

where the mind is without fear

rabindranath tagore

where the mind is without fear and the head is held high

where knowledge is free

where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow
worldwide walls

where words tell out full the depth of truth

where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection

where the clear intellect of reason has not lost its way

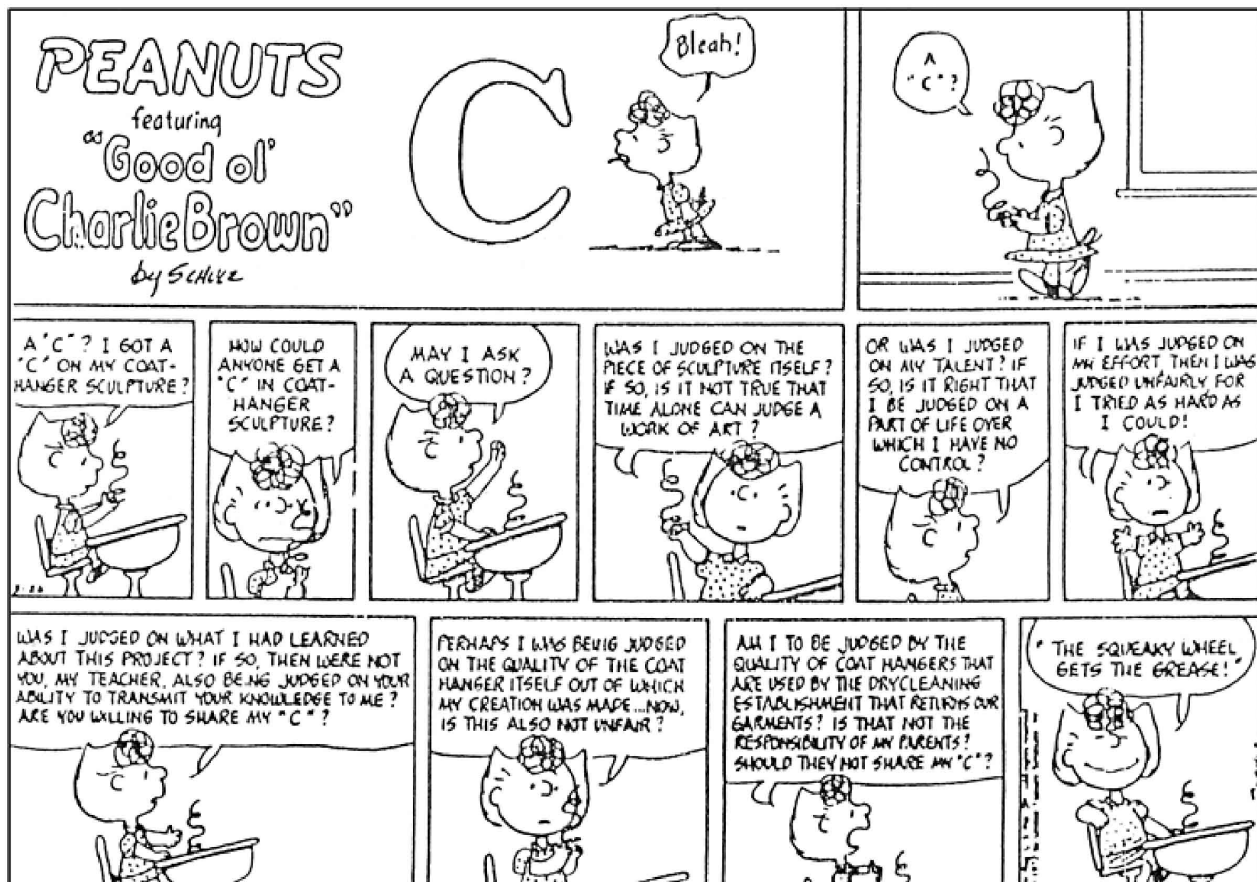
into the dreary desert land of dead habit

where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought
and action

into that heaven of freedom, my father,

let my country awake !

Remembering Schulz



'Yes,' I said, 'But Is It Art?'

by

Pete Morgan

Took me to the battlefield
saw the mushroom cloud
said 'We can see the colours even
when our heads are bowed'
Showed me the destruction
the slaughter a la carte
said 'Isn't Nature wonderful.'
'Yes,' I said, 'but is it Art?'
Took me to the Scientist
opened up a phial
said 'This is only chicken-pox
and rhino bile.'
Showed me what it did to mice
said 'That's just a start
but isn't Nature wonderful.'
'Yes,' I said, 'but is it Art?'
Took me to the hospital
pulled aside the sheet
said 'Look at that pulsating
listen to the beat.'

Showed me the incision
threw away the heart
said 'Isn't Nature wonderful.'
'Yes,' I said, 'but is it Art?'
Took me to the tenement
opened every door
said 'Have you seen the copulation'
practiced by the poor?
We select the ones to breed
and we reject a part
but isn't Nature wonderful.'
'Yes,' I said, 'but is it Art?'
Took me to the prison
threw away the key
said 'If you learn our lesson
you could still be free.'
Pointed out the spy holes
and my adaptation chart
said 'Isn't Nature wonderful?'
'Yes,' I said.

The Six-Lesson Schoolteacher

by John Taylor Gatto

[On winning the New York State 'Teacher of the Year' Award.]

Call me Mr. Gatto, please. Twenty-six years ago, having nothing better to do, I tried my hand at schoolteaching. My license certifies me as an instructor of English language and literature, but that isn't what I do at all. What I teach is school, and I win awards doing it.

Teaching means many different things, but six lessons are common to schoolteaching from Harlem to Hollywood. You pay for these lessons in more ways than you can imagine, so you might as well know what they are:

The first lesson I teach is "Stay in the class where you belong." I don't know who decides that my kids belong there but that's not my business. The children are numbered so that if any get away they can be returned to the right class. Over the years the variety of ways children are numbered has increased dramatically, until it is hard to see the human being under the burden of the numbers each carries. Numbering children is a big and very profitable business, though what the business is designed to accomplish is elusive.

In any case, again, that's not my business. My job is to make the kids like it -- being locked in together, I mean -- or at the minimum, endure it. If things go well, the kids can't imagine themselves anywhere else; they envy and fear the better classes and have contempt for the dumber classes. So the class mostly keeps itself in good marching order. That's the real lesson of any rigged competition like school. You come to know your place.

Nevertheless, in spite of the overall blueprint, I make an effort to urge children to higher levels of test success, promising eventual transfer from the lower-level class as a reward. I insinuate that the day will come when an employer will hire them on the basis of test scores, even though my own experience is that employers are (rightly) indifferent to such things. I never lie outright, but I've come to see that truth and [school]teaching are incompatible.

The lesson of numbered classes is that there is no way out of your class except by magic. Until that happens you must stay where you are put.

The second lesson I teach kids is to turn on and off like a light switch. I demand that they become totally involved in my lessons, jumping up and down in their seats with anticipation, competing vigorously with each other for my favor. But when the bell rings I insist that they drop the work at once and proceed quickly to the next work station. Nothing important is ever finished in my class, nor in any other class I know of.

The lesson of bells is that no work is worth finishing, so why care too deeply about anything? Bells are the secret logic of schooltime; their argument is inexorable; bells destroy past and future, converting every interval into a sameness, as an abstract map makes every living mountain and river the same even though they are not. Bells inoculate each undertaking with indifference.

The third lesson I teach you is to surrender your will to a predestined chain of command. Rights may be granted or withheld, by authority, without appeal. As a schoolteacher I intervene in many personal decisions, issuing a Pass for those I deem legitimate, or initiating a disciplinary confrontation for behavior that threatens my control. My judgments come thick and fast, because individuality is trying constantly to assert itself in my classroom. Individuality is a curse to all systems of classification, a contradiction of class theory.

Here are some common ways it shows up: children sneak away for a private moment in the toilet on the pretext of moving their bowels; they trick me out of a private instant in the hallway on the grounds that they need water. Sometimes free will appears right in front of me in children angry, depressed or exhilarated by things outside my ken. Rights in such things cannot exist for schoolteachers; only privileges, which can be withdrawn, exist.

The fourth lesson I teach is that only I determine what curriculum you will study. (Rather, I enforce decisions transmitted by the people who pay me). This power lets me separate good kids from bad kids instantly. Good kids do the tasks I appoint with a minimum of conflict and a decent show of enthusiasm. Of the millions of things of value to learn, I decide what few we have time for. The choices are mine. Curiosity has no important place in my work, only conformity.

Bad kids fight against this, of course, trying openly or covertly to make decisions for themselves about what they will learn. How can we allow that and survive as schoolteachers? Fortunately there are procedures to break the will of those who resist.

This is another way I teach the lesson of dependency. Good people wait for a teacher to tell them what to do. This is the most important lesson of all, that we must wait for other people, better trained than ourselves, to make the meanings of our lives. It is no exaggeration to say that our entire economy depends upon this lesson being learned.

Think of what would fall apart if kids weren't trained in the dependency lesson: The social-service businesses could hardly survive, including the fast-growing counseling industry; commercial entertainment of all sorts, along with television, would wither if people remembered how to make their own fun; the food services, restaurants and prepared-food warehouses would shrink if people returned to making their own meals rather than depending on strangers to cook for them.

Much of modern law, medicine, and engineering would go too -- the clothing business as well -- unless a guaranteed supply of helpless people poured out of our

schools each year. We've built a way of life that depends on people doing what they are told because they don't know any other way.

For God's sake, let's not rock that boat!

In lesson five I teach that your self-respect should depend on an observer's measure of your worth. My kids are constantly evaluated and judged. A monthly report, impressive in its precision, is sent into students' homes to spread approval or to mark exactly -- down to a single %age point -- how dissatisfied with their children parents should be. Although some people might be surprised how little time or reflection goes into making up these records, the cumulative weight of the objective- seeming documents establishes a profile of defect which compels a child to arrive at a certain decisions about himself and his future based on the casual judgment of strangers.

Self-evaluation -- the staple of every major philosophical system that ever appeared on the planet -- is never a factor in these things. The lesson of report cards, grades, and tests is that children should not trust themselves or their parents, but must rely on the evaluation of certified officials. People need to be told what they are worth.

In lesson six I teach children that they are being watched. I keep each student under constant surveillance and so do my colleagues. There are no private spaces for children; there is no private time. Class change lasts 300 seconds to keep promiscuous fraternization at low levels. Students are encouraged to tattle on each other, even to tattle on their parents. Of course I encourage parents to file their own child's waywardness, too.

I assign "homework" so that this surveillance extends into the household, where students might otherwise use the time to learn something unauthorized, perhaps from a father or mother, or by apprenticing to some wiser person in the neighborhood.

The lesson of constant surveillance is that no one can be trusted, that privacy is not legitimate. Surveillance is an ancient urgency among certain influential thinkers; it was a central prescription set down by Calvin in the Institutes, by Plato in the Republic, by Hobbes, by Comte, by Francis Bacon.

All these childless men discovered the same thing: *Children must be closely watched if you want to keep a society under central control.*

It is the great triumph of schooling that among even the best of my fellow teachers, and among even the best parents, there is only a small number who can imagine a different way to do things. Yet only a very few lifetimes ago things were different in the United States: originality and variety were common currency; our freedom from regimentation made us the miracle of the world; social class boundaries were relatively easy to cross; our citizenry was marvelously confident, inventive, and able to do many things independently, to think for themselves. We were something, all by ourselves, as individuals.

It only takes about 50 contact hours to transmit basic literacy and math skills well enough that kids can be self-teachers from then on. The cry for "basic skills" practice is a smokescreen behind which schools pre-empt the time of children for twelve years and teach them the six lessons I've just taught you.

We've had a society increasingly under central control in the United States since just before the Civil War: the lives we lead, the clothes we wear, the food we eat, and the green highway signs we drive by from coast to coast are the products of this central control.

So, too, I think, are the epidemics of drugs, suicide, divorce, violence, cruelty, and the hardening of class into caste in the U.S., products of the dehumanization of our lives, the lessening of individual and family importance that central control imposes.

Without a fully active role in community life you cannot develop into a complete human being. Aristotle taught that. Surely he was right; look around you or look in the mirror: that is the demonstration.

"School" is an essential support system for a vision of social engineering that condemns most people to be subordinate stones in a pyramid that narrows to a control point as it ascends. "School" is an artifice which makes such a pyramidal social order seem inevitable (although such a premise is a fundamental betrayal of the American Revolution). In colonial days and through the period of the early Republic we had no schools to speak of. And yet the promise of democracy was beginning to be realized.

We turned our backs on this promise by bringing to life the ancient dream of Egypt: compulsory training in subordination for everybody. Compulsory schooling was the secret Plato reluctantly transmitted in the Republic when he laid down the plans for total state control of human life.

The current debate about whether we should have a national curriculum is phony; we already have one, locked up in the six lessons I've told you about and a few more I've spared you. This curriculum produces moral and intellectual paralysis, and no curriculum of content will be sufficient to reverse its bad effects. What is under discussion is a great irrelevancy.

None of this is inevitable, you know. None of it is impregnable to change. We do have a choice in how we bring up young people; there is no right way. There is no "international competition" that compels our existence, difficult as it is to even think about in the face of a constant media barrage of myth to the contrary. In every important material respect our nation is self-sufficient. If we gained a non-material philosophy that found meaning where it is genuinely located -- in families, friends, the passage of seasons, in nature, in simple ceremonies and rituals, in curiosity, generosity, compassion, and service to others, in a decent independence and privacy -- then we would be truly self-sufficient.

How did these awful places, these "schools", come about? As we know them, they are a product of the two "Red Scares" of 1848 and 1919, when powerful interests feared a revolution among our industrial poor, and partly they are the result of the revulsion with which old-line families regarded the waves of Celtic, Slavic, and Latin immigration -- and the Catholic religion -- after 1845. And certainly a third contributing cause can be found in the revulsion with which these same families regarded the free movement of Africans through the society after the Civil War.

Look again at the six lessons of school. This is training for permanent underclasses, people who are to be deprived forever of finding the center of their own special genius. And it is training shaken loose from its original logic: to regulate the poor. Since the 1920s the growth of the well-articulated school bureaucracy, and the less visible growth of a horde of industries that profit from schooling exactly as it is, have enlarged schooling's original grasp to seize the sons and daughters of the middle class.

Is it any wonder Socrates was outraged at the accusation that he took money to teach? Even then, philosophers saw clearly the inevitable direction the professionalization of teaching would take, pre-empting the teaching function that belongs to all in a healthy community; belongs, indeed, most clearly to yourself, since nobody else cares as much about your destiny. Professional teaching tends to another serious error. It makes things that are inherently easy to learn, like reading, writing, and arithmetic, difficult -- by insisting they be taught by pedagogical procedures.

With lessons like the ones I teach day after day, is it any wonder we have the national crisis we face today? Young people indifferent to the adult world and to the future; indifferent to almost everything except the diversion of toys and violence? Rich or poor, schoolchildren cannot concentrate on anything for very long. They have a poor sense of time past and to come; they are mistrustful of intimacy (like the children of divorce they really are); they hate solitude, are cruel, materialistic, dependent, passive, violent, timid in the face of the unexpected, addicted to distraction.

All the peripheral tendencies of childhood are magnified to a grotesque extent by schooling, whose hidden curriculum prevents effective personality development. Indeed, without exploiting the fearfulness, selfishness, and inexperience of children our schools could not survive at all, nor could I as a certified schoolteacher.

"Critical thinking" is a term we hear frequently these days as a form of training which will herald a new day in mass schooling. It certainly will, if it ever happens. No common school that actually dared teach the use of dialectic, heuristic, and other tools of free minds could last a year without being torn to pieces.

Institutional schoolteachers are destructive to children's development. Nobody survives the Six-Lesson Curriculum unscathed, not even the instructors. The method is deeply and profoundly anti-educational. No tinkering will fix it. In one of the great ironies of human affairs, the massive rethinking that schools require would cost so much less than we are spending now that it is not likely to happen. First and foremost, the business I am in is a jobs project and a contract-letting agency. We cannot afford to save money, not even to help children.

At the pass we've come to historically, and after 26 years of teaching, I must conclude that one of the only alternatives on the horizon for most families is to teach their own children at home. Small, de- institutionalized schools are another. Some form of free-market system for public schooling is the likeliest place to look for answers. But the near impossibility of these things for the shattered families of the poor, and for too many on the fringes of the economic middle class, foretell that the disaster of Six-Lesson Schools is likely to continue.

After an adult lifetime spent in teaching school I believe the method of schooling is the only real content it has. Don't be fooled into thinking that good curricula or good equipment or good teachers are the critical determinants of your son and daughter's schooltime. All the pathologies we've considered come about in large measure because the lessons of school prevent children from keeping important appointments with themselves and their families, to learn lessons in self-motivation, perseverance, self-reliance, courage, dignity and love -- and, of course, lessons in service to others, which are among the key lessons of home life.

Thirty years ago these things could still be learned in the time left after school. But television has eaten most of that time, and a combination of television and the stresses peculiar to two-income or single-parent families have swallowed up most of what used to be family time. Our kids have no time left to grow up fully human, and only thin-soil wastelands to do it in.

A future is rushing down upon our culture which will insist that all of us learn the wisdom of non-material experience; this future will demand, as the price of survival, that we follow a pace of natural life economical in material cost. These lessons cannot be learned in schools as they are.

School is like starting life with a 12-year jail sentence in which bad habits are the only curriculum truly learned.

I teach school and win awards doing it.

I should know.

When I heard the Learn'd Astronomer

by

Walt Whitman

When I heard the learn'd astronomer;
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before me;
When I was shown the charts and the diagrams, to add, divide, and measure them;
When I, sitting, heard the astronomer, where he lectured with much applause in the lecture-room,
How soon, unaccountable, I became tired and sick;
Till rising and gliding out, I wander'd off by myself,
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

Sonnet cxiii

by

Edna St. Vincent Millay

If to be left were to be left alone,
And lock the door, and find one's self again,
Drag forth and dust Penates of one's own,
That in a corner all too long have lain;
Read Brahms, read Chaucer, set the chessmen out
In classic problem, stretch the shrunken mind
Back to its stature on the rack of thought—
Loss might be said to leave its boon behind.
But fruitless conversation and the exchange
With callow wits of bearded cons and pros
Enlist the neutral daylight, and derange
A will too sick to battle for repose.
Neither with you nor with myself, I spend
Loud days that have no meaning and no end.

OBITUARY

KURT VONNEGUT JR.

Counterculture's Novelist Dies

By DINITIA SMITH

April 12, 2007

Kurt Vonnegut, whose dark comic talent and urgent moral vision in novels like “Slaughterhouse-Five,” “Cat’s Cradle” and “God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater” caught the temper of his times and the imagination of a generation, died last night in Manhattan. He was 84 and had homes in Manhattan and in Sagaponack on Long Island.

Mr. Vonnegut suffered irreversible brain injuries as a result of a fall several weeks ago, according to his wife, Jill Krementz.

Mr. Vonnegut wrote plays, essays and short fiction. But it was his novels that became classics of the American counterculture, making him a literary idol, particularly to students in the 1960s and ’70s. Dog-eared paperback copies of his books could be found in the back pockets of blue jeans and in dorm rooms on campuses throughout the United States.

Like Mark Twain, Mr. Vonnegut used humor to tackle the basic questions of human existence: Why are we in this world? Is there a presiding figure to make sense of all this, a god who in the end, despite making people suffer, wishes them well?

He also shared with Twain a profound pessimism. “Mark Twain,” Mr. Vonnegut wrote in his 1991 book, “Fates Worse Than Death: An Autobiographical Collage,” “finally stopped laughing at his own agony and that of those around him. He denounced life on this planet as a crock. He died.”

Not all Mr. Vonnegut’s themes were metaphysical. With a blend of vernacular writing, science fiction, jokes and philosophy, he also wrote about the banalities of consumer culture, for example, or the destruction of the environment.

