

LOOKOUT!

September 1986

Number 21

Whatever Happened to the Psychedelic Revolution?

LSD

IN THE EIGHTIES

He was big for his age, and his face looked a little older than it should have, but he was only 15 ("almost 16," was the way he put it, of course). He and his 7 year-old brother sat across from me on the northbound bus out of San Francisco; like so many kids, they were spending their summer being shuttled back and forth between divorced parents. He was working on a drawing that caught my eye. At its center was an enormous peace symbol, and the rest of the page was covered with elaborate curlicues reminiscent of the psychedelic lettering of 60s rock posters. If you looked closely, you could see words hidden within the design, words like "peace" and "love", and in larger, but more subtly drawn letters, "LSD".

The subject naturally came up when we got to talking; he told me that he had been taking LSD since he had been in second grade, and that there were only a handful of kids at his high school who hadn't tried the drug at least once. I thought back to the days when LSD-crazed hippies were believed to be threatening the very stability of the American way of life, at a time when only a tiny minority of college students and hipsters had actually ever even seen the stuff. Even allowing for massive exaggeration on the part of my youthful

informant, it would seem that LSD use is more widespread than ever (media reports and police statistics also support that conclusion). But noticeably missing is the massive inter-generational and intra-societal conflict that accompanied the first big wave of psychedelic experimentation.

It was 20 years ago that California became the first state to ban the use of LSD, a ban which accomplished little beyond making millionaires out of a number of long-haired chemists and capitalists. The drug could be manufactured in a moderately well-equipped basement or kitchen lab, and, in its raw form, 100,000 or more doses could be comfortably concealed in a smuggler's breast pocket; it shouldn't be surprising, then, that authorities found stopping its spread to be an insurmountable task. Changing fashions in drug use probably did more to limit LSD consumption than did the combined efforts of the nation's narcotics agents; the preening self-consciousness of the 1970s disco generation was more conducive to the quick, noncommittal highs of cocaine, alcohol, or quaaludes than the marathon soul-searching and assumption challenging of a day-long LSD experience.

(continued on page 2)

One way manufacturers and dealers responded to the new market conditions was to produce notably weaker doses -- some even called it "disco acid" -- that could be used recreationally, often in conjunction with one or more other drugs. This was in sharp contrast to the days when hippies would consider ingesting LSD to be principally a mystical or spiritual observance. Testimonials to the transformative powers of psychedelic drugs (also including mescaline, peyote, psilocybin, and, to a limited extent, marijuana) were abundant during the 60s; such rhetoric greatly diminished during the 1970s.

Yet even discounting the florid excesses of a garrulous pitchman like Timothy Leary (who, minus the advent of the psychedelic age, might well have ended up a politician or an archbishop), there's no denying that LSD's initial impact on a hitherto complacent American psyche was not unlike that of a metaphysical neutron bomb. The fundamental structures of consciousness were left (relatively) unscathed, but previously ingrained ideas, prejudices, and habits were instantaneously vaporized. In most cases they eventually returned, but never with the degree of certainty that so often strait-jackets the mental processes.

A word about how LSD works: its introduction into the blood stream inhibits, for a brief time, the brain's production of an enzyme called serotonin, whose function in human awareness is roughly equivalent to the blinders worn by a pack horse. The amount of information transmitted by the senses is far greater than the brain can comfortably process while still performing its mundane functions; if you routinely had to consider the ultimate ramifications of your most minute actions, you could very easily spend the rest of your life wondering whether or not it was safe to open your eyes.

LSD is classified as an hallucinogen, and hallucinations are probably the phenomenon most closely associated with the drug in the public mind. But the bizarre waves of color and sounds of strange or unknown origin are ultimately a fairly insignificant side-effect (except in the uncommon but not unknown cases where the resulting disorientation causes someone to wander in front of a speeding freight train). Musicians who work with electronic amplification should be able to understand the nature of this sensory overload and distortion; it is roughly analogous to a guitar or vocal amplifier receiving more input than it can process, causing it to produce uncontrollable screeches and rumbles that make the playing of most music difficult or impossible.

But just as musicians can learn to play on the edge of feedback, even incorporating a certain amount of it into their music, the human brain can adapt to the flood of new perceptions unleashed by LSD. Experienced trippers, especially those taking larger than normal doses (LSD is not toxic *per se*, and people have been known to consume quantities 1000 or more times greater than those contained in street acid), often report having no hallucinations at all; their psychedelic experience consists instead of the sort of untrammelled mental reflection beloved of philosophers, mystics, and visionaries. Some have compared it to examining the workings of the mind with the aid of an almost blindingly illuminated (or illuminating) microscope.

The results, obviously, can be terrifying or liberating; often both. Just as the brain finds it necessary to suppress most of its sensory input in order to perform routine tasks, so the mind must store beneath its surface the vast majority of thoughts, impulses, and memories to avoid a state of random confusion barely distinguishable from clinical insanity. It was once thought, in fact, that LSD might be useful in treating, or at least better understanding schizophrenia because its effects so closely mimicked the symptoms of that disease. But LSD experimentation did not lend itself to the carefully controlled conditions required by the science lab -- among other things, the line between researchers and subjects became impossibly blurred, as was the case with Leary and his partner Richard Alpert -- and all formal research ceased when the drug was made illegal.

But the real experiment was just beginning; thanks to reams of free publicity from both the established and the underground media and the tireless efforts of a new generation of drug dealers, the demand for and the supply of LSD grew geometrically, another testimonial to the American system of free enterprise. But even then there were rumors, rumors which over the years have steadily gained in substance, that the CIA was deeply involved in the LSD trade, was perhaps even one of the nation's major suppliers. It is well documented, of course, that the CIA engaged in extensive experiments with the drug,

many conducted on unwitting and/or unwilling subjects, and that the spy agency had stockpiled in excess of 20 million doses of LSD for reasons that were never made clear.

Musician Frank Zappa, whose fractured melodies and sardonic lyrics served as the sound track for many an LSD trip in those days, told anyone who would listen that in his opinion places like San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury and New York's East Village were CIA experiments in mind control directed at entire communities; in the liner notes to one of his early albums, he advised listeners to read Franz Kafka's *In The Penal Colony* to better understand what was happening to them. But no one likes a party pooper, and people went on listening to Frank Zappa records and taking LSD. It's doubtful whether very many read *In The Penal Colony*; a lengthy attention span not being one of the typical characteristics of the LSD experience.

But one can't help asking: if the CIA was at least in part responsible for LSD explosion, why? What could an organization devoted to the manipulation of political power hope to gain from introducing an entire population to a drug that made the whole concept of political power seem at once superfluous and onerous? For if LSD turned a part of the 60s generation into a loincloth-clad army of Hindu swamis and hollow-eyed zombies, to paraphrase one cynical commentator, it also produced a whole new generation of revolutionaries whose motivations were more visceral than ideological, and whose methods made obsolete all previously existing counter-insurgency manuals.

I myself had thought of LSD as more conducive to a spiritual or contemplative state until one day when, as one of the periodic conflicts between Berkeley police and Telegraph Avenue street people was flaring up, a young man burst into the Caffe Mediterraneo and shouted, "Riot time! Let's drop some sunshine and throw some bricks!" ("sunshine" referred to Orange Sunshine, an extremely potent LSD analog that some users claimed differed from LSD in that once you had taken it you could never go back to being "normal"). I later learned that many of the most uncompromising radicals, the Weatherman faction of SDS, for example, considered LSD not only as an essential adjunct to their own activities, but as a powerful weapon in their revolutionary arsenal. The widely disseminated threats to dose the city of Chicago's water supply with LSD in advance of the 1968 Democratic convention had no foundation in reality (the drug would break down too quickly to have any effect) but they reflected a deeply held belief that LSD in and of itself could instantly transform an unaware and uncaring person into a passionately committed revolutionary.

