the Christian community at large was to provide the sort of context and ongoing tradition in which this sort of attainment could be aspired to. And in turn this attainment was thought to be of benefit to the whole community. It could give Thomas Aquinas the leisure to do his theology, and then Aquinas would give his theology back to "the faithful." Or more esoterically, perhaps, it could provide the context in which a monk who never communicated with the outside world could pursue his life of prayer, and somehow the state he attained was of benefit to all.*

J.N. This is also very much in the Eastern Christian literature. If you are a monk and go into a cave and spend your whole life learning how to pray and never have any intercourse with society at large, you are doing more for the world by praying well than you are by going out and doing good deeds and things of that sort.

J.L. *When you were talking about levels, I was thinking of a possible analogy. John McPhee wrote a book about the tennis player Arthur Ashe, called the* Levels of the Game. *And, as I remember, it had to do first with the obvious fact that lots of people play tennis and operate at different levels—some are pros, and most of us are hackers and just get good exercise. But also, even in an individual player's playing, there are levels of his own game, and that occasionally someone like Arthur Ashe would hit peak moments where he was operating at his optimum. Now people don't mind that at all; in fact there is a kind of cult worship of athletes operating at the top level of their game. They don't feel that everyone has a right to be a great tennis player.*

J.N. That's a very good point. How come everyone has a right to salvation? People are very greedy these days, and have been for a century or so, when they speak about rights. As I interpret the laws of nature, there is no such thing as a right without some kind of obligation that goes with it.

J.L. *Also this matter of levels really seems to be related to the call that you experience. And if you really experience that these higher and lower levels are unfair, then that means that you have the need and desire to strive for a higher level. In the book, you describe "lost Christianity" as "a Christianity that works, that actually produces real change in human nature, real transformation." This presumably is the higher level, the realm of the inner circle that you have been talking about. I wonder, though, what is specifically Christian about this kind of transformation, and more basically what kind of transformation are you talking about?*

J.N. First of all, in my opinion, there is nothing specifically Christian, or Judaic, or Buddhist about this transformation. As I have come to understand it, from a larger perspective, all authentic paths lead to the same transformation of human nature. There are many different ways to this state and many different strategies of how to get there, depending on many things, including the subjective state of a particular culture, or a particular person. The analogy that I find helpful is that if you take the ultimate state of transformation, nirvana, wisdom, or whatever it's called, as the top of a

mountain, then obviously there are many paths leading to it.

J.L. *Including climbing up the sheer face of it.*

J.N. Yes, but even more than that, the paths come from far off, not just from the foot of the mountain. Some paths originate in the tropic regions, some in the desert, some in the North Pole, some in the cities. And there are guide books based on the various starting points: the desert guide book says not to wear heavy clothing and to carry lots of water: "Thou shalt not wear heavy clothing," and that sort of thing. Whereas the polar guide book says, "Thou shalt wear heavy clothing," and so on. So these guide books are very different at the starting points. But as they begin to approach the mountain, they begin to look very similar, until finally they're all various forms of mountain climbing instructions, not all that different from one another. So when you get to the more esoteric or mystical aspect, what you find in the inner, contemplative side of the various teachings begins to look very, very similar. But way back there at, say, Christianity 1, or Judaism 1, or Buddhism 1, they contradict each other. And it's extremely important to understand this, because if you follow a polar book when you're in the desert you could kill yourself. If you're comparing Christianity 1 with Buddhism 1 they'll be the opposite. If you're comparing Christianity 10, which is close to the top, with Buddhism 10, they'll be very similar. This is just a sort of an analogy, but there are interesting aspects to it. For instance, you have to really want to get out of the desert, because if you don't and you have a guide book, it can just help you to erect a tent more securely in the desert, and it could be worse for you than nothing, since it will help to make you happy in the desert rather than getting out to where you have to go. So if one finds that analogy a helpful way of thinking about the similarities and differences between religions, it suggests too that each way has its own strategy. And I think that the Christian genius, the Christian stamp, has to do with love. To be transformed into a Christian means to have the power to love. That is true too of the Buddhist saint, or the Tzaddiq, or the Sufi, but it would be in a different perspective. It's just a general coloration that each tradition has; so that if you have to say what one thing makes a way specifically Christian, it is the preeminence of "love."

The transformation that works, which I'm talking about, is what St. Paul drove home in *Romans* 7; "The good that I would do I do not." I know what I want to do, I know what is good, I believe in it with my inner mind, but I can't do it. I can't love, I can't be kind, I can't live according to what I consider to be true and good. St. Paul has the inner man who wishes to do it, but he finds that he just can't. There is a law that prevents him from doing it—"a law in his members." The transformation, then, would be—among many things—the power to act in accordance with what your conscience and your inner mind know to be good. Many people say that they want to love, but very few people are even aware that they are not *able*. So if someone tells me that I ought to love my neighbor, and I don't see that I *can't* (which I think is true of most of us) either I feel guilty in some sort of neurotic way and may suffer a sort of demented guilt—or I will imagine that I can love my neighbor and at the same time do all kinds of things that are not loving. So you have Christians who are preaching love

at the same time that they are cutting people's heads off.

J.L. *But there certainly are instances of Christians who, to all appearances, are able to love. An obvious example is Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. Her theology and spirituality is extremely traditional, very simple and exoteric; but it looks as though she has learned to love and has taught her nuns to be loving, especially by just having them do what needs to be done—take the dying people in off the street, nurse the lepers, take care of orphans, and so on. And this love is based on a very straightforward theology: for instance, coming to recognize, as the Gospels say, that in serving my neighbor in need—especially the unlovely, the desperate—one is serving Christ. Don't you think some real transformation takes place in such people, or do you think you can be acculturated into perfoming acts of love without really being transformed?*

J.N. I certainly cannot pass judgments on Mother Teresa or her nuns. I don't know her. From everything I hear, she must be a remarkable woman. I'm sure that there are people who are able to love. I wish I were one of them. Where is the help to bring us to that power? I, you, most of us, do not want to give up our lives totally to some loving cause. Why are you not with Mother Teresa? Why am I not with Mother Teresa? Why are we not all running down there? The Church, Christianity, doesn't speak to us about how to become Mother Teresa right here in this life. You're saying that Mother Teresa has attained true Christianity, and maybe she has, but how do I become that?

J.L. *You say in your book that in order to really live the Christian message of faith, hope, and love, a process of transformation has to begin, and you refer to a transitional state called "intermediate Christianity." Without going through this state, you say, it's not possible to attain the capacity to really live out the Christian message.*

J.N. What I am saying is that there may be people who have attained to an extraordinary state, but who don't know precisely how they got there, and their theology or talk may not correspond exactly to what they went through. So I think that you can have genuinely loving and wise people, and yet they can't help me get there. Intermediate Christianity refers not only to the idea that one has to have a certain development, a certain consciousness of one's own self, before the Christian ideas can be absorbed, but also to the idea that one has to come to know exactly the steps that lead us from where we really are (not where we think we are) to the next steps of development. And I don't see that the Christian teaching, as it exists in the world now, recognizes us for what we really are. When, for instance, we hear press reports about the Pope talking about controlling your thoughts, controlling your emotions, that seems to me just the sort of thing that has damaged Christianity: because who can control their thoughts or their emotions? What will happen if people take him seriously is either they won't be able to do it and will feel a new round of guilt, or they will imagine that they can—even while they go around doing what they were doing anyhow. That's an example of religious teachings starting too high. They don't come way down to exactly where we are and tell us what we need to do to take the next step. All our moral ideas are too high. And many of the Eastern religions are coming in at too high a level. They say to people, "Stop your thoughts" or "Wish for the good of other

people," and so forth. Who can do that? At the moment, perhaps yes, but nobody can actually just choose to live like that.

J.L. *There is a standard pattern in Catholic history that religious orders are founded by saints, people who achieved a high level, and whose intensity of life does get communicated to the first followers and codified more or less well in the constitutions of the orders. There does seem to be a flow of energy in which people can get caught up and really transcend their limited selves, that lasts for a couple of generations. And that seems to be happening with Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity. Then too, these orders establish traditions that some people much later on can plug into and be transformed by, even though—by and large—the energy seems to dissipate over the centuries.*

J.N. One has to have a Christianity that accepts that without false attempts to correct it. Christ was crucified. The truth does get twisted. Things do fall down. We do distort the teaching. We are fallen in that sense. A Christianity that does not accept that is not what I understand Christianity to be. It's through authentic humility of accepting that the grace appears again and again. When I accept that I am *not* a Christian, only then will I become Christian. That's what's extraordinary about the great saints: when you hear them speak about themselves, they say, "I don't know" or "I am not a Christian." That's one of the things that struck me about many of the people I have met. The greater the person, the more aware they were that they were not Christian.

J.L. *The Gospel* isn't *easy. You can't really become a "born-again Christian" by coming forward at a Billy Graham rally.*

J.N. In any case, if you have dissipation of the initial energy, this has to be part of the teaching. By understanding that we are not Mother Teresa, we come closer to being who she is. I think that the laws of grace—and if anybody understood them, it was the Christian mystics or saints—are what St. Paul discovered. He found that it was when he said, "I see that I cannot do it," that he was able to receive something. That is a subtle but very important thing to understand. And I think that you will agree that the history of the Church is marked by the tendency to prometheanism—the idea that you can accomplish what you ought to be simply by your own willing, your own effort—and then reformers like Luther come along who insist, "You can't do any of this. You are trying to attain salvation by works, and you can't. It's only by an extraordinary inner feeling that the energy to do what you ought to comes through." Then that gets turned into a kind of militant building and performing and that has to be broken down again by another person.

J.L. *One of the ways that I can imagine transformation taking place is by a kind of karma yoga, in the sense of being gradually transformed by doing. It's also a subtle sort of thing. For instance, you may be working as a nurse and you are told to take care of dying people, and it's the last thing you want to do. There is a way that you could do it and not be transformed at all—by becoming a kind of master sergeant of your soul and marching yourself in there like a private under orders. However, I think all of us have some experience of knowing that a situation is calling for some response and that you find yourself saying "yes" or "no." And occasionally, because we do succeed at a few things, it seems that you can develop your moral or intellectual or religious muscles by saying "yes" and then saying "yes" again, then saying "no" but being able to come back and say "yes" again. And that's what Mother Teresa's nuns and brothers seem to say about learning to love.*

J.N. That's where the whole issue is. In esoteric Christianity, it's not a matter of developing your muscles. This is the most important thing, I think, in all that we have been talking about: there is a discipline—though that's perhaps too formal a word; there is an *attention* to my "no"-saying that can in the long run transform me.

J.L. *It seems that transformation, attainment, development—all the words you use—do involve some sort of willed achievement.*

J.N. Well, those words have taken on funny connotations. What is involved is an attainment, a growth, a development, but I wouldn't say that it is something that I have done. I grew in my mother's womb, but I didn't do it. I attained the state of being a human being, but I didn't do it. In general Christian theology is over-conservative. It's too much afraid of words like human development. On the other hand, words are easily trivialized nowadays, so that I don't blame the Church for being cautious. The idea of the soul as something that develops is an undeniable aspect of Christian teaching; it emerges in many places. There are people who reach certain levels, and it is a level of transformation of *being* that is involved. What makes a saint different from an ordinary person? For one thing, in our Western culture we are very, very ignorant of the physiological concomitants of goodness. I remember years ago when I was working on psychiatry and existentialism, coming across the statement by Binswanger (on whom I did my thesis), which struck me very much when I was twenty: "A saint and a thief are the same after two hours of mountain-climbing"—which was a good old Western way of saying that when it really comes down to it and we have to fight with the body, we're all in pretty much the same situation. But he never climbed a mountain with a saint. And that's not to suggest that a saint is a better mountain-climber; but you can't ignore the physical concomitants of our striving: the body has a role to play in this transformation. We've pretty much left that dimension out of the Western Christian and Jewish tradition. The Eastern traditions are not so bad. They have more of a sense of the work, the discipline involved, the understanding that transformation has a physiological side to it. To put it overdramatically, if you had the instruments to measure the body of a saint and the body of an ordinary person, I think you'd find differences.

J.L. *How do you tell that transformation is taking place? Many times we are motivated to set out on a path because we've seen how it seems to have benefited another person, but it seems very hard to tell. Is this transformation exhibitable?*

J.N. That's a very good question. I know that it is exhibitable; but if the question is "how would I recognize someone who has attained real transformation?" I can't really answer that. But if you are looking for that with *need*, it takes on a very different quality than if you are sitting in the back of the classroom and say "Well, how do you know?" I can't answer that in an abstract, academic way. All the marks, the signs of the saint can be faked. Whether it's James Jones or Gautama Buddha, people can always point to them and say that they have all the signs of a Sufi master or the signs of the robe of transmission and all that. Those teachings about the signs of the true master and the true disciple are all interesting and important, but you have to recognize that you can be fooled—very easily, very long. In looking for transformation, transformed people, you have to be completely open and completely skeptical at the same time. And that's very hard. But someone who is truly in need, truly desperate for guidance, I think will be extremely open and at the same time very critical. He'll know his life is at stake. If you have those two characteristics, your chances of being fooled are relatively small. And you have to keep them both. I think that gurus or teachings that try to put down one or the other of those faculties are to be regarded suspiciously.

J.L. *Anyone who has entered a religious order experiences this. One of the things you're trying constantly to decide is whether this is your vocation or not. And you could decide that it's not right for you, but you also wonder if it is right but that you just didn't give yourself to it. It's very hard to figure out which is the truth. And there are confusions too about just what you're supposed to be giving yourself to. The super novices are often those who don't go the distance.*

J.N. I think that the Church hasn't adapted its theology to making Christianity really understandable to people. I know that it's fashionable in some circles to say that Christianity is supposed to be absurd or that you have to believe because you can't understand. But that's for another time. I think now that it has to be understandable without being reduced just to ordinary psychological or scientific categories. In other words, for Christianity to be a teaching you give your life to, at least in this culture, you have to intellectually understand that it's true, at least to some extent. I don't think people today can just give themselves and crucify the intellect.

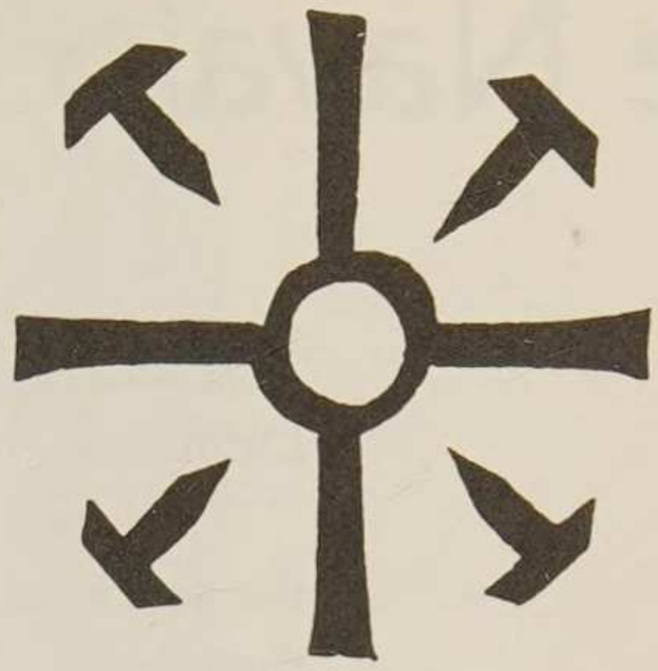
J.L. *I've experienced some of this frustration in going to mass and hearing sermons. Generally what the listener is forced to do is to translate himself out of the world he lives in every day and into some ancient Mediterranean world and think in terms which are completely foreign and unreal. The real challenge is to present the Christian message in ways that make it immediately real here and now. How many preachers or theologians are there who can really translate this stuff, who can present this material in such a way that it really hits home?*

J.N. I think that, like doctors, priests in our society have to pretend to know more than they really do. If a priest were to say that he too doesn't know, doesn't understand, I think the Church would lose some people, but the ones it kept would be much more sincere and serious than the others. I was much more moved by that priest I talk about in my book who says, "I am not a Christian" than by someone who says, "Well, this is what we Christians believe and do."

J.L. *In reading what you have to say about transformation, and about the unrealized potential that we have, I became concerned about all this talk about ideals that are always way off in the distance. You can begin to think that Christianity shouldn't really have to be so complicated and difficult and remote. For instance, your talk about soul development can seem to many just a kind of psychoscientific fiction. How can we sustain the conviction that this sort of transformation is real and possible?*

J.N. I think what we're looking for is exactly where we lost this sense of what Christianity is all about. There's a passage in Meister Eckhart, in which he says, "You must look for God precisely where you lost him." And there's the story in the Islamic tradition of Mullah Nasruddin. He's under a lamppost on his hands and knees, and a man comes over and says, "What're you doing there?" And Nasruddin says, "I'm looking for the key to my house." So this man gets down and starts helping him look for it, and, finally says, "Are you sure that this is where you dropped it?" And Nasruddin says, "No, no, I dropped it way over there." And the other says, "Well, why are you looking here?" and he says, "Because the light is better here." I think that the "lostness" lies not so much in the fact that it's so difficult, but that we're looking for it where we didn't drop it. And where did we drop Christianity? Where did we drop

being human? We're looking for it in terms of developing certain powers, doing this or that, doing good deeds, all the time, when the factor that is missing is this attention factor, this real power of the mind. We experience that, I think, when we are in question, when something happens that's contradictory or we're confronted with an unpleasant fact about ourselves. If we could be in front of our real states at those moments, I think that this process of soul-building would begin. But we're not looking for Christianity there. The key may be in the middle of the street, but we're looking for it where all this so-called light is—doing all these things that we think we should do—and of course we'll never find the key. We don't see that what we really need is not to do better things but to become different people. The way we are is that we occasionally do good things for people, and occasionally we don't. There's no real power, no real self there. Even mystical experiences won't do us any good, in terms of transformation, unless there's a self there who can digest these experiences. Otherwise, they come in like high octane energy and just go right out again, sometimes in ways that are damaging.



