

FINDINGS AND KEEPINGS: ANALECTS FOR AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. by Lewis Mumford. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975. 394 pp. \$15.00.

Since he is in the midst of writing his autobiography, Mumford feels compelled to explain to the reader why he chose to publish "this formless Miscellany" (3). He describes the contents of *Findings And Keepings* as "somewhat like the preliminary probings that a conscientious biographer might make, hoping to find a few nuggets in the gravel and muck" (3). There are many nuggets here, some gravel, and precious little muck. Most prominently displayed amongst the muck is the notion that Lewis Mumford needs to justify publishing anything in an era which so desperately needs his counsel.

Drawing inspiration from Emerson's insight that the work an author chooses to suppress is often more valuable than what he chooses to publish, Mumford presents these analects—"crumbs" or "literary gleanings"—from his notes, letters, and "bashfully published" works dating back to 1914 (3,5). They include an epic play based on the lives of John and Washington Roebling, builders of the Brooklyn Bridge; a semi-autobiographical novel; a number of highly personal and occasionally frivolous musings, and many trenchant commentaries on some of the most profound issues of our time. Mumford's "Prologue to Our Time: 1895-1975" which originally appeared in *The New Yorker* is appended as a "Postlude." Perhaps the most valuable "nuggets" are to be found among Mumford's "Random Notes" from his journal. In the truncated form in which these notes appear here, they often assume the power and grace of aphorisms.

Mumford has partaken fully in "the feast of life" which his humane vitalist philosophy celebrates. He has never accepted C.P. Snow's "two-cultures" thesis, choosing instead to remain a generalist in an age which demands "monocular specialists" (101). His youthful writings reveal that the decision to become one of the great intellectual anomalies of the twentieth century—a sociologist "specializing in beauty"—was not without personal hazard:

Larpoorlar be switched. I have specialized in the art of being alive, and 'art' is only one of the manifestations of life, and all the other things that the Larpoorlarers neglect in their cribbed and cabined estheticism are just as fascinating and exciting, in their own fashion, as the things that the sociologists, and their ilk, neglect. The result of this attitude is, of course, that I am an Ishmael in both camps, and am about as popular as a corpse that has lain too long in no man's land between the trenches (69-70).

More than fifty years have elapsed since these words were written. There is some evidence that the Larpoorlarers—even the academic Larpoorlarers—are beginning to allow their trenches to be warmed by Mumford's wisdom. Whether sociologists will have the foresight to develop a similar enlightened hindsight remains an open question. Mumford's major works, *Technics And Civilization* (1934), *The Culture of Cities* (1938), *The Urban Prospect* (1968),

and *The Myth Of The Machine* (volume 1, 1967, volume 2, 1970), display eloquently the powers of a sociological imagination enriched by humane learning and a touch of genius. But sociologists today are uncomfortable with genius. At best, they prefer it at a distance and safely endentured in professorial robes. Yet, there is much in Mumford's work which is reminiscent of the 'classic' tradition of Weber, Tonnies, Veblen, and Simmel—perhaps Simmel above all with whom Mumford shares Bergson's legacy, as well as an encyclopaedic range of interests, a lucid style, and a predisposition toward a phenomenological analysis of esthetic forms. Like Simmel and Weber, Mumford is concerned that modern man has become imprisoned in his own 'forms,' both social and technological. Indeed, in his postlude, he warns, "if the forces that now dominate us continue on their present path they must lead to collapse of the whole historical fabric, not just this or that great nation or empire" (381). But Mumford is not a fatalist. He is the ultimate skeptic—distrustful even in pessimism. Thus he acknowledges that, "Even the notion of an Explosion and an Implosion, a 'beginning' and an 'ending,' may be only a very human metaphor, which the universe, for reasons of its own, neither recognizes nor exhibits (389)." If Mumford is preoccupied with the more ominous implications of the metaphor, it is because he wants to open eyes. Like Goya whose words he quotes, Mumford believes, "The man who shuts his eyes to the unsteadiness of fortune sleeps soundly amid danger. He can neither dodge impending harm nor make ready for calamity (333)."

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THE GUN IN AMERICA: THE ORIGINS OF A NATIONAL DILEMMA.
(Contributions in American History, #37) by Lee Kennett and James La-Verne Anderson. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1975. 339 pp. \$12.95.

This is a well documented book, valuable both to the casual reader and professional historian. It shows that our frontier egalitarian society, and reliance on citizen soldiers made the gun a necessary and casual adjunct to our way of life. The book is organized chronologically, beginning with the origins of firearms policies in monarchial France and England, and followed by an account of our colonial, frontier and urban experiences with guns. While the book explores territory familiar to many Americans, it contains surprising information about the police use of guns, the fascination for the gun in our urban centers, and the gun's association with vigilante and "good samaritan" acts.

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