His novels — 14 in all — were alternate universes, filled with topsy-turvy images and populated by races of his own creation, like the Tralfamadorians and the Mercurian Harmoniums. He invented phenomena like chrono-synclastic infundibula (places in the universe where all truths fit neatly together) as well as religions, like the Church

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of God the Utterly Indifferent and Bokomonism (based on the books of a black British Episcopalian from Tobago “filled with bittersweet lies,” a narrator says).

The defining moment of Mr. Vonnegut’s life was the firebombing of Dresden, Germany, by Allied forces in 1945, an event he witnessed firsthand as a young prisoner of war. Thousands of civilians were killed in the raids, many of them burned to death or asphyxiated. “The firebombing of Dresden,” Mr. Vonnegut wrote, “was a work of art.” It was, he added, “a tower of smoke and flame to commemorate the rage and heart-break of so many who had had their lives warped or ruined by the indescribable greed and vanity and cruelty of Germany.”

His experience in Dresden was the basis of “Slaughterhouse-Five,” which was published in 1969 against the backdrop of war in Vietnam, racial unrest and cultural and social upheaval. The novel, wrote the critic Jerome Klinkowitz, “so perfectly caught America’s transformative mood that its story and structure became best-selling metaphors for the new age.”

To Mr. Vonnegut, the only possible redemption for the madness and apparent meaninglessness of existence was human kindness. The title character in his 1965 novel, “God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater,” summed up his philosophy: “Hello, babies. Welcome to Earth. It’s hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It’s round and wet and crowded. At the outside, babies, you’ve got about a hundred years here. There’s only one rule that I know of, babies — ‘God damn it, you’ve got to be kind.’ ”

Mr. Vonnegut eschewed traditional structure and punctuation. His books were a mixture of fiction and autobiography, prone to one-sentence paragraphs, exclamation points and italics. Graham Greene called him “one of the most able of living American writers.” Some critics said he had invented a new literary type, infusing the science-fiction form with humor and moral relevance and elevating it to serious literature.

He was also accused of repeating himself, of recycling themes and characters. Some readers found his work incoherent. His harshest critics called him no more than a comic book philosopher, a purveyor of empty aphorisms.

With his curly hair askew, deep pouches under his eyes and rumpled clothes, he often looked like an out-of-work philosophy professor, typically chain smoking, his conver-

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sation punctuated with coughs and wheezes. But he also maintained a certain celebrity, as a regular on panels and at literary parties in Manhattan and on the East End of Long Island, where he lived near his friend and fellow war veteran Joseph Heller, another darkly comic literary hero of the age.

Mr. Vonnegut was born in Indianapolis in 1922, the youngest of three children. His father, Kurt Sr., was an architect. His mother, Edith, came from a wealthy brewery family. Mr. Vonnegut's brother, Bernard, who died in 1997, was a physicist and an expert on thunderstorms.

During the Depression, the elder Vonnegut went for long stretches without work, and Mrs. Vonnegut suffered from episodes of mental illness. "When my mother went off her rocker late at night, the hatred and contempt she sprayed on my father, as gentle and innocent a man as ever lived, was without limit and pure, untainted by ideas or information," Mr. Vonnegut wrote. She committed suicide, an act that haunted her son for the rest of his life.

He had, he said, a lifelong difficulty with women. He remembered an aunt once telling him, "All Vonnegut men are scared to death of women."

"My theory is that all women have hydrofluoric acid bottled up inside," he wrote.

Mr. Vonnegut went east to attend Cornell University, but he enlisted in the Army before he could get a degree. The Army initially sent him to the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh and the University of Tennessee to study mechanical engineering.

In 1944 he was shipped to Europe with the 106th Infantry Division and shortly saw combat in the Battle of the Bulge. With his unit nearly destroyed, he wandered behind enemy lines for several days until he was captured and sent to a prisoner of war camp near Dresden, the architectural jewel of Germany.

Assigned by his captors to make vitamin supplements, he was working with other prisoners in an underground meat locker when British and American warplanes started carpet bombing the city, creating a firestorm above him. The work detail saved his life.

Afterward, he and his fellow prisoners were assigned to remove the dead.

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“The corpses, most of them in ordinary cellars, were so numerous and represented such a health hazard that they were cremated on huge funeral pyres, or by flamethrowers whose nozzles were thrust into the cellars, without being counted or identified,” he wrote in “Fates Worse Than Death.” When the war ended, Mr. Vonnegut returned to the United States and married his high school sweetheart, Jane Marie Cox. They settled in Chicago in 1945.

The couple had three children, Mark, Edith and Nanette. In 1958, Mr. Vonnegut’s sister, Alice, and her husband died within a day of each other, she of cancer and he in a train crash. The Vonneguts took custody of their children, Tiger, Jim and Steven.

In Chicago, Mr. Vonnegut worked as a police reporter for the City News Bureau. He also studied for a master’s degree in anthropology at the University of Chicago, writing a thesis on “The Fluctuations Between Good and Evil in Simple Tales.” It was rejected unanimously by the faculty. (The university finally awarded him a degree almost a quarter of a century later, allowing him to use his novel “Cat’s Cradle” as his thesis.)

In 1947, he moved to Schenectady, N.Y., and took a job in public relations for the General Electric Company. Three years later he sold his first short story, “Report on the Barnhouse Effect,” to Collier’s magazine and decided to move his family to Cape Cod, Mass., where he wrote fiction for magazines like Argosy and The Saturday Evening Post. To bolster his income, he taught emotionally disturbed children, worked at an advertising agency and at one point started a Saab auto dealership.

His first novel was “Player Piano,” published in 1952. A satire on corporate life — the meetings, the pep talks, the cultivation of bosses — it also carries echoes of Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World.” It concerns an engineer, Paul Proteus, who is employed by the Ilium Works, a company similar to General Electric. Proteus becomes the leader of a band of revolutionaries who destroy machines that they think are taking over the world.

“Player Piano” was followed in 1959 by “The Sirens of Titan,” a science-fiction novel featuring the Church of God of the Utterly Indifferent. In 1961 he published “Mother Night,” involving an American writer awaiting trial in Israel on charges of war crimes in Nazi Germany. Like Mr. Vonnegut’s other early novels, they were published as paperback originals. And like “Slaughterhouse-Five,” in 1972, and a number of other Vonnegut novels, “Mother Night” was adapted for film, in 1996, starring Nick Nolte.

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In 1963, Mr. Vonnegut published “Cat’s Cradle.” Though it initially sold only about 500 copies, it is widely read today in high school English classes. The novel, which takes its title from an Eskimo game in which children try to snare the sun with string, is an autobiographical work about a family named Hoenikker. The narrator, an adherent of the religion Bokkonism, is writing a book about the bombing of Hiroshima and comes to witness the destruction of the world by something called Ice-Nine, which, on contact, causes all water to freeze at room temperature.

Mr. Vonnegut shed the label of science-fiction writer with “Slaughterhouse-Five.” It tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, an infantry scout (as Mr. Vonnegut was), who discovers the horror of war. “You know — we’ve had to imagine the war here, and we have imagined that it was being fought by aging men like ourselves,” an English colonel says in the book. “We had forgotten that wars were fought by babies. When I saw those freshly shaved faces, it was a shock. My God, my God — I said to myself, ‘It’s the Children’s Crusade.’”

As Mr. Vonnegut was, Billy is captured and assigned to manufacture vitamin supplements in an underground meat locker, where the prisoners take refuge from Allied bombing.

In “Slaughterhouse-Five,” Mr. Vonnegut introduced the recurring character of Kilgore Trout, his fictional alter ego. The novel also featured a signature Vonnegut phrase.

“Robert Kennedy, whose summer home is eight miles from the home I live in all year round,” Mr. Vonnegut wrote at the end of the book, “was shot two nights ago. He died last night. So it goes.

“Martin Luther King was shot a month ago. He died, too. So it goes. And every day my Government gives me a count of corpses created by military science in Vietnam. So it goes.”

One of many Zenlike words and phrases that run through Mr. Vonnegut’s books, “so it goes” became a catchphrase for opponents of the Vietnam war.

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“Slaughterhouse-Five” reached No.1 on best-seller lists, making Mr. Vonnegut a cult hero. Some schools and libraries have banned it because of its sexual content, rough language and scenes of violence.

After the book was published, Mr. Vonnegut went into a severe depression and vowed never to write another novel. Suicide was always a temptation, he wrote. In 1984, he tried to take his life with sleeping pills and alcohol.

“The child of a suicide will naturally think of death, the big one, as a logical solution to any problem,” he wrote. His son Mark also suffered a breakdown, in the 1970s, from which he recovered, writing about it in a book, “The Eden Express: A Memoir of Insanity.”

Forsaking novels, Mr. Vonnegut decided to become a playwright. His first effort, “Happy Birthday, Wanda June,” opened Off Broadway in 1970 to mixed reviews. Around this time he separated from his wife and moved to New York. (She remarried and died in 1986.)

In 1970, Mr. Vonnegut moved in with the author and photographer Jill Krementz, whom he married in 1979. They had a daughter, Lily. They survive him, as do all his other children.

Mr. Vonnegut returned to novels with “Breakfast of Champions, or Goodbye Blue Monday” (1973), calling it a “tale of a meeting of two lonesome, skinny, fairly old white men on a planet which was dying fast.” This time his alter ego is Philboyd Sludge, who is writing a book about Dwayne Hoover, a wealthy auto dealer. Hoover has a breakdown after reading a novel written by Kilgore Trout, who reappears in this book, and begins to believe that everyone around him is a robot.

In 1997, Mr. Vonnegut published “Timequake,” a tale of the millennium in which a wrinkle in space-time compels the world to relive the 1990s. The book, based on an earlier failed novel of his, was, in his own words, “a stew” of plot summaries and autobiographical writings. Once again, Kilgore Trout is a character. “If I’d wasted my time creating characters,” Mr. Vonnegut said in defense of his “recycling,” “I would never have gotten around to calling attention to things that really matter.”

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Though it was a best seller, it also met with mixed reviews. “Having a novelist’s free hand to write what you will does not mean you are entitled to a free ride,” R. Z. Sheppard wrote in *Time*. But the novelist Valerie Sayers, in *The New York Times Book Review*, wrote: “The real pleasure lies in Vonnegut’s transforming his continuing interest in the highly suspicious relationship between fact and fiction into the neatest trick yet played on a publishing world consumed with the furor over novel versus memoir.”

Mr. Vonnegut said in the prologue to “Timequake” that it would be his last novel. And so it was.

His last book, in 2005, was a collection of biographical essays, “A Man Without a Country.” It, too, was a best seller.

It concludes with a poem written by Mr. Vonnegut called “Requiem,” which has these closing lines:

*When the last living thing
has died on account of us,
how poetical it would be
if Earth could say,
in a voice floating up
perhaps
from the floor
of the Grand Canyon,
“It is done.”
People did not like it here.*

Cripple

by

Maki Kureishi

She is just eighteen. A pretty girl
if you look at her face.
Fair skin --a point in favour. Nice smile.
Talented too, she sings.
She could have married well with those looks.

But the fine map of her face misleads.
Beyond it no one ventures.
Eyes turn back embarrassed by a wrong address.
Her body is a country uprooted by earthquake.
A landscape of stumps.

Who will volunteer joy to this ruined bequest,
or risk his neck
in a noose of those dwarf and twisted arms ?
Waiting for visitors she sits,
tied to a chair by rag doll legs.

She always smiles. Her face wears bright uniforms
a government in exile without courage to advertise despair.
Negotiating self-deceit we speak cheerfully of recovery
as if she had a cold.

Tied to its chair,
her smiling Image waits
every day for what cannot happen.
Nagged by an odd discomfort
we resolve not to visit her again.

What I Have Lived For

[The Prologue to Bertrand Russell's Autobiography]

by Bertrand Russell



Philosopher and Mathematician, Lord Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his History of Western Philosophy.

The piece quoted below has been called the 'finest piece of prose in the English Language in the last century'.

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a great ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy - ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness — that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what - at last - I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate this evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.

Application For A Driving License

by

Michael Ondaatje

Two birds loved
in a flurry of red feathers
like a burst cottonball,
continuing while I drove over them.
I am a good driver, nothing shocks me.

Science

By

Katherine Larson

Science--

beyond pheromones, hormones, aesthetics of bone,
every time I make love for love's sake alone,

I betray you.

From 'Three Short Poems'

By

W. H Auden

Leaning out over
The dreadful precipice,
One contemptuous tree.

To Husbands

by

Ogden Nash

To keep your marriage brimming
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you're wrong, admit it;
Whenever you're right, shut up.

Banning Pornography Endangers Women

by Wendy McElroy

In a controversial ISIL (International Society for Individual Liberty) pamphlet, Ms McElroy presents an argument that has led to heated debates in most feminist circles.

Since the mid-1980s, a strange sight has been on the political horizon. Feminists are standing alongside their arch enemies, conservatives and religious fundamentalists, to call for anti-pornography laws. This phenomenon threatens the well-being of women in at least three important ways: (1) feminism is no longer a stronghold of freedom of speech; (2) women's unacceptable sexual choices are now under new attack; (3) it involves rejecting the principle 'a woman's body, a woman's right'.

At the root of this threat is a new definition of pornography, which has emerged from the extreme feminism, known as radical feminism. It states that pornography is gender violence that violates the civil rights of women. Anti-porn activist Catherine MacKinnon once explained, "We are proposing a statutory scheme that will situate pornography as a central practice in the subordination of women..." Radical feminists call for civil, as well as criminal, proceedings because this avoids sticky constitutional issues, such as the First Amendment. Civil courts also have lower standards of evidence and no presumption of innocence.

But why is pornography viewed as violence in the first place, and not merely words or images? This view was well embodied in the much-cited Minneapolis anti-porn ordinance of 1983. The ordinance stated that all women who worked in porn were coerced, and could bring a civil lawsuit against producers and distributors. Coercion was deemed to be present even if the woman was of age, she fully understood the nature of the performance, she signed a contract and release, there were witnesses, she was under no threat, and she was fully paid.

Consent by the woman was rendered impossible. The author of the Ordinance, MacKinnon, later explained that "in the context of unequal power (between the sexes), one needs to think about the meaning of consent -- whether it is a meaningful concept at all". A male-controlled society made it impossible for women to consent. Women who thought they agreed were so damaged by male society that they were not able to give true consent.

In over a decade of defending pornography against such attacks, I have avoided First Amendment arguments and preferred to challenge the anti-porn zealots on their own terms. The key questions became: are women coerced into pornography? and how does porn relate to general societal violence against women? A secondary -- but essential -- question was whether pornography provided any benefit to women.

Regarding the first question, I appealed directly to women who were involved in the production of hard core pornography such as S/M, where it seemed most likely that violence would occur. In the hundreds of such adult women I spoke with, every single one said they had not been coerced into performing pornography, nor did they know of a woman who had been. I decided to take the articulate voices of these adult women seriously and not dismiss them, as anti-porn feminists were doing.

To such evidence, radical feminists routinely answer that no "healthy" woman would consent to pornography. Therefore, such women were damaged by a male culture and incapable of rendering consent. The Minneapolis ordinance had argued that women, like children, needed special protection under the law: "Children are incapable of consenting to engage in pornographic conduct, even absent physical coercion, and therefore require special protection. By the same token, the physical and psychological well-being of women ought to be afforded comparable protection..."

In the 19th century, women battled to become the legal equals of men, to have their consent taken seriously in the form of contracts and to have control of their own bodies legally recognized. Now anti-pornography feminists are asking the law to dismiss women's written consent?

Moreover, consider how contemptuously radical feminism is treating the "unacceptable" choices of these adult women. If a woman enjoys consuming pornography, it is not because she comes from another background, has a different psychological makeup, different goals in life or an unusual perspective. No: it is because she is mentally incompetent. Like any three-year-old, she is unable to give informed consent regarding her own body.

The touchstone principle of feminism used to be, "a woman's body, a woman's right." With regard to rape, radical feminists still declare, "No means no." But on some sexual matters, saying "yes" apparently means nothing. Pornography could not degrade women more than this attitude does.

As to whether cultural pressure has influenced the decisions of porn actresses -- of course it has. Our culture has some impact -every- choice we make, including the choice to become a feminist. To say that women who participate in pornography cannot make a choice because of cultural pressure, however, is to eliminate the possibility of choice in any situation.

What of women who do not become involved, who detest pornography? The simple answer is that they should not buy it. Moreover, they should use peaceful means to persuade others that pornography is improper. But they should not use the law.

Here, the second question initially posed comes into play: How does porn relate to general societal violence against women? The radical feminist argument runs: Pornography leads directly to violence against women, especially rape. Thus, every woman is a victim because every woman is in danger.

This argument assumes: (1) that pornography impacts on people's behavior, (2) that the impact can be measured objectively, and (3) that it can be related to sexual violence.

Pornography may well impact upon behavior, although recent studies question the extent. But it is extraordinarily difficult objectively measure that impact. Sexual responses are extremely complex, and elude artificial lab conditions. Moreover, the standards used and the conclusions drawn usually depend on the bias of researchers and those who commission the research.

For example, in 1983, the Metropolitan Toronto Task Force on Violence Against Women commissioned Thelma McCormack to study pornography's connection to sexual aggression. McCormack's study indicated that pornography might be cathartic and, so, it might reduce the incidence of rape. Her report was discarded and reassigned to David Scott, a non-feminist committed to anti-pornography, who produced more palatable conclusions.

Statistics almost always contain assumptions and biases. Sometimes the bias is an honest one. For example, a researcher who believes that sexual aggression is a learned behavior will naturally ask different questions than someone who believes aggression is an instinct. Other forms of bias are not so honest. For example, when a reporter for the Boston Phoenix asked the radical feminist Susan Brownmiller to supply some evidence for her assertions, she snapped back: "The statistics will come. We supply the ideology; it's for other people to come up with the statistics."

For the sake of argument, let's assume that a correlation exists between pornography and rape. What would such a correlation prove? A correlation is not a cause-and-effect relationship. It is a logical fallacy to assume that if A is correlated with B, then A causes B. Both might be caused by a totally separate factor, C. For example, there is a high correlation between the number of doctors in a city and the amount of alcohol consumed there. One does not cause the other. Both result from a third factor: the size of the city's population.

Similarly, a correlation between pornography and rape may indicate nothing more than a common cause for both. Namely, that we live in a sexually repressed society. To further repress sex by restricting pornography might well increase the incidence of rape. Opening up the area of pornography might well diffuse sexual violence by making sexuality more understandable.

There is great irony in radical feminists aligning with their two greatest ideological enemies: conservatives and the patriarchal state. They now appeal to this state as a protector. There is a sadness to of the irony: it has been state regulation, not free speech, that has oppressed of women. It was the state, not pornography, that burned women as witches. It was 18th century law, not pornography, that defined women as chattel. 19th century laws allowed men to commit wayward women to insane asylums, to claim their wives' earnings, and to beat them with impunity. Now 20th-century anti-porn may define what sexual choices are acceptable for women to make.

Indeed, pornography brings benefits to women. In censoring pornography, the state will impoverish rather than enrich them. Lisa Duggan explains:

"The existence of pornography has served to flout conventional sexual mores, to ridicule sexual hypocrisy and to underscore the importance of sexual needs.

Pornography carries many messages ... it advocates sexual adventure, sex outside of marriage, sex for pleasure, casual sex, illegal sex, anonymous sex, public sex, voyeuristic sex. Some of these ideas appeal to women reading or seeing pornography, who may interpret some images as legitimating their own sense of sexual urgency or desire to be sexually aggressive."

Pornography and feminism have much in common. Both deal with women as valid sexual beings. They share a history of being targeted by obscenity laws, such as the Comstock laws (1870s) which were used against pornography and birth control information. Feminist material -- especially lesbian material -- has always suffered under the regulation of sexual expression.

