

MOS ON THE NORTH SIDE

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The last two weeks have been a lot of fun, but very hectic -- it's hard to squeeze visits to the Bay Area, Vancouver, and Seattle all into a 2 week vacation period. There were all sorts of things I wanted to do that didn't get done (like eating at Tomasso's and The Frog and Peach, and handing Denys my CRAPazine in Seattle ...). But then again, there were the unexpected things I got to do, like playing with Debbie and Tom's new kitten (has Blaise stuck?) and going to the Seattle zoo.

I also got to see a good many of you, and in addition I got to see the Flying Karamazov Brothers (Ho!) -- not once, not twice, not three times, but ... a whole lot of times, at the Vancouver Folk Festival. They did a half-hour set in the Friday night opening concert, which culminated with them juggling a chain saw (yes) and then going right into the finale of the Terror Trick (you know, the one where they juggle 9 totally dissimilar objects including a torch, an egg, a frying pan, and a bottle of champagne, ending by catching the egg in the frying pan over the torch while the champagne explodes into conveniently supplied glasses).

They got a standing ovation.

They did a full hour show at the children's stage on Saturday (2 standing ovations, one on a bet with the audience, and one at the end), as well as various workshops here and there (they even participated in a workshop on storytelling that had them sitting down for most of it). They were wonderful!

Lots of other good performers at the Festival, and much mirth. There was one guy, for instance, who started singing a good, strong working song -- like "Sixteen Tons", or one of the railroad songs -- very rhythmic and powerful. Only, after a few minutes the words started to sink in, about punching buttons and "hauling data down the Xerox line", folding, stapling, and mutilating cards ... it was great.

It's such a drag to have to come back to New York in August (hot and humid) and go back to work. The weather thru-out my trip was fine (well, except for the Saturday of the Festival, when it poured), even though everybody told me how awful it had been just before I arrived.

I miss the West Coast. *sigh* But as I explained to people, if I moved to San Francisco, the Bay Area would collapse under the weight of all the earthquake clippings my parents would send me.

On to mailing comments:

JANE: Apropos our discussion of computers and unemployment, I caught part of a newscast talking about a Japanese study that predicted a net increase in jobs due to computers, on the basis of which the Japanese government is making a strong push towards computerizing (is that really a word?). I have no details, I don't know on what the conclusion was based, and I don't know whether it has any applicability to other countries (the Japanese may just foresee a humongous export market). Speaking of which, the Chinese are reportedly very interested in microcomputers, and have invited a trade delegation from the U.S. to come over and tell them about such. I find that really exciting -- and micros seem to me to be wonderfully adapted to the kind of decentralization I understand China is trying for (as opposed to the inefficient, centralized, batch-oriented computers I associate with the Russians).

LYNNE: Glad to have seen you. Get a computer! I didn't get to eat there, but I at least now have a card from the Frog and Peach.

RICH: I agree with you about criticism sessions, mostly because of a drug addiction study I was involved with. One of the treatment modalities we investigated (a very popular one, too) was the therapeutic community, based on the Synanon model, and relying very heavily on encounter groups. It was my feeling that highly verbal people could dominate such groups, and there was a terrific potential for abuse of the power inherent in the group ganging up on an individual. Theoretically, the group puts you back together after it tears you down, but in practice that may not happen. Deviant behavior (as defined by the majority) can cause you a lot of grief.

On the other side, when the group works, it can be not only extremely effective but also very attractive, to the point of completely changing peoples' lives. (I don't want to say that our study was compromised, but after two years of involvement with Phoenix House, the therapeutic community under study, our project director had moved into one of the houses, two of the women on the study had married Phoenix House residents, and two others were going out with same.)

Speaking of the Purple Commuter, do you know what you get when you cross an elephant with a grape?

How did I make the commute during the strike? Why, in an associative group of car poolers, of course. Not quite an ideal solution, but the best that the factors allowed. (I don't think I have the Galois to continue this.)

DOUG: Re "difficult" art, I think the problem is that it takes training and experience to understand or appreciate it; if the whole artform is new to you, you can't tell what is creative and what is formula, and it may come across as complete chaos. Conversely, such mind-boggling new concepts as telepathy and hyperspace are pure (and dull) cliché to the cognoscenti.