

The Realist

Number 113

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"Michael and Me"

by Matt Neuman

Detroit, Michigan.

"He's out to get Moore. He wants to punish him, humiliate him. But—Roger Smith direct a movie? He's crazy."

Victor Tomasoni is a public relations consultant, one of many hired by General Motors to fight the tidal wave of bad publicity brought on by the movie *Roger and Me*. Now, recently let go by GM, he was free to talk about his former boss and, yes, his movie-making aspirations.

"I was hoping it would end when they ignored Michael Moore at the Academy Awards. But no. Roger Smith is serious. He's on a mission. He even went to San Francisco, to talk to the people at *Mother Jones*—disguised as a foreign journalist. He wore a very thin mustache, spoke in a very thick accent—said he was 'Rutger Schmidt' from Germany, doing an exposé of Moore for *Stern*, or *Der Spiegel*."

"And they fell for it?"

"They're being sued by Moore, so it was easy. They're blinded by hate." (Note: Moore was fired by *Mother Jones* and his suit against them is still pending.)

Tomasoni tells me that filming begins next week in California, where Smith's private investigators have located Moore at a beach house owned by Democratic fundraiser Max Palevsky.

"He actually thinks he can do to Michael Moore what Michael Moore did to him!"

"Don't laugh," I say, trying not to laugh. "He'll probably win an Oscar."

Malibu, California.

Above, the beach house. Below, a small film crew led by a paunchy, rosy-cheeked man wearing a baseball cap with GM on it. The man is Roger Smith, Chairman of General Motors, and he's making his directorial debut.

I'm here because Smith insisted on having a member of the press along favorable to his point of view (okay, I lied) and to record events carefully, if not factually, to avoid the kind of criticism Moore received. Call it Tomasoni's Revenge.

Smith has thoughts of his own kind of revenge. You can see the twinkle in his eyes, the gleeful anticipation of that moment when Michael Moore is finally trapped, snookered into some uncompromisingly embarrassing situation. And, Smith has only got two weeks in which to do it. That's how much time the GM board of directors is giving him—they think he's crazy too.

Smith has decided to sneak around the back of the house and enter from the beach. Unfortunately, the only access to the beach is from



the heavily-protected, multi-million-dollar homes themselves. Fortunately, Smith's friend Armand Hammer lives next door to Palevsky and he provides us access, as well as some extraordinary food. On my way out I leave a five-dollar bill with "Thanks, R.S." written across it.

"I want the camera up there, on the deck," Smith whispers.

Marty, the cameraman, starts scaling one of the concrete pylons that keeps the house from falling into the Pacific. Smith—easily in his 60's—starts climbing a different pylon, dragging sound man Bob along at the end of a 30-foot cord.

Since I first met Roger Smith he has been absolutely focussed in the pursuit of his goal. He's learned the basics of lighting, camera angles, "framing" shots—and he's prepared. Of course, in the world of documentary filmmaking, you can prepare all you want, but nothing is guaranteed. You need a little luck. Michael Moore got unlucky when he interviewed the vapid Miss Michigan and, later

that year, she became the vapid Miss America. These things can't be planned.

Luck is not with Roger Smith tonight. The beach house is owned by Max Palevsky, but the only sign of life is a housekeeper, who is now \$500 richer.

Hollywood, California.

The very next morning we're at it again. Smith's only had a few minutes of sleep, but you'd never know it. A tip from his private investigators has Moore staying at the fabled Chateau Marmont Hotel in Hollywood. He rousts us from our bunks in the large, luxurious camera truck/RV (made by GM in Mexico, of course) and we hit the road.

Smith, riding in the back and pretending to be "just one of the guys," decides to practice his narrative on a small, Japanese-made tape recorder.

"When I meet Michael Moore I'd like to invite him to come to Detroit—to come up to my offices in the General Motors building. I

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Michael and Me

(Continued from Cover)

want him to see for himself that when he attacks me, the Chairman of General Motors, he is also attacking the people around me—the executives and the managers and the vice presidents that make up the best damn decision-making team GM has ever had. And I want Michael Moore to meet these good people and to see their faces and to see how he's hurt them . . ."

He sounds about as sincere as ex-Eastern Airlines' head Frank Lorenzo. Nearing the hotel, he asks Marty to see some exterior shots.

" . . . the Chateau Marmont Hotel in Hollywood is a long way from Flint, Michigan. And Michael Moore seems to spend more time in Hollywood these days than in the hometown he says he's trying to help."

He stops the tape.

"Right around here I'm going to put in that clip of John Belushi."

The big truck pulls up to the side entrance of the hotel and Smith gets out.

"Wait five minutes," he tells Marty, "and I'll find a window to get the camera through."

Then he tells me to get out.

"It'll look less conspicuous if you come along," he says.

Without stopping at the front desk, Smith heads for the lobby and finds a place to sit down. I do the same. When he pretends to read a copy of *Guitar World*, so do I. The concierge looks at us with suspicion, but Smith follows his plan. After five minutes, he gets up and asks for the location of a bathroom. Then, he excuses himself. I go back to reading about Eddie Van Halen's new amplifier.

All of a sudden there's this loud squeal. The concierge goes to look. I follow. There, at the end of a hallway, is the Chairman of General Motors wriggling to free his head from a small window opening, with Marty on the outside, trying to push his head back in. It's stuck pretty good. A young actor, who I later learn is teen idol Johnny Depp, shuffles sleepily out of his room to see what's going on.

"Drugs," I say, shaking my head and going "tsk tsk."

Depp yawns and shuffles back to his room. The concierge, however, looks like he's ready to call the cops. He doesn't have to, as Smith finally frees his head. The whole thing ends up costing another \$500 to keep the concierge happy.

On the Road, USA.

We're headed for New York, where Smith's new private investigators expect Moore to show up at a tribute to documentary filmmakers at the Museum of Modern Art. Smith has decided to let his beard grow during the trip, the better to hide his identity.

I ask him if he's worried about the comparisons people are bound to make between his film and *Roger and Me*.

"I'm sure there are people who are going to say I got the idea for my film from that film, but I can honestly say, 'How could I? I never saw it.'"

And why hasn't Roger Smith seen *Roger and Me*?—the only movie that is about him

and even has his name in the title?

"I'm not a fan of sick humor," he explains.

New York City.

The Museum of Modern Art has a rule strictly forbidding cameras on the premises. So, Marty has parked the truck on 54th Street and mounted the camera on the roof, allowing a view into the museum's sculpture garden. In addition, Smith is wired with a hidden microphone, a radio-transmitter, and a miniaturized headset under a stocking cap that, added to the beard, gives him the look of an old sea salt. Once again, I go along as a shield, a diversification.

We pay and enter. Smith asks a young girl at the information desk about the film tribute. She says there will be a reception in the sculpture garden at 4:30. *The sculpture garden*. Will Michael Moore be there? Yes!

