



FLATTEN THE TOADS

FTT 9, APRIL 1990

THE EAGLE-EYED AMONGST YOU -- which means everyone; our readership is nothing if not hand-picked -- will have noticed a slight change in our title: the initials are the same but the words are different. We are no longer the fanzine you can't name in polite company (whatever that might be). Sighs of relief from the editors' parents. But then everyone -- even ourselves -- has always abbreviated the title to *FTT* anyway.

So why choose a new set of words? Because the title *Fuck The Tories* was coined to fit our initial brief for this fanzine, although in practice *FTT* has naturally evolved over time -- from the fifth issue onwards it has undergone significant but steady changes which mean that the original title now has little relation to the things we're doing (and has even become a bit constricting). So the initials have been kept to maintain continuity, but will have a different set of words attached to them every time -- *Feather The Turtles, Flatulate The Terrapins, Fandango The Tachygraphs...* Fanzine bibliographers should stick to the initials on the grounds that we might eventually run out of possible titles!

None of which, we suppose, will prevent some people from claiming that we must be abandoning our attempt to blend politics with fandom. As usual, they will simply have missed the point -- and are referred, yet again, to the editorial in the fifth issue which delineated the difference between "political" and "politically aware".

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The titled filler items on pages 5, 15, 19 and 25 are by Judith Hanna; the untitled ones on pages 7 and 15 are by Joseph Nicholas. There are no interior illustrations; the cover has been adapted from an original cartoon that appeared in the National Union of Civil and Public Servants' *Journal*. The soundtrack for the paste-up of this issue was provided by (in alphabetical order) ABC, All About Eve, Martin Carthy, Echo And The Bunnymen, Led Zeppelin (!), Midnight Oil, The Mission, The Primitives, The Psychedelic Furs, The Rainmakers, and Sileas. The red wine was provided by Yalumba in the Barossa Valley (a 1987 Shiraz). Our grateful thanks go once again to Vince Clarke for the electrostencils and to Rob Hansen and Avedon Carol for the duplicating.

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and is available for the usual: letters of comment, contributions, your fanzine in trade, and all that. Which seems a useful spot to remind everyone that letters *et al* sent in exchange *should be addressed to both editors* -- a surprising minority seem unable to grasp that Judith Hanna is a separate person to Joseph Nicholas and plays an equal role in the production of this document. Severe penalties will be imposed on those who fail to heed this fact!

GOING DOWN UNDER

JUDITH HANNA

What's this we hear about you moving to Australia? people keep asking us. Are you serious about it? Does Joseph like the idea? The answers are: that's right, quite serious, and Joseph seems resigned to his fate although attempting to renegotiate the date.

We got married because my UK visa had run out, and the Home Office advised that they didn't give extensions. So I proposed to Joseph, who agreed to make it legal for me to stay here. You can get away with that sort of thing if you're white. "Besides," he said, "you'll be able to get me into Australia to live there." He seemed quite keen on the idea. He seemed particularly keen at intervals thereafter, whenever M. Thatcher did something particularly outrageous like winning the 1987 election and thus condemning Britain to another four years of poor-bashing sanctimony.

But when I returned from an unanticipated trip to my brother's funeral (which was why we weren't at the 1988 Novacon) and told Joseph I thought it was time to move back home and settle down near enough to my family to be able to keep an eye on the rest of them, he turned all patriotic.

"But what about my family, I won't be able to see them," was his first line of defence. "But dear," I said, "I have spent eight years on your cold side of the world away from my family, and I get on much better with mine than you do with yours." True enough, we argue; we Hannas enjoy arguing. But as Joseph's parents have several times reminded us, he almost refused to invite them to our wedding. I don't think he's ever really forgiven them for having known him when he was younger and not so clever as he is now. Besides, they are very Tory. However, last year he actually made the suggestion that we spend Christmas with them. Moreover, he remained perfectly polite and good-tempered all the way through from Christmas Eve to the day after Boxing Day. Clearly the prospect of absence makes the heart grow fonder.

