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Review

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# Fortschritt ins Nichts

by *Andreas Lommel*

With the agreement of author and publisher, *Fortschritt ins Nichts*, by Andreas Lommel (Zürich: Atlantis, 1969), was sent for review, along with copies of the précis printed below, to 20 scholars, of whom the following responded: H. J. M. Claessen, John Friedl, Stephen Fuchs, Jan Jelinek, V. R. Kabo, Vittorio Maconi, Frederick Rose, T. G. H. Strehlow, and Roy Wagner. Their reviews appear below and are followed by a reply from the author.

## Author's Précis

*Fortschritt ins Nichts* (Progress to Nowhere) is the record of a return visit, in 1955—after an interval of 17 years—to the Unambal of northwestern Australia. The first fieldwork, part of a study undertaken by the Frobenius Institute, Frankfurt/Main, in 1938, had focused on rock paintings and their mythological context (see Lommel 1952). The second visit was devoted to the copying of further rock paintings (later exhibited in the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich and published in the exhibition catalogue *Die Kunst des fünften Erdteils*) and to the gathering of further data on art, theater, and mythology.

In 1955, we could verify much of the previous account. We got some more information about rock paintings and their mythological context (p. 100). Besides, we got information about beliefs responsible for customs

like the subincision and weapons like the boomerang (pp. 114, 136). We also had the opportunity to see more aboriginal theater and art (p. 157). In this primitive society, art has a place which it seems to be unable to fill in the modern world. We concentrated on this special form of spiritual life, which seems to have survived only here (p. 135) and must have been typical for very old primitive societies, and which is a special state of creativity responsible also for the Ice Age rock paintings in southern France. There is no hope that this special spiritual state and this artistic creativity can be preserved in our time.

This is an account not of development, but of deterioration and degeneration. Development as far as education, integration, and welfare are concerned can certainly be observed, but it is being paid for with loss of the traditional culture and injury to mental health. For so-called primitive people, material progress and integration into modern ways of life are the end of

everything except physical existence. It is difficult to explain this to a world that believes only in material progress; but it is all too apparent among these people, for whom the spiritual world still, for the moment, exists. Decent living standards are not enough. Every civilization needs spiritual standards, too; and as traditions crumble, no new spiritual standards are visible anywhere. The future of mankind depends upon integrating the masses of the Third World into modern industrialized society. If this society has no spiritual standards, what do acculturation, development, social justice really mean? What can be the result, other than a vast proletariat without form and style, without balance of mind, people driven not by material want but by deep-rooted inferiority feelings, people who cannot find their place in this world because they are uprooted and unstable, people capable of fighting for their rights but not of living with them?

My experience with these Aborigines of Australia makes me doubtful about the idea of "progress"—the leading idea of the modern world since the French Revolution. Perhaps it is time for us to abandon this unfounded optimism and try to face harsh, bleak reality: Some, indeed most, of the real, urgent problems of this world cannot be solved. They will develop according to their inherent logic. To solve them is no longer in the realm of human possibilities.

## Reviews

by H. J. M. CLAESSEN

*Wassenaar, The Netherlands.* 24 ix 72  
*Fortschritt ins Nichts* is a fascinating book. Lommel tries to give the reader some hindsight on the culture of the Australian Aborigines. He presents his data in a somewhat impressionistic way, but though his account is not

systematic the picture of the Aborigines and their culture is rather clear in the end.

To get an understanding of their world of thought, Lommel analyzes the influence of myth and dream. The way of thinking of the poet/medicine-man receives special attention. Lommel shows how this man held the group together and solved the psychological problems of Stone Age man. In his

view, the Aborigines are representatives of Stone Age peoples. Perhaps in some ways they are. They differ from us, for instance, in their way of thinking, which Lommel shows to intertwine past and present, dream and reality, in one coherent system. There is, however, a great difference between Lommel's presentation and that of Lévy-Bruhl (1921, 1935), who also concluded that primitive man had a

different way of thinking. The Aborigines, as pictured by Lommel, are not caricatures, but human beings—though sometimes not easy to understand.