J.L. *It's possible in reading about self-attention and soul-development to see them as yet another psychotherapeutic project. You can imagine pop weekends for attaining self-attention.*

J.N. Well, sure. You don't have any control over how people will use language or reduce ideas. But the self-attention I am talking about is implicated in the whole weight of Christian cosmology, a whole theory of human nature, the scriptures, the life and death of Christ. And in *Lost Christianity*, I quote the case of Saint Simeon the New Theologian who sensed the enormous scale of the inwardness of this self-attention that I am speaking of, with his struggle with three kinds of attention, three kinds of prayer, and so forth. Finally, I discovered in reading that book again and again that the key thing is, "I don't know the place of the heart; I can't find the place of the heart." And all the language, myth, symbol of a tradition, a ritual, communicates the tremendous scale of this world I'm speaking of. Now if you were to take one or two words out of this and make it into a pop weekend—and sure, that happens—people should be aware that there's a whole tradition to remind you of how much is being left out. You need a complete tradition. So when the early Fathers write about self-attention, it's within the context of the whole tradition.

J.L. *One question that your book obviously raises for serious readers is, "Well, what do I do now?" For the majority of people, it seems that at least two things are necessary—meeting or finding a teacher and being part of a group or tradition.*

J.N. I think that most of us are not Mother Teresas. I don't think that most of us have the knowledge or the support for going on past the first step. But I think there is help for those who want to take the next one; and I think help is necessary, either an individual or a community or a group is necessary. But I don't think you can find them, unless you have a certain quality of search. If a person is true to that, he can be prepared to recognize a teacher when he sees one. ◇

EPICYCLE

The Navajo Emergence

This world we live in is the fifth world, and the People, the Dinneh, have come here from four worlds which are below it.

The first world was red, and there were oceans to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west. Twelve people lived there: the people of the Dark Ants, the people of the Red Ants, the people of the Dragon Flies, of the Yellow Beetles, the Hard Beetles, the Stone Carrier Beetles, the Black Beetles, the Coyote Dung Beetles, the Bats, the Whitefaced Beetles, the Locusts, and the White Locusts. These twelve people began to live there.

They quarreled among themselves, because they sinned; they committed adultery, one people with another. And the gods were angry and would not speak to them. But they continued to sin and to quarrel, until Tiéholtsodi, who was chief of the ocean to the east, told them they could not stay any longer in that world. Four mornings later, they saw what looked like a white wall surrounding them on every side, and they saw it was water, impassible and unsurmountable, that was advancing on them from all four directions. So they flew upward in circles until they reached the sky. When they looked down, they saw nothing but water below, and above them the sky was smooth and hard. At last, while they were circling, a blue head looked out at them from the sky and said, "Here is a hole," and they went in by the hole and entered the second world.

The second world was blue, and there was no one in it except the Swallow people. They made an agreement with them, and for twenty-three days they all lived together happily, but then they sinned again and one of them committed adultery with the wife of the Swallow chief, and once more they had to leave that world. Again they circled upward and found the sky smooth and hard, but a white head looked out at them and and showed them where to enter, and they entered the third world.

The third world was yellow. Here there was no one except the Grasshopper people; but they made friends with them and all lived together happily for twenty-three days. But on the twenty-fourth day the same thing happened, and the Grasshopper people drove them out. And they circled upward again to the sky, where a red head emerged and showed them the way to enter the fourth world.

The fourth world was mixed black and white. And in this world it seemed that no one lived, but at last to the north they discovered the Kisáni, the Pueblo people, who gave them food to eat and were kind to them. So they held a council and decided they would not do anything to make the Kisáni angry; and they lived together happily.

One day late in the autumn, they heard a great voice calling. It called four times, each time coming nearer, and four mysterious beings appeared: White Body, Blue Body, Yellow Body, and Black Body. These beings spoke to them with signs which they did not understand, so after four days the one called Black Body remained behind and told them in their own language that the gods wanted to make more people who would be more like themselves, and that the people, who were dirty and stank, must clean themselves and wait.

In twelve days the four gods came back carrying two sacred buckskins and two ears of corn, one white and one yellow. They laid these on one of the sacred buckskins and covered them with the other, and the wind entered between the buckskins and blew into them. When the gods lifted the upper buckskin, a man and a woman

were lying there, and the wind had breathed life into them as it gives life to us all, for when it ceases to blow out of our mouths, we die; and its whirling trail can be seen in the skin of our fingertips.

First Man and First Woman had five pairs of twins, born within four days of each other, and they grew up with miraculous speed and intermarried with the Mirage people and the Kisáni, and soon there were many people in the world. A time came when the women quarreled with the men, and they lived apart for three years, on opposite sides of the river. When they were finally reconciled, the women crossed over the river to join their husbands, and one woman and her two daughters were seized by Tiéholtsodi, and pulled under the water.

Four days later, the people heard the great voice of the gods again; it called four times, each time coming nearer, and White Body and Blue Body appeared with two bowls of shell. They set these spinning on the river surface and underneath them the water opened and gave entrance to a house with four rooms, made of dark waters, blue waters, yellow waters, and waters of all colors.

A man and a woman of the people descended, and Coyote went with them. In the first room they did not find anything, nor in the second, nor the third, but in the room made of water of all colors they found Tiéholtsodi with the two children he had stolen and two children of his own. The man and the woman took the two children of the people and went out; but Coyote, without their seeing him, seized the two young of Tiéholtsodi, hid them in his robe, and followed them.

The next day, all the animals began running by, going from east to west. The people went out to see what was happening and they saw that a great wall of water was approaching them from the east. They fled to a high hill, but they saw that the waters were going to engulf them, and they were very frightened and about to despair when they saw two men coming, an old man and a young one. The two men sat down and took out of their robes seven bags of earth from the seven sacred mountains, which were placed in the fourth world just as they are in this one. And in this earth they planted thirty-two reeds, each with thirty-two joints, and they grew together very rapidly and became a huge reed that was hollow, and had a hole in one side. The two men told the people to enter the reed, and the hole closed behind them just as the waters reached them and surged around them.

The reed grew very fast and kept above the rising water, and the gods, who had accompanied the people, steadied it with clouds made of their breath. By sunset it had reached the sky, but it

swayed so much that Black Body took the feather out of his headband and tied the top of the reed to the sky with it; and that is why this reed always carries a plume on its head. There was no hole in the sky so they sent up the hawk, who scratched away but could not quite get through. Then they sent the locust, who made a hole, but it was too small for the people to pass. So they sent the badger, who made the hole bigger, and got his legs stained black with mud as they have been ever since. Then First Man and First Woman climbed through the hole and all the other people followed them into this, the fifth, world.

They came out on an island in the middle of a lake, which was surrounded by high cliffs. Blue Body threw stones against the cliffs, making holes through which the lake drained away, and the people could walk to the mainland. On the fourth day after they had come out, someone went to look into the hole from which they had emerged, and found that water was welling up in it and about to overflow. He ran back to warn the people, and First Man pointed his finger at Coyote and said, "That rascal never takes off his robe. I think he has something hidden there that he has stolen." They tore off Coyote's robe, and two little spotted creatures dropped out of it who were the children of Tiéholtsodi. The people threw them quickly into the hole through which the water was beginning to rush, and instantly it subsided and dropped roaring into the lower world.

Now the people were safe, but they wanted to know what was going to happen to them. Someone threw a hide scraper into the water and said, "If it sinks we will die, if it floats we will live forever." It floated, and everyone rejoiced. But Coyote picked up a stone and threw it into the water, saying, "If it sinks, we die, and if it floats, we live forever," and the stone sank. The people were very angry, but Coyote said, "No, if we live forever and continue to increase, the world will become too small for us and our cornfields. It is better that we each should live only for a time and then leave room for our children." And the people saw that his words were wise, and accepted their fate.

—Retold by D.M. Dooling

Illustration by Richard Taliwood

Adapted from Navajo Legends *by Washington Matthews, Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society, Vol. V., 1897.*

Ravensgate:

The Other Face of the Pt. Concepcion Controversy

by Scott Eastham

photographs by Tom Kubat

1/ *The "Most Remote" Location*

The very idea is an aesthetic atrocity, of course. Another big, ugly power plant cluttering up the landscape...

But it is also at first brush something of a mystery: Why would anybody with half a wit ever seriously propose the ragged and rugged stretch of mid-California coastal headlands called Pt. Concepcion (and known to mariners for three centuries as "The Cape Horn of the Pacific") as a suitable location for a massive land-and-sea liquified natural gas terminal?

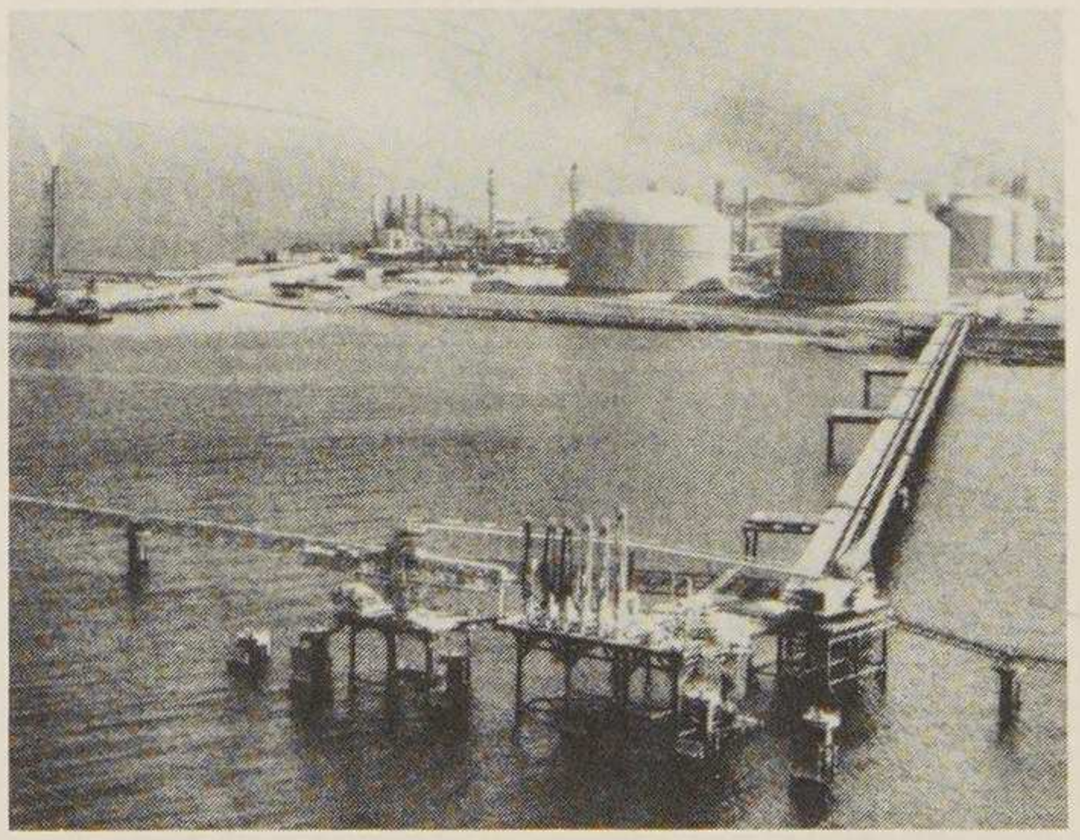
Nothing whatsoever qualifies such a site for such a purpose except, as we shall see, its relative remoteness from densely populated areas. Every public agency considering the proposed terminal has operated on the singleminded assumption that the most remote site is the most desirable, due mainly to their quite justified fears over the extremely volatile character of liquified natural gas. Promoters of the facility may once have hoped that the inaccessibility of Little Cojo Bay, the proposed site on the northern shoulder of Pt. Concepcion, might assure them a minimum of public exposure, scrutiny, criticism or censure. Quite the opposite has in fact occurred.

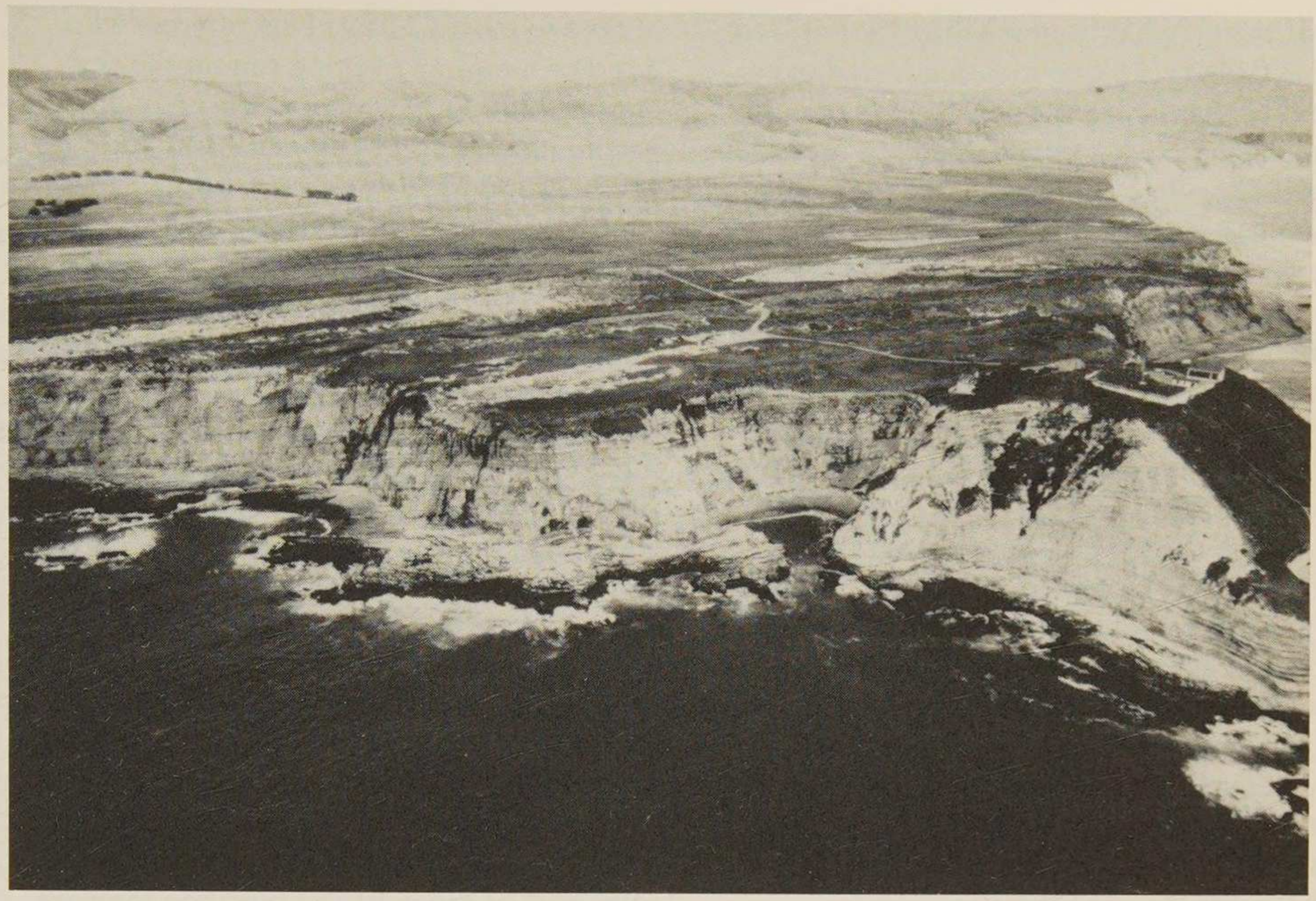
The question marks hovering around LNG are similar to those which haunt the ill-fated nuclear industry: uncertainties as to how vulnerable these facilities are to natural disasters and sabotage, uncertainties about docking ungainly LNG tankers in heavy seas, further uncertainties over exactly how much damage a major LNG catastrophe might entail, and so on. Given the unpredictable and unmanageable character of such a volatile substance, even the mildest "scenarios" are far from reassuring.

LNG is a colorless, odorless gas, mostly methane with traces of ethane, butane and propane, cooled to its liquid state at -260 degrees Fahrenheit and compressed to 1/600th of its original volume. Thus an LNG storage facility contains 600 times the energy and explosive potential of an equal-sized natural gas facility.

Released into the atmosphere, LNG reverts to its naturally gaseous state and, when sufficiently mixed with (seven to nine parts) air, can be ignited. A General Accounting Office report contends that *any* massive spill would ignite. It also points out that no known firefighting technique or equipment is capable of putting out a large LNG fire. Some say a gas cloud from an LNG spill could drift over a fifty mile area until a

LNG facility, New York City (from Gas Co. brochure)





Aerial view of Pt. Concepcion

stray spark ignited it and sent a ball of fire back to the source of the spill. They say such a burning cloud could suck up all the oxygen, asphyxiating everything in its path, freezing human skin...

In lieu of any practicable remedy for this hazard, and instead of re-examining the need for LNG in light of the risks, the GAO recommended that future facilities be built only at *remote locations*. If you assume (a) than an LNG facility must be built and, since it's so dangerous, that (b) it must be built at the "most remote" location in California, what you're stuck with is Pt. Concepcion. All other concerns—topography, ecology, legality—have been summarily dismissed.

In December of 1979, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission redundantly approved its own earlier approval of the Pt. Concepcion site, overruling in this one sweeping gesture a multitude of petitions (from Sierra Club to Shell Oil) to reopen the case. Such behavior cannot but raise questions of due process.

