

BENEATH THE UNDERGROUND



BOB BLACK

"A rope stretched over the abyss between Friedrich Nietzsche and Sid Vicious" – David Ramsey-Steele on Bob Black

BENEATH THE UNDERGROUND

Bob Black



FERAL HOUSE

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Foreword

Bob Black: Hunter of Butterflies
by Dr. Kirby Olson

I only met Bob Black once: in a bar decorated like a teenage delinquent's bedroom. The bar was in Tacoma, Washington and was shaped like a coffee pot. Known as the Java Jive, the interior of the bar was all funked out with fake leopard skin and psychedelic memorabilia; two monkeys gazed glumly out of their cage (animal activists have freed them in the five years since then); there were tattooed cowboys all around us, and 50s hits on the juke box.

Black surprised me: I had expected, from his vituperative writings in the marginal press, the equivalent of Big Daddy Roth's Rat Fink—blood shot eyes, and a pink tail wrapped around cloven feet.

Who was this intelligent, clubby chap wearing a light blue arrow shirt, blue corduroy slacks, black shoes, a gold-colored watch? Though nearly forty, he had soft brown hair with no noticeable gray, a large but pleasant face with a slight overbite of his upper teeth; he cleared his throat often; had large thick glasses; big, well-groomed hands, was rather polite, smiling often.

He said to me, "You're shy, so I intend to dominate you." But while he was extremely articulate, he was also a gifted listener. While he did most of the talking, I got to arrange the conversation according to my interests, so in fact I was the master, he the slave.

He spoke of the Albany Regency, a powerful political machine of the 1820s, whose star was Martin Van Buren. Van Buren, Black explained, was to Jackson what George Bush is to Reagan. He asked in detail of my obsession of the late 1980s—the forgotten surrealist Philippe Soupault. He told me of his various friends such as Zack Replica—for whom, he explained rather loudly in front of the various rednecks in the bar—it was necessary to hold his *huge* dick when he took a whiz, because Zack had *lobster hands!* Then, lowering his voice to a whisper, he spoke of Anarchism.

By the end of the night (10 hours and 7 Northwest micro-brewery

beers later), he spit when he talked, a bit of dribble on his chin. I was in a better state, because I had stuck to tomato juice, but he was still voluble and dynamic. [He makes it sound calculating, but he's a teetotaler], whereas I, at 4:00 in the morning, was technically asleep, as I drove him back to his Law Conference. [I 'd been flown out there by my then employer, the unspeakable Albany Law School.]

that was Black live. But what of the immortal Black, the Black that writes, a member of the community of the undead? This Bob Black is an onophiliac, a connoisseur, tasting among the micro-breweries of avant-garde literature. What he likes—Gerry Reith, Ed Lawrence—has a certain vigorous body—but I think it is ultimately the style that Black favors over the politics, the hue over the cry. Naturally, the one cannot exist without the other, as style is politics, but the emphasis given ought to be noted, even over Black's stoutest objections.

Black's two main bloodlines can be traced to the French Situationists on one side, giving him a certain theoretical density and obscurity, and on the other side to Ambrose Bierce, giving him a rabid bite. While the theoretical Black is intense, and eloquent, it is Eris in Black which I find fraught with the richest Black humor. That Bob Black misuses his gifts in a way such as the Gods of ancient Greece misused theirs—tossing lightning bolts, causing wars, death—often for petty reasons of revenge. Black does just this—apparently without remorse—bringing everything he has to bear on his enemies—delighting in his superior education. Sometimes he disguises these personal attacks by putting them into a historical and intellectual framework—to give the appearance of objectivity, but for Black, the ad hominem attack is a given—as many of the works in this volume will attest. It is a tribute to Black's genius that, in the explosions he metes out to these lesser writers, he does illumine their thoughts—perhaps the only positive social value Black confers on them?

I've scratched my head for years, trying to figure out what Bob Black believes in. In spite of his belligerence, there is a mirage of utopia flickering in his head somewhere. This mirage consists of intermittent moments when he romanticizes Ned Ludd, Maypole dancing, or Mediterranean culture (in spite of being genetically a Scot). Perhaps his values could be discerned in his scholarly writings? [No more than anywhere else.] A close look at Black's legal literature

might reveal something, or it might not. Revealing in concealing.

Black's true economics, the one he operates on without thought of recompense among the marginals ephemera, is Slash and Burn, and he is probably the most sophisticated exponent of this philosophy still extant. Like Tamerlaine, he lays waste to whole fields of thought, figuring that the act of writing is the closest equivalent one can still reach, within today's law, to an intellectual bloodbath. He has put to rout countless anarchists' paper tigers with his ferocious hilarity behind which lurks some mysterious meta-anarchism, which he terms Watsonian. Which Watson? I've tried to Sherlock to the bottom of this, but have never quite made it. Perhaps the shadow play of fisticuffs is enough for me, this conflict of tiny factions among the intellectually neglected fields of the remnants of urban insubordination. It is here that Black excels, where he finds and gives his kicks. Black never retreats, or concentrates on one front, but is always expanding his affronts—not only do we find the mighty SubGenius Foundation, the Small Press Alliance, or *Processed World* under attack, but there is always some fellow marginal, some easy victim such as an old hippy or some socialist kid with rich parents, publishing his first magazine. The only time I can bear to read what they have written is when Black cites them. It may be their one chance at immortality because of having been caught with their eyes open and their pants down in a volcanic explosion, and frozen in amber.

Why must Black pick on the little guy? Though his writing is as luminous and savage, as well-turned as Oscar Wilde's, Wilde picked bigger foes, foes who could fight back, such as Whistler, who could whistle as he turned out nocturnes with one hand and with the other, the sort of murderous commentary collected in *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*. Perhaps Black is turning those he picks on into artists, ever so slowly—as they must rise to their own defense, but there is no evidence of this. [Maybe the guy only looks little after I'm through with him.]

Once I asked Black on the phone whether he would have wanted to be anything besides a writer. He said that when he was little he had always thought he would make an excellent despot. Unlike Hitler, who was forced to abandon his artistic career due to lack of opportunities in order to rule Germany; Black gave up his dreams of becoming a dictator, due to lack of opportunities, in order to become an artist.

What kind of artist? A satirist. Once I asked his why he consis-

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tently took on such minor nitwits, who clearly could not compete with his erudition or intellectual reach. To me, it hardly seemed sporting. Black explained. “Tom Paine didn’t wait around to refute Burke; he churned out his own polemics in the meantime. [?] George III and his placemen weren’t worthy opponents either. We read Locke but not Filmer, but Locke’s greatest is a refutation of Filmer. Swift, Pope, Aristophanes (who gives a shit about Cleon?)—it’s routine for satirists and polemicists to take on their inferiors. If they weren’t their/our inferiors, why take them on? I have lately read a collection by Mencken (*The American Scene*) and two by Dwight Macdonald. Their enemies are as forgettable as mine.” [for an elaboration of my point, see discussion of John Crawford in chapter 6.]

What we find then, in the marginalia periodical literature of this particular fin-de-siècle, is an eccentric chasing butterflies with an elephant gun. But, ever so rarely, in a touching scene, he does stop to admire—and sometimes even spare—the wings of a kindred rutty and riotous Monarch.

Chapter One
Introduction: Beneath the Underground

In 1986 I wrote a review of Gerry Reith's *Neutron Gun* which I sold to several yuppie weeklies, including the *Village Voice*. Emboldened, I tried *The Nation* next. The editrix in rejecting the review expressed interest in an article about the marginals milieu whose existence it incidentally disclosed. Maybe this is the big break for the sub-underground (I mused), like Ed Sullivan and the Beatles. And so I surveyed the scene, in the latter portion of the piece taking for an extended example Gerry Reith, the quintessential marginal. *The Nation* rejected the new piece, too, saying I had failed to render the milieu sufficiently transparent to outsiders. Since I am sure every reader of this book will easily understand everything in "Beneath The Underground," he may conclude that *The Nation* should take no great pride in the capacity of its readership. Presumably, they fall short of readers of the Loompanics Catalog (chapter 8), the *Boston Review* and *Popular Reality*, among others.

I consider the following article the best overview of the samizdat scene, the sub-underground, what Marc Bloch calls the post-moderns, which anybody has ever done. It frames most of the rest of this book, the first book mainly about the milieu. The point of view is sympathetic and internal, but not uncritical. I am paradoxically an expert on amateurism, my specialty is dilettantism. I was doing proto-marginal projects—personalzines in the early 70s, xerox posters in the late 70s—before the marginals as a subculture, with its own characteristic attitudes and tool-kit and forms of expression came together in the early 1980s. I was present at the creation, and always in the thick of it. If I am not now, and maybe never was the most knowledgeable person to map the milieu, right now I am probably the only one with the time and inclination for the task. The timing was perfect. Much earlier nobody could have discerned the unity of the subculture. Much later it is much harder to keep an eye on all the

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representative tendencies.

On the other hand, in the temporary subculture (not that we need another label), projects have a short shelf life. Longevity is exceptional and is only slightly correlated with exceptional quality (*Mallife*, yes; *Inside Joke*, no). Most zines, for instance, reach their peak, if ever, within a few months and then wipe out. Most of the article's specifics are out of date. I have opted for reproducing the 1986 text virtually intact, updating only an occasional fact, because it captured the moment. By way of supplementation, I follow it with my forward to the *Popular Reality* anthology (a revised, improved version of the one that appears there) and a new text dealing with the recent history and current condition of the milieu (*parts of chapters 4 and 7, for instance*). In the main it is an opinionated guide to sub-cultural spelunking.

So much for the explanations, now for the brag. Among my paying customers for the *Neutron Gun* review was the *Express* (Oakland, California). It was but one year after the *Processed World* conflict (chapter 4); the *Express* supported PW, even showcasing a long article by Tom Athanasiou shortly after the thug attacked me on the street; the *Express* printed for PW free classified ads threatening me until I threatened to retaliate with a libel suit. Since the PW's were working with ex-Gorilla Grotto types in their almost successful campaign to destroy me, they were in a position to advise the *Express* that my threat was credible; some time after Grotto rodent John Law smashed my face into the sidewalk ten or twelve times, I impoverished him with a slander suit which cost him \$4,100 in legal bills.

The *Express* might well prefer my submission to my submissions, moreover, I didn't want PW to know my phone number even with a continent between us. I therefore wrote as "James West" and, when the acceptance letter asked for my phone number, I offered carte blanche in editing the piece, besides, I was travelling across the country and could not be reached. To authenticate my lie, I had Garrett O'Hara remail my letter from Junction City, Kansas. The review appeared in due course and many people recognized the review as mine, too late for the *Express*. "James West" signed his \$100 check over to me and I cashed it.

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The underground press of the 1960s has no contemporary counterpart. True, there are “alternative” media, but, like their prosperous readers, they are well integrated into the American mainstream, even if they do detest Reagan. Aside from the purely political slicks of fixed ideology, the alternative press today consists mainly of yuppie-oriented weeklies which sometimes publish good investigative journalism but in the main are little more than glorified events calenders. What they decidedly are *not* is the voice of a new politics and culture.

The “underground” metaphor was always ambiguous. It might mean Marx’s “old mole,” undermining existing institutions. Or it might mean only, as today, the bargain basement of the Great American Department Store, catering to the tastes of a particular class of consumers. To find the counter-cultures of *our* time requires burrowing *beneath* the underground where a lively, little-known non-conformist scene is thriving in the catacombs.

What the printing press was to the 60s, the copy machine is to the 80s. Replacing the silk-screen poster is the photocopy collage poster. 80s counter-cultures are even more decentralized and participatory than their predecessors. From science fiction fandom they have borrowed the “fanzine,” a small-circulation photocopy magazine, and the APA’s (reader-written publications) which are said to be cocktail parties in print. (With the crucial difference, someone observed, that in an APA there is nothing to drink.) Thanks to the ubiquity and cheapness of self-service xerography, even 14 year olds can lead alternative lives by mail, often pseudonymously. For added security, post office boxes start at \$35 a year. For the visually oriented, there is no need for fine-arts training when the morning paper is replete with images—often startling enough—to be recombined in offbeat ways. Add a poem or polemic or maybe just an ad for a garage-band performance as text, and for the expense of four or five dollars, an uncensored poster can go up in a hundred places around

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town. Somewhat more expensive, yet well within the reach of many, self-produced music can be recorded on cassettes (as can spoken letters, a popular pastime) and distributed by its maker or by small independent outlets. Everything can be done by mail, including "mail art," in which collage artists and others bypass the art galleries by putting their work on postcards or take turns compiling it in fanzines.

Like the 60s counter-culture, the 80s version tends to be raunchy, argumentative, impassioned and embattled. In part it is a youth culture, but not monolithic in its cultural tastes. Marginals tend to be interested in music, but where there was once a dominant psychedelic style, now marginals variously prefer punk, industrial music, or nameless high-tech cacophony. The 80s scene is not what remains of the punk scene, but there is some influence and overlap. Marginals involved in punk often act as its loyal opposition, alert to tendencies toward capture by the dominant culture of the kind that, they think, devitalized rock music in the 70s.

This in fact is the usual relation of marginals to adjacent dissident or avant garde scenes. Thus they are usually familiar with anarchism, and quite a few espouse it, but others dismiss it as just another constraining ideology or criticize its obsolescence (as does Feral Faun's pamphlet, *Anarchy vs. Anarchism*). If they once read science fiction, as many have, they don't read it now or they criticize its current condition, as did the thoughtful fanzine *Cheap Truth*. Some of them are, or were, libertarians, but of a kind to make the respectably bourgeois Libertarian Party cringe—people like Samuel Edward Konkin III, whose revolutionary "agorism" or pure free-market anarchism is supposed to abolish and liberate the working class; or Erwin S. Strauss, Jr., editor of the political APA *The Connection*, who takes the self-help individualism of Americans (and marginals) to its ultimate in books like *Basement Nukes* and *How to Start Your Own Country*.

Except for the libertarians, who usually have conservative backgrounds, insofar as they are political the dissidents are left-oriented, or used to be. But few are not highly critical of existing left organizations and ideologies both liberal and Leninist. Impugned as purists or the lunatic fringe if noticed at all by the "alternative" press, the politically-minded marginals can usually retort, with justice, that they've paid their dues, too. Even the teenagers among them may have been brought to demonstrations by 60s parents or, making their

own way there, found themselves scorned for their short hair by grown-ups once scorned for their long hair. They are the ones who tend to have trouble with “monitors.” (Prominent among these are the “peace punks” in cities like San Francisco, who, contrary to what the corporate media suggest, are mostly pacifist anarchists, not followers of the Revolutionary Communist Party.)

Older marginals often have histories of activism. Rev. Crowbar, publisher of the lively bimonthly tabloid *Popular Reality*, is a peace movement veteran and once ran for office. The late Gerry Reith as a teenager was arrested at Seabrook. John Zerzan, who chronicles the “revolt against work” and other indicia of unarticulated rebellion, a critic of unions as protectors of capitalism, is a former union official. Possibly the oldest marginal, who was already boasting he was the world’s oldest rock ‘n’ roll star when he formed The Fugs in the 60s, is Tuli Kupferberg. In the 70s he was born again as a satiric cartoonist, self-published in newsprint booklets, and today he frolics with youngsters who might be his grandchildren. Why are there so few like him with so long a history of fighting the good fight and so little to be ashamed of? This is the question marginals address to their precursors, in so many words or by implication, as did Brother Wretched, the Righteous Dervish, when—upon learning that Neil Young had endorsed Reagan in 1980, redid the lyrics of the Kent State anthem “Ohio” as “Oh My Vote!”

Unfortunately, the critiques of the left by the left-out are little-known to the progressives who might profit by pondering them, for this sort of thinking is shut out of the alternative media, sometimes because the leftists are too lazy to counter novel criticisms from other than right wing quarters, sometimes because they don’t want it known that there is anyone more radical than they are. Crude or combative polemics may also fall afoul of New Age-influenced conventions prescribing a positive approach, but in many cases the message, not the manner, is what disturbs.

Anti-nuclear publications haven’t rushed to print Mycall Sunanda’s essay, written in their own argot, calling on anti-nuclear activists to acknowledge and express publicly the violent feelings they bottle up in the interest, misperceived, of nonviolence as ideology. Nor have anti-war activists welcomed “The Enchantment of Nuclear Destruction,” a piece by Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous which begins: “The possibility of total destruction through nuclear

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war corresponds to a condition of ruin everywhere that makes such destruction attractive." The peace movement, narrowly framing its objective as mere survival, has nothing to say to those who are enchanted by annihilation precisely because they are sick of an everyday life already reduced to mere survival.

In contrast, within the marginals' own media, disputation is vigorous, and the range of permissible opinion is wide. Arcane or even abhorrent topics, from space colonization to Holocaust Revisionism, are taken in stride. Some of it is puerile: the APA *FreFenZine* has lately hosted a raging controversy among verbose nitwits as to whether or not it's sexist to hate Madonna and Cyndi Lauper. But if much of a fanzine like *Inside Joke* is written by teenagers, including several in their late twenties, it has also published fictions by Roldo ("Dark Wings Over Easy"), Kerry Wendell Thornley and Gerry Reith which would have raised the RBC count of many an anemic literary journal.

In this hothouse atmosphere, it is possible to grow rapidly in creative power. Several years ago, a Knoxville marginal known as Revo reviewed his accomplishments: "Have been making collages since 1979, zines since 1980, mail art since 1982, and tapes since 1984." He was, I believe, not yet twenty. Though their graffiti are everywhere, the marginals have so far escaped popular notice except when on rare occasions the media treat them as pranksters or hooligans. As the marginals are beginning to confront the outside world with their talents and their demands, this may be about to change.

Sub-underground artifacts are starting to surface in spite of themselves. Literary-oriented marginals like John Bennett and Jack Saunders have been publishing small press books for years. Detroit's Black & Red, whose animating spirit Fredy Perlman recently passed away, has published a series of well-made books and pamphlets, culminating in Perlman's own poetic condemnation of the course of civilization, *Against His-Story, Against Leviathan!*.

After years of slow but relentless publication of the magazine *Beatniks From Space*, as well as several chapbooks, Neither/Nor Press issued Gerry Reith's collection *Neutron Gun* posthumously in 1985. Before breaking up, Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous self-published, with supplies in part stolen from employers, the best of four years of posters as *Adventures in Subversion*. Despite printer censorship, which in the late 80s emerged as a major menace to marginals book pub-

lishing, Popular Reality Press (successor to the tabloid) published a book of John Crawford's distinctively drawn satiric cartoons deriding "Baboon Dooley, Rock Critic" after their hundreds of appearances in punk and marginals zines.

Marginals are not, in general, joiners. Many are in no position to be joiners because they are so geographically (and in other ways) isolated that there is nothing locally available to join. Their antipathy to organization (a major bone of contention with the established left) arises partly from their crusty individualism, partly from their interpretation of the modern history of radical movements (with the U.S.S.R. as Exhibit A), but importantly also from the raw fact of their geographical dispersion. The 60s counter-culture was based in college towns and in the poor neighborhoods adjoining college campuses in big cities. The 80s Anti's may also be found in those places (notably Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Eugene, Madison, Austin) but, absent conscription, they aren't concentrated there, or anywhere. Above and beyond their aversion to organizations as such, marginals often turn up in the boondocks where there's nobody to join up with anyway. If this is bad for them, it is perhaps good for their cause, which is worst received by the cosmopolitan jades. What the marginals lose in amplification by their spontaneous, localized free-form protests, they hope they more than regain in immediacy and in their relative immunity to co-optation. They are only too familiar with prior oppositional movements. They'd rather provoke a "failure" like the Paris Commune or the Spanish Revolution than a "success" like the Bolshevik *coup d'état* or the election of FDR.

The reclusiveness of marginals does not necessarily establish their impotence. Their poster blitzes may have an impact whether or not the mass media deign to notice their rivals. "Posterists" have made a splash in a number of places. In Sheridan, Wyoming, Gerry Reith so saturated Main Street with fringe posters that the police staked out a copy shop in order to identify him and warn against a repetition. Visiting him later, I replicated his feat, for which he received a police visit and a front page newspaper story that didn't name him. Having by then made my escape, I published a letter in the same paper (pseudonymously, of course) taking full responsibility for the caper and deriding the police.

I have probably posted tens of thousands of broadsides from my poster project *The Last International* (1977–1983). When the

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Multinationalist, Garrett Michael O'Hara, was caught putting posters under windshields in Junction City, Kansas, the police questioned him on suspicion of "seditious," the flyers being (or so they suspected) "of a communist nature." The marginals international went into action, Amnesty International-style, deluging the local paper with letters (some were printed) extolling anarchy and maligning the police. The case was dropped.

"The Falwell Game," which drew the attention of the mass media, was a marginals jape. Innumerable zines published instructions how to waste the Moral Majority's money by calling its toll-free number and hanging up or, better still, signed up as Faith Partners for free Falwell Bibles. Later some gay newspapers picked up on the Game and Jerry Falwell's blustering response was directed at them. Even if they'd dropped the project, the sub-underground—as far beneath Falwell's notice as the early mammals to the lordly dinosaurs—would have kept the Game going. But the Game is over. The marginals won. Falwell's Moral Majority got an unlisted number and later changed its name after receiving and paying a dollar or more for each of one million hostile calls. There is a somewhat similar story in my Falwell Bible about David and Goliath.

My "marginals" tag begs questions it's past time to answer. What kind of people *are* these people, anyway? The implications of my terminology—that they're lumpenproletarian vagabonds—holds true for quite a few of them, but times have changed since Marx coined this abusive adjective. Some of the youngest marginals are high-school or college students who live at home, although several are runaways. Their economic elite consists of self-employed small operators like Loompanics publisher Mike Hoy. Quite a few hold lowly office jobs, often temp jobs, frequently changed in order to free up time to live, although that means chronic poverty. Several are dropouts from law, academia or (in the case of the Little Free Press' Ernest Mann), real estate. A few parley their productions into disability checks. What these various destinies have in common is aversion to lifelong locked-in servitude to any boss. Unemployed shoplifters and self-employed typesetters share an aversion—not necessarily to productive work—but invariably to permanent full-time wage-labor which leaves no time for the free play of their energies and aptitudes.

Their nascent—not popularity, certainly, but their haphazard

publicity—is not always welcomed by xerox zealots with doubts about the printed word. They fear that, by encoding a fixed text onto a physical object, publishing separates writer and reader when what both want is to find each other in community. Even if the marginal's messages aren't inherently falsified by written publication, they may be trivialized by their media treatment. An example is Zack Replica's Dial-A-Rumor. He and collaborators produced an audio telephone daily tabloid of absurdist news from an alternative Carrollian-Kafkaesque universe containing the Iacocca Khomeini, the Chez Guevara restaurant in Berkeley, the Trilateral Foundation for Secular Humanism, and much more. Several newspaper stories (even a mention in *USA Today*) took the edge off this serious satiric project by doing cutesy human-interest stories about Replica because he is quadriplegic.

Gerry Reith (1959–1984) was not the typical marginal, since there isn't one, but he might have been the quintessential one. He grew up on a farm in Connecticut. In his teens he was placed in a mental hospital, I don't know why, an experience from which he never fully recovered. Soon afterwards he became a Bakuninist/Kropotkinist anarchist and got busted for anti-nuclear activism at Seabrook in New Hampshire.

The anti-nuclear left of the late 70s wasn't enough to satiate his hunger for freedom, and he became a (*laissez-faire*) libertarian, influenced by popularizations of the Austrian-school economics of Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, which seemed to offer a self-regulating market system of social freedom. Over the years in which he absorbed and engaged other, avant-garde influences—dada, surrealism, situationism—he never completely sundered his ties to the libertarians. In fact, he was, at his death, the newsletter editor of the minuscule Wyoming Libertarian Party, although he had announced his withdrawal from its (electorally-oriented) activities.

Reith went west for college (unfinished) and passed the last six years of his life in Sheridan, Wyoming—the second largest city in the state but, with 18,000 people, no cosmopolis. Working the night shift as a motel desk clerk, he saw a different world than his neighbors did. They liked him anyway, in spite of his ideas which, at every stage in his rapid intellectual evolution, were unusual. Around 1981 he started sending out feelers by mail, and he found his own kind. His small disposable income went for postage, books, magazine sub-

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scriptions and photocopying (well, also for liquor and methedrine, if the truth be known). In those days he resided in a flophouse with Veteran's Hospital outpatients and other down-and-outs whom he befriended (reading aloud to them from *Don Quixote*, for instance). He half-heartedly practiced with Sheridan's only, abortive rock band, but he spent more time with such leftists and libertarians as the town contained. With one of the latter, who as "Sun Tzu" later contributed to Reith's book *Neutron Gun*, he commenced his first original political project: the Word of Truth Ministry.

Sharing a Menckenesque hatred of small-town piety, the two produced a series of short pamphlets which, taking the Bible deadpan, at face value, proved that the answer to questions like "Did God Ordain the Holocaust?" and "Was Satan Behind the American Revolution" was "yes." Sun Tzu, a preacher's kid, did the actual writing, but Reith as corresponding secretary had to answer for it as the faithful wrote in to complain. They may have done their work too well, since a group of neo-Nazis in Georgia reportedly reprinted the Holocaust pamphlet. The person to complain of this, a punk teen named Carly Sommerstein, ended up as a *Neutron Gun* contributor, so the joke was perhaps on the Nazis. But the point is, from Day One, Reith was playing with fire.

Soon Reith was writing—every sort of thing, to everyone: posters, hundreds of letters, political tracts, fictions, parables, murky Burroughsian narratives, book reviews, a few poems. First letters, later articles and tales went to APA's, fanzines, and to the unorthodox, abuser-friendly fringes of the anarchist and libertarian movements whom he did much to connect in a larger, anti-authoritarian dialog. He had surprising success smuggling his ideas into the local dailies, which seem to have tolerated him as a Wild West individualist eccentric, which of course he was. The police were less receptive, though, to his glue-and-poster rampages down Main Street, and they even arrested him once for throwing snowballs at the Dairy Queen. Plains-clothes surveillance of an April 15 anti-tax picket thrown up by the Libertarian Party roused his paranoid fears, although not to the pitch they reached when he once complained that his boss was using "Masonic mind-control techniques" on him!

Kooks are an acquired taste not shared by many, but if Reith and other marginals are in some respects crackpots, there is more to them than that. Reith's honesty and his rapidly developing literary prowess

earned him a central place in the transcontinental postal salon which brought together wayward poets, bare-knuckle artists and meta-leftist radicals in the early 80s. A voracious reader, Reith became a teacher; he brokered Mishima and Pynchon to the politicos, workers' councils to the libertarian right, and irreligion to the general public. Not all his syntheses came off, but the conventional wisdom was such obvious folly that Reith looked elsewhere, anywhere, for pieces to the puzzle. It came down to this. How could the cause of freedom, which (in any of the many formulations familiar to him) had few adherents, triumph except as the imposition of an enlightened elite and, in victory, defeat itself?

An unpublished Reith story describes a Political Science class project—a successful social revolution which, without infringing any property rights, parleys gift-giving into competitive advantage until the Fortune 500 and their ally the state are bought out. Reith's *Neutron Gun* stories are maybe more realistic in regarding a few fortunately situated terrorists and assassins as the catalysts of a cleansing cataclysm, but Reith's nonfiction opinion was that such efforts—by the anarchist Direct Action bombers in Canada, for instance—were counterproductive. What did that leave?

Education, just what he'd been doing for two or three years, with no pay-off in sight. His students, unlike those of his fictitious Poli-Sci professor, had their own pre-emptive problems, and they were scattered far and wide. Reith had never met most of his closest friends. The very sophistication and systematic tenacity of his scrutiny of would-be world-savers was a source of despair. He figured, reasonably enough, that if there was a viable strategy for social change, he would have gotten wind of it. A late text, "Note on the Impossibility of Reading Your Way to Anarchy," says that he used to enthuse over a mailbox-full of anarchism, but now it bored and bothered him. For someone like Reith, an article like this amounted to a suicide note, although the one he finally did write was more succinct. His enlarged ability to interpret the world in no way increased his power to change it.

A failed love affair deepened his depression. His book *Neutron Gun* seemed endlessly delayed by the publisher's financial and other problems, and didn't appear until a year after his death. Finally, the post office, which had been his life-line to another world, albeit only a world of ideas, became the instrument of his destruction. A correspondent's letter was "accidentally" misdelivered to the local police,

then turned over to the FBI, which questioned Reith's neighbors. Apparently the casual use of words like "anarchism" was enough to activate the G-Men of the High Plains. Reith called the FBI, which refused to hand over the mail, and added that "we know all about you." It was a bunch of bull and Reith, in his last letters, said so, but he'd been driven to the brink. He left a note that said, "I have to get out, or die." In the event, he died, he shot himself. Reportedly he'd toted up the pro's and con's of life and death, and finding them evenly balanced, he flipped a coin.

From Goethe's fictional Werther to the not much more realistic punk bad boy Sid Vicious, the suicide of alienated youths has become a cliche. (It's also claiming the lives of more and more American teenagers.) Reith is representative of the marginals not by the way he went out (I know of only one other suicide in the marginals milieu) but rather in the range and intensity of his interests. His writing, though at times tendentious, at its best is crisp and vigorous, without wasted words. He saw the universe as essentially disorderly and depicted it through vignettes of stylized confrontation. The strain of humor which infuses much marginals work is, in his case, mordant rather than manic. Reith's writing is by no means all downbeat or doctrinaire, either. On topics further away from the gut issues of freedom and truth he could relax and be charming.

A good example is his—book review? operator's manual?—"Quixote: How to Use," which appears in John Bennett's anthology *A Good Day to Die*. But for his book *Neutron Gun*—half of it by Reith, half by his pen-pal partisans—Reith deliberately chose stories which directly forced political questions into the open. He wanted to settle accounts with modernism, liberalism, religion, consumer society, Marxism, *et al.*, because they stood in the way of what he wanted from life. Maybe he hoped his book would be the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of the 80s. He'd tried everything else, after all.

Jack Saunders says that, while no great book goes unpublished, many great books go unwritten. Reith may be the author of some of those books. The book he did assemble is a promise of more to come and an unsettling ensemble of portents. As an anthology, it introduces the American equivalent of the samizdat press. It discloses a level of discontent which is deeper than that of the issue-oriented 60s; there is more water under the bridge. But what is its capacity for action? That was the question that stumped Gerry Reith.

A Bar Room Brawl in Print

Popular Reality
Edited by the Irrev. Crowbar
Brooklyn: Autonomedia, forthcoming 1994

Publishing is like sex; timing is everything. *Popular Reality* (1984–1987) was right on time. The fringe was fermenting. PR bootlegged the best of it. Rev. Crowbar (David Nestle) made it look easy, and for him, it was. Artlessly but not carelessly assembled, PR amplified Crowbar's more than usually unique ego although 99% of the material was by others and most was not produced for PR. PR was always receptive to collage, and no wonder, it *was* a collage. Crowbar was a thieving magpie with a sense of style. Not to say a bratty naif whose decadence had the purity of innocence: Henri Rousseau with a can of spray-paint.

By 1984 the currents, creeds and crazes were commingling in the mails, and PR epitomized and accelerated the intersections. “Politics,” of course, throughout, “anti-authoritarian” but with a weakness for militant actions by whomever conducted which drew down the wrath of precision anarchists. Graphics, newsclips, rad news and low humor (that’s right, Ackerman, you heard me) and, as soon as we all had a look at each other, a free-swinging letters column like no other—that was Nestle’s infant formula. Many who were raised on it now find pap indigestible.

The tabloid started small, at eight pages, and took a few issues to fully find its braying voice. But by ones and twos the crew came aboard, cutlasses clenched between their teeth. The starting cast included Brother Wretched, the Righteous Dervish, who holds the world’s record for Jack Chick plagiarisms; Dadata (Ed Lawrence), mix-master and mischiefmaker; and yours truly. After two accessions in the second issue, Crowbar had himself an Impossible Missions Force.

Anti-Authoritarians Anonymous (John Zerzan and Dan Todd) imparted an important ideational spin—counter-clockwise. PR was

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never closed to orthodox anarchists, not even the risible “True Haymarket Anarchists” or peevish prigs like ex-Professor Jon Bekken, but as a forum the paper best suited, not anarchists exactly, but anarchs, lumpenproles likely to make Prince Kropotkin fidget with his beard or Malatesta maybe take his tie off. The other interloper was the legendary Al Ackerman, second-story man of the psyche, the tall-tale teller Mark Twain desired yet feared to be. What the personal ads call a “teddy bear,” but the kind that devours two or three tourists in Yellowstone every year.

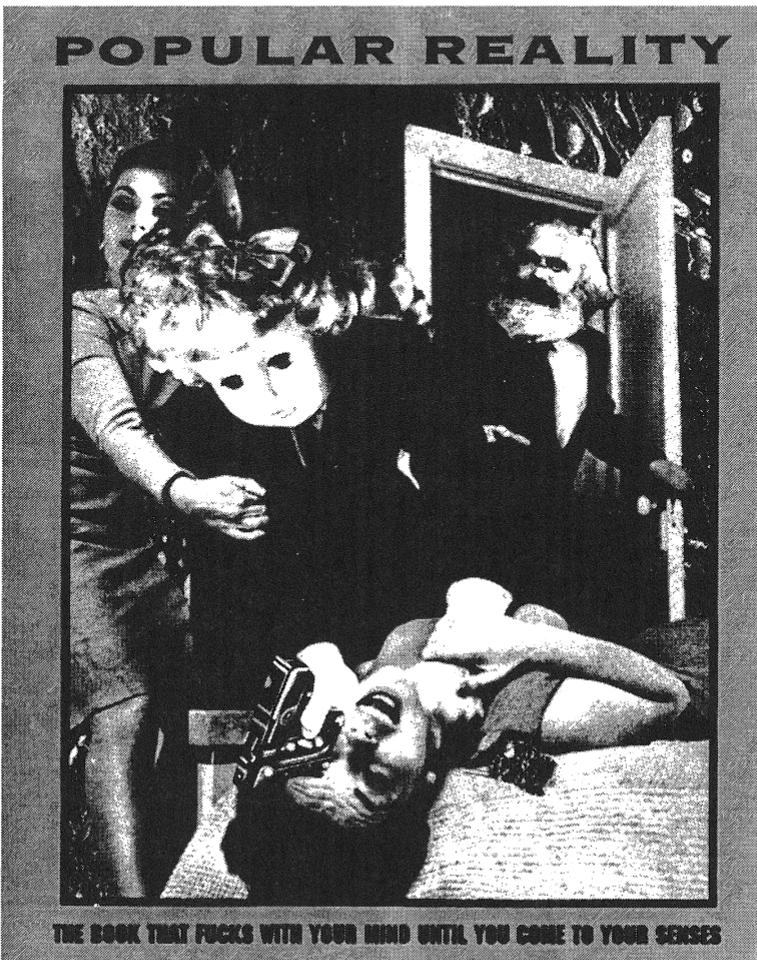
And there was Gerry Hannah and Gerry Reith, anarchists separated at birth; John Crawford and Jerod Pore; the collagists (O’Hara, Kossy, Schwind); the poets (Celeste Oatmeal, Lorri Jackson); the punks (Feederz, Frightwig); post-prose from Jake Berry and tENTATIVELY, a CONVENIENCE; kooks emeriti like Thornley and Dragwyla; and marginals impresario Hakim Bey, whose belated debut is the only evidence he wasn’t indispensable.

Not that an operation run in the what-the-hell way this one was had strict quality control standards. Bob McGlynn never noticed he was at the wrong party, and at the end even Ivan Stang slithered in.

Crowbar put the rabble back into Rabelaisian. He was, to lift a phrase from his admirer Denis McBee, an outlaw jackass publisher; a provocateur (but not an agent). A mistake often made was to react to PR with righteous indignation. The tale of the Tar Baby was reenacted repeatedly in the pages of PR, and it was always edifying. Fierce controversy raged around the Revolutionary Communist Party, the True Haymarket Anarchists, and the ShiMo’s. Fellators argued the appeal of cut versus uncut. A columnist for *The Nation* trumpeted the tabloid, then anathematized it for printing a pseudosituationist essay on Holocaust Revisionism. (The schmuck deserves to be remembered by name: Stu Klawans.) Politicos complained of incoherence (sure, so what?). Boring apoliticals professed to be bored; they were more likely unnerved.

Taken as a whole, *Popular Reality* tended to heal the split in wit, rejoicing intelligence with humor. And funny ha-ha with funny peculiar. Collage aspires to community, towards superseding separation, it is an ingathering of the exiles. Also the sublimation of the urge to dismember our fellows for failure to meet our needs, Ed Gein with his cupful of noses and a vagina for a snap-on tool. PR was the playground for cut-ups of every sort.

PR distilled a wide range of underground activity, much of it emergent, and the effect was intoxicating. There could never be, not even as early as 1984, any all-inclusive 80s marginal outlet. PR, like some other publications such as *Twisted Imbalance*, bolstered the zine scene by reprinting heavily from even smaller projects. PR did a lot to create, perhaps for thousands, a culture of confrontation and a nano-pluralism which was an invitation to produce and not just



Collage by Joe Schwind

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consume. Copies Crowbar didn't sell or give away by mail he just left around in heaps for the local public. (It is ridiculous yet typical that in three years, Crowbar issued the paper in three cities.) He proved that poverty is no bar to philanthropy. Not that he was out to Serve the People. It's just that to keep it you have to give it away.

Popular Reality was a bar-room brawl in print. It was the best. And this book is the best of the best, a *bestiary* of *Popular Reality*.

Bullsheet

The World of Zines

By Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice

New York: Penguin Books, 1992.

Factsheet Five

Edited by Mike Gunderloy (Nos. 1—37), by Mike Gunderloy, Cari Goldberg Janice, and Jacob Rabinowitz (Nos. 38—39), by Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice (Nos. 40—44), by Hudson Hayes Luce (No. 45) and by R. Seth Friedman (Nos. 46—52)

I. Fit the First

Factsheet Five, which originated a decade ago as one page of thumbnail reviews, has grown with the self- and micro-publishing scene it has helped build into an immense bimonthly compendium. Most of the thousand-plus reviews—140 pages of fine print in two columns—are still written by overworked editor-publisher Mike Gunderloy. He boasts he will review anything (except, it turned out, the SubGenius bomb I got in the mail): fanzines most of all, but also books, pamphlets, cassettes, videos, even incense and T-shirts. Other features include news notes, contact addresses, COA's, columns, graphics and letters.

In the marginals milieu, dispersed and decentralized, F5 has assumed an ironic importance. Zines have been produced for the sole purpose of mention there. Increasingly F5 is how self-publishers find out about each other and how they announce themselves to the world. A subculture of amateurism has produced its first full-time paid professional (more than full-time: Gunderloy puts in 90 hours a

week) who now has a paid staff.

Gunderloy is no sellout, but circumstances pressure him toward writing as if he were. Most reviews are perfunctory, as they always were, but too many are also careless and tend toward rote. Every issue has an overused word or phrase (such as "lovely") he willingly shuns when it's pointed out to him but always has a successor.

Two inherent tendencies more seriously flaw all this dedicated effort. The first is that the editor's naturally positive disposition, reinforced by a motive to please, makes for unduly favorable reviews. A good part of *F5*'s circulation consists of trades with the producers of what it reviews. They are its most interested customers and the principal provisioners of material for review; earlier, readers like myself did most of that. There are bad reviews in *F5*, and they tend to be the best ones, but there are not nearly as many bad reviews as there are bad zines, EP's and so forth. It is when he avoids panning something only ordinarily bad, not spectacularly so, that Gunderloy is most likely to lapse into empty evasiveness.

Besides a skew not so much toward the positive as away from the negative, the overall distribution is flattened. Reviews of matter well above average but not outstanding read about the same as reviews of matter well below average but not wretched. It is precisely in this massive *marginals* midsection where orientation is most needed that it is least provided. And it demoralizes those whose work is good but, instead of being incited to greatness, gets mainstreamed with the mediocre. Several very good zines have folded, in part, from frustration with Gunderloy's unfairness and disrespect.

F5, meaning no harm, is nonetheless doing some. Reforms are in order. Some have commenced: next issue (No. 38) two more people making a substantial commitment to the project join the founder in a triumvirate. Gunderloy has unloaded some peripheral activities on others. But the more he succeeds in boosting coverage and circulation the more these relief measures risk becoming mere stopgaps. A few suggestions:

1. Gunderloy should delegate the writing of *all* music reviews. Virtually everyone at all in-the-know condemns his critical judgments and deplores his clout as a reviewer. Glen Thrasher of *Lowlife* deserves credit for printing what many are thinking—as does Gunderloy for reprinting his critique. But the point is to act on it. In no other field will Gunderloy find it easier to enlist capable reviewers.

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F5 derived much of its value, in its middle period, from Gunderloy's overview of the *entire* self-service subculture. He had at least something of a handle on them all, the punks, the SF fen, the anarchists, the game-players, the SubGenii and Discordians, the mail artists, the libertarians, the pagans, the Constitutionalists, the hackers, the APA's, all the do-it-yourselfers and those operating not too far beyond their scale. But while he should certainly continue to pay some attention to everything, he can no longer comment quasi-authoritatively on everything. The interconnections are real—Gunderloy did much to forge them—but his very success precludes his personally presiding over the whole sprawling mess.

2. Gunderloy should get rid of most of his columnists. The regulars are shambling horrors. Kerry Wendell Thornley, co-author of the *Principia Discordia*, is a paranoid burnout whom it is disgraceful to exhibit as a Discordian mascot, especially since Gunderloy himself got into all this from the Discordian sector. Garry de Young is another tiresome crank. Worst of all is the insufferable movie critic, Anni Ackner, whose occasional digressions from self-absorption may well allude to films, but it is hard to tell. In one typical column her first sentence was 320 words long. Of these, 195 are in the first parenthetical phrase (which also contained a parenthetical phrase) and 25 more in the second. I know of no worse writer on the planet. The Internal Revenue Code sings by comparison. She's awful. She's godawful. Get rid of her!

3. F5 should open up even more to outside contributors. In a scattershot way it is increasingly doing so, but there are lots more outsiders happy to help. F5 should issue an open invitation to participate and it should publish anything not substantially worse than the worst of its own reviews.

4. Use the new co-editors and/or outsiders for cliche catching and anytime the Aeditor, as he styles himself, fails even to go through the motions of caring about what he's doing. If Gunderloy finds something "confusing"—perhaps his most common adverse judgment—he should solicit a second opinion before saying so.

5. Discontinue "Publisher's Showcase" which, despite disclaimers, everybody inevitably regards as the blue ribbon. Gunderloy finds the occasional slick publication such a relief after wading through a mass of poorly produced xerography that it is likely to be singled out for unmerited approbation. He's also a sucker for pacifist, vegetarian and

cooperative publications catering to his own pet causes, although they are no better at what they do than any other specialty zines. Few of what I'd choose as the best get showcased or, usually, even given a fair shake down in steerage.

For *Factsheet Five* the challenge is to keep the fun in it or else succumb to its own success. It is wearisome to read what was wearisome to write, and that's more and more of the magazine. If present trends persist it is not too far from time to call it quits.

II. Fit the Further

Without admitting it, Gunderloy enacted some of my reforms. Cari Goldberg Janice and Jacob Rabinowitz joined him in an editorial troika. It was a relief to listen at last to something more than Gunderloy's continuo. And there were minor tightenings-up of business and editorial practices. But the reforms, not carried far enough, were only a respite, not a restorative, for *Factsheet Five*.

Rabinowitz especially is a polished writer (chapter 9) whose words fell like raindrops on parched Gunderloy readers. The first five words marked a review as his own. But both newcomers diversified the monoculture. Just as they came aboard, longtime outside poetry reviewer P.J. Bellomo had to stop contributing. As the only published poet in the troika, it fell to Rabinowitz to write many of the poetry reviews. And a great bleating went up across the face of the land—or so Gunderloy concluded from a few complaints.

The secret garden of the self-published poets was in need of a weeding it never got from Gunderloy and Bellomo. As bad as a lot of fringe stuff is, its poetry is the worst, as thoughtless as punk but without the energy. JR reviewed them as if they were old enough to drive—judging them by criteria like intelligibility, vivacity and scansion (a word he taught to Gunderloy) as if they were (trying to be) poets, not patients.

To propitiate the poetasters, Gunderloy let Rabinowitz go, although JR was gracious enough not to contradict the cover story that *F5* took too much time from work on his dissertation (although he was only responsible for 20 hours a week, the workload of a graduate student teaching assistant). Gunderloy intimated as much when, replying to JR's critics, he announced the editors would work toward a “common reviewing style.” For that, read “Gunderloy’s reviewing style,” which is common all right.

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This affair confirmed that Gunderloy consistently sacrificed the interests of his readers to those of his trading partners. When he was publishing for pleasure, Gunderloy described *F5* as reviews of what he found in his mailbox. When he began to publish for profit—or try to—he required a regular, predictable input of raw materials which he could only secure from the primary producers. No wonder it got to the point that Gunderloy reserved really critical reviews for publishers disliked by all the others, such as racists, or else publishers critical of St. Gunderloy himself. Indeed the “*Factsheet Five* party” became a point of pilgrimage at which the faithful assembled at his house to bask in his glory. And as no hierachic cult is complete without a ritual of excommunication, in this one it took the form of public disinvitation to the holy days at the cult compound.

