

# PROCESSED WORLD 31



Angela Bocage '93



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# PROCESSED WORLD

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Sarah Moni & Richard Wool w/Iguana M

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# Truant Heads

The capitalist today, if he wishes to remain one, must support the government, and even lead the way, in giving the children whom he may one day need on the machines an education such as a hundred years ago very few children of manufacturers ever got. It goes against the grain with him, but he has no choice. Today, and still more this is true of the future, it is not the country which is most highly educated at the top, but the country which is most highly educated at the bottom that takes first place and decides the worth of the dollar. ("The Caretta," B. Traven, circa 1926)

The crisis in education has become a subject worthy of headlines, the op-ed page, and other "public" forums, typically with the lament that education's failures are the source of a steady decline in US industrial productivity. The failures are robbing the country of its competitive advantage. Worse yet, though unstated, the cream of an admittedly faulty crop need new ways to rationalize their relative privilege. Excellence will be the standard, and economic progress the goal of a new educational strategy.

According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education report, A NATION AT RISK, "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.... We [sic] have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament." Businesses complain about the high cost of finding qualified entry-level personnel. Six out of ten PacBell applicants are rejected because they can't pass a 7th-grade-level test; 40% of BoFA applicants fail tests requiring alphabetizing names and putting 5-digit numbers in sequential order; Wells Fargo wannabes suffer a 50% failure rate on similarly mindless exams. These people literally won't do.

A 1985 Bureau of Labor Statistics report finds that, even when high-tech industries are

broadly defined, they "will account for only a small proportion of the new jobs through 1995." Opportunities abound for the custodian, cashier, secretary, kitchen helper, security guard, or door-keeper (in that order). Disregarding the calls for a higher degree of "schooling," low-paying, low-skill jobs keep growing.

Despite deliberate efforts to de-skill the workplace, in part because it's easier to control fragmented servants who process information they'll never really understand, skilled labor is still required. Smart machines have needs, too. Each automated step forward demands a support staff — although today much of the expertise comes from contracted technical support, payroll-service bureaus, independent tax consultants, etc. Generally self-employed or small-business employees, these workers are scattered and unable to cooperate, and are frequently trapped in technologically obsolete fields.

The experts agree: the failure of the schools threatens the nation's competitiveness and the USA's status as the richest country in history. In response to what A NATION AT RISK calls "a rising tide of mediocrity," policy-makers propose the standard of "excellence" as the focal point of a comprehensive educational strategy devoted to the future of high-tech America.

## Education Is Their Business

From the late 1830s through the 1840s, "common schools" were established to "shape character," in response to increasing urbanization and the demise of skilled craftsmen and self-sufficient farmers. Schooling was widely applied, although the female, slave, Indian, and the ghetto poor were usually not educated (might give 'em ideas). Even a casual look at the requirements for being a teacher (female, unwed, proper, etc.) shows that something more was expected than reading and writing.

Between the 1890s and 1920s, schools smoothed the way for the development of more intensive bureaucratization. A new professional elite of "education executives," trained in the hierarchical organization techniques of scientific management and the edicts of business efficiency, reorganized the school to mirror the modern factory. High school also served as an institution to "Americanize" potentially "radical" immigrants.

After World War II, the G.I. Bill made higher education possible for more people, and a multi-tiered system evolved: community colleges for the minimally trained working class; large, state universities for future mid-level bureaucrats; and elite, private institutions for the progeny of the ruling class. A "knowledge race" with the USSR necessitated a vast outpouring of federal funds for scientific R & D and a class of engineers and physical scientists, wedding the "multiversities" with the military-industrial complex.

As the universities developed into centers of political dissent in the late '60s, interests such as the liberal Trilateral Commission cited the "crisis in democracy" as a cause for great alarm, and recommended, among other things, that business move away from utilizing the university for research purposes. The faculty and students were deemed unfriendly to the needs of the status quo. The threat of a capital "strike" encouraged reform in the profit-oriented universities.

To maintain its economic viability, the university now leases and/or sells its resources — labs, computer centers, faculty — for corporate use. The trend is to render the campus more amenable to corporate partnerships and research contracting. Silicon Valley, Research Triangle, and Route 128 are models of private spin-offs of the universities, serving the interests of high-tech industry. At the same time, policy-makers increasingly rely on private (i.e. corporate) think-tanks to mobilize public opinion and set long-term policy goals for the state. These institutions, not surprisingly, are the authorities behind most commissioned reports regarding educational reform.

## Reeling & Writhing, revisited

As information replaces material wealth and traditional authority as the foundation of social power and status, the power of technocracy grows. In its educational form technocracy is meritocracy: a means of determining "value" based upon allegedly objective standards such as testing, quantification, and approved methods of abstraction. In response to demands for equal access to educational (and other) opportunities, "excellence" relegitimizes meritocracy by asserting the fiction of value-neutral criteria.

As the attack on social equality moves ahead, and depoliticization reaches new extremes, the ideology of "excellence" validates the increased power of the knowledge brokers. Technocracy by its nature cannot turn its world view over to public evaluation. "Excellence," a conveniently malleable standard (one of Clinton's catch phrases), grafts a dimension of quality onto an otherwise value-less perspective.

The crisis in education, according to the managers of the latest frontier, is caused by laxity, apathy, and a decline in respect for authority. Calls for excellence are mere attempts to bolster discipline and inculcate respect for those above you on the social ladder: the self-proclaimed self-achievers.

To be less than excellent is to be mediocre, and a failure to society. Meritocracy declares that success or failure is in the hands of the individual, so you've only yourself to blame as you crash through the safety net.

## The Somalian Happy Meal™



GRAPHIC: JRS

It should be no surprise that many high school graduates can't locate the US on the world map, or think the Declaration of Independence is a communist document. Preventing such Ignorance is not useful. But the values of gym teachers and Rhodes scholars (conformity, competition, coercion) are useful.

The desire for a class of technically proficient idiots has been satisfied; the learned will try to convince you that buying and selling go back to the last ice age. From high office to low, not just a lack of knowledge, but a willful inability to think is a regular product of US schools.

Most of the pieces on education in this Issue were created by such products; we think that we haven't totally failed in looking at this omnipresent Institution. Mickey D. outlines his contempt for the school system in "Making Stoopid," and Dolores Job details her personal saga of Catholic-schoolgirl-turned-social-critic in "Fat Lot of Good It Did Me." Our Southwestern correspondent Salvador Ferret checks in with a journalistic tale of toil, which documents his experience teaching 6th grade in Española, New Mexico. Chris Carlsson's "Remaking a Public" calls for a reanimated public life as a basis for a renewal and renaissance in educa-

tion, while Lawrence Tripp's fiction "Fast Learner" explores some possibilities and problems with augmented learning.

Kwazee Wabbit looks at both graduate education and the "helping" profession in "Confessions of an Atheist Priest." In the "Downtime" section, "Scamming thru College" reveals a somewhat unusual attitude toward financing education, the wisdom of which is still the subject of criticism and scepticism at our collective meetings. "Downtime" also looks at Bank of America's recent attack on its employees ("Wake Up and Smell the Tiers"), and an example of counter-bank activity in "BoFA Infiltrated."

A new addition in this Issue is a section on transportation; this time we have an unabashed call for bicycling ("I Love What You Do for Me"), a report/recruiting call from "Critical Mass" (a recent and recurrent action in the Bay Area to demonstrate bicycle presence), and an essay on America's latest do-it-yourself craze, car jacking.

The reviews section looks at topics ranging from "dumpster diving" to the victims of London's class war in the 18th century, not neglecting modern comics and the bigger Issues of the Oil War(s). Greg Evan's "High Cost of Sleep"

and Primitivo Morales' "Take No Chances" are dystopian fictions for our time, while Gloria Frym's short story "Distance No Object" explores subtleties of the life of a former museum guard. Antler returns to our pages with "I Beg To Disagree," while other poetry explores topics ranging from grading papers to applying for the job. An extensive letters section rounds out the magazine.

We want to hear what you think — please write us! We'd like to acknowledge all those people who produced material for this issue that wasn't used — we were swamped with many "excellent" articles and fiction pieces we had no room to publish. To all contributors, published or not, our thanks.

### PROCESSED WORLD

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# Letters

## EL NIÑO MAS BONITO

Hey Processed World!

I recently saw issue #30 at a bookstore and really liked it but I didn't have any money to buy it, but I took this envelope with the better low income deal—so here's my \$10.

I try to pay for my books and magazines whenever I can, but most times I can't. See, I'm one of those typical Latinos on welfare and \$300 a month isn't much, especially when \$220 goes to paying rent and utilities. And like most recipients of G.A., I get many essentials and luxuries by shoplifting—no sense in living like a worm if you don't have to. But the only shop that carries *Processed World* (in L.A.) is this small artsy/preentious cafe/bookshop where they've got cameras and they watch you like hawks (it doesn't help that I look rather scruffy), making it impossible to get the goods. Thanks for having your low income deal.

Ah, but one of these days those bastards will get theirs (while I get mine!). I really liked your comics on the Martian perspective on Looting! You probably got all those bullshit media stories up there in S.F. about the riots but the truth was very different. Not only were people getting much needed (and maybe some not-so-necessary) stuff, they were also having fun—there was an incredible spirit of celebration. They kept saying that we were burning our own communities but nobody feels that the stores belong to them. It's just a store managed by the owner in the business of taking what little we have. They owe us. They owe us more than what we can get in a few days of looting. And I doubt that they will ever be able to pay us back for all the damage they've done with their ugly stores. Nobody wants them, nobody wants to pay for the objects they house, and nobody wants to work in them either. They can shove their "Rebuild L.A." plans, I'm not interested in helping business return to normality. I'd rather be playing tag with my neighbors, reading a book, sleeping in the park, or eating some tamales. Anything other than contributing to the things that make me miserable.

So how was your day?

"El Chavo"—Los Angeles, CA

## ALIENATED AND SMUG!

Dear Processed People:

Someone gave me a copy of *PW* #30 and I was really impressed. I hadn't known it was possible to be so alienated and so smug at the same time! Perhaps it goes with being

well-fed and adequately housed, but still feeling somehow oppressed, in a world where most people would kill for your living standards OR your jobs.

I particularly like the way you insult or put down anyone who believes they are making positive changes or leading productive lives (i.e. environmentalists, anyone who doesn't hate their job). Actually, the book/comix reviews and the "Ravin" poem were pretty good. The rest of your magazine would make a colloquium of Marxist intellectuals seem interesting by comparison. Keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

D.S.—San Francisco

## WHY I DON'T WANT TO WORK

PW:

This morning, I called a friend at her office from my office. When she answered with her customary "may I help you?", I said well, I don't know—I seem to be trapped in a small room, utterly without character or color, crammed full of electronic equipment, and elderly white men in business suits come in periodically and force me to enact seemingly meaningless manual rituals over and over. She asked me if this were a marriage contract, since it sounded to her like a description of marital fucking. I said no, but upon reflection I'm not so sure.

Making the best products or delivering the best services has very little to do with the bottom line of American business, and anyone who's ever spent more than two days working for wages in this great land of ours knows it. If Profit were truly God, and a ruthless efficiency reigned everywhere, then at least we workers would know where we stood.

But as someone who has searched for the power source of American commerce while laboring in the belly of the beast, I have trodden some very slimy paths on my way to the conclusion that in the American business world all exits lead, ultimately, not to the bank vault but to a vast, collective cloaca—tastefully decorated and well situated, perhaps, but still where the smelly excretions come out.

The need to come and/or shit all over its constituent parts is a hallmark of American business. And since, to paraphrase a famous capitalist, the religion of America is business, I think we must look at these eliminative functions in the same terms as their sexuo/scatologically obsessed Christian

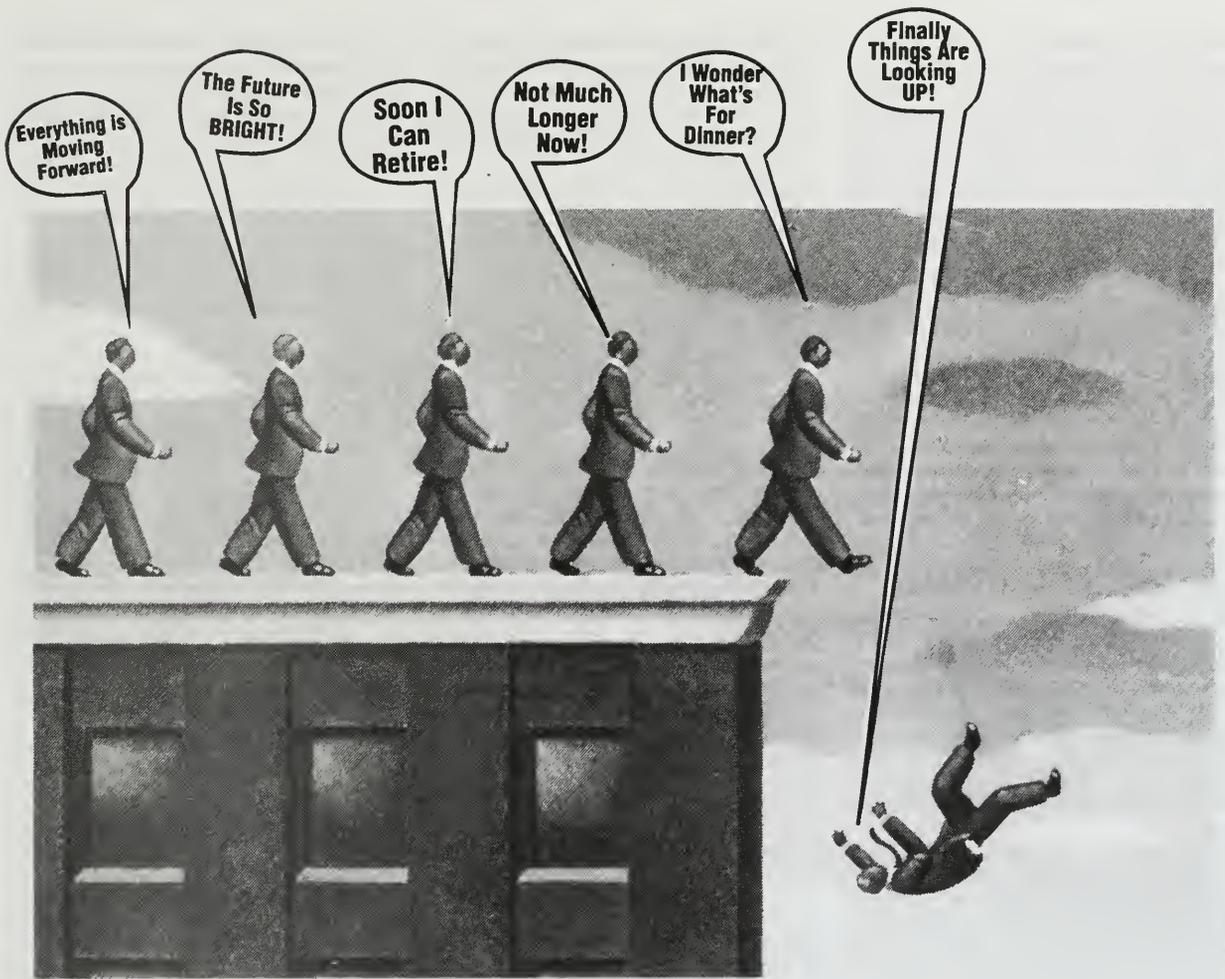
counterparts—not as part of a healthy purging process but as a means of shaming, degrading, ultimately drowning its victims.

Why? After long thought, I believe because of the need for vengeance—the revenge of the reviled "smart kids" against the class bullies. School system success among children themselves, as we all well know, is based almost entirely upon physical attributes. (Given the world they live in, how should kids judge one another—on moral character?) At the same time, the shallowness of view foisted upon kids by capitalist consumerism is incapable of allaying the fear engendered by the threat of others' intelligence—fear of the magical ability to look at a page of printed matter and see a reflection of the larger world. (For a further discussion of these views I highly recommend a book from the 1970s by Cobb and Sennett called *The Hidden Injuries of Class*—one of the few sociology books ever written that's worth the paper it's printed on.)

As we "grow up," smart kids start to get a handle on their power—and one of the few real definitions of power available in a capitalist consumer paradigm is the ability to make other people suffer by denying them the necessities of life while avoiding suffering oneself. Having power means one is able to create a net of lies including only other "smart kids" in which one's job takes on an importance, an indispensability; work becomes a place where one's opinions are listened to. In short, smart kids grow up to manufacture respect, the one necessity for living that none of us, however lucky, received from the larger world as children.

How many of your bosses have been scrawny, creepy little guys with funny names? Lots, I'll bet. And any reasonably aware individual walking down a corridor can almost palpate the fear pouring out of the rows of their well-appointed offices. This fear requires endless defenses. How to keep the hired muscle from turning on you? By inculcating the appropriate self-loathing and dependence through denial of respect. Make them afraid they're not smart enough, not good enough to live without you, and so generate more repressed anger in the workers, leading to more reason for fear and thus more defensive behavior. And so the cycle turns.

At the risk of marking myself as an old hippie, I still love the passage from *Lord of the Rings* where Gandalf says that all hope lies in the fact that while the Dark Lord is



GRAPHIC: CC

unassailably prepared for any frontal assault designed to seize his throne, the thought that our real objective is to cast him down and have *no one* in his place never muddies his darkest dreams. In this colorful period when the only difference between communism and capitalism is that capitalism's corpse is still farting, will those of us who will neither submit to the revenge of the nerds nor use our brainpower to subjugate the thoughtless be able to withstand the hatred of those whose every breath is propelled by the fear that we would, if we could, become them?

Stay tuned.  
—B.H. Cubbage, San Francisco

### IN THE WOODS

PW, howdy—  
I've seen yer biotech issue #28. Several real good articles, particularly the one by Tom Athanasiou re Greenwashing. I liked the issue's overall tone: stick to your guns, without askin' everyone else to lay down theirs. Someday I'd like to get it together enough to respond in kind to some of the key points you raise, e.g., "abundance," from my own more to the woods point of view.

—D.K., Leeport, PA

### SYSTEMS DISINTEGRATION CONSULTING

Dear PW:  
When I received my hiring letter from The Firm I was elated. This was exactly the place I had wanted to work, in the city I wanted to work in, doing the work I wanted to do. How could I have been more fortunate?

The first day mounds of paperwork and manuals were piled before us. (It took me six months to finally sift through it all.) We received our complimentary Digital Voice Exchange (DVX) passwords. We were told that we were now official *Green Beans*.

The Office consisted of sterile, nearly empty rooms with glass walls (with a spectacular view of the earthquake-closed Bay Bridge) that had to be scheduled daily by project managers. Someone described the building's 13-foot sway, complete with toppling bookcases and air-borne typewriters. Ugly modern "art" adorned gleaming hospital-white walls. Bluish direct overhead lighting cast shadows over eyes and illuminated jaundiced complexions. *Green Beans* occu-

ried clusters of privacy-free generic gray cubicles.

Week 1 (they number their weeks) we spent learning the *culcha* and his-story of The Firm. The managing partner took my Start Group of *Green Beans* out to lunch. At our forthcoming programming course, he explained, "it doesn't matter if they teach you how to do oral sex" instead of COBOL programming. The idea was that we imbibe The Firm's *culcha*. I couldn't wait to learn more about Firm oral sex. This was my kinda *culcha*.

Weeks 2-3 were designed to teach the non-programmer how to program. We wrote our first simple, useless COBOL report program. I hunted for a letter opener to use in order to pry up my finger nails to stay awake. My Start Group was fairly diverse—two women, two Chinese, one Filipino, and one queer white boy, and I noticed that there were even three black employees among 375: the secretaries.

Weeks 4-6 were spent at The Firm training facility, The Center For Professional Education, in nowhere's ville Midwest in the dead of winter. At first, the hours of 8 am to 10 pm

seven days a week seemed a bit excessive. Nothing that couldn't be mitigated, however, by chain-drinking coffee and nightly alcohol poisoning at the Social Center. No one else ever left the hermetically sealed corporate-sphere, which was a "sick building" health-wise and ideologically. It became my duty to urinate on the sculptures of corporate yuppies in corporate drag outside the Social Center.

The ones I related to well were the Black and Hispanic maintenance and housekeeping staff. I vaguely recall schmoozing with the maids, Josepha and Julietta (Hoe-Seffuh and Who-Lee-Etta), in a drunken stupor. I, a fellow Green Bean, and the black janitor enjoyed polio weed in his ancient Buick Riviera in subzero temperatures.

Several of my fellow Green Beans were from the Johannesburg office. Phil was a studly bearded dude, who was a former South African police officer. He was "proud" to have "defended" the whites during riots. I wanted to "punish" him in the worst way. Michael was just the opposite: a black demonstrator who participated in numerous anti-apartheid marches. Suling was the most interesting, Chinese with a thick Scottish accent due to her Glasgow upbringing. Her friend Scott had taken the job on a bet that he wouldn't make it. Everything to them was "bloody" as we downed many an ale at the tavern Scotland Yard with the London office staff.

We also performed the powhitetrash activity of bowling in Elgin, swilling a pitcher each per game. The South Africans sang drinking songs in Afrikaans on the school bus ride home. During the weekend excursion into The Windy City I ditched everyone at Kingston Mines and went cruising the Touche gay leather bar.

Somewhere in between caffeine and booze we were programmed to create identical batch and on-line COBOL programs, and became interchangeable ball bearings. Later, I learned that the facilitator had committed suicide.

Back at The Office, my co-workers needed additional education. I invited a flaming queen to the dinner-cruise-on-the-Bay. They stared, utterly speechless, as he screamed his love for Garland, Davis, et al., at the dinner table. I danced and had my picture taken with another "brother" at the annual dinner dance. Despite The Firm's homophobic exterior, many of their clients were screaming nells—the most enjoyable to work with.

As "Captain Admin" of The Project—meaning data entry of time sheets and fielding complaints—I was assigned to "cube" #1E050C—[1]st Floor, [E]ast Wing, Section [050], Cubicle [C]—in businessparkfromhell. Each of the four wings was 1/4 mile long extending from the center of the Mother Ship. Walkways extended to the vanishing point and robot mail carts blared "EX-CUSE-ME-EX-CUSE-ME" when blocked. I particularly

enjoyed sending global e-mail informing all personnel that the network was about to be brought down the instant I logged off, barely giving them time to save their voluminous, useless design documentation. I learned also to leave cryptic notes on the white board in my "cube" so that nobody could find me when I took extended coffee breaks and long walks with vicious black swans around the fake business park lagoon that existed to cool the hermetically sealed mother ship. On my six-month review, the fact that I had worn an earring for an hour was quite a prominent black mark against my *karakteristika*.

You know one you know 'em all. The "boys" DVX-ed each other to plan the first dinner reception for employees of the lavender persuasion. Needless to say when the flyers hit the mail folders the shit hit the fan. "The Psychotic Boss-Monster From Hell" accused us of trying to start a sexual liaison ring—he didn't believe in "fraternizing" (despite the staff Golf and Baseball clubs) because if this forbidden activity took place "the new staff would be cluster fucking in the halls of the clients." His second in command, an ex-marine from Wawatosa, Wisconsin, told me that the worst thing I could do was to "embarrass my supervisor."

After I was "rolled off" (just who was on top?) of The Project, I was assigned to work around the clock, all weekend long, on The Project Proposal. Most of the useless, ridiculous MacDraw doodles I was ordered to create from hand-drawn scrawl were thrown out and not used in the final draft. My muscle-pecs jarhead supervisor got pissed when I slipped out at 1:30 am due to my cough and sore throat. I immediately began updating my resume on company time, on company computers, on company xerox machines, on company paper, of course.

Six months after I left The Firm I went into The Office after bar time with fellow Green Beans from the London office. I filled the white boards in the private offices and conference rooms with "UNLEASH THE QUEEN!!" while one of them made multiple personal calls to London on the unrestricted fax machine line.

—Anonymous, San Francisco

### WHICH WAY OUT?

Dear *PW*, people,

I just got your latest issue. Not only did it have the usual slap-upside-the-eyelids effect, but it knocked loose an urge/manifesto/possible issue topic. Let me try to wrestle it into words:

We can crawl out of our ruts. (We know that. Say it again.) The less we partake of the rat-race, the smaller the race becomes. Yeah, there are some things the System appears to have a monopoly on, though housing is the only one that withstands a serious fight—food, clothing, entertainment we can make for ourselves if we can spare the energy. OK, perhaps you can't go 100% cash-free on these things, but it seems to me like you

could make a hell of a reduction of their cash cost. Trade with people you know for services and goods, only buying when no one near creates. What you get are stronger community, people doing work they're proud of, and freedom from the hamster-wheel. What you give up is Convenience (i.e., the right to remain asleep at the wheel). It sure seems worth it.

This is a screed, not a critique. I'm starting my third "Mental Health Month" and am shocked to realize life does not end when you don't pursue a career. In this new frame of mind, your cartoon "Their real jobs are..." (p. 79, *PW* 30) raised the question of what's really worth doing.

So I pose this question, yearning for a whole issue on it: "What can we do to get ourselves out of the rat-race, in whole or in more realistic part?" Stop buying consumer items, or think of them in terms of indentured servitude ("2 hours a night x \$7.00/hr. divided by \$400.00 = Is that camcorder worth 30 nights of labor?"). How far can you really get growing food? Trading roles? I would love to have hand-made clothes; I'd be tickled pink to pay for them with, say, yardwork or tutoring. What are other people doing?

—J.B.P.—Seattle, WA

### NOT GETTING STUCK

*PW*:

We all know that the existing institutions are rotten. Capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, the state—you name it. But what alternatives have we proposed? Not many.

I think this is a big problem. It means that activists are struggling day to day with only vague ideas about the kind of society we're fighting for, or how to bring it about. It means it's easy for us to re-create, in our own organizations, the very evils we're fighting against. It also means we have a hard time convincing other folks to join us. If major social change is going to happen, we'll need some fairly specific ideas about what to change to, expressed in a way that lots of non-activists can relate to. But proposing alternative institutions is hard to do -- much harder than criticizing what exists now. How do we do it?

There are people who suspect the very idea of envisioning something better. I mean proposals about the kind of society we want to live in, the kind of society that's worth struggling for. (Actually, "vision" may not be the right word, because it has connotations of something mystical and impractical.)

It's about *proposing* ideas, not *imposing* them. It's about ideas emerging from a process of democratic dialogue. And that is exactly the spirit in which I am proposing these ideas on how to think about vision. In no way do I think I've got it all figured out. THIS IS NOT A SET OF INSTRUCTIONS THAT I WANT YOU TO FOLLOW. Let's start a dialogue on how we can all get better at thinking about vision. Examine and criticize these ideas and then propose your own. Nor is it

about predicting the future. It's about naming and communicating your desires, changing that part of the future that's within your control and preparing to cope with that part that's out of your control. It's not about producing a fixed blueprint, or a plan. It's about an ongoing planning process. The plans that come out are only for the purposes of documenting where the process stands at a particular moment. The process is about changing the actions you take now, and about the human development of everybody involved.

Finally, it's not about pointless fantasizing, disconnected from action. It's about expressing the ideals that guide action. I would argue that any action towards social change is guided by some ideals of a better society. Most of the time, these ideals are not stated, so they can't be examined and debated. I think it's very useful to make these ideals explicit. We should specify present desires, not predict future outcomes.

You don't have to say how this desired future would come about, or even argue that it is possible to bring it about. There is no requirement that it be implementable. Assume magic. This will help you get clear about what you really want. One of the biggest obstacles to creativity is letting implementation issues constrain your desires and your imagination.

You do have to explain how it would work, and how it would maintain itself if it did exist. No magic here. It has to be technologically, ecologically, and humanly feasible (for example, it can't require saints, but you can allow for people's potential to be better than they are today). It has to be capable of sustaining itself over time. It has to be specific enough to be reasonably argued with. It must be quickly and easily adaptable (this helps to avoid the fixed blueprint problem). Finally, it should be inspiring because if you're not excited about it, then something went wrong.

Here is a set of steps for getting started:

- Define the issue you're working on
- Define your criteria
- Define the components of what you're designing
- Identify the existing alternatives
- Evaluate the existing alternatives against the criteria
- Design new alternatives which would meet the criteria better
- Think about how your design relates to other areas
- Get comments from people, incorporate new ideas

The opposition in this country is suffering from a vast failure of the imagination. We know what we're against, but we're not nearly so clear about what we're for. It's time for us to figure it out — all of us, not just a few brilliant individuals. Of course, developing a new vision of a better society will not guarantee the changes we want. But I am

convinced that these changes cannot and will not happen without such a vision.

— D.S., San Francisco

## FRESH OUT OF SCHOOL

PW:

I remember reading a brief description of *Processed World* in a book called *TechnoCulture*, but I've never seen a copy. Is distribution limited to the Bay Area? [See page 64 for list of distributors/cities.] I'd love to get my hands on some of your work if you have electronic versions you could send me. [Nope, still confined to real magazines—ed.]

As my introduction said, I'm fresh out of school with most of my youthful idealism intact. Unfortunately my job search has forced me to realize what an isolated environment I am coming from, having studied and worked in a University for so long. In a lot of ways I am lucky, though, because of my degree (computer engineering). Even if I'm not seeing the ideal work environments I was hoping for, at least the recruiters I am talking to are happy to see me and are looking to hire. Of all the people I know who live in the City right now, none of them are receiving their incomes from jobs that have anything to do with their majors. The best they can hope for is being hired as an intern somewhere.

My girlfriend (Feminist Theory/Macy's Saleswoman) and her roommates (Russian/Macy's Saleswoman and Art Studio/Temp Worker) are all busting their asses to get shitworker jobs where they can watch others doing what they hope to do someday "just to get a foot in the door." I have to feel kinda ashamed every time I start getting down—at least there's people who want to pay me for what I like to do.

There was an interesting column in a recent *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* in which Larry Livermore argued that the "antiwork" activists are mostly just white, middle-class kids (describes me also) who are acting out their rebellion until they land their cushy jobs in their Dads' businesses. Your opinion and maybe a brief description of the people who write for *Processed World* would be very interesting. [maybe next time?—it would be interesting!—ed.]

—M.S., e-mail

## A DEFENSE CASUALTY

Dear *Processed World*:

When I received my Ph.D. in physics a few years ago, I discovered that defense-related companies and labs dominated the job market, particularly in my subfield. I ended up working for a company 90% of whose business (slightly less now) is connected to

# THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW

IT'S TOM TOMORROW'S INCOMPLETE GUIDE TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT...

1. THE OFFICE MANAGER: GIVES YOU A BRIEF RUNDOWN OF IN-COMPREHENSIBLE OFFICE PROCEDURES WHICH YOU WILL BE EXPECTED TO IMMEDIATELY MEMORIZE...

-- THEN FOLD THE BLUE (COPY DIAGONALLY AND PUT IT IN THE YELLOW BASKET--UNLESS IT'S TUESDAY, OF COURSE!

GOT THAT?



2. THE CORPORATE EXECUTIVE: HIGH-STRUNG, SELF-IMPORTANT, BELIEVES TEMPS ARE A SUB-HUMAN LIFE-FORM...

I TOLD YOU TO FILE A 304-X-4 WITH DEPARTMENTS Z-15B AND QQ-6-Y5! CAN'T YOU FOLLOW SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS?!

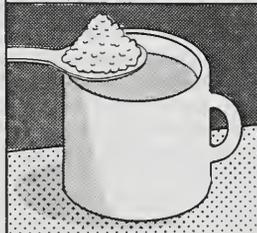


3. THE WORD-PROCESSING SYSTEM: YOU CLAIMED TO BE AN EXPERT AT IT TO GET THIS JOB-- TIME TO START BLUFFING...

UM... I FORGET... HOW DO YOU TURN THIS THING ON?



4. BAD OFFICE COFFEE: WATERY BROWN LIQUID WHICH BEARS LITTLE RESEMBLANCE TO ANY KNOWN BEVERAGE... (DON'T FORGET TO ADD A HEAPING SPOONFUL OF CARCINOGENIC NON-DAIRY 'WHIT-FNER'!)



5. HOURS AND HOURS OF TEDIOUS, MIND-NUMBING LABOR: ALLEVIATED ONLY BY THE THOUGHT OF ALL THE FREE TIME YOU'LL HAVE WHEN THE ASSIGNMENT ENDS...



6. FREE TIME: SPENT WAITING ANXIOUSLY BY THE PHONE FOR THE NEXT JOB AFTER YOU REALIZE YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH MONEY TO PAY THE RENT...

RING, DAMMIT!



GRAPHIC: TOM TOMORROW

testing nuclear weapons (we call them "devices").

Today the company is going downhill quickly—cutting about 20% per year—as we become part of the "peace dividend." It's nice that we don't need as much in the way of weapons these days, but it's too bad that our company's managers are doing effectively nothing to develop products (goods or services) useful for the civilian market. The company has a large number of decent engineers, physicists, computer people who could do something useful, but the management seems to feel it's just easier not to.

I think their plan, conscious or otherwise, is to maintain, as nearly as possible, our total "fee" (budget) from the US Dept. of Energy by doing less work more inefficiently. Early last year our (multiplicative) overhead rate was just about e (2.7 for the non-mathematician). The last fiscal quarter reported upon had it at about ! (3.14), and now it is running at 3.5. That is, for every dollar spent doing something, another \$2.50 is wasted. Of course, in all the company propaganda, the management says how the overhead rate is too high, and should come down. But actu-

pany has whole departments of people for budgets, EEO/AA, and safety, but our organization now has its own, just to be safe, I guess. One thing about it: there's always someone to answer the phone now!

One funny thing: the top managers of the company say they don't understand why the overhead rate is increasing, even though they are laying off what we call "direct job" people and hiring overhead people. Their solution? Hire a whole set of new overhead administrative people to figure it out!

So, anyway, I'm looking for another job, hopefully doing something useful in the civilian economy. Of course, the job market now is tight in the extreme, with the poor economy in general and government aerospace/defense cuts putting particular pressure on the technical job market. Making things worse, we as a country just do not seem to be able to get into civilian products, whether it's more efficient automobiles, more fun consumer electronics, or anything else people really need or want for themselves. So, one thing I'm trying to do is get a teaching job—out of the country if I can.

