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Well guys, I guess this is it...

The Last Ripples

The Last Ripples

(Sob, sob, sniffle, sniffle. Well, they say all things must come to an end. So here goes with the last Ripples column. After this, CS is behind me, at least for now. As Mike Glicksohn says, you can never be sure with fanzines.)

Mike Glicksohn:

Many thanks for the fifteenth and last beautiful and beautifully-printed issue of **Crystal Ship**. I could certainly sympathize with your editorial thoughts. Sixteen years ago I folded my own fanzine after its fifteenth issue (although I'd announced that intention in #13) for many of the same reasons as you state. (I may be the only fanned in history to win a Best Fanzine hugo several months after his last issue appeared!) In those days, without the benefits of desktop publishing and laserprinters and offset printing I still thought I'd taken **Energumen** about as far as a mimood fanzine could go and it was getting very difficult to sustain the momentum the magazine had developed and to make each issue better than the previous one. And yet I felt strongly that keeping the name while changing the style of the fanzine just wouldn't have been kosher. So I folded the name and buried its history with it, freeing me to start a smaller, less fancy, less frequent fanzine. Of course, a bunch of years later I resur-

rected it and published **Energumen 16** but that's another story! (But don't count your fanzines until they've all been hatched!) I wish you luck in following in my footsteps and hope you have as much fun with whatever replaces **Crystal Ship** as I've had with the 14 issues of **Xenium** I've published over the last sixteen years. (And, yes, I do believe that eventually I'll publish another one...I just have no idea when.)

(Hmm, maybe it's time people began nagging you about that, Mike. How about it, Skel, let's organise a Glicksohn-pressure group!)

Pam Boal:

I shall sorely miss the voyages but understand your reasoning so, much as I'm tempted, will not try to talk you out of decommissioning. One thing though: I profoundly disagree with those who said you put presentation above content. 99% of the cargo was well worthy of that well found vessel. This last edition is no exception, excellent articles with such interesting and relevant talking points, which I hope will give rise to a Ship-like letter col or discussion forum in what ever form your future publications take.

Dave Redd:

I note that your favourite issues coincide with mine, namely **CS6** and **13**.

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This may mean simply that they are the most memorable, because they had strong unifying ingredients. The standard never dipped below excellent, so how could any one issue be better than another? Look at **CS15**... It's really a beautiful production! I feel guilty that I did less than most to support it. You did ask for an article on procrastination, but I never got around to it. Sorry. **CS15** is full of people being absolutely fascinating. Well, even we WAHF's and strays are grateful for **CS**, believe me.

Dave Langford:

Suitable salutations and commiserations on the passing of **CS**. It seems that when one stops one has to try twice as hard: ever since it became clear to me that there would be no more **Ansible**, people have been asking in a hurt way why they were ruthlessly ostracized from the mailing list, and I've been saying glassily, "What mailing list?"

(Hilary Robinson's article on Northern Ireland obviously struck most of you as hard as it did me.)

Walt Willis:

I was very impressed by Hilary Robinson's article: I thought it was sensitive, intelligent and well written. I particularly liked her admonitions about instant solutions. They remind me of H.L. Mencken's observation that there is a solution to every problem which is simple, obvious and wrong.

Peter Tennant:

'Suffer The Little Children'... was a quite chilling and moving reminder of the ongoing nightmare that is Northern Ireland. There is, on this side of the Irish Channel anyway, a tendency to be dismissive about the Troubles, an element of taking it all for granted (perhaps this is true of all violence

now). The situation has lost its ability to shock us, we've grown numb. Pub bombed in Ulster? Oh yes, they're at it again, and what's the weather going to be tomorrow. Hilary's words had a depth missing from media coverage. They made it all real for me. The tragedy is that there seems to be nothing anyone can do to help. Only the men with guns can achieve anything, by forsaking violence, but I don't see it happening.

Mic Rogers

I was rather shattered by Hilary's article. As she say, it's so easy to underestimate one's children, these days. (Probably always!) One can never begin to guess what they'll come out with or *what* is going to make the biggest impression. Hilary does have some problems ahead of her and I'm sorry that no one can really advise her. Partly because her exact circumstances and life-style, day-to-day, are unknown and partly because only she and her family will be on hand when any particular problem raises its head. It's the sort of thing all parents have to think about at some time or other, and it just seems these are harder, more complicated times in which to have to do it. Hilary's article has certainly given me something to think about.

(Keith Brooke picks up on the media side of the article.)

Keith Brooke:

I thought Hilary Robinson's was a very moving piece of writing. What can anybody do in that sort of situation? Just carry on, I suppose, and keep on hoping. A lot easier said than done. It raised the 'Whitehouse-question' again: does **The A-Team** and porn turn ordinary people into Ryans and Sutcliffes or do the weirdoes just get drawn to it, maybe even with a cathartic effect? I guess the White-

house proposition is so easy to believe because we can all remember genuinely believing in Mary, Mungo and Midge, Flash Gordon or even Captain Macara. Growing up, for most of us, is learning to distinguish between facts and fantasy. But that still begs the question: did Ryan have to believe in Rambo to do what he did? And if Rambo is the culprit, should he be banned? Maybe the escapism and thought-provoking effects of even the crudest forms of entertainment are worth the risk of a few jerks freaking out; maybe more people would needlessly die in Whitehouse's world than in a more licentious one.

John Miller:

...The Hilary Robinson article...is one of the best fanzine articles I've read in a long time. Some folks would maybe worry about kids getting ideas from a puppet-show like **Starfleet**. When I was a kid, growing up in a place called Newarthill (a few miles away from Ravenscraig steelworks) where there was a good deal of religious sectarianism and indoctrination, kids' parents were often a bit funny about things like **Dan Dare** and **Fireball XL5**. A main complaint about , for example, **Fireball XL5** would be that Zodiac and Venus's jetmobile flying scooters were 'impossible' or 'not real': underlying this was an anxiety at recreations of futuristic cities on television which made the present world seem shabby and backward. According to rumour, a PTA once discussed, in 1964, an SF comic called **Escape From Earth**, in which a man and a beautiful woman escape from a strictly controlled future society on Earth (in this case, where immortality is compulsory). There were probably anxieties about kids building spaceships and escaping from the tyranny of Scotland in 1964, and to some kids that was what it was. The

level of 'rationalist' conformity in some isolated communities was pretty grim...

