

LOOKOUT!

April 1986

Number 16

ALIENATION

MAKE THE BORDERS GO AWAY!

Last summer, during a party at a neighbor's teepee, I was talking with a friend from Paris. Though my French leaves a lot to be desired, we were getting along fine when a snaggle-toothed hippie who'd been drunk since 1969 or thereabouts staggered up and belched in our faces: "Damn Mexicans! Why don't you learn to talk English?"

As it happened, the man I was talking with is fluent in three languages, and is an accomplished photographer, writer, and producer. Yet because he doesn't speak English, a garden-variety drunk feels justified treating him with the sort of courtesy normally accorded a mangy stray dog.

My friend was, of course, an Alien. Perhaps even an Illegal one. Despite the obvious fact that international borders are as imaginary as they are invisible, millions of people are in an uproar over the idea that the United States is being overrun with "foreigners".

No sense in pointing out to these xenophobes that everyone, even the so-called Native Americans, once came from somewhere else. Never mind, too, that just about everything worthwhile in America except the scenery originated in some other land. In the mind of the 20th century know-nothings, the USA is complete as is, and it's time to put up our own version of the Great Wall.

Me, I say the more aliens the better. I love walking down the street with the sound of a dozen different languages caressing my ears. To have my senses teased by sights and smells from all around

the planet is a minor form of heaven. If some Bedouins want to pitch their tents down on the corner and roast goats on a spit, that would improve the neighborhood immensely. Maybe we could even find an obscure race of cannibals which thrives on a diet of disembowelled yuppies.

But obviously the romanticized ideal of America the melting pot has fallen into disrepute. Nowadays we are more likely to hear talk of keeping our culture "pure", of the danger of being overwhelmed by other languages or customs. This sort of thinking, of course, owes more to Nazi theories of the Master Race than to the high-minded sentiments engraved on the much-in-the-news-these-days Statue of Liberty.

The wretched huddled masses yearning to breathe free have been replaced by fleeing dictators and international gangsters, their suitcases stuffed with ill-gotten cash. The ordinary refugee or immigrant, the sort from whom the vast majority of us descended, is confronted with a bureaucratic obstacle course that says at every turn: "If you're not rich and white, or useful as a propaganda pawn, you can go back where you came from and die, for all we care."

Though the arrogance and rudeness of American customs agents is well known to international travellers, the United States is far from alone in obstructing the free movement of people around the planet. At every turn, one is expected to display documents, purchase visa stamps, demonstrate financial worth,

have one's belongings rooted through by an unsmiling stranger, even to be stripped naked and have probes inserted in one's bodily orifices. Practices such as these have become so common, so universal, that few people even question them anymore, accepting them as givens like taxes and military conscription.

Yet the aggravations of border crossings are insignificant in the total scheme of evils engendered by the fundamental myth of nationalism. Arrogant intellectual fascists of the William F. Buckley ilk like to sneer at the inter-tribe conflicts that have made a shambles of attempts at democracy in former Third World colonies, but the endless squabbles among the industrialized nations are no less pointless and infinitely more destructive. When you consider that the tribal system is just a logical evolution of the extended family, it's easy to see why the arbitrary and artificial boundaries imposed by European imperialism have led to major problems; it's as if some heavily armed strangers were to march into your home and inform you that the people next door and some other people from down the block would be moving in with you, and that henceforth you would all live as one big happy family.

Some of the world's older countries are almost tribal in nature; the inhabitants are of the same racial stock, speak the same language, and, to outsiders at least, all look pretty much the same. As a nation of immigrants, the United States never fit that mold, and if there was one reason, besides money, that the USA quickly moved to the forefront in technological and cultural innovation, it was because we had the combined heritages of most of the world's peoples to draw upon. To retreat now into an insular fortress mentality is to turn our back on our greatest natural resource and our truest source of wealth.

The right-wingers and outright fascists who have seized control of America's political agenda are Malthusians in the most fundamental sense of the word; to them the essence of economics is kill or be killed. Anything that challenges their right to have two yachts in every marina is viewed as life-threatening, hence their quickness to disseminate the canard that there is not sufficient wealth in this country to provide for everyone who would like to live here.