In his Loompanics book *How to Publish a Fanzine*, now out of print, Gunderloy explained that the book would have been out two years sooner if the author didn’t love his subject, fanzine publishing, so much. By this point *Factsheet Five* was no more a fanzine than Dan Quayle is Jack Kennedy. If Gunderloy really enjoyed putting it out, he needed a psychiatrist.

In the infancy of *F5*, even before Gunderloy got so full of himself (among other things), Gerry Reith wrote that Gunderloy spoiled everything he touched, that to be praised by Gunderloy was to be insulted. Far awhile he performed a public service, and from afar it appeared as if he still did. Each individual zine appreciates the publicity, but zinedom as a community suffers as it becomes less of a network and more of a pyramid.

I never had any objection to Gunderloy making a buck off the sub-underground we helped (and helped each other) create if he could do it without impairing what is attractive and original about it. He was not cut out to be what he ended up as: a boss. Originally, Gunderloy was an anarcho-capitalist. He became rather an anarchist capitalist. An eighteenth-century critic of the Philadelphia Quakers complained that they prayed for their fellow man on Sunday and preyed on him the other six days. The anarchism is for Sundays, the capitalism is the workaday reality. In the original version of this text, I predicted his demise, noting that “there are occasional signs Gunderloy is beginning to lose it. When he’s gone, everybody will wonder why he seemed so important.” This is my try at explaining why.

III. Fit the Final

On July 27, 1991, Mike Gunderloy announced on a computer bulletin board that the next issue of *Factsheet Five* would be the last. He explained that the returns simply did not justify the entire expropriation of his life. For his fans it was a day to don what Hawthorne called “sad-colored clothes.” For others it was a second chance for the self-help subculture: “Ding Dong! The Witch Is Dead!” as the Prime Minister of Livestock and Heavy Machinery put it.

In an extraordinary turn, one week later an unknown, Hudson Hayes Luce, took over the magazine and assumed its debts. (Contrary to what I have earlier reported, no money changed hands.) A martinet with delusions of grandeur, Luce fulfilled the general expectation that he would run the rag into the ground. Between moving twice and refusing to answer his mail—a Circle Nine sin in the marginals milieu—he made almost every possible mistake. Contrary to his contract with Gunderloy, he failed to honor all subscriptions. A prima donna, he fired his columns editor, Ben Gordon, for the temerity of even thinking of including one column which was mildly critical of Luce. Luce categorized zines geographically, although the whole point of a mail-based subculture is to transcend geography. He raised the price on an issue way behind schedule and worse than any before it.

Meanwhile, the final *Factsheet Five* party was held in an atmosphere said to be “somber.” Gunderloy was soon to leave the area, doubling the devastation for Albany-area acolytes like those from the anarcho-liberal *Reign of Toads* bereft of brown to nose and spittle to lick. But across the Hudson, a picked few celebrated at Neal Keating’s house. The culmination was the largely imaginal but, at that, still pretty disgusting ingestion of a beef heart—symbolizing our devouring the heart of the network, of the milieu.

Weighing in at over five pounds, the heart—procured with some difficulty from a farmer who may have suspected Satanism—with its protruding auricles and ventricles was calculated to make a vegetarian out of the stoutest beefeater even if you did not, as I did, spend the night in the same room with it.

Finally, there is *The World of Zines*, by Mike Gunderloy and Cari Goldberg Janice (Penguin Books, 1992, \$14.00), “A Guide to the Independent Magazine Revolution.” The first part is the briefest of explanations of the zine scene, grossly inferior to several which Marc

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Bloch and others had earlier published in *Factsheet Five* itself. Unlike this book (chapter 1) or even Stewart Home's (chapter 10), it makes no attempt to identify the cultural and political currents whose confluence is the marginals milieu. There is, as Jason McQuinn has written, no history and no analysis. "A revolution in technology" does not explain why so many are using "cheap photocopying, cheap computers and cheap postage" in the distinctive way they are. Science fiction zines date from the 1930s; why were there no others till the punkzines of the 1970s? APA's are over a century old; why were there suddenly so many of them and why were so many hooked into other subcultures by the 1980s? Reading more zines than anyone in human history has apparently not equipped Gunderloy to answer these questions.

More likely he just doesn't care any more. Part II of the book, "Zines," by far the largest part of it, consists mainly of recycled reviews, with a lot of graphics and sidebar quotations as extender. In almost 140 oversized pages the authors manage to cover only a fraction of the zines they did in any issue of *F5*, and they have not taken the opportunity to say more about these selections than they did in the magazine. The graphics probably convey the flavor of the scene better than the reviews, but where are the collages and (knowing Gunderloy, more surprising still) where are the computer graphics? The squibs fall between two stools, too long to be epigrams, too short to anthologize.

The qualification for inclusion appears to be convenience qualified by cronyism. Some of these zines are first-rate (*Shattered Wig*, *XYY*, *MaLLife*), some nondescript, some pisspoor (*The Match*, *The Realist*, *The Upright Ostrich*) but you can't tell which are which from this book. Excluded is the best and even the biggest of anarchist zines, *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*; included is the very tired, very tiresome *Instead of Magazine* wherein Gunderloy has held forth as a seer for many years. Excluded are *Inspiracy Hitlist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *Sasquatch*, *Moorish Science Monitor*, *Ziggurat*, *Radical Pizza*, *Retrofuturism* and others suspected, rightly or wrongly, of contempt-of-Gunderloy. And Gunderloy was paying so little attention to packaging this one up that he included zines like *Syzygy* and *Kooks* which have been defunct for years.

There's something radically wrong with an overview of the zines themselves, which come and go, to the exclusion of the personalities

behind them. There is a “Personal Zines” chapter, but the best zines are all personal zines in the sense that they reflect editorial individuality. And some of the best and most characteristic figures in the zine world are not, or not primarily, zine publishers. Keith Gordon, reviewing *The World of Zines*, wrote: “A special section on the leading lights of the ‘zine world would have been apropos, offering capsule bios on folks like Black [ahem], Al Ackerman, Gerry Reith, Hakim Bey, John Crawford and Ed Lawrence, to name a few.”

The likely fate of this book, as of *High Weirdness by Mail* (chapter 3) is to fall softly to rest on yuppie coffee-tables, an object of contemplation, not a tool for use.

And now the breaking news... *Factsheet Five* has again risen from the grave. From San Francisco, editor-publisher R. Seth Friedman has produced several issues as good or better as any Gunderloy ever did. He has my encouragement, because it is evident the brief Gunderloid hegemony is not to be repeated. Indeed his first issue reviews, under “Reviews,” 27 other zines exclusively devoted to reviews, and of course hundreds of other zines include reviews. The centrifugal revolution continues.

Son of the Return of the Bride of “Beneath the Underground”

Eight years after my survey the marginals milieu is much—maybe too much—the way it was in 1986. The participants have multiplied perhaps threefold. Not only fanzines but books are coming out. Yup-liberal weeklies like the *Village Voice* have run stories, interviews and reviews. Having used them on his upward climb, Ivan Stang now repudiates the marginals, but they still supply lots of the customers for his Simon & Schuster coffee table books (three so far). A very few literary marginals (S.P. Stressman, Rane Arroyo, Kirby Olson) turn up in some conventional small press litmags, including the least conventional, *Exquisite Corpse*. But the marginals are up to ten years away from assuming their inevitable hegemony (there’s nobody else) over nonprofit culture.

My book *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*, published in

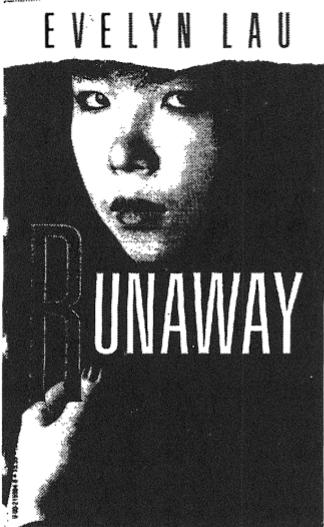
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1986, has plenty of company on the marginals bookshelf. Books by marginals such as John Crawford, Ed Lawrence, L.A. Rollins and Hakim Bey I laud in other chapters. Anthologies with much marginals material include *Semiotext(e) U.S.A.*, the *Popular Reality* anthology, and the vastly enlarged second edition of *Loompanics' Greatest Hits*. Smaller proportions occur in *Apocalypse Culture* (edited by Adam Parfrey), *Rants and Incendiary Tracts* (edited by Parfrey and myself), and in the "Pranks" issue of *Re/Search*. From the down side there are books from *Processed World* (chapter 4) and *SubGenius* (chapter 3). The most unusual anthology is perhaps *Pozdravi iz Babilona* ("Greetings From Babylon"), Slovene translations of North American marginals, edited by Gregor Tomc and myself, published in 1987 in what was then Yugoslavia.

Two fringe publishers, *Loompanics Unlimited* and *Amok* (the mail order outfit) have been so successful they were showcased on the business page of *Newsweek*. (*Amok Press*, a distinct entity, does not publish additional titles anymore but its successors, *Blast* and *Feral House*, do.) Some of us old-timers have seen our stuff assembled in book form, such as John Zerzan, *Elements of Refusal* (Left Bank Books), Ed Lawrence, *Reinventing the Wheel...of Karma* (Bomb Shelter Prods), Ernest Mann, *I Was Robot* (Little Free Press), and

Blaster, the Al Ackerman anthology. Although fringe publishers come and go—*Neither/Nor Press*, whose revised edition of *Neutron Gun* appeared in 1987, will not be publishing further titles—several, like *Autonomedia* and *Loompanics*, can be counted on to be there for the marginals of the 90s.

Loompanics is not the only act to make it into the big time. *Grim Reaper Press*, the original publisher of Hakim Bey's *Chaos*, abandoned the small press scene when publisher Brett Rutherford started selling horror novels to a major publisher. Thom Metzger, in contrast, still publishes as *Ziggurat* although he has sold two novels to the New American Library.



Chapter One

Metzger conned NAL into thinking his twisted and satiric moral fable *Big Gurl* was only horror fiction which had departed from the usual formulas.

The other marginals Cinderella story is anything but amusing. When I mentioned in "Beneath the Underground" that even 14 year olds could lead a cultural life through the mails, I had an example in mind—Evelyn Lau, an aspiring writer in an intolerable family situation who published a zine, *Pigeon Droppings*, and corresponded with me. In 1989, Harper & Collins published her *Runaway: Diary of a Street Kid* as a mass market paperback. Extracted from her diaries and partially fictionalized, the book recounts her two years as a prostitute and an addict resisting every attempt to return her to her parents. It is every parent's worst nightmare, Mommie Dearest and Daddy Dipshit shown up in a book anybody could buy in a supermarket. I'd advised her of the impossibility of an independent life at her age, all she could sell (to quote her book) was, "as someone once said, my ass." And so she did. That's my last hurrah as a vocational guidance counsellor. I was the "someone," that quotation appeared in her zine. It must be an honest book, because the author reveals herself as usually pathetic, often repulsive—guilt-ridden, sex-hating, self-destructive and depressed. All she had to hold onto was her determination to be a writer. I told her the first priority was for her to write her own story. In relating her experiences, her suffering, she found the means to leave them behind her. Not all my advice is bad, I guess.

The book trend is likely to continue since, as Jacob Rabinowitz of Verlag Golem says, for the effort it takes to put out a fanzine you might as well publish books. If some marginals get in over their heads—as did Rev. Crowbar of Popular Reality Press, who ended up selling most of the print run of John Crawford's book to Loompanics to raise cash—there are others to take up the slack. There are some books overdue for publication—by Kirby Olson, Gerry Reith, Jim Wheat, Len Bracken and others. Somebody ought to anthologize women, too. John F. Kelly and I have agreed on the need for a humor anthology. I think Ed Lawrence's posters deserve a full-size separate in-gathering. The "fuck poets" like Cheryl Townsend and Tom Androla, the neologists Geof Huth collects in his *Subtle Journal of Raw Coinage*, "best of" anthologies from *Vague* to the *Fifth Estate*—many possibilities.

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The book boom notwithstanding, zines are central to the subunderground. No one zine ever replaced *Popular Reality*, now one has to assemble a portfolio: *PhotoStatic*, *Mallife*, *XYY*, *Twilight of the Idols*, *Feh!* and *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed* are among the best. The worst well-known zine, *Inside Joke*, ceased publication in 1991. Several excellent zines commenced after my 1986 article and croaked before I write these lines, such as two Boston zines I godfathered, *Anathema* and *Disapproved Theories*. This was after my ejection from Donna Kossy's *False Positive* revealed, too late, that it had always been a collaboration, and my role in it indispensable. And, as American as the marginals indubitably are in origin, they have counterparts abroad—zine culture flourishes in Finland, Greece, Mexico, Brazil—arguably the best marginal publication in the world right now is *Vague* in London. For what it's worth, I've been translated into French, German, Dutch, Italian and Slovene.

Harder to detect and describe are changes in theme, style, meaning and sensibility. Marginals culture is temporary culture and in that lies its permanence, its resilience. It is easy to get into, easier still to get out of when it loses its savor. Some once prominent players have dropped out. Garrett Micheal O'Hara is missing in action. John Crawford, once the most ubiquitous of marginals—no punkzine was complete without his Baboon Dooley cartoons—is reputedly sick of the scene and only occasionally inks up. Occupying his space without taking his place is a talentless liberal lamefuck, the smelly hippie "Ace Backwards." (At this point the ubiquity prize properly goes to Paul Weinman, whose White Boy poems fill up countless cul-de-sacs.) Carlotta Sommerstein and "Chris Estey," to name only two punk notables from way back, aren't involved now. For everyone who opts out, five more turn up for whom the scene is novel, vital, radical, participatory—and they're happy to reinvent the wheel. And some of us who've been around a long time are doing pretty much what we always did—I include myself—which is pretty damn good in such cases as Thom Metzger, Jim Wheat, Ed Lawrence, Norbert Ugly (*Sick Teen*), David Greenburger (*Duplex Planet*) and Blaster Al Ackerman. These inimitables know what they're doing and I want them to keep doing it, but the fact remains that what a lot of other people are doing has been done to death.

Possibly the most fruitful influx into the marginals milieu has been those we could call the erudite marginals. In the later 80s,

overly educated types like John Zerzan and myself were joined by other, uh, intellectuals. It maybe started in 1985 when *Semiotext(e)* sent out a call for materials for the “U.S.A.” issue, and those purveyors of foreign esoterica—Baudrillard, Deleuze, Virilio, Guattari, the whole sick crew—got cast ashore in a country truly foreign to them, their own. “Hakim Bey,” though actually a college dropout, is otherwise the representative erudite marginal—older, well-read in a variety of fields (in his case including anarchism, Islam and pop physics), sincerely believing the marginals milieu is where it’s at and with good reason because he’s been around long enough to remember where it was at. Bey’s marginals debut, if I recall, was a letter to *The Spark*, Steve O’Keefe’s refreshing, if short-lived zine of unorthodox anarchism, in 1983, but he really made his splash from 1985 onwards with *Chaos* (chapter 5) and other broadsides. His protege, Jacob Rabinowitz, author of *Louie-Louie: A Homosexual Science Fiction Epic* (which it’s not, not exactly, but what a read it is), who for awhile issued the *Moorish Science Monitor*, turned up around 1987—a student of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Yiddish, French, German and pornography. And just about the only Zionist in the sub-underground. He recently completed a dissertation in classical studies to be published by Autonomedia and then split for Israel.

A final example is Kirby Olson, also a grad student—in French literature—who is equally adept at translating forgotten surrealists like Philippe Soupault and peddling pornblurbs to *Hustler*. He’s just received his Ph.D. These erudite marginals, age thirty on up, actually know about stuff the younger set—the typical marginal is a white male in his 20s who is, or recently was a college undergraduate—only drop names about. They have retrieved (and continued) a history and a mythology for the marginals they never knew was even there. Their sexual freedom (of the three named, one is a het, one a pedophile, one a “failed homosexual,” all classy pornographers), their command of history and language, their generosity with their intelligence added a new dimension to the milieu.

Overall the scene is one of great growth, some progress and little mutation. The collage or computer graphics in publications like Lloyd Dunn’s *Retrofuturism* or the endless stream of artifacts by collaborators Mikel And and Liz Was in Madison have never been better. There is so much cassette culture that it sustains its own review magazine, *Gajoob*. Some issues of certain zines, like *Mallife*,

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come out in audio. Some writers have ventured into esoteric word-play, what Bob Grumman calls “experioddica”—notably Jake Berry—although the limit of my own appreciation is the Joycean neologism which is Geof Huth’s special subject. A recent fad—or did it just escape my attention? (a growing likelihood)—is the exchange by mail of artifacts, all manner of oddments small enough to fill an envelope. Telephone misconduct like the Falwell game is still popular, someone even published a book of 800 numbers which deserve abuse, the first telephone directory designed for telephone harassment. Several marginals have gotten into a very cohesive subculture—the tattoo community (they’re way beyond “Mother” and “Born to Raise Hell”—I would not be surprised if tattoos replace nose rings.

There ate more marginals martyrs—poets Brian Clemons and Lorri Jackson both died of heroin overdoses—and most of us have heard more than enough about Bob Z.’s posterizing problems with the sanitation police (since when are posters unsanitary?) and Jello Biafra’s obscenity trial (he beat the rap). In their own modest manner, the marginals have done a little censoring themselves. *Factsheet Five* (now under new management) rewrote its rules for the sole purpose of defining my irregular mass mailings as unreviewable. And *FreFanZine*, “the only libertarian science fiction APA in the whole friggin’ universe,” violated its anything-goes rules by suppressing a submission mocking its coeditor, pothead Sean Haugh, after pocketing the money I sent to have it copied. Haugh’s fellow thieves are his bimbo Sara Ovenall and Seth J. Fehrs, the store manager who actually cashed my \$17 check. Friggin’ they are; libertarian they are not. I was also suppressed by the workerist APA *Discussion Bulletin*, Frank Gerard’s mail order nursing home for geriatric leftists.

Not everybody aboard is wallowing in the self-satisfaction which once found its institutional voice in *Factsheet Five*. Some are tired of terms like “marginals” and “zine” and getting tired of what they refer to. While plagiarism is necessary, routine is regrettable. And, after a point, any growth is malignant: look at *Factsheet Five*, whose former publisher got flown around the country—and to Europe—to peddle his expertise. The milieu arose as the overlap of several underground scenes (chapter 10), and if it ever gets much bigger, it might decompose into its formative components.

Punk, Mail Art, SFandom, Anarchism and the rest will revert to

their original insularity to the extent they ever escaped from it. Half the merit of the fringe would endure: self-publication, easily entered into on a personal scale. But half would be lost: the hybrid vigor and intermedia miscegenation which characterizes much marginals creativity. There will still be the means to speak, but less reason to listen. The reversion to specialization would make the marginals mirror the social division of labor which it was their chief merit, whether they knew it or not, to challenge by their syncretic practice.

Top Ten Reasons to Blow Off the Marginals Milieu

10. Bagazines
9. Amok Distribution
8. Ace Backwords
7. Maximum Rock 'n' Roll
6. Vegans
5. "The Usual"
4. Postage Rates
3. "Bob"
2. Fen
1. Gerry Reith is dead

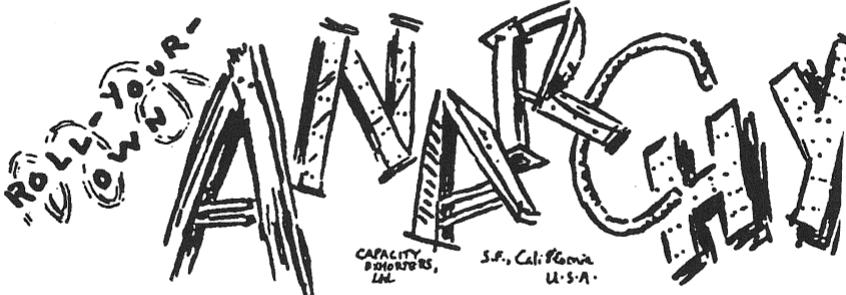
STILL SMOKING THE SAME OLD BRAND?



COMMUNISM...CAPITALISM... They both deliver on that great taste -- Repression... Authority...Dogma...Mayhem! And what's one without the other? After all, they've been battling for close to a century. The same stilted hegemony from either side. Why, without the "Decadent West", the Reds would be in the Pink. Without the "Evil Empire", the West would truly be the Best.

And in between they've brought us such great tastes as World War, Cold War, Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Bay O'Pigs, and soon, Central America. Not to mention a neat 3 trillion \$\$\$ military bill for keeping both sides "In Power".

Well, don't get branded! Leave the rote to the rest and break away from the pack with ANARCHY! ANARCHY! What a great taste! Neither God nor Master. And no State, either. Isn't that refreshing? Our own way. No leaders - no followers. Try it today!!!



Irv Girshman & Alex Jaxon

Chapter Two

· Introduction: The Sphinctre of Anarchism

Anarchism has always been problematic for me. It helped me to arrive at an unconditionally anti-statist, anti-capitalist perspective by the mid-1970s, and yet my first public statement from that perspective explained why I did not identify with anarchism. By dictionary definition, I am an anarchist, but the dictionary is only the beginning of wisdom. It cannot bestow coherence where contradictions abound or reduce differences to a unity by calling them by the same name.

Once an idea is launched into history it takes more and more of its meaning from its experience. Revivalist calls to return to first principles prove the point, for they are history too. And just as no Protestant sect has ever really recreated the primitive Church, no anarchist fundamentalism ever did or could reenact pure anarchism on Bakuninist, Kropotkinist or any other models. Anything which has entered importantly into the practice of the anarchists has a place in the anarchist phenomenon-in-process, whether or not it is logically deducible from the idea or even contradicts it. Sabotage, vegetarianism, assassination, pacifism, free love, co-operatives and strikes are all aspects of anarchism which their detractors try to dismiss as un-anarchist. To call yourself an anarchist is to invite identification with an unpredictable array of associations, an ensemble which is unlikely to mean the same thing to any two people, including any two anarchists. (The most predictable is the least accurate: the bomb-thrower. But anarchists have thrown bombs and some still do.)

The trouble with anarchists is that they think they have agreed on what they all oppose—the state—whereas all they have agreed on is what to call it. You could make a good case that the greatest anarchists were nothing of the sort. Godwin wanted the state to wither away, but gradually, and not before the progress of enlightenment prepared people to do without it. Which seems to legitimate really

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existing statism and culminate in the banality that if things were different they would not be the same. Proudhon, who served in the French national legislature, in the end arrived at a theory of "federalism" which is nothing but the devolution of most state power on local governments. Kropotkin's free communes may not be nation-states but they sure sound like city-states. Certainly no historian would regard as anything but ludicrous Kropotkin's claim that medieval cities were anarchist. The One Big Union of the syndicalists, who also uphold the duty to work, is one big state to everybody else, and totalitarian to boot. Some "anarcha"-feminists are book-burners. Murray Bookchin espouses third-party politics and municipal statism. And Bakunin's "invisible government" is at best a poor choice of words, especially on the lips of a Freemason.

Anarchists are at odds over work, industrialism, unionism, urbanism, science, sexual freedom, religion and much more which is more important, especially when taken together, than anything that unites them. Each of the North American annual "gatherings" of 1986–1989, the first time most anarchists dealt with one another face to face, resulted in a hemorrhage of the disillusioned. Nobody cares to host the next one, although some regional gatherings have gone off fairly well.

But despite the demagogues, doctrinaires and dimwits, a portion of the anarchist press has let in some air, not all of it hot air; and oxygen is antiseptic. Anarchist or, better, anarchistic marginals have often known what to take and what to leave. A family of unorthodoxies I've called "Type 3" or "Watsonian" anarchism has made major inroads into the traditionalists in recent years. Type 3s, the category of the unclassifiables, enrich their anarchism (or whatever it is) with borrowings from neo-primitivism (or else neo-futurism!), surrealism, situationism, the joke religions (Discordian, Moorish Science, SubGenius), punk culture, dope culture, beer culture and Beat culture. Several years ago the outnumbered workerists launched a hate campaign against Type 3s among others—lumped or I should say lumpened together by the moronic epithet "neo-individualist." We are social parasites, mystics, kiddy-diddlers and just generally amoral savages. Yeah, but they are college boys in designer hardhats.

The anarchists... can't live with them, can't live without them. As I once informed *Demolition Derby*, anarchists may make lousy comrades but they're excellent customers. In 1985 I was so disgusted

with the lot of them that I broke off all ties. Over the years that became meaningless, since exactly what was “anarchist” enough to boycott got blurry. Now I proceed on a case-by-case basis.

This chapter, like the next, is a rogues’ gallery. For some of those anarchists I respect, like Ed Lawrence and Hakim Bey, I have shown my esteem in other chapters. Meanwhile I resume the wrestle with terminology. Am I an anarchist or not? Like Feral Faun and others, I have shuffled by counterposing “anarchy” and “anarchism.” Even if the distinction catches on, what to call the respective parties? This is what I suggest. Let the anarchy-ists call themselves *anarchs*, a word whose first known appearance—in *Paradise Lost!*—antedates anarchist by nine years. It’s better because, like the corresponding distinction of monarch from monarchist, it designates not what we believe but what we are, insofar as our power permits: powers unto ourselves.

Too often have the anarchists lectured me to shun “feuds” and “in-fighting” the better to fight “the real enemy,” by which they mean some conveniently remote abstraction such as capitalism or the state. Now it’s arrogant for people who say I’m arrogant to tell me they’re better at spotting my real enemies than I am. In its most seductive form—the flattering suggestion that my ~~enemies~~ are unworthy of me—I have refuted the argument by the way I praise John Crawford (chapter six). I might dismiss the standard, cruder version as a cynical self-serving ploy to escape my criticisms by misdirecting them. Though offered, occasionally, in good faith, it’s rubbish.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto are surrounded by Indians. The Ranger says, “It looks like we’ve had it, old friend.” Tonto says, “What you mean *we*, paleface?”

“The real enemy” is the totality of physical and mental constraints by which capital, or class society, or statism, or the society of the spectacle expropriates everyday life, the time of our lives. The real enemy is not an object apart from life. It is the organization of life by powers detached from it and turned against it. The apparatus, not its personnel, is the real enemy. But it is by and through the apparatchiks and everyone else participating in the system that domination and deception are made manifest. The totality is the organization of all against each and each against all. It includes all the policemen, all the social workers, all the office workers, all the nuns, all the op-ed columnists, all the drug kingpins from Medellin to Upjohn, all the syndicalists and all the situationists.

This isn't rhetoric to me; it informs my choices. It implies that I can expect to find authoritarian actions, opinions and personalities among anarchists as elsewhere. "Comrades" are not my comrades—nor am I, at my worst, my own comrade—insofar as they or I behave like "the real enemy." There is no real enemy apart from human agency.

And what better place for authoritarians to nest than among anarchists who are so easily taken in by labels, so easily dazzled by slick production values, and so easily confused by the facts? Although it is only an ideal type, the authoritarian personality is all but completely realized in anarchists like Jon Bekken, Michael Kolhoff, Chaz Bufe, Fred Woodworth and Chris Gunderson as in anti-authoritarians like Caitlin Manning, Chris Carlsson, Adam Cornford and Bill Brown. (*Anti-authoritarian*, what a story that word could tell; as Bill Knott put it, "If only mouthwash could talk.")

If anarchists are capable of authoritarian attitudes and ideological incoherence, I should no more hail one as a comrade, sight unseen, than I would a state trooper or a used-car dealer. The label is not a warranty. An important reason for my 1985 disclaimer of anarchism was to forestall any claims on my loyalty or for exemption from criticism on the basis that "we" are on the same side. A real comrade would welcome critique.

Talk of my "feuds" is usually foolishness. While there is no ultimate separation of personal from political, especially if you are as political as I am, predominantly personal quarrels find no place in this book. An argument does not become a feud just because I take it past the mutual monolog stage or the other guy starts calling me names. Ideologues who lack the ability or maturity to defend their opinions in depth should keep them to themselves, especially if they publish magazines.

I've been accused of overkill for the following attentats against anarchist publishers Fred Woodworth and "Spider Rainbow." It's a close call. Spider Rainbow did dry up and blow away, but there's one born every minute. Woodworth wheezes along, for that which never really lived can never really die: I excavate the mummy and his mummery. The proper measure of the value of my words is not the stature of my subjects. They don't have to be important to be useful for a change.

Empty Magazines: A Broadsheet

Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed

Anarchism: an ideology of confusion compounded

The Animals' Agenda: Man: the only animal without rights

The Connection: If Conan were a hamster

The Decadent Worker: How JFK assassinated Kerry
Wendell Thornley

Factsheet Five: A mile wide and an inch deep

The Fifth Estate: How deep is deep doodoo?

FreFenZine: A Shirley Temple cocktail party in print

Ideas & Action: Neither/nor

Kick It Over: That's not funny

Libertarian Labor Review: Black-and-dreadful

Living Free: Stummtroopers, a crashing Boer

Love & Rage: Bend over for some deep entrism

The Match!: No match for me! Thank you for not smoking

Maximum Rock 'n' Roll: 101 uses for a dead subculture

Mother Jones: A thousand points of lite

Ms.: Lipstick leftism

New Studies on the Left: Indian gibbers

No Governor: No balls

Open Road: The anarchist *Soldier of Fortune*

Processed World: Jackbooting up

Reason: I can't think of any

Smile: The satisfying crunch of baloney

The Anti-Anarchist Conspiracy: An Empirical Test

There are many proffered explanations for the oblivion into which anarchism in America (and almost everywhere else) descended after the First World War. The anarchists favor those that blame their enemies, especially the state, instead of themselves. It is certain, however, that state repression cannot completely explain the anarchist collapse and cannot begin to explain—what is more important—the anarchist inability to bound back in times of tolerance. Taking the long view, we are in a relatively tolerant time now, yet it is gay artists, rap groups, punk and heavy metal bands—not the anarchist media—which are fighting off censorship. Despite a modest resurgence in the 70s and again in the 80s, the anarchists remain, not only insignificant, but invisible—in contrast to their (albeit lurid) visibility in Victorian America.

Undeniably the anarchists were brutally crushed during and after the war to end all wars, their leaders imprisoned or deported, a number of their activists murdered or lynched, their presses shut down and the mails closed to them. The rest of the left met with the same fate, yet the Socialists recovered a much diminished place and the Communists went on to claim a modicum of influence in the 30s. The CP even stole the anarchists' own martyrs Sacco and Vanzetti, concealing the ideology they died for by casting them as generic progressive victims. The unofficially anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World took a bad beating from the state, but it was the defection of many of its members to Communism by 1924 which reduced this once-feared organization to a social club for aging leftists (more recently, for white college students with rich parents). When it ceased to be a union, the IWW ceased to be what it aspired and claimed to be, and effectively ceased to be at all.

There is simply no basis in fact for the self-serving, self-pitying anarchist line that this noble doctrine has failed to enlist the millions whose interests it serves because it has been concealed and

maligned by the ideological apparatus of the state. Hardly a man is now alive who recalls the time when the cry of anarchy struck terror in the bourgeois bosom. Anarchism is not omitted from the curriculum because it is dangerous. It is omitted because, like Theosophy, Georgism and Anti-Masonry, it is not important enough to be included. Historically the most important thing any American anarchist ever did was assassinate President McKinley, thus inaugurating Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive period—an important but by no means anarchist consequence. Anarchists got plenty of publicity back then. If most of it was bad, nonetheless this bad publicity—concerning the Haymarket anarchists, for instance—attracted to the movement many of the leading lights (such as Voltairine de Cleyre) who gave anarchism such intellectual distinction as it enjoyed in fin de siecle America, the Golden Age of American anarchism.

When I was in junior high school, in the 60s, we were assigned Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience." Spontaneously and as one the students (I was probably one of them) rose up—this was in a public school in a middle-class liberal suburb—to denounce Thoreau's anarchist madness. The teacher didn't train us to react that way. It came naturally to adolescents habituated to hierarchy by schooling and the family, even if (as was the case) they believed in civil rights and soon smoked pot and opposed the Vietnam War. The teacher had to play Devil's—that is, Thoreau's—Advocate as no student would. Now Thoreau's essay is as good an introduction to constructive anarchism as any. He is no revolutionary. He has the added advantages of being a native-born Yankee, not an immigrant and/or Jew, and enjoying consecration by the curriculum as a classic American author. He does not even use the stigmatizing word "anarchism." If he met with unanimous dismissal it is because his ideas were unpopular. They still are.

Anarchist ideologues propound still sillier explanations for their impotence. Chaz Bufe, for instance, blames "fashion anarchists" for the enduring unpopularity of a doctrine which was unfashionable long before teenagers adorned their black leather jackets with circle-A's. Rather, these punks are a main source of recent recruits to the anarchist ranks. If (as charged) their acquaintance with anarchist tradition is scanty that is perhaps a point in their favor. The ignorant can learn. The deluded hoe the harder row of mis-education. If anarchist fathers like the goofy Bufe really mean to dictate a dress code to youths attracted to anarchism they will be received, as well they

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should, like the high school principles these kids have had quite enough of already. Better fashion anarchists than fascist anarchists.

Insofar as anarchism is genuinely revolutionary it would be its success, not its failure, that needed explaining. That would explain, up to a point, why Marxism prevailed over anarchism for so long. Its rejection of the existing order is much more superficial and it is correspondingly more elastic in adjusting to the status quo. When it assumed power it was predisposed to assimilate bureaucrats, managers and military officers into its own apparatus since it had no objection to their functions and was only concerned with their loyalties. The temporary anarchist success in Spain proves the point. The anarcho-syndicalist leaders joined the government even as the militants enforced labor discipline and sacrifice on the shop floor and in the fields. Only the Fascist victory saved the anarchists from exposure of their counter-revolutionary coercion of a decidedly refractory working class.

A few years ago, anarcho-syndicalist Michael Kolhoff issued a "Call" for an official, authoritative North American anarchist organization in which he undoubtedly expected a post. At the 1989 anarchist gathering (or blathering) in San Francisco, those attending overwhelmingly rejected the proposal, as American anarchists always have. It was not so much a considered anti-organizational position (although not a few people had reflectively arrived at one) as an instinctive recoil from control. It may well have been the single most widely shared opinion at the event. The organizers were just too blatantly power-hungry schemers. Even the fashion anarchists steered clear of the proto-officialdom.

Why then is the revealed truth of anarchism disbelieved by almost all and sundry? For, I'm sure, more reasons than I can think of. For now it is something, anyway, to dispell the illusions of the true believers. Kolhoff indigmates that the average working-class Joe requires nothing but a little anarchist propaganda to bring him around. The supporting argument is flimsy. According to Kolhoff, the incipient anarchist, turning to the local library for guidance, would find nothing but "lies" about anarchism. So that's the secret source of anarchist insignificance!

I put this claim to the test of fact, as Kolhoff, a positivist, would want me to, I'm sure. I perused the heading "Anarchists & Anarchism" in the card catalog of the Albany (New York) Public

Library. Albany is an old, economically stagnant city with a declining population of less than 100,000. Joe Average probably lives in a larger, more prosperous city with a bigger, better library (a friend of mine who works there assails its mediocrity). What would one learn of anarchism there?

I did discover books which a doctrinaire like Kolhoff would consider, in some cases correctly, to tell lies about anarchism. But I discovered many more books which espoused anarchism or examined it with sympathy and relative accuracy. These include three titles by Michael Bakunin, one by Giovanni Baldelli, five by Murray Bookchin, two by Emma Goldman, two by Peter Kropotkin, one by John M. Hart, one by David de Leon, and three on explicitly anarchist subjects by historian Paul Avrich, plus two more of related interest (*Kronstadt 1921* and *Russian Rebels, 1600-1800*). Most North American anarchists have probably not read 19 books on anarchism. I have, but I haven't read even half the ones in my local library.

Moreover, the subject heading seriously understates the anarchist presence on the shelves. Thoreau does not appear there, nor do various historical and cultural studies by sometime anarchists like Paul Goodman, George Woodcock and Herbert Read. Kolhoff will perhaps be relieved to learn that my book *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* is assigned another, essentially useless heading (in effect, "Miscellaneous"). And that one, I'm fairly certain, wouldn't be there at all if I weren't local and if I hadn't donated the copy myself. But what about all the others?

One might well come up with a more comprehensive and representative selection of books on anarchism. (Although no two anarchists are likely to agree on that selection.) The point is that Kolhoff's imaginary playmate Joe Average can easily learn a lot more about anarchism than some anarchists, perhaps, would like him to, even in the local library. And if Joe is really Average he has what the survey researchers call "Some College" where he had access to what was probably a much better collection relating to anarchism. And there is always inter-library loan. The problem is maybe that Joe doesn't use the library at all, or uses it for movie videos and junk fiction, not that it denies him the anarchist verbiage he supposedly craves.

I may be taxed for taking the library lament literally—but I don't know how else to take the complaints of ideologues otherwise innocent of irony, metaphor and humor. As an "as if" sort of a thought-

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experiment (which others are welcome to replicate), my card catalog excursion does dramatize a point of some small interest.

Before leaving the library, let's consider what might be done if affairs are as Kolhoff depicts them. Instead of bewailing our martyrdom, why not take direct action and donate books to libraries as I donated mine? I'll send my book *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* at cost—for me, \$4.00—to any American library Kolhoff, or anybody, designates. (Or to any foreign library, but enclose several more dollars for postage.) I first made this offer in *Anarchy: A Journal of Desire Armed*, a fine magazine which then had a circulation of 5,000. How many takers did I have? Two. Guess who wasn't one of them?

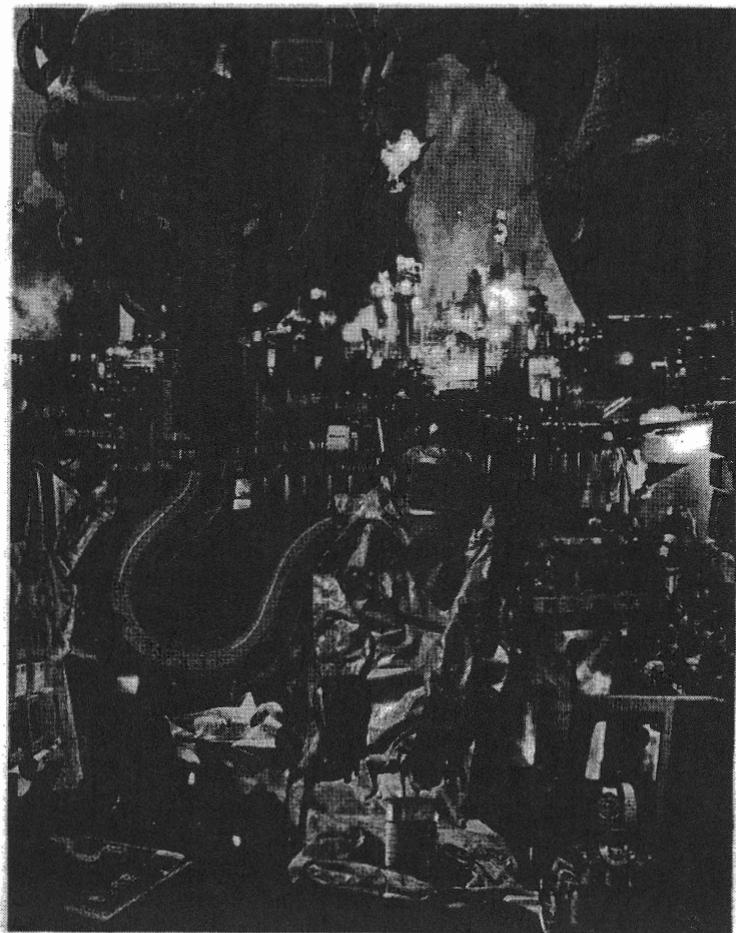
In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Empire, some Western anarchists (myself included) are mailing their literature to their resurgent but embattled comrades in Eastern Europe. Well and good. But why not also send it, at much lesser expense, to the small towns, the totalitarian horroshows in Utah or Orange County or the Bible Belt? We can probably do more for peace and freedom in the world right here, on our own turf, than by exporting ideology to the rest of the world which has perhaps had its fill of our imperial outreach offerings.

Anarchists have always placed great stock on print media—Proudhon is not the only anarchist typesetter—but in the electronic age their traditional technology, like their traditional ideology, is at risk of anachronism. If Joe Average lives within radio range of such cities as New York, Chicago and Detroit (I am sure there are many more) he has access to audio anarchy. It's even been available, at times, in upstate New York on stations in Woodstock and Troy. And if Joe is a techie he can interface with anarchism on computer bulletin boards such as Rick Harrison's *The Alembic*. I am no high-tech enthusiast myself, but it's curious that the syndicalists and other conservatives who buy into industrialism, compulsory work, and the self-management of business-as-usual look to be the last to exploit the technological "progress" they are the last anarchists to believe in.

Again, the foregoing is not the complete explanation for the anarchist demise which, I admit, eludes me. Consider it, instead, as a prolegomenon to any future analysis which wades in bathos. As Ken Knabb says: "Be cruel to your past and those who would keep you there." Again: defeat is the default position for a revolutionary movement and still more so for a revolutionary transvaluation of values.

ZEROWORK

THE ANTI-WORK ANTHOLOGY



EDITED BY
BOB BLACK & TAD KEPLEY

Beneath the Underground

Our side lost because the other side won. Beyond this useless tautology we are not very far along in understanding our debacle. The anarchists increase their relative power—and all power is relative—insofar as they identify and dispense with disabling illusions and self-delusions and grapple with the real forces arrayed against them, or rather, the real forces they are arrayed against.

(Too many) anarchists are—if not the worst—the first enemies of anarchy. This enemy at least the anarchists lack not the power, only the will, to defeat.

The Match is Rigged

The Match! #82

Edited by Fred Woodworth

P.O. Box 3488, Tucson, AZ 85722

"It appears at present that the Anarchist movement has been partially infiltrated by neo-fascists," asserts a letter in *The Match!* Not likely—the pickings are better elsewhere, except maybe for Marxists—but you might well agree if your conception of anarchism comes from *The Match!* Assertedly atheist, it is bombastic in style and dogmatic in substance. Assertedly anarchist, it overtly extols—and exercises—authority even as it vilifies most of the anarchist movement, almost always for the wrong reasons. If anarchism retained any interest for the police, this is how they would want it to look.

TM's longtime editor and publisher is failed academic Fred Woodworth, for whom anarchism and atheism form a finished and perfect system of thought. Opening any issue of TM is like breaking into a mausoleum; a dusty gust of decay issues forth.

Woodworth's unreasoning attachment to 18th-century rationalism and 19th-century positivism renders him an embarrassment to the cause of science, which has long since emerged from the billiard-ball universe Woodworth inhabits. Some of those in the anarchist movement, or adjoining it, are exploring the possible political implications of various new and not-so-new scientific tendencies such as quantum physics, chaos theory, and ecology. TM, hewing to the

orthodoxy of Herbert Spencer and Ayn Rand, parades its comprehension of these—and any other—new ideas. Woodworth boasts of his inability to fathom “timely-toy-topics” like workers’ councils, sexism, and deep ecology. Others contest these concepts. Only Woodworth takes pride in his inability to understand them.

One may doubt, though, that TM’s emancipation from “mysticism”—Woodworth’s one-size-fits-all noose for anything uncomfortably emotive, stochastic, metaphorical, marvelous or oblique—is complete. Recently, after almost twenty years of publication, TM discovered that animals have rights. Somehow this implication of settled anarchist doctrine escaped Woodworth & Co. until now. And yet it’s an easy question . . . aren’t they all? Fetuses, for instance. Human or not, they are at least animals (I mean, what else can they be, plants?)—so do they have rights? No problem, Woodworth explains, “because fetuses don’t think. Animals do.” I see.

By the way, what telescope or microscope measures the objective existence of rights?

Far from being the patient and orderly unfolding of conclusions from the premises of syllogisms, TM is half ex cathedra encyclical, half character assassination (of those dubious about the first half). Woodworth will impugn an appointed enemy as a “creep lawyer” in the same issue to which other lawyers contribute. State violence is abhorrent, but a critic nonetheless “needs to have his butt kicked.” TM recommends a tract by contributor Chaz Bufe which longingly anticipates an antagonist’s arrest. (Not to be coy, the references are to myself. But does it matter?)

Generally the publication seethes with resentment, paranoia, hysteria and repressed sexuality. Thus several anarchist publications are inveighed against as politically incorrect because—get this—they’re tabloids rather than magazines or because they’re typed or word-processed rather than typeset. (Woodworth is a typesetter.) Anarchism, then, is a free and enlightened new way of life in which all of us, humans and animals alike, have the right, yea, the duty, to resemble Fred Woodworth.

Woodworth has never acknowledged an error of fact or opinion. He invariably “wins” arguments with correspondents because, like *Processed World*, he suppresses the ones he can’t answer or else, after unacknowledged excisions, ventilates his inability to understand the remaining fragment. When, after a mysterious hiatus of a few years,

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he resumed publishing in the early 1980s, he began by printing (ostensibly to locate them) the names of everyone who had ever donated or subscribed to *The Match!* Who wants to know except possibly the police? But Woodworth withholds their addresses the better to monopolize communication as to matters that touch on him.