(Ken Lake, as ever, takes a contrary-wise look at the Irish problem.)

Ken Lake

Regardless of Hilary Robinson's protestations, the very content of her article confirms that Northern Ireland is an area where there is a Civil War, in which no-one is neutral, and that it is governed from London and is under military occupation.

From that point on, there may be room for argument - is the police merely an arm of the military, have the Catholics ever had equality of opportunity or freedom of speech, why do the Six Counties exist as a geopolitical anomaly anyway ? Or from the other side - why should a minority have any say in government, why should Sinn Fein be recognised when it's the political arm of a guerilla army, who the hell does the Pope think he is anyway ?

Hilary may deny her personal involvement in the centuries of events that have brought this situation about, just as today's Chinese people like to pretend they had no part in the Cultural Revolution - when merely permitting it to happen is condemnation enough. Regardless of which side of the fence she stands, she has connived with the militants of both sides to bring about the Civil War, and she and her husband have agreed to bring up their children in the world they have created.

Ever since Cromwell laid waste the country, the Irish have voted with their feet, setting up large and gradually assimilated enclaves in Great Britain, the United States and Canada and in many other countries worldwide. Yes, it would be nice if her children, and those from the other

religious group in their joint country, could live and play and learn together - but what exactly are the people of the Six Counties doing to bring that about?

We are often told that the Army in Ireland is merely being trained for similar activities one day in Great Britain's own trouble spots, notably the "black ghetto" cities. Whether things will ever come to that level one cannot say; whether the Army would be prepared to act on the mainland as they do across the water is another: what matters is that such suggestions can be made, and believed, by a growing number of people in our country today.

Like the Sandanistas and Contras, like the Mujaheddin and Communists, like all the religiously and politically polarised groups in all the countries where "limited military actions" rage today, the entire populace of Northern Ireland is involved in an epic struggle to which Hilary Robinson for one can see no solution. The parallels are so many and so obvious - US and Libyan support for the IRA, British governmental refusal to admit that a war is taking place at all, political imprisonment on a vast scale, the Diplock Courts with their inbuilt anti-Catholic stance and the police with the same bias, the whole panoply of repression and the siege mentality that labels whole counties "bandit country," to name but a few.

Do you realise that in signing the Universal Convention of Human Rights, the British government specifically excluded all activities in Northern Ireland? Hilary Robinson may choose to wring her hands about her children's indoctrination - what is she, and what are we as British citizens, doing to bring democracy and equal rights to the "province"?

(Perhaps the answer to your questions, Ken, is encapsulated in Walt Willis's comment on Lord Dunsany.)

Walt Willis:

Lord Dunsany was more than an aristocrat and author: he was also perceptive about politics. It was he who commented that a moderate in Irish politics was like a dog on a tennis court. Both sides would always join together to chase him off so they could get on with their game.

(The piece that provoked most comment in CS15 was, without doubt, Mic Rogers on Honesty.)

David Redd:

Is honesty still the best policy? How has this climate of dishonesty arisen? Mic, you clearly feel that something has gone wrong with our society. I've come to feel that too, but I feel the problem is with people's attitudes rather than with 'society' itself. Almost any social system will enable people to live together successfully, provided that most behave responsibly.

The key word is *responsibly*, of course.

What you're describing is that percentage of society where people no longer think it is necessary to behave responsibly, be sympathetic to others, set a good example or contribute anything to the common good. Local prosperity (relative to previous generations) means that the old 'harsh facts of life' no longer impose a common discipline. In biological terms, adaptive radiation in the new social environment has produced many non-survival characteristics. In systems terms, this local prosperity allows selfish behaviour to spread via the feedback loops of publicity and imitation.

Before I get bogged down in scientific comparisons, let me try to state the

reasons why the 'climate of dishonesty' has arisen.

Or one reason.

People who see nothing wrong in shoplifting, vandalism and aggression judge things purely in terms of personal benefit. They have been brought up to be utterly selfish because, for them, selfishness works.

Many people are living in environments where these selfish activities give the perpetrators more satisfying lives. Self-denial and sympathy are less interesting. If people can be better off by indulging in petty crime than by working, then people who work are losers — they have less income, less free time, and so on. In a free capitalist society (I do not necessarily support any alternatives) dishonesty works. Honesty reduces people's options.

Did you read about the underworld of Washington D.C. recently? It shows very clearly why a 'climate of dishonesty' grows and spreads. Washington showed me a classic example of a situation where circumstances 'make honesty less attractive' as Mic puts it:

The real life example involved a Washington police chief.

Earnest policeman visits ghetto schools.

He lectures the kids on need to avoid a life of crime.

A kid says, "Chief, you're full of shit!" Why?

Because the kid earns more in an afternoon than the police chief earns in a week.

So dishonesty works.

The risk of a bullet in the head from a rival dealer, like the risk of dying in an automobile crash, is regarded as acceptable. For most dealers and driv-

ers life is far better for taking that small risk than it would be if they gave up drug dealing or gave up driving over 30 mph. (I regard the behaviour of a motorist as the perfect indicator of that person's sense of responsibility.)

But the lesson of Washington D.C. is that people learn quickly. They learn that in their present environment, honesty is not the best policy. Drug dealing is. (The Chiang Kai-shek solution to the problem would be to change the environment: shoot all drug users, so drug dealing won't pay. This solution is not acceptable in Washington D.C., or over here for that matter.)

So that answers the second question, about the cause of spreading dishonesty. What about Mic's first question: is honesty the best policy? For many people now, no, but for our civilisation or our species, yes. We need honesty to survive together. Without it...

Only cooperation lets masses of people live together. Individual people are generally not self-sufficient. If people make neighbourhoods unsafe for others — for police, firemen, postmen, meals-on-wheels — they will make their own homes unlivable. During the process we will see riots, starvation, loss of life and all the usual consequences of a population outgrowing its natural habitat. The news in the future will not be good. I can only offer you a supremely sensible quotation from the supremely sensible John Wyndham:

"Find a nice self-sufficient hill-top, and fortify it..."

Eventually natural selection will work its usual rough magic, and that portion of the human species which shows non-survival characteristics will perish. Some of us might wish for some process of hot justice to speed

natural selection a la **Death Wish** or **Dirty Harry**, but such things could get out of hand. Even Peter Simple in **The Daily Telegraph** has realised that responsible, sympathetic, honest, environmentally/socially sound behaviour can only be enforced by a ruthlessly totalitarian dictatorship.