Two burning questions that confront women at the turn of the century are: can feminism embrace sexual liberation? Can the freedom of women and freedom of speech remain fellow travelers?

The feminist Myra Kostash answers the latter by paraphrasing Camus:

"Freedom to publish and read does not necessarily assure a society of justice and peace, but without these freedoms it has no assurance at all."

The *We'll-Believe-Anything* Department

from "THE SEARCH BEGINS" --- Chapter 1 of

THE GOD OF EDEN

The Chilling Truth About Extraterrestrial Infiltration & the Conspiracy to Keep Humankind in Chains

by William Bramley

When I first began researching the origins of human warfare, certainly the furthest thing from my mind were Unidentified Flying Objects, better known as "UFOs." The many flying saucer magazines which once graced the newsstands were, in my opinion, not worthy of serious consideration.* I also did not feel that the UFO phenomenon was terribly important even if it was evidence of an extraterrestrial race. Solving the down-to-earth problems of war and human suffering seemed so much more important than arguing over whether or not "little green men from Mars" might occasionally be visiting Earth. I began researching this book in 1979; however, my desire to see an end to war arose much earlier in life, at just about the age of eight. Back then, war movies were very popular in my circle of friends. Our favorite game was playing "army." I usually commanded one squad of kids and my friend David led the opposition. We filled our imaginary battles with the same glamor and altruism we saw on television. We had no greater hero than the late actor Vic Morrow who would gallantly lead his army squad to victory every week on the television series, *Combat!*

One Saturday afternoon I was watching a Hollywood war movie on television. It was like any other war movie except that it contained a short piece of numbing realism. For the first time in my life, I found myself looking at documentary film footage of an actual Nazi concentration camp. Long after the images vanished off the television screen, I was haunted by the pictures of skeleton-like bodies being thrown into large pits. Like so many other people, I had trouble fathoming the souls of the Nazis who could shove human beings into brick ovens like loaves of bread and moments later pulled out the charred remains. Within a minute, those grainy black-and-white images presented a true picture of war. Behind the curt salutes and stirring oratory, war is little but a degraded psychosis. While war movies and games can sometimes be fun, the real thing is unconscionable.

For centuries, scientists and thinkers have attempted to solve the riddle of why people go to war. They have observed that nearly all of Earth's creatures fight among themselves at one time or another, usually over food, territory, or mating. Aggression seems to be a universal behavior related to survival. Other factors also contribute to the creation of wars. The analyst must take into consideration such variables as human psychology, sociology, political leadership, economic conditions, and the natural surroundings. Many thinkers, however, have erroneously equated all human motives with motives found in the animal kingdom. This is a mistake because intelligence breeds complexity. As creatures rise in intelligence, then motivations tend to become more elaborate. It is easy to understand the mental stimuli in two alley cats squabbling over a scrap of food, but it would be a mistake to attribute as simple a state of mind to a terrorist planting a bomb in an airport.

I began this study as the result of a single idea I had encountered. The concept is certainly not a new one, and at first it seems narrow in scope. The idea is nevertheless quite important because it addresses a motivation which can only be formulated by creatures of high intelligence: War can be its own valuable commodity.

The simple existence of violent conflict between groups of people can, in itself, be valuable to someone regardless of the issues over which people are fighting. An obvious example is an armaments manufacturer selling military hardware to warring nations, or a lending in-

stitution making loans to governments during wartime. Both can achieve an economic benefit from the mere existence of war as long as the violence does not directly touch them.

The value of war as a commodity extends well beyond monetary gain:

War can be an effective tool for maintaining social and political control over a large population.

In the sixteenth century, Italy consisted of numerous independent principalities which were often at war with one another. When a prince conquered a neighboring city, he would sometimes breed internal conflicts among the vanquished citizens. This was an effective way to maintain political control over the people because the endless squabbling prevented the vanquished people from engaging in unified action against the conqueror. It did not greatly matter over what issues the people bickered so long as they valiantly struggled against one another and not against the conquering prince.

A state of war can also be used to encourage populations to think in ways that they would not otherwise do, and to accept the formation of institutions that they would normally reject. The longer a nation involves itself in wars, the more entrenched those institutions and ways of thinking will become.

Most comprehensive history books contain brief references to this type of manipulative third party activity. It is no secret, for example, that prior to the American Revolution, France had sent intelligence agents to America to stir up colonial discontent against the British Crown. It is also no secret that the German military had aided Lenin and the Bolsheviks in the Russian revolution of 1917. Throughout all of history, people and nations have benefited from, and have contributed to, the existence of other people's conflicts. Intrigued by these concepts, I resolved to do a study to determine just how important the third party factor has been in human history. I wanted to discover what common threads, if any, may have existed between various third party influences in history. It was my hope that this study would offer added insights into how and by whom history has been made.

What resulted from this modest goal was one of the most extraordinary odysseys I have ever taken. The trail of investigation wove through a complex labyrinth of remarkable facts, startling theories and everything in between. As I dug ever deeper, a common thread did emerge. To my chagrin, it was a thread so bizarre that on at least two occasions I terminated my research in disgust. As I pondered my predicament, I realized something important: Rational minds tend to seek rational causes to explain human problems.

As I probed deeper, however, I was compelled to face the possibility that some human problems may be rooted in some of the most utterly bizarre realities imaginable. Because such realities are rarely acknowledged, let alone understood, they are not dealt with. As a result, the problems those realities generate are rarely resolved, and so the world seems to stumble from one calamity to the next.

I will admit that when I began my research I had a bias about what I was expecting to find: a human profit motive as the common thread which links various third party influences in mankind's violent history. What I found instead was the UFO.

Nothing could have been more unwelcome.

First Lesson: Unlearn How We Learned

By Alfie Kohn

We are facing an educational emergency in this country. You've heard that claim before, of course, but this time there's a twist: Much of the current crisis is the result of policies enacted in the name of improving schools — specifically, in the name of "standards" and "accountability."

Naturally, this rhetoric finds a ready audience: Who wants to come out against higher standards? But the dirty little secret of American education in the late 1990s is that real learning is being squeezed out of classrooms because people who don't know much about education have decided it's time to get tough.

The top-down, heavy-handed "Tougher Standards" movement has essentially taken over many of our schools, with the full support of business groups, politicians of both parties and many journalists. The primary opposition comes from those who actually do the educating — and, as our children's schools are transformed into giant test-prep centers, increasingly from parents as well.

The first problem is that raising standards has come to mean little more than higher scores on poorly designed standardized tests. The more schools commit themselves to improving performance on these tests, the more meaningful opportunities to learn are sacrificed. Every hour spent drilling students to ace these exams is an hour not spent helping them become creative, critical, curious learners. Thus, the drive for high scores is tantamount to lowering standards—a paradox rarely appreciated by those who make, or report on, education policy.

Children are tested to the point of absurdity in the name of "accountability," which often turns out to be a code word for more control over what happens in classrooms by people who are not in classrooms. This has an effect on learning similar to the effect that a noose has on breathing. Particularly counterproductive is the use of bribes and threats to coerce schools and students into raising test scores, including "high-stakes" testing that determines whether students can graduate or even move on to the next grade.

A few years back, a group of Colorado researchers asked some teachers to instruct their students on a specific task. About half the teachers were told that when they were finished, their students must "perform up to standards" and do well on a test about the task. The rest of the teachers, given the identical task to teach, were simply invited to "facilitate the children's learning." At the end, when all the students were tested, the students in the "standards" classrooms did worse on the task than the other students. The teachers in the standards-oriented classrooms in effect became drill sergeants, removing virtually any opportunity for the students to play an active role in designing their own learning. The teachers were controlled, and they responded by becoming controlling.

This transformation is taking place across the country. One example can stand for thousands: A widely respected middle-school teacher in Wisconsin, famous for helping students create their own innovative learning projects, stood up at a community

meeting one evening and announced that he "used to be" a good teacher. These days, he explained, he just handed out textbooks and quizzed his students on what they had memorized. He had changed his teaching approach because he was increasingly being held accountable for test scores. The kind of wide-ranging and enthusiastic exploration of ideas that once characterized his classroom could not survive when the emphasis was on preparing students to take a standardized test.

The consensus that we need tougher standards is closely connected to the notion that we need to go back to basics — what might be called the "bunch o' facts" model of instruction. Traditionalists typically believe we can make students learn by the sheer force of didactic instruction, by having the teacher stand at the front of the room, perhaps writing on the blackboard while disgorging information that everyone else in the room is supposed to lap up and copy down. The teacher tells; the students listen. And when they aren't listening, they're reading things like textbooks in such a way as to absorb information. Then come the quizzes, compulsory recitations and other ways of proving that they remember what they were told.

Here education is conceived as transferring or transmitting facts, pouring knowledge into empty vessels. This transmission model is found in first grade classrooms devoted to the explicit teaching of phonics and in high school honors classes where teachers slap transparencies on the overhead projector and lecture endlessly about Romantic poets or genetic codes. As a rule, the more that standardized tests are used (and their results emphasized), the more we would expect schools to adopt this approach to teaching students of all ages.

This model, which remains the dominant one in the United States, enjoys the advantage of being familiar to most of us from our own days in school. If most parents accept it — and judge teachers and schools on the basis of how efficiently information is poured into their children — it may be because no one has ever invited them to reconsider it. For us to question the reliance on lectures, work sheets, drills and memorization, we must confront the possibility that we spent a good chunk of our childhoods doing stuff that was exactly as pointless as we suspected it was at the time.

But cognitive scientists tell us that we're not passive receptacles, and learning isn't just a matter of heaping new information on top of the knowledge we already have. It is a matter of coming across something unexpected, something that can't easily be explained by the informal theories we have already developed. To resolve that conflict, we have to reorganize our way of understanding so we can accommodate the new reality we've just encountered.

The best kind of teaching takes its cue from the understanding that people are active learners. In such a classroom, students are constantly making decisions, becoming participants in their own education. Each is part of a community of learners, coming to understand ideas from the inside out with one another's help. They still acquire facts and skills, but in a context and for a purpose. Their questions drive the curriculum. Learning to think like scientists and historians matters more than memorizing lists of definitions and dates.

It's simply not true that one must learn to read before being able to read for understanding; it makes a lot more sense to learn to read by reading for understanding. Exactly the same may be said of math: Wise educators don't teach addition and subtraction

tion as prerequisites for pursuing interesting problems; they teach these skills through interesting problems. Students — including disadvantaged and "at-risk" students — learn skills most effec-

tively if they're invited from the beginning to think in a sophisticated way about the underlying concepts.

Unfortunately, that kind of instruction is rare, and we are paying the price. Many newspapers carried big headlines last year when U.S. high schoolers proved significantly less adept at math than their counterparts around the globe. Less attention was given to the researchers' conclusion that our students are at a disadvantage precisely because of the prevalence of back-to-basics ideology in this country. American classrooms are devoted more to memorizing and practicing rules and skills, at the expense of helping students understand what they're doing.

Consider the way many 13-year-old American students dealt with a problem that appeared in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. The question was: "An army bus holds 36 soldiers. If 1,128 soldiers are being bused to their training site, how many buses are needed?" If you divide 1,128 by 36, you get 31 with a remainder of 12, meaning it would take 32 buses to transport the soldiers. Most students did the division correctly, but fewer than one out of four got the question right. The most common answer was "31 remainder 12."

The shrill calls for tougher standards have had the effect of accelerating the kind of instruction that produces this sort of robotic calculation. False claims about new math and the whole-language reading approach have driven out progressive kinds of teaching that help students become better thinkers — and lifelong learners. Also, the most impressive kind of instruction is very difficult to sustain when a central authority decrees a list of disconnected (and soon-to-be-forgotten) stuff that every third- or seventh- or 11th-grader is required to know. That's why one of the chief consequences of the Tougher Standards movement is that some of the best teachers and principals are getting tired — or fired.

The mindless phrase "raising the bar" is based on the assumption that harder is always better — indeed, that the difficulty level of tests or texts is the most important criterion by which to judge them. A growing understanding of the limits of this sensibility helps to explain why a group of Virginia parents has organized in opposition to the Standards of Learning being rammed into that state's classrooms. It's why some educators, students and parents across the country are beginning to consider the possibility of boycotting standardized tests.

The goal here is not to make school "fun" so much as it is to create a learning experience that arouses and sustains children's curiosity, enriching their capacities and responding to their questions in ways that are deeply engaging. Those who share that goal are likely to work to support schooling that is profoundly nontraditional — and of astonishingly higher standards.

Reading, Writing, 'Rithmetic, and Rote

Proponents of traditional education often describe themselves as a brave minority under siege, fighting an uphill battle for old-fashioned forms of teaching that have been driven out of the schools by an educational establishment united in its determination to make radical change.

Such claims represent an inversion of the truth so audacious as to be downright comical. As educational historian Larry Cuban has argued, "Basic ways of schooling children have been remarkably durable over the last hundred years." His review of an enormous body of research demonstrates "the persistent occurrence of teacher-centered practices since the turn of the century." (We used to copy facts from the World Book; today, our kids download them off the World Wide Web. So much for the educational revolution.) If the continued dominance of traditional education isn't always obvious, it may be because we rarely think about how many aspects of education could be different but aren't. What we take for granted as being necessary features of the school experience are actually reflections of one kind of schooling — the traditional kind.

Consider: Just as we once did, our kids spend most of their time in school with children their own age. Most high school instruction is still divided into 45- or 50-minute periods. Students still have very little to say about what they will do and how they will learn. Good behavior or meritorious academic performance, as determined unilaterally by adults, is still rewarded; deviations are still punished. Grades are still handed out; awards assemblies are still held. Students are still "tracked," particularly in the higher grades, so that some take honors and advanced placement courses while others get "basic" this and "remedial" that. Kids may be permitted to learn in groups periodically, but at the end of the day, eyes still must be kept on one's own paper. Indeed, even from a purely physical standpoint, schools today look much like they did decades ago.

Experimentation with alternative models of teaching wasn't all that widespread even in the 1960s and 1970s, although animated discussion about them may have left the impression that such changes were commonly being implemented. Whatever modest moves toward progressive teaching did take place have largely been rolled back. Even kindergartens are less about exploration and more about teacher-directed skills instruction, despite the nearly unanimous view among early childhood specialists that this is a terrible idea. At all age levels, "traditional mathematics teaching . . . is still the norm in our nation's schools," researcher Michael T. Battista reported earlier this year.

Taken as a whole, all this evidence of traditionalism is especially significant in light of widespread claims that our schools are failing. Because anything that might reasonably be called progressive is actually a rarity in American education, it is rather difficult to blame our problems (real or imagined) on these progressive practices. Indeed, the facts have the effect of turning the argument on its head: If students aren't learning effectively, it may be because of the persistence of traditional beliefs and practices.

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This Is A Classroom

by

Jane Hoskins

This is a classroom, but so many square feet enclosed
by glass and concrete cannot cover up the fact
it was not built to learn in but
for killing time.

Rows of adolescents, some hunched in thought,
some sniffing, some dreaming, some doodling,
sit or slouch or sprawl in silence,
but not in peace. There isn't room to hold
so many different people in so small a space;
the law, like the school itself, weaker and
more temporary as it spreads,
thins outwards with the effort.

They might have kept many of us - but here?
For this is educational famine,
buckets on the floor to catch
the leaking raindrops; where there is no
money to replace the creaking central heating, boarded
windows; where the stretching budget
snapped, and where, between teachers' strikes, we sit
at another generation's desks, buying notebooks, sharing
textbooks, counting minutes -
There are no jobs waiting,
but better to be jobless than to stay,
wringing knowledge from this poverty, in this musty smell
of chalk and inadequacy, hearing
the sound of chanted French verbs
through the chipboard walls.

Understanding Terrorism

By Bishop John Shelby Spong

What creates a terrorist? What goes into and then justifies that strange decision to end one's own life in the destruction of others? What enables those who support these acts to honor terrorists as martyrs? These are the questions that emerge along with the all too human emotions of anger, revenge and fear as we watch terrorists strike at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, African Embassies, ships at sea and the vacation resort in Bali.

People seek to answer these questions if for no other reason than that irrational behavior cries out for rational explanation, without which chaos appears to be our emotional destiny. So allow me to offer a theory out of history that might help to close this gap in our understanding.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, something called 'Apocalyptic Literature,' which focused on the end of the world became very popular between 200 B.C.E. and 100 C.E. Examples of this literature are found in the Old Testament book of Daniel, in the inter-testament book of Enoch, in the New Testament book of Revelation and in those chapters immediately preceding the story of Jesus' death in the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

If we can understand what things conspired first to create -- and then to make incredibly popular this Jewish passion for contemplating the end of the world then perhaps we can illuminate the strange thinking processes of our 21st century terrorists.

"Apocalypticism" arose in Jewish history in the centuries before the dawn of the common era when that nation was regularly conquered, defeated or made a vassal state. The Northern Kingdom of the Jews had fallen in the 8th century B.C.E. to the Assyrian hordes and became the 'lost tribes of Israel.' Then the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C.E., casting them into an exile and a cultural homelessness that has never really ended. From that day on, freedom and a national integrity for the Jews increasingly became only a dream. Next, this little nation was dominated by the Persians, the Macedonians, the Egyptians and the Syrians. Then in the middle years of the first century B.C.E. they were subjugated by the overwhelming might of Rome. It is all but impossible to understand the emotional trauma such a history produces when one has never been part of a conquered nation.

At this point the weakness of the Jews was so apparent and the awesome power of Rome so obvious that any hope for freedom in this world disappeared. The Jews could no longer even imagine a set of circumstances or a time when they might overthrow their cruel oppressors and reclaim their sovereignty. All that the future offered was a vision of endless impotence and constant servitude. Hope for relief inside history thus died. The Jews addressed this wound in their corporate psyche in a unique way.

Since history offered them no hope, they began to look beyond history for consolation. They fantasized about what would happen when the world endured its final cataclysmic conflict on the plains of Armageddon. There all the earthly powers would be destroyed and darkness would cover the earth. Then, to mark the beginning of the Kingdom of God, they envisioned the heavens opening and a mythical figure, called the Son of Man, who had been seated at God's right hand, now descending to the earth to proclaim the eternal reign of God's peace and justice. Living water, a synonym for God's spirit, would flow out of Jerusalem to embrace all the nations of the world, who would, of course, acknowledge Jerusalem's supremacy. The wrongs of history would be righted. The oppressed of the world, including the Jews in particular, would have their fates reversed and they would be vindicated. It was a picture of a hope beyond history that enabled these people to endure their hopelessness within history. By that vision they survived.

Today's terrorism arises out of a similar sense of despair and hopelessness. I do not think the people of the West have yet embraced the pain endured by those who are the poor of the Muslim nations. They are the descendants of the people who endured defeat after defeat at the hands of the crusading kings of Western Europe in the Middle Ages. They have been pawns in the oil wars motivated by economic advantage that have marked Western history. Petro-dollars have enriched the ruling sheiks in their several countries but have not reached down to help the average Muslim. Afghanistan has been for most of its life a vassal state, most recently of Russia, but earlier of Britain. With the building of the Suez Canal, the Middle East also came into the British sphere of influence and was subject to its dominance. For centuries unending poverty and hopeless despair have been the reality of the life of the average Muslim.

To add insult to injury, following World War II, the magnitude of guilt present in the Western world over the treatment of the Jews by Nazi Germany finally came to be acknowledged. As a way of expiating that guilt, the Western powers created -- in a heretofore predominantly Muslim land -- the nation of Israel. They backed this new nation with enormous military power and economic aid. Those two things, combined with the skill and ingenuity of these remarkable people, transformed that newly born state into a garden of plenty living in a desert of emptiness. The displaced Palestinian Muslims were moved into 'temporary' shelters that were destined to be their homes for the next three generations. No military power or economic aid was given to them. With every new war in that region, the Jews expanded their boundaries at the expense of the Muslims. The bitterness grew. These people knew that the overwhelming military might of the West -- especially that of the United States -- was what sustained Israel. That was the history in which all hope for a future died.