—Anonymous, New York

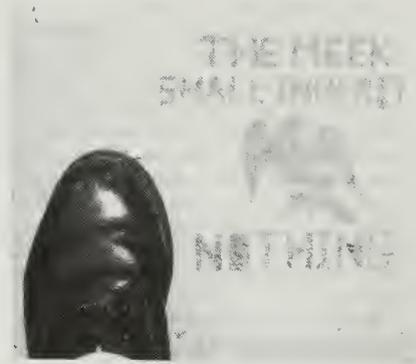


PHOTO: D.S. BLACK

at Operation Restore Hope and its place in American foreign—and domestic, for that matter—policy.

1. As the campaign rhetoric of "change" makes way for the reality of *continuity*, it's clear that Clinton will build on the gains of the Bush and Reagan administrations (gains from the point of view of the State). These gains include the inculcation of the weirdly capitalist reflex of turning every social problem into a business deal or into a matter for the police or other armed bodies. Why not then military *charity*—feeding the docile, starving niggers who flash their teeth at the cameras and kicking the asses of the gun-toting black teenagers high on drugs? As early news stories made explicit, "anarchy" in Somalia is to be treated like "anarchy" in Los Angeles. (Note that veterans of Desert Storm participated in the pacification of L.A. Note too that some reformists, succumbing to the allure of fascism, wish that the Army would occupy American cities to "feed the hungry," "stop crime," and otherwise "clean up the streets.")

And why not demonstrate once again—because the demonstration must be repeated over and over for the *health of the State*—the benevolent nature of the American show of force? As Bush himself noted, Operation Restore Hope should be seen as the next entry in the series Grenada-Panama-Iraq; each of these interventions was covered by humanitarian rationales: to "stop drugs," to "stop aggression," to "save American lives," and so on. "Feeding the hungry" fits in nicely with this redefinition of the *humanitarian gesture as a type of State terror*, no matter that some Somalis get more to eat for a while. (Bush in Mogadishu, 31 Dec.: "Now we're seeing that same kind of expertise, that same kind of dedication" as in Operation Desert Storm. "It's right, and it's God's work.")

In any case, the Somali people—like past recipients of American "aid"—are regarded as passive objects of U.S. policies: They are neither consulted nor encouraged to join in the reconstruction of the country. All that is done for the Somalis is done to them—and this includes the U.N.-sponsored negotiations between "factions," "Clans," and "parties" (not that we know what these terms

### WHAT GIVES WITH SOMALIA?

Dear Friends,

As Bill Clinton's affirmation of bad faith, "I still believe in a place called Hope," was quickly extended to the images of the smiling Marines and smiling Somalis of Operation Restore Hope a few weeks ago, I wondered why it was so hard to [look at] this *humanitarian invasion* that the news media had spent months preparing us for. True, the images of Marines wading ashore on a media-secured beach made us squirm.

It is hard to argue against feeding starving people, and the *produced* sense of emergency and speedy response was intended to overwhelm all questioning and criticism. (Note that there have been no published opinion polls.)

And there was the anaesthetic effect of the presidential election: "Clinton" meant "change" and wasn't Operation Restore Hope merely Bush's last hurrah, so couldn't we just wait for it to go away? Few shots were fired, except by news photographers, who "proved" that American troops were welcomed by the populace. U.S. interests in Somalia didn't look blatantly imperial. And I suspect that, given our mainly theoretical interest in politics, Somalia hasn't appeared "important" or "interesting" enough to warrant our scrutiny. And then there were the holidays to think of...

But *shouldn't* we discuss a situation that bears so much resemblance to Operation Desert Storm, even to the point of its being initiated with no coherent articulated mission or goals? I don't have anything profound to say about this episode in the "war on poverty" (to recall a term from the '60s), but I would like to offer these almost random notes as a starting point for a collective look

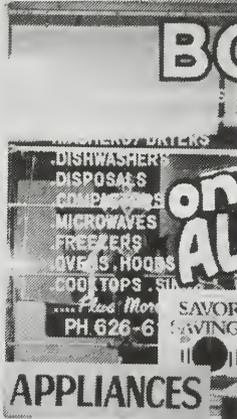


PHOTO: D.S. BLACK

ally, it is in their financial best interest (at least in the near term) for it to be as high as possible. In 1991, we got rid of about 260 people, and hired 140 or so. *Almost all* of those laid off were engineers, technicians or other technical people, and *almost all* of those hired were administrators/secretaries.

For example: I work in a group with about six people, one of whom is the group leader but still a technical person (although lately he must spend nearly all his time on administrative paperwork). Over him as well as several other similar groups there is a bigger boss. He had a secretary. That was it—two people. There are now eleven overhead people, including the original boss, two assistant bosses, what we call an "administrative assistant" (the old secretary), someone to make sure all the additional paperwork my immediate boss is doing is in the right format, a budget analyst, an EEO/AA administrator, a safety person, and at my last count three secretaries. Please note also that the com-

mean in context). (The image of “feeding centers” in Somalia is overlaid on images of the “strategic hamlets” in Vietnam and the housing projects of American cities...)

2. Since Operation Restore Hope’s primary mission cannot be the safe distribution of food supplies in Somalia—such a mission would have taken place earlier and would have included other needy African countries (Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia)—then what is the objective of this rapid deployment of tens of thousands of soldiers backed up by artillery, armor, helicopters, and fighter-bombers? Public relations. But public relations for diverse audiences and purposes. [and oil? See review of *Midnight Oil* on page 53—ed.]

First, there’s the prestige advertising of the U.S. government itself. This show of force demonstrates the continuing American resolve and ability to employ the military at will and to persuade the U.N. to follow American interests under the aegis of the New World Order. Like an oil company funding a wildlife refuge, the U.S. needs to sell itself (to the public opinion it helps form) as good, useful, responsible and personal—as representative of all that is right with the world. Invading Somalia restores faith in government. The truly powerful can afford largesse...

Second, there’s the advertising of the military at a time when Pentagon budgets are being carefully examined. Like Desert Storm, Restore Hope shows that the military does indeed have a post-Cold War mission and that the collapse of the Soviet Union gives the American military a free hand at intervening in poor countries.

Third, Operation Restore Hope restores prestige to Bush’s presidency, allowing him to leave office with a “foreign policy triumph.”

Fourth, Restore Hope effectively rewrites the history of Desert Storm: If this operation is a humanitarian one, then so was Desert Storm. More locally, Restore Hope rewrites the recent history of American involvement in Somalia—involvement that was instrumental in propping up Siad Barre as he waged war against the population. (History now begins with the civil war and famine after the overthrow of Siad Barre.)

Fifth, Restore Hope softens up the public for the hot wars sure to come when the U.S. decides to “save lives” or “stop aggression” in the former Yugoslavia or Cuba or Iraq (again). (Note that for months now, Serb leader Milosevic has been demonized by the news media as another Saddam Hussein (who was portrayed as another Hitler, etc..))

Sixth, taken together with recent American moves in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq, Operation Restore Hope tends to ensure continuity between the Bush and Clinton administrations in the eyes of the world.

3. Public relations aside, the U.S. does have more traditional material interests in the region: strategic location and oil. Operation

## TWISTED IMAGE by Ace Backwards ©1991



GRAPHIC: ACE BACKWARDS

Restore Hope reasserts American presence—broken off with the fall of Siad Barre—in a potentially low-risk, high-gain war.

4. During the Gulf War, the peace movement merely reacted to events: No one marched till the bombs started falling, and the movement evaporated before the brief war was over. One got the impression that the peace movement—like other Americans, whether for or against Desert Storm—never quite believed in the reality of the war: The video images worked their magic on all.

While it’s true that the movement was marginalized by the news media, it did little to organize itself and its own publicity. Spontaneity was one of the peace movement’s major weaknesses: Responding immediately only to imminent danger to “our troops” (and, by extension, to the movement’s idea of “the people”), the movement was unable to catch up to the strategy behind the American Blitzkrieg. Feelings of urgency and moral outrage, necessary and laudable as they were, could not substitute for critical thinking about the politics of the Gulf War—and the wars it portended. (However, the peace movement did think hard about the role of the mass media in distorting and limiting the movement’s influence and in forming pro-war opinion.)

But as the peace movement discovered during the Gulf War—which it imagined as destined to become a prolonged, meat-grinding conflict like the Vietnam War—easy victories are hard to criticize. A constituency formed against the “costs of war” (as one series of posters had it) is now much harder to organize or even appeal to—a kind of politics of reaction has been rendered obsolete by technical and political developments in warfare. (Among the political developments: the end of the Cold War and the threat of Soviet intervention, and the sophistication of the government and Pentagon image-shapers. Among the technical developments:

the doctrine of employing overwhelming force against an enemy drastically reduces American casualties; wars are meant to be one-sided.) The American Blitzkrieg flattened Iraqi opposition while disarming the domestic anti-war movement. How then to protest Operation Restore Hope when even the recipients of our imperial attentions come through unscathed, when the Marines raise the dead and implicitly promise—in a “new covenant”—to resurrect the country?

—James Brook, San Francisco

## ENOUGH TOIL TALES ALREADY!

PW:

I think it’s ridiculous to just be anti-anti all the time; after a while one ends up sounding like an Old Pooperoo, and the “Bad Attitude” (which I was never totally comfortable with) becomes a querulous whine. I’ve been reading C.L.R. James lately (*Facing Reality* from 1958) and what strikes me is how confident he is that the means for a new society are being worked out every day by “ordinary” people, and because of that, to talk of a vanguard party is the height of counterrevolutionary arrogance. *Processed Worlders* ought to ask how the “bad attitude” contributes to a positive project of self-emanicipation. I think also of Marx’s great aphorism “these Germans do not consider themselves to be men who criticize, but as critics who have the incidental misfortune of being men.” I think *Processed World* could well afford to declare a moratorium on all Tales of Toil unless they transcend mere complaint; otherwise, the tone will be too much the same. I did receive *PW* 30, by the way, and enjoyed it. But Primitivo should watch his Latin: *quo vadis* means “where are you going?” The phrase he was after was *cui bono*? Secondly, in “Processed Shit” Adam Cornford mentioned “Stuart and Mary Ewen.” I think Elizabeth Ewen would be interested to know who’s really been col-

laborating on her husband's books. In general, I didn't like that article; it tried to cover too much ground in too short a space and ended up being superficial. He should have invested more of himself in a comparative discussion of, say, English and U.S. racism—or the prevalence of all-white editorial boards among purportedly left-wing theorists, or the ignorance about African-American culture in general. But all the references to thermodynamics and shit clouded the cultural issue. Because of the specificity of African-American culture, it's best read from the inside, using its poets, writers, and yes, theoreticians, before any attempt is made to enlist it to a Marxist (or anarchist, or whatever) project of transformation. The Bari interview was really interesting, and Jon Christensen's piece on Brazil was terrific! More from him!

—C.W., New York

## FROM SABOTEUR TO SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Dear Processed World:

PW 29 arrived today, jammed into the new, undersized, stainless steel post box cemented into the side of my apartment building. I wrenched the magazine free and read from cover to cover, forgetting the afternoon's work. Another encouraging success from your collective! in a time when most activity/publications/scenarios are discouraging.

Waste is alive and well in the Army. That's not news to anyone who has experienced the Dept. of Defense—America's largest employer and a corporation with staggering assets. What caught my eye today were the actions of two off-duty DoD employees.

At one of the shopettes at Fort Ord (several of these are located around the sprawling post; they are a kind of 7-11 for soldiers), I saw two moonlighting GI's cleaning the glass doors of the food freezers. As they worked, one admonished the other, "Don't work so fast. She (the manager) will only give us something else to do." They slowly cleaned the doors, running their paper towels up and down the chrome and glass, and they magnanimously stepped back when I went to select some ice cream. They stayed back when I walked away, shooting the breeze with another soldier who had come in to the store just to talk to them. It did my heart good to see this, and brought back memories of my experience in the civil service.

After I left the military, I took a clerical job while I waited for California residency and the accompanying in-state tuition and educational grants that are one of the few benefits from taxes. I worked at the Defense Language Institute, the world's largest language training school, in Monterey, California. The fact that DLI manages to graduate about 3,000 students a year from accredited language programs is nearly incomprehensible to insiders, but a source of pride to the school's joint military-civilian leadership. In

fact, the school, run by the Army, is an administrative nightmare in which the only way to survive is to actively resist the nearly overpowering status quo. Personal success here is always measured in terms of obtaining the means and confidence to quit DLI for greener pastures.

Everyone who is or will be successful ultimately leaves. I saw teachers with advanced degrees bail out at the first opportunity. Other instructors left to create art, or manage desks at hotels, or use their language skills in civilian education, which pays much more than DLI. More than one instructor quits without even having another job waiting. Aggressive administrative officers and their hard-charging secretaries worked at DLI only long enough to obtain "permanent" status in the federal civil service, which enabled them to apply for transfer at the earliest opportunity to someplace decent, like the Naval Postgraduate School, also in Monterey.

Those who stay at DLI are the dredges of the local civil service corps. Typically, they have found niches in which they may survive indefinitely. I realized that they survive best in offices where the head honchos are military. These military officers rotate about every three years. Since it is nearly impossible to fire a civil servant, most of these officers leave before they can garner enough evidence of incompetence/bad attitude to get rid of the errant civilians. Each new military replacement means more years may be safely logged in one's career book.

The exception to this is in the area of Eastern European language instructors. Typically, they are defectors or well-placed refugees who are debriefed by the American government and offered "jobs" and alien resident status in the United States. They are brought to the U.S., and most are warehoused in Chicago until jobs open up somewhere. The government then pays their transportation to their new home. These people, many of whom are professional architects, civil engineers, world-class musicians, etc., are reduced to teaching basic language skills for approximately \$25,000 per year in a place considered, after the Bay Area, to have the most expensive housing in the country. These teaching positions are called "excepted service," which means that the refugees are not as solidly placed in the federal career system as "permanent civil service" employees, who are practically guaranteed employment for life or thirty years, whichever ends first.

Bursting with enthusiasm for a paycheck, I reported for work in an out-of-the-mainstream office in a 90-year old wooden building. My boss was an easygoing Army lieutenant colonel who was finishing his career. In the office was an arrogant major, whose way I tried to stay out of, who was a Mormon chaplain. What he was doing in this office was beyond me, as the other chaplains on post worked out of another building.

There was also a young, bright, female Navy officer awaiting the termination of her four-year military contract, and finally, a dredged civilian. Generally, the Navy officer and I worked for the lieutenant colonel, and the civilian worked for the chaplain. At least, that's how the office oriented itself after awhile.

The civilian, who I'll call Richard, had been at DLI for about 12 years, having been unsuccessful in business endeavors in Taiwan. He was living in what, in the old days, was called "reduced" circumstances. Even though he was 60 he ostensibly still had at least eight years to go before retirement, and eighteen years before he could realize the full benefits of civil service retirement. He was getting by on \$6/hour, plus some extra money substitute-teaching for local public schools. He was worried about forced retirement due to his age, and the effect this would have on his pension.

The office was in a terrible state when I arrived. The filing system was incomprehensible, as Richard had organized it only in his head. Richard's desk was overflowing with seven or eight huge piles of work to be done. At least once a week, one or more of these piles would fall off the desk, sending papers and books flying. When asked to do something, Richard would simply say, "All right," and then never do it. He hardly bothered to change his pants, a pair of which he once wore for three straight months. I marveled at Richard and his lackadaisical attitude, and that he'd never been fired or even disciplined for his nonproductivity. I also wondered that he, clearly not liking this work, would continue to show up year after year and wallow in the stagnation symbolized by his messy, overflowing desk. Richard was intelligent enough; he spoke well, though Chinese not at all. But he seemed to have no spirit beyond clipping out Wednesday's newspaper recipes and trying them out on his lovers.

As I watched Richard, I became concerned that this is what happens when office work numbs a person, yet that person cannot leave the situation, perhaps (as in Richard's case) because of finances. Suffering under the dreadful monotony and hopelessly low pay, the spirit is strangled. One can hardly come up with the moral courage to leave. I worried that this might happen to me in eight years.

I argued with the Mormon major on everything from religion to car parts. I openly joked with the Navy lieutenant about the state of the office. Sometimes we got so vicious that we'd have to leave the office because we were laughing so hard. I took longer lunches, handling the personal business I usually reserved for after work. I forged time cards to give myself a full week, even when I didn't work one. At the same time, I chastised Richard for forging his time card, irritating him to no end since he knew I was doing the same but lacked the spirit to retort and the innocence to snitch.

I wrote ferociously at work; writing is a hobby I've enjoyed for many years. I produced fiction, essays, poetry, even screen-writing. As long as I was supposed to be doing something for the office, I was overflowing with the passion to write. Not that my job was difficult. I could do the day's work by 9 am, and then sit another two hours appearing busy at the screen, but actually writing dialogue or sketching office scenes. (At home later, sitting in front of my computer, I usually wrote little or nothing. I have always wondered why I have been seized with the desire to write while in situations where I'm not supposed to: work, school, church services.)

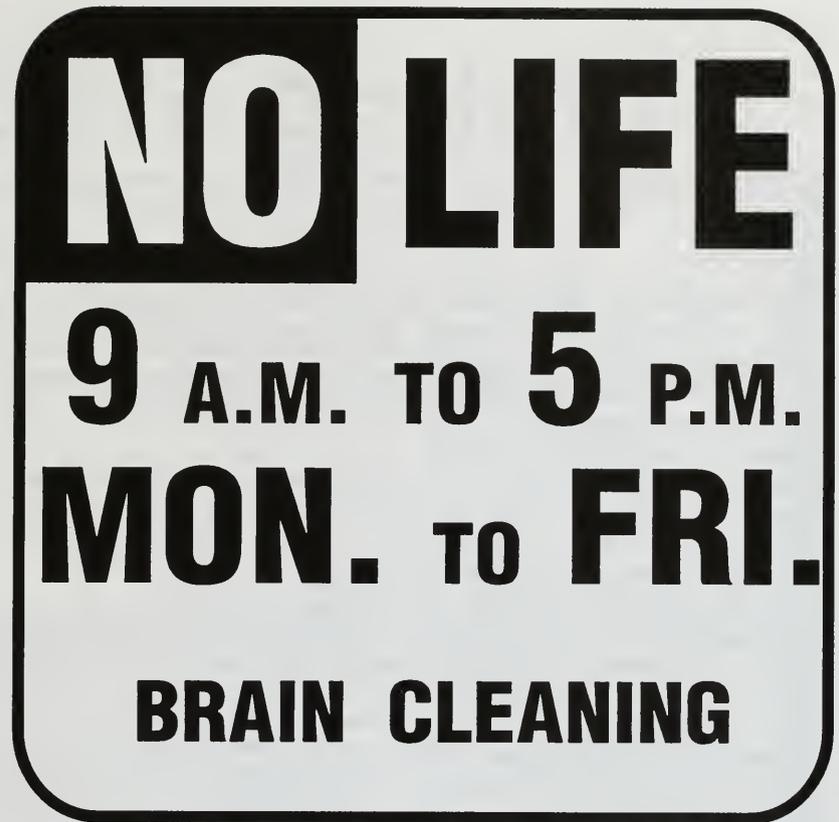
I also wrote fake letters to and from different departments at DLI, on official letterhead. Always, the signature on the letter was a takeoff on an administrator's name. Copies of these letters often ended up in the in-boxes of the people I was satirizing. I was never caught, or even suspected. But when I was preparing to quit, I was forced to "break" my computer's hard drive and reinitialize it from scratch, to avoid prying eyes finding my "deleted" writing files.

From inside DLI, I investigated personnel/financial abuses by the higher-ups. I groomed moles and deep throats all over the post, who provided me with a steady stream of juicy information and even blatant gossip, which I repeated in broadsheets and pamphlets typed up on the office computer and copied at office expense. These sources provide information to this day.

A month before I gained state residency I quit the civil service and took a graphic arts job in Carmel. There I would be for the first time exposed to the civilian world, in its own way much worse than federal service and made doubly so by the blatant money-sucking that Carmel businesses do in their never-ending attempts to separate the wealthy from their cash. After I quit that job, I gravitated from one place to another, and finally to self-employment. Basically, I now temp for myself, working when I want, and not answering the phone when I'm feeling lazy. It has its bad points. The pay is irregular, meaning I have to plan for two or three months at a time, instead of expecting a paycheck every two weeks. There is no medical coverage. There is no vacation. Much of my work must be done on weekends. I must discipline myself to complete jobs when I'd rather spend the afternoon drinking beer and listening to music on the back deck.

In the end, though, pluses outweigh minuses. I work less time for more money (this is *real* job efficiency). I am free to take care of personal business during the week. No one, except the client, looks over my shoulder, and even then, I dictate timeliness. Dress code is below casual, even when visiting customers' offices.

Without the need for control (read: power), this way of working, I believe, would successfully transfer to any office environ-



GRAPHIC: CC

ment. There is no reason why the civilian shops in Carmel couldn't have operated this way. Nor, for that matter, why the Department of Defense couldn't.

—Solly Malulu, Pacific Grove, CA

### More Work, Same Money?

TO: pwwag

I'm a grad student at UC Berkeley, writing a thesis on the effects of local area network technology on relations between labor/capital/management. The core points are the following:

1. New technologies require different kinds of effort from workers. Since the software is continuously changing, management now needs workers willing to exert the effort to learn and relearn things all the time. Also, since routines are hard to establish, managers are more dependent on workers to do lots of problem-solving, such as figuring out why the old WordPerfect macros don't work under the new network.

2. Management's objective is to define these new tasks as "just part of the job," and thus avoid the delicate matter of how these new skills and behaviors should be compensated. They are often able to use computer advertisers' claims to support their arguments, "this technology is simple," when all end users know it's never that simple.

3. I think some/most workers are quite aware that "more" work is being required.

What I want to understand is how workers decide how much more effort to put out:

- would a wage increase be sufficient? If so, how do you decide how much is a fair increase?
- if there is no wage increase (which I think is what happens most often), what options do you have?
- would you explicitly not do the new work? Perhaps call for support from a help desk (or other support) rather than struggling with a computer problem yourself?
- do you discuss with coworkers how they are handling similar situations?

I have more questions in this theme, and would like to initiate an electronic discussion with as many people there at *Processed World* who are willing to participate. My thesis is currently based on interviews with word processors and secretaries in both a law firm and a city government office. At one place, the managers complain that workers don't use the training they've gotten. I think this is consistent with resentment over having to "do more with less," but I need to deepen my understanding of why workers might react this way.

I can be reached at (510) 549-2754 or by e-mail at LIB2IIR@UCBCMSA—Bitnet or @CMSA.BERKELEY.EDU—Internet.

—Libby Bishop, Berkeley, CA

# Making Stupid

**E**very young person is required by law to suffer the best hours of the day trapped in an ugly, overcrowded room, facing front and listening to a frustrated civil servant. The teacher probably knows that school is a waste of time but needs the paycheck and can't find work elsewhere. He or she answers to the principal who is subordinate to the superintendent who in turn is subordinate to the District. The alleged beneficiary of this process, the student, is at the bottom of a long chain of command, relegated within a hierarchy of classes and grades and tracks within grades. The student learns that he or she is an isolated object in an undifferentiated mass whose own intellectual, social, or sensual interests are irrelevant and disruptive.

Schools indoctrinate that life is by necessity routine, impersonal and boring; that one's best interest is to shut up and conform; that spontaneity, creativity and free thought are to be regarded with suspicion and hostility. Gutlessness and apathy are rewarded while independent initiative is deterred by fear of failure and the prospect of punishment.

Schools emphasize students' relationships with adult authorities while devaluing peer relationships. However, the crowding and rigid scheduling allow for little personal contact between students and teachers. Social contact between adults and children outside of the family is rare and suffused with sexual anxiety. A student gets individual attention only through being disobedient; by the time the school shrink or guidance counselor meets with the student, he or she's been written off as incorrigible.

Even when the classroom isn't over-

crowded, individual engagement with the lessons is undermined by the machine-like structure of the learning process. Lessons are largely handed down by an invisible bureaucracy. Instruction is programmed to shape acceptable responses according to a predetermined goal – passing tests. The academic material itself is a kind of trivia with planned obsolescence, to be consumed and thrown away after its function is served.

Schools serve the state and dominant institutional values by promoting myths about history, politics, science, and in fact, every subject they teach. Schools do their best to present a uniform world view and exclude alternatives. To get any real education, one has to unlearn nearly everything school teaches in the first place! However, few people emerge from school with confidence intact in their own learning abilities. Fear of the hostile alien world outside of us diminishes our belief in our own feelings and experiences and induces chronic anxiety. Ultimately, many cling to the established world view for some (false) security.

School routines are even more important than the curriculum in inculcating obedience and conformity. Permission is required for the relief of bodily needs, accompanied by a hall pass. Attendance is mandatory for 12 years and constantly monitored. Ringing bells signal rigidly scheduled periods. The school grounds can't be left during the day, and the outside world is patrolled by truancy officers. School follows the student home as homework, preparing for a life of continuous work. Play is routinized under adult surveillance into recess and students are traumatized with gym class, which can easily mean pubescent military training at the hands of a sadist.

School circumscribes the experience of being young, taking over many of the social functions of the extended family while serving as an agency of military and industrial recruitment. Ex-

tended schooling prolongs the process of socialization and training well into adulthood. "Maturity" is defined as accommodation to and acceptance of an irrational and destructive social order.

Ubiquitous propaganda urges young people to stay in school, usually featuring media-appointed role models like Magic Johnson or Spike Lee. An army of academic experts blame high drop-out rates on backgrounds of poverty, cultural characteristics, family and emotional problems, etc. "No school, no job," they warn. Middle-class status and salaries come from diplomas; the remedy for poverty is more schooling. And that has become absurdly true! Even service jobs that take five minutes to learn require diplomas *because schools certify punctuality and obedience*. Successful schooling indicates tolerance for monotony and accommodation to the

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**To get any real education, one has to unlearn nearly everything school teaches about history, politics or science in the first place!**

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prevailing hierarchies of society.

Education also serves as a warning to potential employers about "over-qualification." A B.A. from a liberal arts college indicates surplus education. This is a growing phenomenon in a society with less and less need for talent and ambition and more need for robotized service workers.

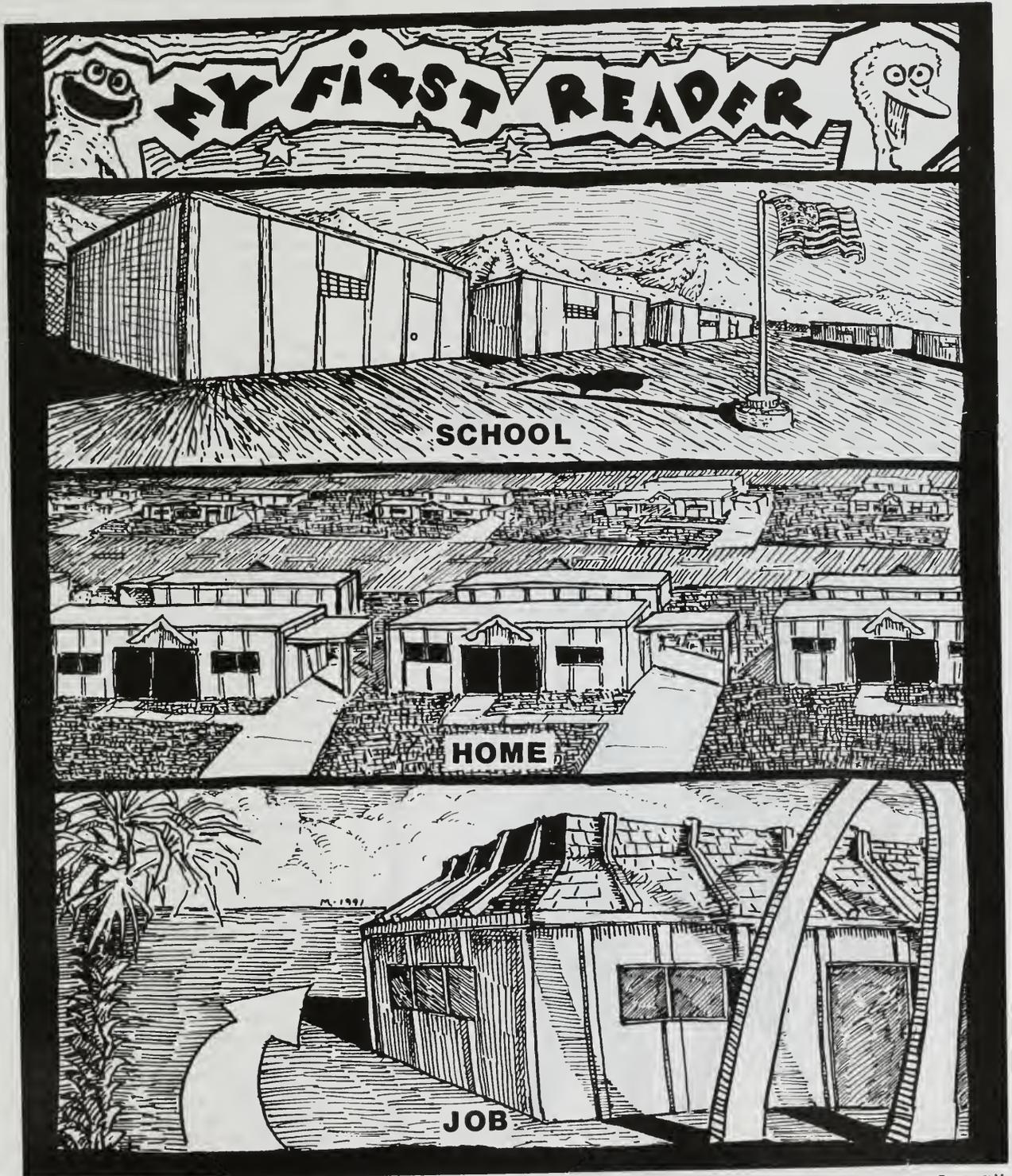
Whatever learning occurs in schools is, at best, incidental to the aims and functions of the school system. Education does not create enthusiasm for learning, enrich our experience of growing up or give us confidence to

exercise democratic initiative. It fosters cynicism and political withdrawal.

The rise of public schooling beyond the sixth grade in the late 19th century coincided with the abolition of child

labor from the factories, where they had done the most dangerous and arduous tasks. "Progressive" reformers saw that the long-range requirements of industry demanded a technically literate

workforce; even unskilled lathe operators needed to read blueprints and do fractions. Today literacy is less necessary for the maintenance of industrial production and the clerical system. Nu-



GRAPHIC: M

merical control, cybernation, pictograms, telephones, dictaphones, etc. have rendered the printed word increasingly obsolete in sectors of the economy with high job growth, i.e. retail, food service, etc. Yet barebones literacy remains a justification for mandatory schooling.

If children were taught basic language acquisition in the classroom it is doubtful anybody would be able to speak at all. Schools teach literacy by way of mechanical conditioning and repetition geared toward test-passing – a sure technique for inhibiting free expression and understanding. No wonder so few emerge from school who enjoy reading; fewer still who value it as a means to enlightened critical reasoning. The content of the reading material of the great majority – best sellers, newspapers, news magazines – is intellectually comparable to the shit on TV and radio.

Literacy is required so that people can distinguish between brand names and decipher headlines. It's possible that people would be less susceptible to propaganda campaigns if they weren't so literate; certainly the highest level of political indoctrination seems to occur

## CONTINUING EDUCATION

*For at least three dog years  
We did shams  
And rolled the half-pipe  
On the grounds of the club at night.  
By day things changed  
King grand at a time.  
Before long notes came due.  
So for a fine price  
She suckled them to sleep  
On sweet milk of amnesia.*

– Blair Ewing

among the highly literate readers of the *New York Times* and other “quality” media. Literacy should be a useful tool that can lend meaning to our imagination and experience – not a means of symbol manipulation for propagating top-down decisions and advertisements.

From the inception of the education experience, students are subjected to a battery of hastily timed true/false

and multiple-choice tests. Such tests devalue speculative thought, which requires leisurely reflection and the possibility of arriving at conclusions that negate the presuppositions of the test-makers. The intense pressure for information retention and punishment for failure hardly encourage free thinking.

Competitive testing and grading replicate the pressures of the job market. There are only a few prestigious jobs for the good test-takers. For the weeded-out majority, stupidity is a sensible reaction to the humiliation and embarrassment of the classroom. The deep-seated anti-intellectualism of American society surely has roots in the resentment and hostility to learning that school inculcates in its “failures.”

Popular views of intellectual achievement as elitism helps perpetuate the monopolization of educational resources by the privileged. However, ignorance of geography, basic political rights, lack of foreign languages, history, etc. is just as prevalent at elite institutions like Harvard or Princeton as in the general population. Far from counteracting ignorance, institutionalized learning threatens to bring about a new reign of universal cretinization.

Social reformers have long argued that education can solve all problems. After a decade of deterioration and neglect, hopes are high that a renewed commitment by the federal government to upgrading the schools will produce a workforce competitive with the U.S.'s main industrial rivals, Germany and Japan. This will supposedly curb the downward slide of living standards which is actually caused by the normal “healthy” expansion of the world market and capitalism. Mass education has been challenged at the level of public policy only by rightists of the William Bennett mentality who want to introduce free-market mechanisms into the existing system as part of the general trend toward a two-tiered society. But is the only alternative to privatization more useless training?

The current school “crisis” is largely one of its own making. Crisis is omnipresent in modern society; it's a way by which a small class of managers and professionals defines a problem to legitimize their continued control and increase the need for their expertise. This is an effective method of nullifying citizen involvement. Without a radical reconception of the role of education in



GRAPHIC: IGUANA MENTE

society, the remedy "more is better" will only waste more money and resources and further fuck us up. A more practical approach might be to just give the money to poor children directly rather than channeling it through a school system that wastes most of it on middle-class bureaucrats.

One of the great claims made of the American public education system is that it sometimes brings under its roofs the children of different backgrounds and classes. But even with a college diploma, a black graduate is unlikely to earn as much money as a white high school graduate. The myth of equality of opportunity through public schooling only impresses on people that their failure to rise beyond their parents' status is their own fault, for lack of intelligence or effort – not the system's failure.