The main part of his book concerns the deterioration and degeneration of culture and man. This part of his description is very impressive. In many respects, his sad story is comparable with the extermination of the Tasmanians more than a century ago (cf. Plomley 1966). It seems impossible to stop this process. Though missionaries and government agents try hard to help the Aborigines, their efforts are not successful. In analyzing this failure, Lommel suggests that the Western world is unable to offer the Aborigines a new world view or new ideals. The loss of their traditional values obviously cannot be compensated by education, medical care, or improved standard of living.

At the end of his book, Lommel extends this view to the Third World as a whole and predicts "a vast proletariat without form and style"—and without a future. Some authors, however, believe that only a Third World proletariat has a chance to create new ideals, a new way of living. For instance, Wertheim (1971), in his discussion of emancipation, evolution, and revolution, points to the example of Communist China, where in his opinion a new society with new ideals and a new world view is growing. This could be an answer to the problem Lommel poses. Besides, feelings of unrest and discomfort are growing in our own culture. Flower power, the Jesus movement, campus riots—to mention but a few—can be interpreted as symptoms of a struggle for new ideals. Lommel's book is a warning. Let us take it to heart.

by JOHN FRIEDL

*Columbus, Ohio, U.S.A. 29 xi 72*

There are two clearly distinguishable themes in Lommel's book, themes which at times seem to fit together rather nicely and at other times are in definite contrast. For the most part he presents us with a view of the "noble savage," whose traditional way of life contains an inner beauty and harmony that no Western society could every hope to achieve. Yet occasionally we see glimpses of another point of view, concentrating on the "primitive" and uncivilized aspect of their life. We see this particularly in the context of modernization, and indeed it is the author's contention that this is a result of contact with Western culture. But still, one comes away from reading Lommel's book with the impression

that perhaps he is hiding his true feelings about their way of life and that occasionally they come through in spite of this.

The author spends most of the book recounting the magical and religious practices and world view of the native Australians who are the subject of his study. Only occasionally does he concern himself with an analysis of the processes involved in the breakdown of a traditional cultural system. His discussion of the changes in the Aborigines' world view in the face of contact with white man's culture is quite revealing, and the changes are thoroughly described within a somewhat narrow framework, namely religious ritual and artistic portrayal of myth. It is unfortunate that he does not elaborate upon this point with regard to the integration of other elements of their culture into the superimposed tradition. Most important, perhaps, is the lack of a practical perspective concerning the realities of cultural change. Western influences cannot be avoided or even postponed. To lament their introduction and spread is commendable and, in view of the author's descriptions, perfectly understandable. But however much we as Westerners may regret the secondary effects of our expansion, as social scientists we are obliged to offer more than our sympathy. It is here that Lommel's book leaves much to be desired, for he offers no hint of a solution to the problem or even a compromise.

Lommel's insight into the relationship between art, myth, environment, world view, and tradition is to be commended. He demonstrates an understanding of the process of creativity and artistic expression unmatched in the ethnographic literature, and his long and detailed accounts of his experiences among the native Australians communicate this understanding clearly.

The problem discussed here is not unique to Australia, but is common to all developing nations. Lommel suggests that Australia is an ideal situation for study because the Aborigine problem is so small in scale as to eliminate many outside influences dependent upon greater economic and political importance. But to my mind it is for precisely this reason that the analysis should be carried beyond Australia, for if it is to contribute to our understanding of acculturation and modernization it must be applicable to other cultures as well. While Lommel has given us a good start in analyzing the effects of culture contact upon "primitive" world view, he has left off where I would most like to see this type of study begin.

by STEPHEN FUCHS

*Bombay, India. 20 iii 73*

In the initial chapter of his book, the author makes an impassioned plea for a more psychological approach to developing peoples. In his opinion, the offer of mere economic improvement and technical knowledge is insufficient and often positively harmful. This standpoint is certainly justified.

