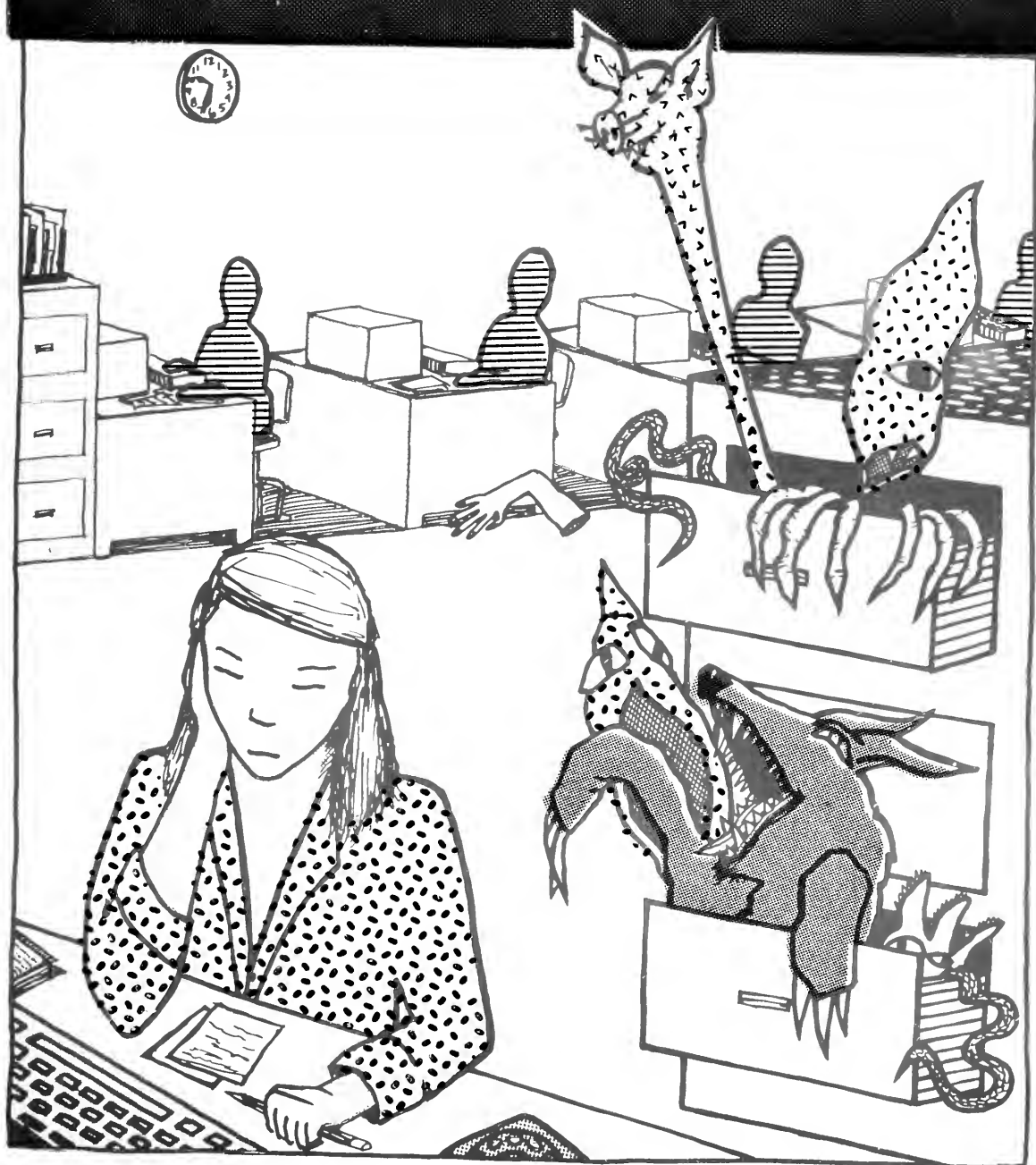


# PROCESSED WORLD 6





# PROCESSED WORLD

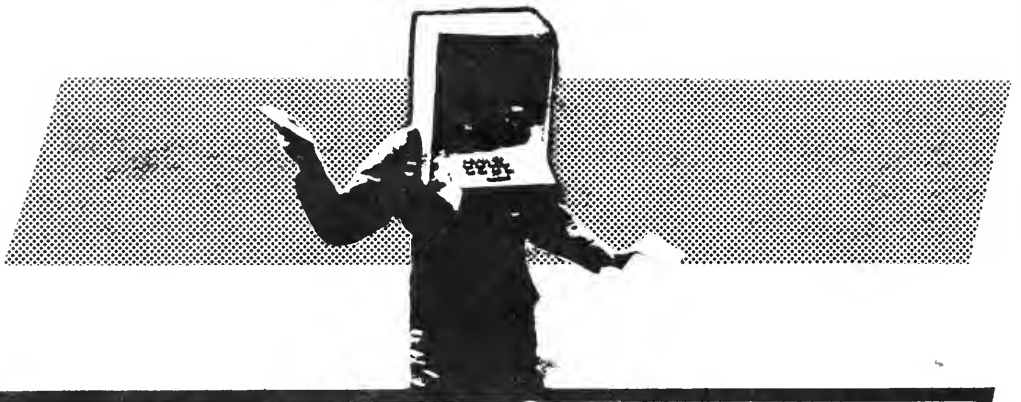
## ISSUE 6, FALL '82

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All of the articles and stories in *Processed World* reflect the views and fantasies of the author and not necessarily those of other contributors or editors.

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# Talking Heads

As issue #6 of Processed World goes to press, nearly half of the active participants in PW are unemployed or living on marginal and sporadic income. Some of us (who don't have children to support) are used to living quite cheaply and appreciate not working and finally having enough time for our own projects. However, everyone is more concerned about that perpetually unpleasant question of economic survival. So where does all this leave PW and others with our "bad work attitude?"

At a recent discussion of the future of PW, several participants expressed hopes of broadening the range and focus of our activities. Up till now, aside from the publication of the magazine, we have attempted to create a space and context for informal exchanges of ideas, information and experiences at bi-weekly gatherings and a couple of picnics. Distributing the magazine to passers-by in the Financial District, and "scandalizing" industry-sponsored events with costume picket lines and leaflets (see

"Duelling For Dollars" on p. 38) are other ways we have attempted to overcome our isolation. While we all agree that PW should continue its public experiments in creating a community based on opposition to the values, images and language of those in power (see e.g., Chris Winks' article on office-ese), there is a wide range of opinion on other directions PW might eventually take.

The question of the relationship of PW as a group/collective/project to the growing number of rebels we have met sparked a long debate. Some people think we could actively seek ways to develop and coordinate our resources and contacts with an eye towards intervening in support of office workers (or others) who are taking a stand against management. This could include soliciting and providing information and advice (e.g., some PWers considered producing a pamphlet on how to deal with unemployment bureaucracy), or more direct participation in conflicts (e.g. block-

ades, disruptions, and sympathy strikes). Furthest along these lines was the suggestion that, if conditions were favorable for instigating organized job actions at a particular workplace, a group of trouble-makers could try to get jobs there. Others feel that, in the absence of more generalized opposition, it is premature to foresee or prepare for collective confrontations. Still others disagree entirely with this strategic approach. They believe PW should not play a direct role in organizing office workers. They fear that if people come to PW looking for answers or directions, this might encourage their dependence and impede self-organization.

Many office workers in SF are temporaries (officially or not), unemployed, or isolated in small offices, so that their connection to co-workers is limited. Moreover, while work is a setting where we experience capitalism's control over our daily lives tangibly and directly, it is by no means the only context for opposition to the ways things are. In this issue, Penny O'Reilly analyzes the current state of childcare and suggests seeking solutions that would maximize autonomy from state or corporate power.

Some PWers spoke of emphasizing symbolic protests in the streets of the Financial District to strengthen solidarity and temporarily disalienate the environment. W.R.'s letter suggests some possible actions of this sort.

Questions were raised about further attempts to define our project and goals in relation to past oppositional movements, including the political experiences of individuals in the group. In this issue, *Roots of Disillusionment* takes a broad look at ways in which socio-economic conditions and cultural practices shaped the experience of the post WWII baby boom

generation. The article examines the growth of "information handling" work against the background of the social movements of the past decades, and calls for a reassertion, broader, deeper and more lucid, of the most advanced moments of the "sixties" revolt.

Hatred for conformism and phoniness, along with a renewed respect for dream and fantasy, were primary values for the rebels of fifteen years ago. Ana Kellia Ramares' story, "Greys," expresses these values powerfully in an OfficeLand context. In this issue's *Tales of Toil*, "Buy 'Em...," the private relations of a notorious San Francisco PR firm, Solem & Associates, are held up to deserved ridicule. And "Them," which could be called a "Tale of Toilsome Leisure," penetrates beyond the hoopla surrounding the recent US Festival to reveal it as just another pseudo-event with computerized trappings.

Enjoy! And keep those letters coming...



photo by Elsa Eder



Dear PW,

Thank you for the copy of *Processed World* that arrived while I was on vacation. Since then there have been about three crises at a time, including the landlord suddenly selling our apartment from under us and the like.

There is a story I've started [which] is based on my time as a Personnel Management Analyst Trainee for the State of Tennessee. The courts had ordered the state to make job definitions for each of the 3,200 classifications then in use. To stand up in Civil Service proceedings the definitions had to be broken down into hundreds of minute actions. The interviews to get the information had to be taken from employees scattered around the state, and then the information had to go through all sorts of computer analyses. Each job definition was to be about 300 pages. When I arrived at the office, the eight PMAs had been working on this about two years and hadn't completed one of the 3,200. Even if they completed one it would legally expire in three years since it might not reflect current job requirements. The then-governor of Tennessee was against the whole thing and just funded it to satisfy the court. A new election was coming up in a few months that might change the whole policy and method of definition. Etc. My job was terrific and just what your magazine is about. I had to work toward writing job definitions that would never be finished, and if finished

never used. Despite this the boss, a one-legged man on crutches known to the staff as Tripod, prowled the halls to make sure we were working. Good story material, Beckett-world.

Sincerely,

D.F.—Lincoln, NE

Dear PW,

I've been an office worker for a long time now — since I left home at fifteen and lied about my age to start as a secy in a temp agency. Along the way have picked up skills — been an admin. asst., word processor, and all-around-peon — as well as gained some real insights into the mechanics of Big Business and our capitalist society. Over the years I've accumulated my share of "Tales of Toil" and have become increasingly fed up with the whole system. What an integral part of this society are we lowly office workers! What a void has been filled by *PW*! I'm so proud and happy that you all have labored and loved to create this much needed forum for us. At last — a place where we can communicate, exchange ideas, and discover that we are not alone. The letter from L.S. in *PW4* and Maxine's response really touched me deeply. It is the people like L.S. and Maxine in my life who have kept me going when the going got rough, and who have inspired me to take the chance and quit working to become a full time student.

Right now I've got a year to go towards my B.A., and then I hope to study law (no — I do not plan to be a

corporate lawyer!). In the meantime I'm working part-time as a secy on campus to survive. Check it out — students aren't *allowed* to make more than minimum wage here. Thus, I am the most experienced worker in the office but have the lowest salary — with no fringe. Also, since "boss" discovered that I write better than he does (which isn't hard) I now write most of his correspondence and edit his reports. *C'est la vie*. At least I get an inside look at the workings of this madhouse...

Although I don't call myself a socialist (haven't really read enuf about it) I know and believe in the slogan "workers of the world unite!" As office workers we fuel the very brain of the industrial monster. I truly believe that we have the potential for enormous power — we could bring Wall Street to its knees, we could halt Pentagon operations — if we wanted to and if we were united and organized. The articles in *PW* on office workers' strikes and the science fiction "could happen" stories all reveal this truth. How far we want to

realize our potential is wide open for discussion — and *PW* gives us a place where we can explore these ideas. The comic relief helps too!

Keep strong, stay healthy,  
L.G.—New Paltz, NY

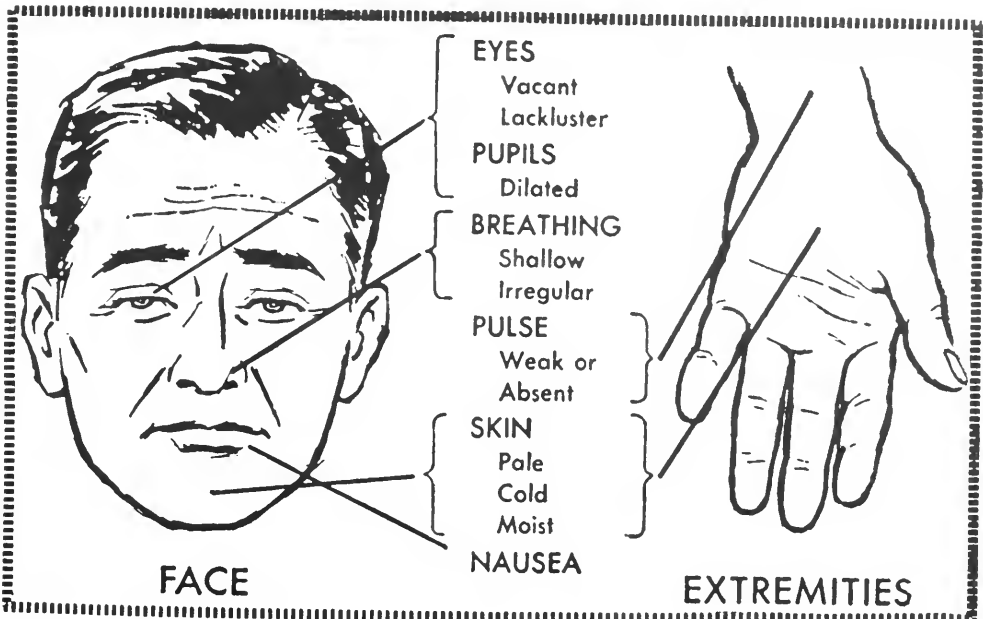
Dear *Processed World*,

I read with interest the Talking Heads column in issue #5. I think the questions being raised about future directions for *Processed World* are important. As I read the article a variety of thoughts occurred to me and I would like to share some of them.

Too many groups in the past have been unable to move past the point *PW* is at now. Instead they've ended up liberal or doctrinaire or just burned-out. All the activism of the 60s and 70s has ended in apathy and disappointment with political movements that have assimilated to the mainstream.

This apathy, even though an obstacle to the goals of *PW*, is a valid feeling and we should accept it. Within the apathy is a potential for a genuinely radical position.

## WORD PROCESSING: THE SYMPTOMS



# Is your secretary trying to tell you something?



That is, people are apathetic because they realize how much is wrong with society. Old political formulas aren't good enough anymore. The potential is for this feeling to become a willingness to consider *new* alternatives, to question one's stake in the system.

PW has done a good job of tapping into this feeling among office workers. But can this alienation be translated into a desire to resist social control and to work for something better? The issue of how to relate to the labor movement and unionism is a good example. Can unions address the alienation office workers feel today?

I don't think so. Unions always assume that we accept our roles as

*workers*. But we don't! And that's what PW has been pointing out. *Even if the wages were better, we'd still hate office work.*

But unions, by definition, limit their scope to the *workplace* and issues of *workers*. For those of us who'd like to see work itself redefined, to unionize is almost a contradiction in terms.

Is there an alternative? A way to move beyond the worker role, to address the socio-economic control that jobs exercise over our *daily lives*?

I emphasize the idea of daily life because I think we've been asked too often to give energy to movements on the basis of abstract or theoretical goals. We're always



talking about the "workplace" or the "voting booths" or even the "streets." But these are abstract metaphors for political processes and not concrete situations in our daily lives. We may demonstrate for the human rights of people in a country we've never been to. But we often don't even know the people who live in the apartment next door. This contradiction ultimately tends to negate our political work.

My point is that these abstract political arenas can never help us achieve our goals. Processes based on the use of power (that is, coercion), from the marketplace to the halls of Congress, are what *creates* alienation. We can't use them to end alienation!

That's not the only reason to question our relationship to these arenas. We've seen how past movements that have used these political processes have ended up thinking and acting *like* the very institutions they wanted to change. There are many examples of this phenomena — from women managers to Black Republicans to unions that cooperate with management to increase productivity and lower wages (like the auto unions).

We need to think about political change in a whole new way. We can't accept issues in the terms that corporations define them. They want to talk about productivity and wages. But we're concerned about the value of work and the quality of life. They want us to define our needs in terms of salaries and benefits. We want to meet human needs without money.

Our concerns today are not as workers or producers (which has always been the basic premise of the labor movement). We want freedom *from* work that is useless and alienating. But what forces us to remain workers is our role as *consumers*. Despite all the abun-

dance and over-production of our economic system, we're still forced to pay money for basic survival needs, as if these things were scarce. And as long as we need money to survive, we're forced to sell our labor.

Organizing us in our capacity as producers only further entrenches us in the world of wage labor. It is as *consumers* that we exercise what choice we do have as participants in the economy. The choice we can exercise now: not to participate at all. So by organizing ourselves as consumers, we can free ourselves from the economic system, especially our dependence on jobs for survival. And I believe that anything that lessens that dependence moves us towards the freedom from work that we are seeking.

The underground economy is the arena where this struggle for freedom is being conducted. This counter-economy is as important to the 80s as the counter-culture was to the 60s. It's an arena that *does* have a concrete basis in our daily lives. It's where our political ideals can be integrated with our own day-to-day actions and behavior.