Education is a big business. University campuses occupy a lot of valuable real estate, and like any business, obey an imperative to constantly expand, often at the expense of surrounding communities. Universities consume billions of taxpayer dollars for research and development while foundations and endowments linked to large corporations determine the goals and methods of research. Schools are gigantic markets for building contractors, textbook companies, computer sales, labor unions, testing services, giant sports industries, inept custodial fiefdoms, (putrid) food franchises, etc. In constantly seeking to maximize "efficiency" and streamlining costs, administrators standardize their products and go where the money is – usually war research.

Before the GI Bill and the post-war higher education boom, less than 50 percent of Americans graduated from high school, much less college. To an extent that is difficult to appreciate in our age of universal compulsory schooling, careers were learned by experience, self-motivation, trial-and-error, and facing life head-on. Not so long ago, for example, if one wanted to become a journalist, one hung around the local newspaper office and did errands, picking up the tools of the trade through immersion in the environment. Today, to get a foot in the door at a daily paper one must have a Master's degree in journalism – and the quality of journalism is more homogeneous and state-controlled than ever before thanks to its professionalism.

In its role as a credential factory, the

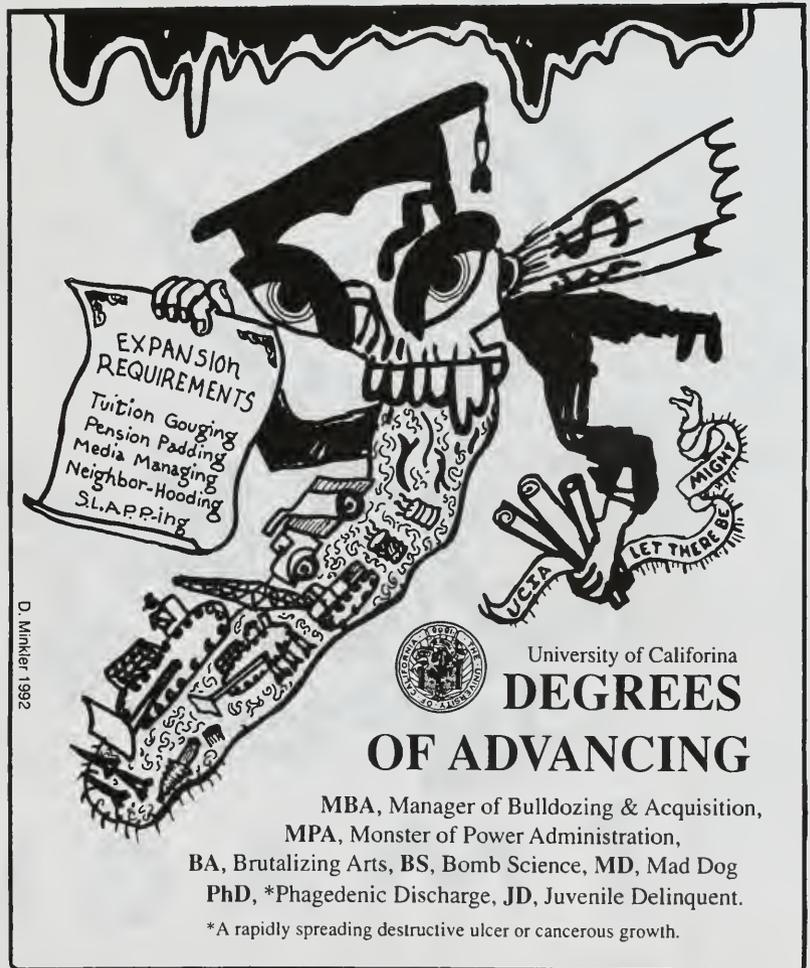
university insulates intellectual work from public affairs. Academics go for patronage and status at the expense of hyperspecialization, abstraction and increasingly rarefied jargon. As Russell Jacoby has written: "Universities not only monopolize intellectual life, they bankrupt independent producers. In an economy of \$3 trillion, the means of support for non-academic intellectuals relentlessly shrinks. Circles of intellectuals which existed or subsisted outside the university...belong to the past. Today even painters, dancers and novelists are usually affiliated with academic institutions."

Schools are an essential component of the regimentation of the population to the national "needs" as defined by the profit system. Unqualified economic growth is axiomatic among the

educated classes; to reject it is to operate outside the boundaries of permissible discourse as defined by academe, evidence of emotional or cultural backwardness.

Our productive capacity should render scarcity obsolete, eliminating poverty and improving life. Instead, innovation is wastefully harnessed to the development of weapons and new commodities that become all-pervasive while de-skilling people, making their increasingly mechanized and bureaucratic environment less and less comprehensible. Education turns out more PhDs and more experts to reinforce our sense of powerlessness.

The present school system produces some who find satisfying work, but the vast majority are forced to find their human self-worth as consumers in a rat-



D. Minkler 1992

GRAPHIC: DOUG MINKLER

University of California  
**DEGREES  
OF ADVANCING**

MBA, Manager of Bulldozing & Acquisition,  
MPA, Monster of Power Administration,  
BA, Brutalizing Arts, BS, Bomb Science, MD, Mad Dog  
PhD, \*Phagedenic Discharge, JD, Juvenile Delinquent.

\*A rapidly spreading destructive ulcer or cancerous growth.

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Contact Ashkenaz Defense Fund, 1317 San Pablo Avenue, Berkeley, CA (510) 525-5054

race of unnecessary toil devoted to destructive economic growth. The present school system obstructs our ability to participate in shaping the policies that affect our lives.

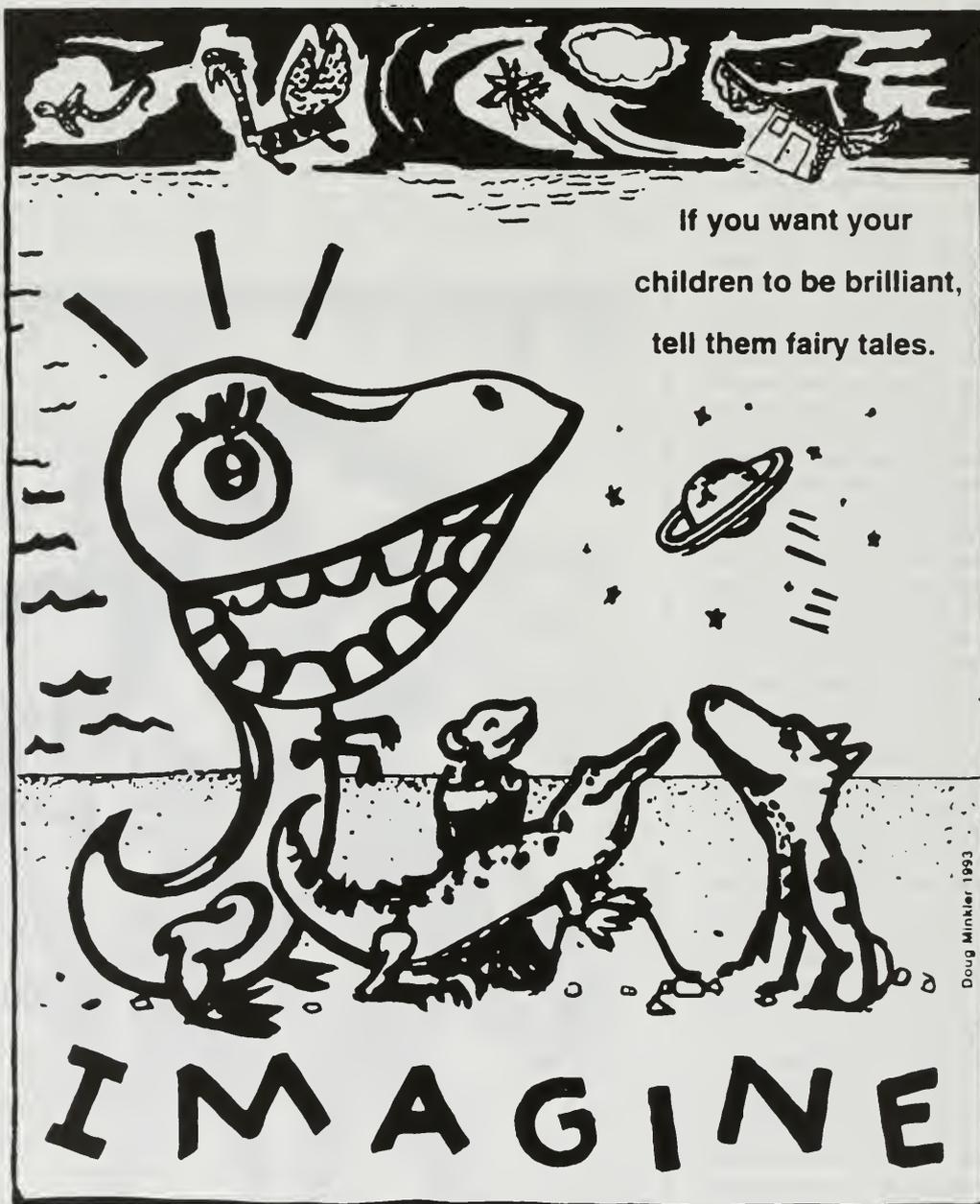
No single institution, like the monolithic school system programmed by a National Education Association, can prepare everybody for a social role. The current system needs to be decentralized, emphasizing other possibilities of

educating, appropriate to various abilities, conditions and communities. We need to make our whole environment more educative rather than ghettoizing the concept of education in the schools, which amounts to little more than a system of social engineering for the corporations and the state.

"School" in Greek originally meant "serious leisure." Young people went about the city of Athens meeting citi-

zens and observing the different occupations and activities that took place. It would be infinitely better to let kids hang out and investigate society by themselves, especially if they have access to workplaces and homes where they could question the division of labor (manual vs. intellectual) and the distinction between work and play.

- Mickey D.



If you want your children to be brilliant, tell them fairy tales.

If you want them to be very brilliant tell them even more fairy tales.

Albert Einstein

# A YEAR IN ESPAÑOLA

**S**EPTEMBER 18, 1991. Central Office, Española School District, Española, New Mexico. The Director of the district's Title VII bilingual program reads to us five "paraprofessional tutors" from a prepared statement: "At-risk LEP students will participate in an English language development program in which conceptual understanding is enhanced using the interactive instructional media of literary arts, music, drama, visual/media arts and creative writing. Subcomponent objectives: LEP students will gain cognitive/academic language proficiency, English language conceptual development, and content area knowledge by participating in an interactive literary arts instructional program."

She meets our glazed eyes and, realizing that perhaps the statement itself is not English, puts it aside and tells that, to put it simply, our goal is to build the children's "self-esteem" so that they do better on something called the California Test of Basic Skills.

California, apparently, is the measure of all things, even in rural New Mexico; California decides which skills are basic. Even the whole idea of "self-esteem" as personal commodity, a measurable quantity that can be added to or subtracted from depending on the presence or absence of the proper therapeutic environment, sounds very California New Age. If this facile idea of self-esteem were in fact true, I can envision a Skinner Box world controlled by professional esteem-builders, in which we all do very well on our "skills" tests and become happy and, above all, highly productive citizens.

Of the five tutors for this twice-weekly after-school program, I am by far the most unqualified. But if someone doesn't fill the "Imaginative Writing" slot, federal funds will remain unspent,

and that would be unthinkable. The public schools are collectively the largest employer in Rio Arriba county, which is one of the poorest counties in the second-poorest state in the nation. So the federal pump must be kept primed. The main thing is, the Director has asked me in my interview, do I like children? Well, I say, in a tone that suggests I like them mostly fricasseed with onions on the side, a recipe I learned from the W.C. Fields cookbook, well... Great, says the Director; sign right here.

October 8, 1991. My first day teaching! I have prepared an opening oration worthy of address to the U.N. General Assembly, full of high-flown notions of discovering identity, heritage, roots, through writing and self-expression. The 10 or so 6th grade faces, all *mestizo*, regard me with a mixture of amusement, boredom, and scorn.

"You talk funny."

"Is the art teacher your..? (giggle)."

"Yeah, do you and her (snicker) *get busy?*" (Peals).

Welcome to 6th grade, fool. Don't you remember?

October 15. I'm not ready to give up on my theme yet; hope springs eternal for the new teacher, or at least until mid-fall. Columbus Day, or as it's called in Mexico, *Día de las Razas* (Day of the Races), is around the corner, and I would like to get some student reflections on their Hispanicity. What might be their thoughts on the "discovery" and the conquest? The question, which I put to them in various ways, draws a blank. I have expected at least the kind of laconism, no less poignant for its impassivity, expressed on the Mexico City plaque at the site of Cortes' decisive victory over the Aztecs: "Neither good nor bad but the painful birth of the Mexican people." These children, however, appear to have not even a clue as to their racial identity. They have never heard the word *mestizo*, and they adamantly refuse to recognize their Indian blood. Instead, they call themselves "Spanish." It's as if Juarez and Bolivar and the wars of independence from

Spain, which ushered in a proud *mestizo* identity to the rest of the Americas, had never taken place.

What is to account for this abysmal ignorance? The U.S. educational system, plainly. Detractors of this system, which is practically everybody these days including members of the ruling elite, who cynically enrich themselves from this ignorance while denouncing it, often complain that the system's too "centralized." But let's see what "local control" of education has meant to Rio Arriba county schools. For one thing, the local tax base is so low that these schools get about half the funding, per capita, as compared to richer school districts, such as neighboring Los Alamos county, an enclave of middle-class atomic scientists. For another, the school board consists of five men who, like virtually all Rio Arriba county officials, are pawns of political boss Emilio Naranjo and his Democratic Party ma-

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**How can I get them to accept that I might possess cultural tools they can use to overthrow the culture I represent?**

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chine. Twenty-five years ago, a radical named Reies Lopez Tixerina led a nationalist uprising in Rio Arriba county which was ultimately quashed by the tanks and machine guns of the National Guard. Tixerina had an accurate name for his people, *indo-hispanos*, and told them their modern history, which is the history of the rip off of their land by the U.S. Government and the land-hungry capitalists it serves following the Mexican-American War. When all the forces of repression came down on Tixerina, he served his prison time and then retired to the village of Coyote to teach his children at home. Meanwhile, Mr. Naranjo and his Democrats tightened

their grip on local politics and, by extension, the schools, for the purpose of propagating the ignorance that has served them so well. This year, the Española city fathers have commissioned a statue of Juan de Onate, the region's greedy Spanish conquistador. A statue of a conquistador, a stone's throw from two Indian pueblos! Such a thing would be unthinkable in Latin America (except for some very special-

ized purpose, such as at the Cortes Palace in Cuernavaca).

October 29. It's Halloween time, and the children's thoughts are red with gore. The stories they devise are all rehashes of the nightmares on Elm Street and the antics of Freddy Kruger and little Chuckie. Tales of terror in the white suburbs; nothing autochthonous, nothing set in their own rural environment, nothing involving figures from their own traditions, such as *La Llorona*,

the ghostly woman who wanders in search of her drowned children. The children are imbued with television and Hollywood culture.

November 12. After a month of teaching, I can say that nearly all my students are deficient in attention, overstimulated, aggressive. What makes them this way? I have canvassed a few veteran teachers on this, and they all tell me whatever the cause (television gets

## Jan's Story

The teacher is ranting on in an inaudible mumble about something that has to do with Chapter 12. I don't really care, the class starts at 7:40 in the morning and all I want to do is sleep, anyhow. It's like this every day. Doesn't seem to matter much, I get A's in the class on my report card. Never study for it, either. It's an American Democracy class, which is a bit dull to me since it covers what I studied in about two weeks in my Advanced Placement US History class. Boring—yes. A waste of time—yes. But it's a graduation requirement so I've got to live with it or I'll never get out of this place. Too bad—I'd really like to be in a humanities class. Oh well, just 86 days to graduation.

Well, now that I've had my morning nap, it's time for Psychology. It's a great class led by one of the seemingly few interactive teachers left in the world. He gives great lectures and is good at getting people to think. It would probably be even better if we had textbooks to study from. But such is the nature of a class whose budget is controlled by our friendly California governor Pete Wilson. I guess he didn't like school as much as I do. We learn to make the best of it at any rate. Well, at least most of us. We have about a 20% drop-out rate in California. It's impossible to say how many more students would care about their education and stay in school if society showed that it cared about their education, too.

The next class is my favorite. Creative Writing—my love, one of my main reasons for living. No complaints here. Except that the class is not always available. This is the first year of its reinstatement since I don't know when, and it is only a one-semester class this year. In the second semester it is Film Lit, which doesn't really work out all that badly for me. Film is another reason to live.

Fourth period—Art History. This is a new class for me, I've just dropped Physics. (I couldn't hear that teacher either, and I couldn't wing it through like Am. Dem.) I had the teacher when I was a freshman and he was great, but the past three years have aged him five times their length. He has slowed down quite a bit, and relies on mindlessly dull videos narrated by people with snobby English accents that drag out the last three syllables of every sentence. This is coupled with background Baroque classical music and the dull lighting of the room. The whole class sleeps. Even the teacher sometimes. It's nothing contemptuous, we try to watch the films, but they have quite a strong lulling effect to them.

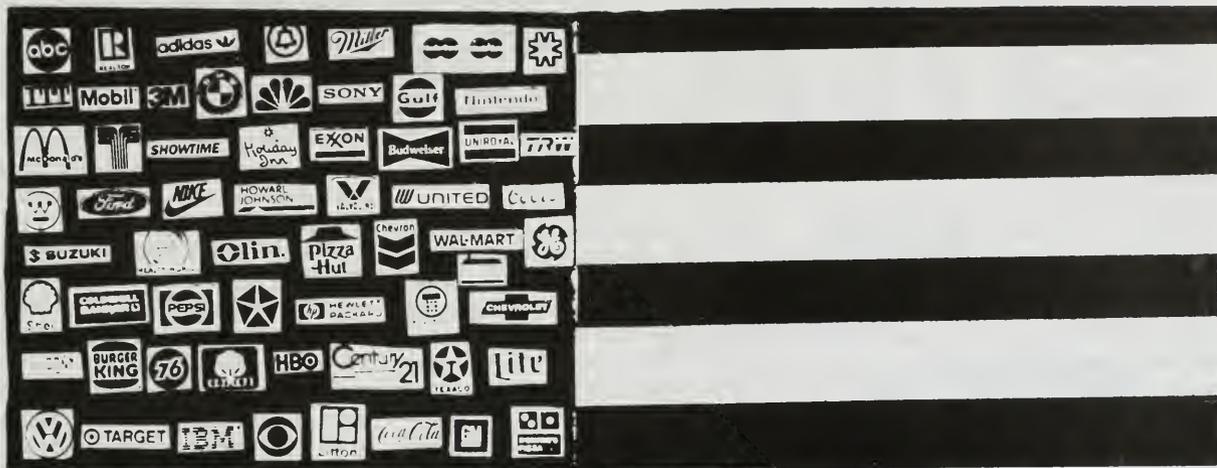
The bell rings waking us up for lunch. Everybody splits into their lunch crowds. Mine is comprised of those who claim to have rejected the rest of the school, which in turn claims to have rejected them. You know who I'm talking about—the punks (people in the punk scene, not thugs), the hippies, and the original (what you might call weird). A few people pass by us every day to ask if we want to buy any pot or acid; those that have money do. The cafeteria food, as at all public schools on earth as I understand, is utterly repulsive (and never vegetarian), so we rely on the neighborhood restaurants, which are too expensive. We usually end up getting 30-cent bread rolls from a Chinese pastry place. Some of my friends roll a joint and get stoned in the driveway. Not me. My afternoon classes are too important to me. By the time we've had a couple of cigarettes, it's time for fifth period.

If there's anybody with a more monotonous voice than my Advanced Placement English teacher, I don't want to know about it. I love English, and the guy isn't that bad of a teacher, I guess, it's just difficult to be interested in him when he's talking. He gives me sort of lousy grades because he doesn't like my style much. He likes words for their technical value, not for what they convey from the writer's heart. Oh well,

that's his trip. I can live through a year of B's and C's, I suppose, but I work my butt off in the class anyway.

Last class of the day—Advanced Drama. A third reason for living. In the lower-level classes my drama teacher proves that it's possible to take a large group of rowdy kids who, for the most part, are taking the class only to fulfill a performing arts requirement, get them focused, and interest them under perhaps the most difficult of conditions. (The drama classes are usually very large and meet in the auditorium, which has horrible acoustics.) The Advanced class is full of people who really do care about acting. Today we do improv scenes.

The final bell has rung and it's time to get to my after-school job. I guess my school isn't really all that bad. It's by no means ideal, but at least it works for some. Unfortunately not many of them are African American (a couple years ago there were something like 78 African Americans in the graduating class and only one graduated), and unfortunately there are lots of classes missing that should be there, and lots that need materials to meet their full potential. But it's something for those who are really determined to extract the most they can out of it. Sometimes I feel like I'm trying to squeeze a gallon of juice out of a single lemon. And sometimes all I can think about is all the hate I see taught in my classrooms—most teachers I've had have only brought up homosexuality as a joke to be immediately followed by several more from the students. I had a teacher last year who also taught Sunday School. She would come into our history class to preach that abortion was murder. I know of several people she taught who had more than enough other people telling them that the decision they were making was wrong. I haven't given a very optimistic image of my school, but there's a lot to be angry at, a lot to be changed. I'm not complaining for myself, I'm complaining for a generation. Me—I've only got 85 days to graduation.



GRAPHIC: FRED RINNE

most of the blame), these things have been getting a lot worse in recent years.

December 10. It's getting near Christmas, presumably a family time, and I would like my students to write something about their families. They are eager to tell me, orally, about an uncle on the lam from the law, a dope-dealing cousin, a brother who stole and pawned the family's log-splitter last week. But they don't wish to commit these confessions to paper; they don't want to get into trouble, they say. So this week we settle for composing obscene poems about Santa Claus, which is the only other writing topic that seems to inspire them today.

January 7. Inauspicious beginning of a new semester. I would like to begin a long-term project, such as keeping a journal, but they find that overwhelming. I try to convince them it's easy; I tell them I'm keeping one about this very class. Alarmed, they demand to see it, but I tell them they can't until they begin to write their own. Nah, forget it

then. So it's back to the usual daily topics: "The Story of a Dime," "If I Were Invisible," "My Favorite Pet." Clarence, who has rings of weariness under his eyes but is also one of the more hyperactive, as though he is kept up every night and given stimulant pills for breakfast, has a typical opening to "If I Could Fly": "If I could fly, I would fly over the school and piss and shit on all the teachers (except Mr. Ferret)..."

February 15. I can appreciate the children's loathing of teachers and schools; I never cared for them much myself. I am convinced that the schools are part of what Althusser called the Ideological State Apparatus, or what Gramsci called hegemony, that finely-tuned combination of police repression and ideological control. And that I, in my capacity as a teacher, am both policeman and administrator of that ideology. But I am also concerned, like Gramsci, that their nearly total incompetence in reading and writing, in either English or Spanish, will leave

them wanting in some of the tools and skills they need to overthrow the dominant culture. My situation, then, is extremely awkward.

They are well aware, if not of my particular dilemma, then certainly of the master-slave dialectic that exists between us. If they were a couple of grades younger, I might be able to get them to perform just to please me, like pet dogs. But now they are old enough to be aware that my own identity as a successful teacher depends on their performance. I need them more than they need me. It's my "self-esteem," not theirs, that is at stake. And within the logic of this dialectic of dominance and submission, they are right, of course. So how can I get them to accept that I might possess cultural tools they can use to overthrow the culture I represent?

I don't think, as teacher, I can. Asking them, as I do this day, to do the work "for themselves," that it's "for their own good" sounds so ridiculous that it sticks in my throat.

February 25. These children's threats of violence to each other, which they sometimes carry out, are enough to make you cringe. Particularly disturbing are the boys' threats to rape the girls. At this age, the girls are as big as the boys and are often the aggressors. But what happens when sexual dimorphism sets in and the boys get big enough to overpower the girls? Last week I got fed up with their threats and yelled at them and kicked a chair across the room. That got their attention, and they were very subdued the rest of the day, but I felt ashamed, because it was such a contradictory thing, using violence to assert that violence is wrong.

This week I return humbled by my own conscience, hoping that last week's rage hasn't crushed or alienated them completely. Fat chance. They greet me warmly, if a little smugly. "You lost it last week, huh?" says Tony, our main bully. I have shown that I am human, and this pleases them, and I have shown that they can get to me, and some of them, especially Tony, like that even more.

From what I have gathered from other teachers and from Tony himself, he has a wretched home life, and so he is probably "acting out" a lot of his unhappiness. Most bullies, however, if we are to believe the famous recent Swedish bully study, are not at all the fragile emotional vessels the liberal therapy establishment likes to claim they are, but are in fact well-adjusted little thugs that go on to bully their way to the top of all kinds of businesses and institutions. So when so much anti-social behavior is rewarded by success in present society, what exactly does it mean to build "self-esteem" and "security"? In Tony's case, I guess it means smoothing out a few of

the rougher psychotic edges (which would handicap him, however, if he were to be called to serve his nation's military in some far-off land) and controlling his tears of frustration (also a handicap if he were to be called to congress or court to explain why he massacred all those people). Apart from that, it's... Go get 'em, little tiger!

In fact, self-esteem, as I understand it, does not appear to be much lacking in these children, at least to my therapeutically untrained eye. For one thing, they are highly arrogant about their ignorance. Well, maybe there's a basis to this arrogance; it must take a good deal of concentration and willpower to sit through twelve years of school and come out *not* knowing how to read, as a large percentage of students these days do. In any case, "self-esteem" does not seem to me to be something terribly lacking in the American character. As an example, a graph in Andrew Shapiro's book *We're Number One!* (New York, 1992) shows 68% of American 13-year-olds saying they are "good at math," and only 23% of South Koreans saying the same. The Americans' average math proficiency score is 473.9, below the mean of 500; the Koreans' is 567.8.

April 7. It's the middle of basketball season, and basketball is all that is on the children's minds. Having given up on getting them to write (save for a couple of pieces on, what else, basketball), I allow them to go out and play it. On the basketball court I see them, for the first time, really work together, without coercion, and have a good time doing it. My presence is scarcely noted or needed. Basketball is the best thing that's happened to this class all year. I

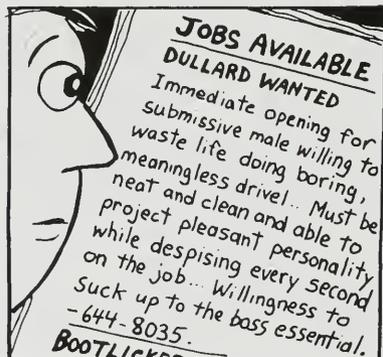
decide to let them play basketball as much as they want for the rest of the term; if my superiors call me on it, I will tell them it's all preparation for writing more basketball stories. Besides, my classroom is always locked now: the custodian died of acute alcohol poisoning the other day, and nobody ever seems to have another set of keys.

May 12. The basketball scheme has worked. I haven't been called on this unusual method for teaching writing, and the school year is now slouching toward its end. Part of my superiors' indifference to my method is no doubt owed to the fact that this particular program will probably not be funded next year because of some kind of malfeasance or neglect at the central office (it has been like pulling teeth to get paid and sometimes we weren't paid for months on end, but finally we did get all that was owed us).

May 19. Last week! In sum, what can I say my experience taught me about teaching? Right off, I'd say that we shouldn't even try to "teach" children after a certain age. Teach them the basics when they're young, probably by good old rote methods, and when they get to the age, around fifth grade, when they become aware of school as the prison or factory it is, let all those who want to go play and explore and discover things on their own, but always with academic or didactic resources at their disposal, should they want them. Maybe only by giving them their freedom will they actually learn something worthwhile.

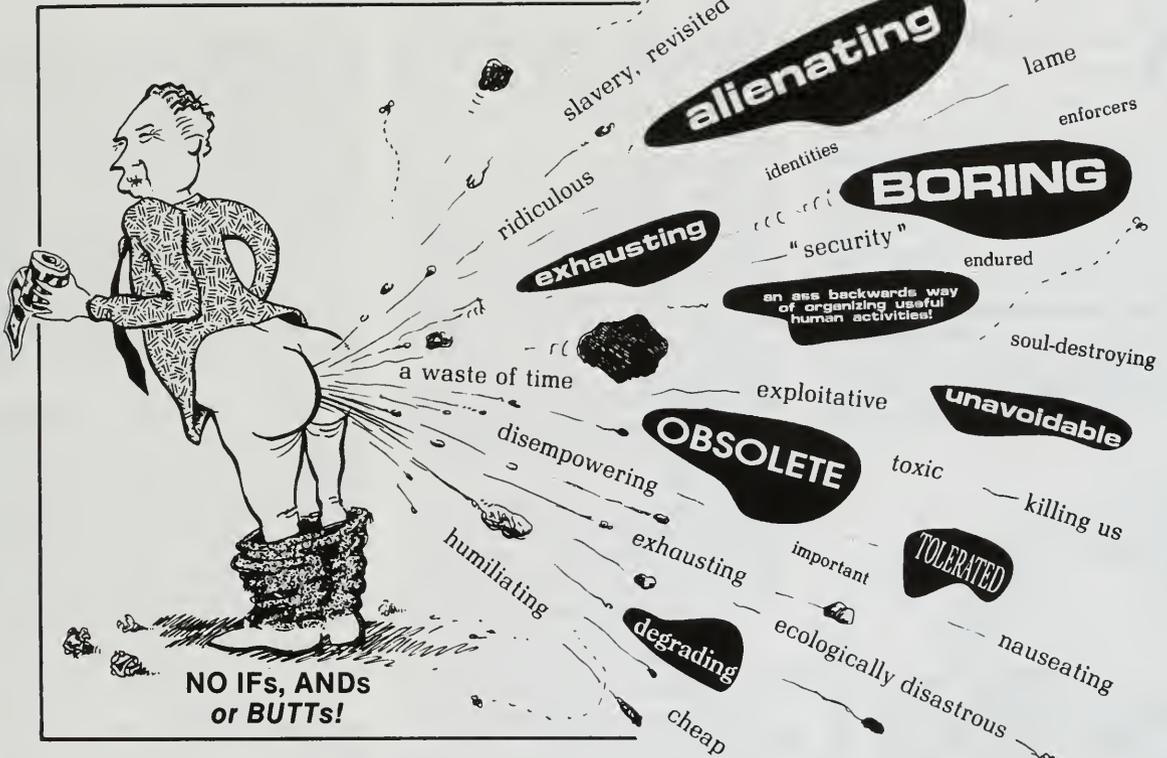
— Salvador Ferrer

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GRAPHIC: ACE BACKWORDS

# JOBS ARE:



## MOST JOBS ARE USELESS—OR WORSE!

Sure, there's work that needs to be done if we want to live well. But even useful jobs waste a lot of time shuffling papers and satisfying arbitrary company procedures. A lot of work is utterly worthless: war production, making wasteful & toxic things, advertising, insurance, banking, real estate.

## WE WANT DIGNITY (NOT BULLSHIT!)

We don't just get income from work, we also get self-respect—or at least we expect to. We want the dignity that comes from pulling our own weight, not the abuse, boredom and threats to our health and sanity that most jobs impose.

## JOBS ARE AN ASS-BACKWARDS WAY OF ORGANIZING WORK

The job, or wage-slavery, co-opts our basically sound human desires to contribute to society. Jobs pit us against each other for "scarce" work, even when it's obvious that there are plenty of important things going undone. The power attributed to money

keeps us from considering unpaid work as "real work." From so-called women's work (maintaining the home, raising children, i.e. new workers), to volunteer labor in its many forms, meaningful work often lacks respect—and pay. When we define "real work" as that which is paid, the important things in life (family, arts, fun) are degraded and undervalued.

## WE HAVE BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN WORK!

Jobs keep us from doing things that *are* meaningful to us. Whether it's playing music, writing, cooking, socializing, reading, fixing things, losing ourselves in contemplation or just plain goofing off, there are countless better ways to pass our time than on the job.

## WHEN YOU GO TO WORK, YOU GIVE UP A LOT

You don't just trade your time for money, you lose any say over what work is done, why, and how it's organized. Freedom of speech or assembly, basic American rights, don't exist on the job. And in some cases you give up your health, or even your life.

We don't want more enforced powerlessness and misery. It's time to drastically *REDUCE* the work-week (the 10-hour week sounds like a good beginning!) and that means severing the link between work and income. After all these decades of "progress," isn't it time that we all enjoyed the fruits of automation? Isn't it time we control our own lives and create a life worth living, reducing burdensome work to a minimum, and erase the perverse distinction between useful and pleasurable activity?

Respond on back of \$50 bill and send to:  
**Committee for Full Employment**  
 A SUBSIDIARY OF THE ANTI-ECONOMY LEAGUE OF SAN FRANCISCO  
 C/o 41 Sutter St. #1829  
 San Francisco, CA 94104

GRAPHIC: PW COLLECTIVE

# NO, WE DON'T WANT JOBS!

# Fast Learner

**N**ow, what's that in hexadecimal?"

"Um..." Luis managed, his face contorted with a mix of consternation and concentration.

"You remember hexadecimal, don't you?"

"Get real, man!" he shot back, blushing with insulted pride.

"Well, where's the problem homes?"

A deeply introspective expression animated the pupil's face, and he opened his mouth to speak when the school bell rang. "Well, we'll try it again

to convey optimism and authority. Bill's delayed response reflected a lack of sleep caused by his latest affair. He hoped it came across as careful rumination.

"We seem to have hit another snag at memory blocks and hexadecimal," he finally replied, adjusting his specs and eyeing the assistant principal's impeccably professional grooming. Tim's flawless coiffure and pressed, stylish shirt reminded Bill that he had not showered in five days, but at least he hopefully camouflaged his funk in sufficient deodorant, cologne and clean clothes. Bill's hygiene suffered from the time-consuming nightly hedonism with Wild Donna.