While in full agreement with the author's main thesis, I find some pre-suppositions of his more difficult to accept:

1. His claim that the fate of the Australian Aborigines is symptomatic of primitive tribes all over the world in their encounter with modern civilization can hardly be sustained. The situation in Australia is peculiar, even unique. Australia is the only continent in which the original inhabitants never advanced beyond the hunting and collecting stage of culture. In all other continents, hunting cultures exist side by side with more or less advanced, though still primitive, agrarian cultures which form intermediate steps and stages in the development towards modern civilisation. In Australia, on the other hand, the gap between the hunting aborigines and the European settlers was from the beginning too great ever to be bridged.

2. The author's presentation of Australian Aboriginal culture is misleading in that he does not mention that their world-outlook is based on false premises. It is unrealistic. The world is *not* full of spirits and ghosts, nor do women need the intervention of spirits to become pregnant. Fertility cults are *not* indispensable for rain to fall and things to grow. Black magic and witchcraft are *not* really effective. It is obvious that the Aborigines have failed to master their situation exactly because they have built up for themselves a world of fantasy and make-believe. It may have provided them with an ideological foundation for their cultural life, but it is also responsible for the cultural stagnation which had set in long before the arrival of the Europeans. We may sympathise with the Aborigines for the rude shattering of their values and beliefs, but ultimately it is a blessing in disguise: their dream-world is giving way to reality.

3. The author's prognosis that the tribals in Australia are doomed to racial and cultural extinction is too pessimistic. Though the ultimate aim of the Australian government is—perhaps wrongly—the complete assimilation of the tribals, at least for the time being the government has reserved for them certain areas (Arnhem Land, for instance) where they are protected

against undue interference. Those tribal groups which are keen on preserving their original culture have a chance to do so. It has yet to be seen whether the influence of modern civilisation is so overpowering that the Australian Aboriginal culture will be completely wiped out. There are experts who believe that elements of the culture and religion will survive (e.g., Kolig 1971, Simpson 1967).

The author takes a rather masochistic delight in blaming Western civilisation for all the evils in Australian Aboriginal life. No doubt the immigrants from Europe were guilty of many atrocities, but they too were very largely victims of their age, rampant with social injustice and economic exploitation. Still, the book is a timely, forceful, though rather exaggerated warning to "civilised" Australians not to allow their "aboriginal" countrymen to "progress into Zero."

by JAN JELÍNEK

Brno, Czechoslovakia. 18 xii 72

Lommel's book is an interesting contribution to our knowledge of hunting peoples and their contact with European technical civilisation. The culture of the Aborigines illustrates particularly clearly all the consequences of this contact because it stands at the opposite end of the spectrum of variability of present cultures from 20th-century technology.

The tendency of Aborigines not to distinguish clearly between real and unreal events is well described. Vague boundaries between reality and unreality exist in other hunting populations, but are here most striking. I do not, however, believe Australian culture to be qualitatively distinct as Lommel suggests. In Europe we have only archaeological remains of hunting cultures, but they demonstrate that the relation between the real and the unreal was very similar to that of the most ancient surviving hunting cultures. We also find notions and phenomena in Aboriginal psychology and culture analogous to those of ancient Europe. Man was for more than 90% of his existence a hunter and gatherer. The last 5,000 years, since man discovered agriculture, are a chronologically negligible and almost irrelevant fragment of human existence. From this fact alone, it follows that the hunting and gathering stage had to fulfill all the preconditions for the subsequent development of European culture. It is impossible to separate the two. The remaining cultural development did not, in the hunting communities, proceed either at the same tempo or in the same way. Thus the technique of

polishing stones was discovered in Australia as early as 19,000–21,000 years ago, when it was on the whole still unknown in Europe. Similarly, we know of cremations in Australia from about 25,000 years ago.