He had expected them to be upset when we broke the news that their little boy might be moving away to the other end of the earth. "Oh yes, jolly good," they said, "we can come and visit you there. We've been thinking about a trip to Australia. When are you moving?"

Then he started trying to persuade me that the Australian economy was going down the drain. "Third World nation," he muttered, "selling itself off to the Japanese and the Americans at rock-bottom prices." Was this, I enquired, worse than what he'd been saying about the effect of the Thatcherite funnymoney boom wasting the North Sea oil revenues, and what about the compensating effects of warmer climate and definitely more comfortable, easygoing way of life? Joseph commenced dissecting Bob Hawke's iniquities and inequities. A letter arrived from Robyn Mills and Perry Middlemiss saying they were thinking about leaving Melbourne and coming to live over in Britain for a year or so. "They must be mad! I shall write and tell them they're better off in Melbourne. What do they want to come here for?" said Joseph. Then he carried on trying to convince me that we ought to stay in Britain.

"We'll be under the ozone hole if we move to Australia," he pointed out. True, and the fact that most of the chemicals causing the hole were emitted in the northern hemisphere doesn't actually shift the springtime ozone depletion over those who deserve it. On the other hand, here in London every day we breathe in excessive low-level ozone, which is a corrosive poison, plus nitrogen oxides which combine with water vapour in the air to be breathed in as little droplets of nitric acid, another corrosive poison. Plus carbon monoxide, which isn't corrosive but reduces the respiratory capacity of lungs by occupying oxygen receptors. Us environmental transport campaigners know what Britain's eighteen million cars fart out their backsides. At least a sunhat, long sleeves, and dark glasses can ward off the excess ultra-violet and sun cancer in Australia.

"But we can't move, dear," he said. "I haven't seen Britain yet, or Europe." "Then let us start," say I, "what shall we go and see next weekend?" "We're not going anywhere next weekend," he said, "I have to get through my Heavy Reading Programme. There's *New Scientist* and *New Internationalist* and *New Statesthing*. And there's *Marxism Today* and *Mother Jones* and *History Today* and *Folk Roots*. And there's a whole bookcase full of unread books I have to get through!"

"Dear," I point out, "You have had 35 years to see this side of the world, which is longer than I have had. If you have wasted all those years with frivolities like working and reading and dashing off letters to fanzines and politicians instead of fieldtrips to theorise the history and scenery, that cuts no ice with me. Besides, you can always pack up books and ship them to Australia to read there, but the sightseeing isn't transferable. So it should take priority. Where shall we go next weekend, then?" Abashed mumbles, followed by outraged rectitude: "But some of these books I haven't read are over two years old. Are you suggesting I should just leave them to go out of date?" Yep, check *your* bookshelves now and ensure their contents have not passed their "Read By" date....

I came back here from Australia in November 1988 wanting to move immediately. I was convinced that Europe was on the verge of some disaster. It could be another nuclear reactor, only this time going critical and spewing radioactive poisons lavishly over Western Europe. Plenty of reactors in Southern England and France which could catch London well within the 100 kilometre zone which was (eventually) evacuated around Chernobyl. Or maybe just a chemical accident, a Bhopal in the Thames Valley or Essex. Or there's always the possibility of accident or false alarm setting off a military nuke. I gave Europe until about September or October 1989. I could feel it in my bones.

"But dear, what about our Samarkand trip?" said Joseph. "We must do the Soviet Union before we move. And in 1990 there is Corflu in New York and the Dutch Worldcon. So, you see, we can't move until 1991." Er-umm-ah, I muttered, and told my bones to keep their fingers crossed. And sure enough, Europe managed to survive 1989. Not only that but contagious *glasnost* spread an epidemic of hope across Eastern Europe, bringing down the Berlin Wall and the Ceaucescus for the festive season. And then there was the tidal wave of greenwash: the Iron Lady of conviction politics suddenly saw herself as Gaia, the Green Goddess. It would be illogical to think that these hopeful changes in the psychological climate of the continent have actually reduced the risks of accident, but certainly Europe seems to feel less as if it's racing headlong towards inevitable disaster.