This belief persisted well into the 1970s, despite massive evidence to the contrary. A dispassionate observer could easily see that LSD users encompassed nearly as broad a spectrum of human behavior as the population at large. Ironically, it was Timothy Leary himself who sounded one of the most resounding death knells for the concept of LSD as an agent of social change when he did a quick flip-flop from mystic to advocate of armed revolution to police informer.

But the fact remains that many LSD users did have their view of themselves, the world they lived in, and the way they treated their fellow human beings radically altered by their experience with the drug. I spoke with a number of current and former users while preparing this article, and none of them (except for one man who had been given the drug against his will) expressed regret for having taken LSD, although many said they had no intention of taking it again. One veteran of the original Sandoz acid of the mid-60s hasn't used the drug in 20 years and has no plans to, but still offers a fairly glowing recommendation of its powers: "With a pure and correct dose, it can promote growth of new nerves; at least wake them up from a deep sleep. Altruism eternal!!" A 17 year old was very enthusiastic about LSD until he "met a serious acid-head (as in every day, almost every night, he does it) and that was like a lesson in what acid can do to you. Ick! On the other hand, I still believe in its value and a person is really missing out if he doesn't try it."

Another "serious acid-head," who hasn't taken LSD for five years now, but did so very heavily for 15 years ("about 1000 times," he estimated), was more adamant: "I find it incredible that any person of my generation (early 40s) who isn't essentially brain dead would have passed up an opportunity to share in one of the most

(continued on page 4)

EARTH TO MENDOCINO

Wayne Newton to Appear at Boomer's? LAYTONVILLE TO BECOME MAJOR NORTH COAST GAMBLING CENTER

Tiny Laytonville, once the butt of jokes from all over Mendocino County, looks at though it may have the last laugh, now that it is set to become the Las Vegas of the North with the opening of a luxurious bingo casino that will seat 3000 high-rollers who will be bused in via Greyhound from all over the state.

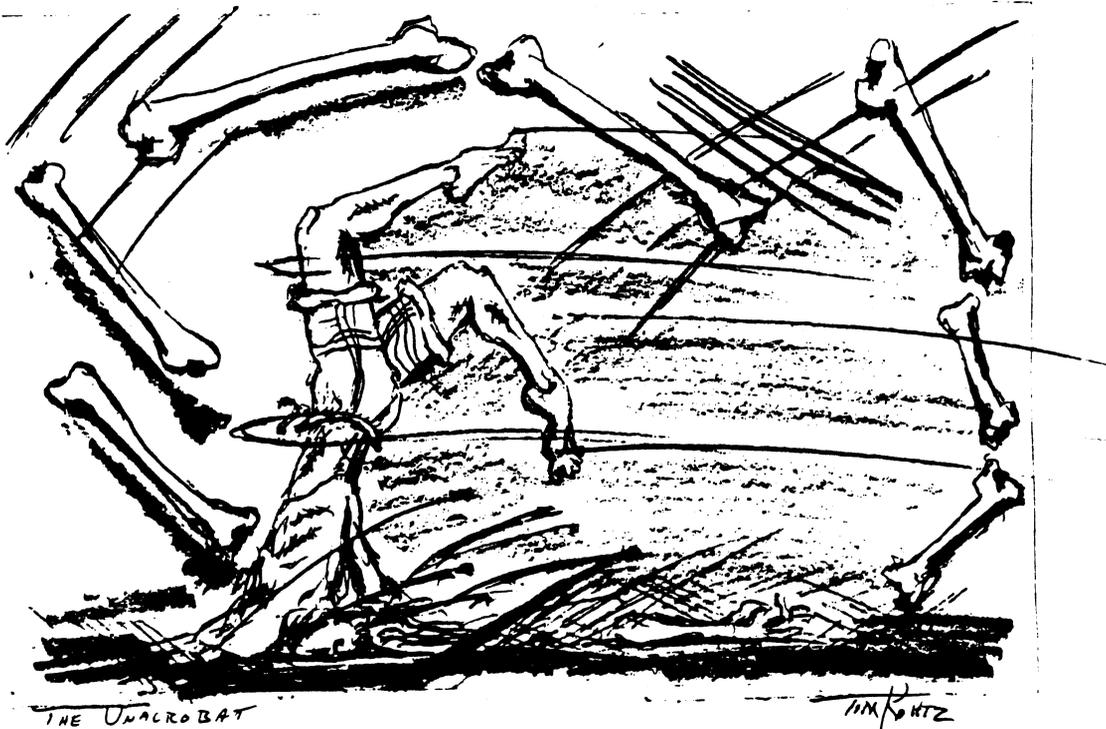
This exciting development has Laytonvillians agog at the prospect of our sleepy streets being jammed with big-spending conventioners who will for sure put our town on the map as they return home with tales of our stunning natural beauty, our dazzling night life (two bars and counting!) and our extra-tasty cuisine (how many towns have anything to rival the Chief Drive-In?). Lorne Strider will no doubt have to take on extra help at his real estate office to handle the overwhelming demand for prime land for the new resort hotels expected to be built. And there will probably be lots of other new jobs for local residents, counting bingo cards, for example, and selling souvenirs to our visitors.

Some perennial carping critics have of course raised their voices to complain, pointing out such petty details as the fact that the new bingo parlor will hold three times as many people as live in our entire town, and that we're barely able to provide enough water and sewage disposal for the people already living here, and that the whole business is probably just a money laundering scheme for the Mafia, but we say, the more the merrier, and let's give a great big Laytonville "Howdy!" to all the new friends and strangers who'll be coming to see us.

CAMP Plane Crashed Into Very Tall Tree, Investigation Finds

Still a mystery is the reason a CAMP spotter plane crashed July 31 just north of the Oregon border, killing all three aboard. When the spy plane first vanished, media types speculated that it had perhaps been shot down by farmers attempting to protect their fields (planes have been fired on in previous years). CAMP spokespersons were quick to point out that that would be very unlikely, since their aircraft never flew at altitudes lower than 1500 or 2000 feet, out of range of most small arms. This pronouncement caused a good deal of bemusement among hill dwellers, who are well aware that CAMP spotters regularly cruise at treetop level.

After a two-week investigation, Federal Aviation authorities announced that they had been unable to find a cause for the crash, other than that the plane had flown directly into a "large pine tree" (that'll do it). Left unspecified was the location of this remarkable tree, which, at 1500 or 2000 feet, would dwarf the Empire State Building.



THE UNACROBAT

LSD..

significant experiences of the mid-20th century. But what I find equally amazing is that a lot of the young people today seem to grow up already possessing, and taking for granted, the kind of cosmic awareness we had to take drugs to achieve."

