

preface

a convergence of urbanists

I, for example, was always talking about the fountains of a city, but others emphasized race riots. If one wanted Voltaire as his mouthpiece, another preferred Montesquieu.

John Burchard¹

Mr. Burchard's complaint came after he had edited a set of manuscripts on urban issues. Reading it after editing the papers in this issue made me think back to comparable work I had done in the past and suggested some observations and comparisons which I would like, at the risk of being somewhat confessional, to share. One never knows how good one of these special issues is going to be until the last article is accepted and one reads through the set as a unit. This set seems exceptionally good to me; the articles seem to cohere and to speak to one another. So I would like there to be a preface to point connections and tendencies, and wish there were an urbanist handy at this late date to write one.

i. educating the editor

The last time I felt this strongly about a special issue was in 1965, when our journal brought out the number (VI,2) which eventually became the book *The American Indian Today*. Comparisons, some personal, suggest themselves. In both cases I was very much an outsider. I'm neither an Indianist nor an urbanist. Nancy O. Lurie, who joined our staff for the Indian issue, had literally to give me a course of reading in American Indian history and in anthropological studies of Indian cultures. I felt a bit less naked intellectually with the urban material, partially because many of the works which form the background for urban studies were part of my training, partially because I have for six years been team-teaching

a course in which urbanists of various sorts have participated, partially because some of my students are urbanists, and I've learned a lot from them, and partially because John Hancock, the guest member of our editorial board for this issue, was for a number of years a member of our department; he taught me a great deal. Yet, though there were fewer surprises here for me than there were in the Indian material, I still feel that I am an outsider, perhaps, in fact, a professional outsider, at best a guide and advocate for the reader who, like me, is not a pro. My contribution had to be stylistic and editorial, not substantive, but I could lean on contributors until they made me understand, or until they considered one another's points.

I said in my preface to that Indian collection that it seemed to me that very shortly all hell was going to break loose in the Indian world. I thought it very important that at least a small minority of people out in the ecumenical culture² should have an accurate sense of what the Indian experience has meant to Indian people, so that when the eruption came of the varied but related and intense pressures under which tribally oriented Americans live, there would be some people in positions of influence and authority who would know not to confuse Indian goals with those of other ethnic minorities, who would understand, indeed, that Indian people have, up until recently, never thought of themselves as a minority, and who would have access to information more accurate than the old nonsense about the tragedy of the vanishing redman.

I'm afraid we were not entirely successful. All hell did break loose, and I have not seen very much evidence that people in positions of power or authority—or even writers for the news media—have really understood the peculiarities of the Indian situations (I make that word plural because of the consummate importance of tribal differences). At least we made the effort; our issue got to senators and congressmen, was the subject of articles, got some notice when it won awards. To the extent that there has been *some* enlightened discourse following Alcatraz and Wounded Knee, perhaps we made a small contribution.

Almost everything that I learned from that experience was new to me and, it seemed, carried a certain urgency: it should be communicated as quickly as possible. To tell the truth, I still feel that way about it. Professionally, though, the present collection is more exciting. What *The American Indian Today* lacked was methodological diversity. It was, essentially, a book by a dozen or so anthropologists,³ edited by an anthropologist and an outsider. The contributing anthropologists did, to some extent, let down their hair and talk about what they thought were the implications of what they'd learned about the various tribal groups on which they are specialists. But their gathering of data remained quite comfortably within anthropological ways of perceiving. Indeed, one of the reviews of that collection, written for an anthropology journal, complained that it seemed relatively unconcerned with even anthropological theory. This struck me

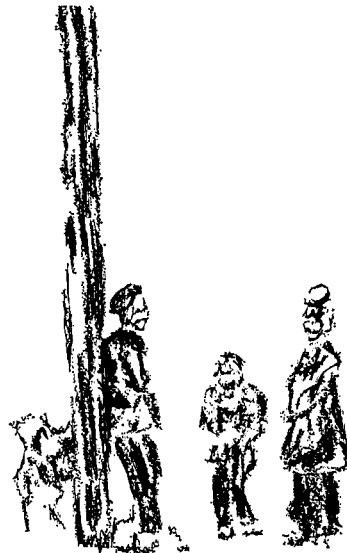
as a valid criticism; it wasn't designed to. That collection was out to brief the rest of us on what was going on in the Indian world.