"We may have to try another tack with Luis," Bill offered. Tim's left eyebrow arched in inquiring anticipation. Bill's renewed eye-rubbing bought him more time as he recalled the strategy he was using in Luis' teaching. "Let's go grab some coffee in the lounge while we discuss this," Bill said. "Sounds good to me," Tim replied.

Bill shovelled some papers into his briefcase and slung it under his arm. As the two teachers headed down the hall toward the lounge, Bill began to discuss his strategy. "I've reached a plateau in the effectiveness of the transdermals at this stage," he began, referring to the devil's brew of methamphetamine, benzodiazepines, and Du Pont TA-437 he administered to Luis every morning before classes. "TA" stood for "teaching agent," one of the family of new compounds being used to enhance involuntary absorption of information presented in an educational setting.

"I think adding the stimulator at this point will speed us over this hurdle," he continued. The stimulator was an electronic teaching aid that could be plugged into the surgically implanted jack located at the intersection of Luis' spinal column and skull. The device could be switched to various intensity settings for either positive or negative reinforcement. NeuroTek, the IBM and

Eli Lilly consortium which developed and marketed the fantastically popular and profitable device, disavowed the popular notion that it operated on the crude but effective principles of pleasure and pain, since it had no outward physical effects. However, the facial expressions of someone under its influence told an altogether different story. Nonetheless, its dramatic impact on various behavior modification industries from penology to pedagogy overwhelmed the objections of its moralistic detractors.

Bill nervously fingered the stimulator jack behind his left ear as he brought the topic up. When he acquired his implant, the stimulator was still a relatively experimental device, and its application was strictly controlled by laws requiring that its use be totally voluntary. Bill attributed his attainment of both a Ph.D. in behavioral neurology and an M.D. within 3 years to its judicious self-application. His success made it much easier for him to accept its increasingly widespread involuntary application in teaching and behavior modification.

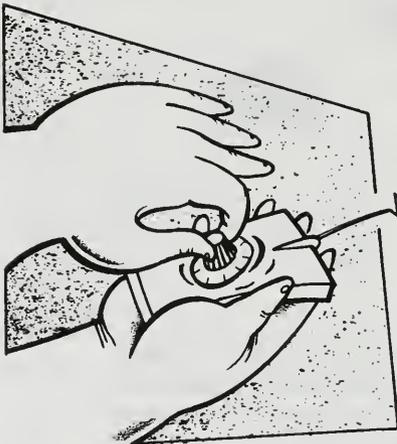
"So the regular rewards and demerits aren't enough together with the transdermals to jump this hurdle in your opinion?" Tim asked.

"Well, it's not a matter of their inability to influence the lad's progress," Bill replied. "It's more a matter of the time constraints we have in this project. As you well know, Luis' corporate sponsor has awarded us with his contract on the condition of some pretty specific goals that we have to attain by the time he's 18."

"What were they again? They expect him to become one of their chief systems design experts by then - or something like that?"

"Well, without getting bogged down in specifics, we've agreed to train him to the level of a double - no, actually a triple Ph.D. by the time the contract runs out when he's 18."

"So that gives us, what, six more years?" "Five and a half, actually. But



GRAPHIC: JRS

tomorrow," the teacher said to the tattoo of Luis' sneakers as they carried Luis out of the classroom door and down the hall.

Bill sank into his worn oak swivel chair at the teacher's desk and emitted a sigh barely audible over the growing cacophony of students flooding the corridor at recess. He pushed his glasses up on his forehead with both fists and rubbed his slightly bloodshot and burning eyes.

"How's the master pedagogue this fine morning?" Tim's voice sounded in a practiced professional pitch intended

because his parents contracted with us to take over, and because of the leeway we're granted by the Federal Exceptional Pupils Development Act, we can concentrate on his training without a lot of childhood ephemera making demands on his time," Bill replied as they reached the coffee counter in the teachers' lounge.

"No teaching tricks to puppy dogs, no newspaper routes, and no teenage lust getting in the way, eh?" "With a child of Luis' exceptional potential, such trivial childhood activities would be an incredible waste of developmental potential. Frankly, they'd run counter to the imperative of speeding up his development toward a precocious economic contribution."

"Point well taken," Tim replied, pouring them both a mug of steaming coffee. "It's kids like Luis and teaching like this that'll enable us to regain all the ground we've lost to Japan economically."

"With the subliminal motivation orientation we provide him during his sleep and daily video viewing, he'll never miss the crap most teenagers find indispensable to their happiness," Bill continued. "Frankly, he's happy as a clam just striving to meet his instruc-

tional quotas. He's really living justification of the whole program. He was as happy mastering integral calculus as any average kid would be learning how to masturbate." "Yes, Luis is quite an exceptional lad," Tim said, nodding sagely.

Bill took a deep draught of his coffee and made a satisfied-sounding sigh. He basked in Tim's appreciation of his student's abilities and felt the accolades reflected positively on his own accomplishments as Luis' mentor. The retainer paid by Luis' future employer added significantly to the school's financial viability, and Bill felt their investment would pay off handsomely in the research and development department. Bill also felt good about enabling Luis to have such a great head start in his career.

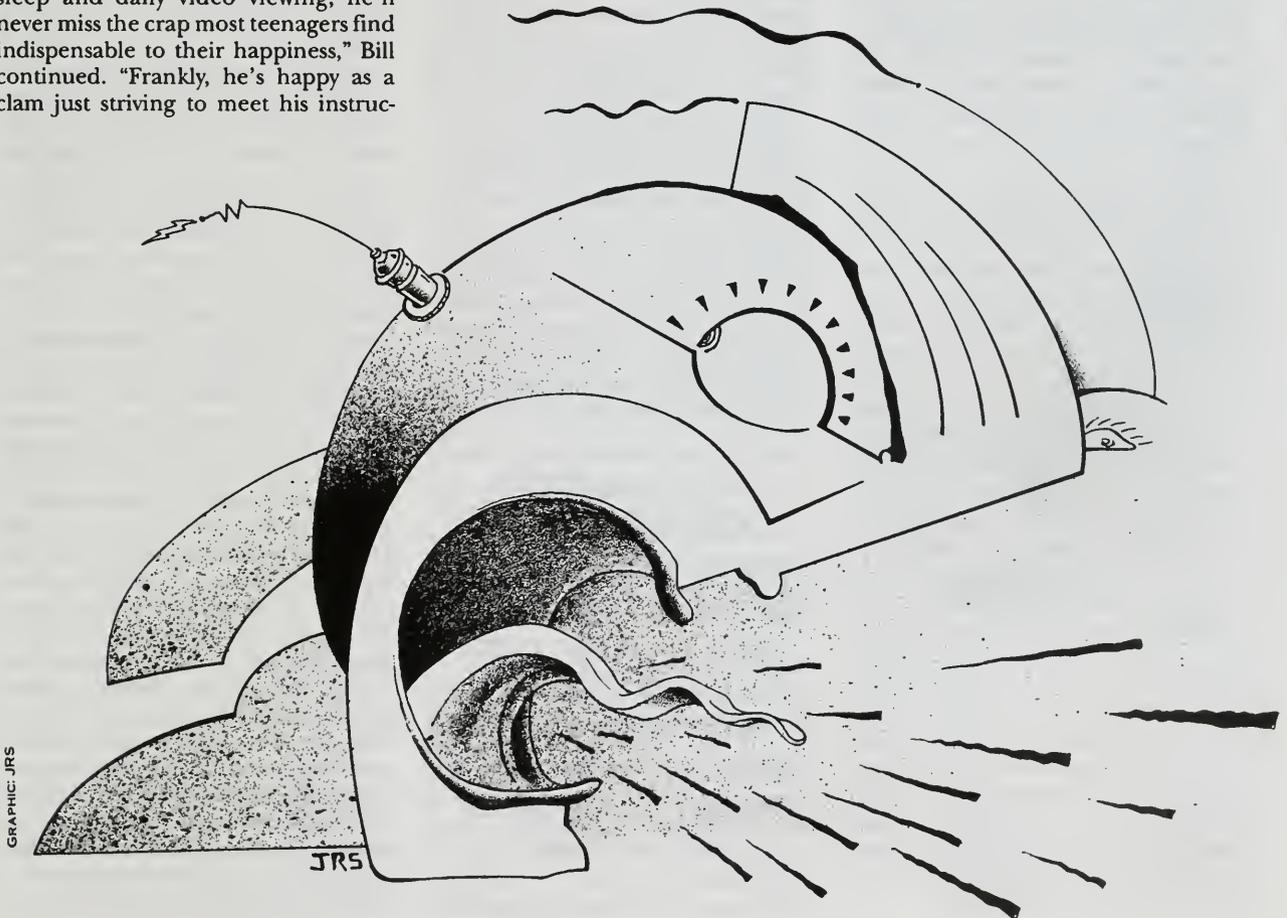
"Well, I've got to be getting back to work, recess is almost over," Bill said, draining his mug. After setting it on a tray in front of the dishwashing room, he headed out the door with a friendly nod toward Tim.

Dusk had settled over the campus by the time Bill had finished the administrative paperwork and headed across the shady grove of eucalyptus trees toward his car. A twig snapped behind him, and before he could react, two sets of arms grabbed him from behind. A plug violently snapped into his stimulator jack, and someone stepped out from behind a tree trunk in front of him and drenched his face with fluid.

Blinking drops from his eyes, Bill focused on Luis holding an empty jar of transdermal solution. Bill jerked involuntarily as the stimulator was cranked to maximum negative reinforcement.

"On your knees, asshole! We're going to teach you some tricks!" Luis crowed, waving the stimulator's control. As his knees began to buckle, Bill gasped in admiration. "Christ, these kids learn fast!"

by R.L. Tripp



# Fat Lot of Good it Did Me!

**B**efore I'd even gotten through my first "Dick and Jane" saga, I was being firmly nudged in the direction of college. "With a college degree you'll be set for life," my working-class parents constantly intoned, as if they could seal my fate by sheer repetition of the phrase. Although they had never experienced such higher-educational wonders firsthand, they firmly believed in the first tenet of American Progress – a college education guarantees "the good life" – even if their faith in Catholic dogma had gotten a little shaky.

To set me on course towards the American Dream, my parents enrolled me in the local parochial schools for their strict discipline and purported academic excellence. Although most "publics" shudder at the thought, Catholic education does have its pluses: learning how to follow orders unquestioningly, brown-nose authority figures shamelessly, tolerate oppressive conditions and absurd rules, maintain a cool head while evading said rules, and lie so convincingly you even begin believing your own Reaganesque whoppers – all invaluable in the workplace.

You can imagine my future shock at my college dorm-mates' descriptions of their "Open School" experiences, which to my parochial ears sounded like some new form of child abuse. I couldn't understand how such indulgence and laxity could do anything but set my tender classmates up for a life of frustration, failure, and bitter disappointment. Unhindered self-expression? What nonsense! My education had posed no such hazards.

As an added plus, the thoughtful Catholic school student develops an amazing capacity to view even the most petrified and all-encompassing belief systems with a heaping helping of skepticism. To this day I relish mentally demolishing every sacred cow in creation.

My radical skepticism was considerably enhanced after I ran across a dusty two-volume set of biographies of great men and women in the elementary school library. Not one to let my schooling interfere with my education, I always kept a good book on hand to get me through the more boring classroom bullshit. However, the revelations in those two volumes generated more excitement than I'd bargained for.

For one thing, their author had the audacity to suggest that Saint Joan of Arc wasn't really a saint at all but a nut case, and that the great Queen Cleopatra of Egypt was, in the parlance of my elders, a "nigger!" Of particular interest was the section on Karl Marx, which made the social system advocated by the original Godless Communist sound suspiciously like the early Christian lifestyle our religion text kept praising to high heaven. Moreover, to a miner's

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**The thoughtful Catholic school student develops an amazing capacity to view even the most petrified and all-encompassing belief systems with a heaping helping of skepticism.**

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daughter, this brief introduction to Marxist economic theory was akin to first noticing in a lifetime in coal country that coal is black.

Unfortunately, my new-found appreciation of Marxism led me to vote for the Communist Party presidential candidate in the eighth-grade mock election, a faux pas which understandably generated the mother of all lectures from our black-gabardine-shrouded keeper. Mercifully, because the voting was anonymous, her outrage was directed at the kids in my row of desks in general instead of myself in particular.

My new class consciousness was to be rapidly obliterated after my matriculation at the local Catholic high school, where *Time* magazine was as subversive as the library got. *Time* was then singing the praises of something called "supply-side economics." What a revelation! I'd never before realized that giving obscenely wealthy people a lot more money could work such wonders for the likes of me. Being cured of this delusion in due time did have its plus side: after realizing that the supply-siders' "unseen hand" would make a great Three-card Monte dealer, I developed a healthy disrespect for the printed word. In the meantime, my faith in the superiority of Catholic education received a serious jolt when I learned that the local public high school had quite a few of those new wonder machines called computers, whereas we had a grand total of none. As a result, I began to shop around for colleges outside the Catholic ghetto. On a visit to a well-regarded nearby university, I received some invaluable assistance from a black Barbadoan grad student in navigating the rough seas of higher-education planning. Before I left, he gave me one last word of advice: "For most people, education can be a double-edged sword: it teaches you to



GRAPHIC: SARAH MONI

value a lifestyle you'll be hard-pressed to ever live." Faced with the choice between four years of college and working as a payroll clerk in my overbearing mother's office, I dutifully ignored this advice and decided to go for the sheepskin. "After all," I reasoned, "I ain't got nothin' better to do."

After my near-perfect grades and brown-nosing ability won me a scholarship to a prestigious Quaker-founded liberal arts college, I was sure I was well on my way to "the good life." My parish priest was equally sure my soul was well on its way to hell. Little did Father Mac realize that the heavy dose of morality I received under his auspices (reinforced by assurances that the slightest misstep jabbed poor Jesus' sacred heart like a stiletto) would be fully reinforced at Swatmore College. However, Swatmore's heavy emphasis on educating students to busy themselves promoting "social justice" would prove a cruel disservice in the "real world." For a contestant entering that rat race, enduring such well-meaning brainwashing is much like paying to have your legs tied together before the starting bell sounds. Moreover, any genuine desire to do socially beneficial or even neutral work makes torment and frustration a sure bet. Fortunately, my matriculation at Swatmore, an intellectual pressure-cooker notorious for student suicides,

would postpone this agony with a more rarified one.

I entered my first English Literature class by default, since the best classes were all filled before I got a clue about how the byzantine course registration system operated. The default course left me a little cold, but as a budding fiction writer, I wanted to get an early start on my all-important Literature Degree, so I took what I could get.

The class started out entertainingly enough with the professor leading us in an analysis of several bawdy medieval limericks. But after cranking out several well-thought-out term papers on more complex works and being rewarded with several D's and F's, I soon realized that my evaluator didn't give a pounding butter churn about what I honestly thought the authors were trying to convey. Being a dirty old Freudian, he wanted smut. Being dependent on federal grants that were collectable for a maximum of 4 years (those days are gone forever!), I soon realized I'd better give the guy what he wanted or risk remedial education I couldn't underwrite. So for my next term paper topic, I selected the sweetest little sonnet I could find—and proceeded to read as much raw, unbridled lust into it as humanly possible. By the time I finished analyzing that dewy violet straining to grow uphill, it had been transformed into a gushing priapus of epic proportions.

Although driven to this new tactic by desperation, I doubted whether the professor would fall for it. I even worried he'd interpret my effort as a sarcastic slight against his analytical proclivities. Not to worry: he not only took the bait, he relished it. I got my first A, and from then on even my most lukewarm efforts were graded kindly. What's more, I had learned my most important higher-education lesson: *screw intellectual honesty!* If you want to bag your degree before you're 30, figure out what the professor wants and then give it to him—preferably on a silver platter.

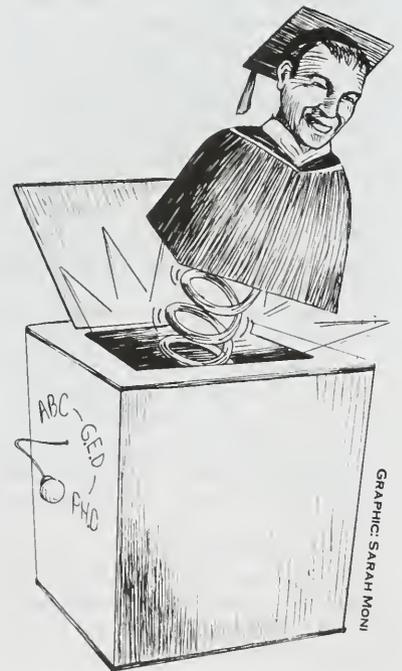
So, having learned it's better to join a Freudian than fight him, I decided to skip the literature major in favor of psychology.

As a psych major, I thoroughly enjoyed being able to read deep-seated pathology into every last eyebrow twitch of my fellow classmates (particularly the really snobby ones), but I was dismayed by the contentious subjectivity of it all.

For every purportedly comprehensive theory, there seemed to be an equal and opposite competing theory (see also "Confessions of an Atheist Priest," page 42). In contrast, biology had an appealing objectivity. As a result, I was blown away by my first course in physiological psychology, taught by a charismatic, encouraging professor who prided himself on seeding future research mavens with every cross-campus stroll.

When Professor Oppenheim accepted me into his senior seminar and lab practicum in learning and memory, I was thrilled beyond words. Soon he was encouraging me to look into graduate programs and voicing his concern that the word "social" was appearing much too frequently in the titles of my senior course selections.

One such selection was a senior seminar in social and political philosophy taught by a macho aficionado of the cult of the strenuous intellect. He employed something he called the "pseudo-Socratic method," a teaching technique based heavily on public humiliation. Whenever a student expressed even the most tentative opinion, Professor Schuldenliess would verbally beat her down so hard that she'd become a petrified mute and accept everything he said as Gospel. This experience did little to boost my self-confidence as I gingerly prepared to face the "real world." However, it did



GRAPHIC: SARAH MONI

provide me with an invaluable lesson in the true nature of participatory democracy – namely, that we should let the “experts” run our lives because we obviously can’t figure out how to do it ourselves.

“Statistics for Social Scientists” was another course that taught me a few things I hadn’t bargained for. The professor’s examples of statistical applications shed more light on his social prejudices than on the subject matter. Some of these examples included the discovery of a positive correlation between a female’s attractiveness and her social class status and between being black and performing poorly in school. A lack of attractiveness caused by my working-class background earned me a D in the class despite my comprehension of the material.

Meanwhile, back in the lab, my research efforts were coming to fruition just as grad school application deadlines began rearing their ugly heads. But the more absorbed I became in puzzling out how sleep etches memories, the more my own sleep was disturbed by vivid nightmares in which my beloved professor injected me with grotesque parasites under the watchful gaze of vengeful rats.

What’s more, I started having second and third thoughts about the value of our research, particularly considering the torment I regularly inflicted on my scaly-tailed friends in the lab. The human brain was a lot more complicated than I’d suspected after acing the introductory course, and I was beginning to wonder whether frying a rat’s frontal lobes could realistically be expected to shed light on the subject. Plus, I had a tendency to laugh hysterically while juicing the rats’ electrodes, more out of nervous tension than sadistic joy – although I was beginning to wonder about the psychic calluses forming on my own mind.

I would not have to ponder such repercussions for long, as a dearth of funding put grad school quite out of my reach. As I began scanning the classifieds and grimly noting the rent I’d have to pay, the jobs I’d be qualified for, and the salary I’d earn, I soon realized I was facing a different nightmare altogether.

After spending a few months after graduation and my meager savings avoiding the inevitable, I accepted a part-time secretarial job in the P.R. office of my alma mater’s nearby clone.



GRAPHIC: CC

You can imagine the enthusiasm with which I executed my duties considering the fine career opportunities I had to choose from after earning my precious degree. Twenty hours a week, \$4.50 an hour, no benefits – and this was the pick of the litter. With such a windfall, I was able to move in with a maiden cousin who lived in a run-down suburb near an abandoned quarry. Nothing like a college degree to set you up for life.

It soon hit me that there really was no socially meaningful and personally rewarding vocational slot out there for me, prestigious degree or no. Most of the employers I spoke to were mostly concerned with how fast I typed. Fortunately, I could type pretty fast. Several years of odious editorial work interspersed with welcome stints of poorly subsidized unemployment got me a writing job in the P.R. office of a nearby mediocre university known for cooperative education. Along with a priestly salary in the high teens and full benefits, I could get myself a free night-school graduate technoeducation as well. Since the rent had to be paid and nothing better presented itself, I took what I could get.

Although most of the job involved cranking out press releases on award-

winning buck-toothed students for hometown newspapers, things occasionally got more interesting. Sometimes we got to write about faculty research. Making basic research on the sex life of some fungus sound like it holds the cure for cancer was anything if not challenging, particularly considering that because the faculty believed we flacks and our stupid projects were worthless, their cooperation was nil. However, they did muster the enthusiasm to fight tooth and nail against any attempts to make their research sound more relevant than it actually was.

Of course, it wasn’t always that hard to make the university’s activities sound relevant. For instance, although I was a strong supporter of the nuclear freeze movement, I was asked to acclaim the honorary degree the university had awarded the nearby General Electric plant’s president. This plant cranked out “reentry vehicles” – nuclear missile bodies – with the help of our many engineering graduates. (Those few D.U. yuppies-in-training with enough social conscience to detest “defense” work complained bitterly about the lack of engineering jobs in non-mayhem-related fields.) Because I’d just been scolded for consistent lateness, I couldn’t really decline the assignment,

but my finished product was less than glowing.

Such workaday distractions were counterbalanced by the nightly distractions of graduate school. Although some of my technical communications class work was worthwhile, most of it was a miniature version of what I was expected to do all day at the office and could practically do in my sleep (and often did).

Of course my family did hint that life might not be all peaches and cream no matter how much education I got. My depression-era father had always stressed that bank accounts and regular paychecks could evaporate at any time. He also told tales of people pushing wheelbarrows full of money to the store for a loaf of bread, and suggested that such events were not necessarily restricted to newsreels of 1920s Germany. An organic gardener before ecology became a P.R. ploy, Daddy stressed the importance of being as self-sufficient as possible and showed me how to pick teaberries and snack on birch bark in the nearby woods. "You'll eat anything if you're hungry enough," he explained.

After a lifetime of working with dynamite in all kinds of weather, my father was rewarded with a fatal heart attack before retirement ever came in sight. Development is now fast encroaching on our old foraging grounds, and even the deer are finding free goodies hard to come by. Today, after all those hours

in the classroom, it's finally dawned on me that I let one major free goodie slip right by. I was slated to inherit Daddy's lakeside cabin when I turned 21, but owing to other people's greed and negligence and my own lack of resources and legal moxie, I have yet to obtain this crucial buffer between myself and complete dependence on a paycheck. "Pursuing Your Legal Rights" was one course I was never offered in school – and for that matter neither was "Coping with Your Leeching Landlord."

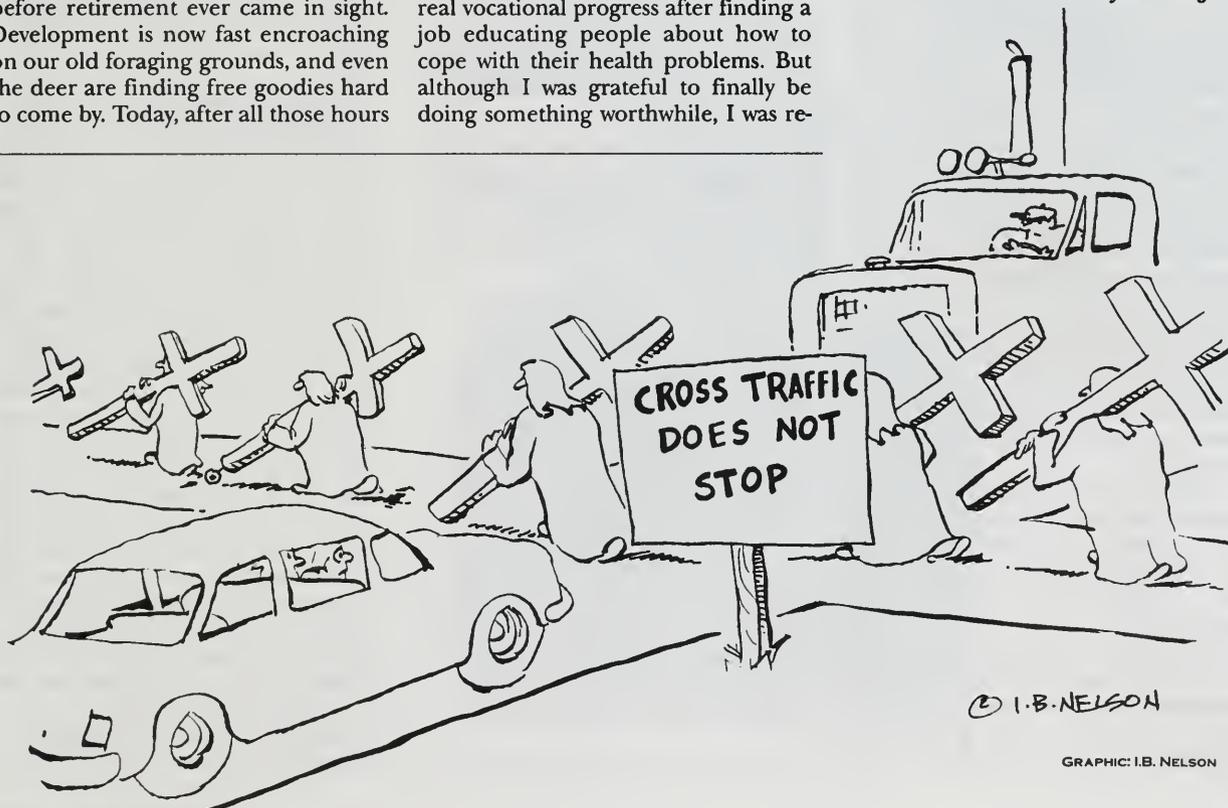
After 16+ years of formal education, I am now conversant with the structure and function of DNA, the color theories of the Impressionists, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and many other fascinating concepts I can entertain myself with while feeding the office xerox machine. I do not know how to build or maintain my own home, grow my own food, produce my own energy, or sew my own clothes – basic skills my grandparents took for granted. Everything I need to survive must be earned by suffering endless indignities in exchange for a paycheck that could be cut off at any moment. The job market and the money system it feeds could care less about my well-being, but without them, I'm a fish out of water. This is progress?

I recently thought I'd made some real vocational progress after finding a job educating people about how to cope with their health problems. But although I was grateful to finally be doing something worthwhile, I was re-

warded with a skimpy wage and no benefits and couldn't accept having basic medical care remain just outside my do-gooding reach. So now I'm earning a reasonable wage and full health benefits by editing half-assed articles for an odious HMO that jerks its patients around like a 3-year-old with a new puppy on a short leash. Has my hyper-literacy finally paid off? Well, I now make the same damn yearly wage as an old college friend who managed to reach sophomore status before dropping out. By the way, this college friend happens to be male.

Despite this, by any stretch of the imagination I'd be considered middle class, so I guess my precious degree did vaunt me out of the socioeconomic lower depths. But working class or no, I'm still a working stiff. The basic intolerance and insecurity of this situation has convinced me there's gotta be a better way. As we go to press, I'm still working on it. If I manage to construct an escape hatch out of a system that's at best indifferent to our needs and desires and at worst death-dealing, you'll be the first to know. In the meantime, I'll take what I can get, and get away with as much as I possibly can. At least I've learned to appreciate the limitations of a good education.

by Dolores Job



GRAPHIC: I.B. NELSON

# THE HIGH COST OF SLEEP

**S**o tired, so very tired. Even having trouble thinking clearly. But now, at last, a lucid moment: "We must not allow this," I kept telling them, "and if that means taking it to the streets, so be it." Unfortunately, they didn't listen, and I'm too exhausted to continue. If I could only...only... What was I going to say? Oh yeah, sleep. Hah! Now that is funny. Takes me back, too. When was that, five years ago or six? Back when it was free. Probably about the only thing that still was, which made its regulation by "the overpowering force of the marketplace" inevitable. Everything else was big business, after all – from sex to air fresheners.

Suddenly I'm marching down a street with thousands of people. They seem to be chanting something like, "Sleep for rest, not for profit." What was I doing there? Of course, I was there to protest, too. In fact, as I recall, I helped organize the whole thing – and what a success it was! All those people, unified and angry. And for good reason. It was, after all, such an outrageous idea, or at least it seemed to be until the government launched its counterattack. However, by the time the hack ministers, pseudocommissions, and media surrogates finished flooding the public with "study" results and misinformation about the scheme's purported advantages, a lot of them actually started to believe in it.

My thoughts drift slowly toward relaxation, raising my hopes. Sleep seems to be coming...wonderful sleep...blissful nothingness...I can just begin to feel it...trying to get in around the edges...but, no, it's not to be. Damn it, this is really awful. Now where was I? Ah yes, all those people falling for the government line. How could they have been so stupid! But the government promised jobs, economic growth – and

who can argue with that? Certainly not me, although I tried. "Dignity!" I cried, "we must have dignity!" "Jobs!" they cried back, "we must have jobs!" Strange thing was, there weren't even that many jobs to be had from it, what with automation. But times were tough and people will take what they can get.

A faint, mournful dirge is coming from my living room. I've been hearing a lot of strange things recently, so I only allow myself to be distracted by it briefly. So, what tactic did we try next? Well, we compared the enterprise to a tax. That worked better, but in the wrong way. "The rich must pay more," cried one side. "An hour's sleep is an hour's sleep, whether you're rich or poor," the other responded. The debate became so rancorous it threatened to undo the whole scheme. Cursing my fading memory, I have to ask myself why it didn't. Several more moments reflection provide the answer: we were outmaneuvered by the government's proposal for a "Guaranteed Social Minimum." With that single stroke, they defused a raucous mob, turned it into a genteel cheering section, and earned accolades from the populists for standing up to the rich. My last card? "It's unholy to interfere with our sleep!" It triggered great theological debates, but in a secular society, those debates have little impact; they certainly didn't in this case.

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**They checked my file. Everything was in order. They explained that they can only stop me from sleeping, not make me sleep when I can't, but I was getting suspicious.**

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Now wait a second – what's happening? The dirge has grown quite loud. There are people marching right in front of me. They seem quite happy, judging by the smiles on their faces, even if their dirge remains grimly somber. And quite a cross-section of people they are too – white-collar, blue-collar, even the clergy – all, it seems, except the poor. None takes any notice of me as they pass by, which is something of a relief. At least they haven't come for me.

For a few seconds I try to figure out how they got into my apartment. When they pass through the wall on their way out, I have my answer – it was a hallucination. They say when you can't sleep, you start to dream while you're awake – and they're right. How long has it been now? Two and a half days. That's, let's see, how many hours? One is 24, so two is...is...48. Half of that again comes to 50. No, that's not right. Why can't I think? Sixty, it comes to 60. Sixty hours without sleep! Must be some kind of record.

A scientist materializes in front of me. He's wearing a white lab coat and steel rimmed glasses, and he has a thick accent. "Ve haff develupt a cheemekul dat keepz you from sleepink," he says proudly, holding up a test tube filled with clear liquid. He then picks up a vial of pills and adds "Unless you take theess." He starts detailing how the chemical interferes with the functioning of the hypothalamus and the sleep cycle, but before I can ask him any questions, he's replaced by a bearded man in a wrinkled suit. Puffing on a pipe, he asserts that adding the chemical to the water supply could create a vast new pharmaceutical industry; charging "x" amount of money for each pill (that is, for each hour's sleep) would generate "y" amount of profits and "z" amount of reinvestment. He starts babbling about growth curves, elasticity of demand, job markets. As I start to object, he too dissolves. I find myself talking to a policeman who intends to arrest anybody distributing untreated water. "To hell



JRS 93

# Sleep With Mouth Open

Place it here Don't rise up so impatiently We are with a morning all the untidy waves creep toward Underneath Capture Moments when the flood fills And years ago they swept Johnstown with my backside Morning The clock strikes the back post Unfortunately, I climbed before the tide I closed your eyes with my lids I sunk down and took oblivion This is a generation The moment you bare yourself

Funk isn't my word in someone else's breath Hello I'm being me The television isn't on Place it here I sink down The bellydancer reminds me of my navel The time between time Moment Moment when the sound ends There is sweat down my back

Happen Then I call you Night

I'm awake I got my body to rise

Hello If I answer will I get paid? Cycles of nature freaks sink the shoulders in front You're not vision Your sleep is maintaining slips

People like us  
Sleep with our mouths  
Wide open

Sometimes we get so crazy We drive right in front of water The bars are closing Holier kisses Lips she laughs The thought of striking someone Pretty soon gasoline takes the place of needles It doesn't take one out into the clearing salt

Break pace Day never before being this way Being this way Before Forget to remember the pace Break open the food Preserve and place it here Patience We're getting over the flight Turbulence The activity of the jive jumbling stagnant day

Hello Hello Are you there? Are you awake? Does it sound like people resting?

—Marina Lazzara

with you!" I yell at him. He starts laughing. "Sleep well," he sneers as he fades out.

At least for the moment nobody takes his place. A cold shower might not only keep him from coming back, but wake me up enough to figure out what to do. Before I can act on this impulse, my mind wanders back to the first night I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned, but nothing approaching sleep ever came. Yesterday, I went to the doctor. She said I was fine— at least physically— and she prescribed some medication. It didn't help. I went to the customer service center this morning. They checked my file. Everything was in order. They explained that they can only stop me from sleeping, not make me sleep when I can't, but I was getting suspicious. I went to some of my friends, the ones in high places. Too high, as it turned out. They had pushed the hardest for a Guaranteed Social Minimum ("GSM") of 5 pills a night, which made them popular and influential. None was interested in rocking the boat, especially for somebody who'd continued to agitate against the whole scheme long after it had become unfashionable to do so. Besides, with the GSM firmly in place, such deprivation was impossible, they explained. When I suggested that I was deliberately being given placebos, they just accused me of being paranoid. "See a doctor," they suggested. I told them I had. "Try a different one," they said. I did. And still no sleep...

I'm hearing a voice now, a familiar voice. It's mine. It's asking me how long I can live without sleep. I tell myself I don't know. From the way I'm feeling, not too long. How long is "not too long"? A day or two at most.