In this particular issue (late 1987), he indignates against an accusation that he is a police agent—an accusation he claims I had just originated. But I did not originate, or endorse, the accusation; I had

only (in correspondence with Canadian anarchist R.-Yves Breton) reported that an anarchist prisoner, Steve Siwek, said that the rumor was current among prisoners. But he'd been denying it in 1986, before I'd even heard it, a charge he pretended I invented in 1987. This idiot devotee of reason must be a time traveller, declaiming against opinions even before they are expressed. Anarchism is unpopular. I wonder why?

The Match! is rigged.

Processed Haughtiness

Dear Fred: The review of DREAM WORLD that I wrote and wanted to get published is still in limbo. I sent it to "Processed World" quite some time ago, expecting they'd bounce it quickly if they didn't want to use it, as has happened before. Instead it just disappeared and I haven't heard from them. They piss me off — their latest issue has the usual plea for reader participation, blah blah blah, but they're among the most impersonal "anarchists" I've ever dealt with. Chances are I'll have to retype the review and submit it elsewhere.

—Neal Wilusz,

Albuquerque, New Mexico

Another writer who recently submitted reviews to "Processed World" magazine included a review of *The Match*. The rest of his column was published, but not the review of our work.

Several years ago, when "Processed World" was under assault by Bob Black and the zoning authorities of San Francisco, an attack that resulted in the publication's having to move its offices and confront a severe financial strain, I urged *Match* readers to support "Processed World" with subscriptions and donations. In their arrogance now, though, apparently solidarity doesn't work both ways.

Something is Happening but You Don't Know What It Is, Do You, Mr. Jones?

In *FreFenZine* No. 55, hippie anarchist organizer "Spider Rainbow" noted: "In addition to the libertarian right and the classical anarchist left, there is a dadaistic subgenius/ShMoist/erisian/surrealist/tongue-in-cheekist Something Else flitting around." Something unorganized, extravagant, and out of control. Type 3 anarchy, with a pie in the face for pie-in-the-sky pietists like Rainbow with their embarrassing 60s pseudonyms. Type 2 collectivists like Rainbow with their discipline, their recruiting ploys, and their leftist phobias have always cannibalized Type 3 free spirits. Thus they turned Groucho Marxist Caucus player Jon Bekken into a

humorless hypocrite of an IWW official (and college professor!). Their counter-magick turns gold into lead.

Since the hallucinations of 1968 wore off, Spider Rainbow has forgotten his glimpse of the Grail. He lost sight of it in the dust raised by all those hob-nailed boots at all those lowest-common-denominator demonstrations alongside all those Stalinist front-groups. But he hasn't forgotten whom to co-opt to sap the energy lost to Type 2 entropy. He's launched a spinoff from *Circle A* in Atlanta in order to force the genie of Type 3, irreverent play-negativity into the Type 2 collectivist bottle. *Fourth World*, "A Journal of Social Nihilism for the Hell of It," borrows its blurbage from the predominantly Type 3, Lost Boyz tabloid *Popular Reality*. What else could it do? Imitation is the sincerest form of insincerity.

The similarities with *Fourth World*'s ally, *Processed World*, go well beyond the names and reflect a commonality of means (manipulation) and ends (radical recuperation). Like the PW's their earlier unreadable Marxist journal *Red-eye*, Rainbow and his clique with their unreadable anarchist journal CAIA have had a makeover for marketing purposes. Like PW, and with as much truth, FW denies that it is a movement, an ideology or a manifesto. Meanwhile, back in *Fref*, Rainbow declares he is a "pure anarchist."

Like PW, FW greases the reader up with groovy computer graphics and the entertainment pages (sex religions, paganism, awareness) before driving home the meat: eight pages of "An Anarchism for Tomorrow" by—Spider Rainbow. As the rest is window dressing (and, as such, deserves a brick today) let's peer inside and find out how much is that dogma in the window?

The rag's "Statement of Purpose," nominally by "Dr. Bugg," aligns FW with "social nihilism, Erisianism, surrealism, political agnosticism, discordianism, etc." Is "Dr. Bugg"—like *Processed World*'s "Paxa Lourde"—a pseudonym exploited to suggest a nonexistent multiplicity of contributors? [1994 note: So it was.] Rainbow's own signed article discloses his true point of view, that certain "fundamental premises" or "essential roots of anarchism" are shared by "black and red" and "black and green" anarchists but challenged by "individualist anarchists" (or 'Erisians' or 'Surrealists' or 'Shimoists' or 'Subgeniuses') on the left [sic!] who eschew organizational or programmatic approaches to social change altogether." We eschew them because they're so hard to swallow.

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Here Rainbow makes a blunder or libel even he avoided in *FreFenZine*, the equation of Type 1 (right-wing capitalist) anarchists with Type 3's, doubtless because enough Type 1's frequent *Fref* to object if he did. More important, his comments imply that Type 3's are not properly part of anarchism as he understands it.

On the other hand, Rainbow explicitly classifies *Processed World* as "black and red," implying it is properly anarchist, although he is well aware that PW's Adam Cornford/"Louis Michaelson" has written: "We do not call ourselves 'anarchists' for the simple reason that most of us are not." Rainbow is thus the avowed opponent of the Type 3's he is pitching to, while supposing himself to be the comrade of those who deny and deride what PW editrix Caitlin Manning/"Maxine Holz" calls the "stupid anarchist philosophy."

Rainbow's article purports to be a "critical response" to another Type 2 tract, the imaginatively titled "Listen, Anarchist!" by PW paperboy Chaz Bufe. It has received the rejoinder which Rainbow is too deeply implicated in its errors even to acknowledge, "Turning a Deaf Ear," although he is familiar with it. Rather, Rainbow rails against Bufe's incidental insults, such as dismissal of old hippies like Rainbow as smelly counter-cultural bums. There is a little shadow-boxing over Bufe's mysterious malefactors, the "marginals," but it is very gentlemanly. For Bufe, despite what Rainbow calls "great hypocrisy," is an "articulate spokesperson" for Type 2 workerism, that is, for the Marxist cake (of custom) with *faista* frosting. Rainbow is not about to rock the boat he shares with Bufe. And yet it is, after all, a Ship of Fools.

Even when a seeming conflict of principles takes place between Red and Green—over *work*, a Type 3 touchstone—closely attended to, it is nothing but a tactical difference among politicos. Bufe dumps on people who dislike or refuse to work as marginals and parasites, just like the Soviet press. "Man was born to labor," says the Bible, and Bufe, an atheist, agrees. He says it is anti-worker to be anti-work. Just like it's anti-slave to be anti-slavery?

Rainbow even indulges Bufe's pretense to be a proletarian, sincerely suspicious of the siren-songs of bourgeois lumpen lazybones. In fact, at the time the horny-handed son of toil was a graduate student at the elite University of California at Berkeley with a part-time job (as one wag put it) "in a factory: the Record Factory," a record store.

Not that any of this alerts Rainbow that Bufe is a ruling-class

apologist; it just makes him a less empathetic organizer. Intones Rainbow: "No radicalism will ever prosper, much less succeed in this country unless it taps into, in an attractive and intelligent manner, the fundamental discontent almost universally felt (if not always realized) with the very fabric of the work ethic." No need to reject work when it is possible to win recruits by retailing the appearance of aversion to it, after the fashion of Bufe's and Rainbow's friends at *Processed World*.

When all is said and done, Type 2 and even Type 1 anarchists (I have defined a libertarian as "just a Republican who takes drugs") will let you smoke pot, suck cock, sniff panties and watch TV so long as you join up. "Bufe's strongest section," says Rainbow, "is headed 'Anti-Organizational Bias,'" begging the question—which Rainbow never asks—whether opposition to organization is a bias or instead a conclusion born of bitter experience being organized. Like Bufe, all Rainbow has to back up his bias is *ad hominem* attacks.

Amazingly, I am conscripted as a condign example of anti-organizational folly on account of my victimization by an organization, Processed World. But which gang, had I joined it, would have protected me from PW's battery, burglary, robbery, defamation, court orders, death threats and police snitching? Rainbow does not say. Rather, there is "great hypocrisy" in Rainbow's weighing of the evidence because he personally placed his thumb on the scales. When in 1984–1985 I appealed to North American anarchist publications to expose the unfolding PW scandal, nearly all refused. Rainbow's CAIA gang went further, siding with PW in private correspondence and calling me "lower than a narc" in *FreFenZine*.

Bufe's "very sketchy and biased account of the conflict between PW and its critics is, wrote Rainbow, "not worth recounting here." Nor anywhere else, such as CAIA, where milling around on the sidewalk with Stalinists is always worth a self-congratulatory story even if the Leninists invariably make off with all the newspaper headlines. Still, a story not worth telling is the sole basis for Rainbow's preachy conclusions.

It serves his purposes to claim that this affair (not worth recounting) "simply reflects how unable to compromise and engage in federal and/or confederal organizing *all* present tendencies are among anarchists." This is irrelevant nonsense. No anarchists in the Bay Area were ever interested in competing with PW to organize the masses.

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The organizational anarchists were all in with PW. Some of us were, however, interested in criticizing PW's Marxist politics, its falsification of the origins and purposes of its leadership, and especially its resolve to take over or destroy other projects which failed to do its bidding, such as *No Middle Ground*, where Chaz Bufe distinguished himself as a PW partisan. When PW turned to libel, censorship, street violence and the police to silence its critics, the struggle became one for the very possibility of anti-authoritarian practice and, indeed, of being allowed to live in peace. To "compromise" these interests would be to submit to authority.

The centralizing power in the Bay Area milieu—*Processed World* and its network of plants and connections in many other media—spits on anarchists, as Chris Carlsson/"Lucius Cabins" literally did to me. To this day, Spider Rainbow pretends not to understand that there is nothing anti-authoritarian about PW in theory or in practice. Rainbow speaks of PW's intolerance of other interpretations of "anarchism"—The dumbshit still thinks PW is anarchist! How many times does it have to say it isn't?

CAIA, boasts Rainbow, has shown how to deal with Stalinists—citing the purge of anarchists from the Atlanta newspaper *Great Speckled Bird*, which appears to prove the opposite. Perhaps the paper's subsequent demise is the anarchist victory (Pyrrhic at best). But every reader of CAIA knows who really won. For years, and conspicuously on No Business as Usual Day (April 29, 1985), Stalinists dominated the demonstrations which CAIA lent credence to. The magazine stupidly showcased the photos of "Lacy Rainbow" (yep, Spider's old lady) depicting Stalinist cults with all their signs and symptoms. With anarchists promoting these authoritarians, it should come as no surprise—but in Atlanta, it seems it did—that the mass media played up the noisy Revolutionary Communist Party presence and ignored their more numerous and docile dupes, the anarchists.

Rainbow discerns an irony he is unable to articulate in my opposing organization while lamenting being "beaten" (and this is not a figure of speech) by *Processed World*. (His paraphrase I omit since I cannot recognize anything in it of mine and it is not the least bit "charitably" phrased, as he would have it.) I have never doubted, instead, I have always maintained that organization is a source of power. That's why I'm against it. Among other things, organization makes inevitable the crushing of an individual who is right by a

machine which is wrong. I notice no PW has ever taken me on one-on-one. Their attacks are always from behind, in gangs, or through police proxies. Other gangs with different but related ideologies, like Rainbow's mob or Bufe's syndicalist syndicate the Workers' Solidarity Alliance, share with the PW Marxist Mafia an interest in eliminating rogue individuals. The PW scandal confirmed my Type 3 understanding that organization is the system's Trojan horse in our midst.

Spider Rainbow is a sleaze-bag with so much to hide that he hardly knows what he can safely say. He is the avowed enemy of his targeted market and he's too stupid to realize that, for all the cosmick cosmetics his new mag wears, he's too old to titillate the trendies like *Processed World* does. PW has already picked off the cream-of-the-crab, the superficially rebellious with deep dependency needs. The autonomous malcontents have already seen through Rainbow and his cronies. A young Atlanta woman is quoted in *FreFenZine* as saying, "You know, you anarchists are just like the RCP. You keep saying they're liars, and they say you are." She's right—and so are they.

Fourth Worldists are Type 2 bureaucrats, Green only in their envy of the "blind self-destructive individualism" of the Type 3's who count coup on the Totality and have fun doing it; whereas a Type 2 struggle session has all the allure of a Sunday school lesson gone into extra innings. So long as there are dentists there will be no need for organizations like the WSA. *Fourth World* is a nonstarter. The Type 3 farce de frappe is out of this world. And therefore relevant and practical.

The one-dimensionals, the Type 1's and Type 2's, have so little confidence in their prophesies of "self-destructive" Type 3 horseplay that they are not above nudging us toward the precipice—passively through cover-ups as CAIA does, or actively like PW with its cops and court orders. There is no incremental escape from the progressive prison of the contemporary. There will be a Great Escape or none at all, a Break-Out From the Crystal Palace which will not hesitate to trample underfoot the cash crops of the Green bourgeoisie.

Not that Green, or Red, or Black is the enemy. The enemy is anyone who waves a flag or wears a uniform of any color. That includes Rainbow's tie-dyed duds, the RCP's red berets, and the dainties of the Lavender Left, to say nothing of the Color Purple. The Type 3's are proud to display their colors—Ultra-Violet and Infra-Red—and we will strike anything except our colors. The future is a pigment of our imagination.

“You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relationship...” But You Can Have Fun Trying!

*You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relationship:
The Anarchist Case Against Terrorism*

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia: Libertarian Socialist Organization,
n.d. [1979] Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada: Anarchist Communist
Federation of North America, 1981
San Francisco, Cal.: See Sharp Press, 1990

In 1979, four Australian anarchist and “libertarian socialist” organizations published a tract called “You Can’t Blow Up a Social Relationship,” presumptuously subtitled “The Anarchist Case Against Terrorism”—as if theirs was the only case against it and as if there were no case for it. The pamphlet has been reprinted by several North American anarcho-workerist groups and by default appears to enjoy some currency as a credible critique of terrorism which is canonical for anarchists.

In fact the pamphlet is rubbish: incoherent, inaccurate, even statist. It makes sense only as an attempt to spruce up anarchism’s public image. It clutters the question of violence and should be swept, if there is still any room there, into the trashcan of history from a perspective which is not pro-terrorist but, on this occasion, just anti-anti-terrorist.

What makes the diatribe so wonderful is the way it refutes itself as it goes along. Opening with reference to some obscure actions by Croatian fascists in Australia, the authors explain that the state uses right-wing terrorism to justify the repression of the left. Indeed, democracies “will even incite or conspire in terrorism to justify their own actions.” They cite “the famous American Sacco and Vanzetti case of the 1920s” as “an archetypal case of the preparedness of the police to frame dissenters on charges of political violence.” Apparently the case is not famous enough for the authors to notice that the duo was not framed for political violence but rather—as

they proceed to tell us!—for garden-variety “robbery and murder.” The Haymarket case would have made a better example but it is, perhaps, not famous enough. The only obvious lesson to be learned is that, one way or another, the anarchists are going to get screwed.

Like the Haymarket anarchists (except Louis Lingg), Sacco and Vanzetti did not “take up the gun,” rather, they “engage[d] in the long, hard work of publicizing an understanding of this society” as the Australians propose. Considering how things turned out, why not throw a bomb or two? (As Lingg was preparing to do when he was arrested... showing that something like Haymarket was bound to happen anyway.)

Here is how anarchists sound when they speak the language of the state:

Around the world the word “terrorism” is used indiscriminately by politicians and police with the intention of arousing hostility to any phenomenon of resistance or preparedness for armed defense against their own terroristic acts. Terrorism is distinguished by the systematic use of violence against people for political ends.

A usage which is indiscriminate when politicians and police resort to it is presumably discriminate when, one sentence later, anarchists appropriate it. By this definition, all violent revolution is terrorism, even if it involves the majority of the population. Indeed, collective self-defense, which the authors elsewhere imply they approve of, is the systematic use of violence for political (among other) ends—and is therefore terrorism. By way of added inanity, this definition of terrorism omits the unsystematic assaults by individuals acting alone—such as Leon Czolgosz’s assassination of President McKinley, or Alexander Berkman’s wounding of the industrialist Frick—which everybody, pro or con, has always considered terrorist. These Australians are just not speaking proper English, and it’s not a difference in dialect either.

Having adopted a pejorative nonsense definition of their subject, the authors proceed to silly it still further. “Just as the rulers”—and, as we shall see, certain anarchists—“prefer the word ‘terrorist,’ terrorists prefer the description ‘urban guerrilla’ as it lends them a spurious romantic air.” For the authors, then, urban guerrillas are terrorists (just like “the rulers” say), but rural guerrillas are not: “Especially in

rural warfare these people can use non-terroristic armed action. This usually involves armed clashes with the police or army.”

So an armed attack on a police station in a village is guerrilla warfare, but an armed attack on a police station in a city is terrorism? Do these armchair anarchists think the police care how populous the locality is they are killed in? Do they think the general population cares? Who’s being romantic here? These guys are romanticizing peasants because they’ve never met one and maligning urban intellectuals like themselves because they know their own kind.

What, according to these ace tacticians, rural guerrillas can do is not (all of) what the successful ones actually do. The Vietcong were based in the countryside but carried out assassinations, bombings and expropriations in the cities too. Guerrilla warfare is by definition elastic and opportunistic: nothing is forbidden, everything is permitted, anything goes. The fact that rural guerrillas can (and do) “use non-terroristic armed action” doesn’t mean that they don’t also use terroristic armed action, such as the village massacres of the Khmer Rouge or Sendero Luminoso.

Lexicography aside, what’s really put ants in these anarchists’ pants? The pamphlet has nothing, really, to do with terrorism as such. Instead it is a critique of urban armed struggle by mostly nationalist and/or Marxist-Leninist outfits in the 60s and 70s: the IRA, PLO, RAF, SLA, etc. Understandably these leftists (as they repeatedly identify themselves) do not care to be confused with these terrorists, but surely their discrepant ends mark the distinction much more clearly than their often identical means?

Most Marxist groups, they admit, denounce terrorism in favor of party-building and propaganda—which is pretty much what the Australians call for. The Red Brigades had no harsher enemy than the Italian Communist Party. Then again, maybe the Australians exaggerate their differences in method (all but ignoring the long history of anarchist terrorism) because they do not differ so much programmatically from the Marxists. They keep making puzzling remarks such as “a democracy can only be produced if a majority movement is built.” Typically, this generalization is false—that is not how democracy came to Japan or West Germany—but regardless, why are anarchists concerned to foster the conditions in which democracy, a form of government, is produced? Or did the “libertarian socialists” slip that in?

“Terrorism does not conflict with such ideas” as authoritarianism and vanguardism, they tell us. Well, there are a lot of ideas terrorism doesn’t conflict with, considering that terrorism is an activity, not an idea. Terrorism does not conflict with vegetarianism either. Hitler was a vegetarian. So were the anarchist bank robbers of the Bonnot Gang. So what? In other words, even if the authors make an anarchist case against terrorism (they don’t), they haven’t made a case against anarchist terrorism, which means they cannot excommunicate the anarchist terrorists and usurp the label for their own exclusive use. Which seems to be all that this miserable exercise is about.

The authors’ treatment of anarchist terrorism is shallow, deceptive and incomplete. If their definition of terrorism as systematic political violence was meant to dispose of a lot of embarrassing assassinations, bombings and bank robberies by verbal sleight of hand, they are smarter than they seem, but they’re really just changing the subject (political violence) to an artificiality of no practical interest. They are talking to themselves with no claim to anyone else’s attention. More likely they aren’t articulate enough to say what they mean.

To state the obvious, anarchists have practiced terrorism in the “Australian” sense—collective politically motivated interpersonal violence—for well over a century. The bungled anarchist insurrections in Italian towns in the 1870s involved firefights with the carabinieri. Soon similar local revolts became recurrent features of peasant anarchism in Spain. By the 1890s, anarchists were killing heads of state all over the Western world—and if they weren’t delegated to do so by authoritative anarchist organizations, doesn’t that sever the link between “terrorism” and “vanguardism”?

The authors allude to Stalin’s bank robberies but not to those of Durutti or the Bonnot Gang. More recently, the noted Italian anarchist Alfredo Bonanno pled guilty to bank robbery. The authors ignore Berkman’s *attentat* against Frick, Dora Kaplan’s attempt to assassinate Lenin, and Stuart Christie’s attempt to assassinate Franco. Some of these, certainly the last one, involved conspiracies and thus qualify as “collective.” To equate anarchists with bomb-throwers is grossly unfair. To black out anarchists who were bomb-throwers, often at the cost of their lives, is dishonest and despicable.

What about the Spanish Revolution? The anarchist armed groups (the authors explain) “drew much [sic] of their specific justifications”—what they are, we are never told—“from the Spanish revolution.”

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tion and war and the urban warfare that continued there even past the Second World War.” Yes, exactly. The urban guerrillas, the terrorists, had some “specific justifications.” They always do. Nobody takes up the gun without a reason. What else is new?

“For our argument the civil war in Spain is exemplary because the slogan ‘win the war first’ was used against politics, to halt the revolution and then to force it back under Stalinist dominated but willing republican governments.” This is asinine coming and going. It falsely equates what the Aussies call “politics” with what the Spaniards made, “revolution.” For the wimps Down Under, “politics” means alternative institution-building (the usual leftist stuff: constituency lobbying, food co-ops, etc.) plus propaganda. For all the Spanish revolutionaries it meant far more, and it certainly included taking up the gun. The revolution no less than the war was done with the gun. When the Durutti Column occupied the town of Fraga and executed 38 police, priests, lawyers, landlords, etc., that was politics. That was revolution. And that was, to hear some people talk, terrorism. If that is exemplary, what is it an example of, pray tell, if not anarchist collective political violence?

It is true that anarchist violence has often backfired and has never won any lasting victory. But that is just to say that anarchism is, to date, a failure. Anarchist propaganda is a failure. Anarchist organizing is a failure. Anarchist schooling is a failure. If anything, anarchists have accomplished more by violence (in Spain and in the Ukraine, for instance) than in any other way.

The fact is that anarchists have not accomplished anything by any means as compared to their leftist and fascist and liberal rivals. Their propaganda, for instance, hasn’t come close to the efficacy of propaganda by Nazis, televangelists and Fabian Socialists. Their institution-building (touted by the Australian consortium) amounts to nothing but anarchists bagging granola in food co-ops or supplying warm bodies for demonstrations which the media will attribute to Stalinists or feminists or Greens unless something goes seriously wrong. Anything they can do, others do better. Might it be that anarchism itself, not its image, is what scares people away? That it stirs up their fear of freedom such that they seize upon media libels like “terrorism” as welcome excuses to look the other way?

My purpose has been negative and limited—just cutting some weeds, not planting anything. If anarchists have an image problem, it

attaches to their anarchism, not to their occasional terrorism. The Australian anarchists seem to be most concerned, not with an anarchist approach to so-called terrorism, but with assuring their government that they are harmless. To their everlasting shame, I am quite sure that they are. But an anarchism which wants to be anything but harmless to the state must deal with “terrorism” and much more in another, more radical way.

Chapter Three

Pullers of Wool: The Church of The SubGenius

Taking the Low Road to High Weirdness

High Weirdness by Mail
By Rev. Ivan Stang
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988

In eighteenth century England, lunatics were sent away to Bedlam, an asylum whose name is now synonymous with crazed chaos. The fashionable set would tour Bedlam to enjoy the antics of the inmates. In *High Weirdness by Mail*, the “Rev. Ivan Stang” (Douglass St. Clair Smith) revives this style of entertainment, akin to bear-baiting and bullfighting. Here he show off or writes off many of the deviants and dissidents he cultivated or kept tabs on for a decade. Often he won their trust, as he won mine, by pretending to be one of them. Now he’s climbing up into celebrity over their not-necessarily-dead bodies, rather like Salvador Dali before him. He has high-powered backing from his corporate publisher, Simon & Schuster, which has since published two more of his books. Stang got laudatory reviews from *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*. He’ll probably get away with it. He’s moved on to the long con.

In HWM, one size-small-fits all. When wearing his SubGenius clown suit, Stang mocks the “normals,” albeit in an abstract,

Beneath the Underground

unthreatening way. The reader comes away reassured that he is not a normal, especially if he is one. When wearing his power suit in HWM, the not-normal are the subject of the book and, except for Stang's cronies, the object of his derision. Acting as a Pinkerton policing the lunatic fringe, he comforts the reading public: *he* is on his beat and there is nothing to fear. The official Library of Congress classification of the book is "Eccentrics and Eccentricities Directories-Humor."

HWM is a book for snobs, for the reader who, generally without much justification, thinks he's hipper than other people. His clique is cooler than their clique. Stang panders to prejudice for profit. I might not mind if he ripped them off in a way that wised them up, but his flattery confirms their passivity. I'm superior, so I'll just keep doing whatever I've been doing, if anything. Especially for those in traditional social roles (such asuppies and family men like Stang himself), set free to feel good about themselves. Treasure your arcane stash, says Stang, for surely that alone elevates you. The reader is better than the kooks *provided* he's hip to them. That's what HWM is for.

According to Stang, his book is "essentially a collection of snide put-downs of hundreds of well-meaning, sincere people in all walks of extremism." With few exceptions, everyone listed is insulted except for Stang's SubGenius cronies and people he owes favors to. Nowhere in the book, though, does he disclose the double standard as he did in a form letter (January 12, 1987) to *Book of the SubGenius* contributors such as myself:

LIKE OTHER MUTANTS, HWM not only lists addresses but also has a one-paragraph description or commentary... most of these are sarcastic, i.e., [sic] when describing rival cults, but occasionally [sic] are rave reviews, such as when I'm mentioning YOUR material if you sell anything. See, although it mostly lists FREE stuff, it also tells the reader to send MONEY in the certain cases such as my PALS. (This isn't a SubGenius book PER SE, but might as well be.)

To show how this works: Stang dumps on leftists and anarchists mercilessly but excepts his longtime collaborators, the (by now, crypto-)anarchist cartoonists (and *Processed World* illustrators) Paul Mavrides and Jay Kinney. After targeting leftist humorlessness, he hypocritically hypes the hapless *Labor's Joke Book*. Its editor, Paul

Chapter Three

The Subversive Verses

© 1981
G Krupey

The Ayatollah Stands NOT PLEASED!



He Addresses the Sub-masses...



As BLACK & GOES Underground, his cities are targeted in retaliation.



Sides are drawn & soon no place anywhere is safe...



The JIHAD is taken to the Streets



Finally, the BLACK Regions Preverz, BIZZ BIZZ DALLAS...



by Greg Krupey

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Buhle, got SubGenius its first national exposure with a poorly done review in the *Village Voice*, and he boasted of landing Stang the contract for *The Book of the SubGenius* with its original publisher, McGraw-Hill. Stang owed him.

HWM is 90% condescension, 10% con-job. (For Stang's latest coffee-table book, *Three-Fisted Tales 'o "Bob,"* these figures should perhaps be reversed. Reviewer Seth Tisue said it should have been called *One-Handed Tales 'o "Bob."*) The book's function is to denature and discredit anything political or cultural which might possibly have some radical clout by losing it amidst countless UFO contactees, white racial nationalists, New Age crystal freaks, televangelist flimflam artists, and monotonous musicians. The anarchists, for instance, fare even worse than they deserve to, treated as just another species of conspiracy theorists whose amusing obsession is the state, as for others it is cattle mutilations or Freemasons. The frame is the same.

While Stang uses HWM to peddle his languishing SubGenius joke, more often than not he does not indicate that the nuts he singles out for celebration are his buddies or business partners. Still, he does it often and extravagantly enough that the unwitting reader would never suspect him of insider trading.

His cronies return the favor. Michael Keckhaver gushed over HWM in *Spectrum* without identifying himself as Pope Sterno Keckhaver of the original, now-defunct SubGenius band Doktors for "Bob." I used to think Sterno was just about the best of the SubGenius lot. It is disquieting to ponder that he probably still is. The corruption continues. There was a glowing review of HWM in the high-tech hippie slick *Mondo 2000*. So who reviewed Ivan Stang's book? None other than Doug Smith, dating Rosie Palm.

The Library of Congress notwithstanding, the book is not even what it looks like, a directory. Even when completed in early 1987, the manuscript (I saw it then) was rife with error. Adam Parfrey told me that the listing for a venture of his was years out of date. My own listing omitted the address Stang knew I'd been at for a year and a half. The post office only forwards mail for one year. Six years later, sending for most of this "free" stuff would be a costly futility, especially since the most memorable kooks tend to move around a lot. Most listees I've heard from reaped no benefits. But then the thrust of the listings was not to foster unmediated communication with the

fringe but rather to supplant it. HWM is designed as a self-sufficient entertainment, a place to read about weirdos. Stang's sarcasms replace their subjects. They are vaccinations against oddity. Why write to a wacko when a talented comedy writer like Stang has wrung out most of the laughs in the material already while shielding you from actual communication with unsettling, unpredictable "extremists"?

In HWM, any and every unusual is only an exhibit in Ivan Stang's freak show. But they we are not about to do tricks for this carny barker. We are singular *and* plural, and we are not all for sale. Unlike "Ivan Stang."

Terrorism as Performance Art

The Black Box

By Hellswami John Hagen-Brenner
Dallas, Texas: The SubGenius Foundation, 1989

A one-shot, literally, from "Satellite Weavers"—Hellswami John Hagen-Brenner—co-designer of *The Book of the SubGenius*. A mail-bomb packaged as a cassette, this martial-artifact, sent to my apartment is the epitome, as Albany police detective George McNally put it, of "high weirdness by mail." For SubGenius it represents a new dimension in head-launching. The bomb, in a stylistic departure from the artist's usual baroque intricacy, is elegant in its simplicity. Opening the cassette would have thrown a contact switch connected to batteries, setting off a row of flashcubes in turn detonating five or six small firecrackers—a flash of illumination!

Hellswami's multimedia debut has a precursor, as respects technique, in Mark Pauline's Survival Research Laboratories, but with a radical originality of purpose. H-B sought to bypass mediate, merely perceptual experience of his "shrapnel art" by immediate physical impact upon the viewer's organs of sight and touch. He has even surpassed the "auto-destructive art" of Gustav Metzger, since it's not just the art that the art would destroy. If I adjudge this pioneering effort a failure—not in concept, but in execution, so to speak—it is

Beneath the Underground

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK

R.D. OF N.Y.
FILED

NOV 14 1989

COF

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

J.R. SCULLY, Clerk
ALBANY INFORMATION

v.

JOHN HAGEN-BRENNER,

Criminal No. 90-CR-119

Defendant..

VIO: 18 U.S.C. § 1716

[Misdemeanor]

COUNT I

THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHARGES THAT:

That on or about November 22, 1989, at or near Albany, in the State and Northern District of New York, JOHN HAGEN-BRENNER, the defendant herein, knowingly caused to be delivered by mail according to the direction thereon, material declared unavailable by this Section, to wit: an improvised explosive device consisting of an audio cassette holder wired with four cadmium-type batteries, four flashbulbs, and five firecrackers, delivered to Robert C. Black, [REDACTED] Albany, New York 12210.

In violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 1716.

FREDERICK J. SCULLIN, JR.
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY

BY:

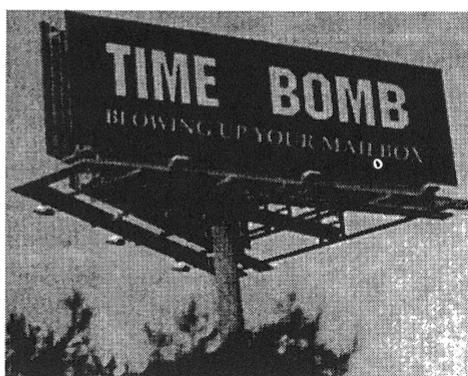
George A. Yantthis
GEORGE A. YANTHIS
Assistant U.S. Attorney

because the artist failed to maintain a consistent level of quality in all the media of which his work partakes.

Specifically, the text turned the primary experience of a bomb-in-the-face into a show, just another spectacle of sound and smoke taken in from afar, like a Pink Floyd concert. The mailing was addressed to me as "Roberto Negro," which is about as funny as the junior high school Spanish class I first heard that one in. It had a Florida return address but a Wisconsin postmark, violating what Aristotle might have called "the unities." Since people I don't know aren't supposed to have my home address, my suspicions were aroused. The cassette was labeled "The Black Box"; again, a juvenilium unworthy of the grandeur of the project. On an impulse I flung the unopened item against a door. There was a flash of light, a puff of smoke and a crack of sound as the flashcubes went off—but the firecrackers did not. And so I didn't have a blast after all. As Neal Keating says, "the only thing that has successfully bombed is the Church of the SubGenius itself."

As a genre, what I call *ballistic* or *immediate* art has a promising future. Unlike Hellswami, since the curator of what remains of "The Black Box" is a Postal Inspector to whom H-B was turned in by superannuated SubGenius jailbait GOBI, aka Suzanne DeGrasse. With criticism of the Church mounting from many quarters, its talented artists may be moved to try to succeed where the Hellswami failed, or at least, as Alfred North Whitehead might say, to make better mistakes. Tragically, death overtook performance artist G.G. Allin before he could realize Hagen-Brenner's vision by firing into the audience from the stage.

If nothing else, the SubGenii may well cease to conclude their writings with the traditional salutation—"Or kill me!"



Excerpts from the Syzygy Interview

Conducted by Seth Tisue and Brad Russell

How did you manage to get printed by the *Wall Street Journal*?

They sought me out. The reporter who put this little mini-symposium on the future of the workplace together had seen the version of "The Abolition of Work" that the *Utne Reader* ran a couple of years ago. *The Utne Reader* is the extreme fringe of what anyone connected with the *Wall Street Journal* might ever read, although it's also probably beyond the extreme fringe of anything I would dignify with the term alternative. So the *Utne* piece credited the piece to *Semiotext(e)*, since they don't reprint [from] books, only periodicals. And they in turn put the *Journal* in touch with me.

They wanted me to be the token dissident. The other pieces were about what I expected, changes in work that mainly had to do with where it was done and what kinds of technology it would be done with and so on and so forth, but always taking work itself for granted. They offered me \$1,050 if they printed what I came up with and a \$500 kill fee if they didn't. Even the \$500 would be more money than I've ever been paid for any writing. So I worked on something for three days. And they printed it. They printed something related to it, somehow... It was rewritten even more drastically than the *Utne Reader* had rewritten me. I think what I did was rent them my byline and my immense prestige in the field.

What kinds of things did they change?

A general ironing out of the language to eliminate any creative or poignant phrase, although I wrote it, I thought, simply. They made it even simpler. Lots of very short sentences with very small words.

Even so, though, I got a kick out of it. I don't know what their circulation is—hundreds of thousands, I think. I liked that deal so much, if I could get them to print me once a month, then I could make \$12,000 a year for 36 days of work. If that's not the abolition of work for me personally, it'll do until that comes along. So I sent

them my book [*The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*] to give them an idea of the range of things that I write about. I don't want them to think I'm only against work, when in fact I'm against lots of things.

What I'd really like is to have a column there. They've got Alexander Cockburn now, he's their token lefty, puts in a column from time to time. Someone told me that's because he's married to somebody's daughter in the management there. But you know, the *Wall Street Journal* represents, not your nervous, resentment-ridden kind of Reagan conservatism, this is finance capital, these are the people that are so big that they still have some self-confidence. So they can afford to indulge a little liberalism of expression and so forth. In other words, they're more like the Shah than the Ayatollah in the management of people's ideas. Plus the mere fact that it's appealing to highly educated, knowledgeable, intelligent people. [Even] I'll read the *Wall Street Journal*. What I'm now trying to do is get the piece ["No Future for the Workplace"] printed in a marginals zine with a particularly scurvy name, you know, we've got things like *Eat My Shit* and *Teen Punks in Heat*...

Oh, if you were published in that, how come Ben Weasel didn't know who you were?

He knows who I am.

Onstage [at Chicago's Club Lower Links] he said, "I don't know what this Bob Black guy does, somebody told me he was an anarchist."

He was just being a shit. He knows what I do. We never met before. Anyway... I'm glad he opened and not Michael Flores [Chicago SubGenius and Psychotronic Film Society person].

That would have been a scene.

Mmm. Maybe it should have been a double bill. Like my opening act should be "Arise: The SubGenius Video." I'm even in that, you know.

We are amused by the issue of *Factsheet Five* where Gunderloy ran the official "Arise" ad right next to the bootleg ad.

You think so, but according to John Kelly, who asked Ivan Stang about this, Mr. Funnyman didn't think it was funny at all. I don't know where his sense of humor is. By the way, [Tad] Kepley has yet to fill any of those orders. So as much as I'd like to see him bootleg the SubGenius video, I wouldn't trust him with any money.

He just kept all the checks?

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Well, he said "I haven't cashed the checks," and I said, "Are you sure they're still good?" I think it's six months a check is good. He seems to think it's a year. But it's been more than six months. He's busy, fifty hours a week at a jackoff joint, working on stuff for Autonomedia, attending demonstrations. I know of at least one person who ordered it from him, got tired of waiting, and ordered it from Dallas.

You know they tried to entrap Kepley? This is funny. He got an inquiry from Texas that he thought was really suspicious. It said, "Well, is this the SubGenius that sometimes comes down my satellite dish," really laying it on like a real redneck stupid peckerwood backwoods yokel. "We'd like to know more 'bout this hyeah video." Kepley thought that smelled. There was an address and a phone number, even, so I said give me those, I have a place to check them. I have an old copy of the SubGenius hardcore mailing list, the inner hundred or so people. And who should be at that P.O. Box and have that phone but a woman named Nancy Douglass Smith, Douglass spelled with two S's, as in —

Douglass St. Clair Smith! [aka Ivan Stang]

We surmise they are kin. So he sent the thing back, saying next time you send one of your lackeys, don't be so obvious. He was thinking of calling her up and terrorizing her on the phone but apparently there was already some charge outstanding against him for doing that to somebody else, so he didn't give her a call.

Chapter Four

Introduction: Left Bankruptcy

It was through the critique of the left that I passed on the way to a critique of the totality, if I have arrived at one. I have been preoccupied with politics since childhood, and with radical politics since college. Ironically, considering the "nihilism" it was to lead to, I first ranged beyond New Leftism out of dissatisfaction with its lack of a *positive* program. Since I already scorned the main currents of Marxism-Leninism and social democracy, I sought for anti-authoritarian traditions and found them in anarchism, utopian socialism,

guild socialism and related tendencies. At the same time, I was absorbing critiques of bureaucracy and professionalization from the likes of Ivan Illich and Paul Goodman. Although I dutifully read Marcuse—the media explained he was my guru so I had to check him out—it was rather from Wilhelm Reich, the hippie movement and my own glands that I found a critique of instinctual repression I considered integral to any project of radical liberation. I was working this out pretty much alone, uninvolved in organizations and unaided by the college courses I was taking except that, majoring in history, I was impressed by popular uprisings and the spontaneous element of the great revolutions.

At this point I entered law school for a staggering experience of total immersion in an intellectual construct—the law—so vast, so intricate, and so perverse I stood in awe of its mad grandeur. By the time I took the bar examination, absurdity was not only my penchant, it was high principle. During those years, I went from critical leftist to post-leftist. My earlier readings in the anarchist classics helped persuade me of the feasibility of a non-authoritarian society but not of anarchism. Now, in the mid-70s, I discovered the unorthodox anarchism of Detroit's *Fifth Estate*, the situationists, Michel Foucault and the latest French fashions. John Zerzan and others recounting the revolt against work struck me as having made the crucial break with what renders the left, after all, conservative—its glorification of work, its "workerism." By then I had also absorbed a form of Max Stirner's egoism (or was it just the "eternal recurrence" of the ideas of my high school hero Nietzsche?) and I thought I had all the pieces now, only in a polemic way, with the posters of The Last International, reserving the intellectualizing for places like anarchist APA's, letters columns and private correspondence. When in 1981-84 I got to write an occasional newspaper column (in *Appeal to Reason*), I had all the means to set forth a critique of leftism well represented in my 1986 collection *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*.

Partly because I've made my general points already, partly because the left is in ruins in 1994, I have not often reexamined the (non-anarchist) left lately. It is not necessary. The neo-conservative and paleo-conservative assaults on leftism are irrelevant. They take leftist rhetoric at face value, pretending to trace the roots of terror to harmless hazy ideals like equality and solidarity. For their own reasons they find only one point of agreement with the left—that they differ

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profoundly—not surprisingly, the one point of universal agreement is wrong. The left lost to the right because the left was ultimately just jostling to administer class society in somewhat different ways. At best—the Nordic welfare states, let's say—the left has inaugurated something less than the collective adventure of a new way of life. At worst, it is what Reich called Red Fascism. What is left-wing and what is right-wing is a distinction neither important nor interesting. Saying so is the only thing to say about all this that is interesting and important.

This chapter examines leftist phenomena which have some relation to the sub-underground. *Processed World* drummed up publicity precisely by pretending to be the do-it-yourself project (“Made in our own homes”) of some sassy downtown office drones acting out their visceral resistance to oppression. Already in 1981 there was a percentage in an image of autonomous amateurism, however bogus. *Cultures in Contention* showcased the Fine Arts in service to the People—done *for* them or *to* them but certainly not *by* them—and I wonder how liberatory such art can be.

Elayne Rapping's book is about television, the medium which has mess(ag)ed all the others, and again I ask what the medium does to the message. “Let The Quips Fall Where They May” is more than critique, it's credo—it's how I relate humor and politics. (Kids, do try this at home.) And in the review of Ace Backwords I discuss one of the leftist hustlers in the milieu—a cartoonist—who illustrates how fetid leftism remains in its last few strongholds, in this case Berkeley. It is mainly very young, very recent arrivals in the sub-underground, new to protest but caught up in it, who for a time succumb to simplistic leftism as served up by the old-timers like Ace Backwords, Jello Biafra, *Maximum Rock 'N' Roll* and *Love & Rage*. If they don't burn out almost immediately, they can get a political education in the milieu you just can't get anywhere else.

The Bad Magazine With an Attitude

Bad Attitude: The Processed World Anthology
Edited by Chris Carlsson with Mark Leger
New York & London: Verso, 1990.

To say, as Laura Miller does (*S.F. Weekly*, Nov. 21, 1990) that *Processed World* is “almost respectable” is an understatement. The *San Francisco Examiner* would not have puffed PW, as it did on December 20, 1983, if there was anything radical about it. After all, contrary to what Miller asserts, PW is pro-technology and pro-work, although it uses anti-tech and anti-work imagery to promote sales. Founder Caitlin Manning told the *Examiner* that PW envisages a world “where the alienation in the workplace could be reduced by the proper use of technology, and by trying to make big business more human by not organizing it around profit, waste and destruction.” It is to yawn.

Miller repeats PW’s by now well rehearsed dissimulations of its origins and purposes. The PW control group consists, not of “dissident office workers,” but of a private-school teacher descended from Charles Darwin (Adam Cornford), and an heiress (Manning) and her boyfriend (Chris Carlsson) who own a business. Manning founded PW, in fact, with a \$7,500 inheritance from her grandfather, conservative cartoonist Al Capp. Presumably the employee theft and sabotage they seem to support is for everybody else’s employees, not theirs, to carry out. Bad attitude... for that *competitive edge*.

By 1990 more than ever before it was urgent for PW to conceal its real ideology: Marxism. When Manning hailed the “benevolent dictatorship” of the Sandinistas in 1983 she was careful to do it in the pages of another magazine, *No Middle Ground*, not in PW where it might frighten the secretaries. Her pseudonym, “Maxine Holz,” is an inside joke: Max Holz was a German council communist of the 1920s. In 1979, Cornford—Manning’s teacher at U.C. Berkeley—published one wearisome issue of *Red-eye*, espousing “communism.”

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At that time, these three founders comprised the pro-tech, pro-work, conservative wing of the Union of Concerned Commies, performers of the “political theatre” Manning mentions. And PW is not situationist. As Manning wrote in *Media/File* (March 1985), “the differences are substantial.” PW is anti-anarchist, although it has suckered a lot of anarchists into supporting it over the years. But when Carlsson and another PW visited Poland in summer 1990, they prudently passed themselves off as anarchists.

PW, “the bad magazine with an attitude” as Gary Brown put it, never realized the founders’ grandiose dream of indoctrinating the unorganized and mostly apolitical proletariat of the information industry and taking power as its “mandated and revocable delegates, responsible to the base” as the councilist formula goes. The PW’s never could reach the working class because they never got over their leftism. Today they ridicule the preposterous Revolutionary Communist Party, but in 1985—April 29 to be exact—they were its ally in a stillborn day of rage, “No Business as Usual.”

This ugly, overpriced coffee table book won’t end PW’s isolation and mediocrity; rather it memorializes the project’s insipidity. The Red diaper babies of the control group, rich kids on a lark, long ago purged everybody who might have instilled a little passion and insurgency into the project. That the founders finally have a tractable work force, as Miller reports, I can well believe. No “almost” about it, *Processed World* is “an institution” and an integral part of the social order it pretends to oppose.

Contending With Culture

Cultures in Contention

Edited by Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier
Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1985

Cultures in Contention consists of 24 articles describing a wide variety of politically motivated cultural projects. Lavishly illustrated—a necessity, to do justice to the visual-arts activities—the book nonetheless is dense with text, three columns per page. The merit of

a collection like this is that it introduces to the general public and even, in many cases, to the mainstream art world a diverse array of projects which would otherwise likely remain obscure. If, as the editors maintain (but I doubt), an art-for-art's-sake aesthetic is prevalent today, this book at least shows that politically committed art persists as a dissenting current.