"But the reception is for Film Society members only," she adds.

Even though his name is on the list of the museum's biggest contributors, Smith doesn't want anyone to know he's here. He pulls me aside.

"You can get me in."

"I'm not in the Film Society," I explain.

"That's okay—you can join, then take me in with you as your guest."

This guy didn't rise to the top on ass-kissing alone. I pay the \$35 for my membership card and, Chairman of General Motors in tow, head for the sculpture garden.

We're a few minutes early, and Moore isn't there yet. Just a handful of "artsy intellectual types" as Smith calls them. The camera lurks beyond the wall. Smith checks the sound. He can hear Bob, Bob can hear him. Everything is in place.

Then a bit of hubbub. We turn to see what it is. Right on cue, none other than Michael Moore, looking just like he does in the movies, rolls in with a flotilla of admirers.

"How does it feel to hurt hard-working Americans?" Smith barks out.

Moore sees Roger Smith, but doesn't recognize him. If anything, he regards him as a crackpot, and turns away. But Smith is relentless.

"I said, 'How does it feel to hurt hard-working Americans?' Answer me, Mr. Rich Hollywood Director!"

He pushes through the crowd, eventually staring Moore right in the face, trying to goad him into a response.

"Answer me, Mr. Rich Hollywood Director!"

It works!

"I'm not rich," answers Moore. "And I'm not a Hollywood director. And I haven't hurt anyone."

"Yes you have!"

"Who have I hurt?"

"People. Good people. Dozens. Hundreds. Thousands," Smith charges. "You think you're so concerned for the working man? Prove it!"

Moore turns to the artsy intellectual types surrounding him.

"This bum probably makes more than I do," he smirks. Then he turns and moves on, his entourage following.

Crass? Crude? Insensitive? What did he mean? That this loudmouth in the crowd is a rich bum? That Warner Brothers isn't paying Moore a bum's wage? That this "bum" is being paid a lot of money by GM to heckle him? To tell you the truth, I'm still not sure what he meant, but it doesn't matter—Roger Smith just got lucky. Buster Douglas lucky. He just got Michael Moore to say something that's going to make him look bad, and isn't that what it's all about?

But, when I look over at Smith, he isn't laughing. He isn't even smiling. Instead, he's standing all alone in the middle of the sculpture garden, frozen in horror, as still as the Henry Moore sculpture next to him.

"What's wrong?"

He holds out a broken piece of wire, then looks down, drawing my attention to a tiny microphone, severed from the wire, lying forlornly on the ground. No words are necessary.

Later, we view the footage. The silent footage. It looks like it was shot by Zapruder. I suggest, kiddingly, that he dub Moore's voice. Smith nods, as if he'd seriously consider it.

Flint, Michigan

This is the last day of filming. Roger Smith won't give up. His private investigators, who are on a hot streak of one, believe Moore is staying here in Flint, with his sister.

We pull up to a modest house on a modest street about a mile from the closed GM plant that was featured in *Roger and Me*. Smith hands me a yellow legal pad and a pencil.

"We're census takers. I'll do all the talking."

The next thing I know I'm wired for sound and ringing the doorbell.

A young woman peeks through the side window. Cautiously, she opens the door.

"Yes?"

"Is there a Michael Moore staying with you?" Smith asks.

"Yes, that's my brother. But he's not here right now."

"Will he be back soon?"

"Who are you?"

"Let me explain, ma'am. We're with the Census Bureau. Your address is what we call a 'target address.' That means that we've targeted certain households to provide us with more detailed information about certain residents of those households. May we come in?"

"Well . . ."

She's not sure, but after looking us over, she decides to trust us. We're ushered into a cozy, unpretentious home.

"Iced tea?" she asks.

Smith starts asking her a bunch of vague questions, nothing too personal to arouse her suspicion. As a result, it takes him 45 minutes and six tall glasses of iced tea to realize he's targeted the address of the wrong Michael Moore. We apologize, Smith offers her money—she's not interested—and we head for the door.

"Goddamn private investigators," he mutters under his breath.

I ask the woman, just for the hell of it, "Was your brother upset at not being nominated?"

COURT JESTER

The Peter Principle Lingers On

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Laurence J. Peter, the patron saint of incompetence. His widow, Irene writes:

"It was a tough two years after the stroke, and where he found the sheer guts to keep going and thinking of the next day left me in awe. Though in a wheelchair with very difficult speech, he kept his sense of life's absurdities and great optimism that things could be changed for the better.

"He made a lasting impression on the speech therapist we had hired for him last fall. The therapist administered a series of tests to see where he could begin. The tests involved some 20 loosely matched items that Laurence had to point to, name, pair up, give the item's use, demonstrate how it was used.

"He pointed to the fork and said, 'This is an instrument used mainly by Caucasians to eat with.' Then of the knife, 'This is a knife, used with the fork, but—pause—'Americans use it poorly.' Then of a quarter, 'This is two-bits, a quarter, used to purchase things.' Then he took the quarter and held it very close and in a slow voice said, '1972. And you've had it too long.' Whereupon he slowly dropped it into his shirt pocket.

"It tells so much about Laurence, that he was able to still think funny even when his body was gradually quitting on him . . .

"There were four errors on the death certificate—Laurence would have loved that!"

Are the '90s Over Yet?

Things are happening so fast, even the rate of acceleration has been increasing. Monumental events are being played out for a public with the attention span of an MTV addict. No sooner did *Time* name Gorbachev as Person of the Decade than there was speculation that Gorbachev was on the way out.

Everybody sees these events through their own particular filters. An account executive in *Advertising Age* described the release of Nelson Mandela as "something we have been looking forward to for a long time. It's a move toward creating a market of 35 million people of all races instead of focusing only on the 5 million whites."

On NBC News Tom Brokaw announced, "For 27 years we couldn't see Nelson Mandela, but now we can watch him eating dinner," as the camera panned to reveal the entire Mandela family chewing militantly away on their own privacy. CBS' Dan Rather asked him what was the worst part about being in prison and, yes, what was the best part?

Then the Trump divorce story knocked Mandela right off the front pages. Homeless people wandered the streets, muttering, "The Donald wants to give Ivana only 25 million dollars—that's unconscionable!" Ah, what news it will be when Mandela gets divorced. You can see the *New York Post* headline now: "Winnie Complains Nelson Learned to Prefer Men in Prison."

Mandela could conceivably become the President of South Africa. Lech Walesa was behind bars and wants to be President of Poland. Vaclav Havel was a political prisoner and is now President of Czechoslovakia. The message is clear: Go to jail—become a President—it's the law! No wonder Juan Ponce Enrile has announced from his Filipino prison cell that he intends to run for President in 1992.

Havel spoke before a joint session of Congress. "Consciousness precedes being," he declared, "and not the other way around like the Marxists said." There was sustained applause, not because these politicians understood the implications of this playwright's subtle concept, but rather because it was anti-Marxian and satisfied their vestigial longing for the cold war.