If you are seriously concerned, may I suggest that you do a little politicking? Try agitating for social reform? Because if you leave the search for a responsible society to someone else, it won't happen.

Mike Glicksohn:

The concept that honesty is the best policy is a purely ethical judgement and unfortunately this world of ours rarely operates on ethical principles. The vast majority of the evidence we see tends to support the theory that anything goes as long as you don't get caught so the pervading feeling in most people is probably not a feeling that one should do right but a feeling that one doesn't want to pay the penalty if one is caught doing wrong. I think I'm by and large a decent person who more often than not does what is right than what is wrong but I'd freely admit that this is largely because I'm scared to face the consequences of doing wrong. If I were faced with some absolutely foolproof way of making two million dollars (without hurting some innocent person) I'd undoubtedly take it. But if there were even the slightest risk that I'd be caught and punished, then discretion becomes the better part of avarice. In other words, it's cowardice that motivates any essential morality I display. And I'm not ashamed to admit that because I think it's a true description of the vast majority of "decent" people. (I do know some people who try to do what is right because they honestly believe that is the best way to be but in my own experience such people are

really rather rare. Many people seem to have convinced themselves that they act from that sort of lofty motivation but I've my doubts about what would happen in the crunch. But then I'm a nihilist and a cynic so what can you expect?) My life is filled with petty dishonesties that don't bother me at all: I usually drive over the speed limit; I sometimes use the school photocopier for personal reasons (although there is no stated ban on this); I've used paper from school to write the locs I send out; if I'm given too much change or not charged enough in a store I usually don't mention it. Etc. On the other hand, I don't abuse women or children, I'm kind to animals, I try to live my life so people aren't hurt by what I do (I'm not as successful on that one as I'd like to be) and the worst crime I've ever been charged with is illegally parking my motorcycle. I may not be a saint but I like to think I'm a pretty decent sort, regardless of what motivates me to act as I do.

Keith Brooke:

Mic Rogers' article had all the hallmarks of the crude sociobiology of the '70s: wild assumptions about evolution based on the flimsiest of evidence (a poll published in a newspaper). The other hallmark of her type of writing is that it is often well-written and very thought-provoking, as was the case with 'Honesty is the best policy?' (To address the problem in sociobiological terms, the rational answer would be that society is a mix of roles, from the outright crook to the pure and honest ['Such as meself, guv']; a society composed entirely of crooks would have far less success [who would do the work?] than a heterogeneous one, so would an entirely honest society [even a slightly dishonest individual would go to town in a place like this]. The balance can shift, but I

don't think we need fear everybody turning to crime, or the alternative.)

Okay, accepting the 'evidence', youngsters see nothing wrong in shoplifting, fiddling the dole, attacks on property, joyriding, insulting strangers, prostitution or smoking cannabis. What's so strange about that? Nothing, unless we want to rosily believe that it wasn't like that until recently. I can't tell you what attitudes were in the thirties or the previous century; but from what I've heard kids saw nothing wrong in scrumping, drinking, smoking and anything else they could get their hands on. Maybe it's easier nowadays: if grandpa could have got his hands on a joint he would smoke it with the rest of us, no matter what he would say now, as a mature adult.

I suppose, as a mere 22-year old, I might be squeezed into the group being discussed, so here's one view from the inside. I was a shoplifter when I was nine. I did it for the excitement (we filled carrier bags in shops and then threw most of the sweets away; I went scrumping too, but that was too easy. Kids of my generation (or at least, the ones I knew) generally disapproved of vandalism, violence, rudeness, etc; sure there was a sizeable minority who smoked joints, fought and stole cars, but they were a minority. They grew up, too. Sure some went on to lives of crime, I see their names quite often in my parents' local paper. But most grew up, stopped rebelling, began to appreciate the effects they have on others. One's in the police, several in the army, others in various offices (no doubt doing illicit copying and stealing the paper clips — what's new? Only the photocopier).

(As an aside: my recent encounter with the DHSS, as it was, said more about the system than anything else.

I'm more honest now: I don't shoplift, I never did approve of violence, I think maybe there's an argument for some sort of legalised prostitution and the legalising of cannabis, not that I touch the stuff, or ever would. Anyway, my wife claimed Income Support when she left nursing; being honest we said, yes, I wrote for more than 24 hours a week but I wasn't earning anything and would tell them when I did. They wouldn't give them anything because my hours were too long. A friend, who works for the DHSS, laughed when I said we had been honest; the system isn't designed for honest replies, he said.)

My point is: so kids might be dishonest on occasion. What's new? First, Mic should be a bit more careful about the source of 'evidence' before bemoaning 'the way kids are today'. I would guess that the main difference is that today there are cars to joyride in, joints to smoke, shops that could have been designed with shoplifters in mind. Maybe things are a little worse, as far as rudeness and violence are concerned, I don't know: there certainly doesn't seem to be any objective measure of it available, certainly not in some press opinion poll. I don't know how old Mic is, but maybe the answer to why so many people bemoan the state of today's youth is simply that they are getting older: when they were kids they had different priorities so these things didn't bother them, but the older they get the more they notice rudeness and dishonesty. I really don't think all this rudeness, cheating and violence is anything to panic about. Honest.

Pam Boal:

...One of the key problems is the discrediting of Authority to put it in a somewhat over simplified manner. This century has made history more immediate, greater literacy, radio

and television has shown the majority now, not just the literate few after events. It's a now a common experience that political authority produces Hitlers, Stalins, and religious authority brings Northern Ireland (even if we are aware that religion is not the over-riding factor of that complicated situation) and Middle East conflicts. The employer is no longer the boss but a managerial employee out to make the most he can out of his faceless employers. Then doctors are shown to be fallible: it is, after all, the once all-wise GP that prescribes the drugs such as thalidomide. Teachers take industrial action, etc, etc. So there are no leaders, every one is their own authority. There are plenty of voices, experts, each with diametrically opposite views but all fostering the belief that the wants of the individual are paramount and that the individual will be happier if he or she has this that or the other possession or life style beyond ordinary means. Families are now regarded as bad things because they were an institution fostered by discredited Authority and because they would interfere with the individual's right to pursue his or her happiness. There is no room for caring in such an egocentric view of the world, an emotional response to televised needs of groups (that only visit the living room confined in a box) is fine but caring is a job for those who are professionals paid to care.

