

Autumn, 1994
Price: \$2

- *John Wayne Bobbitt's Comedy Writer*
- *Cokie Roberts' Alternative Media Fiasco*
- *Robert Anton Wilson's Premature Internet Death*

The Realist

Number 128
Editor: Paul Krassner



COURT JESTER

Personal Propaganda

My thanks to Susie Schlesinger of the Laughing Heart Foundation for funding this issue of *The Realist*.

The bad news is that I had to skip publication of the summer issue due to a severe cash-flow problem. But your subscription has been automatically extended for one issue.

The good news is that Simon & Schuster has just published the paperback edition of my autobiography, *Confessions of a Raving, Unconfined Nut: Misadventures in the Counter-Culture*.

The bad news is that I won't be seeing any royalties on the book until August 1995.

The good news is that I now have a few free-lance magazine assignments which will serve to subsidize *The Realist*. In addition, I'm writing a novel—about a contemporary controversial comedian who commits murder, then defends himself in court—inspired by and dedicated to Lenny Bruce, who always wanted to do his act before the Supreme Court. In several months there should be a completed manuscript. I already have delusions of a bidding war.

Meanwhile, you can help maintain *The Realist's* regularity by sending in gift subscriptions and renewing your own. The rates are \$12 for 6 issues; \$23 for 12 issues. If you order five \$12 subs (your renewal can count as one), the cost is \$50 instead of \$60. If you order five \$23 subs, the cost is \$100 instead of \$115, plus we'll send you a free copy of the \$10 anthology, *The (Almost) Unpublished Lenny Bruce*.

Address: *The Realist*, Dept. 128, Box 1230, Venice CA 90294.

Also, I'll be performing stand-up satire at the Marsh theater in San Francisco on September 29-30, October 1-2. For information and reservations call 641-0235.

Country Joe McDonald Wore Khakis

Of course, this was not the first time I've been broke. Shortly after the original Woodstock festival, my financial problem was so horrendous that Country Joe McDonald graciously hired me to spread false rumors about him. He specifically suggested one—that he had done a commercial for Coca-Cola.

"The people who know my work will know it's not true," he explained, "and it doesn't matter what the others think."

I even went so far as to include this question in my interview with Ken Kesey: "Would you care to speculate as to the motivation of performers like Paul Newman [who had actually done a Coke commercial] and Country Joe McDonald in contracting to lend their graven images to advertisements for Coca-Cola?"

"They need the money," responded Kesey.

But now, tied in with the promotion of Woodstock '94, there was an actual commercial for Pepsi-Cola, with fellow musician John Sebastian asking McDonald, "Remember when we did this 25 years ago?" "No," replies Country Joe, who reportedly received \$25,000 merely for saying that single word. It gives a whole new meaning to the slogan "Just say no."

However, I'm not in any position to be self-righteous about this. In fact, I was so desperate I even offered myself to the Gap people for a "Paul Krassner wore khakis" ad. Would I be selling out, or would they be buying in?

After all, even Allen Ginsberg, the epitome of integrity, recently posed for that series in a full-page ad appearing in such diverse publications as *Interview* and the *New Yorker*. In tiny print you could barely read that "All fees for Mr. Ginsberg's image are donations to the Jack Kerouac School of Poetics, The Naropa Institute..."

All fees for my image would have been donated to my landlord. But I received the following reply from Kelly Corroon, account manager for Gap Advertising: "We appreciate your offer to do a khakis ad, but we usually only use vintage photographs in our khaki campaign. I am thrilled to know you wear Gap clothing, and that you

love our khakis. Thanks again for your offer." I had admitted to owning a pair, but never said I loved 'em.

George Wallace and George Stephanopoulos

Last year, former Alabama Governor George Wallace wrote to Bill Clinton, requesting him to reopen the federal investigation of the attempt to assassinate him during the 1972 campaign, which left him crippled, ending his presidential aspirations, and, combined with the murder of Bobby Kennedy, allowed Richard Nixon to be voted into office again without any true competition. Wallace said he doesn't believe that Arthur Bremer, the man who shot him, was acting alone. A White House spokesperson said that Clinton received the letter and that he was "taking it under advisement."

Several months ago, *The Realist* queried George Stephanopoulos to find out the status of that case. This is his reply:

July 21, 1994

Dear Mr. Krassner:

Thank you for your letter of March 5, 1994. I apologize for the delay in my response and I appreciate your patience.

As Senior Advisor to the President, I am grateful for the perspective that your letter has given me. Comments and suggestions from concerned citizens like you should prove useful to me in performing my job.

President Clinton and I appreciate the opportunity to hear your views and I thank you again for taking the time to write on this important issue.

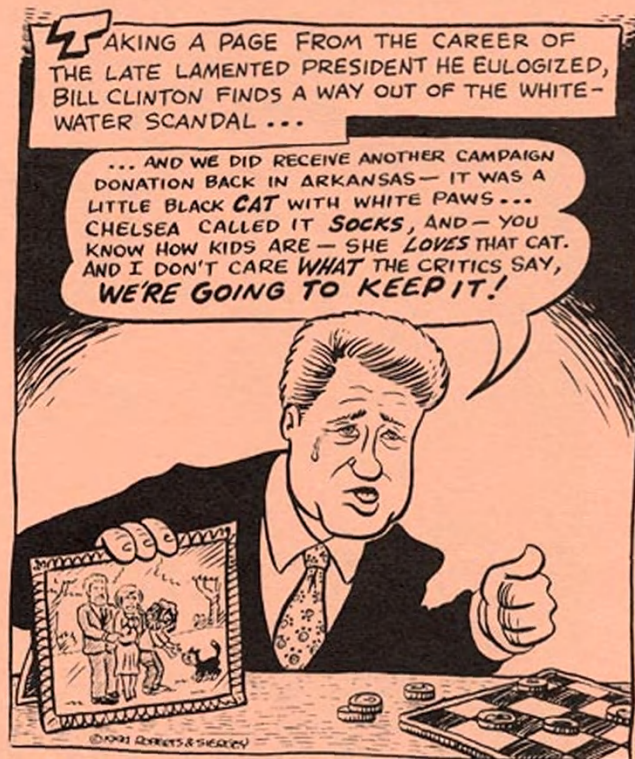
Sincerely,

/s/George R. Stephanopoulos

Senior Advisor to the President for Policy and Strategy

The Original Bad Boy of Broadcasting

This issue is dedicated to the late Henry Morgan, who brought irreverence to radio. He was an occasional contributor to *The Realist*, including a piece on socialized medicine. He was the one who first advised me not to label articles as satire or reportage. His witty autobiography, *Here's Morgan!*, was just published by Lyle Stuart's