Rock paintings of the so-called elegant style are widely distributed throughout North Australia and correspond to the archaeological "complex" known as the Pirri Culture. It is mere speculation to speak of extra-Australian origins. The same is true of the rock paintings Lommel considers. He himself is right in mentioning a range of paintings linking the so-called elegant figures and the Wondjina style. I agree with Lommel that the view that the elegant style first came to the north of the Australian continent but was not here "absorbed" seems to be unfounded. Further study shows a development of this style in the more recent spear-throwing figures and the threadlike paintings of static anthropomorphic figures, all inseparable parts of North Australian rock art. The Aboriginal conception of their own prehistory as the work of spirits, also found in European prehistory, is no proof of extra-Australian origins.

In his analysis of the future of the Aborigines and coloured ethnic groups the world over, the author stresses the independence of economics of the assimilation of the Australian culture, arguing that Aboriginal culture is perishing for purely psychic reasons. This view overlooks the historical continuity of contact—the hunting of Aborigines by white settlers and the supremacy of European guns and all technical products, awareness of which often affected the behaviour of the Aborigines even when they still knew of Europeans only by rumour. It is impossible to separate the material effect from the psychic. It is incorrect to say that without the medicine-man Aboriginal society is decaying. The reason for the decay is material, undermining the economic basis of the community and resulting in the loss of the original social structure and beliefs and with them the function of the medicine-man. Lommel reverses cause and effect. His assertion (p. 184) that the influence of civilisation on the primitive culture of northwest Australia begins in the psychic field has not been proven either by him or by any other researcher. Through such reasoning, one can conclude that psychic isolation springs from the old economic, political, and social insularity. The correct view is that after the undermining of traditional structures and

notions (with the help of economic supremacy) a nationalistic consciousness and the beginnings of a political system can arise.

Lommel understands proletarianisation as "the release of man from the current economic system or social structure and from the spiritual tradition." It is certainly necessary to add "in the context of a highly developed capitalist society." Proletarianisation is in fact the consequence of economic exploitation, which produces social disruption and undermines spiritual traditions. It is not, as Lommel writes (p. 195), a precondition of industrialisation, but its consequence in capitalist society. During the industrial modernisation of any ethnic group, its spiritual tradition eventually becomes mere commemorative folklore. Proofs of this are given us by the industrialisation of, for example, Japan, China, and Soviet Siberia. Lommel's statement (p. 197) that "changes in economic relations, introduced into some sort of population from outside, demand also new social relations, and a new world outlook" is true, but it contradicts what has been said on preceding pages of his book, that it is the new world outlook which requires new economic and social norms. I do not know of any such situation either in the Third World or in history.

The conclusion denies even the possibility of further development of society. The development of society, however, progresses regardless, with new material discoveries and their consequences, with social change and a new world outlook, both in the areas of traditional European civilisation, suffering for the time being from the lack of a unifying moral outlook, and in the Third World.

by V. R. KABO

Leningrad, U.S.S.R. 19 vi 72

Lommel's book is an outstanding phenomenon in contemporary ethnological literature. Its significance goes far beyond traditional ethnology because it recasts ethnology into philosophical argument about important present-day problems, first and foremost the fate of the small peoples. The author does not believe in progress, for he sees it as entailing the destruction of the traditional system of spiritual values of the small peoples; he calls this "progress into nothingness." It is customary to examine progress only in its material aspect. The social and spiritual aspects of the problem are no less important. Progress in these realms, as in the material realm, is not

a matter of faith, but an objective fact. Objective criteria exist for its evaluation. But the last word has not yet been said here. Old ideas and values are being replaced by new ones, not only among the backward peoples, but everywhere in the present-day world. The situation of the former backward peoples of Russia under the new social conditions shows that the gloomy prospect Lommel saw in Australia is not universal, but arises from the social conditions under which the Aborigines live. Further, their future is not really hopeless; new social ideas are mobilizing them for the struggle for a decent existence in the contemporary world. The Aborigines are not alone in this struggle; they are supported by wide circles of Australian society.