That "cosmic awareness" that seems to be a recurring theme among LSD users could be summed up as a perception of the oneness of all things, hardly a radical notion in many cultures, especially indigenous ones like that of the American Indian. But in societies founded on the glorification of the individual ego, Western capitalism being merely the most egregious example, there is something profoundly subversive in assuming responsibility for the ultimate consequences of one's actions. If all the peoples of the world are truly brothers and sisters (closer than that, really, more like varying reflections of a single unvarying truth), it becomes a lot more difficult to apply the principle of "out of sight, out of mind" to the systematically pointless slaughter of one's fellow human beings, even if it is taking place on the other side of the planet. Such a point of view goes a long way toward explaining why many people who had no personal stake in the Vietnam War (draft-exempt college students, for example) worked so passionately to end that war. So in at least one sense, LSD could be viewed as a chemical radicalizer.

LSD also, according to many users, causes people to attach a far greater importance than normal to their thoughts and actions (while, curiously, at the same time encouraging the notion that in the ultimate scheme of things all is meaningless, "dust in the wind," as both the Bible and a popular acid-rock song had it). That sort of hubris combined with the sheer quantity of baby boomers who were in the highly impressionable state accompanying the transition from adolescence to adulthood at the time the LSD wave crested goes a long way toward explaining why the psychedelic revolution seemed so significant then and relatively inconsequential now; the 60s generation still comprises society's dominant demographic, and the children of the 80s lack both the numbers and the unified sense of purpose to impact on society the way their parents did. Not that that couldn't still change -- the apparently almost inevitable war in Nicaragua may guarantee it -- but it's a lot less likely that LSD will play any major part in fomenting the next big social upheaval.

One big question still goes unanswered: where did the CIA fit into all this? Among the world's largest suppliers of heroin and cocaine, did the super-spooks and their Mafia teammates see LSD as just another item in their pharmacological inventory? Or were they really trying to manipulate public consciousness, and if so, to what end? Although its initials stand for Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA has always dealt more in the suppression rather than the proliferation of intelligence, ignorance being a condition far more conducive to the wielding of power.

A possible explanation, dismissed as wildly implausible by most who heard it, was given to me by a young man who may have been in a position to know; his father was a high-level CIA operative who had inside knowledge of the Kennedy assassination (a power struggle between the liberal and reactionary wings of the CIA, he claimed). The son had left home at 19 and made his way to the Haight-Ashbury at the height of the LSD explosion and was in the process of drinking himself to death when I met him. Over the next few years, during his increasingly infrequent lucid intervals, he told me bits and pieces of a story that echoed Tolkien and Wagner in its complexity and scope. It tied together Tibetan monks, Hitlerian mystics, secret brotherhoods dating back to the days of Atlantis, and the manipulation of white and black magic in the name of saving or enslaving the human race.

We'd be watching TV and someone like Henry Kissinger would come on. "He's one of *them*," my friend would hiss, "Look at his eyes." Maybe I was too open to suggestion in those days, but I have never since been able to gaze upon Henry the K's squinting black beads without thinking, "This is what Conrad was really talking about in *Heart of Darkness*." But I risk ranging pretty far afield here; the crux of the tale was that within the CIA there were both good and evil

factions, and when the bad group ("the dark ones," my friend often called them) threatened to gain complete power via the Kennedy assassination and the escalation of the Vietnam War and its related heroin trade, the CIA's white knights struck back with LSD.

Farfetched-sounding, yes, but minus the quasi-mystical elements, by no means preposterous. For that matter, the same words could be just as easily used to sum up the whole history of psychedelia, which is equally true of the history of human consciousness itself. Where it came from and where, if anywhere, it's going remain essential mysteries; we can only watch and wonder, and make feeble stabs at the implications of it all. "What a long strange trip it's been," sang the Grateful Dead at the dawn of the 1970s; as some guru or another probably once said, or should have: "Wherever you look, there you are."

NOTE: Some of the information in this article is discussed in much greater detail in a recently published book called *Acid Dreams* (Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, Grove Press) Unfortunately it's ridiculously overpriced, something like \$12.95 for a paperback. If you're interested in the subject, it's worth looking at, though; try the library or a bookstore that doesn't care if you sit around reading.

Ballad Of The Average Confused

The day started with out with such a storm;
We met each other on the bridge by the sea.
Talking about criminals, the IRS, Marcos, Hitler,
the Reagan administration.
I can't believe we're so blind with love, love for humans, we can hardly
see (the way out).
I want to believe in love, believe in life, but I forget about it all and
imagine us in bed
(The phone bill's so obnoxious, but I've pretty much gotten used to
it)
So we sit over the water, kissing, making love...
(Eight hours a day in that place, no sun, concrete floors")
I kiss you, forget about time, vows, oh God, makes love to me.
Now.

Tomorrow dawns. I shoot the crystal euphoric ephemeral.
I numb out, tune out, forget about the next tomorrow.
I'm such an escape artist, such a fool, I know what it's like coming
down.
Sigh, mess up, screw up, lose it all, lose it completely.
(I can't believe I nearly lost my job, which I need)
I love you and I love you, too; it's all too, much, too much, too
much sorrow.

Stop these thoughts, back to reality, cassette deck on the freeway.
Russshhhh hour.
(7 SECONDS and other totally amazing caring youth)

Then whispers touch me, I hear your words, your statement.
Your song like the future, like nuclear fallout, unavoidable.
Like listening to the radio and the local underground news.
I'm sure we're being poisoned.
(Is it fact or myth that the government supplies the stuff that makes us
forget about the real battle?)
I need money, I need violence, or is it passion?
I need you out there, precious and jaded.
Your ears are listening, why to me, I don't know.
Want to let you know one human cares a lot for you,
yes, you.
Want to let you know how my emotions pay; listen to the night
(Crickets, summertime, silent and alone)
Don't we all await the dawn? The Light? Wonder about our actions?
Do we *know* enough?

And my fantasy about the Golden Gate fades.
I want to please you. I only tease you.
We, the lonely, must join together and make some love
(I know I sound like a hippie, but I'm proud to be a flower child)
Because remember, I love you all,
Forever, I love you forever.

Linda Lou Westman
August's End, 1986
Novato, California

LETTERS TO THE LOOKOUT

Dear Lawrence and Joe:

With all this talk about drugs destroying this great country of ours, I think it's about time us loyal Americans got off our collective asses and did something about it!

So with the help of the LOOKOUT, I am pleased to announce the "Send a Urine Sample to Ronnie" campaign. The way it works is, whenever you get a patriotic urge, you piss into your favorite old peanut butter or mayonnaise jar, slap on the lid, wrap it up and mail it to:

Ronald Reagan
The White House
Washington DC 20500

along with a note of support. Those fortunate enough to live in Washington DC can just heave their bottles over the White House fence. You can do it as often as you like! So c'mon, gang, let's piss one for the Gipper!

Yours for a drug-free
America,
BZ Sarin
Costa Mesa CA

Dear BZ:

Excellent idea! I would only add that since mailing jars can get pretty expensive, people should attach only minimal postage and not put any return address. Then the White House can pay the additional postage due. Or they could mail their samples in plastic baggies. Preferably ones with slow leaks.

LL

Larry:

It's inconceivable to me that I've waited three months to write you back. Instead, I've just been a middle class corporate wage slave. Fun.

If the save-the-puppies article (LOOKOUT #19) was designed to get my attention, it worked. Larry... soft-hearted does not now have to mean soft-headed.

We are higher on the ecological food chain than those quadrupeds. If every dog in the world had to die to save even Amy Carter -- that's where I draw the line; for Ron and Nancy I wouldn't hurt a fly -- it would be worth it.

Frankly, I'm aghast that you've bought into this 1980s equivalent of the temperance movement -- as a race, we have a lot to learn about saving each other before we can even begin to consider toys that couldn't run without us.