That's some of the causes but is there any cure? Yes more people like Mic standing up and saying that she does not like the way people are behaving. More people saying "I do not like the way I am behaving" and being prepared to take responsibility for changing, their own actions instead of blaming Government or the authorities that society, arguably with good cause, has rejected. More people saying "If I take that which I have not

earned, be it a photo copy or a million pounds it is dishonest and if I live in a country operated by the rule of law I must obey the law". More people caring enough to take an interest in electoral addresses and voting for those who say they will seek to change bad laws and their improper implementation. There are some DHSS provisions that virtually force people to fiddle in order to survive. Alas who knows how to induce people to care and equally important, dare to show that they care? Perhaps the old fashioned head teacher who kept in the whole school as the punishment for the deeds of one offender was teaching a valuable lesson. At least some of the pupils might have reasoned that, if he or she was thus affected by another's actions, his or her own actions could affect other people who would feel equally angry with the guilty party. The effect upon others might then have been weighed up as well as the danger of getting found out. Education is a key, a society that does not foster its young is a corrupt and deservedly failing society and that unpopular word, moral, (ethical conduct) teaching is part of that fostering.

Terry Broome:

Too many rhetorical questions, too many demands in Mic Rogers' article for my liking. It's like having someone prod a finger very hard in your chest whilst asking some very simple, stupid and impossible-to-answer questions, not because the answers are difficult to think of, but because communicating them to her would be so difficult. I get angry and frustrated simply imagining trying to explain to her her prejudices and presumptions and things which are patently obvious to me. For example, she asks "How has this climate of dishonesty arisen?" Climate? What does she

mean by that? She seems to be under the delusion that dishonesty is a recent phenomenon, that youthful rebellion and selfishness is something new. Responses to anything become more obvious and violent the more frustrated one is, the more one feels betrayed, let-down, trodden on and ignored. That's why young people consider it trivial to insult and bother strangers. Their value systems are no less eroded than anyone else's, they simply express their values in ways achieve most attention. The more they feel ignored, etc., the less they (rightfully) think of the people doing it to them. Their solutions, their reactions might be disagreeable and counter-productive, but I can understand why they do it. As civilisations become more complicated, sophisticated, they become more restrictive and less human, less caring. What we're seeing in the young is a reflection of this dehumanisation. The young probably have as much concept of what it is like to be Mic Rogers or me, as Mic Rogers and myself have of what it is like to be them. But all this seems obvious to me, and because it isn't obvious to Mic, I wonder if she will ever understand. This is why couching her worries in questions and demands whilst doing so from a rigid, closed perspective seriously flaws the article.

Dorothy Davies:

Mic Rogers is also thought provoking. Anyone watch Clive James? See the American anti drugs advert recently, when the boy is confronted by the father, who asks "where did you learn how to do drugs?" and he says "From you, Dad, from you." We should all teach by example, and mean it, in every single walk of our lives.

David Palter:

I found it a bit odd that Mic Rogers, in

discussing some of the more significant forms of dishonest behaviour that are becoming more frequent and apparently more accepted — shoplifting, joyriding, tax evasion, etc. — includes marijuana smoking. This is not in itself dishonest although it is illegal, and certainly hazardous to one's health. I was even more startled to find, later in the same issue, Mic's letter defending cigarette smoking as a legitimately pleasurable practice. How odd that the same person regards it as being dishonest to seek pleasure from smoking marijuana but reasonable to seek pleasure from smoking cigarettes. It is, in fact, stupidly self-destructive to subject your lungs to any kind of smoke inhalation, but there is no reason that I know of why smoke bearing tetrahydrocannabinol is more objectionable or immoral than smoke bearing nicotine. The former is more euphoric, the latter is more addictive, and both are useless from my point of view (with the exception that THC is of some medical use in treating glaucoma).

Walt Willis:

Mic Rogers asks a lot of important questions, and I am wondering whether by a strange coincidence I might have a new answer right here. I've been in correspondence with Elinor Busby in Seattle, in the course of which I drew an analogy between the reluctance of people to accept new ideas and the inability of computers to accept programs compiled under a different operating system. She writes back: "...what strikes me particularly is your use of the computer metaphor. People are doing this more and more all the time and I love it. It will gradually change the way people think. Instead of rigidly thinking in terms of "right" and "wrong", of "good" and "evil" — they will think in terms of systems and programs. They will

come to a new appreciation of good — the strongest program!”

Don't you think she has something there?

(Time for a quick change of direction away from the real world, and into the fannish underworld, with response to Skel's piece.)

Mike Glicksohn

Skel's article, of course is excellent because, simply put, Skel is one of the best writers in fandom and thinkers about fandom. He may not exemplify the current mainstream of fanzine fandom but that in no way diminishes his awesome talents. (He makes me write these things because I once put a hole in the ceiling of his bedroom.) Still, while I admire the glibness of his arguments and the frequent accuracy of his observations I think he's over-reacting to the points he observes. Nobody would question the truth of his assertion that participation in "fandom" as it's currently constituted requires some degree of narrowing of focus but I don't believe that this needs to lead to the sort of stultification that Skel suggests we're in danger of running into. I became a fan 23 years ago, at a time when fandom was already getting diverse enough that a fanatical devotion to and awareness of magazine sf was no longer necessary for active participation in the central core of fandom. While I still read a fair amount of sf (all books, though, I haven't read the prozines except serendipitously for fifteen years) my own interests have definitely coalesced around "fannish fanzine fandom" and I for one don't believe I'm in any danger of vanishing up my own arsehole because of this. Fandom, of course, merely mirrors the world in miniature and just as the world has become so complex with so many diverse activities/entertain-

ments one could pursue, so fandom has done likewise. Since no-one can be actively engaged in every area of any given activity so no fan can reasonably expect to carry on the same degree of fanac in all the various subfandoms currently extant. And yet it is still eminently possible to lead a very rewarding and creative and enjoyable social life within the "confines" of one's chosen narrower focus. My own two focii are fanzines and conventions and I have no complaints about the twenty odd years I've spent enjoying myself in each field. And since I've had the pleasure of encountering Skel in both places more than a few times in those two decades I can't bring myself to believe that he really thinks we're in danger of suddenly collapsing into some sort of fannish black hole from which no energy can escape.