My Life After Death

by Robert Anton Wilson

I died on February 22—George Washington's birthday, oddly enough. At first, I felt too involved in unfinished work piled up on my desk to notice my transition to the Third Bardo of the Twilight Zone. The word of my demise came, obliquely, from Tim Leary and I found it on my voicemail when I checked at lunch-time.

"This is Tim Leary," Tim's voice said, "with loads of love for both of you, Arlen and uh Bob. Could uh one of you call me back as soon as possible. Please?"

Tim has always seemed like a nice guy to me, contrary to his media image, but he does not normally express "loads of love" on a phone message. I felt moderately curious and called him at once. He sounded oddly happy, and said he felt very glad to hear my voice. Then he told me that the popular computer network, Internet, contained an obituary for me, allegedly copied from the *Los Angeles Times*. His voicemail message to me represented a sensitive way of checking this out.

The fake *Times* obit itself, when I finally ran it down, began like this: "Noted science-fiction author Robert Anton Wilson was found dead in his home yesterday, apparently the victim of a heart attack. Mr. Wilson, 63, was discovered by his wife, Arlen.

"Mr. Wilson was the author of numerous books. . . . He was noted for his libertarian viewpoints, love of technology and off the wall humor. Mr. Wilson is survived by his wife and two children." This had appeared originally on a bulletin board, logged by somebody in Cambridge, Mass. I thought immediately of the pranksters at M.I.T.—the

Gnomes of Cyberspace.

I admired the artistic verisimilitude of the Gnome who forged that obit. He stated my age wrong by one year, the number of my surviving children wrong by one child, and mis-identified my *oeuvre* (only 6 of my 27 books could possibly get classified as science-fiction). Little touches of incompetence and ignorance like that helped create the impression of a real, honest-to-Jesus *L.A. Times* article—the way Orson Welles used squeaking chairs, background coughs, overlapping dialogue, bad sound quality, etc. to make the newsreels in *Citizen Kane* and *F For Fake* seem "just like the real thing."

After Leary, a deluge of phone calls poured in. Many others told me, later, that they couldn't bring themselves to call, because they figured that, if I was indeed dead, Arlen's grief would get cruelly exacerbated by the elephantine subtlety of countless variations on "How is Bob today? Feeling good, I hope?"

And, of course, many friends also worried that if I remained alive but absent from home—out shopping, or in another city giving a lecture—Arlen might get really weirded out and wonder if I *had* died suddenly. These subtle souls called others who might know about my health, instead of calling me directly.

Others called my voicemail service—dozens of them, the first few days—and merely asked tactfully if I could *please* return their calls as soon as possible. Only when I called back did they admit they wanted to know if I was alive or dead.

One friend told me that the first bulletin he saw, on Comuserve, just quoted the alleged *Times* obit and then added, "This is as bad as

learning that Zappa died. I think I'm going to meditate a bit, in his memory."

Another networker, female, keyboarded in a whole chapter of *Ecclesiastes* in my memory—"For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under the sun: a time to be born, a time to die"—and then added "Now get out there and PARTY LIKE HE'D WANT YOU TO!"

Some others had even more exalted lines about the value of my life, but this is not an advertisement, so I won't quote them. I'll just say that they did a lot to cheer me up and remind me that I have admirers.

You see, I've become a bit morbid lately, and have developed a tendency to believe one bad review more than ten good ones—something that happens to many writers about my age. For instance, Hemingway and Faulkner both got bad-review-itus to such an extent that they both submitted to electro-shock therapy to break up their depressions. The electro-shock worked for Faulkner, but not for Hemingway, who shot himself anyway.

But nobody was writing bad reviews on the computer nets the first weeks after my death. All I read about myself assured me that my works belonged on the same shelf with Homer, Shakespeare and *The Little Engine That Could*, while my soul ranked in the vicinity of Jesus, Gandhi and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.

I felt so overwhelmed by the love and kindness in all the obits that I felt a bit guilty about not "deserving" all this by really dying. Shortly, however, other artistic efforts began to appear on computer nets. One from "The House of Apostles of Eris, San Francisco" said that "attempts to contact Robert Anton Wilson have been unsuccessful"—hmm?—

Barricade Books. Stuart once published a collection of mine, *Impolite Interviews*. Here's an excerpt from my 1960 (relatively polite) interview with Henry Morgan:

Q. What's your attitude toward canned laughter?

A. Doesn't bother me. I read books. Anyway, I think the next step will be a lot more interesting. Frozen laughter.

Q. What's your attitude toward telethons?

A. This question is obviously ghost-written. By somebody with a Stupid monkey on his back. It reminds me of the classy questions asked of the Sweepstakes winners. How does it feel to win one hundred forty-two thousand dollars and eleven cents? Great. How does it feel, Ted, to have a lifetime average of .302? Great. How do you feel, Manny, now that you've finished a five-million-dollar picture? Great.

Telethons were invented to give Jerry Lewis something to do after he ran out of material.

Telethons were invented to give the jerks of the world an opportunity to watch the asses of the world.

Telethons were invented to see what percentage of the pledges could actually be collected. (About 11%, by the way.)