Meanwhile, the International Society for Humor Studies now proclaims Havel as their only member who is a head-of-state.

Subscription Information

- *The Realist* is published quarterly.
 - Subscription Rate: \$23 for 12 issues.
 - Back Issues: #99 thru #112 available at \$2 each.
- The Realist • Box 1230 • Venice CA 90294.**

So This Child Abuser Goes to a Bar

According to the Center for Media and Public Affairs, during the first two weeks after Marion Barry's arrest, he was the subject of a *Saturday Night Live* sketch and the target of 25 jokes in late-night TV talk show monologues. Jay Leno, for example: "Remember the good old days when it was a good thing to be called a crack politician?" The jokes continued after that survey. David Letterman: "Mayor Barry has beaten his alcohol and drug habit but now the poor man is addicted to Perrier." Mark Russell: "He says he doesn't have a drug problem, just alcohol—that means he only smokes crack when he's drunk."

However, the Center did *not* keep a tally sheet on jokes about the not-guilty verdict in the McMartin case, even though—to quote from a *Los Angeles Times* article about a campaign to influence the re-filing of charges—"In one of the more unusual elements of the campaign, a coalition of child abuse watchdog groups wrote an open letter to comedians asking that they 'include in their material comments ridiculing the McMartin verdict.'"

So *The Realist* conducted its own survey. Neither *Saturday Night Live*, nor Johnny Carson, David Letterman, Arsenio Hall, Pat Sajak, nor any of their guest comedians, did a single McMartin verdict joke. Substitute host Jay Leno had one, though: "Well, I see that the McMartin jury got together again this week and acquitted John Gotti."

On radio, Harry Shearer (KCRW) sang an advertising jingle about McMartinizing the verdict. And Citizen Kafka (WBAI) did a commercial for the Cabbage Patch Love Doll.

Sam Kinison—who is proud of his routines about starving Ethiopians and fucking corpses in the ass—told Joan Rivers he would never do jokes on abortion or suicide, but he didn't mention child abuse one way or the other.

As for the comedy club circuit, in New York and throughout the country, the McMartin verdict as a funny concept was simply non-existent. Even on the west coast, it was a highly endangered premise.

In Los Angeles, Gene Mitchner—one of five standup comics who do their act sitting in a wheelchair—used this line: "Now that the McMartins got off, I'm not saying that I'm a pervert, but I was looking at this 12-year-old the other day, thinking, 'God, I wish she were six.'"

And in San Francisco, Larry "Bubbles" Brown offered this: "The only outcome that would make people happy with that kind of trial is if they were found guilty and fed to the sharks."

A couple of performers had reactions to the coalition's request-for-jokes itself:

Bob Wieder

My first thought was: *Jesus, these people really cover all the bases!* Protests, petitions, bake sales, legal appeals, open-mike nights . . .

My second thought was: *Here's a novel twist on the old socially-involved-comedian hustle.* God knows, it's hardly new for comics to endorse a cause. Issue-oriented benefit gigs are as much a part of this profession as being bumped from the Carson show by a nonagenarian skydiver.

Indeed, if there's any occupational group more willing to take a controversial stand in public than comics, I dread the idea of meeting them. We're especially gutsy when it comes to condemning such elements as drive-by shootings, dog poisoners and slavery.

But in this case, we standups are being asked to pass judgment on a question of guilt vs. innocence which is only slightly less touchy for most people than the divinity of Christ is for a dying Baptist. Even worse, we're being entreated to *make jokes* about it!

Let me get this straight: We've got this family whose life, livelihood and reputation have been reduced to raw sewage on the one hand, and several dozen young kids who insist they've been used like Turkish prison inmates on the other hand, and we're supposed to call the play? With humor? Gee, there's an inviting proposition.

The problem is that this is one of those maddening, no-win questions that we may never really know the answer to: "Are the McMartins guilty?" "Who killed JFK?" "What the hell is buried on Oak Island?" "How in God's name does Joe Piscopo get work?"

Thanks a heap, anti-child-abusers, for tossing us such a comedic puffball. What—would someone please tell me—are we expected to come up with on this cheery subject, gag-wise?

"So, did you folks like that wacky McMartin trial verdict? We

comedians sure did. Hell, we were *relieved*. After all, for most of us, the high point of the year is Christmas, working part-time as department store Santas and telling 10-year-old girls, "No, honey, I can't get you that pony . . . but wouldja like to be in *movies*?"

"I don't wanna say that the D.A. was a fathead, but they recently performed brain surgery on him, and it was *liposuction*!"

"You'd think a jury would get suspicious when all the defendants take the oath on a copy of *Lolita*."

"God knows, I think I'd come down harder on a nursery school where sucking your thumb was considered a *promising sign*."

Yes sir, this concept should get any audience composed largely of parents (and totally of former children) bobbing like oil derricks with uncontrollable mirth. In fact, next to radical mastectomies, the Holocaust and AIDS, my favorite comedy premise is our cockamamie inability to trust our offspring to day-care providers who may be violating the terms of their parole just by *touching* a child.

Forget jokes about "the difference between dogs and cats." Nay, let me sink my comedic teeth into "the difference between fondling and intrusive molestation." Or maybe I should just go on stage and stick a barbecue fork into my eye. Naw, that's too quick . . .

My third thought was: *What incredibly narrow-focused, single-issue group would be next to appeal to comics to support their position with humor?*

"Folks, look at it from Ramon Salcido's point of view. If this poor sap wants an unbiased jury, he's gonna have to get a change of venue to Korea!"

"The fact is, aborted fetal tissue not only can save untold lives via transplant, but deep-fried and with honey-mustard, it's an appetizer fit to knock your bridge club on their ass!"

My fourth thought was: *If I offer a really heartfelt apology for putting those condoms in the punch bowl at the Christmas office party, maybe I can get my old day job at Fireman's Fund back . . .*

Mark Sweetman

Those seeking a guilty verdict in the McMartin case claim the system failed them. Now we know who the "they" is to whom everyone is so willing to lend credence. You know what *they* say? Actually, the jury found the system guilty and it looks like the fall guy is going to be District Attorney Ira Reiner.

What about the jury? In their quest for justice they gave up two-and-a-half years of their lives. What kind of verdict did we expect from a group of people who spend more time sequestering than most convicted child molesters would actually spend behind bars?

Child molestation watchdog groups have now asked comics to do jokes about the verdict. God knows the wit and wisdom of night club philosophers have been the impelling force behind many a change in the social structure and a compelling impetus behind the march of history (i.e. Nietzsche's dialectical materialism schtick). Look what we've done to Yuppies. Do you know anyone who in the '90s would actually admit to being a Yuppie?