Buck Coulson

There's a fallacy in Skel's article. Narrowing down our focus as the group expands means that you're still interacting with the same number of people, and people vary, not to mention that most people find wider personal interests as they get older, up to a point. (I'm told that the interests narrow down again when you become old, but I guess I'm not old enough yet for it to have happened to me. There is also a limit to the number of individuals that you can interact with; reading fanzines, writing letters, even conversing, all require time, and there are only so many hours in a day. Of course, there are people in fanzine fandom who have always restricted their interactions to a relatively small group of fans, and as they get older, the group naturally gets smaller; people die or gafiate. I started out as a fanzine fan, now where do I fit? I still loc fanzines, get on convention panels as a pro author, I've been an

expense-paid guest at a filk con, and my convention-going has increased from one or two per year when I was a neo, to ten last year, probably as many this year, and Juanita and I have already agreed to be guests at a con in 1990. My main activity while at conventions is huckstering. Some people's interests widen as fandom widens, and I think these are actually in the majority in fandom; they're just not the most vocal segment. They don't have complaints because they're perfectly satisfied.

Terry Broome:

Very intelligent observational article... from Skel. If you have to exclude, then I believe it's better to exclude friends from a fanzine list who don't respond to what you write, than it is to exclude people you've previously had no contact with. I got a lot of stick over this, because many fans don't have time to write locs. A decision must be made whether we're writing for friends or to communicate. That is an easy choice for me, seeing that letters are usually the only contact I have with fans. If you're too busy to write locs, you have less need for fanzines than someone who rarely gets to meet his or her friends. I'm not being unfriendly or unsociable towards my friends — if they don't loc a zine, they are the ones to make that choice, and we can always write letters to one another. I am being more sociable to people I don't know by varying the people on my fanzine list — if they choose not to respond, that's fine by me. I'll fish around. Birds of a feather do flock together, however, so despite my efforts to spread out more, I don't have any control over the response. As for talking to like-minded individuals, I write stuff which pleases and interests me. If anyone else gets a kick out of it, I'm delighted, but I have no particular type of person

in mind when I write. I will include esoterical jokes and references which will be understood by few people but unless it is for an apa, they are very much inconsequential to understanding the main points and ideas I'm expressing. And apas rarely contain members who are all like-minded. I agree that there is a narrowing of focus in the numbers who receive a zine, and therefore who respond, which is why a shifting, changing fanzine-distribution list is a good idea. Inevitably, however, fandom will grow more fragmented, as cores of friends represent smaller and smaller percentages of the number of fans within fandom.

Alan Sullivan:

'The Gates Of The City': the phrase that springs to mind in the initial part of this article is "The Good Old Days Syndrome", coupled with elements of "What Are We Going To Do Now?" OK, we're no longer special — but were we really all that special in the first place?

Are we that different — the fans drinking with their buddies or going to parties — to the golfer and his club mates? We may have different viewpoints, attitudes and personal prejudices, but we're much the same as them, even though we both refuse to recognise each other as such. The selectivity, the 'narrowing', has its parallels in all social groupings, which surely is what Fandom is about, isn't it? Social grouping, people getting together with similarly-minded people and enjoying themselves, partying, dancing and all the other things that make life worth living.

So, if fandom narrows down to the point where it finally shrinks away to nothing (a logical progression to entropy), then maybe hope lies in the

smaller groups, the ones that don't change size very much, but keep in contact with other groups. It's a possible course of development. We've 'centralised': now maybe we should 'de-centralise', open things up a bit, try and emphasise 'membership' of as many groups as possible (and you can find like-minded souls to yourself in every group if you look). Fandom has to keep developing and growing, or else it will shrink away to nothing. It's just out to embrace new ideas. The Future is not only Now—it's Us. And we have to make the best of it, and for what it's worth, I think we could do a lot worse than try and keep our emphasise on fun and socialisation.

Shep Kirkbride

Skel's article hit a sympathetic nerve and summed up my recent apathy. When I first got into fandom, round about the same time as Skel, I must admit that I was full of that "Sense of Wonder".

As the years have gone by, I have become more critical of fandom realising with the passage of time that nothing stays the same forever. This caused me to become very apathetic culminating in my recent non-activity for almost a year.

It was only when I started to analyse it that I realised that it was myself more than fandom that was going through a change and had actually gone into a big sulk and decided that the only way to keep pace with it was to go with the flow of it and accept my minor role in the greater scheme of Fandom.

A little incident that made me realise that the fandom I knew and loved way back when I first became involved wasn't the be all and end all sums it all up for me. Last summer Harry Bond decided to give me a call as he was up in this area.

On meeting him I was surprised at how young he was. Naturally, I had arranged to meet him in a pub only to realise that he wasn't old enough, (legally) to drink. This amazed me and I was quick to point this out to him. My amazement quickly turned to amusement when he informed me that myself, and the aged fans like Skel and yourself, John, were affectionately known as *Fossil Fans*!

Now isn't that great John? How could I dream of giving all that up? Makes you feel kind of insignificant and yet still a part of it all doesn't it?

Dave Langford:

Skel's article strikes me as a fine piece of Viewing With Alarm which doesn't quite make contact with today's situation. Indeed some of the arguments have the suspicious black-and-white neatness of theology. For example, I don't think I accept his sneaky equating of 'congenial' with 'talented' with 'just like oneself'. I know and enjoy communicating with fans whose talentedness I'm not sure about and whose interests seem pretty remote from mine, but they're still congenial and the centre does still hold.

Walt Willis:

Skel's article was very readable, but I don't know that I altogether agree with it or even the Bob Shaw article which inspired it... The current state of fandom in England owes more to the endemic meanness of spirit noted in mundane intellectual circles by people as diverse as Amis and Hockney. This does not exist in American fandom. As for the future of fanzine fandom, I would be prepared to argue that its disparate nature just means that every fan, and especially every faned, can gather around him the sort of fandom he wants. Good luck with yours, and I hope to be a member of it.

Harry Andruschak

...I can, of course, understand why you feel a need to discontinue CS. I guess it... has to do with the subject brought up by Skel in his article 'The Gates Of The City'. What is the balance in our fannish and social lives, between fanzine fandom and the rest of fandom? Or the rest of society?