So we have drawn up a list of British cities Joseph wants to see. Bath and Bristol already ticked off under the tasty auspices of Christina and Peter-Fred and Lilian. Been to Avebury and Salisbury. And we did Canterbury and Winchester last summer. For my birthday weekend in March we did York and Durham, with its formidable Norman cathedral that stands for William the Conqueror's harrying of the North with fire and the sword, which left it an even more depressed area than the current North-South divide. Must get to Norwich, with its much less militant, more graceful Norman cathedral, and Lincoln, whose cathedral though not Norman is said to be quite nice, and Oxford (plus Woodstock). And Edinburgh, where we have invitations to stay with friends. And Portsmouth, for Nelson's *Victory* and the *Mary Rose*. And Chester and Conwy... Oh yes, and Chichester and Arundel. During my first year or so over here, while I was being a tourist, I visited most of them and we have the glossy guidebooks filed away in our tourism box. But I've no objection to seeing them again -- particularly as we now both have top-notch SLR cameras instead of cheapo instamatics and are seriously into taking lots of photos of anything vaguely scenic that doesn't whizz out of shot.

And then there's all Europe, just across the water. At Christmas I picked up an armload of glossy brochures (none of them on recycled paper, I'm sure) for quick breaks in various European cities. Must see Paris, we agreed, so I booked a weekend in February, we brushed up our Franglais, and have ticked Paris off the list: we managed to pick a fine spring weekend between the gales and found it a fine handsome

city except for all the traffic. But I still haven't been to Italy -- Rome, Florence, and Venice before it sinks, eroded by acid rain, beneath the greenhouse effect. And what about Prague and Budapest and Dubrovnik? And Greece and Spain and Turkey. "See, dear," says Joseph, "We won't be able to go before 1992." I concede that we might as well use the summer of 1991 for sightseeing over here.

Then we'll definitely pack up and head for West Australia for the wildflower season in October 1991. Right, dear?

I OPENED OUR SUBSCRIPTION COPY of the *New Internationalist* and some New Age wank fell out -- a leaflet from The Skyros Institute, offering holistic health and fitness holidays on the Greek island of the same name. The Atsitsa Centre claims to promote health "at all levels -- mind, body, spirit", where "activities range from windsurfing, dance and aerobics to yoga, T'ai Chi, dreamwork, massage, music, theatre and painting". Meanwhile, the Skyros Centre offers "another unique and life-changing experience" -- namely, "personal development courses in which people may explore and reconsider the form and direction of their lives" -- and the Skyros Institute of Holistic Studies "provides intensive training courses in holistic health and personal development", including "dance therapy, reflexology, astrology, dreamwork, psychodrama....and many others". With the object, presumably, of helping others to get in on the act of fleecing the gullible.

Then I opened our copy of *Earth Matters*, the members' journal of Friends of the Earth, to find an advertisement for "seven day courses in the beautiful Scottish highlands developing your individual connections with nature: trees, flowers, bubbling streams, rocks, high places, etc.. Individual therapy sessions combine group work and meditation to clear negative patterns and restore your natural sense of harmony" -- plus (or including) "kinesiology, massage, Reichian therapy, rebirthing and vibrational harmonising". Pseudo-profound claptrap, in other words; we couldn't get you with EST, but perhaps some karmic doubletalk will succeed instead. But who is more unhinged; the people who promote this stuff, or those who fall for it?

Then another damn leaflet fell out of another magazine -- advertising cassettes and CDs from New World Productions, all with titles like "Moonstone", "The Calling", "In The Stillness Of A Moment", "Atlantis" and "Keeper Of Dreams". Just look at some of these descriptions: "Flute and violin combine to create a pure and sacred moment, a direct channel for inspiration, dedicated to nature and love....more than a superb piece of music, it is a distant but deeply remembered part of yourself -- a sound that is alive within you. Misty visions and floating memories are conjured up, only to give way to worlds of indescribable beauty....gives you time to listen, time to revive the finer feelings of inner love, compassion and oneness with life....a centred, reflective continuity is maintained throughout as the music hovers with an almost cosmic sense of tranquillity....the gift of inspired spirituality, working through one of the most talented composers of our time".

