

LOOKOUT!



THE VANISHING FRONTIER: Where Do We Go Next?

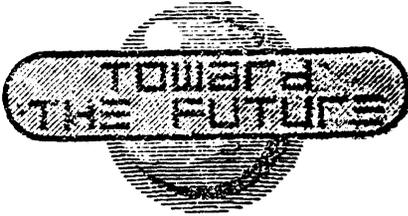
I spent part of the winter in a poverty-ville sublet in the nether reaches of San Francisco. Downstairs was a bar called the Bottom of the Hill better known as the Bottom of the Barrel. A block away, the streets climbed into the yuppie realms, but outside my door were only warehouses, factories, and, by night, an unearthly stillness.

Walking those deserted regions, it was hard to imagine you were in San Francisco; it was hard to imagine where you might be. The neighborhood (to use the term loosely; there were

few neighbors to speak of) was a surrealistic maze, with intersections careening into one another at point-less angles, and eerily lit lunch-eonettes (always empty) perched implausibly in their midst. It was a bizarre spectacle, and an unspeakably beautiful one.

Eventually I discovered an unused railroad track that neatly bisected the whole district, and would deposit me, after a pleasant stroll through the backside of the post-industrial wasteland, smack in the middle of the art, drugs, and money dreamland known as South of Market.

cover by veg



The contrast was as sobering as it was unappealing. Only a few years ago, the south of the Slot after midnight looked as if it had been a test site for every real estate agent's dream, the neutron bomb (clears out unwanted tenants without messy legal proceedings). Now the streets were clogged with expensive cars and the air was thick with the drunken shouts of middle management trainees, underlined by the ubiquitous disco beat.

Is this the future? Will the handful of San Francisco neighborhoods that are still livable and (relatively) affordable be inevitable swallowed up by the blight of encroaching lowest common denominator capitalism? Barring an economic or political cataclysm (one can always hope), it would seem so.

Thoughts like these were prominent in my mind a few years back when, following in the footsteps of Huck Finn, I "lit out for the territories" in the form of the mountains of Mendocino. The breathable air, the drinkable water, and the relative absence of people willing to cut my throat for two dollars made for a pleasant respite. But the forces of greed and power, generally summed up as civilization, hadn't gone on a holiday, and I began to see the wisdom in the words a globe-trotting coke smuggler had uttered to me many years ago: "Honey, there ain't no place on the planet where you can get away from it all."

I once read of a pioneer in the old West who claimed he knew it was time to move on whenever he spied a church steeple within a day's ride of his cabin. In modern San Francisco neighborhoods, the warning flag might be hoisted by the appearance of a Mrs. Fields cookie shop or a sudden influx of real estate brokers with cellular telephones. But the "territories", whether rural or urban, are pretty much filled up these days; for the first time in recorded history, pretty much all of the earth's livable land has been staked off and laid claim to.

This lack of an escape hatch is probably a big part of why America seems to be undergoing a mass nervous breakdown these days. This country was colonized and settled by people unable or unwilling to stay in one place. That's hardly a uniquely American trait, though; the whole history of civilization is that of a heliotropic migration, of nomadic tribes moving from east to west, trying to stay a step or two ahead of the organizers and codifiers, the builders of walls and institutions.

In the last century alone, we've seen the leading edge of cultural innovation shift from Europe to first the east and now the western coast of the United States. It's become a cliché, but true nonetheless, to say that California is peopled by all the sorts who couldn't fit in anywhere else. But unless you count Australia, and the authorities there haven't exactly swung the gates wide open, our westward peregrinations appear to have reached the end of the trail.

So where is the next frontier? With Asia, where the whole thing most likely got started, jammed to overflowing, and the rest of the earth filling up fast, it would appear that it's not going to be found on this planet. Yet the logical next step, the exploration of space, has thus far been and is likely to continue to be confined to government-bred androids, at least until someone comes up with an interplanetary version of the Conestoga wagon.



the urban wilderness



So it should be pretty clear that we're not going anywhere, except to kingdom come, given the current direction of nuclear geopolitics. And for the inveterate pioneers among us, there's only one challenge remaining, and that's to transform what we already have into the sort of utopia our forefathers and mothers were always convinced lay just beyond the horizon.

The most obvious obstacles to such a goal are the same as they've always been: the authoritarian tentacles of church and state. But these twin horrors are really only the objectified doubts and fears of the human beings who have created them. They foster and thrive on the delusion of the separate ego, confusing individuality with the murderous competition that has made much of human history a true hell on earth.

The only real frontier is within, the only real battlefield is the human consciousness, and the only real enemy is ignorance. Speak of concepts like truth or wisdom and you'll see peoples' eyes beginning to glaze over, but that's because true wisdom is not something that can be talked about, but only experienced, and lived.

Last month I wrote about love, this month it's truth, maybe next month it'll be beauty. It's all the same story anyway.

Amerikan @bScene

The spirit of the American West lives on: a high official of the State of California, whose name escapes me at the moment, has proposed that we attack the twin problems of toxic waste disposal and high unemployment among American Indians by building toxic waste processing plants (read: dumps) on Indian reservations.

As might be expected, the ingenuity of this public servant has not met with universal acclaim in the bleeding-heart sector. A pity, since any number of society's dilemmas could be attacked using this dual-edged approach. What, for instance, about using unsightly black ghettos as nuclear test sites? Or conducting biological warfare tests in the indigent wards of public hospitals? Possibilities abound; it's too bad some people have to be so damn sensitive.

The result of the exploding space shuttle could have been immeasurably worse than seven astronauts resting in pieces on the ocean floor. According to the Feb. 22 edition of THE NATION, the next Challenger mission, in May, was to have carried 46.7 pounds of plutonium, enough, if dispersed equally, to kill every living thing on earth.