Another problem that runs through Lommel's book is the problem of cultural typology, of primitive culture. At its center is the figure of the visionary, the possessed one, the poet, the shaman. The author rightfully attempts to sketch the outstanding features of the personality of the shaman as representative of a widespread sociopsychological type. Under Lommel's pen, shamanism becomes a universal phenomenon. The journey of the poet's soul into the world of the spirits recalls the behavior of the shaman in a state of trance. Their typological similarity is striking. The syncretism of primitive consciousness is embodied through the creative act in word and ritual. The chapter "The Theater of the Stone Age" is one of the most interesting ones in the book, but of course it is not simply the theater that is spoken about here. Here before us is the mythological history of the world itself. The picture of the spread of a new cult is also very interesting.

The culture of a people has its own unique nature, its own *Geist* or pattern. Through a combination of scholarly and artistic penetration into the material, Lommel has succeeded in bringing to the reader the unique nature of Aboriginal culture. While this culture is unique, it is at the same time typical; it affords an opportunity to delve into the culture and social relations of early man. However, this opportunity can be realized only on the basis of special methodological principles.

Lommel's book stands on the boundary between a scholarly monograph and an artistic memoir. It is saturated with living impressions; live people, not schemes, move on its pages. The author is a humanist and a poet. Because of all this, the book will find its way to a broad readership. Last but not least, the book is illustrated with beautiful reproductions of Australian

cave drawings executed by the talented artist Katharina Lommel.

by VITTORIO MACONI

Genoa, Italy. 10 1 73

Lommel once believed, I think, in an assimilation of the Australian natives through their experiences at missionary stations and government posts. In this work, he argues that culture contact has been catastrophic for the traditional culture and for the natives themselves; he thinks that the Aborigines are incapable of adopting the Western culture models being imposed on them, because they are tied to a world view with no future, but only past and present as a repetition of a mythical past. The incompatibility between traditional and modern views has created cultural gaps among the Aborigines, and Lommel tries to describe and explain them. The weakness of his argument is that he studies the problem in terms of the psychic characteristics of the Aborigines. The social unit, he says, is a psychological phenomenon, and the medicine-man's role is based on psychic grounds, as he is a determinant element of social cohesion and its propelling centre. Apart from a strong objection to this last statement, I have a suspicion that Lommel ascribes to the Aborigines not only a participationist mentality, but a mentality that makes them unable to distinguish between the mythical and mystical reality of the "dream" and empirical reality. It is beyond doubt that the "dream time," with all its techniques, institutions, behaviour rules, and rituals, is the standard of truth for the Aborigines; nevertheless, we must grant credit to Berndt (1950:233) when he says that the Australians

make a definite distinction between dream and waking life. Both spheres are real in their own right, but each has a different kind of reality. The two overlap only in relation to sorcery, to the initiation and experiences of native doctors. Knowledge of the local native languages, together with the collection of texts relating to everyday life, to mythology and to dream life, should clarify this point.

In my opinion, Lommel does not sufficiently recognise the facts of culture contact. The incompatibility between traditional and modern mentality is based on the fact that the Aborigines both dread and scorn the Whites. On the other hand, sexual intercourse between Aborigines and Whites is forbidden: should it happen, only the Aborigine is subject to the law. In fact, Aborigines side with Whites only for certain material advantages. Introducing sedentary life to these hunters

means compelling tribes to coexist in such a small area that they are unable to maintain their identities and depriving those who remain in their tribal territory of the possibility of surviving as a tribal group. Assimilation may appear the only way to physical survival, but for the Aborigines it involves a complete denial of an autonomous cultural identity.

