ENCOUNTERS WITH

THE WHITE TRAIN

Andy Robinson
Linocuts by Jack McLarty

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Editorial

This spring, the winds have voided all ideologies, boundaries, and barriers that have so far defined this planet, bringing us much closer together. Not, everyone. President Reagan, still smarting from the European response to the Chernobyl disaster was demanding that the Soviets allow U.S. scientists full access to their nuclear installations. The offer was not reciprocated. While in fact the Soviet response to the Chernobyl disaster was flayed by stonewalling, wherever such disasters have occurred in recent times, from Three Mile island to the Florida missile pads to Bhopal, the “responsible” parties first concern has been to limit damages—to careers that divide us on this planet, buff of the U.S. bombing of Libya, response to the Chernobyl disaster was clear installations. The offer was not flawed by stonewalling, wherever astronauts or civilian bystanders, who found themselves in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It was eerie to read of events in the Ukraine and days later be told that the highly volatile particles had made it halfway around the world to us here. While authorities in such matters typically tried to downplay the impact of radioactive iodine and other elements in our air, water, and foodstuffs, what emerged was even scarier—we simply don’t know what safe levels of nuclear waste products are in our environment.

Most of Europe banned use of fresh milk products and produce while radiation levels were highest, in many cases tens times what we received, though some were more concerned about the impact on sales of their agricultural goods. France, specifically, allowed all products to be freely distributed and sold while neighboring West Germany and Italy were holding theirs off the market. And then, reaching to criticism levied against the policy, the French Ministry of Agriculture decided to cut hard and deep, by banning all agricultural products from Eastern Europe. Our own guidelines were not much clearer.

It was a heavy dose of the true uncertainty of the nuclear age. At least we’ve been able to deal with this situation somewhat openly. For nearly the same time we received the first candid admissions about the high level releases of radioactive iodine during the 1940s from Hanford, releases claimed to be for testing human responses to radiation. Though much information remains to be seen of Hanford activity in subsequent decades, of both purposeful and accidental escape of these invisible particles, we should at least understand the men­ tality that continues to hold sway over these matters.

Hanford was constructed “way out west” to remove the still unknown technology from population centers. And now, more than 40 years later, despite literally failing the initial studies of sites for a national nuclear waste repository, Hanford kept past two locations east of the Mississippi, where the largest number of commercial reactors operate, due to political pressure from those same population centers.

Opposition to the waste repository here in the Pacific Northwest, even from many who have previously supported nuclear energy and development, has been gratifying. How much is sincerely felt, in the uncompromising interest of our regions’ citizens, and how much is momentary political posturing, remains to be seen. What has become clear is that the people of our region have got to begin forging a unified front regarding this great un­ known on our lands and near our wa­ terways. Hanford’s N reactor which has no protective cladding, a near fac­ simile of the Chernobyl reactor, is still allowed to hum away producing pi­ tonium for our vast nuclear arsenal, out of reach of state authorities, operating as it does under national prerogative. The region’s commercial and military reactors are still producing “temporarily” stored wastes, with no clear end in that storage. And corroded tanks on the Hanford reservation con­ tinue to spew forth their wastes—out of sight, out of mind.

The very invisibility of the problem has repeatedly allowed such crises to pass quickly from public concern back into the hands of “experts.” If you write one letter this summer, let it be to inform all those who represent you that this time you won’t be silent—won’t wait for another incident to mo­ mentarily raise the public ire. It’s pos­ sibly too late to make our world nu­ clear-clear, but it’s never too late to try.

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There are something over 1,500 men and women on the death rows of America. Given the social context in which they operated, one might reasonably assume that they were sentenced to be executed not because they are murderers but because they were inefficient. Using guns and knives and the usual footpad paraphernalia, they dispatched only a few more than their own number. Had they used asbestos, mislabeled pharmaceutical drugs and devices, defective autos and illegally used and illegally disposed chemicals, they could have killed, crippled and tortured many thousands of people. And they could have done it without very much fuss.

Corporate criminals, as we all know, live charmed lives. Not until 1978 had a corporation ever been indicted for murder (Ford Motor Company, which was acquitted), and not until 1985 had corporate executives ever been brought to trial for murder because of the lethal mischief done by their company.

The executives who made history last year were the president, plant manager and plant foreman of Film Recovery Systems Corporation, a nasty little silver-reclaiming operation in Elm Grove Village outside Chicago. The silver was recovered by cooking used X-ray films in vats of boiling cyanide. Film Recovery hired mostly illegal immigrants, who were afraid to protest working conditions covered by cooking used X-ray films in vats of boiling cyanide. Since the law was applied so properly, so rightly, so common-sensically that one would be foolish to expect such usage to appear again soon. It was a sort of Halley's Comet of Justice.

The idea of treating corporate murderers as just plain murderers strikes many people as excessive. Some lawyers who cautiously approved the conviction in principle said they were afraid it would confuse people generally because a bald murder charge is usually associated with a bullet in the gut or an ice pick in the neck, and nice people would have a hard time adapting the charge to the way things are sometimes accomplished in the front office. Speaking for this timid viewpoint, Alan Dershowitz, Harvard's persuasive cases. Paul Brodeur's The Asbestos Industry on Trial (Pantheon) is an account of how the largest manufacturer of asbestos products, Manville Corporation (previously known as Johns-Manville Corporation) and other asbestos companies committed over the years what many people to flooding the market with lethal products. The executives who made history last year were the president, plant manager and plant foreman of Film Recovery Systems Corporation, a nasty little silver-reclaiming operation in Elm Grove Village outside Chicago. The silver was recovered by cooking used X-ray films in vats of boiling cyanide. Film Recovery hired mostly illegal immigrants, who were afraid to protest working conditions covered by cooking used X-ray films in vats of boiling cyanide. Since the law was applied so properly, so rightly, so common-sensically that one would be foolish to expect such usage to appear again soon. It was a sort of Halley's Comet of Justice.

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During the trial, the Illinois prosecutor accused the defendants of "callousness, disregard of human lives, and exposing people to dangerous products all for the sake of profits." No wonder the verdict had been so modestly praised. If that's enough to rate a murder charge, our whole commercial system is at risk. If it were to become a commonplace, we could look forward to a lineup of accused corporate executives extending out of the courthouse and around the block several times. Since there is no statute of limitations on murder, prosecutors would be obliged to charge those executives at Firestone who, a few years back, allegedly killed and injured no telling how many people by flooding the market with fourteen million tires they knew to be defective and the executives at Ford who sent the Pinto into circulation knowing its gas tank was poorly designed that a rear-end collision could turn the car into a fire trap (several dozen men, women and children were burned alive). From the pharmacological fraternity would come such as Dr. William Shedden, former vice-president and chief medical officer for Eli Lilly Research Laboratories, who recently pleaded guilty to fifteen criminal counts relating to the marketing of Or- aripax, an arthritis drug that the Food and Drug Administration says has been "pos- sibly" linked to forty-nine deaths in the United States and several hundred abroad, not to mention the hundreds who have suffered nonfatal liver and kidney failure. Seems as how the folks at Lilly, when they sought approval from the FDA, forgot to mention that the drug was already known to have killed at least twenty-eight people in Europe. (Shedden was fined $15,000; Lilly, which earned $3.1 billion in 1984, was fined $85,000.) And let's be sure to save an early murder indictment for those three sly dogs at SmithKline Beckman Corporation who whizzed their product, Selzyn, through FDA without mentioning that it had caused severe liver damage in some pa- tients in France. False labels were used to peddle it in this country, where it has been linked to thirty-six deaths and five hundred cases of liver and kidney damage.

Now comes a ripple of books that, were there any justice, would put a dozen or so hangdog executives in the dock. Three of the books make particularly persuasive cases. Paul Brodeur's Out- rageous Misconduct: the Asbestos In- dustry on Trial (Pantheon) is an account of how the largest manufacturer of as- bestos products, Manville Corporation) and other asbestos com- panies committed over the years what one plaintiff's attorney called "The great- est mass murder in history," which is pos-
Manville's attorney, and Lewis Brown, president of Manville, if their physical examination proved it turned out to be a Success. Roemer, Brown Vector, Robins said, in effect. Sure. But if they show our work has that disease, but we don't tell them they are sick because we did, they would stop working and sue us. Roemer recalled asking, 'Mr. Brown, in the mean time, would you let them work until they dropped dead?' And Brown answered, 'Yes, we'd save a lot of money that way.'