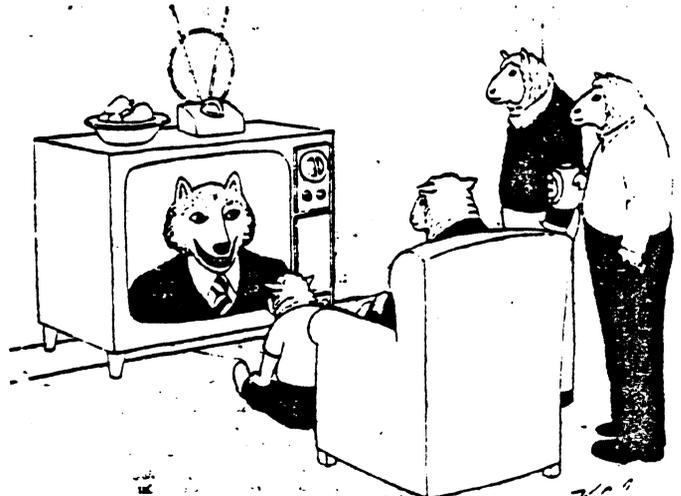
A few years ago I wrote a novel based on the premise of the several hundred pounds of plutonium stored (atop an earthquake fault) at the Lawrence Livermore Laboratories escaping into the atmosphere and causing massive devastation. Publishers rejected it as "too implausible." Leave it to the Star Wars technocrats to make me a prophet.

"If you make a lie big enough and repeat it often enough, the lie will become the truth and the people will believe it."

Jos. Goebbels,
Nazi Minister of Propaganda

Truth is becoming an endangered species here in McDonald Land. Our fearless bozo of a president, no longer content with gulling the prematurely brain dead, is now turning his attention to stifling voices of dissent that might contradict his own incoherent ramblings.

After der Reaganführer's heartfelt plea on behalf of his incomprehensibly massive military buildup ("You can save this little neutron bomb's kill ratio, or you can turn the page"), the normally servile ABC network took the fairly radical step of broadcasting an opposing opinion (normally "responses" consist of an anonymous Democratic Congressman allowing as how, yes, he wants a strong America, too, but maybe we could get by with 95 new MX missiles instead of 100) from (gasp!) the evil empire itself, the Soviet Union.



from: Mendocino Commentary
POB 1222 Fort Bragg CA 95437



graphic by Winston Smith
 from FALLOUT, POB 1535
 Ukiah CA 95482

...NOW IT'S IN THE HANDS
 OF A HAM.

Now as bad as those Russians must be (and that must be pretty bad, considering that we're willing to bankrupt ourselves and incinerate the planet to rid ourselves of them), it's not really that out of order to let them say a few words in their own defense, is it? Even a condemned man gets a last statement, right?

Not in the brave new world of truth, justice and the American way. The White House was "astonished" that the naive citizenry of our country had been exposed by ABC to the wiles of a "trained Soviet propagandist." Now given the fact that 1 out of 4 registered voters cast a ballot for Ronald Reagan in the last election (really, that's all; get yourself a calculator and figure it out), there's obviously a fair bit of ignorance floating around among the populace. But if the American people are too stupid to resist Soviet propaganda, it follows that they'd be even easier marks for trained American propagandists like Reagan himself. Whether selling toasters and soap, or his current brand of Death Valley Days patriotism, Reagan has had a long and remunerative career as a paid liar.

**They're gonna get Mom
 They're gonna get Dad
 THEY'RE GONNA
 BARBEQUE THE DOG!**

Another professional purveyor of mendacity, White House "Communications" Director Patrick Buchanan (who broke into politics as Richard Nixon's chief obfuscator during the Watergate era) likened the ABC broadcast to allowing a representative of the Third Reich to one of Churchill's speeches during World War II. Expanding on the Third Reich theme (though on the wrong side), California congressman Robert (B-1 Bob) Dornan labelled Ivan Posner, the Soviet commentator, as a "betraying little Jew."

All this foofaraw conveniently obscures the fact that we are not and never have been at war with the Soviet Union. They are our "enemies" only because a succession of our leaders has so unrelentingly trumpeted that "fact" for the past 40 years, to the point that political discussion centers not on how best to deal with the Soviets, but rather on how best to destroy them.

Oh, and don't look for a repeat of the ABC experiment in the airing of opposing viewpoints; in the wake of the White House attacks, ABC execs were quick to admit that they had "made a mistake" in allowing the Russians to tell their side of the story. Americans lacking confidence in their own intellectual stability can now return to watching TV without fear of Communist brainwashing.

And in still another Reagan-sponsored excursion through the looking glass, we are told that by giving \$100 million in aid to the contra terrorists now engaged in dismantling what's left of Nicaragua, we will be "fighting for freedom, just as we did in the Philippines."

These words were uttered by the same Ronald Reagan who one week before had hailed dictator Ferdinand Marcos' theft of the Philippine election as evidence that "a viable two-party system" existed in the former (former?) American colony. American involvement in the apparently successful Philippine revolution was limited to providing deposed tyrant Marcos and his entourage of concubines and money-carriers free passage to the USA, which is in danger of supplanting Paraguay as a safe haven for superannuated nazis.

Unless, of course, and this is a real possibility, the entire affair was a CIA-orchestrated repeat of the 1963 coup against Ngo Dinh Diem that launched us into the Vietnam morass. Ah, the trials of maintaining an empire.

And if you weren't aware that we were in the empire business, let me refer you to someone who should know, the inexorably pedantic William F. Buckley. Buckley, whose very existence provides the best argument yet against higher education, states in a column published just before the Marcos downfall that we should not be concerning ourselves with such moot points as democracy for the Philippine people; the only meaningful issue was our military bases there and their role in "our imperial responsibilities."

