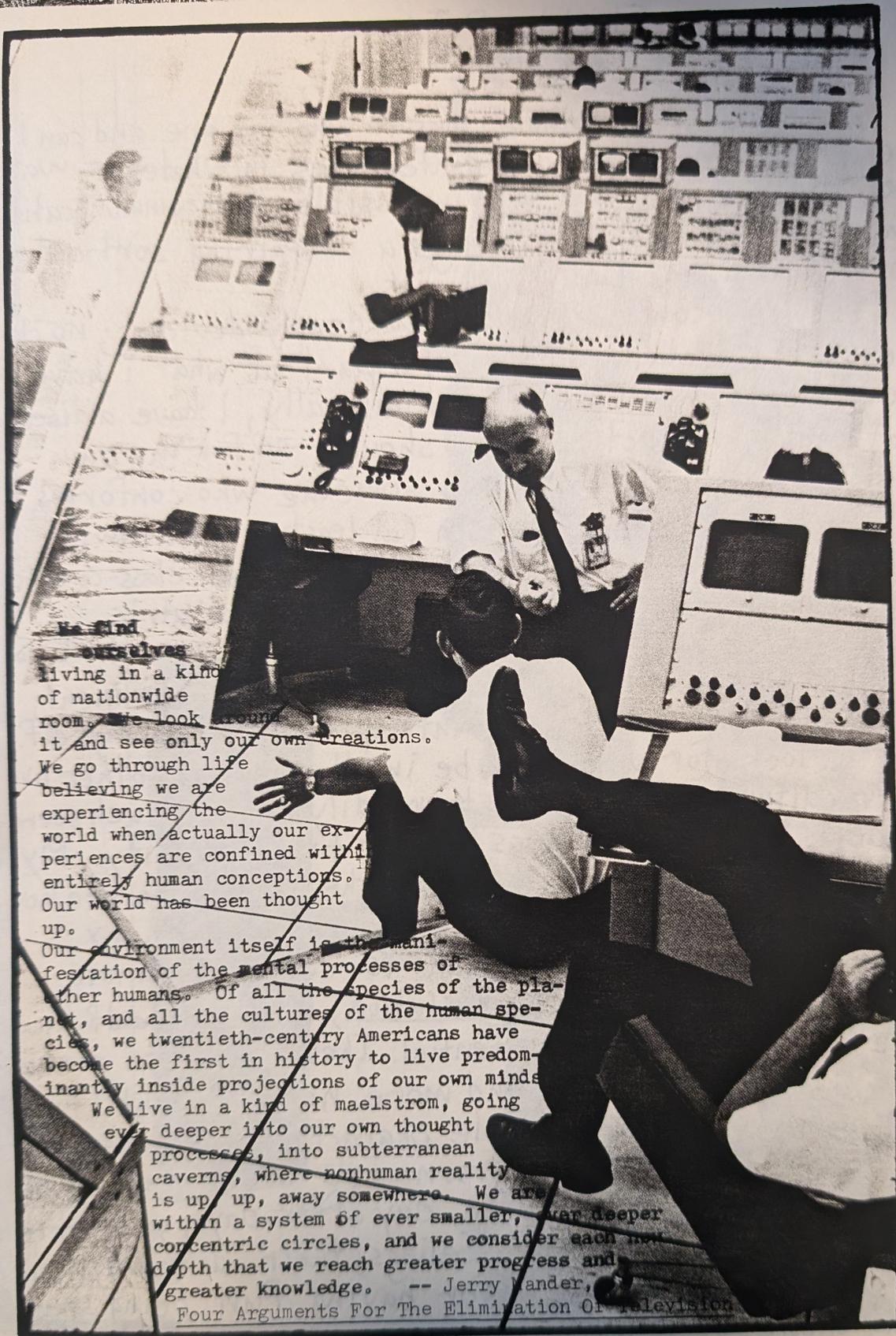




Dragonfly

VOLUME 1 NO. 2

OBSIDIAN I



We find
 ourselves
 living in a kind
 of nationwide
 room. We look around
 it and see only our own creations.
 We go through life
 believing we are
 experiencing the
 world when actually our ex-
 periences are confined within
 entirely human conceptions.
 Our world has been thought
 up.