Saying money, along making money, was obviously the paramount objective of A.H. Robins. Too. This was evident even from the beginning, when Robins officials learned—six months before marketing the device nationally—that the Dakron Shield's multimillion tail had a winking tendency and could carry potentially lethal venom life into use. So the company held up marketing the shield until the further testing to be done made safe? No, no. That would have been a death knell, the $750,000 they had paid the shield's inventors. Though Robins knew it was putting its customers in jeopardy, it hustled the shield onto the market with promotional claims that it was "safe" and "superior" to all other intradermal devices; and never, during the four years the shield was on the market, did A.H. Robins conduct winking studies of the string. The shield's promotional literature, by the way, was a classic example of phony drugstore hype. After Robins claimed the shield kept the pregnancy rate at 1.1 percent; the company was well aware it shield all left at least a percent pregnancy rate, one of the most accomplished in the business. A.H. Robins also advertised that the device could be easily inserted in "even the most sensitive woman," although in fact many doctors, before inserting the shield, had to give local anesthetics, and many women were in pain for months.

Not long after the shield went on the market, Wayne Crowley, one of the few heroes in this sad, a qualified surgeon at Chapel Stick, which manufactured many of the shields for A.H. Robins, rejected 10,000 of them because he was convinced the string could kill bacteria. His body overruled him with the remark, "Your conscience doesn't pay your salary." Crowley also suggested a method for stopping the winking, but his technique was rejected because it would have cost an extra five cents per device. Crowley kept on complaining (he would ultimately become an immigrant and his name was also finally fltrated Daniel French, president of Chapel Stick, who flew Crowley to Washington to contact the home office. French was told to mind his own business and not worry about the quality of the shield, which prompted him to go into the corporate sack to find out what the hell was going on. He wrote A.H. Robins: "It is not the intention of this company to provide any unauthorized improvements in the Dakron Shield. My only interest in the Dakron Shield is to produce it at the lowest possible price and, therefore, increase Robins' gross profit level.

Of course, when thousands of women began dying, screaming, cursing and screaming, it got a little difficult to pretend that all is well with one's product, but more than that, the A.H. Robins men, now best, never recalling the gadget, never sending a word to doctors about possible side effects, and continuing to the last—continuing right up to the present even—losing hundreds of millions of dollars in lawsuits—argue that the shield was a one-hundred percent safe. Robins school spirit was beautifully capitulated by one of its officials who told National Observer, "But after all, we are in business to sell the thing, to make a profit. I don't know we're trying to go out and sell products that are going to be dangerous to the women. We have to do what has been done all the bad things in big headlines."

The World is where the corporate executive who will not save the easy insincerity of 'or what have you.'

The ideal of treating corporate murderers as just plain murderers strikes many people as excessive. Some lawyers said they were afraid it would confuse people, generally because a bald murder charge is usually associated with a bullet in the gut or an ice pick in the neck in the early 1970s. He says that immediately after the company lost its first Dakron Shield lawsuit, its superiors or-dered him (they deny it) to search through the company's files and burn every document that the thought might be used against A.H. Robins in future law-suits—documents that, in Tuttles words, indicated "knowledge and complicity, if any, of top officials at what stage of the game appeared to be a grim situa-tion." Fortunately for the company, Tut-tle did not obey orders. He took pos-session of some of the juiciest documents and kept them. Just why he rebelled isn't clear. Perhaps it was because Tuttle, a plain little guy who admits he isn't the smartest attorney in the world, was tired of having his employees telling him round the clock, which they often did. He says he did it because he was ashamed that "I personally lacked the courage" to challenge the order and "I wanted some soap for my own conscience as an attorney." Whatever his motivation, Tuttle sat on the justifi cated files for nearly ten years. He moved on to other jobs, finally winding up, a born-again Chris-tian, or the Oral Roberts University law faculty. Watching the Dakron Shield trials from arc, troubled by the plaintiffs' in-ability to cope with A.H. Robins' cover-up, Tuttle finally decided to step forward and provide the material their attorneys needed to finish the big breakthrough. A lucky windfall in that it was the only way victims could overcome the tremendous inequity in legal firepower: in the way they mustered defense, corporate mur-ders bear no resemblance to the broken-down, half-nuts, penniless drifters on death row, dozens of whom have no attorney at all. Corporate killers like
At a recent Mississippi execution, the prisoner’s protracted gasping for breath became such an ugly spectacle that prison authorities ordered witnesses out of the death chamber. That sort of execution for Manville executives who specialized in spreading long-term asbestosis among thousands of lives would certainly be appropriate.

The Mississippi execution was a perfect example of what is wrong with capital punishment. The prisoner—rather, the victim—was a man named George Spooner, who had been convicted of murdering a guard at a corrections facility. He had been on death row for 22 years and had been denied a stay of execution by the United States Supreme Court. The execution was to take place at 7 p.m. on December 9, 1983. 

However, the execution was delayed for several hours due to technical problems. During this time, the prisoner began to gasp for air and his body started to convulse. The executioners tried to stop the convulsions by administering medication, but it was too late. The prisoner died of what is now known as “death chamber asbestosis.”

This horrific spectacle is just one of many examples of the barbarity of capital punishment. The use of lethal injection in executions has not been shown to be more humane than other methods of execution. In fact, it has been shown to cause unnecessary pain and suffering.

The use of asbestosis as a punishment for capital offenses is a clear example of how the criminal justice system is used to profit from the suffering of others. Asbestosis is a disease caused by exposure to asbestos, a mineral that is used in the construction of many buildings and products. It can cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, and other serious health problems.

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The use of asbe...
The toppling of Ferdinand Marcos and Baby Doc Duvalier has focused attention on the wealth that Third World oligarchs have plundered and stashed abroad. The collapse of oil has left countries like Mexico and Venezuela begging for relief from their debts. These two stories—capital flight and international debt—are part of the same story. In some cases, the wealthiest classes of poor countries have actually sent more money out of their countries than foreign borrowing has brought in—and often it’s the same money. American banks have promoted, and profited from, both sides of the transaction. Sometimes the money never even leaves the United States. The entire cycle is completed with a few bookkeeping entries in New York.

By James S. Henry
Illustration by T. Michael Gardiner
Hidden capital exports are only part of the story. In fact, the U.S. banks' share of loans to the major Latin American debtors has been less than 30 percent. By contrast, the share of the foreign private capital from these nations is rumored to be 70 to 80 percent for Mexico and Venezuela, and 50 to 60 percent for Brazil and Argentina. This means that the U.S. as a whole is a net debtor, unless one takes into account the hidden capital exports which are not included in the statistics overlook both its biggest import, arms, and its second-biggest export, drugs. And in the case of Mexico, a second method of calculation produces surprisingly similar results. This is simply to take all the money that’s known to have flown in from abroad, and assume that the rest flowed back out again.

Both methods indicate that capital flight exceeded foreign loans by at least $20 billion, and payments to contract-takers and public officials. This loss of capital is widely rumored to have exceeded with over one billion dollars.

Western bankers looked the other way as their money was wasted. The loan fees were lucrative, and many of the banks' corporate customers were making bundles on these "white elephants." The banks also complacently assumed that the U.S. government would never allow either Mexico or Citibank to go bankrupt. Furthermore, until 1981 or so, no one at any particular bank knew just how much money the other banks were lending to Mexico.

De la Madrid’s first promise when he took office was to seek a "moral renova­tion" and rebuild the confidence of Mexico’s investors. He lectured the nation on the need for "belt-tightening." Unem­ployment grew to over 30 percent and real wages sank to 1963 levels. It was thus little embarrassed that this was the second of the "debt crisis": the story of what hap­pened to all the money.

Consider Mexico. On March 6, a Mex­ico City newspaper published a list of 575 names of Mexican nationals, each of whom has at least one million dollars in de­posits with foreign banks. The ex­posure of these "sacacédulas"—people who take out deposits—caused an uproar because it comes just as Mexico is once again pleading bankruptcy to its interna­tional creditors. The U.S. Treasury, Mexico maintains that it needs another six billion to ten billion dollars of new foreign loans and interest subsidies this year to avert insolvency. This would be the second major bailout for Mexico in the last three years.

One example of the "sacacédulas" may be the president of Mexico himself, Miguel de la Madrid. A Harvard-bred technocrat who had been as­sistant to the previous president, Lopez Portillo, whom he had served as minister of bud­get. He had never before held elective office. But then some say that no one really holds elective office in Mexico.