After all, Buckley continued, the evidence clearly demonstrated that most third world countries weren't capable of governing themselves and were thus better off under a "well-intentioned autocracy." This sort of racist flapdoodle is right out of the 19th century, when, in the name of the "white man's burden," Europeans and Americans colonized much of the non-white world. Its bottom line was and continues to be the extermination and/or enslavement of native peoples. This is, of course, of no consequence to Mr. Buckley, who inhabits a moral universe peopled by the Caligulas, Borgias, and Bokassas of history.

SAN FRANCISCO BEAT

Basing the nuclear warship Missouri on San Francisco Bay will cost local taxpayers almost \$18 million, more than five times what every sailor's darling, little Dianne Feinstein, originally told us. For this we get bunch of drunken Navy bums stumbling around the streets and the honor of being a primary target when World War III gets under way. Such a deal.

Tear down the Embarcadero Freeway? Could it be that Mayor Feinstein and I might actually agree on something?

Not really; tearing down the Embarcadero makes no sense unless it's part of a larger plan to ban all cars from the central city (which makes a lot of sense). But that in turn will never work until mass transit is a viable alternative.

Meanwhile, a minor brouhaha has erupted over the design of the new \$5 million toll plaza for the Bay Bridge. Five million smackeroos for a few money-collecting booths?!? And all people can find to argue about is what they're going to look like?

A few cogent individuals have suggested that if it weren't for laying out the five mil for new toll gates and several times that for the toll collectors' annual salaries, the bridge could be free, as was originally intended. Others, equally well-intentioned, say the toll should be doubled or tripled with revenues used to provide better transit service to those civic-minded and ecologically conscious enough to leave their smog machines at home.

I'm sympathetic to both viewpoints; there's no excuse for the hordes of commuters clogging the highways and befouling the skies with their private auto exhausts. At the same time, there are legitimate reasons for driving across the Bay Bridge from time to time, and to create long lines of gas-wasting, pollution-exhaling cars simply to collect the tolls demanded by a self-perpetuating bureaucracy is no more than basic institutional stupidity.

By all means, make the automobile drivers pay for better public transit, but collect it via registration fees or higher parking tariffs and get those ridiculously anachronistic toll gates off the Bay (and Golden Gate) Bridge. And while you're at it, bring back the ferries and I'll promise never to drive to the East Bay again.

The words of the prophets...

"Crack down on graffiti!" rails the San Francisco Examiner, which daily hacks down whole forests in order to promulgate its own pernicious brand of social commentary. Mayor Feinstein, too, has taken up the cudgel, following in the footsteps of New York's head psycho, Ed Koch.

What is it that these paragons of civic virtue find so threatening about the swelling ranks of urban redecorators? In communist countries, we're warned, typewriters and xerox machines are rigidly controlled by the state. Here it's spray paint.

Feinstein's assault on graffiti is particularly galling, coming from one who has devoted the bulk of her singularly slimy career to defacing the San Francisco cityscape with those high-rise protruberances which double as invitingly blank canvases for our spray paint guerillas (hint: portable air brushes can greatly increase one's efficiency).

I'll admit that I'm not totally charmed by a lot of graffiti, especially the variety containing racist slurs or that amounts to nothing more than plastering one's name over everything in sight.

But amid the multiple moronicisms there are jewels of wisdom to be found.

(My favorite this month: on Bay Area buses there are posters containing supposed human interest stories interposed among the advertisements. One of these posters tells the tale of a "heroic" rodeo star who subdued thousands of bulls by biting them on the lip (?!). This "brave cowboy," the story concludes, was finally killed by a horse, to which a local wit has appended, "Smart horse!")

Given ample archeological evidence that graffiti have existed just about as long as walls have, one would think that people would have by now learned to accept them as an occasionally annoying and occasionally charming aspect of urban life. Not so with politicians like Feinstein and Koch, for whom the war against wall scrawlings has become something of a domestic Vietnam, into which ever-spiraling amounts of money and manpower are poured to no visible effect.

For the current fiscal year Feinstein has budgeted a whopping \$750,000 merely to remove graffiti from Muni buses (that sum combined with the \$11.3 million siphoned off to pay for such perks as the mayor's 24 hour limousine service completely wipes out the 25% fare increase imposed on Muni riders earlier this year). With overcrowded and unreliable transit service driving thousands back into private automobiles, it would seem that the mayor has a strange order of priorities, but evidently she would prefer a neat Muni to a usable one.

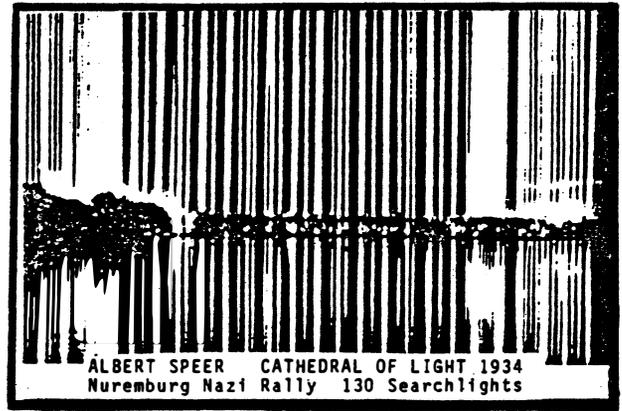
In New York literally millions of dollars have gone into repainting subway trains a virginal white. The trains are subsequently protected against further violation by double barriers of razor-sharp fencing, between which roam Alsatian attack dogs. No such precautions have been taken to safeguard life and limb of those who actually have to ride the trains; for them a simple commute to work remains something of a crap-shoot.

More importantly, graffiti serve as the mass media of the disenfranchised. With "freedom of speech" increasingly limited to those with the ability to pay for it, those whose ideas and whose very existence are routinely denied by television, radio, and the mass-circulation newspapers will inevitably find ways of making their presence known. That is the nature of the human spirit.