Our environment itself is the mani-
 festation of the mental processes of
 other humans. Of all the species of the pla-
 net, and all the cultures of the human spe-
 cies, we twentieth-century Americans have
 become the first in history to live predom-
 inantly inside projections of our own minds.
 We live in a kind of maelstrom, going
 ever deeper into our own thought
 processes, into subterranean
 caverns, where nonhuman reality
 is up, up, away somewhere. We are
 within a system of ever smaller, ever deeper
 concentric circles, and we consider each new
 depth that we reach greater progress and
 greater knowledge. -- Jerry Mander,

Four Arguments For The Elimination Of Television

Flight of Ideas

Jghann

Without lively connections to who we are and can be, we hit our walls, our sharp-life-edges, in whatever way we may. Isolation makes impossible clear communication, knowledge of isolation brings a despairing sort-out of motives and personal realities.

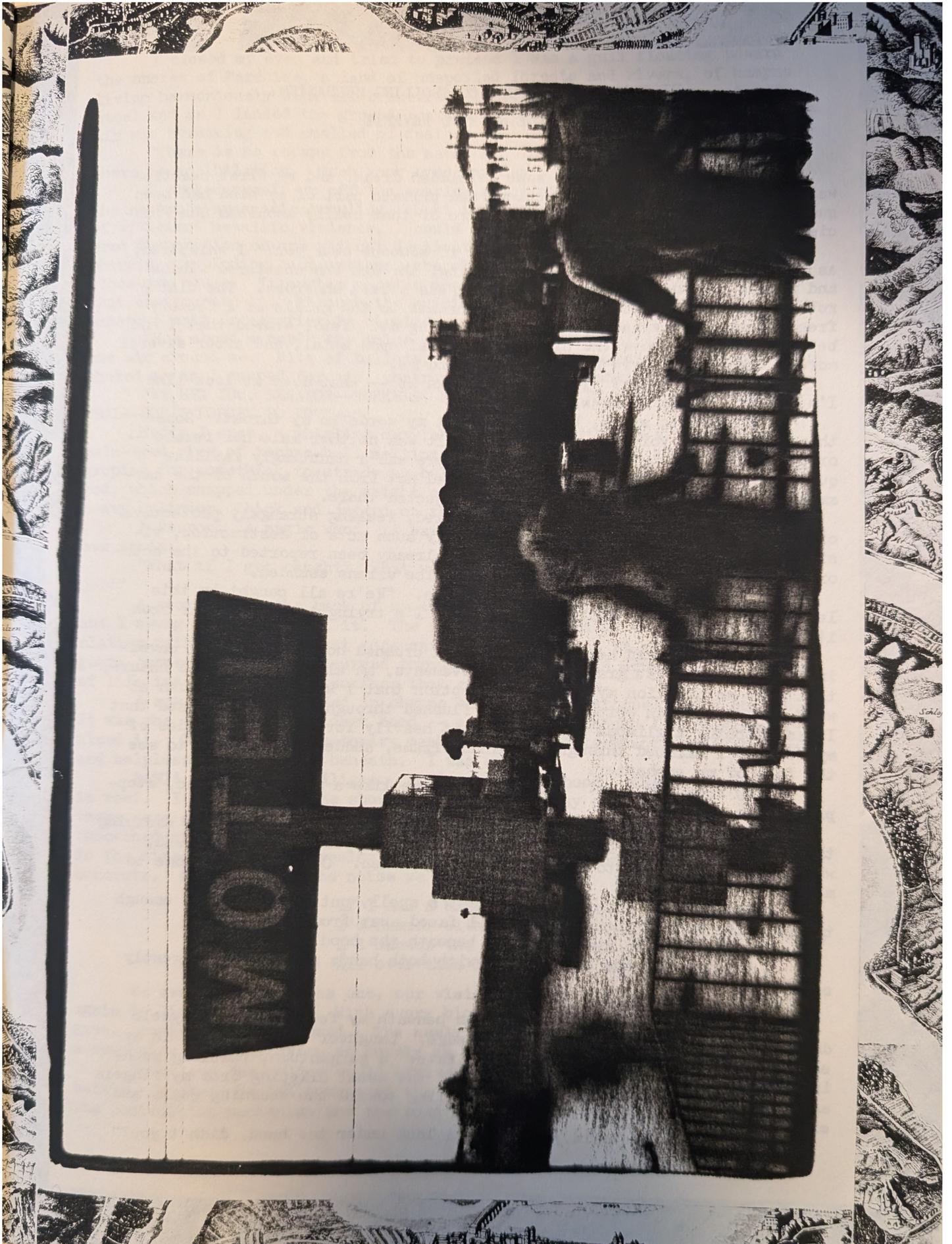
Viewed economically i seem deeply deviant; no class theory can explain more than a part of what i have been through, who i am. Psychiatrically, i have a disease that makes me act not as i should—so for my own good i must be remade into someone who conforms to a society i cannot believe in (at least as i am now!).