Portillo was a stout law professor whose relatives were reputed to be prof­ligate spending, wildly optimistic growth promises, and loans that were un­derwritten even by Mexican standards. All of these statistics overlook both its biggest import, arms, and its second-biggest export, drugs. And in the case of Mexico, a second method of calculation produces surprisingly similar results. This is simply to take all the money that’s known to have flown in from abroad, and assume that the rest flowed back out again.

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Another very important category of U.S. assets that Latin Americans have been sending away is a "foreign asset" that is often physically kept away. From a financial standpoint, it represents a net claim that for- eigners have on the local currency. This helps to account for the curious fact that there are now about three $100 billion in circulation for each man, woman, and child in the United States. A recent U.S. Treasury "guessimate" is that perhaps $20 billion worth of them are offshore.

Cash is also a preferred method of transferring money. Sizable accounts are built up in banks in Miami. Venezuela transfers to Miami a significant fraction of the $1.5 billion in cash in 1981 alone on the Treasury forms that enter to the U.S. to have it off. Currency has long poured into the Miami Federal Reserve district because of drug traffic. Miami has a very large Cuban and San Antonio Federal Reserve districts have reported net receipts of currency. This is one of the reasons that Mexican banks have been carrying across the border in quantity, all the pesos received in San Francisco's receipts during the past two years. The Mexican bank merger with the Phippine capital flight and a shift of dollar money to the West Coast.

Who owns these accounts? The typical Mexican investor with dollars at home or abroad is pretty middle class. As one writer recently put it, "Even the Mexican City show-shine boys stockpile dollar notes. It is a sign of prestige, the key fact about flight capital is that it is highly visible. In the local bank, in the bankers' wet dream, the super-rich. This is one reason for "Global Elite," a list of 5,000 or so people from around the world who are supposed to be the richest individuals in the world. The U.S. supposedly has about 50,000, or five percent of the population, and a mixed one.

To what extent were American bankers aware of what was going on? It's a nice question. Some observers feel they must have been knowing, at least willing, participants, just like the middlemen in phony asset scams throughout financial history. This suspicion requires an as- sumption about the intelligence, cun- ning, and foresight of bankers that, in my experience, is not warranted. What's in- disputable is that wealthy Mex- icans invest their own capital abroad, they are much more cautious than the foreign bankers who finance the local country's debt. It is also indisputable that leading American banks are as involved in ferry- ing capital out of Mexico as they were in lending money to the country in the first place. The U.S. banks that are the most aggressively involved in helping wealthy Mexicans are Citibank, Mor- gan Guaranty, Bank of America, and JPMorgan. They all have extensive networks of foreign exchange dealers that have been known to help their private customers evade even the restriction by settling in "parallel" foreign exchange swaps that avoid the banking system entirely. So in 1979, the major banks used their customers to help their own governments. The favorable method is the so-called "back-to-back" loan, whereby the bank "lends" the client

Probably two-thirds or more of Mexican flight capital has found its way into time deposits. Now some large Mexican depositors have begun to shift their holdings into U.S. government securities, because of concern about the health of U.S. banks that have loaned too much money to places like Mexico.

A s the dollar has weakened, the U.S. banks have done exactly what they get paid to do. They have essentially continued doing exactly what they get paid to do. They have essentially continued

The U.S. Treasury polls American bankers, security dealers, and other busi- nesses for details of their transactions with foreigners. These data are riddled with imperfections, most of which lead to underestimations. Still, they do show the pat- terns that are consistent with other things we know. They indicate that between 1975 and 1985 Latin Americans and their Caribbean and Latin American counterparts, 30 to 40 percent of their short-term deposits with U.S. banks by at least $33 billion. At the same time U.S. banks were increasing their loans to Latin America by about $50 billion. Thus the basis of their activities by U.S. banks to Latin America was that of a middleman between the short-term deposits of the countries' elite to the medium-term loans demanded by their governments.
A Letter to a Friend

By Nils Peterson

Illustration by Stephen Leflar
Though we stop regularly for diesel oil, it is clear that Eros drives us all. The bodies of the
young quitter with it.
BODY AND SOUL

By Sara Graham

PHOTO-PAINTING BY MARLY STONE

Maries was middleaged and had only recently lost a few of her more than two hundred pounds when she became involved with her own body in a rather aesthetically sensual manner.

Though Marie had never been one to confuse bathroom jokes with literature or smut with art, the process of elimination fascinated her with its qualities of urgency and basic satisfaction. It was, in fact, one of those rarely spoken experiences for which she had profound respect. So, although the irony did not escape her, Marie was not shocked to find herself in a most heart-rending sympathy with the soft smooth surface of her fat ageing thighs while sitting on the toilet one morning shortly after her 45th birthday—perhaps it might have been Theresa’s 45th birthday.

Marie wanted to tell Theresa about it so they could roar with laughter before becoming fascinated by what it might mean over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. She remembered rubbing the thin smoothness of Theresa’s legs, immobile, aching; Theresa saying, “Oh, that feels so much better”, but in a few moments needing more morphine and one more or less pillow under them.

“Requiescat in pace old friend,” she whispered, devoid of faith. It was true that after she had removed the catholic, straightened the cold thin legs, removed the pillow one last time, straightened the sheets, washed the beautiful chiseled face, penciled in the eyebrow lost to chemotherapy and/or radiation, and closed the eye that insisted on opening a bit as though pecking at the watchful moon, Theresa’s body, in its final stillness, bore a semblance of peace.

“The heart is at peace at last, my darling girl,” said the mother.

“Thank God the agony is over,” said one sister.

“It looks like she’s smiling at us,” said the other.

So do we create a final peace for our lost companions. So do we create an end to our own intolerance of pain and fear of death. Does the pain stop at death? Is the spirit free of the miserable bondage? It could as well be that like an amputee the spirit continues to suffer the body’s afflictions, Ignorant cowards and lovers, we solve the mystery otherwise, concluding in perfectly fearful faith that which we have no way of knowing.

Several weeks after discovering her thighs, Marie, nervous and bored with undone tasks at hand, went to her room to change clothes. Disrobed, she lay down on the bed, experiencing an immediate and remarkable comfort. Lying upon her side with on big round knee bent, the perfect small foot pressed upon the bed near her hip, she rested her hand on her waist deep within the curved arc of rib and hip. She ran her hand up her side brushing past the small breast to her armpit, then down again into the deep cavity of waist and on up the smooth high softness of the huge hip, then down the previously discovered wonder of her thigh.

This angle rounding forth from her waist seemed magnificent to Marie. As though caressing a reclining Renaissance nude sculpture she experienced herself as a work of art. She was once enlightened by the pleasure of her own beauty.

To some unknown, to the preeminent behind the curtain in her own mind, she confessed her love of this grand body, this sensuous frame, this “all too solid flesh” which two-score and five had transported her consciousness. She proclaimed a passionate love of her own body and the agony and fear of losing it. She prayed to hold body and soul together. She wept.

Theresa said, several days before she died, “My spirit is getting fat,” with some concern—as if a reducing diet were in order. It was perhaps only an aspect of her integrity that Theresa was worried about any sort of fairness, for cancer had quite effectively concluded her lifelong struggle against extra weight. For the duration Marie took comfort in Theresa’s fat spirit, considering it a harbinger of immortality.

Marie endured migraines for several months after Theresa’s death. One memorable episode was relieved by nothing but a near overdose of opiates after two and a half hours of agony. The pain was so extreme that she was unable to lie still with the wet cold rag which usually brought relief. She was up and down, taking pills, pacing, then running amuck.

Death occurred to Marie as a way out, but, suddenly, she knew with absolute certainty that there was no guarantee the pain would not go on. She knew her body would look peaceful in death, but she did not know if the pain would really stop. What if it went on and on throughout eternity? And what if Theresa’s fat spirit had simply taken on the agony of her wasted body? Marie, aching for a return to the solace of tradition, yearned for faith.

Upon such frequent occasions of existential discontent, Marie began to console herself by placing a hand on her waist, if standing, or thigh, if sitting. One of these times she recalled an awareness of her own dying mother’s body—how beautifully smooth and soft her mother’s skin seemed, like that of a young girl. This singular, sensual experience was recalled in Marie’s body as well as in her mind.

Now Marie began to wonder if her recent awareness of the beauty of her own body was not simply a prefiguration of her own death. Marie began to be afraid.

Sara Graham is a writer living in Portland.

An illustration in CSD by artist Marly Stone won first place in the 1985 Sigma Delta Chi regional journalism competition. She lives in Portland.
Maud is eighty-six years old and weighs just that many pounds. She is nearly bald; her skin is worn and loose where the catheter tube emerges. She is bare like a young girl, but the work of decades has left its erosion.

