

Virginia Scholar

Newsletter of the Virginia Association of Scholars

Number 12

ISSN 1073-7235

March 1998

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MEMORANDUM

TO: All Division and Department Heads
FROM: John Q. Bureaucrat
TOPIC: Program Priorities
DATE: Fall, 1997

As we begin the new year and the new Governor takes over, we need to get our ducks in a row as directors and leaders of various programs. Provided below is a description of our priorities. Please examine them carefully. A more detailed manual is in preparation and will soon be available.

Please do not circulate this memorandum -- it is for higher authorities' use only. If you feel some subordinates need to be informed of these priorities, do so judiciously.

The importance of these strategies cannot be overestimated. Although our position is fairly secure, the critics of our agenda are powerfully positioned and constitute a real threat. This is no time for carelessness. Again, do not circulate this memorandum. Treat it with great discretion since some rank and file employees are suspected of seeing our work from a hostile perspective.

PRIORITY #1: PRESERVE THE BUDGET. It cannot be said enough that the first and most important priority is to maintain the budgets of our departments. Be absolutely sure that every penny which has been allocated gets spent. Otherwise, elected officials or the central office may be led to conclude that our institution does not need its current level of funding. Remember that we are not running a profit-seeking enterprise and it is urgent for the public good that we function at the highest possible cost.

It often happens towards the end of the fiscal cycle that large amounts of unspent moneys remain in the departmental accounts. We suggest that you explore workshops, retreats, seminars, and conferences to which you might send groups of your faculty or staff. Consider bringing in consultants, too, for their fees usually consume sizable funds (and provide additional employment for many of us in the trade). All group gatherings should be scheduled at outside locations, which will necessitate the hiring of banquet rooms, expenditures for meals and lodgings, etc. Retreats and training sessions are difficult for auditors to evaluate, hence, their utility as a means of disgoring unspent funds is preferable to the purchase of extra supplies and equipment.

Although we do not expect this contingency in the current climate, Richmond officials may threaten to reduce the allocations of certain schools. Should the threat arise, we will notify you. There are numerous devices which may be employed to resist spending cuts. First and foremost, we must encourage our personnel and local board members to contact their elected representatives by providing them with addresses, telephone numbers and the names of staff members. Suggest to them statements by which complaints about the cuts may be voiced. Second, tap the pool of recipients, the "constituents" if you will, of the curriculum(s) and program(s) and organize them in a similar manner. Every year, the agencies serving the elderly are very successful at putting together groups of people from all over the state to go to Richmond and demonstrate against various budgetary threats. If we dare mention, the organizers for the elderly are very skillful and can frighten the daylights out of the old folks. They really rattle the media when they put together these shows. The uproar normally reaches near-panic proportions and no budgets ever get cut! Observe their methods carefully.

PRIORITY #2: EXPAND THE BUDGET. It almost goes without saying that anyone seeking to rise the ladder of public service (particularly in education) must be able to boast that his/her agency accomplished impressive growth while under his/her direction. More functions and higher expenditures are always associated with higher prestige and the trade and professional journals are always anxious to do stories

about active administrators and lively programs. Often these journals will allow you to publish articles which you have written -- even about yourself -- if you can demonstrate how big and important your agency's services have become. Another device you might try is to write articles about one another or about the college's leadership. A little mutual back-scratching can be of inestimable value! Always keep in mind that a bigger school means more constituents, more security for our programs and bigger salaries for us!

The most effective method for expanding our budgets is very simple. We request very large increases in moneys from Richmond even though our actual ambitions are more modest. Then, if the legislature or the system provides us with, say, an additional \$2 million instead of the \$4 million we requested, we can complain to the local board and the press that our budget is being "slashed" by \$2 million! The device of characterizing a more modest budget increase as a budget reduction has worked wonders at virtually all levels of government and the stupid public rarely catches on! In 1996 the public school people were able to convince the state's voters that public education spending in Virginia was being "cut" by \$90 million while it was actually increasing by \$1.5 billion in the biennium! If you have observed the national scene closely, you will note that Medicare spending in the 1995 Congressional plan was slated to rise at twice the rate of inflation for the next seven years, but most people were convinced it was being "cut to the bone," by \$270 billion! We mention these cases because they are absolutely classic examples of the tactic we described above.

In the event that administrative or legislative officials continue to resist our efforts, there is another useful strategy that dates to the 1980's. It is known as "closing the Washington Monument" and it works as follows: in response to a threatened cut, we will terminate a highly visible segment of our operation, one that will be obvious and outrageous to the public and one that is certain to generate many stories in the media about the "pain" being inflicted by the stinginess of Richmond officials. Then we will announce through the news channels that the service that we are discontinuing cannot be maintained because of the extreme attitudes of the people holding the public purse. Then watch them squirm! We will be sure, of course, to disseminate this unpleasant information about the termination of some of our services to the recipients and employees, too. It is guaranteed to produce an uproar that will work in our favor.

Do not forget that it is essential to recruit clients for your curriculums. Success at recruiting gives you the opportunity to tell the higher officials and local boards that there is huge "demand" for our services. Investigate the possibility of tapping more federal grants to expand our operations. It is amazing how much cross-fertilization of spending efforts can be achieved through these grants. With more grants, we can then call upon Richmond to give us more personnel -- think creatively! The bigger the budget, the more important we are!

PRIORITY #3: PROMOTE A POSITIVE IMAGE OF OUR INSTITUTION. We have hired good public relations professionals and we will help you with the information with which you should flood the media and inundate the local board about our programs. Do not neglect to mention yourself in the news releases, since we want it clearly stated that you are the one in charge and leading the effort. Work up stories about the people in the department, portraying them as caring and compassionate. Run stories about the many citizens whose lives and careers have been enhanced by our school's work. The impression must be driven home that any harm to our institution is horribly detrimental to the public welfare.

Be very attentive to contacts amongst local board members and local legislators. Think of awards our school might bestow upon them -- they will greatly appreciate the flattery and the warm publicity. Insofar as activities during the legislative session are concerned, we need to devise means of calling attention to the needs of our programs. A couple of years ago, the VCCS distributed cheap cameras to the members of the state legislature, urging them to "focus" on our agenda. It was a stroke of brilliance and it provoked a nice amount of press attention.

We will be sure to have board members and legislators visit our offices; we can give them a tour, and we perhaps can serve them lunch or dinner. Mealtime gatherings provide excellent opportunities to lobby in an intense but friendly way for the things we seek. Contacts with the people in key positions of power can be critical in times of duress, such as when the ill-informed attempt to restrain taxes or spending. We cannot be

attentive enough to elected officials, our boards, and their associates.

Incidentally, most institutions contain a number of sycophants among the lower ranking employees. These can be our most valuable tools, since their enthusiasm to meet our every pleasure makes a very positive impression with the people to whom we must answer. Do not forget to keep a couple of those lap dogs handy for dinners and luncheons with the authorities; they will boost our position tremendously with the board members and legislators we want to impress. We sometimes count our blessings according to the number of such lackeys we can develop in an institution.

PRIORITY #4: SUPPRESS THE WHISTLE-BLOWER. If sycophants can be counted a blessing, there is another type of individual in a public agency whose presence can be a curse. The problem seems to be the tendency of an occasional lower level employee (such types cannot, by their nature rise in educational institutions like ours) to disrupt the mission of the program by his/her insistence that the school subordinate its purposes to some abstract loyalty to the "taxpayer," to "academic standards," etc. Consequently, a whistle-blower appears here and there, and if not dealt with decisively, he/she can become a major threat to our agenda.

First, you must indoctrinate all employees zealously (orientation programs are excellent tools for raising the proper consciousness) to the mission of the institution. All personnel must understand that our purpose is to spend money and grow. Sometimes troublemakers can be perceived at that point and either punished or removed; incompetence can be readily tolerated in educational service, but the unwillingness of any personnel to work for the good of the school must meet an immediate response.

Your first problem is one of detection. Whistle blowers can sometimes be discovered by their diction. We suggest you find out who does not like to use the language of education agencies. See who prefers traditional terminology in his/her memorandums. Particularly examine those who refuse to use appropriately sensitive forms of address. Reluctance to say "his/her," or "African-American," or to use the term "Ms." is an ominous sign, and protests about "political correctness" or lack of enthusiasm for the diversity effort are dead giveaways. You might check the private autos in the college's parking lot for political bumper stickers. Some of those stickers will provide us with indications of people with poor attitudes. Employees who have difficulty finding enough expenditures or who exhibit a dislike for methodology workshops, planning retreats, and sensitivity seminars are also likely prospects for trouble. Hopefully these suggestions will be helpful in ferreting out sources of disloyalty to our institution.

Once discovered, no quarter should be given such incendiaries. Being mindful of the danger of adverse publicity, we can quietly find methods of intimidating or harassing the individual causing the problem. The law unfortunately protects these malcontents from the punishment they truly deserve, but we can make our displeasure known in subtle ways. The employee evaluation system provides ample opportunity for us to smear or discredit difficult personnel. In an extreme case, we can consider down-sizing the curriculum or program in which the person is employed, allowing for his/her removal. No greater danger exists to our agenda than the one posed by the whistle-blower. It is a mystery how such people get into education in the first place!

PRIORITY #5: SERVE THE PUBLIC. Do not under any circumstances allow this item to interfere with the execution of the other priorities.

*The above piece came to us from the pen of **William E. James**, Assistant Professor of History at Southside Virginia Community College. In his 27th year of teaching there, he is clearly familiar with the mores of our contemporary crop of academic administrators, sometimes called "leaders".*

HOWL 1998

For Academe*

I saw the best minds of my generation demoralized by
 the madness around them, starving hysterical unbelieving,
 dragging themselves through the classes, meetings, hallways
 looking for an honest academic fix,
 angelhearted scholars burning for the ancient heavenly
 connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night...

With self-interested ignoramuses selfishly making self-serving curriculums,
 with neophytes rendering judgment on their mentors and
 novices on their tutors

with education professors professing empty nothings

with feminoid sexists calling men sexist
 with racist black fanatics calling others racist,
 demanding sensitivity, and illustrating it
 by honoring Hymie-calling Jackson and Jew-baiting Farrakhan,
 teaching that black Egyptians could fly and read minds
 (who never were black and never could)

demanding for themselves the right to speak and to slander
 while shouting down any contrary opinion
 as the sanctimonious guardians of academe watch and approve
 demanding for themselves separate this and separate that
 "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is also mine"...