The Aborigines have been unable to create a new outlook on the world because it has been impossible for them to organise socially and politically apart from their traditional organisation (and not only because of a psyche that incapacitates them for any new life experience). Therefore they have only been able to seek refuge in the past. This is demonstrated by the fact that no real syncretistic cults derived from contacts with the Whites have arisen, but only revivals of traditional cults as protection against the Whites, of which the Kurangara cult mentioned by Lommel is an example. Even though this cult is widespread, it never gives rise to new cohesion either for the tribes themselves or for people of different tribes living together in missionary stations and the like, and it never assumes the character of revolt against the Whites.

Every sociocultural self-identification involves a personal responsibility: among the Aborigines this was expressed in the organisation of the horde in the tribal context. The contacts with the Whites were a heavy attack on the horde and the tribe. The Whites assumed that the only possibility was to invite the Aborigines into residential centres, more or less stable in their structure and organisation, convinced that even for the Aborigines this represented a desirable solution. In this situation, proletarianisation was a matter of course. The Aborigines follow European ways of life, but on Sundays they leave clothes, houses, etc., behind and go far away, giving themselves up completely to their social and cultural traditions. Nevertheless, recovery of their cultural authenticity is but a bitter illusion, because they have been changed from "indigenous" to "indigent" people. Even the attempts at creating co-operative societies controlled by the Aborigines, such as that of Pindan at Port Hedland in Western Australia, have miserably failed.

Mixed-blood Aborigines are no solution: in spite of their large number, they lack prestige among the full-blood natives. Nor can the full assimilation achieved by some natives offer hope for the future: assimilated people cannot assume important roles in traditional communities or in those under

transformation. Only people with extraordinary skill against the world of the Whites (for example, people who have escaped the police, thus showing that they have supernatural power) may rise to leading roles.

Through contact, the Aborigines have received more goods than they ever had under traditional conditions, but have suffered a pitiable impoverishment on the psychological, social, and spiritual level. Lommel seeks to show the real basis of this psychological emptiness and deculturation, but his arguments, exclusively bound to a psychic element, are abstract and not very well connected with the Aborigines' experience.

by FREDERICK ROSE

Berlin, Germany. 9 XI 72

On the back dust-cover, we learn that the author "is a member of several learned societies. He does not teach and is not attached to any university. He is not a member of any political party or any authoritative body. He bears no titles, distinctions or decorations." The image is of a self-effacing, apolitical scientist. Yet the blurb at the front says that the book deals with Australia as a case study of the proletarianisation of the Third World—political dynamite!

This contradiction permeates the book itself. The first and the last two chapters—34 pages—have direct political relevance, while the middle 154 pages cover Lommel's research. There is scientifically nothing here not already published (Lommel 1949, 1950; Petri 1950; Berndt 1950; Rose 1965:118). What is new to most readers (Strehlow 1970) is Lommel the astute politician. But Lommel has long campaigned to hitch anthropological studies to the German Federal Republic's neo-colonialist bandwagon (Lommel 1963). *Fortschritt ins Nichts* is a synthesis of the two Lommels.

By clear if indirect references to the theories of "the industrial society" (p. 9) and the "north/south conflict" (p. 17), he aligns himself with the anti-socialist, anti-Soviet Establishment of West Germany. The book ends with his doubting whether Marxism can interpret the processes he has described (pp. 196–97). Lommel's political overtures found immediate resonance in a positive three-page review in *Der Spiegel*, a political journal of the U.S. *Time*'s format and circulation.

The book, like its title, is extraordinarily pessimistic. The Aborigines, by proletarianisation—his terminology can be disputed—become "helpless in a white world" (p. 18), "without tradition" (p. 11) and beset "with an inferi-

ority complex" (p. 186). Lommel condescends in treating the Aborigines as objects and not as active subjects in the historical process. Has he not heard of the Australia-wide struggle of the Aborigines for land and the right to develop their own culture, epitomised by the events at Wattie Creek since 1966? If this postdates his manuscript, has he not heard of the Aborigines' strike in Northwest Australia on May 1, 1946, which led to an Aboriginal cooperative still viable today? Or does Lommel choose to close his eyes because the Aborigines have found their natural allies in the white working class—the Australian proletariat?