Furthermore, the Pt Concepcion site is a prime candidate for historical monument status, since the Chumash Indian village of Shishalop is one of the few archaeologically intact village and burial sites on the West Coast. For the Indians, the site has traditionally been understood as "The Western Gate," threshold between this world and the world of the spirit. Pt. Concepcion is the westernmost jut of land on the lower California coast; if the souls of the dead follow the setting sun, as the Indians believe they do (and who can deny it?), then the choice of Pt. Concepcion as the "Western Gate" is an eminently reasonable one, as centuries of tradition have apparently confirmed. From a legal viewpoint, the fact

that the area has been inhabited for at least 25,000 years (a stone tool uncovered in recent trenching by Western LNG may push that figure back to 80,000 years, if archaeologist Clay Singer's analysis is confirmed), the further fact that these village sites have never been excavated, and the indisputable witness of contemporary Indians who deem this "sacred ground"—all this should at least be enough to raise the issue of whether or not we are hellbent on desecrating a truly irreplaceable national treasure in our quest for "national energy security."

Indeed, the First Amendment is involved here, as well as Public Law 95-341, a Joint Resolution by the 95th Congress enacted 11 August 1978 to preserve American Indian Religious Freedom. In this curious document, following several "whereas" clauses belatedly admitting longstanding deficiencies in federal policy toward Native Americans, it is "Resolved by the Senate and House...

"That henceforth it shall be the policy of the United States to protect and preserve for American Indians their inherent right of freedom to believe, express, and exercise the traditional religions...including but not limited to access to sites, use and possession of sacred objects, and the freedom to worship through ceremonials and traditional rites."

2/ The Western Gate

The local Chumash are not alone in reverencing the Pt. Concepcion site. It is an age-old wisdom that declares the four cardinal directions are "gateways" to other dimensions. The "Western Gate" is the spiritual door through which the soul must pass to join its ancestors; the bridge between this world and all that it is not. Here power from the spirit world enters this world to nourish and sustain living things; here unborn spirits enter our world to be born; here indeed is the balance point of the entire creation. This should not be terribly arcane to most Californians; anyone who has seen a molten evening sun set the sky and the blue Pacific on fire has no doubt had an inkling of what it is the Indians reverence so highly.

"The Chumash are the caretakers of the Western Gate," explains Chumash Elder Kote Lotah, "(but) it is neutral ground and belongs to all the tribes of the whole continent....There are four gates, four directions. Each one has a function and a meaning." American Indian religion is very site specific—the Eastern counterpart to Pt. Concepcion is Cape Hatteras in North Carolina—it does not or cannot take refuge in the abstractions (progress, determinism, etc.) so characteristic of occidental religions.

The Indians argue that building an LNG terminal at Pt. Concepcion will *close* the Western Gate, which for them is tantamount to a condemnation to Hell. It is not some sort of superstitious bugaboo they are concerned about, but a catastrophe of cosmic proportions overtaking the ultimate frontier of human life. The souls of the dead who would normally pass through the Gate will be doomed to wander aimlessly throughout eternity. Further, and there is bitter irony here, this world will find itself cut off from the world of the spirit, handed over once and for all to the demons of materialism.

3/ The Parting of the Ways

In the Pt. Concepcion controversy, two very different cultures are meeting head-on over one forlorn spit of land. Their struggles to date only underscore what amounts to a thoroughgoing mutual unintelligibility.

Western LNG and the American Indian Community defending Pt. Concepcion speak incompatible languages. For the utilities, LNG is the issue; for the Indians, Pt. Concepcion is the issue. The problem is deep-seated—what is obvious to the one party is opaque to the other. It is a crisis in presuppositions, in what people—indeed, whole peoples—take for granted. It is an encounter of radically dissimilar *myths*, a term (too often used loosely) which refers to the ever-elusive *horizon* of meaning and values, to the very *context* of any under-

standing, to all that "goes without saying" in a given culture.

At stake then is not merely a choice between two proposed actions on the same level: i.e., Build the terminal, Do not build the terminal. Rather, the dilemma posed by Pt. Concepcion reverberates on many levels; some conscious and clearly defined, others archetypal and maddeningly difficult to bring into focus. The Pt. Concepcion controversy calls into question entire world views, distinct *modes of organizing human behavior*, and not merely one behavior or another, one statement or another, one law or another.

In short, something's amiss at Pt. Concepcion. The symptoms indicate a deep cultural malaise. To find a remedy, if there is one, we must seek out the causes of the illness—in this world, and/or the world of the spirit. We are therefore impelled to examine much more closely the presiding cultural paradigms which lead the people involved to respond to the situation in the ways that they do.

And we must not stop halfway; we must avoid the common tendency to reduce the *reality* of one of the parties to the *categories* of the other. Here the only cure that does not kill something vital may reside in achieving a new and deeper understanding. Here, indeed, to heal must be to make whole.

The two rubrics of *Progress* and *Tradition* may serve to define the fundamental cultural options at issue. The first is perhaps more familiar to most of us:

On the one hand, we discover in the project's sponsors an unabashed and uncritical belief in the myth of scientific *progress* to the goal...the straight-line continuum of technological progress, the very backbone of the modern Western world, which loudly proclaims itself based on "historical facts." It is noteworthy, as Thomas Kuhn and others have shown, that this continuum of "progress" is itself more an article of faith than a historically verifiable sequence. Science only proceeds in lineal sequence once its basic paradigms (e.g., causality, statistical method, etc.) are taken for granted. Every so often, an anomaly in the paradigm causes the entire structure to tumble down, and a new "model" to be erected in its place; as relativity physics replaced Newtonian mechanics. But the myth of progress subsumes all such discontinuities into its only normative value structure; lineal progress toward objective knowledge of the natural world, which provides humans (in theory) the right and (in practice) the technical means to manipulate the Cosmos to human ends.

Nowadays, faced incontrovertibly with the finite resources of the planet, it can be said that the scientific myth of progress is beginning to undergo a transformation ...progress, yes, but not at all costs. Growth, yes, but within limits. *Life*, not cancer—unchecked local cell growth which eventually destroys the host organism—is once again becoming central to science, or at least to some scientists. The ecological movement over the past decade, the many-faceted search to replace fossil fuel dependence with solar and renewable energy sources, the international effort to eliminate nuclear weapons, etc., are so many signs that unbridled "progress" has revealed to us its liabilities, and that perhaps more enlightened scientific and "technicultural" strategies are in the offing.

On the other hand, we find the Indians expressing the traditional myth of liturgical death and rebirth, which we may verify from examples in very many other cultures as something like a religious invariant. It is another way of reaching the goal, but unlike the myth of scientific progress, the primordial myth of death and new life does not rely solely on human agency. It springs from a dynamic balance between the powers of Earth and of Heaven, a balance between the material world and the world of spirit and light. It addresses Man as a ritual being.

The scientific mentality would suppose that such a view of the world is not founded on historical "fact," and is therefore erroneous. Yet at this juncture in the history

of the North American continent, it is not farfetched to say that the native religions (or at least most of their adherents) have in *fact* been killed off by the encroachments of Western civilization, and are in *fact* currently undergoing a rebirth which articulates itself in precisely the sort of confrontation that is coming to a head at Pt. Concepcion...or in the Black Hills, or Utah. There is talk of an emerging American Indian ecumenism which will embody values shared by all Native Americans. And reverence for the Western Gate is perhaps among those values which brook no compromise.

* * *

So at Pt. Concepcion there is an encounter of ultimate values brewing. What is the meaning of human fulfillment? Which path do we follow, or should we follow? The battle lines so far drawn between "Us" (we are reasonable, rational, and well-motivated) and "Them" (they are unreasonable, irrational, and obnoxious) simply do not suit the situation. New guidelines are in order, which may perhaps be drawn out in the following form:

The path of "progress" is continuous, sequential or gradual, evolutionary, lineal. The norm here is surprisingly conservative; progress requires a certain maintenance of the status quo, else there is "nothing" which is progressing. From this point of view, "non-historical" peoples make no progress; how would you gauge it?—unless by dint of ethno-archaeological perseverance you manage to construct a quasi-history of engineering feats, territorial battles, astronomical calculations, or whatever.

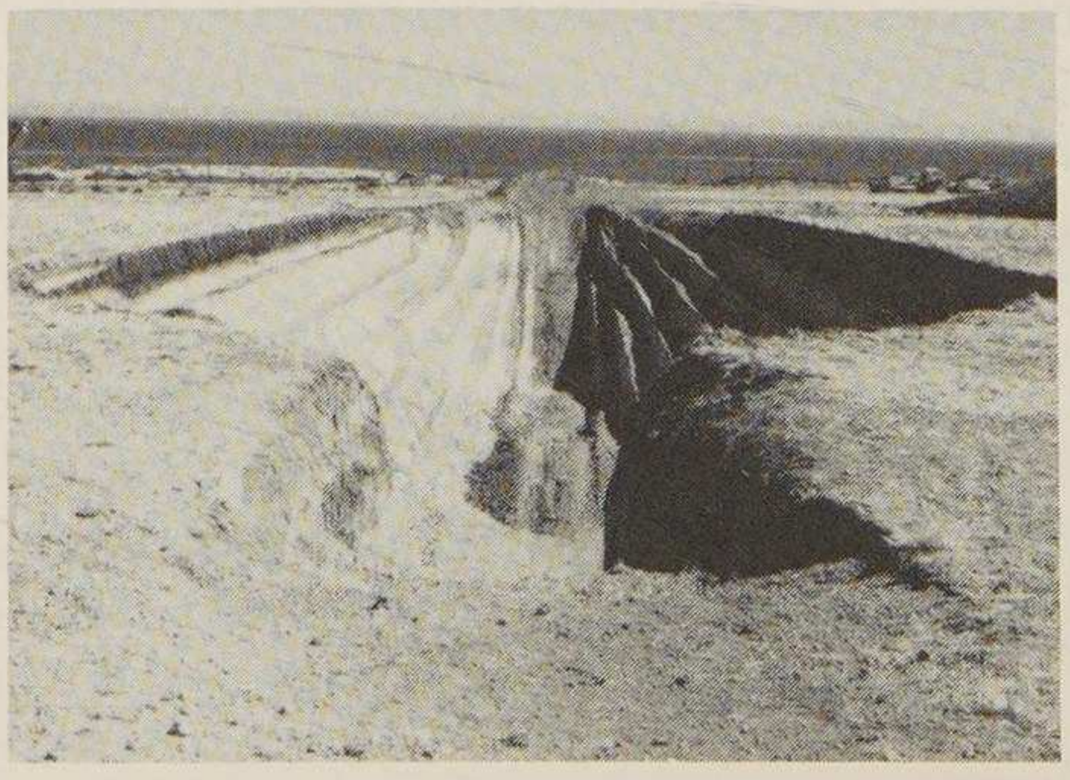
The traditional path of "rebirth," i.e., ritually enacted death and new life, is by contrast *dis*continuous, cyclical, revolutionary, and recursive. The norm here is radical transformation, which makes such a world view surprisingly flexible and adaptable. The new life in some sense requires the demise of previous life-patterns, but this can be effected without rupturing the fabric of communal existence. It is above all a tradition of renewal.

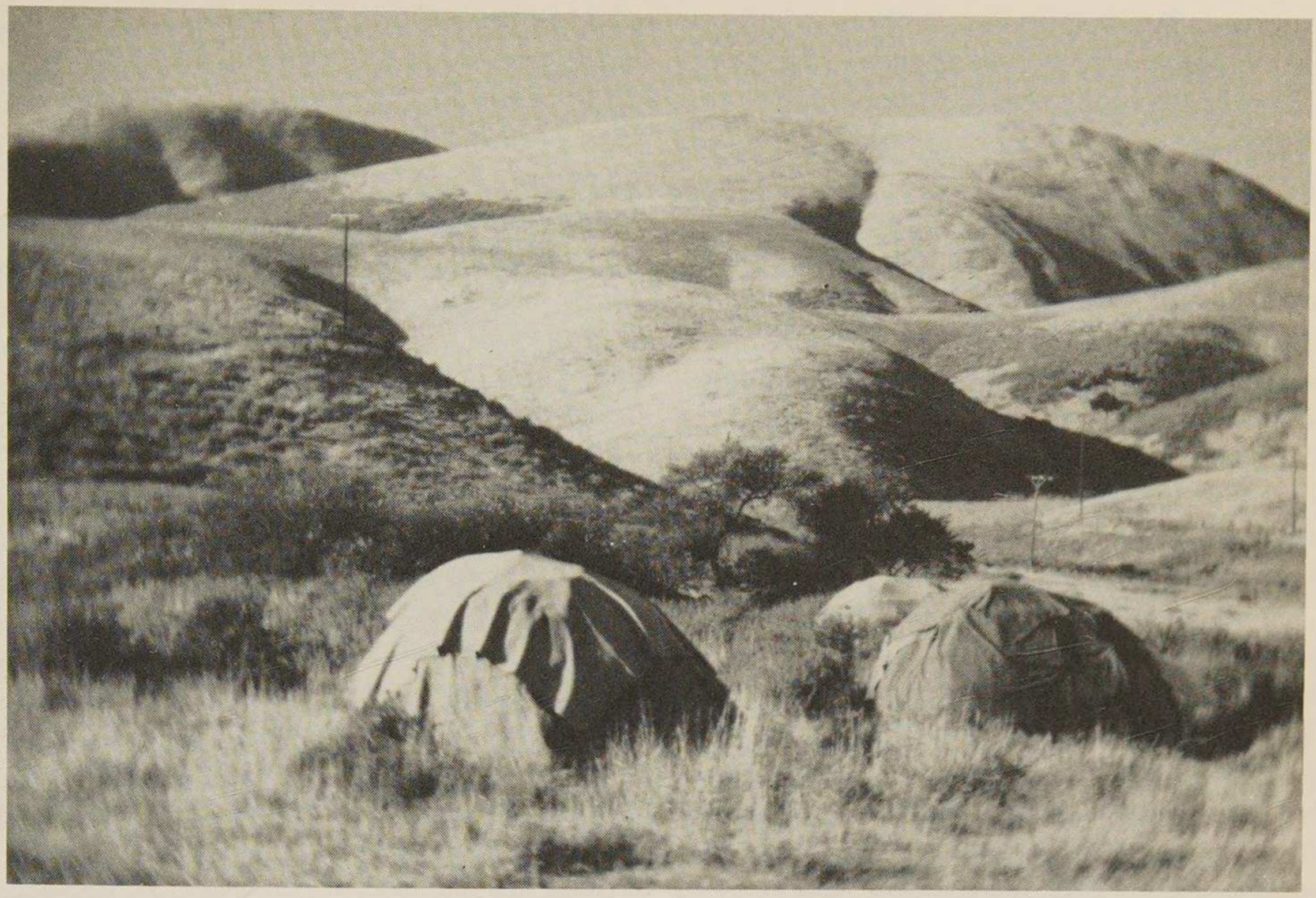
The myth of progress is rooted in historical time; it is monolithic, monotheistic, and usually institutionalized. This history of progress is essentially the fable of Empire, "His-story," the outreach of centralized authority—Empire gradually expanding from its "capitol" until it engulfs the nether shore of its desire. The sociology of imperialism has its correlate in the psychology of "the Emperor within," the massive (and nowadays alienated) *ego-structure* of the autonomous individual who is, no doubt, the proudest achievement of Western civilization.

The traditional myth of death and rebirth, contrariwise, underpins a world view built up of many dynamic polarities. It consists of autonomous groups, natural rhythms of sun and moon, polymorphous powers and divinities, etc. It is the tale of the Tribe crossing the great water, or the desert, or the bridge "wide as a hair" to the promised land, the other shore, Shimilaqsha. Although human groups still vie with one another for land or food or supremacy, this view of the world is centralized, and authority is ultimately personal. Wealth of relationships, not segregation or inflation of the individual, is regarded as the highest human value.

A telling symbol of technological progress would be the *thermostat* which keeps

Digging begins at Pt. Concepcion, May 1978





Chumash lodges

one's house stable in temperature; centralized, self-regulated heating; the "steady state" theory of human dwelling.

A telling symbol of the tradition of death and re-birth would be *the sweat*, that most venerable of steam baths, heating the body up until breakthrough to a new level or dimension of being occurs...and then a plunge into icewater.

The criterion for achieving the former is *quantitative* measurement, with which one gauges one's "progress"—usually in terms of property, profits, or power.

The criterion for consummating the latter is *qualitative* change of state; there is pattern here, and hence number, but no quantity or quantification of human goals.

Understanding these goals as *mythic* dimensions of the life of their respective cultures emphasizes that they are most in force when they are least noticed or questioned.

The Path of Progress is the myth of history inverted; a past "continuum" (however spurious) projected into the future—where we are shocked to discover it is subject to the kind of irreversible decay represented by cancerous growth: runaway progress, a racing engine without a governor. Such a culture concentrates on *the worship of time* (...and time is money), while most traditional cultures revolve around *the time of worship* (...and all the rest is illusion). The Path of Tradition is the myth of regeneration inverted; the tradition (however well or poorly understood) is reborn in the present ceremony, just as the celebrants expect renewal through their enactment of the traditional rites of passage. Tradition exists only as it is handed down, passed on; that is, left behind, superseded...

The story which follows recounts one such traditional journey.

You are about to enter the Western Gate. The rendition of the Chumash tale you are about to read comes from Thomas C. Blackburn's collection *December's Child*. Bear in mind that this is a late, and somewhat Christianized, version of a story that has echoed in oral tradition for uncounted

centuries. Yet despite two or three cryptic lines—*qaq* are raven, by the way—the traditional path of the soul in its westward pilgrimage emerges with remarkable clarity.

Now the word "soul" is a tricky one here. There is in American Indian religion a much greater contiguity between this world and the spirit world than we are accustomed to in the transcendent religions of the Judaeo-Christian-Islamic heritage. The soul is less like the "shadow" of one's former self than the *life* of that person persisting, like the "dream ego" beloved of Jungians, in other states of being.