I seem to remember reading somewhere that the basic unit of human society after 'the Family' is 'the Tribe', about 200-300 people as a cohesive group. I am not sure how serious I would take this, but...

Time and again I have heard fan editors say that their fanzine was enjoyable as long as the print run, and the associated social group, was under 300.

On the other hand, LASFS, the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, has long stabilized at 200-300 active members. The result? Most LASFS members have no need for other fannish contact, and in turn this gives the LASFS a reputation for being isolated and in-groupish.

Along this same line of thought is the 'Alano' clubs. I should explain the word first. As you may know, I am a recovered alcoholic, going to meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous 3-4 times a week. For me, these meetings keep me sober, and I make a few friends at these meetings.

However, many recovered alcoholics have started and run 'Alano Clubs'. These are social clubs that are open 18-24 hours a day. They may have 4-6 AA meetings a day at the club, but far more importantly, they have lounges and a coffee bar. You can be a part of the tribe of 200-300 who centre their lives around the Alano Club.

Of course, many people in AA avoid the Alano Clubs if they possibly can. I

am one of those. As you have probably guessed, Alano Clubs foster a real atmosphere of "Us vs. Them". They become a sort of co-ed monastery, where they lick their wounds, coin terms like "normie" and "alkie", and pointing fingers at the tigers-out-there.

Yet for many people in AA, the Alano Clubs are the only way they can stay sober. So they do have a function for those who need it or want it.

(As ever, CS readers proved up to the task of tackling the esoteric, this time in the form of Sue Thomason's article on sculpture.)

David Bateman

I'm not much of a one for sculpture, but I enjoyed Sue Thomason's article, including her thoughts on coding and self-reference, which seem very relevant to the arts in general. Obviously literature is a coded art-form by its very nature, but that aside, there is still a huge amount of self-reference and artistic incest going on, and has been for centuries. At its best, this is no problem at all; but at its worst, it can make the art-form incomprehensible to all but the select few who received exactly the same education as the artist, writer or whatever. I'm thinking partly of all those classical allusions in poetry that had to be explained so laboriously at school. Allusions, particularly if they're self-explanatory, can liven up a poem or whatever and be informative; but too often they actually obscure the poet's meaning, which to my mind is not what poetry is about. Take T.S. Eliot: a truly gifted poet, sure, but often so OTT with the artistic incest that he wound up having to annotate his own poems to save them from being incomprehensible even to his classically educated readers.

Film-making is one of the youngest

arts, and its mostly only over the last couple of decades that we've seen a huge rise in self-reference here. The most obvious forms of self-reference are the sequel and the parody, but we're also seeing a huge rise of films which pastiche a genre (say horror, SF or detective) without always quite being a parody of that genre. I'd rate **Evil Dead** as a singularly creative exploitation of a genre in this respect: a pastiche that uses all the strengths of the original genre, whilst at the same time parodying its weaknesses, so what you wind up with is a classic horror movie, but with laughs instead of winces at all those equally classic bits of clumsy plotting, etc. But those bits of parody rely on the audience being familiar with all the old horror movie cliches; so if it's your first horror movie, then forget it: you'll find the funny bits just about as comprehensible as dear old T.S.Eliot.

Andy Sawyer:

Sue Thomason's article reminds me of some large wooden sculptures I saw on exhibition in Liverpool last year. I wonder if it was Lawson? Very striking carvings of figures in pain. The story about the kettle made me think of one of the rocks which is by our fireplace (we have a habit of bringing home 'interesting stones' from our holidays). This is a large heart-shaped stone - like a sculpture of a conventional 'Valentine' heart. On one side is a slight depression, almost but not quite a hole. What is it? 'Hole-in-the-heart'? A broken heart? You can get quite a lot out of it, I fancy, and if it had been made, even more so. But it remains a natural formation, a chance combination of water and hard-and-soft stone with no original meaning except what the viewer gives it. Does this confirm or deny this meaning, I wonder?

Mike Johnson:

...I particularly enjoyed Sue Thomason's article on Fenwick Lawson's sculptures. I find Alvin Toffler's quote... and subsequent comment, somewhat baffling. I cannot picture what an 'uncoded message' might be. Surely the very fact that I am aware of a stimulus and store it in memory suggests that I 'code' it either symbolically and/or semiotically. Art is frequently self-referential, but since Dada at least, the coding of everyday objects into aesthetic artefact status has both changed perception of 'everyday' objects and 'art' objects, e.g. putting the pile of bricks in the Tate Gallery 'codes' them as aesthetic artefacts, not functional ones. The language of 'art', far from being a minority language, actually threads non-art language, to the extent that all art-discourse has become mixed. 'Tribalism' and 'common baseline culture' co-exist, and artistic 'snobbery' (to use an emotive word) can be seen for what it is. I rather resent 'artists' saying that a picture is 'better than it looks' or a piece of music is 'better than it sounds'. Nonsense. The complexity of meanings inherent in a work may depend on one's education in a particular area, but if I prefer Michael Jackson to Stockhausen (or both equally, depending on situation, mood, etc.) that's up to me. Unfortunately, devotees of each usually only listen to one or the other — their loss probably, but who am I to clamp new headphones on their ears? Incidentally, much mass culture is closer to elemental levels, e.g. the beat in pop music, than high art: **Eastenders** touches some levels of 'real' life much closer than Shakespeare does.

John Miller:

Sue Thomason's article 'A Splitting Of Images'... is another excellent and first class article. By odd synchron-

icity I see she uses Jungian terms like 'archetype' and 'shadow forces', terms familiar to me after having read a book called **Them or Us** by Patrick Luciano published by Indiana University Press. In this thought-provoking work, a film critic applies Jungian psychology to reviewing old black and white SF movies like **The Blob** and **Fiends Without A Face**, and succeeds admirably. The film critic brought over the realities behind these Jungian terms and concepts, eg. 'the collective unconscious'. Sue's article is interesting about what gets called art when it gets put into an art gallery or called art by some artist. As cheesy arto-people know, Marchel Duchamp elevated a bottle-rack into an 'art object'. On a piece of waste ground near here, opposite from the chip shop I buy a monster bag of chips from almost every day, there's a dumped armchair with a knackered Hoover placed on the seat and a burst bicycle wheel placed on the upright Hoover-handle. All around the base of the seat are dumped loads of empty booze bottles. I really like this junk-construction, which some kids or bikers have quickly and easily assembled, and admire it every day as I pass in the street...

