

MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE

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Gee, V-Con was a lot of fun -- don't know what happened at the convention, but I had a great time showing off my computer to assorted people (since I live about a 10-minute walk away from the con site, on the U.B.C. campus). For some reason I got it into my head that there was lots of time after the con to get my CRAPA zine done ... Let's hear it for last-minute minac (available at all participating dealers; void where prohibited).

MAILING COMMENTS

DEBBIE: Re LEFT HAND, I would make a remark about people who subvocalize while they read, but then again, I suppose Joyce freaks must develop different reading techniques ... // Two comments re age classifications: First of all, some generalizations about age have high applicability (e.g. people change more when they're younger, barking major catastrophes); secondly, age is relevant when you get to reminiscing about episodes of "Rocky Jones, Space Ranger".

CHRISTINE: Will answer your Noncon letter real soon now. As to commandments, if "no graven images" is part of the first commandment, then I can't see ten of them. Besides, I have a distinct mental picture of tablets with the two-word abbreviations for the commandments on them, which is a common Hebrew symbol, and I'm sure one of them translates as "no pictures". It's obviously relevant to the first commandment against idolatry, but I think it counts as a separate one. My juxtaposition of abomination and idolatry was purely coincidental, I assure you. I'm finding this whole discussion fascinating. I have to confess that the whole business of the Sodomites wanting to carnally know the angels went over my head in third grade -- though I was aware, I don't know from when, about Lot offering his daughters to the mob. I just checked my King James, and sure enough, the people were asking Lot to send out the angels so they could know them (lord knows how my third grade teacher translated the Hebrew for that).

DENYS: I will try to restrain myself to only a mini-diatribes on censorship. If by 'disarming weapons (art) trained against you' you mean replying in kind, fine; but your choice of phrases, not "allowing" such attacks to continue, sounds like using the power of the state, of the mob, of whatever you can get your hands on to ... what? Burn books? Tear down theatres? The Québec government feels that their culture and way of life are under attack; consequently it is illegal for you to put up a billboard in English, or to have a store sign using such Anglicisms as "Mo's Deli". If you moved to Québec, you would be forbidden to send your children to an English school. This is very mild censorship, to be sure, because Canada shares that silly tradition of "free speech" -- unfortunately, there's no Bill of Rights protecting that, just tradition, so this same country, on the Federal level has an Official Secrets Act, and each province can ban whatever they want in the way of movies. I do not believe that ideas kill people -- people kill people. It's precisely the oppressors, the people on top, who have the most to gain through censorship of any kind. I don't think you can stand and point to something and say that work is against humanity: expunge it. At the very least it should be preserved in a special place for the historians, and for those who need to know what people are capable of. (Talk to me some other time about snuff films, as I don't want to undercut my case.) If the marketplace of ideas is not free, it's because of the same market forces that dominate other commodities -- control of the means of production and distribution. Don't add censorship, too! (I will, however, allow you to affix a sticker saying "Caution, this artwork may be hazardous to humanity")

DENYS (change of topic): I dunno if a universe run by a Supreme Being would be random and unpredictable -- I expect that the chief science would then be psychology (or perhaps Psychology). Current physics does seem to imply that, contrary to Einstein, God does play dice with the universe. If you live in such a world, and are trying to deal with it, you try to learn the rules, which would doubtless be probabilistic rather than deterministic (if I burn this fatted calf while saying this prayer, I probably won't get hit by lightning).

ROBERT: Re cabbage rolls, and uniquely Western Canadian customs, I have to mention that my grandmother made the best stuffed cabbage in the world (she's Hungarian, by the way). You want cabbage rolls, try a New York Bar Mitzvah. But your point is well taken. (Do you know the Stringband song about Alberta, "Intruders"?)

DAVID: I just wanted to tell you that I really like the artwork on pages 6 and 3 (I don't know anything about art, but ...) The one on 6, especially, seems very vibrant and energetic, and I get a definite emotional feeling from it. The one on p. 3 seems more peacefully alive, the way a forest is. (I don't feel I have the vocabulary to comment adequately on art; it's much easier to comment on words with words.)

DOUG: I was trying desperately not to be elitest about art. Perhaps great art can only be fully appreciated by a limited audience, but don't you think there's something there that can affect most people? I understand Shakespeare was very popular with the Elizabethan commoners (or, as my eighth grade English teacher would say, after pointing out one of the dirty jokes, "Shakespeare wrote on many levels"); Beethoven has been kind of popular (in the immortal words of Walt Disney, on viewing the rushes of FANTASIA, "This will make Beethoven!"); and I had the privilege of seeing the Pietà at the New York World's Fair, and I don't see how it could fail to affect most everybody.

PAUL: I like the concept of appropriate technology, and especially the idea of convivial tools (akin to what Ted Nelson calls "tolerant" computer systems). I tend to associate that sort of thing with high, that is, advanced technology -- primitive technology is individualized but weak; intermediate is what I would call all that stuff that relies on massive machinery and huge numbers of people (who are reduced to standardized cogs); it's only really advanced stuff that is both powerful and individualized. I would expect tools to become more convivial as they become more intelligent (which would give them the power of adaptability). Use of subtle technologies (like some of the biologically based ones in SF -- DREAMSNAKE is an example) always seemed to me "higher" than the brute force type (the pulsing busbars of Doc Smith, or VENUS EQUILATERAL). And, actually, transistors are extremely subtle, making use of some of the more mystical aspects of quantum mechanics. But computers would be the same in effect even if they were made out of laminated mouse brain instead of chips -- the important point is to pack a lot of intelligence into a very small space for a very low cost in raw material. Part of that also involves convivial ways of communicating with the human user -- but I expect as the cost and size of memory goes down, you'll start to see microcomputers (and wristwatches and whatever) that speak and understand some sort of pidgin English.

JANE: I just read about a new discovery, a sort of pigment that is impossible to photocopy or reproduce by printing. It has great potential for stopping counterfeiting, the article said. The stuff apparently looks like the shimmer of butterfly wings, or peacock feathers, and the iridescence is due to something fancy in the molecular arrangement of the stuff. It came out of the missile program (?), and its inventor was using it in art, which was selling in galleries. As the story goes, one day a gallery owner told the guy if he could have some good reproductions made, he could clean up -- our inventor started to explain why it was impossible to reproduce, and *click*, he's got a gold mine in anti-counterfeiting. Now what does your poor artist do when you can't copy the work?