Telethons were invented to give Dietrich's daughter an opportunity to cry for a fee of two thousand dollars. You heard me, buster, two thousand dollars. The ladies with the big tear ducts make even more.

It's hard for Jerry Lewis to raise money for spastics when he's living proof that they're employable.

Telethons were invented to give Milton Berle a layover between

Miami and Las Vegas.

Telethons were invented to show what bad taste would look like if you could get it all into the same place at one time.

Telethons were invented so that show folk could demonstrate that they're all heart.

Q. Jerry Lewis spent \$800 to fly his barber to Miami for a haircut. What's your reaction?

A. Why did his barber need a haircut? . . .

Q. Are you pessimistic or optimistic about the future?

A. As an amateur historian I'm pessimistic, but as a human I'm optimistic. Everybody'll die except me. Not that I'm afraid to, you understand—it's just that I don't count on it. I have a great deal to live for. (Myself.)

I don't have a book to finish, a research project which needs doing, or any of the other things which many people seem to discuss fluently on their deathbeds, but I'm partial to ocean bathing and want to see can I get in some more of it. I'm not interested in skindiving—which is an escape like Zen—I like to be on top of the water like a diatom.

I also enjoy eating all the things that give me gas. And there are so many other things to be enjoyed: wondering how a naked girl will look in clothes; doing double-crosters in ink; waiting for the first potable instant coffee.

The future. Funny, nobody seems to notice that he lives in it constantly. This second was the future but a second ago. I dare say that the main thing to worry about in the "future" is that there's liable to be a Heaven after all. Wouldn't that be sheer Hell?

but nevertheless reassured all that "RAW is alive and busy with religious works."

I think that was *designed* to sound unconvincing, especially to the initiates of my Classic Novels (Erisian "religious works" consist of mind-fucks or hoaxes), and thereby cast doubts on the other denials being posted on the nets by various friends who had managed to contact me. Certainly, the conspiracy buffs who have followed my career ever since *Illuminatus* will not believe a report that includes the incriminating admission that I could not be contacted "at present."

Many contributions to the alive-or-dead controversy seemed unsure whether I had died, or hadn't died, in Los Angeles or San Francisco. The funniest one of all thought I was alive, not dead, but in Howth (County Dublin, Ireland) where I lived during most of the 1980s: "Contacted at his home in Howth Castle, Wilson said 'The reports of my death have been slightly exaggerated. I can still totter about a bit and even crack a weak joke occasionally.'"

To which some wit replied: "Shouldn't that be Howth Castle and Environs?" Indeed, I never lived in Howth Castle but I did live in its environs due to my fondness for Joycean scenery. (See the first sentence of *Finnegans Wake*.)

The Howth legend continued to circulate from one net to another, and soon included the news that I had taken over management of the Committee for Surrealist Investigation of Claims of the Normal (CSICON) after the death of its founder, Prof. Timothy F.X. Finnegan, of Trinity College, Dublin, and that CSICON still offers \$10,000 to any "normalist" who can produce "a perfectly normal person, place or thing—or even an ordinary sunset. Or an average day."

Of course, Finnegan and CSICON exist in some sense, like Howth Castle, as readers of my works know by now—not quite in the sense in which the Statue of Liberty exists, but not entirely in the metaphoric sense in which King Kong "exists" either. But the result of all this was beginning to make me wonder if I exist only in some metaphoric sense myself, sort of like a male Madonna.

You see, I had once read a Spiritualist treatise (I read all sorts of weird literature, which keeps me from believing totally any of the stuff we get told as Official Truth by the major media). This ghostly tome claimed that we poor dead bastards often do not know we've died until some medium "contacts" us and explains why people have started treating us so rudely lately—and why even our nearest and dearest ignore us outright unless we knock over lamps or rap in code on the tables.

I had also read Jonathan Swift's hilarious "pamphlet war" with the astrologer Partridge about whether Partridge was alive or not. Swift's subtle argument—that just because a man *claims* to be alive and may even believe it himself, does not logically require us to credit

his unsupported testimony—had left Partridge floundering (never argue with a Dublin intellectual) and now I felt myself floundering a bit also.

Obviously, my testimony on the matter would not convince Swift, when he decided to play the Scientific Skeptic, and I wondered if it would convince CSICOP (the group opposing CSICON). They believe not just that the "normal" actually exists somewhere, but that it exists everywhere.)

I thought I was alive, but I have often thought I was awake when I was dreaming, and I have even thought I was achieving Great Spiritual Insight when everybody else in the room thought I was over the hills with the Wee Folk, a few gallons shy of a full tank and generally so far out the trolleys don't run there anymore.

Then the C.I.A. entered this Trip, playing the Wrathful Demons of this bardo. Somebody (signing him/her/itself as "Anon") logged the following into several computer bulletin boards: "THE C.I.A. KILLED ROBERT ANTON WILSON . . ."

"Wilson did not die of natural causes. He was assassinated. Earlier on that day, Wilson was injected with a time-delay poison based on shellfish toxin, by agents of the C.I.A.'s special SUPER SECRET BLACK OPERATIONS SQUAD, using a special microscopic needle made of a plastic which dissolves in the body without a trace. Wilson's body had immediately been taken and cremated and the usual step of an autopsy had been bypassed, BY ORDERS FROM ABOVE.

"It is clear why the power\$ that be wanted Wilson dead. Wilson was a dangerous element; the government can only govern if the majority does not question the system (whoever currently "rules" does not matter.) The troublesome minority can be dealt with discreetly, by means of EXECUTIVE ACTION (assassination), which is what happened with Wilson. . . ."

"Earlier the same agencies (C.I.A., NRO, DEA and CFR/TLC/Bilderberger BOL-SHEVİK SHADOW GOVERNMENT) had LSD mind-expansion advocate Dr. Timothy Leary 'neutralized' by injecting him with a neurotoxin which DESTROYS THE MIND and ARTIFICIALLY INDUCES A STATE SIMILAR TO SENILITY . . . Dissemination of this information is encouraged. MAKE 30 COPIES."