Maud had a stroke years ago, and then another and another. She doesn’t open her eyes, never speaks. She is fed with a big plastic syringe that the nurses slip past her resisting lips; the right amount of pureed chicken or spinach tickles the back of her tongue and makes her swallow, involuntarily.

Tonight I discover that Maud has cellulitis, an odd but common infection under the skin. Her right hip is red, swollen, hot; she has a temperature of 104 degrees. I call her doctor. He asks me, “If you were her granddaughter, would you want me to treat her?” “I’m not her granddaughter,” I answer. “You know,” he sighs, alone in his office, wanting to go home. “I promised that lady her granddaughter,” I answer. “You know how you can stand it,” the niece tells me. “I don’t want to know—” she says in a whisper. “It is a terrible place,” never having been inside. I tell her that in every nursing home, there are people who scream; that they scream without warning, at private, intimate moments. “I ask her where such people should go,” I say. “I know she would stop them from screaming. She listens and I know she is uncompromising.” Nursing homes are terrible places, she says, and it is because what happens there is terrible.

I am often asked how I can stand my work, and I know that it is very going on that my questions mean. Not only the uninhibited, but other nurses and physicians often dislike this “gutter work” that I do: part-time charge nurse in an old, not very good, urban nursing home, working with the sickest patients, the ones who won’t recover from an unfortunate age. Some of the nurses I work with are always looking for a “better” job, competing with thousands of other nurses for the hospital positions grown suddenly scarce in recent years—hospital jobs where patients come and go quickly, and sometimes get well. I feel a measure of peace here, a sense of belonging, that is rare for me anywhere else. Partly it is because I know what to do, because I am competent here. Over the years, though, the ease that I’ve felt since my first job as a nurse’s aide when I was sixteen has become layered with fondness, the way one grows used to a house and its little quirks, the slightly warped happiness from the sightings upstairs window. Here all is aslant, and I have to lift my head a bit to see it clearly. Coming in to begin a shift, I pass the activity room, crowded with hump-backed, white-haired people asleep in wheelchairs, facing a man playing the “Star-Spangled Banner” on a musical saw. In the corner, one upright, perfectly bald man spins slowly round and round in his chair, like a wind-up doll, bumping the wall at last and spinning back the other way. This is a scene of astonishing absurdity, and no one is paying any attention to it. We take it for granted, like the faint, lingering smell of urine tinged with kitchen steam and disinfectant. I leave the elevator on the third floor and step into furnace heat—July without air conditioning—and the queer conversation of the confused that will dog my steps all evening long. They give me this gift of skewed perspective like a gift of non-Euclidean sight, so that I become as willing to dip and bend with the motion of a damaged cortex as a tree in wind. I pass medicine room to room, and in each room the televisions are tuned to the same channel. For my 4:00 pass, it is “People’s Court,” plaintiff and defendant, as I travel down the hall. At 6:00 we watch “Jeopardy.” “What is the only martial medal that can be given to noncommissioned officers?” asks the host, in Monter’s room; then I pass next door to Sylvia, and together we guess: “The Medal of Honor.” And we are right. Bent over a task, preoccupied, I am startled by the peculiar speech of the nurse-worn, its sudden clarity. Up here each day is the same, a refrain, and nothing can be taken for granted, nothing.

I know how many people hate nursing home; they hate the work, the notion, the possibility. A friend of mine lives next door to a local nursing home, and she tells me she hears people screaming in the evening, unseem, their voices leaping the tall fence between. She assumes the worst, my friend: that they scream from neglect, from anguish, from terror. She says it is a “terrible place,” never having been inside. I tell her that in every nursing home, there are people who scream; that they scream without warning, at private, intimate moments. “I ask her where such people should go,” I say. “I know she would stop them from screaming. She listens and I know she is uncompromising.” Nursing homes are terrible places, she says, and it is because what happens there is terrible.

I am similarly fearful about big machinery, in boiler rooms and factories. I am out of place, adrift, and fear the worst: is that shower of sparks routine, or does it signal disaster? What is that loud noise? I enjoy my work, but I enjoy it in moments that are separated from each other by long stretches of fatigue and concentration. I enjoy it best when it’s over. I catch myself, hot and worn at the end of the day, hoping the man I keep expecting to die will live until the next shift. I get irritable, and the clock creeps past 11:30, past midnight, and I’m still sitting with my feet propped up, trying to decipher my scribbled notes. The undone tasks, the unexplained events that want explaining, badger and chafe. And everybody dies.

My ideals twitch on occasion, like a dog’s leg in dream. I want no one to lie in urine a moment, I want every ice pitcher filled at every moment. For a long time, for many years, I disliked the use of sedatives and antipsychotics to knock out the wound-up chatter of restless, disoriented souls. The orders read: “p.r.n. agitation”—as necessary—and this is the nurse’s power to ignore, and the power to mute. So easy to misuse, so simple. But like a shot of morphine can break the spiralling cycle of pain, so can a spiral of panic be broken—not for my comfort, but for the comfort of the nursing home. Sadie screams at me from far down the hall: “Help! It’s an emergency!” And she screams over and over, rocking back and forth, till I come to see: she leans over and points at the blazing fire under her bed, a fire she sees and hears and smells, raging out of control. I see no fire. I coo to her, hushing; she babbles on. Finally I lie beside her; she is stiff and yearns to leap up. And, at last, I go to prepare the syringe: “From the doctor,” I tell her, because Sadie loves her medicine, and she falls asleep.

The responsibility is mine, the consequences are mine. I have to be sure about choices no one can be sure about. I call for nurse’s aides to come in and hold the flailing arms and legs of Charlie, more than six feet tall, furious at the world that confounds him so. He squirms and tries to bite me when I tilt his hip with the needle. We all fumble across the bed together, grunting. And I know that the visitor, passing by sees only the force, the convenience, the terrible thing we have done to this person: the abduction.

The same is true of the small, just barely there, acid in the heat. It’s true of the drooling, the patter of nonsense in the dining room. Visitors tremble, knowing Grandma is here, and wish they had the courage to bring her home, out of this awful place.

Could this inadvertent audience, my patients’ families, see these scenes and believe me when I say it is a labor of love? Some do; they bake blueberry pastries for me in the kitchen, make the hanky-panky over the arm, cluck their tongues. “I don’t know,” my friend says. “I found him sleeping.” The niece says, after an afternoon at Aunt Louise’s bedside.

The difference here is in what we call love, the gap of definition between their words and mine. We are broken—but we seem to really want to know—is a burden of despair, a personal burden, bred of fear and impotence in equal amounts. This personal despair imagines as its opposite, its anima, a personal love and a
Sadie screams at me from far down the hall: "Help! It's an emergency!" She leans over and points at the blazing fire under her bed, a fire she sees and hears and smells, raging out of control. I see no fire. I coo to her, hushing; she babbles on.

Death is the breath after the last one. The living let their own held breaths go, and smile, and in the solemnity is an affirmation. I like dead bodies: at no other time am I so aware of my own animation. I am a witness, an attendant, to a forewarned truth.

I have learned not to make personal what I see; not, as it were, to anthropomorphize my patients' experiences. Just as the witness imagines himself, completed, transformed to this place and trapped, so does he grant full imagination to those who are.

and control my urine, and I know these for the blessings they are. I am young enough, still, to take care of the old. But these are the most treasured of graces, these graces of health, and I might lose them tomorrow, forever. These are my last words, the old man says. "No, these are my last words. No, no, wait..." We have three-part myths of death here, and first is that no one dies when we think they will, always later. Second, if a person long ill and silent suddenly comes to life, he or she will die soon. And last, people die in threes. Within a day or week of one death will follow two more. Just last week, Monte died, days after we'd predicted, and now Mr. H. down the hall is talking again, after months of sleep.

Death is anticipated, waited on in suspense. It is like waiting in a very long line that snakes around a corner so you can't see the end. When the last breath is drawn it is startling; here is a breath, and another, and another. Death is the breath after the last one. Always fresh, always solemn, and not unlike a childhood: the living let their own held breaths go, and smile, and in the solemnity is an affirmation. Here it is. I stroke the skin so suddenly and mysteriously waxen. I pull out tubes and patch holes. I live dead bodies: at no other time am I so aware of my own animation. This isn't because I am lucky and this poor fool is not, but because here before me is the mute, incontrovertible evidence. Some force drives these shells, and it drives me still. I am a witness, an attendant, to a forewarned truth.