Jonathan Coleclough:

The letters and Sue Thomason's rambling review (which I liked) got me thinking about Art... I'd agree with Sue that "art-value does not reside in the object itself". It's people coming into contact with it (whatever 'it' is) and their reactions, how they view it, that makes it possess that elusive 'art-value'. Art is, after all, a human activity, and the idea that its value could be somehow locked into a material object is pretty peculiar. But whilst art-value doesn't reside in objects, monetary value does. As a consequence, tangible, durable art tends

to me legitimised in preference to the more ephemeral. (I'm thinking of performance, time-based work, installations, to use the jargon.)

I disagree with Michael Gould when he writes that "the misinterpretation of a work must be laid firmly on the shoulders of the artists". There doesn't exist a 'right way' to interpret art — there is only your way. So called 'art experts' don't have a qualitatively different experience when they meet art, to that experienced by you or me. All our different art-experiences are equally legitimate. But, as Sue says, "how insecure we are in acknowledging that we do see what we see, we do feel what we feel". The artist may well have intentions that their work should express something in particular, but they have no control over how it is in fact interpreted by the different people who come into contact with it.

Michael Gould's ideas that what he calls the 'audience' bring to art simply differing levels of intelligence seems simplistic to me. We all differ in many more ways than this. With a unique life behind each of us, and no agreed 'language of art' for us to learn, we make of it what we will.

As for artists complaining "the audience can't understand it" — in my experience it's the audience who complain much more, and who feel cheated if they don't 'understand', as if art were just a crossword puzzle with a set of correct answers.

(While we're on the subject of art, time to spread a little egoboo on CS15's artists)

Mic Rogers:

I thought the cover illo was really superb, with a remarkable control and use of tone. I hope we'll see more of such work.

Krischan's effort on p. 17 was good, too, though it was hard to tell if the ovals were floating stones (and no reason why they shouldn't be, if that's what the artist wanted) or mushrooms without stalks. It has a clever treatment of the smoke/fumes and the water(liquid) effect, too. The more I look at it the more there is to see. Wonderful

Shep Kirkbride's was very good too, I am so very sorry the articles on fanart folded after such a good beginning. Perhaps, in time, it will re-surface in your next zine. *(Any volunteers?)*

Peter Crump's artwork is very skillful, too. The way he conveys the feeling of wood grain as well as the way it's carved is most effective. Was he working from the originals, or photos of the originals, or what? *(He worked from photos)*

What can one say about Martin Helsdon's, work? Even before I read that it was for a role-playing game, I felt there must be a story attached to the Aztec-type figures. For some time I couldn't make out what sort of creature was portrayed on p. 37. At first glance I thought it was a frog or toad of some kind. Then, at last, as I looked at it more closely and turned the page around I saw it's a crouching humanoid figure! How *clever* he is. Talk about camouflage!

Shep Kirkbride:

You couldn't have picked a better cover to end with. Ghod, it was brilliant. I know I've lead a sheltered life, but where have you been hiding this guy. I hope you've got him tied up for your next publication. I mean, this is the sort of stuff that proves the argument that artwork is a definite must in any self-respecting zine.

I'll be damned if the guy doesn't go and do it again with his illo on page seventeen. This is beautiful artwork

captain, I need desperately to see more.

The Pete Crump illustrations for Sue Thomason's article were very effective. I often do illos myself that involve a bit of wood grain effect, but on a much simpler level. I must say that Pete has definitely got the feel for the wood in his illos...and of course, they compliment the article perfectly. They seem to jump out of the page and yet they are so simple in their execution.

Yes John, I know I am biased towards the art in fanzines but I have to say that I thought your choice of artwork for the last Ship was damned near perfect, (myself excluded of course.) In retrospect, I'm not that sure if I like that piece of mine that you used.

(Enough of this "cheesy art" stuff, lets plunge on into the odds'n'sods.)

Andy Sawyer:

Glad to see the reaction to my Dun-sany piece... Perhaps, if you're sending comments back to writers as you've done before, you could add something to Richard Bowden whose loc made some interesting comments. about W.H.Hodgson (sorry about the misspelling, by the way). Although I do still feel that the style of **The Night Land** is awful, I have pointed out elsewhere that it is not contemptible and Richard's view of the tension between WHH's imagination and the 'dirge like predictability' of the prose is close to my own view. Here's what I wrote in **William Hope Hodgson: Voyages And Visions**, edited by Ian Bell:

"In writing it down I feel with only too much keenness the inadequacy of pen and ink", writes Wells' narrator of **The Time Machine**; 'and truly you do know how I mean; only that I have no skill of such matters', stammers Hodgson's narrator of **The Night**

Land. In one disclaimer we have a conventional underpinning to what we know will be a skilful narrative, in the other we have - what, an ironic admission of failure? Not quite, I think, because somehow Hodgson has created literature which is worth the attention. Faced with a vision embracing the end of the Victorian era - the dashing of its ideas of progress and the culmination of its spiritual and social doubt - Wells and Hodgson crystallised this in the motif of a dying Earth. Wells, in keeping with his rational, modern approach, expressed it in straightforward prose, the clear scientific narrative of the twentieth century. Hodgson, on the other hand, took the more audacious step of attempting to manipulate the language and structure of his novels in order to create a verbal analog of the spiritual dislocation embodied within them. I cannot say that he succeed, but then again perhaps he did not altogether fail."

I'd add to that, that since writing it I read more thoroughly Malory's **Morte D'Arthur** and it's become clear to me that Hodgson was writing in very obvious and skilful pastiche of Malory's English. And people do not write novels of the far future in language which harks back to the 14th century unless they're absolute cretins. I think Hodgson was following William Morris's example back to its source in Malory in an attempt to recreate a sense of unworldliness. I still don't think it worked but this is a failure which far outreaches many another writer's 'successes'.

Walt Willis:

Good for Richard Bowden. **The Night Land** has long been my favourite book and I agree the peculiar style is part of its appeal. It has always seemed to me that an essential ele-

ment of it is the way the narrator describes every minute of the journey, with no sophisticated jumping from one interesting bit to another; this apparent lack of artifice gives a most convincing impression of honesty and verisimilitude. It is a bit like the two ways you can write a convention report. You can select the interesting bits and "write them up", and that can make an entertaining article. Or you can recount everything that happened exactly as it seemed to you, and how you felt about (it), and that can result in a work of art.