But details came from elsewhere:

"Oh come on now," somebody using the monicker Zippy responded to Anon. "If you're going to perpetuate the wind-up at least have the courage to put your own name behind it." This stopped me for a minute, coming from a Zippy, but so many children of the '60s have names like Leaf and River and God that I suppose there could be a Zippy. In any case Zippy continued "'Air Force captures flying disk': see lots of newspapers 1947. And unlike your fiction those headlines really

appeared."

Another chap, or a continuation of Zippy after a jumbled insert, said: "R.A.W. is alive and well. Verify it by telepathy."

A Marshall Yount wrote to deny that Dr. Leary had been "neutralized" and roundly asserted that Tim was "pretty goddamn sane" and told "Anon" bluntly, "You are probably an Oliver Stone fanatic."

One J. Fleisher wrote on the same net, "I liked that bit about the 'plastic dissolving needle.' Did you make all that James Bond stuff up yourself? Correct me if I'm wrong but aren't most plastics insoluble (in just about anything let alone the human body)???"

Arthur Hlavaty, a personal friend, entered the net with, "I just spoke with Robert Anton Wilson, who denies that he is dead. I believe him, but I'm pretty gullible."

Others grew more eldritch: "Maybe the government has installed a VIRTUAL R.A.W. in his place to allay people's fears. Oh sure, he can respond all he wants, but I know it's not the real R.A.W."

That one really pushed my buttons. Long ago, I heard the story of the art dealer who, when offered some alleged Picasso paintings, took them all to the Master for authentication. Picasso quickly sorted them into two piles—"real Picassos" and "fakes." But then as he tossed one into the "fake" pile, the dealer objected, "But that's not a fake, Pablo. I was here the week-end you painted it!"

"No matter," said Pablo. "I can fake a Picasso as well as any thief in Europe."

I also thought, again, of Orson Welles's "documentary" *F For Fake*, in which several "insiders" who might possibly know what they're talking about, and might possibly want to tell the truth, all claim that most of the best-loved Van Goghs are really by El Mir, the greatest art forger of the 20th Century.

And I thought of Archie Leach, who was once told by a young man, "Every time I see you on the screen I think, 'I want to be Cary Grant.'" "That's just what I think," said Archie, the poor boy from Liverpool who played Cary Grant in all his movies. I guess Archie, or Cary—they occupied the same body—had taken some Acid again that day.

I often wonder, because of these Zen insights by Picasso and Cary Grant—and the Deconstructionism of Welles's "documentary"—that sometimes I am too tired to write a "real" Wilson article and only fake one. How many readers nowadays have enough sense of style to tell a real genuine Wilson from one I faked? And reading my fan mail (after quickly throwing out the day's hate mail) I also think, "I wish I could be Robert Anton Wilson."

But my favorite contribution of the Wilson Mythos was logged by somebody using the monicker, The Green One: "There is no toxin. There is no needle. You have not heard

(Continued on Page 7)

I Wrote Jokes for John Wayne Bobbitt

by Mark Miller

It was a day like any other, only this one started with an unusual classified ad in the Hollywood trade paper, *Daily Variety*. The ad proclaimed: "John Wayne Bobbitt is embarking on a national comedy tour. Needs great writer with stand-up experience. Fax resume and sample of work to A.M. Gordon Management."

I couldn't believe it. Could this actually be for real? Could John Wayne Bobbitt, whose wife Lorena lopped off his manhood, seriously be interested in standing in front of an audience and telling jokes about it? As it turned out, yes. And isn't this occurrence, according to Nostradamus, one of the signs of the Apocalypse?

Not that there wasn't plenty of material there. Every other comedian was already doing at least one Bobbitt joke in his or her act. The last Comic Relief seemed like 25% Bobbitt jokes. No doubt Bobbitt's mother was telling Bobbitt jokes to her bridge group.

But this was no job for any prestigious writer who cared about his image, I thought. After all, I had written for the likes of Jay Leno, Roseanne, Gary Shandling, Rodney Dangerfield, Joan Rivers, and Carol Burnett. My humor essays appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*. For God's sake, I had a B.A. in English and American literature, with honors. I did my honors thesis on "Selflessness as Fulfillment: The Character of Virtue in Malamud."

But what about the character of virtue in Bobbitt? Here was a guy whose specialties were parodying without his wife, being selfish in bed,

and verbal and physical spousal abuse. I had absolutely nothing in common with this guy. Okay, maybe the selfishness in bed thing, but otherwise, I'd have nothing to say to, or about, him. He disgusted me and I felt he deserved what he'd gotten.

Later that day, I happened to glance at my bank account balance. Half an hour later, I was faxing a letter and samples of my material to Bobbitt's manager, telling him how eager I was to help turn John Wayne Bobbitt into the next Bob Hope.

His manager, Aaron Gordon, operated out of Las Vegas. Perfect. He was in business with his father, Jack Gordon, who until very recently was married to, managing, and occasionally smacking around—LaToya Jackson. Now they had Bobbitt, too. How's that for one giant, dysfunctional cross-section of Hell?

Bobbitt's manager faxed me back a letter, beginning, "Thank you for your interest in helping John Wayne Bobbitt with his upcoming stand-up routine." As I read the letter, I heard a faint whirring sound. It was Bernard Malamud spinning in his grave. The manager requested I fax back a couple of sample jokes written specifically for Bobbitt.

I sent him five including: "I remember waking up in a pool of blood, with my penis missing, and my first thought was, 'Y'know, this would make a really amusing stand-up comedy routine.'" And also: "Can you imagine some poor cop at the dinner table that night? Wife asks him what he did today. 'I arrested a few speeders, checked out a stolen car, and, oh yeah, I found a dick in the grass and put it on ice.'"