Just think, enough McMartin verdict jokes—or, as they are now being called on the club circuit, McVerdict jokes—and who knows, maybe we'll see the day when there are no juries. Comics have been called to the task. We can do for the justice system what we did for Imelda Marcos, Salman Rushdie, the Bakkers, Jessica Hahn, Jimmy Swaggart, Manuel Noriega, Gary Hart and every Republican Administration high-level appointee.

It is good to be funny in America. Personally, I feel the McMartin jokes have a short shelf life. After all, the Trumps are breaking up.

While watchdog groups are almost vigilant in their single-minded, tunnel-visioned public relation campaigns, many newswatchers like myself have often wondered what qualifications there are to become a watchdog group. Is there an association of watchdog organizations? A university study? Or even a watchdog group that diligently keeps other watchdog groups in line? Some type of umbrella organization with a code for all watchdog groups to follow? Let's say, the Watch Dog Groups of America.

For some reason, I picture a tiny office, sub-leased and tucked into the corner basement of the Eagle Forum's main offices, with dividers rather than walls, and a hand-made sign with the letters SIVA. Margret Wills, president/secretary of this group of professional pests, would cheerfully explain to the rare visitor that SIVA stands for "Single Issue Voters of America." Of course, Ms. Wills, representing the single

issue voters, or "sivvies" as she likes to call them, fits that image perfectly with her hair-style exactly 20 years behind her fashionably up-to-date clothing.

"I'm not saying all," cautions Ms. Wills, "but *most* sivvies are young and middle-aged mothers. All their friends and neighbors have jobs and you can really be shut out of the social circles if all you can contribute to the conversation is infant horror stories. But if you have caused a fuss by throwing paint on a fur coat, or get arrested for blocking the entrance to an abortion clinic, or picket a movie you don't want yourself or anyone else to see, well, then, you have accomplished something. I mean, really, what sale, what board-room dealing, what office politicking can compare to seeing yourself on the six o'clock news, shaking your fist at the school board because they showed your daughter what a condom looks like?"

Picking up on her sudden fervor, I would press further: "I take it, that was your pet issue?"

"Pet issue?"

"Your *raison d'être*?"

"Huh?"

"Are you against teaching children sex education—"

"You betcha!"

"—in schools?"

"That's how I got into the single issue business." (Finally, she caught on. I'm not a journalist. I don't know all the short cuts to get the answers I need.)

After she would explain how she convinced the school board to teach abstinence alongside contraception, she would detail how she used her talents to help others.

"The first thing you need is an issue. Hopefully, a controversial one." (Capital punishment for people who misuse the adverb "hopefully" when they mean to say "I hope" or "I would hope," perhaps?) "Many groups, surprisingly enough, don't have an issue. Or the issue is too broad and general. The more narrow your focus, the better able you are to focus your concentration. The Right to Life people are actually anti-abortion. They've kind of dropped the folks who were concerned about the life of the child that was born because of their efforts. Our organization made that recommendation and look at the news coverage they've gotten since."

She would later tell me that this is the one issue where she has advised on both sides, even though Pro-choice advocates don't consider themselves sivvies, she does. She had advised pro-lifers to be for welfare funding of elective abortions and advised pro-choicers to be against it. Her research showed that with access to reproductive choice, fewer potential Democrats would be born. If, however, reproductive options were limited by economic viability, more potential Republicans were possible.

"Next," she explains, "we find the group an acronym. That's Beth's department." She motions to a desk cluttered with cross-word puzzle books and a home version of *Wheel of Fortune*. "Everybody wants the first letters of each word to spell something. You know, MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers, that sort of thing. Right now we are working on a new NRA slogan that spells AMERICA." Then she quickly adds, "America with a C!"

"So you have a very specific and unwavering issue and a name. What do you need now?"

"Recruits. Joiners. People to do all the work. Our organization helps with these guidelines for recruitment." She hands me a 10x13-inch card. In the middle, inside an oval, in big letters, is the word YOU. Outside the oval are lines that look like spokes. I make a mental note that I need to stop and buy soap on the way home. Turn the card over and there are the Ten Commandments of recruiting volunteers. Most I had heard before. One in particular struck me. Number 8: "Most people who look like you tend to feel as you do."

My visit ends as I feel I have learned all I need to know about watchdog groups, single issue voters, and all organized curmudgeons everywhere. Ms. Wills asks me if I am interested in starting a narrowly focused organization. I take her pamphlets and as I leave I see a plaque with the SIVA motto emblazoned across it: "Well, All I Know . . ."

The Obligatory Dan Quayle Joke

Dan Quayle saw *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and thought it was a documentary about Earth Day.

Pop Goes the Culture!

by Robert Myers

The catalog for the Popular Culture Conference in Canada contains the titles, locations, times and brief descriptive abstracts of hundreds of lectures, or papers, as they are known in academic parlance. These papers are presented at panels together with other similar papers. For instance, at a panel called *Children's Culture—Games & Media* the titles of the papers to be presented are *The Television Viewer in Contemporary Children's Books*, *Children's Games as Cultural Commentary* and *Barbie Meets Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Kids On The Margin*.

The morning I arrive, participants are running around on the mezzanine floor drinking coffee and looking at books and journals on popular culture, trying to decide which of the approximately three dozen hour-and-a-half sessions they will attend next. There are four sessions a day for four days, most of them in conference rooms named after Canadian provinces. The session called *Condomania: Condoms in Popular Culture*, for example, is in the British Columbia room, while the session called *Jewish Popular Culture* is scheduled for the Newfoundland room. (This oxymoronic encounter of subject and location never takes place. The conference organizers, showing an amazing degree of cultural insensitivity, schedule it on Saturday morning. None of the panel members shows up, so I go to hear a paper called *On the Question of Lesbian Battering* in the Saskatchewan room.)

The most striking fact about the titles of the papers offered at the conference is the preponderance of colons and conjunctions. Odd juxtapositions of subjects or persons are followed by a colon and then a theme or a critical discourse that allegedly unifies these disparate categories, such as *The Aesthetics of Wrestling: Aristotle, Brecht, Barthes*.

The abstracts in the catalog, included to provide a clearer indication of the paper's theme, usually compound the confusion or reinforce the sense that the paper will be delivered in equally indecipherable jargon. The abstract for the paper on wrestling reads:

"This paper re-reads Barthes' essay *The World of Wrestling* in light of Aristotle's *Poetics* and Brecht's writing on epic theater. It seeks to show Barthes' exegesis can afford a compromise between the seemingly incompatible theories of Aristotle and Brecht with regard to the dramatic iconography of professional wrestling."

Unlike Barthes' exegesis, I decide I can't afford the compromise of sitting through *The Aesthetics of Wrestling*, unless, perhaps, its author delivers it in black togs and a mask, which he removes at the end to reveal that he's actually Hulk Hogan.

Besides, my presence hardly seems necessary. If the paper can re-read Barthes, it can certainly listen to itself and applaud politely afterward. I do, however, wonder what constitutes the iconography of professional wrestling. Gold-plated companionship medallions on enormous sweating bellies and black briefs stuffed with gonads the size of grapefruits?