People who live without hope live in depression. Depression, when internalized deeply enough, ultimately issues in suicide. When that depression is externalized, it issues in murder.

Terrorism has combined the two.

When the fundamentalist mullahs became the primary educators of Muslim children, hatred, spawned by despair, was combined with religion and

turned against the West. Gaining their primary images of the West from American television, these religious teachers suggested that the power of these 'demon nations' under which they writhed was exceeded only by a moral decadence that violated everything for which Allah stood. If there was no hope in the life of the average Muslim, then to sacrifice that meaningless life in striking a blow against Allah's enemies took on enormous religious appeal.

The same experience that produced end of the world fantasies in another era now produces terrorists in our time. Terrorists are also people who see no solution for their plight inside history. While the apocalyptic writers projected hope to the end of history, the terrorists strike to end their lives inside history in a noble if not hopeless act. Their consolation comes in the claim that they might expect by this action to win Allah's reward in heaven. Once inside that mind-set, their behavior does not seem quite as irrational as it once appeared. They have discovered the perfect way to experience a purpose in life and to escape its bitterness all at the same time.

How do those of us in the material-rich West, for whom life is filled with hope and meaning, defend ourselves against terrorist attacks? The fact is we cannot. A free and democratic society is by definition a porous society. The enormous coastline, the volume of imported goods that passes through our ports each day, our unprotected water supplies and power plants and our transportation systems of roads, bridges, tunnels and terminals make this nation eternally vulnerable. Our lax gun laws make everyone a potential sniper. The availability of homemade explosives suggests that if one no longer cares about whether he or she lives or dies, there is no power on earth that can stop that person from killing innocent people.

Who would have thought that our overwhelming technological advances and even our atomic dominance would be rendered incompetent to defend us so soon after we had achieved such weapons?

There is only one way to defeat terrorism and that is to defeat despair and to create hope for all people. Life must be worth living for every person or no one will finally be safe or secure from anyone. Terrorism will finally force the nations of the world to step beyond tribal boundaries, to recognize the depth of our human interdependence, and to work for common solutions. *The world will not long endure with half of its population dieting while the other half is starving.* War against Iraq will not do it. Saber rattling on the world stage together with boasts about our overwhelming military power and our willingness to use that power preemptively to remove dangers from our world is hopelessly naive. It is a manifestation of a 20th century mentality that has quickly become irrelevant in the first decade of the 21st century.

It does not appear to me that anyone in power in our nation today, on either side of the political aisle, understands this reality. Perhaps our political leaders might profit by reading the apocalyptic literature from a time in Jewish history more than two millennia ago.

Manifesto

by

Andrew Darlington

I disown word-games.
I despise academic constipation.
I'm sick of literary incest.
I want to write poems fuelled by anger.
I want poems grimed with perspiration,
poems that leak like mildew
through tenement walls,
poems punctuated by
the rhythm of factories,
poems of insolence,
poems that belch from
industrial chimneys showering
cities like syllables,
poems that thumb noses.
I want poems that slum children
can play with in gutters.
I want poems to chalk on the
walls of condemned buildings.
I want poems of hope for those
who slouch on street corners.
I want poems to be chanted at picket lines,
poems set to the metre that measures despair,
poems to inspire insurrection against inequality,
poems that explode myths like neons at midnight,
poems encapsulating hopelessness.
I want poetry that is real.

Challenging Islamic Nationalism

By Yakoub Islam

One of the late, great postcolonial Muslim thinkers, Eqbal Ahmad, pointed out that 19th and 20th century Muslims living on the Indian subcontinent were utterly opposed to nationalism. They believed, unashamedly, that nationalism was anti-Islamic. Most of the religious scholars of pre-Independence India were opposed to the idea of Pakistan.

The people who brought nationalism to the masses of the colonial nations were those with European educations, but who were largely excluded from being truly 'British' or 'Dutch' by racism. Despite the fact that racism is often individualised and psychologized, *racism is better understood as an integral facet of nationalist and patriotic ideologies.*

Patriotism and nationalism were used to justify colonialism, but the educated elite of the conquered nations were quick to spot the massive hypocrisy of colonial powers celebrating their 'freedom' whilst they enslaved millions. And the educated elite of the colonial nations were also well placed to exploit one of the key tools in perpetuating nationalism taught them by their masters: print-capitalism.

Europe is adept at massaging its history, but contemporary European nations are really inventions, thought up largely by politicians rather than ordinary people, beginning with the Peace of Westphalia of 1648. Nationalism was further boosted by bloody events such as the French revolution and its imperial aftermath. The European wars of the 20th century would have been inconceivable without nationalism - whether it be Churchillian or fascist.

The problem is that, particularly in continental Europe, cultural realities have rarely coincided with the political fantasies of nationalist ideologues. The Basque, with their unique linguistic heritage sprawling from Southern France to Spain, are perhaps the prime examples of this contradiction. But few if any have been able to resist the sweet smell of patriotism's poison. The Balkan wars, which led to the massacre of Srebrenica, simply awakened a slumbering nationalism which had been frozen in time by the cold hand of communism.

Today, nationalism in Northern Europe is less about nations and borders, and much more about culture. This understanding was at the heart of the thinking that led Hazel Blears, who currently leads a government commission on "integrating minorities", to suggest that Britain's ethnic communities should "re-brand" their identities in an attempt to inspire greater patriotism. Muslim leaders could only respond by presenting a different version of nationalism and patriotism because the ideology of nationalism is now almost normative.

The deepening inculturation of nationalism signals that questioning its sentiments is almost as dangerous as questioning the illegality of paedophilia.

This paranoia is aided and abetted by the stalwarts of popular nationalist sentiment - the tabloid newspapers. This is the place where corporate interests and public manipulation meet and marry. It is clearly in the best interest of the neocons to perpetuate nationalist sentiment and thinking. The last thing they want is for people of the global North to feel anything more than a passing sense of fellow feeling for folks like themselves living in the global South. Their nightmare scenario is human unity fuelled by a sense of social justice.

Nationalism, despite its claims to unite, always divides - the 'natives' from the 'foreigners', the whites from the blacks. It divides people into groups like a farmer separates out different breeds of cattle. Islamophobia is simply a reformulation of this color-based racism. Nationalism is a virus of hate, and now it has infected Muslims. Those fanatics who support the London suicide bombings of 7/7 follow a mutated genus of this disease - one which swears allegiance to a reified Ummah and a king-god, whilst rejecting other 'nations' as the spawn of Satan. Indeed, extreme Islamic nationalism is at the heart of the debased theologies informing all global khalifa movements.

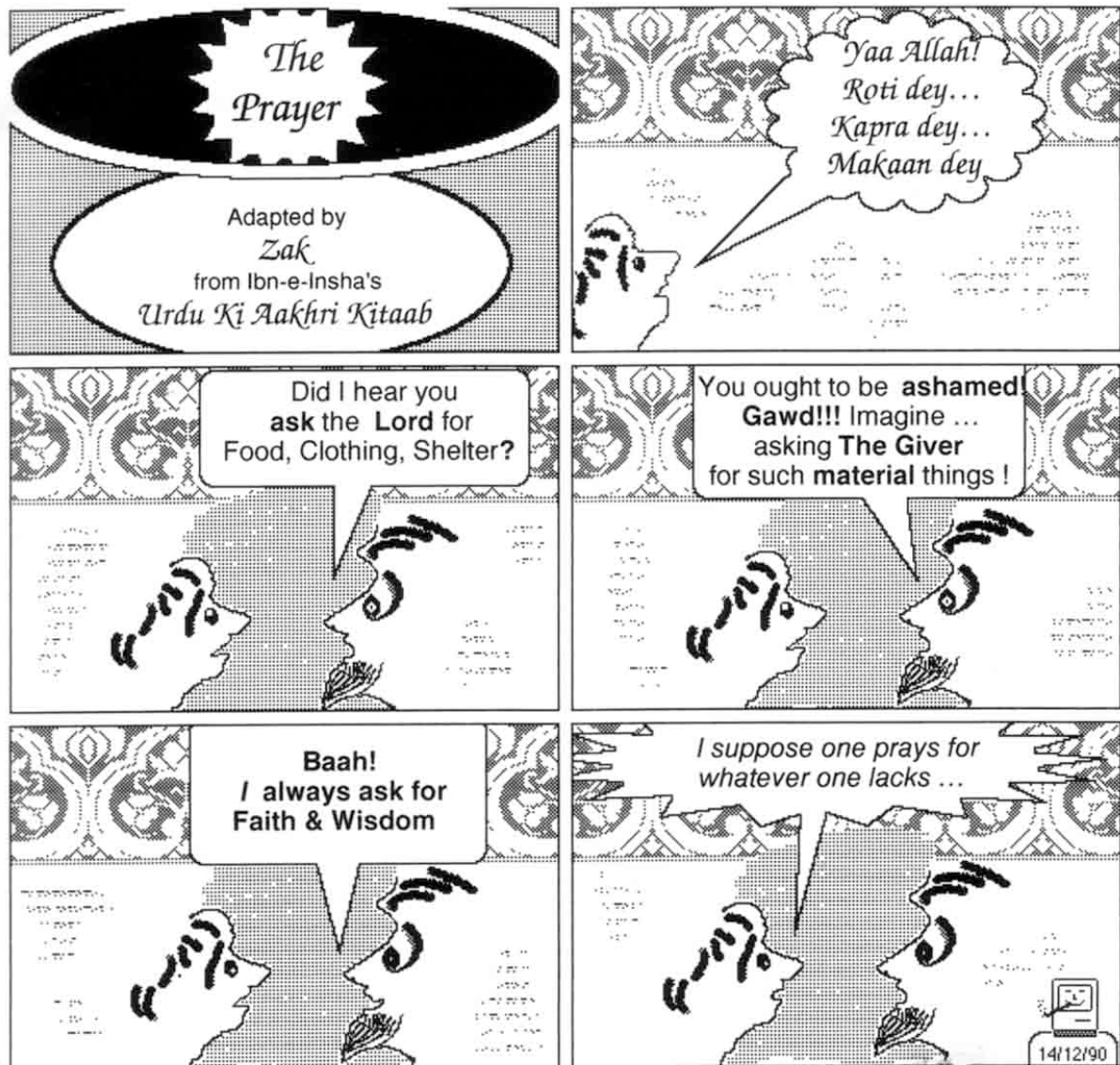
Islamic nationalism needs to be challenged. This does not mean that we should stop feeling the pain and suffering for our brothers and sisters in Palestine and Chechnya. It means extending this empathy to include all of humanity. Someone asked me, on hearing about the famine in Niger, whether it was a 'Muslim country'. Does a Muslim child starve to death differently from the child of a Christian or an animist?

Nor does challenging Islamic nationalism mean opposing the unity we feel when praying in Jum'ah or other forms of Ibadah. There is nothing that prevents us from praying alongside Christians, or fasting alongside Jews, or even sitting next to atheists in silent contemplation. If we seek to unite the world, it should surely be in thought and remembrance of Allah.

Nations do not exist as communities in the same way as a rural village. They are, as Benedict Anderson says, imagined communities, created by appeal to a central script language and a material conception of temporality, and perpetuated by print-capitalism. But English is now a world language; time, like all meta-concepts, is open to challenge within the critical methodologies of post-structuralism; print-capitalism has been subverted by cyberspace. As the Qur'an says, we were created so that we might know people different from ourselves. *By Allah, let's do it!*

Yakoub Islam is a British Muslim who runs the weblog 'Anarcho Akbar'

from
SIGNS OF THE TIMES
a comic strip by ZAK that appeared in TFT



Lady Lazarus

by
Sylvia Plath

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it----

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify?----

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?
The sour breath
Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.
And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.
The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot
The big strip tease.
Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical
woman.
The first time it happened I was ten.
It was an accident.

The second time I meant
To last it out and not come back at all.
I rocked shut

As a seashell.
They had to call and call
And pick the worms off me like sticky
pearls.

Dying
Is an art, like everything else,
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
To the same place, the same face, the same
brute
Amused shout:

'A miracle!'
That knocks me out.
There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart----
It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,
I am your valuable,
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.
I turn and burn.
Do not think I underestimate your great
concern.

Ash, ash ---
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there----

A cake of soap,
A wedding ring,
A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

Competition - The New Fanaticism

by Sabeen Mahmud

com·pe·ti·tion

n.

1. The act of competing, as for profit or a prize; rivalry.
2. Rivalry between two or more businesses striving for the same customer or market.

Source: The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 4th Edition

Are we born competitive? If so, are some of us who aren't competitive, aberrations of nature? Pro-social behaviour is consistently observed in toddlers and infants, who share toys and take turns in the playground so that lays to rest the idea that human beings are born with a competitive streak.

Everyone strives for the same share of the pie, whether it's an energy contract, a place in Nursery School, or a seat in the Senate. Everyone also believes there's just that much that can go around, so, someone has to lose. When everything is perceived as a contest, Mutually Exclusive Goal Attainment (MEGA) becomes the standard, and one person's success requires another's failure.

What about doing something just for the sake of doing it well? The collapses of Enron, WorldCom, and numerous other high flying businesses have a clear message: Wall Street doesn't know what it's doing anyway so why not just be decent for a change? Why not do something just because it makes you happy, just for the sheer satisfaction of a job well done. Naïve thoughts? Perhaps, but so what? I want to be successful. I believe in what I am doing with intensity and passion. I want to be a winner, but does that automatically mean that someone else must be a loser? Why should investment bankers and stock market analysts determine whether you're good at what you do? Surely there is more to life than bottom-line earnings, P/E Ratios

and the shareholder. Then again, maybe not. There is the "little problem" of the earnings press release that will make or break the value of the share. Hey, no problem, fudge the figures but remember to withdraw when the time is right and pray that Wall Street will forget the earnings press release that shook the bourses.

"Contrary to accepted wisdom, competition is not basic to human nature, and actually poisons our relationships, damages our self-esteem, and holds us back from doing our best".

Alfie Kohn, author of "No Contest - The Case Against Competition"

America rules the world and the Global Corporation rules America. So, who calls the shots at the end of the day? The Big 4 Accounting Firms? The SEC? The folks responsible for GAAP? Aggressive CEOs and CFOs? People say that there's nothing like healthy competition. Beat the crap out of the other guy because he wants what you want. The battle for the hearts and minds of consumers all over the world rages on, unabated. *"Jo chaho ho jaey laykin phir bhee yeh dil maangay more"*.

There is no such thing as healthy competition. Why did it take McDonalds to arrive on the Karachi scene for Mr. Burger to spruce up its act? Why couldn't Mr. Burger have painted the premises because the plaster was peeling before McDonalds arrived? Why did 2 more DSL Internet Service Providers have to crop up before WorldCall improved its shoddy connectivity speeds? Bill Gates, the ultimate icon of the go-go 90s, TIME's Man of the Year: To the top thou shalt go, just kill whoever gets in your way. There are role models all around us. Take your pick, emulate the nastiest and the baddest cause these are the guys who WIN.

Where does this insanity begin? In the womb of the woman! A child is conceived. The child MUST go to school. There is obviously, in every school, a quota. For each seat at a "good" school, numerous applications are received. At this point, since the child hasn't been born yet, the parents compete with other parents for the prize. The parents are good at this and are willing to stand in line for an application form, a line that, at some schools, begins to form at 5 o'clock in the morning. The well-heeled, of

course, send their servants to do the needful. Once the child gets into school, he shares a classroom with approximately 29 other children. Obviously, two children can't get first position. And from there on begins the rot. From age 3 onwards, we are sucked into the vicious cycle of competition and nobody has the courage to get out of the game. When the innocence of childhood ends, capitalism awaits.

The driving force of capitalism is the endless pursuit of profit and its presumed success at satisfying human needs is merely an accidental by-product. The goal of meeting earnings expectations and delivering consistent growth requires the continuous consumption of products. These products will be purchased only if they are desired.

Enter the advertising industry, entrusted with the critical job of manufacturing desire. Advertising also produces a continual dissatisfaction with what we currently have and sells us stories of the fulfillment we shall attain when we purchase yet another product. This creation of "scarcity" is artificial, but succeeds tremendously in pitting companies, brands, and eventually consumers, against each other, everyone trying to outdo themselves in the race to the top.

It's about time the competition myth got busted. Competition does not motivate us to do well, in fact, schools and workplaces are in a mess because competition is valued instead of excellence. Instead of building character, competition wrecks self-esteem and destroys relationships. It even sabotages recreation by transforming playing fields into a battlefields.

The top spot is very relative. We can all get there if we cooperate and collaborate instead of competing. We should, as a civilized society, be aiming for excellence because our customers deserve to get the best of what we have to give them. We don't have to "beat" anyone else at what they are doing to deliver value and to bring meaning into our lives.

Solipsist

By Frederic Brown

Walter B. Jehovah, for whose name I make no apology since it really was his name, had been a solipsist all his life.

A solipsist, in case you don't happen to know the word, is one who believes that he himself is the only thing that really exists, that other people and the universe in general exist only in his imagination, and that if he quit imagining them, they would cease to exist

One day, Walter B. Jehovah became a practicing solipsist.

Within a week, his wife had run away with another man, he'd lost his job as a shipping clerk and he had broken his leg chasing a black cat to keep it from crossing his path.

He decided, in a hospital, to end it all.

Looking out the window, staring up at the stars, he wished them out of existence, and they weren't there anymore. Then he wished all other people out of existence, and the hospital became strangely quiet, even for a hospital. Next the world, and he found himself suspended in a void. He got rid of his body quite easily and then took the final step of willing himself out of existence.

Nothing happened.

Strange, he thought, can there be a limit to solipsism?

"Yes" a voice said.

"Who are you?" Walter B. Jehovah asked.

"I am the one who created the universe which you have just willed out of existence. And now that you have taken my place" — there was a deep sigh — "I can finally cease my own existence, find oblivion, and let you take over."

"But, how can I cease to exist? That's what I'm trying to do, you know."

"Yes, I know," said the voice. "You must do it the same way I did. Create a universe. Wait until someone in it really believes what you believed and wills it out of existence. Then you can retire and let him take over. Good-bye now." And the voice was gone.

Walter B. Jehovah was alone in the void and there was only one thing he could do. He created the heaven and the earth.

It took him seven days.

Risk

by
Anais Nin

And then the day came,
when the risk
to remain tight
in a bud
was more painful
than the risk
it took
to blossom.

We have not long to love

by
Tennessee Williams

We have not long to love.
Light does not stay.
The tender things are those
we fold away.
Coarse fabrics are the ones
for common wear.
In silence I have watched you
comb your hair.
Intimate the silence,
dim and warm.
I could but did not, reach
to touch your arm.
I could, but do not, break
that which is still.
(Almost the faintest whisper
would be shrill.)
So moments pass as though
they wished to stay.
We have not long to love.
A night. A day....

The Hat Trick

By Frederic Brown

In a sense, the thing never happened. Actually, it would not have happened had not a thundershower been at its height when the four of them came out of the movie.

It had been a horror picture. A really horrible one — not trapdoor claptrap, but a subtle, insidious thing that made the rain-laden night air seem clean and sweet and welcome. To three of them. The fourth —

They stood under the marquee, and Mae said, "Gee, gang, what do we do now, swim or take taxis?" Mae was a cute little blonde with a turned-up nose, the better for smelling the perfumes she sold across a department-store counter.

Elsie turned to the two boys and said, "Let's all go up to my studio for a while. It's early yet." The faint emphasis on the word "studio" was the snapper. Elsie had had the studio for only a week, and the novelty of living in a studio instead of a furnished room made her feel proud and Bohemian and a little wicked. She wouldn't, of course, have invited Walter up alone, but as long as there were two couples of them, it would be all right.