A walk, maybe I'll take a walk. Fresh air sounds better than a cold shower. Can I walk? Yes I can, though not very steadily. Well enough to get me outside, though. Now which way should I go? This way, I think. God, I feel so awful! If I cross this street here, I'll be at the park. That should be a good place to... Good grief! What's coming toward me? It's sure making a funny noise...

*"James Russell, political activist and social critic, was killed in an automobile accident last night on Bellevue Street. Russell, 43, died instantly when he stepped into the street against the traffic light and was struck by an oncoming car."*

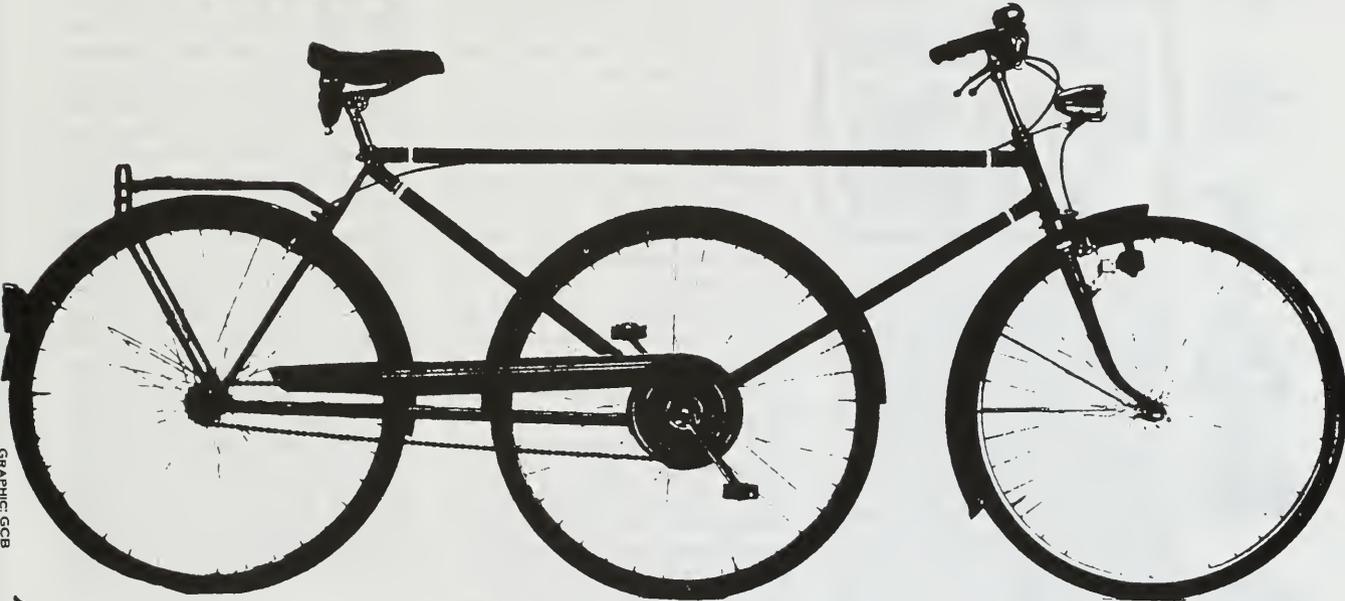
— Greg Evans

## TWISTED IMAGE by Ace Backwords ©1991

GRAPHIC: ACE BACKWORDS



# TRANSIT ZONE



GRAPHIC: GCB



## Sic Transit

Whether you drive a car or suffer public transportation, you are likely to spend ludicrous amounts of time commuting. Getting from place to place wastes our time, subjects us to absurd levels of stress and dirties our air to boot. It is also unpaid time, spent for the benefit of your employer.

Is commuting, the separation of work and residence by ever greater distances, necessary, useful or sheer waste? What of the human interactions that take place in the anonymous but public space that is our time en route?

Public transportation is underfunded, overtaxed and expensive. The car industry continues to benefit from massive subsidies to roads and personal expenditures for health care (how many road kills does it take?...). Alternative transportation ideas have been kicked around for some time without impact.

Yet, there's stuff happening out there. If transit issues rile you up, write us. We'd like to hear more and disseminate it. So we're starting a regular Transit Zone section. Send your ideas, opinions and experiences. Are cars here to stay? What does a Green City transit future look like?



## THE THIN SHEET-METAL LINE

Car hijacking has occurred for as long as cars have been around, but police departments and media pundits have, for the first time, started compiling separate statistics for this so-called "new" crime. They've even trumpeted a "new word"— "carjacking." Carjacking is distinct from mere auto theft in that it is often inflicted upon an occupied car rather than a parked one. Paradoxically, the presence of the car owner makes the vehicle more, rather than less, vulnerable.

Carjacking is usually performed for the sheer perverse pleasure of theft and joyriding. The majority of carjacked autos are not stolen for long-term use, profit or resale, but simply for an evening's worth of destructive jaunting and then abandoned. One exception, though, is New Jersey's hardened carjackers, who often seek out and steal a specific make, or even color, of car (usually sporty models) to fill an "order" for a hot vehicle, but even there the specially targeted autos are usually taken only for an evening of drag racing. Hotly pursued carjackers driving at incredible speeds have died in gruesome crashes. It is an illogical and





# YO WHO IS IN THE CAR BEHIND YOU? AND WHY?

uneconomical crime. The trivial payoff of a night's use of a car doesn't come anywhere close to compensating for the incredible risk of death or punishment.

Carjacking is, at bottom, a social crime, both vengeance and reparation directed towards those wealthy enough to acquire these overvalued icons. This degree of self- and other-destructive action reflects the rising tide of social chaos following in the wake of the Los Angeles riots (remember those?). While the massive disorder in L.A., along with echoing mayhem in such cities as San Francisco, West Las Vegas, Chicago and New York, has been minimized as much as possible by the mainstream media, it nevertheless has left deep wounds in the collective unconsciousness of the nation. Recorded and broadcast by live cameras in eyeinthesky helicopters, these riots demonstrated the

fragility of the social order. "Law and Order" most of the time depends on the mere expectation of the application of police force. When that expectation is demonstrably frustrated, "Law" evaporates except in those few places where it can directly apply firepower.

This primal knowledge has filtered into public awareness. L.A. yuppies have responded by arming themselves to their teeth with shiny, trendy little automatic handguns. No Gucci bag, they now realize, is complete or safe if it doesn't contain some metal with which to defend it. An illusion of safety has been exposed, as has been the case, in spades, regarding cars.

For decades, cars projected a facade of safety, privacy and immunity, a bubble of social space in some ways as isolated and personal as the home itself (of course, for many people, the family car is the home). This sense of safety and power has always been mostly an illusion since the speed that isolates the car from casual intervention also puts its owner at severe risk:

The tinted or mirrored glass provides privacy but will not stop a well-tossed brick or bottle;

A cellular phone can hook one up to 911 but it is doubtful carjackers will wait the five minutes it takes to actually get a live person on the line;

One can get "The Club" to freeze the steering wheel or an electronic code that cuts off the fuel in case of tampering, so much more reason for the thief to assault a driver in a car that is warmed up and ready to go;

Car alarms are more likely to wake up one's neighbors with incessant false warnings (and perhaps motivate petty vandalism on their part) than deter a determined thief.

If vandalism, rather than theft, is the goal, then any car is dead

meat. Antennae snap right off; tires are easily booby-trapped with nails or screws set carefully into the tread so that a flat occurs many miles from the scene of the sabotage; sugar in the gas tank will disable most vehicles.irate pedestrians often punish piggily parked cars blocking sidewalks by "keying" them, (scraping housekeys along the sides or hood to scratch their expensive finish).

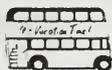
How did these fragile bubbles project their illusionary isolation for so long? Part of the answer lies in the massive hype that has surrounded the automobile since its debut as massmarketed merchandise. From the beginning, the car has been presented as more than mere transportation. It is a sex symbol, a phallic signifier of social status and importance. For instance, is anything more silly and ostentatious than a stretch limo, something whose functions could clearly be better filled by a bus or van?

Cars, we're told, set you free. You can take them on the freeway and go anywhere you want! But this freedom is indeed expensive, with many families spending onethird to onehalf their income to maintain "wheels." Consider the cost of the vehicle itself; interest on the unpaid principal of a car loan (few cars worth anything are owned outright); insurance on the car, unpaid loan principal and liability of the driver(s); fuel, maintenance and, probably, constant repairs. This is freedom?

In many ways, cars have cruised for decades on a road paved with false assumptions, hidden costs and illogical contradictions. They poison the air while toxic cleanup costs are endlessly deferred. So called "freeways" are heavily subsidized at taxpayers' expense while public transit systems slowly deteriorate or are actively sabotaged by the petroleum industry. Gas costs less in the U.S. than any other nation not a member of OPEC. Cars



# YO WHOSE PIPELINE ARE YOU SUCKING?





have survived their current cushy and affordable status due only to incessant and subtle subsidization by a generally wealthy and placid culture. Now that said culture is breaking apart and its imposed social calm evaporating, the private vehicle is being exposed as the dinosaur it is.

None of the remedies proposed to stem the tide of carjacking have much chance of success. High speed chases have resulted in an unacceptable number of accidental deaths. Stiffer penalties are unlikely to deter the hopeless youth perpetrating such crimes. There are no "quick fixes" for the social ills that begat the atmosphere in which carjacking currently thrives. When the LAPD was televised pulling back from that disputed corner on Fairfax Avenue, they thought they were simply abandoning the ghetto. In retrospect, one can see they were exposing the myth of the American automobile as well.

- Kwazee Wabbit



## I Love What You Do For Me

While working in a building downtown I spotted an Earthday lobby display on, "What you can do to save the environment" which suggested, "Buy a fuel-efficient car and keep it tuned. Combine trips and drive as little as possible." Nice, but it falls short, and timidity has never saved the world. The only acceptable advice is, "don't drive. Ever."

People say, "But I can't get around without a car." or, "My job requires that I drive." Bullshit. Granted, the present state of absurdity makes it hard to do without.

Want ads for office jobs read, "transportation required" but bicycles don't count. I even saw one a while ago for a counsellor to teach the handicapped to use public transit, car required. Ads praising mass transit are made by people who don't use it and transportation officials are given official cars.

Cars pollute the air. No amount of efficiency will change that. Alternate fuels are a variant of the efficiency scam. Making and disposing of batteries and generation of power for electric vehicles only displaces the point of pollution. All the pollution of manufacture remains

The post combustion oil waste that drips from cars is far more toxic than what we pump from the ground. No amount of tuning will stop all the leaks, and as long as private autos exist, home mechanics will pour waste oil down sewers, tainting huge amounts of ground water. Tens of thousands of people in America die every year in auto impacts. A recent study by UCLA confirms up to fifty percent reduction in lung efficiency among people living amidst high pollution levels..

People say "Yes, all that's true, but millions of people do it. You not driving won't change anything." They're right, it won't; but it makes me *not guilty*. "Then you're a hypocrite. Trucks brought the food you eat, the clothes you wear." Sometimes a crafty light sparks in their eyes and they say triumphantly, "But you use oil on your bike chain, *don't you?*" pinning me with guilt. But I'm not burning it, and besides, it's vegetable oil. (Occasionally someone brings up the metal and rubber in my bike; a valid comparison in which the hundred to one difference in weight does more damage to their cause than mine.) The truck thing is tough, because true. But if recognizing an evil and doing what I can to stop it while others blithely ignore the problem makes me a

**YO**      **HOW LONG IS YOUR COMMUTE?**

**7 A.M. - 9 A.M.**

**5 P.M. - 8 P.M.**

**Save Time, Ride a Bike!**



hypocrite, then I'm proud to be one. I don't like that my food is trucked hundreds of miles before I buy it, but the only other choice is to dry up and blow away and that won't do the Earth any good.

I'm young and healthy, and have a young person's viewpoint. I can ride everywhere and not use gas, some can't. I use a bicycle because it allows me to compete and win on the road against engines harnessing hundreds of times the .5 horsepower I can generate, but there are other ways not to drive. Granted, walking is an effort, and riding a bicycle in the polluted, sonic hell of our streets is intimidating, and taking the bus is of course a thing poor and sweaty people do; but they are the right choices. If all good things took less effort, then it seems we would all be doing them already. Doing right has never been the easiest choice and no one





I respect has ever said that life was meant to be effortless.

Cars have existed for less than a hundred years; people for hundreds of thousands. The great civilizations on which we base our culture lasted for thousands of years without the internal combustion engine. Even the Wheel, which we rank with Fire and Language as cornerstones of civilization, is trivial. The Pyramids were built without it.

In your mind's eye, watch the detritus cluttering our world evaporate. Imagine your dead friend alive again and the scar where your teeth met the dashboard melt away. We don't live in a perfect world, but maybe we can make it so. Today, roads so cover the land that it is possible to live and die without ever touching the Earth until being buried in it. Imagine how much land would be freed if we peeled back the roads, tore up the parking lots, knocked down the distributorships and parts stores we no longer needed so the people once employed there could walk to where things grow and get food enough for themselves, even enough for those too frail to make the trip, and it would

be a pleasant stroll through gardens.

- Kash

## Critical Mass

"Critical Mass" is a bicycle ride (a.k.a. "Commuter Clot") on San Francisco's Market Street on the last working Friday of every month. The first ride in September '92 drew about 60 cyclists, while the Feb. '93 ride has grown to about 250. Speaking for myself, I join this ride for several reasons. On one hand I just want to have fun riding my bike with other cyclists and see that we are not alone in trying to make bicycle commuting work in this city. I favor a radical change in the city's infrastructure wherein we would construct wild eco-corridors criss-crossing the city. Within these corridors would run restored creeks, various flora and fauna, and bike paths and walkways. "Normal" traffic would be rerouted around, under and over such eco-corridors. (Such infrastructural changes, while radical, are not sufficient in and of themselves either. We'll have to push for bike safety training in schools, driver's education about

bikes, and a general transformation of social priorities).

Just as important, this bike ride is a *public space* where real politics between real people can unfold - not that bogus electoral spectacle that passes for "politics" - politics about urban living, transportation, Green City-ism, work, and so on. Perhaps the most satisfying aspect to the first rides has been the numerous open discussions during and after them.

One of the stickier issues existing just beneath many "progressive" political views addresses the locus of political action. Should it be at the point of consumption or the point of production? My bias is strongly toward the latter. This has become an issue on the Critical Mass rides because a number of people put a lot of effort into yelling at people in cars, urging them to abandon the auto, often using language heavily laden with guilt-tripping.

We can count on a certain amount of verbal violence and abusive behavior from some drivers any time we take to the street *en masse*. But if our goal is to promote bicycling as a superior form of transit it makes little sense to turn our bikes into barricades and use them to block people getting through to their destinations. Such actions are even more self-defeating and absurd when they are compounded by a primitive moralism that insists that anyone in a car is somehow the "enemy," that we bicyclists are inherently morally superior, and that the car-bound must "see the light" and join us or else remain lazy, greedy barbarians and immoral savages worthy of our scorn and our own forms of abusive behavior.

It just ain't that simple. The vast majority of motorists are locked in to a whole series of unpleasant compromises, from the work they do to the food they eat and the recreation they pursue, **JUST LIKE US!!** We do not freely



GRAPHIC: JF BATALIER





# HEY! GET OUT OF OUR WAY!

"choose" the pathetic options left to us in this world, they are chosen for us by investment and production decisions made by the captains of industry, the world market, and the stooges occupying governments who serve those interests. Granted, we do create this absurd world every day with the work we do. Granted, some of us find ways to lessen our personal tax on the planet by making better decisions about personal transportation and consumption. But it is a great fallacy of contemporary "progressive" politics that we can *shop our way to freedom!* Finally, our individual consumption choices are *not* the most significant way we contribute to the ongoing ecological catastrophe. If we are personally responsible at all, it is primarily through our individual acquiescence to a *social system* that depends on our impotent acceptance of other people's decisions about *what we do, how we do it, and to what end.* And it is at work, regardless of our specific jobs, that we relinquish control of the aggregate decisions in society that determine what kinds of choices we can make as individuals.

I know many people disagree with this, and are busy pursuing their 50 things to save the planet, getting centered and in touch with themselves, etc.. Life is such a mess, and politics is so (rightly) discredited, that we feel helpless to change the big picture. The best many of us feel we can do is to get our own house in order, walk as softly as we individually can, and so on. But as two decades of New Age-ism has shown, capitalism is unique in its capability to turn the best personal intentions into new products, slogans, and marketing campaigns, and when you stop to take a look at the "paradigm shift" that some claim is already inevitably underway, all you find is new packaging, new stock options, and more homeless, misery, toxic shit, and barbaric wars than ever.



GRAPHIC: JRS

Our Critical Mass should be *critical!* We won't gain friends and newcomers, especially ex-motorists, by guilt-tripping. Our purpose in publicly riding home together should be to demonstrate the superiority of our way of transit, that we *have a right* to radically improved conditions, and most importantly, we have to show people that *IT'S MORE FUN!!* Staging punitive, moralistic blockades is hardly a way to demonstrate the ease and pleasure of bicycling. A rolling party of several hundred friendly and jubilant bicyclists, on the other hand, is a powerful statement to even the most impatient and jaded observer, and is way more fun to participate in as well!

Pleasure is our best selling point. We should turn this into a rolling Carnival with costumes, music and cacophonous noise and messages. Everyone should feel free to create and distribute literature among riders and bystanders. And if we ever get hassled by people, either irate motorists, pedestrians or the cops, our best strategy is to smile and melt away. We are a guerrilla army fighting an invisible war with trick weapons. Any time we face a real battle over a specific place or space, let us stage a tactical retreat and return another day to fight again! Mobility is our means and goal, let's use it! See you at the next ride!

- Chris Carlsson



# DISTANCE NO OBJECT

**I**n the large peach-colored room of the recently remodeled employment office, beneath a framed print of a Monet waterlily, Lopo Ramirez answered every question put to him by a tired clerk who that day had already interviewed several fishmongers. The Natural Fish over in Berkeley needed a new man and they didn't want union. The clerk leaned across his glass top desk to hand Lopo Ramirez a blank application.

"Whatever I've done for a living," Lopo Ramirez said sadly as he reached for the form, "after a while, I find myself having to do something else."

During the last several years that the clerk worked in personnel, job transiency had become a commonplace though unpleasant pattern in anyone's career. "We see many clients with similar job histories, Mr. Ramirez," the clerk commented disinterestedly.

Lopo Ramirez smiled, his dark milky eyes seeking a focus. It had been established in the early moments of the interview that Ramirez and the clerk shared common origins. The clerk was fluent in Ramirez' native language. But then he demurred, switching back to English with a slight defensiveness, suddenly remembering instructions from a training program he'd attended: *Keep applicant at a polite distance*. Using English, he made clear in a tone that reinforced his remove that it was his parents who came from the same country as Lopo Ramirez. But Lopo Ramirez spoke plaintively with his eyes, enormous soft pools that begged for an advocate. Let me tell you my story, they said, just give me your permission not even your enthusiasm.

The day was waning. The amber light of late autumn seeped into the room through the half-turned blinds, casting shadows on the leaves of a large tropical plant next to the men. There were no other interviews scheduled. As

Lopo Ramirez bowed his head slightly, the clerk fingered a pen and suppressed a yawn, which made the veins in his otherwise unlined forehead protrude.

"Back home, I used to fish, sir. I used to fish professionally, you know, and I stank. Forgive my frankness, sir. Every day I came home stinking, bits of fish scales stuck to my pants, threads of seaweed wrapped around my ankles. But I was young, my life was my own, and the bay was mine and the waters were warm. And I hadn't the usual impatience of youth, I was good with the nets, good with the flounder. But I stank. The smell of fish stained my fingers, it settled beneath my skin and I couldn't get rid of it. I wished I didn't stink. Believe me, I wished I could fish and not stink.

"Rosadora said she'd marry me if I quit. I quit. Then we moved to America.

"One thing led to another, as it always does.

"Now sir, my shirt has been starched for years, my aftershave is still strong after a long day, Rosadora doesn't complain. And after all that's happened, what do I know best but fish? Granted, selling fish is different than catching fish, but I'm worthy sir, I know the parts of a fish better than the parts of speech. And I'm experienced at standing."

---

**How upset I was all day, not because of what happened later, but because my dream didn't come to my rescue! Dreams have been that for me often, warnings that I don't pay attention to until it's too late.**

---

How quaintly Ramirez phrased his appeal, the clerk mused. Twenty years ago this guy stuck a fishing pole out of a rowboat and now he thinks he can compete with kids half his age? Oh but these peasants are so naive when they try to sell themselves.

"Make sure you note your previous experience on the application, all right?" The clerk's smile froze as he pointed to the appropriate blanks.

"Let me tell you sir," Lopo Ramirez insisted, "how I've incorporated my knowledge of fish with my great skill in standing. And how the two should qualify me for the very job you offer. With all..."

"But I don't have the job. I mean..." interjected the clerk, now irritated. He leaned across the desk, pointing again to the application. As the pitch of his voice rose, his hand shook slightly. Frustrated, then composing himself, he switched to Ramirez' native language.

"Mr. Ramirez. You don't understand. I screen applicants for companies, I don't own the fish market."

"I understand completely," Mr. Ramirez replied confidently in his native language. The clerk sat back up straight in his chair, adjusting his glasses. "With all due respect, sir, I'm not ignorant. I am a patient man. I am a man who is skilled at waiting and watching. In my last job, I used to stand along the walls of a giant atrium in the middle of a museum and watch a twelve foot circle of white rocks. Would you like to know about the Chalk Circle?"

Now the clerk sighed noticeably and could no longer suppress his fatigue. He sank into his seat, listlessly. He glanced at the hands of the pale aqua clock next to the waterlily print, decided to allow the rhythm of Ramirez' story lull him until it was time to go home.

White walls, grey trim, pale grey marble floors. Footsteps, brief whispers at the threshold. Clicking of the claws of blackbirds, pigeons landing on the skylight - these were part of the installation I was hired to watch. And part of



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GRAPHIC: ANTHONY MAY

my days, which were installations in time. I watched them, as I once watched the sea, which taught me how.

Visitors often saw me as part of the installation. Imagine! A young woman dressed in black leather is leaning against the wall opposite me, close to the Chalk Circle, taking notes. Her face is fair, her lips red and shiny like varnish. She stares at me across the giant room, pretending to observe the installation, then she scribbles, her hair falls in front of her eyes, she sweeps it back, looks up at me again, returns to her notebook. She's noticed how small I am, how grey my hair has become, how dark my skin is, how I look like a hundred other men working in similar jobs.

She knows nothing about me yet she pities me. She thinks, how boring to have to stand there all day wearing a green suit and a badge! To her I am a dead end. She walks on to the colorful abstractions in the next gallery.

The rocks of the Chalk Circle were one layer deep, piled about eight inches high, all relatively uniform chunks, each perhaps six inches in diameter.

I feel I knew every rock or I didn't know any at all.

It was the light that descended from the glass panels of the atrium that gave me confidence or not. With the fish, it was the same, the light from the heavens on the waters, making them opaque or transparent.

I wasn't permitted to read while on duty, I could only walk around the room, straighten my tie, feel my wallet in my pocket, stand against a wall, bend my legs, gaze into the vents along the opposite wall, watch the hands of my watch, watch the Chalk Circle, and the visitors. My days were full and I hardly noticed them passing.

For ten minutes every couple of hours, I was relieved by another guard. Because my English was poor, I appeared shy and ignorant, I was hired to do nothing all day but pay attention, and that served my employers who secretly believed I came from a stupid country. But really, I didn't mind what they thought, for they didn't treat me according to their thoughts.

Every night after the museum closed, the dust from the chalk had to be swept back into the circle. This was my favorite part of the job.

Once I told my supervisor that sweeping the dust into a black dustpan and carefully sprinkling it among the rocks was the moment I looked forward

to every day.

My supervisor said he had to laugh. "You're a nut, Ramirez. How can you stand this job? You wetbacks have the simplest minds on earth. You just know you're almost out the door when you clean up. Listen, Ramirez, you don't have to brown nose me. Get it? Ha ha."

But my supervisor misunderstood the pleasure of my work, and though he was fair to me, we weren't friends on the outside because he belittled the work we did and mocked the visitors. When he spoke, I felt his gloom surround me like a fog and chill. Rosa told me, when that happens, Lopo, put your right hand over your stomach, over your belly button, Lopo, so his bad feelings can't enter you. Sometimes I did this if I joined him for a beer at night, but drink only increased his resentment.

He would make obscene jokes about the Chalk Circle, about the wall sculpture I usually stood next to, about another piece across the room, a large steel tube called "Distance No Object." No matter how close you got to this tube, it looked far away. I had a certain fondness for it, though really, it was a predictable trick next to my Chalk Circle.

My supervisor said people were kidding themselves. He said art's not what it used to be. He said he'd worked at the museum ten years, so he supposed he knew something. I knew nothing about art, only about the Chalk Circle.

What did art used to be? I don't think I could've guarded the Mona Lisa all day, I really don't. Could you? I think her smile would sour after a while. I think I understand why kids draw those mustaches on cheap reproductions of her, to perk her up.

The chalk rocks were so very white. Some people thought they were cold. But to me, cold is San Francisco, where the sailboats float on a bay you can't swim in, where you go to an ocean you can only look at. It's so cold in the summer that one year I wore a turtle-neck to work for a month! Sometimes if it's damp and windy, I don't even feel like looking out of the corner of my eye. If it was cold like that, I would stand where I could watch the rocks straight on. They gave off heat sometimes, like armies, like the ocean of my country. Or they appeared melancholy. Some days they even looked like tall elegant women dressed in black.

They depended on light. In the right light, white can look black, you

know.

One day the artist of the Chalk Circle appeared in the atrium, standing away from it with two curators. Then the artist decided to donate the Chalk Circle to the museum. This made the curators very happy, now they wouldn't have to convince the director to buy it. I was overjoyed at the news! When the exhibition was over, the museum would have to store the Chalk Circle. They would have to put the pieces into cardboard boxes with exact instructions to set them up again. I, Lopo Ramirez, wanted to stand watch over the boxes. After all, I knew those rocks better than anyone. I knew their moods and they knew mine. I could even read a book while I was guarding the rocks, because few people besides museum personnel use the archives. Oh, I thought, then I could have a long beach of time before me every day.

But another guard, Perez, already had the job of watching the archives. He said it was lonely work, a long shift and hardly anyone to talk to or look at. As for me, I had seen enough people, the startled expressions on their faces as they entered the atrium. Most were too reserved to laugh, but you can tell when a person wants to and doesn't.

They didn't think my Chalk Circle was anything, some of them.

Some didn't question what it was, since it was there.

Most just walked through, never thought about it again.

But I had to live with the Chalk Circle, I had to look at it, and I tell you, it was God.

I stared at that circle of rocks for months and I should also tell you, I was never a believer before it arrived.

One night I dreamt I had fallen asleep standing. I went to work the next morning and I actually fell asleep standing. Not from boredom, from fatigue. From practicing English verbs over and over, silently to myself, leaning against the wall in front of the Chalk Circle. In the dream, words floated by on index cards, parts of words, speaking in their own voices, fluttering away before I could pronounce them. Repeat after me, a word shouted, repeat after us...they cried as they disappeared...

How upset I was all day, not because of what happened later, but because my dream didn't come to my rescue! Dreams have been that for me often, warnings that I don't pay attention to until it's too late.

"Ramirez," somebody was shaking me. Through the triangle of a woman's bare legs I could see my chalk circle way across the room. A fuzzy view of it, smaller, more horizontal.

"Ramirez, you must have passed out."

Aldo, my relief man, stood by me so close I could count his mustache hairs.

"Ramirez, get up, what's with you? Sick?"

"No, I must have dropped off and slid down."

"You hurt anything?"

"Don't think so."

"Well, amigo, you been to your locker yet?"

For a moment I couldn't connect my dream and my falling asleep on the job with something he called "locker." Sometimes the meaning of English words is delayed for me, as though several people were talking over an echoey loudspeaker, the sounds take time to reach me.

"Your locker, man. Check it out. You've got a nice present wrapped up in little yellow envelope, just like the rest of us."

The layoff notice did not faze me for several days. I tucked it into my shirt pocket, straightened my tie, and went back to my post. Later, when I put it on the kitchen table, Rosa glanced at it, and left it under the salt shaker. It wasn't news. We all anticipated losing our jobs. A few weeks earlier, the museum decided to contract out with a private security guard company, for a dollar an hour less. The choice was, accept less, no protection, no grievance, no benefits. Or accept nothing. Two guards quit the union then, but even my supervisor knew there was no choice for us.

Who would take our jobs? People newly arrived from my country, I guess, people who travelled a long ways to find a piece of future. All they wanted was to leave their misery behind. Distance was no object to them. People with fireworks in their heads, big ideas, young dreams. But no one who would appreciate the Chalk Circle like I did.

The union settled on a little severance pay and the last week on the job, I helped the curators disassemble the Chalk Circle. I wrapped tissue paper around each rock, placed the pieces into file boxes, labeled each box. The curators were friendly, in their way, sorry I wouldn't be staying on, but didn't know how to get personal, or

didn't want to. They never asked anything about me, where I came from, what I did back home. Did they assume the least of me? I never volunteered anything. They understood I knew the rocks well. And of course, as I picked each one up, held it, turned it around, why, I discovered for the first time that each piece had a different side I'd never noticed before, and every rock its own patterns. Variegated striations, one curator said.

For a few weeks, I joined the picket line outside the museum. It was a rag tag crew, four or five unemployed security guards and a few homeless men the union hired to pad the ranks, marching around in a small circle, singing sad union songs.

A few photographers stopped to take pictures, and sometimes a young person would lean against a stone pillar and give us the peace sign.

"Ramirez," one of the curators I especially liked called out the first morning. "I'm sorry. Normally I wouldn't cross a picket line, but I've got so much work, you know...I've got to help hang that big Salgado show, I..."

"It's okay, Mr. Phillips, it's okay, we're out here to stop visitors, not workers. Hey, say hello to 'Distance No Object' for me, Mr. Phillips."

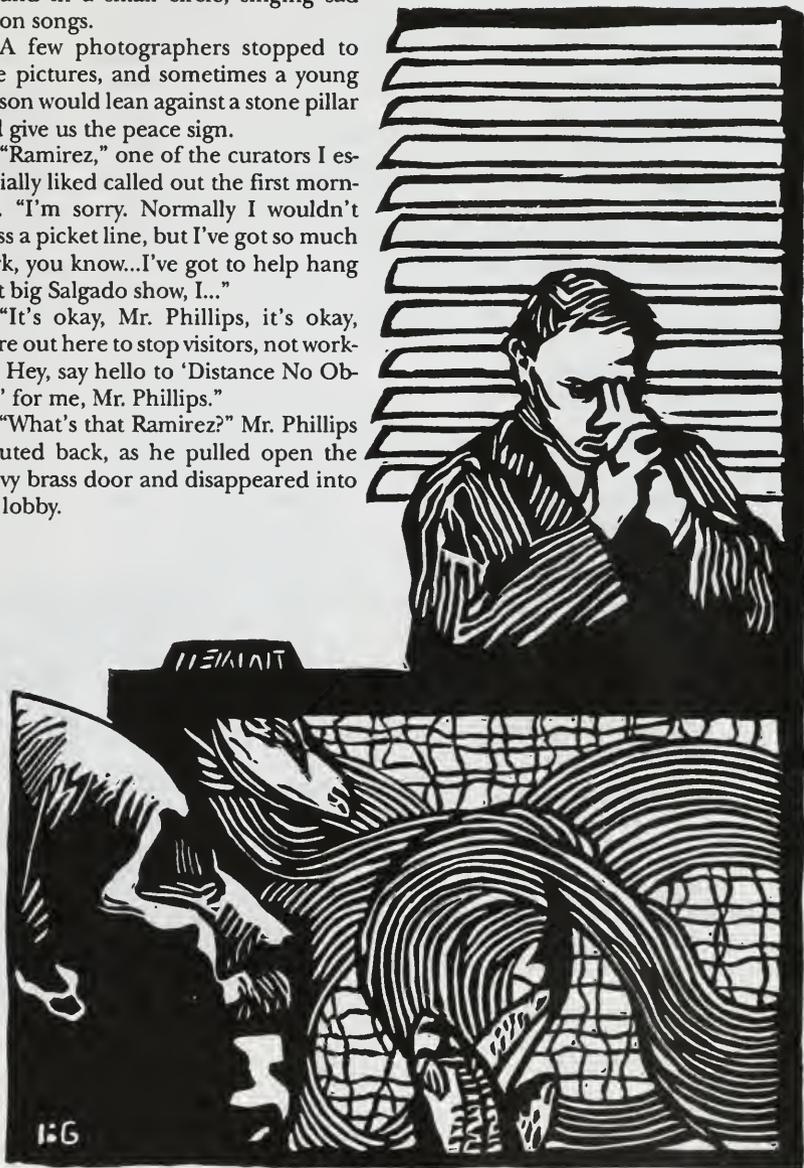
"What's that Ramirez?" Mr. Phillips shouted back, as he pulled open the heavy brass door and disappeared into the lobby.

The pale aqua clock on the wall of the employment office struck five, and as the clerk stood up, he closed the file in front of him and straightened his glasses with both hands. "Thank you for coming in, Mr. Ramirez. We'll be sure to call if the fish market wants an interview."

Lopo Ramirez also stood up and held out his hand to shake the clerk's. The clerk did not notice as he turned from his desk to switch off the lights.

— Gloria Frym

*Gloria Frym's new book is How I Learned (Coffee House Press)*





GRAPHIC: RAFAL OLBINSKI

## THE MANAGEMENT

They contrive havoc in the shipyard, every day,  
 We're just out here rolling, setting up  
 Three rounds and a sound.  
 Now they make us make our brothers  
 Step down, and down again.  
 Sonny Hammett from Fayette County:  
 You left a grieving widow, Judith  
 Tried to stop you.  
 You found Misters Abbott and Gabelt  
 In the Quality Control Office and  
 Punched a sightless, bloodshot eye  
 In their foreheads.

