

# AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

*Science* serves its readers as a forum for the presentation and discussion of important issues related to the advancement of science, including the presentation of minority or conflicting points of view, rather than by publishing only material on which a consensus has been reached. Accordingly, all articles published in *Science*—including editorials, news and comment, and book reviews—are signed and reflect the individual views of the authors and not official points of view adopted by the AAAS or the institutions with which the authors are affiliated.

## Editorial Board

1969

EMIL HAURY	KENNETH S. PITZER
WILLARD F. LIBBY	ALEXANDER RICH
EVERETT I. MENDELSON	CLARENCE M. ZENER
JOHN R. PIERCE	

1970

GUSTAF O. ARRHENIUS	RICHARD C. LEWONTIN
FRED R. EGGAN	ALFRED O. C. NIER
HARRY F. HARLOW	FRANK W. PUTNAM
MILTON HARRIS	

## Editorial Staff

### Editor

PHILIP H. ABELSON

### Publisher

DAEL WOLFE

### Business Manager

HANS NUSSBAUM

Managing Editor: ROBERT V. ORMES

Assistant Editors: ELLEN E. MURPHY, JOHN E. RINGLE

Assistant to the Editor: NANCY TEIMOURIAN

News Editor: JOHN WALSH

Foreign Editor: DANIEL S. GREENBERG\*

News and Comment: LUTHER J. CARTER, BRYCE NELSON, PHILIP M. BOFFEY, MARK W. OBERLE, MARTI MUELLER, SCHERRAINE MACK

Book Reviews: SYLVIA EBERHART

Editorial Assistants: JOANNE BELK, ISABELLA BOULDIN, ELEANORE BUTZ, HELEN CARTER, GRAYCE FINGER, NANCY HAMILTON, OLIVER HEATWOLE, ANNE HOLDSWORTH, PAULA LECKY, KATHERINE LIVINGSTON, VIRGINIA NUSSLE, SANDRA RATTLEY, PATRICIA ROWE, LEAH RYAN, LOIS SCHMITT, BARBARA SHEFFER, RICHARD SOMMER, YA LI SWIGART, ALICE THEILE

\* European Office: 22 Mulberry Walk, London, S.W. 3, England (Telephone: 352-9749)

## Advertising Staff

### Director

EARL J. SCHERAGO

### Production Manager

KAY GOLDSTEIN

Advertising Sales Manager: RICHARD L. CHARLES

Sales: NEW YORK, N.Y. 10036: Robert S. Bugbee, 11 W. 42 St. (212-PE-6-1858); SCOTCH PLAINS, N.J. 07076: C. Richard Callis, 12 Unami Lane (201-889-4873); MEDFIELD, MASS. 02052: Richard M. Ezequille, 4 Rolling Lane (617-444-1439); CHICAGO, ILL. 60601: Herbert L. Burkund, Room 2107, 919 N. Michigan Ave. (312-DE-7-4973); BEVERLY HILLS, CALIF. 90211: Winn Nance, 111 N. La Cienega Blvd. (213-657-2772).

EDITORIAL CORRESPONDENCE: 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, Phone: 202-387-7171. Cable: Advancisci, Washington. Copies of "Instructions for Contributors" can be obtained from the editorial office. See also page 7, *Science*, 4 July 1969. ADVERTISING CORRESPONDENCE: Rm. 1740, 11 W. 42 St., New York, N.Y. 10036. Phone: 212-PE-6-1858.

## Activism and the Rejection of History\*

We are a society bemused in its purposes and yet secretly homesick for a lost world of inward tranquility. The thirst for illimitable knowledge now conflicts directly with the search for a serenity obtainable nowhere upon earth. Knowledge, or at least what the twentieth century acclaims as knowledge, has not led to happiness.

Ours is the most time-conscious generation that has ever lived. Our cameras, our television, our archaeological probings, our C<sup>14</sup> datings, pollen counts, underwater researches, magnetometer readings, have resurrected lost cities, placing them accurately in stratigraphic succession. Each Christmas season the art of Ice Age Lascaux is placed beside that of Rembrandt on our coffee tables. Views of Pompeii share honors with Chichen Itza upon the television screen in the living room. We unearth obscure ancestral primates and, in the motion picture "2001," watch a struck fragment of bone fly into the air and become a space ship drifting among the stars, thus telescoping in an instant the whole technological history of man. We expect the average onlooker to comprehend the symbolism; such a civilization, one must assume, should show a deep veneration for the past.

Strangely, the results are quite otherwise. We appear to exist, instead, amidst a meaningless mosaic of fragments. From ape skull to Mayan temple we contemplate the miscellaneous debris of time like sightseers to whom these mighty fragments, fallen gateways, and sunken galleys convey no present instruction.

In our streets and on our campuses riots an extremist minority dedicated to the now, to the moment, however absurd, degrading, or irrelevant the moment may be. It is an activism that deliberately rejects the past and is determined to start life anew—indeed to reject the very institutions that feed, clothe, and sustain our swarming millions.

A yearning for a life of noble savagery without the accumulated burdens of history seems in danger of engulfing a whole generation, as it did the French *philosophes* and their 18th-century followers. Those individuals who persist in pursuing the mind-destroying drug of constant action have not alone confined themselves to an increasingly chaotic present—they are also, by the deliberate abandonment of their past, destroying the conceptual tools and values that are the means of introducing the rational into the oncoming future.

Their world, therefore, becomes increasingly the violent, unpredictable world of the first men simply because, in losing faith in the past, one is inevitably forsaking all that enables man to be a planning animal. For man's story, in brief, is essentially that of a creature who has abandoned instinct and replaced it with cultural tradition and the hard-won increments of contemplative thought. The lessons of the past have been found to be a reasonably secure instruction for proceeding against the unknown future. To hurl oneself recklessly, without method, upon a future that we ourselves have complicated is a sheer nihilistic rejection of all that history, including the classical world, can teach us.

—LOREN EISELEY, *Benjamin Franklin Professor of Anthropology and the History of Science, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia*

\* This is an excerpt from *The Unexpected Universe*, which will be published in October by Harcourt, Brace & World. Copyright © 1969 by Loren Eiseley.