Don't waste your energy, Larry. Keep fighting for what's worthwhile instead.

David Shapiro
Santa Fe NM

Dear David,

Where do I start? In the first place, despite the endless protestations of the medical establishment, there is a lot of evidence suggesting that much of the research carried out on stray animals is superfluous and unnecessary. That was certainly the case with the examples I cited in my article.

Second, some of the cruelest tortures perpetrated against laboratory animals have nothing to do with finding a cure for cancer or AIDS, but rather are used for such noble purposes as testing the safety and effectiveness of cosmetics and perfume. If you wouldn't hurt a fly to save Nancy Reagan, would you willing to dissect Fido without benefit of anesthesia to test the goop she and her hideous clones across America plaster on their faces in a vain attempt to hide the unspeakable ugliness that dwells within?

As for the "food chain", well, after six years of Ronald Reagan, I've heard all I care to about anti-social Darwinism. And your snide derogation of "quadrupeds"? What is this, Human Farm? "Four legs good, two legs bad"? And dogs are "toys that couldn't run

without us"? If you were to be plunked down in the wilderness with a typical family dog, which of you would have a better chance of surviving?

What it's ultimately about is respect for life. All life. Yes, I know it's not possible to live without doing some harm to other living things, but it is possible to try and minimize that harm. The ability to empathize with and come to the defense of creatures less fortunate than ourselves is one of the few legitimate claims humanity has to superiority over the animal kingdom.

LL

To the Editor:

What the Mendocino County Board of Supervisors wants is not so much to close the libraries (LOOKOUT #20), but to close our minds. That the county voters can be easily manipulated by specious rhetoric was made appallingly clear by the majority vote to condone and make legal animal seizure by the medical industry. This effort was spearheaded by Supervisor Butcher and the huge medical lobby.

Now the gang of five are into the enormous lucre of offshore oil and tourist industry development. Closing and barring access to places of public information that might impede their enterprises would make their livelihoods secure. Their propaganda would be the only game in town.

It is not that large a gap between selling off domestic animals for "legal" industrial torture, and selling us and our environment as well. It is a Mengele Syndrome, and it is happening here. Right now.

Larry Tanager
Fort Bragg CA

OPEN LETTER TO Maurice Babbi, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Sacramento CA

Dear Mr. Babbi,

I am concerned about the bingo operation proposed for the Cahto Rancheria in Laytonville (see related story on page 3), and ask for you help in stopping it.

It is my understanding that your office by way of a management contract review committee, is in the position to approve or disapprove the contract being prepared between the Cahto Tribal Council and the management / financial organization funding the bingo gaming venture.

While I am very concerned about numerous aspects of the venture, and will deal with them separately, the points I will make here deal with the qualitative ability of the management / financial organization to properly manage the bingo venture. My profession is management evaluation and consulting.

Management always has the responsibility to assess the impact their decisions have on the community in which their activities occur. Nobody involved with the bingo project has involved any member of the Laytonville community in the decision to build the bingo operation in our town, despite the fact that the the expected crowds are three times the population of the entire area. The project has been presented as a fait accompli, even to the point of listing it in a directory of like gaming operations. That attitude calls into serious question the intent and capacity of the management / financial organization to manage, both ethically and qualitatively.

I am interested in the promises made by the gaming organization which create unreasonable and false expectations of the benefits from permitting the bingo operation on Cahto Indian land. My research indicates that numerous expectations have not been met at other similar operations and the the only beneficiary is the management / financial organization itself. What happens when those promises and expectations are not met?

An article in Akwesasne Notes, a Mohawk nation publication, reports that the failures of similar gaming operations are held out as examples of incompetence on the part of Indians to manage their own affairs and continue that myth, while justifying the expropriation of native people's lands and rights.

Bingo on Indian land is based on greed. Greed by the promoters to exploit the legal definitions of tribal land. Greed makes people think that bingo is more than a game, that bingo operations are prudent investments, that bingo is economic development.

The promoter's promise of wealth from bingo is like the U.S. Army's promise of warmth from the smallpox-infested blankets they distributed.

I ask you to please not approve the proposed management contract until there are public hearings and adequate

community involvement to assess the impact this project has on our region. There are many issues and unanswered questions ranging from the ecological consequences to the burden on community services.

The common opinion is that this community is not permitted to comment on this situation. That is simply not true. We are obligated to be involved. We all live here, whether we describe our community as Laytonville or the entire planet. I trust that you will see your responsibilities the same.

Very sincerely,
Bill Evans
Laytonville

cc: Cahto Tribal Council
Mendocino County Board of Supervisors

Dear LOOKOUT!

With Mother Earth now occupied by five billion persons plus, we selfish humans had better take lingering looks in our respective mirrors. Kids keep showing up because of the ultimate ego-boosting, narcissistic activity: creating a clone (or almost) of oneself.

The population bomb is not simply a Third World sterilization issue. It is a question of whether First World citizens will give up their "right" to indulge themselves with children to crowd the planet. I'm sorry, but ask any yuppie or middle-class or rich or poor Amerikan couple about vasectomies in China or India and they reply, "great humanitarian effort." Ask them to give up their vas deferens or ovaries and it's, "No way, honey."

Joi Bergmann
Iowa City IA

Dear Lawrence,

Before I was turned on to the LOOKOUT (by Joe Britz's father, by the way), I had never heard of do-it-yourself magazines, or zines, or whatever you call them. What a great idea, skip all the rejection slip angst and print it yourself.

And my idea of punk was shaped by the conventional press and TV. Punks were English boys with funny hairdos who were put out because there were no jobs to be had, so they just slouched at street corners and sneered into the TV cameras.

Now I find out that there are American punks. They think. They (at least some) are concerned with peace and justice as applied sciences. This is a surprise.

So put me down for a subscription. I like surprises like this.

Kathleen Ray
Flushing NY

Dear Lawrence,

I'll try to keep this somewhat to the point, as I tend to ramble on at times. Especially when I'm enjoying the subject. First off, I'm really glad I discovered your zine when I did (couple of months back). It was at a time when I was going off the wall, trying to locate some sanity in this dawning of right-wingism that we find ourselves in. Although I'm still back and forth in terms of emotional anguish, etc., in reaction to the times we're in, reading the LOOKOUT really does a lot to ground me. It's great knowing there are others around who feel the same as I do, and that the country isn't completely yuppie-fied. I'm 24, and most of my age group have chosen the path of least resistance, it seems. Anyway, I'm on the off period of my bitch-and-moan, fuck everything phases, so I'll stop right there. Oh yeah, also I'm going back to school (third time) this fall, taking cultural anthropology (Refuge in another culture? Probably. Can't see much in this one.) and environmental studies. Hoping people will be into discussing real things going on in the real world. Anyway, how does a Young Anarchists Club sound? I figured there's a Young Republicans Club on campus, so we need a good counter balance.

So, last, but not in the least, your music section's really good. I'm trying to divorce myself from the mostly (if not all) trash on the radio, but am not up on political punk bands. The great column and reviews by Joe Britz help to see who's out there.

Well, once again (risking being redundant), thanks for the LOOKOUT!