Still I have my own despair: For me it is the things undone that break my back sometimes, the harried rush with people calling, and all those unexplained.

get back to work.

I have to remember to temper my criticism of the aides, who work at least as hard as I do in a job of numbing repetition and labor. Hardest to remember when so much is left unfinished is what I have managed to do. I think I've been of no help at all, and then realize how little help I'd be if I get discouraged and quit. Every task, no matter how hate, every kind word, no matter how brief, makes a difference, in my first job as an aide I cared for a Swedish woman named Florence, who

and had only one leg. She was happy and confused, and didn't know she'd lost her limb. Time and again she would try to walk, and fall. I tied her in her chair, in her bed, and over and over she managed to untitle herself and fall, thud, to the hard tile floor. She was always surprised. Sometimes I would call her, raise a plate over her and asked, "What am I going to do with you?" And

she looked up from where she sprawled and said, "Don't stop trying, dear." Don't stop trying. This is far from the best nursing home. It isn't the worst. I rent, jump to complain, go home frustrated. It should be better. But the aides are changed, people are fed, for the most part each one is treated with kindness—a clumsy, patronizing kindness at times, but many of them do not discriminate these fine points. Kindness is enough. Thousands, hundreds of thousands of people have joined these ranks, saved. There is no place to go but on, and on.

I like dead people and all their appren- ticed fellows like Maud, who, slowly, is learning to die. And I like this place, with its cocky, tepid cement logic. I will feed Maud her squirts of puree and a few minutes later Sadie will announce she is the Queen of Germany, and requires royal treatment. Callia will cough up blood, and, as I consider my options, I will hear distant bedrails shake, the curses, the rhythmic, patterning singing. Sometimes the borders shift even further. I sprawl across a bed, fiddling with

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Roberta's leaking catheter, trying to dis- entangle her fingers from hair. The tube feeding drops on my leg. Who is keeper, who is kept? This is the Marx Brothers all grown up, sapstitch mature, life imitat- ing art imitating life. Down the hall the Greek Chorus begins, explaining the meaning and the mystery as the melo- dramatic story limp skis.
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**How to RELATE to HANDICAPPED PEOPLE**

**I.** In the past, handicapped people weren't an issue because they weren't seen around much. They were "shut-ins."

**By John Callahan**

**II.** Today, handicapped people are more visible than ever. Yet people are often still uncomfortable around them. In an attempt to be appropriate, people tend to overcompensate.

**III.** The first thing to realize is that the handicapped are just like you or me!

**IV.** The correct way to approach a handicapped person:

- **A.** EYES (look to make eye contact)
- **B.** FROM HANDICAP (handicapped folks can't always hear in effect)
- **C.** APROPRIATE ADDRESS (address the handicapped person using the latest pop-culture)
- **D.** APPROPRIATE CONVERSATIONAL REFERENCES (mention the special circumstance's need)

**V.** Don't be afraid to ask questions—children are spontaneous and uninhibited in their curiosity.

**VI.** When should you help a handicapped person? (Many people have expressed anxiety regarding this issue.) Basically, you must use your own judgement.

- **A.** HAVE A BEAN AND BE BOTHERED
- **B.** MEET A RABBI TO SEE IF THEY NEED HELP
- **C.** ARE COOL
- **D.** NOT TELL THEM WHAT TO DO

**VII.** Handicapped people can be helpful to you sometimes. Let them! Handicapped folks get a special sense of usefulness when they are on the helping end of a situation.

**VIII.** If you enjoy a handicapped person's company, what's next?

- **A.** HAVE A SANDWICH
- **B.** MEET A RABBI TO SEE IF THEY NEED HELP
- **C.** ARE COOL
- **D.** NOT TELL THEM WHAT TO DO

**IX.** Over the years, many myths have arisen. Here are a few we've heard one too many times!

**X.** Odd 'n' Ends—how to communicate problems.

**XI.** Test Your Knowledge!

Below are the answers to the questions:

- **A.** HAVE A SANDWICH
- **B.** MEET A RABBI TO SEE IF THEY NEED HELP
- **C.** ARE COOL
- **D.** NOT TELL THEM WHAT TO DO
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San Salvador is a city of extremes—tiny and cardboard shanties line the steep slopes of the barricada (ravine) that skirts the "Metro Center," a sprawling air-conditioned mall complete with supermarket and a McDonald's. Across town the public market offers a sharp contrast—a labyrinth of plastic covered stalls where queso fresco (soft country cheese) is stacked up next to baskets of live guineas, freshly butchered pigs and turtle eggs. The flies, smells and crush of people in the intense wet heat are almost overwhelming.

Wandering through both markets it is easy to forget this is a country at war with itself. The constant drone of helicopters and truckloads of troops are everywhere. Periodically, the bombing of the countryside can be heard in the city, but it easily passes for thunder. But the war is distant.

The brutally chaotic days of death squads and massacres by uniformed troops have given way to something new. After six years in the spotlight of North American media and nearly $2 billion in U.S. aid and advice, the Salvadoran military has learned how to conduct a war without getting on the wrong side of world opinion. At the same time, the military's control of El Salvador's "democratic" government and of the civilian population seems more far-reaching than ever. The war is clearly not over; both sides admit it is stalemated. But its character has changed dramatically. It is no longer solely a military conflict.

Insider, the prison feels more like a Kasbah than a penal institution. Prisoners sell everything from handmade toys and baskets to cigarettes and pupusas. This thriving free market is operated from little tech classes ranging from basic literacy through Marxist political theory. They maintain their own code of discipline and field a soccer team, Equipo Farabundo Martí, currently ops in the prison league.

The prison director appreciates the order side of COPPES' organizing efforts. He hopes to encourage the common prisoners to organize themselves along the same lines, though he admits he's not sure how to instill the "social consciousness" that seems to be the essential ingredient.

Mariona is a microcosm—in the same way COPPES has struggled to carve out a liberated zone against the wishes of the prison authorities, much of the civilian population of El Salvador has organized to create a small opening for change in a system dominated by a small oligarchy for 200 years. This domination has taken on a democratic face in the last two years, and even assuming the best of President José Napoleon Duarte's intentions, the country is still controlled by the oligarchy's long-term partner: the military. Mariona figures prominently as a link in the chain that imposes the rest of Salvadoran society.

Today, in the strange arithmetically cold logic of body counts, things do appear to be improving. Instead of the monthly tabulations of literally hundreds of corpses that would turn up in the streets or in body dumps like El Playón during the early eighties, deliberate kill-
Deliberate killings of civilians by security forces and death squads have now been rein in to a "palatable" 20 or so a month. While fewer are being killed, more are being put into the prison system.

Rings of civilians by security forces and death squads have now been rein in to a "palatable" 20 or so a month. While fewer are being killed, more are being put into the prison system. Mariona's political prisoner sector has grown from 660 in January, 1986 to 850 in May. Many of these inmates would have simply turned up dead a few years ago, but now the military knows it's just as effective to salt them away in Mariona. Unless they're a dead body involved, the foreign press doesn't seem to care.

These days, while still struggling with the armed opposition, the military has increasing interest in controlling or squelching civilian organizations opposed to government policies. Of the 850 political prisoners in Mariona, less than 50 were armed when they were captured, although all stand accused of being members of the guerrilla coalition, the FMLN. In fact, most prisoners had been active in unions, church, student and active in unions, doesn't seem to care.

Dead bodies involved, the foreign press no longer the ratings grab it briefly was. Part of the greatly reduced press coverage is proof embarassing. Many recent Mariona arrivals spoken with testified to just such this sort of psychological torture. Several also mentioned being given coffee laced with some kind of drug, after which none remember what happened or what they said.

Such treatment of POWs during the Korean War outraged the U.S. military. Back then we were calling it brainwashing. In El Salvador, the U.S. military advisor wasn't losing much sleep over the same techniques being put to use by the military. "It's the sort of issue about whether or not four days of sleep deprivation represents torture." He lamented the fact that "they really have only 15 days to get everything we need on any given arrival," or at least get rid of Mariona and are out of reach.

The very fact that these people are surviving their detention at all is pointed to an improvement of the human rights situation. This view is very popular within the U.S. Embassy, a concrete compound dug in behind a fence of high walls and fences shored up in a special chain-link skin to guard against rocket attacks. Inside this bunker, the foreign service official assigned specifically to monitoring human rights conditions, followed the Salvadoran press accounts of killings and mistreatment by the military, and then come up with statistics which become proof of this sort of psychological torture. Several also mentioned being given coffee laced with some kind of drug, after which none remember what happened or what they said.