This is why i will undertake neither class-conscious reconstruction of my life nor similar psychiatric rearrangement. This is why i accept no aspect of how i live and feel and understand things as permanent, and constantly question my inter-pretations of myself.

I look for who i can be in other people, other lives, other cultures. Psychiatrists readily define such search as delusional, meaningless flight from Reality. My experience of life has included the ability to see how our culture denies the possibilities of life; my expression of this knowledge is called Paranoia.

From Repression or Revolution, by M. Glenn and R. Kunnes:

"Kids are born omnipotential. Their lives are gradually channeled for them, more and more narrowly, until finally they seem like a recognizable character type — neurotic or a crazy off-the-wall person. It's the tragedy of this society that kids must lose, day after day, year after year, contact with their feelings, their dreams, their fantasies, their potential for having fun, being serious, being alone, or being with others."



DISENGAGING FROM THE CONTROLLING MECHANISM:

A SOLSTICE NIGHT'S REVERIE

It seemed a vision from some forbidden dream, and my first reaction was abject fear, as if some precious and private part of my mind had been suddenly exposed to the artificial glare of that nearly moonless San Francisco night.

"What are you doing there? What if someone sees you?" I whispered, as loudly as one is capable of whispering, through the shattered window and across the smooth floor of the Van Ness Street showroom. The black-robed figure continued taking a sledgehammer to the grille of a factory-fresh Mercedes-Benz sedan, not acknowledging me. Yet I sensed that I had been heard, even above the clanking of metal upon metal, and after several more strokes the figure half-turned toward me.

"What am I doing? I'm smashing cars up -- what does it look like I'm doing?" the voice answered sharply.

I started to speak, but then caught my words in my throat. Something about that voice gave me chills. It was neither male nor female -- or perhaps it was both at once -- and there was a hauntingly familiar quality to it. It seemed to have emanated not from the mouth of the car-smasher, but from my own head, as if projected there.

"What if you get caught?" I whispered, feeling strangely protective of my mysterious new acquaintance. Surely such acts of destruction, visible and audible to any passersby, had already been reported to the authorities. Oddly, though, no alarms or police sirens sounded.

"I'm already caught!" sang the voice. "We're all caught by this lethal monstrosity we call Civilization. I'm trying to free myself from it right now--"

BANG! A broken headlight. POW! A crushed hood. CRACK! A caved-in roof. There was a grace to these movements, an almost dance-like nature, that made me question my initial assumption that I was watching a man at work. Just then an epiphanic warmth flushed through me, and I sensed that I was catching a glimpse beyond the most heavily fortified barricades of my heart. I climbed through the window frame, suddenly desperate to see the face of my enchanter.