The fears thus stirred up among the working classes, whose own existence is already dangerously marginal, conveniently obscure the painfully obvious fact that this country is rich enough in both food and money to by itself provide for every person now living on this planet. The concentration of that wealth in the hands

of the greedy and monomaniacally self-centered few has created the worldwide imbalance that has millions of impoverished would-be immigrants vying for the privilege of busing tables and picking up the garbage of America's ruling class. And in one of capitalism's most inglorious traditions, the poor and the even poorer are at each others' throats while the rich go merrily unmolested on their way.

But there's no denying that if we were to eliminate international borders today, the population of the United States would quickly double or triple, and while that could be quite exciting for aficionados of chaos, the resulting disruption would be less than completely pleasant. How then to go about creating a borderless world, the obvious and necessary next step in human development?

The first step is to extend the notion that we our our brother's keeper to include all our brothers (and sisters!). Except for the ignoramuses who worship at the Reaganoid temple of greed, most of us accept the idea that it is our responsibility to lend a helping hand to those less fortunate than us--as long as they were fortunate enough to be born in the same country as us. Is it too great a leap of logic to realize that people on the other side of the Rio Grande like to eat, too? The millions of Mexicans who have migrated northward are for the most part not here because they prefer our climate or culture, but because they simply can not afford to live in their own land. Racists may try to tell you that Mexico is poor because its people are congenitally lazy (that's why they're willing to take the low-paid and back-breaking jobs that even the hardest up norteamericanos won't touch), but it probably has a lot more to do with the fact that we stole half their country, and the richer half at that.

That may be historical water under the bridge, but the fact that millions of people are suffering and even dying from malnutrition right under our upraised noses is not. People say, well, we can't feed the whole world, and I say why not? For the past forty years we've poured the bulk of our resources into building machines whose sole function is the elimination of all life from this planet. People accept that as normal, yet consider the idea of feeding the world's hungry dangerously radical. To me the sight of people starving while others devote their lives to blithely piling up wealth and implements of destruction is as unbearable as it is unthinkable.

Our real enemies are not the masses confronting us from across opposing borders, but rather those who draw the lines that keep us divided. I long ago withdrew my recognition of any international boundaries. I will go where I want to go, and I will do whatever I can to help anyone who

wants to come here. I hope people of good will everywhere will do the same. The borders will not vanish all at once, but if we begin now to tear down the barriers within our minds, their physical counterparts will soon begin to wither away, as they should and must.

One planet one people the only way it
can be
One planet one people and we'll all
live free

the LOOKOUTS

Ronald Reagan Prays



O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle--be Thou near them! O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief. For our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water

their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it in the spirit of love, of Him who is the Source of Love, and who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all who are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

...Mark Twain

reprinted from the
ANDERSON VALLEY ADVERTISER

Don't Cry For Nicaragua...

Don't cry for Nicaragua
Cry for what we've become
A nation of the criminally stupid
Blind to what our government's done
Don't cry for Nicaragua
Nicaragua will be free one day
But I shudder when I think of the
bloody price
My own country still has to pay

...the LOOKOUTS

Sometime soon, probably within the next year, young Americans will start dying in Nicaragua. What's wrong with this sentence?

What's blatantly wrong is that Americans, young, old, and in-between, have been dying in Nicaragua for years, but because they were Spanish-speaking Central Americans and not English-speaking North Americans, nobody in this country (beyond the usual handful of bleeding hearts) could be bothered caring.

And in the debate over U.S. aid to the contras, the recurring theme is not the morality of funding terrorism in Central America, but rather what course of action will prevent the necessity of sending "our American boys" to fight and die in that tortured land. Such is the manipulative power of Ronald Reagan and this nation's sycophantic media apparatus that discussion no longer centers on whether we have any business trying to overthrow another country's government, but on how best to accomplish that aim.

But underneath Reagan's obscene gobbledygook about "freedom fighters" and our "noble cause" lies the grim reality that the United States is headed into another insane and bloody war, one which will probably make Vietnam look like a picnic. The invasion of Nicaragua could very well begin the final unravelling of the (North) American Empire.