Politicians exhibiting a fetish for the neat and orderly bear watching; who, for example, was more devoted to the cause of worldwide cleanliness than the likes of Hitler or Mussolini? (Artist Winston Smith has provided a dramatic demonstration of this thesis with a photo-reduction of one of Hitler's famous Nuremberg rallies; the interplay of floodlights with the columnar stage set creates a series of lines that uncannily resembles the modern Universal Pricing Code).

A little untidiness is the price we pay for a truly free society. And if only graffiti artists could learn to confine their efforts to the abundance of undeniably ugly buildings (all right, I

THE EVOLUTION OF THE UPC



REDUCTION OF FOTO ABOVE



UNIVERSAL PRODUCT CODE FACSIMILIE

know that's a hopelessly subjective definition), they'd hear no complaints from me. And in that spirit, I'm willing to offer a free lifetime subscription to the LOOKOUT to the first person to spray-paint an insulting slogan across the front of Mayor Feinstein's Presidio Terrace mansion.



Graphic by Winston Smith

WHEN I HEAR THE WORD CULTURE...



It was a rainy Valentine's night, and, desperate for escape from the sight of endless yuppie couplets schmoozing over plates of pre-fab pasta (this is what passes for a night life these days), I risked social status and mental health to attend an avant-garde "art happening" (word choice and quotes mine).

Before you split your sides at the thought of anti-culture curmudgeon Lawrence Livermore subjecting himself to the pretentious ravings of the black-garbed and green-haired set, let me attempt to justify myself with these mitigating circumstances: 1) the admission price was a scant \$2, representing only a minor overtaxing of the LOOKOUT entertainment budget 2) the event took place at least a mile from the south of Market artistic sinkhole 3) some of the participants still enjoyed a working relationship with both planet earth and fellow members of their species. No, it wasn't quite Art for the Masses, but neither was it Diver-sion for the Addle-Brained with Large Dis-posable Incomes.

By far the highlight was my discovery of the most original American author I've come across since Kerouac (granted, I don't read a lot of modern fiction, but face it, why bother?). PETER PLATE, one of the evening's organizers, read from his work, and so impressed me with his command of the written and spoken word that the very next day I trundled on down to Bound Together (1369 Haight, SF) where (get this) his books are available for free! And these are no xerox rags like the LOOKOUT, but real live books, the kind you'd fork over multiple bucks for if they had the name of some schlockmeister like Rod McKuen or Norman Mailer on the cover.

What's so special about Peter's work is that he writes about real people and real feelings, wasting hardly a word on the hyperthyroid cerebralizing that the intellectual establishment confuses with literature. His stories will have special meaning for those who have known and loved the romantic underside of San Francisco street life.

If you're interested, write to Peter at PO Box 8456, San Francisco CA 94102. And I don't know how this will square with his philosophical grounding, but I'd slip a buck or two in the envelope for postage if you want him to send you something.

Another discovery for me was the TRIBAL WARNING THEATER (great name!), who presented an excerpt from a work in progress that's meant to be performed on the street (which is where, to my mind, theater belongs these days; I'd love to see the TRIBAL WARNING's death cycle unfold itself in the midst of the financial district one five o'clock just as the catatonic stockbrokers come filing out of their crypts).

TRIBAL WARNING carries on some of the stylistic tradition and revolutionary approach of the legendary LIVING THEATER, with which a couple of its members performed for many years. The segment I witnessed lacked a discernible story line (usually a minus in my book), yet the fearsome images of what I read as planetary death throes still linger powerfully in my mind several weeks later. I look forward to seeing more from these people.

There was lots of other stuff to the evening, some good, some mediocre, but none of it made a lasting enough impression on me for me to be able to fairly review it. Anyway, there's a limit to how much cultural enrichment I can absorb in a month, let alone an evening. But it's heartening to learn that maybe subterranean San Francisco isn't dead after all.

LETTERS TO THE LOOKOUT

Dear Lawrence,

I've really enjoyed the clarity of style and personal transparency you bring to the LOOKOUT. But with the February issue (#14) a definite liberal streak has emerged, which I greet with much distaste.

Your putdown of Republicans, minus further commentary, serves to elevate Democrats. Further, by urging locals to register and vote for a new County Agricultural Commissioner and Congressman, the notion that some should exercise power over others is upheld.

While many refuse the legitimacy of representation, you are trying to give the electoral corpse new life. I loathe all politicians and the assumptions inherent to their role, and I'm surprised to find that you are now giving a tired civics lesson to those who have superseded that old con.

John Zerzan
Eugene OR

Dear John,

While I generally ally myself with the basic tenet of anarchism, i.e. the best government is no government, I have also been made painfully aware by my life's experience that the only absolute is that there are no absolutes.

The refusal of a number of people to accept the legitimacy of elected governments has not resulted in the disappearance of those governments. Rather it has meant that the diminishing pool of participants in the electoral process, consisting of mostly authoritarian types, has saddled the rest of us with ever more onerous "leaders."

My primary goal is not to further the ideology of anarchism or any other philosophy, but to make a happier and healthier world for myself and my fellow creatures. All politicians may be evil, but a politician who is trying to prevent the state from spraying me with poisonous chemicals is considerably less evil than a politician who is prepared to personally pilot the spray plane. If my not voting could make both politicians go away for good, that would be better still, but I think we both know that's not how it works.

I'd feel a lot more deserving of your criticism if I were advocating electoral politics as any more than a temporary palliative. As a regular LOOKOUT reader, you must know that I constantly advocate the resistance to and the undermining of all authority. If I vote, it is not to strengthen or even to acknowledge authority, but merely to mitigate its effects on me.

The logical conclusion of arguing otherwise would be that a true anarchist could never hold a job, collect a welfare check, or even take advantage of a green light to cross the street.