The possibilities suggested by this approach are numerous. Any project that promotes economic and psychological freedom from the workplace can be considered. The following are ideas that occurred to me:

*Information:* Office workers have a real need for an information resource or network that isn't sold out to corporate interests. We need to exchange information to help us survive in the office world, such as: comparisons of salaries, benefits, corporate policies and similar information about various companies, the reputations of corporations for discrimination, employee relations, etc., experiences with various temporary employment agencies, our

legal rights on the job, health hazards in office environments, and strategies for dealing with employers, unemployment insurance, job-hunting, etc., etc.

*Resources:* Instead of waiting for the corporation to provide us with benefits to meet our needs is it possible to provide for some of them ourselves, cooperatively? Some workers, especially temporaries, have a real need for health insurance. A lot of people take a permanent job simply because they need the health benefits offered. Another area might be child care...

*Co-ops and Exchange Networks:* Having to pay for goods not only forces us to work — routine shopping takes up a terrific amount of what little free time we have. A network for trading and bartering goods and services could help. So could cooperative food-buying, especially if the distribution outlet was near our jobs or home...

*Support and Community:* Contact with other office workers in similar situations helps us find support. It's also a key way that people develop an awareness about their situations. Informal gatherings, like PW has already been doing, are good as well as formal events. I like the idea of an annual "Secretaries Ball" — sort of a counter-part to the annual Hooker's Ball in San Francisco.

By these suggestions I don't mean projects organized like human services. I mean projects organized by people to benefit themselves. Some may not consider this to be valid political work. But today, the corporations are determined to co-opt all our needs into the cash economy. If we don't address these needs ourselves, they will soon have a price tag on them and we will be all the more dependent on the economy. Dropping out of the cash

economy, its laws and its values, is a genuine act of resistance.

This is where official, formal, legal organizations — the kind most groups seem to think they have to be — are actually a disadvantage. By working informally, without a platform or manifesto or even a name, it's possible to promote the underground economy and advocate resistance with less risk of becoming a legal target.

Then, unlike unions, we can really challenge the whole system of corporate values and the absurdity of our jobs. For example, we could hold a press conference on the steps of the Pacific Stock Exchange to announce awards to companies based on categories like "Lowest Salaries," "Most Paternalistic," "Most Incompetent Management," "Most Sexist," etc. Or we could start a Corporate Crime Secret Witness Program and offer rewards to employees who anonymously leak information about their corporation's crimes and boondoggles.

Once we get over old ideas about revolution being led by united, mass fronts, we can open ourselves to creative thinking about our political work. We can learn to be comfortable with a variety of opinions and a diversity of actions — not everyone has to agree with us or do what we do to be a friend.

As for developing our own processes for decision-making, there are a couple of ideas worth considering. One is the process of *consensus*, where the group acts on something as long as no member has a strong objection. If there is an objection it is discussed and if the objection still remains then the particular action is not taken. Consensus requires more time initially, but it ensures the participation of all group members and requires the majority to consider the opinions of independent or minority voices within the group. A corollary to this

is the use of *direct representation*. Representatives appointed by the group serve only to convey positions the group has agreed to in consensus. They can't change that position (like politicians do) unless they return to the group for a new consensus.

Having said all this, there is still the question of what to do about the jobs we still have to have. Workplace organizing can be worthwhile depending on its goals. To make us increase our keystroke rates in return for a higher tax bracket? Or to win us freedom, piece by piece, from the alienation of the workplace? It can do this, for example, if the union seeks fewer hours for workers.

But for a goal like this to be practical, we still have to address our dependence on the cash economy. That's why I put the idea of cooperative projects first. If we can meet our material needs in other ways, we can seek a goal like a shorter work week.

The purpose of my ideas here has been to help PW find ways to address this challenge: not only to find the direction to move in, but to overcome the apathy at the same time, to find alternatives to past mistakes of political movements and to show office workers that change is possible, starting with the concrete reality of our daily lives.

Sincerely,

W.R.—Los Angeles

P.S. I just saw the news that Blue

Shield is pulling its office out of San Francisco in a clear attempt to break the union there, one of the first unions of office workers in S.F. [Write PW for copies of past coverage of the fights at Blue Shield]. This only underscores the futility of the union approach. Corporations today are national and international in scope — they can move anywhere, while we, as individuals, always remain local. It is the local level, and our daily lives, that offer us the best opportunities for organizing today.

Dear Will,

Thanks for your thoughtful letter. So far PW has focused on workplace issues and though this will probably remain true for some time, we welcome discussion and articles on other aspects of our daily lives. In any case, I don't believe that the sphere of consumption can be divorced from the sphere of production as you seem to propose. Organizing as "consumers" no more guarantees freedom from the coercion of the marketplace than does organizing as "workers". Both these roles need to be redefined, or better still, abolished as such.

Finding new ways to circumvent the money economy is a crucial step in doing away with it altogether. But the purpose of co-ops and collectives is defeated if they don't actually spare people from alienated labor, and few such experiments have succeeded. As long as the market



rules, "dropping out" of the cash economy tends to take the form of self-imposed poverty. Witness the burn-out rate of communes and collectives in the sixties and seventies. [The counter-economy was, in fact, an important part of the counter-culture, see "Roots of Disillusionment" in this issue].

The workplace and the streets are not just "abstract political metaphors for political processes," they are very concrete arenas of social activity. Wrestling control of neighborhood space from landlords, banks and police officers certainly concerns our daily lives, as does taking control of work places, whether to destroy them or transform them.

Nevertheless, some of your suggestions for ways we can immediately help each other are well-taken. Some people working on PW are interested in contributing to such an information exchange. If anyone wants to send in comments, reports, recommendations, etc., on companies, bosses, etc., we can begin putting it together for publication. If other people would like to co-ordinate childcare co-ops or take up other ideas for projects, we can help put people in touch with each other, if so desired.

— Maxine Holz

## CONSERVE ENERGY



black thumb press 1980

## BURN A BUREAUCRAT

Dear comrades-in-arms,

A friend who is highly skilled in office sabotage gave me issues #4 and 5, and Christ on a bicycle, I don't think I've been this grateful since I was first taught to read! Having just lived through a year-long horror story that I'll send to you someday, I was particularly enchanted by "Sabotage: The Ultimate Video Game" (although Gidget neglected to mention the financial power incarnate in the shit-job of mail clerk — how sweet it is to whisk away to the washroom and flush checks!).

Me, I'm a secretary with some word processing. Till the beginning of this month I worked in a "permanent" job with a computer consulting company — then after many attempts to force me to resign, my old management gave up and fired me for BAD ATTITUDE. Yippee! Now I'm doing temp for a university. The only bad thing is, now that I know the most effective ways to fight back, I'm working for a good employer, dammit.

In real life, though, I'm a writer.

Just wait until I'm well paid and I'll send you lots of bucks. This is better than the Cancer Fund. (Also, considering VDT risks, potentially more effective. Let us attack all problems at their source.)

May your cog be ever toothless,  
J.M.—Ottawa

Dear *Processed World*,

I've hesitated subscribing until now because I thought you would probably be another one of those little radical magazines that folded after two issues. But enclosed please find my check for \$10 to cover one year's subscription. This is as much a vote of confidence and encouragement as anything else.

Your magazine is becoming more and more relevant to my life. I started at my present job at a large bank as a part-time student assis-

tant while I studied Art History at SFSU. When I graduated, I was offered the position of "Data Base Manager." This job entailed lots of responsibility coupled with lots of shit work. I have an ambitious boss who is getting ahead with the help of a lot of my (unacknowledged) creativity. I don't mind too much because she leaves me alone and I have the chance to learn a lot about all the new office equipment that the bank puts at my disposal. I will soon have the distinction of having two VDT's at my desk (...) The point is that I have found myself relating to, and in some ways fascinated by, a technology that two years ago I dismissed in favor of gothic cathedrals.

I would like to make personal and political connections with people who share my concerns and experiences (...) It would be nice to connect with some people who have also thought and worked around [this situation].

In solidarity,

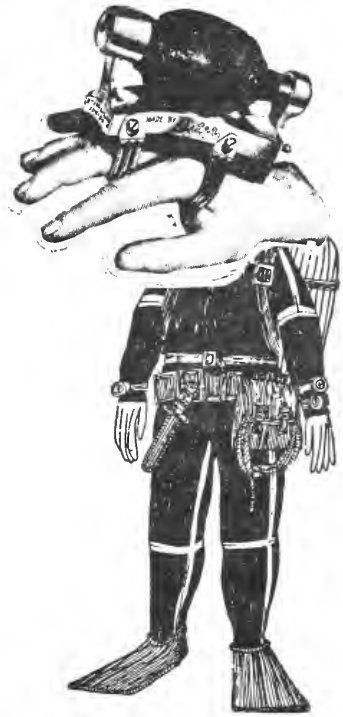
M.L.—SF

Dear *Processed World*,

Just what do these guys do anyway?

I mean these fat ones, wandering around the office with their vests unbuttoned and sleeves rolled up, making sick jokes with the secretaries (like, "Did you hear the one about the stenographer who goes into her boss' office and says, 'Boss, I've found a new position,' and the Boss says, 'Great, let's try it!' "). And they stand around all day talking about their children, their cars, their patio cement that's cracking, or the card games they play sitting in their Winnebagos.

Once or twice a day they disappear into their cubicles. Three hours later they waddle out belly first with a notepad clenched in their fists. The results of their hours of managerial productivity: a three para-



graph memo ready for typing.

*Deciphering* is what we really do. We take their child-like scrawls and correct the spelling, make verbs agree with subjects, create paragraphs, interpret various arrows and inserts, and make something out of it you could actually read (if you wanted to).

We return the masterpiece for approval and they spend another happy hour "reviewing." The door opens again and out they come, the memo finally ready for "distribution."

That means a score of xeroxes distributed to files, binders, CC's, and personal scrapbooks, stuffed in envelopes, drawers, and in-boxes on three floors.

Just about when we're finished they suddenly appear again, an apparition hovering around our desk, clearing its throat... could they make one small change on the memo? And off we go again, re-typing, re-xeroxing, re-filing.

One of two of these executive documents a day seems to be the limit of most managers. But *our* job helping them maintain this extraordinary level of productivity can

leave us exhausted at the end of the day.

Obviously they don't want to admit how important our role is in making their attempts at communication legible. What I want to know is... what do *they* do? I mean, what are managers supposed to know that we don't?

It doesn't include spelling or basic writing skills. Remember those spelling tests they give you at employment agencies and Personnel Offices? Good thing they don't give tests like that to managers!

I, for one, think it's time to stop covering for the Boss, using skills we aren't paid for. Correcting grammar and spelling is *editing* and that's the job of a "communications specialist." Laying out letters and creating formats for reports is the job of "graphic artists" and "forms control officers." And those jobs all pay a lot more than ours do.

I'm suggesting that we simply stop making all these corrections *for* them. I did at my job and I was surprised to discover that my manager didn't even notice! Now I regularly send memos out system-wide with sentences like "Thank you for your patients," and "Newer contruction are listed for rent," and "Local environs are well appearing."

If more of us do this we can clog the corporate communications system with their own gobbledy-gook. Then, sooner or later, someone "higher up," like the president, will notice that all the memos he receives are written in sixth-grade English. He'll throw an executive fit, call an executive meeting, issue an executive bulletin... and look for a consultant.

And that's where we can be the recipients of corporate misappropriation and extravagance for a change. We can market the skills we've stopped using on the job in the lucrative world of consulting.

*Processed World* could form a subsidiary corporation to give us part-time employment consulting corporations who don't understand why their communications are proto-illiterate. It's just taking advantage of an old principle, "create a need and fill it." (Of course, *our* corporation will have to pay us so much in salaries that it *never* makes a profit and we can all use the loss as a tax shelter...)

No more free rides! Let the Boss dot his own i's... if he can. A 1000 office workers who know the secret of a 1000 incompetent managers can be a powerful force. Corporate communications are already meaningless. Let's make them illiterate, too, and help cut the final ties of the corporate world to reality! Let them drown in their own words!

Sincerely,

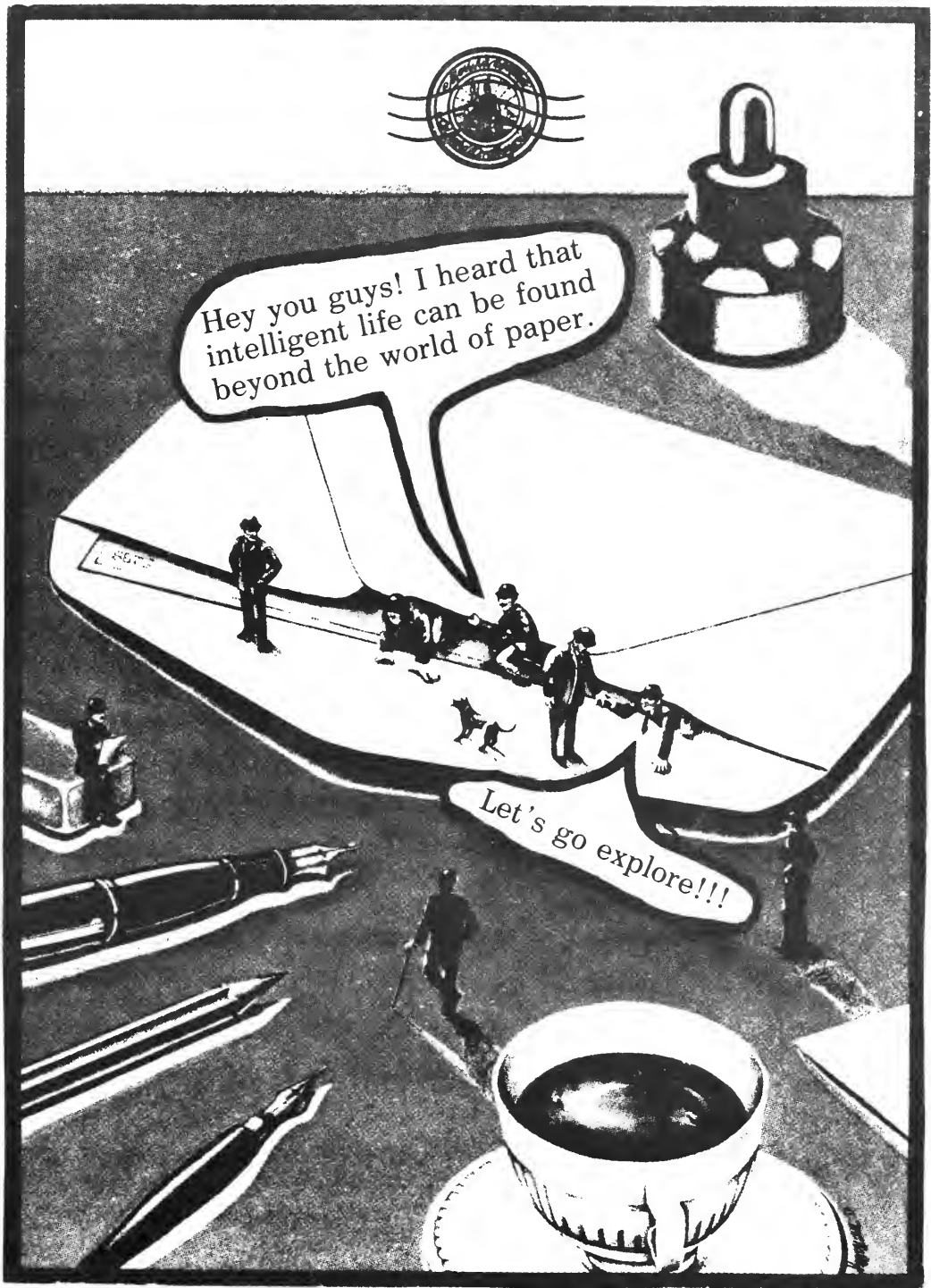
K.L.—Los Angeles

Dear Comrades,

My companion and I have just moved from Philadelphia to Endicott N.Y. If you don't know of Endicott you should — not only is it the "home" of Endicott Johnson Shoes (bad enough!) but also the home of IBM! Imagine our disgust moving from Philadelphia — home of murderous pigs, foul water and hot pavement ("home" is the wrong word — my description is too broad — it could fit anytown USA — no, make that the world!).

Endicott is for all practical purposes a company town with IBM being "the company."

Since unions are not tolerated — we've heard the rumored existence of *IBM Workers United* but can find no signs outside. You can't imagine how annoying it is to try and cash our food stamps at lunchtime when they come out to fill the streets. Or how last year we found out the company "spilled" some toxic wastes by "accident" and the whole mess was covered up by village



authorities so as not to get IBM upset. Since we've only been here several months we're still orienting ourselves about local customs and politics. When the Japanese computer theft story broke we thought about spray painting "I'm Turning Japanese" on one of the ugly buildings that so ruin a rather pleasant landscape, but thought it too ambiguous and perhaps racist in

its meaning.

We are slowly at work on the local history of agriculture in this county (from self-reliance to corporate control) and have met some local farmers who still hold out and feel very good about sharing information and skills with "anarchists" — we'll see what happens, maybe *Processed Dirt* — "the magazine of the modern farm worker."