"I am a contra," declares our callously insensate president, but he carries no gun, braves no bombardments, and is unlikely to show his contemptible face within a thousand miles of a battle zone. No, as always, it will be the

young, just awakening to the meaning and potential of the lives lying ahead of them, who will have their bodies ripped and shredded into bloody bits to satisfy the greed of the few and the ignorance of the many.

If Reagan is a contra, let him lead the next assault, and let him take with him the cowardly gaggle of senators and representatives so quick to say, "Let's you and him fight." People who put guns in the hands of murderers themselves, whether they sit in the halls of Congress, or merely give their assent by way of votes or taxes.

If I were 18 or 19 years old today, I'd be making plans to get out of here; the draft is coming back, and the flag-draped coffins won't be far behind. But if we only worry about sparing ourselves while allowing our government to wage war by proxy on a whole nation of innocents, we will already have surrendered our consciences. With that battle lost, the rest is a foregone conclusion; a country that abandons any semblance of moral responsibility is not long for this world.

If the United States goes ahead with its planned invasion, it does not deserve to live. Throughout much of its history, our country has fed, vampire-like, on the misery of a whole continent to the south of us. If we as Americans can sit back enjoying the fruits of our corporate government's plunder and not lift a finger in defense of our Latino brothers and sisters, we deserve to go down in flames with the whole bloody system.

Vietnam was just a warning, a faint foretaste of the fury that will be unleashed if this country continues its murderous ways. The smug suburban gringos of California, of Texas, of all the southwestern United States, would do well to remember that they are sitting on occupied territory, and that all around them live the people from whom it was stolen. Whose side do you think they'll be on if it comes to the crunch? Whose side do you think I'll be on? Not that of Ronald Reagan and his gang of despicable nazis who have taken everything I ever found beautiful and true about America and trampled it beneath their jackbooted heels.

Don't cry for Nicaragua
Nicaragua will be free one day
But I wonder how long that will still
be true

Back here in the USA
Don't cry for Nicaragua
Nicaragua will be free one day

Good News for Your Kids:

Baby Food Mostly Free of Glass

MENDOCINO CONTRAS LIKEN SELVES TO FOUNDING FATHERS; ASK CIA AID

Inspired by the federal government's enthusiasm for arming the Nicaraguan "freedom fighters", embattled Mendocino farmers have formed their own contra units and are appealing to the CIA for similar assistance.

Especially sought after are shoulder-launched Stinger missiles able to bring down helicopters at a distance of three miles. "Without these weapons," declared Rainbow Sunlight Abraxas, the guerrillas' colorful leader, "the forces of freedom will be helpless against the spreading cancer of CAMP (Campaign Against Marijuana Planting). We are following in the footsteps of America's founding fathers and mothers in resisting colonial oppression. Surely President Reagan, who has declared himself foursquare on the side of freedom, will not desert us in our hour of need."

At press time the LOOKOUT had been unsuccessful in reaching President Reagan for comment; aides said that he had locked himself in a room and was amusing himself by making anonymous insulting phone calls to Libyan President Moammar Khadafy.

COMET BURNOUT: METAPHOR FOR A LIFE?

All right, so it's only a neon dirtball trailing sparks halfway across the universe; ever since I first heard about it as a 10 year-old astronomy buff, Halley's Comet was always charged with a special meaning that went way beyond that of an intergalactic fireworks display.

In those black-and-white-blurring-into-gray days of the 1950s, 1986 seemed impossibly far off, an eternity of Christmas eves and birthdays away. As I grew older, and realized that time really did pass of its own accord, and after being burned by 1975's no-show comet Kohoutek, The Comet also assumed a symbolic importance. I thought of the relative handful of people who were around back in 1910, for whom Halley's would serve as a beacon marking the beginning and ending of their lives.

And for me it would mark the midway point, the time when my creative powers would be at their zenith, a time to look back with satisfaction on my accomplishments and adventures, and to

begin reaping the harvest of a life well spent.

Things don't always work out the way you planned, do they? With a part of me slipping into middle age and another part still wallowing in adolescent angst, I see my life racing by at a breathtaking clip while I'm still bumbling around trying to figure out how work this contraption I call myself.