Bob said, "Swell. Listen. Wally, you hold this cab. I'll run down and get some wine. You girls like port?"

Walter and the girls took the cab while Bob talked the bartender, whom he knew slightly, into selling a fifth of wine after legal hours. He came running back with it and they were off to Elsie's.

Mae, in the cab, got to thinking about the horror picture again; she'd almost made them walk out on it. She shivered, and Bob put his arm around her protectively. "Forget it, Mae," he said. "Just a picture. Nothing like that ever happens, really."

"If it did —" Walter began, and then stopped abruptly.

Bob looked at him and said, "If it did, what?"

Walter's voice was a bit apologetic. "Forget now what I was going to say." He smiled, a little strangely, as though the picture had affected him a bit differently than it had affected the others. Quite a bit.

"How's school coming, Walter?" Elsie asked.

Walter was taking a premed course at night school; this was his one night off for the week. Days he worked in a bookstore on Chestnut Street. He nodded and said, "Pretty good."

Elsie was comparing him, mentally, with Mae's boy friend, Bob. Walter wasn't quite as tall as Bob, but he wasn't bad-looking in spite of his glasses. And he was sure a lot smarter than Bob was and would get further some day.

Bob was learning printing and was halfway through his apprenticeship now. He'd quit high school in his third year.

When they got to Elsie's studio, she found four glasses in the cupboard, even if they were all different sizes and shapes, and then she rummaged around for crackers and peanut butter while Bob opened the wine and filled the glasses.

It was Elsie's first party in the studio, and it turned out not to be a very wicked one. They talked about the horror picture mostly, and Bob refilled their glasses a couple of times, but none of them felt it much.

Then the conversation ran down a bit and it was still early. Elsie said, "Bob, you used to do some good card tricks. I got a deck in the drawer there. Show us."

That's how it started, as simply as that. Bob took the deck and had Mae draw a card. Then he cut the deck and had Mae put it back in at the cut, and let her cut them a few times, and then he went through the deck, face up, and showed her the card, the nine of spades.

Walter watched without particular interest. He probably wouldn't have said anything if Elsie hadn't piped up, "Bob, that's wonderful. I don't see how you do it." So Walter told her, "It's easy; he looked at the bottom card before he started, and when he cut her card into the deck, that card would be on top of it, so he just picked out the card that was next to it."

Elsie saw the look Bob was giving Walter and she tried to cover up by saying how clever it was even when you knew how it worked, but Bob said, "Wally, maybe you can show us something good. Maybe you're Houdini's pet nephew or something."

Walter grinned at him. He said, "If I had a hat, I might show you one." It was safe; neither of the boys had worn hats. Mae pointed to the tricky little thing she'd taken off her head and put on Elsie's dresser. Walter scowled at it. "Call that a hat? Listen, Bob, I'm sorry I gave your trick away. Skip it; I'm no good at them."

Bob had been riffing the cards back and forth from one hand to the other, and he might have skipped it had not the deck slipped and scattered on the floor. He picked them up and his face was red, not entirely from bending over. He held out the deck to Walter. "You must be good on cards, too," he said. "If you could give my trick away, you must know some. G'wan, do one."

Walter took the deck a little reluctantly, and thought a minute. Then, with Elsie watching him eagerly, he picked out three cards, holding them so no one else could see them, and put the deck back down. Then he held up the three cards, in a V shape, and said, "I'll put one of these on top, one on bottom, and one in the middle of the deck and bring them together with a cut. Look, it's the two of diamonds, the ace of diamonds, and the three of diamonds."

He turned them around again so the backs of the cards were towards his audience and began to place them one on top the deck, one in the middle, and —

"Aw, I get that one," Bob said. "That wasn't the ace of diamonds. It was the ace of hearts and you held it between the other two so just the point of the heart showed. You got that ace of diamonds already planted on top the deck." He grinned triumphantly.

Mae said, "Bob, that was mean. Wally anyway let you finish your stunt before he said anything."

Elsie frowned at Bob, too. Then her face suddenly lit up and she went across to the closet and opened the door and took a cardboard box off the top shelf. "Just remembered this," she said. "It's from a year ago when I had a part in a ballet at the social centre. A top hat."

She opened the box and took it out. It was dented and, despite the box, a bit dusty, but it was indubitably a top hat. She put it, on its crown, on the table near Walter. "You said you could do a good one with a hat, Walter," she said. "Show him."

Everybody was looking at Walter and he shifted uncomfortably. "I - I was just kidding him, Elsie. I don't - I mean it's been so long since I tried that kind of stuff when I was a kid, and everything. I don't remember it."

Bob grinned happily and stood up. His glass and Walter's were empty and he filled them, and he put a little more into the girls' glasses, although they weren't empty yet. Then he picked up a yardstick that was in the corner and flourished it like a circus barker's cane. He said, "Step this way, ladies and gentleman, to see the one and only Walter Beekman do the famous non-existent trick with the black top hat. And in the next cage we have —"

"Bob, shut up," said Mae.

There was a faint glitter in Walter's eyes. He said, "For two cents, I'd —"

Bob reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of change. He took two pennies out and reached across and dropped them into the inverted top hat. He said, "There you are," and waved the yardstick-cane again. "Price only two cents, the one-fiftieth part of a dollah! Step right up and see the greatest prestidigitatah on earth—"

Walter drank his wine and then his face kept getting redder while Bob went on spieling. Then he stood up. He said quietly, "What'd you like to see for your two cents, Bob?"

Elsie looked at him open-eyed, "You mean, Wally, you're offering to take anything out of —"

"Maybe."

Bob exploded into raucous laughter. He said, "Rats," and reached for the wine bottle.

Walter said, "You asked for it."

He left the top hat right on the table, but he reached out a hand toward it, uncertainly at first. There was a squealing sound from inside the hat, and Walter plunged his hand down in quickly and brought it up holding something by the scruff of the neck.

Mae screamed and then put the back of her hand over her mouth and her eyes were like white saucers. Elsie keeled over quietly on the studio couch in a dead faint; and Bob stood there with his cane-yardstick in midair and his face frozen.

The thing squealed again as Walter lifted it a little higher out of the hat. It looked like a monstrous, hideous black rat. But it was bigger than a rat should be, too big even to have come out of the hat. Its eyes glowed like red light bulbs and it was champing horribly its long scimitar-shaped white teeth, clicking them together with its mouth going several inches open each time and closing like a trap. It wriggled to get the scruff of its neck free of Walter's trembling hand; its clawed forefeet flailed the air. It looked vicious beyond belief.

It squealed incessantly, frightfully, and it smelled with a rank fetid odor as though it had lived in graves and eaten of their contents.

Then, as suddenly as he had pulled his hand out of the hat, Walter pushed it down in again, and the thing down with it. The squealing stopped and Walter took his hand out of the hat. He stood there, shaking, his face pale. He got a handkerchief out of his pocket and mopped sweat off his forehead. His voice sounded strange: "I should never have done it." He ran for the door, opened it, and they heard him stumbling down the stairs.

Mae's hand came away from her mouth slowly and she said, "T-t-take me home, Bob."

Bob passed a hand across his eyes and said, "Gosh, what —" and went across and looked into the hat. His two pennies were in there, but he didn't reach in to take them out.

He said, his voice cracking once, "What about Elsie? Should we —" Mae got up slowly and said, "Let her sleep it off." They didn't talk much on the way home.

.....

It was two days later that Bob met Elsie on the street. He said, "Hi, Elsie."

And she said, "Hi, there." He said, "Gosh, that was some party we had at your studio the other night. We—we drank too much, I guess."

Something seemed to pass across Elsie's face for a moment, and then she smiled and said, "Well, I sure did; I passed out like a light."

Bob grinned back, and said, "I was a little high myself, I guess. Next time I'll have better manners."

Mae had her next date with Bob the following Monday. It wasn't a double date this time.

After the show, Bob said, "Shall we drop in somewhere for a drink?"

For some reason Mae shivered slightly. "Well, all right, but not wine. I'm off of wine. Say, have you seen Wally since last week?"

Bob shook his head. "Guess you're right about wine. Wally can't take it, either. Made him sick or something and he ran out quick, didn't he? Hope he made the street in time."

Mae dimpled at him. "You weren't so sober yourself, Mr. Evans. Didn't you try to pick a fight with him over some silly card tricks or something? Gee, that picture we saw was awful; I had a nightmare that night."

He smiled. "What about?"

"About a—Gee, I don't remember. Funny how real a dream can be, and still you can't remember just what it was."

Bob didn't see Walter Beekman until one day, three weeks after the party, he dropped into the bookstore. It was a dull hour and Walter, alone in the store, was writing at a desk in the rear. "Hi, Wally. What you doing?"

Walter got up and then nodded toward the papers he'd been working on. "Thesis. This is my last year premed, and I'm majoring in psychology."

Bob leaned negligently against the desk. "Psychology, huh?" he asked tolerantly. "What you writing about?"

Walter looked at him a while before he answered. "Interesting theme. I'm trying to prove that the human mind is incapable of assimilating the utterly incredible. That, in other words, if you saw something you simply couldn't possibly believe, you'd talk yourself out of believing you saw it. You'd rationalize it, somehow."

"You mean if I saw a pink elephant I wouldn't believe it?"

Walter said, "Yes, that or a — Skip it." He went up front to wait on another customer.

When Walter came back, Bob said, "Got a good mystery in the rentals? I got the week-end off; maybe I'll read one."

Walter ran his eye along the rental shelves and then flipped the cover of a book with his forefinger. "Here's a dilly of a weird," he said. "About beings from another world, living here in disguise, pretending they're people."

"What for?"

Walter grinned at him. "Read it and find out. It might surprise you."

Bob moved restlessly and turned to look at the rental books himself. He said, "Aw, I'd rather have a plain mystery story. All that kind of stuff is too much hooley for me." For some reason he didn't quite understand, he looked up at Walter and said, "Isn't it?"

Walter nodded and said, "Yeah, I guess it is."

•

Points to Ponder

from *The Best of Internet Humour*

1. Why do we press harder on a remote control when we know the batteries are flat?
2. Why do banks charge a fee on "insufficient funds" when they know there is not enough?
3. Why does someone believe you when you say there are four billion stars, but check when you say the paint is wet?
4. Why do they use sterilized needles for death by lethal injection?
5. Why does Superman stop bullets with his chest, but ducks when you throw a gun at him?
6. Why did Kamikaze pilots wear helmets?
8. What is the speed of darkness?
9. Are there specially reserved parking spaces for "normal" people at the Special Olympics?
10. If you send someone 'Styrofoam', how do you pack it?
11. If the temperature is zero outside today and it's going to be twice as cold tomorrow, how cold will it be?
12. If people evolved from apes, why are there still apes?
13. If it's true that we are here to help others, what are the others doing here?
14. What level of importance must a person have, before they are considered assassinated instead of just murdered?
15. If money doesn't grow on trees then why do banks have branches?
16. Why does a round pizza come in a square box?
17. How is it that we put man on the moon before we figured out it would be a good idea to put wheels on bigger suitcases?
18. Why is it that people say they "slept like a baby" when babies wake up, like, every two hours?
19. If a deaf person has to go to court, is it still called a 'hearing'?
20. Why do people pay to go up tall buildings and then put money in binoculars to look at things on the ground?

Are We Really Supposed To Murder 'Apostates'?

By Hesham Hassaballa

Among the horrible news about Islam and Muslims lately is the execution of Egyptian envoy Ihab El Sharif by terrorists because, according to them, he was an "apostate." Murderous Sunni militants kill Shia because they are "apostates." So many of Islam's detractors frequently speak of the punishment in Islam for apostasy, or ridda. They also claim - like many Muslims themselves - that leaving Islam is punishable by death. I have heard this many times growing up, but every time I thought about or discussed the issue, it ended in an inherent contradiction. So, I looked up a fatwa, or religious edict, on the website *IslamOnline* regarding the issue of apostasy. I reproducing the fatwa, or religious edict, here:

Coming to your question on the basis of the punishment of apostasy, we would like to start with the following words of the prominent Moroccan scholar Sheikh Abdul Bari Az-Zamzamy:

"It should be noted that Islam never compels any person to accept it or embrace its teachings. It gives the freedom of thinking to people, with full respect to their mentalities and way of thinking. However, Islam is not a man-made religion that is subject to scrutiny or biased criticism that is based on mere suspicion, since it was originated by Allah, the Supreme Creator of all minds and mentalities. In addition, apostasy causes a total disruption and confusion in the Muslim community, and thus, a severe punishment was set for it to deter anyone from thinking of it. It was originally put into force following the Jewish conspiracy against Islam. The details of that conspiracy were simply mass conversion to Islam and then mass apostasy. The main ill aim was to cause confusion and to lead people astray. Thus, the punishment was set as a precautionary measure to stop all these offenses."

Speaking of the authority of the punishment and its being genuine and based on the authentic sources of Islam, Sheikh 'Attiyah Saqr, former Head of Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee, states:

"It is not right to deny the punishment of apostasy claiming that it has not been reported in the Qur'an, because it has been recorded in the mutawatir (Hadith which has been reported by at least four of the Companions in different times and places in a way that make a person sure that such Hadith is not fabricated) and the non-mutawatir Sunnah of the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him). Hudud (Islamic punishment specified for certain crimes) may, of course, be based on the non-mutawatir Sunnah."

Detailing the issue and showing some of the evidence for the punishment of apostasy, the prominent Muslim scholar Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, states:

"All Muslim jurists agree that the apostate is to be punished. However, they differ regarding the punishment itself. The majority of them go for killing; meaning that an apostate is to be sentenced to death."

Many authentic Hadiths have been reported in this regard. Ibn 'Abbas reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Whoever changes his religion, you kill him." (Reported by all the group except Muslim, and at-Tabarani also reported it with a sound chain of narrators. Also recorded in Majma' Az-Zawa'id by Al-Haythamiy.)

There is also the Hadith of Ibn Mas'ud that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The blood of a Muslim individual who bears witness that there is no god but Allah and that I am the Messenger of Allah, is not to be shed except in three cases: in retaliation (in murder crimes), married adulterers (and adulteresses), and the one who abandons his religion and forsakes the Muslim community." (Reported by the Group)

The actual example of one of the greatest Companions, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) gives credit to this also. He himself carried out the punishment on some people who had deified him. He gave them three days respite to repent and go back to their senses. When they proved adamant, he put them to fire."

Here come the questions from a student, because - as you know - I am not a scholar. How can this be in light of the quite clear evidence to the contrary from the Qur'an?

The Qur'an is quite clear:

"There is no compulsion in matters of religion" (2:256).

"Say, 'The truth is from your Lord': Let him who wills believe it, and let him who wills, reject (it)." (18:29)

"If it had been your Lord's will, they all would have believed - all who are on earth. Will you, then, compel the people, against their will, to believe?" (10:99)

"It is not required of thee (O Messenger), to set them on the right path, but God sets on the right path whom He pleases." (2:272)

"It is true thou wilt not be able to guide every one, whom thou lovest; but God guides those whom He will and He knows best those who receive guidance." (28:56)

"Thou wouldst only, perchance, fret thyself to death, following after them, in grief, if they believe not in this Message." (18:6)

It is quite clear that there is complete freedom in matters of faith and religion. The choice of religion is a deeply personal one, completely up to the individual. It could not be more plain in the Qur'an.

Furthermore, the Qur'an states that the reason war is sometimes necessary — as a last resort and in self-defense — is to preserve religious freedom:

"Had God not checked one set of people by means of another, there would surely be monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques - in which the name of God is commemorated in abundant measure - would surely have been destroyed. " (22:40)

So, how could it be that if someone chooses to leave Islam, he or she is liable to be killed? Where does the Qur'an say so? It doesn't.

Yet, the Qur'an does talk about what happens to someone who becomes an apostate:

"Those who turn back as apostates after Guidance was clearly shown to them,- the Evil One has instigated them and busied them up with false hopes" (47:25).

"Any one who, after accepting faith in God, utters Unbelief,- except under compulsion, his heart remaining firm in Faith - but such as open their breast to Unbelief, on them is Wrath from Allah, and theirs will be a dreadful Penalty. This because they love the life of this world better than the Hereafter: and God will not guide those who reject Faith ." (16:106-107)

These verses are akin to this passage in the Bible:

"Ye shall not go after other gods, of the gods of the people which are round about you; (For the LORD thy God is a jealous God among you) lest the anger of the LORD thy God be kindled against thee, and destroy thee from off the face of the earth." (Deuteronomy 6:14-15).

Do the verses in the Qur'an issue a stern warning against disbelief? Yes. But, this is God talking. He can say whatever He wants to say, like what He said in the above Biblical verse. Still, however, this does not mean that He necessarily will punish those who become "apostates," because, again, this is God. He can do whatever He wants. I mean, didn't Jesus (pbuh) say to God - after God asked him whether he told people to worship him as God:

"If you punish them, they are Your servants: But, if You forgive them, You are the Exalted in power, the Wise." (5:118).

The verse seems to hold out the possibility that God will forgive even those who worshipped Jesus (pbuh) on Judgment Day. But, the operative words are: "Judgment Day," i.e., the Hereafter. In the here and now, the Qur'an does not say that the apostate is to be killed. So, once again, I ask the question: from where does this notion come?

Moreover, there is no instance - as far as I know - in which the Prophet (pbuh) killed someone for leaving Islam. The most convincing proof of this is the case of Abdullah ibn Ubay. He was the chief of the Hypocrites, a group of Madinites who feigned Islam, but were pagans in secret, constantly working against the Prophet (pbuh). Even though it was clear that Abdullah ibn Ubay was an "apostate," the Prophet (pbuh) never once tried to have Abdullah ibn Ubay killed. Another one of the Companions of the Prophet, 'Uyayna ibn Hisn, had met with a warring tribe and encouraged them to fight against the Muslims. This from someone who openly accepted Islam. Still, the Prophet (pbuh) did not have him killed. When Musaylimah claimed to be a prophet, the Messenger (pbuh) did not send an army for his "apostasy."

So, once again, the student asks the question: *from where does it come that Islam directs the "apostate" to be killed?*

I mean, think about it! *What sort of faith keeps its adherents in its fold upon pain of death?*

What sort of God claims to be Just while holding that those who choose not to follow His path be killed on earth? If Islam claims that the human being has complete freedom of will, how can the apostate be killed? What kind of faith - which claims to be the truth - is so threatened by the rebellion of some of its adherents that it mandates they be murdered?

Whenever I raise these questions, I am told: *"You are not a scholar, so shut up!"* But, that does not answer my question, does it? Given all the evidence from the Qur'an — allow me to become a Canadian, if only for a few seconds — saying Islam allows the murder of apostates makes little sense, eh?

Hesham A. Hassaballa is a Chicago physician and writer. He is the co-author of "The Beliefnet Guide to Islam," due to be published by Doubleday in 2006. His blog is at www.hassaballa.org.

The Roger Schank Spot

What is an Educated Mind?

"People learn best when they are pursuing goals that they really care about and when what they learn helps them attain their goals. The best means of learning has always been experience."

For a few years, in the early 90's, I was on the Board of Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Most everyone else on the board were octogenarians -- the foremost of these, since he seemed to have everyone's great respect, was Clifton Fadiman, a literary icon of the 40's. When I tried to explain to this board the technological changes that were about to come that would threaten the very existence of the the Encyclopedia, there was a general belief that technology would not really matter much. There would always be a need for the encyclopedia, and the job of the board would always be to determine what knowledge was the most important to have. Only Clifton Fadiman seemed to realize that my predictions about the internet might have some effect on the institution they guarded. He sadly commented, "I guess we will just have to accept the fact that minds less well educated than our own will soon be in charge."

Note that he didn't say "differently educated," but "less well educated." For some years the literati have held sway over the commonly accepted definition of education. No matter how important science and technology seem to industry or government or indeed to the daily life of the people, as a society we believe that those educated in literature and history and other humanities are in some way better informed, more knowing, and somehow more worthy of the descriptor "well educated."