The "soul's journey" here is inappropriate if soul means not the Life within us, not the archetypal Self, but merely my "ego," the Emperor within. From the perspective of the Western cultural myth of progress, it is the presumption of the ego—etymologically the "I," psychologically the oppressor and repressor within—that it will progress to *eternal* life, just as it is sociologically a presumption built into the bureaucratic megamachine that the Empire it serves will never die.

In this Chumash story, then, we detect a wholly different emphasis. Not an eternity of ego inflation, or of cancerous imperial growth, not *eternal life* (as in the "Thousand Year Reich"), but rather *LIFE eternal* (as in the regeneration of the Phoenix from its own ashes). It is the intuition that *LIFE* goes on...

And here is its story:

The Soul's Journey to Šimilaqša

Three days after a person has been buried the soul comes up out of the grave in the evening. Between the third and fifth day it wanders about the world visiting the places it used to frequent in life. On the fifth day after death the soul returns to the grave to oversee the destruction of its property before leaving for Šimilaqša. The soul goes first to Point Conception, which is a wild and stormy place. It was called humqaq, and there was no village there. In ancient times no one ever went near humqaq. They only went near there to make sacrifices at a great šawil. There is a place at humqaq below the cliff that can only be reached by rope, and there is a pool of water there like a basin, into which fresh water continually drips. And there in the stone can be seen the footprints of women and children. There the spirit of the dead bathes and paints itself. Then it sees a light to the westward and goes toward it through the air, and thus reaches the land of Šimilaqša.

Sometimes in the evening people at La Quemada (Šišac'i'i) village would see a soul passing by on its way to Point Conception. Sometimes these were the souls of people who had died, but sometimes they were souls that had temporarily left the body. The people of La Quemada would motion with their hands at the soul and tell it to return, to go back east, and they would clap their hands. Sometimes the soul would respond and turn back, but other times it would simply swerve a little from its course and continue on to Šimilaqša. When the people of La Quemada saw the soul it shone like a light, and it left a blue trail behind it. The disease from which the person had died was seen as a fiery ball at its side. When the soul turned back, as it sometimes did, anyone at La Quemada who might have recognized it would hurry to the village where the man whose soul it was lived, and if the sick man then drank a lot of toloache he might recover and not die. María heard that a short time after the soul passed La Quemada the people there would hear a report like a distant cannon shot, and know that that was the sound of the closing of the gate of Šimilaqša as the soul entered.

The old people said that there were three lands in the world to the west: wit, 'ayaya, and Šimilaqša. These were somewhat like purgatory, hell, and heaven. When the soul leaves Point Conception and crosses the sea, it first reaches the Land of Widows. When the women there get old their friends dip them in a spring and when they awake they are young again. And they never eat, though they have all kinds of food there. They merely take a handful of food and smell it and throw it away, and as soon as they do so it turns to feces. And when they are thirsty they just smell the water and their thirst is quenched. Once past the Land of Widows the soul comes to a deep ravine through which it must pass. The road is all cut up and consists of deep, fine earth as a result of so many souls passing over it. In the ravine are two huge stones that continually part and clash together, part

and clash together, so that any person who got caught between them would be crushed. Any living person who attempted to pass would be killed, but souls pass through unharmed.

Once past the clashing rocks the soul comes to a place where there are two gigantic qaq perched on each side of the trail, and who each peck out an eye as the soul goes by. But there are many poppies growing there in the ravine and the soul quickly picks two of these and inserts them in each eye-socket and so is able to see again immediately. When the soul finally gets to Šimilaqša it is given eyes made of blue abalone. After leaving the ravine the soul comes to La Tonadora, the woman who stings with her tail. She kills any living person who comes by, but merely annoys the soul who passes safely.

Just beyond this woman lies a body of water that separates this world from the next, with a bridge that the soul must cross to reach Šimilaqša. The souls of murderers and poisoners and other evil people never reach the bridge, but are turned to stone from the neck down. They remain there on the near shore forever, moving their eyes and watching other souls pass. When the pole begins to fall the soul starts quickly across, but when it reaches the middle two huge monsters rise from the water on either side and give a loud cry, attempting to frighten it so that it falls into the water. If the soul belongs to someone who had no 'atiswin or who did not know about the old religion and did not drink toloache—someone who merely lived in ignorance—it falls into the water and the lower part of the body changes to that of a frog, turtle, snake, or fish. The water is full of these beings, who are thus undergoing punishment. When they are hungry, they crawl out of the water and wander through the hills nearby looking for cacomites to eat. The old people used to say that someone who drank toloache always passed the pole safely for they were strong of spirit.

*Once the soul has crossed the bridge it is safe in Šimilaqša. There are two roads leading from the bridge—one goes straight ahead and the other goes to the left. María knows nothing about souls being born again in this world. Souls live in Šimilaqša forever and never get old. It is packed full of souls. They harvest islay, sweet islay, and there is no end of it. Every kind of food is there, in abundance. When children die they take the same route as adults. The qaq peck out their eyes, but they have no other troubles on the journey. They pass the bridge easily, for the monsters that try to frighten other souls do not appear.**

4/ *The Ravensgate: Toward A New Conception*

"While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly
there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my
chamber door.
"'T is some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my
chamber door—
Only this and nothing more.'"

E.A. Poe
The Raven

"Only this and nothing more"—but it is Death come a'callin', ever recognizable in Raven's guise. And so it is in our story: A simple tale, that of the soul's journey through the spectral portals of the setting sun, reverberates with renewed significance in light of today's controversy over the use of this "wild and stormy place...called *humqaq*": Gate of the Raven, or of Death. Is it okay to put a square mile of LNG at Death's Door?

Well might one wonder. This, indeed, would have to be "the most remote location" imaginable. And how does one acquire the new eyes to see what is beyond that final frontier? Living humans who transgress are struck dead straightaway. At least we have gleaned the sense behind the taboo against picking poppies this side of the gate; even embedded in California State Law, any taboo bears witness to a ritual moment when it is the proper thing to do. We do not just casually pick the poppies because they are the eyes of our ancestors. Our time, too, will come...

And perhaps it has. Perhaps today we ought finally to pick those poppies, to seek out a new vision of ourselves through the eyes of our forebears, even though we may not relish the moribund specter we see there....Dare we look Death in the eye?

** From Thomas Blackburn's* December's Child *(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). Reprinted by permission.*

The Ravensgate is Death; really to go through it requires that the dynamism of life and death propel us to some other shore. Some things are out of our hands and cannot be guaranteed. But in today's context, we can no longer envision what is required as merely an individual death. Today it is *civilizational death* that is upon us, and a civilization dies differently from an individual. There are, however, certain similarities: the gloomy narrator of Poe's *Raven* prefigures the self-condemned soul, the guilty soul of self-conscious Occidental Man, who now presumes to assault even the Western Gate, Death itself...

Western culture is dying, as Eliot also foresaw: "spread out against the sky/like a patient etherized upon a table." But it has broken loose from all the old forms of living and dying which once sustained it. An entire civilization has forgotten how to die properly, that is, ritually, in such a way as to find renewal.

Western civilization—that squabbling bundle of people and peoples which has lived out the historical myth, the myth of the progress of the chosen people on their way to Modernity—this our civilization is dying like a brontosaurus, of malignant giantism: wallowing in its own muck, sinking ever deeper. LNG terminals and other such "life-extension" contrivances are not arguably "life-enhancing;" quite the contrary. By such measures we progressively reduce our highly vaunted "civilization" to an armed guard around a comatose bureaucratic vegetable. And however much money we throw at its symptoms the disease rages on.

Pt. Concepcion today is no longer the Ravensgate of yesteryear, obviously. But the old stories have a way of echoing ultimate human concerns...

The guilty, self-condemned soul of Occidental Civilization hovers at the Western Gate, like the moth troubling the flame that may consume it. In the legend, the people of neighboring Shishalop (La Quemada in Blackburn's rendition) say they can see the soul on its way to Shimilaqsha...the soul shines like a light. The "disease" from which the person had died is also visible, "as a fiery ball at its side." (A ball of what? Western LNG might well ask.) If the villagers could turn the soul back by clapping or shouting (or picketing?) then the sick person might recover and not die—yet. One day, though, this and every soul would return to pass through the Gate of Death (unless perhaps it ran up against an LNG terminal blocking the way). Then, "a short time after the soul passed La Quemada, the people there would hear a report like a distant cannon shot and know that that was the sound of the closing of the gate of Shimilaqsha as the soul entered." One need hardly add that next time the Gate closes, the report may be considerably louder than a cannon shot.

Now we are in a position to respond to some very basic questions: Why does our society so persistently and so perversely flirt with its own destruction? Why has Western Culture become a Death Cult? (As it patently has: over 52% of U.S. tax dollars go to the military establishment, which uses this wherewithal to perfect instruments of genocide a thousand times more lethal than the Nazi death camps.) The so-called dominant culture has degenerated into organized barbarism—Why? Because Western Culture has forgotten how to die. We need the Western Gate to remain open, as much or more than the native populations who are trying so desperately to save it. We need the option. We now have the technical means to create the conditions of Hell on Earth, to turn this garden planet into a fiery inferno. And we have come close to doing so, several times. If we as a culture do not learn to die to whatever "identity" (national, cultural, religious) we are so mortally afraid of losing that we imperil the whole Earth; if we cannot die liturgically, symbolically, metaphorically...then we may well have doomed ourselves to die physically, literally, and irremediably—with no hope of resurrection.

Today we stand at the edge. It is not just the end of an historical era. It is the end of history. Together we stand at this threshold...do we fall, or learn to fly?

The Ravensgate challenges each of us and all—it challenges "civilization" itself —not to drop dead, surely, but *to survive* the demise of our too-precious "identities" and arise in concert to forge a future predicated on the spontaneity of Life, instead of on age-old habits of error.

Human beings have never been very tolerant of one another. We have no patience for people who disagree with us. But in a world of thermonuclear politics, you cannot annihilate your opponent without also courting your own destruction. In principle, then, how are we to deal with incompatible systems, or ideals, or people? Certainly we are very quickly going to have to discover new ways—creative ways, life-enhancing ways—to deal with the tensions and conflicts which inevitably arise between human groups. And not in theory only; the urgency of the present human predicament demands that we put such alternatives into practice—now, or never.

Whatever else happens at Pt. Concepcion, the connection symbolized by the Western Gate—between Grandfather Sky and Grandmother Earth, God and the World, Spirit and Matter—must not be lost or trivialized. One way to nurture it is to cultivate what has emerged at Pt. Concepcion: An ongoing exchange and dialogue between religious values and ecological concerns. What today might be called the ecological and religious modes of awareness, could legitimately be described in classical terms as the immanent and transcendent faces of the same Mystery.

As one may gather from other stories of the Pacific Northwest Indians, the Western Gate is more than a one-way street. Each day, recall, Sun completes his westward journey and returns on the morrow full of life and promise. The solar myth always comes full circle. Moreover, there exist legends of a mysterious *White Raven*, counterpart to the giant *qaq* who guard the way to Shimilaqsha. This is the creator raven who set Sun and Moon in the heavens, the Civilizer who brought fire to humans and whose feathers were blackened by its smoke.

Perhaps here we touch the far shore: the other face of the dread Ravensgate, over in that land beyond Death, may well be that of the White Raven—in whom resides the awesome power to create new life, new civilizational forms, new relations between people and peoples.

Pt. Concepcion...it is only a beginning.

Ravensgate: update 1981

A month or two after this was written, an ironic twist of fate may have saved Pt. Concepcion.

In a surprise move this January, some of the project's sponsors issued a report which concluded that California needs neither more LNG nor a new terminal. Accordingly, the California Public Utilities Commission has just reopened hearings on the issue, which are scheduled to run through August.

Officially, at this point, the outcome is still anybody's guess. But why has there been a shift in the wind?

It is appallingly simple: we suddenly have a president, Ronald Reagan, who happens to make his home on a ranch in the Santa Ynez Mountains, just a few miles due east of Pt. Concepcion, and much closer to the site than 99% of Santa Barbara's residents. Pt. Concepcion is no longer the "most remote" site on the west coast: it's smack in the president's backyard.

So for all the wrong reasons, one might hazard the welcome prediction that there will (probably) be no LNG terminal at Pt. Concepcion. In this scenario, the cowboys and the Indians are at last going to agree about something. ◇

Notes from Oberammergau

written and illustrated by Frederick Franck

Looking out of the window of my *Gasthaus*, I see clusters of people marching purposefully in the direction of the theater. It is only 8 and the play starts at 9, all seats reserved....What's the hurry?....Better make sure! I swallow my coffee, start walking through the bracing mountain air. The village is picture-postcard cute. The carved balconies of the chalets blaze with red geraniums, partly plastic; their ochre walls are adorned with frescoes of saints, virgins, crucifixions. From everywhere people are converging on the big, square theater at the edge of town: priests in Roman collars with platoons of still identifiable nuns, groups of well-dressed men and women, on every bosom a plastic identification tag: "Faith Tours," "Europa Reisen," "Wholesale Tours." Middle class. Middle aged. German, American, English voices predominate. The Germans look Midwestern, the Americans British in their blazers and Harris tweeds. Only the women offer a clue. Vanilla, aqua, strawberry slacks certify American citizenship.

At the stage door bearded oldsters in loden knickers and Tirol hats gossip and smoke their pipes. By five to nine the third of the village population of 4700 that is involved in the production are in action. On foot, on bicycle, on motorbikes they arrive, the actors, the choir-members and orchestra, the stage hands, program and textbook peddlers. A boy with a donkey. Another one dragging two reluctant, improbably white, sheep backstage. From the open windows tuning noises escape into the alpine air, Mozartian snatches on violin and clarinet. Tour leaders nervously check tickets against entrance gates, attempt to keep their flock together, wave little flags, hold colored umbrellas aloft in the sunshine.

It is not my first Passion Play. I would not have flown in from New York, if it were not for that other one I saw some time ago. I was twelve then. But I never forgot...

It was on a bright Sunday morning, around Easter, in the square of our small town in southern Holland, performed by parishioners for the edification of their fellow faithful, as Passion Plays have been since medieval times. The play of my childhood was typical of these spectacles which a "good Christian" could be counted on to watch with warm sympathy for the good guys and rising indignation, anger, and hatred for the bad ones. The bad guys were not only the strapping Romans in their cardboard helmets, who mocked, flogged, and crucified pitiful, sad-eyed Jesus, but especially Jesus' fellow-Jews, who stood there smiling wickedly down their comic-opera Jewish noses and into their white cotton high-priestly beards, as the Savior was being nailed to the cross.

The play perplexed and haunted me. It posed a riddle: Who was this Christ? What did it all mean? It was so preoccupied with

good and bad guys that it did not even give a hint of a solution....But for me the riddle assumed the importance of what—much later—I would recognize as a koan. For a koan is a question, theme, or problem given by the Zen master to his student to be solved, so as to test the genuineness of insight the student thinks or claims he has attained. It is a riddlesome question which defies all intellectual interpretation.

"The koan," says D.T. Suzuki, "is in ourselves; each one of us brings it along into this world at birth and tries to solve it before he dies. What the Zen master does is no more than to point it out to us, so that we may see it more plainly than before."

Erich Fromm explains that it serves "to break through the fictions that fill the mind so as to experience Reality..." "A process which may produce a great deal of anxiety," he adds archly.

I vaguely felt the riddle of the Christ's life, death, and resurrection to be closely interwoven with the riddle of my own life, to whose meaning I suspected that this enigmatic figure concealed the key. Eventually I came to see the Christ myth to be more than just my private koan: wasn't it mine just insofar as I was a product of the Western culture of which it was the central myth? For Western culture cannot be understood apart from the Christian tradition with which it is mutually interpenetrated in its every aspect of belief, symbol and value system, art and ethics. Christianity, as we know it, is just as unthinkable apart from Western history as Western history is unthinkable without Christianity: the only

spiritual tradition the West has—until quite recently—ever known. From it such ideologies as liberalism, marxism, and even my own parents' agnostic humanism had sprung....One does not have to be an indoctrinated, card-carrying Christian to be affected by the myth. Its ubiquitous symbols supply us with the matrix in which first intuitions of transcendence may take form.

However debilitated the cultural impact of Christian theology may have become, and for however little institutional Christianity now counts in the councils of the world, its symbols, its rhetoric, its very language survive in the vernacular, in poetry, campaign speech, and curse. These symbols are alive and well directly below the surface of the secularized consciousness of us Westerners. As soon as favorable conditions prevail, the supposedly fossilized Christian imagery, stereotypes, and automatisms spring to life, be it with positive or negative effect. One has only to recall the universal inspiration—the sudden wave of faith, one is tempted to say—in response to Pope John XXIII, that pope for all seasons, who had he lived longer might have re-christianized the West, perhaps in a new and even revolutionary manner. Other such signs were the euphoric welcome to Pope John Paul II, before anyone had an inkling of what he had in store, the sudden rise of Jesus freaks, the recent spread of Pentecostalist fervor...

The Christ myth at the root of our culture, however, has all too rarely been interpreted as the key to the riddle of our individual inner process, our communal existence and its meaning, as the myth that transilluminates our finitude in time and our timelessness, let alone as the koan by which to test the genuineness of our insight, the koan whose solution would liberate us from the fictions that alienate us from ourselves and one another so we might awaken to reality....Has the myth been suppressed with the mystics who realized this? Has it been subverted, rationalized, over-intellectualized by Western theology? Did it simply go unrecognized during all these centuries?

The tradition of the Oberammergau plays goes back to 1634 when, during a devastating plague epidemic, the townspeople took the solemn vow that should the town be spared, they and their descendants would devote every tenth year to the performance of the Passion of Christ. The plague did not take a single victim in their village, and the Oberammergauers kept their promise. The text has frequently changed since 1634. The present one was written in 1810 by a Benedictine monk, Othmar Weiss, and adapted for the 1860 season by the village pastor, Alois Daisenberger. During the Nazi period a special nazified version was staged in which Jesus and his apostles became Aryan heroes, so that Hitler was moved to declare the Oberammergau Play "a racially important cultural document" and "vital to be continued, for never has the menace of Jewry been so convincingly portrayed..."