What's next? Do things ever start to make sense, or do they just go on careening out of control until they have their final reckoning with the brick wall of time?

Oh yeah, the comet... Well, as anyone who happened to glance up in the sky lately knows, it was a likely candidate for flop of the century. Are the heavens trying to tell me something about myself? Maybe this whole era of history was a big mistake, and those of us unlucky enough to be born in it would be best advised to cultivate a sense of humor and a lot of patience.

That last is good advice in any place or time, but no, I don't think my life's a flop. Boring and frustrating at times, yes, too often tragic and comic at all the wrong moments, but somehow amid the wreckage of my delusions I've managed to find threads of hope, of truth, of love.

I'm alone a lot; too much, it often seems, and yet my words rattle around the brains of people all over this planet. Though the paper I write upon, like the culture I reflect, is ultimately disposable and visibly impermanent, I have already made a mark, however slight, that will never be erased.

So a bunch of electrified dust in the cosmic wind let me down. In my necessarily vague view of the afterlife, I have this fantasy that people who accumulate enough light and wisdom evolve into stars and suns. Me, I think I'll be a comet.

LETTERS TO THE LOOKOUT

DEATH OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Woman kills husband and 2.1 children, then kills self. "The stress of today's society is too much," note says. Maybe her husband's family had a long history of males who were alcoholics and/or wife beaters. Maybe they had kids because they thought that's what they were supposed to do. Maybe one income wasn't enough to satisfy their needs. What is happening to the old-fashioned family where women were housewives and rearing brats was fulfilling? What is going wrong? It's just that this is not the norm anymore, and we must re-adjust our brains and our tax dollars to accommodate the change.

Though it may seem like the guns before butter policy will be the ruin of most of us (it's a steep triangle with very few rich people on top), there are various programs within the state, county, whatever, that actually do try and help families in distress. Funds, of course, run out, but don't be apathetic. If you are in need, ask for help. If they won't give your family food stamps (more on some new definitions of "family" momentarily), at least they know you're out there. Write to your congressman, that's only one stamp. Often the runaround on the phone to various departments can be frustrating.

I am married, have two children, don't have a job (that pays). I want a job. Somehow society slipped up on molding me into a perfect Mommy. But I am having trouble even looking for a job. What do I do with the kids? In today's society, "kin" are usually far away. I must form a network of caring friends to support my position (babysit for free). This is what I believe shall be in the future considered "family". There are also single parent families, blended families (divorcees plus two sets of offspring), gay families, and more and more families where both parents work.

I can't believe that Ray-gun had the gall to blame rises in unemployment on the fact that more women are joining the work force. On top of handicaps the ERA is attempting to rectify, the old geezer is trying to make us feel guilty! The old barefoot, pregnant, and in the kitchen bigotry. Meanwhile, back on the ranch: I, like Lawrence, also live quite isolated from civilization, and my for-the-most-part sweet children are literally driving me insane. I have realized and admitted to being a potential child-batterer. Just like I could also admit to being a drug



The BIA (Billboard Improvement Association) Award of the Month goes to the Noe Valley artists who altered this advert at Jersey and Castro

addict, a total bitch, frightened to death, or just plain lonely. Communication is tres important in this world, people. Open up.

Anyway, now I'm wondering how society will deal with the problem it has bred--me. Will they provide me with adequate child care? Will they help me get a job? Or will they send me home with a prescription of Valium #5s--"Chin up, old girl!" Maybe they'll come in their clean white suits, etc., etc. I promise to write a short in the next issue to let you all know what happens.

And if you need help with your life, look into what's offered--for free. Call Narcotics Anonymous, call a shelter for battered women if your macho boyfriend seems to be holding you prisoner. They'll provide transportation and you will be safe at a confidential location. I believe that they're going to make welfare recipients and those on AFDC take job training courses, which is good. At least that means they're going to have to put out more cash and energy to those lucky enough to qualify. How about applying for a grant to go to college? Or maybe down at the EDD (Employment Development Department) they have some federal or state jobs available. Take the power away from assholes. Take control of your own destiny. Life isn't meant to be miserable.