"You know who I am!" The voice hit me like a gale-force wind, stopping me in my tracks.

"Why chase after ghosts? There are no Saviors. There is no escaping the responsibility to live your dreams. And yet you remain paralyzed, waiting for the light to turn green. Okay, then. Come closer. Come to me."

I came, as if under a somnabulist's spell, until I was close enough to touch the hooded figure that still faced away from me.

"Do you wish to see what lies beneath the hood?"

I reached for the black cloth with both hands and pulled it gently earthward.

"Ohhhhhh..."

I felt the ground disappear from beneath my feet and found myself dangling from some sort of metallic ledge. Laughter rang hollowly in my ears as I looked below to my probable fate: a gargantuan, rumbling machine that waited hungrily for me. I felt the metal slipping from my fingers and before I knew it I was falling, falling toward the churning gears and exploding pistons.

"Hee, hee! You said you wanted a look under the hood, didn't you?"

I closed my eyes and tried to pretend I was a gull floating toward the shores of Paradise, a land of unspoiled forests and rivers, of humyns living harmoniously with all creaturely life. But my wings were made of steel and as I landed the ground beneath me became grey concrete and the air was screaming and smelled of death.

"There is no escape from the machine. There is confrontation or there is annihilation. Open your eyes, my dear."

I picked myself up off the searing metal and plugged my ears against the engine's spasmodic growling. Lost in a landscape of sludgy greyness, of efficient metallic violence, I could do nothing but run with the blinkered desperation of one without destination. Past all forms of sputtering, whirring, exploding contraptions, the obscene creations of armored men with clockwork souls. Through a machine designed to obliterate the very beings that constructed it. Through the suicide machine, scrambling toward a non-existent exit, staggering in circles.

"How about a map?" the voice mocked, as a flurry of confetti filled the air around me. Bits of ballots, leftist party newspapers, and petitions choked me as I gasped for air, their words screaming shrilly out at me:

"WE BEG YOU, SENATOR--WORKERS, MAN THE FACTORIES--TECHNOLOGY IS NEUTRAL--DON'T FORGET TO VOTE--"

Madly I span, a whirling dervish fancying my dizzied vision to be a calm-eyed view of techno-hell melting away. I blacked out and stumbled, groping for something to steady my balance. My hands found a smooth metal rod, which snapped under the weight of my falling body. I examined the heavy cylinder, thick and jagged on the end that had broken.

A weapon. A magic wand. A way out. Then more mocking words. My own words:

"What if I get caught? What would my friends think? What about my job?"

A gear caught the back of my thigh, slicing through fabric and flesh, and I swung reflexively at it. The impact bent it back, causing it to clatter pathetically against adjacent gears. I struck it again and the gears jammed. Adrenaline surged through me and I began drumming the rhythm of life into every deadly surface that crossed my path.

I saw a face reflected in chrome before me and stopped for a moment. It was the face under the dark hood -- my own face, though I hardly recognized it. Gone was the customary mask of cynical detachment, gone the fear and helplessness cowering beneath. I was smiling.