So let this be a lesson to all who contemplate the "simpler life" — while it's true we'd rather be here than Philadelphia (who wouldn't) — the "problems" (and their solutions!) become just as great — there is no "escape."

For a World without Toil,  
R.S.—Endicott, NY

PW5 is a winner. Thanks for sending it to me. As always it reinforced my sense of community. Although I work in spiritual isolation I have no physical privacy. My telephone calls must be made in full hearing, papers on my desk are public property, and the nearness of others as bored or drugged as I is a further irritant. No community here, friends.

Like Gidget I am involved with the questions of subversion, self-definition, and powerlessness. Of course, computers don't work, people do. Of course, too, computers increase productivity, but the *potential* for abuse of the technology is great. Counting keystrokes is an inadequate measure of productivity, although an electronic overseer is a nice touch on the word-processing plantations. In fact, the technology

defines the extent of the subversion. It's less risky, more fun, and definitely more profitable to program or key in misinformation than to hold up a bank at gunpoint. Creative programmers, Captain Crunch, et al., are acting in the tradition of Jesse James, not Joe Hill. The outlaw has always been the American Hero. The current infatuation with "man-against-machine" in the media is no different from the idealization of the gangster in the movies of the 1930s. Had Gidget's article appeared in the pages of the *Wall Street Journal* or *New York Times* (the private Western Union of the elite), it could have been used to reinforce paranoia and interest in anti-intrusion systems and computer security. They don't advertise electronic briefcases with "voice stress analysis to detect lying" for nothing.

It is my duty to subvert authority. The problem is that, like Gidget and so many others, I have convinced myself of the absurdity of management. I've forgotten they can't take jokes. It's sort of like forgetting that dope is illegal. I've had to forgive myself for these occasional lapses, even if they've meant getting fired,



trusting a co-worker, being terrified, or feeling alone. The only way not to feel alone is to trust a co-worker (and if trust leads to conspiracy, so what?). Office friendships are subversive, too, and IBM, among others, has corporate fiat forbidding them. It's not only "dissension" that management tries to control through its personnel department agents.

Incidentally, the ultimate video game isn't sabotage — it's pulling the plug. The nuclear holocaust is the end of the game, all the games.

B.C.—SF

Dear PW,

Gidget Digit's "firing" *does* reveal a lot about her. When she was suspended, I was waiting for *her* to act. Surely a copy of the *Sabotage* article would appear on every co-worker's desk! Tied with red/white/& blue, maybe. And when the time was up, surely she would walk into the VP's office with a colorful "letter of resignation," informing him that a copy of *that* letter was being circulated in every BofA branch in the Bay Area! As Saul Alinsky says, this "blunder" was the true *opportunity* when looked at in a clear light! But all she did was scurry around for another job, which she got (something she omits in her confessional letter... along with her real name). What a disappointment *this* letter was, coming before the well-written *Sabotage* article!!!

I remember well one member of the BEAVER 55 group Gidget Digit mentions. "X" was an honor grad student in physics at the U. of Chicago when they invaded the Hewlett Packard installation. Even though she was brilliant, she was subsequently blacklisted from every lab in the country. She took a job close to science — teaching it. But she found that painful because she itched to get into a real lab. So she

changed careers, got married, ending up (last I heard) in, of all places, an ad agency! She had many a bout with her conscience... many times we had talks about whether she should've played it safe. She accompanied Jane Kennedy when Jane turned herself in; she sobbed when she read the obit of another "friend" who had jumped off the Golden Gate Bridge. "That's the third one," she said. "They are getting us all." Was this "social critique" worth it? Who knows. It would be interesting to find out.

Sincerely, Your Supporter Despite Poor Editing,

Shirley Garzotto—SF

P.S. It is OK if you reveal *my* name and address. I think you should be consistent about this: I may not agree with Mr. Wallis, but I think *you* treated him unfairly by printing his name and address. Boo! Hiss! Otherwise, #5 was a good read, as usual.

*Ed. Note: Wally is a self-employed engineer. Revealing his identity does not threaten him or his job security. This is in contrast to most writers and contributors to PW whose jobs might be jeopardized if their real name were printed in PW.*

Dear PW:

In the preface to her article in PW #5, Gidget Digit waxes ironic at the expense both of PW and herself. It's not clear how seriously she intends her self-description as a "professional anti-authoritarian revolutionary" pursuing a "shadow career" in PW while working as a systems analyst for the Bank of America. But certainly she seems intent on tarring PW with the same brush: like Gidget herself, PW's regulars stand accused of dishonesty, for not revealing our "definite political backgrounds that stretch back for years" and implicitly therefore of manipulation. She

admonishes us to analyze “our relationship as marginals, radicals and revolutionaries to the people we are approaching.”

The core of truth in Gidget’s attack is that some of us developed fairly extreme and well-thought-out criticisms of the existing society in contexts other than office work — as students, as other kinds of workers and/or as activists against nuclear power, war, male domination and so on. Several of us, for that matter, are still sneakily active in such “outside” causes. Worse, one or two of us are not even currently office workers! How dishonest can you get?

All of this, of course, misses the point. *Processed World* was not conceived by missionary leftists, “professional revolutionaries” who marched into the Financial District to educate the white-collar masses. Instead, a handful of people who had got into office work as one of the few ways open to them to make a living, got fed up with their isolation and with the *silence* around them concerning all the important questions. They set out to produce a vehicle of communication for others working in financial districts with similar attitudes to their jobs and the world at large.

A general skepticism, even hostility, toward authority and an intense frustration with boring work are characteristic of many in our generation. The only thing different about the initiators of *PW* is that unlike most people, they have articulated these attitudes into a relatively coherent critique of the modern world and some (rather sketchier) visions of how it might be transformed. Some of *PW*’s subsequent associates, like me, share most of their outlook. Others share much less of it.

In developing this critique and these visions, *PW*’s founders very naturally drew on past radical

traditions. Possibly they might be criticized for not discussing these further or referring readers to them (I would like to see, for instance, a series on great Utopians of the past, such as Charles Fourier and William Morris. And a long article or even a special issue on the history of workers’ movements, already seriously discussed in the group, ought to be produced). But *PW* has been anxious to avoid any association with the 57 varieties of boring leftism, from Tom Hayden to the Spartacist League or the RCP, that pollute the radical working class tradition with their authoritarianism, opportunism and hysteria. In the pages of a magazine that wants to be open to people without any “political” background, it is very difficult to discuss this tradition without creating such associations. A cursory treatment is likely to be confusing, and a lengthy one would take up too much of an already crowded magazine. Besides — and here’s the rub — we vary widely in our interpretation of the tradition anyway, and the last thing we want is to fill *PW*’s pages with endless debate about who was right or wrong in 1870 or 1921. Declarations of our beliefs couched in the specialized terminology of past revolutionary tendencies, however bold and honest they might make us feel, are more likely to confuse than clarify in most people’s eyes.

As to whether Gidget should have revealed more of her “politics” sooner to her co-workers, I’m not in a position to say. I suspect that she’s being too hard on herself. Certainly it seems only prudent to sound out one’s workmates carefully before letting on too much, a prudence which has always been part of the agitator’s and the organizer’s task. Why get fired, or worse, merely for the sake of “honesty?” If she moved too slowly this was only a tactical mistake.

We will all make further and bigger mistakes, and, I hope, learn from them. Once again, *PW's* purpose is not to recruit or convert to a pre-existent ideology or organization. The core group of *Processed World* has never made any secret of its views and aims, but neither has it imposed them on other contributors. The immediate goal of *PW* is to make possible the sharing of ideas, emotions and perceptions, and to further debate about strategy and tactics among rebels in the workaday world. I hope to see this debate continue, not only in *PW's* pages but in the cafeterias, rest-rooms and elevators of downtown, beyond our immediate contact or influence. I am only too aware of how vague and flawed are our visions of change, and I know that only the experience and creativity of countless others can give them clearer and more tangible form.

Yours objectionably,  
Louis Michaelson

Dear Staff:

FANTASTIC! In the midst of uniformity and digital death, art survives! I read my first issue of *PW* (#4) at the June 12th peace rally, and I was impressed. I really liked the creative xerox art the most (did you know that "xerox" is the greek word for "draw"??), and also the information on office uprisings. The healthy weight and thickness of the booklet itself proves something about audience response.

I know. I work for a major minicomputer company in Embarcadero IV, doing field repair work, and I see the firsthand results of digitalized society every day, from the endless parade on Market street to the poor file clerks holed up in the giant glass prisons that line the streets of our fair, postcard-perfect city. Anyway. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,

Jose's Son—SF

## OFFICE WORKERS' SURVIVAL NOTEBOOK

○

### ELEVATORS

#### The truth about "Close Door" buttons

#### TRUE FACT

**QUESTION:** What does the "Door Close" button in an automatic elevator really do?

**ANSWER:** Door Close buttons do nothing, in general. That's from an elevator service expert. That button gives you something to do while you're waiting for the door to close. Doors set to close automatically respond to their own internal commands without accepting any overriding signals from the Door Close buttons.

○

BY WILLIE THE RAT

Zerox two copies of this page, cut out the "True Fact" coupon and scotch tape it above the "Door Close" button on the next two elevators you ride.  
HELP STAMP OUT MECHANICAL BULLSHIT!

# Confidential Correspondences



“You have certainly observed the curious fact that a given word which is perfectly clear when you hear it or use it in everyday language, and which does not give rise to any difficulty when it is engaged in the rapid movement of an ordinary sentence becomes magically embarrassing, introduces a strange resistance, frustrates any effort at definition as soon as you take it out of circulation to examine it separately and look for its meaning after taking away its instantaneous function.”

— Paul Valery, from *Variete V*.

\* \* \*

Paul Valery has summarized the critical approach to existing society, not with reference to specific institutions, but to the most fundamental expression of social being — language. We know that there is more to language than “words, words, words.” What holds these words together is not just a given grammatical or syntactical structure, but an entire complex of social traditions that give meaning to the combinations of sounds we use in our daily life, the hidden order behind the “rapid movements of ordinary sentences.”

Valery’s observations can be expressed more briefly and colloquially as “All words are loaded.” Loaded in the sense that dice are loaded by an unscrupulous gambler who, much to his opponents’ consternation, manages to win every time. In such circumstances, a casual onlooker would say that the loser’s first and

worst mistake was to allow the hustler to supply his own dice. And so it is with language. Since the categories and concepts on which we rely to make ourselves understood have been transmitted to us from birth, we become entangled in a tradition so all-pervasive that even our attempts to name and thus understand our situation tend to be accommodated to the ruling definitions which, as ever, are those of the ruling classes.

Imagine (or recall) a subordinate who comes into conflict with her boss, or a group of workers taking a grievance to their supervisor. By speaking for themselves, they become aware of the radical discrepancy between their interests and those of management. The everyday fog of polite banalities is beginning to lift. However, once the die is cast, it turns out — unexpectedly — to be loaded. The boss rises, perhaps with a supercilious smile on his face, and motions his interlocutor(s) to the door, saying, “It’s obvious that we don’t speak the same language.”

At this juncture, the most common reaction for the momentarily unruly employee(s) is to back off in the fear that nothing will be salvaged from this confrontation. “Well, that’s not true, it’s all a misunderstanding, really . . .” and then the search for mutual comprehensibility begins. Regardless of the outcome, it will always favor the boss, simply because proclaiming his monopoly on definition

has enabled him to regain effective control — over the use of his own loaded dice.

But what if our rebellious worker(s) had retorted, “Damn right we don’t speak the same language, and a good thing too”? The workers and students of Poland have shown us the radical consequences of such an attitude. Since 1956, the popular opposition to the successive Stalinist, neo-Stalinist, and military regimes in Poland has been directed as much against the ossified, constipated language of the ruling bureaucracy’s propaganda as against material injustice. During the Polish Autumn of 1980, the intoxication of uninhibited dialogue led to an explosion of underground publications which not even military rule could suppress.

In company with rebels throughout history, the Polish insurgents grasped the intimate relation between the liberation of society from the state and the reclaiming of language from its bureaucratic proprietors. The demand for the abolition of the Communist Party’s system of *nomenklatura* — where obtaining positions depends on official protection — is equally a fight against a broader structure of nomenclature: the power to arrogate exclusive control over social meanings and thereby deny (rewrite) the history across which words evolve in search of their hidden truths. Is it any wonder that literary and poetic experimentation flourish during periods of popular social upheaval? Whether ideas improve or degenerate, the meaning of words participates in the process.

All words, then, are not just loaded; they are live ammunition in a social war. The same words that buttress Power can be used to undermine it, but only if such concepts or keywords are examined for their multiple meanings. Each word must first be removed from its customary context, or borrowing Valery’s phraseology, taken out of circulation and deprived

of its instantaneous function. (Sabotage is a similar technique applied to objects or social relationships.) Without the magic cloak of daily routine to render its meaning invisible, the word begins to assert that embarrassing power to which Valery refers. How is it that we persist in allowing certain words to dominate our lives, even though we can’t explain how they *worked* their way into our speech?

Certainly, the dictionary explains word origins, but only as components of static definitions, arranged numerically on an arbitrary scale of importance. Yet language is above all dynamic. The multitude of popular grammars, vocabularies, and speech patterns — abusively termed “slang” by linguistic authorities — shows that for all the trends toward increasing uniformity of thought and expression, language preserves its playful qualities. In the end, we ourselves are the alchemists of the words we use.

It follows that we need not respect the supposed finality of any definition. The decomposition of language in the grip of bureaucratic reason calls for irreverent new counter-practices, where influential keywords can be actively de-composed and re-composed according to imaginative whim. From such a perspective, words that have been particularly abused reveal surprising implications, especially when viewed in the light of older, seemingly outmoded definitions.

I have chosen to play with seven such words. Each has its own history. Far from being buzzwords, they are all relentlessly banal, integral threads in the texture of the processed world, and thus all the more diverting to unravel. In order of consideration, they are: CORPORATION, OFFICE, CLERICAL, SECRETARY, MANAGER, PROFESSIONAL, CAREER.

Roman law is the source of the word “corporation,” which came to mean an entity, formed for a specific purpose, that was considered to have a legal existence over and above the



individuals who comprised it. Once rules and regulations became institutionalized, the individual became of less consequence than the structure that incorporated him into its functions. A corporate officer is judged according to his ability to personify the qualities associated with the company's mission, the better to pass himself off as a servant rather than a shaper of policy. If challenged on a specific arbitrary procedure, he will invariably seek refuge in the cliché, "That's the way we do things here."

This domination of concrete activity by a fictitious — lifeless — representation, which Karl Marx saw as characteristic of alienated labor, is hinted at in the root word of "corporation," *corpus*, with its evocation of inertia and death. Indeed, the deadly silence that pervades the corridors of power can only be compared to a morgue. And judging from organizational charts — those bizarre convolutions of boxes connected by solid or broken lines — the body has become somewhat swollen. In 18th century England, a fat stomach was jestingly called a "corporation." This compari-

son retains its accuracy, for corporations *create* nothing, they only feed off others and excrete the results.

Offices are the limbs of the corporate corpse. Originally, the word "office" referred not to the physical backdrop for the performance of work, but to the particular array of tasks entrusted to an individual. Any kind of service carried out regularly for someone else was deemed an "office," and a certain amount of prestige accrued to anyone who discharged the duties of his office properly. That the scope of the term should eventually encompass the workplace is a testimony to the growing depersonalization and interchangeability of functions. Ultimately, the content of what one does pales in comparison to the necessity of blending it into the overall environment. Our office becomes . . . *the* office. While it may be impossible to take pride in one's job (*jobbe*, the Middle English word meaning "lump"), we are supposed to draw comfort from efficiently fitting into a smooth operation, and forget that the whole process reduces us to insensate lumps. Fortunately for our sense of black humor, another definition of "office" is "toilet," and in fact some of the office worker's rare moments of privacy are spent in the privy offices. How much more healthful and conducive to contemplation are these cramped stalls than the assorted departments, sections, and units that empty tons of waste into an already saturated world!

Corporations yoke large numbers of people to their team by means of stiff *clerical* collars. Medieval clerks were scholars who usually toiled away at some level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. With the gradual secularization of European society, the word came to include anyone who kept records and accounts for somebody else. Nowadays, we know that clerks don't have to be scholars, particularly when all it takes to carry out most jobs are a few motor functions. Through

the irony of history, however, many so-called educated people, the clerks of an earlier era, have over the past several years joined the modern clerical orders. Although the work ethic has displaced the crucified Christ, the religious illusion maintains its essential continuity; clerks now sacrifice themselves for God & Co. The spell can only be broken by a revived *anti-clerical* movement to crush the infamy of wage-labor.

Like "clerk," the evolution of the word "secretary" illustrates the decline of a once-privileged social role into a subservient position. The key to its meaning lies in the first five letters — secret — implying an element of personal contact and service. In the world of Renaissance political intrigue, a secretary was usually an aide-de-camp to powerful men; although clearly subordinate to his nobly-born master, the secretary, in his capacities as scribe and guardian of the secrets, was still in a position to exercise influence. Even up to the nineteenth century, secretaries were their bosses' right-hand men.