After the demise of the Third Reich, the play reverted to the Daisenberger text which for the last few decades has been attacked by various Jewish and liberal Christian organizations as being intolerably anti-Semitic. A less offensive text, that of another Benedictine, Ferdinand Rossner, written in 1775, in which the central conflict is that between Christ and the Prince of Evil instead of between Jesus and "the Jews," was voted on, but rejected. The Daisenberger text, however, was somewhat laundered of the most hateful expletives and diatribes and, for the 1980 Passion preceded by the conciliatory prologue: "Greetings to you also, brothers and sisters of the people who brought forth the Redeemer. Let us not try (sic!) to find blame in others; let each of us recognize his own guilt in this event," to quote the official English translation.

Still, the essential objection to this so astutely commercialized event (individual admission was almost impossible to obtain,

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PARABOLA

The Quarterly Magazine of Myth and Tradition

for the great majority of tickets had been sold in advance to international tour operators) is not only that of its anti-Semitism, virulent as it may be. What Oberammergau is actually guilty of is an artistically and religiously deplorable production which demeans, sentimentalizes, and vulgarizes the central sacred drama of Western spirituality, the Christ myth. It does so by subverting Christ-event and Easter mystery, core of Christian faith, into a pageant which it claims to be historical and biblical, but which is so only in a sense which by the criteria of contemporary studies is clearly meretricious. It mixes the synoptic gospels and that of St. John tendentiously, neglecting the by now generally acknowledged fact that these gospels are not historical documents written by historians but by evangelists, who relate the momentous events from their particular theological standpoint and with their particular audience in mind. Furthermore, the organizers' claims to biblical correctness is vitiated by deliberate deviations from the gospel story. Some of these are merely tasteless, sometimes comical, sentimentalizations, as for instance Mary's reply to Jesus' "Mother, behold your son!": "Even while dying you still worry about your mother!"* Others are tendentious and at variance with biblical accounts; witness the interpolation of Dathan. This figment of the imagination is the representative of the Temple traders, who as revenge for Jesus' cleaning operation manipulates Judas into betraying his Master...

When the play was last rewritten, in 1860, it was still a folk event. Its author was a village priest, the music was written in 1810 by the music teacher of an isolated mountain village. It was performed by peasants and woodcarvers for their neighbors and a few mountaineers from the surrounding villages who had walked the steep trails to join the celebration. In 1980, however, it was no longer a folk event. It had become a prime tourist attraction, advertised worldwide in travel folders. Is this sophisticatedly commercialized occurrence, which brings in some fifteen million dollars in box-office alone, then a purely cynical business operation? Maybe I was naive in expecting something else. *"Geschäft ist Geschäft"*....Business is business, shrugged a smiling young villager with whom I had a beer. Still, I could not quite accept this to be the full answer. Couldn't it rather be a hereditary flaw in this culture, or, digging a little deeper: that hereditary flaw—that blind spot at the root of the human intellect—which in the East is called *avidya* and in the West the Fall, but which is everywhere the source of greed and cruelty and the delusions that coarsen the heart?

Simone Weil recognized it: "Except for those whose soul is inhabited by the Christ, everybody despises the afflicted to some degree, for affliction deprives its victims of their personhood and makes them into things..." In this show, the "Sleeping Christ" who inhabits the soul is ignored and absent, and so are the teachings embodied in Jesus' words, life, and response to his destiny, as well as the values for which he lived and died. The myth is falsified, degraded. A myth, so demeaned, turns into its opposite; the perennial truth it pointed at becomes a web of lies. "He who seeks the Buddha outside of himself," Dōgen reminds us, "is a devil."

In the margin of the volume of pious doggerel by which during six hours one follows the play, I find these scribblings:

Costuming: opulent. Christ + disciples: bareheaded/two-tone (decorator color) robes: silver grey & pink, harvest-gold & peacock blue, chartreuse & mauve. *Jews*: turbaned/heavily orientalized in gaudy messes of fabric. *High priests*: permanent scowl/fringed togas/horned headgear (stylization of satanic horned Jew of medieval lore?). *Acting;* rolling eyes/flailing arms/wooden gestures/unctuous declamation/much shouting. *Jesus:* hardly Son of Man (Son of Mayor Zwink) handsome—in dovegray & prune robe, (brown

*"*So sorgst Du sterbend noch für deine Mutter!"*

shoes). *Interruptions:* 14 × repeated processional of the 48-piece choir (unforgettable after 10th). *Mob scenes*: 300 to 400 humans, ages 7-87, Cecil-de-milling stage-wide/hosannaing, waving plasticized palm branches/subsequently bellowing (Barrabas! Crucify!). *Music*: far superior to hamming/original score doctored: Haydnish with Schubert & Bach seaonings + *soupçon* of Mahler. *Tableaux*: Old Testament scenes (pious calendar oleographs). *First five hours*: unrelieved tedium/Break for lunch between Gethsemane and Sanhedrin (mostly Bratwurst & Löwenbrau)/*Final hour*: sado-masochistic relief/Romans & temple guards: all too SS/ crucifixion *á trois*, superrealistic/lancing: ketchup interpolation unbiblical! *Resurrection*: 12 apostles, up front, eyes to heaven/Mary (St. Sulpice-posture) dead center/stage rear: on rock pile, Moses (scarlet velveteen), white-maned with mini-horns/one step higher: angels with cross and gold jumbo-chalice/on summit; risen Lord holding red-white banner against wall-to-wall glittering gold sun....

Is Oberammergau's Passion Play an act of faith? Cantwell Smith defines faith as an awakening to the multidimensional meaning of the structure of Reality, as grasping the cosmic point of existence. As this spectator saw it: a distorted tale of Christ's life, death, and resurrection has been radically externalized in time and space, thereby blocking instead of stimulating the inner experience, and with it all relevancy of the myth to one's own life cycle. The function of the myth as a lodestar in our human existence has been subverted, until both as art and as a religious expression it becomes a caricature of the historical Jesus in which the Christ myth is rooted, and of the universal significance of the trans-historical Christ, of the Christ consciousness which, for this writer, is analogous to the Buddha Nature in Mahayana. There is not even a hint of the Christ as the restored Imago Dei, the new Adam, the Mirror in which the image of the human is reflected in its perfected, "divine" Wholeness. Christ's *kenosis*, that self-emptying in which all attachments to the delusional ego are abandoned, is far beyond the level of insight the play reaches both in its text and its action: all the good and all the bad guys in the drama remain equally caught in their individual and collective ego games. The Resurrection as the recreation of Adam, of Anthropos, as the unveiling of the "Original Face" of our humanness, is degraded into sacrilegious kitsch.

The Master's immense sayings: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"..."I and my Father are One"..."Who has seen Me, has seen the Father"...these koans that conceal the core of the message Jesus not only taught, but lived and died, become here mere Pavlovian trigger words for pietistic emotionality. Oberammergau thus becomes a demonstration of the dysfunction, the failure, of conventional Christianity, of a pathology by which the faith of Jesus is distorted into a tribal cult around an idol Jesus, manipulated as a corporately owned stage property. The Christ myth's lifegiving meaning is annihilated by its encapsulation in defunct culture-specific conceptualizations. And dead concepts being highly toxic, these may have caused Oberammergau's symptoms of commercialism, aesthetic baseness and anti-Semitism. Oberammergau is the refusal to ask the existential question: "Who am I?" and hence "Who is the Christ?"

Albert Schweitzer spoke to this question: "He came to us as one unknown, nameless...speaks to us the same word: 'Follow me,' and sets us to the task which He has to fulfill in our time. He will reveal Himself to those who respond...as an ineffable mystery. They shall know Him through their own experience."

In the *Gospel according to Thomas* Jesus speaks: "If you bring forth that within yourself, that which you have will save you. If you do not have that within yourself, that which you do not have within you will destroy you." That which Oberammergau does "not have" is the universal paradigm of the Human: the Christ. ◇

Frederick Franck is the author of many books, The Zen of Seeing, The Book of Angelus Silesius, *and* The Awakened Eye *among them. He is a Consulting Editor to* PARABOLA.

Templo Mayor Rising

by Susan Bergholz

Proyecto Templo Mayor

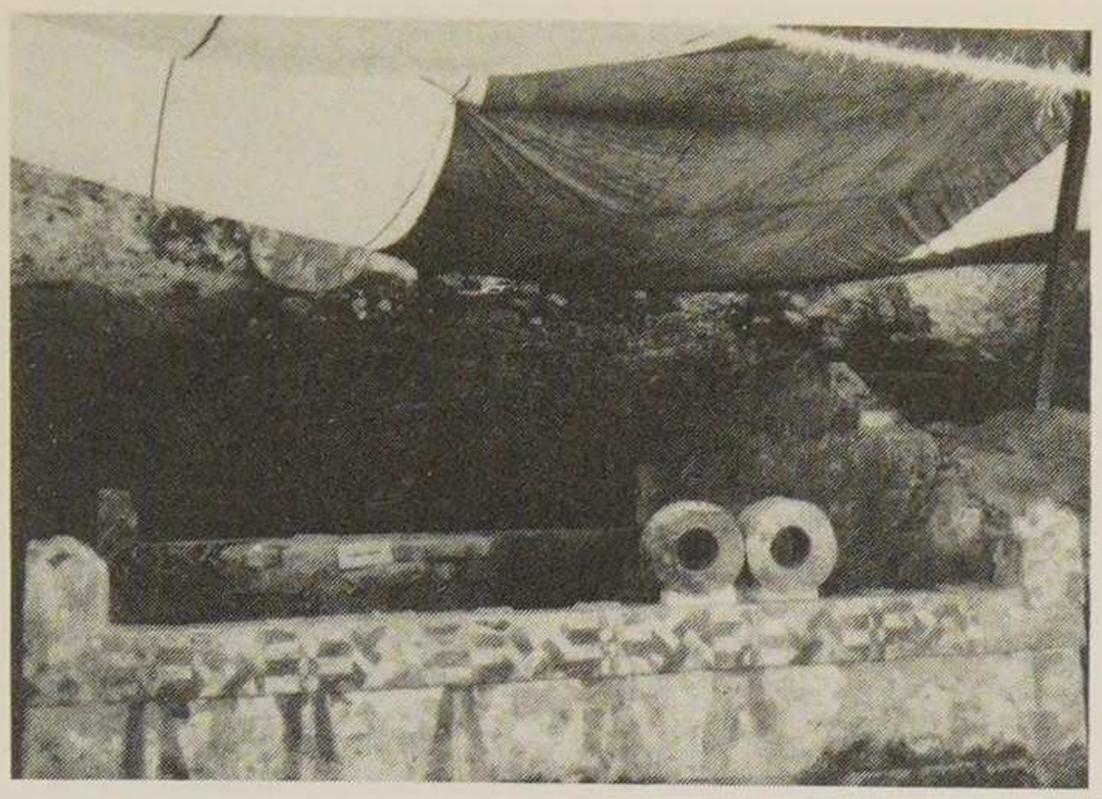
The idea that a contemporary "civilization" might be witness to its own mythology, its own history—that it might be present at the uncovering of the layers of its past—is fascinating to many of us. It is also an archaeologist's dream. Today the people of Mexico City are that witness, at the *Proyecto Templo Mayor*. From the sewers and electric cableways that wind their way under a sprawling, sophisticated city, an archaeological find—one of the most important of our time—is emerging: the Templo Mayor, the Great Temple of Tenochtitlan, the last center of the Aztec empire.

I have been to many of Mexico's archaeological sites—Chichen Itza, Uxmal, Monte Alban, Mitla, Palenque; and to the magnificent Museo de Anthropología which houses most of the treasure from these sites. And I remain curious about how the people lived and worshiped in this very different—or perhaps not so different—time. But this is not the same experience: this is the actual process of getting to that time—the painstaking unfolding, stone by stone, layer by layer—finding the patterns of existence in another civilization that is difficult to understand. To see a major religious shrine emerge from beneath a twentieth-century city, to find a piece, however small or oddly shaped, of the huge, human puzzle holds a great attraction for me.

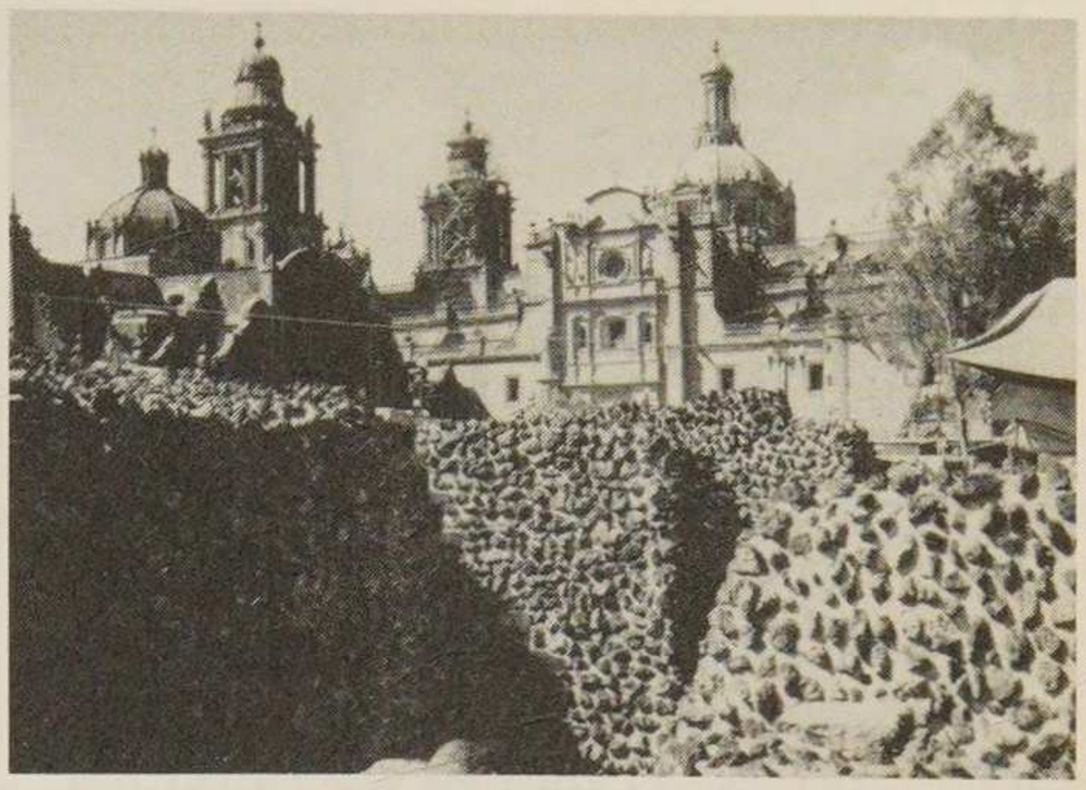
As I approach the site (adjacent to the Zócalo, between the vast Cathedral, sinking yearly into the marshy ground on which the city rests, and the Palacio Nacional, covered now with tarpaulins to protect it from the dust of the excavation or perhaps from the pollution of exhaust from thousands of automobiles), I see that the interest I thought to be unique to archaeologists, scholars, and sometime students of myth and religion is shared—deeply shared—by "the man-in-the-street." Thousands of Mexicans stream past the site during their workday, gathering at the chicken-wire openings in the corrugated iron fences that surround the huge hole. They are admiring, excited, proud. The atmosphere is electric, festive. And inside, the site itself is overwhelming.

Hundreds of workers swarm over the area—pushing wheelbarrows up and down steep, narrow ramps, hacking at stones with pickaxes, sifting through the rocks, brushing away bits of dirt, measuring. There are huge trucks, payloaders, steam drills—everyone and everything with a single intent: uncovering the monument of another time.

I find I am holding my breath; to my right is a brilliant yellow tarpaulin covering a delicately-formed structure of rose and white stone in beautiful patterns; to my left, I look down from the steep ramp to see the five levels of temple walls extending outward from a central area. Hundreds of years ago, others swarmed over this same area, building those walls, cutting those stones. The model I saw yesterday in the museum was grand, but being in and on this space is amazing.



The Rose Temple



The temple and the cathedral

I have come here with the generous guidance of David Carrasco of the University of Colorado to meet with the project director, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, "Maestro," as he is affectionately called by his associates. The professor is in his office on the top floor of an ornate, colonial building—one of the many that ring the site and limit its development because of their landmark status. He greets me from behind a cluttered desk. He speaks in a rapid stream of Spanish with great intensity, and graciously calls in his colleague, Amelia Malagamba, to translate. He senses my excitement, smiles. "When we started working, great expectations were aroused; there was great anticipation. Many people here had thought archaeology was dull stuff of the past, but they became involved and found out how accurate and scientific it could be."

More than a quarter of a million people have visited the temple since work began in earnest in March 1978, and many more will come in the future when excavation is completed and the site is open to the public sometime in 1981. It has become a symbol for many of the people of Mexico City of a rediscovery of origins. But Matos, the archaeologist, is not so much interested in his "roots" as he is in the political, social, and economic reality of the time when the temple was built. In the thirteenth century, at the direction of their patron god, Huitzilopochtli, the Aztecs were led south to this "Place of Authority," *Tenochtitlan*. Over a period of two hundred years, this shrine was built and enlarged—five times completely, and eleven times on the front portion—as leaders changed, wealth increased, and the need to assert power over outlying tribes grew. (The magnificent temple was leveled in the sixteenth century by the Spaniards, who used its stones to construct the adjacent Cathedral.)