Eric
Santa Rosa CA

Dear Lawrence,

As always, the LOOKOUT is a potent blast of truths and indignance, BUT -- and you probably saw this coming from me, if no one else -- got some contentions to raise with your views on Christianity ("Welcome to the Bimillennium", LOOKOUT #18). You ARE absolutely right in stating that many people's myopic views of God the Holy Trinity have led to heinous, indefensible acts throughout history, as they continue to do so. It sickens me, too, Lawrence. Conversely, however, would you find fault with Christian pacifism, civil rights activism instigated by people such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson, the sanctuary movement for Latin American political refugees where nuns and priests have been indicted, the Plowshares Christian military base/nuke protests, and the 11th Commandment evangelical ecologist folks (the 11th Commandment people believe the earth is God's creation and shouldn't be defiled; a far cry from James Watt wanting to build a landing strip for the Second Coming, eh?)? There's even a movement within Christianity, though now more active in Europe, for true feminism in the church (they're still oftentimes against abortion, but so long as it's the woman's individual choice and not an imposition on the rest of society, that's a valid prerogative). I'd submit that the genocides of the Turks, Native Americans, Jews, et. al. in the name of Christ's man's warping of divine principles, as are the policies of most tele-preachers (Dr. Gene Scott comes closest to preaching Godly peace, but I have heard him be patriotic/imperialistic, too). It's good of you not to persecute JC himself as the cause of all the pernicious perpetrating done his/His name over the ages, but it's not right, either, to dismiss an entire faith on the basis of those who've polluted it.

Jamie Rake
Waupun WI

Dear Jamie,

I believe I pretty much covered the points you raised in my response to another letter last month, but to reiterate: nobody's suggesting that there aren't many Christians who have done many fine and wonderful things. There are also many Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, pagans, and atheists (even communist atheists) who've done equally wonderful things. All good and noble human deeds are the result of the development and refinement of the individual conscience. The arcane rituals, byzantine dogmas, and hierarchical structures of the various religious institutions can only impede the optimum functioning of that conscience; churches, like schools, are in the business of telling people what, not how to think.

That's fine that a handful of Christians have discovered that the earth is sacred and shouldn't be defiled; to me, it's just a matter of common sense, just as it was to millions of Indians and other native peoples all over the world centuries before Christianity insinuated itself into their lives. Would you seriously suggest that the James Watt ilk of Christian is not in the overwhelming majority? A substantial body of Christian thought (to use the word loosely) holds that nature itself, in other words, anything in the realm of the material, is fundamentally evil, and to be subdued and conquered.

Of course, you could say, I'm only pointing out the worst aspects of Christianity (though, not wanting to leave anyone else unoffended, let me stress that the same goes for every other cult, congregation, coven, or congeries of theistic folderol yet contrived), just as you are highlighting the positive tendencies (which, you must admit, can with sufficient depth of perception, can be found anywhere, even in a pile of otherwise unappreciated manure). But both history and human nature amply illustrate that the worst characteristics of our species come to the fore when we act in concert with large groups, whereas those occasional bursts of excellence that are our principal redeeming grace are almost without exception the product of individual courage, insight, and intuition. None of those, to the best of my knowledge, are encouraged by the various religions of the world, which, like the primitive superstitions from which they evolved, best thrive in a climate of ignorance and fear.

LL

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Lawrence D. Livermore, Editor and Publisher

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KULTUR KOLUMN

Reviews of the Latest Alternative Sights and Sounds

FORETHOUGHT, Cassette, \$1 ppd. to 71 Bemis St., San Francisco CA 94131

My duties as a reviewer require me to pigeonhole everything, but this excellent tape doesn't fit into any specific categories. I'll just say (or write, actually) that the diverse music combines with personal lyrics to give each song an energetic, positive feeling.

I Love Life: "I love life and what it could give; I love life the harder it gets"

...Joe Britz

PAINKILLERS, Cassette, \$3.50, c/o Brenden Findlay, 90 Norwood Ave., Buffalo NY 14222

Having committed no crime greater than being from Buffalo, NY, the PAINKILLERS have apparently been banished to punk rock limbo, unloved in their own town and unknown elsewhere. That's too bad, because this tape is an outstanding piece of work, both in production and content. The sound owes at least as much to late-70s punk as it does to 80s thrash or hardcore; the music is slower than usual these days, and features a grinding, almost grating attack that perfectly underscores Paul Painkiller's irascibly uncompromising vocals. No squeaky-clean straight edge positivity here; this guy is clearly pissed off about plenty, and is quick to let you know about it, whether it's toxic waste, mindless commuters, or nuclear apocalypse. One of several highlights is *Get Out*, a darkly comic ode to teenage suicide. Recommended (the tape, not teenage suicide).

...Lawrence

7 SECONDS, *New Wind* LP (BYO)

What a mess! Take away the four songs produced by Ian MacKaye and what remains is a "lead singer" doing his best Frank Sinatra croon with the help of a local wimpy bar band. Incredibly bad! The label says "Turn It Up", but I say rip the needle off and put on *The Crew*.

Grown Apart: "Do we still have those hopes and dreams?"

...Joe Britz

Second Opinion: I hate to admit it -- regular LOOKOUT readers will know that I have long held up 7 SECONDS as one of the few hopes remaining for humanity -- but Joe's right. The only quibble I would have is in calling this record "incredibly bad." It is, but only in the context of what 7 SECONDS have shown themselves capable of doing in the past. Much worse records are not only made everyday, but also sell millions of copies. Still, this is a major disappointment.

...Lawrence

CRASS, *Best Before*, Double LP (Crass)

A compilation of CRASS singles plus three unreleased singles, two different versions of *Do They Owe Us A Living?*, interviews, a lyric booklet, a band history, and a surprise or two. A great package, with brilliant artwork to match. It's missing the *Who Dunnit* single, for some reason.

Big A, Little A: "If you don't like the life you live, change it now, it's yours; Nothing has effect if you don't recognize the cause"

...Joe Britz

Second Opinion:

Even though I'm not a real fan of CRASS' music (too repetitive and idiosyncratic for my tastes), I'd recommend this to anyone who still doubts the existence, in at least some sectors of the punk scene, of a deeply passionate and intelligent commitment to social change. It might be especially enlightening for hippies who think they have nothing in common with punk rockers.

...Lawrence

FACTSHEET FIVE, Zine, Quarterly, \$2 an issue, ppd. c/o Mike Gunderloy, 6 Arizona Ave, Rensselaer NY 12144

The "underground" press was one of the more visible, and more exciting features of the 1960s; what's not commonly known is that alternative journalism is alive and well in the 1980s. The LOOKOUT receives an average of 25 publications a month, ranging from the slick to the sick, and that's only a tiny fraction of what's out there. To begin to grasp the scope of the new underground, get hold of a copy of FACTSHEET FIVE, most of which is no more (or less) than a listing and review of every homemade zine editor/publisher Mike Gunderloy has been able to come across. There are also record and tape reviews, and a few articles and/or columns, but essentially FACTSHEET FIVE is about zines, and nobody that I know of does it better.

...Lawrence

SOUND CHOICE, Zine, Quarterly (allegedly), \$2.50 an issue, POB 1251, Ojai CA 93023

What FACTSHEET FIVE is to zines, SOUND CHOICE is to independently produced tapes and records. Pages and pages of reviews, probably more than I'd ever be able to read if the zine came out as often as it's supposed to. But it's easy to forgive the publishers for being late because each issue is extremely well put together and packed with valuable information in addition to its comprehensive review section. One particularly useful article this year (SC #4) contained all the facts and diagrams necessary to start your own pirate radio station. Also of use to musicians and independent record companies is a listing of radio stations around the world that are open to playing alternative music. There are also zine reviews, features, and recently, even a work of fiction (at least I think it was) by post-surrealist master Eugene Chadbourne. Highly recommended.