The collection is ambitious in scope, designedly embracing many countries and many media of expression. Topics include billboard artists in Britain and Australia, popular theatre in Jamaica and Kenya, Chicano muralists in Los Angeles, and pirate radio in Japan. In most cases the creators themselves describe their creations, usually in a congratulatory tone which in a few cases comes close to conceit. Most of the authors are not very well known, and the few celebrities among them are by no means the most interesting. Thus Nobel Prize winning novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez provides a slight and uninformative piece on the making of a Nicaraguan film which unwittingly reveals how the Sandinista regime subsidizes—and supervises—culture. (A speech by Minister of Culture Ernesto Cardenal, also included, reinforces these revelations. It is essentially a stump speech by an incumbent officeholder defending his record, not a dispassionate account of Nicaraguan cultural policy. Still, one cannot imagine as literate a speech from an American cabinet official.) Archie Shepp, the jazz saxophonist who is also a university professor, declaims against the dominant white culture for demoralizing black artists. But is it so easy to assign the blame for a situation where audiences, black and white alike, prefer shallow pop musicians, black and white alike, to the more challenging genres like jazz and even blues music?

A majority of the projects described are collective in nature and involve women and/or Third World peoples. These include a history of Sweet Honey in the Rock, a sort of secularized black women's gospel singing group from Washington, D.C.; "Los Angeles Lesbian Arts"; and, by Suzanne Lacey and Leslie Labowitz, "Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance," which unabashedly advocates the aesthetic/emotional manipulation of imagery to advance a rigid ideological agenda. The authors explain how to manipulate the mass media into favorably covering feminist media spectacles, which for them mean basically anti-pornography actions. The report of the Meese Commission, which calls for precisely the sort of vigilante

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protests favored by Lacey and Labowitz, is a measure of the “success” the media feminists have had in again making censorship respectable.

Viewed as art, as many will view them regardless of the artists’ intentions, some of these efforts are very interesting. “The Changing Picture of Docklands” describes a billboard project which for several years documented and dramatized the depressed conditions in the Docklands area of London. The constituents of the billboard collages were changed, piecemeal, sometimes in response to current events, so that at any given time, there was continuity with previous images, yet also forward movement. The book reproduces some of these (literal) signs of the times. And Klaus Staech, a German left photomontage artist in the tradition of John Heartfield, in “Beware Art!” reproduces political art at once visually arresting and funny, coupled with a lucid *precis* (for some reason phrased in the third person) of the artist’s aims and methods. The trouble is that many of the projects described in the book, those depending on movement or the ear, just cannot be rendered in words alone with any authenticity. We pick up on the political purposes of Sistren, a Jamaican women’s theatre group, for example, but we *feel* nothing because the experience of art, even ideologically urgent art, is something over and above its moral. The article on Sistren is thus only of value as a history of the performing group.

Some ambiguity attends the editor’s definition of what it is these artists (or “cultural workers” as some of them unfortunately prefer to regard themselves) have in common. All are leftist—the politically motivated art of, say, Bob Hope is emphatically absent—but ranging from mild reform (such as Fred Lonidier’s “Photo/Text” exhibits for labor unions) to raging revolution (Tom Ward’s “The Situationists Reconsidered”). The incompatibility—indeed the virulent antagonism—between the perspectives of the avant garde Situationist International (1957–1972) and the Sandinista regime is impossible to exaggerate. But the politically committed intellectuals who wrote this book have nothing to say about one another’s politics. They engage in a sort of cultural counterpart to the Popular Front politics of the 1930s when it was said that “there is no enemy to the left.” They are mostly uncritical about their own efforts, and still more so about each other’s. The authors may not be at fault for this—it is enough, perhaps, for them to get some hearing for their aims and accomplishments—but the editors must have made a conscious deci-

sion to smooth over differences as great, in some cases, as those dividing left and right. The book is the poorer for their timidity.

Several articles don't seem to belong in the book at all. One of these is possibly the most intriguing to appear there, "The Coup Merchants" by German investigative reporter Gunter Wallraff. In an exploit worthy to rank with Woodward and Bernstein's Watergate exposes, Wallraff, impersonating a representative of a right-wing German political group, entrapped Portuguese General Antonio de Spinola in 1975 into disclosing both his fascist sentiments and his plans for a *coup*. Publication of the article in Germany not only aborted the coup, but reacted adversely on the political fortunes of some right-wing West German politicians (such as Franz-Josef Strauss) who had expressed sympathy for the attempt. It's a great cloak-and-dagger story (Wallraff has pulled off other sting operations, also): but what does it have to do with cultures in contention?

The editors and their contributors seem to be uncertain just what their complaint against culture is about. Some seem to be complaining that they are left out of the dominant culture and want a piece of the action, a place in the sun, a slice of the pie. When Hispanics in Los Angeles get government subsidies to paint murals, they appear to be satisfied, except perhaps about the size of their grants. The Dockland artists got funding from Labor-controlled local government bodies for their leftist billboards, then voiced indignation when a Conservative national government abolished some of these bodies and otherwise refused to subsidize socialism. Many of these anti-Establishment artists depend on government for the costly resources their projects require, but none of them notice the irony of their position. Often they start out, as did Sistren and the Docklands project in Jamaica and London, respectively, promoting their private political viewpoints with funds extracted from taxpayers who didn't necessarily agree with them. When later the wheel of fortune turned against them, they complain of political persecution. Do they want the government to finance and manage the arts, as in Nicaragua, or don't they?

Cultures in Contention is a good vehicle for its contributors: their work deserves to be noticed and now it is more accessible. Its infirmities are editorial. Those who contend with the dominant culture ought to be at least as pitiless with their own, unless what they want is not a cultural revolution but a palace *coup*.

Let the Quips Fall Where They May

Cultural Correspondence. No. 1, N.S. ("Radical Humor" issue)

Labor's Joke Book. Edited by Paul Buhle.
St. Louis, Missouri: WD Press, 1986.

Groucho Marx once went with his young daughter to a swimming pool to which he was refused admission because he was Jewish. Groucho's reaction, as best I remember, was something like this: "Well, my daughter is only half-Jewish, can she go in up to her waist?"

Mention of "radical humor" may well bring to mind what Rocky (the squirrel, not the plutocrat) said about "army intelligence": "It seems like a contradiction in terms." What with their doctrinal disputations and earnest, unimaginative exhortations, many leftists make far better objects than subjects of humor. We all know how many feminists it takes to screw in a lightbulb: "That's not funny." (How would they know?) Still it's funny how the left went awry, for radicality and humor are essentially conjoined.

Andre Breton, writing in 1936, made the point in his ponderous way: "Humor, as a paradoxical triumph of the pleasure principle over real conditions at a moment when they may be considered to be particularly unfavorable, is naturally called upon as a defense during the period heavily laden with menaces in which we live." Humor is an affirmation (through the exercise) of creative power. Implicit in its refusal of the real is an insistence on something better beyond. And consciously critical humor is radical humor.

Historically humor served the weak as a weapon against the authorities, a *guerrilla* waged with weapons of wit, an ancient tradition repeatedly renewed: the heretical ballads of the Middle Ages; the ironic communiques to which rural rioters signed the names "Ned Ludd" and "Captain Swing"; *The Little Red Songbook* of the Wobblies; the punk lyrics of the Feederz and the Dead Kennedy's. With graffiti the anonymous activists of the absurd, taking a tip from

the situationists, still target officialdom, orthodoxy and routine, Before they overthrew them, Czechs mocked their Marxist masters as “radish communists”: red on the outside, white on the inside. (Just as black militants here speak of “Oreo cookies” and Asian-Americans disdain “bananas” like S.I. Hayakawa.) In Poland, the best Polack jokes referred to the ruling *junta*. A member of the *milice*, the political police, was walking down the street with a kielbasa up his ass. Why so? someone asked. “I just had a tooth pulled, the dentist told me to chew on the other side.”

At least since Aristophanes, even humorists of consciously conservative convictions have sometimes produced insidious subversion in spite of themselves. Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll were both clerics in the Established Church, but their lasting legacy is corrosive. Just as these humorists couldn’t help being radical, radicals can’t help but be humorous. Even Marx made humor one of his weapons of criticism—black humor riddles texts like *On the Jewish Question* and, beginning with the title, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. It was Marx who protested, “I am not a Marxist!” And it was Bakunin who, standing Voltaire on his head, averred: “If God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish Him.” Fourier and even Thoreau had spasms of sarcasm.

Paul Lafargue, Marx’s Cuban son-in-law, while in prison penned a radical humor classic, *The Right to Be Lazy*. There is extant unmistakably radical humor from Twain, Wilde, Shaw, Brecht, Kraus, Bierce, Mencken, even Veblen. Very often they fell afoul of the official administrators of radical rectitude. I know, I’ve been there.

In our time—mine, anyway—radical humor has infiltrated the many forms of pop culture. The Yippies were the masters of a humor of action, anything from running a pig for President to reducing the New York Stock Exchange to chaos by flinging money from the visitors’ gallery onto the trading floor. (How these scruffy hippies got into the building is radical humor itself. At the door the guard refused them admission because they were, he explained, hippies. “Hippies? We’re not hippies. We’re Jews!” That did the trick.) Tom Lehrer, Phil Ochs, the Fugs and the Firesign Theatre put radical humor on record(s). Bob Kaufman’s Beat Abomunist Manifesto is a masterful mess for which the author, whom I met too late, paid the price—brainscrambled by electroshock. There was only so much lip the authorities were prepared to take in the early 1960s from a half-

black, half-Jewish smartass.

Indeed radical humor insinuated itself into the psyches of yesterday's children by donning innocent garb, like the wolf who disses Red Riding Hood. *Mad* magazine usually kept the subversion implicit but one of its creators had, when young, been involved with the Communist Party daily. *National Lampoon*, for all its passive cynicism and eventual slide into reaction, took a toll on the naivete of some college students. Bugs Bunny, Rocky & Bullwinkle, Dennis the Menace and a whole lot of other cartoon characters wrote a sinister subtext to the formative 50s for the baby boomers now in charge of all but the uppermost echelons.

For the most part, the organized left is oblivious to all this, as it is to so much else of the real sources and opportunities of contemporary radical possibility. Both the "progressive" moralists and the Leninist Machiavellians rightly fear they won't be taken seriously except by seriously somber sorts. They overlook that what they decry as evil or obsolescent is also absurd—as Groucho revealed as he dealt with even so solemn a subject as racism. Sensing that they're missing the boat, yet another one, some leftists are too self-consciously trying to remember and revive their satiric roots. But, as Bugs Bunny so sagely said, "Never send a duck to do a rabbit's job."

Paul Buhle's "Humor International," long since defunct, produced the first issue of the new series of *Cultural Correspondence* (also defunct) devoted to "Radical Humor." The programmatic, by Buhle for instance, sound good, but practice was never so far from preaching. With reluctance I quote a middle management SubGenius entertainer, Pope David Meyer, only because what he says is true: "If you don't have a sense of humor, don't try to be funny." Invariably the editor (nominally not Paul Buhle, but blatantly his errand boy) seeks out the safe and the saccharine. From *After/Shock* No. 1, all-women exercises in sociosexual apocalypse, CC reprints the weakest contributor, Mary Wilshire, whose notion of feminist humor goes no further than predictable sex-role reversals. Wilshire's back page is all sermon, no satire. Melinda Gebbie, *Processed World* commissar Adam Cornford's consort, has done some powerful rococo/decadent drawing but CC reprints only her illustrations of Emma Goldman quotations. On these occasions neither Goldman nor Gebbie was even trying to be funny, so what was this cartoon doing in a "Radical Humor" publication?

Later, Buhle went public with an anthology which must represent what he regards as radical humor. But if *Labor's Joke Book* is humor, the *Kinsey Report* is erotica. Much too short to do justice to its subject, considering its content one wishes it were shorter. The book lacks, along with much else, an identity. It's mostly not a joke book, the world of work is apparently not a fecund field for stand-up. Its labor humor is mostly union humor, although there is some anti-capitalist humor unrelated to the union movement. But if R. Crumb and Zippie the Pinhead panels are labor humor if they have a workplace locale, why not those proletarian and bourgeois archetypes, Dagwood and Mr. Dithers? Peter Finley Dunne gets in without an obvious labor angle, why not Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, or for that matter the Three Stooges? After all it was Bierce who defined *labor* as "one of the processes by which A acquires property for B."

Even when working with labor humor narrowly conceived, the editor's judgment is poor. There is only one page of Wobbly humor, and nothing from the *Songbook*. (Although there is a wry tale by T-Bone Slim.) From the crypto-Marxist *Processed World* he might have taken an amusing photo-novella by "Gidget Digit," who was later forced out for ideological error. Instead Buhle reprints the turgid and tendentious sarcasm of Chris Carlsson's "Heel Business School":

Don't let it worry you that the world economy is on the verge of a massive depression, or that the skills you are learning will soon be computerized (leaving you unemployed). As economic activity contracts, and recession turns into depression, don't ask yourself why this system demands austerity and hardship from average people like yourselves (while owners and managers like me continue to live in material comfort).

Gut-busting stuff, isn't it? Apart from showcasing Carlsson's prophetic powers—he wrote on the eve of the Reagan-era boom—the funniest thing about this flyer is that Carlsson was telling the truth for a change, he is an "owner and manager" of a typesetting business purchased with his paramour's inheritance. The joke is on us.

Labor's Joke Book has an ideological agenda, mostly unacknowledged. With plugs from three union officials on the back cover, the book is deferential to unionism despite its irrelevance to the work experience of most wage-laborers today. During the 1974 Dodge

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Truck wildcat strike in Detroit, workers treated one union boss who demanded respect as their leader to a chorus of “Sieg heil!” This anti-union labor humor is, I grant, grim, but from the graveyard shift we should expect gallows humor, not sitcom gags. Also respectfully protected from humorous probes is the working man’s bane, the traditional left, in which the editor has participated since the 1960s when he was calling for a “mass revolutionary party” combining “the best elements of the Old and New Left.” Many workers think there’s something funny about people who talk like that. Not much less amusing than the rest of the book is the appended “Statement of Principles” by Workers’ Democracy, the small socialist group that published the anthology.

Buhle confesses a political bias against “cynics who attack work itself.” He shut them out altogether, and not just spoiled punk bohos either. The nameless peasant who bestowed the name “St. Monday” on the habit of skipping work that day has many descendants. If the Wobblies get short shrift in a volume they should have dominated, it is probably because a song like “Hallelujah, I’m a Bum” doesn’t toe the dignity-of-labor line. The militants of WD aren’t much in sympathy with the Wob who wrote,

I'm going to stay where you sleep all day,
Where they hung the Turk that invented work,
In the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

That song couldn’t have gone in anyway... note the anti-Turkish racism.

A labor’s joke book worthy of the name would speak to the toilers in a language they understand. Baseball, for instance. In its exposé of “All-Star Ballot Fraud,” the Surrealist Workers Party includes on the roster centerfielder Tom Hayden, who “under the tutelage of coach Moraji Desai has returned to Port Urine to revive his sagging performance.” But another coach complains, “Tom gets behind one strike, two strikes, but the count is always no balls.” Then there is the *Manual for Revolutionary Leaders* which stitches together countless quotes from 60s left luminaries (Hayden, Avakian, Carmichael, Aronowitz), their classical forebears (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao) and a few others (Hitler, Mussolini, Machiavelli) to reconstitute “the single Thought of which each of these ideas is a mere frag-

ment.” Buhle is well aware of this book since its co-author Fredy Perlman typeset Buhle’s magazine *Radical America*, but it is not even listed in the bibliography. Perhaps because some of those fragments of the Thought, like the quotation about the “mass revolutionary party,” are by Paul Buhle himself.

Indeed this little book is vitiated by cronyism as much as by laborite sectarianism and a paralytic fear of offending any victim-group. The funniest material in it is some SubGenius stuff, by now heavily overexposed, which has nothing to do with labor. Buhle boasts of having landed SubGenius its first book contract. In return, in a display of interested dishonesty extreme even for him, the Rev. Ivan Stang plugged Buhle’s book in *High Weirdness by Mail*. At a time when Buhle was a freelance journalist he reprinted an Art Young cartoon from *The Masses* but not his most famous one, depicting journalists as whores in a brothel.

The omission from *Labor’s Joke Book* of so much accessible material, so much better than what it does contain, condemns the book as a bungle. The only contemporary cartoonists included are those published by the General Motors of the genre, Last Gasp—more favoritism or just ignorance? There is none of the hard stuff, no John Crawford, Tom Roberts, Tuli Kupferberg (the former Fug). Surely somebody like Ace Backwords is wishy-washy enough for Buhle. From a month’s worth of my mail I could casually compile a superior selection.

Here is an example of modern labor humor I had a hand in. On Labor Day 1980, Workers Against Work (in this case, Pierre Barral and myself) staged a “Rock Against Work” in San Francisco. As pickets flourished signs—“We Want Less Jobs” and “I Wanna Get Laid (Off)” —a speaker, myself, harangued the masses between sets. (Flipper followed.) My key demand was “to commute the sentences of everyone sentenced to commute.” Excerpts follow:

Fellow Lumpens:

Work is what makes the system—work. Anybody who isn’t revolting against work is working against revolt...

Show me a geek who says work is necessary and
I'll show you a fat cat who doesn't do any.

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Some people say “anarchy won’t work.”
That’s not an argument against anarchy;
that’s an argument against work.

Living and *earning a living* are as different
as capital punishment and the punishment of capital.

I closed with a venerable proletarian slogan: “Take it easy... but take it!” (*Laughter, applause, etc.*)

Humor is one thing, good humor is something else again. Radical humor is more than commodity comedy with the sexisms, racisms and other isms airbrushed out. Excising the improprieties from the ethnic and the locker-room jokes does not result in radical humor. Too many would-be political humorists owe less to Groucho Marx than to Margaret Dumont. Better to forswear humor altogether than to neuter it. But better still to reinvent it, to release its anti-power, and let the quips fall where they may.

That which is utterly, unmercifully radical is necessarily also an I-poking humor of extremity; while the ruthlessly, relentlessly humorous by sparing nothing calls everything in question and *that* is radical.

Get it?

Rapping Rapping

The Looking Glass World of Nonfiction TV
By Elayne Rapping
Boston: South End Press, 1987

This is a critical examination of “nonfiction TV” and the industry which produces it. By nonfiction TV, Elayne Rapping refers to everything from newcasts to soap operas, docudramas, game shows and pseudo-realistic mini-series like “Roots” and “The Day After.” In a sense, as she remarks, commercials are another important element; not only are they often on the cutting edge technically, but they frame and give meaning to everything else appearing on the screen.

Paradoxically, given the way she has limited her subject, television in recent years has derived much of its hypnotic power from commingling fact and fiction. "TV magazines" and talk shows purport to present hard news and commentary while deploying all the techniques which enliven TV entertainment. At the same time, TV fiction creates an experience more real to millions of viewers than a conversation with the stranger who lives next door.

At one level, Rapping makes the important if unsurprising case that television, both local stations and national networks, is a business with interests which determine the limits of the possible and set the tone for everything which airs. She sets forth a number of particular cases which are enlightening and unsettling. Rapping is careful not to claim that top-hatted malefactors of great wealth directly dictate program content—not usually, anyway. But the concerns of advertisers and of the television industry as an industry shape programming in ways which are unlikely to be explored anytime soon on "60 Minutes."

A deeper, less obvious, more interesting argument is that television refracts reality in a subtly but systematically biased way. The small two-dimensional screen fragments and individualizes experience, and the constraints of time aggravate the distortion. In seemingly variegated contexts, as Rapping argues time and again, television reduces social issues with collective, political dimensions to private problems which receive triumphant individual solutions on TV which don't touch or even hint at systemic evils. Poor people win big money on game shows, or Mike Wallace puts some small-time crook in the hot seat—and the message is that the system works, although the possible institutional sources of poverty or corruption never come up. TV best portrays individuals and episodes, not institutions or trends.

One of the many particular topics addressed is the role of television in politics. Considering the temptation, Rapping treats the matter of the actor-President Reagan with restraint. She analyzes him—and his much-discussed "style"—as the culmination of TV's influences and limitations. She possibly slighted the media campaigns of earlier times—William Henry Harrison, William Jennings Bryan and, of course, the FDR of the "fireside" chat come to mind—but is surely right that television has become the space where national politics takes place. It turns out that Eisenhower was the first presiden-

tial contender to turn TV to advantage, and every successful candidate (and some others) followed his lead. This being the case, it is puzzling why Rapping regards the media-oriented Jesse Jackson campaign as a proud moment in the history of television.

In fact, the curious thing about this book is that the author, writing from an openly critical left-wing stance (and for a political publisher) shrinks from the apparent implications of her argument. Herself an avid TV-watcher who is a Professor of Communications at Robert Morris College in Pittsburgh and author of many articles and criticisms of the media, she states that TV is here to stay, that it is an art form, and that TV—cable, especially—has radical(izing) potential. As she truly says: “Fantasies of worlds in which our deepest dreams come true are the stuff of human and social change.” But the TV fare she studies is not the vivifying fantasies which spring from our own imaginations, nor is it like the myths and traditions which give shared meanings to historical communities. TV impatiently abolishes history, which is no longer something people make but rather something they watch. Rapping rhapsodizes about the liberating potential of cable television, which may well make TV more pluralistic but cannot really make it into a collective invention. Rapping envies the networks their audience and understandably longs to expose it to broader perspectives. But switching scripts leaves unchanged the passivity of the process. TV would be the better if it aired the radical talk show “Rapping With Rapping” or Reverend Jesse Jackson’s televangelism outreach ministry, no doubt. But liberation means more than the right to change channels. Just possibly it would clear the air(waves) if more people, opting for immediate experience of the world and one another, *turned the damn thing off*.

Wasted Postage

Twisted Image

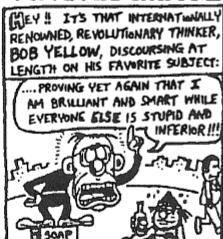
By Ace Backwords

Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1990

It was a mistake to assemble in an oversized (or any) book the cartoons of Ace Backwards, the greasy hippie who has wormed his way into numerous fanzines by dint of sheer persistence and a massive postage budget. To read him in book form is like sitting down to a multi-course banquet catered by Burger King. In a fanzine his cartoons are endurable because soon over with. Here they appear massed in their mediocrity. It is 8 millimeter material never meant for the wide screen. Seen together it reveals how often Backwards repeats himself and how little he has to say.

Backwards is very vain about his ubiquity in the fanzines, but the explanation is unflattering. The virtues of the marginals press are also its vulnerability. Most zines are very accessible, and you can get anything published somewhere if you try enough places. Most zines, too, are relatively new, which means the monotony of the material is not yet manifest, and by the time it is, other zines will have taken their places. Sheer longevity confers star status in this evanescent scene, and Backwards has been trying to draw since the early 80s, although mercifully the book prudently passes over that black dawn.

TWISTED IMAGE



Ace Backwords ©1991



The cartoons do not—with one obsessive exception, sex—say anything with any offensive power. Finally, the cartoons are a convenience to the amateur editor who does nothing a mainstream publisher would call layout: they can always be reduced at no loss of what they lacked anyway, aesthetic merit, and used as filler when there is empty space after everything else is pasted up.

In fact, there's an even simpler reason. During the 80s, John Crawford's Baboon Dooley cartoons established themselves in punk zines everywhere (except the Berkeley of *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, of course). Then Crawford retired and Ace Backwords took over the space Crawford had won for cartoons. Into the vacuum created by removing Crawford's heady oxygen rushed the farts of Ace Backwords.

What's funny is (not his cartoons, certainly, but) Backwords' pretense he is a professional cartoonist. In an interview reprinted from *Baby Sue* he says cartooning pays the rent. I am familiar with most of the hundred-odd credits he lists—I've been in over twenty of the same zines—and almost all of them do not pay. To appear in so many nonpaying pubs Backwords is surely losing more money to the post office and the copy shop than he's gaining from the occasional sale. I'm in the same position and don't do much better myself. Backwords goes on to say he doesn't work, that he had over a hundred acid trips before his first bummer (how many since?), and that after ten years of "various dead end bum trips" he "got a lucky break back in '87 and have been cartooning full time for the last four [sic] years." I have a pretty good idea what pays the rent: the Department of Social Services. Backwords probably got SSI for emotional disability in 1987. His address is a Berkeley welfare hotel if my (happily fading) memory of Berkeley hasn't played me false.

Backwords has really put one over on his largest audience, the punks. He's not a punk, he's a hippie: not the 60s sort, but a 70s dregs-on-drugs burnout—Telegraph Avenue, not Haight Street. In other words the kind of hippie the punks pretended they wanted to kill. Backwords on arriving in Berkeley joined the *Berkeley Barb*, whose occasional iconoclasm, a fading echo of the paper as it once was, failed to fig-leaf what it ended up as, a porn rag. The *Barb* taught Backwords everything he knows, and his project is to perpetuate hippie culture at its absolute worst. A talentless R. Crumb plagiarist, Backwords never tires of repeating themes which have long since become clichés, such as his many tiresome variations on "Isn't it

hilarious to depict straight people on drugs?" He'd draw the way Crumb does if he had the ability.

In an introduction which is more generous than judicious—R. Crumb, Charles Bukowski and I refused the honor—John Crawford says that Backwords' settling in Berkeley was a "mistake." That is the only categorically nonsensical thing I ever recall Crawford saying. Backwords is the epitome of what Berkeley became: smug, trite, narcissistic, anachronistic and phony. In a word, *backwards*. Berkeley's protest tradition is perfunctory ritual, its freedom of the head degraded to addiction, its radical politics degraded to voting for the ruling leftist political machine (the BCA), its sexual freedom degraded to porn and prostitution (against an intellectual climate of radical feminist terror), its vaunted tolerance is a repressive hospitality for public incivility (Berkeley's armpit is the famous Peoples Park). Ace Backwords is in his element there. He is imaginable nowhere else.

What might appear a bit daring in some of Backwords' attitudes to the embattled punks of the heartland is orthodoxy in Berkeley. He is not exactly going out on a limb in saying drugs can be fun, the homeless aren't getting a fair shake, heavy metal dudes are conformist, TV evangelists are greedy hypocrites, Nazi skinheads aren't nice, and Dan Quayle is (gasp!) "a mush-brained imbecile." All this is canonical in the holy city of Berkeley, California. Backwords takes no risks. That's why he could never produce satire even if he had a better sense of humor. There is nothing remotely radical in his posturings; hewing to Berkeley dogmatics, he even endorses voting: "If ya don't vote...don't emote!"

There is only one subject on which Backwords is controversial in any quarter: sex. His sub-pornography is of course anathema to the repressive feminists, which might make it seem he was doing something right for a change, but not really. Put enough monkeys at enough typewriters and you will eventually get *Hamlet* and *Neuromancer*. Put enough feminists at enough typewriters and you will eventually get a valid accusation of sexism. The point of the fable of the boy who cried wolf is that, eventually, the wolf did turn up. The sheer quantity of T & A and beaver shots betrays an obsession, and Backwords is one wanker who parades the fact he is one. He shows himself to be thoroughly familiar with that highly conventionalized genre, pornography ("Oh baby you make me so hot!" appears with predictable redundancy). Once again it is the assembly

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of all these cartoons in a book which confirms by sheer volume criticisms which were only plausible based on random fanzine sightings. The majority of these cartoons are pornographic, suggesting that the selectivity of the zines has made Backwords look a lot less sexist and obsessive than he really is.

Certainly his attitudes are, in the quaint argot of an earlier time, sick. One of his wish-fulfillment fantasies—repeated of course—is the male feminist wimp abasing himself only to be beaten out for the woman's favor by a macho stud. Another is the battle of the sexes ending in a clinch. This is locker room humor for the guys who used to get laughed out of the locker room. In a didactic cartoon in defense of porn, he explains “men cannot have sex unless they are first aroused by the sight of a woman.” A letter to *Popular Reality*, one place this cartoon appeared, asked did Ace Backwords really think blind men are impotent? It’s a sure thing Backwords can’t get it up without visual stimuli, and surely autobiographical are the several cartoons (repetition again) whose gimmick is the guy using a live woman to get him hot enough to jack off with a stroke mag.

Whatever Backwords went to Berkeley for in 1976 it was not for a college education. Mush-brained imbecilites abound. Misspellings or malapropisms, not always easy to say which are which, include “vicious,” “dwebes,” “beastiality,” and “masulinity.” You’d think somebody with such profound doubts about his masculinity would at least take care to spell it right. In a cartoon biography of Elvis he reveals that “in a urinal he would piss in a stall like a woman.” That’s one huge urinal big enough to accommodate a toilet stall. Since he never did quite get a life, Backwords is severely limited in his subject matter. Even the punk scene on which he is parasitic is something he knows very little about, the decline from Crawford’s scathing and effortless currency is precipitous. (Another thing he didn’t come to Berkeley for was art school. His Jello Biafra looks like his Alice Norton. Then again his Michael Jackson looks like his Grace Jones.)

When Backwords tries to satirize anything at all intellectual he falls on his face. Heavy Mental Rock ‘n’ Roll, for instance, men in suits singing that “Kierkegaard’s philosophical assertion that metaphysics is conceptually obtuse turns me on baby!! Woo-woo!!” and “Postulate that theorem! Postulate that theorem!” What a laugh riot. You can’t satirize what you can’t begin to understand. The gimmick of the incongruous cross is a good one if you know what you’re doing.

Thus I've crossed heavy metal and Marxism, Zack Replica has crossed left politics and baseball, and Carly Sommerstein has crossed Shakespeare and game shows. Basically all Backwords knows well enough to cross is various entertainment genres, achieving perhaps the greatest of his limited successes crossing porn and mainstream cartoons—which he has, as usual, spoiled by doing it to death. You're a loser, Charlie Brown!

Ace Backwords: drug-dazed retro-Berkeley smut peddler. The image of iconoclasm, the actuality of acquiescence, playing it safe—such is Berkeley and its favorite son, Backwords. A smelly hippie who's so far had the last laugh. Indeed, just about the only one.

Chapter Five Looking Back on Leaving the Twentieth Century The Realization and Suppression of Situationism

“For our time—I think every statement should be dated” - Alexander Trocchi

“The Situationists, whose judges you perhaps imagine yourselves to be, will one day judge you. We are waiting for you at the turning.” On this vaguely threatening note Maurice Wyckaert, speaking for the Situationist International, wrapped up a rant at London’s Institute for Contemporary Arts in 1961. One baffled member of the audience (or was he a shill?) asked just what was “Situationism” all about? Guy Debord arose to announce, in French, “We’re not here to answer cuntish questions,” whereupon the Situationists walked out. In a publicity brochure issued several years ago, the ICA recalled the event as “a conference whose chairman was stone deaf, whose main speaker spoke no English, and whose participants denied that the meeting existed.” (Actually they only denied that its topic existed, since the Situationists defined “Situationism” as a nonsense word coined by anti-Situationists.) The ICA, as we shall see, has taken its revenge.

The Situationist International (1957–1972) was an international but Paris-based formation which recreated the avant garde tradition

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on a high plane of intelligence and intransigence. Best known today for its ultra-left politics, the SI was founded by artists who merged two tiny organizations, the Lettrist International (starring filmmaker Guy Debord and his wife Michele Bernstein, a collage artist) and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (including painters Asger Jorn and Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio). IMIB, whose anti-functionalism credo might have been *form follows fun*, regrouped artists from the defunct COBRA group. One of them, the painter and urbanist Constant, soon brought with him into the SI the notion of unitary urbanism, “the theory of the combined use of arts and techniques for the integral construction of a milieu in dynamic relation with experiments in behavior.”

Although its public face was always that of a monolith, the SI experienced several schisms and “excluded” 45 of the 70 individuals who were members at one time or another. The fundamental antagonism, roughly corresponding to a Lettrist International/IMIG-COBRA divide, was between aesthetes and political theorists. The former were usually Germanic, such as Jorn, Constant and the German *Spur* group, with the prominent exception of Pinot-Gallizio. The latter were usually Latin and under the leadership of Guy Debord.

The aesthetes, faithful to the program of unitary urbanism, called for a democratized art, for the reunification and universalization of high culture and popular culture, and for an aesthetic eruption to transform the city into an ensemble of gratifying ambiences. Thus they took an interest in urban planning and architecture, although they seem to have accomplished nothing in either field. The politicos—in the formulation of Raoul Vaneigem, the first non-artist to become important in the SI—demanded the “realization and suppression of art,” a revolution of everyday life.

Both sides rejected art as a specialized department of privileged creativity and as the production of commodities for consumption. Every Situationist was anti-capitalist. But where the aesthetes aspired to infuse art into every aspect of life, the politicos sought to transform social relations directly, not just vivify them by comprehensive, qualitatively superior social conditioning. As Mustapha Khayati—an Algerian Situationist and possibly the SI’s most accessible polemicist—put it: “The realization of art—poetry in the situationist sense—means that one cannot realize oneself in a ‘work,’ but rather realizes oneself period.” After art comes the art of living.

Not to ask a cuntish question or anything, but what's the difference? Neither tendency ever built what Constant called "another city for a different life." If it had, existing conditions and opportunities would count for more than preconceptions. It was in the pre-revolutionary here-and-now that the competing orientations implied divergent practices.

At the Fifth Conference of the SI in Sweden in 1961, the tendencies clashed openly. The politicos had recently immersed themselves in the history of the revolutionary workers' movement and adopted the council communism of the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The aesthetes were not so much opposed to the renewal of proletarian revolt as skeptical of its prospects in the prosperous quiescence of the early 1960s. They proposed instead to deploy their power where it was already making itself felt, in the art world, for the time being. The politicos retorted that the aesthetes—the *Spur* Germans, for example—overlooked signs of refusal in their own back yards, not to mention misscelaneous episodes ranging from Zengakuren student demonstrations in Japan to the Katangan uprising in the Congo. All these, they optimistically (and erroneously) supposed, had some implicit revolutionary content. The politicos denounced the aesthetes as "cultural pimps." The aesthetes told the politicos that "your theory is going to fly right back in your faces!" Could be they were both right.

In 1962 the Germans and the "Nashists" (Jorgen Nash and the Scandinavians) were excluded; Jorn had already resigned. The Situationists assumed the political posture they would maintain for their final decade. Debord made no more films until after the SI dissolved. Situationist art—collages, cartoons and altered originals—became pure propaganda. Bernstein produced a series of collages—among them "Victory of the Paris Commune" and "Victory of the Workers' Councils of Budapest"—which were unfortunately destroyed when the Situationist headquarters in Denmark was torched in 1965. The Teutons formed their own Second Situationist International, publishing *Situationist Times* in Amsterdam and exerting a lasting influence on Scandinavian culture.

Although the Situationists boasted that theirs "was the best effort so far toward getting out of the twentieth century," they never made it over the wall. Their old foil the London ICA, among others, several years ago returned them to their cells in the world they'd

made their break from. Their art made the rounds at three prestigious avant hip venues. In 1989–1990, “On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time”—named after a Guy Debord film he will no longer permit to be shown—went from the Musée national d’art moderne (Centre Georges Pompidou) in Paris to the London ICA and on to the Boston ICA where I took it in. As delicately phrased by the catalog, the exhibit posed “a unique museological challenge,” much as the remains of a downed UFO pilot would present a funeral home with a unique mortuary challenge.

No avant garde tendency ever tried harder, fully aware what was at stake, to escape the curator’s clutches than did the Situationists, even in their initial phase of intervention in the art scene. They knew that their Futurist, Dadaist, Surrealist and Lettrist forebears had been, in their word, recuperated, that is, recovered by and for the existing order. An order which showed itself as the spectacle, the “organization of appearances.” Art—already image—is the easiest of all specialties to recuperate. All you have to do is ignore it or, if that doesn’t work, buy it. As Vaneigem declaimed in the wake of the defeat of the aesthetes, the SI was “not working for the spectacle of the end of the world, but for the end of the world of the spectacle.”

And so the sits incorporated failsafe mechanisms into their productions. Wyckaert’s and Debord’s word-fetishism at the ICA as to “situationism” was probably just part of the ambush laid for the audience, but sit texts did regularly harp on parts of speech as protective amulets against recuperation—a formalism at once naive and nitpicking. *Mémoires*, a graphic/textual collaboration between Jorn and Debord when they were probably both, as usual, in their cups, is bound in sandpaper covers to thwart the librarian or bibliophile who dares to treat it like just another book by shelving it between others. With mindless mimicry, the ICA bound one of its two coffee-table books in sandpaper covers too, the sandpaper donated by English Abrasives and Chemical Limited. But anything abrasive about the *Mémoires*, inside or out, was smoothed over by the ICA by keeping the book, and all other specimens of Situationist publishing, under glass.

Similarly, Giuseppe Pinot-Gallizio’s “industrial painting” parodied mass production with painting that came off a roll and sold by the meter. What remains of one roll, part of the ICA exhibit, is 145 meters long. The idea was to devalorize art by cranking it out in vast quantities, but even in the 1950s the cunning of the market prevailed.

When the artist arbitrarily jacked up the price of his glorified wallpaper, demand increased. After all, anything expensive must be worth it.

Naturally nothing came of Pinot-Gallizio's ambition to drape entire cities with industrial painting. The closest he came was the "Cavern of Anti-Matter," a large, dimly lit room lined with the stuff. I enjoyed the Boston ICA's enfeebled replication because it was the only place I was not under the surveillance of the staff. For also on display were some of Asger Jorn's "modifications"—kitsch paintings by nobody artists which he "overpainted" with phantasmagoria. The last thing the ICA wanted was for anybody to get ideas and behave like a Situationist—by, say, overpainting overpainting.

The futility of the Situationists' precautions reminds me of a story, related by Suetonius, of an enemy of Caesar's who consumed graduated doses of poison in order to immunize himself. Hearing of this, the Emperor laughed, saying, "There is no antidote against Caesar!"

Whatever else may be said about the exhibition and its companion volumes, they correct the self-serving interpretation of the SI circulated by its regnant political faction since 1964 and recapitulated by almost everything which has appeared in English about the SI. Part of the indignation over these productions is reflexive anxiety that the SI—which boasted of its blackout by the mainstream and by the left—is now being translated, interpreted and exhibited by specialists who don't even purport to be pro-Situationist. Ralph Rumney, an early-excluded SI founder, has complained of the way it "commandeered history," writing its own self-congratulatory version. Some attention to the history of "situationism" in Britain and America is necessary to situate the Situationist fad which the ICA represented and reinforced.

Although one of the handful of SI founders, Ralph Rumney, is English, Anglophones were more than usually likely to fall out with the Parisian control group. Rumney was soon expelled. Alexander Trocchi, a Scot, resigned in 1964. The entire English Section was expelled in 1967 for equivocating over the Parisians' resolve to break off contacts with several Americans who had the temerity to expound to Vaneigem himself a "mystical" interpretation of his book *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. The English formed King Mob, which included the future manager of the Sex Pistols, Malcolm McLaren. The Americans, based in New York City, concocted a hippie-Situationist amalgam, the Motherfuckers.

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Later, the American Jon Horelick and the Dutchman Tony Verlaan formed an American Section of the SI, again in New York City. It was the “scission” of the Americans in 1971—leaving the SI with four European members, one of them residing in an Eastern European insane asylum—which convinced Guy Debord to liquidate the SI. By then, a few SI and SI-influenced texts (by the epigones the SI scornfully called “pro-situs”) had circulated, with little effect, in Britain and the United States. They were too little and too late to influence the New Left. Too bad. The New Left needed theory that was rigorous and anti-authoritarian, but it (quite sensibly) shunned anarchism as intellectually flaccid and toyed with Marxism in its retrograde Leninist varieties, sundering the radicals from their (to this day underestimated) sources of popular support.

As the SI decomposed, pro-situ groups formed in New York City and in the San Francisco Bay Area with names like Negation, Point Blank, Contradiction and Bureau of Public Secrets, followed in other localities by not-so-sit grouplets (Upshot, Aurora, Tampa Narcissus) which, without intending to, insinuated situationism into the somewhat resurgent American anarchism of the 1970s. In Detroit, Fredy Perlman’s Black & Red project translated and published Debord’s book and other sit texts, and after 1975, the vintage underground newspaper the *Fifth Estate* adopted an anarcho-situationist stance which has recently, alas, deteriorated into some sort of eco-reformist nature-worship cult.

Excluded English Situationist Christopher Gray published an SI translation anthology, *Leaving the 20th Century*, in 1974; not many copies crossed the Atlantic. Vaneigem’s book appeared in translation in 1979, followed in 1983 by a joint Anglo-American authorized version. In 1981, pro-situ Ken Knabb (sole member of the Bureau of Public Secrets) self-published a *Situationist International Anthology* containing about a third of the materials in the SI’s magazine and other texts. Months later rock critic Greil Marcus, after tutoring by pro-situ Tom Ward, ended the American media blackout with a *Village Voice* article on situationism. Marcus followed up with his 1989 book *Lipstick Traces*, an uncritical and disorganized but not uninformative treatment of situationism, punk rock and all that which was published, remarkably, by Harvard University Press.

The thing about this accretion of texts is that they were just that, texts. Nobody knew about the artistic origins of the SI or the aes-

thetic preoccupations of its earliest years. The Debordists had their reasons for concealing their own artistic roots the better to come off as social theorists, and so it was as politics that situationism captivated a small but growing number of Britons and North Americans from the mid-70s onwards. The Teutons of the Second SI, who disdained to conceal their artistic aims, got no hearing in the Anglophonic world, although their scandals compare favorably to those of the Debordists. Constant with several anarchists set off the Provo movement in Amsterdam (1965–1967), proving it was possible for Situationists to put some fire in the belly of the counter-culture. The Germans of *Spur* were prosecuted for pornography. One of them, Dieter Kunzelmann, founded Kommune 1 in Berlin—which introduced hippie culture to both Germanies and incubated several of the terrorists of the June 2 Movement. In the Netherlands, Jacqueline de Jong's *Situationist Times*, with less text and more graphics than the SI journal, anticipated the fanzine style of the late 70s and 80s.

Back in England, SI excludees formed King Mob, which targeted art students. One of its veterans, Jamie Reid, designed Christopher Gray's SI anthology, but he was to have far more impact on the punk aesthetic through his association with the Sex Pistols. Gray has been faulted for his sloppy translations and shallow commentary, but in one crucial respect his anthology is superior to Knabb's: it incorporates enough of the cartoons and graphics to resemble the original look-and-feel of the SI journal. Knabb out-Deborded Debord in marginalizing the aesthetic dimension. For even after the Debordist consolidation, Situationist productions reflected the aesthetic of integrated forms practiced by the COBRA and IMIG artists. The presentation in English of most Situationist and pro-situ texts has sharply tilted toward the suppression, not the realization of art, diminishing the holism of the tendency and perhaps contributing to Situationist theory's exaggerated reputation for aridity.

Not much later, Reid placed his collage style—commingling mass media texts with cut-outs—at the disposal of Malcolm McLaren, also a King Mob veteran. McLaren's management—not to mention his manufacture—of the Sex Pistols, looks suspiciously like a cynical experiment in Situationist social engineering. Some of the graphics which adorn Sex Pistols album covers (eagerly sought after by collectors today) Reid had previously placed in pro-situ publications.

Although not many knew it at the time, the comprehensive neg-

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ativity of punk had been refracted through a Situationist prism. Happily the programmatic particulars, like council communism, had fallen by the wayside. By the late 1970s, the punk eruption in Britain included a zine eruption. Publishing a punkzine was even easier, and even more participatory, than performing punk music, which was anything but difficult. No small number of the thousands of zines which have come out in the last fifteen years look like messy versions of SI publications, and some of them were dealing with Situationist ideas before Greil Marcus got hip to them. Having glanced at every page of every issue of the SI journal—the Boston ICA stapled them up—I can say that the best SI collages are markedly inferior to the work of such marginals milieu collagists as James Koehnline, Ed Lawrence, Joe Schwind, Freddie Baer and Mykell Zhan. Why were absolutely none of the North American posters, postcards, fanzines and tabloids placed under glass with the rest of the relics, although nondescript post-modern art from the likes of NATO and Art & Language, which reflects little if any Situationist influence, went on display?

Probably because the marginals materials aren't relics—yet. For this kind of art, the copy is the original. Thus their small print runs count for less than the potential for the infinite multiplication of originals in the calculations of museologists, whose dismal science is, like economics, predicated upon scarcity. Pinot-Gallizio was on to something after all, but the material conditions for the mass production and distribution of art weren't quite there yet. The supersession of art—as of work—is not a matter of unitary urbanism or workers' councils but rather of generalizing the gift, solvent of all separations. The SI's practice was for once ahead of its theory here. Its slick journals were inexpensive, and during May-June 1968, the Situationists (both Internationals, in fact) churned out hundreds of thousands of posters and publications, their *don gratuit* to the proletariat.

The Situationists (especially the Debordists) chronically indulged in imputationism, that is, wishful thinking dressed up as critical theory. The S.I. was forever discovering unconscious situationism in the actions of Watts looters, Swedish delinquents, Katangan separatists, even Berkeley students. You don't have to be a Situationist to know that things are not always as they seem (although it helps). The spectacle only seems to be seamlessly serene. The temptation to elitism, as to optimism, is irresistible: it is condescending to annex all

the orneriness of others to one's own pet fancies. Just possibly some people knew what they were doing and it was not situationist, thank you. The Situationists made a spectacle of themselves, and that was their undoing. They finally did take their desires for reality. Psychiatrists call that "ideas of reference."

