

MOSS ON THE NORTH SIDE

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I really ought to change the title, now that I've left the Pacific NorthWest -- but nothing springs to mind, and if I wait for inspiration to strike, I'll miss this mailing too. Onward to mailing comments:

DOUG: Re pornography and continual escalation -- I think eroticism is personal and highly subjective (in the eye of the beholder, as it were), but nevertheless, it should be possible for an artist to erotically stimulate a wide variety of people with a single work (here I go on artistic universals, again). Continual escalation is a cheap way of accomplishing stimulation, a symptom of failure of the imagination, I'd say. It's exactly analogous to E.E. Smith (who was aiming for our Sense of Wonder rather than our gonads) raising the stakes in each sequel, figuring that all the people bored by exploding planets would be turned on by exploding galaxies next time.

PAUL: I'm not really clear on what you call the difference between a boss and a worker, that which there can be no democratic exercise of. I see very fuzzy categories, especially in view of all the middle managers and profit-sharing goodies (which you mention). In Saskatchewan we had some weird things happen because the unionized positions extended fairly high up the hierarchy (e.g. all except the top three jobs in the Regina Correctional Centre were in the union) -- like a union member filing a grievance against his boss, who thereupon filed a counter-grievance against him, since they were both in the same union. Your story about Rick and the lunch hour seems to say more about where you work than worker/boss relationships (we both know a manager who was hassled by her boss over her lunch times). If a contract (union or otherwise) forbids your boss to fire you without proving some gross misdeed, does that affect anything? If the grossness is reviewed by a committee of your peers, is that a democratic exercise of the difference? Conversely, if your peers can cause you to lose your job, what's the story then? (Example: If you must be a union member to keep your job, and you can be kicked out of the union for refusing to strike.) I realize that everything is far more clear-cut in non-unionized industries, but unions are a part of modern capitalist society, supported by the state (via the law).

NEIL: On pornography -- I'd say the crucial difference between babies loving your rat poison and people loving misogynist porn is that adults are not babies. Of course you and your friends have no trouble avoiding all this filth, but we must protect all those dummies out there from being corrupted by porn. I'm all in favor of picketts and boycotts, even of such creative stunts as photographing people entering porn theatres (now why is that so sinister when it's the government taking pictures?). But the only porn that could possibly require desperate measures is that which is popular, therefore that which can't be suppressed without a police state (if then). If you change people's attitudes, the market will die by itself; if you think people are so docile that a few porn movies will turn them into rapists, then it should be a snap to change their minds. But I think this is a case where the "art", such as it is, is following the people, not leading, and is therefore relatively harmless. The stuff that "everybody" knows is bad doesn't need to be suppressed, and the rest sets up the censors as dictators. I want to be able to find Mein Kampf if I feel like reading it, even though I'd be terrified if it appeared on the best seller list.

DENYS: "It is utterly impossible to protect people for their own good." Bravo! That may be what I was trying to say up there.

DENYS (cont'd): On the free marketplace of ideas, well, even if you can't get on TV, you've still got a mimeo. It may be hard to reach a really mass audience, but if what you're preaching is popular enough, you can make enough money to compete with the biggies (viz. Synanon, Scientology, and est). Wasn't it you who pointed out that the capitalist will sell you the rope with which to hang him (or her)? I'd hate to think that your workers' paradise would take away mimeos from Libertarians.

On the purpose of art, and communication, etc. -- I think the point ought to be "The augmentation of the complexity and intensity of the field of intelligent life," if I may quote from LEFT HAND OF DARKNESS. In context, there are overtones of increasing harmony and joy. I thought of that line when you were talking about enriching the lives of children -- because I had a friend in Regina who had separated from his wife, and gone blind, and was fighting for custody of his son; I read him LHOD, and once when I asked him why he wanted his son with him, he quoted that line: He said that Sam augmented the complexity and intensity of his life. (I just dug up the full quote -- the part up there sounds too devoid of emotion by itself; the rest of it goes "The enrichment of harmony and the greater glory of God. Curiosity. Adventure. Delight." The context is the purpose of the Ekumen, but I think it applies just as well to the purpose of art.)

On dieties: "What, after all, is the difference between a diety that chooses not to interfere, and no diety at all?" The point is that in one case the rules of the game are created by a conscious Being, presumably for some Purpose. I think it makes a tremendous difference whether or not there is a Plan behind all this, and I find the concept of a Creator morally and philosophically repugnant for just that reason. I far prefer Alan Watts' "Nature or Tao is not pursuing any purpose, and therefore is not meeting any difficulties."

JANE: I've been thinking alot about your jobs and computerization thing. I've been lucky in that the systems I've worked on so far are all of the type that add completely new functions, impossible without computers, rather than those that replace existing ones. (E.g. a Pharmacy system that, by keeping track of what drugs each patient is getting, allows the pharmacist to check for drug interactions. The old system used the pharmacist purely as a dispenser, with the entire medical burden on the prescribing doctor.)