The Salvadoran press accounts of killings and mistreatment by the military, and then come up with statistics which become proof of this sort of psychological torture. Several also mentioned being given coffee laced with some kind of drug, after which none remember what happened or what they said.
trol over the movements and access of the press corps in El Salvador, who have a difficult time getting out of the capital unless its on a government-conducted junket. But more fundamentally, the shape of the war is no longer the simple and violent sort of story that neatly fits the format of those compiling our news. The change is not accidental, but by design — the distortion of the Pentagons experience during and since Vietnam. The newly sanitized war in El Salvador has shifted into a more brutal, less vicariously violent mode — low-intensity conflict.

It’s a far more sophisticated and high-handed approach to countenancing with rev- olution in the Third World than direct mili- tary intervention. Many concerns about our outcomes in Central America revolve around it becoming another Vietnam. Oddly enough, these concerns are shared by the Pentagon. One mistake the U.S. military feels it made in South- east Asia was giving largely free rein to the press. Pictures of our boys in bodybags and napalm fires on the even- ing news helped mobilize domestic op- position. The smart military men re- sponsible for this threat are twofold; first, keep the journalists out of the field al- together — the news blackout of the inva- sion of Grenada was a proving ground — and second, maintain levels of conflict below the point that they draw the atten- tion of the press. It means digging in for a longer war of lesser intensity, one step back to take two steps forward, a war that can be maintained without interference from the home front.

This also fits into the other side of the lessor in Vietnam, that the war was won over the hearts and minds of those within a country at war. Winning superiority in a conventional military sense does not guarantee victory in wars that are less for territory than for the loyalty or obedience of a people. As Col. John Waghelstein, Commander of the Army’s Seventh Spec- ial Forces explains, “This type of conflict involves a struggle between socio-econo- mical warfare with the military being a distant fourth in many cases. Its total war of resistance to the United States trying for a quick and perhaps fleeting victory by the United States in the back, a lasting triumph is only secured by committing to a more all-embracing strategy that recognizes insurgency as permanent ideological warfare.

The lesson is beginning to be learned by the Salvadoran Army, which has modi- fied its conduct of the war in the coun- tradyside. Operation Phoenix, appropri- ately named for the granddaddy of all counterinsurgency operations in Viet- nam, opened with the customary heavy aerial bombardment and sweeps of ground troops into the area around the Guatape lake. It involved an aerial campaign, guerrilla-controlled zone 30 kilometers north of San Salvador. The ground troops of the operation were being moved to homes and crops, but instead waited for their orders. This operation was due to a long history of massacres by these same troops which would consider civilians as do willingly.

During these operations the civilians withdraw to taut, caves they’ve dug into the slopes of the volcanos stocked with enough food and water to get them through the 3-7 days the Army would usu- ally devote to these scorched earth sweeps. But in the case of Phoenix, the Army moved in to stay and longer than the civilian out.

When people emerged to replenish their supplies they were apprehended by the occupying troops. They pretended they weren’t killed but instead rounded up in holding areas where officers from the Army’s psyops division told them that the military was now their friend and that they should cooperate. The campesinos were then loaded into helicopters and airlifted to refugee camps in and around the capital where they joined the nearly half million desplazados — displaced people. It is estimated that another one million Salvadorans have fled the country entirely. Operation Phoenix netted the Army 1,000 campesanos who were forc- eably relocated in this manner.

This “vicarious action” is modeled after experiences elsewhere. In the case of El Salvador, the scorched earth opera- tions are followed up with Army-run medi- cal and dental clinics, passing candy out to kids, and generally tailoring economic and humanitarian relief to support the low-intensity strategy. Douglas Blaufarb, former CIA station chief, explained how U.S. aid is tied into the military pacifica- tion program.

“All of this was done under the rubric of refugee emergency as- sistance, resettlement and rural de- velopment, and peace enforcement (Agency for International Develop- ment) categories of approved ac- tivity. In order to be allowed to fund the civilian front of an unconditional war which could not have been pros- ecuted without the aid program.”

The more ominous side of such an unconditional war falls to the military and police forces. If economic assistance programs and other forms of “nation building” fail to coopt civilian opposition, then it’s important that alternative nation builders not be given the space to orga- nize. This strategy underlies the Sal- vadoran military’s relentless offensive against union, student and human rights groups and the Catholic Church, and what ulti- mately puts individuals like the Centeno brothers in Mariona.

Building Democracy

As the economy of El Salvador con- tinues to fail and unrest seems to boil over again, this sort of repression be- comes more essential to the govern- ment’s survival. The most recent aid package, $513 million in aid (85 percent of which goes to military operations), also including directing an additional $22 million to the Salvadoran police forces. This would be the first such aid since direct support of foreign police forces was abandoned in 1974 after their role in involvement in torture and assassination by the police in such places as Iran, Uganda and Vietnam came to light.

This time around, the police aid comes in the currently popular form of “counter- terrorist” support which, according to its sponsors, is designed to help profes- sionalize the police and aid them in their fight against urban terrorists. The killings of U.S. Marines in San Salvador’s Zona Rosa in June, 1985 is provided as a ra- tionale. The police forces already re- ceived $4.5 million to prime the pumps from monies reprogrammed this year from military assistance funds.

At the end of May the Duarte adminis- tration arrested 15 leaders from four prominent human rights organizations and accused them of being terrorists. If the $32 million in direct assistance to the police is approved, such tactics are bound to increase.

The question facing policy makers, and finally all of us, is how far we can go in aiding and directing the erosion of an- other police state in El Salvador and still delude ourselves that we are also build- ing and supporting the cause of democ- racy. The discrepancy is currently ac- cepted much the same way we do not accept different standards in our eco- nomic relations with the Third World. Products that we’ve banned at home — Dalkon shields, DOT, and other chem- icals, foods and pharmaceuticals we’ve found too dangerous to live with — are dumped on overseas markets. We seem willing to export retrograde political sys- tems that similarly would not be tolerated at home. At the heart of the problem is an attitude that clouds the way the U.S. views, and relates to the rest of the less developed world. One Embassy staffer, voicing her reluctance to get overly con- cerned about abuses and violations, ex- posed her deepest feelings about the people of this Third World nation: “The Salvadoran culture is a vio- lent one that also has big problems with alcoholism. If you should see a body lying in the gutter, I wouldn’t get upset. It’s probably just some poor drunk... After all, you can’t just push a button or something and have them turn Anglo-Saxon overnight.”

As it is disregard for the lives and hopes of our neighbors may ultimately bear a heavy cost. Just as the DOT we ban- ned from our shores is now returning in civilian clothing, the growing up in our waste, the world political ideologies we tolerate and cultivate overseas may unfortu- nately also find their way home.

Matt Wurker has recently visited El Salvador. A former Portland resident, he now lives in Los Angeles where he works with ElRemache, a project for Central Ameri- can refugees.

Instead of pursuing a quick and perhaps fleeting victory by wielding the big military stick, a lasting triumph is only secured by committing to a more all-encompassing strategy that recognizes insurgency as permanent ideological warfare.

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Clinton St. Quarterly 29
We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn’t, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by Orwellian nightmares.

But we had forgotten that alongside Orwell’s dark vision, there was another—slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling. Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World. Contrary to common belief even among the readers of the New Republic, Huxley did not prophesy the same thing Orwell warned we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy. Maturity and history As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that underpin it. What Huxley feared were those who would demand an end to the whole of information, and that we would lose the truth.

Orwell feared those who would deprive us of the truth of information, Huxley feared those who would lose the truth. Orwell feared that the truth would be reduced from us. Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of unreality. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of fiddles, the only happy and the centrepiece of an impotent and impotent society. As Huxley remarked in Brave New World Revisited, the civil wars that are taken into account in modern books, the civil wars that are fought by the arguments and the politicians who are doing it for the sake of being in the argument. In Brave New World, they are controlled by indulging pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us.
AMUSING

O URSELVES TO

DEATH

By Neil Postman
Illustration by Robert Williams

"Now... This"

Consider, for example, how you would proceed if you were given the opportunity to produce a television news show for any station concerned to attract the largest possible audience. You would, first, choose a cast of players, each of whom has a face that is both "likable" and "credible." Those who apply would, in fact, submit to you their eight-by-ten glossies, from which you would eliminate those whose countenances are not suitable for nightly display. This means that you will exclude women who are not beautiful or who are over the age of fifty, men who are bald, all people who are overweight or whose noses are too long or whose eyes are too close together. You will try, in other words, to assemble a cast of talking hair-dos. At the very least, you will want those whose faces would not be unwelcome on a magazine cover.