I got the job. Gordon told me that he'd received tons of replies to the ad, from not only comedy writers, but also from club owners anxious to book Bobbitt. A tour of college campuses and comedy clubs is being planned, in which Bobbitt would m.c. a show consisting of himself and two or three other professional comedians. Then, who knows? His own TV show, movies, a run for the Presidency? Hey, don't laugh. Tom Arnold is now a movie star. Enough said.

Gordon sent me Bobbitt's press kit, such as it is, consisting of a brief case history, and a 3-page treatment for a potential TV movie of the week (I told you) called, *Silent Mind, Angry Heart: The John Wayne Bobbitt Story*. I'm still trying to figure out what "silent mind" means. I would have preferred the more accurate and visual *Silent Crotch*.

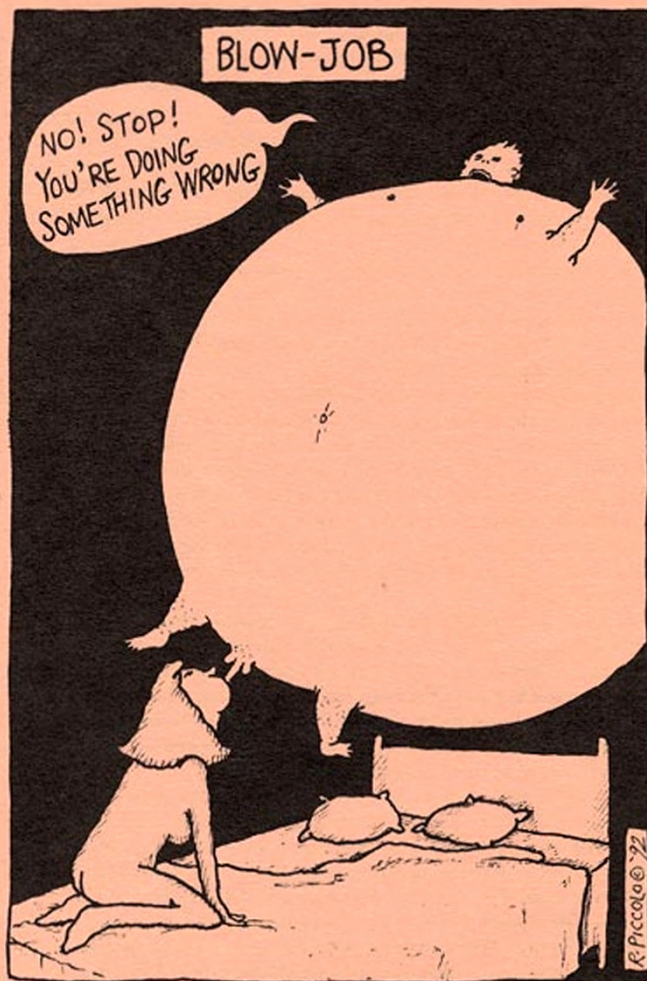
In any case, the treatment paints a totally sympathetic portrait of Bobbitt (how surprising), beginning, "This is the story of a young man raised in a horribly unstable environment, who becomes a classic product of his surrounding." I'm weeping already.

It describes how Bobbitt, while in the Marines, meets "a lovely little 18-year-old Venezuelan girl named Lorena. They spend the evening talking about dreams." I wonder if she told him her dream about the cutlery.

The treatment's last paragraph is my favorite: "John has become a true American folk hero, he is recognized throughout the states and sought to speak around the world, in places like England, Germany, Spain, South America, Japan, Russia, and Australia. At each appearance, he signs hundreds of autographs, he is a symbol of survival. He has survived man's greatest fear . . . a vengeful wife with a knife. Today, Lorena lives in exile." Roll credits. I envision the sequel: *Bobbitt Two: She's Back!* (Just When You Thought It Was Safe to Put the Steak Knives Back on the Counter . . .)

I started working on the agreed-upon 90 jokes. For the first time in my career, my assignment was to write dick jokes. In fact, Gordon's letter to me actually contained the line, "Please feel free to be vulgar and on the thin lines of decency, as that is what has made this story the sensation that it is." More whirring sounds. Malamud, grave-spinning; my college literature professors bursting with pride.

Okay, I'll admit I enjoyed the work. I got excited and the jokes just spurted out: "They told me they were going to re-attach my penis using Micro-Surgery. I was humiliated. I wanted Jumbo-Surgery" . . . "My medical and attorney bills are over \$750,000. Not to brag, but that's \$95,000 per inch" . . . "I think if they ever make a movie out of



From Rina Piccolo's *Stand Back, I Think I'm Gonna Laugh*

Alternative? What Alternative?

by Erik Himmelsbach

The most telling sound bite at July's national convention of the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies (AAN) was uttered at a seminar in Boston's historic Faneuil Hall, which, incidentally, was sponsored by AT&T and taped for broadcast on C-Span. "It's an odd moment for the alternative press to fulfill its function," said Victor Navasky, editor of *The Nation*. "It can't agree on what to rally the troops around."

No shit. In the good old days, the alternative media thrived by confronting The Man in its various corrupt guises: Vietnam, Nixon, Reagan et al. But in the post-Cold War '90s, they lack an obvious villain to sink their pens into. The irony, of course, is that the alternative media have prospered financially as they meander ideologically. And making a profit, it seems, goes a long way in fanning the flames of denial. For example, the convention's host paper, the *Boston Phoenix*, is a veritable juggernaut: It owns a cable TV station, a radio station, and other weeklies throughout New England, grossing a cool \$12 million last year. And they made sure conventioners had a grand ol' time, thanks to deep-pocketed corporate sponsors.