Following the introduction of "scientific management" techniques into the workplace and the resultant growth of centralized bureaucracies, women entered the labor force in large numbers and the position of secretary took on new meaning. Women's enforced submissiveness in the home was duplicated in the relationship of the female secretary to her male boss. Some degree of secrecy and confidence remained, as the secretary knew almost everything that had to do with her boss's job. Unlike her male predecessors, though, she exerted little real influence over her boss's decisions, and was deemed worthy of notice only to the extent of her ability to carry out — and preferably anticipate — her boss's wishes. She became indispensable only if she stayed in the same place all her life. These days, most secretaries keep secrets less for their bosses than from them-

selves. They can't talk about how much money they earn. Many still try to endow their jobs with a long-vanished aura of prestige, and are encouraged to see things through their boss's eyes.

Managers benefit from their secretaries' activity. So assiduously do they guard their puny shares of authority, and so vigorously do they proclaim it, that they should be reminded of *menage*, a root word of "manager" which means "house-keeping." In a sense, managers are housekeepers for capital: witness the anal-retentiveness of the typical manager who, like a housekeeper, is applauded for his "attention to detail." The active sense of the word "manage" originates in the process of training horses for a show, which even today is still called a *manege*. "Management training" is therefore a redundancy. The implications are there for all to see: taming, bridling, and controlling. A manager's success is gauged by how well he is able to put his troops through their intricately-choreographed paces.

If these human horses are to fulfill





their potential as a team, they will each have to be professionals in their jobs. Often, the label of “professional” gains quasi-mystical significance in the eyes of its disciples: “We have to approach the problem professionally,” “My professional opinion is blah-blah-blah.” How appropriate that such an article of faith should be . . . professed. Like their religious forebears who earnestly studied dogma, today’s professionals must pass through various stages of initiation — MBA’s, systems analysis, management courses — before they can be professed in the corporate credo. Centuries ago, theology, law, and medicine were termed the “three professions,” and the latter two fields continue to enjoy at least financial prestige. Theology, it is true, has fallen on bad days, but possibly computer programming, with its convoluted language, peculiar incantations, and the devotional fervor of its practitioners, might fill the gap.

Within the confines of their vocations, professionals follow an individual trajectory called a “career.” Careers are described in the terminology of a footrace — goals are striven for, hurdles are encountered along the path, and newly-minted careerists note with satisfaction that they are “off and running” or “on track” towards the fulfillment of their ambition. But the word “career” actually implies a race far removed from jogging. The root of “career” is a word meaning “chariot,” and its associations evoke a chariot careening down a steep path in full career. A rat race, perhaps? Indeed, most careers are headlong dashes into an uncertain future fraught with the perils of ulcers and heart disease. There are always new procedures to learn, new courses to take, new political configurations to adjust to, unexpected reversals — and through it all loom, tantalizingly out of reach, those ever-elusive “goals.” For many, the promises of a career, with its connotations of move-



ment and progress, are preferable to those of a job, with its overtones of inertia and lumpishness. However, at the end of a career, very often another meaning emerges — the fixed paths of celestial bodies, which when transplanted into human existence turn out to be *ruts*.

In his epic poem *Altazor*, the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro proclaimed: "All the languages are dead/Dead in the hands of the tragic neighbor/We must revive the languages/With wagons of giggles/With short-circuits in the sentences/And cataclysm in the grammar." His exhortation strikes a sympathetic note in all of us who are stuck in workplaces and forced to shoulder a burden of processed words. We have the power to breathe life into the endless procession of meaningless, artificial phrases, simply by unloading our wagons of giggles and short-circuiting sentences at their weakest link — the individual word. We can employ the tactic of the deliberate Freudian slip; if a letter or two is altered in a word, numerous disturbing affinities appear. *Corporation* becomes *coporation*; *anti-trust* metamorphoses into *anti-tryst*. With the

addition of a prefix, personnel becomes *impersonnel*, and the mere deletion of an "i" reveals an ominous aspect of *policies* — *polices*. Homonyms are dangerous as well — whence comes the strange sonic symbiosis between *supervisor* and *snoopervisor*? Or *memorandum* and *memorondumb*?

Anti-lexicons of de-composed keywords can be prepared and folded into the vest-pocket-sized *Basic Secretarial Terms* that clutters up so many desks. Against the ignorant mystification of manufactured speech and computer "languages," the technique of *words in freedom* must be practiced. Sound poems and abstract patterns of letters and words can be easily constructed and printed on word processing equipment and clandestinely distributed along with scandalous xero-graphic collages, with results undreamed of by the old Dadaists. Language can thereby start to regain its function not just as a means of



communication, but as a means of revelation. Huidobro's demand for "a beautiful madness in the life of the word" needs only the addition of a "l" to the last "word" to become an articulation of our desire for a new life, and of the intimate bond between our words and our world.

"And since we must live and not kill ourselves/As long as we live let us play/The simple game of words/Of the pure word and nothing more."

— Vicente Huidobro  
from *Altazor*, Canto III

— *Christopher Winks*

\* \* \*



# GENERIC BUSINESS LETTER

Cairn

[MrMs] [First] [Last]

[Address]

[City], [State] [Zip]

Dear [MrMs] [Last],

Thank you for your interest in [Interest].

Enclosed you will find [Enclosure]. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to call me at [Telephone].

Sincerely,

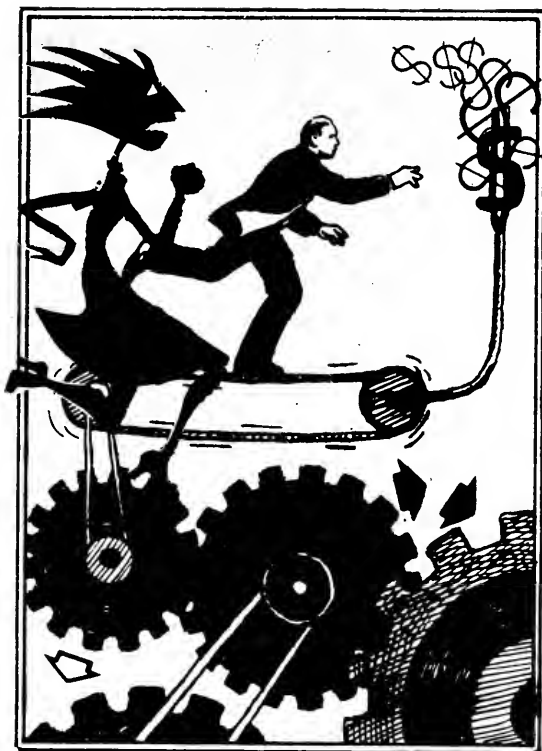
[Respondent]

75487 01100

75487 01100

75487 01100

*This unique text will completely revolutionize business communications. At last, the Model T of DP, a business letter that requires no human intervention! This remarkable letter can be used by any business, any place, anytime, for any purpose. Change nothing — save time, money, and cut back expensive management staff!*



# BUY 'EM & SELL 'EM AT SOLEM

Once again my money ran out and it was time to end another glorious bout of unemployment. It took 5 or 6 interviews, but just when I was beginning to believe those screaming headlines of economic doom, I scored a job at an advertising/public relations firm. Welcome aboard.

Ah, the illustrious Solem Associates (a.k.a. Hype, Inc.), nestled on the edge of the Tenderloin. I would spend the next four months here entangled in the illogic of doublethink and plain old fashioned lies and absurdities.

Solem Associates survives through political connections. Mr. and Mrs. Hype and many of the ever-eager Hype Associates are close pals with S.F.'s own Lady Di and other liberal party hacks. Solem specializes in anti-rent control campaigns. The financial backing of local real estate interests enables Solem to assume one of its many disguises, "Citizens for Fair Housing," which in turn allows them to produce tons of glossy literature to convince "citizens" that affordable housing, tenant security, and an end to bureaucracy await those who vote *against* rent control.

Most recently Solem has been busy saving S.F. from municipalized electricity. They also run two relatively benign state-funded projects. Half the staff works on The War Against Waste! This consists of taking photos of a man in a "Wasteless Willie" bear costume and mailing tons of "Wasteless Willie" literature to unsuspecting citizens. Solem and "Wasteless Willie" produced and discarded — due to mistakes or because the literature was outdated — a truly obscene amount of paper.

My job was project secretary and chief flunky for the "Family Com-



Psss... did you hear that Bill's new secretary is really "gung-ho" about her job?



That's incredible!  
She seemed so  
normal!!!

on parent communication — which hardly anyone would attend. These workshops, plus the program literature and media advertisements, were our product and my daily work.

While the actual content of my job was absurd, the work itself was strictly secondary to the exciting terrains of office politics and office social life.

What kind of people are attracted to advertising/public relations? The prime mark of a Solem-lifer was that, although they might bitch and moan about the task at hand, deep down they *believed* in what they were doing, or at least believed in the possibility of an exciting career in public relations.

I sat in a cubicle surrounded by a four foot partition and watched over by the mandatory flickering fluorescent lights. There was not a real wall to be found in the entire office. The partitions gave the illusion of privacy, but attentive ears in adjacent cubicles assured the rapid spread of gossip. Through scraps of conversation floating into my unit I quickly identified all the office types. Like the Most Creative Man in S.F., or so he believed when buzzed on coke which was most of the time. Or the Office Spy who stared hawk-like into all the cubicles, ever vigilant for any infraction of rules. Once he discovered someone using the postage meter to mail a letter to her mother and deducted \$.20 from her paycheck.

munication Program." With a million bucks from the State of California, Solem Associates spewed forth yet more glossy literature and a half dozen annoying radio and TV commercials. The object? To stop teen pregnancies. "The unique aspect of this program," Mrs. Hype proudly announced "is that it has no content!" The million dollars (spent at a time when community health clinics and other direct service agencies are screaming for funds) was merely to convince parents to talk to their kids about sex, and not, of course, to promote contraceptive use or to encourage responsible attitudes towards sexual activity. This would have been much too controversial.

The "Teens Please Don't Fuck" program employed 20 people and was heavy on tokenism. Before the field staff was hired, I overheard the bosses musing, "Well, we've got one Asian, we could use one Japanese... we've got two Blacks, how about another Black and another Hispanic..." Once the proper racial/ethnic blend was selected, these 14 troopers contacted community groups and encouraged them to sponsor workshops

A curious aspect of Solem Associates was that for the most part my four supervisors were so wrapped up in the details of their various projects that they rarely noticed what I was up to. As long as I delivered a minimum amount of work which met their loosely defined standards of professionalism they left me alone.

On the other hand, the abundant "support staffers" were eager to step into supervisory roles. Even with the obliviousness of my bosses, I still found it necessary to try to hide the

many little ways I ignored the rules and procedures and to cover up any of my mistakes. It took me a long time to understand that I really could not trust most of my coworkers. And in the meantime, I nearly lost my job by confiding too much about my political beliefs and my very critical attitude towards wage labor.

“Chatty Kathy” sat in the cubicle next to me: she loved her job as a secretary and talked in an excruciatingly loud voice about the endless details of each little task. “Chatty Kathy” also loved to play snoopervisor and was responsible for firing two clerical workers. Chatty discovered that one woman who had

Q: HOW CAN YOU TELL WHEN YOUR BOSS IS LYING TO YOU?

A: WHEN HIS LIPS ARE MOVING.

claimed family emergency was actually on vacation, so of course Chatty ran to Office Spy who was more than happy to bump her from the payroll. Chatty’s second victim was a single mother who sometimes came in late when she had to take care of her son. Chatty thought her commitment to something or somebody outside work was very unprofessional and used her influence to get her fired.

Along with the vicious manoeuvring for power and prestige was an exaggerated superficial friendliness. One minute my “cell mate” would give someone the finger behind their back, and the next she would exclaim (to the same person) “Oh, you’re the greatest!”

Solem Associates was going bust. They lost contract after contract. The candidate they promoted in the democratic primary lost big. Each new defeat meant a few more layoffs. The remaining people became more frantic about continually proving their worth, primarily by trying to point out other people’s lack of worth. While the failure of the firm was on everyone’s mind, it was never the subject of open conversation — just whispers in the corridor about who would be the next to go.

Money for the “Hey Don’t Fuck” program ran out and to my immense joy and relief I was laid off. Now I’m safely on unemployment and wondering how long I can stretch it before once again I’ll be compelled to enter what so many people think of as the real world.

— Helen Highwater

\*\*\*\*\*

**MOVE MOUNTAINS OF PAPERWORK** with fast and easy



SLASH-O-MATIC SURETY SHREDDER



Secretaries! Don't get teed off when your boss asks you to take a vacationing co-worker's paperwork. With just a push of a button, our electric wastebasket lets you handle it all and more. For special emergencies or the everyday irritation of meaningless work, our fully automatic shredder is guaranteed to cut your workload in half (and smaller)!!

“The MOST in proletarian paper shredders”

\*\*\*\*\*



# DOWNTIME!

## Ten Ways to Wreck a Digital Video Terminal

*by Digit-Dogshit*

Hi there:

My pen-name is Digit-Dogshit... Why??? Because dogshit is everywhere. It's in the city, it's in the country, it's on the mountaintop, and it's in the valley.

Of course, I can't give my real name, because if my boss sees this I would most certainly get fired and/or arrested by the police/FBI.

So here goes—10 ways to wreck a DVT:

1.) Coffee poured into the keyboard is effective in gumming up the works, but instead of using sugar in the coffee, use salt instead—about 3-5 times as much salt as you would use sugar. You see, saltwater is quite conductive to electricity and very corrosive to the foil-conductors on the circuit boards. It will short-circuit the integrated circuit (I.C.) chips on the board and screw things up very nicely (use lye or drano solution if possible).

2.) If possible, remove the cover of the DVT. Then try unplugging the circuit boards with the power-on and replugging them in again. This is a very effective way to blow-out every I.C. chip and transistor on the board. I.C. chips and transistors can't stand this kind of treatment and will blow-out every time. (I know—I have done it.) (Caution: very high-voltages are present at the CRT, and touching the CRT could cause you to get the living-shit shocked right out of you. So be careful.)

3.) Try reversing the ribbon-cables connectors if possible. This will really screw things up.

4.) Bring cuticle-cutters to the workplace and cut a few conductors in the ribbon cable. This will cause endless problems.

5.) Dump metal paperclips, staples, BBs, tacks, aluminum foil pieces, etc. into the DVT cooling slots. Hopefully they will land on some circuit boards, and cause short circuits and other nasty problems.

6.) Cigarette smoke causes problems with the circuit boards. It condenses and coats the slip-connectors on the printed circuit boards and then they don't want to make contact anymore. So blow as much smoke as possible into the DVT.

7.) Be creative: remove I.C. chips from their sockets, and put them in backwards. This will cause untold problems and drive the repair technicians crazy.

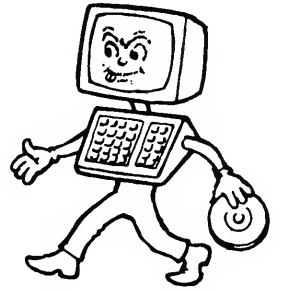
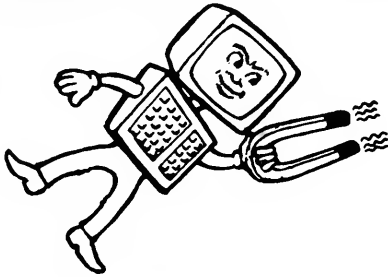
8.) Floppy diskettes are very sensitive to magnetic fields. Some diskettes have the software programming on the outer edge of the disk. Run a magnet across the disk a few times in different directions. This will make life interesting for your supervisors and bosses and a magnet leaves no trace, unlike staples, paperclips, and ball point pens which are too obvious to the eye.

9.) A bulk tape eraser (used for erasing stereo tapes) is very effective

in erasing all digital bits from a diskette. Even a tapehead demagnetizer can be used effectively this way.

10.) Put a plastic magnet or a rare-earth cobalt magnet (the most powerful magnet made) inside of a

finger ring. No one will ever suspect that it is there, provided you don't get paper clips or staples stuck to the ring. So when you handle the diskettes, run your ring across them a few times.



## The Worship of Holidays

A policy allowing federal employees time off for religious observances is being widely abused. Religious leave is taken under a law authorizing such time off but requiring that the time be made up. However, the inspector general said, records are often incomplete and the makeup — if there is any — may be at a time when it is of little use to the government.

According to a Health and Human Services Dept. report, most religious leave was requested for days off before and after holidays, Fridays and Mondays, and weeks during the summer vacation season. Days surrounding federal holidays were most popular.

Among the cases reported were:

- On July 5 and 6, following the Independence Day holiday, 75% of the 325 employees in one branch were absent each day on religious leave.

- On December 26, 27, 28 and 31, an average of 27% of the 390 employees in one branch were absent each day for religious observance.

- One office with 9,200 employees

reported 5,066 religious leave days taken the week after Christmas and the day after New Year's; 269 days on the days before and after Memorial Day weekend; 211 days on the state's Memorial Day holiday; 1,387 days in the week following July 4.

- On Good Friday and Easter Monday one unit reported 70% of its key punchers, four of its six console operators and five of 10 supervisors absent.

The guidelines for religious leave are based on an opinion of the Office of Personnel Management's general counsel that said:

"As a practical matter, agencies are required to accept at face value claims that employees are entitled to take time off... Consequently, any attempt to deal with abuses... may not extend to inquiring as to the legitimacy of the reasons why the employee seeks time off for religious observance."

*Amen. And see you at the beach!*

— based on *Washington Post* 2/82



# Pravda Blasts Work Shirkers

Moscow

The Soviet Communist Party newspaper Pravda yesterday lashed out at shirkers, pointing out as one example workers at a factory in the Urals who took turns having a week's vacation while colleagues covered for them at their machines.