Christine Craft has just such a face, and so she applied for a co-anchor position on KMBC-TV in Kansas City. According to a lawyer who represented her in a sexual suit she later brought against the station, the management of KMBC-TV "loved Chrisine's look." She was accordingly hired in January 1981. She was fired in August 1981 because research indicated that her appearance "hampered viewer acceptance." What exactly does "hampered viewer acceptance" mean? And what does it have to do with the news? Hampered viewer acceptance means the same thing for television news as it does for any television show. Viewers do not like looking at the performer, if whom she lacks credibility. In the case of a theatrical performance, we have a sense of what that implies. The actor does not persuade the audience that he or she is the character being portrayed. But what does lack of credibility imply in the case of a news show? What character is a co-anchor playing? And how do we decide that the performance lacks verisimilitude? Does the audience believe that the newscaster is lying, that what is reported did not in fact happen, that something important is being concealed?

It is frightening to think that this may be so, that the perception of the truth of a report rests heavily on the acceptability of the newscaster. In the ancient world, there was a tradition of banning or killing the bearer of bad tidings. Does the television news show restore, in a curious form, this tradition? Do we banish those who tell us the news which we do not care

The average length of any television news story is forty-five seconds. It is simply not possible to convey a sense of seriousness about any event if its implications are exhausted in less than one minute's time.

The American humorist H. Allen Smith once suggested that of all the worrisome words in the English language, the scariest is "uh oh," as when a physician looks at your X-rays, and with knitted brow says, "Uh oh," I should like to suggest that the words "Now... this" are as ominous as any all the more so because they are spoken without knitted brow—indeed, with a kind of idiot's delight. The phrase, if that's what it may be called, adds to our grammar a new part of speech, a conjunction that does not connect anything to anything but does the opposite: separates everything from everything. As such, it serves as a compact metaphor for the discontinuities in so much that passes for public discourse in present-day America.

"Now... this" is commonly used on radio and television newscasts to indicate that what one has just heard or seen has no relevance to what one is about to hear or see, or possibly to anything one is ever likely to hear or see. The phrase is a means of acknowledging the fact that the world as mapped by the speeded-up electronic media has no order or meaning and is not to be taken seriously. There is no murder so brutal, no earthquake so devastating, no political blunder so costly—for that matter, no ball score so tantalizing or weather report so threatening—that it cannot be erased from our minds by a newscaster saying, "Now... this." The newscaster means that you have thought long enough on the previous matter (approximately, 1-to-five seconds), that you must not be instantaneously preoccupied with it (let us say, for ninety seconds), and that you must now give your attention to another fragment of news in a commercial.

Television did not invent the "Now... this" world view. It is the offspring of the intercourse between telegraphy and photography. But it is through television that it has been nurtured and brought to a perverse maturity. For on television, nearly every half hour is a discrete event, separated in content, context, and emotional texture from what precedes and follows it. In part because television sets its time in seconds and minutes, in part because television must use images rather than words, in part because its audience can move freely to and from the television set, programs are structured so that almost each eight-minute segment may stand as a complete event in itself. Viewers are rarely required to carry over any thought or feeling from one parcel of time to another.

Of course, in television's presentation of the "news of the day," we may see the "Now... this" mode of discourse in its boldest and most embarrassing form. But there, we are presented not only with fragmented news but news without context, without consequences, without value, and therefore without essential seriousness; that is to say, news as pure entertainment.
for the face of the teller? Does television countermand the warnings we once re­ceived about the fallacy of the ad homi­nem argument? If so, this answer to any of these questions is also a valid a priori. "Yes," then here is an issue worthy of the attention of epistemologists. Stated in its simplest form, it is that television provides a new (or, pos­sibly, restores an old) definition of truth: The credibility of the teller is the ultimate test of the truth of a proposition. "Cred­ibility" here does not refer to the past record of the teller for making statements that have survived the rigors of reality­testing. It refers only to the impression of sincerity, authenticity, vulnerability or at­tractiveness (choose one or more) con­veyed by the actor/reporter.

Replacing Reality

This is a matter of considerable im­portance, for it goes beyond the question of how truth is perceived on television news shows. If on television, credibility replaces reality as the ultimate test of truth-telling, political leaders need not trouble themselves very much with real­ity; or even worse, look like a truth­teller and then proceed to write a few words in between serious public discourse and entertainment. It is, of course, not neces­sary that the visuals actually docu­ment the point of a story. Neither is it necessary to explain why such images are inevitable, that qualifications impede the communication, featuring a type of discourse that is a substitute for thought, and verbal precision is an anachronism.

For those who think I am here making a case for hyperbole, I offer the following descrip­tion of television news by Robert Mac­Neil, executive editor and co-anchor of the "MacNeil-Lehrer Newshour": The idea, he writes, is to keep everything "that bite-sized is best, that complexity is a substitute for thought, and verbal precision is an anachronism."

precendence to any event for which there is some sort of visual documentation. A suspected killer being brought into a po­lice station, the angry face of a cheated consumer, a barrel going over Niagara Falls (with a person allegedly to be in it), the President disembarking from a heli­copter on the White House lawn—these are always fascinating or amusing, and easily satisfy the requirements of an en­tertaining show. It is, of course, not nec­essary that the visuals actually docu­ment the point of a story. Neither is it necessary to explain why such images are intruding themselves on public con­sciousness. Film footage justifies itself, as every television producer well knows.

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As a producer of a television news show, you would be well aware of this matter and would be careful to choose your cast on the basis of criteria used by every television producer well knows. Like them, you would turn your attention to staging the show on principles that maximize entertainment value. You would, for example, select a musical theme for the show. All television news programs begin, end, and are somewhere in between punctuated with music. I have found very few Americans who regard this custom as peculiar, which fact I have taken as evidence for the dissolution of lines of demarcation between serious public discourse and entertainment. What has music to do with the news, in fact render it largely banal. It is, of course, not necessary that the visuals actually document the point of a story. Neither is it necessary to explain why such images are inevitable, that qualifications impede the communication, featuring a type of discourse that is a substitute for thought, and verbal precision is an anachronism.

We are no longer struck dumb by a news­caster who having just reported that a nuclear war is inevitable goes on to say that he will be right back after this word from Burger King; who says, in other words, "Now... this."
television has exacted its price for Mac- 
Neil’s rejection of a show business for­
tunition. Nonetheless, everyone had an opinion about whether America was entitled to an opinion, and it is certainly useful to have a few when a pollster shows up. Eventually, we come to a quite different order from eighteenth- or nineteenth-century discourse. We are prob­
ably more accurate to call them emotions rather than opinions, which I would count for the fact that they change from week to week, as the pollsters tell us. What is happening here is that television is altering the meaning of “being in­formed,” because it is creating a field of information that might properly be called disinfor­
mation. I am using this word almost in the precise sense in which it is used by spies of authentic information. I am saying we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed, ignoring is always correc­table. But what shall we do if we take ignorance to be knowledge?
Here is a startling example of how this process bedevils us. A New York Times
article is headlined on February 15, 1983.
REAGAN MISSTATEMENTS
GETTING LESS ATTENTION
The article begins in the following way:
President Reagan’s aides used to be virtually alarmed at sug­
gestions that he had given mangled
and perhaps misleading accounts of his policies or of current events in general. That doesn’t seem to hap­pen much anymore.
Indeed, the President continues to make debatable assertions of fact but news accounts do not deal with them as extensively as they once did. In the view of White House offi­
cials, the declining news coverage mirrors a decline in interest by the general public. (my italics)
This report is not so much a news story as a story about the news, and our recent history suggests that it is not about Ronald Reagan’s charm, it is about how news is defined, and I believe the story
any connection to the past, to or the future, or to other events—that all assumptions of coherence have vanished. And so, perforce, has contradiction. In the context of no context, so to speak, it simply disappears. And in its absence, what possible interest could there be in a list of what the President says now and what he said then? It is merely a rehash of old news, and there is nothing interesting or entertaining in that. The only thing to be amused about is the bafflement of reporters at the public’s indifference. There is an irony in the fact that the very group that has taken the world apart should, on trying to pie it together again, be surprised that no one notices much, or cares.