Mike Glicksohn:

Mic Rogers answers her own question about fannish standards and the quality of work a fanzine will publish. It depends on the faned. It depends on the faned's own standards of excellence and also on the faned's reputation for producing a quality fanzine. A faned may want to publish nothing but award-worthy art and writing but if the faned has no contacts among those who create such material or has no reputation for showcasing his contributors nicely, he or she may have to settle for material of lesser overall quality. On the other hand, a fanzine like **Crystal Ship** is so elegantly produced and attracts so many top quality contributors that its editor can pick and choose from contributed material. It would be unreasonable of a new young writer or artist to expect the editor of something like **Crystal Ship** to bump a higher quality piece in preference to something of demonstrably lower quality just because its creator was a new fan. As in most areas of human endeavour there's an apprenticeship to be served before you get to play in the big leagues. Some fans have so much talent that they serve an apprenticeship you could miss if you blinked twice. Others have to work there way up from

the Fourth Division until their talents are sufficient to admit them to the First Division. Elitist? Of course it is. But if I'm paying for a fanzine and sending it out with my name on it I'll be damned if I'll publish inferior material when I have a choice in the matter. At any given time in fanzine fandom there's a complete spectrum of fanzines as far as quality is concerned so any new fan should be able to find his or her own level. Then it's a matter of working hard enough (if you care about such things) to move up the scale. Some people don't care and continue to produce mediocre work year after year and that's their right. But it's also my right to refuse to publish it or comment on it. We're all doing this for fun, after all, eh?

Ian Covell:

I agree with Terry Broome: indeed, I realised many years ago that vampires are actually heroic figures—immortal, powerful, spawning by blood, they'll one day conquer the entire race (then where'll they get the blood?) and so sympathetic. (They also happen to typify sexuality to a gruesome degree: in our society it's okay to see a man bite a woman to death just to have her blood, but try showing a man screwing a woman to even exhaustion, and see how fast the film is banned). The problem with 'heroes' is that they typify values we're told are right, while their personal lives (and love-lives most of all) also conform to that 'rightness': we agree with their aims, while disagreeing with their priggish personalities. The villains, on the other hand, act at least close to human even if their exterior aims are brutish or corrupting..

Mike Glicksohn:

Whenever I read comments such as the one that suggested John Norman

readers are potential rapists (as reported by Ian Covell) I'm reminded of the first panel I ever saw John Norman on. At the end of his speech his faithful readers rushed up for autographs...and each and every one of them was female! (There were only six or seven but they were all girls, quite young and quite attractive. If they're all potential rapists I'm willing to volunteer to help them achieve their potential!)

David Palter:

Ian Covell's remarks about Gor are only partially correct. I agree that it is not necessary to ban these novels, and that reading these novels will not drive anyone to commit rape (although I can well believe that some rapists do enjoy reading the Gor series). But no, the objections to Gor do not derive from the discovery, by female characters, that they like sex. Come on Ian, you must know there's more to it than that. John Norman depicts every female character as a masochist, who craves not simply sex, but violent sexual domination of herself by a sadistic male. It is John Norman's constant propagandising of the rather offensive (and certainly inaccurate) view that all women, whether they admit it or not, are masochists which makes his writing so unpleasant.

(While we're talking about masochists, Harry Warner has an interesting piece of lateral thinking on smoking.)

Harry Warner, Jr.:

The loc section is very interesting, but there's not much room left for comments. I'll confine myself to the suggestion that Mic needs to think some more about tobacco products. The hungry people in the world would have a little more to eat if all the land devoted to tobacco production were

switched to foodstuffs. The number of persons employed in the tobacco industry is far exceeded by the number of persons unemployed because of health impairment caused by smoking. Then there are the secondary problems caused by smoking. Fires, for instance: besides those caused by smoking in bed, most of the fires caused by children playing with matches or lighters would never occur if the world would kick the tobacco habit, because most house-holds would have little or no use for fire-starting devices. Then there's the pollution problem: the waste product resulting from smoking a cigarette isn't very great, but hundreds of millions of smokers burning dozens of cigarettes apiece each day add up.

David Bateman:

Krsto Mazuranic is spot on with his comments on cheek-bones in literature. Apart from the occasional prominent cheek-bones, or — very rarely — pronounced cheek-bones, cheek-bones in literature are invariably high. My favourite cheek-bone reference is in Viv Stanshall and Neil Innes' thoroughly engrossing yarn **Rawlinson's End (Part 14)**:

"Aubrey... looked... older somehow, but that proud Rawlinson chin was unmistakable; and the cheek-bones: a little higher than his mother's, they appeared as twin humps on the top of his head."

Buck Coulson:

Cheekbones aren't the only part of anatomy described monotonously. Alex Panshin once announced that he was going to write about a heroine with low, humble breasts, but I don't think he ever did; publisher probably wouldn't accept it. Sometimes in this country, the high cheekbones are attributed to Indian ancestry rather than Slavic.

David Palter:

It is bizarre that William Bains laments the lack of useful response to his speculation about the connection between science and Buddhism. As always, the problem in achieving enlightenment is not the difficulty of finding the truth, but rather the difficulty of recognising it once found. I have already provided the needed response, and William Bains did not even consider the possibility that I actually did answer his question. Well, keep searching! If the truth is not sufficient, I'm sure you can find something else more to your liking!

Andy Sawyer

Many thanks for the latest and now, it seems, to be last CS! It will be sorely missed among the assorted crew of deadbeats, drunkards and sewer-rats who haunt the waterfront, and I'm sure everyone is waiting with bated breath to see what will appear out of the Owen brain and his little publishing-printing firm known to those Not In The Know as the Open University. Thanks for it all, and good luck in the future.

WAHFs: George Airey, T.K. Atherton, K.V. Bailey, Sheryl Birkhead, Sydney J. Bounds, Judy Buffery, Ken Cheslin, Mike Brian Earl Brown, Cobley, Chester Cuthbert, Mike Gould, John Francis Haines, David Haugh, Martin Helsdon, Terry Jeeves, John Light, Ethel Lindsay, Steve Sneyd, Sue Thomason, Roger Waddington, Sue Walker, Bert Warnes.

*(And that's all, folks! Any points raised in this publication will carry over into the letter column of **Shipyard Blues**. See you all in there, yes?)*