The three-day junket at the swank Park Plaza Hotel may have been a swell party, but as a forum to sort out what the hell's going on with the alternative press these days, it was an exercise in empty rhetoric. There was lots of hemming and hawing, but it sounded like so much self-congratulatory masturbation. As a convention, it was strictly by-the-book, merely an excuse for reporters to bitch and moan and drink on the company's tab. "At least we haven't sold out to the mainstream dailies," was the rationalizing mantra. Seminars were held to make us all feel better about what we do for a living and to justify AAN president Scott Spear's opening-night comment that "Professionalism doesn't mean compromise." Spear is vice president of New Times Inc., a chain of six weeklies nationwide.

Because it was, after all, the alternative press, the troops did manage to work themselves into a tizzy about one issue, which seemed to dominate virtually every booze-swilling conversation: Cokie must go.

Never mind the important stuff: The burning issue at AAN '94 was Cokiegate. Why was ABC and NPR correspondent Cokie Roberts, daughter of Rep. Hale Boggs, daughter of the Establishment, paid a reported \$15,000 for a keynote speech that de-

fended the political status quo while backhandedly telling the alternative media to call off their dogs: "Do we have any responsibility to the institutions of this country?" she asked. "All we have is the Constitution and the institutions that come from it. If no one trusts anyone to do anything or to fix anything, what's the point of investigative journalism?"

The AAN rumor mill swirled with unsubstantiated whisperings about a near-eleventh-hour cancellation by Roberts: Did ABC want to pull the plug because of a policy that forbids its correspondents to receive payment for speaking at trade shows? Did Roberts get cold feet after critical pre-AAN stories in *USA Today* and the *Columbia Journalism Review*? No such luck. Cokie decided to take the money and run on and on.

Cokiegate sparked a poll in the daily AAN newsletter, which revealed a few intriguing names as possible future keynote speakers: Among them, Lynda Barry, William Grieder, and comedian Stephen Wright, who was spotted at the opening dinner with author Cynthia Heimel. But after the convention, *Boston Phoenix* editor Peter Kadzis dismissed the griping as simply a "tempest in a teapot."

And why was William Weld, the governor of Massachusetts and a possible GOP presi-

my life, I'd like Robert DeNiro to play me. And Joe Pesci to play my penis."

Every person to whom I mentioned my Bobbitt assignment had a Bobbitt joke for me that they'd either heard, or had made up—including my doctor, my mailman, and, I swear, my mother. I came this close to having to wash my mother's mouth out with soap. Payback.

Bobbitt was given a performance coach, named Leslie Coogan, actor Jackie Coogan's daughter, to help him learn to be a stand-up. Leslie's job involves taking Bobbitt around to little clubs to try out the material. Which turns out to be more difficult than we'd initially imagined, as Bobbitt suffers from Attention Deficit Disorder. And it falls to us to transfer his attention from his penis to the work he's now required to do. Not unlike the task President Clinton's strategy team had to face.

I meet Bobbitt for the first time at Leslie's house in Malibu. He arrives with an entourage consisting of a brother or two, friends, and a manager. He immediately bonds, not with Leslie or me, but with Leslie's 21-year-old son, and the two share cigarettes on the patio, while discussing which bar they should visit that night. Apparently, if Bobbitt doesn't get into a bar fight at least once a week, he breaks out in a rash.

Bobbitt is a compact, powerfully built man, with blue eyes. In the Marines, he'd trained lieutenants in hand-to-hand combat. (Unfortunately, he himself turned out to be the victim of *hand-to-gland* combat.) He is likable, but soft-spoken, and speaks in a monotone; clearly not a born performer. Still, he offers to show us his re-attached penis. We're having lunch, and take a pass on his offer. For a guy who underwent that kind of trauma, he seems remarkably well-adjusted.

Everyone chips in with ideas for Bobbitt's act—material, structure, staging, props, video segments. For the *A Day in the Life of John Wayne Bobbitt* video segment, we plan to show him waking up and checking a "Things to Do Today" list. Number one on the list is "Check to Make Sure Penis Is Still There." Number two is "Breathe a Sigh of Relief." For the *What Lorena's Up to Today* video segment, we show her working as a chef at Benihana's.

I go home and continue working on the material. Leslie helps mold

the material into an act for Bobbitt, and takes him to the clubs, where he often reads the jokes off index cards. But he's easily distracted—by his brothers, his friends, his own insecurities and lack of discipline, and doesn't seem all that motivated. It will be a miracle if he's ready for the planned September start date of the John Wayne Bobbitt Sleep On Your Stomach Tour.

In addition, he keeps having to go back to Vegas to face paternity suits from two different women, and domestic battery charges filed by his new fiancée, a Vegas topless dancer. (She takes it off for a living; he had it taken off and lived.) Then there are his bar brawls, jail sentences, therapy sessions.

And now we have the latest Bobbitt surprise. He's making an X-rated movie about his life, to be produced by a well-known porno film production company. In it, we will see him making love to several women. Bobbitt says he's doing it to show that men can have their penises cut off and still recover to lead fulfilling lives.

I have to wonder how big a market is there for this video? How many men are now sitting around, dickless, praying for such a video? And even if all eight of them purchase the video, will it be cost-effective to produce?

Is it just me, or is Rasputin starting to appear normal by comparison? Of course, to be fair, Rasputin didn't have to contend with Lorena Bobbitt or LaToya Jackson's management. That might have really pushed him over the edge. Still, to be honest, I enjoyed the experience overall—in much the same way that I enjoyed my last high colonic. Perhaps this will become my specialty—getting victims and perpetrators of heinous crimes into stand-up.

In fact, if any of you have contacts with Joey Buttafuoco, the Menendez Brothers, Charles Manson, or O.J. Simpson, please feel them out on the possibility of their doing a nightclub act. We already know Manson can sing and Simpson can act. The others must have hidden talents. Perhaps Lyle Menendez yodels. They can reach me care of *The Realist*. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a meeting with Jeffrey Dahmer. We've already received quite a bit of interest from several major dinner theaters, in the one-man show I'm writing for him—*An Appetite For Life*.

dential candidate in '96, onstage to introduce her? Gosh, I guess he did own a weekly called the *Real Paper* in the '70s that was crushed by the *Phoenix* machine, and besides, he's a Deadhead. But we're in serious trouble when allegiance to the Grateful Dead is all that's required for admission to the fraternal order of alternative journalists.