This urban collection has no such simple purpose, and perhaps partially because of that, it seems to me methodologically much more innovative. I've been contrasting it mentally with the collection prepared in 1963 by Oscar Handlin and John Burchard, *The Historian and the City*, at the end of which one of the editors, in the passage quoted above, complains—albeit somewhat playfully—of the lack of communication in the symposium which gave rise to the book. It would be encouraging to think that our collection, coming ten years later, demonstrates a much greater maturity in interdisciplinary studies. I don't know that that is really true; other variables are involved. We have some obvious advantages over collectors of papers read at a meeting: more control over manuscripts, more time to require revision, more time to allow our editorial consultants to weigh and compare. A meeting happens on a fixed date; a scholarly journal may come out a month or two late to allow staff and contributors extra time to mull and ponder. Yet this time there are many congruities, and this time one gets a very strong sense not merely of developing methodological sophistication, but of methodological convergence.

ii. convergence and change

Our rationalism disposes us to believe that simple laws ultimately will be shown to govern the universe. Mystics, pulling from the other end of consciousness, would have us believe in a sort of simplicity, too, a holistic feel for totality which will wash over us to show the unity in the multiplicity. Well, cosmic truths of transcendental simplicity may underlie everything, and—who knows—even academic Aquarians may be groping towards them. For the moment, though, simple truths about human societies are in short supply and ill repute. The truth seems always richer and more complicated. Cliches and simple generalizations fail to describe human situations.

And scholars have no business sharing nostalgic fondness for a more straightforward past; the past was as complicated and ambiguous. "In these days," Miles Coverdale complained, "there is absolutely no rusticity. . . ." The country folks who show up at a village lyceum look "rather suburban than rural." Nathaniel Hawthorne had his narrator say that in *The Blithedale Romance* in 1852, and we have been learning ever since that the "rural-urban dichotomy" is, despite Jefferson, less a dichotomy



than a slippery continuum.⁴ It may well be that in some sense even what happened at Wounded Knee was an "urban issue," too.

"Dichotomy" is too simple to account for complex human reality, certainly too simple for a human reality as complex as a city. If Coverdale saw rural folk becoming citified, we remember also the hopeful folk from rural places in border states who move today in old cars into our cities seeking work, and change the cities by their presence; or we think Roger Sale's observation on the effects of farm and timber on Seattle, a city not uninfluenced by rural utopias of the sort which Coverdale knew. One moves from Hawthorne to Dos Passos with unexpected ease: both show us reformers, socialists, defeated idealists and the myth of the garden.

Hawthorne's observation is just an observation, of course, on the level of cocktail party chatter, what we used to call cocktail sociology, and what Sylvia Fava calls pop sociology. She wants us to try to turn it from chatter into a force for the good. The chatterers, one hopes, carry the right values; inform their conversations with real data and one might touch off not merely an educational campaign, but, one might hope, a fruitful debate. But one would have to keep feeding in new information, for our "best understanding" of the new towns and suburbs which she discusses or, for that matter, of any urban issue, does not remain static. If, for instance, what Forrest Berghorn and Geoffrey Steere say about the implications of their study in one city is true elsewhere, we have quite seriously misunderstood what mobility really means.

It says in the first chapter of everybody's social science textbook, "Watch out for common sense: social facts really are more mysterious than you think." One needs to watch out for more; carefully gathered data may be misleading, too. There is always the bright new mind which sees the data from a different angle and reads it differently, or the graduate student who, checking out his professor's hypothesis, turns up a stubborn knot of material which sets us off in another direction.

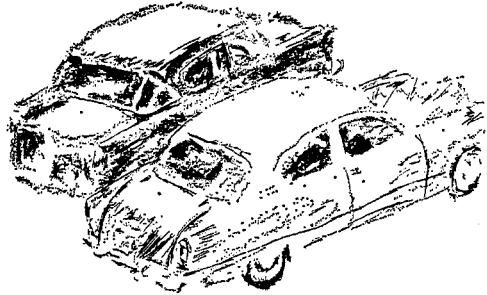
Such changes have occurred in the past. Our understanding of the urban slum, for instance, was changing at the turn of the century. Contrasting the work of two novelists to what had come before, David Fine shows as much; slum life was being treated through a range of popular stereotypes which operated much as do the conclusions of Fava's pop sociology. But the sentimentalized slum fiction was itself a "reform" attempt to combat neglect and ignorance. Cahan and Crane, had they convinced anybody to change the portrayal of urban poverty, would have been reforming reformers. Neither, by the way, was a social scientist. In their case, one can almost speak of the change as a reform in journalism, as pop sociology reforming itself.