He repeats the myth that one psychological result of contact with (Western) civilisation is to render the Aborigines sterile (p. 189). True, in 1938 the Ungarinyin and Worora were dying out. The real reason was that at least 50% were syphilitic and one in eighteen were lepers. But today, with the introduction of antibiotics and other drugs during and after the war—indirectly but intentionally to protect the white population (Rose 1971:355–56)—population explosions are taking place.

The alternative to Lommel's neo-colonialist "industrialisation"/proletarianisation is the consistent national and minority policy carried out over 50 years in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the world's second industrial power—pace the "industrial society" ideologists! Here, despite difficulties and errors and despite distortion and slander, we have an intrinsically optimistic picture of moral and economic strength. An example nearer home is Vietnam, which practises a nationality policy similar to that of the Soviet Union. This small country, optimistic in its united moral strength, has effectively stopped in their tracks the fighting forces of the United States, the world's leading industrialised power.

It may be surprising to some CA readers that I have offered such a scientific-political review of Lommel's book. But *Fortschritt ins Nichts* is essentially a political book, with little if anything new to offer scientifically. It is quite proper for Lommel to have written such a book, but the editor of CA might well ponder whether the columns of CA are appropriate for reviews of books of this nature.

by T. G. H. STREHLOW

Adelaide, Australia. 18 VIII 72

In his earlier writings on the Ungarinyin, the Worora, and the Unambal of the Kimberley region of Western Aus-

tralia (1949, 1950, 1952, 1959), Lommel set down the scientific information on which this book is based, evaluated aboriginal Australian culture as a critical ethnologist, and discussed the aboriginals in impersonal sociological terms as members of a dying social order. *Fortschritt ins Nichts* reveals a new Lommel—a clear-sighted and humanitarian European capable of emotional response to the aesthetic properties of aboriginal art forms who describes, often in beautifully sensitive language, the plight of a dark people whose social order, economic activities, culture, beliefs, and languages he found in the near-final stages of collapse.

The different style symbolizes a completely new approach. From 1788, when the first Europeans arrived in Australia, till recent years, the settlers regarded the original black inhabitants as inferior to themselves in physique, culture, language, and technology. Every section of the new white population—landowners, politicians, missionaries, administrators, technologists, and well-meaning reformers—asserted with almost religious dogmatism the belief that the black folk had to be changed into black-skinned white Australians to fit them for survival in the modern world. The attempts at change—called at various times Europeanization, Christianization, and assimilation—were, however, never very successful. The result, as clearly pictured by Lommel, was a society deprived of its culture, its members destined to become a "coloured proletariat" in a Pacific outpost of Western European culture.

In Lommel's view, the greatest problem of social change is essentially an emotional one: mere materialistic technological progress unaccompanied by a deeply humanizing ideology cannot fill the emotional and spiritual void left by the total loss of a culture. All this is excellently argued. Lommel is aware that social change and technological progress cannot be arrested either in Australia or in the countries forming the so-called underdeveloped Third World which includes by far the greater part of the human race. Young aboriginal Australians do not want to "return to the bush" any more than do the modern New Guineans or the rest of the coloured peoples.

Similar problems facing the white nations are indicated by their growing concern about atmospheric and water pollution and about nuclear and biological warfare. Again, no modern system of philosophy has yet been evolved

which is worthy of being called a *Weltanschauung*—a scientifically valid view of the universe capable of giving rational meaning to the Western “civilized” way of life.

Deeply pessimistic, Lommel believes in the ultimate disappearance of all aboriginal Australian languages, norms, social institutions, and religious beliefs. Against this must be set the fact that the younger aboriginal and part-aboriginal Australians—with growing white Australian support—are increasingly resisting this threatened final absorption into white society, demanding special land rights, and searching for a new identity. Aboriginal culture does not lack ideals that could have validity in modern conditions, among them the principles of cooperation, not subordination; differentiation without inequality; tolerance for the customs of neighbours; and respect for the hunting grounds of other tribes.