"Do we have an ideology other than being pro-choice, pro-gay rights, and pro-Grateful Dead?" asked Bob Young, news editor of the *Casco Bay Weekly* in Portland, Maine. Uh, no. The reality is that the alternative press is lost at sea but won't admit it, at least until the sales figures stop adding up. It has become naturally less subversive as its sales figures rise and its infrastructure (and its readers) creeps ever closer to the mainstream. Demographics have replaced issues. And its anointed status as the liberal advocate of reason may also be in jeopardy. On one hand you have 'zines. Although they may seem primitive now (remember the *San Francisco Oracle*?), I'm willing to bet that as the medium evolves, 'zines will be the heir to the alternative mantle simply because they don't give a shit, an attitude once characteristic of the alternative press. Simultaneously, mainstream papers have co-opted some of the trademarks of alternative reporting.

"What began as the alternative press has been completely assimilated," said Sidney Blumenthal, a writer for the *New Yorker*. "The sense of skepticism, the stylish writing and the point of view: You can see it in the *Boston Globe*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*." Blumenthal appeared on a panel called "The Future of Alternative Journalism." I presume he was selected because he once worked for *Boston After Dark*, the embryonic version of the *Phoenix*.

OK, so where does that leave us? How can the alternative media avoid becoming irrelevant and obsolete? Certainly not by maintaining their status-quo boys club of white middle-class sensibilities. "But it can be a great viewpoint," said Jack Shafer, editor of the *Washington City Paper* (without irony, I might add), at a seminar addressing "The Alternative Agenda: Are We in Touch With Our Readers?" Only Patricia Calhoun, editor of Denver's *Westword*, seemed to be taking the affair seriously. "Keep things local," she said. "Be intimate with the communities you write about—it's where you can make a real difference."

Other seminars addressed problems inherent to all print media, including the obligatory look into the future ("Virtual Newspapers: Technology and the Alternative Press," also sponsored by AT&T Multiquest Services) and various tricks of the trade offered under different titles to help papers sell, sell those ads. *Boston Globe* editor Matt Storin's comment that "Alternative media has stretched the boundaries of journalism," is being used as a crutch by alternative journal-

Disturbing Images

A printer refused to print *Nose* magazine unless the illustrations below were censored. From top to bottom: Betty Rubble by Emily Cohen, a reader's version of Connie Chung, and an item from *Eightball* comics.



ists to coast on its storied glory days and as an excuse to avoid what may be a difficult future. Although Storin's statement is valid, there are new boundaries to stretch.

The alternative press needs to stop telling itself how great and valuable it is and think instead about how it can make a difference into the next century. As AAN wound up with a general business meeting on a bleary Saturday morning, membership dues were raised, new members were added, and Nashville was announced as the site of 1995's convention, where tractor-pulls and Grace-land field trips were promised. With the droning of war stories and shop talk mercilessly over, the journalists slowly descended into the bright Boston afternoon, where a day

of pub crawling could begin without inconvenient interruption.

Jews in the News

• Bob Dylan has purchased a synagogue in Santa Monica. Said Rabbi Jeffrey Marx: "Dylan has always gone through phases of investigating his Jewish roots, but he probably did it for investment reasons."

• During the much-publicized soccer games in Los Angeles, the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance offered 10% off its regular admission price to all visitors who mentioned the words "World Cup."

• *Rumor of the Month*: The Lubavicher Hasidism are holding an essay contest to select a new Messiah following the death of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Runners-up will receive a lifetime supply of Ben & Jerry's ice cream.

Premature Death

(Continued from Page 4)

of a toxin. You have not heard of a needle. They were not tools of the conspiracy. There is no conspiracy. The toxin and the needle, which do not exist, played no part in the conspiracy, which does not exist. Fnord. Repeat after me. There is no toxin . . ."

Slowly, as March turned to April, it all petered out—or I thought it did. The denials, by people who had heard "me" lecture one place or another in the weeks after my death, or who had talked to "me" on the phone, convinced more and more people; the whimsies and/or paranoias of the more imaginative hackers faded away. By May, I thought it had all come to an end.

Then around May 22 (3 months after the first forged obituary went on line) I got a phone call from some friends in Nevada City, at the Institute for the Harmonious Development of the Human Being (formerly, the Fake Sufi School). They had finally heard the rumor and wanted to find out for themselves whether or not I had passed on to the Great Holodeck in the sky.

I thought of Mencken's bathtub hoax, and realized that some fantasies go on forever. New people will hear about my heart attack or C.I.A. poisoning every few months now and "I" will have to deny it again and again, as long as "I" live; and when "I" do finally die, many fans will not believe it and will flatly denounce the obituary as a new hoax.

Well, it all gives me a certain Buddhist detachment, or at least it gives me deeper insight into Buddhist (and Deconstructionist) ideas about the individual ego existing only as the product of socio-linguistic definitions and agreements. I created Robert Anton Wilson the same way Archie Leach created Cary Grant—out of a certain style, a persona and other art tricks; and "reality," like art, is what you can get away with.

MEDIA FREAK

The O.J. Simpson Case

Tragedy and absurdity were two sides of the same coin, from O.J. Simpson's "suicide" note with a smiley face in the O of his signature to the woman who pinched lawyer Robert Shapiro's ass because "I wanted to be part of history."

On the day of O.J.'s first pre-trial court appearance, artist Nancy Reiner was so struck by the cynicism of the defense that she sketched a drawing of *False Defenses: #1*, with Shapiro whispering to Simpson: "We'll show them what a hero you really are, O.J. Why, when they hear that you came upon that vicious waiter slitting Nicole's throat and you tried in vain to save her life (and in the process killed her evil murderer), they will love you for your heroism! And you'll walk. Trust me. Now, cry."