The paper, calling for tougher measures against shirkers, said the case was symptomatic of widespread idleness and illegal absen-

teeism throughout Soviet industry.

It said employees at the factory in Uralsk boasted to workers elsewhere about their vacation scheme.

The management did not notice the absent staff because the factory's production plan was being fulfilled without difficulty and one of those involved received an honor for hard work, Pravda said.

It reminded readers that millions of people in the West were unemployed.

*Reuters*

## More Trouble in "Paradise"

Chinese Communist Party Chairman Hu Yaobang has told the nation he wants an improved work attitude and an end to "unscrupulously pursuing personal enjoyment" in the next five years.

Hu said better morality "means

putting an effective check on, and arousing universal contempt for, such unhealthy tendencies and practices as loving ease and hating work...

—*S.F. Chronicle* 9/3/82



## It Even Counts Your Feces!

Sneaking into work late or taking an extended coffee break may soon be only memories. A Dutch company has developed a way for employers to keep track of their workers' whereabouts with a computer. Employees carry passes the size of a cigarette pack which emit an electronic signal that is picked up by sensors around the office. Too much time around the water cooler will show up in the computer. The system — called

"VORTACS" — can also keep track of the number of employees in the building, how many of them plan to eat in the cafeteria, and even remember which of them are vegetarians. The company's British distributor predicts people will call the system "Big Brother," but adds, "They did the same thing when we introduced surveillance cameras into shops."

*New Scientist*, 3/4/82



# THEM

The US Festival — the Labor Day weekend extravaganza that drew 425,000 spectators and 1000 reporters to a smog-smothered, heat-baked park in the foothills of the San Bernardino Mountains — was intended to be not just a rock concert, but a genuine Cultural Watershed. Most commentators, even those in the Los Angeles daily newspapers, concluded in relief that it's still not possible to produce a world-historical event on cue.

But the US Festival was definitely state-of-the-art spectacle, with all the latest advances in consciousness razing. It foisted on its massive audience not only uninterrupted commercialism and propaganda for prepackaged techno-utopia, but also a silly if vaguely ominous "US philosophy." According to the promotional literature, what is meant by "us" is "government and industry, management and labor . . . joining forces to improve the quality of life for everyone."

The Festival was dreamed up and personally bankrolled by ex-computer nurd, nouveau multimillionaire Steven Wozniak, who sunk twelve and a half of his millions into the rock concert and a Technology Fair. And no one was supposed to forget it for a minute.

Over \$2 million went into shoveling around dirt to create the world's largest "natural" amphitheater. At one end of this concert bowl sat the giant stage, flanked by three huge video screens and two almost-apple-shaped backdrops rendered in the rainbow colors of Apple Computer Inc. In case this commercial was too subtle, a hot air balloon decorated with the Apple Corporate symbol loomed continuously at left. (Though Apple Computers was careful to remain officially separate from the US Festival, the publicity it received as a result of the show is priceless.)

At night, when the full moon rose,

the lasers turned on, and lights played on the flashy "US" logo, the amphitheater resembled nothing as much as a colossal video game. The world's largest sound system, a truly impressive 400,000 watts, broadcast the world's top rock bands and the US philosophy to the very edges of the concert bowl.

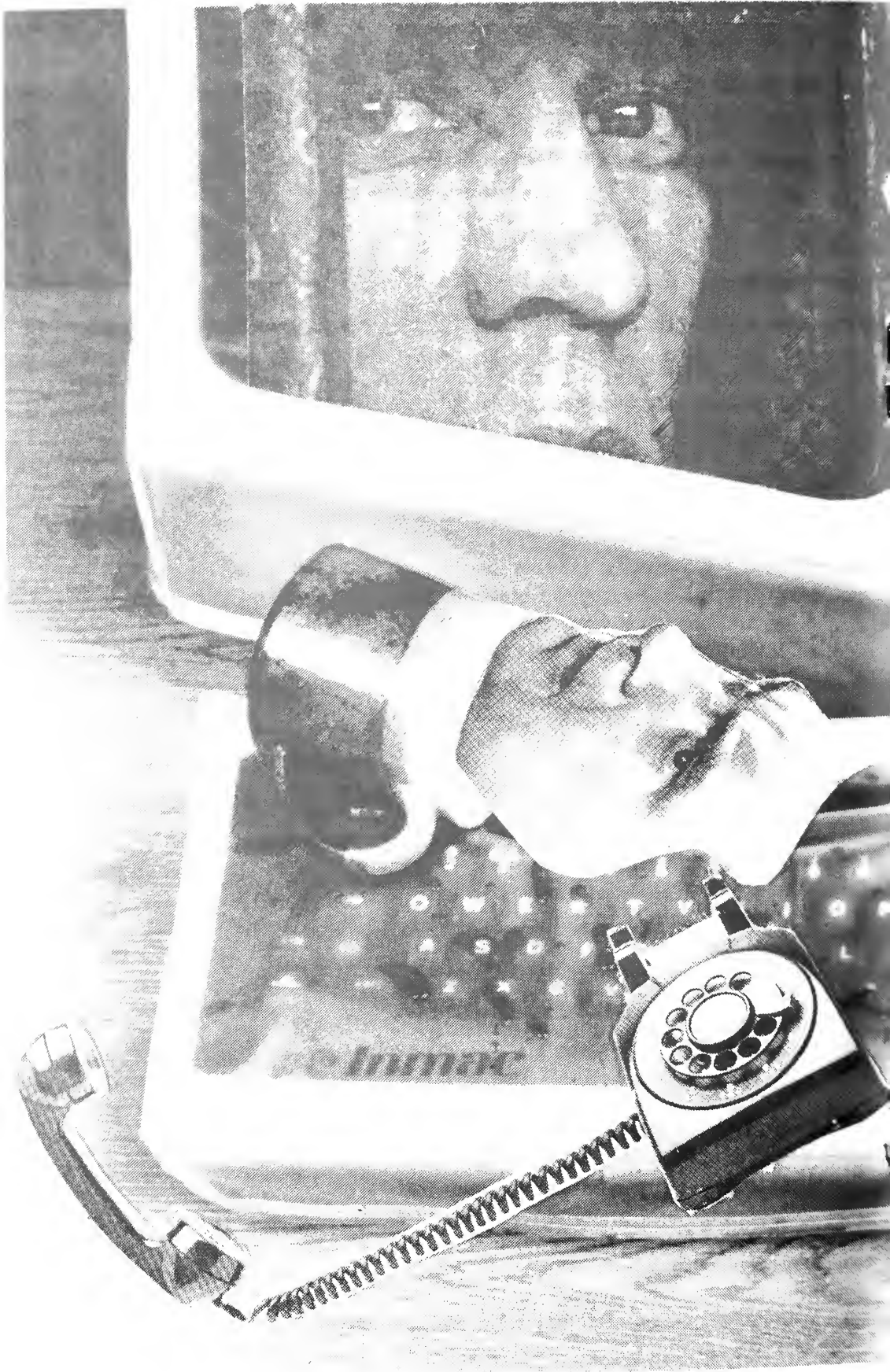
Campsites for 110,000 had been provided, but they were your basic parking-lot-and-port-a-potty variety. A special freeway ramp had been constructed and a shuttle bus system set up to handle the Festival traffic; nonetheless, it took up to three hours to get in or out of the concert site.

The US Festival was much touted as a model of efficiency in crowd-pleasing. No riots. The bands stayed on schedule. Everyone was mellow. But so what? Is this the best we can expect from our brave new techno-future — that the buses run, even if not quite on time, and that the toilets don't overflow?

In return for the "party of the century," most of the crowd seemed perfectly willing to show obsequious gratitude. When the water cannons on stage were turned on between sets and sprayed at the sweaty masses, the crowd roared and surged toward the source, arms waving worshipfully in the air. And "Woz" was given a thunderous ovation when he appeared on the stage with his newborn son. The cash transactions at ticket offices across the land were somehow forgotten.

It's fine with me that people want to party rather than to analyze, but must they parrot the packaged line so unconsciously? As I worked the Festival with my tape recorder, I found little in the way of critical awareness. Even when I probed it was, "Let's hope this is the US decade." "It's a good idea to cooperate." "I think it's about time we all worked together."

Everyone seemed to accept the



Another Day At The Offi



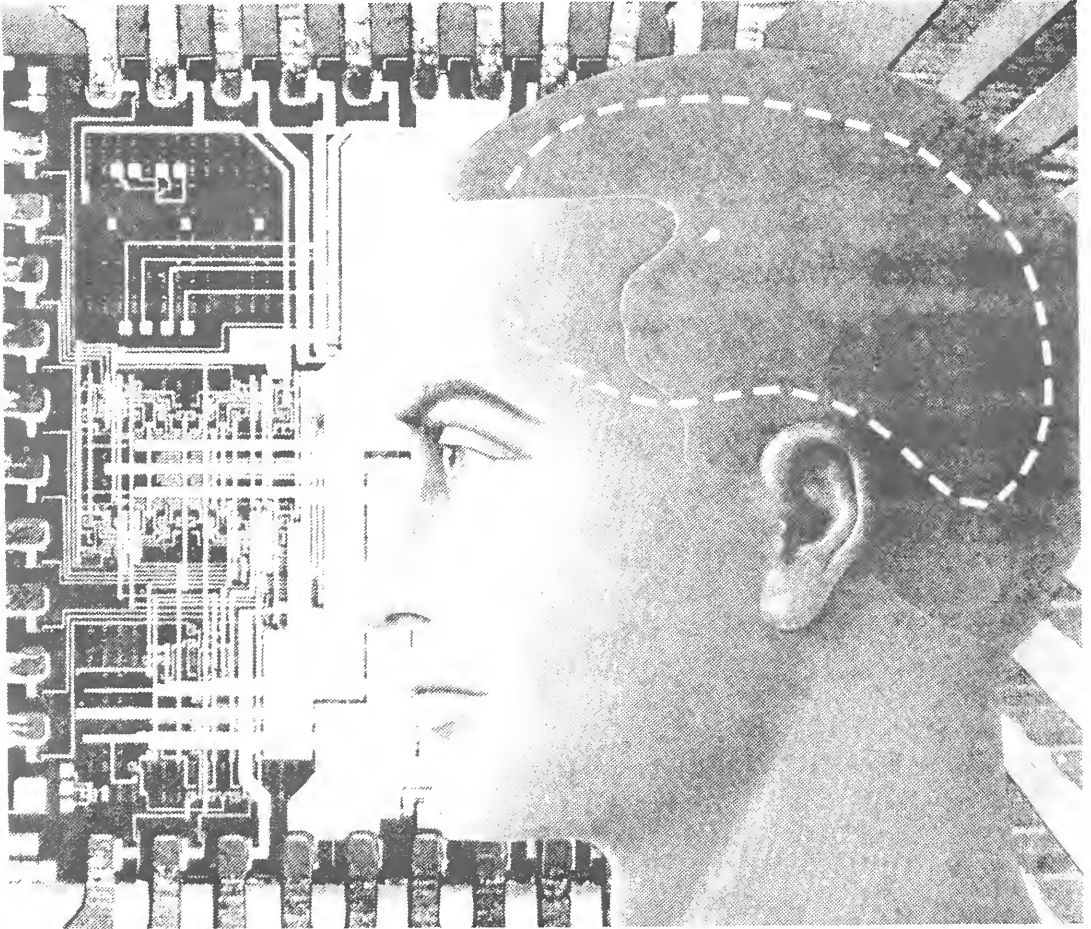
ce: What Have We Lost?

Festival's commercialism and the hierarchy of the cash nexus as perfectly natural. "It's Woz's money," they told me over and over again. "He can do whatever he wants with it."

No one questioned the assumption, shared by Wozniak and a lot of others who are blissed out on computers, that what's good for the Information Society is good for computer company executives, data entry clerks, and

Third World electronics assembly workers alike.

It is a well-known truism of the personal computer world that the market out there must be educated. To introduce a completely new kind of commodity, new desires must be developed. What are the masses going to *do* with a personal computer in the living room? Does Mom really want to put her shopping lists and recipe on line?



## **BFB: Can Modern Technology Improve the Human Brain?**

We're taking advantage of the latest advances in science to bring you the smartest, yet most pliable, workers *ever*. Top quality silicon chips will be surgically implanted in your own information processors. Special obedience training in every chip — now your workers will *love* to make your-data flow! And you'll love watching their fingers fly, knowing it's all for your profits!

## **BFB: Brains für Bosses, Inc.**

Apple Computers has been particularly aggressive in preparing the ground. One of its schemes (er, marketing tactics) is to hook young kids on its machines by donating an Apple to every elementary, junior high school and high school in the country. In exchange, it is getting a tax break from the government.

For peddlers of the computer age, the US Festival was the way to the hearts of another demographic group. The special challenge presented by the 20-to-30-year-old set is that some residual influence of a counterculture once associated with "back to nature" might have infected it with suspicions of high technology. Nothing like a big party thrown by a Wizard of Woz to soothe any lingering fears. And what a coup it was: the whole Malibu Beach bunny crowd was somehow convinced that a technology exhibit in the desert was *the* place to be.

The real distinguishing characteristic of the US Festival was its self-importance, its claim to greatness. From its inception, Wozniak stressed that the Festival would "mark the end of the 'me' decade and the beginning of the 'us' decade."

If only by virtue of consolidating already existing techniques of crowd control and image manipulation, the US Festival was an advance on the bread and circuses of the past. Tellingly, its history is described in the official program as though it were a movie. "If this were a film epic, it would begin with the inspiration of one man, Steven Wozniak," the story begins. It goes on this way for pages: "Here the film would have quick cuts . . . Here, in the film, is the opportunity for some great effects."

For most of us extras in the audience, passive enjoyment was all that was required. It was impossible for any significant proportion of such

a crowd to see the stage; most saw only multiples of the camera's view on the much larger-than-life screens. In spite of — or perhaps because of — the clarity of the sound system, most of us may as well have been watching a movie.

Besides showing off superstars and light shows, the giant screens intermittently played images of the crowd back to itself. There we were, dancing and laughing and being happy. This was an important enhancement of spectacle-making abilities: mid-course myth correction. Just in case any spectators are in doubt, the screen tells us that we're having a great time.

Though Wozniak wound up in the black on the venture, his protestations of indifference about making money on it are significant. The US Festival was far more important as a spectacle than as a way to make money. Production is organized to maximize control as well as profit; the organization of consumption has similar goals.

The sweaty mass of young middle Americans at the US Festival came to "party down" — and left, for the most part, feeling they'd gotten their money's worth. They were entertained, and assured that by their presence they'd made history. But these golden surfer boys and Valley girls (and students, and young workers, and aging hippies, and computer hobbyists, and families with babies) are being softened up.

The promise is flashy computer baubles with the counter-cultural trappings of yore. The reality is a place on one end of an incessant broadcast of instructions and over-produced entertainment. It may go over big for a weekend, as an alternative to the drab routine of a job or the grind of unemployment, but hopefully it won't satisfy for long.

— by Marcy Darnovsky



# Small Victory in Small Claims

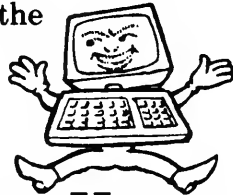
San Francisco, CA — A part-time Word Processor employed by Marsh & McLennan, Inc., the insurance giant, has won a suit in San Francisco Small Claims Court against his employer over a disputed pay increase.

Arthur Evans, who has been with the company since January 1982, was awarded a permanent, court-ordered pay raise on September 7, 1982, by Pro-Tem Judge Ronald Larson. Judge Larson ordered Marsh & McLennan to raise Evans' salary from \$650 a month to \$715 a month with a decrease in the hours Evans has to work for this amount from 22½ hours a week to 20 hours. Evans was also awarded \$260 in back pay.

Evans filed suit against the company in July claiming he was promised a pay raise after three months' employment, which the company later refused to grant because of, in the

company's words, "the present business conditions." Evans contended in Small Claims Court that a specific figure was quoted to him for a subsequent raise when he was hired by the supervisor of the Word Processing Department and that the company was bound by that quotation.

James F. King, Vice President of the San Francisco office of Marsh & McLennan at Three Embarcadero Center, originally granted Evans' increase but was subsequently overruled by the company's corporate headquarters in New York because of the latter's apparent financial difficulties. Evans argued that the New York headquarters of the corporate giant could not negate a monetary commitment previously made by the local firm's word processing supervisor.



## Going Home

The 14 Mission snaps, crackles and pops through the cold rain. The wretched refuse from the hives and gutters of the *zona monetaria* is its cargo tonight, every night. I travel in another dimension, but the quack of voices pierces my smooth flight.

"We lost our receptionist Danny."

Bitch, did you misplace him behind a filing cabinet?

"Oh, what happened?"

Shit, another receptionist story. I can put myself on automatic pilot for this one.

"Well, he died."

That *was* losing him.

"Oh."

Notice the social worker "affect" here. This is called listening.

"He came in to work and looked so sick that Gladys sent him in a cab to

Kaiser."

Boor devil, what a trip that must have been. At least he didn't have to check a medical dictionary before calling in sick.

"They checked him over and sent him home that day."

Kaiser's getting more efficient. Used to be that you'd die waiting for doctor to see you. Hope they got his medical insurance numbers.