But then again, as Art Kleps asserted, maybe ideas of reference are where it's at. In a recent book, Debord brags that history has absolved him. Perhaps the spectacle, the essence of appearance, is more manifest than ever. (The mall has its uses for things.) There is something situationistic abroad which has made the theory more accessible even as it shows up the parts that are passe. When anti-situationist publishers like Mike Gunderloy and Fred Woodworth boast of their inability to understand situationism, increasingly their readers are likely to conclude that they must be smarter than these proud know-nothings. To the stunned viewers of the recent mini-series, the Gulf War, the spectacle may be more meaningful than any of the old anarchist cliches. And it illuminates that by which it is illuminated.

Since 1972 unchaperoned by any organization, situationism has been available for various uses, some dubious. Punks pilfered it for subliminals. Museologists curated it. Marxist academics at *Telos* explained it away as Frankfurt School philosophy as harmless as they are. Pro-situ hustlers like Tom Ward traded on their expertise in it. SI veterans reminisced about it, but only the ones who'd been excluded. Anarchists either maligned it or miscegenated with it. Poseurs congratulated each other for having heard of it. Somewhere, workers might have appropriated it, although this is sheer speculation. It is all over, and yet it is all over the place. Situationism is dead. Long live situationism!

Quit While You're Ahead

The Book of Pleasures

By Raoul Vaneigem

Translated by John Fullerton

London: Pending Press, 1983

The nostalgia craze has caught up with the Situationist International, although a reunion and comeback tour is unlikely. From the nadir of the mid-1970s, when the American pro-situationist groups fought themselves to exhaustion, interest in the sits has been on the rise in the English-speaking world, especially since Ken Knabb published his translation anthology and Greil Marcus revealed the situationists as the occult inspiration of punk rock. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* has been available from Black & Red for over twenty years, and the authorized translation of Raoul Vaneigem's *Revolution of Everyday Life* for more than ten. "Situationism" is back, if only as an object of contemplation, but it has no avowed practitioners (except absurdity incarnate Bill Brown). As *Newsweek* used to say, "Where Are They Now?"

For the Situationist International the flush times were the early and middle 60s. Having ousted the aesthetes, the triumphant politicized faction of Debord and Vaneigem turned its mercilessly lucid scorn on global "spectacular" society at its zenith. The spectacle is capital self-confident and fully realized, a self-subsistent structure of appearances which the situationists supposed they discerned through the welter of "issues" and contingencies. Weberians in Hegelian drag, the sits (Debord above all) constructed an ideal type, the spectacle, capitalism in its purity and maturity.

And it must have seemed that managed capitalism had left behind world wars, colonialism, and all other detractions from the business of realizing itself as a totality. Class society at its acme called forth the most radical negation possible: that of the situationists themselves. Within a few years—in the United States, anyway—eco-

nomic decline, executive corruption, military defeat and thwarted expectations exhumed, then reburied the archaic forms of leftist opposition, something the sit-ins failed to foresee. In the end (of which they were the beginning) it would be simply the situationist workers against the society of the spectacle. Everything else was a sideshow, part and parcel of the greatest show on earth, the spectacle.

Now it was the partial success of the situationists which was to prove their undoing. As they were fond of quoting (a salutary example, actually), "those who make half a revolution dig their own graves" (Saint-Just). Their half-revolution of May–June 1968, for all their subsequent boasting, surprised them as much as it did their enemies.

In France there was no war, no economic crisis, and no serious political conflict. Even the students who started it all had only petty grievances. Which suggests that the uprising was about something more serious than issues. A few situationist-influenced students, enraged and anarchists, early appreciated the depth of the malaise and exploited it. Situationist theory was indeed practical. Ten million French workers walked away from work in solidarity with students they had never been particularly fond of. Since they made no demands, the traditional leaders supplied some, above all, more money—more of the same—as the philistine technocrat C.P. Snow would say, "more jam." In its final consequential act, the Communist Party through its unions separated workers from students and, more important, workers from workers. Perhaps their massive multi-media agitational campaign lent credence to the situationist brag that their ideas were in everybody's heads; but during a rather brief period of time. The bad old days returned. Even de Gaulle enjoyed an Indian summer. The sit-ins had given him too much credit the time they said that, unlike the left, at least the Gaullists understood modern society well enough to administer it.

The return to normalcy was so rapid and so seemingly complete that situationist claims concerning the May days and their part in them



sounded empty and self-serving when announced over a year later in “The Beginning of an Era.” Rene Vienet had within weeks produced a short account with documentation, but the full-blown analysis and critique came curiously late. If May 1968 was the beginning of an era, what was June? And what next? If it was time, as announced, to put situationist theory into practice, what was the role of the erstwhile theorists? They suggested that further theoretical progress would be informed by renewed working-class militance. It never was. If the theorists were now to play a purely pedantic part, restating and popularizing a theory considered complete or at least presented that way for pedagogic purposes, the situationists would qualify for the very critique they had aimed at the anarchists. What is to be done? When in doubt, more of the same—or stall for time. Debord took the first route, Vaneigem the second.

The Debordists, including Vienet and ex-enrage Rene Riesel, polemicized against anonymous others—Vaneigem—for resting on their laurels. Stung by the accusation of indolence, Vaneigem resigned in 1970, invoking a “taste for pleasure” he later went to great lengths to justify. In 1971 Riesel was purged and the two-member American Section staged its “scission.” Debord and Gianfranco Sanguinetti responded with a tedious tome, *The Real Split in the International*—the sits thus producing their equivalent of *The German Ideology* at the end of their career instead of, as Marx and Engels did, at its beginning. Debord awoke at last to his embarrassing resemblance to the quixotic conquistador in Werner Herzog’s “Aguirre, the Wrath of God” when he finds himself alone on his raft, adrift on the Amazon. The S.I. dissolved in 1972.

There had always been tension between Debord’s and Vaneigem’s visions, even if Vaneigem—the first non-artist of any importance in the S.I.—gained his combat experience as a partisan of Debord in the campaign against the aesthetes. Debord, though an artist, was a classicist. Vaneigem, not an artist; was nonetheless a romanticist. Debord’s “spectacle” is objective, static, a structure (in hindsight, situationism shared with—or owed to—structuralism much more than any situationist will ever admit). Vaneigem is more diffuse, more dynamic in historical sweep, more subjective and more concerned with subjectivity. Debord resembles Robespierre; Vaneigem resembles Danton. Debord is Appollonian; Vaneigem is Dionysian. Ken Knabb’s *Situationist International Anthology* heavily emphasizes the

texts of Debord and those reflecting his Hegelian-cerebral style. It all but suppresses the aesthetic faction (Asger Jorn, Constant, etc.) so prominent in the early S.I., and it also slighted Vaneigem. Not that Vaneigem was a hippie—he vehemently rejected the American would-be situationist Ben Morea for interpreting him as one. But he might have been just what the 60s counter-culture needed to infuse some lucidity into its sensibility and deepen its differences with the death-culture. Herbert Marcuse, Che Guevara, Paul Goodman, Norman O. Brown, Theodore Roszak—none was up to the task. Not surprisingly, the trickle of translations from Debord and the Debordists made no impact on 60s America.

But if Vaneigem was more the man for the 60s than the 60s set ever knew, the 70s took their toll on him, as on them. *The Book of Pleasures* (1979), translated in 1983, takes its place among the many monuments to contrived nostalgia which so many found so soothing at the time (and ever since). What was urgently explicated with furious intelligence returns as stilted self-simulation. As at a retro-rock reunion, all the old superstars put in an appearance: “survival sickness,” “reversal of perspective,” and the familiar antitheses of gift and exchange, life and survival. But they shuffle on-stage stiffly, slowly, self-consciously. Vaneigem, formerly a situationist, is now a pro-situ. He’s something less than—but not something else than—a situationist.

It was thanks to Vaneigem that the S.I. retrieved for radical critique the achievements of Wilhelm Reich. Vaneigem appropriated Reich’s concept of “character,” the “armor” which, at once protective and restrictive, reveals neurosis to be both normal and normative in a repressive society. The medical model of mental illness realizes and exhausts itself in the conclusion that society is sick. Freud shrank from the implications; Reich took it from there. But as Jean-Pierre Voyer observes, “While Reich concluded in a very ambiguous manner that character was an obstacle to work,” rather, “character is an obstacle to the critique of work.” Vaneigem’s original formulation—also “ambiguous” in keeping with situationist deference to Marxism—came as close to relating the supersession of character to the supersession of work as the S.I. ever got. He linked character (via the playing of roles) to the division of labor and thus to the totality of exchange-organized sociality.

Freud was conservative, in fact fatalistic, about sexuality. It

couldn't be suppressed, and yet it had to be suppressed. In contrast, Reich's was a radically positivist approach with a slight savor (and savoir) of Saint-Simon or Bentham. Social engineering and social revolution are strange bedfellows, especially in the bedroom. Reich's Freudian contribution to Marxism was only additive. Where there was one beef, economic exploitation, now there is also another, sexual repression. Reich never regarded character and work totalistically as exercising a coercive co-dominion over everyday life. Hence he called for radical reforms in both the norms of morality and the organization of work, but nothing more. And any advance Vaneigem made on Reich in *The Revolution of Everyday Life* he surrendered in *The Book of Pleasures*.

Masters and Johnson have long since taken the input-output sexology model to the farce-point for positivism. Vaneigem complements their parodic Reichianism with a parodic situationism. There are exactly two ideas in his Book. Sex is good. Trade is bad. Four legs good, two legs bad. It is impossible to enjoy a commodity: "Even stolen, it is tainted with the infamy of price." On the other hand, "intense pleasure" implies the end of work, exchange, guilt, the state, even the intellect! The truth was always right under your nose, sitting on your face. Love the one you're with. All you need is love. Now Vaneigem is a hippie.

In *Revolution*, Vaneigem's critique of exchange was subtle and far-reaching, converging from every quarter of human time and space upon the apotheosis of exchange: bourgeois society. Vaneigem put the collar on exchange in even its most successful disguises. Religious sacrifice, for instance, is (*vide Christ*) a form of exchange with unusually confused bookkeeping. In contrast the Book bookishly rails against even the gift as suspect, conceivably concealing some claim to reciprocity.

Like John Zerzan, Raoul Vaneigem is looking for the fall from grace, the original sin. He appears to be unaware he has found it in society itself (which is, come to think of it, a plausible reading of the Garden of Eden myth). The earliest humans were hunters and gatherers living in stateless, classless, kinship-based face-to-face societies. Judging from their contemporary counterparts, they practiced what anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has called "generalized reciprocity": ongoing gift-giving relations with, however, implicit expectations of approximate equality over the long term. If by becoming social we

became human, by becoming human we lost our humanity.

In *Revolution*, Vaneigem held up as inspiring and instructive the play-element in the potlatch of the Northwest Coast Indians, an unmistakably competitive system of gift-giving (“fighting with property,” in Helen Codere’s phrase). The Vaneigem of the *Book*, committed to an absolute anti-economic moralism, cannot distinguish this, or any, exchange-“tainted” relationship from any other. But any relationship is by definition a bilateral (if not multilateral) “exchange” of, if nothing else, meanings. A relationship in which one person does all the giving (or all the talking) is at least as alienated as any exchange.

And what about “intense pleasure,” solvent of all alienations? Is there no reciprocity in that? If not, Vaneigem’s formula for liberation is just—and not just metaphorically—a jackoff.

“It is impossible,” he explains, “to enjoy anything made by work and constraint.” What a cross to bear! Intense pleasure dispels guilt—but not before Vaneigem makes us feel guilty for feeling guilty, and for just about everything else which we, huddled in darkness, do to obtain some satisfaction from living however bittersweet.

So if trade is sickening, the cure is—literally, it seems—at hand. You can always fuck your way to freedom provided no trace of mutuality taints your ecstasy with exchange. This is no revolution of everyday life, just other-worldly contempt for it. “As sure[ly] as work kills pleasure, pleasure kills work.” If only it were that easy. Ben Morea wasn’t wrong, just premature: Vaneigem is a mystic after all.

The Book of Pleasures reads like Cliff Notes for *The Revolution of Everyday Life* compiled by an uncomprehending exegete. Ideas are nothing else but what you do with them. In this sense Vaneigem has run out of ideas, although he remembers their names. He once cut deep with his critique of roles; now he hates them too much to understand them. He’s too afraid of playing roles to play with them. His one-handed cult of the abstract orgasm is pathetic. Some people should quit while they’re ahead.

A Situationist Bibliography

The Action-Image Of Society: On Cultural Politicization. By Alfred Willener. New York: Pantheon Books, 1970.

A Swiss sociologist's analysis of the French student movement, with serious attention paid to the situationists and kindred tendencies.

The Assault On Culture: Utopian Currents From Lettrisme To Class War. By Stewart Home. London: Aporia Press & Unpopular Books, 1988.

Reviewed in chapter 10.

The Book Of Pleasures. By Raoul Vaneigem. London: Pending Press, 1983.

First published in 1979; reviewed in this chapter.

Contributions To The Revolutionary Struggle Intended To Be Discussed, Corrected, And Principally Put Into Practice Without Delay. By Ratgeb [Raoul Vaneigem]. London: Bratach Dubh Editions, 1981.

Published pseudonymously in 1974, four years after Vaneigem's resignation from the S.I.—a latter-day “Catechism of a Revolutionary” marred by the naivete which inheres in that format. The reflections on the military aspects of modern urban revolution, however—as Greg Dunnington pointed out to me—break new ground.

An Endless Passion... An Endless Banquet: A Situationist Scrapbook. Edited by Iwona Blazwick. London: ICA/Verso, 1989.

Issued—in imitation of a book by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn—with sandpaper covers, this accompaniment to the London version of the 1989 situationist art exhibition stresses SI reverberations in Britain, such as the influence on punk.

Enrages And Situationists In The Occupation Movement, France, May '68. By Rene Vienet. Brooklyn: Autonomedia & London: Rebel Press, 1992.

Written by a participant only a few weeks afterwards, this is an analytic account of the situationist and Enrage role in the May Days.

Chapter Five

If I Wasn't Alexander I Would Like To Be Diogenes. By Roberto Ohrt. Seattle: Left Bank Books, 1993.

A 32-page tract, largely but not wholly favorable, treating select aspects of Guy Debord's activity as a Lettrist, a Situationist and afterwards.

In Girum Imus Nocte Et Consumimur Igni. By Guy Debord. Translated by Lucy Forsyth, London: Pelagian Press, 1991.

The script of Debord's last film (1978) which, like all the others, he will not permit to be screened.

Italy: Autonomedia—Post-Political Politics, Semiotext(e). Vol. III, No. 3, 1980.

Book-length anthology on the theory and practice of "autonomist" resistance in Italy, with brief texts by Debord and Sanguinetti.

Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of The 20th Century. By Greil Marcus. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989.

An utterly disorganized romp through several cultures of rejection including dada, lettrism and situationism. Marcus, a rock critic, regards the SI through a music prism—the situationists would not approve. Not a good introduction except possibly for punks, but Marcus has done more original research than Stewart Home (*q/v*) and deserves credit for the 1982 article in the *Village Voice* which broke the American media blackout of the SI.

On The Passage Of A Few People Through A Rather Brief Period Of Time: The Situationist International 1957–1972. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989.

A coffee-table book to accompany the exhibit of situationist art(ifacts) which went from Paris to London to Boston in 1989. It recovers the aesthetic dimension of the SI which had been so successfully suppressed by the Debordists (including Ken Knabb).

On Terrorism And The State. By Gianfranco Sanguinetti. London: BM Chronos, 1982.

A vigorous if largely unsubstantiated argument by an important situationist that Red Brigades terrorism was orchestrated by the Italian intelligence services; it got the author prosecuted. Especially worthwhile in its dissection of the conservatism of the Italian

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Communist Party.

The Origins Of Modern Leftism. By Richard Gombin. Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1975.

A short volume (misleadingly titled) by a sympathetic French social scientist surveying the currents of modern revolutionary theory, the situationists included, which are hostile to Marxism-Leninism.

Preface To The Fourth Italian Edition Of 'The Society Of The Spectacle'. By Guy Debord. Second Edition. London: BM Chronos, 1983.

Debord crowing that events since 1967 have borne out his analysis in *Society of the Spectacle*; self-indulgent, but with some suggestive comments on the modesty affected by statism in the 1970s (remember Carter?).

Protest In Paris: Anatomy Of A Revolt. By Bernard B. Brown. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press, 1974.

An account of the May Days by a hostile American political scientist, visibly resentful over events which gave the lie to his pluralist ideology, but which nonetheless documents the important part played by the situationists and their enrage allies.

The Revolution OF Everyday Life. By Raoul Vaneigem. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Seattle: Left Bank Books & London: Rebel Press, 1983; rev. ed., 1994.

The authorized translation of Vaneigem's 1967 *Treatise on Living for the Use of the Younger Generation*, one of the two fundamental situationist works. Debord wrote the classicist situationist analysis, Vaneigem the romanticist one—a lush, sensuous, wide-ranging treatise on how-to-live. Translator Donald Nicholson-Smith was expelled from the SI in 1967, which is credentials enough, I daresay. (There was an earlier translation in 1972 from Practical Paradise Publications [London].)

The Right To Be Greedy: Theses On The Practical Necessity Of Demanding Everything. By For Ourselves. Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, n.d. [1983; reprinted with corrections, 1991].

A bracing exposition of “communist egoism” by a pro-situ group (1975); the principal author was Bruce Gardner. The Loompanics edition—the only one in print—includes a Preface by me (directed to libertarians) and an earlier version of this bibliography.

Situationist International Anthology. Edited and translated by Ken Knabb. Berkeley, California: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981.

Despite its Debordist bias, the only English-language anthology readily available (or worth reading) of SI texts—produced by a veteran Bay Area pro-situ. Contains about one-third of the material in the SI journal plus some free-standing texts, notably “On the Poverty of Student Life,” probably the most lucid brief introduction to situationist theory.

The Situationists Reconsidered. By Tom Ward. New York: Left Field/Downtown, ____.

Ward, an ex-member of For Ourselves, had little to do with its best production, *The Right to Be Greedy*, but contributed this reconsideration to *Cultures in Contention* (reviewed—a tad too sympathetically—in chapter four). No longer useful as an introduction, it is more obviously self-promotional than ever, lauding some of Ward’s forgotten failures along with his yuppie Marxist cronies at *Processed World*. In a footnote he calls *Loompanics*, which reprinted *Greedy*, “right wing,” without troubling to explain why a right-wing publisher would reprint a “communist egoist” polemic written by a group that Ward himself belonged to. Ward retains only the worst of the situationists: their economic determinism, their councilism, and their bad manners.

Society Of The Spectacle. By Guy Debord. Second Edition. Detroit: Black & Red, 1977.

Cerebral, Hegelian and a bit daunting—still this is an essential text, well worth taking a little time and trouble to read. (The breaking news: there’s a new translation by Donald Nicholson-Smith, published by Zone, and critically reviewed by Len Bracken, *Estraphile* No. 2 [Summer 1994], 30-31.)

Society Of The Spectacle And Other Films. By Guy Debord. Translated by Ken Knabb et al. London: Rebel Press, 1992.

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Debord's film scripts made more fully available than previously. See Len Bracken, "Guy Debord: Executioner of the Seventh Art," *Extraphile* No. 2 (Summer 1994), 32-40.

Spectacular Times. By Larry Law. London: Spectacular Times, various dates.

A series of a dozen-odd prose collage booklets written and/or assembled by the late British anarcho-situationist Larry Law. Some go off on tangents remote from the original sit project (such as "animal rights"), but many are not-too-simplistic popularizations of situationist notions. Autonomedia plans to reprint the entire series in book form.

Chapter Six

Introduction: Marginals Demigods

There is a pleasing paucity of false modesty in the marginals milieu. Even its cynics are often less detached than Dionysian. The SubGenius pseudo-evangelical style (chapter 3) with its rants, brags and struts is only one extrovert influence among many, including punk vocal style and the ecstatic poetics of Blake, Whitman and Ginsberg and beyond. Combine exuberance of manner with highly personalized (some would say egocentric) expression and you sometimes arrive at a Promethean Narcissism which at worst is a relief from academicism; at best it renews an originally American style of popular culture.

As it happens, none of the "Marginals Demigods" I esteem in this chapter are great braggarts, but their material has the self-assurance which comes from knowing you are doing something inimitable. Not that anybody is in any absolute sense inimitable. I mimicked Jim Wheat's "Because of Laws" with a poem of the same name, but if mine detoured his conceit to political purposes it is also true I couldn't keep it going for nearly so long. Ed Lawrence, whom I honor herein as I do Wheat, so adroitly emulated me as I used to write that he developed the style much further after I'd largely abandoned it. Nobody has imitated (or parodied) Hakim Bey yet, although I am

tempted. Rival punk cartoonist Dennis Worden made the mistake of attacking John Crawford by trying to parody him, only to publicize his relative mediocrity by inviting comparisons.

There are others I would single out (chapter 1) if I were setting up as an agent; I show my hand, only to illustrate how similar they are in their degree of differentiation. All are or, in Crawford's case, were active for from six to more than ten years. Bey and Lawrence, unorthodox anarchists both, are well known as these things go. Crawford, for many years a fixture of most zines with even a glancing interest in punk, is inactive—temporarily I hope. Jim Wheat, although he was "discovered" by SubGenius, way back when SubGenius itself was toiling to be discovered, is virtually unknown—he's less prolific than the rest and does almost nothing to circulate his stuff, which does take some getting used to. His material, like Al Ackerman's, belongs in a book. I hope I've provoked someone into thinking about publishing it.

The Marginals Marco Polo

T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, and Poetic Terrorism

By Hakim Bey. Brooklyn: Automedia, 1991

Guy Debord once put out a book with sandpaper covers. The idea was to make it impossible to shelve the book with the rest without lacerating them. A good idea but Hakim Bey has gone Debord one better. He put the sandpaper inside.

Hakim Bey, the goofy Sufi, is the Marco Polo of the marginals milieu. An American, he journeyed to the East for the 70s while we homebodies bumbled along entropically. In Iran he went native. When that was not enough he went native again, this time in a country of the imagination, a Terra Incognita whose sea monsters hold no terror for him. Bey wants to put his homeland on the map—on a tropical island, an asteroid, somewhere.

Bey has a potpourri of penchants—anarchy, speculative physics, fanzines, dope, heretical Islam and comely boys—which are somehow

all of a piece in his hands. Bey put the sin back into syncretism. He has written numerous essays as well as *Crowstone*, the world's finest—and only—pornographic sword 'n' sorcery man-boy love novel; and *Chaos: The Broadsheets of Ontological Anarchism*, an ecstatic anarchobabesque vision. *Crowstone* as fantasy (in the rococo decadent mode of, say, Jack Vance), like *Crowstone* as hard-core porn, astonishes by the way it at once realizes and synthesizes these genres; his parody, like Fielding's, actually displaces the object of parody.

Hakim Bey is not just a Bohemian, he's a Taborite. His *Chaos* is a stone skipped across the sea of tranquility. A pervert, unashamed, Bey would rather be a lunatic than a Moonie. Erudite, he disports his intellectation unaffectedly. *Chaos* shouts for joy, demanding marvels without cease, a Commune of Kings where "your inviolable freedom waits to be completed only by the love of other monarchs..."

Bey's "ontological anarchism" is perhaps his least felicitous phrase. He means to capture (and make off with) the romantic and sinister connotations of anarchism, but he risks getting stuck with the lost baggage of a failed sect which threw down its only weapon when it started saying that "anarchy is not chaos." (If not, so much the worse for anarchy.) Bey knows he is not for the "liberationists & ideologues" and they are certainly not for him.

Chaos is not a rehash of *Sturm und Drang* or Surrealism or anything like that, although it comes close in spots to the fantastic Orientalia of, say, the Fu Manchu pulps were they written by Nerval. Taoists and Dervishes, hopheaded assassins, kundalini-snakes, the Chinese who reserved gunpowder for holidays and the frightening of demons, these are the denizens of a never-never East where Bey, like Prester John, reigns over a fabulous kingdom.

Not that he has no respect for the West—for his Maryland forebears Poe and Mencken, for the Luddites and Ranters and Haymarket bombers. The modern city is plainly the scene for the crimes and japes he proposes. But Bey has harsh words for the Occidental mandarins, the pedant provocateurs: "The Surrealists disgraced themselves by selling amour fou to the ghost-machine of Abstraction—they sought in their unconscious only power over others, & in this they followed de Sade (who wanted 'freedom' only for grownup whitemen to eviscerate women & children)."

Speaking of Amour Fou, Bey celebrates a vice which, unlike homosexuality, is not yet an asset to the upwardly mobile intellectu-

al. He is a boy-lover. His chapter on “Wild Children” echoes the early Burroughs (or the late Burroughs echoing the early Burroughs) not only in its affection for Wild Boys but in seeing them as “natural ontological anarchists, angels of chaos,” innocents whose Eros fits them to be teachers, not pupils of adults. Writes Bey (with more than a little wishful thinking): “We share the same enemies & our means of triumphant escape are also the same; a delirious & obsessive play, powered by the spectral brilliance of the wolves and their children.” Tell it to the judge...

Anarchism would turn a mental hospital into a mental ward; anarchy makes of it a phalanstery. Anarchism legalizes drugs; anarchy takes them. Anarchy is chaos, and Chaos is anarchy.

“Hell, I’ve Even Laughed”

Baboon Dooley, Rock Critic: Baboon Gets Ahead in Life
By John Crawford
Ann Arbor: Popular Reality Press, 1988

To his delight, I once called John Crawford “the R. Crumb of the 80s.” To my chagrin, so had everybody else by the time I got around to it. Although my gift is of gab, I couldn’t really explain what I meant by that for all the ink in India, if Crawford hasn’t used it all up. My acquaintance with comics, over- and -underground, is haphazard. Something about the graphic arts eludes me—coordination, probably. About the most complex manual operation I’ve mastered is the hand-job. But something about Crawford’s cartoons, like Crumb’s before him, grabs me and doesn’t let go till I’m all shook up. Comparisons aside—that’s what History of Art majors are for—what’s so great about Crawford?

Style, for starters—not to be confused with fashion, a foible Crawford has shish-kebopped like nobody has since Thorstein Veblen, but much more succinctly. The look of his cartoons is absolutely original. You’d spot a Crawford bit anywhere, any place, and any time, even if it peddled pizza or retailed revolution—which it indubitably would not. Which is to say, Crawford has not only origi-

nality but also integrity. He hasn't bailed out of the mainstream just to be washed away by some brackish counter-cultural current. How is it possible to be consistent without being conformist? Easy: by consistently ragging on conformity to anything including nonconformity. And while this might be a moot point in Sheridan, Wyoming or Salt Lake City, it's a clear and present danger in hip-ridden hotspots like the Bay Area of (hypothetically speaking) *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll* and *Processed World*.

Great cartoonists operate through memorable, archetypal characters—Crumb, Al Capp and (the earlier) Bill Griffith come to mind—and John Crawford has his: the unspeakable Baboon Dooley, Rock Critic. This wonderful monster, to anyone even tangentially related to the punk milieu, is more real, in the absolute veracity of his phoniness, than all the countless poseurs from whom he derives. Dooley is superficial, not in the shallow manner of so many trendies, but to the very core of his being. He exhibits the cowardice of Pere Ubu without his strength, the naivete of Lemuel Gulliver without his sincerity. Not that Dooley's insincere, exactly. Rather, at any given moment he sincerely means what he says, but he doesn't know what he's talking about. He'll be equally adamant about another second-hand posture waiting in the wings, and he'll switch signals when the word comes down.

Crawford has blown up or blown away Baboon Dooley more times than Wile E. Coyote, but he always brings him back for more. Because Dooley imitates everything but learns nothing. And this is because he never, ever creates anything. He's a parasite, a scene-maker who's always (for all his exertions) a few steps behind. His foil is usually a streetwise dude who patiently permits Dooley to blow up his balloon for three panels and then pops it, *en passant*, in the fourth.

I should quit while I'm ahead, but won't... Crawford's relation to the punk scene is reminiscent of Crumb's toward the hippies. On the one hand, utter and intimate familiarity from the inside; on the other, enough detachment to notice how much these counter-culturalists share with the system they profess to oppose. Crawford's youthful brush with the hippie/yippie movement (discussed in his rare anti-MR&R one-shot *All the Drugs You Can Eat*) reflects his disillusionment with the first rock 'n' roll revolutionary scene he believed in.

A shade older than Crawford, I was wary of punk and maintained an ironic (di)stance when the next wave, the New Wave (the phrase

is as early, maybe earlier than "punk") rock 'n' rolled in. By the late 70s rock was not a pretty scene, to be sure, and the punks said so by the pains they took to uglify themselves. MC5/White Panther guru/martyr John Sinclair ("Free John Now!") made this unforgettable clear to me at the time when he was quoted in the Business pages of the *Detroit News* as saying, "We used to call it revolution, now we call it business."

Crawford is a punk, as Crumb was a hippie, in a way that used these scenes as trampolines for jumping off into the wide world where the spectacle of human hypocrisy and folly is an all-ages show. Indeed these (wise-)guys free-fall into our cerebra almost as if we didn't have central nervous systems. Without being "political" in any way even I can discern, Crawford makes central systems *nervous*.

The satirist is someone condemned to be misunderstood, especially by his friends. Uniquely he achieves greatness through the self-surpassing enormity of his own pettiness. He succeeds in the measure he persuades us that his enemies are not worth the trouble. And they're not. But they are not to get off so lightly!

If the satirist didn't think he was better than his targets he wouldn't belittle them, as he always does. In his satiric capacity he doesn't hate, he despises. He hasn't the patience to wait, as for the Messiah, for a worthy foe. Everywhere he looks, somebody is getting away with something. Each in himself is not worth the trouble, but every one as an instance of a type, as a concrete universal is the only thing *worth troubling*. The target, however paltry, is real. The satirist's opposite number is the theologian. You can star the Seven Deadly Sins in a morality play but just try to cast them for a dance number in a musical comedy.

For John Crawford, as for any fully realized satirist, the best tele-



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scope is a microscope. He sees (and draws) things literally in black and white. For a decade his cartoons have closely tracked, and mocked, the trends and impostures of punk. But their enduring interest is that they mock trendiness and imposture, not that they mock punk. Crawford is as gossipy as Aristophanes or Swift. He names names because evil is incarnate or it is nothing.

Crawford's might be the satirist's crowning glory, to rescue his victims from oblivion. The names of Gellius and Egnatius survive only because Catullus paid them back for their treachery with malicious, imperishable verse. It may well be that Crawford will wreak a like vengeance on Tim Yohannon and Jello Biafra, condemned to be remembered as only what they only were: cartoon characters.

A Jack of All Tirades

Reinventing the Wheel... of Karma

By Ed Lawrence

Seattle: Bomb Shelter Props, 1989

Ed Lawrence speaks—and also listens—to whom it may concern, “to anyone interested in maintaining channels of communications as more than diversion ditches.” Disinclined to chatter, he is by all indications writing not from the usual compulsions or careerism (he does construction work in rural Pennsylvania) but as an extreme retort to the extremity of the contemporary condition. Appreciating as he does that “silence is the highest form of communication,” when he does break silence he does it with an urgency which—as erudite, lyrical, playful or vulgar as he usually is—derives insurgency from emergency. No mystic, Lawrence sets himself against what Reason has come down to in Western thought, “a standard which prunes every tree to the dimensions of a utility pole.”

Lawrence communicates several interlinked themes through a variety of forms. Originally a poet, he is additionally adept at the brief essay, at collage and at their interminglings which are so characteristic of his field of play, the marginals milieu rooted in xerography. Indeed Lawrence is among the makers of this now well interconnect-

ed milieu of posterists, anarchists, mail artists, absurdists, punks and other flotsam. His own material stands out there, and much of it would stand out, if other media could stand it, almost everywhere. Lawrence, one of whose perceptible influences is William Blake, gets much the same silent treatment. His book is largely textual but includes, as it absolutely had to, his memorable amphibians.

Lawrence has taken from Nietzsche, Camus, Karl Kraus, Blake, the anarchists—by now he qualifies as one, although he baffles their orthodox publications—but he's given back much more with a

HIDDEN PICTURES: *Jack and the beanstalk
at the Bitburg Air Base*



IN THIS PICTURE FIND: a lightbulb, football, jew in a world still threatened by anti-Semitism, pliers, Afghan, saucerman, prisoner of the gulag, duck, fish, refugee in a crowded boat fountaining off the coast of Vietnam, mitten, Scottie dog, Laotian, Cambodian, fork, wrench, Cuban, turtle, Miskito Indian in Nicaragua, feather, desk lamp, a potential victim of totalitarianism and DADDA.

decade long Potlatch. Verse, his original voice, is not heavily represented in this collection, but what there is has some throw weight. “Ice Tea Without Mercy” chillingly recounts a mercenaries’ reunion whose MIA’s were lost not to enemy action but to the real enemy, ordinary life: coronaries, cars, swine flu, suicide. Another poem is unashamedly jingly doggerel denouncing judges, it’d make a magnificent rap song. In recent years the poetry has infused the prose, which is the better for it.

Lawrence’s collages are representative of marginals graphics but for their economy. As instantly recognizable as a John Crawford cartoon, a Lawrence collage is always lean and mean, with only the most sparing textual annotation. No slapdash mess of clip art and tabloid frenzy, Lawrence collages may cover the same dark and bloody ground but with precision and purpose. Any marginals collagist might veil Khomeini in a spacesuit and assign him an entourage of Klansmen. Only Lawrence would think to add the fortune-cookie caption, “Beware of enterprises that require new clothes.” “Usurer Friendly” illustrates—in addition to the artist’s pronounced punmanship—very literally, skull-duggery, “the inner face of capital’s interface,” what T.S. Eliot called the skull beneath the skin. Lawrence goes on to connect, with an umbilical cord, a baby to a Bunsen burner. He lets you seek out the hidden faces as Jack in the Beanstalk goes to Bitburg. Not to be neglected: “The Sexual Positions of a Ladder.”

Lawrence is humane and so no humanist. Aghast at economics, his art is nonetheless economical. Apparently a freethinker, his sensibility for what for lack of a better word (we need one) might be called spiritual sets him as much against the secular humanists as the clerics. In-spiration, in-spiriting, he calls what he feels, a breath of fresh air. He offers what I take to be, not a program, but an invitation to undo our programming:

Our struggle is to work to restore a living, balanced, joyful environment where death provides the fertile ashes from which life springs anew and to oppose to it the dissected world where the thrashing contortions of prosthetic tentacles provide the only semblance of animation. To reject a world choking on blind fury in favor of one of vision which will be able to appreciate the delicate gradations as they play across the dawning sky.

Lawrence has seen the dawning sky, as he has seen the moon rise “like Lazarus from a cold bed.” Like Goethe, he calls for more light. His multiplicity of methods accords with his perception of plural paths to the truth. His holism isn’t hollow, Lawrence is no New Age grifter or Green recruiter. He is able and willing to get empirical as well as lyrical, as he does in several forays into revisionist scholarship. “The Transvaluation of Traditional Family Values” quotes chapter and verse to illustrate the aboriginal Christian antipathy to the family. Investigating a problem posed in Melville’s *Redburn*, whether mankind shall stand or sit at the Last Judgment, Lawrence by Biblical hermeneutics establishes that the Lord by afflicting sinners with hemorrhoids ensures “not only will seats be provided but that in so doing justice will be served in the end!”

The book is good enough to survive my saying it could have been better.

There are too many typo’s and spelling errors. The graphics, originally letter size, in some cases suffer from reduction by 50%. Lawrence is a powerful writer but he occasionally overuses an image (like Allah’s smile, the slit throat). His prose has sometimes an antebellum ponderousness perhaps derived form his favorites Poe and Melville, and infrequently his wordplay gets so convoluted that he trips over his own coils. Always playful, thoughtful, funny and sincere, Lawrence is not always polished.

Ed Lawrence and I are so close in most of our views that there is no point in my itemizing the excellent opinions we both hold. Better to record several differences. I am baffled by the vehemence of his vendetta against the Founding Fathers. Worse than simplistic, it is even superfluous. In my childhood, and a little later in Lawrence’s, Walt Disney made patriotic icons of the Swamp Fox, Davy Crockett and the like, but how many young Americans entertain, and I use the word advisedly, even a fairytale version of their country’s history? Now the television heroes are vice cops and hit-men, government goons whose forte is flaunting the Constitution in which Lawrence sees only the hypocrisy of its slaveowning authors. A too-easy call by a Monday morning quarterback two hundred years later. I expect more sophistication from Ed Lawrence than, say, some punk moralist like Jello Biafra. If, *contra* Reagan, the Founding Fathers weren’t fully freedom fighters, *contra* Lawrence they weren’t quite *contras* either. The Constitution is by no means entirely useless to

someone who gets in trouble as often as I do.

Lawrence's book includes a thoughtful review of Camus' *Neither Victims Nor Executioners*, which might well have been its title had that been untaken. His recoil with horror from homicide is all that might disqualify him as a revolutionary, at least for some cafe communists and armchair anarchists who are probably much more up for ordering executions than for themselves carrying them out. He asks no one to go any further than he's prepared to go himself, which is why he has outlasted countless apoplectic apocalyptic who fly in one window and out the other like the sparrow which the Venerable Bede likened to fleeting human life. If most men lead lives of quiet desperation, Ed Lawrence leads a life of passionate tranquility. Where neo-primitivist posing is pedantic or shrill, Lawrence relates to the natural world in a natural way, as familiarly as Blake spoke with the angels and the Prophets passing by. Ed Lawrence is dedicated, and so is his book—to his wife (sadly, recently deceased) and "for all the girls and boys of the spontaneous generation."

A Real Texas Twister

- Free For a Dollar.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1989. \$1.50
- Gumbo.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: The Lost & Found, 1980. \$1.50
- Faster Than Gone.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1986. \$1.50
- I Ain't Through Laughin'.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1987. \$1.50
- I Won't Tell a Soul.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: The Lost & Found, n.d. \$1.50
- Shouting in a Vacuum.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1987. \$1.50
- Spook.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: The Lost & Found, 1981. \$1.50
- Spout.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1985. \$1.50
- Uh-Oh!* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: The Lost & Found, 1982. \$1.50
- "We" Ain't Me.* By Jim Wheat. Garland, Texas: Nonzense, 1992. \$1.50

"Nothing makes sense when you least expect it," explains Jim Wheat in one of his self-published nonsense books. If Harpo spoke, this is what he might say, even as the applause of one hand clapping brings down the house until they put it up again. Harvest some Wheat and you too can say that "I know an illusion when I see one."

What Wheat does is non-Euclidean humor, unalloyed absurdity which shows up the official absurdists, the Becketts and Ionescos, as academic if not sophomoric. Operating out of a Dallas suburb, Wheat in a decade has issued ten booklets, with one exception of 15 pages each, wherein Lewis Carroll speaks with the voice of Mark Twain, where Middle Earth meets Middle America. Where, "Because of Laws," it is illegal "to discriminate against trees of any shade" or "to unmask an about face." Where his horoscope advises a Leo to "eat anything but food today" and warns Virgos that "a prize appliance may run away."

Except for one booklet—a relatively uninspired story—all of Wheat's publications combine forms. There are collages, reviews of bogus books and films, "fictionary" definitions, Escheresque crossword puzzles, false ads, spurious quotations and the as yet nameless practice of rearranging clipped-out words, as is done in ransom notes. A dating service questionnaire, for instance, is invested with unexpected charm when the choices for "Your income" are "almost every night" and "a few times a week."

Wheat writes of humble folk (Dotty Pepper, Moo Ellen Bailey, Gabe Pirtle) in towns like Big Dip, Missouri where events take place like the Steak Stab & Gristle Pull and the Malpractice Survivors Picnic. Innocent of ideology, Wheat's quips and anecdotes nonetheless lay bare small town banality, not by baroque sarcasm after the Mencken manner but by situating the Baptists and Rotarians where they are right at home: in the Twilight Zone. We are talking lysergic populism here. Which reminds me, Wheat has the Updown Pharmacy advertise a "Just Say 'No' Sale" featuring such pills as Radars, Tardies and Homers ("Load the bases on a single hit!").

When Wheat writes, "What I cooked for breakfast is lunch for someone's supper," he moves at right angles to meaning and meaninglessness. What is the word for "to back into a fan"? His publishing persona, Nonzense, is well named; just about everything he names is well named. Country crooner Gene probably never really sang "You Are My Last Roundup" or "Old Doodle Toot," but if he did, he

because of laws

IT IS ILLLEGAL:

- to change lanes in a bowling ball
 - to discriminate against trees of any shade
 - to whisper the Lord's Prayer in an ear of corn
 - to wear a mask in a nightmare
 - to hallucinate while dead
 - to molest a space clown with mudflaps
 - to wear an asbestos night gown in a train wreck
 - to hibernate with tinkerdog men
 - to almost be more or less not too specific
 - to use nuclear bait while fission
 - to engage in a left lane conversation during a red turn on green
 - to smoke while burning
 - to fumigate Wednesdays on Fridays
 - to underestimate the approximate unknown results of an unfinished guessing game
 - to be where you haven't been
 - to siphon eggs from a diesel chicken
 - to overhaul a Barbie doll engine with Ken's leg
 - to bark at olives in pear trees
 - to be in the night what you aren't in the light; without a switch
 - to go from A to Z incognito
 - to carve a mule out of a pumpkin
 - to breast feed a prune
 - to wind watch backwards in the front seat of the Titanic
 - to cry on the shoulder of a squeaky leg
 - to tighten the belt on a waist basket
 - to know how much it costs to make it seem like there are never any profits in the business of life
 - to concentrate on the juice of a radial tomato
 - to believe in life after dark
 - to slow down the number of stops in a go
 - to unmask an about face
 - to read a story to a book
 - to lighten the brightness of a horizontal contrast
 - to gaze into the eyes of a slanted goat
 - to jump to conclusions before they land
 - to open windows before they're shut
 - to breed a schnoodle with a colliehuahua
 - to grow tired of planting energy
 - to open a book to close a deal
 - to swim the English Channel speaking French
 - to be on the same side of a difference
 - to squash a pumpkin with a melon
 - to tattoo Bluto on Popeye's thigh
 - to cause an effect to lose their balance
 - to bee stuck in a hive without your honey
 - to be hip to the legs of a handy army
 - to grow closer to farther without a mother
 - to turn south upside down in a northbound tornado
 - to whisper sweet nothings to anything sour
 - to jump up falling down
 - to discuss the possibilities of ever knowing what it is you had in mind when you first decided to even think about forgetting the whole damn thing
 - to expose a photograph to an indecent film
 - to become one with two or more alone
- * * * * *

would. Then there is "Ask the Mask," a lone-starstruck Dear Abby, or Ann Landers after joining the Residents—he explains that the trouble with the marshmallow crop was that "you planted 'em too close to the ground." (I offer no explanation for this but the only humorists remotely resembling Wheat—Al Ackerman and Zack Replica—like him hail from Texas, "the perfect place to visit till help arrives.") Jim Wheat knows what he's doing. I wonder what it is?

The Night They Forgot the Alamo

Blaster: The Blaster Al Ackerman Omnibus

By Dr. Al Ackerman
New York: Feh! Press, 1994

Artist, author, podiatrist, recidivist—Dr. Al Ackerman has been all these and more. In retrospect it seems beyond belief how long it took fame and fortune to catch up with him. Although part of the explanation undoubtedly lies in Ackerman's settled practice of abruptly leaving town (no forwarding address) when certain "misunderstandings," as he refers to them, proliferate unduly. I would rather not enter into the controversy which, if I am not mistaken, Lionel Trilling commenced by contending that Dr. Ackerman was the inspiration for Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s memorable character Kilgore Trout. Everybody from V.S. Naipaul to Hilton Kramer has, it seems, weighed in on one side or the other. It is past time to take the measure of Al Ackerman on his own terms.

Ackerman's MacArthur Foundation or "genius" grant came none too soon. Year in and year out, as I well remember, Ackerman pseudonymously nominated himself for this signal honor, cunningly disguising his handwriting—when he remembered to—by switching from right hand to left and vice versa. A sly trick ever so characteristic of this man of infinite ingenuity and, as Homer might say, "inextinguishable laughter." It is not just that time has brought vindication. It is also that the statute of limitations has run.

Some authors are inseparably associated with certain places: Thomas Hardy's Wessex, John Steinbeck's Salinas, William Kennedy's

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Albany, and Tom Vague's Stoke-Newington. Right up there is Al Ackerman's San Antonio. Or so it seemed to me when, after certain "misunderstandings" of my own in Michigan and California, I repaired to the Lone Star State and hooked up with "Ack," as I knew him. And found myself in the thick of the remarkable story, never previously told, why Al Ackerman had to leave Texas.

As his legion of loyal readers has probably surmised, Ackerman has what can only be characterized as a "checkered" employment history. His job stints tended to be of very brief duration. It was almost as if as soon as an employer got a good idea just what sort of a person Ackerman was, he would "let him go," forthwith. For someone as sensitive as Ack these repeated separation traumas (or, if you will, traumata) must have been agonizing. No wonder then that the Doctor would "doctor" his resume the better to accentuate his genuine talents so short-sightedly slighted by his many previous employers. If I were he, I, too, would pass over in silence the novitiate in the Benedictine monastic order—the perennial "fox in the henhouse" problem. Luckily there was another copy of the recipe on file with the Vatican.

