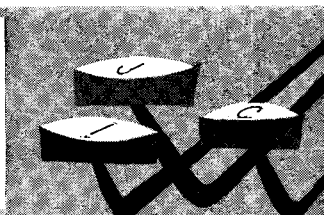


Manner of Speaking



The Refugee Angel (a, perhaps, allegory): Homesick for ourselves, we refugee angels inserted personals in the leading newspapers and became pen pals. It wasn't, of course, the same thing as going home, wherever that had been, whatever was left of it.

But just to have someone to talk to in our own language (which we are forever inventing) is almost the next thing to a reality, like phoning long distance from a combat zone: there's half a world and all its cables between saying and being; and still if you shouted you could be heard, and if you strained you could almost hear what was almost a voice of someone almost remembered say Yes, the weather was fine, and wanting to know how you were. And when you said Goodbye, to nothing, that was a month's pay shot.

As a matter of fact we phoned only in the beginning. In the long run the letters (with always the dim snapshots) were not only cheaper but more satisfactory. A letter is an evidence. It can be folded and carried in a pocket and reopened at night and read again. And, during the day, touched. It is the next thing to being almost real. It is a thing and, therefore, partly believable.

Even when you forgot who had written it, it was there with its dim snapshots of whoever it had been you had meant to remember.

Even when it was from no one you knew except as a name, the name was still vaguely of someone who knew what you knew about the towers and choir-stalls and gold villages.

It was always from someone who had been there when you had been there and who spoke parts of the language you were forever inventing as the way all of you have of trying to remember how far back it is to never-again.

Though, really, it wasn't so much that I wanted to be a pen pal as that I had nothing else to be.

Maybe it's like smoking cigarettes after you get the habit of it: you don't really want the cigarette, but what on earth do you do without it?

So I chain-smoked and pen-palled from all the endless world's ends I was forever being sent to, and I kept the letters that came to me, some of them from space, and some of them almost halfway to being nearly understandable. For after those first few times, I never again tried to reach back by cable.

And after the first few letters carried

into combat and bloodied a bit, I never folded them into my pockets but mounted them in bound tomes and stored them in the squadron files to read again on furloughs.

When I was finally discharged with my two Band-Aids and my disability pay, I was sure I had all that was left of the libraries of Heaven.

I had to turn down Air Force transportation and make my way back by freighter just to get the crates of books back to the ranch-style abbey I had picked out in San Diego.

And here I am, and even now I can pass days just stroking the bindings, feeling the weight of all those words we were forever inventing, hefting the bulk of the great proofs I used to read when I could see.

Sometimes another angel passes through town and drops in and I bring out the wine and we toast the names we invent again as if we could really remember what we once knew.

In the end, of course, we have nothing to say.

The bottle is always empty too soon.

He is still on active duty and he has his orders and it is time to say goodbye.

It is always time, from the beginning, to say goodbye.

I cannot see him and I am sure he does not see me.

He came not to hear what I had to say but what he had to say.

He admires my library but he cannot read it either.

And still I know what it makes him feel just to stroke the bindings and to heft the bulk of all those proofs.

I know how much he wants to persuade himself that we were real once and that we might again become real.

I let him listen to himself and I pretend that I, too, am listening, and sometimes I am, but not to him.

What I am doing is listening through him.

I hear all the waters of all the oceans we have crossed from nothing to nothing.

I hear the express rush of space, the raging silence.

I remember when I had eyes in that dark too wide to see across.

I think how it was really the same as being blind.

Whatever we were looking for was farther across the dark than we could see to, except for those pinpricks of light at the opposite nothing.

Blind, I can imagine that much as clearly as I saw it then.

He ignores me and I ignore him and we stroke the bindings and heft the weight of the proofs and empty the bottle and it is always time to say goodbye.

Sometimes the letters still arrive, two or three at a time, dog-eared and limp, and I can guess how many times they have been forwarded from God-knows-where and the way stations between.

But even if I opened them and even if I could read them, what could they say that I don't know already?

Yes, I confess I can never quite bring myself to throw them out. I toss them into a drawer and forget about them.

The fact is I no longer care to invent what I never was in the first place—or what I can no longer remember having been, which is really the same thing.

I think sometimes of the blood I shed in combat and I wish it had been real.

I touch the sewed-on scars and think of unstitching them, but it's like throwing out the letters—some inner feeling stops me: what could I pretend to be without them?

I could even open my eyes and see the dark again, the uncrossable fact of it. But why?

If I think hard enough, shut here in my own willed dark, I believe I could reinvent myself as a thing.