LL

Dear Larry,

Darlink, I had to smile at your lofty moral distinctions which you think should be taken for granted by all others. I refer to your reply to my letter in LOOKOUT #14.

Come on, Larry. Do you really believe a kid from our catastrophic urban slums, destined while still in the womb to be the loser and failure nonpareil in this society, is, while his naked butt is quivering awaiting its first jab from the innoculating Doc, suddenly going to start wringing his hands and wailing, "To kill or not to kill? That is the question!" (Or perhaps you would prefer, "Oh Lordy, am I my brother's keeper?") He has just come in out of the cold; he's going to start eating regularly for a change. A big change. Killing an equally wretched hombre in South America has probably not even occurred to him at that point (but not to worry, Cap; his sergeant will take care of that).

Until we make these neglected families one of our chief concerns there will always be plenty of fodder for Bonnie Ronnie's oppressive war machines. And it follows, as surely as night follows day, that so long as we continue to think we can change our class-ridden system by voting, so long will the ruling elite pull our strings (Dance! Dance! Bush gets his turn next!).

Are you projecting your own moral values on a class whose every thought centers around survival? Say it isn't so, Larry.

Best regards from a
revolutionary reader
Dorothy Hardin
McMinnville OR

Dear Dorothy,

You raise some good points, especially with regard to our country's burgeoning underclass being a fertile source of cannon fodder. So much so that I can't help believing it was deliberately planned that way. And a lack of moral scruples is certainly more understandable among the desperate and oppressed than among the rich and privileged.

Understandable, yes, but excusable, no. Granted, it's easier for those of us who fall nearer the middle of the power spectrum to offer advice and make moral distinctions, but killing your fellow human for personal gain is either right or wrong; I don't see anything lofty about that. Somebody, somewhere, has to break the chains of violence and hatred, and I don't want to hold my breath waiting for Reagan and Co. to do it.

As for voting, I think my response to the previous letter covered my views on that subject. Nothing halfway about you folks up there in Oregon, is there?

LL

Dear Sir:

I read an excerpt of your publication in the Nov. 30 issue of THE NATION ("Only a Pawn in Their Game: The Life and Death of Dan White -- LOOKOUT #11). While I'm sure your sentiments are "excellent", you probably were not even aware that you revealed a prejudice against Asians.

If Vietnamese are "gooks", then why aren't blacks "niggers" and gays "queers"?

Apparently blacks and gays have enough power to have pushed their case for respect, while Asians, as yet, have not (at least not in your consciousness).

Sincerely,
Joe Ruesing
121 Evacuation Hosp.
APO San Francisco

Dear Joe,

My word choice was more revelatory (I hope) of sloppy writing than of prejudice, conscious or otherwise. I believe my original intent was to use (for irony's sake) the derogatory terms for all three groups. The LOOKOUT is often typed up in great haste at deadline time, and without benefit of proofreader. Nonetheless, thanks for calling the mistake to my attention; I'll try to be more careful in the future.

LL

MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU STUPID

I've had to once again put off my planned article about macho music because of too much other material, but most of this month's news and reviews touch peripherally on the subject anyway.

But I can't let pass a remark by the San Francisco Examiner's resident burnout, Hunter S. Thompson, in which he urged readers to listen to an old DOORS record so they would know "what it was like to hear men play rock and roll music." I always liked the DOORS, and I never had anything in particular against Hunter Thompson (except for his embarrassingly desperate attempts to prove what a man he was), but that statement has to rank as one of the stupidest I've heard in recent memory.

On the bad news front: the New Method, which I only discovered in January, is no more, the victim of mindless stupidity on the part of some of its patrons, who thought it would be real "punk" to trash the toilets and otherwise mess up the place. Not everyone agrees with me on this, but I think it's no coincidence that the damage occurred at a show featuring bands that, though they originated in the punk scene, are now basically heavy metal. Oh well, another scene gone, and really, there's no reliable place left to put on good all-ages shows. And given the record of the past few years, why would anyone want to try and start one?

Of course we could just let everything go back into the hands of the big promoters, which seems to be the trend these days. I had a rather gross reminder of what that would be like when I attended a GRATEFUL DEAD show in Oakland last month.

LOOKOUT readers will know that I've been begging for someone to give me a free ticket to see the old geezers so that I could at least give them a fair review for once instead of just putting them down based on my memories of several years ago. Well, someone finally came through with one, but there really wasn't that much to see.

The crowd, though dressed like it was still 1970, was largely young; most of the survivors of the original Dead era were leaning against walls nodding out or were working as crowd control goons for producer Bill Graham.

What they were supposed to be controlling was a mystery to me; the crowd, 90% of which was probably tripping on LSD, was about as aggressive as a convention of sea anemones. Nevertheless, everywhere you turned, Graham's burly thugs, clad in tasteful blue satin jackets proclaiming that we were listening to "Miller Music: Made the American Way" (you wouldn't expect a poor struggling promoter like Graham to be able to provide his own uniforms, would you?), could be seen roughly elbowing their way through the tie-dyed throngs and tenaciously guarding a series of imaginary lines behind which the Truly Important people could take their drugs in peace without having to be bothered by the consumer rabble.

I think people paid something like \$16.50 for this extravaganza, and I didn't hear anybody complaining about it. On the other hand, a lot of the mostly suburban crowd probably stole the money out of their moms' purses or got it by selling drugs to their high school classmates. But they looked happy, dancing merrily along to whatever turgid rhythms the DEAD dished up.

Oh yeah, the GRATEFUL DEAD, I almost forgot about them. They were there, I think, though it could have been an elaborate stereo system for all I know; unless you were willing to climb up in the balcony, it was almost impossible to see the stage from anywhere where there was room enough to dance. I had been looking forward to this show, convincing myself that it would be like the old days, and worked up a lot of enthusiasm. Unfortunately, the DEAD hadn't; they pretty much walked through a generic set interrupted by an hour-long break (geez, I know they're old, but how much rest do they need?).