"Well, we didn't hear from him. A couple of days later his landlord called. I guess he hadn't seen Danny so he checked the apartment. Danny'd been dead for about a day or so."

Sick, went to Kaiser in a cab, was checked over, sent home, died.

"Does anyone know what he died from?"

Being misplaced, losing, riding the 14 Mission, impersonating a receptionist, information pollution, loneliness, plague.

"We won't know until the autopsy."

God, I hope it isn't plague.

"We're all wearing black arm-bands."

And I thought it was just a trendy

fashion thing.

"He'd been with you quite a long time, hadn't he?"

Minutes, hours, days, months, years. My Lord and my Redeemer, let me count them all. Danny, Danny.

"Gee, the same thing happened at my office. We had this CETA worker..."

— by J. Gulesian

ANNOUNCING!

# The Revolutionary New SUBLIMINAL-EAZE® Stationery

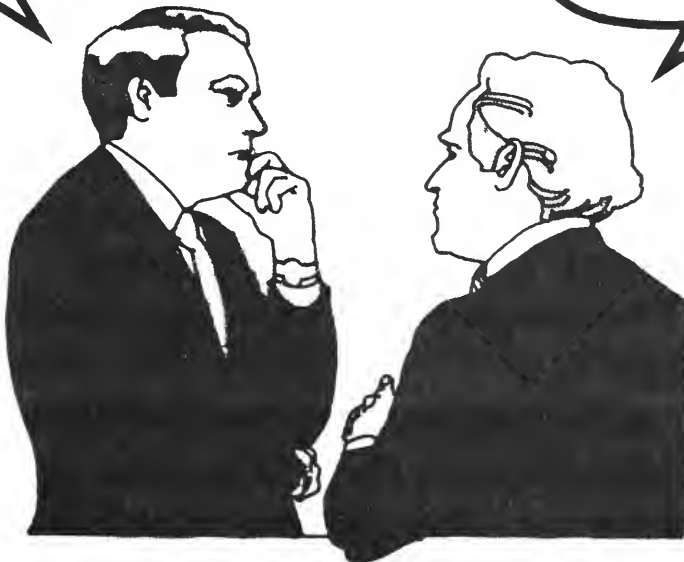
**Say What You Really Think — And Get Away With It!**

*Everyone knows your boss is a jerk, but does he?*

*Tell him with clinically-proven Subliminal-eaze®. The message is between the bond. Subliminal-eaze® is specially encoded for maximum impact while remaining invisible to the naked eye!*

Suddenly I've begun to feel like a jerk!

Could it be that weird stationery?



*Comes in 4 color-coordinated messages:*

- For high security information processors: "Copy and Distribute"
- For the overzealous co-worker: "Take A Break!"
- For the sabotage conscious: "Mangle This!"
- For the boss: "I Am A Jerk!"

# DUELLING

# FOR

# DOLLARS'

INNER-VOICE #4



Selene here, from Top Dollar Temps. Sure was swell to see you at the contest!



I noticed your score was pretty low and honey you know we only take Top Talent at Top Dollar Temps... but if anything comes in at your level we'll be sure to let you know. Bye now!



And I thought it was just a game. AW SHIT!!

## Who Will Be The Winner?

Remember when everyone in the office thought those who knew how to do word processing had a truly special skill? A few years ago in San Francisco, a word processor could sail into almost any modern office and be guaranteed \$10-12 an hour, no problem. But now that many more of us have learned word processing and jobs are scarcer, the relatively high rate of pay is crumbling (even though TemPositions still charges \$25/hr. for word processors).

In the meantime TemPositions is sponsoring a special competition, "Duelling For Dullards," ostensibly as a PR stunt which will also benefit Wang, donor of the machines used at the event. Apparently TemPositions' attempt to make a name for itself was serious enough to warrant hiring a PR firm, the Orsborn Group, to smoothe over the rough edges. A less obvious "benefit" of the contest is its potential role in setting production norms, always a boon for cost conscious bosses. While everybody knows that 55-60 wpm is a standard speed on a typewriter, there is still some uncertainty as to how much work can be squeezed out of word processors. Many of us with word processing skills like to perpetuate that mystery to our advantage! While we doubt temp agencies will really call "their girls" after the duel to bump off slower operators, agencies and other businesses are indeed eager to measure and "rationalize" word processing.

Whether or not standardization is a conscious motive for today's event, this publicity gimmick is clearly an encouragement for word processors to work faster and harder, and to take pride in being better than their co-workers. As long as secretaries identify with corporate goals and standards, they are less likely to question or challenge the ultimate value and meaning of all the tedious hours spent in front of a VDT, and more likely to submit passively to the deadening office routine.

When we compete amongst ourselves to see who can be the fastest, the brightest and the best in the office, it's a sure bet that our bosses will be the winners.



Nasty Secretary Liberation Front  
c/o 55 Sutter Street, #829  
San Francisco, CA 94104



This leaflet was distributed at a "Duelling Word Processors" publicity-contest in downtown San Francisco. The event was sponsored by a local temp agency and a large word processing vendor.



# GREYS

"Look at that!" Mike snarled, pointing to a roll of blueprints. "The guy who wanted these came down here at ten-thirty, saying he just had to have fifty copies before noon. Fifty freakin' copies! He thinks I just shove it in the machine, press a 'fifty' button and, presto, copies! They always forget that if they want fifty copies I have to push the blueprint through the machine fifty separate times. I told him I couldn't promise they would be ready, but he really hassled me about it. 'Gotta have 'em,' he said. So I dropped all my other work to get the damn fifty copies done, and here it is, three-thirty, and his damn blueprints are still sitting here! He can go to hell before I bust my ass for him again."

Ardath snickered, "What do you expect from a Grey?"

Greys, the men and women who have dedicated their lives to assiduously climbing the corporate ladder. They can be readily identified by the color of their clothes and, sometimes, their hair. Grey polyester has replaced grey flannel, but the message is still the same. Be neutral. Blend in.

"Dress like a professional," a Grey counseled the denim-clad Ardath on her first day at the Company.

"Pay me like one and I will," she replied.

"What the hell would they do without us?" Mike asked.

"They'd do the work themselves. Who knows? Maybe it would make them human."

"Nothing could make them human," Mike retorted, his disdain evident in the snap of his wrists as he rolled up another set of blueprints.

"They eat blueprints for breakfast."

"And blueprints clerks for lunch," Ardath thought.

Mike sneered, "I can't stand them. Have you ever noticed how they always line up? They even walk to the cafeteria in a single file. They talk over their shoulders."

"That way they can see if the boss is following them."

Ardath's crack did not lighten Mike's mood. Mike reproduced everything from blueprints to reports to doodles for six floors of Greys. Ordinarily, he operated on a first come-first served basis, but he did his best to accommodate emergencies. Mike felt abused whenever an inconsiderate junior executive pulled a false alarm. He could nurse a grudge for a long time.

"New job lined up yet?" he asked.

"Nah, summer is a slow time for temps."



“Whatcha gonna do?”

“I’m going to try to remember how to write.” Ardath glanced at her wristwatch. “I’d better get back to my desk, Mike. See ya’ round.”

“Thanks for stopping by.”

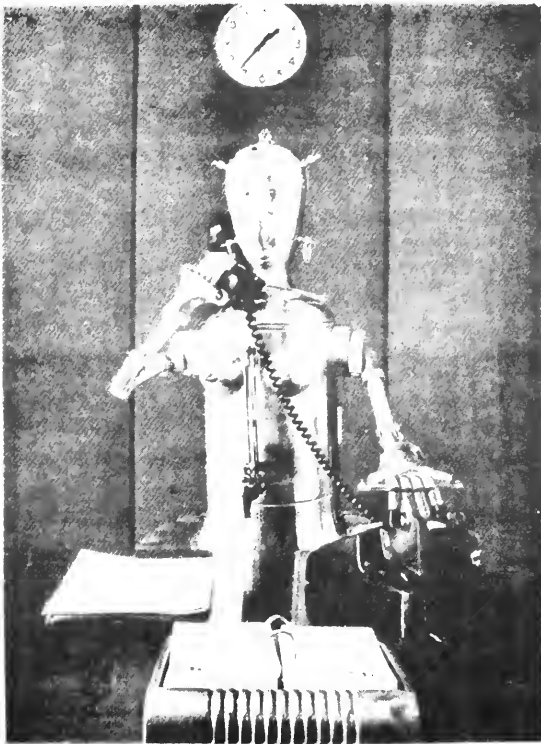
As she walked down the hall, Mike called out, “Hey, Ard?”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t yell in the halls, Kids,” cautioned a passing Grey. “This is a professional establishment.” When the Grey turned his back, Mike and Ardath each raised a clenched fist, middle finger extended. As soon as an elevator had swallowed the Grey, Mike yelled rapidly, “Let me know if you publish anything!”

“Mike, I promise you the first copy of whatever,” Ardath shouted back, trying to penetrate the din of Mike’s reproduction machines. I’ll even warn you that it’s coming so you can buy some fish to wrap.”

Ardath walked down the four flights of stairs to her office. The staircase was usually a faster means



*Introducing Agnes...*

*A multifunctional interactive unit with built-in coffee dispenser!*

of transportation than the seven high speed elevators which wormed their way through the innards of the giant grey icecube tray the Company called home. As she descended the stairs, Mike’s questions resurfaced. “What the hell would they do without us?” Us, the Blues, blue jeans, blue collars, blueprint clerks. Blues can be readily identified by the fact that they work at their lowest mental levels so that the Greys can work at their highest. The Company’s work force was aligned in a typical Financial District pattern: Blues on one side, Greys on the other, Secretaries, like Corinne, in the middle.

Ardath passed Corinne’s desk.

“Ardath, Nate wants to see you.”

Ardath spied Nate reading in his office. “Good,” she thought, “I can get it over with now.” She strode quickly to Nate’s door, hoping to reach the threshold before he noticed her. Nate would often tell Corinne that he wished to speak to Ardath, only to close his door and begin a long series of phone calls when she approached. Ardath was convinced the ensuing wait was part of a power game calculated to give Nate a psychological advantage in their meetings.

Ardath’s heartbeat quickened from a combination of annoyance and trepidation. “Did he notice I was away from my desk almost two hours?” she wondered. “He shouldn’t bitch about it today, but, knowing Nate, he probably will.”

Nate was an apprentice Grey. He had recently moved “up” from a bullpen of five people to his very own cell with four complete walls. He had a long way to go before he won the Company’s Grand Prize, mahogany furniture, but Ardath had no doubts he’d make it. Corinne, the handmaid and master sergeant he shared with two other apprentices, would train him well. Nate’s own attitude made him a promising prospect. His thinking was molded by Company politics.



Ardath despised him for it.

“Corinne said you wanted to see me.” Ardath employed a flat tone of voice when speaking to Nate. Her ability to verbally erect a stone wall intimidated some co-workers, but the wall was actually Ardath’s defense against intimidation.

“Just wanted to thank you for all you help, Ardath. We’ve had our differences, but actually, I’m sorry you’re not staying with the Company. It’s just very hard to become a permanent employee.”

“Hard? It’s absolutely bizarre!” Ardath thought, as Nate droned on. All new applicants, except lawyers, accountants, engineers and computer programmers, were restricted to a handful of entry-level jobs. The hiring policy protected senior employees from being by-passed for promotion,

but it also produced the anomaly of Ph.D.’s pushing mail carts.

“We were trying very hard to find something else for you,” Nate continued, “but all we have left are odd jobs. It’s very hard to justify the fee we pay your agency if you’re not stuck to a desk.”

At the desk she had been stuck to, Ardath assembled and updated technical looseleaf services for the Company’s engineers. On the first day, she and Nancy, her predecessor, were kibitzing in the basement where the empty looseleaf binders were stored.

“This job drove me nuts and all I have is a high school education,” Nancy proclaimed. “I hear you’re a college graduate?”

“Master’s degree in comparative literature.”

“Master’s? Good luck! After two

days you'll see why I'm transferring."

Ardath saw after one day. As she stuffed the binders, updating dusty manuals no one had consulted in years, she consoled herself with the thought that tedious office work would be a dim memory once she established herself as a novelist. But her boredom on the job manifested itself in a loathing of paper. Ardath did no creative writing during the three months she worked for Nate.

Nate knew Ardath's job was well beneath her abilities, but the same could be said for the jobs of all the workers in his department. All of them, including Nate himself, were disgruntled at some time or another. They had learned to accept the situation, or transfer. But Ardath routinely questioned procedures, openly complained when superiors boorishly imposed on clericals, and, once she pointed out a situation which was irrational or unfair, expected the situation to be rectified immediately, without regard for Company politics. When the Personnel Department found a Company employee to fill the job permanently, Nate decided to terminate Ardath. She was a fast learner and a productive worker; he

could have given her more challenging assignments in his short-handed department. Releasing her was the line of least resistance. He had no time to cope with an employee who couldn't take "It's Company policy" for an answer.

"Keep your application up to date," Nate advised. "Maybe something will open up when the employees' children go back to school this fall."

Nate and Ardath ended the interview with chit-chat about atomic bombs, a ceremonial conversation calculated to demonstrate that the work relationship was allegedly ending on an amicable note.

When Ardath emerged from Nate's office, Corinne asked, "Did you catch hell for being away from your desk most of the afternoon?"

"No, he didn't even mention it. He probably realized I was saying good-bye. That's one thing about this Company; it doesn't begrudge you a good-bye."

At five o'clock, the sadness Ardath felt while saying good-bye gave way to relief. The sense of belonging one can acquire during a long-term temporary assignment was gone. All to the better, as it was a false sense.



Ardath shared the crush of the commute, the expectations of punctuality, dress and performance, and the frustrations of the work with the permanent employees. But, on the day she felt ill, she had not been allowed to see the Company doctor. ("Company medical benefits are for Company employees only..."). Though obviously underemployed, she had not been allowed to apply for better jobs. ("We promote from within..."). On this last day, there was no farewell lunch, not even a box of cookies.

The rigors of the business world were far behind Ardath as she walked along the shores of the lake. Southern Indiana had been her home until the pressures of supporting herself in a recessed economy forced relocation to an urban center. Her childhood memories were filled with the sights and sounds of this lake: her brothers wrestling on inner tubes in the summer, her mother painting watercolors of the brilliant autumn landscape, her father being fooled by whatever fish were in season, and little Ardath dancing across the Griffin dam as if she were Olga Korbut on a giant balance beam. As an adult, Ardath returned to the lake whenever she could. This day, she strolled across the dam, pausing midway to observe a couple paddling a canoe toward a nearby island. "Lovers on a picnic?" she mused.

The bike messenger wore grey overalls. The blue propeller on his beanie whirled faster as his legs pumped harder. He was trying to beat the light. He missed. No matter. He banked a sharp right.

Ardath heard a distant voice. She turned toward the sound but was unable to spot its source. She fell asleep on the sun-baked dam as the summer breeze murmured through the trees around the lake.

The impact threw the messenger from his bike. He landed on the hot grey asphalt, scraped and stunned but not seriously injured. A crowd

*Uunnh! It's 6:25  
— five minutes  
before I have to  
get out of bed.*



quickly gathered around the fallen pedestrian. The grey monoliths of the Financial District towered impassively over the hunched shoulders and craning necks of the curious on-lookers. The shaken messenger knelt beside the victim.

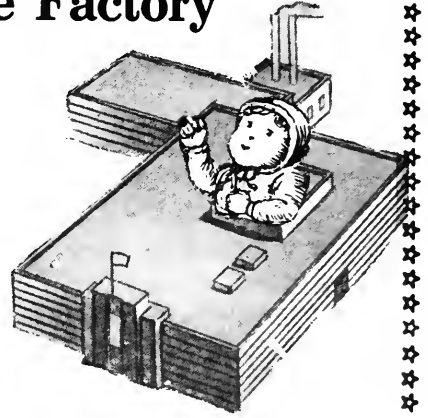
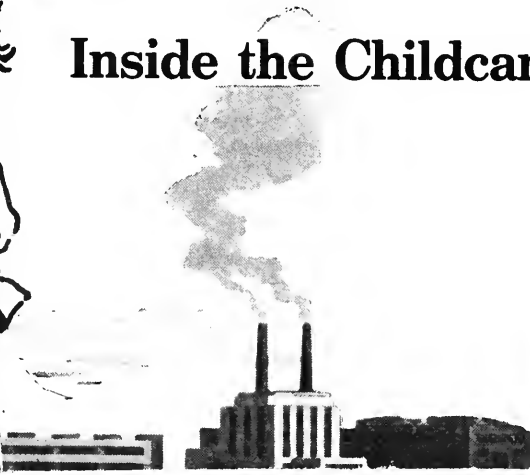
"Lady," he said, choking back the tears, "Didn't ya hear me yellin' atcha to watch out?"

She briefly opened her eyes. "You shouldn't ride a bike on the dam," she said, as she slipped into grey unconsciousness.

*by Ana Kellia Rames*

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Processing Our Children**

**Inside the Childcare Factory**



Today many parents in both single and two parent families are confronting serious problems in caring for their children while at work. Since they frequently have no nearby friends or relatives who can regularly look after their children, affordable care in centers, family daycare homes or with babysitters has become more important than ever.