And every with-it administrator and professor howling down Western Civ
 – the envy of every other culture around the world – which
 abolished slavery, gave its women legal equality, brought humanity its
 Enlightenment, merged the cultures of
 umpteen languages and sovereignties and several religions

howling down Western Civ
 at Yale (rejecting \$20,000,000 rather than have Western Civ)
 at Stanford, Duke, and all the other elite, leading benchmarks of
 self-abasement and sophisticated folly

howling down Western Civ to praise the other cultures:
 those mutilators of child women, those holders of slaves,
 those stoners-to-death of adulterers in front of their children
 those murderers of other tribes
 those fanatics of their God, their country, their color

With faculties aye-saying standard-less mindless spin-doctored crap
 With administrators unaccountable – lawless, gutless wonders
 self-serving spineless conviction-less lackeys

* *pace* Allen Ginsberg, "HOWL — For Carl Solomon", San Francisco 1955-56, often cited as an icon of the "Beat Generation" that was willfully estranged from a society it could not believe in, in the words of Collier's (1969) Encyclopedia. "Beat" signified "ruined", "spent", as in "I'm beat". "But the term 'beat' has a second meaning: 'beatific' or sacred or holy. Kerouac, a devout Catholic, explained many times that by describing his generation as beat he was trying to capture the secret holiness of the downtrodden" (Levi Asher, <1998, on the Web).

Academics today are certainly "beat" in the first sense, and some are in the second as well.

With professors bedding students – M/F, F/F, M/M, any number can play
 and writing it up as scholarly work
 hiring their lovers, their children, their wives, promoting their friends
 hiring by race, by sexual orientation, by sexual performance,
 by political activity, by anything but scholarly merit
 all approved by Dean Pontius Pilate: “They all do it”;
 and by Provost Pontius, and by President Pilate...

With professors preaching not teaching, indoctrinating not educating and
 proud of it!
 giving grades to please and to get praised in return

All selling out, everything for sale, degrees expensive enough but
 often worth nothing

II

What sphinx of cement and silicon bashed open
 their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Filth! Ugliness...

Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose
 blood is running money...

Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long
 streets like endless Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories
 dream and croak in the fog! Moloch whose
 smokestacks and antennae crown their cities!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch
 whose soul is electricity and banks!...

III

Christopher Brand! I'm with you in Edinburgh
 where the spirits of countless generations of
 distinguished scholars and graduates gape unbelieving
 at the spectacle of a Provost investigating whether students might
 have been *discomforted* as they learned to think about the world

Joe Conlin! I'm with you at Chico State
 insisting that academic qualifications be the hiring criterion
 with administrators – who else? calling that – what else?
 – “racial harassment”

Craig Cobane! I'm with you at Cincinnati,
 where graduate assistants must have their brains washed
 with multi-culti sensitivity training

John Doe! I'm with you at Valparaiso

Adam Lack! I'm with you at Brown
 — and with countless others, from sea to shining sea –
 where no due process stops the lynching, if you're white and male
 charged with rape because some girl willingly had sex with you but
 later regretted it and now absolves her guilt by blaming you,
 becoming as a bonus a feminoid heroine
 a paler Anita Hill

Murray Dolfman! I'm with you at Penn
you said... "ex-slave"!!!
for which no apology could be enough
it called for sensitivity brain-training
and still they wanted you to be fired

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese! I'm with you at Emory
where Women's Studies mustn't be intellectual, only ideological

Linda Gottfredson! I'm with you at Delaware
where research sponsors must always be politically correct

Alan Gribben! I'm with you at Texas
and with all the others at all the other places
who still think that professors in faculty meetings ought to vote their
professional opinion without reprisals from the ranting fanatics
who will brook no deviation from the PC party-line

Louis Jacobs! I'm with you at Ohio State
and with all the other flaming liberals who learned – re-learned,
learned over and over again, shades of Stalin – that the Left
eats its own, who dare think for themselves, and spits them out
and pisses on them
and tears out their hearts as reward for lifelong loyalty

Heinz-Joachim Klatt! Marjorie Ratcliffe! I'm with you at Western Ontario
Graydon Snyder! I'm with you at Chicago Theological Seminary
innocent of sexual harassment
but reputation besmirched as though you had been guilty

Judith Kleinfeld! I'm with you at Alaska-Fairbanks

Lino Graglia! I'm with you at Texas Law
daring to speak what everyone knows but mustn't say;
Don't you know that the truth creates a hostile environment?

Marlin Lask! I'm with you at Sarah Lawrence
persecuted for breaking into laughter
"We know you're not guilty... but you tried to make an environment
that was uncomfortable and demeaning.
Your actions can be interpreted as hostile"

Julius Lester! I'm with you at Massachusetts-Amherst
where everyone is free to believe the same things, not anything else

Jim Maas! I'm with you at Cornell
in the Star Chamber of feminoid radicals where rules are made up as
they go along, no due process, without shame, without decency
and the dean washes his hands until he can become a Provost with
a fancier washroom

Al Mandelstamm! I'm with you at Virginia Tech
master teacher of tens of thousands, applauded for decades, honored
alike by colleagues and students
then lynched by one Women's Affairs Officer
who refused to look at the evidence because even one single complaint
from a woman should be enough to end anyone's career
whether or not the complaint has any basis in fact
And ten years later, who cares that your Department has still not
found anyone to fill your shoes?

Pete Schaub! I'm with you at Washington
 where no questions are permitted when it's a class in
 Women's Studies
 where the Truth is being revealed, not ideas discussed
 where it's OK to teach female masturbation
 but not to offer a different opinion

Phoebe Spinrad! I'm with you at Ohio State
 where diversity doesn't include veterans

Shelby Steele! I'm with you and all the other self-thinking ones
 Thomas Sowell! Glenn Loury! Kenny Williams! Stephen Carter!
 the list is long; Julius Lester! Walter Williams! on and on
 excommunicated from "your" group in the name
 of freedom for not toeing the color-line

Stephan Thernstrom! I'm with you at Harvard,
 whose official language is double-speak
 No professional opinions, please, just agree with
 the hallowed slogans of officially designated victimhood

Phi Kappa Sigma at Riverside! I'm with you
 for the right to advertise with normal sophomoric humor
 a Spring Break in Mexico

Students (who want to study)! I'm with you at Penn
 amidst stampeding noisy water-buffaloes
 non-studying students stealing newspapers
 applauded by administrators

Political Science at British Columbia! I'm with you
 suspended for political incorrectness

Scandinavian Studies at Minnesota! I'm with you
 not guilty, but harassed for months and reputations smeared by
 Sexual Harassment Officers and administrative lackeys

Oh Academe! I'm with you in Asylum-land
 where machines are prized more than brains

I'm with you in Asylum-Wonderland
 where professors assert that there's nothing to profess
 where administrators hold faculty accountable but no one else not
 themselves and certainly not the students

I'm with you in Wonderland
 where Enlightenment is a dirty word but
 everything else can be said (if you're the right sort of person)

I'm with you all in Asylum-land
 in tears...
 in the Western night

*The perpetrator of this appropriation of Ginsberg's work, **Henry Bauer**, begs that stridency and infelicity therein will be excused: he did it while victim of a hostile intellectual environment, having just heard of three separate instances of hires for reasons of nepotism rather than merit, in two of them even contrary to programmatic need. A would-be whistle-blower reporting illegalities in a search was shrugged off by the dean – "They all do it" – and by the EO/AA officer because, said she, only unsuccessful candidates lodging such a complaint need be attended to by her.*

FOLLOW-UPS

BRAVO!

President Paul Torgersen of Virginia Tech announced an admirable new approach¹:

Playing athletics at the intercollegiate level is a rare privilege afforded very few students. We expect the young men and women at Virginia Tech to uphold the highest values of sportsmanship, honor, integrity, and respect for others. We expect behavior off the field to reflect standards set by countless athletes who have represented Virginia Tech in the past. If contemporary athletes are not up to this standard, they won't be playing for us.

Under this new policy, athletes merely **charged** with a felony will be suspended until the charge has been resolved. Being found guilty of a felony, or pleading no contest, will mean permanent dismissal from the team. For misdemeanors, the athletic director – **not** (as previously) the coaches – will consider all aspects of each case and may impose sanctions ranging from a warning to dismissal from the team.

Violent crimes are “utterly incompatible with the character of our university community. We will clearly convey to student athletes our expectations about behavior and the repercussions from breaking the rules or the law. However, we also understand that the role of student-athlete brings special pressures... For that reason we will also expand the support programs available to athletes”; and the associated costs will be borne by the Athletic Department.

This initiative deserves to be rewarded by future freedom from the scandals that have besmirched the last few years. Perhaps this will also provide other universities around the country with a lead that has been sorely needed for some time.

Athletes

The Patriot League is inching away from **student** athletics because of “what happens to colleges that try to sustain major sports programs without making significant academic and financial concessions in the recruitment of athletes”². Up to now, the League members have not offered athletic scholarships, and

the SAT scores of a freshman athlete are no more

than 50 points lower than the class average. By contrast, the average athlete at many Division I institutions has an SAT score 200 points below the class average.

The average SAT score of the current freshman classes at Patriot League institutions ranges from 1,200 to 1,350, so coaches... recruit from a relatively small pool of athletes

– those, one infers, who want a college education.

Victims

It is a fact – sad, noble, or perhaps just plain – that all the former deans of UVA's Law School are white and male. “Re-writing history” (*V.S.* #11, p.18) noted the desire of certain fanatics and intellectual fellow-travelers to change this. Accordingly, the offensive collection of the former deans' portraits will be moved to a less conspicuous place. The demand had been made in a petition that “Only about 60 of the school's 1,120 students signed”³.

“A panel of students and professors had recommended hanging the portraits” in the first place.

So a decision had been made, not that long ago, by a representative and democratically appropriate body. It was overturned after a petition signed by fewer than 6% of students. Just another typical example of PC in action: when a sacred cow is gored – or rather, when someone with protected-minority status merely asserts that a sacred cow has been gored – action follows almost at once. So I suggest a new definition that reflects current realities:

A **victim** is one who has only to make a suggestion or register a complaint to gain what s/he/it wants.