Maybe if I'd joined in the collective drug orgy (on the way in I was offered cocaine, mushrooms, LSD, mescaline, amphetamine, marijuana, and hashish by various vendors), I would have been able to get more in the spirit of things. As it was, the whole affair reminded me of a Disneyland exhibit.

Reviews

SPASTIC CHILDREN, ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT, 7 SECONDS at Rock On Broadway, with non-musical sequel at the emergency room of San Francisco General Hospital

Back in journalism class (I hope that revelation doesn't completely discredit me), the first rule we were hit over the head with was, "Just the facts, dude," otherwise known as that nebulous ideal of "objectivity."

The alternative media explosion of the 1960s went a long way toward dismantling that myth; many of the era's best journalists were first participants in, and only secondarily recounters of, the demonstrations, riots, mystical quests, and drug-induced megalomaniacs of that already storied time.

The reasoning behind this new approach went along the lines of Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty, which posits that any process that takes place is inevitably affected and altered by the mere act of observing it. You know, the old nothing takes place in a vacuum, no man is an island sort of thing...

All of which is an elaborate way of saying that this was not a normal show for me, and I obviously can't write a normal review of it. Readers who are only interested in the music can get a capsule summary thereof in the next couple of paragraphs and skip the rest of the story.

Rock on Broadway used to be a punk venue, but for some time now it has been pretty much exclusively a metal scene. This was reflected in the crowd (what there was of it), most of which looked like it belonged at Winterland circa 1975. SPASTIC CHILDREN were composed of your basic heavy metal jock types, complete with groupies, foppish costumes, and antediluvian hairstyles. Their act consisted of what I believe was meant to be a parody of punk rock. I hesitate to call it truly bad, since some bands will take that as a compliment. Let's just say it had all the charm of a toxic waste dump leaching into your water supply.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT had, for want of another word, a much better attitude. Much of their material deals with war (they're against it), and their energetic singer didn't hesitate to remind the audience of that fact. One unpleasantly: a tune called "Rambo's a Fag". While I stand second to no one in my loathing for Sylvester Stallone's sub-moronic neo-nazi panderings, to use words like "fag" as epithets sounds pretty close to a Rambo mentality itself. Try substituting "Rambo's a nigger" or "Rambo's a Jew" and see how it sounds. The first step toward genocide is the reducing of a class of people to sub-

human status. There are plenty of ways to attack Rambo without slurring homosexuals. ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT's music? Sort of like heavy metal without guitar solos, if you can imagine such a thing.

7 SECONDS, the band I had come to see, is more and more becoming a solo act featuring singer Kevin Seconds and whatever backing musicians he can throw together. For one who has made a career out of preaching unity, it's curious that he seems unable to maintain much of it with his fellow band members.

The current incarnation turned out more than competent versions of all the greatest hits, but minus (a big minus) the anthemic background vocals that have always set 7 SECONDS apart from the generic thrash bands.

But while it wasn't peak-quality 7 SECONDS, it was more than good enough to put a smile back on my face for the first time that night. A short-lived smile, as it turned out; about two thirds of the way through the set a stage diver delivered a kick to my forehead that left me staggering off the floor with blood gushing from my face at a frightening clip.

Was it deliberate? I don't know, but I suspect it was. I do know that if it had landed on a more vulnerable part of my skull, it could have killed me.

I was still mopping up blood when the show ended. Now came part two of the evening's entertainment: five hours in the waiting room of San Francisco General Hospital, that special circle of hell reserved for those pathetic individuals so bereft of decency as to possess neither medical insurance nor large amounts of cash.

Let me interject that I don't mean to attack the beleaguered doctors and nurses, who remain amazingly compassionate and caring in the face of the nonstop carnival of horrors assaulting their senses. There just aren't enough of them. During the post-midnight hours that I spent pacing the waiting room, I had plenty of time to think of the shameless criminals like Dianne Feinstein and Ronald Reagan, comfortably asleep in their taxpayer-supported mansions, who had looted the money once allotted to medical care and dumped it into their own self-aggrandizing boondoggles.

But I also had a lot of time to think about myself, and the punk scene I have defended so strongly for all these years. When people would say, "It's all just a bunch of mindless violence," I would counter with, "No, that's just a minority who don't understand what punk's really about."

Now I'm seriously wondering if it's not me who's in the minority. As someone who doesn't feel that character is something to be measured by the ability to endure or inflict pain, I'm starting to feel way out of place.

Maybe (dare I say it?) it's time for me to step to the sidelines and leave the pit to a younger generation. Just before I got kicked, I had been kidding MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL's Tim Yohannan about the fact that I had never seen him thrashing at a show, to which he protested, "I'm forty years old!" Well, I'm only a couple of years behind Tim; maybe I've been fooling

myself thinking that, in the words of 7 SECONDS' classic song, "I'm gonna stay young until I die."

But one of the biggest attractions of the punk scene for me was that it was open to all kinds and all ages of people. My own band has a policy of not playing in bars because we don't want an audience limited to over-21 alcohol drinkers. I want to see a scene where not only people half my age, but also people twice my age can feel comfortable. But I'm just a crazy dreamer, right? Maybe so, but it's too late for someone like me to stop dreaming now.

A lot of people will say I'm taking this all too personally; others have been hurt way worse, even killed in rock and roll violence. Yet I don't have any other way to take it but personally. Beyond all the moral and ideological aspects that attracted me to punk, the first thing was that it was fun. That's starting to not be true anymore.