Leslie Abramson and Harry Shearer have something in common. Both have agents, but neither has been able to get on the Letterman show. Abramson was ABC's legal expert, and Shearer taped her off the satellite feed when she didn't know she could be heard saying, for example, that Shapiro shouldn't be kneading Simpson's shoulder, but that it was different when she touched her client, because the Menendez brothers needed her. "My boy was 18, but emotionally he was 8."

There has been a plethora of one-liners about the O.J. Simpson case. Our favorite joke happens to be true. While the slow-motion chase scene was being watched on every channel, *Realist* editor Paul Krassner was being interviewed on cable access.

Tim Leary Meets Daryl Gates

Parade, the Sunday supplement, recently published an article, "Should Marijuana Be Legalized?" There was a photo of Tim Leary, with this caption: "I get really disgusted and despairing when I see young teenagers smoking grass and lying around listening to the Grateful Dead."

Says Leary: "This distortion of my feelings and words came as a shock to me. And to many of the 50 million Americans who share my belief that marijuana is a gentle, mellow, safe, life-affirming, love-generating brain medication. Not to forget the 40 million American Deadheads, who participate as often as possible in the greatest pagan audio-visual ceremony of all time. Not to forget millions of Deadheads in other countries."

The quote was taken out of context. Leary had been interviewed by former L.A. police chief Daryl Gates on the latter's radio show. A caller said that she knew people who were addicted to marijuana and were Deadheads. She asked how Leary, at 72, remained so "sharp and healthy."

Leary: "The aim in life is moderation and common sense, no matter what it is. I've always practiced that. Also, I've been fortunate

enough to stick with people who have common sense and who keep me from going too far. If you're a young person out there, be very careful with marijuana because it makes you feel so friendly and easy-going but you don't go to school. You've got to really earn the right to have this wonderful experience. I really get disgusted and despairing when I see teenagers smoking grass and lying around listening to the Grateful Dead. Sure, that's great on a Sunday afternoon, but get on your feet and get out there. We've got to defeat brilliant right-wingers like Chief Gates here. So we need your help in this political future coming up here. So don't overdo, overdose or do too much marijuana. Think for yourself."

Leary told *The Realist*: "Conservative readers of *Parade* may not remember that over the last 30 years I have regularly debated with the most articulate, notorious, flamboyant defenders of the Pentagon/Police/Scientific Establishments—G. Gordon Liddy, top



DEA officials, publicity-hungry U.S. Senators & Representatives, various right-wing medics, and several brilliant Professors at MIT, which since its founding has performed as the R & D arm of the Defense Department. Since I am older, more experienced, better-educated, more self-confident and better-known than most of my esteemed opponents, my debating style is professorial, amused, tolerant and gently sarcastic. I have practiced diligently to earn a Very Bad Reputation. So, I have nothing to lose. Irony, satire, tongue-in-cheek mockery are the standard tactics of counterculture philosophers. Rowdy laughter is the aim. I am usually able to get my 'esteemed opponents' to laugh at jokes at their own expense. I particularly delight in debating extremist right-wingers. So the context of the *Parade* misquote was my playful teasing of the ultimate fascist wannabe—Chief Gates, who himself has nothing to lose."

From the transcript:

Leary (mimicking a prosecutor): "What's this, Chief! You once said that marijuana smokers should be taken out and shot?"

Gates: "Well, I was before a Senate Committee, and I used that old term to show disdain for casual drug users. That's an old phrase that my mother used to use."

Leary: "Of course, your mother wasn't chief of police of the most militaristic force in the country... So you kind of scared people when the chief of police of the second largest city in the country, with this incredibly crack force, militarily trained, wants to go out and shoot 40 million citizens. There are a lot of impressionable cops out there that adore you and worship you, and you're telling them it's okay to do that?"

To which Leary now adds, "I do feel compassion for Chief Gates' grief. His son was a highly-publicized heroin addict. I also enjoy his above-the-law, swashbuckling arrogance. Chief Gates, himself, is no slouch at using the classical rhetorical techniques of satire and mischievous exaggeration. So, love and peace, brother Daryl."

Bill Hicks: "That—Was Special"

Perhaps the most outspoken stand-up comic of the '90s, Bill Hicks died at age 32, of pancreatic cancer. He refused to compromise in his work. Here's an excerpt from one of his last shows:

"If you're so pro-life, don't lock arms and block medical clinics, okay? Lock arms and block cemeteries. Let's see how committed you are to this premise. I want to see pro-lifers at funerals with crowbars opening caskets, going, 'Get out!'... They said they had to break down the Waco compound because child abuse was stepping up. Well, if that's true, how come we don't see Bradley tanks knocking down Catholic churches?... And this is the routine that has virtually ended my career in America. If you have children here tonight—and I assume some of you do—I am sorry to tell you this. They are not special. I'll let that sink in. Don't get me wrong, folks. I know you think they're special. You think that. I'm telling you—they're not. Did you know that every time a guy comes, he comes 200 million sperm? Did you know that? And you mean to tell me you think your child is special? Because one out of 200 million sperm connected—that load? Gee, what are the fucking odds? Do you know what that means? I have wiped entire civilizations off of my chest, with a grey gym sock. That—is special. Entire nations have flaked and crusted in the hair around my naval. That—is special. And I want you to think about that, you two-egg-carrying beings out there, with that holier-than-thou, we-have-the-gift-of-life attitude. I have tossed universes, in my underpants, while napping. That—is special."

The Mechanical Munchies

Ron DeLacy in the *Modesto Bee*: "Forest Service special agents fed \$6.7 million worth of marijuana through the Fibreboard Corp.'s steam boiler here Thursday. As a crowd of 6,000 people looked on, the boiler belched thick plumes of brilliant psychedelic oranges and reds and then forgot what it was doing, lost its ambition, shut down completely, and demanded peanut butter and potato chips."