A mote would be enough: I have survived ambition, I tell myself.

And then I know I have been gulped down into the same pride I rose in once. That insistence on being real.

Always that insistence.

Among other dreams.

Of nothing.

—JOHN CIARDI.

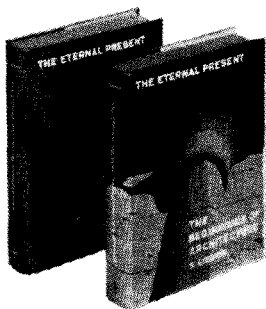


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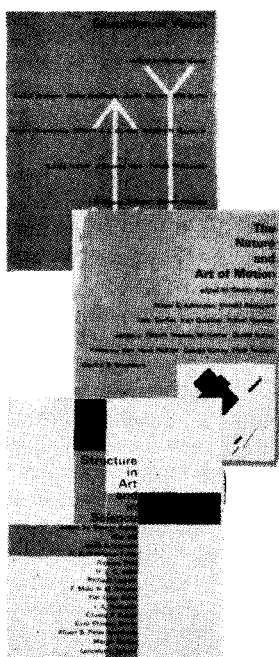
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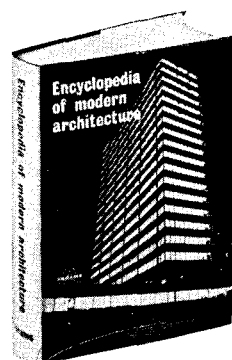
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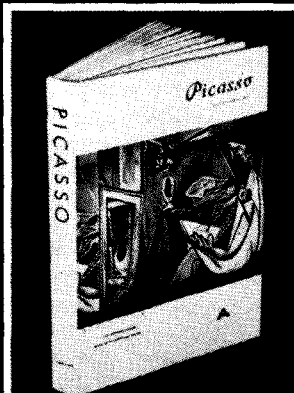
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ICY.

A Report on the White House Conference On International Cooperation Year

By ALFRED BALK

LAST November 28 nearly 5,000 distinguished Americans met in Washington for what President Johnson described as "the assignment of the century": exploring means by which the government and citizenry of the world's most powerful nation can lead mankind to a Golden Age of Peace through international cooperation.

Known as the White House Conference on International Cooperation, it was, in many ways, the conference of the century. It was, first, the largest, most comprehensive joint planning effort ever undertaken by American citizens and government officials. Indeed, as the President observed in a written welcome to participants, the three-day conference was nothing less than a "town meeting of leaders of the nation."

Citizen participants represented more than 500 organizations, ninety corporations, and eighty-nine educational institutions and foundations—an extraordinary diversity of backgrounds. All were chosen by a 200-member National Citizens

Commission on International Cooperation, appointed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

A "Cabinet Committee" representing twenty-two federal agencies directed governmental participation, under the supervision of Harlan Cleveland, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs until his appointment as ambassador to NATO. Then his successor, Joseph J. Sisco, assumed charge. Overall conference chairman was Robert S. Benjamin, President of the United National Association of the USA, which served as coordinator of citizen efforts.

Of equal or greater importance, however, was the larger backdrop against which the conference occurred, for it was only one of a series of programs throughout the world in connection with ICY (International Cooperation Year), a world-wide project of the United Nations in its twentieth anniversary year. After the highly productive International Geophysical Year of 1957, various world leaders, including the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pope John XXIII, had suggested a similar undertaking in the humanities and sciences. The result was ICY, so designated by the United Nations General Assembly in the autumn of 1964.

In a sense, even talking of an Inter-

national Cooperation Year at that time seemed purely an act of faith: deliberations of the General Assembly had all but been halted by the dues impasse and other problems, and the U.N.'s future appeared bleak. Yet within months the situation had changed, and in this, perhaps, is one of the most profound lessons of ICY. In international relations, as in music, the theme is enormously more important than the variations—and the dissonance of one movement may be only a prelude to ascendancy of harmony.

WHAT happens when so diverse a group of Americans is given two words—International Cooperation—and asked to transform that theme into recommendations to government?

Some respond in essentially ceremonial terms; others on a project level; still others, on a level of fundamental analysis of the way in which society—national and international—is organized. All these responses were present, particularly in preliminary stages of the conference, when thirty major committees and scores of subcommittees, all organized by subject, spent six months sifting and refining research and ideas on their own.

What made the conference exciting, however, was the opportunity for interaction of all these themes and approaches during the three-day conference proper

Alfred Balk, a writer who specializes in social and political affairs, was assigned by SR to write this digest of the more than a quarter of a million words growing out of the ICY Conference.