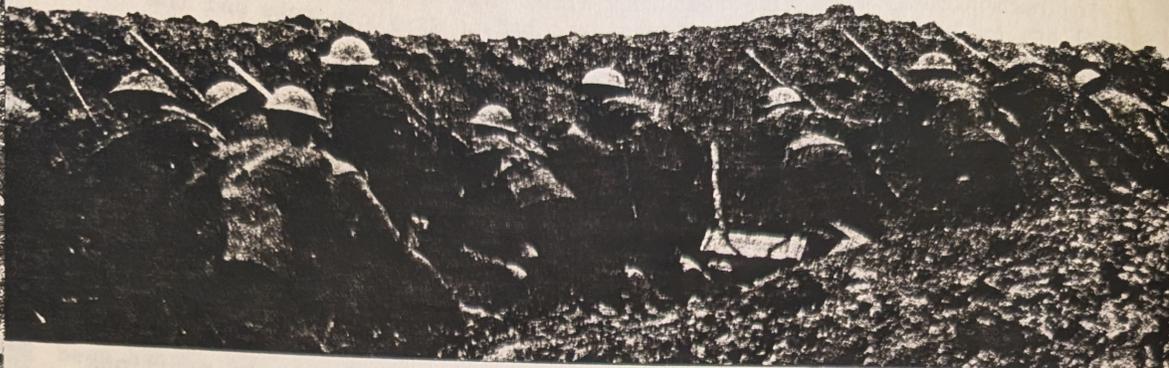
BANG! A broken headlight. POW! A crushed hood. CRACK! A caved-in roof. I was back in the showroom, one among many car-smashers. Now there were alarms and police sirens, but they seemed rather distant, perhaps concerned with other sledgehammer dancers. There were dynamite explosions in the streets outside, freeing the soil from large chunks of asphalt and concrete. And over all the noise we sang:

If I had a hammer
I'd hammer without warning
I'd hammer the machinery
All over this land...

We swung our tools as one, our vision-possessed eyes meeting now and again in liquid embraces. With every blow, a seed was planted, camaraderie grew, conviviality blossomed. The newly liberated soil would give birth to a community of wildflowers as surely as the moon now grew in the sky above.

Doubtless the police would arrive soon. But we had won the biggest battle already: We had conquered the cops within. We were disengaging from the controlling mechanism and the road ahead was earthen and unmappable...

-- H.H. Bliss



SOME THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN SAN FRANCISCO STREETS THIS SPRING...

***Corporate Mystery Tour (early Opal/late March) -- This was the first "War Chest Tour"-type demo in the city since the 1984 Democratic Convention. A simultaneous rowdy labor rally at Moscone Center kept cop presence to a minimum.

Beginning at Embarcadero Center Plaza, about 100 participants toured the Financial District, visiting corporate headquarters of, among others, Bechtel, General Electric, P.G. & E., and Wells Fargo. At each stop an activity (facilitated by a participating collective) was carried out. There was a haunting mimed performance at Vaillancourt Fountain, a spoken-word indictment of General Electric, a ritual "tasting" of nuclear waste at P.G. & E., as well as more spontaneous merry-making, including music and urban re-decoration.

Differences were expressed between those believing corporate property should be "respected" (all in the name of "good vibes") and those feeling no reverence and much antipathy toward it. A participant tried to discourage me, for instance, from drumming on the walls, floors, and other resonant surfaces of corporate lobbies, but I persisted, perhaps being "violent" from her point of view. I felt, on the other hand, that I was merely manifesting life in the face of death, taking back those metal and stone constructions for the earth, making them sing, mournfully and joyfully in turns.

Wonderful how impotent an armed guard becomes when a crowd blithely opposes his will; priceless the look upon the face of corporate authority when the hallowed halls of its world headquarters are being trashed by hooting, dancing anarchists. We never hung around in one spot long enough to greet S.F.'s Finest, though plenty long enough to show that corporate resistance does exist, that not everyone believes profit to be sacred. And doubtless we provided a ray of hope, a glimpse of an alternative, to some of the wage-slaves we met along the way...

We finished by circling in a nearby park and "doing the hokey-pokey." No one was arrested!



Leapfrog (21)

***St. Stupid's Day (15 Opal/April 1) -- A silly and subversive S.F. tradition, featuring hundreds of costumed revelers celebrating the stupidity of modern urban life. A good time, though a bit anticlimactic following the aforementioned event.

An aside: When the Provos marched through the streets of northern Europe chanting "Legalize Strawberry Ice Cream!" their life-affirming silliness was brilliantly complemented with physical resistance to authority and consumerism (in Newspeak, "rioting and looting.")