Here is a sampling of some of the titles of papers delivered at the conference:

Most Pretentious: *The Illusion of Ontotheological Reality in the Three Stooges*

Most Insignificant: *Observing the Stages of Courtship and Marriage via the Music of John Denver*

Most Unappetizing: *Alfred Hitchcock's "Frenzy"—A Voyage Through The Alimentary Canal*

Wittiest: *Shades of Incest in Toni Morrison's "Beloved"*

Silliest Paper on Baseball: *Exit Laughing: The Eschatological Fusion of Now and Then, Here and There in "Field of Dreams"*

Guaranteed to Draw the Smallest Audience: *Cultural Pluralism Versus Assimilation as Evidenced in the Oral History of Norwegian Americans in the Red River Valley*

Is This Important Even to Them?: *Is it a Double or a Single: Do Baseball Card Collectors and Investors Have Different or the Same Sociopsychological Profiles?*

Advice to the Deadlorn

Etiquette columnist Miss Manners was asked about videotaping funerals. She wrote:

"That those who did not attend the funeral require an instant re-play instead is a revolting idea. It is no disgrace to be prevented by hardship from attending a funeral, but it does not require compensation afterward. I suggest that someday funerals will be attended only by the deceased, with family and friends merely watching the tape at their convenience.

"How would they watch it? Alone and depressed? In a gathering in a recreation room? It is impossible to capture on film the solemnity of a funeral of assembled family and friends. It is also hard to imagine the satisfaction that the bereaved who did attend might get from reliving the funeral. Surely it is pictures of the person alive that they would treasure. Do they gather the descendants years later and say, 'Let's look at Dad's funeral again?'"

Ferretting Out Racism?: *An Examination of Black Underrepresentation as Flea Market Participants*

Papers I Wish I'd Seen: *The Enigma of Eldridge Cleaver; Close Encounters of the Star Wars Kind—Nancy Reagan, Astrology, and the White House; The Evolution of Cursing in American Film; The Jack Benny Show as Gay Text*

Papers I'm Glad I Missed: *Self-Referentiality in "It's Gary Shandling's Show"; Outhouse Episodes—A Nostalgic Review of Some Current Midwestern Literature; A Simmelian Approach to Field Research—Deadhead Subculture; Julie Andrews: Last of the White Soul Sisters; Is Nature Necessary? The Culture and Codes of Bass Fishing*

Not Sure Whether I Wish I Had Or Glad I Didn't: *The Roy Cohn Testimonial Dinner, July 28, 1954*

Your Guess Is As Good As Mine: *Sensual and Consensual Hallucinations: The Meat and the Matrix*

There are over half a dozen panels or cemeteries, each with three or four lectures. This seems, at first glance, to be an interesting object of cultural study, but most of the

papers are on subjects like *Symbols of Secret and Fraternal Lodges in Southern Ontario Cemeteries*. On Friday morning, however, there is a paper entitled *Like Human, Like Pet: Parallelism in Gravemarkers*. Its abstract reads:

"Terminologically, real estate set aside for the final resting place of pets is frequently called a 'cemetery,' the objects which indicate the location of their burials are called 'gravemarkers' and the information inscribed thereon parallels strongly that found on markers for humans. Moreover, the similarities do not end there."

Nonetheless, the slides of pets' graves that are shown during the talk more than make up for the somber subject. One of the slides is of a grave marked with a rabbit cut from metal and painted white. Its epitaph reads: "Fluffy. 1968-1972. You did not know you were a rabbit."

A number of the gravemarkers in the slideshow combine animal statuary and religious symbols, thus resembling post-modern totem poles that give the cemeteries—a coon dog graveyard in Alabama and a pet cemetery in Philadelphia—the aura of pagan burial grounds.

A wooden pony on a pole has an enormous white cross on its head and its name, "Lucy," and dates of birth and death emblazoned on its side. An ornate marble headstone for "Fritz" has a bas-relief carving of a collie and a Star of David. According to the folklorist, the family held an unveiling for the dog and left pebbles on the headstone whenever they visited the grave. He did not say whether the family sat *shiva* for Fritz.

The talk on pet cemeteries is followed by a paper entitled *The Effect of Computers on Gravemarker Designs*, which according to its author is based on an article she wrote for a magazine called *Trends in the Tombstone Industry*. I decide to look in the catalog for something a little more interesting and finally narrow it down to either *Nurse Autobiographies or America in the Norwegian Imagination*.

The figure of Ted Bundy looms large in the imagination of those who study American popular culture for a living. At no less than three separate sessions I attend, speakers mention the fact that Bundy tried to save himself by blaming his crimes on his viewing of pornography as a young boy. He is frequently referred to as the "Elmer Gantry of serial murderers."

At one of the sessions on *Deviance and Popular Culture* there is a paper devoted to *The Discourse of Serial Murders*. According to the speaker, the United States is number one in serial murders, far ahead of both England and Germany. This statistic should be publicized in Central America, where it might improve the image of the U.S. It would at least let the Salvadorans, Nicaraguans and Panamanians know it's nothing personal. Americans like to commit mass murder just for the hell of it.

The police profile of a serial murderer, the speaker says, is a white male, in case anyone in the audience thinks it's a Filipino female. An Indian man suggests that the prevalence of serial murders in developed Western societies seems to suggest some relationship between

this type of crime and capitalism. This insight is met with a shrug of the shoulders. Now that the American system of freedom has triumphed over communism it is apparently considered indelicate to bring up the fact that whereas the Romanians produced Ceausescu, the U.S. produced the Hillside stranger, Richard Speck and John Wayne Gacy.

At the session entitled *Popular Culture and Libraries*, 15 or 20 people—most of whom are librarians—sit around a conference table listening to the speakers, who are also librarians, present papers on censorship, the image of librarians in books and films, and *Libraries and Librarians as Portrayed in Contemporary Pornographic Novels*.

According to the presenter of this final paper, he began his research into this heretofore unexplored field of popular culture studies when he stumbled across a novel entitled *Sex Behind the Stacks* at a used book sale in Albuquerque.

He has subsequently added over fifty books to his collection, including *Bookworm Bimbo*, *The Overdue Librarian* and *Helpful Head Librarian*.

The other titles in this genre are considerably less inventive—*Loose Librarian*, *Hot Pants Librarian*, *Nympho Librarian*, *Bondage Librarian*. Almost all such books he has found are for heterosexuals—perhaps, he suggests, because gay male porno novels tend to focus on professions that are perceived to be more macho, with titles like *Truck Driver Stud* and *Oil Field Slave*.

The presenter, who has an advanced degree in statistics as well as library science, says he is planning to do some sort of statistical analysis of the books in his collection using a spread-sheet program, which in this context takes on an entirely new meaning. One minor irony he fails to mention is that none of these "novels" is likely to be found in any library.