LLW
Petaluma CA

Dear Larry,

I, of all people, can certainly understand your desire to "break the chains of violence and hatred" (Letters, LOOKOUT #15), but your remedy--i.e., singling out society's wretched poor as standard-bearers for the crusade--is totally unrealistic. As a mystical idealist you rate an 'A' but as an astute observer (which you usually are) of contemporary chaos, you deserve an 'F' in this case.

"Thou shalt not kill" didn't work for the Decalogist Moses and it won't work for Lawrence Livermore. As you well know, the history of mankind is nothing if not a series of bloody holocausts in which the powerless were always the victims.

Exploited people living today who perceive that they have no stake in a society usually won't vote and some of them will join the military forces, to name two of your bugaboos. If we truly want to put an end to all the shameful ramifications of human degradation we've got to change the system which spawns violence. Abject poverty is a built-in given of capitalism at its base. On the opposite end we have legitimized governmental violence in the name of a complex network of corporations which support it. Both are the unintended results of invention, technical advance,

and the accumulation of goods which, at present, favor only the wealthy. Total anarchy won't work for that is a blueprint for even more violence. Neither am I advocating a Russian-style society (take note, commie-haters!), but I refuse to believe the Russians are the evil threat that present and past manipulative politicians and the obliging "free" press would have us believe.

But I digress--this all started when you, Larry, called the enlisted men "dregs of society." As Tallulah Bankhead once said of a Maeterlinck play: "There's less here than meets the eye." The men are acting and re-acting in a way the conditions of their lives dictate: in short, in a human way, and to expect them to do otherwise is to miss the point of history. Men eat before they reason. In that respect your position is, indeed, lofty (Do I detect a vestige of your discarded, authoritarian religion still clinging to you?). A good argument could be made that your moral tenet is a prop to the very class whose interests the capitalist system embodies.

By the way, what name would you call the over-paid scientists who enlist in the most powerful triumvirate (the military-industrial-governmental complex) in history to give us The Bomb? Or those now responsible for spending billions for Star Wars? And how about those charming fellas in the CIA? Or the anti-abortionists who bomb and burn while screaming to high heaven about the sanctity of life? And what will you call the members of Congress if they vote \$100 million of our taxes for the contras?

Either "dregs of society" is in the eyes of the beholder or I'm too quick to defend the poor.

Your dissenting friend,
Dorothy Hardin
McMinnville OR

Dear Dorothy:

OK, you win. I'll admit to slinging epithets around a little too glibly and as a defense can only plead my own inbred middle-class prejudices. After all, soldiers are visibly ill-mannered, whether machine-gunning their fellow peasants or merely carousing drunkenly about the streets of your town. That bunch you mentioned in your next to last paragraph, on the other hand; mostly dress in nice suits, speak good English, and keep their lawns neatly mowed. In the words of John Lennon, they have learned how to "smile as they kill."

But you are right; they are infinitely more to blame for the institutionalized carnage masquerading as modern society than are "the young, the dumb, and the numb" whose bodies, indeed, whose whole lives are viewed as nothing more than tools of industry and weapons of war.

But in conclusion, I cannot resist asking if this means that I can inform Mayor Feinstein that you would be willing to have the U.S.S. Missouri and its crew home-ported up there in McMinnville instead of in San Francisco?

LL

Lawrence -

I finally got your missive. The address you wrote to was incomplete, so it took about 2½ weeks for me to receive it. So I guess I missed your deadline.

Anyway, thanks for your sentiments. I'm glad you came to our Gumption Theatre function.

About my books: THE FINAL CHAPTER was my fourth. The previous three were the same in content and format. Of the four,

I made 1000 copies of each and gave them away. The material is/was mostly autobiographical (why not admit it?). Call it, shall we say, my literary age of self-consciousness. I'm coming out with another book in a few weeks; it should prove to be different.

I have no more books left, except for what's in the near future and 200 copies of THE FINAL CHAPTER. I don't know if I'm planning to distribute in book stores anymore. Frankly, overall, I don't like the way people treat me. So I'll mail you a copy of the next one.