Further comment seems a bit superfluous, what?

RETURN TO VICTORIAN VALUES

We don't get to many cons or pub gatherings these days. Various reasons, some to do with money and time, exhaustion after long day at work. But my principal motive for keeping away is that I've had enough of being made sick by tobacco smoke. Fandom is supposed to be a recreation, fun, right? Being sick is not fun. When I say sick, I don't mean just the stinging eyes, pain in the chest, and raw throat at the time. The company and conversation are fair enough compensation for that. It is that after a few hours in the smoky atmosphere, I spend the next three days not just a nasty cough, but throwing up in the morning because of the guck clogging my lungs. It only happens, and it happens regularly, after time spent in smoke-filled meetings.

Back in Victorian days, the custom was not to light up in polite company unless you had assured yourself that no-one objected. I don't think it would hurt to pretend that fandom is polite company. And this is one Victorian value I'd like to see brought back. I wonder how many others currently stay away because they're affected by the haze of tobacco smoke. Draconian prohibition curtailing the personal liberty of smokers? Or unjustifiable assumption that it's okay to pollute the air others must breathe?

Had everything gone according to plan, the following article would have been in the previous issue -- but instead of entrusting it to the universal if neolithic technology of envelope and postage stamp, Roman sent it by e-mail via a contact at Friends of the Earth UK...who looked in his box just about the time we were pulling the previous issue together and found only the return address still legible. And by then it was too late to secure another copy....

Which means, among other things, that the GUFF deadline will have passed by the time you read this, and it will have had no effect on the final result. All we can say, therefore, is that we hope your vote was a correct one.

POLITICIANS, CANE TOADS AND OTHER SLIMY CREATURES

ROMAN ORSZANSKI

Cane toads and politicians have long been inextricably linked. Cane toads, of course, aren't native to Australia. They were introduced in the thirties in the Far North (Queensland, similar in many ways to the Deep South of the USA -- politically, that is), and are now spreading west across Australia's Top End. Like politicians, they seem to be taking over the country.

Luckily, Film Australia has financed an incredibly useful documentary about the cane toad and its effects upon people's minds. If you get the chance, see the film *Cane Toads: The Unnatural History*, by Mark Lewis. It's very funny, from the opening music ("Cane Toad Blues") to the final credits. In Queensland, people keep toads as pets; keep a tally as they run over them with the front wheel ("Curse you, Red Baron!"); organise hunting parties; hold toad races; and stuff them as souvenirs². Mind you, that's Queensland, where the heat drives people troppo...

The director, Mark Lewis, had no difficulty getting the toads to perform; he kept hot and cold toads in the boot of his car. The hot ones would hop around and look active (and menacing!), while the cold ones, refrigerated and kept in an eskie until needed, would just sit there and stare at the lens for close-ups. As he said, "hot and cold running toads"³. He also said that they're *much* more interesting to work with than politicians...

The toad is so troublesome because it secretes a poison which wipes out many of the local creatures, and it breeds prolifically. Being an introduced species, it has no local predators. Cane toads are slowly moving west and south⁴. The most sensible thing a government minister suggested in the last fifty years was that all those soldiers on Joint Defence Exercises in the Top End should be put to better use by being deployed on search-and-destroy toad hunts.

But then politicians aren't renowned for sensible statements. Take, for example, Senator Richardson, our current Minister for the Environment (technically, his super-department is Arts, Sports, Transport, Tourism and the Environment!), who makes much play of being a "born again" greenie. He is a cold, ruthless, numbers man for the New South Wales right-wing of the Australian Labor Party, probably the nastiest group of politicians and crooks around. He could probably teach that softie, Margaret Thatcher, a thing or two. In a submission to the ALP's recent Uranium Policy Review Committee he claimed that Chernobyl was a "minor" accident, and that nuclear power is a possible solution to the greenhouse effect. I had the misfortune to meet him at Adelaide University's Centre for Environmental Studies recently. He was there to look green and help launch the career of a budding politician, Dr Bob Catley, an academic at the university.