I first became aware of one of the basic problems in childcare while looking at a college job board. After one and a half to two years of specialized training, I could expect to earn from between \$3.50 to \$4.95 an hour. A wage offer above five dollars an hour was rare. Because of the terrible remuneration, I seriously debated whether or not to pursue a childcare career. I found childcare an unusually challenging and rewarding job and I dreaded returning to waitressing. I was single, without dependents and accustomed to living frugally. For me, all of these factors outweighed the lousy wage.

***THE IDEAL: HAPPY CHILDREN  
AND SYMPATHETIC TEACHERS***

Children may be as young as two or three months when they first enter school and the separation from parents and the multitude of new experiences and people is usually

traumatic. An understanding adult must reassure the child and make sure that their needs for good and proper rest are met. Once a relationship of trust is established between the child and teacher, the child can develop the self-confidence to enjoy his/her surroundings.

Teachers of young children must possess a sympathetic rather than judgemental nature, being able to express their thoughts and feelings simply and clearly. They should value the spontaneous logic of children while maintaining an overall classroom orderliness. If they are to maintain their resourcefulness, imagination and sense of humor, the teachers can't have too many children in their charge or work more than a reasonable number of hours. As part of their paid working day, teachers need uninterrupted time to talk to the rest of the staff about activities, routines and children.

My first childcare job came closest to this ideal. At this job, the staff stressed cooperation and the toddlers in our care grew daily more self-assured and independent. The center was relatively small so the daily routine was not rigid; each child had one adult primarily responsible for their care. When this job ended I moved to San Francisco and began to

do substitute teaching in various childcare centers. After three months I realized that my school experiences had sheltered me. Most childcare facilities in which I have worked range from mediocre to terrible. Rarely have I found conditions that come close to my first job.

### *THE DAYCARE NIGHTMARE*

Centers are usually funded through a combination of government subsidies, parent fees and donations from private organizations. Government support — the bulk of most centers' funding — has been drastically reduced in the past few years. The soaring cost of living makes it impossible for parents to be the sole support. Fund raising activities, while good for bringing together parents and staff, are too time-consuming and uncertain to provide more than a fraction of the necessary funding.

In an effort to meet costs and remain open, centers are compromising the quality of their care by over-enrollment. I have worked in centers serving over fifty pre-school age children. Even in schools which maintain the federally regulated adult to child ratio, the incessant noise and chaos of activity makes it difficult to do anything requiring a period of unbroken concentration. Children are often either overstimulated and unable to relax, or defensively withdrawn. Because teachers don't have time (or the peace of mind) to observe and form attachments with individual children, they don't have the necessary information to plan activities or intervene helpfully in children's disputes. In large centers, daily routines require such massive coordination that the kind of flexibility which best meets individual needs is frequently impossible. A teacher's role inevitably disintegrates: she or he becomes a police officer who must enforce strict adherence to the daily grind.

Teachers usually work seven to eight hours daily in an emotionally

trying give-and-take atmosphere. By the second half of their shift, patience, objectivity and openness have all but evaporated. Many teachers burden themselves with feelings of failure because they are not able to give their children proper care. Women, who make up the majority of childcare workers, are especially susceptible to this since they have been socialized to assume complete responsibility for the emotional health of their dependents. Instead of falling prey to guilt, teachers should examine the problems within the structure of their center.



As funds for childcare become scarcer, teachers will become responsible for ever larger groups of children and more untrained adults will be hired at lower wages. Some workers won't even be interested in children, since in hard times people are more concerned about having a job than liking it. But high turnover will persist in centers with especially poor conditions, compounding the children's insecurities.

Many children spend eight or nine hours a day in their center. Even in the best conditions these long hours can be a strain on children. But in a center with almost constant stimula-





tion (except for the one or two hour nap), where the adults don't have time to comfort and reassure, a child can become exceedingly anxious. Children who are placed into such institutions at a young age are more likely to become frightened and insecure adults who hesitate to question or think for themselves.

We shouldn't underestimate how much the ruling order benefits from the psychological effects of an increasingly factory-like childcare system. A government gains stability and legitimacy from a population which is used to depending on authority to tell it what to think, what to buy, and who to hate.

Some childcare advocates are pursuing employer-sponsored childcare as an alternative to government funding. In the present economic situation, this tactic will not get very far. Factories are closing everywhere, and thousands of people are finding themselves suddenly unemployed. In an effort to forestall layoffs and plants from closing, unions negotiate away the pay increases and benefits which workers have already won. With the possible exception of small companies in need of skilled labor, there is little chance of employer-sponsored childcare becoming a major source.

### ALTERNATIVES

I believe that parents should demand free, parent-controlled childcare. Parents and teachers concerned about the damage done to children in overcrowded schools staffed by overworked, undertrained adults will want to gain control of public money and use it to improve their centers.

As part of the daily struggle for quality care, teachers in large centers should strive to plan activities in small groups. If the same teacher is with the same small group of kids everyday at a snack table or in a special activity, the intimacy between adult and child, as well as child and child, is strengthened.

Parents and teachers are also beginning to create more extended, family networks, playgroups, simple parent co-ops and other forms of childcare which do not require government or business support. Small parent groups can share childcare among themselves and/or divide the expense of employing a teacher. If children are cared for in a parent's home, much of the expense of a center can be eliminated. Both teachers and children benefit from the manageable size of the group and the comfort of a home environment. Instead of being paid entirely in money, a teacher could accept free rent in a parent's home, free car repair, free food from a parent's garden or any exchange imaginable.

Implied in this type of organizing is more parent participation than a center usually requires and a tighter relationship between parents and teachers, as well as between parents. It's true that working parents have little time to organize their own childcare, and teachers have little desire to become too involved in the lives of the families they serve. But as money becomes more scarce, centers will start to close or decay into factory-like schools. The alternatives we develop can build the communal strength and resiliency which our dependence on bureaucratic institutions so effectively paralyzes.

— by Penny O'Reilly





## The Thing That Is Missed

*The thing that is missed is  
time without plans  
time that invents itself  
like children with summer vacation  
day after day of it  
not one free square  
on your mark get set go  
Have FUN-dammit-FUN  
RUN-dammit-RUN*

*Time's up.  
Back on the line.  
Well did you have fun?  
Not too much fun?  
Too hectic?  
More relaxing to work  
isn't it...  
heh heh heh heh.*

by Barbara Luck

## METROFUCK

stroll quietly  
sit complacently  
lie down  
dry tiles  
dusty, and without reflection

*caffeine boot*

glance away  
snag another  
panic in public  
transportation  
stifling, and without sympathy

*on line*

Then eighty-eight keystrokes  
pave the way  
to thermal-paper climax —

endless manipulation  
useless information  
and the solitude of the ten-o'clock bagel:

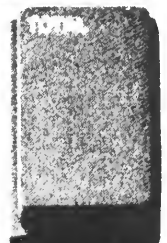
*occupation*

by Jose's son



*They make a cult of work  
expect, I think, salvation for it  
they work unruffled  
no creases spoil the day  
they eat numbers  
and shit the difference  
can process whole years  
in printout or paragraph  
machines they're not  
machines won't work that way  
they're human, that is to say;  
mornings they appear  
with papers by phones  
a right response  
comes when needed  
(is there life after work?)  
lunchtime's hello time  
yet they will speak more  
when unavoidable;  
do they ever feel, though,  
some days just won't work?*

— by John Norton



FJ

# Lift Up Thy Invoices

Lift up thy invoices to heaven  
And let your purchase order you around.  
Give the boys in the shipping room  
Something to look up to  
As they cart those cases around

As you die where ya live  
And your faith leaks, like a sieve  
Come on, dig down deeper in your pockets  
How much can you give?

We let ya add your little quirks  
To your tedious work  
And just where would mail be today  
Without mailroom clerks?

So lift up... (refrain)

O it's joyful and it's grand  
It's a nightmare well in hand  
So if you can't keep your face from falling  
What's your problem, man?

We got the Reverend Jim Jones  
He brought the kool-aid for the punch line  
And when you talk about redemption  
I get green stamps on my mind

So lift up.. (refrain)

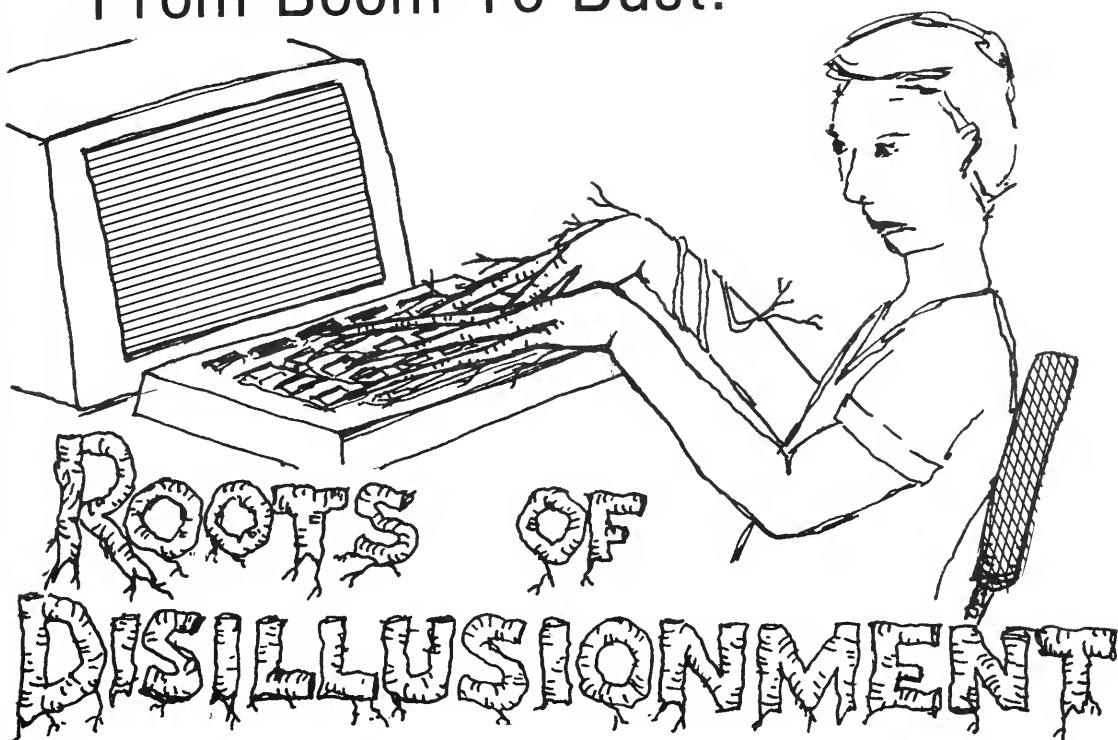
We are baptized, we are blessed  
We don't waste a second guess  
'Cause we know tomorrow's like today  
It's already at the press

Yes, it's a world of jolly bliss  
We can't get enough of this  
But I'm askin' for permission, Lord  
'Cause I gotta take a p-p-piss

a song by Tom Ward © 1980



# From Boom To Bust:



*How do I fill my days?  
A force called "Hard Cash" moves my feet  
Gang of Four, 1982, "Call Me Up"*

From the vantage point of the "Raw Deal" eighties it's hard even to imagine the expectations people in their teens and twenties had in the decade after World War II. The U.S. was unchallenged ruler of half the world, wages were rising rapidly if not steadily, and after 1947 inflation was a minor annoyance. Buying a home and starting a family were easier than they had ever been before.

The prosperity of the post WWII era coincided with the birth of 76 million people between 1947 and 1964 — the biggest "baby boom" in US history. New consumer goods and the suburbanization of a large part of the working class provided the basis for a much-touted "upward mobility." Capitalism's ideologues announced an era of unlimited economic growth in which all good citizens could expect to participate.

The new generation grew up amid ubiquitous encouragement from radio, TV, magazines and newspapers to define success and happiness in terms of material commodities. In exchange for accepting the responsibilities of work and family life, anyone, it was thought, could attain "middle class" status. "Upward mobility" generally meant getting out of the blue collar and into the white collar, out of the city and into the suburbs, off the bus or train and into the private car, etc.

Parents who saw only marginal improvements in their own living standards focused their aspirations on their kids' futures. For millions of American workers, the only way to participate in the glories of an expanding capitalist economy was to ensure a better job for their children. Being the father or mother of a lawyer was somehow considered a just reward for parents who spent their own working

Jeez, could this be the "real world" everyone's been telling me about?



lives as auto workers or seamstresses. It was widely accepted that a college education guaranteed a good job with steadily increasing income, status and responsibilities. As living standards improved and fears of economic depression receded, many parents were able to set aside money to help send their kids to college.

Governments at all levels helped establish a college education as a status elevator and meal ticket by building many public universities and creating demand for colleges via grants, loans, G.I. bill, etc. This in turn presented job opportunities for college graduates in government and universities. By 1969 higher education had become an industry employing more workers than either auto or steel.

Unlike past generations, a large minority of the 76 million baby boomers attended college. The proportion of students to non-students peaked in 1969 when one-half of all college-age white males were enrolled. This was the first generation in which many considered it normal to stay at home until age 18 or 19 and then go on to some kind of higher education. For some, the university experience itself was the "fruit of the American Dream." Most schools were endowed

with an array of facilities, structures, and equipment beyond the reach of the average citizen. These "luxuries" were added to the luxury of the students' several years of relative freedom prior to donning the responsibilities of job and family (though it is true that most students had to work at lousy, low-paying jobs in order to help fund their training for "something better").

But in spite of efforts to inculcate blind nationalism and conformism at an early age with daily recitations of Pledges of Allegiance and Star-Spangled Banners, complemented by regimented leisure activities like Boy and Girl Scouts, in spite of the proliferation of role models like Barbie and Ken and G.I. Joe, somewhere along the Great White American Way the socialization process broke down. The very generation brought up to enjoy the fruits of the new consumer society began rejecting it in earnest as they watched the American Dream fade into a Nightmare of boredom and banality.

Promises of the Joys of new dishwashing liquids and of the freedom provided by modern conveniences were countered with the poverty of spiritual and emotional life in the new suburban ghettos. The revolt coalesced into a social movement that left few areas of daily life unchallenged as people experimented with ideas and lifestyles that escaped (at least temporarily) the mold of the "buy-or-die" economy.

An important impetus for this breakdown came from far beyond the world of suburban tract homes and spanking new campuses. It came from the Black revolt which, beginning in Alabama and Mississippi, flared through the Southern states and across the Mason-Dixon Line to the industrial ghettos of the North. Hundreds of young whites shared as Freedom Riders the experience of

Black solidarity, dignity and courage against the brutality of police and vigilantes. Not only did they participate in a community different from anything they had ever known but they were abruptly compelled to view the "forces of order" as guardians of an unjust, exploitative and routinely violent system.

This encounter with the Civil Rights movement—whose aspirations ranged from social revolution to a mere equal incorporation of Blacks into "consumer society"—pushed huge numbers of white youth to revolt against the generally subtler constraints and repressions of their own lives. "Do not bend, fold, spindle or mutilate me," cried the partisans of Berkeley's 1964 Free Speech Movement, while Students for a Democratic Society, founded two years earlier, shifted from mild, left-liberalism to increasingly radical critiques of the whole social order and a commitment to mass participatory democracy in its own activities (though it's true they didn't always carry out these principles).

Alongside and within the Black, student and "counterculture" revolts grew mass opposition to the Vietnam War. Awareness of the atrocities committed by the U.S. military opened up a whole series of related issues: the imperialist nature of U.S. foreign policy, the inhuman misery and poverty associated with corporate America's exploitation of the Third World, the government's complicity in bolstering repressive regimes that facilitated multinational corporate profits, and the destructive uses of modern technology both in its military and its industrial applications.

As ghetto after ghetto exploded in the wake of Martin Luther King's assassination, white youth fought in the streets against the war and the way of life which gave rise to it. An unstable community developed based on common values and symbols that were articulated in a flurry of underground

publications as well as in rock-songs and movies. These new cultural activities were themselves a lively critique of the commercialization and homogenization of "leisure time."

In the rag-tag laboratories of the East Village, the Haight-Ashbury and a few other such centers the experimenters, many of whom became known as "hippies," broke with all the established goals and norms they could think of. Using drugs, music and visionary art, they tried to purge themselves of their parents' obsession with work, money and possessions.



**THE ONLY MASSAGE  
INSTRUMENT OF ITS KIND  
IN THE WORLD**

Already the more radical hippies had denounced marriage and the nuclear family as breeding-grounds for neurosis and repression. Now small groups of feminists criticized the masculine privilege built into hippie "free-love" ethos and the macho, authoritarian behavior of many male activists. Thousands more girls and women soon began rejecting sex roles in all kinds of ways — from insisting on wearing pants to school and refusing to take "home ec" classes, to attacking beauty contests and forming "consciousness raising" groups where they could throw off the age-old domination of "their" men and discover their own power and



*People's Park Riot, 1968, Berkeley, CA*

creativity. At about the same time, many homosexuals refused to conceal their orientation any longer and rebelled violently against discrimination and police harassment in the famous Stonewall riot of 1969.

Together these youth created temporary and partial alternatives to wage-labor, the life-blood of capitalist society. Collectives, cooperatives, and communal farms provided many "dropouts" with a way of eking out a living on the margins of the commodity economy. While small networks of such groups still exist in the U.S. today, many have been broken by the tribulations of the money economy, or have had to tighten up and become more "business-like" so that they now differ little from "straight" business operations. Still others have collapsed under the weight of isolation or

in-fighting, undoubtedly exacerbated by lack of money, time, and space. An "alternative" business loses its appeal when it ends up requiring more energy and effort to sustain than a regular job in a corporate office or shop floor.