There is a tendency at all of the panels to save the best papers for last, and *Sex, Eros, and the Media* is no exception. The first paper, a comparative study of personal ads, would seem to present infinite possibilities for cultural enlightenment, but it quickly devolves into a recitation of strange statistics. For example, the women who place personal ads in Roanoke weigh, on average, 125 lbs., whereas in Washington D.C. they weigh 160 lbs.

An interesting insight: hardly anyone ever mentions children in personal ads. You don't see ads that say: "Wealthy Widower. Feminist, Tom Selleck look-alike, seeks long-term relationship, possible marriage. Race, class and religion unimportant. Father of nine lovely children."

The second paper is about the case of Ellen Jewett, a prostitute murdered in New York in the 1830's, important primarily because it was the first time the U.S. media bothered to cover the murder of a prostitute. This tendency to ignore crimes against prostitutes—or, for that matter, minorities or anyone considered "marginal" or "aberrant"—continues unchanged, as was pointed out at the panel on deviance. Serial murderers and rapists are generally ignored as long as their victims are prostitutes, winos, and homeless people.

One of the factors that may have caused the

media to focus its attention on Ellen Jewett's murder was the presence of an open copy of a book of Byron's poetry on the table beside the bed where she was killed. She may have been a whore, but she was a high-class whore.

The third paper concerns the expurgation of material deemed to be obscene in the texts of Shakespeare, Chaucer and other western classics, in versions appearing in high school textbooks. Companies like McGraw-Hill have hired English professors to lop off the offending phrases.

Miscellaneous Factoids From the Conference

- Most crimes on *America's Most Wanted* occur in Seattle, Portland, Florida, Louisiana or Texas.

- When ad agencies first began conducting research in the 1920's on the African-American consumer, they determined that blacks consumed more alcohol, food, cigarettes and Kotex.

- In Cleveland there are a number of "Spyshops" that sell surveillance equipment. The merchandise is marketed not to protect property, but as a means to "surveil your children." The kids are being encouraged to get their revenge on interactive shows like *America's Most Wanted*, which have escalated the war on drugs from "Just Say No" to "Turn in Your Parents."

- In a trial in France during the Algerian war for independence, a French witness identified a suspect in a trial by pointing at him and referring to him as "an Arab dressed as a person."

- 90% of pet owners say they talk baby-talk to and/or buy birthday gifts for their pets.

- Phyllis Diller has had plastic surgery over two dozen times, including eye-liner tattoos, cheek implants, liposuction and a mini-lift.

- None of the Three Stooges graduated from high school. (Moe's daughter, who spoke at the conference, did indicate, however, that her father frequently expressed his concern about the ensemble's ability to create the illusion of ontological reality.)

- 80% of American nine-year-old girls are presently on a diet to lose weight.

Not just words and phrases are removed—"suck," "nurturing," "prick of noon," "monstrous breasts," "bullocks and horse turds," "wipe your arse clean or on your britches it can be seen"—but huge passages, such as Friar Tuck's speech in *Romeo and Juliet* and the entire *Wife of Bath's Tale* in *The Canterbury Tales*. According to the speaker, most of the teachers who use the textbooks don't even notice that anything is missing.

The U.S. is not alone in North America in the text-cleansing and book-banning business. In Canada a children's book containing an episode in which a giant kicks God was removed from school libraries. The major objection to the book was apparently not the violence done to the deity but the fact that God was portrayed as a little girl.

The grand finale is a paper titled *Bestiality: Was Prime Time Simply Not Ready?*—focusing on a 1989 episode of CBS's *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the main character, Catherine,

consummates her love for the lion-like beast, Vincent. After a videotaped presentation of the climactic scene—spewing volcanoes, time-lapse shots of roses blooming, and intertwined hands—the speaker analyzes the reason for and responses to this restrained poetic depiction of bestiality on network TV.

A number of female viewers, the speaker says, sent letters to the producers expressing their dismay at the lack of explicitness in the scene, but a Catholic nun wrote approvingly that Catherine and Vincent had "loved on a higher plane." Furthermore, it is rumored, Cardinal John O'Connor, who indicated that he's not a regular viewer but happened to see that sequence while switching channels, was particularly pleased that no birth control was used and that the participants were of the opposite sex, even though not of the same species.

Everyone finds the clip from the program quite funny, but the laughter dies down—especially among the males in the room—when the speaker compares this depiction of bestiality to that appearing in a Canadian novel entitled *The Bear*, about a librarian who has an affair with a bear in British Columbia. As the speaker reads several passages from the book—"He [the bear] licked. He probed. . . he licked her nipples stiff and scoured her navel. With little nickerings she moved south"—a professor begins to run his hand through his hair and fidgets nervously.

The speaker asserts that bestiality is a societal taboo because it is "non-procreational," but it's difficult to imagine who, besides the College of Cardinals, would define a taboo quite so narrowly.

The search for pleasure has been a recurring theme throughout the conference. It was never entirely clear whether this had a philosophical basis or was simply a testament to the drudgery of the academic profession in places like Athens, Ohio and Radford, Virginia. There were numerous seminars on African American culture, popular music, the '60s and Vietnam—especially appropriate since Canada has historically been a refuge for American dissenters.

At these panels there also seemed to be nostalgia for a time when American Culture presented a variety of lifestyles and viewpoints, and pleasure was not only desirable but possible.

To many participants, Canada appeared to be a very attractive alternative to the U.S.—Native Americans are treated better, there are far fewer people living on the streets, and doctors are free. *The Toronto Globe and Mail* denounced the U.S. invasion of Panama and seemed horrified at the jingoistic support for the invasion in the American media.

Maybe a number of pleasure-seeking professors of popular culture will be moving north soon, to Canada, where portraying God as a little girl is frowned upon, but sex with bears is socially acceptable.

Personals

Will the reader who has that photo of Laurel and Hardy please contact the editor.

Occult Gossip

by Robin Clauson

The Psychedelic Conference was like a cast party of extras from the movie *Flashback*. An overflow audience of 600 graying professionals, Deadheads and a sprinkling of fresh-faced psychology students packed a Berkeley hotel ballroom to raise funds for psychedelic research.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* sent its religion reporter and *The Realist* sent its astrologer.

The conference benefited the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a non-profit research group founded to explore the medical and therapeutic uses of psychoactive compounds (the new, politically correct term for psychedelics).

Apparently newspeak is just one tack that researchers must now take in order to distance themselves from the anarchistic, Kool-Aid acid tests of the past. But MAPS is finding it difficult to attain intellectual respectability and FDA approval for controlled testing due to the war on drugs.

Mark Kleiman, a former U.S. Department of Justice counsel, pointed out that we're not experiencing a war on drugs, but a war about drugs: "If we could get a society to define excess, rather than drugs, as the enemy to be made war on, we would have made great progress."