More Social Science/Sense

According to Alan Wolfe, who professes sociology and political science at Boston University, “A tragic paradox haunts race relations in the United States: the better the conditions, the more bitter the tone”⁴.

But this is no paradox at all. It is the normal state of human affairs, as I pointed out in *VS* #5 (p.3, the “irony” that Haile Selassie had been overthrown

OUR PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

When *VS* started we were hoping for several issues a year. But the production staff numbers one, and *VS* gets done as other things permit.

During Fall 1997, the staff was on research leave, so there's only one issue this academic year, and some of the material may be a bit more dated even than usual.

But we've got a fine contribution from a new contributor, and it's a larger issue than any previous one. For the future we hope to enlist the help of a retiring friend. And contributions from others would help us to keep publishing.

Through the good offices of **Peter Rony**, some past issues of *VS* are now available on-line as Adobe Acrobat PDF files, which can be read on Windows, Macintosh, and Unix platforms.

Adobe Acrobat Reader 3.0.1 software is available free at the Adobe web site. Try to obtain the Reader With Search installation file: rs32e301.exe (for Windows 95), arws301e_sea.bin (for Macintosh). Once you install Reader 3.0.1, you will be able to download, read, save, and search *VS* #6 (October 1995) to #10 (December 1996) at <http://fbox.vt.edu:10021/faculty/aaup/index4.html> (courtesy of Virginia Tech AAUP Chapter)

by those he had nurtured). Social protest movements are quite typically at their most obstreperous when their aims have already been largely achieved, in other words when they have attained some power, not when they are struggling to gain a foothold.

Martin Luther King was able so magnificently and courageously to put final paid to segregation to some extent because law and public opinion had already changed: segregation, after all, had earlier been abolished in schools and in the Armed Forces. King's moral crusade might not have been so successful 50 years earlier.

The Women's Movement didn't become prominent in those places where women are most mistreated, but in the Anglo-Saxon regions of Western civilization, where women already had more equality, not so say sheer power, than in other parts of the globe.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Tara Tuckwiller, "Officials reveal details of athlete conduct plan", *Collegiate Times* (VPI&SU) 25ii97, A1,2; Larry Hincker, "Programs added to address student-athlete behavior issues", *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 27ii97, pp.1,8
- ² Jim Naughton, "Why a league with an academic focus started allowing basketball scholarships", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 17i97, A45
- ³ "A hallway of their own", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 21ii97, A6
- ⁴ Alan Wolfe, "Beyond black and white", *New York Times Book Review*, 9ii97, p.11, reviewing Ellis Cose, *Color-Blind: Seeing Beyond Race in a Race-Obsessed World*

B I T S & P I E C E S

Of Foxes and Hen-Houses

or, in academese, *quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*

The National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education was stacked with the very people who are responsible for the rises in tuition and "costs" that led to a perceived need for such a Commission. Their recommendations¹ were utterly predictable: "colleges must redouble their efforts to cut costs and keep tuition affordable", ineffective even as a pious hope, given that colleges haven't *made* any efforts at all along those lines; all their efforts have been aimed at raising enough money from every possible quarter in order to keep expanding all the things they've been

doing that have nothing to do with scholarship or learning. For the *real* reasons why "costs" have risen so steeply, see rather the series, "Why Going to College has Become so Expensive in Virginia", *VS* #1-4.

Still, between the lines of the Commission's report one discerns some of the truth. Barry Munitz, retiring as chancellor of the California State University system, remarked that "If colleges and universities don't behave *more* responsibly..."; which surely acknowledges that during his tenure the colleges under his direction have not behaved particularly responsibly. He should know.

But the “costs” he mentioned specifically were construction, faculty salaries, and technology outlays, which ignores the greatest single category of expenditure, namely social engineering, practiced through Divisions of Student Affairs and various Multi-, AA, EO etc. empires (see aforementioned series in VS).

For instance, Virginia Tech is in process of hiring into a newly created Vice-Presidency for Minority Affairs, which with subsidiary staff, travel, etc. is bound to cost upwards of a quarter of a million dollars each year, or \$10 per student.

Compared to that, the \$20,000 is just peanuts, that is annually given out as grants in aid of “innovative affirmative-action projects”².

Among the “costs” of higher education are those incurred by membership in such organizations as AAC&U (the Association of American Colleges & Universities, formerly AAC), with conference fees etc. Of course the *monetary* cost is small compared to the intellectual one, since almost everything preached at those meetings is nowadays off the mark. What have we to show for it, after decades of conferences on “general education, foreign language, interdisciplinary studies... and collaborative leadership for academic change”, which are topics for AAC&U’s “series of state-of-the-art working conferences”?

AAC&U has made itself an immoderate pressure group for “diversity”: the with-it academic kind, namely based on externalities and superficialities, not intellectual diversity. It publishes such propaganda monographs as *Diversity Works* and *Achieving Faculty Diversity: Debunking the Myths*. Their brochure announcing the latest workshops³ offers the same stale brew of “national experts”, “practical strategies”, “self-study”, “planning”, and so forth. The tone is set by the blurbs about those national experts, who are referred to by their forenames, no doubt to reinforce the genuineness of the egalitarian refusal to discriminate on any grounds, including merit, achievement, or indeed expertise. Nevertheless, the chosen theme for the 1997 meeting was “Educational Integrity”.

Thirty years from now, the big university campuses will be relics... [The] totally uncontrollable expenditures, without any visible improvement in... education, mean that the system is rapidly becoming untenable⁴

Race-based programs

California’s Proposition 209, its upholding by federal courts as constitutional, and the Supreme Court’s refusal to review the case, send a rather clear message. So does the Hopwood decision declaring racial preferences illegal in admission to graduate school. So will the follow-up cases filed by the Center for Individual Rights (which had won in Hopwood) on behalf of white students not admitted as undergraduates at Washington and Michigan because of racial set-asides. And so does the willingness of “civil-rights” organizations to ante up \$300,000 rather than have the Supreme Court review the Taxman case in which hiring preference hinged purely on race.

But not everyone keeps up with these matters:

the dean has agreed to fund our STS Summer Minorities Program at \$40,000 for one year. You will recall that we asked for \$40,000 for two years... The dean indicated he will commit an additional \$40,000 for 1999-2000 if we succeed in our fund raising efforts outside the College...

The dean definitely wants us to work in tandem with the HBCU initiative.⁵

[HBCU = Historically Black Colleges and Universities]

Plenty of money available for *some* things, even as positions continue to be cut and operating budgets of departments sorely limit photocopying, travel, etc.

Insanity in the antipodes

La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia, indoctrinates the children in its crèche into correct speech by banning “the use of about 20 words which were considered to be offensive (including, curiously, terms like *girl*, *boy*, and even *shhhh*). Any offender was made to pay a fine into a box, a kind of swear box for ‘dirty words’”⁶.

Insanity across the border

Quebec helps us to recognize the connection between being a “province” and behaving provincially. It’s engaged in a no-holds-barred campaign to eradicate the English language in favor of French. Signs may have both, but if they do the English must be no more than 50% the size of the French.

60 Minutes had an amusing (if you’re not in or from Quebec) piece about this on February 8 featuring among others the fanatically stone-walling steely-faced minister in charge of all this. Writer Mordecai Richler, who lives in Quebec and writes in English, has described the situation⁷, from which our own guardians of political correctness could no doubt learn much:

- apostrophes are illegal
- Jews are classed as Anglophones
- Matzohs (unleavened bread), whose boxes bear descriptive material in **English**, may now by special dispensation be imported into Quebec for 40 days before Passover and 20 days thereafter, but not at other times of the year.

Remember that those who live in glass houses shouldn't cast stones: if you assert the necessity of "gender-neutral" or "non-sexist" language, or if you assert that such terms as "ex-slave" must not be used, then you're a Quebecois under the skin.

Insanity at Yale

"Why not a chair for colonialism, slavery, empire, and poverty?" asked Sara Suleri Goodyear, faculty member at Yale, during controversy over Yale's rejection of \$20,000,000 for Western Civ⁸.

"Hard" learning, where sex differences are an American invention

"female... students who have recently immigrated to the United States [said] that not until they came to America did they begin to hear about math and science being a 'boy thing'" ⁹.

Talking: where sex differences are genetic

Scientific studies have shown that girls are born talkers... they start exercising their mouths when they are still in their mother's wombs.

On the other hand, boys practise limb movements...

This startling evidence of genetic sexism comes from studies conducted at the Wellcome Trust Foetal Behaviour Research Centre in Belfast!¹⁰

Without women...

The percentage of women on physics faculties varies from a low of 3% (Japan) to more than 34% (Portugal). Toward the low end with Japan are Switzerland, West Germany, Canada, USA, Korea, Norway, United Kingdom; at the top end with Portugal are Philippines, USSR, Thailand, Turkey, Italy, China, Brazil, Poland, Spain!¹¹.

Accompanying those figures is a statement by feminist guru Sandra Harding that "scientific development can't happen as long as women are de-developed". Shall we suppose that Professor Harding regards Portugal et al. as more scientifically developed than Japan et al.?

Or is it just (as usual) that evidence doesn't count when politically correct views are at issue?

Private schools are better – but that's not fair!

Pupils at private schools are up to three A-level grades ahead of students of equal intelligence in the state sector, according to a government-funded study... The findings... will come as welcome ammunition for ministers who plan to increase the number of pupils on the assisted places scheme under which poor children are subsidised [i.e. a "voucher" scheme] ¹²

Parents who pour savings into private education are horrified to discover that their children may face discrimination at interviews for university places and jobs...

Some universities... argue that there is a rational basis for apparent 'discrimination'. Pupils who have shone in the state sector have done so against the odds... A pupil who attains A-grade A-levels at an inner-city comprehensive [school] may be more impressive than one with a comparable record from a... [private] school!¹³

Social engineering faces such a variety of self-inflicted complexities, doesn't it?