Nothing like that here. Our chant, "A Well-behaved Parade" effectively expressed the intimidating effect the police presence all around us created, but perhaps also served as ironic commentary on what we were at times reduced to: a safe lunchtime entertainment to be consumed by downtown workers, then excreted with a dismissive snicker -- "April Fools!"

At our best we made clear that every day was Fool's Day in the Financial District. We showered Bank of America with pennies, stuck thousands of colorful dots on corporate "art" and businessmen, exchanged socks at the Pacific Stock Exchange, chanted "Don't Walk!" in unison with the traffic lights, and "Jump!" to a corporate drone viewing us from a balcony hundreds of feet above.

Perhaps we sparked ancestral memories of more lively, earthly ages, times of pagan street carnivals and pageants, of troubadours and sacred clowns. I hope so. But holding this event on April 1 bestows upon it a certain societal approval and safeness that undercuts its power of subversion. Many bystanders seemed genuinely challenged by our doings until reminded it was "April Fool's Day."

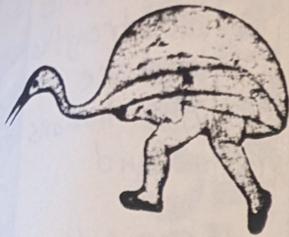


Whipping a top (51)

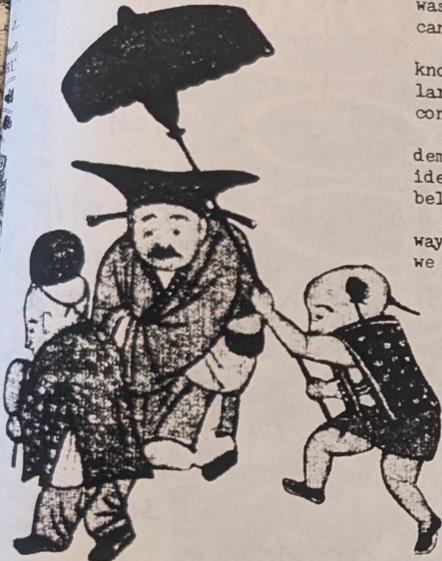
"Oh, I see. Heh, heh. Well, I guess everyone has the right to be silly one day out of the year..."
 One arrest last year (for stealing food from a café table); none this year.



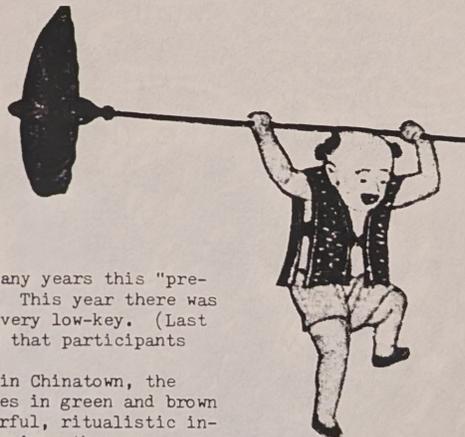
Running the gantlet (24)



Sacred crane



Servants mocking a mandarin



Acrobat with parasol



A figure in an ancient legend

***Anti-Contra Demos (late Opal/early April) -- Massive marches called in response to U.S. escalation in Central America. Thousands of demonstrators, including anarchists and the entire spectrum of the Left (from yuppie liberals to "Popular Front" groups like CISPES, as well as the usual assortment of newspaper-hawking "revolutionary" party recruiters.)

In spite of the omnipresent shrill voices, advertising all the latest slogans over megaphones, I enjoyed myself. After all, we were taking the streets back from the automobile! What a joy to walk down the center of Mission Street, or Castro Street, or Market Street, and not have to fear for my life! Cars were paralyzed against the force of our numbers, and though we had no permit, the police dared not interfere with our progress through the major thoroughfares of the city.