There is no way to be sure that any new approach, whether grounded in journalism, in artistic insight, or in the kind of firm study Fava advocates and Berghorn and Steere illustrate, will itself yield answers we can safely use. Central in our values is the meliorist's faith that the way to solve a problem is to pour research on it, and, to tell the truth, some of the things

we try do work, albeit imperfectly. But an analysis other than the one we're using might at any moment suggest alternative methods to fix what's wrong. Park Goist's paper strikes me as refreshing because he doesn't see the problems in terms of that rural-urban split to which we referred a couple of paragraphs back. Instead he's noticed a continuing national concern for community, and shown us a string of intellectuals who demonstrate it. One could, indeed, go back to the Puritan insistence that rural settlers live in the community and walk out to the fields each day, or come forward to the commune around the corner from me, whose "brothers and sisters" say they're there not to experiment but to huddle together for warmth. Better yet to go back beyond the Puritans, and forward beyond the present: begin with the tribal feel of Indian societies, and end with our decision some time in the future that there *are* things for us to learn about community from tribal folk. Goist, of course, is writing a kind of intellectual history, and not proposing solutions, but his work nicely illustrate what a change of perspective might do to one's thinking.

We must come to terms with complexity and surprise. Given the constant revision of evidence and hypothesis, a degree of humility in advocating cure-alls might be healthy, too. One thinks of that Hawthorne novel again: poor Coverdale, the minor poet who makes such insightful observations, is no model for us. He never acts; indeed, he fears he never lives. But Hollingsworth, his beloved rival, is just as bad: sure he has the key to it all, the sole reform which will save the world, he turns himself into something scary, something we have seen too often in the twentieth century, the monomaniacal leader sure that if we only entrust him with enough power and enough of our confidence, he can lead us to the dawn. We need no more of that ilk, whether they base their claims on demogogic or technocratic expertise. Would that some administrative Hollingsworths of the past few decades had thought in terms like Goist's, or examined lumpy and unexpected findings of the sort Steere and Berghorn discuss, before embarking on the urban programs about which we currently complain (but which, "now that we know more," we incurable meliorists would like to see better funded again?).

Certainly Peter Goheen's study of ways of explaining how industrial cities grew suggests that we must learn to respond to the subtleties of complex data. Technological change, location theory, patterns of trade, competition, entrepreneurship, population growth and movement, and the social characteristics of the population which does the growing and moving: no one fact is going to work as a "key." Goheen finds that he has to list more



variables than did, say, Bridenbaugh, who, filling in the background for his study of colonial towns, wrote,

Medieval towns grew in proportion to their success in catering to their own needs and those of nearby villages. They cultivated enough purely local trade to meet their daily requirements and to supply them with commodities for exchange in the world market, where their chief interests lay in the exploitation of the most profitable portions of distant international commerce.⁵

In suggesting that factories don't "cause" cities, Goheen argues for something close to the systems approach advocated in the essay by Leonard Simutus. But one could just as easily say that he is simply reinforcing what Roger Sale feels about Seattle in the late 'teens: "Of necessity everything begins to connect with everything else."

Urban Issue: Urban Issues, in other words, contains articles by people working on extremely dissimilar material, approaching the city from very different angles, yet reaching similar conclusions. They seem to be saying that to understand the city we need methodologies which are in some ways almost deliberately messy—just the kinds of things to madden the "hard data" social scientist, who sees in them too many variables. Our work must be factual, enormously complex, and yet at the same time, to scramble our metaphors, it must be informed by a "feel" for the large picture.

Well, humanists are more comfortable than social scientists with messy conglomerations of variables. Perhaps what is going on in these articles is really a kind of meeting of the minds, so that, again, when Sale says that "everything begins to connect with everything else," he is saying about the same thing as Simutus, who argues that we need something as complex and—one is tempted to use the term—holistic as systems theory if we are going to be able to respond creatively to the multiform complications of the urban experience.

Indeed, maybe that is what *Urban Issues* is really about and what "interdisciplinary" finally is going to mean. One recalls the complaint during the heyday of OEO that the technocrats were ignoring human elements. It is complementary to the cry that the humanistic advocate lacks facts. These have sometimes been valid criticisms, but as an intellectual debate, that argument seems too superficial to sustain interest. Humanists and scientists are too liable to carry the same values. And if American Studies means anything as a field, it is in its demonstration that there is no need to draw a line between humanists and scientists.⁶

iii. discipline, interdiscipline, synthesis

Though doing so may be a trifle rough on the scholar's ego, one should remember that the history of scholarship is an acceptable entry into intellectual history. To some extent at least, what we are up to, collectively, is going to be regarded as an index of intellectual currents of our age. We

interpret the scholars of the past and the recent past that way; it will be done to us, too. Perhaps the essays collected here will seem part of a process: from theories which accounted for human history or behavior in terms of a key—Marxist, Freudian, what-have-you—scholars moved to a period of more complex analysis, perhaps manifested in such tendencies in different fields as the insistence on multiple causality, neo-Calvinism, “re-revisionism,” and multidisciplinary approaches. These in turn might be headed in the direction of holistic approaches, and the present set of articles could be seen—let’s say—as poised at the point at which multidisciplinary syntheses become transmuted into systemic analyses founded on (so we are being told) new holistic consciousnesses able to “feel the whole thing.” Be that as it may, Mr. Simutus does not seem to be exaggerating when he says that systems are “pandemic.”