Classifying by race and ethnicity

A very long time ago already, the logical absurdities were delineated of attempting to classify human beings by race or ethnicity, for example the need to use fractional designations (see *The Sociology of the Absurd* by 'Professor X', Simon & Schuster 1970). What would **your** affirmative-action executive or "expert" do with Betta Singh? Whose father was "a Guyanese Indian... [his mother was] Hindu... His childhood tutor and adult mentor... a devout Muslim, yet his only true confidant is Creole and Christian. His education is European, but he... [lives] in tropical Guyana. His language is 'proper' English, which sets him apart from his Hindi- and pidgin-English-speaking countrymen, but he is considered 'black' by the white colonists. Who is he? Which... culture is truly his? **The answer... for Betta as for the rest of us, is... in his simple participation in the process of human life**" [emphasis added]¹⁴

Treating people on the basis of group classifications confuses statistical averages in a group with inescapable attributes of individuals; and often further confuses "genetic", "hereditary", and "pre-determined". The errors in that sort of thing are noted in Sulloway's recent most comprehensive and statistically careful analysis of human behavior, highly recommended reading on more than one count!¹⁵:

Research on siblings, including twins reared together

or apart, indicates that... 30 to 40 percent of the variance in... personality traits is genetic. The big surprise from this research is the discovery that environmental influences on personality are largely specific to the individual.... [For example, for] openness to experience, the shared family environment explains only 5 percent of the variance... [whereas] nonshared environmental influences appear to explain 35 percent of the variance

Properly understood, evolutionary accounts of human behavior are far from deterministic. A Darwinian approach calls attention to the constant interaction between nature and nurture... within a *developmental* framework.... Darwinian evolution highlights *the uniqueness of the individual*

Still, “group” studies proliferate. There’s a “Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in Appalachia”, for example. No doubt other scholars will fill the gaps with Centers for the Study of Ethnicity and Gender in the South, the South-West, the North-East, Brooklyn, etc. etc. In these days of financial stringency in academe, it’s good to discover a scholarly growth area.

Semantics helps toward innovation: we’ve had Women’s Studies and Womyn’s Studies and Wimmin’s Studies and Wimyn’s Studies¹⁶; now there’s also a Womanist Studies Consortium¹⁷.

And, at last, what we’ve all been waiting for: “whiteness studies” ¹⁸.

Mr. Hughes excoriates the
‘lumpen therapeutics’ of today’s victim art,
with its brandishing of a coat of harms¹⁹

On Being Deaf

“Deafness is the least understood of disabilities” begins Hugh Kenner’s review of *Forbidden Signs: American Culture and the Campaign Against Sign Language* by Douglas C. Baynton (University of Chicago Press). Among the intriguing points:

- At one time there was the view that, since gestures had preceded speech in human history, they were a gift from God; and sign language for the deaf could “perfect the communion of one soul with another”. But with Darwinism came the notion that to be human was to speak, and using signs “was to step downward in the scale of being”.
- “Normal” describes not only the way things are but also how they ought to be; so in common usage the word propagates the naturalistic fallacy. As standardization became an industrial and commercial “good”, so **people** too were increasingly

measured against the average or “normal”. So a teacher could write early in this century that “our first and foremost aim has been the development of the deaf child into as nearly a normal individual as possible”.

The sympathetic understanding and insights that flow from thus uncovering history surely serves the cause of sensitivity better than any amount of strident demanding of instant equality for all members of hitherto not-equal groups.

Regimentation

Radical feminists know only one way in which **all** women should live and think and **should** have lived. Thus Nobelist Rita Levi-Montalcini is criticized for “her firm decision, which she never regretted, to pursue her vocation – at the exclusion of a family. One cannot but wonder why such a resourceful and adventurous person, who survived so ingeniously during World War II, has not even attempted to meet the challenge of combining a scientific career with raising a family, or to confront the role of gender in science as a social, rather than as a personal, problem”.

— review²⁰ by Pnina Geraldine Abir-Am
[Abir-Am herself *does* combine career and motherhood. Her baby’s cries have been heard by speakers and audiences at several professional meetings – HHB].

Inclusion-Exclusion

The gurus of inclusiveness and sensitivity are sadly ignorant of – among much else – basic rules and implications of language use, no matter that they spend so much time blathering about it.

They don’t know, for example, that specifying a number of things implicitly excludes non-specified things. Thus Virginia Tech “does not discriminate against employees, students or applicants” — plainly implying that it **does** discriminate against such other groups as, say, policemen, parents, spouses, or chess-players.

VT moreover doesn’t discriminate against those three fortunate specified groups only “on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, veteran status, national origin, religion, or political affiliation” — plainly implying that it **does** discriminate on such other grounds as profession, wealth, fame, etc. etc.

In 1996-97, VT had asked instructors to be sensitive to “religious and ethnic holidays” ²¹, specifying First Day of Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year); Yom Kippur (Jewish Day of Atonement); Diwali

(Hindu Festival of Lights); First Day of Ramadan (Islam month of fasting); Martin Luther King Day; id al-Fitr (Ramadan ends); Ash Wednesday (Christian Lent begins); Palm Sunday; Pesah (Jewish Passover begins); Good Friday; Yom ha Shoah (Holocaust Day).

Some of those are easy to accommodate: I wasn't planning to give a quiz on Palm Sunday anyway. But that list seems to leave a goodly number of the world's religions obviously excluded. Asia seems to have been entirely overlooked: there's not a single Buddhist or Shinto date there. Perhaps that's why this particular administrative folly has not been repeated (yet).

During the discussions, many years ago now, to include "sexual orientation" among the categories selected for non-discrimination, some of us argued for a more specific description so that the university might reserve the right to discriminate against **some** sexual orientations, for example necrophilia or sadism or intercourse with animals. But the illiterates, politicians, and assorted fanatics carried the day, no doubt considering our examples altogether impossible. But they shouldn't have counted on it. Already the "GLB — Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual" is being augmented in many places by "T" for transgender or trans-sexual²³. At SUNY-New Paltz, the Women's Studies Department, for one, is willing to be omnivorously sexually inclusive. At their conference that drew 250 people, one of the papers was about "Safe, Sane & Consensual S&M: An Alternate Way of Loving" ²⁴. [For the culturally challenged, perhaps I should explain that "S&M" is short for sadism, the experiencing of sexual pleasure from the inflicting of pain, and masochism, the experiencing of sexual pleasure from having pain inflicted.]

Not that only *talk* about all forms of sexual behavior is now acceptable in academe. Jane Gallop remains a distinguished professor of English and Comparative Literature at Wisconsin-Milwaukee despite engaging in sexual relations with students²⁵. She defends such behavior in a book, *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, published by... take a guess: Duke University Press.

How many white male professors would keep their distinguished professorships if they slept with students and openly admitted it?

What's in a Name?

"Good-bye, Columbus, Hello LBT"

In an effort to avoid offending Native Americans, the

POLITICALLY CORRECT LINGUISTICS ²²

Afro-American Speak	Ebonics (ebony + phonics)
Irish-American —	Leprechaunics
Native-American —	Kimosabics
Italo-American —	Italics Spumonics Rigatonics
Chinese-American —	Won-tonics
Japanese-American —	Mama-san-ics
Polish-American —	Kielbasanics
Jewish-American —	Zionics Hebonics
Russian-American —	Rasputonics
Spanish-American —	Flan-ics
Scottish-American —	Tartan-ics
Eskimo-American —	Harpoonics
German-American —	Autobaunics Teutonics
French-American —	Cornichonics Escargonics
Greek-American —	Gyro-nics
Left-wing-activist —	Libronics
Right-wing-activist —	Limbaugh-nics
Oakland-School-Board— (also Bevis and Butthead)	Moronics

University of Arizona and its collaborators have just changed the name of their soon-to-be-completed Columbus telescope to the innocuous 'Large Binocular Telescope.'

At this point, a more descriptive name might be the Politically Incorrect Telescope.... First came environmentalists who sued project leaders for endangering the lives of the red squirrels that live near the summit. That suit was dismissed... but trouble returned when the Apache Survival Coalition... brought suit claiming that the observatory was being built on sacred land...

In the mid-1980s, Columbus seemed like a good idea...: The project included collaborators from Ohio State University in Columbus, as well as Italians, and was originally slated to start up in the quinquecentennial year of 1992, 'before Columbus was considered a bad word.... We first considered other explorers... but every one had some political correctness problem associated with them — we couldn't find any explorer that was benign' ²⁶.

T

he University of Virginia mounts a “**Theory Seminar**” funded by the Academic Advancement program. Some of the Spring 1997 offerings include:

- “Caravaggio’s Secrets: Knowledge and Sexuality in the Art” by “a prominent literary critic and theorist of homosexuality”
- philosopher Ian Hacking on “A Bodily Expression of Male Powerlessness”
- “1712 – The Invention of Onanism” by Tom Laqueur, author of *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*
- “Gay Male Identities, Personal Privacy, and Relations of Public Exchange”

Maybe this is a biased sampling? Check it out for yourself at:

<http://minerva.acc.virginia.edu/~theory>.

A feminist professor of English protested when an advertisement called for a “dynamic teacher” because – in her view – “dynamic” could be construed as a codeword for “male”. Naturally the Director of Affirmative Action, Zaida Giraldo, concurred. Taken to task by “extraordinary press coverage”, Giraldo felt it necessary to explain the correctness of her stance²⁷:

When I learned that this was the first time that the term had been used in public advertisements [how widely and carefully was that assertion tested, one wonders], I checked to see if the apparatus that needs to be built to defend a criterion in a position announcement had in fact been constructed... [A]s a federal contractor, we are required to prove that all criteria we use in our selection procedures are job-related and non-discriminatory... [T]he college had not meant to imply that they were seeking a particular style of teacher... [and] had not designed a method for assessing the ranking of individuals on this criterion...

I think we all need to become aware of the tactics being used nowadays to attack affirmative action...

Quite right, Ms. Giraldo. We should be aware, for example, of how the *Chronicle of Higher Education* attacked affirmative action by printing your letter, which goes a long way to demonstrating how stupid and disruptive are so many of the actions taken by affirmative-action directors and gurus.

For those who do not spend their time in academe, it must be eye-opening to ponder the amount

of time people spend on such things as defining job criteria and finding methods of how to rank candi-

THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN THE COMMONWEALTH

VAS jointly with the

Virginia Institute for Public Policy

mounted a well-attended public conference on this subject in Charlottesville, 20 May 1997. Opening remarks by President Michael Krauss were followed by

Henry Bauer: “Students who don’t study”

Robert Lerner: “The higher education curriculum in Virginia”

E. D. Hirsh: “The schools we need and why we don’t have them”

Robert Holland: “The school-to-work curriculum: not with my child, you don’t”

Sheldon Richman: “Goals 2000: the bid to nationalize education”

Michelle Easton: “The failures of the federal Department of Education”

Closing remarks were made by John Taylor, President, Virginia Institute for Public Policy.