And in response to your question: no, I don't want to remain underground. It's just another ghetto, and I've been in different ghettos all of my life. I don't want commercial/overground acclaim, either. Let's just say, I want access to every living room in America with my words. I want to infiltrate your dreams with my sentences. Is that asking for too much? Anyway, why not, I'll mail your readers books. Thanks again for your letter. It's good to know you can hear me in the babylonian wilderness.

As always
Peter Plate
San Francisco

Ed. Note: Readers of LOOKOUT #15 will recall that I referred to Peter as the most original American author since Kerouac, a description I stand by. Apparently I gave the wrong address for him, so if any of you wrote to him and didn't get a reply, well, blame it on me. The correct address is, I believe, 537 Jones St. #8456, San Francisco CA 94102.

To Lawrence Livermore and his awesome magazine LOOKOUT:

Thank you a whole lot for sending me two issues of your wonderful and enlightening (well, not especially enlightening to me, more like a pleasant reinforcement of my views) magazine. I don't have ten dollars to spend on a subscription, so I'm sending a buck. I hope you can keep track of a little amount like that, and send me however many issues you can with it. How do you afford to print this thing? Contributions? Maybe if I get some money I will send you a contribution.

Also: I saw that you had a few art type things printed. Do you want art submissions?

I especially like the blend of music and political and other commentary. I get real sick of reading bland interviews of bands, bland reviews of albums by people that may not have my tastes in music, and ESPECIALLY fucking show reviews. I always thought that was the stupidest thing to write about. Like if it was lame, I don't want to hear about it, if it was awesome I was either there or else that will just make me sob that I didn't go. What is the point? Well, other than, as in your case, illustrating the rise in violence at shows, or some other social-type commentary. Anyway, it's a very wonderful zine, so feel free to keep some of that buck and buy yourself an ice cream or something, but do try and send me a couple more issues.

Andrew
Milwaukee WI

Dear Andrew:

To answer your questions: yes, I welcome contributions of all kinds, art, writing, money, or just kind words. I obviously don't have room to print everything; LOOKOUT #15 was a financial disaster for me because it ran four pages over normal size. The extra printing costs are bad enough, but anytime I have more than 10 pages, the postage cost goes from 22¢ to 39¢ for each issue.

Which brings me to your other question, how do I afford to print this thing? Well, first of all, by not eating ice cream. Also eliminate meat, coffee, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, and most forms of "entertainment", and you'd be amazed at how much money is left over. Some people would think that that would make for a pretty boring life. But they don't get letters from great people like you.

LL

False Spring . . . Or the Real Thing?

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

...T.S. Eliot

It happens almost every year here in the mountains: an unseasonable burst of warm, sunny weather in January or February will coax the flowers and trees out of hibernation, only to be frozen and buried by the inevitable March blizzard.

This year looked as if it was going to be no exception. By late February the almonds, peaches, and apricots were in full bloom, a month or more ahead of schedule, and I resigned myself to another complete crop wipe-out. Sure enough, just when the trees had set record amounts of fruit, a storm came swirling down from the Gulf of Alaska laden with snow and trailing sub-freezing temperatures behind it. I headed down to San Francisco to brood about the inexplicable meanness of nature.

Even in The City, it was unpleasantly cold and wet, and I knew that it must be snowing on the mountain; a phone call confirmed that a foot had fallen in a single day. When it cleared up the temperature dropped even further, into the upper 20s. I didn't even want to go back to the mountain and face the brown and shrivelled remnants of another springtime's dreams.

When I finally did come home, the warm weather had returned and there was only an occasional patch of snow to be seen. Though it was late at night, I barely needed a jacket, so I took a stroll around by flashlight. Its beam picked out clumps of daffodils on the hillside; they were slightly bent, but still standing proud. I trained my light on a nearby almond tree, and it, too, was almost undamaged. Was this possible?

Morning revealed that the blast of wintry weather had come and gone so quickly that almost everything had survived, and now, in mid-March, it was spring all over again. Though there are still the not unusual April blizzards to worry about, maybe this time we'll make it. Foolish hope, isn't that what spring's all about, anyway?