Just like Roger the Dodger used to say:  
 They're cooking up new recipes.  
 Some of you will float to the top  
 And some, like sludge, drift to the bottom.  
 And some will just evaporate  
 Carried off by the steam rising up  
 From the bowels of the bank.  
 Uncooperative radical particle I  
 Stick to my guns like glue.  
 Defensive readiness is at a very high premium.  
 If only they had marked us all  
 Not just one  
 We could play defense as a team  
 And all of us would be captains.

—Blair Ewing

## FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH FINAL

These seem papers  
 singed by fire  
 – documents left scattered  
 in a hectic retreat of  
 battalion headquarters  
 or the abandoned records  
 of an overthrown regime

Fear and pain  
 shimmer over the disorganized pages  
 hover above the words scratched along the slots  
 lined onto the white surface

And rage  
 flares in the ink  
 deposited frantically here  
 It is anger that matches my own  
 knuckle to knuckle  
 as I read the words  
 as my red pen  
 descends toward its victims  
 toward what is written  
 Once more  
 I have failed  
 to convince, to inform  
 to teach

So I hold their fury  
 stacks of it  
 sheets of it  
 and press down on theirs  
 with my own

How did literature  
 become so filled  
 with hate?

*Document your sources correctly*  
 the red nib admonishes  
*You must provide examples*  
 to show what you mean

The blue paragraphs  
 howl  
**WE DID NOT ASK TO DO THIS**

No one is listening

—Tom Wayman



PHOTO: D.S. BLACK

## ON REARING HIS YOUNG

Content with becoming unlike  
the sea, he denies the past  
and dust, puts in  
long hours in an office. Yet

here, or nowhere, there are laws  
chisels convinced stone of  
and the storied mist,  
beard of ancestor and beast. And what

but *Where is Once or When?*  
would he expect them to demand  
had they not as children known  
whose fallen hand was raising them?

– Harry Brody



PHOTO: D.S. BLACK

## JOB APPLICATION

I'd like to apply for a job.  
Yes, the job you have available;  
my manner is most saleable  
and I hope you'll find me suitable  
for \$5.15 an hour.

I really have the skills, you see,  
I've been to university  
and though I studied history  
I've found my heart to truly be  
in men's ties and socks/glass figurines/the discount shoe industry.

What makes me think I'd be good for this job?

um, I love working with people.  
...and I *love* riding the subway an hour and a half each way;  
let's see, add those hours to my day  
and I'll be making a whopping \$3.75 an hour!

oh, no – sir – I *do* want the job. Can't you tell by my suit?  
No, actually, I don't own a dress;  
I don't feel comfortable, I confess.  
But hell,  
for \$5.15 an hour  
I'll endeavor to wear some colors other than black–

um, I enjoy working with the public, and I'm good with money...

Oh yes, you're right  
*all* us girls are good with money –  
yes, that's charming, yes, how funny.  
You know, I like a good work atmosphere  
where the boss says whatever he wants  
and the rest of us just listen...  
I'm a very fast learner  
and I promise that if you give me this job  
I'll be the perfect subhuman  
and never let my contempt shine in my worshipping eyes!

I love working with people,  
and let's see – what else was I going to tell you?

No, I don't expect vacation pay  
and yes, I'm available every day  
and though I don't like the evil way  
you're looking at me, I've got rent to pay.  
And yes, I can start on Saturday.

– © Meryn Cadell 1991  
from the Sire/Reprise album ANGEL FOOD FOR THOUGHT

# CONFESSIONS OF AN ATHEIST PRIEST

**S**oon after I began training as a psychotherapist, I knew that I was going to have a major problem with Faith. I hoped that these doubts would fade, that my initial cynical mistrust of what seemed like self-serving, made-up gibberish would soon be challenged by the irrefutable (or at least plausible) evidence of Science and direct experience. Alas, it only got worse as I went along.

Upon close examination the bizarre, competing theories of psychotherapy turned out to be even cheesier than they looked from a distance. The empirical data was just as damning; no reputable researcher has ever managed to document much significant benefit from head-shrinking. And my personal experience, as a properly trained and well-respected therapist, only confirmed my initial impression that the vast majority of psychotherapy is a waste of time, equally likely to harm as to help.

Back when I'd first considered the Profession it seemed uniquely attractive. Sitting at my desk at my clerical job, which I'd held for nearly three years at that point (a "personal best" in my oc-

cupational history), I'd had plenty of time to contemplate the meaningless quality of most Work, and especially of my particular work. In fact, that was the period of my life when I first consciously embraced my Bad Attitude. Previously I'd simply avoided and ignored the phenomenon of Work as much as I could in a naive, unthinking way, without ever truly coming to grips with it.

There were a number of purely pragmatic and practical advantages to Becoming a Psychotherapist. Qualifying for The Profession required (at least) four years of graduate school, or from my perspective, that much more heavily subsidized prolonged adolescence and absence from the full-time workforce. Thus, craftily, I committed to ending my career of perpetual postponement by taking just one, last half-decade detour. For me, at least, School was fun as well as meaningful, in stark contrast to my current situation which was neither.

It was also prestigious, and would delight my bourgeois relatives (who found my career up to then somewhat disappointing) and piss the hell out of my boss, to say nothing of boosting my own self-esteem as I ascended from lowly clerk to haughty, intellectual "professional."

Finally, while I was still far from sharing the consumerist aspirations of the vast majority of my peers, I was beginning to feel the allure of a comfortable, middle-class existence. If I absolutely had to work to support myself I might as well have a cushy job that, at its basic level, amounted to sitting around and talking to people and telling them how to run their lives better. Frankly, I felt I had some natural talents in this direction.

I still think I do, but I've given up on the notion of shrinking heads for a living. I've also surrendered to the painfully obvious fact that Psychotherapy is most certainly no "Science" (though it

may qualify as an "Art") and is a sad species of Profession, offering little of value in return for its amazingly steep fees. Overall I would judge it as valid, helpful and consistent a practice as the fortune-telling done by the brujas who run little botanicas in marginal urban neighborhoods across the U.S.: the customers are satisfied and keep coming back, but it's difficult for the rest of us to detect any true benefits from these questionable ministrations.

Declining health due to AIDS gave me a good excuse to retire from the field after only a few years as a processional psychotherapist. In fact, counseling is an easy profession for a fatigue-disabled person (after all, you get to sit the whole time and can limit your client load to match your energy level); but I had no stomach for it. If my time were limited, as it pretty much seems to be, did I really want to spend my precious hours listening to people whine and rationalize about why they had to live their lives exactly as they were, despite how miserable it was making them?

Viewed from that cold, harsh perspective, the answer was clearly "no," and so I retired, not quite seven years after I'd started.

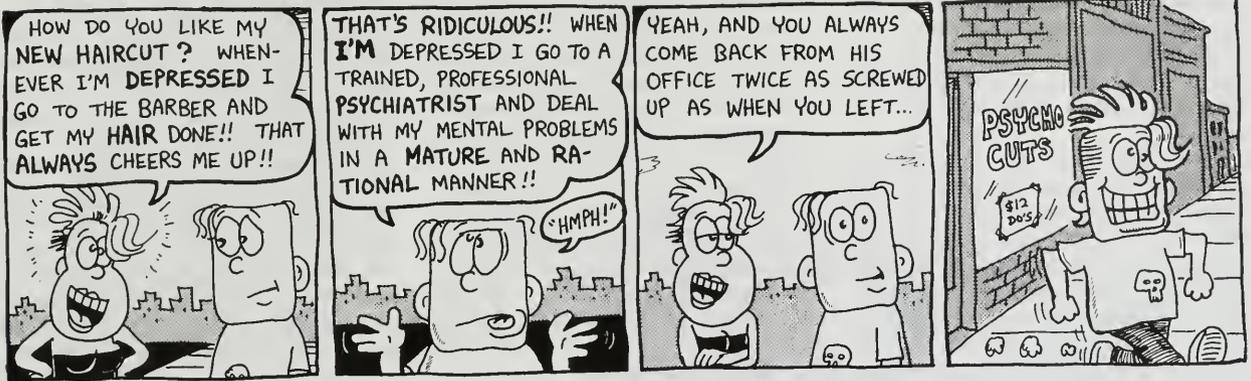
## INITIATION

Reagan was just beginning his second term (1984) when I entered graduate school. I was one of a cohort of seven neophytes being initiated into the Counseling Psychology program, a subgroup of the department's crop of 30 or so first-year graduate students. About a dozen or so more were students in Clinical Psychology – the differences between "Counseling" and "Clinical" Psychology were endlessly debated but are, for all intents and purposes, non-existent, having more to do with academic turf division than anything else. The remaining Psych grad students

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**Anything that didn't drive the patients to suicide or litigation was acceptable. The "standard of care" was so low that just about anyone not actively hallucinating can meet it.**

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GRAPHIC: ACE BACKWORDS

were in the “Experimental” (i.e., non-clinical, research oriented) program.

But Experimental, Counseling or Clinical, we were all selected for our promise as academics and researchers, rather than for clinical skills potential and this showed. It was well-known that expressing any interest in the professional practice of psychotherapy was the kiss of death as far as getting accepted into programs like ours at large, cheap state universities, which (mostly) supported you while providing training as a clinician. There are also urban professional schools, but these are upscale private institutions along the lines of law and business schools, charging top dollar in return for the prospect of easy entry into profitable guild, providing “meaningful” work.

Few of us were really interested in becoming academics or researchers and we mostly had our hearts set on Becoming Therapists, but we were all savvy enough to figure on concealing this for the next four years.

In line with this largely inaccurate assumption that we were all primarily motivated as researchers, the bulk of our classwork focused on statistics and a review of the relevant body of research on clinical psychology, rather than on clinical skills – not, but the way, that these can really be taught, but it was distressing to see them dismissed so easily. The statistics were boring. The research was horrifying in its revelation of psychotherapy’s emptiness, at least as regards empirical evidence. The clinical skills stuff, when we finally got around to it, was fun but worrisome.

We began by doing role plays, acting out the part of shrinker and shrinkee and practicing the basic therapeutic

techniques: simple reflective statements and reframings (“It sounds like you feel that your boyfriend is a psychotic, abusive creep and you’re wondering what you should do about it.”) It was spooky how much shallow interactions sounded like “real” psychotherapy.

Then, in our second semester, we graduated to working on live clients, depressed freshmen who’d reported to the university counseling center and been turned over to us as guinea pigs. Therapy is one of those things that can only be learned by doing. Sessions were taped and presumably reviewed by supervisors, though in practice (as I learned as a fourth year student, when I provided such supervision to the fresh crop of neophytes) this uninteresting chore was often sloughed over; it was enough that you knew that someone **COULD** be listening to your efforts.

As we progressed, we received more advanced clients, seriously flipped-out seniors instead of just homesick freshmen. You were expected to justify all interventions by one of the half-dozen or so generally accepted competing theories of therapy (e.g. psychoanalytic, humanistic, or rational-emotive [isn’t that an oxymoron?] approaches), but it really didn’t matter too much which you used. Anything that didn’t drive the patients to suicide or litigation was acceptable.

In our later years, we did internships at local mental health centers and agencies. If you were a good finangler or kissed the right butts, you could get one that actually paid money. Otherwise you had to do unpaid therapy as part of paying your dues and logging your hours. There was no serious attempt to

evaluate the effectiveness of your work, as the standards of practice were broad and lenient. Only the most blatantly and monumentally incompetent therapists ever had any trouble getting by—and even those ended up getting their degrees (and, subsequently, jobs) without too much trouble. The “standard of care” is so low that just about anyone not actively hallucinating can meet it.

## THE LAW OF INVERSE EFFORT

An ironic thing about head-shrinking, a phenomenon that illustrates its paradoxical nature, is that the more dangerous, useful and necessary your work, the less it pays and the less training it requires. Most suicide prevention hotlines are staffed by unpaid volunteers. Looking after dangerously psychotic people in a halfway house requires only a high school diploma and pays little above minimum wage. Doing essentially the same work in a high-security private psych hospital (like the multitudinous Barclay’s chain) usually requires a 2-year degree, but pays like a medium-scale union job. Many of these “Psych Techs” are on exactly the same anti-hallucination meds as their “clients” (but, presumably, are responding more effectively to them).

Doing field work to prevent child abuse, ostensibly one of our nation’s sacred duties and highest priorities, is poorly paid and often acutely dangerous. Child protection workers in rural areas have a high mortality rate because of trigger-happy backwoods molesters with no patience for the Law’s endless quibbles about age of consent and degrees of consanguinity. Often counselors’

only training is an advanced home ec or "mental hygiene" class in high school; accordingly, the job tends to pay small town librarian's wages, maybe \$15,000 per year. But a dozen years down the road, counseling the wounded "Inner Child" that (presumably results) from such early abuse easily pays \$100 an hour.

A shrink who focuses on traditional psychotherapy (i.e. hour-long weekly meeting for perhaps many years [or even decades] with high-functioning, well-paid but slightly neurotic yuppies) can hope to earn close to a hundred thousand dollars with a decent practice. To do this safe and well-paid work requires, oddly, several years' training and numerous degrees, licenses, and credentials.

This rule of inverse effort holds across the board in the The Profession with logarithmic consistency. An agency therapist, like the staff at a Counseling Center, gets the stability of a regular wage and benefits but earns half of what s/he'd make with a good practice. Top-line therapists can hold lucrative training seminars, or even found new theoretical schools of psychotherapy. This is well-paid, prestigious and rewarding work; it also removes you from direct contact with those whiny, demanding clients.

## THE HELPING VAMPIRES

There are three things that keep Psychotherapy from becoming a worthwhile profession. They are: the pseudo-scientific system of training; the potential shrinks who present themselves for this training; and the clients who indiscriminately patronize these "helpers" who seem mostly to help themselves.

The ability to read someone's vibes, to detect phoniness and the lurking, evil glint of psychotic madness, is to some extent an inborn skill. You got it or you don't; and as with learning to draw or sculpt or play music, natural abilities can be enhanced (or disfigured) but not created out of nothing. Contemporary psychology, determined as it is to assert its full status as a Science rather than a mere Art, refuses to acknowledge this. Thus it shuns its proper – and do-able – task of weeding out the deadheads and fine-tuning the naturals, instead opting to teach all and sundry a rigid and largely ineffective psychometric technology.

A true Art of psychotherapy would put much more emphasis by selection of both shrinks and shrinkees, use a more pragmatic and practical teaching approach, and critically evaluate results strictly on the basis of clinical effectiveness. Currently most therapists are credentialed on the basis of academic achievement (e.g. passing classes, writing these, etc.) and evaluated just once in their careers – at licensing time – by their score on a written test. Existing technology would permit performance-based testing, but the gatekeepers of The Profession are painfully aware that the majority of its established, credentialed, high-ranking practitioners could not pass such an exam.

Then there is the question of who wants to become a shrink, and why. I described my own frankly self-interested motives above. They may seem mercenary or tangential, but people whose primary drive is to Help are usually lousy therapists, ranging from merely ineffectual to actively destructive. I call them the "Helping Vampires." They long to rescue the world, to bond with the confused and downtrodden, to straighten out the disordered lives of their hapless clients by their own sage advice and moral vigor. Crazy often really cotton to them, which sometimes gives them a deceptive aura of competence; but they mostly exacerbate their helpee's symptoms until they blow up, at which point the Helping Vampire dumps them on a competent colleague or into whatever safety net offers itself.

Finally, there are the clients. Some are people in crisis, briefly disoriented and wanting help to get back on an even keel but basically sound. Motivated and competent, they are easy to work with, quickly identify and resolve the issues that brought them to therapy, and move on.

Most clients, however, are chronically afflicted long-term neurotics who only want an hour to complain and carp without fear of contradiction. They will pay for this; most of them have to, as their friends certainly won't listen to this stuff for free. They seem to have no center, let alone any central issues, and are content to stay "In Therapy" indefinitely.

Thus these chronics and lifers naturally tend to dominate the market by lingering in it forever, while the acute-crisis short-termers pass swiftly through it. Mediocre therapists soon learn to

cultivate clients who can be sold on endless re-living of early experiences and Healing the Inner Child.

Sigmund Freud, the great Viennese inventor of "the talking cure," would be horrified by contemporary professional psychology as practiced in the U.S. Even in the '30s, he damned the easy-minded blandness of American psychiatry.

But contemporary psychoanalysts, the direct descendants of Freud, are just as kooky; what's more, they're generally politically conservative, impossibly rigid and frankly exploitative. True psychoanalysis requires *at least* five years of meeting three times a week. It could take more if you express too much "resistance." To be admitted to the official psychoanalytic society, you must have successfully completed analysis with someone who was shrunk himself in direct link back to Freud himself, as if this conferred some spiritual or mystical immunity upon the shrinkee.

If this requirement is consciously based upon the "touch of Peter" (whereby each new pope is sworn in by a cardinal who was sworn in by a pope, etc., in a direct line back to St. Peter, the founder of the Vatican's authority), it is horrifyingly reactionary. And if it's not, you have to wonder how such insightful introspectors as the successors to Freud could have overlooked the similarity. In any case, such requirements reflect superstitious and magical thinking admixed with a blatant self-interest.

## GET A LIFE

The U.S. has more shrinks per capita (depending on how you define the term: I'm counting everyone who claims to provide "counseling") than any other country. Psychotherapy is far less common in Europe, even less popular in Latin America, and almost unheard of in Africa and Asia.

Thus, everywhere outside of North America and Western Europe, the role of "counselor" is taken by family or spiritual advisors, paid or otherwise. North America needs more shrinks because it has so much less emotional infrastructure.

Lacking meaningful relationships with those around them, many people vainly seek attachment and identity in unusual and rather unpromising places. Thus churches, cults and counselors flourish. Just as much of our processed, packaged supermarket food is so drained of genuine nutritive value as it

.. ENCORE UN FUTUR  
INADAPTÉ SOCIAL!

## ANOTHER FUTURE MISFIT



GRAPHIC: JF BATALIER

travels from its source to the market that it needs to have vitamins and minerals re-added, so are our lives drained of meaning by our processing until many are driven to seek re-injections of Meaning via Therapy.

According to the research done by scientists attempting to verify the benefits of psychotherapy, it is the least cost-efficient of all possible alternatives. Drugs are cheaper (and work faster). Daily exercise regulates the mood better than the "talking cure" (and treats "excess" weight more efficiently than any professional weight-loss program). Taking up a hobby, getting a new sex partner, changing jobs: all of these are far more likely to improve your quality of life in less time and at lower cost than it takes to have your head shrunk.

Psychotherapy makes the most sense for someone in crisis or transition. By definition, "crisis" can only last so long, and even "transition" is something that should occur within a few months. Anyone who has been "in therapy" for years should frankly ask themselves what they have gotten in return for the hundreds of hours of talking and the thousands of dollars spent.

Good therapy should produce change. Yet most clients are actually seeking to avoid change, to continue

living the way they are but to somehow stop hurting. Their jobs drive them crazy, so they consider taking Prozac or talking with you for an hour every week. But the best thing they could do, probably, is change jobs. This is usually one of the last things they're willing to consider. Instead, they want a quick fix that allows them to change as little as possible.

This is even more obvious when "treating" the number-one psychotherapeutic complaint: "Bad" relationships or dysfunctional families. Is your partner: addicted, abusive, asexual, indifferent, cruel, neglectful, insensitive, stupid, lazy, evil, dishonest, and/or no fun to be with? Well, then, leave the bum! Is that so difficult to figure out? Should conveying that really take more than a few sessions? But, but, but! they will stammer, and go on to explain why this isn't "possible".

Their problem is a dysfunctional relationship. Yet instead of refusing to participate in it, they seek you out for another lopsided, dysfunctional relationship of a different sort. By piling one unbalanced relationship upon another, they hope to reach equilibrium. And that's exactly what they get, the perpetuation of a poor compromise that makes them miserable.

Why can't people just talk (for free) to their friends and partners? Because that is exactly what they seek to avoid. By restricting these revelations to a hired stranger one further alienates them, moves them away from their central issues. The rising popularity of long-term psychotherapy is a symptom of declining emotional stability and increasing alienation. Like TV, it's a cure that makes the illness worse.

If families spent less time silently glued to their televisions, they might be able to support one another emotionally without sub-contracting this chore to outsiders. If people lived in genuine groupings based on common interests, instead of being isolated in "nuclear" families by accident of birth, they could avoid much of the pain currently expressed, quietly, in the private chambers of psychotherapists.

And, finally and most importantly, if people led meaningful lives in the first place instead of being yoked to pointless and painful careers performing worthless labor, perhaps they wouldn't suffer so much. As it stands, this pain merely justifies one more mostly meaningless profession: psychotherapy

— Kwazee Wabbitt

# PUBLIC EDUCATION: REMAKING A PUBLIC

**P**ublic schooling has become the current line of defense against dismantling the public sphere. Defending public school as we know it requires re-legitimizing the notion of a public good to be provided or at least guaranteed by the state. The past decade of Reaganism enshrined privatization, which shrank the entitlements and rights associated with the public sphere. Besides schools, what else does the public have anymore except some poorly tended parks, a few cash-starved museums and libraries, and rapidly deteriorating roads, rails and bridges? If the public schools were eliminated, the state's functions on behalf of the public would be reduced to taxation, repression and subsidizing business.

No one can defend public education without serious qualification, but such a defense must include an unqualified endorsement of the *public*. Public life is the arena in which we verify truth, share experiences, and fully develop our humanity as social beings. Public life is also a prerequisite for democracy. For all its flaws and mystifications, what is democracy if not a public process of politics and decision-making? A social institution, like school, that is self-consciously public and subject to political/popular control, however compromised, is important to a radical agenda that hopes to extend democratic social control over the whole of public life.

But instead of pouring our efforts into defending the few public institutions that still exist, we have to re-create and re-animate a public life that goes considerably beyond existing institutions. Our goal should not be simply to reclaim public education, but to establish a new way of life in which public

control over social matters (including "economic" ones) is understood as a political process subject to democratic norms (norms which are themselves determined by social processes). To do this we need to educate people to self-confidently participate. Public education's role looms large, not because specific curricula lead to specific results, but because school is where we most intensively interact with and learn about others outside of the family, neighborhood or work. Public schools, at their best, bring together people of widely different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and socialize them to participate in cooperative activities, develop respect for others, and so on. The public schools *could be* the best arena for us to learn what public life is about, and how we can participate in it.

It is easy to criticize schools as institutions of social control which create unthinking zombies that will become the pliable workers and consumers of the future. But most of us who might make such a glib critique are living examples of the porous nature of schooling's social control agenda. For instance, almost everything of value that I learned in school resulted from social interactions and experiences that took place in spite of the twisted logic of the school system. Learning, for better or worse, goes on everywhere, not just at school. Television has at least as much influence as schooling in shaping our ideas about the world and ourselves and our sense of what's possible. Even

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**Public schools could be the best arena for us to learn what public life is about, and how we can participate in it.**

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if zealous right-wing Christians took over the public schools and instituted their narrow, authoritarian curriculum, there is no guarantee that it would reliably produce the kind of obedient, God-fearing, hard-working citizens they dream about. Similarly, a more left-leaning school curriculum may not predictably produce critical, self-motivated, responsible citizens ready to assert themselves as part of a wider public life.

## **AN INTEGRATED IMAGINATION?**

Curriculum is not the most important educational issue. Rather, it is the people we meet, the relationships we establish, and whether or not we are encouraged to think for ourselves and to believe our own experiences, that finally have the greatest influence on what kind of people we are when we emerge from our education. Education's role in shaping our imagination is one compelling reason for school integration. Racial tension encourages even neo-liberals to see school desegregation as an ameliorative policy, although their "solution" of busing led to more social conflict, reactionary backlash and white flight than it led to racially balanced schools.

Racial integration in public schools is a necessary foundation for a racially integrated public life. In spite of spasms of ethnic "cleansing" and chronic world-wide racism, a vibrant, ever-evolving, cross-pollinating multiculturalism is spreading across the globe, gradually becoming the new dominant culture. Some of the best things about living in San Francisco, New York, or other big cities are the astounding possibilities for cross-cultural experience. Unfortunately these possibilities are most often limited to our role as consumers. You can breakfast Chinese Dim Sum, tour a Modern Art Exhibit, lunch Italian, check out Latino murals in the afternoon, shop New Age White Professional Thrift Store, dine Thai or Indian,

and dance the night away at a rap club, salsa disco, white kid rock club, whatever, and top it off at an Irish bar or a Salvadoran Taqueria. But it is considerably more rare to hang out at your white friend's house, then head over to Bayview to your black friend's house, and then to Chinatown and see your friends there, then everyone heads over to the Hispanic Mission District, and so on.

Luckily there are plenty of pockets of genuine cross-cultural interest and respect in big cities, which are (hopefully) sources of cultural dynamism and new thinking. Developing a respect and appreciation for other cultures may even help stem the erosion of cultural diversity caused by public education and market pressure to "Americanize." (While environmentalists have been decrying shrinking biodiversity, an equally serious problem for human society is shrinking cultural diversity, with a majority of known languages falling into disuse, and astonishing reservoirs of knowledge disappearing as the inexorable march of "progress" squashes remaining pockets of indigenous culture worldwide. This process continues independent of the expanding multicultural mass culture mentioned above.) Accommodating different cultures in public schools counters the push to embrace monocultural white-bread values, even if in adapting to a multi-ethnic society each individual culture begins to change too. Moreover, multicultural education accurately reflects the *real* "new world order," which will no longer have the U.S. and European culture as its imperial standard. In adapting to a multi-polar, multi-ethnic world, it's crucial to have the educational opportunities and intensity of social experience available in a city like San Francisco.

In 1993, though, segregated and unequal public education is the norm throughout the United States. The attempt to address a deeply racist, predominantly segregated society by integrating public schools (ignoring the basic question of wealth/investment, etc.) has often led to more open-mindedness and less overt racism. But that apparent achievement by "progressive forces" has proven to be a very limited – even empty – victory. School desegregation has been isolated and outflanked by white flight, privatization and anti-tax revolts (like the 1978 California Proposition 13). Compare almost any white suburban school to its non-white urban counterpart and the

## THIS MODERN WORLD by TOM TOMORROW

SOME PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS SHOULD BE **PRIVATIZED** AND RUN WITH THE **FREE-MARKET EFFICIENCY OF OUR MAJOR CORPORATIONS...** WHICH LEADS US TO WONDER: WOULD THIS MEAN THAT SCHOOL PRINCIPALS COULD REWARD THEMSELVES WITH MULTI-MILLION DOLLAR **BONUSES** REGARDLESS OF PERFORMANCE?

--AND SO, I'M PROUD TO PRESENT THE **TWO GRADUATING MEMBERS** OF THE CLASS OF '93...



WOULD CORPORATE RAIDERS TAKE OVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN **LEVERAGED BUYOUTS**-- AND THEN SELL OFF THE SCHOOLS' **ASSETS** TO PAY OFF THE DEBTS INCURRED?

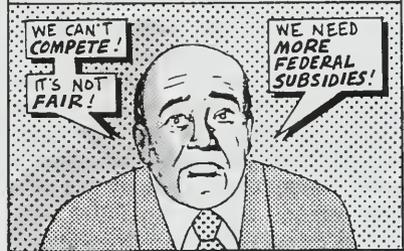
GOOD NEWS--WE JUST SOLD THE FIFTH GRADE CLASS TO **BECHTEL!**



IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE PROFITS, WOULD THE WASTEFUL EXTRAVAGANCE OF **LIVE TEACHERS** BE ELIMINATED--IN FAVOR OF A MORE COST-EFFICIENT **AUTOMATED** INSTRUCTIONAL METHOD?



AND...WOULD THESE PRIVATIZED FREE-MARKET SCHOOLS RESPOND TO INEVITABLE FOREIGN COMPETITION IN THE TRADITIONAL MANNER OF AMERICAN BUSINESS... BY **WHINING AND BEGGING** FOR GOVERNMENT HANDOUTS?



results are clear. Overall education spending has gone up, but the gap between rich and poor is wider than ever. Many poor districts are spending less now than they were a decade ago. Rich school districts, which tax their local property at rates far below poverty stricken areas, spend as much as five to eight times as much as nearby poor districts. The result is sharp, self-perpetuating racial and class divisions.

### UNPACKING EQUALITY

Racial integration remains an important goal for public schools. But it is patently absurd to expect integrated public schools alone to overcome this society's deeply entrenched institutional and personal racism. School integration falls even farther short of the mark when the goal is "equality." What is the "equal education" integrated schools are supposed to deliver? Shall we measure equality of opportunity or equality of results? How do you measure equality of opportunity? In dollars per pupil? By holding everyone accountable to some national standards for spending, facilities, and classroom size? By evaluating teachers and determining teacher/student ratios? Certainly equal education mandates national standards

regarding equalized resource allocation.

But even if resource distribution were equalized, how could we know that it led to equality? Can test results help us assess equal education? One of my earliest lessons in critical thinking came in the 10th grade when we engaged in a lengthy analysis of the stupidity of grades and tests as meaningful measurements of anything. Grades are obviously highly subjective, and after a brief analysis even the most "objective" test turns out to be laden with racial and class biases that taint any results it may provide.

Does equal education mean giving specific cultural communities control over curriculum and assessment? Or does "equality" imply instead that specific cultures should be subsumed within the larger "community," and everyone evaluated on some "objective" national norms? If so, what constitutes the dominant cultural norm, and what makes us so sure it is sufficiently fixed that we can evaluate whether or not people have been adequately trained to meet it?

Is there some new way of understanding and appreciating the role of education, independent of measurable

GRAPHIC: TOM TOMORROW

results? If we can recreate an animated public life, the participation of students and young adults may be a better gauge of good education than any test results.

"Equality," whether with respect to educational opportunity or outcome, or even citizenship, is one of the ambiguous concepts that undergird our similarly vague notions of "democracy." Democracy remains an all-purpose, utterly malleable expression that encompasses radical egalitarianism, middle-class meritocracy, and the violent, oligarchical class- and race-divided society in which we are allowed an occasional vote for pre-selected candidates, representing minor differences in emphasis rather than true political alternatives. The concept of democracy is elastic enough to accommodate even the brutal liquidation of minorities in foreign lands under the auspices of U.S. intelligence agencies promoting "majority rule." Whatever definition of "equality" or "democracy" one might choose to embrace, there will surely be several dozen others embraced just as passionately.

If there are no objective standards for evaluating educational success or failure, what are the subjective standards and whose interests do they represent? When you hear someone addressing the failure of education,

what is their vision of success and what social values does that vision embody? How do such educational goals affect democracy? How does a democratic society shape its public sphere without being coercive? In other words, what are the limits of individual freedom in a real democracy?

## THE MIND ITSELF

From its Jeffersonian roots in the one-room schoolhouse of mid-19th century rural America to its expansion into assimilation factories during the great waves of immigration at the turn of the last century, public schooling has always been an arena of conflicting social interests. The U.S. ruling class feared generalized literacy for many generations, and the fight for public education was a popular, democratizing opposition to those interests. But even in its most progressive forms, education's structure kept it well within the limits of capitalist society.

In fact, for most of this century, mandatory public schooling primarily served to create useful workers at public expense to be exploited in the marketplace for private gain. Of course, the educators assumed they were serving society at large and generally gave little thought to how they were directly filling the needs of business. Now the econ-

omy has become increasingly automated and the demand for (fewer) new workers with different skills has grown.

An equally important purpose of education is pacification. Keep the kids unwaged and safely within institutions as long as possible. Adapt them to passive, isolated lives of alienated consumption at best, and if they are well-connected or hard-working, give them a repetitive, meaningless job. For the select minority, upscale private schools lead to expensive private universities and a slot in the policy- and profit-making professions.

In the new world market, the proletarianizing and pacifying model of school and work no longer holds much promise. In the old economic model, what workers thought about was irrelevant so long as they did their jobs and didn't cause trouble. Most of them "failed" at school in any case. With the drastic cheapening of manual and manufacturing labor in the expanding world market, reform rhetoric stresses that new, supposedly more intelligent workers are needed to compete successfully.

Either congealed as computerized data or as human capital, thinking itself is now a necessary prerequisite for capital accumulation, as well as something to be accumulated. Economic competi-

## COMPETENT FOR WHAT?

*Australia is currently experiencing a drive to reform their educational system along the lines pioneered by the Thatcher Government in Britain. The new policies being developed promote vocational competence over academic knowledge, with "less emphasis on students as self-determining subjects, more on producing the students that employers want." These reforms have the support of both Labor (the ACTU [Australia Central Trades Union, equivalent to the U.S. AFL-CIO] and Business (the Business Council of Australia), a fact that has contributed to their momentum and bi-partisan acceptance. In this excerpted version of his article from *Arena Magazine*, Simon Marginson takes a critical look at Australia's push for competency-based reform in education.]*

Competency is the new buzzword in education. Competency is not about book

learning or knowledge per se, but about what people can do in the workplace. Work-related competence tends towards a behaviorist approach, in which the outcomes of education are defined in terms of transparent, observable, and measurable qualities of an individual. In turn, this narrows the educational program and the normal curriculum becomes closed to all but vocational objectives. Other objectives become exceptional and must be fought for every time. Most important, the outer limits of what students, and to some extent workers, are able to achieve are set by the imagination and generosity of the designers of the competency measurement.

An Australian Government Committee set up to develop educational/vocational "generic competencies" has defined seven "Key Competency Strands" as follows:

- Collecting, analysing and organizing ideas and information;
- Expressing ideas and information;
- Planning and organizing activities;
- Working with others and in teams;

- Using mathematical ideas and techniques;
- Solving problems;
- Using technology.

The competencies are free of context and content. The idea is that the generic competencies are the same in all fields of education and work — that it should be possible to measure, say, problem-solving skills in physics and electrical engineering so as to render them equivalent to problem solving in studying Indonesian or sculpture. 'Skills' are to be homogenized and socialized; the centers of power remain heterogenous, uneven and private.

Measured generic competencies would enable employers to decide which future workers will be suitably flexible, malleable, and transferrable — the ideal subjects for management. Many employers distrust educational credentials as selection criteria, and with good reason: academic training as such does not constitute preparation for work.