The audience was gratifyingly large and actively involved in discussions. Several of us have derived long-term benefits through new contacts made and new things learned (or recognized).

The media gave good coverage; there was a nice article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*. Further conferences on similar issues will be invaluable in bringing our concerns to that wider audience, the silent majority whose hopes and beliefs have so much in common with ours.

dates on each one of them.

Extremism and moderation

“While there may indeed be disturbed situations in which it is courageous to counsel moderation and to occupy the middle ground, the present situation in our universities, just possibly, is not one of them” ²⁸.

Saying so, makes it so

is the Administrator’s Magic Motto²⁹. That magic has been widely adopted by PCers with the result that oxymorons are used as slogans, for instance in such titles as “director of student equity, excellence, and diversity” ³⁰ or in advertisements for Multicultural Awareness Programs that proclaim “United by Diversity” ³¹.

Endnotes:

- ¹ Stephen Burd, "U.S. panel warns colleges to cut costs or risk an 'erosion of public trust'", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 30i98, A26
- ² *Spectrum* (VPI&SU) 10iv97, p.4
- ³ Spring/Summer 1998
- ⁴ Peter Drucker, *Forbes Magazine*, 10iii97; picked up by *Science* 275 (21iii97) 1745
- ⁵ Date: Thu, 18 Dec 1997 09:24:52 -0400
To: DowneyG, AE.Moyer, JCPITT, EdwardsJ
From: Burton Kaufman <kaufmanb@vt.edu>
Subject: STS Summer Minorities Program
- ⁶ *Scope* 40, March 1996, p.4
- ⁷ For example in "Fighting words", *New York Times Book Review* 1vi97, pp.8,30
- ⁸ Lila Arzua, "Yale's *Mea Culpa?*", *CAMPUS* 9 (#2, Winter 1998) 14
- ⁹ Jane Margolis, "Confident females?", *Science* 272 (96:5:10) 796
- ¹⁰ Dani Garavelli, "Chatter-box females can lay claim to being born talkers", *Scotsman* 24 July 1996
- ¹¹ Constance Holden, RANDOM SAMPLES — World women in science", *Science* 272 (17v96) 957
- ¹² Cathy Scott-Clark, "Private schools are worth their weight in A-levels", *Sunday Times* (UK) 7vii96, NEWS11
- ¹³ Cathy Scott-Clark, Margarette Driscoll & Rupert Steiner, "Privilege and prejudice", *Sunday Times* (UK) 7vii96, p.16
- ¹⁴ Robert Houston, "Exiles", reviewing *The Shadow Bride* by Roy Heath in *NYTimes Book Review*
- ¹⁵ Frank J. Sulloway, *Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives*, Pantheon, 1996, pp.20 & 87-89
- ¹⁶ See Henry Beard & Christopher Cerf, *The Official Politically Correct Dictionary & Handbook*, New York: Villard Books, 1992
- ¹⁷ Residency sites for Rockefeller Humanities Fellowships, 1997-98; *Chronicle of Higher Education* 11x96, A25
- ¹⁸ Quentin Hardy, "School of thought: the unbearable whiteness of being", *Wall Street Journal* 24iv97, A1,12
- ¹⁹ Lee Siegel, *New York Times Book Review*, citing Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America*
- ²⁰ *American Scientist* 77 (July-August 1989) 408, review of *In Praise of Imperfection: My Life and Work* by Rita Levi-Montalcini
- ²¹ <http://www.vt.edu:10021/admin/registrar/holidays.html>
- ²² Forwarded to VASNET by Fritz Heinzen, 24ii97
- ²³ Robin Wilson, "Transgendered scholars defy convention, seeking to be heard and seen in academe", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 6ii98
- ²⁴ "Campus Wire – S&M at SUNY", *CAMPUS* 9 (#2, Winter 1998) 9
- ²⁵ Courtney Leatherman, "A prominent feminist theorist recounts how she faced charges of sex harassment", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 7iii97, A12
- ²⁶ Constance Holden, "RANDOM SAMPLES", *Science* 260 (93:5:21) 1070
- ²⁷ Zaida Giraldo, "The debate over hiring 'dynamic' professors", *Chronicle of Higher Education* 16ii96, B4
- ²⁸ Alan Rutenberg, "Moderation in defense of extremism", *American Scholar* 66 (#2, Spring 1997), 290-94, reviewing *Great Books: My Adventures with Homer, Rousseau, Woolf, and Other Indestructible Writers of the Western World* by David Denby
- ²⁹ Henry B., "A sabbatical tale", *AAUP Bulletin*, 60 (1974) 296-98
- ³⁰ Mentioned in Joye Mercer, "A fight for Hawaiian sovereignty",

Chronicle of Higher Education 16xi94, A6

³¹ *Collegiate Times* (VPI&SU) 1xi94, B3

Center for Individual Rights

We've mentioned before this organization and its sorely needed crusades for what's right and proper. One could hardly find a more worthwhile group to support. Their delightful *Docket Report* has now been augmented by a Web site:

[HTTP://WWW.WDN.COM/CIR](http://www.wdn.com/cir)

If you're feeling down, despondent about the future, lacking in right-minded company, visit the site and feel better. Few items are snatched so eagerly from our mailbox and devoured with such gusto as the Center's *Docket Report*. Read about the Center's support for the black student refused a race-restricted scholarship at a traditionally black Alabama college or for the Chinese community in San Francisco whose children tend to be too scholarly to be allowed into the schools in their own neighborhood. Follow the Maas vs. Cornell saga, and reflect on what little Maas could have done without the assistance of a group like the Center. Rejoice as the *Docket Report* recounts its victories against affirmative quotas and its confident launching of further cases against discriminatory admission practices at Michigan and Washington. There's ample evidence that those who demand quotas and those demagogues who make their living from pretending to speak for every individual and group that can be labeled "minority" will not easily relinquish the sinecures and perquisites they've achieved over the last couple of decades: the Center's work must continue; I suspect they would appreciate whatever assistance any of us can provide. If you're fortunate enough to get on the mailing list for the *Docket Report*, you'll not only get tidings of good cheer over substantive progress on a number of battle-fronts, you'll read about it in prose that may send shivers along your spine (pleasant or unpleasant according to taste). Just one quote from the February 1998 issue: "Having run out of... Buddhist nuns to shake down, Mr. Gore is ransacking the Gospel for... donor maintenance opportunities"

BOOKS

[Reviews of and comments on books, unless otherwise specifically noted, are from the pen of Henry Bauer]

Hunters and Gatherers

by Francine Prose¹ is a funny, accurate satire without being vicious. The jacket blurb describes it well:

How do women treat one another in the absence of men to treat them badly? [This book is about]... a group of somewhat addled devotees of the ancient matriarchal Goddess... [like] Moonwagon, an academic turned New Age priestess...

A satire of the pieties of New Age religion and knee-jerk feminism...

Prose has uncommonly keen insight into the human condition and shares it with wry, inventive humor. A few snippets:

wondering... how a reasonably intelligent person could have made a series of choices that seemed less like clear decisions than like a series of stumbles down the path of least resistance... that had dead-ended in a cul-de-sac

cranky, like a child at a toy store, weepy from the pressure of too many choices...

One awful thing about psychic suffering is how often it lasts beyond the point at which our friends hate hearing about it.

Prose has written other critically acclaimed novels. Prose's Bigfoot Dreams is hilarious – a writer for one of the tabloids (say National Inquirer or Weekly World News) makes up a story out of whole cloth and then must take the consequences when reality imitates her fiction.

If you see something by Francine Prose, read it.



Try defining "political correctness". How about

intellectual fascism applied to language

or perhaps

an American fashion or... species of intimidation, to make us change our ways of speaking about people so that all savour is taken out of life.

Those felicitous suggestions come from

Matricide at St. Martha's

by Ruth Dudley Edwards², a murder mystery set in British academe:

The recent recipient of a huge bequest, St. Martha's is being torn apart by the demands of rival factions. The ascetics... believe the bequest should be spent on fellowships in the most austere areas of scholarship; the sybarites feel it should promote more worldly pleasures; the politically correct want the college turned into a center for ethnic and gender studies.

One admires the courage of the author, who "won't cave in like all those terrified dons who threw in the towel at the sight of a demo of stoned sociologists".



Another book well worth reading is

The Death of Truth

(ed. Dennis McCallum, 1996, Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis MN 55438; ISBN 1-55661-724-0; list price \$10.99 (p) but available at \$8 from www.crossrds.org)

Written for a "popular audience", The Death of Truth makes startlingly plain to what a pronounced degree post-modern attitudes pervade society. Individual chapters describe the impact of post-modernism on education, on law, on health care, on psychotherapy, on religion, on science, on literature, on history. A context for those is set by introductory chapters describing and contrasting three world-views: modernism, post-modernism, and theism. Clearly contrasted in particular are the ways in which those world-views deal with human nature, with free will, with the use of reason, and with the idea of progress.

Though addressed explicitly to evangelical Christians, the book will be enlightening and useful to many who, like this reviewer, are not evangelical nor even Christian; very few passages only, as well as perhaps the last chapter (of a total of 15), are of plainly parochial concern. For its explicit audience, the book makes plain the challenge for Christians

¹ New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1995

² UK: HarperCollins 1994; New York : St. Martin's Press, 1995

confronted by post-modernism, a different challenge than that earlier posed by modernism.

Even as the cost of health care has become a major national dilemma, an increasing proportion of that care is by “alternative” medicine, despite the fact that its “proponents... cannot demonstrate that it works”. Thus “therapeutic touch”, taught in many nursing schools, is “based on the conscious use of the hands to modulate, for therapeutic purposes, selected nonphysical human energies that activate the physical body” – “energies” unknown to science and indeed not demonstrable except by their purported healing influence. Thus in a post-modern age in which “scientific methodology is declared nothing more than a cultural bias”, health-care dollars get spent on nurses waving their hands around the bodies of patients and on the training of nurses to do that.