Yes, we were opposing aid to the Contras, and U.S. militarism in general, but I sensed an undercurrent of another sort of protest, against the alienation of modern urban civilization itself. However momentary and superficial, there was a feeling of community and human-scale interaction in the streets that one can rarely experience in this age.

There were other thrills: scores of corporate newspaper boxes were knocked over or destroyed, the windows of two major banks were smashed, and large areas of grey concrete were covered with colorful spray-paint (to the consternation of the liberal element!)

And there were chills: at times the cops got rough, pummeling several demonstrators at the Federal Building on one occasion. Another time, a resident of Fox Plaza Tower threw bottles down at demonstrators dozens of stories below, striking two among us, one in the head.

But all in all I left feeling empowered, though frustrated that we always wait until the U.S. Government does something particularly nasty before we take to the streets in such force.

***Mud Tribe Crawl (5 Pyrite/May 20) -- Third time in as many years this "pre-literate mud tribe" has invaded downtown San Francisco. This year there was a legal permit for the crawl, and the cop presence was very low-key. (Last year the event was broken up by cops when they insisted that participants "walk in single file" on the sidewalks.)

Beginning this time in Portsmouth Square, a park in Chinatown, the participants stripped down to rags and covered themselves in green and brown clay, some entwined with leafy vines. There was a powerful, ritualistic intensity among participants -- they weren't simply performing, they were experiencing. They took in their surroundings as if seeing a city, seeing civilization, for the first time:

concrete so hard, unforgiving... monotonously smooth and colorless... scalding to the skin when the sun shines upon it... asphalt's worse, scraping flesh from knees and palms... whoa! be careful on the tarry paths -- those metallic beasts are indiscriminate carnivores... why do these odd, grey-clad people pull away when reached out to? what are they afraid of? wait! a tree, alone in this desert, to caress, to climb into... why do the natives go on staring like that, some laughing, some angry, some confused?

Getting over the flu, I limited my activities to handing out flyers (feeling very ambivalent about "explaining" this event to confused bystanders), and observing the reaction to the crawlers. Some comments:

"What are they, some sort of religious cult?"

"Where are they from? Are they Americans?"

"I'm a liberal man, but this-- hmmmph!"

"What's going on -- somebody explain all this to me -- what's the meaning?!"

"Y'know there's a zoo over by this ocean in this town!"

"Mommy, are they real?"

"Hey, it's the missing link!" (Yeah, between you and real living!)

—Chris—

Edgar Pangborn wrote at least 7 novels and many short stories before his death in 1976. Per ability to depict individual strengths and weaknesses, and to personify the processes of history are wonderful. The deeply felt importance of love between humans that Pangborn evokes with a quiet power has inspired and grieved with many people, including myself.

Pangborn wrote of very real people living through times and situations which brought some to deny the right of existence to others, and of the distortions which ideology and history work upon real lives. The needs, fears, and failings of per characters I cannot do other than mention now, being, as with all of us, unique. Most of per stories take place in what New England becomes after a nuclear and biological war, and rising of the sea level; in all covering hundreds of years and the destruction and building of many societies, large and small.

Love is Pangborn's greatest value, and many of per characters are persecuted for their love of truth and devotion to others. The depiction of these loves was opposed by much of this our society's denigration of same, and person's sight of love was not restricted to heterosexual couples.

By clearly and carefully giving us views of human life, person has shown us how real and important our own lives are; how devotion brings growth, how denial of personal relationship is needed to institute oppression, how repetitious is the face of corruption and life-denial. Edgar Pangborn took the time to build a world that lives, as a part of this one, on the strength of its insight and honesty.

USUALLY FOUND
AS SCIENCE FICTION,
WIDELY AVAILABLE:

Judgement of Eve
Davy
The Company of Glory
A Mirror for Observers

Still I Persist in Wondering (8 stories)

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* Some Things... * Edgar Pangborn * antimoney * Rhine Fragments