When the *Christian Science Monitor* signed on Ack as a part-time film critic, many of his admirers such as myself hoped he had finally found his niche; but, once again, ill-fortune plagued him. It was imprudent to observe that *Glory* "should have been called *Gory*," and his comments to the effect that there was something fishy about *The Little Mermaid* (the nose knows) were as tasteless as they were witty. But what put paid, as Stewart Home might say, to Ack's career as a critic was getting on Schindler's Shit-List.

Reviewing *Schindler's List*, Ack quipped that the film was "*E.T.* without the special effects." Unwittingly—and unfortunately—Ack spoke truer than he knew.

Although Dr. Ackerman had no way of knowing it, director Steven Spielberg's masterpiece of evil and redemption was originally planned to be, like *E.T.*, a science fiction epic. Spielberg knew that his arch-rival, Rob "Meathead" Reiner, had purchased the film rights to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, an adult cartoon animal fable about Jewish suffering under the Nazis based on the fitful recollections of Spiegelman's father. Spielberg thereupon purchased the film rights to Norman Spinrad's *The Iron Dream*, a sword-and-sorcery fantasy of race war in a distant post-nuclear future. The great director intended

to jazz up the script with stunning special effects concocted by the best in the business—John Hagen-Brenner of the Church of the SubGenius, whose credits included *The Abyss*.

But Hagen-Brenner was, to make a long story short, unavailable for work. In his off-hours he mailed me a cassette bomb, “The Black Box.” Turned in by SubGenius Mata Hari “GOBI” (Suzanne DeGrasse), he confessed. Pursuant to a plea bargain he was sentenced to, *inter alia*, forty hours teaching art classes in Los Angeles. With Hagen-Brenner otherwise occupied, Spielberg decided to make the best of a bad situation by doing *Schindler’s List* as a grainy black-and-white *noir*-looking film. And he made sure that Ackerman was once again “let go.”

Which is really too bad. “A prophet is not without honor, but in his own country,” the Good Book says (Mark 6: 4). Long before garnering the American attention he deserves, Al Ackerman—like Edgar Allan Poe, James Joyce and Jerry Lewis—attracted the approbation of the Parisian intelligentsia. The accolades of Georges Bataille, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Baudrillard are too familiar for reiteration here. But consider what Guy Debord (not a man to mince words) has to say:

What do Hieronymus Bosch, Jean Magritte, Shirley Jackson, Pecos Bill, Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, Will Rogers, Jim Thompson and “Blaster” Al Ackerman have in common? If you have read a single paragraph of Ackerman, no explanation will be needed.

Jim Thompson lifts the rock to show us the translucence of the maggots beneath: in “Blaster” Al’s world our fingers change to maggots as we watch, horrified and ultimately amused. Ackerman knows what has been making our eyes twitch in REM sleep but he REMEMBERS and writes it down at 3:00 A.M. The universe of Al is one we recognize in our viscera as the images that fly just beyond the range of sight even as we whirl backwards to catch them.

Ackerman knows that “real life” is an oxymoron and if we stop and look at it we’ll see it, too. So let “Blaster” Al flop on your sofa, join him in a brewski, and laissez le bon temps roulez!

I daresay that pretty well sums up the critical consensus on Dr. Al Ackerman and his place in what the late Professor Allan Bloom called the “canon.”

It was not always so. The San Antonio years were long years, hard years—testing years. Years of false starts, imbroglios and dashed hopes. A lesser man would have checked himself into a mental hospital rather than, as Ack often did, work for one. He had a wonderful way with the patients—almost as if he were one of them. But Ack was, as he phrased it, “between situations” when I hung out with him upon my arrival in San Antonio, carpetbag in tow.

I remember (as if it were yesterday) one of the times I came upon Ackerman at The Third Leg, a transvestite hooker bar with very reasonable pitcher prices located in a changing neighborhood not far from the Alamo. Ack was sharing a table with “Bexar Bertha,” a statuesque African-American who was saving up money for surgery.

He addressed me without ceremony, as was his wont.

“Bob,” he said, “were you aware that bread—the staff of life—was invented, or rather discovered, as an accidental by-product of beer production? This was, of course, in pre-dynastic Egypt. I conjecture that the grain residue was lying about awaiting dumping in the Nile when for some reason the building caught fire. Afterwards the peasants, or ‘fellahin,’ stirring about in the ashes for amulets or whatever, came across the ‘dough,’ by then baked into ‘bread.’ Not unlike the scenario sketched by Harold Lamb in his *Dissertation Upon Roast Pig*. ”

“Ballocks, Ack,” I retorted with, I’m sorry to say, some acerbity. My SSI application had just been turned down; I was in a bit of a snit.

“It was the other way around. BEER was a by-product of BREAD production. As I’ve told you every time you tell me this story.” (Back then, before he was going to meetings, Ack not infrequently experienced “blackouts.”) “And it’s CHARLES Lamb, not HAROLD Lamb. Harold Lamb wrote a biography of Genghis Khan.”

I was instantly stricken with guilt for rounding on Ackerman in a manner not only harsh but unfair. How many times had he patiently listened, or seemed to, as I railed against *Processed World*? I apologized from very close to the bottom of my heart.

At this juncture, Bertha—to, perhaps, dispell tension—interjected that “the Egyptians were black. They invented civilization. And Greece.” (Bertha was taking a course at a community college.)

“Grease is very important in this dive,” quipped Ackerman—ever the master of the moment—but maybe a tad too loudly. The bartender, a certain Dingleberry—a giant of a man (or whatever)—glow-ered ominously our way. Ack insouciantly ate one of the salted pretzels

the bar provided, gratis, to stimulate customer thirst—"gilding the lily," surely, in Ack's case. And then he launched into one of the most remarkable rants it has ever been my privilege to hear.

"I ordered this book," he began, "out of the Loompanics Catalog." At this my heart sank and my gorge rose, crossing, "like swords" as Nietzsche might say, somewhere in the neighborhood of my sternum. Just as children ought not to play with matches, Dr. Ackerman ought not to intermeddle with the Loompanics Catalog, the self-styled "Best Book Catalog in the World" provided that ethical considerations play no part in one's notion of "best." I could only hope that Ack's fancy had settled upon some harmless book of sadistic fantasy, like *101 Ways to Hassle Your Grandmother* or *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*. I was to be sadly disappointed.

MicroLivestock was the volume which had set Ack's imagination afire. Talk about "small is beautiful." Inestimable benefits would flow (Ack expatiated) from "downsizing" various animals to make them more "user-friendly." In an ever-shrinking world, animals should too.

Wildlife preservation: a case in point. "Many species are on the endangered list," according to Ackerman, "because of their dwindling habitats—the panda, the spotted owl, the Karner blue butterfly and such. Realistically speaking there's no way to restore land lost to development to its pristine condition—and now there's no need to try!" Ack pounded the table for emphasis, very nearly demolishing my shot glass. "Go ahead and clearcut the whole goddamn State of Washington," he shouted, "just leave a patch for tiny little spotted owls—tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of them a-twitter on a few acres!" On and on he carried on how miniaturization reconciled the economy and the ecology.

Meanwhile Bertha slipped away to join the rather seedy sorts beginning to occupy the bar-stools. Around this time of night there was a really remarkable volume of traffic in and out of the men's room. I was already more than a little inclined to beat it out of there and return to my abode, The Gecko, the residence hotel where, as did Ackerman, I inhabited an "SRO" (single-room occupancy) which was, if no cleaner, at least quieter than The Third Leg. Dr. Ackerman was unmistakably working himself up to a fever pitch. My better judgment suggested I excuse myself and cut short what had been, all in all, not one of my better days. "Quit while you're behind," I always say.

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But beclouding the counsel of reason was the “dinner” I’d ingested at “the Leg.” For the low-budget drinker such as myself, the Leg offered a potion, “All Nations,” which went all the way back to the gin mills of 18th-century London. All Nations consisted of whatever was left behind in the customers’ glasses. For myself I could never understand leaving anything behind—it offends me as unthrifty and wasteful—and I was always more than happy to “recycle” the drink dregs at the Leg’s very reasonable pitcher prices. I’d been working on such a pitcher since my arrival at the Leg, and not without effect. As I see it, we all eat too high on the food chain, and needlessly so. I find that a pitcher of All Nations, some pretzels and a multi-vitamin meet my daily subsistence needs without unduly impacting Mother Earth. At the same time, such a regimen involves some alteration—indeed, a certain dulling—of conscious awareness, with concomitant fallback on the limbic system. To make a long story shorter, I was too trashed not to endure the mother of all diatribes.

Having addressed wildlife conservation, Ackerman turned to pest control. “Pesticides,” he opined, “are pestilential. If they don’t work, they don’t work. But if they do work they promote the adaptation of resistant strains on which they don’t work. Meanwhile we ingest these poisons ourselves.”

My head sort of drooped at this point. Ack took that for a nod of assent, although it was more like nodding off. “The alternative is organic! Micro-predators! Birds! Insectivorous birds! Mites, fleas, ticks—send some hungry ‘nano-falcons’ after them. They can run but they can’t hide!”

Ack, warming to the topic, continued. “And not just birds. Cats kill mice for us. But how often do the filthy rodents escape into a mouse hole or under the stove? Let’s downbreed our cats just small enough to go in after them. Which is another plus, *petite pets*. The smaller the pet, the cheaper the pet food. A pet to fit any space however small. Bonsai animals. Porpoises the size of goldfish . . . whales you can fuck! Swarms of micro-pit bulls like terrestrial piranha devouring intruders!”

And so forth. Every time I was sure Ack was finished, he started up again. Warfare? “Why not really put tigers in their tanks!” Fine dining? “A whole suckling pig as a single serving!” More fun? “A barrel of monkeys with space to spare!” I myself caught a glimpse of Ack’s vision, even as my own grew blurry. In my mind’s eye the

buffalo, shimmering numberless hordes of them, returned—to Buffalo (and to many other cities with surplus redevelopment lots). Sloths dangled from vest pockets like so many living watch-fobs. Seeing-eye elephants.

Ack's booming voice broke in on my reveries, but by then the joint was so jumping that nobody—nobody else, that is—paid him heed. "Animals," he all but shouted, "are just the beginning. We are animals. If we liken Gaia, our mother the Earth, to a pair of pants, we might say that the human race has gotten too big for its britches. Time to diet down—diet for a small planet—diet or die! But we can have our cake, and other tasty treats, and eat it, and them, too! We need to shrink."

Although my own mind was by now working at well below full capacity, even I was rather inclined to think that Ack did not so much "need to shrink" as need *a* shrink. Sweat filmed his flushed face, glistening with sebum, reminding me of nothing so much as—before certain "misunderstandings" occasioned my departure from the Boston area—a full moon shining down on Walden Pond at midnight. Thoreau's refuge had, by then, a rather serious pollution problem—mainly a gas-and-oil patina from motorboat discharge—and the refracted rays were strangely beautiful.

"All it takes," explained Ack, "is time, patience, and drugs. Consider a country like India. One cornstalk (brought down by lumberjacks—Gurkhas, perhaps) could feed an entire village. We can have it both ways." (Something common enough, I mused ruefully, at *The Third Leg*.) "Any life-forms we want to keep on our scale we take down with us. Anything else we leave big. We can take high tech with us: it gets more 'nano' all the time." Etc., etc.

I was all but certain Ackerman had taken a wrong turn somewhere, a left turn off the road to reason, but so help me I couldn't say where. It was hardly an atmosphere conducive to reflective thought. There was some sort of an uproar whose epicenter, so to speak, was over towards the men's room. Bexar Bertha was back; also joining us were Tijuana Trixie and a sextette who would be doing a stage show later as "*The Wild Brunch*." It was getting hairy, metaphorically speaking, with nary an electrolysist in sight.

Once again my train of thought got switched over onto Ack's track. I envisaged nano-maids cleaning out those hard-to-get-to spots. Nano-health care providers going on a *Fantastic Voyage* into

my innards. Nano-whores swarming all over a john, inflicting a plethora of mini-nibbles and other micro-delights.

The All Nations—very much the biggest bang for a buck—had kicked in big-time, influencing my thought processes. Impairing them, rather. I knew I was very close to a condition in which I couldn't see what condition my condition was in, to borrow an expression from Kenny Rodgers, who (some scholars contend) derived it from Lao Tse, the Taoist sage and reputed inventor of Stir-Fried Dancing Crab. I excused myself and repaired to The Gecko just as fast as my fumbling legs could carry me.

Glaring down on me was a full moon, pallid as a flour tortilla on a bed of black beans, although it's a much better idea, obviously, to put the beans on the tortilla. Down by the river, the haunting strains of salsa music welled up like tainted food. Eroding with a feeling of foreboding, I redoubled my steps, thus falling down even more often than before. All I wanted was to get home, although The Gecko is the kind of place that nobody, however down and out, would ever mistake for "home." Not a place you would hurry to get to, just a place to get to from a place you were hurrying from.

I had Ack to thank for settling me in the place—my room was right next door to his, in fact—when I arrived in San Antonio with my affairs in some disarray. I must say that my initial gratitude had given way to certain misgivings. But tonight those concerns, indeed, all concerns, were far from my thoughts. I just wanted to get to my room and flop.

A signal lesson to me, so often learned, so often forgotten, is to make haste slowly. The front door of the hotel was unlocked—contrary to house rules, but much to my relief. I wearily wended my way to my womb—I mean, my room. I couldn't get the damned key to fit! I frantically fiddled and jiggled till the door swung open. I was all ready for my much-needed rest.

But I was not to get it, not that night. Unexpectedly I stumbled over a small mountain of glass bottles and fell on my face with a tremendous crashing sound and a small scream of pain and fear.

In a flash of awareness—an "epiphany," as James Joyce would say—I "grokked" the situation. I was not in my room at all. In my impatience and intoxication I had mistaken Ackerman's SRO for my own. I'd inadvertently forced my way into his room. And tripped over his empties.

Now this merits a few words of explanation. As I am, Ackerman is an environmentally aware kind of a guy. He abhors waste. Unfortunately, Texas is not one of those states which mandates the recycling of beverage containers. Ack had a standing arrangement with The Third Leg to remove and recycle the bar's empty liquor bottles—with “recycling” having, however, a somewhat special meaning for Ackerman.

What Ackerman did with the empties is what is known, in binger-drinker argot, as “sweating.” That is, one takes a portable heat source (typically a can of Sterno or a Bic disposable) and applies the heat to, say, the bottom and sides of a bottle of Johnny Walker or Cuervo, “sweating” out the leavings. Do this to enough bottles and the resultant or, if you will, the upshot is a blend very much like All Nations but even cheaper—free, in fact. What became of the bottles afterwards I have no idea. But peradventure I knew I had fallen all over them.

I wish I could say that in taking this fall the worst of my very bad day was over; fervently I wish it. But as I stumbled up out of the broken glass, bruised and bleeding, I was aware of a confusion of sound—a cacophony—welling up in a room whose occupant was absent! I groped for the light switch. I found it.

No matter how bad a situation is, it can always get worse. For it transpired that Ackerman had taken his “micro-livestock” mania past the talking stage. It was already more than mere jarble, more than “the wine talking,” as Samuel Johnson used to say. Dr. Ackerman had been conducting some experiments which, unhappily, had made more than a little headway, as I realized as I gazed at what were, for me, truly terraria of terror.

He'd started with the birds. Thank God he'd gotten no further. I don't know where he got them or what he doped them with—maybe he used the “mushrooms” readily available in south Texas from the less scrupulous Indian medicine men—but there they were: hawks, eagles, falcons, majestic birds of prey (I am unable to identify them all) no more than half an inch long. And highly excited, since as I stumbled about I'd upset their cage and broken them out. They homed in on my bloody bruises with gusto. By their behavior they gave every indication that Ack was behind schedule in feeding them. To visualize the ensuing encounter, hearken back to King Kong buzzed by bi-planes.

Reserving reflection to a later time, I “vamoosed,” as they say in

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Texas, in other words, I buggered off.

Only to run right into another night-crawler returning from the Leg: Al Ackerman himself. The micro-predators paid no attention to the sprawling shambles of our commingled confusion. They were up, up and away—out of there.

The full story of the horrors which befell San Antonio that night it would take a Hitchcock to tell. Many people actually forgot the Alamo, which is difficult anywhere in Texas, and all but impossible in San Antonio.

The authorities promptly drew a shroud over the episode. Today they deny it ever happened. Ack and I departed the Lone Star State in opposite directions. According to conspiracy theorist Jim Keith, the Federal Reserve Board—the real government, if anybody needs to be reminded—has “nationalized” nano-biology in the interests of national security (and the ruling class). Research is rumored to have resumed, under tight controls, in Area 51.

That, my friends, is the reason Al Ackerman had to leave Texas.

On Inordnance

by Ed Lawrence

Friendly Fire. By Bob Black. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Autonomedia, 1992

I

To be blunt, that is, to the point, Bob Black takes a bacchanal-chemic joy in the protean instability of language. His creative ferment overflows from the fountain of linguistic intemperance. With palpable delight he wrings from words their last drops of intoxicating music; acapriccio. True, this causes him to strike the occasional sour note, but better this than for the fruit of language to rot on the vine. The unexpected turn and return of phrase, the double entente, pun and repartee are not mere diversionary ploys nor simply distractions used as a tour de force to disguise an underlying emptiness of content like some false bottom in an overstuffed portmanteau.

The virtue of these laconic devices is their ability to incorporate

the poetry of subversion within an economy of surprise by undergoing an out-of-body experience. Giving birth while being born, these words entwine the stretch marks of ambiguity around the forks of a slingshot creating a caduceus that can not be brought to heel. Given wide berth, by defying description they describe defiance. The ouroboros of satire which crowns Black's discourse like a halo also sheds a preposterous nimbus, a kiss of light surrounding the human encounterpoint with a throne. It conflates the lowest complement into the highest compliment.

But Black's revels in wordplay indicate, as well, that he is wary of the way words can fossilize meaning by leaching away the very indeterminacy within which the pasquinade naturally secretes itself. Approaching a text is then reduced to an archeological dig; sifting through the ashes of an abandoned fire pit in hopes of turning up a few charred vertebrae, remnants from the spine of a dictionary.

Like Blake, who depicted an open book as twin headstones marking the gravesite of the imagination, Black knows that words can be impedimental, can hinder understanding when they become transfixied and obstruct the fluidity of mind that flows intuit. Against this lull into hypnosis, Black opposes hypgnosis. And, of course, he is not always successful. At times, being too cavalier, he plays Laocoon to the Trojan horse. He may sometimes even mistake a hobby horse for a unicorn. Yet, unlike the poets who marshall their cadence to



the syncopation of a meat grinder, and to his credit, Black never confuses Pegasus with dog food.

II

Another aspect of Black's oeuvre is the documentation, as impertinent as pertinent, of his ensnarlement in various imbroglios. Like black in a chess game, truth usually starts at a disadvantage. Due, in large measure, to its ungainliness, veracity often appears a poor second, ill-fitting and unfashionable, compared to a prevarication which can be tailor made to conform to the contours of expectation and embroidered by the tawdry seamstress of verisimilitude. Fairy tales aside, when someone has the indecency to question the cut of the cloth they generally get either ignored or slammed. Black has had his share, if not his fill, of both responses. In being ignored he can take a clue from Karl Kraus who perfected the uncanny ability of turning Pyrrhic defeats in-side-out in such a way as to expose their latent transparency. "Der Bieberpelz," Kraus' account of his stolen coat, concludes with the line, "By publishing a new book I might manage to make the Viennese forget me." Here, despite the smoldering desolation, a smile lingers like an unrepentent phantom of redemption; a cheshire catastrophe.

On the other hand, Black is confronting a wholly other form of effacement when thugs try to use him as a sidewalk eraser. Undoubtedly his assailants will never forgive him for the bruises he has caused to their knuckles, but we expect from Black a response of a different grain, one not marbled with infinity. Concrete excoriation certainly, but falling short of eternal damnation. When Black confounds athanasia with Athanasiou he begins repaying a debt of ingratitude on the installment plan where the interest quickly overwhelms the principal. The result is that Black wastes his scorn on people who are beyond contempt. By pouring it into a bottomless pit he is drawn into the vacuum, and the suction inexorably siphons off a disproportionate level of fervor. A fist closing in on his eye may blot out the sun, however, calling it an eclipse doesn't make it a celestial event. Instead, it reinforces a distortion of perspective, giving his attackers an increased stature they little deserve. It is, to borrow Nietzsche's phrase, putting magic hats on straw heads. When warding off slugs, even outfitting them with petasus will not make them rise above the trail of their own slime.

III

Black prefaces his latest collection of writings with the letter of psychiatrist Harold Lockett, dated April 13, 1959, recommending that "a bright psychoneurotic child" who displays "extreme hyperactivity, impulsivity and poor response to controls" be "given a trial on medication": a drug called vesperin from the phenothiazine group. Thus did the eight-year-old Black unwittingly make his debut into the world of 'zines, undergoing his first trial by friendly fire.

The fallout spreads. The first section of the book contains three essays which continue the exploration Black embarked on with his influential piece de resistance "The Abolition of Work." Building upon the anthropological/sociological/historical insights of Marshall Sahlins, Ivan Illich, Fredy Perlman, Edmund S. Morgan and The Firesign Theatre (to mention only a handful of his inspirations), Black further elucidates his critique of the social construction of work. He shows why it is no coincidence that the word which describes the forced seizure of territory also denotes one's usual means of earning a living. The terrain of occupation is daily life, and in this no-wo/man's land the war of attrition is waged. Black moves triage to celebrate the authentic potentials of ludic living. In the richly textured lives and wide ranging sensibilities of the pre-occupied he sees a peripheral vision with a much greater scope than the modernist tunnel vision which is being constricted even more to the impoverished dimensions of the tube. This may all some as a kind of shock (therapy) to anyone who thinks that "*The Flintstones* was a documentary."

Through eight other sections of *Friendly Fire* the forages of a "mental traveler" (Blake) are presented. In some instances, like Vesuvius in regard to Pompeii, Black preserves a host of fleeting images by buying them intact beneath the ash and lava of an erupting text. In others he reconstructs from a single shard, and with marvelous ingenuity, an Aladdin's lamp.

"Elementary Watsonianism" is the most brilliant example of this type (Type 3) of magical reflection. Happening upon a 1954 case in which Reul S. Amdur was convicted of creating a public nuisance for distributing anarchist literature near Sather Gate on the Berkeley campus, Black meditates with profound empathy upon the possible permuted meanings of Amdur's pronouncement, as attested to by the policeman, "Go ahead and arrest me. I'm a Watsonian anarchist

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and will stand on my constitutional rights!" Shifting sand as it turns out. After detailing the incident, Black writes, "The small-minded might quibble that Watsonianism is nothing but an error in transcription" but "It matters not. So majestic and evocative an expression surely has some objective referent with which I, for one, am proud to be associated." Black brings up the rear of this collection with his pre-mortem autopsy of the Gulf War. "There is no need to bring the war home," he writes, recalling the Vietnam era slogan, because "It never left." Against the "agony of hierarchy, violence and boredom... We will fight the same way we want to live, playfully, creatively, ecstatically, unpredictably."

Chapter Seven Culture Wars

Maybe Not Well-Hung, but Well-Endowed

The National Endowment for the Arts: Misusing Taxpayers' Money
By Robert H. Knight, Senior Fellow, Cultural Policy Studies
The Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 803, January 18, 1991

The right wing brings to contemporary *Kulturkampf* a great strength and a great weakness. Its strength is its instinctive affinity for the society of the spectacle where appearance trumps essence and symbolism supplants substance. Flag-burning is worse than fag-burning. And defunding Robert Mapplethorpe is more important than refunding AIDS research. But conservatives are wont to dissipate their initial advantage by repeating themselves long after the audience has changed the channel. The anti-NEA campaign is a case in point. For awhile the public got off on the orchestrated sensationalism of this bracing brew of sex, sacrilege and symbolic politics. Soon the arguments, like the audience, were exhausted. Each side, after all, had an interest in occluding any precise public perception of

the art at issue, the left because it knew most people would see filth, not free speech, and the right because it was too squeamish to circulate smut. It was time to start another phony war (or would be if George Bush hadn't started a real one). Instead the right is renewing the art war it has already lost.

When the gunsmoke cleared, the NEA was still in the grants business. Instead of the content restrictions forbidding "obscenity," which predictably had been adjudged unconstitutional, was a merely hortatory standard of "decency," undefined. Notorious applicants Karen Finley and Holly Hughes, defunded in 1989, are refunded in 1990. NEA Chairman John Frohnmeier, who previously proved himself more repressive than Jesse Helms by denying grants to projects not within the "spirit" of the previous restrictions, turned his coat and talks freedom of speech this week. And the traditionalists are back, crying up the usual complaints, hopeful that by announcing "that the NEA remains controversial" they can make it so when it is just yesterday's news.

You've heard of think tanks? The Heritage Foundation is a doublethink tank. Its report faults the NEA for not funding representational art at the same time it is indignant over sexually explicit art for being too representational. Indeed the only necessarily representational genre, performance art, falls within the only funding category (Inter-Arts) the Foundation proposes to abolish. *Piss Christ* and *What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?* can only be offensive to author Robert H. Knight, "Senior Fellow, Cultural Policy Studies," because he recognizes what they *represent*, on every level, only too well.

Like most conservatives, this paladin of traditional values cannot decide between the free market and the authoritarian state and so calls for both. He intones, out of force of habit apparently, that "a free market is the most reliable guarantor of excellence since it fosters competition." In this context... competition for what? And between what? Elsewhere Knight remarks that denying funding to offensive art doesn't prevent it from being produced privately and so, he supposes, that isn't censorship. But still less does providing funding to some artists prevent others from creating their own art. Senselessly, Knight says that the NEA "hampers competition," but how can it hamper competition to pump money into arts funding, any arts funding, which would otherwise not have paid for art at all?

Perhaps what Knight is trying but failing to say is that government patronage frees the artist from the immediate demands of the marketplace. For many people, and especially for artists, that is exactly what's good about it. The representational artists don't need NEA grants to paint button-eyed muppets, the dentists stand ready to fund their art by purchase. But there is no point arguing the matter with Knight because, regardless, he proves too much. If government subventions free the arts from market discipline, so do corporate subventions. His argument, such as it is, is against patronage itself. The entire history of art is so much a history of patronage as to rule out that argument summarily. Does this gallant Knight then crusade against corporate philanthropy? Yes, but not from principle, from sour grapes. His own report indicates that business donors take their cues from the NEA, not from, say, the Heritage Foundation. The NEA does not finance the culture distorters on anything like the scale of J.P. Morgan & Co., the Chase Manhattan Bank, Con Edison, Phillip Morris and New York Telephone (all backers of the scandalous Karen Finley). The Fortune 500 just don't appreciate what the Heritage Foundation is trying to do for them.

If patronage "hampers competition," where does the Heritage Foundation get its money from, magazine sales? I doubt it very much. If this pseudo-scholarly sermon is typical I daresay it is unlikely the rent on a Capitol Hill office and the salaries of Senior Fellows and their superiors and subordinates are paid out of profits. This stuff is too highbrow for the yahoos, too stupid for the intelligentsia. Undoubtedly the Heritage Foundation lives off corporate charity, not sales savvy; freeloaders for free enterprise.

Knight's lip-smacking preoccupation with the by now overexposed handful of (often homo) horribles leaves little doubt the hubbub is about sex and, to a lesser extent, God and Country, not arts policy. But in order to claim some credibility and sound a little less like the caveman conservatives like Senator Helms and Rev. Wildmon, the white Knight tricks up the criticism that the NEA discriminates by style. The NEA is variously and not quite consistently taxed for favoring "the avant-garde," "Modernism" and "non-representational" art, seemingly synonyms for Knight although the accusations are unsubstantiated so it is hard to say. Imagine criticizing an earlier government arts patron—the Papal States of the warrior-Pope Julius II—for funding only "Modernist" artists like Michaelangelo.

Now try to imagine the Heritage Foundation criticizing a Pope: Knight is a puppy on a short leash. To say the NEA funds mostly a single style, “the avant garde” is like saying Pope Julius funded only a single style, Renaissance. “The avant garde” as the Heritage Foundation deploys the phrase is even less a single style than the Renaissance. Avant garde does not mean non-representational as everybody knows who has a nodding acquaintance with modern art. Representational reproductions are mainly the business, and I use the word advisedly, of commercial art—advertising—not fine art. Ordinary representational art—portraiture—is the province of professional photographers. It pays its own way. Extraordinary representational art, the photography of Robert Mapplethorpe or even Cindy Sherman, is what the Heritage Foundation wants out of sight.

Knight is hard pressed to identify examples of the NEA’s anti-representational bias, but he adduces one. He had to reach back pretty far. In 1972, Frederick Hart sought a grant to design “the ‘Creation’ sculptures on the facade of Washington’s National Cathedral.” Obviously style had nothing to do with the denial. Hart himself is quoted concerning the real reason: “An NEA bureaucrat told me that they didn’t do religious things. Separation of church and state and all that.” You don’t have to be Alan Dershowitz to figure out that the government cannot constitutionally pay for church decorations, not even if they are “Modernist.” Elsewhere, Knight complains that the NEA has funded some people who didn’t need it, like Tama Janowitz. Does he think the Catholic Church is too hard up to decorate a cathedral? One would think the Catholic Church is just the kind of arts patron Knight should approve of. If it was good enough for Michaelangelo it’s good enough for Frederick Merk.

Knight may not make very much sense, but he betrays an alertness to what the ruckus is all about, the emotional power of symbols. The word censorship is the most powerful symbol arrayed against him and he resorts to a desperate expedient to neutralize it. Quoting the dictionary, he defines censor as “to alter, delete or ban completely.” If he means to imply there must be complete “prevention of production or display,” he is simply not speaking proper English. A more recent dictionary from the same publisher, Merriam-Webster, says that to censor is “to examine in order to suppress or delete anything considered objectionable.” It is as much censorship if it is partial and selective as when it extends to the complete suppression of a work.

Knight himself uses the word correctly when he asserts—in the same paragraph!—that “by systematically enforcing a modernist, avant-garde style, NEA censors all other art...” That would indeed be censorship if only it were true.

Apparently grounding in culture itself isn’t necessary to engage in Cultural Policy Studies. The NEA does not have any figures on which grant recipients are “representational,” not because there is a cover-up but because it is aesthetically irrelevant. Is photomontage representational? Is *Nude Descending a Staircase?* *Guernica*? What difference does it make? It is like dividing art into two styles—blue and non-blue—and demanding that the General Accounting Office (the noted arts critics) ferret out figures on the anti-blue conspiracy.

If aesthetics is no part of Cultural Policy Studies, seemingly neither is law. Someone who sees no constitutional difficulty in the NEA funding the Catholic Church is predictably incompetent in his discussion of freedom of speech as well. Artists, he huffs, “do not have a ‘right’ to money taken from taxpayers.” Of course not. Neither do tobacco farmers—until Congress enacts legislation creating entitlements. “[The] Constitution,” thinks Knight, “does not prohibit Congress from setting rules for how federal money is spent.” But it does! The spending power, like all Congressional powers, is constrained by the Constitution. Welfare applicants, for example, “do not have a ‘right’ to money taken from taxpayers”—but only in the sense the government does not have to provide welfare (or arts funding) at all. But once it does, it cannot hand out money in a way that discriminates. A person who has exercised his right of interstate migration, for instance, cannot be denied welfare if it is available to other state residents (*Shapiro v. Thompson*, 1969). If government subsidizes expression, it cannot discriminate on the basis of subject matter (“content control”) (*Police Dept. of Chicago v. Mosley*, 1972). So it would be unconstitutional to enforce Knight’s proposal to deny funding for “explicit sex, child pornography and attacks on religion.”

The previous content restriction on “obscenity” would have been constitutional if properly interpreted because obscenity is unprotected by the First Amendment. Constitutional, but superfluous. By definition, obscenity lacks “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value” (*Miller v. California*, 1973). Since the NEA’s mandate is to fund material of serious literary or artistic value, in approving a project it necessarily makes a determination it is not obscene. It may

well err, but it's probably better at aesthetic adjudication than a court.

The proposed ban on child pornography is also unnecessary. The production of child pornography is a felony to which an artist would effectively confess his guilt by making public, as he must, the art he was funded for. Not even Knight suggests that any grant recipient has ever produced kiddie porn. And "attacks on religion" are obviously protected expression. To affirm your own religion is to deny, to "attack" the others. Blasphemy is a constitutional right. *Piss Christ* is not an attack on religion, it's an attack on Christianity. It wouldn't bother a Buddhist. If Knight had his way, Mark Twain wouldn't qualify. Neither would Thomas Jefferson.

"Although the very idea of government funding of the arts is itself questionable," Knight doesn't question it so far as to oppose it. The free market isn't working itself pure to his complete satisfaction. Selective funding is about the only instrument government has for policing the arts. Now it would suit me fine if the NEA were abolished. The grants go to insiders, academics and ethnics in rapidly descending order, rarely to what is now avant garde. They go to the well-connected with a talent for grants mainly rhetoric and capital-intensive capers, cluttering up the cultural terrain.

Imagine if for just one year the NEA abandoned all standards whatsoever and divided its \$47 million equally among all the estimated 10,000 fanzines publishing at any one time in this country on an annual budget of two or three figures. Each zine would get \$4,700 for postage, copying, advertising expansion or improvement in any combination. The public would be exposed to images, enter-



tainments and opinions from the creative grass roots. Priming the pump might actually work for once, millions might connect up with congenial cultural currents they never knew existed, so low budget they'd then easily sustain themselves through user fees. Ideas, and maybe not only ideas, would run riot. Some people would watch TV less; others, differently. And if only a tiny fraction joined the samizdat subculture as participants themselves, they would multiply it manyfold, it would transform the surface culture beyond recognition (look what an impact watered drinks like *Twin Peaks* and *The Simpsons* have had). Cultural Revolution... on the cheap.

My utopian suggestion is ridiculous, but everything else (to lift a line from the Situationists) is even more ridiculous. The crucial cultural divide isn't left and right, it's up and down. The NEA-pampered in-group is as elitist about art as the Heritage Foundation is about—well, everything, actually. Both sides reproduce the separation of creators and consumers, of leaders and led, and the NEA “Modernists” if anything reinforce it by shows which shock without thereby ceasing to be shows. The audience, flattered to be let in on something, forgets it is nonetheless only an audience. Forgetting is what art is for, that's what Cultural Policy is openly for. Do-it-yourself culture is ridiculous. Everything else is even more ridiculous.

The Reyes Question

There has to be a better way to dispel a myth than to replace it with another one. It is of course true, as Norreida Reyes observes (“Dispelling the Primitive Myth,” *Albany Student Paper*, 1993), that not all the ancestors of today’s African-Americans were “primitives.” Songhay, which she discusses, was but one of several sub-Saharan civilizations. But some of Reyes’ remarks are wrong, even ridiculous, and racist to boot.

At no time was the Songhay Empire “larger than Europe” (Europe is about three million square miles), nor was it even the largest in Africa (Kanem-Bornu was larger). Ms. Reyes compares this kingdom favorably to what she erroneously supposes to be its contemporary, the Pilgrim colony, “primitive Plymouth Rock.” No doubt Plymouth Rock was primitive—rocks usually are—but the name of the colony

was Plymouth Plantation, not Plymouth Rock. Perhaps she has confused it with Bedrock. In any case, she refers to Askia Mohammed of Songhay as the contemporary of the Pilgrims, but he reigned from 1493 to 1528; the Pilgrims landed in 1620. Reyes says that the empire fell in the seventeenth century, whereas its rapid decline commenced with the Moroccan invasion of 1591, which was in the sixteenth century.

Ms. Reyes is, at best, confusing in trying to explain the abrupt decline of these godlike beings. She suggests they were “unprepared for the righteous trumpets of the Islamic and Christian religions.” She seems to think their downfall was brought about by trumpeting, as Gideon’s trumpet brought down the walls of Jericho. But historians attribute the Moroccan victory to their muskets, not their trumpets. And they would not have been Christian trumpets anyway, in the unlikely event the invaders played any. Even Ms. Reyes, one hopes, must have noticed she was contradicting herself when she acclaimed Songhay as a brilliant Islamic civilization, then blamed its downfall on “the wrath of gods that were not their own.” For some Songhay, especially the urban ruling elite, Allah *was* their own god.

One does not have to know even these few fragmentary facts about Songhay, easily obtainable in a few minutes in the library, to notice that Reyes has to be babbling bullshit. “People from all over the world,” she reports, traveled to Songhay. Really? From Japan? From Australia? From Switzerland? Not! How could Reyes possibly know that the city’s “huge libraries” helped make it an “intellectual paradise,” that it produced “many brilliant authors”? Can Reyes name even one of these authors? Does she know how many libraries there were? How many books they contained? And how many Songhay knew how to read?

Although she claims to have derived much of her polemic from it, it looks to me like the only thing Reyes got out of Bennett’s *Before the Mayflower* was that the title moved her to compare the Pilgrims to the Songhay Empire. Since Bennett is a serious black historian, not a Leonard Jeffries, he engaged in no such pointless exercise. To compare an empire of millions with an isolated village of hundreds is senseless. What, no universities in Plymouth? How barbaric! Of course, in the neighboring colony of Massachusetts Bay, a few thousand Puritan colonists very similar to the Pilgrims founded a college, Harvard, only seven years after settlement.

Concededly the Pilgrims did not go around, as Reyes says the Songhay did, “heavily jeweled with gold.” They were not wealthy; there was no gold to be found in New England; and ostentatious display was forbidden by their Calvinist faith. But very few people in Songhay or any other society, past or present, have ever walked around heavily jewelled with gold, except pimps.

I fail to see why Reyes, in denigrating the primitive and exalting the civilized, is doing a service to American blacks or anybody else. There is much to be said for primitivism and much to be said against civilization. I don’t regard government (especially a despotic government, as in Songhay); organized religion (especially Islam: the word means “submission”); class systems (especially the worst one, important in Songhay: slavery); war and imperialism as any improvement over primitivism.

And I was taken aback by Reyes’ ignorant racist abuse of the people she calls “hillbillies.” Can she be unaware that “hillbilly” is the same sort of ethnic epithet as “nigger” or “spic” or “wog” or “kike” or “redneck” or “wetback”?

Anyway, hillbillies are not “primitives” in Reyes’ sense of the word, if only for the same reason the Pilgrims were not. The rural population of the mountainous parts of the American South has always been a part, if not a privileged part, of a larger civilization. There are no tribal or band societies in the Appalachians or the Ozarks. If hillbillies are to be compared to anyone in Songhay it should be to their plebeian counterparts—the illiterate, non-Muslim peasants whose taxes financed the urban Muslim elite—not to our Rockefellers or their Askia Mohammeds.

“Many Africans,” fantasizes Reyes, “who arrived in America were noblemen, merchants or priests.” Serves them right! But seriously, there has never existed a society where these elements formed more than a small part of the population. The blacks whom other blacks sold to Europeans were mostly prisoners of war or condemned criminals drawn from the bottom of society. These “proud men,” she assures us, thought “beautiful thoughts.” Could Ms. Reyes recount to us, please, two or three of their beautiful thoughts? Just one maybe?

And if the men were thinking beautiful thoughts, what were the women thinking? About polygamy, for instance? Is it not remarkable these questions did not occur to the Women’s Issues Director of the SUNY-Albany Student Association?

There is nothing shameful about descent from primitives. Go back just a few thousand years of the million or more of human existence and you will find that we are all the descendants of primitives, i.e., of pre-industrial, pre-agricultural peoples—hunter-gatherers—who were without governments and class systems. Civilization arose late—and later in Africa than anywhere else—and is not self-evidently an improvement. “Dispelling the Primitive Myth” is, no doubt, worth doing. Dispelling the civilization myth is much more important, for it is a far more widespread delusion.

Americas, Americas

The Americas Review: a Review of Hispanic Literature and Art of the USA

Edited by Julian Oliveres
Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 1990

“A Review of Hispanic Literature and Art”—mostly literature—“of the USA,” *The Americas Review* is a well-produced, grants-funded quarterly which except for its subject matter is a typical university-based literary journal. If there is no tension there is at least irony in this anchoring of ethnic content in academic form, since it parallels a common theme in the content itself: acceptance by or participation in the dominant society vs. returning to and reaffirming one’s natal cultural identity.

TAR does not try for an innovative format. This issue opens with a feisty Editorial, proceeds to Prose (four stories), then Poetry of course, a long interview with Sandra Sisneros, an essay (actually a lecture with overtones of a stump speech), some Criticism, Art by Puerto Rican nationalist Juan Sanchez, four Reviews, and the obligatory Books Received (what is the function of this small press fixture anyway?) and notes on Contributors. The color cover features an attractive reproduction of Sanchez’s rather tendentious “Tres Banderas,” and this, by the standards of academicist anemia is perhaps a bit of a departure, although it is still tame compared to what the xerox subculture publishes in some quantity (and quality).

The leading piece is a vehement counter-attack against the “barbarians” like Jesse Helms who have targeted Federal arts funding, not surprisingly since TAR itself as well as several contributors to this issue are recipients of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Editorial points out that if the NEA mandate is not renewed or restrictions are imposed, Hispanics, blacks, Native Americans, and Asian Americans will suffer the most. Actually, renewal with restrictions (the likely outcome) may not affect ethnic minorities so much as sexual or political minorities. Long before the New Right clamored for moral controls on arts funding, critics like Richard Kostelanetz assailed Federal arts patronage for flowing to well-connected academics and their pets to the detriment of newer experimental writers. And as he also observed, the only government concession to changing times was to start funding ethnic authors along with the professors. That is something, but recent victims of de-funding were not explorers of ethnic experience, whom even Jesse Helms does not seem to find especially threatening, but homosexuals, blasphemers, and flag desecrators. Indeed, Helms’s original proposal would have withheld grants from art deemed offensive to minority groups, and what would editor Olivares make of that? Would he still say, as he now does and as I do, *ne pasaran?* I hope so, but I wonder.

The contributions to this issue are mostly in English (several are in Spanish), mostly by Hispanics, except for two critical pieces. As I do not read Spanish I can comment on only two of the four stories. “Dulcinea is Dead” by Hiram Perez recounts the abruptly violent self-destruction of a Florida household consisting of three Cubans: a crippled anti-Castro martyr, his superannuated paramour of an ex-dancer, and his passive stay-at-home adult son. Perez tries too hard to concoct florid sentences but not hard enough to indicate what, or why, what is going on is going on. Of Dulcinea the dancer he writes: “Her vitality was of the nature of a good strong healthy cancer bounding with the sated gluttonous fervor reaped from the crops of flesh of parasitic prosperity.” There are several more lines like this, unfortunately.

Much better, dusted not drenched with enigma, is “Lying in Bed” by Stephen D. Gutierrez, the tale of a vaguely restless young Chicano who resolves to get a nose job and does. Gutierrez discloses his delicacy by not closing the story, as ethnic duty must have tempted him

to, with some sort of penitent breast-beating by the protagonist, bemoaning too late his self-hating castration of a badge of his identity. He had a short panic—he looked like Nixon!—but it passed, he didn’t, really, he decided. He peddles off on his bicycle, rehearsing his justification for the operation, and what the reader picks up on is not that Walter has disgraced *la raza* but that he hasn’t *faced up*, so to speak, to the real determinants of his fate. Now what?

The centerpiece of the issue is Pilar E. Rodriguez’s interview with author Sandra Sisneros, self-styled “loose woman” which means both more and less than it seems. Sisneros is torn not only between the Anglo and Chicano cultures but, at right angles to that, she’s a woman in a man’s world. And she doesn’t hesitate to repudiate the role assigned her as a Mexican (-American) woman: she has relationships with men but won’t marry, and she subordinates all that to her writing. “Loose” by the double standard of *machismo*—nothing for Anglos to gloat about overmuch, *macho* would not in recent years have lodged itself in our language unless there was a need for it—Sisneros uses “loose” literally, to be let loose, to be free. Freedom of sexual choice and freedom from compulsory marriage are part of that, parts most of us take for granted, but not all of it.

Sisneros discusses the rigid division of women into virginal Madonnas and sluttish Magdalenes, wife-mothers and whores. Nicholasa Mohr, addressing the Hispanic Media Conference (the aforementioned stump speech) likewise speaks of the “Maria syndrome,” as of the Hispanic media stereotypes which she, as a Puerto Rican, grew up with—what the hell does the Frito Banditto have to do with her life in 1950s Spanish Harlem?—and what she says about the Anglo stereotype is as true of the Hispanic-macho one: “Where were the rest of us?”

If the articulate Hispanic women are self-assertive and critical, their male counterparts are—judging by this issue of this magazine—dissociated, in transit, unsure of themselves. It may say something that the only macho character in this magazine is Pito, a womanizing dwarf in a series of poems, which usually feature a colloquy between Pito and the narrator whom he pesters to fetch him women but who just can’t into it himself, despite Pito’s taunts. In Gutierrez’s story, Walter, recuperating in the hospital, recall his involvement with Irma, a *chola*—the Latino equivalent of a punk, if after my four years in San Francisco’s Mission District I might venture a translation—a loose woman, as

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Sisneros would say. He liked her, she blew him (that's male orgasm at its most detached), but he was embarrassed by her style and dreaded his family discovering her, and he let her slide. The stay-at-home son in the Perez story is also passive, thirty-nine years old, yet back in the nest. These men seem to be between two worlds; they lack the heart to act out the old dominant role (none even married) but haven't grappled with an equality of intimacy either, instead holding back, waiting to see what happens next. Sort of like Anglo-American men have behaved for the last fifteen years or so.