...Lawrence

NO ALLEGIANCE, *Mad*, LP, (Destiny Records, c/o David Pollack, 30 Winterfeldstrasse, Berlin, West Germany)

I can't pretend to be objective about this record; I've known lead singer David since he was a kid in San Francisco, before he moved to West Berlin and got involved with a series of bands, each one of which has gotten better than the one before. NO ALLEGIANCE is a direct offshoot of David's last band, PORNO PATROL, but has a more polished and focused energy to it. The record is very well produced, both musically and in the packaging; it makes a lot of major corporate releases look rather shoddy. The music is fast and hard-edged punk as opposed to all-out manic thrash. They lyrics mostly deal with what might be called personal politics ("All political problems start as personal problems," David said in a 1985 MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL interview), and are all in English, although David has been away so long that at times he appears to be speaking English as a second language. Overall, an outstanding effort.

...Lawrence

MR T EXPERIENCE, LP, *Everyone's Entitled To Their Own Opinion*, c/o Reuben Kincaid Mgmt./Disorder Records, 1850 Union St, San Francisco CA 94123

Another one I can't be objective about; I know and like all the members of the MR T EXPERIENCE. But even that wouldn't prompt me to say good things about this record if I didn't like it on its own merits. Contrary to the impression one might get from the band's name and song titles like *Surfing Cows* (*Skating*

*Cows, too), Danny Partridge Got Busted, and I'm In Love With Paula Pierce, the MR T EXPERIENCE is a serious band ("...serious about not being serious," according to singer-guitarist Frank Portman, who's also renowned as a perversely deadpan KALX DJ). My favorite cut on the album is *Marine Recruiter*, which combines a savage political statement with a memorably melodic hook. Another high point is the haunting *Disconnection* ("My old girlfriend just went insane, disconnection in her brain..."). Production is excellent, too; the band got a better sound out of an 8-track studio than many groups manage with 16 or 24. Conclusion: the MR T EXPERIENCE provides one of the few bright spots in a very weak Bay area music scene.*

...Lawrence

BOOM AND THE LEGION OF DOOM, FORETHOUGHT, VICTIM'S FAMILY, CHEETAH CHROME MOTHERFUCKERS, BGK, MDC, Live show, at the Farm, San Francisco, August 17

There were a lot of people, but the place was not quite packed. I often find that I spend more time at these mega-shows meeting people and/or talking with people I already know (punk networking?) than in actually listening to the music. I'll probably get at least one letter calling me a poseur for making that admission, but that's the way it is. I was late for this show anyway, completely missing BOOM AND THE LEGION OF DOOM, and to be honest, I didn't see enough of FORETHOUGHT and VICTIM'S FAMILY to offer a fair opinion (although previous victims of Lawrence Livermore reviews might question whether there is such a thing).

CHEETAH CHROME, true to the Italian hardcore tradition, hit the stage with the expected on-the-edge, though in this case not quite inspired madness. Their singer seemed not fully aware of what he was doing; some people told me he was drunk, though I couldn't tell myself; I've seen a lot of stone cold sober people acting a lot stupider. CCM were exciting, but not as much as I'd been led to expect.

BGK were excellent, though they seemed a little detached, possibly worn out from touring. A few slightly metallic, or maybe just plain old fashioned rock tinges intruded into the mostly seamless musicianship. Good show though.

MDC, fresh from an east coast tour, were way tighter than during their June show, and ripped through the first part of their set. Then Sammy of FANG grabbed the microphone to announce that a friend had been mugged outside "for being a white boy" and to demand that the crowd do something about it. Singer Dave MDC seemed a little thrown off his rhythm by this sudden interlude, and asked several times, "Well, what do you want us to do?" When no answer was forthcoming, the music started again, but the energy never got quite as tightly focused again. Still, on balance, it was the best set I've seen so far from the re-formed MDC.

And the show as a whole? Pretty good, really, no big problems with violence or jerks, and lots of interesting people to talk to. I wouldn't mind going to shows like that more often.

...Lawrence

CANCER GARDEN, NEUROSIS, LOOKOUTS, NO ALLEGIANCE, Live Show, Golden Gate Park Bandshell, San Francisco, August 29

Considering that it was a free show, not too many people turned out on this foggy Friday afternoon. Which is too bad; quite aside from the quality (or lack thereof) of the music, it would have been worth the trip just for the sight of a bunch of punk rockers cavorting on the monumental, mock-classical stage that more often plays host to opera singers or oom-pah bands (and considering the number of complaints received by the police, some from as much as a mile away, it may be quite a while before the spectacle is repeated).

CANCER GARDEN started things off and drew in a number of curious tourists with their slow-paced, keyboard based music that was a lot prettier than the band's name might suggest (vocals, which ranged from the scabrous to the preposterous, excepted); sort of an 80s version of KING CRIMSON.

NEUROSIS continue to get better and better at what they do, which is traditional hardcore thrash, and they got an

excellent reception from the audience, about half of which seemed to have come with them.

As for the LOOKOUTS, well, there's a word *bathos*, which is defined as a descent from the sublime to the ridiculous, that pretty well sums up the LOOKOUTS' performance, if you leave out the sublime part. Actually, it wasn't all bad, and a few songs came across pretty well, including the first-ever non-mangled version of *One Planet One People*. But there were a number of low points when, for reasons that were unclear even to themselves, each of the LOOKOUTS decided to play a different part of the song at the same time. "Well, I guess you just have to practice more," said one of the LOOKOUTS' few remaining fans afterward. On the bright side, all of the LOOKOUTS' parents who were in attendance said they enjoyed the performance.

It almost looked as though NO ALLEGIANCE weren't going to show up, leaving the LOOKOUTS to flounder about on stage dredging up every cover song they had ever learned, but just in the nick of time, the boys from West Berlin pulled up in their van and took the stage. For San Francisco-born singer David Pollack, this was his homecoming performance, and he was clearly excited to be there, a feeling he successfully communicated to the crowd. To make him feel especially welcome, the police showed up again and said the sound had to be turned down (let's be fair, though, they were very civil about the whole thing) and NO ALLEGIANCE cut their set short, bringing to an end what had been advertised as a "1986 love-in" that actually did see a couple of onlookers stripping naked (not punks, you can be sure; it's a well-known fact that punks never completely undress), a gesture not to be sneered at on a chilly day in August.

...Lawrence

SHOW OF THE MONTH: MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL at the City of Berkeley Board of Adjustments, September 8

There was another gig I could have written about, featuring RUIN, FOLLOW FASHION MONKEYS, and INDIGESTI at the Farm, but it was just too depressing; great bands, no people. For the 149th time this year I was ready to give up on punk rock, but there was one more formality to go through, one last nail to be driven in the coffin.

A couple of times this summer I've mentioned that a group of people, under the banner of MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL, had taken out a lease option on a West Berkeley warehouse, with the idea of turning it into a multi-media center for the arts, including but by no means limited to live music. Ever since June, 30-50 of us have been meeting every week to do the groundwork, but it was difficult to believe it was really going to happen. The first obvious obstacle was the expense, but MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL agreed to recycle profits from their magazine into the project. An apparently much more insurmountable barrier was the City of Berkeley bureaucracy, from which we somehow had to get a permit to operate.

