

# not bend, fold, staple or mutilate

seventies. Some say that we are afraid to live in our own age, that we lack confidence. There's no fascist Big Brother, so perhaps Pogo's realization is valid: "We have seen the enemy and it is us."

## Kulchur en Haut

In the fifties and sixties a strange movement known as the counter-culture emerged from the dull woodwork of classicism. There was no movement, it didn't even emerge, and it couldn't have been preceded by classicism, whatever that is. Counter-culture, popular art, avant garde; the terms are generally meaningless. In any case, they are used in an arbitrary manner against what is similarly labelled "high culture."

To stratify culture does more harm than good in spite of what Mao has to say. Mozart can be both the subject of cocktail party chat and popular. The question of intelligent or unintelligent art is an entirely different matter.

Alice Cooper is "popular," but he is also counter-culture because he believes he can enhance a performance through its destruction. He takes away much more than he replaces. Eisenstein never shocked us with profound social issues in *Potemkin*, but he went beyond this to illuminate an art form. At some point, we've undoubtedly been bored by the cycles of Wagner or the montage of Bergman, and have tried to relegate them to the grave yard of other maestros.

In the sixties we were bombarded with supposedly new messages which tried to throw off this mythical joke of high culture and, playing off the same metaphor, re-excavate the basic roots. Despite its "newness," Stan Brakhage's work cannot be understood without a sense of what Eisenstein was doing.



The "series of events" myth of history, lacking in comprehensivity, succumbs to the artist metamorphosing his medium into an extension of his intellect.

The writer Thomas Pynchon recognizes the myths of history and weaves them into the intricate web of a search which leads nowhere, parodying itself; there is no catch-all solution to the world's problems because the odyssey-search is invalid. By forcing culture to conform to some grandiose plan and rejecting dissident mutations, we develop "high culture." Transcending this nose-in-the-air tradition helps to remove the barriers to creativity.



## What Kil-A-Wot Culture Generators

If culture is synthesis, then what constitutes the range of choice? Subjective decisions. Whether through individual of participant action, culture is generated along very broad lines, and cannot be characterized by a finite set of characteristics or items; try to write a journal sometime. A danger lies in identifying sectors of our society as "culture producers;" the implication which follows is that other sectors are "culture receivers."

The stimulus-response model could not apply by definition; culture is not a transmittable medium. But not too many people read the dictionary these days, and they tend to link the two, denying their own roles as generators.

Films like *Towering Inferno*, *Earthquake*, and *Jaws* equated sensationalism with box-office profits; the vicarious excitement is not unlike that of Huxley's "feelies." If our self-image is of passive observers, we are participating in a very questionable manner; if we do not feel capable of making the decisions, then we are depriving ourselves of the essence of developing culture, and are enfranchising others with that task. The result is pseudo or mock culture.

In the dark recesses of the Centaur viewing *On The Job*, or sitting in an easy chair listening to Keith Jarrett, you may ask yourself what contributing to culture entails; should you speak to an actor or write a letter? There is no answer, so don't search for one; as long as the choice is there, and a decision can be made, at least you're aware of the situation.

*Brave New World* may be overworked as representative of hellish utopian thought, but the ease with which its attitudes and institutions are accepted, even desired as inevitable, points to a very frightening social entropy. Perhaps "sickness unto death" is a paradox: active participation in apathy by choice.

## Illusion: Mixed Bag Media

To press the point further, we can easily lapse into role playing: culture consumerism. Substituting the medium for the experience, we too often go to "get cultured", as though someone sells it in different grades by the pound.

If you can't stand being fed Handel, at least know why. In a land of abundance, the choices to be made increase at an exponential rate, and a comforting, secure euphoria is welcome as a relief from society's hectic rate of progress.

"I am assuming that the defence of civilization implies the defence of an intelligence that is not authoritarian. But all contemporary defenders of civilization must be aware — though I don't think it helps to say it often — that this civilization, already so far overtaken by barbarism, is at an end, and nothing we do will put it back together again. So in the culture of transition out of which we can try to make sense, fighting off the twin afflictions of hyperesthesia and passivity, no position can be a comfortable one or should be complacently held."

— Susan Sontag

An earlier story in the Daily suggested how comfort can be linked with susceptibility to brainwashing; interpret the rest as you wish. The illusion that the decisions which develop culture along these lines are the property of certain "culture producers" has already been discussed; to long as culture can be filed away, only a card catalog or a computer will allow us access.

Educational institutions are recent entries into this arena of supermarket competition. Out of the call in the sixties for relevancy arose the strange view that college education should supply the student with the means to secure employment after graduation. Education is no longer an enlightening medium of dialogue, but an institution permeated with or supplanted by an ominous concern for material goods.

Universities have traditionally been closely associated with culture, and it is an illusion that they should pretend to sell themselves; buy cultural status along with diploma. Do not ask what "a college education" can do for you; not shop for a product; ask what you can give educational processes; your intellect, ability and courage to make decisions.

"Whenever anyone asks me what I'm going to do with an Arts degree, I just answer, "Hang it on the wall," I mean, it doesn't really matter:

Arts, Engineering, Science; they're all pretty vague areas... I don't want to do anything with a degree per se, and I don't expect to be able to. It seems foolish to expect to leave this place having drastically changed yourself; you're always changing, interacting... If you can learn from others, that is what is important. Hopefully the process is reciprocal."

At university, it's easy to conform to a nine-to-five syndrome while shopping around, as consumers, for education. The mass media have made the comfortable choices also the easiest. We are asked to extend our faith to the newspaper, radio, and television since they tell it like it is. Facts. Eh?

Centralization of authority has reduced their accessibility to the public, so we tend to view these media as technological products, and not the cultural participants behind the lines who pervade our lives.

When Orson Welles gave us *War of the Worlds*, these illusions about radio were destroyed. Television has yet to lose its pretensions and exploit its potential as an art medium.

There may be no connection between our actions and the environ-

Sontag warns of the precarious nature of "positions", but responsible decisions can and have to be made with some notion as to what "culture" entails; I have attempted to question certain notions of the character of our culture too often taken for granted. We must extend the history we are presently creating as far into the past and future as we are able to and dare. Toffler's *Future Shock* directly addresses culture shock; unless we actively prepare ourselves for our own decisions and their implications, we will be left blinded and suspended in the purgatory of a culture vacuum.

— AI

ment created by television, especially with regard to violence, but this is only because we are still sufficiently skeptical so as to treat it from a consumer's standpoint as a producer of goods. The possibility of mass media becoming mass culture has obvious implications for our freedom; culture is whose business?

So is our laboring over definitions, the roles of media and non-roles of culture, and myths of historical fact all to no avail? There are no answers, and as Freud wrote, such illusions have no future.