Studies of the benefits of meditation ignore the need for scientific controls, for example comparison with people who merely rest without the ritual of meditation. Even proponents of alternative medicine admit that “although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many such therapies improve the quality of life... [there is] little scientific evidence that such methods extend life beyond what could be achieved with conventional treatments”. More disturbing, though, is that alternative medicine is self-contradictory, seeking to have it both ways even when those are mutually inconsistent: thus Deepak Chopra claims both that people used to die younger and lived less fulfilling lives because of the severity of living conditions, but also that they used to live to great old ages because they worked hard and had less stressful lives. Alternative medicine also carries a hidden spiritual cost: “therapists introduce people to spiritual disciplines without disclosing their religious nature... What these therapists promote as medicine is in fact a religion”.

Over the last half-century, graduates from American schools have become less and less competent at comprehending written English, at expressing themselves in written English, at managing elementary arithmetical tasks; it is surely no coincidence that “No area of society has been more influenced by postmodern thought than education”. Whereas modernists held that “giving students mastery over subject matter... [would] enhance students’ self-esteem”, the post-modernist dogma is that “self-esteem is a precondition for learning... [E]ducation... [is] a type of therapy”. Post-modernism also recog-

nizes no “privileged” role for teachers over students: hence we have “cooperative” learning and “facilitators” instead of leaders – the “knowledge constructed by learners, teachers, or scientists *are all of equal worth*”. Teachers must not impose traditional rules of English grammar on kids from the inner city, who have their own equally valid rules of grammar. “To be... told that it is *wrong* is unhelpful and inhibiting... because it disregards the effort the student has made” – even when in point of fact no “effort” in the literal sense may have been made.

In education as with alternative medicine, the post-modernist approach is self-contradictory: “Why teach at all if we have no true knowledge to communicate?” Still, our society continues to permit post-modernist theoreticians to determine what happens in our schools; most recently, the teaching of “whole math” *which does not in fact teach arithmetic or mathematics*: “America may become the first country in the world afraid to tell its children that they got the wrong answer on a math problem!” (The tense in that quote is wrong, of course; we *have already* become that.)

“Multicultural” education too is self-contradictory. “Because postmodern education has rejected the possibility of absolutes, it has *no basis for moral critique or limits on diversity*... How pointless it is for postmodernists to beat the drum for tolerance apart from any moral basis for tolerance!”

For the possibility of psychotherapy, post-modernism spells disaster: “Postmodernism creates a worldview which is ultimately untenable and unlivable.” “Compelled to act without a foundation in truth... not really knowing why we do what we do, or why we believe what we believe... we lose a sense of identity”; and with that, any sense of personal responsibility.

As for law or justice, “Since [according to post-modernism] we have no foundation for objective knowledge of any kind, law has no foundation but power. Because it has no foundation in truth or reality, law does not deserve our allegiance.” Only the post-modern attitude can explain some of the extraordinary events of recent years or decades: in relation to California’s Proposition 209, for example, the assertion that barring racial discrimination is racially discriminatory. The willingness of the politically correct to venture absurd law suits and public complaints makes sense only once it is recognized that these are not attempts to clarify, to persuade of reality or of truth, but self-conscious grabs for power,

grounded in the experience that the wider society is still susceptible to such ambushes carried out in the guise of guilt for past societal misdeeds and of sympathy for the less privileged. "Must might make right? ... yes", says Stanley Fish, post-modern professor of Law and English at Duke University.

Science and modernism are not identical, according to this book, though they share much in common. In discussing the post-modern impact on science, some useful points are also made against the extreme *modernist* view of science that is often described as scientism, the notion that only science or only the scientific approach are capable of producing reliable knowledge. "Postmodern criticism of science is, as in other areas, mainly a grand exaggeration. Postmodernists... use observation and logical inference to reach the conclusion that observation and logical inference tell us nothing".

For post-modernism, the first cardinal sin is intolerance; yet it grants "one exception to this universal prohibition against intolerance... it's okay to question and even denounce the religious views pejoratively labeled 'fundamentalism'" which, nowadays, means simply "anyone who claims to know truth or who charges another religion with falsehood". Thus a postmodernist who calls for "tolerance and syncretism (mixing different religions together)... [also] calls evangelical Christianity a 'junk religion'! Where is the tolerance? Where is the inclusiveness?"

In arguing about religion as in other matters, "postmodernists... use reason all the time... They only reject reason when it becomes inconvenient, and religion is one area where it's an absolute nuisance!"

The Death of Truth, then, cogently illustrates how post-modern attitudes have become part of the fabric of our society. In doing that it renders a most valuable service. The book does not, however, explain how the residents of the academy's ivory towers could achieve so much. The attempt to understand that suggests that the question is based on a misconception. It is not that post-modernism has flowed from the academy into society at large: post-modernism simply *is* the tenor of this age, and academe has merely articulated it self-consciously and clearly. The 18th-century Enlightenment marked the beginning of the end for religion as universal societal authority, progressively displaced since the 17th century by the achievements of modern science. The second half of the twentieth century, however, has seen the authority of science waning in its turn,

undermined by the recognition of unsought and dangerous environmental side-effects of science-stimulated technology; and perhaps especially because science has not proved a substitute for religion in the crucial matters of meaning and purpose, ethics and morality, life and death. But even as the authority of science wanes, we have nothing ready to assume the authoritative role being vacated by science. Hence post-modernism: a *lack* of any generally agreed authority in all matters human and spiritual. Post-modernism is not so much an attitude as the *absence* of an attitude, the *lack* of a coherent, self-consistent world-view. That is why post-modernists can say such silly things, such inherently self-contradicting things, haranguing just as though they sought to be believed even while insisting that there is no basis for believing anyone or anything.

The lack of a firm, consistent set of beliefs also explains modern society's creation and discarding of role models – various figures enjoying their 15 minutes of fame, *pace* Andy Warhol. Under Enlightenment modernism and the earlier Christian era, heroines and heroes *exemplified perfection*, challenging us to strive for it even while knowing we would fall short. Mother Teresa was one such heroine, exemplifying freedom from the selfish sinfulness that humans are prone to. But more and more our heroines and heroes are not Teresa-like but rather of the ilk of Princess Di, whose good works are accompanied by warts of all sorts – capriciousness, promiscuity, divorce, self-centeredness. Post-modern role-models do not challenge us to strive for perfection, they reassure us that all our own imperfections are okay, we can be "good people" even as we break pledges, lie, steal, or whatever. We are, after all, like Princess Di, mere victims of our upbringing and our environment; our transgressions are not our fault but the fault of circumstances, the dysfunctional family or other environment in which we grew up.

This book explains much about modern life, making clear how deeply and widely the nihilist post-modern attitude has captured religion, politics, education, business, our whole way of living.



A few years ago I had as pleasantly memorable an experience as an author could wish for. My phone rang, and a voice not yet known to me admitted that:

You don't know me. But I've just read *four* of your books and I just had to call you to tell you how much I enjoyed them all.

After my own reading last summer, I really ought to place such a call to Neil Postman. A colleague had circulated an intriguing chapter from Postman's

Technopoly:

The Surrender of Culture to Technology³

Eventually I "found the time" to read the whole book, and ever since I've been telling everyone else that they should read it. The book "attempts to describe when, how, and why technology became a particularly dangerous enemy" (xii).

Postman immediately acknowledges the long sequence of notable minds who have addressed the same issues; but I venture to suggest that few other works put the issues so plainly and so accurately. Reminding us of Thoreau's insight that we are "tools of our tools", Postman cites (3-4) from a couple of millennia ago a certain skepticism even about the benefits of the invention of writing:

What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society.

So much for "information technology". And if our educationists and administrators had had the benefit of a proper liberal education, maybe they would have encountered such insights and wisdom and not be taking us to the place we're rushing toward in the proverbial hand-basket. Among the people who ought to read Postman is Raymond J. Lane, president and CEO of Oracle Corporation, a software outfit second in size only to Microsoft. Giving the Commencement Address at Virginia Tech, Lane asserted that the "information revolution" will make it possible for everyone "to take courses from the best teachers in the world" ⁴. Some random minor thoughts:

- If "distance learning" is really so desirable, why are students asked, in evaluating their professors, whether the professors are readily available to them? Why are we supposed to keep office hours?

- Has Lane ever heard of **books**? One of the great things about them is that we can learn not only from "the best teachers in the world" but from the best teachers *who ever lived in the world*. It's what has been called a Great Books program.

For a screamingly funny, incisive insider's assessment of the mental caliber of those who brought us the information revolution, read Robert Cringely's *Accidental Empires*.

The computer, in its capacity to smooth over unsatisfactory institutions and ideas, is the talcum powder of the mind

Technology, we are not commonly aware, has influenced our **internal** life even more significantly than it has our material way of life; and even the most apparently advantageous technology brings with it unforeseen consequences, indeed **unforeseeable** consequences:

to a man with a hammer, everything looks like a nail...
 To a man with a computer, everything looks like data.
 And to a man with a grade sheet, everything looks like a number (14).

So what shall we say about administrators who judge professors on the basis of numerical student evaluations? And about the professors who countenance and abet it?

"We come to believe that the results of opinion polls are what people believe, as if our opinions can be encapsulated in such sentences as 'I approve' and 'I disapprove'" (89); for "the computer redefines humans as 'information processors' and nature itself as information to be processed" (111).

the clock was invented by men who wanted to devote themselves more rigorously to God; it ended as the technology of greatest use to men who wished to devote themselves to the accumulation of money. In the eternal struggle between God and Mammon, the clock quite unpredictably favored the latter (15).

What's important is not how the computer may be an efficient teaching tool, but how it alters "our conception of learning, and how, in conjunction with television, it undermines the old idea of school" (19); "something has happened in America that is strange and dangerous, and there is only a dull and even stupid awareness of what it is – in part because it has no name. I call it Technopoly" (20).

Among other things we suffer "information glut", "information chaos" (60); "we are awash in informa-

³ New York : Vintage Books, 1993

⁴ Paul Dellinger, "Tech sends 3,000 grads out into cold world", *Roanoke Times* 11v97, B1,9

tion... Information has become a form of garbage” (69). Our leaders speak enthusiastically of coping with the “information explosion” through “information technology” on the “information super-highway” that actually points only towards hell: “as incomprehensible problems mount... [and] meaning itself becomes suspect, the Technopolist stands firm in believing that what the world needs is yet more information” (61). Technopoly is “cultural AIDS... Anti-Information Deficiency Syndrome... [the] information immune system is inoperable” (63).