The impasse between the genders includes and opens out into another ambient theme: futility. These tales and poems often announce failure or misdirected energy. One of Rane Arroyo's poems recounts a pointless and inconclusive Chicago street-corner brawl between friends... even the police mock the fight as street theater, not even dignifying the combatants with arrests for disorderly conduct. There is a similar fight in the Gutierrez story, and the Perez story is actually weaker, not stronger in its version inasmuch as the anomic fratricide is the more destructive. In their frustration these characters dissipate the little (too little) strength they have, wasting it on each other.

The critical pieces I shall pass over as they involve the finite (but still too long) regress of critiques of critiques. Wilson Neate's grad school type term paper on the fiction of Rolando Hinojosa belabors the point that fictional settings for historical processes free the author to pin down subjective experience (what else is new?). Roland Walter's thesis that the novels of Miguel Mendez move from "social" to "magic" realism I abandon for examination by those better informed, but I am moved by the distinction to note—once again—that the fiction and poetry in this publication fall uneasily somewhere in between. In fact, *in between* is very much, at the end, as at the beginning, where the contributors to TAR find themselves; in between Anglo-American and Spanish culture, in between men and women, and in between the academy and the barrio. It's their quandary and it's not for me to advise them, but when I find myself in a spot like that I am wont to say *neither/nor* or *none of the above*.

The 12-Step Shuffle

*Alcoholics Anonymous [the "Big Book"]. Third edition
New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1976*

I don't want to cause no trouble
Just won't do the 12-Step Shuffle

Rather have me a Whiskey Sour
Than get dry-drunk on my Higher Power

I don't care if you drink or not,
But I don't like a complacent snot

A drinking problem ain't no joke
Nor is secondary smoke

It may well be that your problem's real
But it's always better to stand than kneel

And if you surrender yourself to a group
You're still a drunk and now a dupe

You ain't much better off to be
addicted to sobriety

For sure we gotta help each other,
Without God the Father, without Big Mother

I'm not telling you what to do,
But the answer is inside of you

I don't want to cause no trouble,
Just WON'T do the 12-Step Shuffle.

Chapter Eight

Introduction: The Panic Catalog

In 1979 I read my first Loompanics book, the fabled *Principia Discordia*. (Borrowed from Mitch Parker, later—and even later, not—the bass player for Government Issue.) Loompanics was then still in its improbably named original locale: Mason, Michigan. It took several years for any regular contact to develop between me and “Mike Hoy, Prop.” dba Loompanics Unlimited.

In fall 1982, when I was in Berkeley and Loompanics was in Washington State, I sent Hoy—an avowed egoist—the pro-situationist tract *The Right to Be Greedy* espousing “communist egoism.” I’ll show you egoism! I smirked. The following February, out of the blue, Hoy wrote to say he was reprinting the essay and would I write a preface? I did (it’s reprinted in *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays*), and so commenced my spasmodic politico-business relationship with Loompanics.

Earlier I think Hoy saw me mainly as a stick to beat the mainstream libertarians with. In 1984 he flew me to Aspen to deliver to the Eris Society convocation the diatribe rewritten later as “The Libertarian as Conservative.” The Eris Society is sort of a Masonry-in-waiting, an assemblage of con-artists, many of libertarian bent, who get together every year to sucker one another. (I was a year late to hear the Breathairean spokesman for the abolition of eating.) The brethren were dumfounded, then indignant to be told about the resistance to work. They in turn so astonished me that at one point I blurred, “You’re not exactly the salt of the earth, you know.” The libertarian publicist Marshall Fritz rose to remark that he didn’t understand a word I was saying and he was glad he didn’t. (I’ve since had a talk with Fritz and he’s not really a know-nothing, but he spoke for many in that posh chalet that day.) Hoy was delighted by all this.

In the summer of 1985 I wrote my all-time money-maker to date, a review which must have struck just the right cord of ironic voyeurism to titillate the alternative weeklies. What immediately

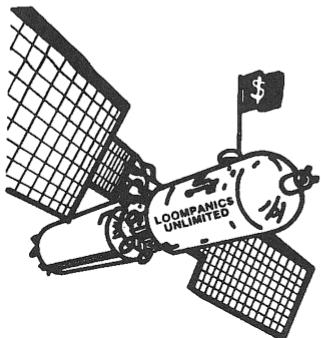
follows, previously unpublished, is the thinner revision. It is the only text in this book which overlaps the first one, in part, for which I have several justifications:

—Half or more of the particular books mentioned in 1985 are unavailable now, the catalog is over twice as compendious, and I have so far enlarged and improved the review as to offer much to interest my original readers; and

—Loompanics has become part of the general culture of the well-read marginal; this book would be incomplete without something like the review and I cannot, for another two or three years anyway, improve on this version of it; and

—Loompanics was offered, but declined, the opportunity to use this version (as I preferred) in the next reprinting of *Abolition of Work*—but I expect no complaints over the favorable publicity here.

After that I review a few Loompanics books which provoked some reaction from me, not the how-to books—I'm unqualified to review bomb recipes or hydroponic horticulture—but the ones which download memes.



The Best Book Catalog in the World

1994 Main Catalog
Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1994

Remember *The Whole Earth Catalog*? Self-sufficiency, personal growth, utopian visions, innovative technology? That was then and now, it's today. Not all that different in many of its listings but very different in point of view is the 1994 Main Catalog of Loompanics Unlimited, the dark side of the Power. It is *The Whole Earth Catalog* ruthlessly re-edited by Friedrich Nietzsche.

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Somewhere in this catalog there must be a cookbook with a recipe for Hobbit Tartare. This is either the worst or, as it modestly proposes, “The Best Book Catalog in the World.” It is by and for people who want freedom, unabashedly understood as a question of power. (The distinction was always an elusive one.) Loompanics is visionary, almost mystical in its own way, but not tunnel-visionary. The Catalog pushes pragmatism past the point of fantasy to a place where its archetypal user, the soul of Rimbaud in the body of Rambo, struts unobtrusively—a Road Warrior with outside interests.

On paper at least, Loompanics and its customers are not too particular about what it takes to get what they want. Many of the books available in this 254 page catalog (and in precious few other places) tell how to do the sort of things best left undone in a better world, and even in this one. Consider John Minnery’s 512-page “Kill Without Joy”: *The Complete How to Kill Book*; or *Secrets of Methamphetamine Manufacture* by “Uncle Fester”; or the lockpicking manuals of “Eddie the Wire,” one of which was Loompanics’ all-time bestseller until recently edged by the catalog itself. There are books on home-made guns and ammo—and home-made money (in the vulgate, counterfeiting). Often it is point/counterpoint: assassination manuals but also *Dead Clients Don’t Pay* (bodyguarding); lockpicking manuals but also home and business security manuals. On which side of the divide to place the formerly available *How to Rip Off a Drug Dealer*—by “Rex Feral”—is not my call, happily.

So many Loompanics authors (the discerning reader will have surmised) employ pseudonyms—or, to put it another way, have something to hide—that I propose hereafter to dispense with quotation marks when I mention authors like Adam Cash (*Guerrilla Capitalism* and *How to Do Business “Off the Books”*), Tony Newborn (*Secrets of International Identity Change*) and Judge X who, if he really is a judge as he says, has good cause to postpone past retirement taking credit for *How to Avoid a Drunk Driving Conviction*.

Pretty scary stuff, eh? Not to worry—too much, anyway. Loompanics mail-order mayhem hasn’t launched the 50,000 recipients of its catalog—up 100% in three years—on any apparent crime wave. Or maybe it’s point/counterpoint so let’s call it a wash. Then again, the mischief-minded might have bought *Ninja: The Invisible Assassins* so how are we to know? Admittedly this book no longer appears, as it did in past years, in the catalog (or is it still there but

nobody can see it?).

Avowedly egoist and amoralist, Loompanics has a reputation as more reliable than many mail-order outfits, much the way atheists usually lead more ethical lives than Christians. Self-interest is the reason. "So controversial are the books we offer," writes founder-owner Michael Hoy, "that most magazines will not allow us to advertise. Bookstores and distributors will not carry our publications. Periodicals refuse to review our books." (Well, not always.) Even *Soldier of Fortune* bans most Loompanics advertising. The cheap and cheesy covers common on early Loompanics publication recall the days when nearly all its books were bought, sight unseen, by mail. Loompanics now carries over 800 titles, including 160 of its own publications, justifying *Newsweek's* description of it as "the biggest of the not-ready-for-mass-market publishing outfits." Because the marketing strategy is many titles mostly in smallish quantities, prices tend to be high. To compensate, Loompanics cultivates its customers (shipments within 24 hours) in order to keep them.

Who then are Loompanics customers? (You can rent the mailing list to find out, but any of them to worry about are surely among those who checked the box to opt out.) They are probably not the well-armed, high-tech, drug-taking, survivalist, martial-arts, black-marketeering, tax-dodging, life-extensionist, freethinking, paper-tripping Discordian master criminals that a composite of catalog cullings would suggest. I think they are mostly spiritually restless materialists: macho contemplatives locked into day jobs. They dream of escape—of "vonu" (invulnerability to coercion by withdrawal from society); of the High Frontier (space colonization); of life extension to tide them over till a better day. They long for the *big score*. They take hope from books which parade their contempt for normal life as they portray fantastic possibilities always presented according to a patented formula of tough-minded realism. The typical Loompanics reader is, I conjecture, a surrealist trapped in the body of an engineer.

So I doubt the crime rate is much affected by the self-help burglary books or the crime prevention texts. (Maybe a little by the tax—"avosion" and harassment manuals.) Loompanics is neither pro- nor anti-crime, neither right nor left. Loompanics lore is not so much neutral as double-edged. The company does not, strictly speaking, believe in "rights" (it published *The Myth of Natural Rights*), but even if rights are myths or metaphors, its own favorite could only be the

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Promethean right for you to know anything that They know.

As befits the self-styled “lunatic fringe of the libertarian movement,” Loompanics insists that since governments know all about violence and dirty tricks, individuals too had better learn the score. Is such rhetoric too facile to excuse a torture manual? Maybe, but isn’t it a pensive point that many Loompanics manuals on the Dark Arts are simply reprints of government publications like *Covert Surveillance and Electronic Penetration* and *CIA Field Expedient Incendiary Manual* (“An excellent manual for fire departments and law enforcement,” says the catalog)? Other titles raise real credentials challenges. Is it absurd to consider *How to Start Your Own Country*? It’s been done before: we’re living in one. *Basement Nukes*, a classic of Loompanics deadpan dadaism, ostentatiously eschews all emotion and all ethics, yet this futurist fantasy forces reflection about just who is qualified to possess nuclear weapons if you and I aren’t.

Libertarianism is no longer the Loompanics reference point it once was. *The Case Against a Libertarian Political Party* wasn’t reprinted, according to Loompanics editor Steve O’Keefe, probably because there are not many libertarians left who need convincing. Loompanics departs from the uptight anality typical of libertarians who would rather not know *How to Collect Illegal Debts* (the author is in the pen) and who’d never even consider *Fighting Back on the Job*. The libertarian glossy *Reason* banned all Loompanics advertising because it adjudged one ad for *The Right to Be Greedy* “misleading” (translation: disconcerting to libertarians), which seems to bespeak a certain lack of faith in the self-corrective harmony of the free market.

While self-empowerment is the primal product—54 titles begin with the words *How to*—Loompanics is doing increasingly good service as an original and reprint publisher of pure ideas. The line includes a photo reprint of Eunice Minette Schuster, *Native American Anarchism* (1932) and an essay collection by Bolton Hall, a Henry Georgist who anticipated several New Age and Green themes. Loompanics reset and reprinted Ragnar Redbeard’s Social Darwinist diatribe *Might Is Right* (1896) and *The Autobiography of a Criminal* (1807) by Henry Tufts, the earliest American career criminal to have published his autobiography.

More often the heretics who scale the soapbox are contemporary. There’s the World Power Foundation calling for a new, colorblind slave society to meets the needs of the many to submit and, more

important, the few to dominate. Two of its postulates: “Excitement is more important than equality” and “Might and right are not exactly the same, but after a few years no one will notice the difference.” Or *Principia Discordia*, a speedball concocted of Zen, conspiracy theory and Americana whose mythos inspired *Illuminatus!* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. One of its authors, Kerry Wendell Thornley, testified before the Warren Commission about a Marine Corps buddy he wrote a novel about: Lee Harvey Oswald.

Rip-off manuals—bread-and-butter stuff for Loompanics—are the perfect product from the vendor’s viewpoint. No need for planned obsolescence: the better they sell, the sooner they evoke counter-measures which compel their frequent revision or replacement. Thus *The Paper Trip I* begat *The Paper Trip II* and some spinoffs, all explaining how to document a new identity. Act now before Congress finally mandates a national ID! *New ID in America* is one of the best (more realistic, less boosteristic). The tax loophole books wear out even faster. *How to Find Missing Persons*, an eye-opening introduction to the methods of private investigators, has an aura of authenticity, although it grossly overestimates the number of states where arrest records are open to the public.

If a lot of these books promise more than they deliver, that may be their most important message: to accept no authority at face value, not even their own. Take two of the more notorious recent releases. *How to Sell Yourself to Science* disabused me of what little interest that held for me, although if I didn’t have scarred kidneys, I could see selling one in some circumstances. Whereas *The Art and Science of Dumpster Diving* is not only practical, it’s hilarious: the author grew up in a family of super-scroungers who lived like lords. It is not exaggerating too much to praise this book as both a critique of our world of waste and an aspect of what we can—what we’ll have to—do about it.

For Loompanics, victimization is voluntary insofar as it is avoidable. You can survive and even prosper during the bad times while awaiting utopian salvation (whether or not it ever comes to pass). “Be here now”—or make my day! The title of a crime-prevention volume by an ex-con says it all, almost: *Don’t Become the Victim*.

How does it all cash out? Surely not in martial-arts marauding. With schoolchildren running amok with assault rifles it’s silly to fret about Loompanics selling instructions for homemade zip guns. A

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goodly share of homicides are committed by the police. Having read they originals, they have no need for the Loompanics reprints. Like pornography, Loompanics looks like an incitement to sin but it's really a substitute for it. Its important self-defense books are the ones, not about throwing knives or razor-fighting, but about how to stay out of kill-or-be-killed situations in the first place. To these, no one should object, and I know of no other source for so many of them.

If Loompanics readers are attuned to its wavelength as I receive it, they pursue liberty through privacy, more by avoidance than approach. That is what relates a book on how to hide stuff to a book on how to live year-round in an RV.

Vonu: The Search for Personal Freedom may express the core Loompanics aspiration. During the 1960s the author, "Rayo," espoused the rational transformation of one's lifestyle to gain liberty through self-sufficiency. Since authority is too strong to resist, the Vonuan becomes invisible to it by removing to the wilderness, alone or with his mate. Finally Rayo, who was rigorously logical, acted on his own logic. In 1974 he vanished. As his editor says, "his goal was always to become invisible to coercers (meaning mainly Government). He might have come to believe that this required that he become invisible to everyone." If this is logic it is also insanity. But if this is madness it is also the stuff of romance. Who would have thought so mundane an American tradition as do-it-yourself has such tragic and transcendent power? Everyman his own ninja! If everybody minded his own business, it would revolutionize the world. That's the general idea. For the details, consult the Loompanics Catalog.

Of course something might go wrong. If it does, Loompanics has a back-up book: *Surviving in Prison*.

Whatever It Is, I'm Against It

Lucifer's Lexicon

By L.A. Rollins

Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1987

L.A. Rollins is an aphorist, or rather, an againstist. He is of the fraternity of those who deny both sides of every question, the refusniks who are always untimely. He pits his puns against the pundits. Rollins knows that "Man does not live by bread alone, but by circuses as well." He doesn't even believe in skepticism (an agnostic, after all, is "a Godfearing atheist"). For him there isn't a department of human experience that won't sell you a bill of goods.

Rollins is comprehensive in his complaints, from A (Abortion: "The termination of a pregnancy with extreme prejudice") to Z (Zionism, the movement "to make the desert Bloom's"). Politics, religion and sex dominate his diatribes as they do life, but pretty much anything goes (in): "Incorruptible, n. Overpriced."

By inference from some of his gibes, likely lost on the lay reader, Rollins is of Objectivist (=Ayn Rand) and libertarian ancestry. In the late 1960s he published *Invictus*, "A Journal of Individualist Thought." But today Rollins harries individualists and anarchists as mercilessly as everybody else, but with the bitterness of betrayal. That he once believed... oh, the shame of it. For awhile the leading libertarian glossy *Reason* published the mildest of these Rollins *defamations*, only to ban him at last.

Yet the antistatist impulse persists. For Rollins B-1 is "a vitamin essential to the health of the military-industrial complex." No supporter of farm subsidies, Rollins defines a dairyman as "one who milks the public, not with his own hands, but with the State's arms." If he calls Vietnam "Sovietnam," he also says Solidarity is "the feeling of brotherhood felt by American capitalists for Polish workers." (Reagan repressed the air traffic controllers' union just when General

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Jeruzalski suppressed Solidarnosc.)

Many who can handle all the rest—with tongs, perhaps—will throw up their hands, if not their lunch, at Rollins' least popular heresy: Holocaust Revisionism. (He actually uses the J-Word.) Rollins has written on the subject and his bitterness over the civil liberties Holocaust befalling the Revisionists weakens some of his material. As “examples” of some of his definitions he forces the inclusion of quoted passages which transparently serve to push the Revisionist case—although it is difficult not to be appalled at the published statements (they are accurate) from the likes of Elie Wiesel and Meir Kahane. Rollins’ foray against a PLO apologist will doubtless not save him from accusations of anti-Semitism, despite his definition of Nazi: “A totalitarian. One who believes that blondes should have more fun—or else. Formerly, an overman; now, an underdog.”

But then a dogma is “a bitch of a belief” and sacred cows are “food for freethought.” I agree with Rollins that a white supremacist is “an inferior white man,” But agreement is not the point where a Bierce, Twain, Kraus, Mencken—or Rollins—is concerned. These misanthropes fly under false colors: cynics, egoists, scoffers, these comic Cassandras sacrifice themselves, Christlike, for the herd they regard without hope. Pardon me, not Christlike. Christ was an optimist, He had Connections. The pessimist aphorists are more like the Norse gods who knew they were doomed but prepared to battle the Giants anyway. Cruel and unusual humor is among the few forms in which heroism still manifests. And who knows, a random (sling)shot might bring down a Goliath every once in a while.

Thus Spake Mitty

Might Is Right

By Ragnar Redbeard

Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1984

The only certain fact about “Ragnar Redbeard” is that someone writing under that name brought forth upon this continent in 1896 a book called *Might Is Right*, “whose survival has nothing to do with

popular acclaim or academic attention" (S.E. Parker). Redbeard might have been a New Zealander, Arthur Desmond, who championed assorted radical causes—aboriginal rights, trade unions, the Single Tax—before emigrating to Australia and then to the United States. If so, his values got transvaluated, or rather knocked for a loop.

Redbeard is the ultimate Social Darwinist, or else his parody. Himself a scribbling intellectual—what else did he ever do but write this book?—he must have dreamed he was a freebooter, a warrior chieftain mighty of thew, swearing great oaths whilst quaffing from his mead-horn. *Might Is Right* is *Thus Spake Zarathustra* had it been penned by Walter Mitty. Redbeard made an effort, far from successful, to rid himself of moralism at gut level, by summoning it to a song-duel, and not just to refute it in the abstract. Yet he remained a slave to several of the tawdriest prejudices of his time. Worse than gratuitous, his misogyny and racism belie his espousal of winner-take-all, equal-opportunity predation.

To some extent Redbeard has got to be putting us on. He is obviously too well versed in the economic and social thought of his day to believe that the systematic exploitation of the unheard-of opulence of the new industrial society is just holding up the stage-coach on a larger scale. None of Redbeard's scorned socialist contemporaries were so crude as that.

No matter. Redbeard's vulgar (yet eloquent) bombast, for all its affectation, is a purgative, cleansing the mental system with its roughage even if it hasn't got much nutritive value. He's an even keener ironist than he knew. By extolling at book length the masterful men of action he proves beyond doubt he isn't one. Real *condottiere* don't write books. (Or read them, for that matter.) If Ragnar Redbeard was an Overman, Idi Amin Dada is a performance artist.

If You Do Go Against Nature, That's Part Of Nature Too

Natural Law, or, Don't Put a Rubber on Your Willy

By Robert Anton Wilson

Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1987

This witty polemic is rather more illuminating (and far more entertaining) than the account of its origin would suggest.

In 1983, Loompanics published *The Myth of Natural Rights* by L.A. Rollins. It was a devastating critique of the Natural Law theories of four prominent contemporary libertarian magnificos. In 1985, Rollins and his foils debated one another—and also Robert Anton Wilson—in the pages of *New Libertarian*. As is his wont, editor Samuel Edward Konkin III interpolated his own comments in other peoples' texts—critical comments in Wilson's case. Incensed by Konkin's “heckling,” as he considered it, Wilson penned a rebuttal, *Natural Law*. He really must have been pissed to lay aside his usual intellectual hustles long enough to produce so esoteric a diatribe.

Despite the narrow context, *Natural Law* challenges everybody, leftists and liberals no less than libertarians, who suppose there are universal essences, “human rights” which have actual “existence” Out There in the world. Strangely, the Natural Lawmen (as Konkin calls his side, with not nearly enough irony) who agree there is Natural Law cannot agree on what its content is. For the Pope, observes Wilson, Natural Law means “don’t put a rubber on your Willy.” For the late Ayatollah, it means that a wife cannot divorce her husband for sodomizing a camel, but may divorce him for buggering his brother-in-law. For the libertarians it means private property is sacrosanct. Wilson thinks many natural facts and cultural creations are very fine indeed, but nothing is sacrosanct.

Patiently, as if teaching a child, RAW explains to the Lawmen that they have confused natural laws (which are descriptions of regularities in nature) with juridical laws (which are prescriptive, not descriptive guides to human action). In effect they have made a philosophy out of a coincidence in vocabulary. Indeed, legal or moral laws take up precisely where natural laws leave off, their whole point is to stop people from doing what comes naturally. You don’t have to send people to prison to make them obey the laws of gravity.

To call nonbelievers in Natural Law, as Konkin does, Natural Outlaws is like calling Satanists atheists. In fact lawyers and criminals presuppose law just as Satanism is not atheism but Christianity with the good guys and the bad guys trading places. The Natural Lawmen think they are forming arguments when all they do is assume their own conclusions. They do not so much reject the distinction between the normal and the normative as fail to imagine

one is thinkable.

Now Wilson may be a trend-milking opportunist—how else could he work the New Age, the futurist and the SubGenius circuits simultaneously?—but here he comes across as a tolerant, humane and lucid controversialist. His adversaries by comparison are overexcited and earnest. One of them, economist Murray Rothbard, in *New Libertarian* fulminated that heretics who disbelieve in Natural Law should be refuted by hitting them with chairs. This has, as Wilson says, the logical form of a sentence he attributes to a Ring Lardner story: “Shut up,” he explained.”

Wilson wins this round on points, I think.

The New Dark Ages

The Resurrection of Aristocracy

By Rudolph Carlyle Evans

Port Townsend, Washington: Loompanics Unlimited, 1988

Countless pundits tally the crises of Western society. Some predict the demise of industrialism. A few welcome disaster as an opportunity for utopian reconstruction, whether futuristic-cybernetic or neo-paleolithic. Both schools of post-industrial utopians foresee pacific and participatory futures. In this, according to Rudolph Carlyle Evans, their vision hazes over and their nerve fails. All agree that for centuries Western man has contended with nature, and with his own nature, with disastrous results. But for Carlyle the way out is the way back—back to feudalism, to the unabashed rule of a proud, warlike aristocracy over an unquestioningly subservient peasantry. Thus the masterful minority realizes its destiny to dominate... and the massified majority finally gets what it really wants: freedom from freedom.

Carlyle forges, like a sword, a synthesis of left- and right-wing critiques of our impersonal, materialistic, atomized, bureaucratic, consumerist, ecocidal, mass society which cannot and will not go on. In his combination of anti-capitalism, anti-socialism, sexism and panegyrics to the impulsive strong man of action he has taken more from fascist intellectualism—including fascist intellectual anti-intellectu-

alism—than he admits. He himself prefers to embarrass liberals and leftists with citations to his broad if sometime indiscriminate readings in Marx, Mill, Schumacher, Marcuse, Schumpeter, de Tocqueville, Ernest Mandel, Erich Fromm, the anarchist Murray Bookchin and such.

But on the other hand he is anti-racist, anti-nationalist and implacably hostile to state-managed mass mobilizations whether Nazi or Stalinist. In his utopia, nations as linguistic/cultural communities won't quite disappear but they will not ordinarily be organizable by a central power. Instead they will be loose agglomerations of lordly holdings incessantly contesting for power and glory, ever vigilant to combine against an overmighty aristocrat who might reduce the nobility to his service. Carlyle anticipates a predominantly agricultural, technologically simple society with minimal commerce, with a stable population much lower than the present level, with a sensibility attuned to nature. Given such a material base, not unlike the vague anticipations of various New Age and appropriate-tech and anarchist sorts, what's so preposterous about a political superstructure of serfdom and feudalism? I mean, it wouldn't be the first time, would it?

As against the other post-industrials Carlyle dismisses with contempt their values—which he, the reactionary, mocks as conservatory holdovers from the doomed and degenerate status quo—humanism, democracy, legality, equality, technology. That's all part of the problem which has (insists Carlyle) a solution, only one solution, a harsh solution but the only one in keeping with man's real nature. The modern world demands too much of most people while granting too little scope to their natural superiors. (Query: If they're so superior, why aren't they having their way already?)

Although he'd doubtless repudiate the suggestion indignantly, it seems to me that Carlyle is a utilitarian, albeit one with rather odd psychological assumptions. He posits, apparently trans-culturally (for all his interest in "Western man"—why should an *Uebermensch* care about East or West or good and evil?)—immutably two classes of people, rulers and ruled. He insists the commoners are happiest when they till the fields to wrest a sparse but usually adequate subsistence, when simple nature-cults give simple answers to their simple questions about life's meaning, when they glory in the might and valor of their lord.

Could be. But why does he even care? Real aristocrats never com-

plain, never explain, they do what they will. Nobles are class-conscious, not self-conscious. Is Evans the Moses of post-modernism, fated to glimpse a Promised Land of power (and land) which he, hobbled by sentiment and intellect, will never enter?

Chapter Nine

Introduction: And Now For Some Things Completely Different

What does Catallus have in common with Joseph Goebbels? Which they in turn share with a teenage heavy metal Satanist from legendary Sheridan, Wyoming? Just only this: they caught my eye.

A Sense of Place

Michael: A Novel
By Joseph Goebbels
New York: Amok Press, 1987

First published in the early 20s by an author also in his early 20s, *Michael* is a semi-autobiographical novel in diary form. The author held a doctorate in literature, but soon abandoned the field for a career in political journalism. Very much a young man's book, the novel is not too successful as a narrative. Its language is more forceful than original. But Goebbels might take that for a compliment. Aside from its definite if limited interest as a period piece not previously available in English, the book hints at a precociously modern media sensibility. Of this, more later.

A veteran of World War I, Michael begins his diary as a student in Heidelberg. It ends with his death in a mining accident after he has relinquished his role as an intellectual to plunge into the hellish reality of the German proletariat, the better to experience, even literally, "the hard soil of my homeland." The plot at first glance is stereotypically trite. The brooding student, replete with experiences which intellectuality can never do justice to, is left cold by his

courses. But he warms to the ambient sky, the forests, the lake—and fellow student Hertha Holk whose eyes are “grayish-green enigmas.”

Michael produces an epic drama on the life of Christ, informed by his view of the Christian God as “a god of strength. He does not like incense fumes and the dishonoring crawl of the throng.” As Michael’s awareness of his destiny hardens, Hertha is left behind—to their mutual relief, possibly. Michael writes: “I kiss Hertha Holk on her soft, dreamy mouth; we are both embarrassed.” Enough of that. Not that Michael is incapable of emotional bonding: he is a German romantic. During a summer on an island in the North Sea a young boy, Gustav Adolf, becomes his “best friend.” Gustav, seemingly much taken with Michael’s physique, later writes to him: “Are you still as tan as you were?”

Michael’s profound passion is politics. A socialist, he perceives a struggle between labor and money, but not a struggle *for* money, which is Marxism, “a doctrine of money and stomachs” which “assumes that a living human being is a machine.” Here Goebbels anticipates the romanticism of the New Left in its aversion to alienated labor and culture. That is not the only modern note this Weimar novelist sounds. “Farmer’s blood rises in me,” remarks Michael, who identifies social redemption, as do many feminists and environmentalists, with renewed communion with nature. Although the specific sex-roles Michael assigns to women might be controversial today, like contemporary radical feminists, he posits a fundamental dichotomy in the masculine and feminine experiences.

Above all, Michael was a man of his time—and of our time—in his affirmation of the centrality of *work* as the distinctive human activity. “Work sets you free,” he more than once asserts. Michael himself finds redemption through sacrifice and death in the mines. Toiling in the bowels of mother earth, he experiences primal verities beyond the power of rational expression: “Home! Earth! Mother!” His socialism is sacrifice for one’s own folk: “We modern Germans are something like Christ Socialists.” “Work is war!” he exultantly adds; it is a summons to greatness.

For the contemporary reader, Goebbels’ almost willfully banal vocabulary, even more than his pedestrian plot, is a backhanded challenge. It’s almost as if Goebbels deployed the most hackneyed phrases—“white as snow,” “the hard yoke of labor”—as if it were not enough having Michael expound vapid bombast (“Art is not just

ability, it is also struggle") impossible to take at face value. (Similarly, certain passages, arguably anti-Semitic by modern standards, must be construed as ill-chosen metaphors or lapses into contemporary prejudice, much like Marx's crudities of 70 or 80 years before. Goebbels, like Marx, was a man of his own time and place. As are we all.)

This was incipient art, not fumbling accident. Goebbels designedly avoided all freshness and originality in simile and metaphor. His purpose was to move the common man to action, not to pose conundrums to cosmopolites. "Style is everything!" as Michael opines. Goebbels, despite a certain undeniable literary mediocrity, spoke the language of the masses—a language of short pithy sentences, of even shorter sentence fragments usually enhanced by rococo punctuation, of embellished commonplaces. "We Germans think too much," Michael complains early on. To this problem Goebbels ventures a solution, a genuinely popular or populist discourse which, like contemporary best-sellers or rock videos, occupies the high ground of low culture.

Indeed Goebbels, in the retrospect of 70 years, seems modern not so much in what he says (though sounding many modern notes) as in the way he says it. He is a man of the mass media; his novel squirms in the straightjacket of book publication. Goebbels' sensibility calls for lights, music, a public spectacle. His purposes would soon find their means with the advent of cinema, radio and television. Maladroit as literature, the images and catch phrases which animate *Michael* might have had a profound impact in newspapers, magazines, movies, radio and the apparatus of the modern consciousness industry. Equipped with modern cinematic and broadcast technology, who knows how far Goebbels might have gone?

Crayons of Infinity

I Hate You and Vomit Drinker (cassettes)

By Tartarus [Toby Knapp]

Sheridan, Wyoming: Sacrificed Goat Music, 1986 & 1987

Tartarus is the premiere Satanist heavy metal band on the High Plains. Inverting the Trinity—as might be expected—it is one

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person, teen terror and Dial-a-Rumor veteran Toby Knapp, in three: "Diablo Doom," axe; "Lucifer Hades," bass/vocals; "Beelzebub," skins. Knapp laid down all the tracks and mixed them in his parents' basement. He was then 15. Knapp seems serious about his Satanism, perhaps because it puts the fear of the unknown into the Rotarian ruling circles and pick-up truck peasantry of the once-Wild West. He reportedly discovered that the Sheridan Public Library assigns to *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce the classification "The Occult."

Tartarus plays relentless minimalist metal, with words—"lyrics"

they are not—such as a pretoilet-trained toddler might write if he made it to puberty with his id unsocialized. “Hades,” whose voice recalls Motorhead, not Zeppelin, rasps out one challenge to decency after another: “Up With Khadafi,” “Hang Yourself,” “Retard Bus” (“They painted it blue/Just for us”) and an inspired cover, “I Shot The Teacher (But I Did Not Shoot the Principal).” As much as Tartarus longs to kill Mormons, they don’t hesitate to hate cutesy pukesy HM icons, as in “Elfin Magic” (“Fuck elves!”). There is something purifying about the innocent joy with which Tartarus revels in scatology, dirty words, death and disease.

Tartarus does not neglect the holy days of rival cults. One cassette includes “Die, Easter Bunny” (improbably accused of Mormonism), the other “Claus Is Dead” (“I shot him in the head/He did not bring me/The train set”). These Children of the Damned are “Happy In Hell.” It was perhaps the rave-up in “Crayons of Infinity” which, according to Zack Replica, for a few seconds sounded like channeled Hendrix. If so, Hendrix must be happy in Hell. And a ditty like “I Want Nuclear War” shows that Tartarus is not your typical apolitical metal band. These cassettes are the hell-hottest blasts out of Sheridan since Gerry Reith’s *Neutron Gun*.

Alas, Tartarus was not to escape the political repression of culture which disfigured the 80s. Knapp’s parents knew nothing of his recording venture till Toby’s little sister betrayed the secret. That was the end for Sacrificed Goat Music, but not for Toby Knapp who has produced several extraordinarily able instrumentals—including a speedcore version of Vivaldi!—which have aired on local radio. A title like “A Pauper’s Grave” suggests continued sympathy for the devil. Adversity has tested Toby’s mettle, his heavy metal, but he has endured. Long may he headbang!

“God of Mockery, Fill Me with Your Force!”

Gaius Valerius Catullus’s Complete Poetic Works
Translated by Jacob Rabinowitz
Dallas: Spring Publications, 1991

"No one escapes my lines," exults Catullus (c. 84—c. 54 B.C.), the Roman poet and bon vivant. Impassioned, aristocratic, theatrical, Catullus played out his brief life as a public performance. The verses of other poets reflect their life experiences. The poems of Catullus were some of his experiences. His was a poetry of love, friendship and vendetta, not just about them. Catulus, as J.L. Austin might have said, knew how to do things with words.

In Jacob Rabinowitz, the only classical scholar who has ever self-published a fanzine or a "homosexual science fiction epic" (*Louie-Louie*), Catullus has found the first translator who could possibly do justice to his elegance and invective with an X-rated rendering as far beyond good and evil as Catullus himself. Rabinowitz writes: "No mistaken shame has made me muffle Catullus' sexual directness, and I have never exceeded the freedom of the Latin."

He didn't have to. Catullus accuses personal enemies and public figures of incest, graft, urolagnia and stealing the silver. With familiarity he addresses Cicero, Caesar, Cornelius Nepos and others, for us marble figures, for Catullus peers whom he regards without the awe of after centuries—as "Caesar, your homoship, fearless leader!" It is no news that Catullus addressed erotic and love poetry to a boy, Juventius, as well as to a woman, Lesbia, but not until now was the poet's bisexuality displayed as openly and easily as Catullus himself must have flaunted it. He calls a foe a "faggot" with the same maliciousness innocence he boasts to a friend:

Just now in the alley I surprised a little boy
shoving it to a girl—
and, may it please Venus! quick as a pistol I shot
up his ass.

**BEST of the bath-house thieves, father Vibenius, you and
your homo son
(greedy, daddy's hands, and greedy the butt of his boy),
why don't you go into exile? Why don't you go to hell?
Everyone knows papa pillages unwatched clothes
and sonny can't make another cent on his hairy ass.**

Catullus, reacting against a tradition of Roman poetry which Rabinowitz likens to the patriotic piety of "The Star Spangled Banner," wrote of the personal even when he touched on the political, mocking Caesar's minion Mamurra as a "bankrupt playboy" parvenu and Caesar himself (almost as an afterthought) for wrecking the Republic. Except for some verse in traditional mythic form (devoted, however, to Priapus) Catullus was colloquial and Rabinowitz freely resorts to pungent popular phrases—no literalist would have Catullus mock an upstart who "uses a shopping bag for a suitcase."

In what is extant of Catullus' work, the verisimilitude and verve derive from the immediacy with which the poems and fragments recount incidents and individuals that mattered to him. It is precisely their particularity, even at times their pettiness which Catullus takes hold of in their concreteness to make them real for us. Rarely does he wax philosophical about love, jealousy or friendship, but in verse he acts out, he reenacts what real loves and real betrayals meant to him. Because he speaks for himself he speaks for many another forsaken lover when he address his "ex":

The way you hurt me makes me love you more,
even if it makes me like you less.

As for Rufus, the false friend who alienated her affections, Catullus conferred on him his contempt, the only reason posterity knows his name: "Poisoner of my life, you make friendship a disease."

No classicist myself, I cannot say how faithfully the translator has carried out his mission. The principles he professes seem sound. The text is vigorous, vulgar and clever. When the translator has Catullus call for a slave to pour "some really relentless cups" he invokes something of the contemporary gay male social scene (not as remote in its sensibility from Catullus and his circle as most of current culture) without using an outright cliche like "fabulous." Rabinowitz has rearranged the traditional order in a roughly thematic and/or chronological sequence. The scholarly apparatus is, like a suspension bridge, light and graceful but strong. The bare minimum of exegesis is offered, sometimes worked into the translation itself; footnotes after all would be anachronistic. The intent of the translation, as of the original, is to seduce, to flatter, to revile and to celebrate. It does.

Chapter 10

Introduction:

Taking Culture With a Grain Assault

Except for a very able abridgment I doubt I could have carried out myself, published in *Black Eye*, the following review is unpublished. It has enjoyed only a modest manuscript circulation in England and America. It's a good way, if maybe not the best way, to situate my main subject—the marginals milieu—within what Stewart Home calls *the tradition* (of self-help avant garde utopianism). The trouble is, most of the marginals weren't invited, so we had to crash the party.

I barely recognize any utopian dimension in some of what Home recounts—especially what he recounts approvingly—whereas he maligns most of the avowed utopians he covers while ignoring many others clearly requiring attention however critical. In the course of detecting the pattern of Home's prejudices, I hope I have also made a start at relating the currents he does cover—with whatever honesty and accuracy—to some of those dealt with in this book.

Taking Culture With a Grain Assault

The Assault On Culture: Utopian Currents From Lettrisme To Class War.

By Stewart Home

London: Aporia Press & Unpopular Books, 1988.

Stewart Home, the “Karen Eliot” (there are others) of London Smile (there are others) has charted the passage of a few persons through a rather brief period of time. This short book is not, however, about utopian currents. Some utopian currents, like Anarchism and the New Age, are slighted or ignored, even as Home

covers art movements, like Fluxus and Mail Art, with minimal political content. His decision which avant garde trends from the 1940s onward are *in* and which are *out* seems as arbitrary as the author's use of italics. Home implies that what the groups share is in some fashion the fusion (or confusion) of experimental art with radical politics. And they do, but not only with each other. The secret of his selectivity is that Home writes as one "engaged" in this tradition (whose participants, moreover, he considers his primary audience). But Home, then a young man of 27, was involved in only two of these currents, Punk and Neoism. Between the perspectival limitations of his personal, essentially *aesthetic* vantage point and the partisan vendettas he pursues, Home has written—too hastily, to judge by its style—a parochial polemic unequal to the demands of the subject.

"The utopian tradition," explains Home, "has aimed at the integration of all human activity." But his story begins, not with avowed utopians—Owen, Fourier, Bellamy, Morris—but with Futurism and Dada. Perhaps it should have ended there since, to hear Home talk, the successors he writes about didn't develop the tradition much further. He fast-forwards right through Surrealism, "the Bretonian glaciation," although most of the later currents were related or reacting to Surrealism. Tradition implies continuity. Even if the Surrealists deformed the tradition by their flirtations with mysticism and the occult, "glaciation" is after all a form of preservation.

His treatment of the Surrealists typifies Home's unfairness and superficiality. Their genuine mystics, like Artaud, speedily departed precisely because of Surrealism's activism, optimism and intellectualism. Home doesn't know or doesn't care to disclose that, as Andre Breton repeatedly explained, the Surrealists toyed with seances and such as *techniques* to evoke the unconscious, not because they believed in spiritualism.

Home never makes a more serious charge against the Surrealists, their ill-fated excursion into Communist Party politics from which so many of them (Aragon, Tzara, Eluard) never recovered. But then Home always ignores the historical context. Surrealist successor-critics like the Situationists understood that the Surrealist blunder in embracing Communism as Stalin was perfecting it as an instrument of conservative consolidation took place amidst a hostile cultural climate, and in response to a rising Fascist threat which they knew at first hand. (French Fascists procured the banning of Bunuel and

Dali's *L'Age d'or*.) The classical workers' movement dwindled to a few anarchist and councilist grouplets and was finally extirpated during the Spanish Revolution. Excluded from cross-pollination with consequential political currents by the Stalinist culture gendarmerie, the Surrealists were reduced to the status of mere artists in spite of themselves.

By the mid-1940s the Surrealists at least knew Stalinism for what it was. Not so their Belgian colleague Christian Dotrement who broke with them, reports Home, "over the questions of mysticism and the Communist Party." In other words, with Home's tacit approval, Dotrement persisted in his Stalinism, even as he helped found COBRA, with which Home's narrative really commences. Granted he got over Stalinist chain-gang utopianism within a couple of years, but only because of its persistently retrograde art "line," Socialist Realism, which by then was very old, very bad news. There is no indication Dotrement, or Home, sees any other dystopian element in bureaucratic state socialism besides an unfortunate cultural policy. The only further clue to Home's politics is his embrace of what he calls a "materialist" definition of art—art is high (nonpopular) culture commodified— cribbed from the vulgar Marxist Roger L. Taylor.

COBRA (so called for its principle centers of activity, COpenhagen, BRussels, Amsterdam) called for "popular art" collectively invented to assume centrality in everyday life. The catch phrase "everyday life" Dotrement borrowed from the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre who would later impart it to the Situationists. Major figures in addition to Dotrement were the Dane Asger Jorn and the Dutchman Constant; these two later passed through a similar outfit, the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus (IMIG) on their way into the Situationist International. COBRA art was, manifestos notwithstanding, anything but accessible. COBRA, like most of its successors was exoteric in theory, esoteric in practice.

Coincidentally in Paris, Isadore Isou's Lettrists staged another Oedipal rebellion against the hapless Surrealists whose return from foreign exile occasioned universal denunciation from Stalinists, existentialists and everybody else. Isou's Lettrism is, on Home's account, a mishmash of back-to-basics Dada, confusionist social theorizing (St.-Simon, I think, went into this stew-pot) and megalomania. But its breakaway faction the Lettrist International (starring Guy Debord) in 1957 merged with IMIG as the Situationist

International.

The SI seems to be the main subject, and certainly the main target of the book. Home claims to discuss utopians who aim at the integration of all juman activities. Curiously he is hostile to those who articulated this objective (Lettrists, Situationists), hospitable to those who didn't (Fluxus, Mail Art, Neoism). For all his Marxist materialism, he has a way of interpreting avant garde in-fighting "undialectically" as a rumble between good aesthetes and bad politicos. His own antecedents are, as noted, aesthetic, even if he exonerates his own favorite forms of specialized creativity from indictment as "art" by definitional trickery. Mozart is art, he explains, Slaughter and the Dogs are not, because Mozart is high culture, Slaughter is low. Never mind that—if not Slaughter—other Punk bands outsell Mozart. A "materialist" might look to the bottom line, but home exempts his friends in the rock industry from his aspersions by verbal chicanery.

Home asserts he is out to inform as to matters where information has been unavailable and to debunk where *the tradition* has been mystified. To a limited extent, he accomplishes the first purpose. He recounts information which practitioners (and voyeurs) of the tradition would like to possess, even if some of it is gossipy. But as to the second, his critical pretensions are ludicrous. There surely is a mystique about the Situationist International it is well to dispell. But Home only further muddies waters already murky but not deep. The Sits, whose prestige is increasing, probably should be taken down a peg or two—but not the way Home does it.

In what Home mocks as the SI's "heroic" phase (1957–1962), the evil Debordists, though insidiously ascending, were checked and balanced by the COBRA/IMIG artists, who set its agenda. Constant furnished a notion of "unitary urbanism," of art and architecture integrated into urban planning with a view to fostering ambiances. He envisaged a "covered city" with features ranging from street lighting to building interiors mutable at the whim of the inhabitants as they "drift" from place to place. The former is unpleasantly suggestive of Britain's New Towns, as Home notes, and the mall. The latter is common in modern office design whose compartmentalized "work stations" vary with the changing needs of management, not the desires of the workers. It seems to be an iron law of utopianism that a utopia not realized in its totality contributes only to its dystopian details to the reformation of the future. Thus from Edward Bellamy's

Looking Backward we have little more than, to quote a phrase he coined, the *credit card*.