Even the most starry-eyed among us didn't think that was very likely; everyone knows that punk rockers are among the least popular segments of society, even in a relatively tolerant place like Berkeley. Besides, they told us at first that we couldn't even have a hearing on our application until October 15, and we just couldn't afford to pay rent on the building for that long without even knowing if we'd ever be allowed to open.

So we appealed for an earlier hearing, and, miracle of miracles, they said OK. Then everyone from the mayor on down started getting in the act, calling the Board of Adjustments (the people who grant permits) and asking them to support us. Credit for this rather amazing turn of events should probably go mostly to MRR honcho Tim Yohannan, who could probably be elected mayor of Berkeley himself if he didn't live in San Francisco.

When the big night finally came, a lot of us were so nervous that we could barely bring ourselves to attend the hearing. When Tim's turn came to address the board, those of us (at least 50 people turned out to show their support) sitting behind him could see his knees visibly shaking. But there was no reason to fear; the board loved us. They were almost falling over themselves to give us more than we'd even dared ask for. I sat there (barely; I was squirming like a little boy on the last day of school) with my mouth hanging open; could it be that something was actually going to work for once?

Yes, it could; we've got our permit, and even though the real work of construction and planning is just beginning now, I'm still buzzing with excitement as I write this the following day. There may not have been any bands playing, but it was the most exciting show I've been to in a long, long time.

P.S. Those of you who are interested, stay tuned; we'll need all kinds of help in the next couple months. And the first show? Maybe sometime in October.

BUT SERIOUSLY, FOLKS...

by Joe Britz

Ronald Reagan perceives (a contradiction in terms if I ever heard one) welfare to be a substantial hindrance to capitalism and he may have stumbled across an actual thought this time. Because of the continuous withdrawals it makes from America's bank account, I believe the Welfare Force provides an integral service in present-day society. Long may it consume!

I've recently decided to join the ranks after working at several pointless jobs for what seems like a lifetime (though it's only been about seven years). What have I got to lose besides a life of boredom, servility, and mind death? Anyway, the pay is good, and though I've gotta eat some shit by sweeping the streets for a few hours each week, I really enjoy the experience.

I start my "workday" by picking up all the ghastly garbage at "the box". Broom, vest, gloves, and trash bags. We then clean all the crud off the city streets in the morning, only to have it magically re-appear the following day. As dependable as the waves of the ocean and the setting of the sun comes the stench of last night's revelry: broken glass, assorted food containers, newspapers, and hundreds of empty, urine-scented booze bottles are the main loads. What goes on at Turk Street between Jones and Taylor every night? Dope, video games, alcohol, porno parlors, and whatever other working class drugs you can come up with, it seems.

So you're probably wondering what's so great about pushing a broom around. It's mainly to do with memories of past jobs I've had. Compared to plodding through a stuffy room with a bunch of heartless zombies, sweeping the gutters of the Tenderloin is thrilling labor. It's filled with real human beings! The two people I've been working with are interesting folks. One of them, who also happens to be the only native San Franciscan I've met since moving here, has been doing this sort of nastiness for a while, and shows me how to scam my way through the day (sweep junk under cars, where to hide from the supervisors, etc...). The other guy is entertaining until he starts his, "Jesus has shown me the light, brothers," routine, after which he'll make a few rude comments to passing women. But religion's a topic best left for Lawrence to devour.

Other characters I've come across include: someone asking me for an empty trash bag "...cause I'm doing my wash today," a guy who helped get two people out of my way ("Don't say 'excuse me.' Tell 'em to get out of the motherfuckin' way"), two women who were running across the street toward each other, screaming, apparently ready to kill. They ended up hugging and laughing instead.

But soon it'll be time to look for full-time employment, I suppose. The other day I went to some warehouse and the owner told me he had some back-breaking job for me. "It's grueling work, but somebody's got to do it," he said in all earnestness. So is receiving welfare, I thought. Needing to fill out my job search form, though, I told him to put me on file and laughed all the way home.

Your loved ones tell you to
get a job
Piss off, I'm not a lazy sod;
I'd rather not pay into Ronnie's
bank
I'd rather make a withdrawal with a food stamp
Break the bank to your knees,
Uncle Sam

...TOXIC REASONS

Looking at Clouds

Last night I stayed up late playing piano. About midnight I took a walk up the road to see the moon rise and to hear the coyotes howl. It was a half moon, but still pretty bright when it wasn't being blotted out by a fractured black cloud that was beginning to slip behind the mountains to the east. It was the last of a whole gang of clouds that had been hanging around off and on all day; in fact for about a week now, increasingly serious-looking clouds have been slipping in from the sea to play hide and seek with what's left of summer.

A lot of old-timers hereabouts are predicting an early rainy season, and I'm inclined to think they're right. When I walked outside again at 2 a.m., the sky was almost completely clouded over again, and I could almost smell the moisture, almost feel the winter storms stirring themselves up somewhere in the remote reaches of the Pacific.

This morning the sky was clear again, looking as though it were going to be summer forever. But anyone who's spent time in the mountains knows not only how quickly but how suddenly summer can disappear. That's what's so frighteningly compelling about nature up here: it doesn't mess around, and humans who treat it too lightly are apt to get a firm, even harsh lesson about their fairly insignificant place in the overall scheme of things.

I speak from experience; it was March when I first moved to the mountains; the grass on the hillsides was dazzlingly green and flowers were beginning to bloom. I set about planting fruit trees and digging a swimming hole in the creek, and taking plenty of time to just lounge about in the warm sunshine. One night the temperature dipped below freezing, but not enough to do any real damage; I was looking forward to a long and happy summer.

It was still chilly enough in the evenings that we needed a fire, but I was able to saw up enough wood by hand to last until bedtime. People told me I'd need a chainsaw, but I resisted the idea because I hated the sound of the things, and besides, we probably wouldn't be needing much more firewood; it was practically summer, wasn't it?

Then it turned a little colder, and I started having a harder time finding enough wood small enough for my hand saw, so I reluctantly admitted that I needed a chain saw and set out to town to buy one. The sky had gotten really cloudy, so much so that I felt it a good idea to put on my headlights, even though it was 2 o'clock in the afternoon. When I cleared the top of the ridge on my way home at about 6:30, it had already been snowing for an hour; about three inches had accumulated, and my car, still equipped with city tires, barely made it.

That was March 27; it kept snowing, with only occasional breaks, for the next 12 days. Fortunately, because the ground was already fairly warm, a lot of the stuff melted, but we still ended up with about five feet; at the top of the ridge, which was the only way out, it was more like 10 feet.

But we weren't worried about getting out; that was out of the question. It was all I could do to dig my way to the firewood pile, which lasted barely through the first night. From then on, survival, in the form of finding enough even semi-dry wood to keep from freezing to death, was my full-time job. Aside from that, life revolved around a 10-foot semi-circle in front of the stove, about as much of the house as we could keep warm with the mostly green wood we were burning.

Eventually the sun came back, but it was still another two or three weeks before the roads, or what was left of them, were passable. Life got easier, and it was possible now from time to time to just sit back and gape at the staggering beauty that was sufficient to provide one with a lifetime supply of postcard memories. I even tried skiing once, but quickly gave it up after nearly breaking my neck less than 20 feet from my door. One thing was sure: I felt a lot less like a city slicker than I had a month earlier, and another sure thing was that if I hadn't bought that chain saw, I might not be here now. Oh, I suppose we could have burned all the furniture and then started in on the walls, but I don't think that would have lasted long enough. Anyway, you won't see me in the mountains in winter now without at least a few weeks' supply of wood and food, at least not when there's even the vaguest hint of a cloud on the horizon.