The idea of a false spring was also playing around the edges of my mind as I watched the sudden downfall of two of the world's more offensive dictators, Haiti's Jean-Claude Duvalier and the Philippines' Ferdinand Marcos. Could it be that the cause of freedom was actually going to win a couple? Or would the

tender shoots of liberty be stillborn on the vine when confronted with the realities of a world dominated by the imperial aspirations of the superpowers? I thought back to Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Chile in 1973, and shivered.

Well, here it is a couple months down the road, and both revolutions (though revolution is probably too strong a word for what was really just a transfer of power to more humane hands) are still alive. What's even more remarkable is that both were accomplished with a bare minimum of violence, and even that was really peripheral to the main action, which amounted to nothing more complex than hundreds of thousands of people saying, "No! We're not going to take it anymore!" Now if only the American and Russian peoples would take a cue from this and give the boot to their own abysmal governments, the whole planet could breathe a little easier.

If history moves in cycles, like the seasons, isn't it about time that spring came around again for the human race? The forces of evil have held sway in the world for so long that people can hardly be blamed for concluding that such is the natural order of things. But by the same token, when you're buried under the glacial harshness of a seemingly endless winter, it's hard to imagine that the warmth of the summer sun will ever return. Yet it always does. Is it too much to hope for the same of freedom, justice, and the dignity of man?

MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU STUPID

No reviews this month, even though I've been to a bunch of shows, and the LOOKOUTS even played at a couple of them. I had a DESCENDENTS review all written up and ready to go in this space, but at the last minute I decided I wanted to write about something else, namely the state of the punk scene and alternative culture in general.

When you study history in school, your brain gets filled with the information deemed important by the people in power. If that seems to amount to not much more than a list of who won what battle or election, you shouldn't be surprised; the function of history as normally taught is to strengthen the existing system, not to expose its weaknesses.

Real history unfolds in the houses and streets and fields and mountains of our many lands, and most of it is never written down, or even thought about, for the simple reason that people are too busy living it. Textbooks concern themselves only with tangible events; they give little or no attention to what was going on in the hearts and minds of the people who brought those events about.

Why this sudden concern for historiography in a column ostensibly devoted to punk rock? Well, for starters, because I'm trying to place punk into a historical context. Yes, I know it carries on and expands upon the particularly American tradition of loud fast music, but there's a lot more to it than that. Far more important is the role it plays in the history of alternative culture, and that, my friend, is a history you're not very likely to learn in school.

A relatively astute observer, or one who has managed to live through two or three decades without abandoning consciousness (a trait far rarer than it would seem), can readily perceive links between the hippies of the 60s and the punks of the 70s and 80s. But only a very careful student, or one who is both old and wise, is likely to see both subcultures as merely the most recent developments in a tradition that is probably as old as civilization itself.

When Socrates, Plato, and the gang lounged around the Athens town square 25 centuries ago, they were called a lot of unflattering names by the respectable citizens of their day. Words like "beatnik", "hippie", or "punk" hadn't yet come into being, but no doubt the ancient Greeks had their equivalents. Socrates was finally murdered by the state for the crime of asking questions no one was able to answer. Today his words are regarded as one of the foundations of western civilization. Time has a funny way of playing tricks on you.

If Socrates were around today, where do you suppose he'd be hanging out? At the philosophy department of some major university? Fat chance. In the research and development section of some megalithic corporation? He'd sooner go get his own cup of hemlock. More likely he'd be holed up somewhere on the fringes of society with the rest of the misfits, because that's where the action is, and always has been.

So what am I trying to prove? That the great philosophers of our time will be found playing in punk rock bands? Not necessarily, though I've heard more farfetched ideas. Remember, too, that not all ages can be golden, and ours so far would appear decidedly leaden. But when new ideas, and more importantly, new ways of thinking, do appear, you can bet it will be among those people living dangerously close to the edge.

So where is the edge these days? For the past ten years I would have unhesitatingly replied that it was the almost exclusive monopoly of the punk scene. No

other form of (sub)culture came close. Today, though, many of the brightest and most creative minds are drifting away from punk. Not because they've tired of the music or the ideas that spawned it, but because its values are becoming so diluted that they have lost much of their meaning.