Now if this were an issue confined to those who run the elite universities and prep schools or those whose bible is the New York Review of Books, this really wouldn't matter all that much to anybody. But this nineteenth century conception of the educated mind weighs heavily on our notions of how we educate our young. We are not educating our young to work or to live in the nineteenth century, or at least we ought not be doing so. Yet, when universities graduate thousands of English and history majors, it can only be because we imagine that such fields form the basis of the educated mind. When we choose to teach our high schoolers trigonometry instead of, say, basic medicine or business skills, it can only be because we think that trigonometry is somehow more important to an educated mind or that education is really not about preparation for the real world. When we focus on intellectual and scholarly issues in high school as opposed to more human issues like communications, or basic psychology, or child raising, we are continuing to rely upon out dated notions of the educated mind that come from elitist notions of who is to be educated.

We argue that an educated mind can reason, but curiously there are no courses in our schools that teach reasoning. When we say that an educated mind can see more than one side of an argument we go against the school system, which holds that there are right answers to be learned and that tests can reveal who knows them and who doesn't. Indeed the entire government testing campaign is all about learning the right answers. It is not about debate or being able to show that you can see both sides of an issue. We are training parrots not reasoners.

It seems to me that understanding the basics of telecommunications is more important than understanding basic chemistry in today's world. And, as heretical as it may seem, I believe that knowing HTML is more important than knowing French for today's high school student. There are choices that have to be made, and even if you don't agree with the ones I might make, where is the national debate about this? It will not take place until our fundamental conception of erudition changes or until we realize that the schools of today must try to educate the students who actually attend them as opposed to the students who attended them in 1892 when the current curriculum was put in place.

And while we are at it, how about ethics, or child raising, or marriage? These non-intellectual subjects are unimportant in a high school's academic curriculum. Why is that? because we still think we are educating the elite who will have to little more than debate the classics and show off their erudition. But, it just isn't so. The average college student isn't erudite despite our attempts to march him through a liberal arts curriculum. The average college student is just trying to get through the ordeal of college and get his degree so he can go off and pursue his life as an investment banker or lawyer.

The 21st century conception of an educated mind is based upon old notions of erudition and scholarship not germane to this century. The curriculum of the school system bears no relation to the finished products we seek. We need to rethink what it means to be educated and begin to focus on a new conception of the very idea of education.

Dr. Schank was the Founder of the renowned Institute for the Learning Sciences at Northwestern University, where he is the John P. Evans Professor Emeritus in Computer Science, Education and Psychology. He was Professor of Computer Science and Psychology at Yale University and Director of the Yale Artificial Intelligence Project. He was a visiting professor at the University of Paris VII, an Assistant Professor of Computer Science and Linguistics at Stanford University and research fellow at the Institute for Semantics and Cognition in Switzerland. He also served as the Distinguished Career Professor in the School of Computer Science at Carnegie Mellon University. He is a fellow of the AAAI and was founder of the Cognitive Science Society and co-founder of the Journal of Cognitive Science. He holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from University of Texas.

In 1994, he founded Cognitive Arts Corporation, a company that designs and builds high quality multimedia simulations for use in corporate training and for online university-level courses. The latter were built in partnership with Columbia University. In 2002 he founded Socratic Arts, a company that is devoted to making high quality e-learning affordable for both businesses and schools.

He is the author of more than 20 books on learning, language, artificial intelligence, education, memory, reading, e-learning, and story telling.

Read more by Roger Schank on many websites, including

<http://www.districtadministration.com/pulse/default.aspx>

Politics

by
W.B Yeats

How can I, that girl standing there,
My attention fix
On Roman or on Russian
Or on Spanish politics?
Yet here's a travelled man that knows
What he talks about,
And there's a politician
That has read and thought,
And maybe what they say is true
Of war and war's alarms,
But O that I were young again
And held her in my arms!

A Dream Deferred

by
Langston Hughes

What happens to a dream deferred?

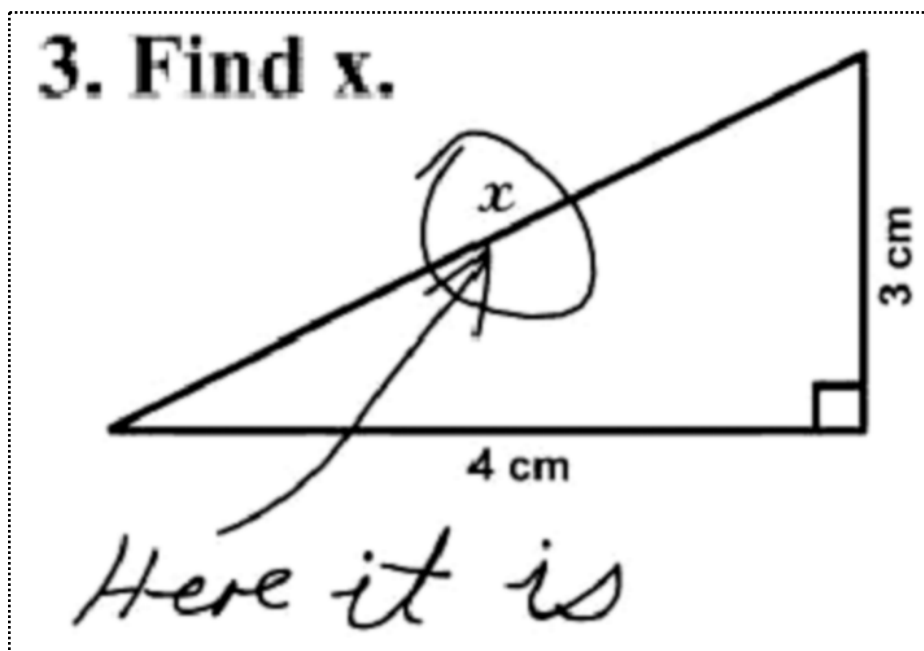
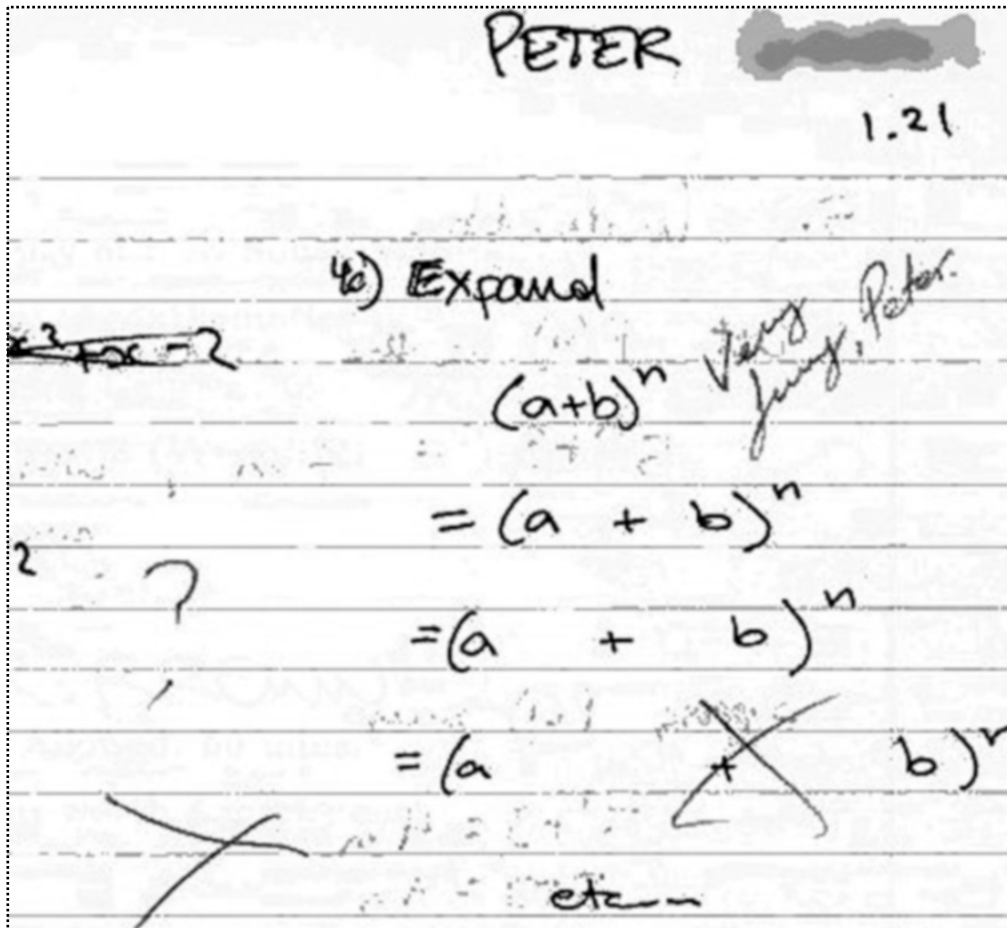
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

My Favourite Test Answers

from They Didn't Study ... But *Were* Creative!



STORY-SHORTS: Using Films to Teach Literacy

by David Parker and Hilary Pearce

Film and television play a central role in children's lives and cultural understanding. Children love sharing the experience of watching films. Story Shorts aims to reflect the central role films and television have in children's lives and to offer some specific suggestions about how this existing cultural knowledge can be built upon to develop literacy.

In this article, David Parker and Hilary Pearce from the British Film Institute (bfi) outline the beneficial relation between literacy and cineliteracy. They detail the piloting of the Story Shorts project, and show how schools in various Education Action Zones helped to develop a resource that uses short films as whole texts for literacy teaching.

Introduction – best of enemies

The relationship between moving image media – especially films – and literacy has been an area of interest to researchers and academics for many years. Initially, it was manifest through comparisons between books and film adaptations and so the notion of literacy was bound up with a sense of literariness (McFarlane, 1984). Subsequently, through the 70s and 80s the idea of 'media literacy' gained prominence, and the focus tended to be the promotion of critical awareness rather than aesthetic appreciation. Even more recently, with the rapid development of digital media and the advent of the National Literacy Strategy (1998) in schools, the relationship has been reconfigured to reflect current concerns with new technologies and a perceived falling standard in reading and writing amongst children. Indeed, there can be few more vociferous educational debates than those surrounding literacy.

Historically speaking, the new and old media are seen as being diametrically opposed. Schools could be characterised, until relatively recently and outside of the post-16 media studies curriculum, as places where films, TV and video have no place and where the printed page is king. But this is changing rapidly as the creative possibilities of making moving image products begin to be explored on a number of fronts.

Some current thinking ...

Recent research in this area (Marshall, 1997; Robinson, 1997; Browne, 1999; Parker, 1999; Oldham, 1999; Sefton-Green & Parker, 2000) has suggested that moving image media may have an important role to play in augmenting existing literacy teaching programmes. Robinson has shown how the concept of narrative is a key bridge spanning cognitive processes associated with print and

visual media. Her notion of language, culture and the mind coalescing around powerful visual narratives, in much the same way the mainstream policymakers have – perhaps erroneously – seen curriculum subject areas revolving around literacy, is an important contribution to the debate. Equally, Browne has shown how television and video are key components in the toolkit children use on their journey towards decoding the abstractedness of written language.

Collaborative research from King's College, London and the bfi (Parker, 1999; Oldham, 1999) has not only corroborated work such as Robinson's and Browne's, it has also suggested that a virtuous cycle of learning outcomes is possible when using moving image media whereby both print literacy and cineliteracy (Film Education Working Group, 1999) are fostered simultaneously. The dimension of ICT compounds these claims by showing how new child-centred software packages are attempting to locate editing within a languagebased paradigm (Sefton-Green & Parker, 2000).

What has the bfi done to explore the relationship between the moving image and literacy?

The bfi has responded to this early research by developing a resource called Story Shorts. Effectively, this project situates short films – complete narratives rather than clips – within the context of the primary school's Literacy Hour. Each film lasts between 5 and 15 minutes, an ideal duration for the whole class phase of the Literacy Hour.

How does Story Shorts work?

Story Shorts is a resource the bfi piloted extensively with the help of Key Stage 2 teachers across the UK. Our teaching colleagues adopted a variety of pedagogical approaches to the project as it developed through the classroom-based phase. Many followed the bfi's suggested lesson plans closely but others devised activities of their own. This sense of ownership on the part of some teachers was an important aspect of the pilot project. Thinking of the lessons which were planned by teachers rather than those included in the notes drafted by the bfi, it was interesting to see children strongly encouraged to articulate aspects of visual design, both in terms of moving image sequences and still images.

Clearly, teachers saw the opportunity to develop both print and visual literacies as aspects of a larger symbiotic communicative process. This sense of visual communication carrying more meaning in texts, the essential attributes of a fictional character for example, corroborates much of Kress's (1997) recent work. And children's spoken responses to the Story Shorts films also reflected the same principle, with greater use of spatial and visual delimiters and a richer use of adjectival language. One of our main interests was whether this sense of visuality might find expression through writing too

Reading images, writing words

Writing is a key area for the National Literacy Strategy, especially since standards appeared not to rise in step with reading attainment after the first year of the strategy's implementation. The evaluation feedback from teachers in the Story Shorts pilot suggested an interesting link between the use of moving image texts and children's writing skills.

One advisory teacher from Solihull specifically targeted elements of writing in her teaching with a small group of underachieving boys. She characterised the boys she worked with as passive linguists – they could talk about language, structure and character with some degree of confidence, but couldn't write about them. Their focus was to translate the rich sounds and colours of the film and to reflect shifts in camera position through descriptive prose. The task was to write out the story of *El Caminante* for younger pupils who would not have access to the film. They looked at some examples of written texts to reflect on how concepts used in film, such as close-up, scene setting and plot development, had an equivalency in written language. Results were very encouraging, with individual written responses being more sustained. There was also a greater use of paragraphing and what the teacher described as 'a distinct visuality to their work. They picked up detail from the film and translated that to their writing'. Other teachers remarked on this transference of visual detail from screen to page. 'The children learnt to interpret a film in the same way we interpret a text and that's something new. They took all the bits of the film they could visualise and talk about and used them in their writing – not just writing about the film, I mean all their fictional writing.'

Whether this implied residual effect of Story Shorts is as lasting as the teacher felt it would be remains to be seen. Standards can only ever be properly assessed over longer periods of time but, in terms of effectiveness, her comments suggest an increased confidence not only on the part of the pupils, but also in her own ability to work with visual texts. That in itself is a significant development and confounds the view that the visual arts and moving image media in particular will only ever be the preserve of committed individual enthusiasts. Another teacher commented on the way repeated viewings of the same short film provoked new 'ways of seeing' '... every single time they saw these films they saw something different ... they understood that the same object can represent different things. Now they routinely use a thesaurus for new words'.

What are the implications of Story Shorts?

Some important issues are raised by the way this pilot project was received by teachers and pupils. In this section we move on to think through the implications for future curricula, to extract what the basis of the relationship between visual and verbal texts might be, and to consider how moving image media,

and in broader terms ‘visual literacy’, might be located within our conceptions of innovative teaching practice.

Why does Story Shorts work?

One key idea within educational theory that may be relevant in relation to Story Shorts is Vygotsky’s notion of scaffolding. This is an aspect of the narrative structure that can be used as an active pedagogy (Parker, 1999; Sefton-Green & Parker, 2000). The ability children displayed throughout the Story Shorts pilot to switch from regimes of reception associated with visual practice – aspects such as framing, composition, shot, sequence, colour, shade, tone, etc. – to those acquired through the decoding of text – for example, paragraphing, style, intonation, voice, grammar – suggests many principles of the ‘scaffolding effect’. Essentially, the strengths of one medium create a conceptual structure around the weaknesses of another.

The familiar texts – in this case moving image media – offer a cradle to support the development of different, yet related, concepts in another area. Often, when theorists have considered the ways films might support the teaching of literacy or literature, they have tended to focus on the aspects of the two media that are similar (Reynolds, 1993). The responses to Story Shorts suggest that, in fact, it is the differences, rather than the commonalities, that make the relationship so fruitful. This is a benefit that can be exploited in two ways.

Firstly, it suggests that moving image media can augment existing literacy teaching. Secondly, by exploring differences rather than similarities across two media, it is possible to develop understanding of communicative features relevant to particular sorts of text. This allows for a curriculum where noun, verb and adjective sit alongside other types of ‘grammatical’ vocabulary such as pan, zoom and edit. It would also implicate other visual media in the sense that moving images are often remembered as a series of narratorial propositions in the form of ‘stills’, or key moments. This is suggestive of the rich relationship between what Kress has called the ‘grammar of visual design’ and the skills of reading and writing. This would also enrich the future curriculum and would better reflect the kinds of literacy events young people participate in as young makers of pictures, inscriptions, models, etc. and interact with, as strong visual iconography imbued with social semiotic significance in the global marketplace saturates newspapers, the Internet, TV, video and film.

Where next for moving image?

So, in the curriculum of the future, where would we expect to find moving image media? An obvious answer, and one that the bfi has historically advocated, is that it would be located within the context of English. Certainly, the Story Shorts project with its apparent seamless interweaving of literacy and cineliteracy may point towards English still as the natural home for use of moving

image media. However, there are elements of the project that deserve further attention and which have more wide-reaching implications than media merely being a powerful and necessary adjunct to literacy study.

It may be that we are witnessing more of a 'sea change' in communicative practice, one which involves the arts, sciences and humanities. As the 'visual' becomes a major repository of knowledge, both conceptually and as a delivery mechanism, perhaps we need to argue for a curriculum that offers opportunities to consider how these visual media operate aesthetically, politically and grammatically across all subject boundaries.

Just as we see our curriculum as 'literacy' driven, should we not also consider the possibility that the moving image and responses to it might form part of expected literate behaviour? In this way we see the 'box teaching the book' in the very widest sense imaginable, feeding into our varied 'readings' of mass cultural production, some of which will be print rich, some of which will be more moving image based.

Endnote

Reading and designing moving image media has historically been under-represented in schools – especially at primary level. This has largely been due to issues of cost and training. However, we have now reached a point where the costs associated with this kind of activity have fallen drastically. Coupled with the increasingly intuitive nature of the software required, it is now possible to imagine a future where classrooms can make full use of moving image texts both in terms of their reception and production. What do we mean by 'full' use? Well, one way of characterising this would be to draw a distinction between delivery and inquiry.

If 'knowledge' and 'information' delivery – terms often used in connection with media and schools today – is a model where learning is characterised as the mastery of discrete facts and bodies of information, projects like Story Shorts are operating very much within an inquiry model. Here learning is seen as a broader ability to use one's mind in framing and solving open-ended problems by making meaning. In such a model, technologies serve as a catalyst and support for more extended inquiry involving guessing, debate and multiple materials. However, that these projects take the inquiry pathway as their starting point does not mean that they fail to recognise the value of delivery. In fact, one of the strengths of these projects is that they are inherently complementary. They link school reforms such as the National Literacy Strategy with innovative teaching practices and new technology to create a possible blueprint for the curriculum of the future – one where the cultural present will sit comfortably alongside the cultural past and where moving image texts will be read incisively both as communicative expressions in their own right, and as pathways into other media, including print.

The Brush Off

By Elizabeth

He was beautiful. Head bent over a book, his hair was a mass of glossy chestnut. It was perfectly tousled and mussed but he didn't look the type to have done it on purpose. I think it was a byproduct of leaving the house in a hurry.

He looked up from his book and reached for another. Soft green eyes scanned the library briefly before settling into the new read. Across the table I sat, watching him over the rim of my glasses. I wondered what he was studying. His books didn't look familiar.

As I was trying to melt into my chair and be as unobtrusive as possible I noticed that a piece of hair had fallen into his face. It just hung there, waiting to be swept back into place. It was just long enough to be hanging in front of his eyes but it didn't seem to bother him. He went on reading as if he didn't even notice it.