Oh yes, clouds, that was what started me out on this whole reverie, wasn't it? Well, ever since then, I can't look at clouds blowing in from the ocean without being reminded of that spring blizzard. I also almost never go anywhere, even in summer, without a jacket and a pair of boots in the car. But I still love clouds, and the message of constant change that they bring. In fact, sometimes I can hardly wait for summer to end so that I can once again see their eternally elusive meanings dangled across the unyielding skies.

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FASHION IS FASCISM: DRESS TO KILL

...San Francisco graffiti, 1980

Fashion, like language, conceals as much as it reveals. The more spectacular a person appears, the less we are likely to know about that person. The principal goal of ostentatious dressing is to draw to ourselves people who know nothing about us. Or at least very little; there is usually at least one unmuted element in any fashion statement, and that is the attempt to align ourselves with certain people while distancing ourselves from others.

The most blatantly sexual of costumes is not intended, except perhaps in the case of the prostitute, to invite all comers. By the same token, the most determinedly anti-social finery of a punk rocker or a heavy metalloid is not meant to repel those of like mind. Fashion is a game we all play, willingly or not; those who vehemently proclaim that they have no interest in the prevailing styles (a very fashionable thing to say these days) remind one of those who, as Oscar Wilde noted, speak badly of society because of their inability to be a part of it. We can choose to blend into our surroundings, whether that means donning a business suit or a motorcycle jacket, or we can attempt to stand out, something becoming increasingly difficult as leather, lace, and technicolor hairdos move from the realms of rock stars and late-night drug abusers into the secretarial pools of downtown high-rises.

But personal appearance remains a crucial issue, perhaps more than ever in the image-conscious 80s. I remember times as a teen-ager when being in the wrong place with the wrong haircut could literally get you killed. Now it's not likely to cost you much more than admission to the career or new wave disco of your choice. But the greying of America, as in the grey flannel of the newly respectable corporate death burghers, threatens to cloak us all in with a drabness that does not confine itself to outer appearances, but clutches at our very souls.

Fashion is big business, there's no doubt about that, but because of its intrinsic evanescence and the essentially frivolous character of many of those associated with the industry, it is generally not taken as seriously as, say, auto or steel manufacturing, or even as more nebulous enterprises like insurance or securities. But its influence is all-pervading, and like television, another information exchange medium whose import is often underestimated because of the trivial nature of its content, fashion not only reflects, but has enormous power to shape popular culture. And with what's left of democracy rapidly giving way to the new meritocracy, or government by mind control (or by lies, if you prefer the French derivation), anything that affects people's thought and behavior patterns becomes deadly serious indeed.

The real thrust of media style these days is to get everyone into uniform. Three-piece suit or combat fatigues, polyester pantsuits for fast food franchise employees or cookie-cutter Esprit wear for yuppie embryos, or even the latest big-city rage, the homeless bag lady look, it doesn't matter as long as everyone's role in society is clearly defined. In some ways the current period resembles the 1940s, when even civilian clothing mimicked the military motif that so dominated the decade, but a closer analogy would be to the inbred caste system of Brave New World, where only the dominant Alphas were permitted any degree of latitude in behavior or appearance.

The greatest bane of would-be nonconformists is the speed with which the bizarre can be turned into the banal by the miracle of modern marketing. Clothes only recently considered unusual or shocking are quite acceptable as long as they carry a prestigious label and corresponding price tag; meanwhile, the remnants of the subculture that spawned nearly everything now considered "modern" fashion skulk about street corners in various shades of black, blank looks plastered across their bewildered faces as they ponder how to regain the offensive in the never-ending war against normality.

As the 1950s turned into the 1960s and beatniks gave way to hippies, one of the most visible signs of change was the transformation from black and white into color, from the dingy and deliberately unobtrusive apparel of the late night subterraneans into the flowered shirts and paisley bell-

bottoms of the flagrantly exhibitionistic "love generation". Narcissism stopped being a dirty word and became a way of life. As always, a good idea taken to wretched excess eventually produced the opposite result; when TV anchormen and brain-dead executives started looking like refugees from the latest love-in, the real counterculture retreated into the stark post-apocalyptic look that characterized the early punk scene.

The overwhelming message of punk at its inception was *NO*, as in no future, no compromise, or simply short for noise. But while black is the inescapable prerequisite to color on any artist's palette, and destruction the unavoidable twin of creation, the limitations of the negative inevitably become burdensome to those whose refusal to fit into society is motivated by more than simple contrariness. Today's *alternativos*, increasingly a hybrid of hippie and punk, are out to change the world, or at least to make it fit for habitation by humans and other living things. Silly as it may sound, one way to start is by redecorating.

It's no coincidence that the financial districts of our great cities constitute as soulless a place as can be found outside the depths of hell itself; the architecture, the dress and mannerisms of the occupants, the mute desperation kept shuttered behind deliberately unseeing eyes, all conspire to deaden and destroy the spontaneous joy and the caring awareness that make life both worthwhile and possible. The artist who splashes paint across those blank walls, whether in the form of a thought-provoking statement or a random application of color, is performing a revolutionary act. The same goes for those who make walking canvases of themselves, who not only rage against the dying of the light, but who assist at its rebirth. One of the joys of strolling through a city like San Francisco are the little islands of cantankerous whimsy and passionate beauty that determined individualists have carved out of the urban landscape; each alteration of the environment that causes someone to laugh, cry, or reflect on the nature of the human spirit is a vital beachhead in the struggle for survival.

Self-appointed 1960s trendsetters like the Andy Warhol clique helped make fascism chic when they started hobnobbing with the powermongers of the Reagan set; the moral bankruptcy of our age has created a vacuum which cries out to be filled with creative alternatives to the nightmarish vision of the future we have inherited from those who judge the value of art solely by its novelty. Someone like myself, whose drawing skills are roughly those of an advanced kindergartner, might find it hard to think of oneself as an artist, but even I can cover my t-shirts and tennis shoes with multi-colored designs that say to the world, "Hey, I'm not dead yet," and hopefully will inspire those with greater talent to create (or to be) more potent spectacles.

One of my seemingly inconsequential hobbies is to collect punk rock flyer art, most of which consists of black and white xeroxes, and recopy it on colored paper. The difference is astounding; if only I could afford it, I would do the same thing with the *LOOKOUT*. These are only my first small steps toward remodelling reality; what I have in mind is the sort of transformation encountered by Dorothy when she stepped out of her black and white farmhouse into the full-color land of Oz. Others may feel that there are more pressing issues before us, such as the elimination of war and hunger and man's inhumanity to just about everything, but in my mind, making the world a more beautiful place is not at all inconsistent with these more sweeping goals. Truth, beauty, justice, pure unadulterated goodness; they all go hand in hand, and any one of them is as good a starting point as another.

Hannah Arendt's point about the ultimate banality of evil was well taken; the sort of men who operate death camps are quite different from those who amuse themselves by drawing day-glo patterns on their uniforms. Jello Biafra's proposal that all businessmen be required to wear clown suits should have been taken as more than just trenchant humor; I propose that it be extended to include all those who would wield power over their fellow human beings. And even one who harbors no such desire might well consider dressing as a fool to avoid acting like one.