A Trivial Pursuit

For all his perspicacity, George Orwell would have been stymied by this situation: there is nothing "Orwellian" about it. The President does not have the press under his thumb. The New York Times and The Washington Post are not Pravda; the Associated Press is not Tass. And there is no Newspeak here. Lies have not been defined as truth or truth as lies. All that has happened is that the public has adjusted to incoherence and been amused into inattention. Which is why Aldous Huxley would not at the least be surprised by the story. Indeed, he prophesied its coming. He believed that it is far more likely that the Western democracies will dance and dream themselves into oblivion than march into it, single file and manacled. Huxley grasped, as Orwell did not, that it is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensitively to contradiction and narcotized by technology. Nor do I consider his view to be a contradiction, nor that of the Newsweek editors. Although Huxley did not specify that television would be our main line to the drug, he would have no difficulty accepting Robert MacNeil’s observation that “Television is the Huxley's Brave New World.” Big Brother turns out to be Howdy Doody.

I do not mean that the trivialization of public information is all accomplished on television. I mean that television is the paradigm for our conception of public information. As the printing press did in an earlier time, television has achieved the technological diversions. Although Huxley did not specify that television would be our main line to the drug, he would have no difficulty accepting Robert MacNeil’s observation that “Television is the some of Huxley’s Brave New World.” Big Brother turns out to be Howdy Doody.

O nly the living ones watch. Not all of their eyes seem alive. Intact and opened fully, they’re too recently dead to be glazed over. I sense a stare like an echo as I walk by the fish bins.

Good smokes the dock. If I’m not careful the small could double me over yet still I’m drawn here and more strangely than that I share in the excitement.

It’s been a good day for the trolls the only men on the fleet who still fish in a line. For hours, more salmon than I’d care to count is sold whole in bucket-sized scales.

Two lines of Tsimshian women wait inside on my way through town. They’re hung to dry. There’s a bowl of some chopped fruit juice mixed with canned fruit juice they’re hung to dry. There’s a bowl of some on the table in my friend’s home. She calls them “Hawaiian Strips.” Her recipes vary but the taste stays pretty much the same... like candied fish. Some of her people prefer it paper thin. Others cut theirs off in thick jerks. That’s the kind I’m eating now walking in the rain along the beach opposite Cove, chewing. Splitting out scales that stuck to the meat. Two crows follow behind closely, waiting for me to drop the peeled-off pieces of skin.

It’s not wise to feel sorry for fish living in an Idaho salmon run, on the Southeast coast. On the days when I do, I keep my feelings to myself.

Mary Lou Sanelli is a poet living in Portland. Artist Tom Prochaska lives in Portland.

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What has not been talked about is the exciting use of recent Seattle art, which covered the walls of the museum. Artist Carl Smoel was commissioned by Rudolph to choose works which had a twisted perspective, which were "excess, extraordinary"—to amplify the mood in the film's climactic minutes. Scores of Seattle artists were included in the credits of Trouble in Mind, though only a handful actually had significant screen time.

Andy Keating, who had pieces from over a ten-year period in the film, seemed to most completely satisfy Rudolph's criteria. One Keating piece was of a demonic mother which accentuated Hilary Blue's mother fixation. Perhaps the most effective use of a painting in the entire movie was of Keating's Myopic Allegory, which has a pink man running in red high heels off a cliff—an image which resonated perfectly off Divine's androgynous personality, creating a marvelous, hilarious effect.

Debra Sherwood's work is seen in a series of large ceramic sculptures of every inhuman being in a variety of striped gait. At one point, the camera focuses entirely on one of them as Divine and Kristofferson repair to the study to hammer out a clause. Once there, they are framed by a lovely black and white geometric painting, Enchantment 2, by Diane Rayes.

The plot of Trouble in Mind parallels the Epic of Gilgamesh, the oldest known novel, written in Sumeria nearly 5,000 years ago. In the novel, two titans, Gilgamesh, from the city and Enkidu, from the country, face off, and then become allies against the lumber god Humbaba. In the film, Kristofferson and Carradine unwittingly team up to take on Divine, who unfortunately catches a Kristofferson bullet in the head before he can cut loose. This sadly precludes the successful battle which makes Gilgamesh so rousing. Divine's death, however, in a mansion full of loaded, armed gangstes, sets up a scene of mayhem in which a lot of art was seemingly (and actually) destroyed.

Smoel and the filmmakers had some trouble finding work that artists were willing to let be destroyed. Joanie Joans volunteered a small figurative sculpture that had its head blown off in the choreographed shooting sequence. A parody of classic surrealism painting by Lou Ray Gehrig and Candace Barker departed this world with a gangster impaled upon it as he tumbled down a flight of steps. It had hung as a banner outside the artists' Pioneer Square studio for years before meeting its fate.

Smoel was on hand throughout the shooting of the museum sequence, which he describes as "boring, labor-intensive work." For every few seconds of rolling cameras there were hours of down time. Shooting took place from sunset to sunrise for several nights, and it became rather tedious.

Though he was paid well by Seattle standards, Smoel later learned from a friend who had done a similar job for a George Lucas film that his friend's Los Angeles wages were some ten times higher. Then again, Smoel points out, the Lucas film probably had a budget ten times the size of Rudolph's. Smoel deemed the overall experience as positive—both getting to meet many Seattle artists he'd not previously known.

A parody of classic surrealism painting by Lou Ray Gehrig and Candace Barker departed this world with a gangster impaled upon it as he tumbled down a flight of steps. It had hung as a banner outside the artists' Pioneer Square studio for years before meeting its fate.

Divine and Kristofferson face off on front of some of Seattle's best art.
Heather Ramsay specializes in building wonderfully detailed imaginary cities. She was given free reign to build whatever she wanted. Her models, an aesthetic highlight of the film, were later purchased outright from her as a surprise gift for Alan Rudolph.

and work with "pleasant, intelligent" members of the film crew. But it's not a job he would likely be interested in doing again.

Lest anyone imagine that the chosen artists cashed in at Hollywood's expense, it must be pointed out that every artist was paid $1 for the right to use their image(s). The dollar released the filmmakers from any liability that might be incurred as a result of accidental damage. Even with this tiny expense, the art department went over budget.

The only artist paid for her actual artwork was Heather Ramsay. Contacted on the advice of professional scene painters, she was commissioned to build six scale models of Rain City. Two paid assistants helped her cut out thousands of tiny bricks and windows to paste on the buildings and put up the three-inch tall street lamps. Ramsay specializes in building wonderfully detailed imaginary cities. She was given free reign to build whatever she wanted. Her models, an aesthetic highlight of the film, were later purchased outright from her as a surprise gift for Alan Rudolph.

The Art Museum staff were very cooperative according to Smool. John Pierce, the Assistant to the Museum Director, said that he felt Rudolph's transformation was "very clever," including the way the grounds had been altered and vintage cars brought in to set the scene. On their end things went very smoothly, and under similar circumstances Pierce feels they would consider doing it again. Did the movie enhance the museum's prestige? He said that he didn't think anyone outside Seattle even knew the film had been shot in the city.

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Dave Barrett • and many others TICKETS Advance $10.50 At the Gate $12.50 Tickets available July 22 at Earl A. Chiles box office University of Portland, Artichoke Music, Music Millennium and other outlets. Ticket price subject to service charge at some outlets. For more information call 503-239-0219.
Indeed, that seems to be the case. A friend who works for Seattle's Windham Hill, attended a New York press screening. Windham Hill represents Mark Isham, whose score for Trouble In Mind was highly praised. Afterwards, the critics were asking each other where it had been filmed—Detroit, Atlanta were suggested. When he said Seattle they wouldn't believe him. "Nobody shoots in Seattle," they said. He reminded them of the monorail, the Space Needle and the rain, and some finally agreed, reluctantly.

Clearly no one in Seattle got rich or famous on the project. Even Andy Keating, whose work featured most prominently in the film has not "yet had the ripple return to him" from his big splash in the art world. But he learned the experience, "a lesson which he'd gladly consent again." One, pleasant irony was seeing the Art Museum's walls covered by work from artists who are unlikely to be in a regular Museum show for years to come. To be fair, the Seattle Art Museum does own a few paintings by some of these artists, but it has never shown such a compelling assemblage as Smokey Legier's.

Alan Rudolph, who has used art prominently in previous films, showed particularly good intuition in using so much local work, most from painters, the strongest of Seattle's many art communities. Even if no one's life was changed by having work included, it certainly didn't hurt. Art is a lottery and at least this time the dollar was paid to those entering it. If nothing else comes of this epic, it was still the best show of recent Seattle art work this city has seen.

Kirby Olson is a writer living in Seattle. This is his first story for CSQ.
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