Words when overused tend to become useless. Twenty years ago the word "hippie" left no doubt about the sort of person you were discussing; today the word has more definitions than there are people to apply them to. The same has started to happen with "punk". Do you mean the Sid clones, with the safety pins in their noses and dirty needles in their veins? Or the clean-cut straightedge skateboarders? Or the pot-smoking long-haired metalcores? Or the vegetarian anarchist peace punks?

The operative ideal has been to draw all these disparate groups together in the name of "unity", but from what I've seen, it's just not working. As you may remember from elementary school arithmetic, in order to add up fractions, it's first necessary to reduce them to their lowest common denominator. That's a great way to increase your numbers, but at the risk of sacrificing your identity.

All right, to get down to specifics: I'm sick of shows featuring obnoxious drunks, aggressive attitudes, regressive sex roles, and the glorification of the individual ego. The punk-metal fusion that some view as the next step forward for me represents a headlong plunge back into the cultural wasteland of the early 70s. The eagerness of many bands to sign contracts with major corporations makes me wonder if they ever believed or understood what they were singing about. And I know I'm not alone in feeling this way; the last couple of months I've talked with literally dozens of people who've articulated or echoed the same sentiments.

What to do? I think a good first step might be to retire the word "punk" and replace it with one that more accurately describes what we're about. I'm open to suggestions about what that word might be; for now, all I can do is describe some of the characteristics of the alternative culture I want to be involved with.

First of all, it's made up of creators, not consumers. I'm not interested in putting on spectacles for people who just want to pay their money and be entertained. You're either part of the show or you're a black hole sucking up valuable energy. If you think you don't have anything to say, then you'd better start checking yourself out and find out what you're about.

And once you know who you are, what are you going to do about it? It's easy to sit on the sidelines making sarcastic jokes to demonstrate how aware you are, but your cynicism and smugness are only a short step away from self destructiveness. Ask the hippies. Ask the punks. Ask yourself. If you think there's no hope, do the rest of us a favor and kill yourself now and stop taking up space.

If you don't question and challenge the ignorance that surrounds you, don't be surprised if no one else does. If you don't use your innate talent to write, to draw, to sing, dance, and redecorate the world, don't be surprised if the world remains a bland, boring, and unhealthy place. If you don't use your power to create, it will destroy you. There are no innocent bystanders.

Publishing a zine and playing in a band have been the greatest things I've done in my life, not just for their own sake, but because in the process I learned there was virtually no limit to what I could accomplish. I was already pretty sure I had some ability as a writer, but now I'm learning about graphic design and layout, photography, drawing and painting, and other related skills. I may never become a genius in any of those fields, but I can use them to better get my message across, and to better find out what that message is.

There's nothing special or unique about me; the further I get into this business, the more people I meet from all over the planet who are doing the same sort of things. Most of us have been driven to the edge of insanity by lifetimes of feeling like voices in the wilderness, but now we're finding out we're not so alone as we thought we were. We're out, plain and simply, to change the world, and nobody's going to tell us it can't be done.

I'll never forget (or regret) what being involved with punk has meant to me, and the same goes for what I learned from being a hippie. But I don't want to wallow in the past. I'd rather be busy being born than busy dying. And I plan on staying young until I die. How? By continuing to grow and continuing to re-create my reality. By keeping a smile on my face, a song on my lips, and love in my heart. And if I can do that, I know I won't be travelling alone.

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Fun-lovers try out the latest dance craze at a NEW METHOD show



photo by Murray Bowles

CAMP IS HERE (TO THE TUNE OF JINGLE BELLS)

by Shannon DeBold and Jenny Widner

(Ed. Note: This bit of verse by two Laytonville High School seniors is way out of season on two counts, but the LOOKOUT decided to print it anyway to demonstrate that despite the pathetic state of our public schools, the spirit of literature still lives among our young people)

Dashing through the trees
Trying to get away
Crawling through the brush
It's not our lucky day
CAMP is on our road
Giving us a fright
What work it is to pull our plants
And get them out of sight
CAMP is here
CAMP is here
Raiding all the way
Leaving me with a nursery bill
That I have to pay
Hey

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