Meanwhile, back at the hospital, an old man, apparently homeless, fell asleep in the waiting room. Ordered to get up and get out, he couldn't or wouldn't respond. Two of the many cops hanging around (they outnumbered the doctors, by the way) put on sterile plastic gloves before carrying him out the door and depositing him on the sidewalk like so much human garbage. One of the cops then went back to his desk to carefully sterilize his hands with alcohol. And I thought the punk scene was cold?

Either I'm getting too sensitive for my own good, or society in general is getting progressively more barbarous. Any subculture I'm going to be a part of has to offer a genuine alternative to that trend. If punk is going to become nothing more than an opportunity for young men to vent their pent-up hostilities, maybe it's time to be moving on.

Now I've got five stitches in my forehead, and they tell me I'll have a small but permanent scar. Some scars you can wear as badges of honor; this one's more a memorial to stupidity. Whose stupidity? Mine, for not paying attention?



non-lethal thrashing



The guy who kicked me and never even looked back to see if I was all right? A scene that shrugs its collective shoulders at the sight of people stumbling away from shows with bloodied faces or worse?

POST SCRIPT: It's now a couple of weeks later, and as the doctors predicted, I've got a noticeable scar on my forehead that I've managed to convince myself lends character to my face. I haven't given up on punk after all, though I doubt you'll see me around the Rock On Broadway again.

The very next night, with my face still looking as if I'd gone through a windshield, I went to a CHRIST ON PARADE show in an East Bay pizza parlor, and had a lot of my faith restored. This was a New Method in exile, AKA No Method production, and even though I hardly know most of the people involved, it felt like coming home.

photos by Murray Bowles

Most of the people that heard what had happened to me the previous night said something like, "It's that speedmetal crowd; they just don't know how to thrash without hurting people." I'm inclined to agree. Some people see the blending together of punk and metal as a positive thing, but as far as I'm concerned, its effect on the punk scene has been almost totally regressive. I mean unity's fine, but unity about what? If you just want to be together with a bunch of people, go join the army.

Anyway, CHRIST ON PARADE were great, the energy in the air was positive, and I decided that this was the only kind of show I wanted to be involved with. Not too big, and consisting of people who genuinely care about one another. I realize now that I don't belong in strictly commercial operations like the Rock on Broadway. If other bands want to play there, that's their business, but unless the scene totally changes, you won't ever see the LOOKOUTS there. I'd rather play in the streets.

Speaking of the LOOKOUTS, if you live in the Bay Area, watch for us to be performing sometime soon. Where, I'm not sure yet. We're hoping to put together a show with two exciting new East Bay bands, RABID LASSIE and the MR. T EXPERIENCE. And that's the latest on the rock and roll scene from your old pal Lawrence "Scarface" Livermore.



Mike of CHRIST ON PARADE

photo by Murray Bowles

WHO OWNS THE AIRWAVES?

When I was growing up in the 50s and 60s, my ear was never far from a radio speaker. Sure, there was a lot of dreck sandwiched between the pimple cream ads, but there was also some of the greatest rock and roll music ever made.

As it began to sink into the arteriosclerotic skulls of corporate America just what it was that those kids were screeching and hollering about, rock and roll radio underwent a process of sterilization that was to give us the formulaic Top 40 (really the top 15 or 20) format. Any sounds that were not sufficiently bland, Caucasian, and commercially packagable were inexorably winnowed out.

Cultural purges of this sort have periodically recurred ever since. Frozen out of the AM airwaves by a rigid self-imposed censorship, the rabble-rousing drugs and revolution music of the late 1960s found an outlet when hipsters created "underground" radio by taking over little-used FM channels. But by the mid-70s the FM sound had devolved into as rigid a format as that of 60s AM, with waterbed ads taking the place of the pimple creams.

The punk and new wave explosion of the late 70s predictably found little acceptance on the now-establishment FM stations, and a new underground was born, this time on low-power noncommercial college radio. With ridiculously inadequate equipment and signals that extended barely a few miles from campus (and that only if there were no hills or large buildings intervening), stations like KUSF and KALX (University of San Francisco and UC Berkeley, respectively) broadcast the first stirrings of the new musical revolution.

Today those stations, and hundreds of others like them, have become big business. Not in the conventional sense; they still don't sell commercial time, and thus are theoretically free from the constraints for-profit radio stations labor under. But to the handful of corporations that control the pop music scene, college radio has become an invaluable marketing tool.

In this age of illiteracy, the electronic media become all-important. Any fool can start a newspaper or magazine (you hold Exhibit A in your hands), but the radio and television airwaves, while nominally owned by "the public," are completely controlled by the government in the form of the Federal Communications Commission and the corporations it chooses to grant licenses to.

In societies where repression is less subtle, the government would simply send armed men to shut down non-conforming transmitters (set up an unlicensed transmitter in this country and you will quickly achieve the same result unless you're mobile and clever--more about that later). But here much of the dirty work is done by the allegedly free marketplace.

The handful of truly independent stations operate under tremendous financial pressures (I'm speaking now mainly of radio; free TV is almost prohibitively expensive). Thus the temptation is great to subsist on a diet of freely proffered corporate music (now almost universally referred to as "product"). The result is a further homogenization of tastes and the closing off one of the few remaining avenues of exposure for new music that fails big business' political-cultural litmus test.

A case in point: in the late 1970s, one of the prime movers of San Francisco's new musical underground was Howie Klein, who in addition to starting his own record label, 415 Records, played a big hand in the adventurous direction then being taken by KUSF radio. Despite being president of his own company, Howie was no executive type; he could regularly be seen at shows pogoing to the likes of the NUNS and the AVENGERS. Today 415 Records is a minor satrapy of CBS (or maybe it's Warner's; I don't keep track of these things), and Howie is more likely to turn up at industry conventions and awards banquets, twisting his tongue into improbable contortions to sing the praises of "my good friends" HUEY LEWIS or JOURNEY, the sort of mainstream rockers who represent everything punk set out to destroy.