This, though, is the aspect of Situationism which Home has most sympathy for. Within the first few years of the SI Constant and Jorn resigned and many of their tendency were “excluded,” a practice which possesses a profound fascination for Home and other SI critics although Home, like the SI, rarely furnishes enough information to determine if the exclusions were justified. By 1963, in any event, the Debordist faction—by then joined by Raoul Vaneigem—gave a decidedly more political turn to the group. The SI explicitly espoused as its political program council communism as taken from the post-Trotskyist journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. It commenced a close scrutiny of the history and prospects of the worker’s movement. In lieu of the democratization of art, on Home’s view, the Debordists demanded “the realization and suppression of art.”

Call me thick, but I’m not the only one—Tom Vague is another—to see in all this nothing more than differences in phraseology expressing faction-fight. The schools of utopian socialism which furnished detailed blueprints of the good life having fallen out of favor since the 19th century, modern utopianism tends to the general, the metaphorical and the vague. Ivan Chtcheglov, Lettrist and Situationist, prophesied that “everyone will live in his own cathedral.” Vaneigem called upon “masters without slaves” to institute “generalized self-management.” The realization of *any* idea is also its suppression, the realization of any value transvalues it. Better that an aspiration announce its open texture from the beginning. Within the SI the difference between aesthetes and politicos was tactical, and perhaps temperamental. In the early 1960s, the aesthetes were pessimistic about the short-term prospects of working-class revolution, and so proposed for the time being to enlarge their influence where it was being felt, in the art world. The politicos were optimists, pointing to scattered indicia of rebellion (wildcat strikes, juvenile delinquency, picturesque insurgencies like Melelism in the Congo) as portents of what they would soon be predicting, the second proletarian assault against class society. The aesthetes were more reasonable, but the politicos were more prophetic than it was reasonable to be.

That, in the upshot, there was little difference in practice confirms that there had been little in theory. Both tendencies, having

parted ways, engaged in vigorous propaganda by word and, in the tradition of Dadaist-Surrealist scandal, by deed. As Home reports to the English-speaking world for the first time since 1964, ex-Sits from Scandinavia, Germany and Holland reformed as the Second Situationist International. In addition to producing publications whose use of collage and clippings anticipates the fanzines and posters of the marginals milieu of America in the 80s, they decapitated a revered statue—and tourist attraction—the Little Mermaid, in Copenhagen harbor. Their German participants, the *Spur* group, influenced the German radical movement including its terrorist offshoots like the June 2nd Group. In the Netherlands, Constant in cahoots with several Anarchists fomented the Provos, a high point in the 60s ludic anarchic invasion of ordinary life.

Meanwhile, back in Paris, the politicos—Home's “specto-situationists”—flew against the prevailing winds. They never quite abandoned art as a combat zone—Michele Bernstein, Debord's wife, did pieces like “Victory of the Bonnot Gang” and “Victory of the Worker's Councils in Hungary.” Debord made more films which were allegedly plagiarized by Godard. But they were more in their new element elaborating concepts like “the spectacle” (the organization of appearances by and for the system) and “recuperation” (the recovery by the status quo of oppositional tendencies self-sabotaged by their own parochial partiality, like the civil rights movement). They announced their conclusions in two books, Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and Vaneigem's *Treatise on Living for the Use of the Younger Generation* (translated as *The Revolution of Everyday Life*) published in early 1967, just in time to place their stamp on the May–June 1968 general strike. Even earlier, though, was their dress rehearsal at Strasbourg University when their student sympathizers took over the student union and blew the treasury on reprints of Sit diatribes and other unseemly materials.

Home's objection to the Debordists is essentially moral, not political. In the Bretonian tradition the Parisians just didn't play fair, purging their enemies—yesterday's friends—with ruthless rage. Yesterday Gil Wolman might have been Debord's Lettrist comrade, today he is discovered to be mentally defective. Strange how he fooled so astute an observer as Debord for so long. Constant was central to the original Situationist project, but the SI spitefully maligned the movement he inspired, the Provos, without so much as

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mentioning he was a former Situationist. The SI and its Anglophonic publicists (Ken Knabb included) completely concealed the existence of the second, Teuto-Situationist International (the “Nashists” in their heresiarchal argot). Moreover, the Debordists added to their gratuitous hostility hypocrisy. Home reveals that the most successful Situationist artist, Asger Jorn, was the SI’s principal financier both before and long after his resignation in 1964. Both Internationals enjoyed his patronage. Jorn must have been a man of rare generosity considering that the ejected Jorgen Nash, the “Nashist” himself, was Jorn’s younger brother. This and other evidence reveals Debord & Co. in an unflattering, even unsavory light, but Marx was a repugnant character too but what does that have to do with the cogency of his, or their, critique? Even Home knows he needs to go on, if he means to win this game of King-of-the-Mountain, to debunk the *ideas* of the Situationists and belittle their influence.

As an *artiste*, predictably Home would dispute, if he meant to dispute anything, the “specto-situationist” formula, the realization and suppression of art. (“Specto-situationist” is Home’s epithet for the SI after the exodus of the aesthetes, alluding to the notion of the spectacle, about which more anent.) He quotes the Situationist Khayati: “The realization of art—poetry in the Situationist sense—means that one cannot realize oneself in a ‘work,’ but rather realizes oneself period.” The art of living is the only possible realization of art. Home comments:

If art, from a materialist perspective, is a process
which occurs in bourgeois society, there can be no
question of its *realization*. Such an idea is mystical
since it implies not only that art has an essence, but
that as a category it is autonomous of social structure.
[It does?] To undertake its *realization* and *suppression*
is an attempt to save this mental set at the very moment
the category is *abolished*. Art disappears from the
museums *only* to reappear *everywhere!* [Eccentric italics Home’s.]

Here Home, as he has since admitted, reverses Khayati’s contention even as he ascribes to the “spectos,” a position Home defended when the aestheto-Sits upheld it. Besides, a “materialist” should know that out of nothing, nothing comes. Revolution is a process of

selective expropriation, reconstruction and redistribution of elements of the past—a weighing and sifting, a judging—it is detourment literally with a vengeance. Abstract denunciation of any and every aspect of bourgeois society as terminally tainted is not only bad Marxism, it is itself a symptom of bourgeois self-hatred. The point is to pillage the past intelligently. Home claims to be a materialist, but he is no dialectician. For him contradiction is not a creative opportunity but a catalyst for moral indignation. But moralism, like boredom, is always counter-revolutionary. Always.

Home next tackles the SI's core trope, the spectacle, which is (as he quotes Debord) “not a collection of images, but a social relation among people mediated by images.” Debord devotes a book to elaborating upon this concept. Home, in over his head, disapproves of the idea for two paragraphs without using even so inadequate a space to any advantage. Human relations, he huffs, have always been conducted by way of sense-perceptions such as visual images. Debord goes beyond this basic banality to point out that “everything that was directly lived has moved away into representation.” The spectacle is an *interposition* between I and Thou, the *organization* of appearances from without. The distance from symbolically mediated sociability to the spectacle is the distance from gift-exchange to the world market. Debord doesn't denounce mediate apprehension any more than Hegel did, he draws attention to the degeneration of everyday life, as he put it, from being to having to appearing.

Debord, complains Home, treats “the *spectacle* as a generalised, and simultaneously a localized, phenomenon.” Yes, just as Marx treated capital. It is not a concrete universal (in Hegel's phrase), but a multiplication of uniform isolations. Everything is familiar everywhere but we are nowhere at home, every choice is an echo. Home has a sort of psychologically Thatcherist aversion to untidiness, insistence on decency, and incapacity for metaphor.

Strike One: Debord only appraises the movements of the spectacle, he charges, without demonstrating their relations. Debord's is not a formalized deductive analysis, certainly, but social theory never is. Debord's “series of overlapping but hardly regimented descriptions” is in that respect reminiscent of de Tocqueville on America, Weber on Protestantism, Durkheim on religion, Marx on historical materialism, Nietzsche on Christianity, or Home on anything. Strike Two: the Scandinavian aesthetes he lauds “at least had the decency

to place the word ‘Second’ before the name of their SI. What does decency or nomenclature have to do with the validity of the *theory*? Strike Three: the Situationist Vaneigem “talks of communist society as being a world of ‘masters without slaves,’ when it is actually a society in which metaphors of class denomination will be rendered meaningless.” They will be *then*, but Vaneigem, to get from now to then, realizes and suppresses the meaning they have *now*. In a classless human community the separated and mutilated qualities of master and slave reunite and improve as the common properties of the inheritors of our common property. This is perhaps optimistic, arguably untenable, but when Home calls it meaningless, he is announcing nothing but a failure of his own understanding.

Having (to his satisfaction) demolished Situationist theory, Home diminishes its practical influence. For Home, materialism means counting heads, judging by his explanation why the SI could not have had much impact on the May–June 1968 insurrection in France: “When it’s considered that millions of workers and students participated in the May events, such a minuscule grouping cannot be deemed of much significance,” since the SI had only 18 members at the time. Home has no idea how small groups strategically situated play big parts in opportune crises. It is common knowledge that the *enrage* student allies of the Situationists provoked an escalating series of confrontations with university and police authorities which eventuated in a general strike by ten million workers. The Sits themselves threw themselves into an immense project of agitation, circulating hundreds of thousands of texts and posters, and they must have had many sympathizers for their slogans to have been spray-painted all over Paris.

Intellectual influences on political history are tricky to demonstrate. Home, in one paragraph, couldn’t begin to explain the May events. It serves the interests of the right, according to Home, to exaggerate the role of the SI. He mentions no example. Academics who credited the SI with some significance include the hostile political scientist Bernard Brown, the sympathetic participant-observer sociologist Alfred Willener, and the left-leaning historian Richard Gombin. Unlike Home, none of them asked to be accepted on faith; they related something of what was said and done. Several were even there.

For Home it is even more *indecent* for the Situationists to have affected *art* in London than *life* in Paris. The Situationist influence on

Punk, he expounds, was less than that of “futurism, dada, the mother-fuckers, fluxus and mail *art*.” On its faces, this is a category mistake, a confusion of mediate and immediate influences, a jumble of the Situationists, their influences and their influencees. King Mob, for instance, were what the Debordists call “pro-situs,” epigones not admitted to SI membership, including several members of the SI’s English section “excluded” in 1967. They were a *conduit* for Situationist influence into English avant garde circles, not in competition with it, especially considering that the SI and King Mob were both defunct by the time Punk got going. Moreover, ex-King Mob members like Malcolm McLaren and Jamie Reid literally invented Punk, and they did it quite consciously as a rather cynical experiment in Situationist social engineering. Reid created the visual style, McLaren recruited the Sex Pistols out of the art-school milieu from which English Rock bands like the Kinks have always derived. (Who else but art school students would have heard of Fluxus or Mail Art? Not the working-class football hooligans Home romanticises.)

And doesn’t Home miss the point altogether? Punk is first and foremost Rock ‘n’ Roll, physical music for young people, whatever else is read into or out of it. Punk as music is the invention of several hippie bands, mostly from Detroit, in the late 1960s, such as the Stooges and MC5; as it happens, even then it had explicit political and sexual content. All Home has to say about this is that MC5 were affiliated with the White Panther Party, although he gets dates and details wrong. For all the inanity of Rock ‘n’ Roll revolution—John Sinclair of the White Panthers, later a businessman, wrote a book called *Guitar Army* (sic)—how can you possibly write a book about popular “utopian” cultural politics which ignores Yippies, Flower Power and the Woodstock Nation the better to describe several thousand frustrated artists who exchanged their postcards with each other. If this is Utopia then it is indeed *essentially* as it is *etymologically*, nowhere.

According to Home, he can’t do justice to the 60s counter-culture for lack of space. Yet he finds space for the much smaller Punk movement because he was in on it in some small way. He even devotes a short chapter to a one-man art movement, Gustav Metzger’s Auto-Destructive Art, because it prefigures some aspects of Home’s other involvement, Neoism. Scarcity—of space in Home’s book, of newsprint in Nicaragua—implicates political choice, not natural

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fatality. Nobody asked Home to write a book and he is answerable for its pretensions and omissions.

Relative to the available space Mail Art gets detailed and favorable treatment. Even Home admits that most Mail Art is crap. Most Mail Artists refuse the art world of galleries and museums and critics only because they lack the talent for it. Home's attribution of any political dimension to this hobby is farfetched. Its egalitarianism and participatory set-up is implicitly "democratic," and therefore a challenge to the art world which is visibly in terror because some amateurs have joined in a support group.

Home criticized the Situationists for their grandiose delusion that "our ideas are in everyone's heads," for imputing their ideology to everybody from Hungarian workers to Watts rioters. Not-so-curiously, this—is most serious criticism of any cogency—is an argument Home slighted, as well he might, since it applies to him too. He too has done the thinking for others and they have only to appropriate their own readymade consciousness. Thus Home: "As an open network the mail *art* system has enormous possibilities, but for these to be realized the majority of participants have to become fully conscious of the subversive current of which their mailings form an incoherent part." Don't wait up for it to happen. Home ignores the possibility that Mail Art is not a failure for not meeting his expectations, but a success at what it is actually for. Mail Art meets the needs of Mail Artists to assemble in an uncritical, hermetic clique which is homologous with the art establishment but rhetorically opposed to it. It has its own star system, not unlike the Special Olympics. It's a ghetto, a closet, self-satisfied and self-stultified, defensive like a neurosis, not incoherently revolutionary but coherently involutionary.

Like Mail Art, Punk finds favor with Home for practicing what he preaches. It's "democratic" because it's participatory and involved thousands of people—and it's not *art* because it's lowbrow. Are these then the sufficient conditions defining a politically correct utopian current? If so, Grateful Dead fandom is a utopian current, since thousands of Deadheads clap and sing and get high together at Dead shows and Dead music isn't art. It is also clear that the case for imputing "democracy" to the *practice* of Punk is flimsier even than Home's brief for Mail Art. Relative to the other pop music scenes of the mid-1970s, Punk was participatory: the consumers were less passive (they

roughed each other up on the dance floor and threw things at the musicians) and there was considerable upward mobility from the listening proletariat to the performing bourgeoisie. There were careers open to talent precisely because it didn't take talent to play Punk music. But, hype aside, the separation of producer from consumer was not bridged, only narrowed a little, only to widen later when Punk's very notoriety occasioned its incorporation into the spectacle (to say nothing of the record industry). No wonder Home, the ex-Punk is so inordinately anti-Situationist: his own tendency, the expression of his own youthful rebelliousness, Punk is a classic case of what the Sits called "recuperation," the *recovery* of dissident tendencies by the spectacle. Partial, fragmentary oppositions, carrying too much dead weight when they fail to reach escape velocity either fall back into the atmosphere and burn out or else orbit as satellites.

Compare Punk and Mail Art to yet another tendency which, on Home's account, ought to be adjudged utopian: *science fiction fandom*. Since the 1930s, SF fans (*fen*, in their patois) have been numerous, participatory and lowbrow, more so, in fact, than the Punks ever were. In the United States alone, where their activity is greatest, there are tens of thousands of active fen who migrate from one science fiction convention to the next, who share a common literary tradition and vocabulary, who publish innumerable APA's (amateur press associations), i.e. reader-written periodicals. As an instrumentality of participatory *democracy*, the APA puts the Punk rock gig in the shade.

SF fandom even has an explicitly utopian spin very different from what arty types like Home are used to. Fen are often hackers and computer pirates, always sympathetic with those who are, technophiles who debate and dream about the High Frontier, cryonics, robotics, Artificial Intelligence and nanotechnology. Some are interested in utopian currents Home might consider dystopian (as I do) if he stooped to acknowledge their existence, like laissez-faire libertarianism. But one man's meat has always been another man's poison. Where the Lettrist/Situationist Ivan Chtcheglov prophesied that everyone will live in his own cathedral, a self-styled lunatic-fringe libertarian like Mike Hoy wants everyone to live on his own asteroid. Neither is objectively more utopian or more ridiculous than the other. Each has an allure as we progress toward the point where everyone will live in his own dumpster.

Currents enjoying Home's favor, especially if they were graced by his involvement, are judged more leniently than the rest. Surrealism is dismissed as derivative of Berlin Dada, but the kids are alright who got into Punk although Home concedes there was nothing original about Punk and confines himself to quibbling how much was taken from this as opposed to that precursor. He mocked the Situationists when they indoctrinated their followers in the Strasbourg University student union in the art of scandal, but Home minimizes the less consensual programming of the early Punks by the Maclarens clique (succeeded by the didactic Anarchists of CRASS and other leftist pedagogues).

These interested manipulations have never ended. Home's final subject is Class War, a group of Anarchist militants which in 1983–85 achieved some notoriety by inciting a larger number of much younger Punks to engage in several noisy, mildly disruptive demonstrations in London. In Germany, an ex-Situationist helped found Kommune 1, which not only introduced the politicized hippie counter-culture into Germany, but indirectly inspired armed resistance groups like the June 2nd Movement. But Kommune 1 gets two paragraphs, Class War a chapter in Home's text.

In the United States, elderly leftists with media clout (and a taste for teenage girls) gained hegemony over some major Punk scenes, dealing out rewards (like record reviews, venues to play at, radio airplay, inclusion on compilation albums) for the ideologically (and sexually) responsive. Punk cartoonist John Crawford, for instance, has tirelessly exposed the maneuvers in San Francisco of Maximum Rock 'n' Roll and their cronies, Jello Biafra's Dead Kennedys (now defunct). Home does not cover these developments. Then again, does not seem to be aware that there was any punk in North America. In this he manifests not only his parochialism, but his hypocrisy about the puppet-masters of Punk. It doesn't really matter the Punks didn't know they were being used, because "this ignorance didn't prevent kids on the street from understanding Punk as an expression simultaneously of frustration and a desire for change." Thus Home divines the occult meaning of Punk, although this remained unconscious for its *rank and file* [Home's phrase, not mine], just as the SI was the privileged interpreter of strikers in Spain, looters in Watts, and students at Berkeley, all oblivious to the true meaning of their own doings.

Time to return to and resolve the mystery of Stewart Home's edi-

torial eccentricities. Every inclusion, and every up- and down-thumbing is explicable with reference to one or more of the following principles. They rarely, if ever, conflict. Home's choices are arbitrary, but not random. I do not suggest that Home is *conscious* of these determinants of his behavior. Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so we must ground Home's subjective, exoteric whimsy in objective, esoteric reality. Here goes:

1. *The Genealogy of Moralism.* Home writes (he says) as one "engaged" to the tradition, but "married to the mob" is more like it. He is only interested in avant garde tendencies that turn up in his family tree (including those, like the Situationists, who represent the black sheep in the family). Thus Futurism or Dada—Granddada, as it were—figures in the pedigree of everyone Home deals with, including Surrealism, which he views as a skeleton in the family closet, the retarded uncle to the manor born whose death is impatiently awaited so his title can pass to a brother or nephew like Lettrism or COBRA. Although the bloodline is sometimes dubious, one thing Home unfailingly does with the limited space available (whether limited by his patience, his knowledge or his publisher, he doesn't say) is try to establish these ties. To the extent he succeeds he has rendered a small service to the tradition and its small but growing audience. But at a price.

Greens, Feminists, SFen, Discordians, New Agers, Libertarians, Hippies and traditional Anarchists owe little or nothing to Futurism or Dada, although they all have some claim to be utopian currents. All apparent exceptions prove the rule. Of the two predominantly Anarchist movements mentioned, the Provos had a COBRA and Situationist filiation through Constant; and Class War, as noted, wielded Punk totems to recruit the youth. Kommune 1 in Germany and the Motherfuckers in New York City were part of Hippie culture, but the former evolved from a Dada group and the latter was founded by a would-be SI member. The White Panthers get grudging mention because their band, MC5, married into the family, so to speak, by inventing Punk music, and their siblings the Yippies count as affines. I suspect the "tradition" Home traces played a greater part in the 60s counter-culture than most people, including Home, suspect. Fluxus, an art movement Home does recount, to his evident dismay increas-

ingly assimilated into the Hippie movement. Yoko Ono was a Fluxus artist. The Fugs, “the world’s oldest Rock ‘n’ Roll band,” wrote funny, dirty and erudite songs which reflect familiarity with everything from William Blake to Anarchism; they may well have consciously drawn on the tradition. Besides, were Home to publish a book on modern counter-cultural currents which failed to mention the Yippies he would be dismissed as an ignoramus. He might hope to get away with ignoring Discordians and Anarcho-Capitalists. To sum up, what Home writes is not so much history as heraldry.

2. *Rule, Britannia*. Stewart Home is Eurocentric and, when circumstances permit, Anglocentric. Movements involving hundreds in England count for more than movements involving hundreds of thousands in the United States. The closer they get to Home in time (1975 onwards) and space (London) the better they look. Consider the disparate treatment of Hippies and Punks. In the 60s Americans created a vast Hippie counter-culture imitated in England, Germany and elsewhere. Home slights it. In the 70s the English—at once continuing the Hippie tradition and rebelling against it—created a much more modest Punk subculture imitated in America and elsewhere. Home treats it in (for him) great detail. Further confirming his chauvinism, he entirely ignores the quantitative expansion of Punk to the States and to other countries after its vitality in the motherland waned. But by 1979 or so, when Home considers English Punk to be finished, American Punk was going into high gear in various cities such as San Francisco, which I mention only because I witnessed that personally. All Punk sporadically, and early American Punk especially had a utopian political dimension. Indeed, in San Francisco, bands like Negative Trend and then Flipper were directly influenced by “the tradition” in the form of pro-Situationism; several pro-Situ groups were active in the Bay Area in the 1970s, unmentioned by Home although several of their texts surface in his bibliography. These Punk and Situationist influences have since blended with Anarchism in the Bay Area and elsewhere, but of this turn of events, Home has nothing to say.

I don’t fault Home for his disregard (or, more likely, his ignorance) of Punk as a political and cultural force in the 1980s in Yugoslavia, Greece, Mexico, Finland and possibly Estonia. To place reasonable limits on a history is, of course, reasonable. But that can’t explain why North American Punk doesn’t exist for him whereas

North American Neoist “Apartment Festivals” (i.e. parties glorified as art happenings) merit his condescension. Home ignores offshore Punks for the same reason he notices, however snottily, North American Neoists. The Canadian and American Neoists have repeatedly trekked to London. They may not be English but they have paid homage to the Motherland by their pilgrimage thereto. To be, is to be perceived by Stewart Home. If a tendency impinges on England, Home gives it a bit of publicity.

On the other hand, Home doesn’t—can’t—deal with counter-cultural currents however important that don’t activate his nationalism. I’ve mentioned SF fandom and related currents. There are more important examples. Consider, for instance, the recent American tradition of *seriously bogus religions*. In Britain, nobody takes religion seriously except recent Moslem immigrants. The Church of England is a social club. There, Wesleyan fanaticism has long since simmered down but in the USA, Protestant nut-cults not only flourish but have alarming political influence. In the South, in rural areas and in prosperous conservative areas like Orange County, evangelical fundamentalism casts a shadow over all other culture and thought, if any. For every reactionary there is an unequal and opposite reactionary. Americans by turns oppressed and amused by conventional religion have rolled their own with varying admixtures of satire and spirituality.

Unquestionably utopian for instance is the Neo-American Church founded by Art Kleps in the mid-1960s and organized around the sacramental consumption of LSD. Claiming up to 6000 members, the Church had a psuedo-hierarchy of Boo Hoos, Toads, Primates, Metropolitans and Patriarchs, scriptures (*The Boo Hoo Bible*), usually drug-related rituals and a visionary demand to remake the world into a “veritable fairyland” where a bad trip would be environmentally impossible. It litigated unsuccessfully to establish its constitutional right, as a religion, to employ LSD as the Native American Church used peyote; the hostile judge was (as Kleps tagged him) “Gerhard Cardinal Gesell,” who later presided over the Oliver North trial. It is possible the Neo-American Church was influenced by “the tradition” in the form of the College of ‘Pataphysics, but a more obvious influence, acknowledged by Kleps, was the occasionally humorous a-logic of Zen Buddhism, perhaps mediated by Beats like Alan Watts.

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Arising about the same time in a few cities like New York and Baltimore was the Moorish Orthodox Church, which drew inspiration from Noble Drew Ali, America's original Black Muslim (apparently killed by Chicago police while in custody) and somewhere between a heresy and a parody of Islam. Its 60s journal the *Moorish Science Monitor* was recently revived, lapsed, and now returns under editor Metzger. Also fructifying in the 60s when Stewart Home was losing naval battles to the rubber duckies in his bathtub was the Discordian or Erisian movement. This absurdist creed is *democratic* in Home's sense in that it was the evolving collective creation (through the mails, like Mail Art) of an ethos and mythos revolving eccentrically around Eris, the goddess of discord who was remotely responsible for the Trojan War. It teaches that God is a crazy women. Its essence is distilled in the *Principia Discordia* by "Malaclypse the Younger" (currently a San Francisco computer consultant) and "Omar Khayyam Ravenhurst" (Kerry Wendell Thornley). Some Discordians went on to become Libertarians. Like the Boo Hoo's, the Discordians took something from Beatnick Zen—but also added to it, for instance, the book *Zen Without Zen Masters* by Camden Benares. Discordians were often the lunatic fringe of science fiction fandom. Some of them are still around and they've influenced movements even Home recognizes, like Neoism, SubGenius and perhaps Mail Art. The popular fantasy trilogy *Illuminatus!* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, recently reissued, is by Discordians and based on its mythos.

Finally there is the only bogus Church Home grudgingly recognizes, in a backhanded way—with a one-page *textual footnote*—the Church of the SubGenius. Unlike the Boo Hoo's and the Discordians—but much like a precursor, also Texas-based, the Church of the Coincidental Metaphor radio project of the early 1970s—SubGenius inverts evangelism (and televangelism) directly. Every dues-paying member is a "Reverend," and active participants include artists and musicians ("Doktors"), ersatz preachers and other hustlers ("Popes"), and impractical extremist visionaries ("Saints") (I was a Saint myself). "Revivals" include ranting preachers, "anti-music" (much like the post-punk "industrial music" genre pioneered by Mail Artist Genesis P-Orridge and his former band Throbbing Gristle) and, behind the scenes, much drug use. SubGenius has a few hundred members although it claims several times that many serious-

ly and millions jokingly.

Religion, America, humor, possibly drugs—what could bring our avant garde Thatcherist to notice what is, when all is said and done, an ambitious ploy by artist Douglass St. Clair Smith (“Rev. Ivan Stang”) to talk his way into the big time, to make some money off his madness? Only this. Home is, or was, a Neoist. The most intense and extreme of North American Neoists, Michael Tolson (alias tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE) has visited London and carried out several japes there. Home concludes:

As well as participation in the Krononauts, Neoists and Church of the SubGenius, tENTATIVELY simultaneously pursued his own individual interests as a “mad scientist/d composer/sound thinker/t ho ught collector/as been & not an artist.” Without these other *diversions*, it seems unlikely that someone as *hip* as tENTATIVELY could sustain an interest in the *church*.

Actually, I can report that tENT, like several of the more creative and independent intervenors in the Church (“Other Mutants,” as antecedent or parallel non-Euclidians are labeled) is tired of it, as I am. But every tendency Home discusses is spent, according to him. Be that as it may, or as it may dismay, SubGenius occasionally rallied an impressive array of utopian fanatics both in and out of the tradition. Insofar as SubGenius was an insolent rejoinder to the moronic fundamentalism fostered by Reagan in the 80s, fighting fire with fire, it deserves more respect that it gets from Home who lacks, as always, historical context. He has no idea what we were up against, he has no acquaintance with American conditions.

3. Sex, Drugs & Rock 'n' Roll. This is a clumsy catch-all for the emotive dimension of utopianism which Home shuns. It largely overlaps with the previous points not so much in content (“sense”) as in coverage (“reference”), to borrow Frege’s categories. Stewart Home is *uptight*. For polemic purposes Home, like Karl Marx and Guy Debord before him sometimes manage a mordant moment, a spasm of sarcasm. In *Smile*, home’s talent for parody finds an outlet, but not in this book, which is overall serious, all-too-serious.

The rebellion of the 60s sought to expand the mind and enjoy the body. Sexual freedom and drug experimentation distinguish most of the currents Home neglects, including Beatniks, Hippies and Boo-

Hoo's. Although there was a puritanical Punk counter-revolution, "straight-edge," in the AIDS 80s, Punk also accommodates these activities. Several overdosed Punk notables (Darby Crash, Will Shatter) have joined Jim and Jimi and Janis in Rock 'n' Roll heaven. But if sex and drugs figured in early English Punk, the only brand Home recognizes, sex also took place among Discordians, SFen, SubGenii and Neoists. Implicitly Home condemns such hedonic excess; better he should acknowledge what went down and why he doesn't like it. A tradition which acknowledges with pride such ancestors as de Sade and Baudelaire and Rimbaud and Jarry can't be de-sexed and just-said-no to without distortion.

How fares the tradition today? Much better than you'd think from reading Home, who signs off after consigning Class War to oblivion in 1985. For there has been, in North America (with some transcontinental input) something of an ingathering of the exiles, a cross-pollination of utopian tendencies since the early 1980s. Its medium is the mail, and Mail Art is one of its sources. I've called it the marginals milieu and the "marginals" tag has caught on. Briefly, parts or all of some of the utopian currents—Punk, Mail Art, SFen (very partially), Discordians, Libertarians (very partially), Anarchists (partly), SubGenii, free-lance absurdists like myself and assorted unclassifiables have linked up. The fanzine is perhaps the crucial link, augmented by the activities of posterists like myself and a massive multi-party correspondence. The reader-written APA, borrowed from SFen, has been adapted to political and mixed uses. That's where Mail Art now often appears. The photocopy machine and the cheap tabloid are our major means of expression. The audially inclined do music and even letters on cassettes and circulate them by mail. Technophiles and technophobes frolic together.

Referring to his own London Punk coming-of-age, Home relates: "A Do-It-Yourself ethic prevailed, with independent record labels issuing releases by *unknown* bands, a vast proliferation of the independent press in the form of punk fanzines (usually xeroxed in editions of a few hundred), and almost every punk making *designer* alterations to their [sic] clothes in the form of rips and tears." This is, rips and tears aside, an accurate description of just part of the marginals milieu of the 1990s. Mike Gunderloy, publisher of the review compendium Factsheet Five, hazards the guess there are five to ten thousand "zines" being published in the United States alone at

any given time, half of which will be defunct in a year. (Which is not a bad thing. In the tradition, the highest achievements are often topical, site-specific and fleeting. The best Punk zines enlarged their scope, often into politics (usually Anarchism) but also into humor (like *Sick Teen* and *Perv*, which also got into sports!).

Punk, SF, Anarchism, SubGenius, Mail Art, Pro-Situationism—every scene harbors those with a vested interest in its institutionalization, border guards who fear the unknown. They mistake conformity for community. They hold back from the “cross-currents and cross-pollination” (to quote Mike Gunderloy) of the marginals milieu, the opportunity for every scene to give and take and to gain without losing. For the best creative talents, it is typical to enlarge their repertoire of forms while abandoning exhausted ones. Ed Lawrence was first a poet, then a polemicist, later also a posterist. Al Ackerman gave up SF authorship for the genre’s more free-wheeling fandom, moved on to become a major Mail Artist, helped invent Neoism and now churns out cartoons and hilarious tall tales. In less than three years, the late Gerry Reith produced essays, stories, poems and posters. If you’re aiming for “the integration of all human activity,” so are many of the marginals.

If many of those most conservative of *fen*—Science Fiction—hold themselves aloof, one literary faction, the Cyberpunks, has forged close ties to the marginals milieu. John Shirley plays in a punk band. Bruce Sterling pseudonymously produced the garage gonzo *Cheap Truth* zine with the help of Lewis Shiner, a columnist for the prominent punkzine *Forced Exposure*. Sterling in *Islands in the Net* and Shiner in *Slam* draw directly on my anti-work writings. Shirley and Shiner are also SubGenii. The recent *Semiotext(e)* science fiction issue was a (not very successful) attempt to cross-breed science fiction with fanzine culture. It is impossible to trace all the connections between SF and the tradition (Lisa Goldstein, for example, has written a science fiction novel about the Surrealists), but virtually all the marginals I know of have read SF at some point. Home betrays no awareness of any of this.

I heartily agree with one of Home’s conclusions, “it is unfortunate that many samizdat organizations did not call it a day long before their final disintegration.” SubGenius, for instance, shot itself in the foot (gland), fatally it may be, at “Boston Bobalon” in 1987. The local SubGenius *hierarchy* under the alcoholic Ahmed Fishmonger

had the cops eject tENTATIVELY, a cONVENIENCE without even knowing who he was. Later Sacred Scribe Ivan Stang threatened the cartoon magazine *Badger* claiming copyright violation for use of the Dobbthead trademark he'd plagiarized himself. He also claimed, falsely, that his corporate publisher Simon & Schuster owned a half-interest in the image. Cops, copyrights, careerism, cassette-bombs—SubGenius is no part of the tradition any more.

With Home's other conclusions I cannot agree. Samizdat, in Home's derivative use of the word, connotes an inclination toward self-publishing, indeed, but not, as he goes on to add, a political commitment to "anti-bolshevik communism." If there is a usual samizdat politics common to today's Punks, Neoists, or even SubGenii and Deadheads, it is Anarchism, often Situationist-influenced. Councilists and other left Marxists are few, outnumbered perhaps even by the Libertarians, and suffer from association with notoriously unsavory ideologues such as *Processed World*, the San Francisco quarterly with a history of cooperation with the police. "As a tradition," contrary to Home, samizdat is not "by necessity collective" in its goals or methods. Many marginal posterists and zine publishers and just plain letter writers are voices howling in the wilderness of their own geographical and personal isolation. Most Mail Artists would be as surprised to learn they are communists as most Punks would be to find out their aim is the integration of all human activity. Home's book is not a history, but a hijacking of the tradition for his own ends.

Karl Kraus once wrote an 800 page play to be performed, he explained, in an ampitheatre on Mars. My very long review of a very short book was meant to be published in a fanzine on Jupiter. Home's little book is so dense with specious assertions he might well hope for critics to fail to flag most of them. Disclaimers of objectivity and comprehensiveness are ingenuous and beside the point. Home, by his selection and treatment of topics, imparts a form to them and constitutes the heavily editorializing information as a representation of what must be an integral tradition since it has a name and is made to appear as at some level a unity. This is less important for some of the dubious interlopers *let in* than for the many utopian currents *left out*, resulting in the falsification through miscontextualization even of those currents properly present. "Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle," as Thomas Jefferson wrote regarding the press.

Disclaimers only disarm readers more than usually in need of the weapons of criticism. I find that the more I know about anything, the more I find fault with what Home has to say about it. Thus I distrust what he says when he seems to know more than I do, since he always seems to but, so far as my knowledge extends, never does. The foreseeable audience for this book, to which in fact it is expressly addressed—those currently engaged in *the tradition*—is for the most part more enthusiastic than informed about the tradition, or rather, the exciting news there is a tradition of unexpected antecedence and breadth they are a part of. They (mis)take Home's snide cynicism for the same kind of put-down games they play with the others in their sector, Punks let's say, unaware of the higher-order meta-cynicism animating Home's manipulation-by-misrepresentation. The joke is on them too. If, as is not unlikely, they find facts and interpretations of their *scene* they know to be wrong they are nonetheless likely to excuse that as an isolated mistake since overall the picture seems plausible.

I may not be any smarter than this hypothetical Home reader, but I have been at it so much longer that my exposure to the currents is, if uneven, at least extensive, nor was there ever a current (Anarchism, Surrealism, Punk, SubGenius) which was my only predominant commitment. I am far from the only person capable of venturing extensive criticisms of Home, however, in six years, I am the only one who has. This is not the first time I have found myself in this position...

Though first in the field, Home's is no longer the only book to chronicle major elements of the tradition: now there is *Lipstick Traces* by Greil Marcus. It is a measure of his alarm that Stewart Home has published no less than three hostile reviews of the Marcus book, none of which mention that Home is the author of a competing product. I do not intend to double the length of this Jovian, if not jovial review by indicting the breathless boosterism and recursive redundancy—I am told this is the received rock-critic style—of the Marcus book, which indeed I was unable to finish. Certainly its thesis that *the tradition* culminated with the Sex Pistols, its epiphany being “Anarchy in the U.K.” is ridiculous—but not pernicious. Marcus has augmented the information known to (or, Home being what he is, revealed by) the author of *The Assault On Culture*, but the tradition is not a funnel, it is rhizomatic, it does not culminate in anything, it differentiates, it insinuates, here and there it dissipates,

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elsewhere it permeates, and every so often, when somebody like Stewart Home comes along, it even pontificates. At its best it celebrates. And the beat goes on.

Afterword

By Dr. Al Ackerman

As a rule, afterwords are notoriously dull and redundant. To call them, as Dryden did, “superfluous waste matter existing solely to prolong the reader’s suffering and lassitude,” probably describes them best, for really they serve no useful function. An exception to this rule is the afterword I wrote—it must be over twenty years ago, now—for Sir Henry Mort-Mirken, the famed British editor and anthologist. Sir Henry, as it happened at the time, was in the process of assembling a volume of bird lore (Victorian bird stories, bird poems and the like) under the title of *Twitterings*. On the day he invited me to meet with him in his office at the London publishing firm of Chapman-Carruthers, he spoke bluntly as was his habit, and told me that he needed “an afterword written to go with this bloody bird book that the firm is bringing out,” adding that I would have to have the piece finished and on his desk by “no later than Tuesday of next week.” Tuesday of next week, he explained, was the printer’s deadline.

“Well?” He fixed me with a flashing Yorkshire eye. “That gives you less than a week to come up with something. Think you can do it?”

“Consider it done,” I said confidently.

Of course, the thing that most attracted me to the assignment was Sir Henry’s policy of paying his authors in advance. I walked out of his office that afternoon with a cheque for seventeen pounds in my hand and a strong resolve in my heart. I checked into the Stoke-Newington Arms, a creaking residence hotel on Belgrave Road, and set straight to work. Working an average of twenty hours a day I was able to make enormous headway with my chemical experiments, which were focused on the creation of an all-purpose “miracle elixir” of salvarsan, benzoin-peroxide and rum, the great scientific endeavor to which, in those days, I was dedicating my life.

Consequently there followed a four or five day period that remains

a virtual blank as far as any rational memory goes.

At some point, the calendar wavered and shimmied in front of my eyes. I can still remember how the sight of it stirred some vague recollection in my mind... something to do with Sir Henry... something about a book contract...

"Let's see," I mumbled thickly, sitting up among the welter of bottles, beakers, and sundry scientific apparatus that littered the floor of my hotel room. "H-have to have something or other written for good ol' Sir Henry by, by, by... no later than—Tuesday?...Tuesday... And that's—What's today?"

My mind wouldn't focus. Somehow I managed to put through a shaky call to the desk downstairs. It took a long time but once he understood what I was trying to ask, the room clerk informed me in frosty tones that the day was indeed Tuesday. To be precise, it was nine-thirty A.M., Tuesday morning.

And he added, pointedly, "I do hope there won't be any more singing and shouting and sobbing from your room today, sir. We've already received quite enough complaints as it is..."

"G-got to write that piece for Sir Henry," I mumbled to myself, letting the telephone receiver drop to the floor, where it broke something. "Got to... say—what the hell was that piece s'posed to be about, anyway?"

In a fog I stumbled around the room, finally found my typewriter under the mattress. Gradually, after much effort, as though pulling together fragments of something I had heard spoken long ago in a dream, I succeeded in recalling Sir Henry's words, or, so I thought. Laughing triumphantly I began to pound the keys.

Many scare-stories have been circulated about dipsomaniac writers and the terrible literary abortions they have brought forth by trying to write "while under the influence." Sinclair Lewis, Hemingway, poor Scott Fitzgerald, Tolstoy... the list is long and calamitous. Perhaps I am not the most competent judge, but I continue to believe that all those writers were adversely affected not so much because they *drank*, per se; rather, they were adversely affected because they drank the *wrong stuff*.

I, on the other hand, had just spent four or five days imbibing "the miracle elixir of the ages"—for such was my view of the mixture I had created by combining salvarsen, benzoin-peroxide and Ron Bacardi—and therefore it stood to reason that anything I wrote would receive

the benefits of my magic nostrum, the way a piece of fruit, say, is irritated and invigorated by the life-giving rays of the sun.

In a word, I wrote skillfully and well, hacking out my piece for Sir Henry in record time. The results, as I saw them through my unfocused eyes, were good. Brilliant, in fact. The opening paragraph alone seemed to me nothing short of a masterwork:

“Certain idiots” (I had written) “say that outright extinction or superstitious reincarnation are the only two avenues held open to us when we die. But I’m here to tell you that such is not my vision of the next world. On the contrary, it is my very firmly held belief—and I am sure that many philosophers and theologians will concur with me on this—it is my belief that after we ‘pass over’ we go straight to Sylvia’s, that fashionable brothel in downtown Philadelphia, where I used to spend so many of my winters. Sylvia’s is heaven, pure and simple. One of the girls upstairs at Sylvia’s is a little Danish belle named Hulga who can do the most amazing things you ever saw with a six foot length of wet rawhide...”

On and on my piece ran—scintillating and insightful, by turns.

Elated, my masterpiece folded and tucked safely away in my pocket, I hailed a cab in front of the hotel and started across town to Sir Henry’s office, still exalting in my creation—exalting and exalting. I knew that at once he laid eyes on what I had written, Sir Henry would find himself stunned, dazzled, bowled over, be so profoundly moved that he would find himself at a loss for words. How could he not be?

Well, in a sense, I wasn’t far wrong.

He greeted me in his office, leaning forward across his desk like a veritable bulldog, impatient and bristling. “Finally! High time you were showing up. High time. You certainly waited till the last second, I must say. We go to the printers at four, and here it is, nearly three. All right, all right, don’t bother making excuses, just hand the bloody thing here and let me read it.” He ripped the pages out of my hands and adjusted his heavy tortoise-shell bifocals. “Now, let’s see what we have here: ‘Certain idiots say that outright extinction or superstitious reincarnation are the only two avenues held open to us when we die—’”

He continued to read aloud in this vein for several more paragraphs, spasmodically a small muscle began to twitch in his left cheek. Suddenly apoplectic, he jerked back in his chair.

His eyes bulged out at me incredulously.

"Y-you bloody ass," he whispered. "You incompetent simpering moron. Do you know what you've given me here?"

"A masterpiece?"

Sir Henry laughed sharply, though actually it was more like a bark than a laugh. "A masterpiece? A masterpiece, did you say? Oh, no. No, indeed. Far from it. I asked you to write an *afterword*, and here—here you've gone and written all this great bloody drivel about—about—about some sort of *afterworld!*"

"I see," I said weakly, as the dim sinking realization broke slowly over me that of course he must be right. Obviously, my memory had played false with me back at the hotel. Very much so. And the result had been this embarrassing and inexcusable mix-up between "*afterword*" and "*afterworld*."

"Does this"—I swallowed—"Does this mean you won't be using my piece?"

Sir Henry was standing now. He gazed at me for a long moment. Then, using just his thumb and forefinger, the way you might pick something dead up by its tail, he slowly lifted my typescript and shook it at me. "Oh, I'm going to use it all right... Yes, I'm going to use it—never fear—I'm going to use it in the only bloody way it was ever meant to be used!"

So saying, he started around his desk toward a corner of his office. Bathed in dull, sodden confusion, I watched him uncomprehendingly... There was a bird cage standing in the corner. A commodious, elaborate, wrought-iron Edwardian contrivance, with the office pet, a parakeet—or "budgie," as the British like to call them—swinging and twittering on its perch inside.

Sir Henry opened the door of the cage, took my typescript and began to distribute it carefully, one page at a time. He stood there for a long time, his hands moving inside the cage, smoothing and arranging the sheets, and muttering and mumbling to himself:

"Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes... Yes—I'll use it. Here, you can see for yourself how I'm using it; why it's really quite perfect this way. Serves a genuine function now, so to speak. See? The bird seems to be making splendid use of it already—"

So that was how, in the end, when all was said and done, my "*afterword*" (or "*afterworld*") wound up being used to line the bottom of a bird cage!

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Fortunately, before I could fall to brooding overmuch on this unhappy turn of events, the after-effects of my "magic elixir" brought on a prolonged attack of d.t.'s and I had to be carried out of Sir Henry's office and down the stairs, and bundled into an ambulance. Then on to Bedlam Hospital where I was committed.

MORAL: Afterwords are for the birds.

Beneath the Underground is the first in-depth exploration, from within, of the rapidly growing cultural phenomenon which received its name from author Bob Black: the "marginals milieu." You could also call it the do-it-yourself subculture. It consists of the perhaps 20,000 self-publishers of micro-circulation "zines" and other self-produced art, music, pamphlets, and posters.

Bob Black has been a major figure in this subculture since the late 1970s. His previous books, *The Abolition of Work and Other Essays* (1986) and *Friendly Fire* (1981), collect some of his contributions to the milieu. In this book, he illuminates the zine milieu itself.

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"[Black] outwrites every other political essayist alive... fastest pun in the West. Let 'em go for their writin' irons and ol' Bob Black just aerates the sons-abitches."

— Hakim Bey

"Bob Black is an anarchist satirist, as corrosive and subversive as the breed gets... Provocative, visionary humor of Twainian, Biercian ferocity and zest."

— Booklist



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