“The pastoral myth,” Gary Szurberla writes, “disguises a process of urbanization.” His subject, the Chicago novelist Henry Blake Fuller, wanted Chicagoans to face up to the machine. One wonders whether the technocrat ought not equally to face up to the pastoral myth: it, too, is real, and has been a force in modernization. Overwhelming force of facts has failed to diminish its impact even on writers one would not first think of as pastoralists.⁷ And when we try to face up to the machine, we are liable to come away as puzzled as old Henry Adams staring at his dynamo, muttering about occult force and twentieth century multiplicity.

That’s not wrong, either: occult views of the world are certainly “holistic.” Writers who advocate holistic thinking use occult religions as models of the “right way.” Systems theories might be attempts to do with data what mystics do with the cosmic energies they feel. Unity in multiplicity is what they say it’s all about: No wonder Suberla quotes Emerson to start his essay.



Assumptions which underlie the work in these pages suggest a period of transition and synthesis. One begins to see common citations in footnotes of pieces produced by men in discrete disciplines. Concepts understood in common lurk beneath the text: modernization theory in the Goheen article, or the theses of Lewis’ *The American Adam*, or Smith’s *Virgin Land* in several other articles.

The odd structure of our academic fields also suggests the transition period. People in similar areas wear different labels in different institutions. The sociologist and geographer write for an American Studies audience. Is the “urbanist” in another specialty, or is he the product of other “disciplines”? If you are an academic, what determines your field, the title of the

department to which you are attached, or the nature of the problem on which you are working? The American Studies department in which I work trains some urbanists who go directly into city governments and not into university teaching, but it also trains Indianists, museum curators, colonialists and the by-now-traditional "history and lit" American Studies products. Among others! I would like to think that the cheerful chaos in our department is creative, that, indeed, it is chaotic only if one tries to understand it in terms of traditional disciplinary lines. I would like to think also that the articles gathered here are intellectually related, that we are entering a period in which the pursuit of needed knowledge within and without the academy blithely ignores boundary lines when they are simply in the way. Hopeful signs in discouraging times. Maybe we are getting it all together.

SGL

footnotes

1. "Some Afterthoughts," in Oscar Handlin and John Burchard, Editors, *The Historian and the City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 252.
2. A term I'm borrowing from Rosalie and Murray Wax. They used it in their essay "Indian Education for What?" in the Indian issue, VI, 2 (Fall, 1965), 164-170.
3. Well, to be perfectly strict about it, not all were anthropologists: one, to my knowledge, is a sociologist, and another, as I understand it, is a kind of social worker.
4. A good discussion of the extent to which "rural" and "urban" can—or ought—still to be differentiated is Russell B. Nye's "Changes in Twentieth-Century Rural Society" in this journal, X, 1.
5. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness* (New York, 1938); in the 1971 Oxford paper reprint, p. 29.
6. I feel quite strongly that the famous "two cultures" debate of a few years ago, while it did to some extent describe something real, lacked a convincing definition of "culture." I've speculated on the relationship between values, culture and subculture in "Arts, Values, Institutions and Culture," *American Quarterly* (May, 1972), 131-165.
7. Warren French's *The Social Novel at the End of an Era* (Carbondale, Ill., 1966) is the best study of this phenomenon I know of.

about those boxes

Religious leaders condoned snitching "profane" melodies for liturgical use with the rhetorical question, "Why should the devil have all the good tunes?" Operating on the same general theory, **American Studies** asks, "Why should popular magazines have all the interesting layout?" Early in our career as a scholarly journal, we borrowed from the popular magazines the idea of the box-in-text, a brief passage too important to relegate to the footnotes, yet somehow not part of the article proper.

We use it in this issue, as we have in the past, to explain procedural matters which a general reader or a reader trained in another field of American culture might not understand, to define terms peculiar to specialized branches of study, to point connections between one scholar's work and another's, or to point out peculiarities in a given article which enhance its usefulness, but might be easily overlooked.

It seems to us that a collection composed, say, of an article each by a sociologist, a teacher of literature, an historian and a geographer, does not really constitute an interdisciplinary approach unless a reader from any one of those disciplines, or an interdisciplinarian whose training doesn't happen to cover all of them, can make good sense of it. Hence the boxes: one more way to get dialogue going across the disciplines.