***When statistics and computers
are joined, volumes of garbage
are generated in public discourse***

With the telegraph, “the fortunes of newspapers came to depend not on the quality or the utility of the news they provided but on how much, from what distances, and at what speed” (68). The “tie between information and human purpose has been severed” (70); but “any educational institution, if it is to function well in the management of information, must have a theory about its purpose and meaning... [and] must... give clear expression to its theory... to a large extent, by excluding information” (75) – for instance, I suggest, by **not** allowing student evaluations of professors, or grade-point distributions of individual classes, to be made public; and by **not** publicly competing on such “measures” as numbers of papers published, numbers of patents won, dollar amounts brought in by researchers and football teams... and so on and so forth. How often do we hear anything from educational “leaders” that is **qualitative**, let alone **thoughtful**? As in Technopoly, “they make no moral decisions, only practical ones” (79).

Our management-of-health-care gurus should read Postman’s chapter 6, “The Ideology of Machines: Medical Technology”. (We “customers” of the health-care “system” don’t need to read it because the horrors are already all too well known to us.)

Social scientists should be reminded that “the quest to understand human behavior and feeling can in no sense except the most trivial be called science”; “there is an irrevocable difference between a blink and a wink” (148). Scientific failure to recognize the limitations of science is why social science “has contributed scarcely anything to our understanding of social phenomena” (147, citing Hayek). It provokes

considerable thought when Postman claims that “in the nineteenth century, novelists provided... most of the powerful metaphors and images of our culture [whereas in] the twentieth century... [they] come largely from... social historians and researchers” (156).

***the United States is not a culture
but merely an economy,
which is the last refuge of an
exhausted philosophy of
education***

In chapter 10, “The Great Symbol Drain”, Postman brings stunning examples to illustrate how commercialism and advertising have joined with Technopoly to disparage traditional beliefs “not [in] blasphemy but [through] trivialization... the adoration of technology pre-empts the adoration of anything else... ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me’ applies as well to a technological divinity as to any other” (165).

In Chapter 11 Postman accepts the challenge that social critics often decline, to offer something in the way of solution – even as he admits it unlikely of adoption. The chapter is titled – or dedicated to – “The Loving Resistance Fighter[s]”

- “who pay no attention to a poll unless they know what questions were asked, and why;
- who refuse to accept efficiency as the pre-eminent goal of human relations;
- who have freed themselves from the belief in the magical powers of numbers, do not regard calculation as an adequate substitute for judgment, or precision as a synonym for truth;
- who refuse to allow psychology or any ‘social science’ to pre-empt the language and thought of common sense;
- who are, at least, suspicious of the idea of progress, and who do not confuse information with understanding;
- who do not regard the aged as irrelevant;
- who take seriously the meaning of family loyalty and honor, and who, when they ‘reach out and touch someone,’ expect that person to be in the same room;
- who take the great narratives of religion seriously and who do not believe that science is the only system of thought capable of producing truth;

- who know the difference between the sacred and the profane, and who do not wink at tradition for modernity's sake;
- who admire technological ingenuity but do not think it represents the highest possible form of human achievement."

To nurture such folk, Postman suggests that education needs to "stay as far from contemporary works as possible" (196) and do the sort of thing that Great-Books fans and liberal-education enthusiasts want. He acknowledges that "students, immersed in today's popular arts, will find such an emphasis... tedious and even painful" (197).

He may be right there. But he might well also be wrong on this. Why not try? Over the years I've met some quite unusually outstanding engineering students, and uniformly they were bored by their professional courses and took whatever literature, poetry, writing, history they could find time for. For the last several years I've taught elective courses in "Humanities, Physical Sciences & Technology" built on Jacob Bronowski's *Ascent of Man* which is now 25 years old, replete with unfamiliar terms, full of Bronowski's *thoughtful*, sometimes intricate reasoning, anything but superficial or "easy"; and I continue to be delighted at how well most students take to it. Having been starved for 15 years or so by our impoverished, present-oriented schooling, they may be hungry for such solid, *deeper* stuff.

when the ancient universities become efficient
they will cease to be productive

I constructed elaborate flow charts of what I
needed to do, when what I really needed to do
was do something

The awkward truth, when it comes to the
humanities, is that knowledge, taste and
judgment get into us by uncharted routes

Clive James, *May Week Was in June*
(*Unreliable Memoirs III*), London: Pan Books,
1991, pp.84,106,119

In *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*⁵

Postman describes what schooling might be, were it designed to deal with the central issues of human life rather than, as at present, with peripheral and superficial matters. Unlike most academics writing on education, Postman has relevant first-hand experience: he has not only taught real subjects at the college level, he began his career teaching in elementary school. As in *Technopoly*, Postman's fluency and frequently striking phrases attest to coherent, long-digested and clarified opinions formed in a wide-ranging, perceptive, *independent* mind. As with *Technopoly*, you'll be better off having read it.

Getting students interested, "motivated", in the classroom, Postman points out, is "a temporary psychic event" separate from whatever *reasons* there might be "for being in a classroom, for listening to a teacher, for taking an examination, for doing homework, for putting up with school even if you are not motivated" (4). "Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention" (7).

**people in distress will sometimes
prefer a problem that is familiar
to a solution that is not**

Meaning comes from *narratives* – not from facts, data, or anything else that science or technology have to offer; "public education depends absolutely on the existence of shared narratives *and* the exclusion of narratives that lead to alienation and divisiveness"; "public education does not serve a public. It *creates* a public... The question is, What kind of public does it create?" (17-18).

The End of Education has two parts, "the doctrine... [and] the commentary" respectively (91). Postman's argument in Part I is carried through chapters on "The Necessity of Gods", "Some Gods That Fail", "Some New Gods That Fail", and "Gods That May Serve". Those titles describe very well their contents. Plain speaking and common sense are mounted against academic obscurantism, for instance the "kind of metaphysics of meaninglessness, known popularly as the philosophy of 'deconstruction.' Invented, so to say, by a reformed Nazi sympathizer, Paul de Man... [P]erhaps he wished us to be-

⁵ New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995

lieve, by way of self-justification, that it is possible to read *Mein Kampf* as a paean of praise to the Jewish race" (24).

Postman talks "about children as they really come to us, not children who are invented to show us how computers may enrich their lives" (48). He acknowledges that "the 'multiculturalists' are the most active and dedicated education philosophers we have at the moment... not especially interested in methods or machinery... But they have a story to tell, and they believe their story can serve as a foundation to schooling. The trouble is that it is a terrible story, at least for public schools" because it "makes cultural diversity an exclusive preoccupation" (51-2). "The task of the public schools... is to erase the hyphens [in African-American etc.] or to make them less distinct... not to make blacks black, or Koreans Korean, or Italians Italian, but to make Americans" (57).

**education as a subject of study
is rarely taken seriously
even in college, for reasons...
too painful to discuss**

Chapter 4, "Gods That May Serve", introduces five possibly useful narratives "that I make no claim... exhaust the possibilities... [to] provide respectable, humane, and substantive reasons for schooling... The purpose... [is to promote] a serious conversation *about* reasons. Not about policies, management, assessment, and other engineering matters. These are important, but they ought rightfully to be addressed *after* decisions are made about what schools are for... [O]f all those who have business to conduct with schools – school administrators, classroom teachers, students, parents, politicians, publishers, and professors of education – it is the last who seem least interested in talking about reasons, with the first not far behind" (91).

Postman's five possible narratives are "The Spaceship Earth", "The Fallen Angel", "The American Experiment", "The Law of Diversity", "The Word Weavers / The World Makers". Part II of the book suggests how these parables might inspire actual instruction. "The Spaceship Earth" is self-explanatory. "The Fallen Angel" suggests that students be directed to look for errors in the texts and in what teachers say, as plausible and feasible a manner of actually encouraging critical thinking as anything suggested by others in more high-falutin terms.

"The American Experiment" proposes an idea

missing from the 41 goals set by experts of the New York Board of Regents, namely "acquiring and/or deepening a love of one's country" (130). Students should be confronted with the question with which the American Experiment began: "Is it possible to have a coherent, stable culture that allows the greatest possible freedom of religious and political thought and expression?" (132); "no student would be allowed out of the eighth grade unless she or he knew by heart the First Amendment" (133). Then there's the "second great American experiment [that] began about the middle of the nineteenth century... 'Is it possible to have a coherent, stable culture made up of people of different languages, religions, traditions, and race?'" (135-6). "The third began toward the end of the nineteenth century... 'Is it possible to provide a free public education for all citizens?'" (137). The question for us now, of course, is: "Is it possible to preserve the best of American traditions and social institutions while allowing uncontrolled technological development?" (139).

As to "The Law of Diversity", Postman emphasizes the criterion of *merit* in the choice of examples: "Emily Dickinson and Edna St. Vincent Millay... because their poems are good, not to strike a blow for feminism... Whitman and Langston Hughes for the same reason, not because the former was a homosexual and the latter African-American. Do we learn about Einstein because he was Jewish? Marie Curie because she was Polish? Aristotle because he was Greek? Confucius... Chinese? Cervantes... handicapped?... Grieg... a short Norwegian, or Beethoven... a deaf German?" (80-1). [And implicitly, of course, this short list already exposes the common special pleading that traditional classics are white-male-Eurocentric.]

"The Word Weavers / The World Makers" notes that "human language constructs a worldview" (175). I'd love to take a course with Postman expounding on that.

An Epilogue notes that "American culture is not presently organized to promote the idea of childhood; and without that idea schooling loses much of its point" (196) and also "without it we must lose our sense of what it means to be an adult" (197).

Given today's realities of "higher education",
Paul Alper suggests it should be spelled

HIRE EDUCATION

To learn more about what it might mean to be a child and an adult respectively, turn to Postman's

The Disappearance of Childhood⁶

That "children have existed for less than four hundred years" (xi) may strike the reader as absurd; yet "childhood as both a social structure and psychological condition emerged around the sixteenth century". "The idea of childhood is one of the great inventions of the Renaissance" (xii); before that, "child" indicated *relationship*, not age (14).

The notion of childhood as specifically different from adulthood is eroding – **has** eroded in modern America; for when did we last hear of "juvenile delinquents"? Or of sport "played for no other reason than pleasure" with "no instructors or umpires or spectators", rather than as "infant-pro" Little-League baseball or Pee-Wee football? (4)

The Disappearance of Childhood argues that "without a well-developed idea of shame, childhood cannot exist" (9). Adults must have secrets that children do not share in, if childhood is to be a distinct phase of life. In the pre-literate days of the Middle Ages, childhood ended at seven, at which age young humans are able to speak and understand just about everything that mature humans can.