Matos feels, "The temple is very, very important because we see a total picture of the time. On top of the earliest building there are two shrines: one dedicated to Tlaloc, the god of fertility, agriculture, water; the other to Huitzilopochtli, the god of war. These were the bases of Mexica life. In the offerings that were placed between the walls of the various enlargements of the temple, we found further documentation of the way these people lived. There had been a wave of political expansion. They had an extensive tribute system, tribute they exacted from the tribes they had conquered in the surrounding areas. That area extended quite far, because we find offerings of shells, turtles, swordfish, —all things from the sea, from the coastal area. We found masks and statues made of materials that are not local. Eighty per cent of the offerings are from outside the area. The Aztecs had picked up these things and brought them all together here. We also found elements of war: knives, masks, skulls. Water and war; life and death."

The Templo Mayor was the sacred center for this imperialistic culture, struggling

with an arid environment and many enemies. David Carrasco in his paper, "The Aztec Vision of Place," has offered some thoughts on the "incongruity of grandeur and terror" that the Aztecs exhibited: as a sacred place, Tenochtitlan was laid out to reflect cosmic order and destiny. The Templo Mayor was a shrine to this ordered cosmos. And it expressed not only great power and pride, but also great fear of outside threats (in the many tributes and the ritual sacrifices of captured warriors) and its own inner weaknesses (in, for example, the incorporation of the Mayan/Toltec Chac Mool in front of Tlaloc's temple—an attempt, Carrasco says, "to integrate a superior cultural past into the mighty present").

Matos tells me that the temple reiterates an Aztec origin myth. At the foot of Huitzilopochtli's shrine, they have found a huge, carved stone of a dismembered woman. It is impressive, in many ways the centerpiece of the site. The contorted face and broken body look as though they were carved yesterday. She is Coyolxauhqui.

The myth tells that Coatlicue, the goddess of earth, was cleaning her temple one day when she found a beautiful ball of feathers which she placed in her bosom. But when she looked for it, it was gone, and she found she was pregnant. Her daughter, Coyolxauhqui, thought evil of her mother, and she asked her many brothers to help her destroy Coatlicue. But Huitzilopochtli burst forth from Coatlicue's womb on Coatepec, Serpent Mountain, and killed his brothers and Coyolxauhqui. She is dismembered as she hurtles down the steep mountain. The stone in the temple is placed at the foot of the steep stairs and huge serpent heads have been found at the base of the temple.

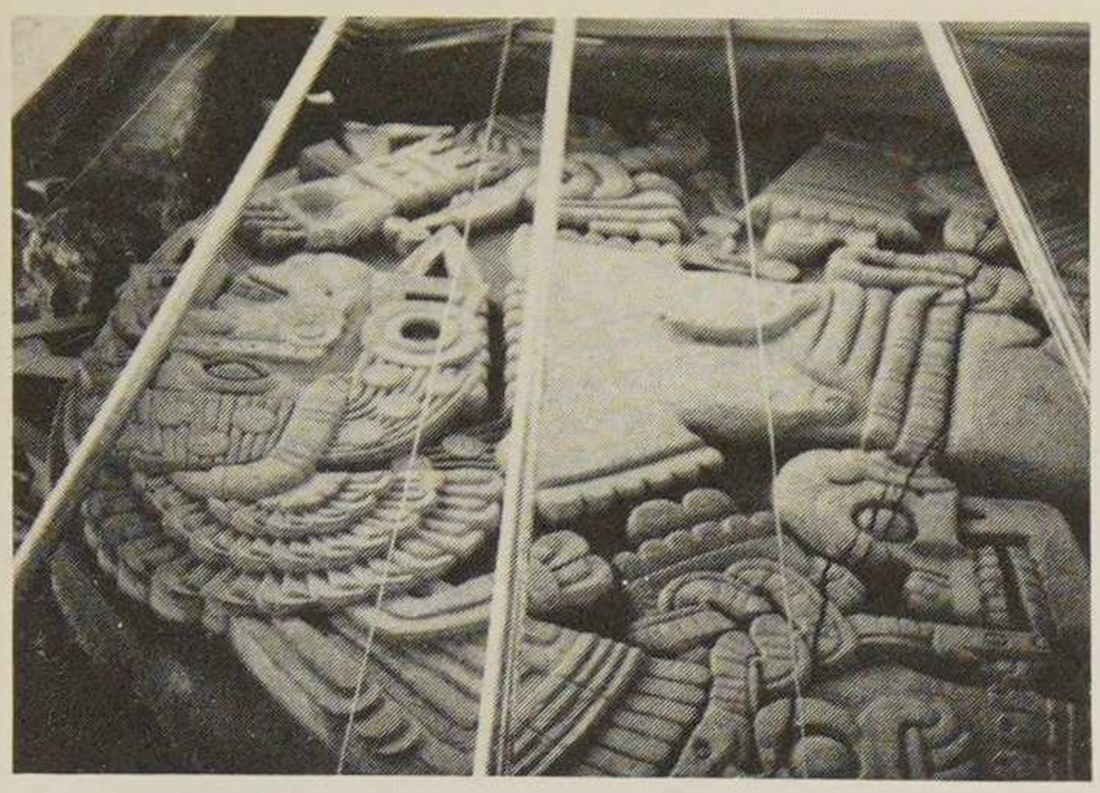
The professor continues. "From what we have found here we believe that principally warriors captured in battle (the

The Chac Mool figure in front of Tlaloc's temple

enemy, as Coyolxauhqui was to her brother) were sacrificed here. There was the reiteration of the myth, but the sacrifice also allowed them to exhibit power and control over the captured tribes." This suggests a political necessity, but what of the religious nature of the sacrifice? And why did the sacrifice have to be a literal one?

After a momentary pause, Matos responds with a great deal of passion: "I think one must be very careful not to transfer cultural values from one situation to another. What is 'brutal' today may not be relevant to this aspect of Aztec religion. All religion tries to give 'answers' for the traditional myths. The Aztecs did it this way. All cultures do it in the way they can, given their traditions and their history. You see, they had the idea—that developed perhaps because of economic and political realities—that the gods *had to be fed—literally*. Blood is the divine water that gives food to the gods. The gods have sacrificed for the people; they gave them food and led them to this position of power. And the people have to give them back the sacrifice, the blood." (An Aztec metaphor for blood is sometimes translated as "flower.")

He continues, "Sacrifice renews life. So there was war and death, and agriculture and life. These beautiful sculptures in stone—the shells, the fish; the skulls, the knives: always in combination—this is the mechanism of their system. Coyolxauhqui and Huitzilopochtli. Life and death. With the captured tribes, life for the Aztecs, death for their enemies. Divine water for the gods and water for the food of man. Huitzilopochtli and Tlaloc. The reactualization of



The Coyolxauhqui stone

The serpent head

the myth is very important. It was a real event, a real moment."

These were a people who believed that sleep is a dangerous time wherein the soul wanders and may not return, causing death; that sacrifice had to be made to bring the rain; that every fifty-two years, all fires were extinguished and had to be rekindled from the heart of a sacrificial victim. They lived under constant threat of annihilation and so assumed sacrificial destinies. An oration delivered at the birth of a male child illustrates this in poetic terms:

My beloved child, my precious one,
here are the precepts, the principles,
your father, your mother, Yohualtecutli,
  Yohualticitl, have laid down...
Know this, understand this:
Your home is not here.
You are the eagle, you are the jaguar,
you are the precious scarlet bird,
you are the precious golden bird of the lord of
  the near, the lord of the close;
you are his serpent, you are his bird.

Only your nest is here,
Here you only break out of your shell,
here you only arrive, you only alight,
here you only come into the world...,
here you only have your cradle, your blanket,
  the pillow where you lay your head;
this is only your place of arrival.
Where you belong is elsewhere.
You are pledged, you are promised, you are sent
  to the field of battle.
War is your destiny, your calling.
You shall provide drink,
you shall provide food,
you shall provide nourishment for the Sun and
  the Lord of the Earth.
Your true home, your domain, your patrimony,
  is the House of the Sun in Heaven...*

"So, you see, they exerted control, *and* they made their offerings. In all Mesoamerican cultures there is a very rich representation of death, but more so among the Aztecs than anywhere else. But it is very important to try to see that the concept they had of death is really a concept of life. The sacrifice fed the gods so they would give back life and keep the movement going. The people felt if they didn't do that, that everything would stop."

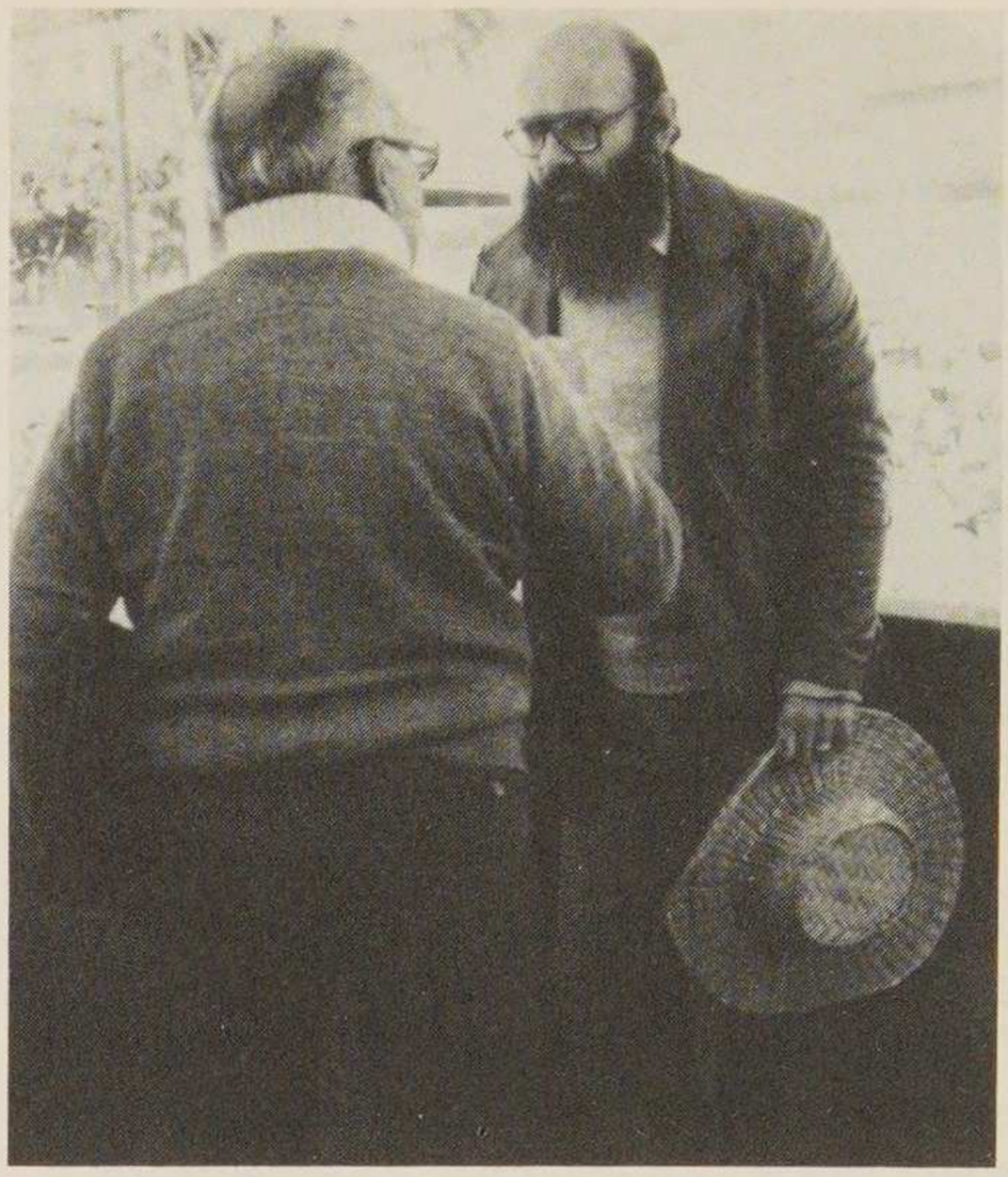
But in spite of the sacrifice, which appears to have become more and more extreme as the Aztecs fought to maintain control, it did stop. Although there have been many interpretations of Cortés' easy defeat of Moctezuma II, Matos does not wish to "mystify" history. He would not sympathize with Octavio Paz's analysis of the situation: Moctezuma suffered a "sacred vertigo" in the face of the overwhelming Spanish strength. Rather, he sees that Cortés took advantage of a *realpolitik* situation: he recognized the discontent of the tributary tribes, organized them in support

*Translated by Thelma D. Sullivan in her article, "A Scattering of Jades: The Words of the Aztec Elders."

of him, and thereby was able to conquer, but only after some months of intense battle. Carrasco agrees: the need to include "peripheral systems" (which might undermine belief systems and lead to rebellion and revolution) into the ceremonial center held a potential for destruction. And although Paz speaks of history having "the cruel reality of a nightmare," (which for many reflects accurately the world of the Aztecs) and "man's grandeur" consisting in making "lasting works out of the real substance of that nightmare," I don't think the Maestro would agree. As he strides across the site (a site that he feels is "very good: the principal representation of the Mexica is here in the Templo Mayor; the main bastion of the Spaniards, there in the Cathedral; and our present situation—the government—there in the Palacio Nacional. It is a very good place to be") in his wide-brimmed straw hat, he looks like a farmer tending a huge field that is yielding up the fruits of another, different civilization. He will leave the poetic interpretation to others. He has work to do.

My last look at the Templo Mayor is through the eyes of my helpful and charming guide, Amelia Malagamba, an art student who is cataloguing and copying the artifacts as they are discovered. This experience here has changed her life. "Every day there is something new. Something we never expected...so many beautiful things these people made and offered to their gods. I am so fortunate to be able to be here, to rediscover."

We meet another young archaeologist. They have just been working on a small temple on the very edge of the site, recently uncovered. It is more delicate in carving and in scale. She is hoping the floor of the plaza in front of the miniature temple will relate to some level of the Templo Mayor so it can be dated. She asks if I would like to see the eagles. They are on the front of the temple, covered with plastic boxes. A workman proudly removes the covering, and two small, beautiful eagle heads are freed. The colors are startling—subtle, soft greens, blues, pink. They are exquisite...



Eduardo Matos Moctezuma at the site

The tension that strains opposites to the breaking point remains: between the magnificent carving of the Coyolxauhqui stone and the offerings she received; between the fragile tezontle stone in Huitzilopochtli's temple and the victim whose heart was torn out as he lay across it; between the poetry of the birth oration and a destiny of war; between the terror and the grandeur.

One cannot help but wonder—standing in front of the monuments of another civilization—what the relationship is to our own time; and what future observers will think of us when they stand before our ruins. ◇

With thanks to Johanna Broder, David Carrasco, Doris Heyden, Margarita Laris, Amelia Malagamba, Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, and Thelma D. Sullivan.

Susan Bergholz is Executive Editor of PARABOLA.

CURRENTS & COMMENTS

From March 26, 1981 through January, 1982, The Newark Museum, 43-49 Washington Street, Newark, New Jersey, will present "Tibet: A Lost World." This will be much more than an exhibition of the museum's extensive collection of art and crafts: it includes a film series, March-May; gallery tours and lectures by Valrae Reynolds, John Myrdhin, Raoul Birnbaum, and Jacqueline Miller-Dunnington in April; a presentation of "Myth and Music of Tibet" on May 12 in co-sponsorship with PARABOLA's parent organization, The Society for the Study of Myth and Tradition; a Family Day in September; and a festive "Evening in Old Lhasa," October 10. Most events are free to the general public.

Note on a recent concert at the Whitney by contemporary composer, Steve Reich:

The best and most effective artistic works seem to be discoveries rather than inventions. Reich's music is almost all discovery. When he does invent, as in "My Name Is...," the result is interesting but not to be compared with the power of "Drumming" or "Octet," other pieces on the same program. What Reich always seems to be dealing with is the experience of slow change—not the "white noise" type of changing that is so much a part of our daily lives; rather, it is the change of watching your children grow which happens slowly, slowly, and suddenly, they are different. Listening to Steve Reich's music is like that; it changes, evolves, shifts, devolves, slowly yet surely, like the Mills of God. "Wait till you hear this!" I heard an excited young man say to his companion at the concert. "Wait—*then* you'll hear this," replies Steve Reich with his music.

The Asia Society has recently moved into a new home at 725 Park Avenue, New York City. To celebrate, the Society will present "Festival" performances throughout the year which include Kathakali South Indian Dance Drama (April 24-28); Dancers and Musicians of Bali (May 6-June 7); Nihon Buyo and Hogaku, Classical Japanese Dance and Music (September 15-16); and Court Dance Theater from Okinawa (November 12-15). The Festival idea, which is an established tradition in Asia, allows the audience more than the usual participation: they come early to witness ritual preparations while they enjoy an exhibition and food relating to the culture of the performers. After the performance the audience will be encouraged to meet members of the company to exchange observations and information. The series offers an unusual opportunity for Western theatergoers.

The first New York Storytelling Conference was held, February 28 and March 1st, at Columbia University in New York. The event, hosted by Maison Française, was organized by Sonya Baevsky and storyteller Laura Simms, and was attended by upwards of one hundred eager listeners. Most of the storytellers were of local extraction, including Diane Wolkstein, Gershon Winkler, Penninah Schram, and Lynn Gottlieb. Irish *senachaidie* Joe Heany came to tell of the Tuatha De Danaan and their descendents, and Pura Belpre told stories from Puerto Rico. Muriel Bloch, a young French storyteller, was the featured guest: on Sunday evening, she brought tales in French and English, switching back and forth between the two languages for the benefit of non-French-speaking listeners. On Sunday afternoon, a panel led by Paul Jordan-Smith discussed the role of the storyteller today.

While no definitive conclusion to that question was reached, it was apparent that there are many who feel the need for a living oral tradition. We hope this conference will be the first of many.