I had one of those crazy impulses to reach out and put it back into place. The impulse was so strong that for a moment I thought I was going to do it. I didn't even know him! For that split second though it didn't matter. I just wanted to put that bit of hair back in place, feel it's softness and run my fingers through the rest of it. I realized that my fixation was starting to sound bizarre and I capped that thought before I ended up acting on it. What was wrong with me?

I tried to turn my attention back to physics. No matter how hard I tried I just couldn't focus on Newton and his three laws. Ok, the First Law of Motion, I thought. An object at rest tends to stay at rest and an object in motion tends to stay in motion with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted upon by an unbalanced force. Well that's a fact, isn't it? Here I was sitting mere feet from this beautiful creature and I couldn't even act. And unbalanced? Definitely.

The Second Law of Motion. The acceleration of an object as produced by a net force is directly proportional to the magnitude of the net force, blah blah blah. Simply, a force causes an object to accelerate. The force that was causing my heart rate to accelerate looked up again, this time toward the door. I wondered if he was waiting for someone. That hair was still out of place.

I chewed on my pencil and tasted wood. The Third Law of Motion. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. What would be the equal and opposite reaction if I leaned across the table and kissed him? His lips were full and looked soft. Wow, I needed to get out of here. This was getting out of hand.

I collected up my books and notes and started shoving everything into my backpack, not bothering to tidy up and organize my work. Across from me, the object of my mini obsession looked up briefly and smiled at me. There went that Second Law again.

I slung my backpack over my shoulder and started towards the door. I had taken three steps when I suddenly stopped. What the hell. I turned back around and walked over to him. I don't remember my heart beating.

"Excuse me?" He looked up at me and I gently brushed the hair out of his face. "That's better", I told him. I caught his smile as I turned and walked away.

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COURTNEY LOVE

A RADICAL VIEW ON 'PIRACY'



Courtney Love does the math

The controversial singer takes on record label profits, Napster and "sucka VCs."

June 14, 2000 | Today I want to talk about piracy and music. What is piracy? Piracy is the act of stealing an artist's work without any intention of paying for it. I'm not talking about Napster-type software.

I'm talking about major label recording contracts.

I want to start with a story about rock bands and record companies, and do some recording-contract math:

This story is about a bidding-war band that gets a huge deal with a 20 percent royalty rate and a million-dollar advance. (No bidding-war band ever got a 20 percent royalty, but whatever.) This is my "funny" math based on some reality and I just want to qualify it by saying I'm positive it's better math than what Edgar Bronfman Jr. [the president and CEO of Seagram, which owns Polygram] would provide.

What happens to that million dollars?

They spend half a million to record their album. That leaves the band with \$500,000. They pay \$100,000 to their manager for 20 percent commission. They pay \$25,000 each to their lawyer and business manager.

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That leaves \$350,000 for the four band members to split. After \$170,000 in taxes, there's \$180,000 left. That comes out to \$45,000 per person.

That's \$45,000 to live on for a year until the record gets released.

The record is a big hit and sells a million copies. (How a bidding-war band sells a million copies of its debut record is another rant entirely, but it's based on any basic civics-class knowledge that any of us have about cartels. Put simply, the antitrust laws in this country are basically a joke, protecting us just enough to not have to re-name our park service the Phillip Morris National Park Service.)

So, this band releases two singles and makes two videos. The two videos cost a million dollars to make and 50 percent of the video production costs are recouped out of the band's royalties.

The band gets \$200,000 in tour support, which is 100 percent recoupable.

The record company spends \$300,000 on independent radio promotion. You have to pay independent promotion to get your song on the radio; independent promotion is a system where the record companies use middlemen so they can pretend not to know that radio stations -- the unified broadcast system -- are getting paid to play their records.

All of those independent promotion costs are charged to the band.

Since the original million-dollar advance is also recoupable, the band owes \$2 million to the record company.

If all of the million records are sold at full price with no discounts or record clubs, the band earns \$2 million in royalties, since their 20 percent royalty works out to \$2 a record.

Two million dollars in royalties minus \$2 million in recoupable expenses equals ... zero!

How much does the record company make?

They grossed \$11 million.

It costs \$500,000 to manufacture the CDs and they advanced the band \$1 million. Plus there were \$1 million in video costs, \$300,000 in radio promotion and \$200,000 in tour support.

The company also paid \$750,000 in music publishing royalties.

They spent \$2.2 million on marketing. That's mostly retail advertising, but marketing also pays for those huge posters of Marilyn Manson in Times Square and the street scouts who

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drive around in vans handing out black Korn T-shirts and backwards baseball caps. Not to mention trips to Scores and cash for tips for all and sundry.

Add it up and the record company has spent about \$4.4 million.

So their profit is \$6.6 million; the band may as well be working at a 7-Eleven.

Of course, they had fun. Hearing yourself on the radio, selling records, getting new fans and being on TV is great, but now the band doesn't have enough money to pay the rent and nobody has any credit.

Worst of all, after all this, the band owns none of its work ... they can pay the mortgage forever but they'll never own the house. Like I said: Sharecropping. Our media says, "Boo hoo, poor pop stars, they had a nice ride. Fuck them for speaking up"; but I say this dialogue is imperative. And cynical media people, who are more fascinated with celebrity than most celebrities, need to reacquaint themselves with their value systems.

When you look at the legal line on a CD, it says copyright 1976 Atlantic Records or copyright 1996 RCA Records. When you look at a book, though, it'll say something like copyright 1999 Susan Faludi, or David Foster Wallace. Authors own their books and license them to publishers. When the contract runs out, writers get their books back. But record companies own our copyrights forever.

The system's set up so almost nobody gets paid.

Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA)

Last November, a Congressional aide named Mitch Glazier, with the support of the RIAA, added a "technical amendment" to a bill that defined recorded music as "works for hire" under the 1978 Copyright Act.

He did this after all the hearings on the bill were over. By the time artists found out about the change, it was too late. The bill was on its way to the White House for the president's signature.

That subtle change in copyright law will add billions of dollars to record company bank accounts over the next few years -- billions of dollars that rightfully should have been paid to artists. A "work for hire" is now owned in perpetuity by the record company.

Under the 1978 Copyright Act, artists could reclaim the copyrights on their work after 35 years. If you wrote and recorded "Everybody Hurts," you at least got it back to as a family legacy after 35 years. But now, because of this corrupt little pisher, "Everybody Hurts" never gets returned to your family, and can now be sold to the highest bidder.

Over the years record companies have tried to put "work for hire" provisions in their contracts, and Mr. Glazier claims that the "work for hire" only "codified" a standard industry

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practice. But copyright laws didn't identify sound recordings as being eligible to be called "works for hire," so those contracts didn't mean anything. Until now.

Writing and recording "Hey Jude" is now the same thing as writing an English textbook, writing standardized tests, translating a novel from one language to another or making a map. These are the types of things addressed in the "work for hire" act. And writing a standardized test is a work for hire. Not making a record.

So an assistant substantially altered a major law when he only had the authority to make spelling corrections. That's not what I learned about how government works in my high school civics class.

Three months later, the RIAA hired Mr. Glazier to become its top lobbyist at a salary that was obviously much greater than the one he had as the spelling corrector guy.

The RIAA tries to argue that this change was necessary because of a provision in the bill that musicians supported. That provision prevents anyone from registering a famous person's name as a Web address without that person's permission. That's great. I own my name, and should be able to do what I want with my name.

But the bill also created an exception that allows a company to take a person's name for a Web address if they create a work for hire. Which means a record company would be allowed to own your Web site when you record your "work for hire" album. Like I said: Sharecropping.

Although I've never met any one at a record company who "believed in the Internet," they've all been trying to cover their asses by securing everyone's digital rights. Not that they know what to do with them. Go to a major label-owned band site. Give me a dollar for every time you see an annoying "under construction" sign. I used to pester Geffen (when it was a label) to do a better job. I was totally ignored for two years, until I got my band name back. The Goo Goo Dolls are struggling to gain control of their domain name from Warner Bros., who claim they own the name because they set up a shitty promotional Web site for the band.

Orrin Hatch, songwriter and Republican senator from Utah, seems to be the only person in Washington with a progressive view of copyright law. One lobbyist says that there's no one in the House with a similar view and that "this would have never happened if Sonny Bono was still alive."

By the way, which bill do you think the recording industry used for this amendment?

The Record Company Redefinition Act? No. The Music Copyright Act? No. The Work for Hire Authorship Act? No.

How about the Satellite Home Viewing Act of 1999?

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Stealing our copyright reversion in the dead of night while no one was looking, and with no hearings held, is piracy.

It's piracy when the RIAA lobbies to change the bankruptcy law to make it more difficult for musicians to declare bankruptcy. Some musicians have declared bankruptcy to free themselves from truly evil contracts. TLC declared bankruptcy after they received less than 2 percent of the \$175 million earned by their CD sales. That was about 40 times less than the profit that was divided among their management, production and record companies.

Toni Braxton also declared bankruptcy in 1998. She sold \$188 million worth of CDs, but she was broke because of a terrible recording contract that paid her less than 35 cents per album. Bankruptcy can be an artist's only defense against a truly horrible deal and the RIAA wants to take it away.

Artists want to believe that we can make lots of money if we're successful. But there are hundreds of stories about artists in their 60s and 70s who are broke because they never made a dime from their hit records. And real success is still a long shot for a new artist today. Of the 32,000 new releases each year, only 250 sell more than 10,000 copies. And less than 30 go platinum.

The four major record corporations fund the RIAA. These companies are rich and obviously well-represented. Recording artists and musicians don't really have the money to compete. The 273,000 working musicians in America make about \$30,000 a year. Only 15 percent of American Federation of Musicians members work steadily in music.

But the music industry is a \$40 billion-a-year business. One-third of that revenue comes from the United States. The annual sales of cassettes, CDs and video are larger than the gross national product of 80 countries. Americans have more CD players, radios and VCRs than we have bathtubs.

Story after story gets told about artists -- some of them in their 60s and 70s, some of them authors of huge successful songs that we all enjoy, use and sing -- living in total poverty, never having been paid anything. Not even having access to a union or to basic health care. Artists who have generated billions of dollars for an industry die broke and un-cared for.

And they're not actors or participators. They're the rightful owners, originators and performers of original compositions.

This is piracy.

Technology is not piracy

This opinion is one I really haven't formed yet, so as I speak about Napster now, please understand that I'm not totally informed. I will be the first in line to file a class action suit to protect my copyrights if Napster or even the far more advanced Gnutella doesn't work with us to protect us. I'm on [Metallica drummer] Lars Ulrich's side, in other words, and I feel

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really badly for him that he doesn't know how to condense his case down to a sound-bite that sounds more reasonable than the one I saw today.

I also think Metallica is being given too much grief. It's anti-artist, for one thing. An artist speaks up and the artist gets squashed: Sharecropping. Don't get above your station, kid. It's not piracy when kids swap music over the Internet using Napster or Gnutella or Freenet or iMesh or beaming their CDs into a My.MP3.com or MyPlay.com music locker. It's piracy when those guys that run those companies make side deals with the cartel lawyers and label heads so that they can be "the labels' friend," and not the artists'.

Recording artists have essentially been giving their music away for free under the old system, so new technology that exposes our music to a larger audience can only be a good thing. Why aren't these companies working with us to create some peace?

There were a billion music downloads last year, but music sales are up. Where's the evidence that downloads hurt business? Downloads are creating more demand.

Why aren't record companies embracing this great opportunity? Why aren't they trying to talk to the kids passing compilations around to learn what they like? Why is the RIAA suing the companies that are stimulating this new demand? What's the point of going after people swapping cruddy-sounding MP3s? Cash! Cash they have no intention of passing onto us, the writers of their profits.

At this point the "record collector" geniuses who use Napster don't have the coolest most arcane selection anyway, unless you're into techno. Hardly any pre-1982 REM fans, no '60s punk, even the Alan Parsons Project was underrepresented when I tried to find some Napster buddies. For the most part, it was college boy rawk without a lot of imagination. Maybe that's the demographic that cares -- and in that case, My Bloody Valentine and Bert Jansch aren't going to get screwed just yet. There's still time to negotiate.

Destroying traditional access

Somewhere along the way, record companies figured out that it's a lot more profitable to control the distribution system than it is to nurture artists. And since the companies didn't have any real competition, artists had no other place to go. Record companies controlled the promotion and marketing; only they had the ability to get lots of radio play, and get records into all the big chain store. That power put them above both the artists and the audience. They own the plantation.

Being the gatekeeper was the most profitable place to be, but now we're in a world half without gates. The Internet allows artists to communicate directly with their audiences; we don't have to depend solely on an inefficient system where the record company promotes our records to radio, press or retail and then sits back and hopes fans find out about our music.

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Record companies don't understand the intimacy between artists and their fans. They put records on the radio and buy some advertising and hope for the best. Digital distribution gives everyone worldwide, instant access to music.

And filters are replacing gatekeepers. In a world where we can get anything we want, whenever we want it, how does a company create value? By filtering. In a world without friction, the only friction people value is editing. A filter is valuable when it understands the needs of both artists and the public. New companies should be conduits between musicians and their fans.

Right now the only way you can get music is by shelling out \$17. In a world where music costs a nickel, an artist can "sell" 100 million copies instead of just a million.

The present system keeps artists from finding an audience because it has too many artificial scarcities: limited radio promotion, limited bin space in stores and a limited number of spots on the record company roster.

The digital world has no scarcities. There are countless ways to reach an audience. Radio is no longer the only place to hear a new song. And tiny mall record stores aren't the only place to buy a new CD.

I'm leaving

Now artists have options. We don't have to work with major labels anymore, because the digital economy is creating new ways to distribute and market music. And the free ones amongst us aren't going to. That means the slave class, which I represent, has to find ways to get out of our deals. This didn't really matter before, and that's why we all stayed.

I want my seven-year contract law California labor code case to mean something to other artists. (Universal Records sues me because I leave because my employment is up, but they say a recording contract is not a personal contract; because the recording industry -- who, we have established, are excellent lobbyists, getting, as they did, a clerk to disallow Don Henley or Tom Petty the right to give their copyrights to their families -- in California, in 1987, lobbied to pass an amendment that nullified recording contracts as personal contracts, sort of. Maybe. Kind of. A little bit. And again, in the dead of night, succeeded.)

That's why I'm willing to do it with a sword in my teeth. I expect I'll be ignored or ostracized following this lawsuit. I expect that the treatment you're seeing Lars Ulrich get now will quadruple for me. Cool. At least I'll serve a purpose. I'm an artist and a good artist, I think, but I'm not that artist that has to play all the time, and thus has to get fucked. Maybe my laziness and self-destructive streak will finally pay off and serve a community desperately in need of it. They can't torture me like they could Lucinda Williams.

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You funny dot-communists. Get your shit together, you annoying sucka VCs

I want to work with people who believe in music and art and passion. And I'm just the tip of the iceberg. I'm leaving the major label system and there are hundreds of artists who are going to follow me. There's an unbelievable opportunity for new companies that dare to get it right.

How can anyone defend the current system when it fails to deliver music to so many potential fans? That only expects of itself a "5 percent success rate" a year? The status quo gives us a boring culture. In a society of over 300 million people, only 30 new artists a year sell a million records. By any measure, that's a huge failure.

Maybe each fan will spend less money, but maybe each artist will have a better chance of making a living. Maybe our culture will get more interesting than the one currently owned by Time Warner. I'm not crazy. Ask yourself, are any of you somehow connected to Time Warner media? I think there are a lot of yeses to that and I'd have to say that in that case president McKinley truly failed to bust any trusts. Maybe we can remedy that now.

Artists will make that compromise if it means we can connect with hundreds of millions of fans instead of the hundreds of thousands that we have now. Especially if we lose all the crap that goes with success under the current system. I'm willing, right now, to leave half of these trappings -- fuck it, all these trappings -- at the door to have a pure artist experience. They cosset us with trappings to shut us up. That way when we say "sharecropper!" you can point to my free suit and say "Shut up pop star."

Here, take my Prada pants. Fuck it. Let us do our real jobs. And those of us addicted to celebrity because we have nothing else to give will fade away. And those of us addicted to celebrity because it was there will find a better, purer way to live.

Since I've basically been giving my music away for free under the old system, I'm not afraid of wireless, MP3 files or any of the other threats to my copyrights. Anything that makes my music more available to more people is great. MP3 files sound cruddy, but a well-made album sounds great. And I don't care what anyone says about digital recordings. At this point they are good for dance music, but try listening to a warm guitar tone on them. They suck for what I do.

Record companies are terrified of anything that challenges their control of distribution. This is the business that insisted that CDs be sold in incredibly wasteful 6-by-12 inch long boxes just because no one thought you could change the bins in a record store.

Let's not call the major labels "labels." Let's call them by their real names: They are the distributors. They're the only distributors and they exist because of scarcity. Artists pay 95 percent of whatever we make to gatekeepers because we used to need gatekeepers to get our music heard. Because they have a system, and when they decide to spend enough money -- all of it recoupable, all of it owed by me -- they can occasionally shove things through this system, depending on a lot of arbitrary factors.

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The corporate filtering system, which is the system that brought you (in my humble opinion) a piece of crap like "Mambo No. 5" and didn't let you hear [the brilliant Cat Power record](#) or the [amazing new Sleater Kinney record](#), obviously doesn't have good taste anyway. But we've never paid major label/distributors for their good taste. They've never been like Yahoo and provided a filter service.

There are lots of factors that make a distributor push a recording through the system:

How powerful is management?

Who owes whom a favor?

What independent promoter's cousin is the drummer?

What part of the fiscal year is the company putting out the record?

Is the royalty rate for the artist so obscenely bad that it's almost 100 percent profit instead of just 95 percent so that if the record sells, it's literally a steal?

How much bin space is left over this year?

Was the record already a hit in Europe so that there's corporate pressure to make it work?

Will the band screw up its live career to play free shows for radio stations?

Does the artist's song sound enough like someone else that radio stations will play it because it fits the sound of the month?

Did the artist get the song on a film soundtrack so that the movie studio will pay for the video?

These factors affect the decisions that go into the system. Not public taste. All these things are becoming eradicated now. They are gone or on their way out. We don't need the gatekeepers any more. We just don't need them.

And if they aren't going to do for me what I can do for myself with my 19-year-old Webmistress on my own Web site, then they need to get the hell out of my way. [I will] allow millions of people to get my music for nothing if they want and hopefully they'll be kind enough to leave a tip if they like it.

I still need the old stuff. I still need a producer in the creation of a recording, I still need to get on the radio (which costs a lot of money), I still need bin space for hardware CDs, I still need to provide an opportunity for people without computers to buy the hardware that I make. I still need a lot of this stuff, but I can get these things from a joint venture with a company that serves as a conduit and knows its place. Serving the artist and serving the public: That's its place.

Equity for artists

A new company that gives artists true equity in their work can take over the world, kick ass and make a lot of money. We're inspired by how people get paid in the new economy. Many visual artists and software and hardware designers have real ownership of their work.

I have a 14-year-old niece. She used to want to be a rock star. Before that she wanted to be an actress. As of six months ago, what do you think she wants to be when she grows up? What's the glamorous, emancipating career of choice? Of course, she wants to be a Web designer. It's such a glamorous business!

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When you people do business with artists, you have to take a different view of things. We want to be treated with the respect that now goes to Web designers. We're not Dockers-wearing Intel workers from Portland who know how to "manage our stress." We don't understand or want to understand corporate culture.

I feel this obscene gold rush greedgreedgreed vibe that bothers me a lot when I talk to dot-com people about all this. You guys can't hustle artists that well. At least slick A&R guys know the buzzwords. Don't try to compete with them. I just laugh at you when you do! Maybe you could a year ago when anything dot-com sounded smarter than the rest of us, but the scam has been uncovered.