There's a lesson here, and it should be fairly obvious: little compromises lead to big sellouts, and the artist or entrepreneur who thinks he or she is capable of "using" the corporate media apparatus without being sullied thereby is suffering from a more than average overdose of hubris.

It would be stretching a point to call many college stations "underground" these days; KUSF scores higher in the Arbitron ratings than many commercial operations. But the absence of advertisements and the good-natured amateurishness of the production values (less and less true these days, especially at KUSF, which is sounding like a farm team for the big FM stations) creates the sort of aura that once clung to the "hip" FM channels long after they had devolved into little more than corporate shells.

And that, sadly, is what appears to have happened to KUSF. The station that was the first to play much of the most exciting music of the late 70s and early 80s is now reduced to a monotonous diet of new wave pablum with no real point other than to hype the major record companies' latest releases (I heard one DJ, in an inadvertent spasm of broadcast lucidity, say precisely that, though he might have thought he was being sarcastic).

So what's wrong with that, I can hear a lot of you saying. After all, rock and roll is just a business, like any other kind of entertainment, isn't it? It's always been heavily commercialized, and besides, what has rock and roll ever had to add to the cultural mix besides sex, drugs, and unbridled hedonism?

So saith the Washington housewives, and you'll get the same argument out of the more staid old lefties, but to the vast majority of young people to have come of age in this second half of the twentieth century, rock and roll has also been the marching music of revolutionary change. Never mind that it has been co-opted to sell everything from vaginal deodorants to army enlistments (a fate which seems sooner or later to engulf every new form of artistic expression); from the 50s down to the 80s much of the most piquant (and effective) social criticism has been shouted and screamed to a driving 4/4 beat.

Those who judge the current state of rock and roll by the stuff heard on commercial radio and the somatic MTV would be justified in concluding that the spirit of radical protest (minus the vaguely liberal musings of a Bruce Springsteen) has been completely replaced by paeans to consumerism and nostalgia. But with the cultural media almost completely controlled by the same handful of corporations who provide us with South African fascism, nuclear death cults, and Ronald McReagan's Amerika, Inc., what did you expect?

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There are a handful of broadcast outlets that have so far managed to resist the overall trend. Berkeley's KALX provides those lucky enough to live within its 500 watt range some of the most exciting programming available anywhere. Listener-supported KPFA, also in Berkeley, is politically radical but musically conservative (except of course for Tuesday night's MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL). But an enormous vacuum still exists, one which in my opinion can only be filled by truly "underground" broadcasting.

I'm talking about what has been romantically called pirate radio, and the time has never been riper for it. In fact, if I were capable of stringing two wires together without electrocuting myself, I'd be on the air already. Pirate radio (and TV, in some cases) is thriving in some European countries, and it's disgraceful that America, touted as the land of innovation, is lagging behind in this all-important area.

The technical expertise required is apparently not all that great (SOUND CHOICE magazine, \$2.50 and well worth it from POB 1251, Ojai CA 93023, promises its spring issue will contain a complete guide to setting up your own transmitter), and the other part of the equation, outwitting the authorities, is (or should be) deeply woven into the American way of life.

So hop to it, boys and girls. Help keep the spirit of freedom alive, and break the government-corporate (it's about time somebody invented a word to combine those two almost identical concepts) stranglehold on what goes into the eyes, ears, and brains of the ovine masses. Out here in radioland, I'll be listening for you.

And here's a good start...

PRESS RELEASE: 937-1469 PUTS YOU ON THE AIR IN MENDOCINO!

Starting at noon, February 21, a new radio station will be heard in Mendocino, at 88.1 on the FM dial. The station operates at less than one tenth of a watt, and it may be received clearly throughout the village.

Directly connected to the transmitter is a telephone-answering machine which may be reached at 937-1469. Callers will be told, "You're broadcasting! Have fun!" and will automatically be put on the air live at the sound of the tone. The phone number will only be listed in the paper, so write it permanently on or near your phone.

The tiny station uses less electricity than a flashlight bulb, and will run 24 hours per day indefinitely, without a moderator, and without causing any form of radio or TV interference.

You can call 937-1469 and, once greeted by the machine, play records and tapes into the phone. You can arrange rides, read poetry, tell stories, complain about your job, talk about things you talk about all day anyway! The possibilities are endless. Children are especially encouraged to call and speak. You may call again and again, any time and from anywhere, to the limit of your telephone budget.

This amazing service is provided free by RADIO*FREE*EARTH. For more information, write RADIO*FREE*EARTH, Box 1497, Mendocino CA 95460, and enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Remember: write the phone number or pin this article next to your phone, watch this publication for further details, and when in town, tune in! Have fun!

Marco McClean

QUOTH THE LOOKOUT: LIVERMORE

I'd like to apologize to my readers for this issue of the LOOKOUT being a week or so late. I could blame it on last month's floods, but that would be only marginally true. In reality I was just in a black and blue funk that made the idea of sitting down at my typewriter more than I could bear.

The flood did prevent me from getting to my mailbox for a while, and when I finally did, out tumbled an avalanche of letters that gave me both a much-needed energy boost and some even-more-needed ideas for what I was going to write about this month. A lot of the letters were too long or too personal to publish, but that doesn't mean that they weren't (in)valuable contributions to LOOKOUT #15. So to all of you, thanks for reminding me of why I put myself through all this every month. And though it may take me a while, I'll personally answer every one of you.

I've also received a couple of criticisms for referring to Dianne Feinstein as a "Jewish den mother" in LOOKOUT #14, from people who thought that amounted to an ethnic slur. I didn't mean it that way, but to people who took offense at it, I'm sorry. I'll have to give more careful thought to how I insult the old girl in the future.

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