Andrew Weil provided a witty, historical overview on psychoactives; how they were domesticated well before food plants and how the desire to alter consciousness is a natural instinct in humans. Only the methods (ingestion, drumming, chanting, dancing, etc.) vary from culture to culture.

Timothy Leary (who's looking increasingly like a dapper William Burroughs) worked the crowd with his usual manic, beaming charm. Pacing the stage, he invoked the names of "brain navigators" John Lilly, John Lennon, Abbie Hoffman, Huxley, Thoreau, Emerson, Mark Twain, William James, Albert Hoffman and Marshall McLuhan. He admitted that McLuhan gave him the immortal phrase, "Turn on, tune in, drop out."

Ram Dass honored Leary for changing his life back at Harvard and ruefully acknowledged that he's been playing the straight part to Leary's fool for years. His warm and moving talk on the benefits and mistakes of the '60s was rewarded with the only standing ovation of the day.

Brain damage humor was popular. Leary told an old joke: "There are three very serious side affects from psychotropic botanicals: 1) long-term memory gain; 2) short-term memory loss; 3) I forget the third."

There were a lot of "Just say know" buttons and stickers, but my favorite statement was a Three Stooges "Just say Moe" T-shirt.

The global political awakening was mentioned with mind-numbing frequency throughout the 12-hour conference. It sometimes seemed like they believed that 60s consciousness paved the way for the current explosion of freedom. (But in all fairness, if I were at an astrologer's conference, they'd be giving the planets credit.)

Leary asked for empathy for G. Gordon Liddy because now that the cold war is over, "he's suffering from severe enemy deprivation."

Terence McKenna crowed, "Communism is just going first. This is the death knell for centralized structures. The tail that wags the dog is chaos. What do you give a crowd of a million people? Anything it wants!"

Ram Dass quoted from Vaclav Havel's speech to the joint session of Congress: "Without global revolution in the sphere of human consciousness, nothing will change for the better in the sphere of our being."

Switzerland is presently the only country in the world where psychedelically-assisted psychotherapy is legal. A professor in Holland used to have that country's only license to administer the drugs at his clinic for torture victims and concentration camp survivors. But when he retired in 1988, the Dutch government allowed the license to lapse, which is ironic considering how readily-available LSD and MDMA are on the streets of Amsterdam.

After the new Romanian government repealed its repressive abortion laws, it occurred to Kleiman, "that the issue that excites almost as much emotion as abortion is drugs." He suggests that MAPS should talk to the leaders of newly-emerging East European democracies about establishing clinics for the psychedelic treatment of cocaine addiction. He thinks that they might be open to radical restructuring of their drug laws, if only for the hard currency income such clinics would bring in.

The Native American Church has found peyote to be a powerful antidote to alcoholism, yet its use as a sacrament has just been limited by the Supreme Court. Considering our current political climate, moving psychedelic research to another country may not be such a far-fetched notion.

Smoke Pre-Mortems

by Sam Leff

After the failure of their thinly-disguised venture to market nicotine in tobacco-free cigarettes, word in the industry has it that one of America's largest nicotine companies is intensifying its search to capture all available consumers in the shrinking but still hugely profitable cigarette market.

Losing 1000 customers a day to the grim reaper and 4000 a day to common-sense self-preservation, the reports are that following their embarrassing failure to target the black (*Uptown*) population and uneducated young women (*Dakota*), fearful nico-profiters are targeting yet another vulnerable population—the million or so American addicts who are already dying from smoking but can't stop anyway.

Our informants tell us that *Pre-Mortems* will be a high nicotine cigarette that will subtly encourage the lung cancer and heart patient who can't and won't stop smoking to fizzle out of life in an intoxicating puff of concentrated nicotine smoke. Its campaign will be oriented around libertarian concepts; the idea of freedom to die enjoyably *the way you want to die*. Offering an upscale final solution to oral fixation, "Die High!" will be its slogan.

Some of the names that were considered before deciding on *Pre-Mortems* were *Snuff Puffs*, *Smoke Enders*, *S&Ms*, *Nicoterns*, *Nicophils*, *Terminals* and *Kamikazes*.

As usual, the marketeers have their own multi-dimensional hidden agenda for this program. Ultimately *Pre-Mortems* are aiming to strengthen their masochistic market and to hold to the fold those who are marginally on the verge of quitting but like their nicotine lows too much to give them up. They will offer another pathway for the embattled smoker in the accelerating social clamor against cigarettes and smoking.

Having spent millions on secret research on the rationalizations for smoking, they will reinforce the old favorite, "You're going to die anyway! Why give up something you really enjoy? Why not go out in a pleasurable puff of smoke?"

As an ambitious Club Med-like spinoff to the campaign, the company is planning to set up *Pre-Mortem* Resorts so that pre-mortems can live out their days in smoke-filled rooms where nobody will protest or raise ugly objections to their nico-indulgences. Not unexpectedly *Pre-Mortems'* bottom-liners are excited by the possibility that these "smokers' resorts" will become a major new source of revenue and perhaps even counteract the negative influence that the health and fitness movement has had upon their sales.

Our source states that the underlying strategy of the resorts is that by isolating the pre-mortems in these death camps, *Pre-Mortems* will also keep other cigarette addicts away from the frightful sight of fellow smokers dying of cancer—a sight which their research clearly recognizes to be the most significant deterrent to the sales of their product.

For the resorts, *pre-Mortems'* social engineers are working out a sophisticated early warning system which will whisk mortems out of sight so that the surviving pre-mortems will not have their intoxication disturbed by unnecessary exposure to the death rattles of cancerous lungs and heart attacks.

The company is confident that they will be able to open their resorts in the tobacco states and that with the strength of their lobbyists and Senator Helms they may well be able to win Medicare subsidies for the cost of the facilities.

Highly aware of social pressures which killed *Uptown* and *Dakota*, the company is preparing for criticism of this new effort by seeking out celebrities to support the campaign for the new product. Among other incentives, they are researching stories about former smokers who gave up cigarettes only to die horrible deaths from unrelated causes.

Finally, they are working on a companion product they are calling *Post-Mortems*, based on an Indian amulet fetish including all parts of the tobacco plant, from seed to full flower, that will be offered in a specially designed Tiffany mouthpiece to be held between the lips of an addict in the grave, much like the ancient Egyptians who were interred with their most prized possessions.

MEDIA FREAK

Just Say Gribbet

Ellen Uzelac in the *Baltimore Sun*:
"Licking toads will not give you warts or produce a fairy prince, but it might get you high. The DEA says toad licking is the latest way to hallucinate. The Cane toad, which can grow to the size of a dinner plate, produces a toxin called bufotenine, which the toad secretes to ward off predators. When licked raw or cooked, the toxin acts as a hallucinogen.

"The green-and-red toads produce the same toxin that is found in amanita mushrooms, cohoba seeds and other plants. South American Indians have used the toxin for years in religious ceremonies because of its mind-altering qualities, and some tribes have used it in blowguns to kill dinner.