The celebrity-for-sale business is about to crash, I hope, and the idea of a sucker VC gifting some company with four floors just because they can "do" "chats" with "Christina" once or twice is ridiculous. I did a chat today, twice. Big damn deal. 200 bucks for the software and some elbow grease and a good back-end coder. Wow. That's not worth 150 million bucks.

... I mean, yeah, sure it is if you'd like to give it to me.

Tippling/music as service

I know my place. I'm a waiter. I'm in the service industry.

I live on tips. Occasionally, I'm going to get stiffed, but that's OK. If I work hard and I'm doing good work, I believe that the people who enjoy it are going to want to come directly to me and get my music because it sounds better, since it's mastered and packaged by me personally. I'm providing an honest, real experience. Period.

When people buy the bootleg T-shirt in the concert parking lot and not the more expensive T-shirt inside the venue, it isn't to save money. The T-shirt in the parking lot is cheap and badly made, but it's easier to buy. The bootleggers have a better distribution system. There's no waiting in line and it only takes two minutes to buy one.

I know that if I can provide my own T-shirt that I designed, that I made, and provide it as quickly or quicker than the bootleggers, people who've enjoyed the experience I've provided will be happy to shell out a little more money to cover my costs. Especially if they understand this context, and aren't being shoveled a load of shit about "uppity" artists.

It's exactly the same with recorded music. The real thing to fear from Napster is its simple and excellent distribution system. No one really prefers a cruddy-sounding Napster MP3 file to the real thing. But it's really easy to get an MP3 file; and in the middle of Kansas you may never see my record because major distribution is really bad if your record's not in the charts this week, and even then it takes a couple of weeks to restock the one copy they usually keep on hand.

I also know how many times I have heard a song on the radio that I loved only to buy the record and have the album be a piece of crap. If you're afraid of your own filler then I bet

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you're afraid of Napster. I'm afraid of Napster because I think the major label cartel will get to them before I do.

I've made three records. I like them all. I haven't made filler and they're all committed pieces of work. I'm not scared of you previewing my record. If you like it enough to have it be a part of your life, I know you'll come to me to get it, as long as I show you how to get to me, and as long as you know that it's out.

Most people don't go into restaurants and stiff waiters, but record labels represent the restaurant that forces the waiters to live on, and sometimes pool, their tips. And they even fight for a bit of their tips.

Music is a service to its consumers, not a product. I live on tips. Giving music away for free is what artists have been doing naturally all their lives.

New models

Record companies stand between artists and their fans. We signed terrible deals with them because they controlled our access to the public.

But in a world of total connectivity, record companies lose that control. With unlimited bin space and intelligent search engines, fans will have no trouble finding the music they know they want. They have to know they want it, and that needs to be a marketing business that takes a fee.

If a record company has a reason to exist, it has to bring an artist's music to more fans and it has to deliver more and better music to the audience. You bring me a bigger audience or a better relationship with my audience or get the fuck out of my way. Next time I release a record, I'll be able to go directly to my fans and let them hear it before anyone else.

We'll still have to use radio and traditional CD distribution. Record stores aren't going away any time soon and radio is still the most important part of record promotion.

Major labels are freaking out because they have no control in this new world. Artists can sell CDs directly to fans. We can make direct deals with thousands of other Web sites and promote our music to millions of people that old record companies never touch.

We're about to have lots of new ways to sell our music: downloads, hardware bundles, memory sticks, live Webcasts, and lots of other things that aren't even invented yet.

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Content providers

But there's something you guys have to figure out.

Here's my open letter to Steve Case:

Avatars don't talk back!!! But what are you going to do with real live artists?

Artists aren't like you. We go through a creative process that's demented and crazy. There's a lot of soul-searching and turning ourselves inside-out and all kinds of gross stuff that ends up on "Behind the Music."

A lot of people who haven't been around artists very much get really weird when they sit down to lunch with us. So I want to give you some advice: Learn to speak our language. Talk about songs and melody and hooks and art and beauty and soul. Not sleazy record-guy crap, where you're in a cashmere sweater murmuring that the perfect deal really *is* perfect, Courtney. Yuck. Honestly hire honestly committed people. We're in a "new economy," right? You can afford to do that.

But don't talk to me about "content."

I get really freaked out when I meet someone and they start telling me that I should record 34 songs in the next six months so that we have enough content for my site. Defining artistic expression as content is anathema to me.

What the hell is content? Nobody buys content. Real people pay money for music because it means something to them. A great song is not just something to take up space on a Web site next to stock market quotes and baseball scores.

[DEN](#) tried to build a site with artist-free content and I'm not sorry to see it fail. The DEN shows look like art if you're not paying attention, but they forgot to hire anyone to be creative. So they ended up with a lot of content nobody wants to see because they thought they could avoid dealing with defiant and moody personalities. Because they were arrogant. And because they were conformists. Artists have to deal with business people and business people have to deal with artists. We hate each other. Let's create companies of mediators.

Every single artist who makes records believes and hopes that they give you something that will transform your life. If you're really just interested in data mining or selling banner ads, stick with those "artists" willing to call themselves content providers.

I don't know if an artist can last by meeting the current public taste, the taste from the last quarterly report. I don't think you can last by following demographics and carefully meeting expectations. I don't know many lasting works of art that are condescending or deliberately stupid or were created as content.

Don't tell me I'm a brand. I'm famous and people recognize me, but I can't look in the mirror and see my brand identity.

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Keep talking about brands and you know what you'll get? Bad clothes. Bad hair. Bad books. Bad movies. And bad records. And bankrupt businesses. Rides that were fun for a year with no employee loyalty but everyone got rich fucking you. Who wants that? The answer is purity. We can afford it. Let's go find it again while we can.

I also feel filthy trying to call my music a product. It's not a thing that I test market like toothpaste or a new car. Music is personal and mysterious.

Being a "content provider" is prostitution work that devalues our art and doesn't satisfy our spirits. Artistic expression has to be provocative. The problem with artists and the Internet: Once their art is reduced to content, they may never have the opportunity to retrieve their souls.

When you form your business for creative people, with creative people, come at us with some thought. Everybody's process is different. And remember that it's art. We're not crafts-people.

Sponsorships

I don't know what a good sponsorship would be for me or for other artists I respect. People bring up sponsorships a lot as a way for artists to get our music paid for upfront and for us to earn a fee. I've dealt with large corporations for long enough to know that any alliance where I'm an owned service is going to be doomed.

When I agreed to allow a large cola company to promote a live show, I couldn't have been more miserable. They screwed up every single thing imaginable. The venue was empty but sold out. There were thousands of people outside who wanted to be there, trying to get tickets. And there were the empty seats the company had purchased for a lump sum and failed to market because they were clueless about music.

It was really dumb. You had to buy the cola. You had to dial a number. You had to press a bunch of buttons. You had to do all this crap that nobody wanted to do. Why not just bring a can to the door?

On top of all this, I felt embarrassed to be an advertising agent for a product that I'd never let my daughter use. Plus they were a condescending bunch of little guys. They treated me like I was an ungrateful little bitch who should be groveling for the experience to play for their damn soda.

I ended up playing without my shirt on and ordering a six-pack of the rival cola onstage. Also lots of unwholesome cursing and nudity occurred. This way I knew that no matter how tempting the cash was, they'd never do business with me again.

If you want some little obedient slave content provider, then fine. But I think most musicians don't want to be responsible for your clean-cut, wholesome, all-American, sugar corrosive cancer-causing, all white people, no women allowed sodapop images.

COURTNEY LOVE - A RADICAL VIEW ON 'PIRACY'

Nor, on the converse, do we want to be responsible for your vice-inducing, liver-rotting, child-labor-law-violating, all white people, no-women-allowed booze images.

So as a defiant moody artist worth my salt, I've got to think of something else. Tampax, maybe.

Money

As a user, I love Napster. It carries some risk. I hear idealistic business people talk about how people that are musicians would be musicians no matter what and that we're already doing it for free, so what about copyright?

Please. It's incredibly easy not to be a musician. It's always a struggle and a dangerous career choice. We are motivated by passion and by money.

That's not a dirty little secret. It's a fact. Take away the incentive for major or minor financial reward and you dilute the pool of musicians. I am not saying that only pure artists will survive. Like a few of the more utopian people who discuss this, I don't want just pure artists to survive.

Where would we all be without the trash? We need the trash to cover up our national depression. The utopians also say that because in their minds "pure" artists are all [Ani Di-Franco](#) and don't demand a lot of money. Why are the utopians all entertainment lawyers and major label workers anyway? I demand a lot of money if I do a big huge worthwhile job and millions of people like it, don't kid yourself. In economic terms, you've got an industry that's loathsome and outmoded, but when it works it creates some incentive and some efficiency even though absolutely no one gets paid.

We suffer as a society and a culture when we don't pay the true value of goods and services delivered. We create a lack of production. Less good music is recorded if we remove the incentive to create it.

Music is intellectual property with full cash and opportunity costs required to create, polish and record a finished product. If I invest money and time into my business, I should be reasonably protected from the theft of my goods and services. When the [judgment](#) came against MP3.com, the RIAA sought damages of \$150,000 for each major-label-"owned" musical track in MP3's database. Multiply by 80,000 CDs, and MP3.com could owe the gatekeepers \$120 billion.

But what about the Plimsouls? Why can't MP3.com pay each artist a fixed amount based on the number of their downloads? Why on earth should MP3.com pay \$120 billion to four distribution companies, who in most cases won't have to pay a nickel to the artists whose copyrights they've stolen through their system of organized theft?

COURTNEY LOVE - A RADICAL VIEW ON 'PIRACY'

It's a ridiculous judgment. I believe if evidence had been entered that ultimately it's just shuffling big cash around two or three corporations, I can only pray that the judge in the MP3.com case would have seen the RIAA's case for the joke that it was.

I'd rather work out a deal with MP3.com myself, and force them to be artist-friendly, instead of being laughed at and having my money hidden by a major label as they sell my records out the back door, behind everyone's back.

How dare they behave in such a horrified manner in regards to copyright law when their entire industry is based on piracy? When Mister Label Head Guy, whom my lawyer yelled at me not to name, got caught last year selling millions of "cleans" out the back door. "Cleans" being the records that aren't for marketing but are to be sold. Who the fuck is this guy? He wants to save a little cash so he fucks the artist and goes home? Do they fire him? Does Chuck Phillips of the LA Times say anything? No way! This guy's a source! He throws awesome dinner parties! Why fuck with the status quo? Let's pick on Lars Ulrich instead because he brought up an interesting point!

Conclusion

I'm looking for people to help connect me to more fans, because I believe fans will leave a tip based on the enjoyment and service I provide. I'm not scared of them getting a preview. It really is going to be a global village where a billion people have access to one artist and a billion people can leave a tip if they want to.

It's a radical democratization. Every artist has access to every fan and every fan has access to every artist, and the people who direct fans to those artists. People that give advice and technical value are the people we need. People crowding the distribution pipe and trying to ignore fans and artists have no value. This is a perfect system.

If you're going to start a company that deals with musicians, please do it because you like music. Offer some control and equity to the artists and try to give us some creative guidance. If music and art and passion are important to you, there are hundreds of artists who are ready to rewrite the rules.

In the last few years, business pulled our culture away from the idea that music is important and emotional and sacred. But new technology has brought a real opportunity for change; we can break down the old system and give musicians real freedom and choice.

A great writer named [Neal Stephenson](#) said that America does four things better than any other country in the world: rock music, movies, software and high-speed pizza delivery. All of these are sacred American art forms. Let's return to our purity and our idealism while we have this shot.

Warren Beatty once said: "The greatest gift God gives us is to enjoy the sound of our own voice. And the second greatest gift is to get somebody to listen to it."

And for that, I humbly thank you.

URSULA K. LE GUIN

THE MILLS COLLEGE ADDRESS



A Left-Handed Commencement Address

Author Ursula K. Le Guin at the Mills College Graduation - 1983

I want to thank the Mills College Class of '83 for offering me a rare chance: to speak aloud in public in the language of women.

I know there are men graduating, and I don't mean to exclude them, far from it. There is a Greek tragedy where the Greek says to the foreigner, "If you don't understand Greek, please signify by nodding."

Anyhow, commencements are usually operated under the unspoken agreement that everybody graduating is either male or ought to be. That's why we are all wearing these twelfth-century dresses that look so great on men and make women look either like a mushroom or a pregnant stork. Intellectual tradition is male. Public speaking is done in the public tongue, the national or tribal language; and the language of our tribe is the men's language. Of course women learn it. We're not dumb. If you can tell Margaret Thatcher from Ronald Reagan, or Indira Gandhi from General Somoza, by anything they say, tell me how. This is a man's world, so it talks a man's language. The words are all words of power. You've come a

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long way, baby, but no way is long enough. You can't even get there by selling yourself out: because there is theirs, not yours.

Maybe we've had enough words of power and talk about the battle of life. Maybe we need some words of weakness. Instead of saying now that I hope you will all go forth from this ivory tower of college into the Real World and forge a triumphant career or at least help your husband to and keep our country strong and be a success in everything - instead of talking about power, what if I talked like a woman right here in public? It won't sound right. It's going to sound terrible. What if I said what I hope for you is first, if -- only if -- you want kids, I hope you have them. Not hordes of them. A couple, enough. I hope they're beautiful. I hope you and they have enough to eat, and a place to be warm and clean in, and friends, and work you like doing. Well, is that what you went to college for? Is that all? What about success?

Success is somebody else's failure. Success is the American Dream we can keep dreaming because most people in most places, including thirty million of ourselves, live wide awake in the terrible reality of poverty. No, I do not wish you success. I don't even want to talk about it. I want to talk about failure.

Because you are human beings you are going to meet failure. You are going to meet disappointment, injustice, betrayal, and irreparable loss. You will find you're weak where you thought yourself strong. You'll work for possessions and then find they possess you. You will find yourself - as I know you already have - in dark places, alone, and afraid.

What I hope for you, for all my sisters and daughters, brothers and sons, is that you will be able to live there, in the dark place. To live in the place that our rationalizing culture of success denies, calling it a place of exile, uninhabitable, foreign.

Well, we're already foreigners. Women as women are largely excluded from, alien to, the self-declared male norms of this society, where human beings are called Man, the only respectable god is male, the the only direction is up. So that's their country; let's explore our own. I'm not talking about sex; that's a whole other universe, where every man and woman is on their own. I'm talking about society, the so-called man's world of institutionalized competition, aggression, violence, authority, and power. If we want to live as women, some separatism is forced upon us: Mills College is a wise embodiment of that separatism. The war-games world wasn't made by us or for us; we can't even breathe the air there without masks. And if you put the mask on you'll have a hard time getting it off. So how about going on doing things our own way, as to some extent you did here at Mills? Not for men and the male power hierarchy - that's their game. Not against men, either - that's still playing by their rules. But with any men who are with us: that's our game. Why should a free woman with a college education either fight Machoman or serve him? Why should she live her life on his terms?

Machoman is afraid of our terms, which are not all rational, positive, competitive, etc. And so he has taught us to despise and deny them. In our society, women have lived, and have been despised for living, the whole side of life that includes and takes responsibility for helplessness, weakness, and illness, for the irrational and the irreparable, for all that is obscure, passive, uncontrolled, animal, unclean - the valley of the shadow, the deep, the depths of life.

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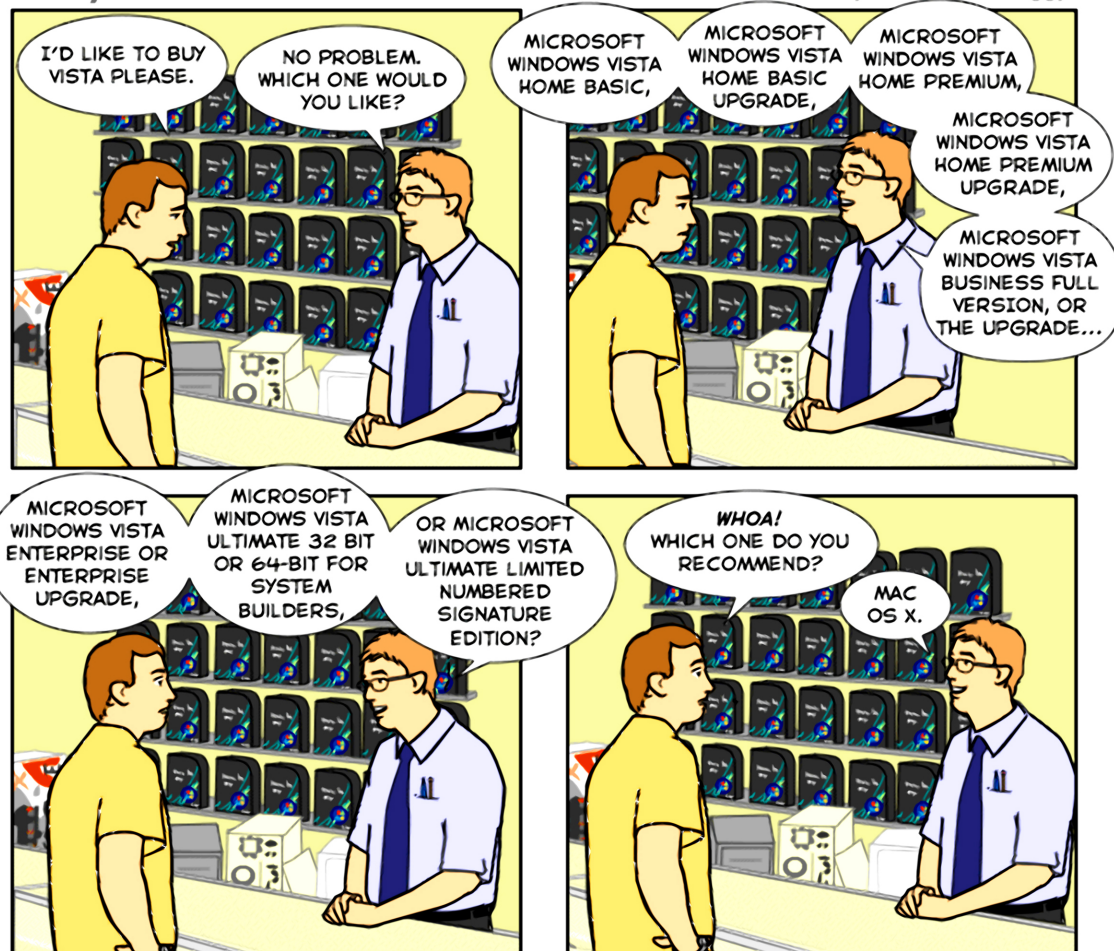
All that the Warrior denies and refuses is left to us and the men who share it with us and therefore, like us, can't play doctor, only nurse, can't be warriors, only civilians, can't be chiefs, only indians. Well, so that is our country. The night side of our country. If there is a day side to it, high sierras, prairies of bright grass, we only know pioneers' tales about it, we haven't got there yet. We're never going to get there by imitating Machoman. We are only going to get there by going our own way, by living there, by living through the night in our own country.

So what I hope for you is that you live there not as prisoners, ashamed of being women, consenting captives of a psychopathic social system, but as natives. That you will be at home there, keep house there, be your own mistress, with a room of your own. That you will do your work there, whatever you're good at, art or science or tech or running a company or sweeping under the beds, and when they tell you that it's second-class work because a woman is doing it, I hope you tell them to go to hell and while they're going to give you equal pay for equal time. I hope you live without the need to dominate, and without the need to be dominated. I hope you are never victims, but I hope you have no power over other people. And when you fail, and are defeated, and in pain, and in the dark, then I hope you will remember that darkness is your country, where you live, where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is. Our roots are in the dark; the earth is our country.

Why did we look up for blessing - instead of around, and down? What hope we have lies there. Not in the sky full of orbiting spy-eyes and weaponry, but in the earth we have looked down upon. Not from above, but from below. Not in the light that blinds, but in the dark that nourishes, where human beings grow human souls.

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