This is primarily rationalization, but: If you are discussing the impact of computers on jobs, you can't treat any single application as a closed system. Obviously, if a company replaces people with a computer, the cost of the computer must be less, and since most of that cost is ultimately due to the wages involved in making the computer, there has to be a net reduction. On the other hand, there have been more than half a million home computers sold in the U.S. so far, and I don't think most of them have replaced anybody -- they're something new, a toy, a way for people to get more out of their hobbies, or sometimes a new part-time business. So you have to add the manufacturing jobs created by all the new computer-based devices, to see if there's a net plus or not.

The nature of jobs is going to change an awful lot, and lord knows if it will be for better or worse. The "excruciatingly boring" jobs are the obvious candidates for computerization, but there ought to be a lot of new jobs in the area of personal services, especially where the computer as a tool makes new things possible. "Directory assistance" is pretty dull to start with; if it went back to being "information" (now that you people are charging for the service) wouldn't that perk things up? A computer could enable more people to function at the level of a good research librarian, necessary in these information explosion days. I could get someone's phone number myself from an automated directory, but I'll be damned if I can ever find the right heading in the Yellow Pages.

One thing I was thinking of, apropos your part-time jobs -- wouldn't it be nice if you could get up in the morning, say "I feel like working for a few hours today", and plug into a nationwide temp job bank? I ~~xxx~~ mean, how many 2 and 3 hour jobs go unfilled (maybe undone) because the overhead of finding

someone is too high? Because the (local) labor pool isn't large enough to come up with a match? Alvin Toffler is already talking about a rebirth of cottage industry as people use the new technology to work out of their homes. If somebody can file an ad for a 2 hour typing job in the bank, get matched with a typist who has 2 spare hours 2000 miles away, blip a dictaphone tape at high speed to the typist, who then types the whatever into the computer net where the employer retrieves the perfect copy ... (The telephone system will just love all that high-speed data transmission, won't it Jane?) After all, if temp work is reliable and is paid at levels comparable to permanent jobs, wouldn't a lot of people opt for the extra flexibility?

Yeah, I can see lots of problems -- there's still the overhead of screening employees (and employers!) for honesty and reliability, all those things that temp agencies do (for which they charge, which is why the temp wages are lower). Maybe economy of scale would help. My main thing is coming up with new jobs, things to do that weren't (you should pardon the expression) profitable before computers.

I've never understood economics, so I can't say how to create jobs out of thin air -- though frankly, every time I think about it, our national economy always seems to me to be a lot of people "earning a precarious living taking in each other's washing." If everybody's working, everybody had money with which to buy the stuff everybody else is producing (whether goods or services). When everybody's laid off, nobody can buy anything, so there are no jobs.

Microprocessors make possible an enormous host of new gadgets (often low power, a plus), which people could buy, thus employing lots of gadget-builders, who would have lots of money to spend, thus keeping everyone else working. No? It seems to me just like a conjuring trick.

Anyway. Does anyone know how many jobs are involved, directly or indirectly, in the TV industry? (Manufacturing, distributing, repairing, providing the entertainment for, etc.) That ought to give a rule-of-thumb estimate of computer jobs to look forward to from micro-computers.

Re your comment to Rihh on graphics, I don't know about a \$300,000 PDP 11/70, but how about a \$10,000 micro hooked up to a 54,000 frame video-disc (no price yet, but coming out Real Soon Now)? (Note: You can hook up a 20-megabyte disk to a cheap micro for about \$5000 today.)

I love your "round" yon virgin. Do you know about the kid, singing "God Bless America" who made that perfectly logical conclusion -- "...stand beside her, and guide her, through the night with the light from a bulb ..."

CHRISTINE and ROBERT: I hope the letter I wrote you has cleared the air somewhat. I am not angry at you, and my comments in CRAPA were more peevish-sounding than I felt. What I was principally upset about was not having a chance to see the transcript before it was published; I concede that there was a tacit permission-to-publish given to you when I sat down in front of your tape recorder. I mentioned the permission business mostly to point out that we hadn't discussed anything about the interview between the time it took place and its publication. I'm sorry that it came across sounding like you had gone against my express wishes, because it wasn't like that at all. Since my "No, you can't publish it" came in the middle of a lot of joking around before the panel, while I was kvetching about being dragged out of bed in the middle of the night (11 AM) and so forth, it could easily have been ignored. I think you are all wonderful people and I had a great time at NonCon and I've almost completely forgotten about the dim sum. OK?

KEITH: Can you tell me anything about getting polyphonic music out of my computer with one speaker? It can play any single voice with two numbers per note (one to specify the frequency at which to twiddle the speaker, and one to specify the duration of that note); but I don't see how to do the twiddling when there are three voices, with notes starting and stopping all over the place. I'm not even entirely clear on how to produce a simple chord.

I guess that's it for now. I hope this more-than-minac makes you happy, Denys.