"Bufotenine is considered a controlled, dangerous substance and is therefore illegal. However, it is not against the law to own a Cane toad. Robert Sager, chief of the DEA's laboratory in San Francisco, explained, 'If you had a toad, we would have to prove you were licking it on purpose, or you had given it to someone to lick on purpose.'"

Farts in the News

ABC promotes violence toward children on *America's Funniest Home Videos* but wouldn't permit them to show a woman telling her husband, "Honey, we've been married for a week," just as an off-camera horse passes gas very loudly and the bride's demeanor turns from joy to terror. However, ABC did allow an entire episode about flatulence on *Roseanne*.

And *Detroit Free Press* columnist Bill Laitner writes:

"Environmentalists have revealed that some of the world's champion fiber eaters have been adding nasty pollution to our atmosphere, making global warming worse. Seems that cows know their oats and aren't particularly polite about digesting them. The methane they emit as flatulence is a major source of globe-warming 'greenhouse gas.'"

No Laughing Gas Matter

A former Rajneesh cult member wrote an open letter to the guru in *Critique* magazine:

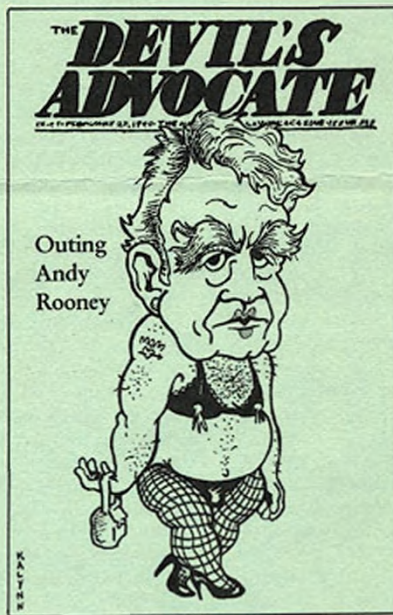
"People unnecessarily suffered, Bhagwan—people unnecessarily got hurt. My friend Loka is probably only now waking up to the reality that at 18 years old, she'll never have a child, because when she was 12, you personally okayed her sterilization! She was sterilized at 12 years old, you bastard! What good is your 'enlightenment' without your compassion? . . ."

"You had no right, Bhagwan—people died. One of your Japanese sannyasins drowned at Krishnamurti Lake after we had repeatedly told Sheela that one lifeguard for a few thousand people swimming wasn't adequate. Bhagwan, a Share-a-Home guy was murdered—drugged, beaten and dumped—while you were sitting in your air-conditioned room watching a video, waiting for your daily dose of nitrous oxide."

Mickey Mouse Operations

The Disney empire, ever concerned about its image, has asked the Greater Orlando Coalition Against Pornography to cease using a pamphlet quoting Walt Disney: "Our greatest natural resource is the minds of our children."

Meanwhile, cartoonist Berkeley Breathed continues to use his decrepit character, Mortimer Mouse. *The Realist* queried Disney's head of Corporate Communications, Erwin Okun, who replied: "We haven't yet decided what course to take with the *Outland* strip. I can assure you, however, that we are considering a number of options."



Filler Items

• Lewis Grossberger in *7 Days*: "We have a President who won't eat his vegetables, a Vice-President who plays with dolls, and a former President who calls his wife Mommy—and we're the world's greatest power. Imagine how we'll do when we have grown-ups in office."

• Dear Abby apologized for plagiarizing Mark Twain, and the headline read, "Twain Robbery was Unintended."

• On WNYC, station president Mary Perot Nichols announced that Steve Post was fired for alleging there were "financial and military ties between myself and various fascist dictators." Although it was only a fund-raising hoax, a producer for *60 Minutes* took it seriously.

• Barbara Walters, on an upcoming unauthorized biography: "You're not going to find out I had an abortion of a baby by Frank Sinatra."

• TV critic Monica Collins: "*Mr. Belvedere* presented the worst episode of TV—ever—last night. When the anchor-man at the TV station has to have a colon operation, the station's zealous news director puts a camera down his rectum to record the operation live. Instead of the operation, the station shows tape of a coal mine shaft. When he gets out of the hospital, the anchor-man tries to kill himself. And I'm not making this up."

• Oliver North is now in the bulletproof vest business. He claims to wear it every day. "The comfort is unequaled, and it provides the ultimate in body armor."

• The Oregon State Bar has decreed that it is not necessarily unethical for a lawyer in a divorce action to become sexually involved with his or her client.

• Oregon advocates for decriminalization of marijuana claim that pot plants can be turned into high quality paper totally free of cancer-causing dioxin. "You can make every grade of paper from toilet paper to newsprint at one fourth the cost."

• The *British Medical Journal* published a study concluding that men are subject to frostbite of the penis. Normal treatment for frostbitten extremities is immersion in a bowl of warm water, "but this would clearly be impracticable in these circumstances." The doctors recommended a hot shower instead.

• In a commercial for Oatmeal Raisin Crisp they sing "Look what they've done to my oatmeal" to the tune of Melanie's "Look what they've done to my song, Ma."

• *Penthouse* reports that, on New Year's Day, 1986, Congressman Barney Frank and his escort Steve Gobie, "in the silence of the empty House gymnasium, naked in the shower like a pair of naughty adolescents, snapped each other with towels, and then began masturbating—ejaculating into the open locker of then Vice-President George Bush."

• Facts learned from TV talk shows: Gary Merrill wore skirts. Vanna White carries a gun.

• Peter Jennings' special on Gun Control featured New Age background music by Philip Glass. And there was a classified ad in the *Albuquerque Journal* for a group, "New Agers Anonymous—a recovery program for those who use spiritual truths to reinforce the addictive process."

• Gay comic Tom Ammiano talks about celebrities both metaphorically—Jane Fonda and Ted Turner: "I wonder who's on top in that relationship?"—and literally—Burt Reynolds and Loni Anderson: "When he married her, he finally put to rest all those rumors that he was straight."

• A rabbi stated on Israel Radio that, although Jewish law bars the faithful from eating pork, even the most devout Jew is allowed to receive an organ transplant from a pig.

• Hyperactivity is now known as "Attention Deficit Disorder."

• A letter to the *Village Voice*: "I have nothing against the food-as-foreplay aspect of a fine meal, but when [you] describe melting salmon with pear wasabi essence as 'sweetish and translucent as semen,' my digestive juices go up the river bile without a paddle. What's next: 'zesty as a golden shower' or 'robust as a hairy-knuckled fist?'"

• Professional prankster Alan Abel: "I've given up smoking until this lung-cancer scare blows over."

• According to the grapevine in Boston, Charles Stuart—who jumped off a bridge when he became a suspect in the murder of his pregnant wife—left a suicide note reading, "A black man pushed me."

• Graffito: *Absurdity is the key to perfection.*