An optimist would not exclude the possibility that non-white men of the future might yet evolve ideals capable of carrying forward civilization beyond the point which many fear to be the end of the road for Western civilization.

by ROY WAGNER

*Evanston, Ill., U.S.A.* 11 XII 72

Perhaps because it has never wanted to be wise, but only clever, learned, precise, parsimonious, or rational, anthropology has seldom achieved wisdom. It has gained its insights largely by exploiting the ideologies and reali-

ties of a secular civilization, its rationalism, utilitarianism, and social determinism, translating unfamiliar lifestyles into “science” so that scientists could understand them or into functions and processes to aid the comprehension of a people that habitually fools with gadgets. Because these insights fail to include the insights of the subjects in their own formulation, tremendous “ethical” problems are generated.

But *Fortschritt ins Nichts* is a wise book, and it bespeaks an anthropological perspective broad enough to include theoretical, ethical, descriptive, and introspective concerns within a single formulation. This requires a deeper and more comprehensive theory of cultural phenomena than usual and an appreciation of the realities of the people themselves. The former is certainly there, sometimes rather ambiguous, otherwise very explicit in statements that recall the (largely forgotten or misunderstood) ideas of Oswald Spengler. And Lommel’s attention to the necessity to see the people in their own focus gives his discussion a force that is missing in writings on the Aborigines from Spencer and Gillen onward. The reality of these people is a “religious” one; it is, to use the somewhat impoverished language of modern anthropology, a “symbolic” reality, a total means of experiencing (and hence creating) the world, a world in itself.

Lommel continually invokes a distinctive “psychic structure” or “psychic reality” to characterize this mode of experience. Since analogous phenomena crop up repeatedly and have been glossed in a variety of ways, we might

conclude that choice of words makes little difference. Yet relegating what are essentially the central human experiences to a “psychic” realm grants them a seemingly unwarranted independence of the symbolic forms—the iconic images, metaphoric, choreographic, pictorial—through which experiences, however personal or private, must be mediated. And since Lommel’s ethnographic interest centered on the rock paintings the interplay between “psychic” concept and representational form might be worth his further consideration.

The core problem of the book, pursued with a forthright disregard for the fantasy-world of “ethnographic present,” is that of a kind of ethnocide—the murder of a people, of “man” in the most essential sense—that is beyond any appeal or reprieve. The clash of “realities” here is no mere academic exercise or translational error; the Western “interpretation” of things has been enforced as the context of everyday life among the peoples of northwestern Australia, against which the traditional spiritual life can only impinge as a self-conscious escapism or pose of vainglory. This problem emerges as a universal one; Lommel’s assertion that “only soul-less intellectuals” can inhabit the modern worlds of the urban West is only partially belied by a “second religiosity” of cultists clamoring for a return to “belief”—or its external accompaniments—at any price. The crisis demands insight and sympathy of the sort that Lommel has shown in this book, and the atrocities it leaves in its wake are as ghastly as any nihilistic excesses of modern warfare.

## Reply

by ANDREAS LOMMEL

*Munich, Germany.* 12 III 73

I realize that my book is a very controversial one, so I am very grateful to my reviewers; I could not expect so much understanding. My reviewers rightly see my outlook as pessimistic. Of course, life will go on, but to view

future developments with pessimism may turn out to be realism.

It is true that I should have made more careful distinctions. Trying to paint a vivid and impressive picture, I drew general conclusions that can certainly not be applied everywhere. Modern developments in Australia, in New Guinea, in Siberia differ, but all illustrate the difficulty of the problem of the confrontation of material

progress with loss of traditional culture and mental stability.

My book appeared in 1969. Meanwhile, all the problems of the “environment” have come out into the open, and the optimism of never-ending progress is gone. Now we can discuss the limits of growth, and these limits are already visible. With systems analysis as a new tool, mankind is trying to find an appropriate attitude.

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