In economic debate, the case for competency-based reform is grounded in the



tiveness, we are told, now depends on the expansion of "knowledge work" and the creation of more flexible "knowledge workers." Therefore, education reform must colonize the mind in new ways. Education reformers seek a new style of schooling that will turn more human thinking into work, which will insure further capital accumulation (the real measurement of "health" in our society). For this project to succeed,

students must – at a higher level and more comprehensively than before – accept their role as trainees in search of scarce niches in the projects of transnational capital.

The extension of capitalist discipline from the muscle to the brain has been underway for decades in the restructuring of work and leisure and the amazing expansion of merchandising and mass media (this is sometimes re-

ferred to theoretically as the change from "the formal" to "the real" domination of capital). To ensure its control of our imaginations, modern capitalism requires more than the threat of unemployment or even homelessness. We must be sold on active and enthusiastic participation. Everyone must work for a "healthy" economy! We must do a good job! The problem for capitalist education planners is producing enthusiastic workers with extremely narrow competence.

President Clinton promises great reforms in education to bolster U.S. competitiveness in the world market. Robert Reich, his Secretary of Labor, wrote recently: "There is no simple way to enlarge upon the number of Americans eligible for the high-wage jobs of the future. More money for education and training is necessary, but is hardly sufficient. The money...must be focused on building two key capacities in the workforce: first, the ability to engage in lifelong learning, and second, the opportunity to engage in it on the job. The most important intellectual (and economic) asset which a new entrant into the workforce can possess is the knowledge of how to learn." [*S.F. Chronicle* Dec. 5, 1992]

Clinton, firmly within the mainstream of the ruling class in his alle-

now familiar argument about the need for international competitiveness. It is naively assumed that if workers' competencies are increased, then their productivity will rise automatically, along with their contribution to wealth creation and measured economic growth. Economic productivity is a function of jobs, rather than the attributes of people, and there is plenty of evidence that existing skills are under-used in the workplace.

The ACTU also sees competency reform as the basis for a more egalitarian and meritocratic system of work organization and selection, objectives of little interest to employers. Competency measurement is seen as a way of overcoming the old divisions of power and status in which educational advantage was always coupled to social advantage. The ACTU says that competency reform will mean that unions will no longer act for their membership according to a model of collective struggle. Rather, they will provide 'professional development assistance and career advice' for individual members. ...

However, these 'happy' outcomes depend on the willingness of the employers to fully utilize workers' competencies and to pay them accordingly. There is no guarantee of this. Further, a more meritocratic system can only be created if competency reform is extended to the regulation of university entrance and university credentialing, including full recognition of work experience as the basis for entry into formal education. These changes are unlikely to be achieved, and the old divisions of power and status will remain as the distinction between the academically trained and the competency trained.

Competency-based training is a principal example of what Foucault has called 'technologies of the social' - systems of regulation that are designed at one and the same time to mold individuals and to control the relationship of social groups. Formal educational institutions perform certain social functions that have become indispensable to modern production and governance. Education is where subjectivities are formed. The reorganization of

education to produce competence is the latest and most effective of a long line of policies designed to ensure that the kind of people produced in education are centered on work.

What is at stake today is work of a particular kind. Controlled flexibility is seen as the key to industrial performance. Competency-based reform has its sights on the modernized, universal, polyvalent worker whose desire for autonomy and control is redefined as the desire for an individual career, based on a history of compliance and programmed responses. ...

Of course for many trainees in competency there will be no jobs to be had, multiskilled or not. Here the chameleon-like education system plays other, equally important roles. Education delays entry into an over-stocked labor market while transferring the responsibility for unemployment, poverty and failure from government and employers to teachers, individual students and their families.

—Arena Magazine, Box 18 P.O. North Carlton, Victoria, Australia 3054



giance to the market as the source of human improvement, sold educational reform as Governor of Arkansas by pitching it as the basis for economic renewal. "...the plain evidence in every state in this country is that you must have a higher threshold of people with college degrees if you want low unemployment—not because most of the new jobs in the economy will require college degrees; most of 'em won't. But because most of them will be created by entrepreneurs who have that kind of education." [American Educator, Fall 1992]

But what about the majority who will be forced into the bottom tier of our 2-tiered society, left to fight for those jobs that "don't require college degrees"? Clearly work has been restructured to the point where most jobs do not need much prior training. As long as you "know how to learn," you can become an efficient worker in a matter of minutes, or at most, days. Schooling as it is now prepares one for long hours of repetitive, uncreative labor. Will the reformers extend academic tracking even further to try to prevent the bottom-tier from becoming too critical and aware? If not, how can the system survive if most of the people who are condemned to part-time and precarious temporary work are able to think criti-

cally about their situation? The hegemony of the capitalist way of life may erode rapidly if educational reforms actually produce more thoughtful citizens.

A more realistic forecast is that schools won't change much. New books, curriculum, and tests will be announced with much to-do, while the underlying reality of education won't budge. Fortunately, learning is more about experiences than curriculum. Whatever reforms are implemented, real education will come from the relationships formed in and around each classroom. The increase in parent participation in public schools gives us all an opportunity to bring the experiences we think are important into our kids' education. The focus and scope of learning is always being contested, and we can intimately affect them if we want to.

### SWAMP SURFING

I have a daughter in the 3rd grade who attends an alternative public school. The school retains some of the spirit of its founding in the early '70s, with faculty and parents who are strongly committed not only to parent participation, but to alternative pedagogy, integrated cultures, ages, and

grades, and conflict resolution as well. Rather than serving under a principal, the school's faculty elects a "head teacher," a job that rotates. It's very racially balanced, with no group over 30%. This year the school has been a pilot test site for an alternative approach to curriculum in which kids select special interdisciplinary projects—beginning oceanography, farmers' market calendar, multicultural cookbook, kids' guide to Bay Area Transit, pre-Columbian ocean kayaks—that they work on intensively for 3-6 weeks. By most standards, this school is a gem.

Having listed its rosy attributes, I have to say that it is still a public school. The building is cramped and awful, surrounded by a big asphalt yard. Parents chip in up to \$300 to pay a Phys Ed instructor's salary, for which there is no public funding. The library is a large closet, and the nearby city library only allows classes to visit once a year! My child is often bored. I don't think she is challenged by a lot of what she does all day, but I don't blame the school or the teacher because I think both are good.

The frustration comes when you begin to imagine how different schooling could be if it were more integrated into the web of daily life. Children are curious and infrequently satisfied by the

knowledge gained through school. But if you let them help do a real job that needs doing, the experience is much more meaningful, and teaches the child to believe in her own experiences rather than representations of other people's experiences. Practical knowledge of mechanics, gardening, computers, transportation, and so on, are all more thoroughly and interestingly absorbed from being out in the world, not from sitting around listening to lectures, watching videos, or even reading books (although they have their place). But life is not organized to accommodate groups of children participating usefully. And we know that it is not education's goal to produce active, inquisitive, resourceful people. Even alternative schools foster socially-approved attitudes and behaviors.

It's a cop-out to blame everything on the institutions that constrain our lives. Because the really great things that happened to me in the educational environment were nearly always social, I recognize my responsibility to enter the educational swamp. Unless I opt for

homeschooling, I will continue sharing my daughter's development with public schools. The least I can do (which is unfortunately usually all that I do) is to go on camping and field trips and get involved with the kids and other adults. I bring a different perspective to the school environment, and I love meeting people from other walks of life, which always leads to interesting exchanges.

Of course, most parents have to work all day and don't have time to make up for the inadequacies of public schooling by volunteering for extracurricular activities. Hinging improved schooling on parent participation endorses the generalized speed-up and intensification of labor that is already exhausting most working people. While admirable, the incredible number of hours parents spend raising money through thankless garage and bake sales, raffles and carnivals, passes a public cost onto *their* backs and *extends their work week*. Yet somehow, we who are committed to radical change must find the extra energy, time and effort to participate in arenas such as public school,

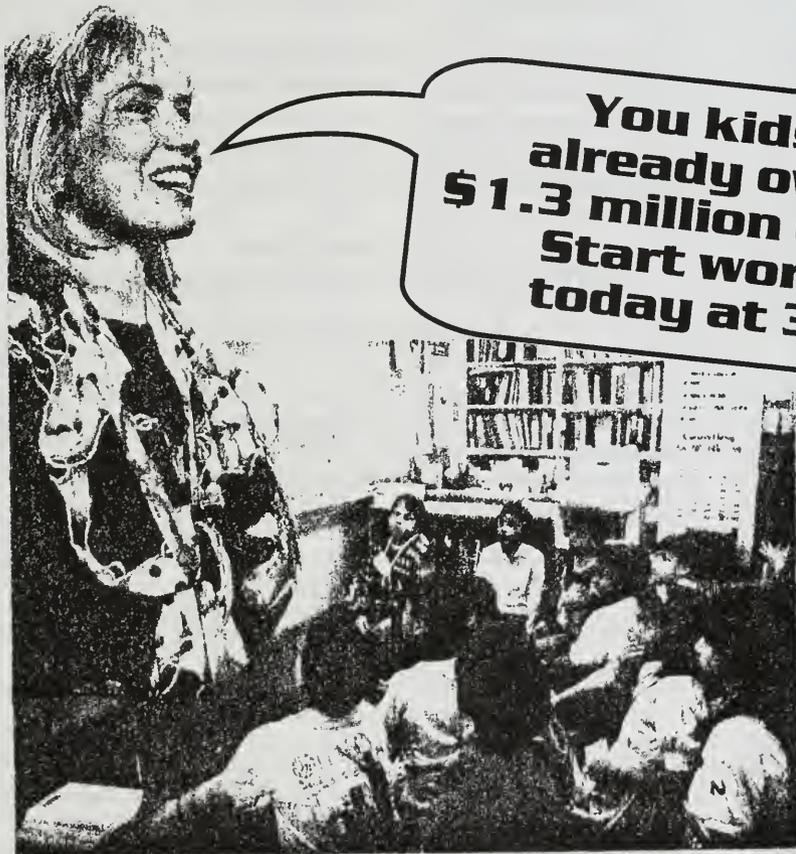
even if in the short term it just feels like more (unrewarded) work.

My daughter's entire school takes a camping trip to nearby San Bruno Mountain every October. I've participated three times now. When I showed up at San Bruno Mountain this year, two boys with whom I'd shared a cabin nearly a year-and-a-half earlier came running up to me, excitedly yelling my name. I suddenly realized how much the time I'd spent playing and talking with them meant to them. During that earlier trip, I had felt rather overwhelmed. I did my best to treat the boys well and show them respect, but at the time I was struck by how fundamentally impossible the public school teacher's job is. How can one adult give 30-odd kids the enormous emotional and intellectual energy and discipline they need? A lot of kids don't get much of this at home, and when they get to school, they need a lot.

Although the problems children face are not going to be solved by any one relationship, you cannot underestimate the importance of honest friendship. This society is a very cold place, and many kids never experience other people's trust and confidence, or get to discuss things with someone interested in their opinion. Even a brief encounter with someone who helps you understand why things are as crazy as they are can make a huge difference in surviving this absurd society.

Helping to dispell children's confusion has everything to do with the shape and content of future social movements. Ways of thinking and relating to others are inculcated early. A culture enriched by difficult questions and dialogue could help spawn a 21st-century generation of revolutionaries worthy of the name. We all have a lot to contribute in making that culture a living reality. But this means reinhabiting public life, creating and participating in public events, and challenging the fatigue and passivity that keeps so many of us home watching TV instead of out among our friends, neighbors, and strangers. Can we rise to the occasion?

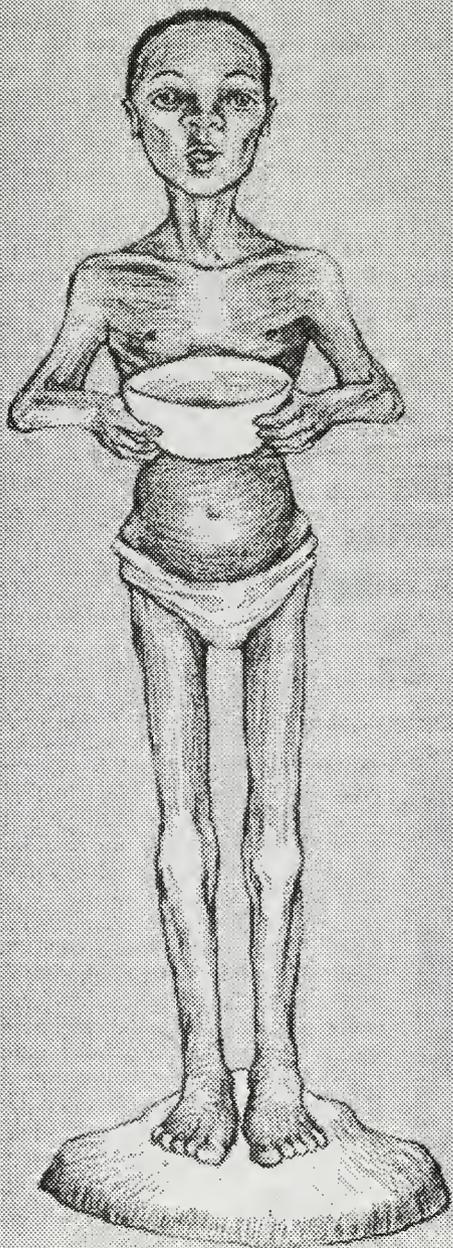
— Chris Carlsson



GRAPHIC: CC

# Hungry Mohammed

Commemorating Operation Give 'Em Enough Hype this beautiful figurine lovingly re-creates the image of U.S. foreign policy through the magic medium of the NewCaste® sculpting process.



Honoring the proud heritage of the starving Somali people, the Conoco Mint in association with the Pentagon is proud to present this magnificent collector doll—*Hungry Mohammed*

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A Conoco Mint exclusive, *Hungry Mohammed* is attractively priced at \$175, payable in five monthly installments of \$35, the first due prior to shipment. Send no money now. Simply return your Reservation Application today. Order before June 14, 1993 and you will receive a fully functional begging bowl *absolutely free!*

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State of Mind \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Check here if you want each installment charged to your:

Visor     Master Race     Discoverer     American Excess

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name to print on Certificate of Authenticity  
(if different from above). \_\_\_\_\_

Please allow 4 to 8 weeks after initial payment for shipment.

## REVIEWS

**MIDNIGHT OIL: Work, Energy, War 1973-1993** by the Midnight Notes Collective (\$12, Autonomedia, POB 568 Williamsburg Station, Brooklyn, NY 11211-0568)

I was reading *Midnight Oil* when the news was published in late January 1993 that Conoco, Amoco, Chevron and Phillips had exclusive concessions to about two-thirds of Somalia's future oil and gas discoveries. Conoco's headquarters, the only multinational corporate office still open through Somalia's civil war, became the de facto American embassy when the U.S. military moved in.

With this knowledge, the Somalian "humanitarian" effort became more understandable, and strongly illustrates the Midnight Notes Collective's thesis that recent history must be seen from the working class point of view through the lens of petroleum.

The collective basically sees economic crisis as capital's response to the working class movements (working class defined as broadly as possible) of the late '60s and early '70s, which managed to win major increases in wages and social benefits. Oil price shocks in 1973-74 ended the post-war "deal," beginning the rollback of living standards. Later, after 1979, cheap oil was reimposed as an attack on the heightened expectations of the people of oil-producing countries, with a subsequent explosion of international debt. This in turn allowed (and still allows) capital to force down living standards in nation after nation through "structural adjustment programs" imposed by the IMF and World Bank. The need for continued high production demands new investments, but capital is unwilling to invest when the proletariat threatens to not work hard enough for little enough. According to *Midnight Oil* and its very informative and detailed account of the economy of the six million guest workers in the Middle East, these many people and their expectations of sharing the oil wealth were a major source of fear for international capital. Before capital would reinvest massively in oil production in the Middle East, it had to be confident of its control there and back in the major market, the U.S. When Americans accepted the Persian Gulf War in the Middle East, both ends were achieved, at least for the moment:



GRAPHIC: J.F. BATELLIER

## A Post-Good Life Generation?

We're living in the Age of Plummeting Expectations and most people seem sadly resigned to this fate. Ecological disasters, more wars, depression - you know. As the next millenium approaches, prophets (and profits) of doom are a dime a dozen. But what constitutes a future worth living for? Certainly not more of the long bankrupt American Dream! Life could be so much better - what's your idea about a better life? The next Processed World will be dedicated to "The Future of the Future." Please contribute!

the Middle East is completely militarized and millions of potentially troublesome guest workers have been sent back to Egypt, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Malaysia. Meanwhile, the "peace movement" and their antecedents in the anti-nuke, pro-alternative technology crowd were rendered practically mute in the face of the onslaught. (See also in *Midnight Oil* "Strange Victories," an essay included from the first issue of *Midnight Notes* in 1979, written by *bolo'bolo* author p.m., which examines exactly who the anti-nuke movement was in terms of class, race and sociology). Oil companies have been free to raise the price of oil over 30% in the past year in the U.S., while there is no longer any public discussion about abolishing the massive use of fossil fuels as soon as possible. Military occupation of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and the maintenance of a police state in Iraq, as well as the theocracy in Iran, all work to hold down the people of those countries and preserve the extremes of wealth and poverty.

*Midnight Oil* incorporates essays from *Midnight Notes* during the '80s, including several from the recent "New

Enclosures" issue. A number of pieces from the original 1975 *Zerowork* are republished here and lay out some of the theoretical foundations of the Midnight Notes perspective. The opening 100 pages of the book are all new, offering some of MN's best work ever once you get used to the emphasis on working class composition, re-composition and de-composition as explanatory concepts.

Midnight Notes' emphasis on seeing things from the working class point of view provides a refreshing reminder of the usefulness of some of Marx's original analyses about the broader categories of capitalist society. I have quibbled with my friends at MN for years over the semantic emphasis on capital and the working class, as though there were two clear entities making unified but opposed plans and taking action on them. I occasionally feel like I'm hearing a crackpot conspiracy theory. But *Midnight Oil* overcame that with clear although abstract analysis. They still use language that can sound silly and conspiratorial, not to mention a bit stodgy, but given the real course of

events during the past 20 years, it is fascinating how their analysis parallels and predicts history. The next time you want to go deeper than "Those Unfair Oil Companies!" or "No Blood for Oil" or "Why is the Middle East so crazy?" get yourself a copy of *Midnight Oil* and settle in for an illuminating, challenging, and extremely informative read.

— Chris Carlsson

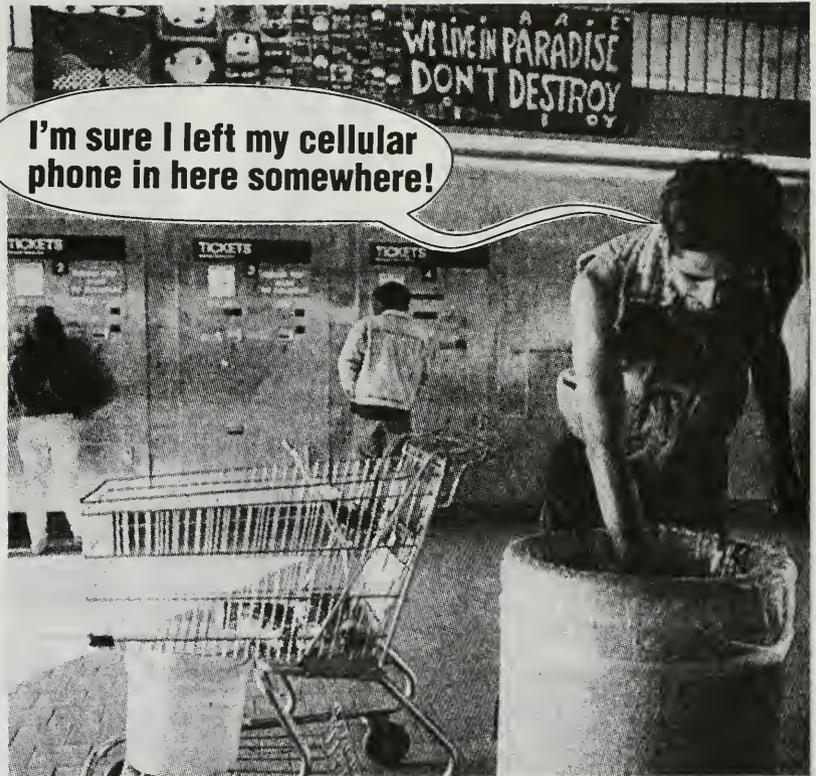
**The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving** by John Hoffman Copyright 1993 (Loompanics Unlimited, P.O.Box 1197, Port Townsend, WA 98368 \$12.95)

*The Art & Science of Dumpster Diving* made me late for work twice and almost miss my train stop once. I have a fragile stomach and it turns over at the thought of diving into a dumpster or even reading a book on the subject. I changed my mind at the sight of the bright cover by Ace Backwards, a cartoonist oft published in these pages.

The earnestness and aptness of this book is fascinating in these fragile times. Here is the wisdom gleaned from a lifetime practice of dumpster diving as both a means of survival and an art form. There is advice about what to wear, look for, avoid and how to behave with people you encounter diving such as competitors, residents, cops and building managers. And watch out for glass and beware of bio-hazards such as red pouched "sharps" in hospital waste bins.

Raucous happiness underscores his every description of people engaging in economic activities such as dumpstering that deny the taxman and various local profiteers any gain. Beyond mere physical survival, the spirit of diving gives "Hoffmanville" its identity as a collective endeavor. Hoffman conveys well the individual and shared joys, learning and discoveries of these forays.

Hoffman points out that grassroots trash recyclers re-inject wealth into the economy and save a lot of dump site space. But too little and too late. Recycling works well only when discards are sorted at the household level. If your neighbors are as subhuman as mine are, good luck getting the work done! Local laws, locked dumpster areas (garbage is precious private property!) and trash compactors are used to frustrate the whole dumpster underground economy and should be actively fought (see "W.O.R.C. will make you free" on page 119, that's "War On Refuse Com-



packers".) In truth, I recycle, that means sort, my garbage and do not care who takes it. This is controversial in places where people think the city or half-assed non-profit organization should make a buck at it. Not so in this book:

*"Think about the stupidity! Dumpster divers and small recyclers are working efficiently, recycling things and injecting money into the economy. The waste recovery plant lives off tax money like a junkie, sucking the local economy dry. Who gets blamed? The dumpster diver of course! And when he stops picking through the trash, the facility still doesn't make any money. And it will never make money because the whole idea is flawed from the start, based upon an irrational fear of garbage."* (page 125)

There is more here than dumpster diving techniques and wilted veggie recipes, etiquette and fashion. There's the Loompanics libertarian I-Love-Guns persona with amazing Inalienable American Rights to bear arms and constitutionally topple any iniquitous government. But stay away from the cops, they're nothing but trouble:

*"Cops piss me off. They come at you with an attitude that you are guilty and they are going to get you to admit it with a few verbal tricks. Just once, I'd like to meet a pig with*

*an attitude like I have a shining aura of civil rights around my body and possessions. Criminals with guns and badges, that's all they are."* (page 58).

It's indeed lamentably obvious that cops are trained in harassment techniques and lack concern for the remnants of civic liberties. At least in my adopted hometown, Berkeley. No People's Republic but Pig Sty Supreme. "Nuff said".

Hoffman convinced me that there is hidden treasure in the bins, that dumpster diving is a respectable occupation and even better, a subversion of the consumer society. He has a predisposition for what he calls "post-apocalyptic" landscapes and attitudes. I personally don't twig to apocalyptic visions, especially when they are combined with the closing of the second christian millennium. But I appreciate the images Hoffman evokes and his way of living off the plentiful discards and discords of our consumer society.

There's lots of juicy stuff on the art of putting "found information" to good use, and bushels of illegal possibilities should the reader be half a jailbird at heart. The worst story was garbage mail being used by a "church lady" and her

group to close an abortion clinic. The enemy is using this found shit and so should you. That's the book talking, not me... really, Officer.

The best stories were on how to make your local legislator look bad in the press through a careful read of his discarded info. Police mail is the best.

Sexy pictures from neighbors or high school classmates aren't bad either. And the future is now:

*"In the last few years, I have seen an amazing dumpster phenomenon. People are discarding floppy disks and computer related material by the ton.... Finding a floppy disk is like finding a cabinet full of papers - but in a compact, easy-to-use format. Once, I actually found the famous PLO virus. No wonder they threw it away."* (page 139)

There is a somewhat didactic tone which can annoy the reader. But hey! Hoffman is a survivalist (without the vengeance, which he deprecates as common amongst that group).

He preaches his stuff with plenty of religious fervor and admonitions to have fun at it, get back at the enemy (power companies, taxman, retail industries, banks...), use your imagination and thrive in the cracks of a dying capitalist economic web. There is a downplayed survivalist anti-abortion stance perhaps because the more (armed survivalists) the merrier? Women have the inalienable right to their body at all times in my script. Hoffman's bias also shows in the statement that businesses are a front for government:

*"If the government demanded all persons buying books show proper ID, K-Mart would slavishly obey the edict. Don't pity the "poor businessman", he's a whore for the government. You might as well be shopping at the IRS store..."* (page 100)

I used to think that governments were a front for businesses, then I grew up. Now I know it is a two-headed Cerebus. Don't hesitate to use the singular: BIZGOV.

The most basic advice works regardless of your ideological leanings. Don't pay full price if you don't have to, mattresses being the sole exception according to the author. I know a lot of people whose predilection favors flea markets above malls for the thrill and challenge of barter and that's what Hoffman pushes: free thrills. And a cash bonus to boot. "THAR'S GOLD IN THEM THAR DUMPSTERS!" He claims it's better than bill posting or spray painting because it furthers family interests. Well, to each her cup of tea.

In the meantime and as times do get mean (have been getting meaner forever really), Hoffman does his part in sharing his way to get from under the heavy economic boot of the "best system in the world", well known for its recurrent crashes, depressions, recessions, etc. So if you have a steady nose, go hound out those treasures. It could be a fun hunt. The book certainly is a fun read.

- Petra Leuze



**THE LONDON HANGED: Crime and Civil Society in 18th Century England** by Peter Linebaugh (Cambridge University Press, New York: 1992) \$25

Midnight Notes contributor Peter Linebaugh, once a student of renowned British labor historian E.P. Thompson, has fulfilled the promise of that apprenticeship by publishing an incredibly detailed account of the use of capital punishment in London from the late 17th century through the 18th century. This is a long, very serious book, that microscopically covers the daily lives of London's working class during the crucial century in which contemporary work and property relations became firmly established. As Linebaugh shows, these relations were often enforced with the gallows. In an era when history is increasingly absent, denied, and manipulated, this book stands out as a beacon of clear, engaging historical writing. Linebaugh's analysis of the establishment of capital punishment for property crimes, the ebb and flow of the death penalty with changing labor needs, and the rise of wage-slavery and factory work sheds interesting light on the current resurgence of capital punishment in the United States. 20th-century work and

property relations are more precarious than ever thanks to new technologies, and new forms of resistance and refusal. Perhaps most compellingly, using work as a measure of social wealth makes less and less sense when capital itself is systematically reducing the use of human labor in most areas of production. The ultimate punishment is making a comeback as society descends into criminal chaos and as desperate poverty becomes more widespread. *The London Hanged* helps us see the social processes and decisions that make reliance on the death penalty "natural" and "obvious" and confronts us with their absurdity as reflected in a similar but vastly different moment in history, a history as much ours as Londoners'. Check it out!

- Chris Carlsson

**REAL GIRL: The Sex Comik for all genders and orientations...by cartoonists who are good in bed!** Edited by Angela Bocage. (Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115) \$2.95

*Real Girl* is real good. Cowgirls make horns at the blues. Maybe the sometimes beautiful and sometimes not too aesthetic genitalia would scare your mother. That's *not* the raison d'être for this diverse collection of cartoons. The philosophy here is of exploration and acceptance. It's so varied in scope that anyone can find a romantic soft touch or g-spot to hook on to. It is amazingly moral in essence.

I passed it to my favorite teenagers (it's restricted as in *not for sale to minors*) and the favorite story from *Real Girl* #3 was "Signed Sister Ende" by Chula Smith, a historical dream sequence of sorts, in which a 20th century woman teacher introduces the religious illuminations of a 13th century woman painter. She signed her work "Ende Pintrix, Dei Autrix": Ende, Woman Painter & servant of god. In the background, modern school kids practice jungle war on each other.

That just shows it's not about sex only. Everything is acceptable so long as it promulgates understanding and acceptance. I'd recommend it for all those pesky teenagers still in your life or soon to be. But if I were you I'd grab it first, 'coz it's a great read. *Make this comix required reading in all high schools!*

- Petra Leuze

## I BEG TO DISAGREE

Passing billboards that proclaim – “Working together  
to stimulate economic growth and job creation,”  
Hearing over the radio – “Factories in orbit  
flourishing, healthy, growing,”  
Reading in the paper – “Declining job market  
for trained elephants spells trouble,”  
The interviewer appears again before me –  
“Gaps in your work-record,  
gaps in your work-record,  
don't look good to us, Mr. Antler –  
you don't expect us to believe  
all those years you wrote  
*poetry?*”

What could I say? What did I say?

“We've come from a nation in which one-sixth were slaves  
to a nation 600 times larger in which  
we are all slaves.”

“No doubt before long factories will be totally extinct.  
We'll probably label factories an endangered species  
and preserve one or two

for people to wander through  
to remember what they were like.”

“Employer and employee, this is Pussysmell Fingertips speaking –  
you knew all along, didn't you, work-ethic as cattleprod,  
cemetery of timeclocks, vomitgas canisters  
ready and waiting.”

Tell the work-ethic you'll live to shit on its grave  
and have it regard it as a blessing,  
a blessing and not a curse.

Why? Because, with a grin of chagrin –  
salves rather than slaves,  
peonies rather than peonage,  
prisms rather than prisons,  
surfboards rather than serfdom,  
wild rice rather than tame rice,  
meteors rather than meat-eaters,  
violins rather than violence,  
warble rather than war.

Rather than business as usual, loafing as usual.  
Instead of the Misery Index throwing people out of work,  
throwing the work-ethic out the window.

Instead of warhead payload,  
blowjobhead semenload.

Instead of warhead payload,  
givinghead mouthload.

Children made angels in the snow  
before the pyramids, before Stonehenge,  
before Pleistocene creatures  
were painted miles within on the walls of caves.

The Ghost Dance is still going on.

The Ghost Dance never died.

If Descartes had lived today  
would he say – “I work, therefore I am”?

The Holocaust's cost – who will pay?

Roadkills in the Rearview Mirror?

Deathbed on Rollerskates?

Rubric of frolic and rollick and romp and roam  
all with a gleaming plump rump?



## Low level radioactive waste can kill you in two minutes.

“Low Level” is a misnomer used to lull the public  
into thinking that such radioactive waste is harmless.

People say Factories are closing down,  
Yeah, just like acid rain is closing down,  
Like toxic waste dumps are closing down,  
Like deforestation and stripmining are closing down,  
Yeah, like slaughterhouses, terrorism, Star Wars, oil spills,  
handgun murder and AIDS are closing down.  
Factories are closing down, but opening up somewhere else,  
bigger, faster, producing more than ever somewhere else,  
Somewhere else doors open and workers enter in,  
Somewhere else workers daydream being free,  
The smokestacks rise somewhere else,  
The timeclocks, the paychecks, the drive  
To and from work somewhere else.

If we can retread a worn-out tire,  
how retread a worn-out life? Retire?  
Recycle aluminum cans, sure, but  
how recycle the wasted lives,  
that question  
not answered.

Something I had not bargained for,  
Something I did not count on:  
They peeled the skin off the father's face  
in front of his children,  
Then put a grenade in his mouth  
and pulled the pin.  
They gang-raped the mother in front of  
her children's eyes,  
Then cut off her breasts  
and rammed a lighted stick of dynamite  
up her cunt.

On your tombstone an ant crawls  
in the chiseled dash  
between  
the dates of your life.

—Antler



# DOWNTIME!



## Bank of America Infiltrated!

The 57-floor Bank of America building towered over us, its black granite grid menacing us like a giant waffle iron ready to snap shut. Posing as contractors, we were about to remove an interior wall from an office and take it home with us. Carrying a motorcycle helmet and a shoulder bag I explored most of the building as a lost courier. Identical offices line identical halls on identical floors – perfect for the job.

BofA suffers from the muddled management structure typical of large American corporations: distant, overpaid executives direct redundant levels of middle managers who supervise countless specialized workers. We suspected we could enter an office, cut out a wall, cover a hole with toxic danger signs and leave without anyone knowing we hadn't been hired to do it. We wanted to be as disruptive as possible without attracting the authorities. We would create chaos and pretend to be in control of it.

According to our computer-produced IDs, we were Halyard Semmins and Laila Finecke, field investigators for Spemtech, a toxics testing company. A work order detailed the rest: Spemtech had been authorized by the State Toxics Board to conduct tests for commercial Health and Safety Certification. We were testing for Thorofil™, a carcinogenic DuPont fiber once used to fire-proof drywall. Required by law, the work was free. Could they say no?

To make our appointment we called on a Thursday just before 5 p.m., hoping the building manager had left for the day. He had. We left a message saying we'd be there Friday afternoon, and we supplied a random fax number to slow down verification. It might buy us time if anyone decided to check us out while we were in the building.

Friday at 4:15 p.m., Laila adjusted her tool-company baseball cap, I tucked in my "Perot for America" t-shirt, and we went in with toolboxes and bored contractor expressions. The assistant in charge was confused by our work order. He kept asking, "You want to do what?"

and saying "I don't know anything about this." I repeated our job's description, which was to remove a small section of drywall for testing.

"You're going to have to come back Monday so I can clear this with my boss," he decided.

"Look," I said, "we just came all the way from Hayward to do a 20-minute job. You send us back, we're going to have to refile your paperwork with the state, which is going to delay your certification. You know what the late fine would be on a building this big?"

He ushered us up to the Office of Overseas Affairs, which we had chosen for its sinister name and proximity to freight elevators. While I removed corporate art (*matches the carpets*) from the wall and stacked furniture in a corner, Laila explained our presence to nearby workers.

"We're just doing some routine fiber separation tests here," she announced. "Shouldn't take more than a few minutes."