Another storytelling conference of unusual interest took place in Helena, Montana, on April 23 and 24, when the Department of Native American Studies of Carroll College sponsored a program entitled "Re-Telling One's Own: Indian Story-Telling in Education and World View." Among the participants were two of PARABOLA's Consulting Editors: Joseph Epes Brown of the University of Montana and Barre Toelken of the University of Oregon; also various other friends and contributors, including Arthur Amiotte, who wrote the Focus for this issue; Agnes Vanderburg, interviewed in Vol. V, No. 1; David Carrasco of the University of Colorado, exponent of Aztec thought and culture, and Tom and Susie Yellowtail, noted Cheyenne storytellers. Paul Jordan-Smith, our Epicycle Editor, attended the event representing PARABOLA.

Kentucky farmer and concerned individual, Wendell Berry, makes his position clear in *Recollected Essays, 1965-1980*, published by North Point Press. The poet Berry molds his experience into observant and eloquent essays which have to do with how we care for and conserve the earth, a caring that determines the quality of our lives. He firmly believes that one can only approach the cosmic if one understands and respects its interaction with one's own microcosm.

The question of human limits, of the proper definition and place of human beings within the order of Creation, finally rests upon our attitude toward our biological existence, the life of the body in this world. What value and respect do we give to our bodies? What uses do we have for them? What relation do we see, if any, between body and mind, or body and soul? What connections or responsibilities do we maintain between our bodies and the earth? These are religious questions, obviously, for our bodies are part of the Creation, and they involve us in all the issues of mystery.

Some may find Berry's stand reflective of a noble, but dying, romanticism; to others it represents a necessary and an urgent realism.

Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting, with essays by Wai-kam Ho, Sherman E. Lee, Lawrence Sickman, and Marc F. Wilson, brings together the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum's collection of early works from China with those from the post-Sung dynasty belonging to The Cleveland Museum of Art, to form a 2,000 year portrait of Chinese painting. Although there are relatively few color plates, they are especially well done, and a sense of color carries over to the three hundred black and white illustrations that form the major part of the book. The essays are brief but informative, and unusual, in-depth detail is provided for each reproduction. The catalogue is published by the Cleveland Museum of Art in cooperation with Indiana University Press; the show which it accompanies opened in Kansas City and will travel to Tokyo and New York in 1981-82.

The Seven Visions of Bull Lodge, edited by George Horse Capture and published by the Bear Claw Press, 1039 Baldwin St., Ann Arbor, Michigan, is the absorbing story of a powerful leader and medicine man of the White Clay People, who now live on the Fort Belknap Reservation in northern Montana. This is a tribe which never numbered more than 3000 and now includes 2100 people, according to the forceful and authoritative introduction by Horse Capture, and is officially but inaccurately known as the Gros Ventre. Bull Lodge's story is told with simplicity and great dignity by his daughter, Garter Snake, who died in 1953 at the age of eighty-five. Both the collector, Fred P. Gone, and the editor, also of the White Clay People, deserve great credit for this remarkable little book (125 pages). It is beautifully presented, with fine illustrations in color as well as photographs and black and white drawings.

In journeying through Aperture's new photographic monograph devoted to *Brett Weston: Photographs From Five Decades*, one is reminded of the "infinite consanguinity," as Hart Crane puts it, that connects us intimately to our world, and particularly in this case, to the many worlds it contains. Shimmering dunes and beaches mingling with rivers and sky, tide pools highlighted by the delicate lyricism of swamp grasses, the dark luminosity of a Monterey pine forest, the dramatic abstractions of twisted metal and paint are just a few of the images that evoke the primal acts of creation and destruction, transforming and vivifying our natural and man-made world. While photography in the twentieth century has a predilection for heightening one's sense of the substantiality of an object, Weston's great contribution has been to see within the forms of nature the myriad patterns of substance and light waiting to explode into endless rhythmic variations. To look at these photographs is to witness and share in a miraculous display of activity and life within the stillness of the photographic frame. This latest, magnificent volume of Weston's work is further enhanced by facsimile reproductions and an intelligent and sensitive text that make this excursion into form and presence a rewarding experience.

Everyone speaks of *karma*—even modern-day Westerners—but few use the term properly or even understand why their usage might be incorrect. Though the concept of *karma* is one of the most famous in Indian philosophy, it is as hard to get a handle on as it is an ever-present binding force through centuries of Indian literature, philosophical and otherwise. *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Traditions*, a collection of essays edited by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty (University of California Press), represents a triumph in so far as it not only sets the parameters for an investigation of *karma* theory but moves that investigation to the center of an ongoing dialogue amongst interested and able discussants. It presents a variety of ideas about *karma* theory, some opposing others, but all striving for common ground. The twelve essayists are some of the best in their fields—from Ludo Rocher and Karl Potter to William Halbfass and O'Flaherty, herself. O'Flaherty's unique style, lively and astute, makes reading her introduction and first essay a delight; as for example when she suggests "karmic transfer in Hinduism is very materialistic, visualized as a thing—money or food—in a system of limited goods: if one goes up, another must come down, on the karmic seesaw. In Buddhism, however, the transfer is spiritualized: somehow, the more you give, the more you have, as with love or cell division." By breaking new ground on so many fronts, this book is clearly the most definitive study of *karma* to date.

Once again, Brian Keeble at Golgonooza Press in Ipswich, England has published a book close to our hearts. It is a greatly expanded version of an essay by Keith Critchlow (which originally appeared in PARABOLA Vol. III, No. 4), *The Soul as Sphere & Androgyne*. It is a plea for "wholeness" based on Critchlow's particular understanding of the sacred geometry of traditional wisdom. Golgonooza is also responsible for such interesting volumes as *On the Traditional Doctrine of Art* by A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Cecil Collins, Painter of Paradise* by Kathleen Raine, and *The Uses of Imagination and the Decline of the West* by Elémire Zolla.

It is worth noting that Keeble and Critchlow are joining Kathleen Raine and Philip Sherrard in a new venture, the periodical *Temenos*, to be published twice yearly. Its contents of essays, poems, and reviews will seek to affirm sacred dimensions in the arts, with contributions by Henry Corbin, Huston Smith, Toya Izutsu, Robert Duncan, and others. The first issue is due in the spring of 1981 and will be distributed by Watkins Publishing in England and by The Lindisfarne Press in the United States.

The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light: Mythology, Sexuality and the Origins of Culture

By William Irwin Thompson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981. Pp. 261. $14.95.

Reviewed by Thomas W. Moore

William Irwin Thompson's new book cracks and sparkles in a fireworks of novel ideas and wide-ranging allusions. With the sheer boldness of his juxtapositions and interpretations and with the inventiveness of his prose, he makes the study of myth and ancient history dazzling. But dazzle, of course, is not enough, and one must ask, when the smoke of Thompson's pyrotechnic style clears, about the value of his criticisms and alternative scenarios.

As a critic of established positions on history and mythology, Thompson is a rare and valuable voice challenging the spirit of the times. With a sure footing in history and a confident manner in several other disciplines, he counters uncompromisingly the perspective that has seized and numbed academic departments—the idea that the social scientific method has the last word on culture studies. In particular, he offers a substantive critique of sociobiology, calling attention to its uncritical embrace of Darwin as well as its tendency to do some myth-making itself when confronted with gaps in information. He also takes anthropologists to task for rejecting mythopoeic thought, though they speak of "evolutionary momentum" as if it were fact rather than fiction.

Thompson favors the polyphonic fugue as a model for the study of myth. Accordingly, his book plays out several key subjects that enter and fade and occasionally overlap in a dense stretto. The subjects include: the origins and development of human sexuality, animal sexuality, the critique of sociobiology, esoteric interpretations of myth, a recovery of yogic and initiatory kinds of learning, and a cultural reinstatement of the feminine. All of these subjects find their place, however, in an orderly, chronological design that moves, in Thompson's language, from the historical phase of "hominization," through "symbolization and agriculturalization," to "civilization" in Sumer and Egypt.

One of the delightful aspects of this book is Thompson's knack of taking some commonly known material and turning it around to reveal a new facade or an unfamiliar depth. He compares, for example, the vagaries of the stock market to the natural rise and fall of the male phallus and notes that "nothing is more short-lived than the erection." This example may be one of the more clever and less profound; yet these twists of images move the imagination more than the criticisms of the scientists. Indeed, one might read this book more for its intriguing asides than for its central argument.

Thompson acknowledges that some of his readings may sound far-fetched, and indeed some of them seem rather tautly stretched. But, no matter how far he may have gone to fetch an interpretation, the breadth of his imagination is not nearly as troublesome as his tendency to fix rather narrow meanings to an image. For example, he explains castration as a misguided literalizing of the wish to be removed from the male penis-pattern of living-dying in order to participate in the eternal feminine. The complexities of the castration fantasy are here lopped off in favor of an argument in favor of the feminine. His understanding of the Marquis de Sade as the "mirror-image of the moralist" borrows narrowly from

far-fetched Freudian tendencies to invert whatever cannot be understood right side up. Readers who champion mythic imagination in an age of scientism will want to support Thompson's bold, fertile thought, but we need to avoid the trap of narrow thinking in whatever form it takes.

Thompson abjures any single-minded reading of myth, whether it be Marxist, structuralist, historicist, or Jungian, and indeed he draws from these and other sources. He also repeatedly cites Lévi-Strauss who declares that all versions of a myth should be included in a scholarly study—"Freud himself should be included among the recorded versions of the Oedipus myth." But this dictum becomes for Thompson license for a syncretistic blending of mythic themes from several cultures in a manner that wipes away the lines of the given image. Whenever a snake appears, for example—to Eve, Gilgamesh, Osiris, or others—it *is* the *kundalini* of Indian Tantric tradition. Working interpretively with a mythic image is subtle business; it's fatal for the interpreter's favored idea, in this case *kundalini*, to overshadow and devour the image in question, Eve's serpent.

Mythic images also suffer an unnecessarily cramped reading from Thompson's interest in establishing a Western kind of yogic spiritual practice. This concern comes through plainly in his claim that the highest form of mythic understanding is not description but performance, the kind of unitive vision the yogi has in meditation. Many Westerners would doubtless agree with Thompson about this claim, yet it brings a threat to mythic *imagination*. If yogic performance is the ideal, then the alternative is labeled mere description. But other words for this alternative might be less superficial: deep reflection or imaginal elaboration and insight. Performance may be one way into myth but, there are others equally valuable though disparaged in Thompson's limited approach.

The title of the book, presumably, reverberates with several possible meanings.

It suggests both fall and rise, while it echoes the Gnostic theme of the return of the soul from its fallen state, a theme Thompson cites frequently in his writings, indeed in the opening of this book. He agrees, he says, with the dictum, "As above, so below." But apparently he disagrees with the saying of Herakleitos: "The way up and the way down are one and the same." His is the upward path, though myth also speaks of a lower way, of the earth and of the world beneath it. No doubt there is a longing within us to rise above the dense physicality of materialism, literalism, and scientism; but there is also a yearning for our earthly roots, our depth, and a satisfying sense of body. The word "light" in the title suggests the brightness and airiness of spirit, or the settling down to earth. One might hope for more evidence of that intriguing ambiguity that would keep the mythic mind aloft yet tethered.

Another dictum found at the opening and close of the book reads: "Myth is the history of the soul." This principle tends to give myth the narrow focus of personal and social meaning. Perhaps myth would more freely guide human consciousness if that dictum were changed to: "History is the myth of the soul." Then myth is given primacy, a goal that Thompson, revisionist of history, seems to be after.

Thomas W. Moore teaches psychology and myth in the religious studies department at Southern Methodist University. He has recently completed a mythic narrative for symphony orchestra, and he is writing a book on the Marquis de Sade. His book, The Planets Within, *will be published this year.*

American Genesis: The American Indian and the Origins of Modern Man
By Jeffrey Goodman. New York: Summit Books, 1980. Pp. 285. $11.95.

Reviewed by Peter Nabokov

Publication of a popular work on the last decade's sensational archaeological digs in southern California and elsewhere has only been a matter of time. New sites—at Del Mar, La Jolla, and Calico—and refinements in radio-carbon and racemization dating techniques have pushed man's presence in the New World back 50,000 years or more. Classic chronologies have been rocked, and now archaeologist Jeffrey Goodman builds a rickety but tantalizing hypothesis on this material: *this* was the Old World. People he dubs Proto-Caucasoid/Paleo-Indians conducted a "migration in reverse." The Bering Strait land bridge was one-way in the opposite direction; the forefathers of today's Indians populated not only Europe and Africa and Asia, but swung back and forth to evolve into the divergent Indian peoples of North and South America.

I'm less interested in whether this is ultimately right or wrong than I am concerned by Goodman's problem with the nature of validity—two kinds of validity, in fact. The first is obvious: the presentation and the use of evidence. I'm no archaeologist, nor embroiled in what (from Goodman's overview of the discipline) sounds like a karate-match of personalities and the-

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ories. But I do recognize a well-presented argument, and Goodman's promotion of his theory gets the best of him. The blizzard of dates is simply confusing. There is a disconcerting tendency for a hypothetical assumption to reappear a thousand words later as a statement of fact. Extraneous discussions—of Atlantis, mythology, and imagined scenarios of primitive hunters—and incessant repetitions of fact mar the power of the argument. I suspect editors are becoming closet agents, on phones or out to lunch while solid, two-part articles get inflated into books. This work appears to be one of these, and suffers from the same inflationary tendency when it comes to its critical dates: they grow like weeds. What is described on the dust jacket as a tentative 250,000 year-old date for the existence of Indians here, gets doubled by page 191. It is as if the hyperbole and the bombardment of facts are meant to make us surrender to the thesis.

Still, there is much study and synthesis here. The reader does get a primer in modern archaeology. Goodman seems most convincing when he takes a deep breath and calmly presents evidence, site by site, in the middle chapters. We end up conceding, despite the unpleasant hard sell, that he might have something. Which leads me to the book's motivation—so what? So what if the pre-Indian was the "father" of modern man? What validity, what worth, does that lend Native American culture and world view that it doesn't already have? Goodman makes no bones about his purpose: to overturn the presumption of higher cultural significance for European man; and he tacks on to his presentation a survey of the Indian's accomplishments that is reminiscent of backhanded compliments native culture would receive every Thanksgiving Day in grade school as their "contributions" to America were listed. He also glibly ties in Hopi origin mythology with the general outlines of his Indian-origin scenario. Yet this attempt to find a convergence between myth and paleo-history seems to distort the purpose and power of myth by subordinating it to the assumption underlying the book: antiquity equals validity.

To be sure, myth and oral tradition probably do enclose trace memories of ancient acts of man and nature, but their more fundamental purpose is ahistorical. They are contracts and codes for relationships between people and the unseen. They are mandates for survival of a highly particular kind, as they repeatedly streamline and renew the native universe. They grant an identity beyond time.

As I fought my way through Goodman's barrage of digits and projectile points and migration maps, I was thrown back to an afternoon in the archives of the University of New Mexico. I had found the transcript of an exchange between an oral historian and an old Navajo. The historian wanted the Indian's reaction to a classic work on Southwestern archaeology. First he showed him one of those maps with arrows showing migrations. Through a translator the elder answered.

"He said that if he told all his secrets like that, he would fall to pieces...maybe

the other people came over that way, but us Navajos didn't. Well, he said that the white corn, the kernels, that they are actually the mother of the Navajo tribe, and then the sun is the father. The sun and the kernel talked to each other. The sun said he would be the father, and the kernel said (she) would be the mother, so the kernel rubbed her chest and she get the dirt and laid it somewhere and then she rubbed on her back, and got the dirt out there, from under her arms and laid it aside and that is where the Navajos come from, into life..."

Were the arrows to point the other direction, the response would probably have been no different. Then the old man was shown the same Clovis and Folsom spear points which Goodman uses for his revolutionary thesis. Did he think that early Indians made them? The translator and the elderly Navajo huddled for a few minutes. Then: "He says that...this isn't true. Whoever wrote it, just thinks about it, just thinks about it...and just makes up a story about it...the horny toads carved (the stone points)."

Peter Nabokov, Research Associate of the Museum of the American Indian, teaches Native American architecture at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of Two Leggings, *and editor of* Native American Testimony. *He is working on a book about Native American architecture.*

Angels
By Peter Lamborn Wilson. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980. Pp. 200, illustrated. $29.95.

Reviewed by Robert Pittenger

Five years ago, while painting a landscape based on "The Story of Jacob's Dream," I wished for a large art book full of images of Angels. Happily, that book has now appeared.

Peter Lamborn Wilson's *Angels* stands out among recent picture books; with its one hundred and eighty illustrations, thirty-eight in splendid color, it should be on many coffee tables, somewhere between *Man and His Symbols* and *The Book of the Dragon.*

Wilson, a translator of Persian texts and the editor of the journal, *Sophia Perennis*, has done a remarkable job of compressing knowledge from many cultures into one volume, making the book a fine introduction for those who have not read Joseph Campbell or Mircea Eliade. His theme is that Angels (which he capitalizes) are important not only for Christianity, but for all the major traditions. Many well-known Renaissance paintings are thus omitted so as to juxtapose a dazzling wealth of less familiar art.

Wilson begins by presenting the Angels of the Kabbalists, of Plato, and of the shamans; he equates the Tlingits' Raven with the Prime Angel Metatron, as well as with Hermes and Logos. The varieties and hierarchies are here—everything from Angels as wheels to Angels as raindrops.

But what *are* Angels? In monotheistic and polytheistic traditions, Angels are Messengers. They are Theophanies, or appearances of God; thus they are also the Message. Wilson asks, "What do Angels do?" Angels' work, their music, their relation to God or Gods, their "location" in space and time, and even their eroticism, gradually reveal—out of the detail—the idea of connection, *connection* between levels, both inner and outer. For me, a highlight was the section of Angels' journeys, linking stories of Black Elk, Monkey, Moses, Mohammed's Night Journey, and the Grail Cycle in a clear and direct way, showing the Angel as a common thread. (With delight I read that in the *Hierarchies* of Dionysius only the fourth Order of Angels wear shoes.)