The impossibility of preserving an alternative society within the capitalist economy contributed to the disintegration of the 60s movements. The end of the Vietnam War and the Watergate purges also defused political opposition, by removing favorite targets of the protest movements.

Once separated from the multifaceted critique of daily life, the cultural creations of the movement became commodities like any other. rock promoters, drug-pushers, hip New Age entrepreneurs and Self-Help merchants all profited from the co-opta-



tion of the counter-culture. The language and symbols of the disintegrating community of "drop-outs" were absorbed by the mainstream where their subversive meanings were neutralized. "Feminism" came to be represented in the media by the image of a dressed-for-success woman executive. At the same time, channeled through anti-war activism into a fight on behalf of *others*, and lacking an adequate theory of its own, the political wing of the movement fell an easy prey to authoritarian Old Leftist ideologies like Maoism and Trotskyism.

Aspirations for a complete transformation of society gave way to a quest for novelty and vague desires to be "different." Pop-psychologists, "Me-Decade" hacks and other propagandists of the status quo rationalized the demise of radicalism as the sober reaction of mature individuals to the "excesses" of their youthful "idealism." They prescribed pseudo-philosophies of "Positive Thinking" to help obliterate social consciousness and alleviate prevalent feelings of anger, frustration and failure. The common social problems faced by everyone were supposedly "solvable" by "changing your lifestyle." In an ironic parallel with the politicians, the spiritual seekers likewise succumbed to authoritarianism and dogma. A whole crop of gurus and spiritual leaders cashed in on the self-sacrificial *ideology* of anti-consumerism, and the widespread spiritual poverty, turning thousands of confused, disoriented young people into their zombie slaves.

Despite the co-optation of the 60's movements, it is undeniable that they left an imprint on popular consciousness, especially among still younger people who were not directly involved in the events themselves. This is particularly clear in the gut-level distrust for authority and government that millions still feel.

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The post-war economic boom gave way in the seventies to inflation and depression. Alternatives to the regular job-market dried up, just when millions of college-educated baby-boomers began entering it. Reductions in student grants further closed off opportunities for even temporary respite from wage-work, and job opportunities in the government and academic worlds — traditional employers of college grads — have been on the decline for years.

Where have these millions of new economic draftees gone to seek employment? Those who responded to seventies' economic projections by specializing in business, computers, and sciences, have usually found jobs in those fields. But what of the millions who resisted the dictates of the market? It has become something of a cliché to refer to the cab-driver with a Master's Degree in English literature, but it is true that the expansion of employment has mostly occurred in the so-called "service" sector of the economy.

Within the service sector, by far the greatest growth has come in "information services" within and between businesses and government. The number of people working at white-collar jobs has more than doubled in the past twenty-five years, now comprising over 53% of the workforce. The largest increases have been in the clerical realm, where there are now 18½ million people working, and "professional and technical work" where there are now nearly 17 million workers (this latter category includes occupations as varied in income and status as computer programmer, health worker, technician, lawyer, school teacher). Coincidentally, the primary "skill" learned from a contemporary university education has been at least a rudimentary ability to "handle information" — a skill one needs simply to get through the educational bureaucracy.

## *THE GROWTH OF THE INFORMATION SECTOR AND OFFICE EMPLOYMENT*

In the post-WWII era, big US companies were growing by leaps and bounds. To take advantage of the geographically large US market, many companies built facilities all across the country. Often this led to greater and more complex flows of raw materials, semi-finished, and finished products. Similarly, many companies began moving their plants to Europe, Asia, and Latin America — to take advantage of those markets, as well as of the lower wages and the absence of governmental regulation. Dispersion of a corporation's production and distribution facilities throughout the world complicates record-keeping at all levels, creating ever greater needs for "administrative support" (read, office work).

Along with expanding markets came the need to publicize new products. Advertising, which first came into its own in the 1920's, really grew in the 50's and 60's along with TV and other new media. Entertainment, constantly interrupted by advertisements, glamorized ever newer and fancier consumer goods. Industries like film, recording, publishing and advertising, geared to the production and dissemination of "information" hired thousands of workers to design products and publicity, and to buy and sell these information commodities.

Innumerable disputes and conflicts evolved from the complex relationships within and between different businesses and business sectors. These, plus the ever-growing load of governmental regulation and constantly changing tax laws, led to the extraordinary growth of legal work and its millions of lawyers, researchers, clerks, reporters, examiners, etc. The vast majority of litigation involves corporations and government agencies, and focuses on their control of

markets, products, and profits. Partly to protect themselves in court, all companies now produce and maintain *at least* duplicate records of everything (triplicate and quadruplicate records are common in accounting and legal firms). Memos and contracts have become the final proff of what is "real." All of this calls for millions of workers to write, type, copy, file, and retrieve the information.

Another participant in the litigation merry-go-round has been the insurance industry. The increasingly complex economy has created more possibilities for things to go wrong, which in turn has caused the insurance industry to boom. Since everything that goes wrong implies a financial liability for someone, it isn't surprising that everyone wants to buy protection from potentially catastrophic losses due to accident (or due to the consequences of deliberately cutting corners in the scramble to get an advantage over competitors — see for example Love Canal or the Ford Pinto). Nor is it surprising that insurance companies have spent a good deal of money on lawsuits to avoid paying even more money to beneficiaries and/or victims. Insurance companies now employ millions of office workers and wield enormous power in investment decisions through their control of premium money. Because of their importance as money managers, the insurance and banking industries have begun to converge.

One of the much-publicized features of the past 35 years has been the astounding growth of government bureaucracies at every level — municipal, county, state, and federal. In spite of the current attempts to curb governmental growth this sector of the economy still employs more than 6 million information workers.

Yet another contributing factor to the growth of office employment has been 15 years of merger-mania — the

remarkable rise of conglomerates, or large holding companies which own numerous manufacturing, distribution and/or financial subsidiaries. Bureaucracy grows as each subsidiary has to devote time and money to comply with the information needs of its parent. Meanwhile parent companies become pure bureaucracies, interested only in the flow of data coming in from the subsidiaries.

The last and most important sector of "information work" is banking. This primarily used to consist of taking in corporate and individual deposits and loaning it out on interest. But recently, fiercer competition for scarce investment funds has made possible higher returns than banking has traditionally offered. Higher earnings for investments have led to an inflow of funds and this, in turn, has stimulated the beginnings of the capitalist concentration process — the big companies absorb the small and begin fighting each other for market shares. The government is taking its

first steps towards the gradual national de-regulation of banking.

The trend toward concentration in consumer investment services is exemplified in the recent acquisitions and mergers between big banks, insurance companies, credit card companies, stock brokerages, real estate firms, commodities brokerages, and even retail giants like Sears. We are now seeing the creation of the ostensibly broader category, "financial services," which includes not just demand deposit banking and consumer and corporate credit, but also data processing and computer services, speculative investment in real estate, stock markets, money markets, commodities, etc., and such consumer services as insurance, credit cards, retirement accounts, and travellers' checks.

Remarkably, in spite of the more than 5 million workers already involved in finance, insurance, and real estate and in spite of the advent of office automation, most projections of



future employment possibilities continue to stress the field of financial services. They urge computer literacy as the primary prerequisite. This assumes that as these new financial service conglomerates begin to battle for the consumers' dollar there will be an unprecedented expansion in ways to shuffle all the money around. In other words, IRA's, All-Savers Certificates of Deposit, money markets, etc. are only the beginning, and the "financial services" industry will need thousands, if not millions, more workers to handle all this additional "information." In line with these

projections, the Reagan administration's Labor Department recently offered for public comment before adoption some new rules regarding child labor. Fourteen and fifteen year olds will be allowed to work as data entry clerks (among other jobs) after school for four hours a day, probably at less than minimum wage.

### *THWARTED ASPIRATIONS AND NEW POSSIBILITIES*

For years, people from poor and working class backgrounds, especially women, have struggled to get white collar jobs as a step up in social status (if not income). The system's ideologues have encouraged this effort, saluting the rise of white collar work as the expansion of the "middle



Imagine, an entire series of industries based on ceaseless permutations in the movement of meaningless information! What'll they think of next?

class." But the reality of office work makes the illusion of white-collar professionalism hard to maintain.

The vast majority of white collar workers have inherited a workaday life consisting of repetitive, meaningless tasks, subordination to petty, coercive authority and grinding anxiety. Creativity has been systematically eliminated from most jobs through years of scientific management, speed-up and automation. The relentless assembly-line logic of productivity is riding automation into its new frontiers of low-to-middle management and professional and technical workers. It is not hard to imagine that in the very near future most people will carry out their jobs in front of TV screens.

Beyond these generalizations, though, the office workforce is divided into variegated, complex and overlapping hierarchies of pay, status, and function. Lowest on the totem-pole from almost every point of view are the "information processors" — data entry and file clerks in particular. Career ladders out of this layer are virtually nonexistent, the pay is often appalling and the work rivals the assembly-line for sheer monotony, anxiety and exhaustion. Not surprisingly, most key entry and data processing rooms are filled with younger women, especially Blacks, Chicanas and immigrants from Asia and Latin America.

On the other side of the hierarchy are the trainee-junior and middle managers. The lowest of this group are typically products of night-school courses or in-house training and despite their often ferocious ambition are unlikely to rise much further, since they lack either the general education or the connections required. The Bachelors in business administration, most of whom these days are working in dead-end lower management positions, often plan to go back to school for their MBA's.

Management aspirants come from

all layers of the workforce, having in common only ambition, authoritarianism, and the other rather twisted attitudes toward life and the living required for the role. John Lennon summed it up in "Working Class Hero": "*There's room at the top, They are telling you still, But first you must learn, To smile as you kill.*"

Between the sterile ghetto of "information processing" and the rat-maze of management are the secretaries and "support staff." The older generation of secretaries are mostly white women, well-schooled in the traditional secretarial role, which combines aspects of wife, mother and military aide-de-camp. This old-style secretary typically has to know every aspect of her boss' job that relates to the office itself. She has not only to answer the phones, take dictation and type letters and memoranda, but to organize her boss' entire working life and provide crucial emotional support as well.

As automation clicks and chirps its way up from the key entry room into the managerial suites, secretarial work is being downgraded. Admittedly, some former secretaries become NCO's of the clerical army — word processing, supervisors, data base administrators, and other fancy sounding occupations. These low-level supervisory jobs are just as controlled and watched as the positions they supervise, and don't represent any real control, although they do indicate a certain compliance with the status quo on the part of the person holding the job. Non-supervisory secretaries, meanwhile, are being gradually reduced in status as their old tasks of memory and organization are taken on by micro-processors.

All the same, in most offices the secretary or administrative assistant still has rather more variety and more pay and rather less direct supervision, than her number-crunching colleagues downstairs. And it is in these



secretarial and “support” jobs that a large proportion of “sixties rebels” have settled (the ones who have learned to type anyway — others have found their way into less-automated clerical niches like the mail room). Lacking the drive to manage, but educated and versatile enough to avoid the data processing departments, they have become the new breed of secretarial worker — restless and mobile, if not officially “temporary,” and far less identified with the job than their traditional counterparts. If *Processed World* has a typical reader s/he is one of these.

As the depression takes hold, the situation for all of these groups is deteriorating. The “information processors” are forced to accept ever larger workloads which are monitored impersonally by keystroke-counters built into their machines. Aspiring

executive-types find the corporate career ladders increasingly “clogged,” as the *Wall Street Journal* puts it. This year, college grads are being offered 19% fewer jobs than last. The most adventurous climbers try to move up by diagonal hops between companies, a risky business. Many others can expect at best stagnation, at worst a fast ride down to the street as their functions are taken over by a terminal in the suite upstairs.

The new-style secretaries are feeling the crunch in their own way. Often cynical about their jobs, they have illusions of a different sort. Many are artists, musicians or actors looking for the Big Break, which is now increasingly unlikely to arrive as the cultural markets too have turned bearish. The most rebellious, the habitual absentees and job-hoppers, are finding that work takes longer to find and are correspondingly cleaning up their acts. Once-choosy temps are more reluctant to turn assignments down.

In the short term it looks as if at least outward conformity is going to sweep OfficeLand as people get frightened about survival. Certainly the single biggest response of U.S. workers to the economic crisis so far has been increasing caution and privatism. Grin and bear it at work, then seek pleasure and self-fulfillment in free time. But it takes an immense effort to overcome the fatigue and numbness that sets in at the end of the work/day week. People end up flopped in front of the TV or other forms of passive consumption trying to muster the strength for the next go-round.

In this context, creative thought about one's predicament is very difficult. Public space is colonized by the entertainment industry, which profits from our need to forget, to escape. In the cinemas and concert-halls where we consume its products, we are "alone together," isolated

from each other even as we occupy the same space. The few scenes where some genuine community exists can't really compensate for the dreariness of the working week.

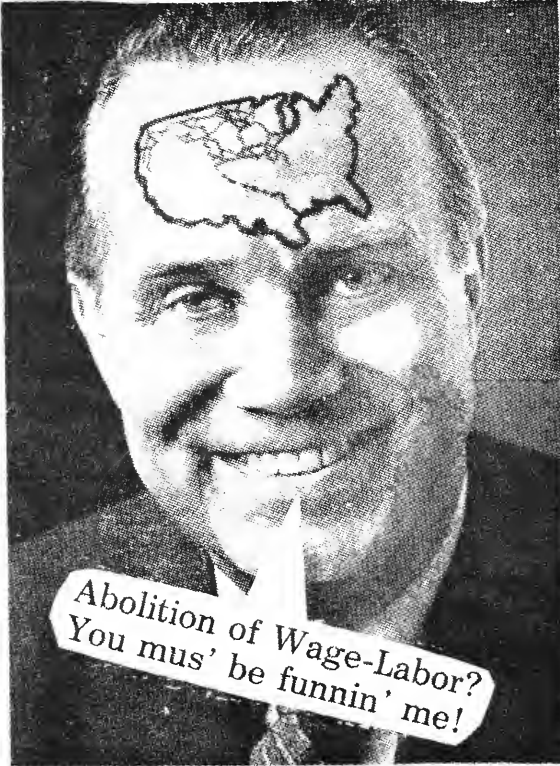
It's no wonder so many people feel their lives are being *wasted* by countless hours of boring, uncreative toil. Office workers are in a particularly good position to recognize this. Most office labor is "useful" only for realizing the political and economic priorities of governments and corporations. One need only consider how few people ever benefit from the millions of money transactions that occupy millions of workers daily in brokerage companies, banks, law firms and other corporate offices. The "services" provided by these institutions are "needed" because of the insecurity and scarcity that the money system creates in the first place.

The wastefulness of information work is only the latest development of



*"We're looking for someone who's willing to start at the bottom and stay there."*

a social system that has made *waste* its primary product for most of this century. The ecological and psychological problems attendant to an automobile/suburban "throw-away" society are well documented, as is the planned obsolescence of many allegedly useful goods and tools. Likewise, the vast military-related industries use billions of hours of potentially creative human labor for the production of means of mass destruction, misery, and terror. Even where this system has produced incredible abundance, as it has in food (though often of dubious nutritional value and at the expense of the planet's ecology), significant amounts are systematically destroyed to preserve the present system.



A great many people will readily agree to all this, and many will even agree that the problem lies at the core of the existing set-up. But most can't really envision any other way of doing things. On the one hand, they view state-dominated societies like the USSR with understandable distaste and dread. On the other, the idea of a freely, genuinely cooperative and

communal world, in which the individual would be realized rather than suppressed, is totally alien to their experience. How to imagine collective, equal responsibility for social decision-making in a world of universal hierarchy and irrational violence, hatred and fear? How to take seriously a vision of creatively satisfying work, directly controlled by those who do it, when people now must be driven to work by the cattleprod of the wage system?

In the movements of the sixties, such ideas, confused as they may have been, were partly naive idealism. More important, though, they grew out of the actual experience of the movement itself — out of organizing demonstrations, sit-ins, boycotts and strikes, as well as communal households, food co-ops, free music gigs and so on. Some of these experiences were disillusioning too — a good many former activists and communards turned sourly conservative after concluding that free collectivity was impossible. But others still remember the successes, partial as they were, the moments when people felt they had the power together to make their own history, to become anything they might desire to be. They carry with them a blurred snapshot of utopia.

Today the sixties survivors, along with younger people who have developed similar feelings and attitudes in response to this society, are being pressured to knuckle down and forget even the remnants of their dreams, preserved by some through work avoidance and the "artist" and "activist" roles. But this pressure will probably increase their dissatisfaction. They are likely to be joined in this dissatisfaction by many from the key entry rooms, the data centers, and even the lower-level management offices, as all levels of the office-worker hierarchy find their work harder and duller, their pay poorer and their aspirations thwarted. Here



A MESSAGE TO THE CLASS OF '82

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## ...YOU'LL LOVE WORK

WORK: A PRISON OF MEASURED TIME

is common ground on which to begin questioning in earnest the life we are forced to share and the fight for a better one. Perhaps, after all, the muddled and sometimes easily co-opted hopes of the Baby Boom generation will not simply be lost in

the corporate machinery. Perhaps they will reappear, immeasurably strengthened and clarified out of a new social movement both broad and coherent enough to realize them.

— by *Lucius Cabins, Maxine Holz,*  
*and Louis Michaelson*

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