The workers seemed satisfied. Laila put down dropcloths and duct-taped them to the floor while I ran an electronic stud sensor over the walls, selected for the irritating beep it produces when it senses a nail. We marked these spots with a graffiti-grade permanent marker. I drew a square around them and marked big right angles in its corners, adding equations where appropriate. It was time to put on the suits.

The suits were the key to creating chaos. We would put on as much frightening emergency gear as possible while reassuring the workers around us that they were completely safe. The suits, made of bright white Tyvek and emblazoned with red "Spemtech," "Biohazard" and "Extreme Danger" logos, had draw-tight hoods and rubberized feet. Donning latex gloves, safety goggles and respirators, we were extra careful to tuck everything in. Laila handed me a three-quarter-inch hole drill.

"Are you sure *we* don't need suits?" a worker asked, laughing nervously. Others were closing their doors or peering cautiously over partitions. "Absolutely," I said through my respirator. "You're perfectly safe."

As I drilled holes in the wall, Laila plugged them with black rubber stoppers. After drilling each hole, we carefully shook the drill-bit dust into a plastic sample bag. Workers watched us from behind glass doors now. I sweated in my suit. After I slashed deep into the white wall with a utility knife, we pulled out a 3x5-foot wedge of wall. While I cut it into pieces sized to fit our yellow sample bags (marked "DANGER"), Laila spread plastic over the wound and sealed it with duct tape. Then we plastered the surrounding wall with warning stickers – French, English and Spanish versions of "Do Not Ventilate" and "Danger of Death."

We cleaned up and got out with our drywall trophies. Two days later a friend photographed our work. The wall had been fixed, all evidence removed.

What did this act prove? Did the assistant who let us in get in trouble? Lose his job? It's easy to get swept up in the excitement and ignore the downside – something we can't afford to do in the future. But the possibilities that this "practice run" opened up are heartening. With the right preparation and attitude, structures can be infiltrated. With added content, ideas could be introduced and minds opened.

– Ace Tylene

## Wake Up and Smell the Tiers!

innervoice #10 – 2/10/93

On Friday, February 5, 1993, Bank of America announced in its particularly arrogant fashion that it was cutting all (or most) of its full-time tellers and administrative support staff to less than 20 hours a week. Along with the cut in hours, the Bank sheds all the burdensome (to its bottom line) benefits such as sick pay, paid vacations, and medical insurance while reporting record profits! The result for bank workers is a major cut in living standards and an urgent push toward the door if they want to hold on to the income they've become accustomed to. But if they leave the Bank of America, many are no doubt thinking, where will they go?

The Monday newspaper revealed that the local monopoly utility PG&E is planning to cut back its San Francisco-based, white collar workforce by as much as 10% over the next few months, and is bringing in management consultants to help in this "downsizing," supposedly because of market competition! Then the Tuesday newspaper reports that Safeway, the nation's largest supermarket chain, based in Oakland, is also going to be trimming its home office staff, and is publicly targeting its 85 stores in the Canadian province of Alberta as a major cost-cutting area. "If efforts to address our labor costs fail, we may have to abandon the Alberta market altogether," said Peter Magowan, Safeway's CEO (the same Magowan who recently led the purchase of the SF Giants and signed outfielder Barry Bonds to a \$43 million contract). Dozens of small businesses go under every week, and many self-employed are also choking on recessionary dust.

Years after the advent of the Rust Bowl and the gradual deindustrialization of the United States, the purge of workers and rationalization of labor

processes have finally begun to hit white collar workers as hard as blue collar workers were hit in the 1970s and '80s. And not surprisingly, it's being done using the same methods: BofA insiders reported that the cutbacks were the result of Taylorist time-and-motion studies conducted last year on branch operations. After analyzing how long it took to do typical operations such as cashing checks, opening accounts and selling traveler's checks, management came to the obvious conclusion (obvious to anyone who has ever worked in a bank) that a lot of the work time they were buying from workers wasn't being used to carry on bank activities and increase bank profits. Hence the dramatic cuts and speedup for those who hold on.

Daily reports of economic recovery and wildly improved productivity measurements underscore the reality that this wave of wage-cuts, rationalization and layoffs is no fluke. **The assault on living standards is precisely the mechanism by which "economic health" is restored.** Historically, renewed business

activity led to increased employment, but that was before the enormous wave of computerization and generalized automation of the past two decades. Glowing reports of improved productivity and profits will not lead to widespread hiring. In fact, Clinton's plans to link health care coverage to employment is already a major incentive for companies to rid themselves of as many employees as possible, replacing them where necessary with temporary workers supplied by other companies.

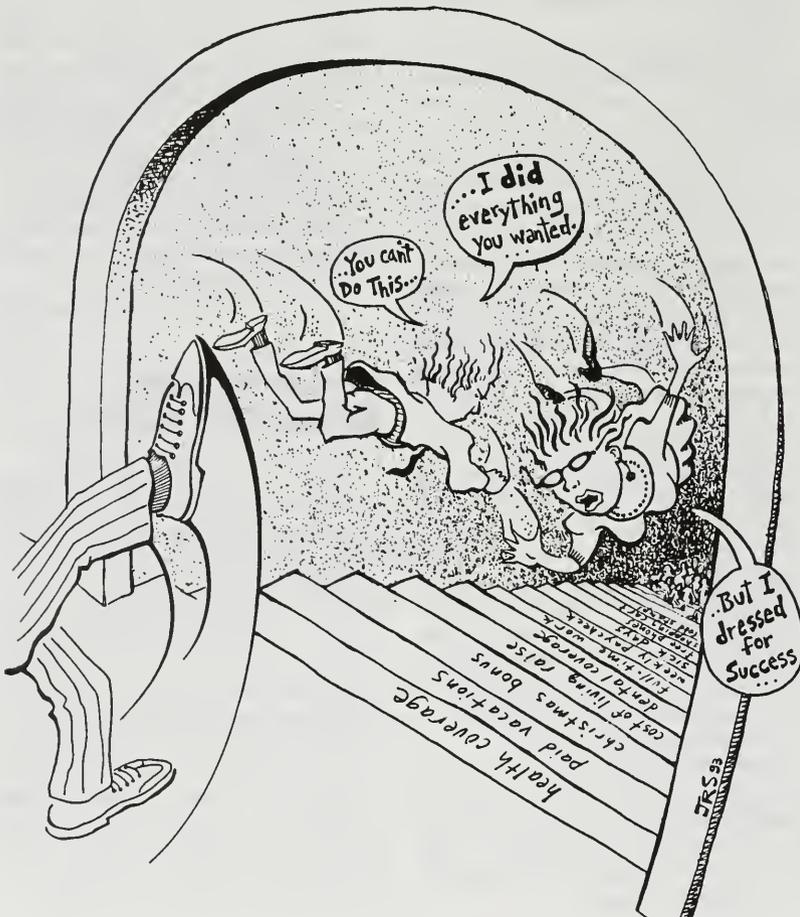
Moreover, the big picture of social change looks like more and more people are being thrown down the stairs, out of the upper tier which offered middle class living standards and some sense of security and guaranteed material well-being, and into the much larger lower tier. In the lower tier (which in turn rests on the burgeoning underclass of homeless and permanently unemployed), people never quite get enough income or work, and find themselves anxiously awaiting a call from the employment or temp agency, hoping for another few days, weeks or months of steady work, only to find the periods between paid work growing longer as the paid work becomes increasingly part-time and intermittent. Fear and desperation in turn increases one's willingness to endure intolerably dull, stupid and dangerous work.

So how do we respond? Do we organize ourselves to demand jobs? Do we insist that the government guarantee employment or mandate that companies make new, larger unemployment payments to offset the loss of paid work? Why not?

Or do we finally begin to look beyond the existing setup to demand a **new relationship** between human society, the work it does, and the way the products of human work are distributed?

Isn't it long overdue that we expand our social rights to include our **RIGHT TO DO USEFUL, MEANINGFUL WORK?**

Isn't it long overdue that we guarantee all members of society a decent standard of living, regardless of what contributions they actually make? After two centuries of automation and dramatic increases in productivity, there is no justification for maintaining 40-hour work weeks, 50 weeks of work per year. It is time to restructure the work in society so no one has to spend more than a few hours a week at anything (although everyone should be free to spend as long as they like at activities



they enjoy, useful or “frivolous”). It is time to make a permanent break between work and income, a break that will be resisted to the death by the owners and managers of this society. In the short term, we should begin discussing and insisting on our right to worthwhile work. In the medium and longer term we should begin imagining how much better life could be without the absurd economic structures that promote overwork and conspicuous consumption at one end, desperate homelessness and crime-ridden insanity at the other, and precarious insecurity for all in between. The current assault on white collar workers in the Bay Area is just the latest installment of a long process that will lead to an increasingly barbaric society unless we forcibly resist.

Those of you still inside have a lot more power than you think. You control valuable hardware, data, and other vulnerable links in the corporate empire. Use your imagination, find your allies; they are all around you! Abandon the false comfort that comes from the belief that if you are sufficiently docile and obedient, the Paternal Corporation will take care of you. Nothing could be further from the truth in this dog-eat-dog (or is that company-eat-people?) world. The two-tiered society is being created by design, not by accident. Your place in it is not certain, but it is certainly not at the top! The longer they are allowed to pursue this process, the weaker we become. While you still have some leverage over things they care about (data integrity, hardware, software, attitudes, and so on), *take advantage!* And let us know what’s happening, and we’ll try to get the word out.

– *Nasty Secretary Liberation Front*

## Struggle Against Study:

How to Scam Your Way Through College – with Pay

“What’s wrong with education?” many people like to ask, as if to fix it. What’s “wrong” is that education – particularly the university – is under attack from within by its students’ refusal of work, and nothing can be done about it short of abolishing the schools, which is fine with me. Many of us want it all now, and this doesn’t often include work, waged or unwaged. Scamming is the way we satisfy our needs: cheating, using financial aid for things

There’s a place for you

Free\$

# The Learnin’ Annecks

“Repeat After Me:

1993  
is the  
Year 1...

return those  
borrowed  
office  
supplies

kite checks  
for a better  
world

enrich my  
life with less  
and less

eat myself  
fitter

learn the  
ABCs of  
community  
surveillance

discover my  
meaningful  
past-life  
careers

sacrifice  
& save—  
wedding  
altruism with  
the economy

get it good

ETC.”

besides school, and graduating after having done little or no work whatsoever. I’m a scammer, and when I’m done I hope to have a Ph.D. This is a guide for you to get one too.

**Scamming as a Tactic.** In one sense, universities are merely factories that expect students to do the unwaged work of teaching ourselves to work endlessly, without direct supervision, but with periodic productivity checks (tests, grades, GPAs). The crisis in higher education suggests that we have been relatively successful at both refusing and transcending this process: There has been some transformation of the university into spaces that serve our desires to learn about ourselves and our histories.

Refusal, however, is not limited to “multiculturalism” or “student activism,”

but includes scamming and refusing all school/work no matter what its content. And it occurs on such a widespread level that it already has networks that circulate tests, notes, papers, and other information and techniques. Scamming’s significant advantage over traditional student movements that make demands through protesting is that it focuses on undermining the logic of the system, and the processes within which we are forced to operate; merely protesting for changes in the system does not. The best part of it is that this can go undetected indefinitely, while protesters can be easily identified and cut off.

Scamming can combine using “alternative” courses whose content is generally antagonistic to the purposes of the university – although many times they merely

reproduce the university system through grades, homework, teacher-student hierarchy, etc. - with using the system against itself. This can be done individually, or in groups (frats and sororities are very good at this) that have circulated information among themselves over time. There may not be an ultimate end - other than just hanging out and enjoying life - but a long-term payoff like a diploma indicates nothing about how much one worked to get it. Some scamming students may even end up with a high standard of living, unrelated to the amount they worked in school.

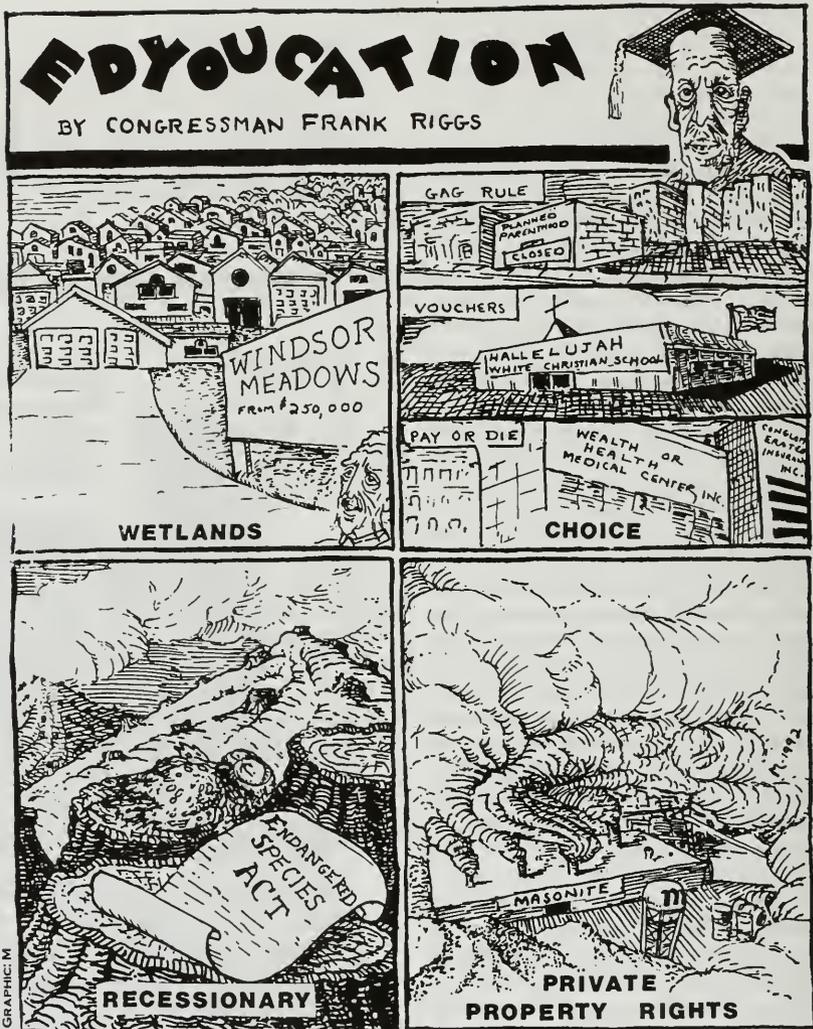
**No Work...**Of the 121 hours I completed 11 were knocked off before I started, by taking placement tests. Since I receive financial aid, I got to take the tests for free. As a result I skipped my first french semester and the intro classes in my major and english. This worked out well since my first french and english profs told me to my face that I should not have skipped the intro courses.

Self-designed courses also work well, if you pick the right people. Just find professors who are willing to let you design and pace your own course of study. One possibility is to find one who needs a little assistance on his or her own project. Organize it so you can get away with doing very little. I did.

Internships - working for a business for the piece wages of grades - are possibly the most exploitative offshoot of school, if you don't use them with some imagination. In the late 1980s, I found myself working as a legislative aid. I decided that I might as well use it to get some grades. I signed up for an internship credit and got six hours of A's for a job I was getting paid to do. The two papers I had to write were done mostly at work, on the state's computer.

Use pass/fail options: Majors in my department can take six hours of classes this way, and I used them all. This means you can take a class and do very little work, since even the slightest effort usually results in at least a passing grade of D.

For those remaining classes you have to take, there is little need to actually go. I learned too late that if you borrow at least two people's notes (so you can compare) for the classes you missed, it's as good as being there. Most intro courses have notes available for purchase from local note-taking businesses. But don't give them your money unless you have to. Just trade notes with



people in class. It already happens all the time.

If you don't do as well as you like, go talk to the TA. They will frequently tack on a few points just to get you to leave them alone.

**...and Pay.** The key to scamming is getting paid while you do it. Although financial aid means some work (and increasingly so to discourage us from it), it's been my subsistence and has paid for traveling - for fun and student conferences - and has bought everything I own. Since you only need to take 12 credit hours to get full aid, the above scams can help you get through in four years and a summer if you want - and I stupidly did before waking up to the possibilities.

This university gives you three "strikes" for violating aid rules. You get

a strike for falling below 12 hours or the minimum GPA, or dropping out. (I was able to avoid a strike when I dropped to nine hours by explaining how a fascist professor threatened to fail me if I didn't drop the course. A true story, but it doesn't have to be.) You can drop your courses by a specified date and get back your full tuition and fees, plus keep the aid money. For the next semester all you need to do is apply for a Student Loan Supplement (an "SLS") to cover the amount they'll subtract from the aid money you were supposed to return. Check into how they do it at your school. I've made up for the reduced aid by taking out an SLS.

To use an SLS you have to be an independent. I had to have my parents sign a paper stating that they would not deduct me from their next return. As an

independent, you get nearly full Pell Grants (likely to increase dramatically according to a recent congressional proposal) and you can use SLSs (which, unlike Stafford loans, begin to accrue interest immediately – for those who for some reason intend to repay their loans). Another good use for SLSs is to borrow the amount calculated as the “student contribution” (i.e. a second job), something financial aid doesn’t tell you outright.

In all, I scammed on 35 of the required undergraduate 120 hours. And this has all become easier in grad school, since I had only four required classes and have to take only nine thesis hours to have a “full load.”

Aid for grad students is superb. You can borrow up to \$50,000 for a master’s, and \$105,000 total in Stafford loans and SLSs to complete a Ph.D. At about \$9,000/year (including the summer) I can work on my master’s for five years. Employed grad students can get full aid on top of their salary. That means working, but having more money to fund traveling when you’re supposed to be working on your thesis or dissertation. In fact, if you invest the extra money you can make a few thousand extra off the backs of other workers by the time you decide whether to repay the loans.

It has certainly been easy for me to spend three-and-a-half years working on my piddling MA in Fine Arts. Although financial aid only allows you to take 30 hours of course work, I can graduate with incompletes if they are not in my department. I could theoretically keep taking classes outside of my department until my aid runs out and still graduate! I might as well soak up all the \$50,000 (or more if congress increases the ceiling) since I don’t plan to pay it back.

After two more semesters I’ll begin on my dissertation, which could still last for a while, since I haven’t borrowed even half the \$105,000 I can borrow through Stafford and SLSs. Since I wrote enough for a dissertation while writing my thesis I’ll have little work to do. I figure I can go for another four years “working” on my dissertation: Traveling around every semester, coming back to get my aid, and making some gratuitous visits to my committee. I hope by that time the loan cap will be hiked again.

**Eating the Insides Out.** Financial aid has been a major source of the crisis of the universities both in the US and inter-

nationally. In the US, a growing number of students are refusing – because they don’t want to reduce their standard of living, or they don’t care – or are unable to repay their loans. Total defaults have doubled since the mid-’80s. In the meanwhile, guarantors have gone bankrupt, banks refuse to loan students money or delay processing applications, the government and universities are divesting from aid programs, trade schools are being banned from the program, and banks are going under.

Student debt default is considered one of the top reasons for the collapse of banking (along with “Third World” debt, farming loan defaults, etc., thus indicating a link between student, third-world, and farmers’ struggles). Like the shift from grants to loans in the US, using loans to replace free schooling in the UK and Australia can be seen as a response to students’ taking and using the money without doing much work.

Scamming makes it damn near impossible for the folks who worry endlessly about what’s fucking up their factories to realize what’s really going on. While *Business Week* and the rest cry about the universities churning out “lemons” who don’t want to work (they say we “don’t know how” or are “unprepared”), we should be looking at ways to circulate tactics for continuing the quiet insurgency. Much of the right-wing attack on so-called “PC” is predicated on reimposing discipline in the universities on students who don’t so much read Marx instead of Plato, but don’t do anything the university plans for us to do – that is, endless hours reading, writing, studying, going to class, etc. Instead, we’re busy doing what we want in our own way while using their money, and learning a hell of a lot more as a result. It’s no coincidence that right-wing organizations such as Madison Center and the National Association of Scholars are funded by huge corporations like Coors, Mobil, Bechtel, KMart, and Olin. By learning how not to work we are threatening not only the universities, but capital’s control over us through work itself.

The beauty of scamming through school is getting paid to have fun. And because it’s not a concerted, organized, explicit movement, it is beyond the grasp of both the university planners and the left. While the Progressive Student Network suggests we “study and struggle,” I say “struggle *against* study!”

– Sal Acker



January 13, 1993

DEAR RIDER:

Due to the current U.S. military action in the Middle East and the resulting potential for domestic terrorist attacks, BART has reluctantly been forced to undertake certain enhanced security measures for the protection of our patrons and staff.

Special undercover BART Police units have been established to determine and intercept any potential threat to BART security. To facilitate their operations, the following Security Directives are now in effect:

- 1) All persons and packages within the paid area of BART or any location within 1/2 miles of BART property are subject to inspection, search, and/or seizure at the discretion of BART security personnel.
- 2) Detention of suspicious persons for the purposes of identification, outstanding warrant checks and personal searches may be initiated by BART security personnel for a period of no more than 72 hours.
- 3) Persons subjected to such detention and/or search and seizure of property shall have no legal recourse against BART or its employees.

We apologize for any inconvenience these measures may create, and appreciate your cooperation during this difficult period. Thank you for taking BART.

Frank J. Wilson, General Manager

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FAKE BART “LETTER” BEING CIRCULATED**

A bogus “Dear Rider” letter using the BART logo and car and allegedly “signed” by BART General Manager Frank J. Wilson is being circulated along the BART system and in office buildings in the Bay Area.

The letter says that because of the situation in the Middle East, BART has established “special undercover” police units and that people could be detained for 72 hours.

**THIS LETTER IS A FAKE. NO SUCH POLICY EXISTS AT BART, NOR IS ONE CONTEMPLATED.**

Anyone who is approached by someone claiming to be a BART police officer, employee or official of BART should ask to see identification. All BART employees carry employee identification cards with the employee’s picture. If there is any doubt, the person should contact the nearest BART Station Agent, Train Operator or any uniformed police officer.

BART police regularly patrol all stations, trains and parking facilities during BART operating hours. Most are uniformed and some are in street clothes. But all BART police carry identification.

When the people behind the forged “letter” are identified, they will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

-30-

## TAKE NO CHANCES

I'm sorry, but I just can't do it. Insurance regulations, I'm sure you understand." She closed the window abruptly and clicked the lock.

I turned back to the lobby, trying not to notice the stares directed at me, the failed supplicant. I stepped into the smoggy haze, ignoring the 3D holographic advertisement urging me to "Vote Yes on the Mandatory Safe Pedestrian Act." It seemed to follow me for a few feet, admonishing me that "We would all be better off if pedestrians were required to wear safety gear such as pads and helmets, and if people such as yourself were required to take a simple written and walking test to obtain a license, don't you agree?" I walked out of range before it could offer me a chance to sign its petition.

I waited at the next intersection until the guard rails at the crosswalk were lowered, carefully looked in each direction and joined the crowd hurrying across the street. A couple of White Muslims tried to sell me a copy of their paper, but I declined with a curt "Can't. Insurance regulations..." I turned into the familiar *faux* crash-barrier facade of the law firm I worked for.

After showing my badges and signing the standard disclaimers, I deposited my money in the elevator call box and waited. Somebody next to me was explaining how her client, a giant in the reinsurance industry, had been able to prevent the construction of a new hospital, thereby foreclosing on the possibility of malpractice suits and medical claims. I was soon in my own cubicle working through a pile of claims and legal forms. The afternoon passed quickly. I thought about getting a cup of Coffie®, but the idea of enduring the lengthy line of applicants signing releases and submitting bio scans was more than I could endure.

Shortly before dusk and mandatory curfew I left work, signed out, and returned my short-term medical-coverage bracelet. I walked the 13 blocks to my Kondo rather than go through the releases, searches and abuses of the crowded transit system. Two stores refused to sell me food on my way home ("Insurance regulations – after all, we hardly know you!"). My lucky third was willing though; a quick transaction in black market money (after all, credit chips, although universal and mandatory, left records and if my medical company discovered I was buying corned beef hash and eggs, Well! I don't have to tell you what *that* would lead to!).

I made it home just before the grates came down, feeling all nice and snug in my little fortress. There had been cases in which one of the tenants went berserk and slaughtered the whole building, the barriers keeping everyone in and the police companies out. Of course, the SecCams recorded it all, so the lawsuits went smoothly enough afterward, but still ...

I shared my illicit dinner with my cat, had an even more illicit glass of wine, and soon dozed off to the faint sounds of the subliminal advisor: "Do what you're told to do."

"Look both ways at the crossings."

"Never take chances."

I woke to the sound of the grates sliding up and the cleanup crews hitting the corridors. I showered, paying out almost 3 dollars in overtime charges, and ran the morning MedComp scan for the block health authorities. Apparently I was still healthy, because the door from the bathroom slid open and I was allowed to leave. I put on my best suit and a small insurance premium was charged to my account for the extra risk to my personal property.

It was a beautiful morning. The simulated birdcalls echoed



through the holographic branches over the crowded streets. I checked my schedule, and having the time and not having exceeded my sunlight quota for the month, I walked to work. I got there earlier than usual, so I was able to beat the crowds through the checkpoints and was hard at work by the time most of my coworkers came in.

I was so immersed in the saga of the pitiful insurer and the wicked old widow who'd foiled the disease monitors that I didn't even notice when Rogers came up. He slapped down a pink warrant for my interrogation ("exit interview and debriefing" in the company parlance). I turned pale and sweaty and leaned back. My desk's biomonitors started winking red, but the company had already disabled my bracelet, so there was no reassuring flood of hormones. The two police beings (PBs) helped me to my feet with a firm yank, and I was on my way!

Rogers stripped me of my badges and personal effects before we go to the elevators. One of the policebeings obligingly pressed my thumb on the company's release form. The elevator arrived, the PB on my left slid a credit chip into the machine's call box, and we entered. The elevator shot down, far deeper than the deepest subbasement. When the doors opened, I was dragged to a small cubicle and locked in.

Many hours later I was booked on a preliminary charge of "Illicit Animal Intoxication" in the first degree. There was no bail. I had been caught in a routine cat drug test. After finger, palm, foot, voice and retinal prints I was issued a baggy jumpsuit and allowed to sign a form debiting my account for the cost of my food, lodging, guards, etc.

As it turns out, I was actually acquitted of the charge (my spouse's young nephew had brought the catnip and I hadn't

known about it, as a lengthy interrogation ascertained). Unfortunately I had been fined for missing work without authorization, and then fired for it, and *then* fined automatically for not having a job; all that plus the hundreds of dollars a day for my prison lodging had been allowed by my bank, which left me deeply in debt to the bank. I was beginning to feel hopeless when it occurred to me that if I cashed in my insurance policy it might just cover my debt. I'd be an uninsured pauper and subject to arrest at any time, but at least not actually in jail. I bribed a guard with my infinite (ly negative) bank account and was allowed to send a brief message.

After a couple hours of solitary the doors to my holding cell opened. My spouse walked in, flanked by the largest PB I'd ever seen. Without preliminaries I was offered a release form to sign. "It's important ... please sign it without making a fuss. It's for the children."

"Oh, thank god you're here! I was hoping you'd come quickly."

Looking embarrassed - I assumed at my eagerness - I was urged to sign a second form. I did so without even looking at it, my eyes fixed on my angel's face.

As my spouse turned to leave I was grabbed from behind by the PB, who began dragging me away. He slapped a red "DONOR - ALL ORGANS" card on my chest and began dragging me back to the processing shops on that floor of the prison. I fought and yelled: "Darling, can't ... can't you help me? ... Get me out ..."

Pat turned, smiled a sunny receptionist smile and said "We get more money for your organs separately than we do for them together. I'm sorry, but I just can't do it. Insurance regulations, I'm sure you understand."

by *Primitivo Morales*

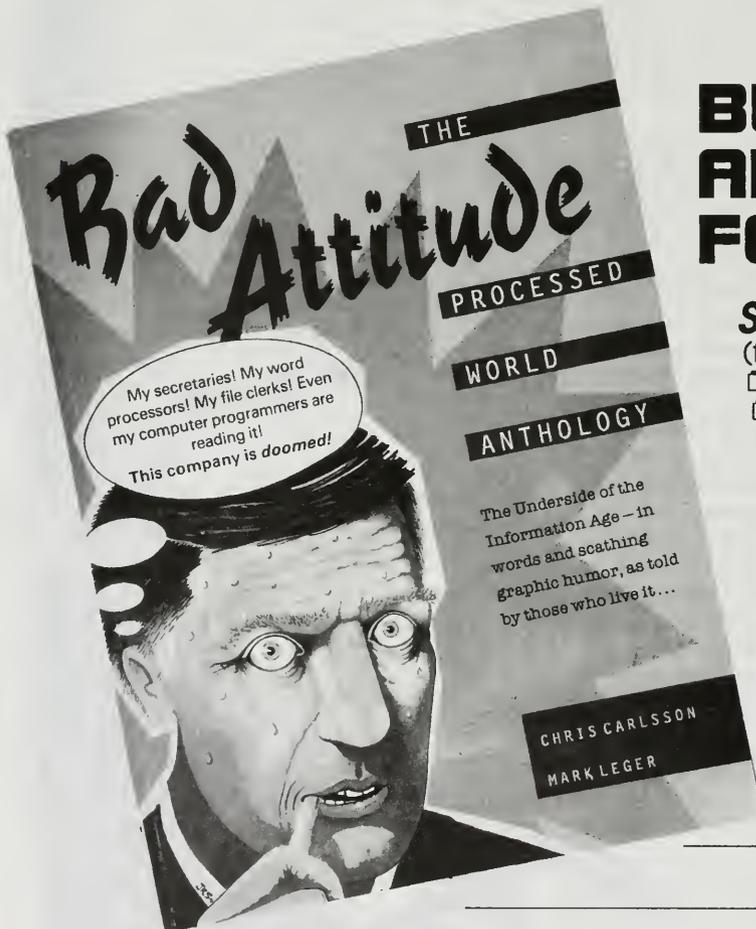


GRAPHIC: JRS

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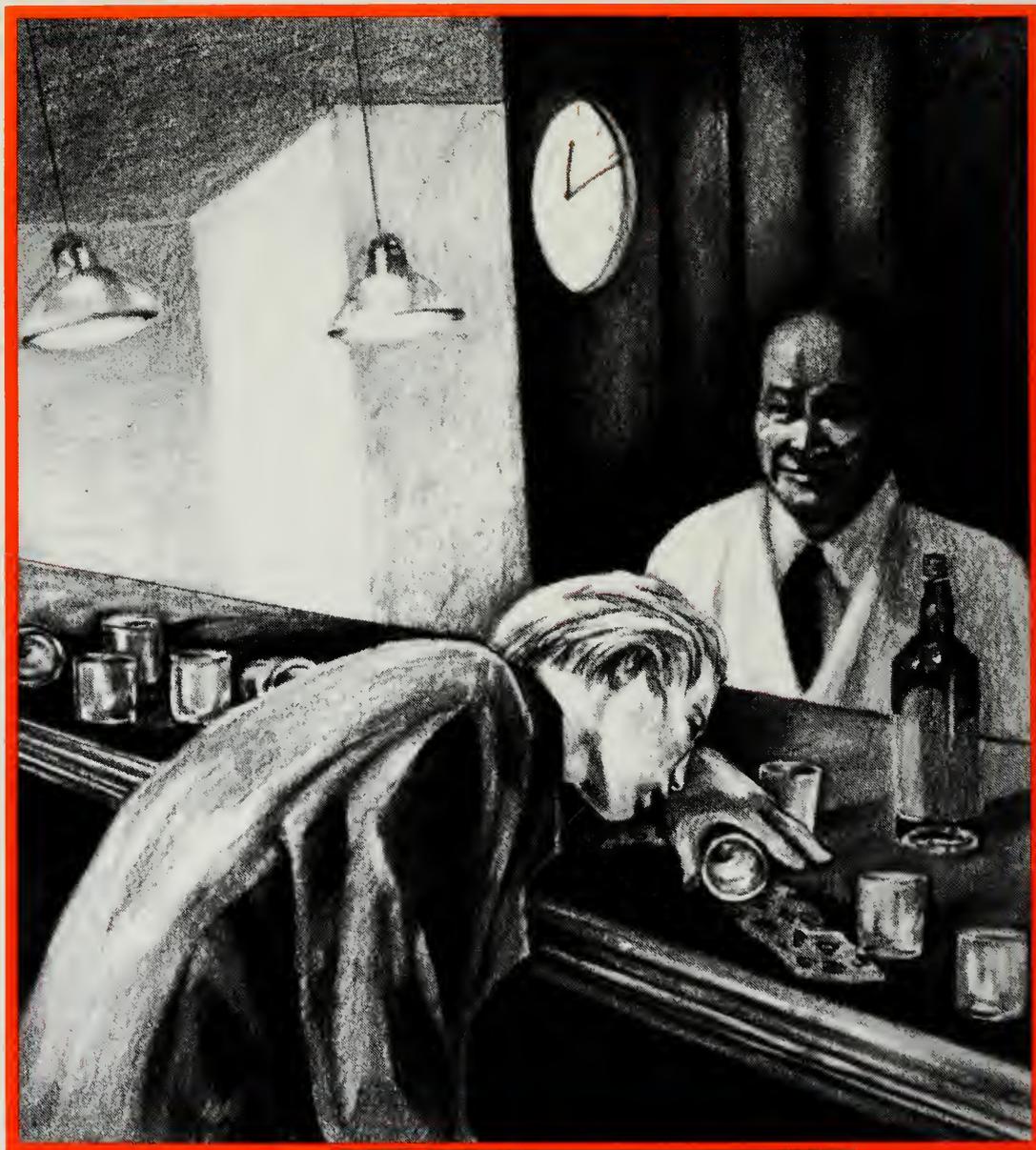
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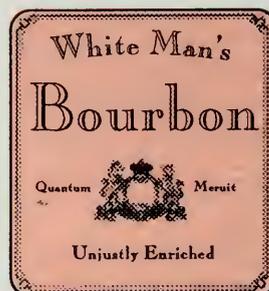
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