To stress his theme of the inner connections of the Angel image, Wilson rightly avoids making outer, art-historical links. These have been excellently presented elsewhere for the Christian tradition in Gunnar Berefelt's *A Study of the Winged Angel* (Stockholm, 1968, available in English). But the plates in this volume are indeed important. The elemental, many-layered fullness of the Angels' visual context is immediately apparent. There are Sicilian, Persian, and Bolivian Angels, Hindu Apsaras, Ethiopian Guardians, Japanese dancers, engravings from Robert Fludd, and more. A color sequence, from an Isis in pale copper-red and copper-green, to Mohammed nearly hidden in golden clouds, to Giotto's sorrowing rose Angels, is especially moving. In a third of the plates, the Angel is the main subject; in another quarter, Angels are supporting characters; in the rest, they interact with humans in many, sometimes surprising ways. And the Angel is not always depicted with wings: Wilson shows this in thirteen plates of wingless Angels and with a lovely retelling of the story of Tobias, where the Angel without wings is not recognized until he reveals his true identity.

But finally, having enjoyed plates and text, we sense there is more. Too quickly and perhaps superficially the image is absorbed and is not questioned. Thus the Angel never truly reveals itself. The image remains a mere illustration: we marvel excessively at the fine gold, the elegant decorative elements, the detail of clothing; the more familiar Christian images are taken too sentimentally, and we get caught up by the strangeness of the exotic ones. Somewhere, behind the outer image, the Angel is hiding. Perhaps what is necessary is a longer, and quieter, time to let the image connect with something deeper.

For me, the Angel image evokes the medieval. Our flat, abstract, contemporary aesthetic has, for better or worse, more in common with the medieval that any subsequent period. Perhaps *Angels* can offer clues to contemporary artists who are searching: beyond illustration, is there now a possibility for a new, more meaningful kind of painting? Can the image of Angel reappear? Let us hope so.

Peter Lamborn Wilson has led us closer to Angels; we have much to thank him for.

Robert Pittenger is a New York painter who uses landscape as symbol.

Ancient Indian Magic and Folklore; An Introduction
By Margaret Stutley. Boulder: Great Eastern Book Company, 1980. Pp. 190. $18.50.
Women in Buddhism
By Diana Paul. Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, a division of Lancaster-Miller Publications, 1980. Pp. 333. $19.00.

Reviewed by Janice D. Willis

Both Margaret Stutley and Diana Paul have done masterful jobs with their respective materials. Ms. Stutley continually tantalizes the imagination with an almost dazzling display of cross-cultural "suggestions" and comparative parallels, drawn from the everyday world of the indigenes and early Aryan invaders of the Indian subcontinent. Dr. Paul focuses on a narrower area of investigation—*not* owing to the texts she presents, which span several centuries and two major literary traditions (the Sanskrit and Chinese)—but owing to her interest in ferreting out the changing images of "woman" in these texts from a body of later literature which was probably not very commonplace, nor "popular." The two books provide a panorama of the everyday life of the people, with a focus in on one key issue, namely, the changing ideas vis-a-vis women of a literate elite.

Ms. Stutley centers her study of ancient Indian magic and folklore appropriately upon the *Atharvaveda*, chief representative of the popular religion of Vedic times, and its companion commentaries, the *Kauśika Sūtra* and the *Atharvavedapariśiṣṭa*. Drawing skillfully from these materials, she informs us of ancient charms and rituals aimed at everything from keeping Indian men and women healthy, safe, attractive, and prosperous, to helping them to destroy their

enemies and thereby live long lives. Equally "at home" with the Indian materials and with those produced by the ancient civilizations of Sumeria, Greece, the Jews, and Christendom, she is a folklorist who does genuine credit to her chosen field, as she weaves her way through a vast amount of material with admirable grace, ability, and erudition. In speaking of the ancient practice of transferring disease from an ailing victim onto some other animate or inanimate object, she writes:

> The ancient Greeks, like the Indians, believed that particular objects—like wool, animal-skins or eggs—could absorb harmful and polluting substances.... In ancient Greece plague was transferred to crows by the command: "Go to the crows"; in Sumeria, disease was transferred to the "white kid of the god Tammuz," its heart having been removed and placed in the patient's hand, and its carcass laid close by.... Sometimes a pig was substituted for the patient. This may have been the intention behind the New Testament story of the Gadarene swine when Jesus caused the devils possessing two men to enter the herd which then rushed headlong to their deaths.

Particularly interesting for me were her allusions to parallels between the *Atharva-vedic* materials and passages found in either the Jewish Bible, the Apocrypha, or the New Testament. Having said that in the *Atharva* materials..."saliva, like blood, is considered to be the focal point of vital power..." possessing "magically protective and healing properties," she mentions that "Jesus often made use of spittle when curing men suffering from deafness and blindness (Mark 7:32; 8:23; and John 9:6)." And so on.

From these clearly written pages one learns a great deal—about ancient Indian mythology, as well as about ancient Indian fears, hopes, and the social mores of a life which continue to operate in India, virtually unchanged, until this very day. There are some minor points of contention: she does not even mention the idea of *satya-krīay* (the Hindu "rite of truth"), i.e., a powerful verbal declaration, admonition, or "charm" if you will, most often spoken by women and especially by the "faithful wife," which existed even in the earliest strata of the Vedic materials. I also disagree with a read-

CHANGING MIND
Vincent G. Stuart

The acquirement of esoteric knowledge is not in itself sufficient to effect the transformation of one's being, and in fact genuine schools of esoteric knowledge do not attempt to change their pupils. True change begins with the opening of one's mind to new ideas. *Changing Mind* explains the qualities necessary to form the ground of understanding into which esoteric ideas may be planted. Simply written in an inspirational style, it helps the reader see the need for higher knowledge, how to apply it to himself, and from that knowledge, perceive the truth through his own experience.

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ing of Koranic materials in a footnote on page 170. But these are two minor criticisms of a work which remains throughout, in my opinion, consistently prudent, provocative, and well-documented.

Paul's book centers on the texts of the Mahāyāna tradition. (A more "sociological" study based on the earlier Theravādin texts had already been done in 1930 by I.B. Horner and called *Women Under Primitive Buddhism.*) As Beatrice Miller pointed out in a recent review of Paul's books, its title ought properly to have been "Women in (Mahāyāna) Buddhist *Literature*," for the book is preeminently about the *texts*. In fact, it is a beautiful anthology comprised of nineteen short texts—eleven translated from the Chinese by Diana Paul, and eight translated from the Sanskrit by Frances Wilson. Nine of the texts appearing here are translated into English for the first time.

In these pages, Dr. Paul clearly establishes the fact that there were *changing* images of women and "feminine" and indeed, of sexuality, in Mahāyāna literature. Two interesting issues reside unspoken in the background of the work: 1) To what extent does sexuality fit, influence, or impede the spiritual quest? (Does Buddhist Enlightenment demand repression of sexuality, asexuality, or androgyny? Are questions of sexuality even appropriate in the context of the spiritual quest?); and 2) What was actually *happening* in the day to day world of the Buddhist practitioner, who may or may not have been influenced by these texts? Paul's book may inspire some to take on the awesome task of beginning to fashion *a social history of Buddhism.* That would be an important contribution. But even if it does not do this, it will still have greatly benefited the field by making available a finely selected and well-translated group of Buddhist texts dealing with the feminine image.

According to the mythology, Paul tells us "...woman is the goddess...who is the primeval force of the cosmos, the maternal

power which has a dualistic dimension of demonic and creative proportions. As the power of the universe, she may either bestow life or annihilate it." Paul shows that Buddhism inherited this mythological structure, and the texts she presents illustrate how this tension was played out, at least in some of the Mahāyāna literature.

Some of Paul's early assessments unfortunately overstate her case, emphasizing rather one-sidedly misogynist tendencies in some of the texts. While these tendencies certainly may have presented themselves, it is not the general thread and flavor of the texts presented in this book; and Paul admits that the "more prevalent Mahāyāna Buddhist view" is that in which "masculine and feminine are seen as complementary aspects of a unified spirit, in the manner of compassion and wisdom." Nevertheless, additional questions are triggered: Who wrote these texts? What was their intention? Was the purpose to dissuade women from entering and practicing the Dharma, or to insure that men practiced it purely, in an atmosphere free of lustful temptation? How much did the texts, as vehicles of *doctrine*, influence Buddhist *practice*? And were the texts attempts to limit or prevent the veritable flood of female devotees from immediately crowding into the faith, as was the case with the "other" breakaway *śramaṇa* movement, Jainism?

Both these authors, as well as the presses which set their work in print, should be congratulated for offering readers the pleasure of reading intelligent, provocative, and attractive books.

Janice D. Willis is Associate Professor of Religion at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. She is the author of The Diamond Light: A Collection of Tibetan Buddhist Meditations *(Simon & Schuster, 1972, 1973) and of* On Knowing Reality: The Tattvārtha Chapter of Asanga's Bodhisattvabhūmi *(Columbia University Press, 1979). She has just returned from studying with and recording the oral histories of Tibetan Buddhists in Switzerland, Paris, India, and Nepal on an NEH Fellowship.*

The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller
By Carlo Ginzburg, translated by John and Anne Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980. Pp. 177. $14.00.

Reviewed by Jack Miles

In the closing decades of the sixteenth century, in the Italian border province of Friuli, there lived a miller named Domenico Scandella, nicknamed Menocchio. Menocchio entertained a number of ideas that for any time might be unusual but for his own time were dangerous, for his was the era of the Roman Inquisition. Accused before the Inquisition by the jealous priest Odorico Vorai, Menocchio was condemned and imprisoned. After some years, persuaded that he had repented of his errors, his captors released him. But a few years later, he was again arrested, tried, and this time executed.

Menocchio's is a sad story, but there are a dozen sadder ones in any issue of *Matchbox*, the monthly bulletin of Amnesty International, and Carlo Ginzburg does not tell Menocchio's story for its pathos. Nor is he interested in Menocchio's ideas because he finds them, in themselves, either true or appealing. He is interested in them because they are the ideas of a humble miller, and he is interested in the miller as a specimen of peasant radicalism.

Everyone knows that in the second quarter of the sixteenth century, Martin Luther challenged the authority of the pope. Fewer remember that in the turmoil that resulted, there arose a movement variously called Anabaptism, popular rationalism, or—Ginzburg's preferred term—peasant radicalism. Peasant radicalism challenged both the emerging Protestant polity and the surviving Catholic one, and eventually, in both Protestant and Catholic Europe, it was suppressed. All Europe, however, paid a price for the suppression.

The price, as Ginzburg sees it, was the interruption of a traffic in ideas and images down from the educated, ruling classes to the peasants and workers, and, just as important, up from the latter to the former. Look at a Brueghel painting. The sense of vigor there, of candor, and of the psycho-

logical intrusion of all upon all is what make Brueghel a master artist of the last years before there was peasant radicalism to be suppressed. Find the miller in the painting. The mill, no less than the tavern, is loud with new ideas. The miller, who can read, is yet not an educated man. He grinds and mixes ideas the way he grinds and mixes grain. And the result?

The result—the cosmos of a sixteenth-century miller—is what Carlo Ginzburg brilliantly and touchingly reconstructs from the records of Menocchio's trial before the Inquisition. A sack of grain surviving, against all probability, from Menocchio's mill would tell us something about what people ate in Friuli. The records of the trial tell us something about what they thought. Examining them, Ginzburg has one overriding question. In plain language, where did Menocchio get his funny ideas?

He got many of them from reading. The Inquisition records the books that its officers found in Menocchio's quarters. One of these was John Mandeville's *Travels*, a book whose chapters on the orient were largely invented but which Menocchio read as we read anthropology; that is, as proof that the practices of his own society were not the laws of human nature. Listing the sources of his errors for the Inquisition, Menocchio put this book, whose description of "Many kinds of races and different laws...sorely troubled me," in first place.

Another book in Menocchio's small collection was the *Fioretto della Bibbia*, a retelling with picturesque embellishments of Bible stories. Menocchio, reading this work in what Ginzburg calls a "one-sided and arbitrary" way, infers from the fact that St. Joseph addresses Jesus as "my son" that Jesus was not divine.

A view current in Menocchio's day was that millers were likely to have Lutheran leanings, and a few of Menocchio's ideas may indeed have Lutheran roots. Thus, "I wish that [the church] were governed lovingly as it was when it was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ...now there are pompous Masses, and the Lord Jesus Christ does not want pomp."

Still other ideas may come from a "beautiful book," not identified by name but possibly the Koran. Koranic would be Menocchio's concern with whether or not Mary could have remained a virgin *after* giving birth to the son she had conceived by the Holy Spirit. Koranic also might be Menocchio's belief that God would not have allowed himself to suffer as Jesus did on the cross.

Some of Menocchio's ideas have a neo-Platonic ring. Still others he may owe to Boccaccio or to popular songs and plays: he was a sometime guitarist at local festivals. The source that most fascinates Ginzburg, however, is a postulated oral tradition. The cheese and worms of the title refer to a homely image Menocchio resorts to in describing the creation of the world:

> All was chaos, that is earth, air, water, and fire were mixed together; and out of that bulk a

mass formed—just as cheese is made out of milk—and worms appeared in it, and these were the angels,

who then served the Lord God as workers serve a contractor.

Whence comes this notion? The Vedas, Ginzburg notes, contain a myth of creation through coagulation; the Buddhist Kalmucks told a similar story. He muses:

It can't be excluded that [this myth] may constitute one of the proofs, even though fragmentary and partly obliterated, of the existence of a millenarian cosmological tradition that, beyond the difference of languages, combined myth with science.

This intriguing possibility seems contradicted, however, by Menocchio's own testimony. Even under torture, he insisted that he had had neither teachers nor disciples but had only thought, read, and pondered his reading.

My own reaction to Menocchio's story rests on my suspicion that belief in an all-encompassing Nature and belief in a transcendent God are archetypes that occur spontaneously even in cultures where one or the other is most unwelcome. If an entire culture believes that God (or the gods) and men are both part of the same giant thing or the same giant thought, that they are like separate pieces of cheese coagulating from the same sempiternal milk, then the idea that there may exist a *true* God, a God with power beyond all that, will sound in that culture as a thunderclap. Much of the excitement of early Christianity in the polytheistic but cosmologically monist pagan world was the excitement of poly-atheism. One stopped honoring as divine what was really inseparable from oneself and started worshiping a God worthy of worship. On the other hand, should that same liberating idea become entrenched over hundreds of years, as it did in the Christian West, then the opposite idea—that God and man are deeply and finally indistinguishable—must seem the liberation. For if, as in the Christian West, God is *not* a part of our world and if again God alone is what matters, then there must follow a withdrawal of affection from our world; the domesticity of it must vanish; it must come to seem less than a true home. An idea that can make the world seem like home is likely to be a welcome idea.

In short, as I see it, Menocchio may have derived his radical, immanentist—in orthodox Christian terms, his atheistic—cosmology from an oral tradition of great antiquity; but we are not forced to that hypothesis. The psychological cost of either of the great cosmological ideas, continuing unchecked for centuries, is so great that eventually it calls forth its opposite.

Jack Miles is an editor at the University of California Press.

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PROFILES

Dino Buzzati (1906-1972) was a novelist, playwright, and painter. He spent much of his life in Milan, where he worked as a journalist on the *Corriere della Sera* for over forty years. Avon Books recently published his novel, *The Tartar Steppe*.
Lawrence Venuti is a translator of contemporary Italian poetry and prose, for which he won the Renato Poggioli Award for Translation from the Italian in 1980. He teaches in the English Department of Temple University and is preparing a book of Buzzati's stories for publication.

Jonathan Cott is a writer who has published a number of books; among them, *City of Earthly Love*, a collection of poems (Stonehill) and *Forever Young*, conversations with Harry Partch, Glenn Gould, Henry Miller, Maurice Sendak, and others (Random House). He edited *Beyond the Looking Glass*, Victorian fairy tales, novels, and poems (Wallaby/Pocket Books) and was co-editor of *Wonders*, a collection of writings for children (Rolling Stone Press/Summit). He is an associate editor of *Rolling Stone*.

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David Leeming is an associate professor of English at the University of Connecticut where he teaches, among other things, a course in Myth, Religion, and Literature. He is the author of *Mythology: The Voyage of the Hero* (Lippincott), *Flights: Readings in Magic, Mysticism, Fantasy, and Myth* (Harcourt Brace), and *Mythology* (Newsweek Books). He is a Contributing Editor to PARABOLA.

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David Price received his doctorate in anthropology from the University of Chicago in 1972. He has spent seven years in Brazil, where he taught at the University of Brasília and set up a program of assistance to the Nambiquara for the Funai. He now lives in Ithaca, New York, where he does odd jobs, collects wild foods, and works to publicize the plight of Brazilian Indians.

Kathleen Raine, poet, scholar, and translator, has published many books of poetry, and her *Collected Poems* are to be published by Allen and Unwin in the near future. She is the author of *Lost Country*, *Living in Time*, and a three-volume autobiography: *Farewell, Happy Fields*, *The Land Unknown*, and *The Lion's Mouth* (published by George Braziller in the United States). Other recent publications include *Blake and the New Age*, *The Oracle of the Heart* (poems), and *From Blake to a Vision*. She is one of the editors of the new journal from England, *Temenos*.

Paolo Soleri, Italian-born architect and "arcologist," is responsible for the "urban laboratory" being built in Arizona: Arcosanti. Soleri is dedicated to synthesizing architecture and ecology and coined the term "arcology" to indicate this combination of concerns. He is the author of *Arcology: The City in the Image of Man* (MIT Press), *The Bridge Between Matter and Spirit is Matter Becoming Spirit* (Anchor Press/Doubleday), and *Fragments* (Harper & Row). His latest book is *The Omega Seed* (Anchor Press/Doubleday). He is currently involved in planning a centennial celebration/conference at Arcosanti, "Teilhard and Metamorphosis," scheduled for September 19, 20, and 21 of this year.

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