With the availability of cheap books came the aim of literate education. Protestant emphasis on personal familiarity with the Scriptures, and Catholic shying away from it, saw intellectual leadership pass from the Catholic Mediterranean to the Protestant North-West Europe and also explains "why childhood emerged sooner and in sharper outline in the British Isles than anywhere else" (39). By the 16th century, children's clothing was distinct from that of adults (43) – incidentally another difference that has virtually disappeared in modern America where 1- and 2-year-olds of both sexes are fitted with ear-rings and 80-year-olds wear jeans and tennis shoes. Children's speech became differentiated from adult speech.

Is Postman right, that "a child evolves toward adulthood by acquiring the sort of intellect we expect of a good reader:... the capacity to think logically and sequentially, the capacity to distance oneself from symbols, the capacity to manipulate high orders of abstraction, the capacity to defer gratification" (47)? Then what are we in for as our educationists and sundry other "leaders" push Infotech and read-

ing becomes a thing of the past?

Childhood started in the middle classes, but between 1850 and 1950 it became – at least in America – universal: "as every person's birthright,... childhood came to be defined as a biological category, not a product of culture" (67); and that was the beginning of the end. The electronic and graphic revolutions assaulted childhood as they assaulted print culture. Television is a "total disclosure medium"; with it, shame and manners lose their significance. The "calculus of wonderment changes... [and] children... are given answers to questions they never asked" (90).

Television tends to make the rigors of a literate education irrelevant...

'we have yet to hear of a television viewing disability'

There seems general agreement that humans benefit from good role models. But television, from which children cannot be effectively shielded, depicts "the world as it is [and thereby] undermine[s] a child's belief in adult rationality, in the possibility of an ordered world, in a hopeful future... [M]ostly shown on television is the plain fact that the adult world is filled with ineptitude, strife, and worry" (94-5). Also, of course, TV "reveals to children at the earliest possible age the joys of consumerism" (96); and "today's children are better informed than any previous group of youngsters" – and both of those mean "they have become adults... expelled from the garden of childhood" (97).

Study our TV commercials: "it is now considered desirable that a mother should not look older than her daughter. Or that a daughter should not look younger than her mother" (98). In our "new configuration of the stages of life", between infancy and senility there is only an "adult-child" (99).

Postman has fascinating suggestions about the influence of TV on us adult-children. Ponder that the background music in films varies appropriately as the mood of the action changes; but in news broadcasts, the same music is played no matter whether the news be merry or grim. The time devoted to a given "news item" is more readily measured in seconds than in minutes. "Excitement" is conveyed through tempo, not through substance. TV plus preacher-evangelists have accomplished "the near infantilization of theology" (116).

⁶ New York: Vintage Books, 1994, with new preface and slightly revised from original Delacorte Press publication in 1982

It is not essential that a TV newsreader grasp the meaning of what is being reported; many of them cannot even produce an appropriate facial display to go along with the words they are speaking. And some have even given up trying

Distinctions between childhood and adulthood are disappearing throughout our culture: in matters of taste and style, of law, of schools, of sports; in alcoholism, drug use, sexual activity, crime... Children *qua children* disappear from TV, but humans of child age serve as pitchmen in commercials: “we have a new meaning to the prophecy that a child shall lead them” (124). And adults too have disappeared in this age of the “adult-child”: “With a few exceptions, adults on television do not take their work seriously (if they work at all), they do not nurture children, they have no politics, practice no religion, represent no tradition, have no foresight or serious plans, have no extended conversations, and in no circumstance allude to anything that is not familiar to an eight-year-old person” (126-7).

The Disappearance of Childhood concludes with six questions:

- Was childhood discovered or invented?
- Does the decline of childhood signify a general decline of American culture?
- To what extent do the Moral Majority and other Fundamentalist groups contribute toward the preservation of childhood?
- Are there any communication technologies that have the potential to sustain the need for childhood?
- Are there any social institutions strong enough and committed enough to resist the decline of childhood?
- Is the individual powerless to resist what is happening? – when “for parents merely to remain married is itself an act of disobedience and an insult to the spirit of a throwaway culture in which continuity has little value” (152).

Voting... is the next to last refuge of the politically impotent. The last refuge is... giving your opinion to a pollster

What TV has wrought in our culture, Postman refers to in several of these books, but it takes center stage in

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business⁷

“In [Orwell’s] *1984*... people are controlled by inflicting pain. In [Huxley’s] *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure... This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right” (viii).

“The Medium is the Metaphor” explains how the ideas we express are determined by the medium through which public discourse is carried on. Chapter 2, “Media as Epistemology”, argues that, in consequence in the TV age, “the content of much of our public discourse has become dangerous nonsense” (16). “In a print-culture, we... say of people who are not intelligent that we must ‘draw them pictures’ so that they may understand. Intelligence implies that one can dwell comfortably without pictures, in a field of concepts and generalizations” (26) [which our Gadarene rush into Infotech will make rarer and rarer as even words of instruction are replaced by little pictures, “icons” indeed]. “Typographic America” suggests that “America was founded by intellectuals, from which it has taken us two centuries and a communications revolution to recover” (41). To “The Typographic Mind”, “Public figures were known largely by their written words,... not by their looks or even their oratory... [But think of] Richard Nixon or Jimmy Carter or Billy Graham, or even Albert Einstein, and what will come to your mind is an image, a picture of a face, most likely a face on a television screen (... [or] a photograph of a face)” (61). “The printed page revealed the world, line by line, page by page, to be a serious, coherent place, capable of management by reason, and of improvement by logical and relevant criticism” (62).

With the telegraph came “The Peek-a-Boo World” of *context-free information*. Information became a commodity prized for its novelty, interest, curiosity, not for any function of serving social and political decisions and actions (65). “To the telegraph, intelligence meant knowing *of* lots of things, not knowing *about* them” (70).

Add to the telegraph the influence of photography and graphics: “the photograph presents the world as object; language, the world as idea” (72).

⁷ Viking Penguin 1985, Penguin 1986

Photos are not to be agreed or disagreed with, simply accepted. They cannot be “out of context”, whereas words can be; and “**all understanding begins with our not accepting the world as it appears**” (73; emphasis added).

Traditionally information served “to manage the real contexts of... [people’s] lives”. With proliferating context-free information, we began “to invent contexts in which otherwise useless information might be put to some apparent use... crossword puzzle... cocktail party... radio quiz shows... television game show... ‘Trivial Pursuit’...The pseudo-context is the last refuge... of a culture overwhelmed by irrelevance, incoherence, and impotence”. The sole purpose of pseudo-contexts is to amuse (76).

So now we’re in “The Age of Show Business”, in which “all subject matter is presented as entertaining” (87). “Thinking does not play well on television... There is not much to see in it” (90). What there **is** a lot of on TV is “Now... This”: switching every minute or so from one thing to another, from one news item to another, or from news to commercial, all equally entitled to the viewer’s attention; “embedded in the surrealistic frame of a television news show is a theory of anti-communication... a type of discourse that abandons logic, reason, sequence and rules of contradiction. In aesthetics... the name given to this theory is Dadaism; in philosophy, nihilism; in psychiatry, schizophrenia. In the... theater,... vaudeville” (105).

So “opinions” on television really means “emotions” (107) – how often, indeed, do we now hear people say, “I feel that...” when presumably they ought to mean “I think that...”?

“Shuffle Off to Bethlehem” takes up religion on TV. “Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether” (121).

“Reach Out and Elect Someone” is about politics and TV. “The distance between rationality and advertising is now so wide that it is difficult to remember that there once existed a connection between them” (128). “It is a very bad commercial indeed that engages the viewer in wondering about the validity of the point being made” (131). So now “on television the politician does not so much offer the audience an

image of himself, as offer himself as an image of the audience” (134).

And then we have “Teaching as an Amusing Activity”. “As Dewey wrote..., we learn what we do. Television educates by teaching children to do what television-viewing requires of them. And that is as precisely remote from what a classroom requires of them as reading a book is from watching a stage show” (144); “there must be a sequence to learning,... perseverance and a certain measure of perspiration are indispensable,... individual pleasures must frequently be submerged in the interests of group cohesion... [;] learning to be critical and to think conceptually and rigorously do not come easily... but are hard-fought victories” (146).

TV has no prerequisites, tries not to induce perplexity, and avoids the argument, discussions, reasoned discourse of expository books; TV seeks **to entertain**, and those educated by TV expect to be entertained. To those who keep declaiming that TV – or Infotech, or multi-media, or whatever the latest fad is – can increase learning, Postman replies by citing a review of “2,800 studies... [of] television’s influence on behavior... [yielding no] persuasive evidence that ‘learning increases when information is presented in a dramatic setting.’ Indeed... quite the opposite conclusion is justified... print significantly increased correct responses to questions [about presented material]” (151-2).

Postman concludes with “The Huxleyan Warning”: “When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is re-defined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility” (156).

Does that sound too apocalyptic to be plausible?

Consider that our chief national pre-occupations seem to be the economy – **Bread** – and Big-Time Sports – **Circuses**. Pop history it may be, but is there not any truth to it, that Roman civilization crumbled when the populace had come to care for nothing but their bread and their circuses?

THE VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

believes that rational discourse is a necessary foundation of academic life and of a democratic society. So we seek to foster and protect

- the free exchange of ideas;
- academic freedom: *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*;
- the substance and integrity of scholarship and learning;
- respect for our intellectual heritage;
- rigorous standards of excellence in teaching, learning, and research;
- the evaluation of students strictly on the merit of their individual performance;

and we aim to

- create forums in which university life can be rationally discussed;
- provide informed comment on immediate and on perennial issues in higher education;

and we urge academic leaders to

- recognize learning and scholarship as the pre-eminent and primary purpose for which colleges and universities exist;
- behave responsibly in pursuit of that purpose;
- practice honesty with the public, with students and parents, with faculty, and with everyone else.

Further, we shall resist

- attempts to subsume academe under political goals;
- ideological corruption of teaching and scholarship;
- intimidation of students or faculty who voice unfashionable views;
- treatment of students, faculty, and others as ciphers or symbols of groups instead of as individuals worthy of individual consideration.

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