I was asked to design invitations for assorted bigwigs to visit the Centre and meet Senator Richardson. The wording also included a plug for Doctor Bob as a candidate for the Federal Parliament. I naturally put the important details first, and consigned the bump about Doctor Bob to an inconspicuous position in a *minute* six-

point type. Luckily, the Vice-Chancellor of the university insisted that the waffle about Bob Catley be truncated, so rather than reading "Senator Graham Richardson, who will be introduced by Dr Bob Catley, the ALP candidate for the Federal seat of Adelaide", the final phrase was omitted.

Have you noticed how politicians -- even aspirant ones -- are most slimy when they want something? I first met Doctor Bob when he came to the Centre in search of an already-published article about green politics and the ALP. He was a balding man, with a quickdraw smile and just a slightly-too-friendly manner⁵ -- obviously in training to be either a politician or a used-car salesman. Since I had just been reading the article in question, I was able to quickly locate and photocopy it. Rather than taking it and leaving, Doctor Bob sought to engage me in gentle banter about how wonderful the ALP was on environmental issues. I startled him by pointing out their shameful record: a reversal of their anti-uranium mining policy, a refusal to act on greenhouse gases because it might affect the mining companies, a delay in declaring Stage III of a World Heritage Area to appease Broken Hill Propriety, a back down on Aboriginal land rights, attempts to bully New Zealand into dropping its stand against visits by nuclear-armed warships, a drive to double arms exports to the South Pacific, hosting and upgrading US spy bases on Australian soil...

"But what," interjected Doctor Bob, "about protecting the Franklin, saving rainforests in the Daintree -- "

"All done after massive public campaigns, all conceded at an election. And let's not forget the adoption of plant patenting laws, or the reduction of overseas aid..."

Exit Doctor Bob, clutching photocopy.

On the morning of Senator Richardson's visit, I thought it might be a good time to launch a pamphlet, *Six Green Issues The ALP Won't Touch*. A limited edition photocopy on recycled paper, copies were strategically placed about the Centre for Environmental Studies and credited to the "Green Independents". Selected people browsed through it while waiting for the Senator, and I made sure that Bob "Just-One-Of-The-Mates" Catley had a copy to forward to him.

Curiously enough, a coalition of community groups approached me a few months ago to see if I'd stand as a Green Independent in the Federal seat of Adelaide -- that is, run against Bob Catley. The conservatives currently hold the seat by a slim margin, and it was very tempting to upset the ALP's bid to regain it. And wipe the smirk off Catley's face. But I declined. (And Doctor Bob duly went on to retake the seat from the Liberals.)

In Queensland, they recommend a number eight iron for dealing with cane toads. Address the toad face on, and you get a very satisfying *thwok*. Side-on, the toads tend to break right (or left). Perhaps a similar, direct approach would deal with slimy politicians.

- (1) Must be something about peanut farming.
- (2) The publicity agents for the film sent us a stuffed one (blecch). Fitzwilliam now resides in a terrarium at the Adelaide University radio station.
- (3) I hasten to add that the cold toads suffered no ill-effects (for those of you who actually worry about the revolting creatures).
- (4) Hence the much-feared "invasion from the north".
- (5) *Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene iv, line 148: "One may smile and be a villain".
- (6) Okay, I admit, cane toads aren't slimy; they just look slimy, and who wants to touch one?

HAVE YOU NOTICED that Margaret Thatcher has yet to utter a single word about the result of the Nicaraguan elections in February? Could it possibly be that to say anything about them would be to admit that economic sanctions actually work?

(And have you noticed how the Labour front bench have yet to try taunting her on this point? Are they afraid that they might be made to sound too defensive of the Sandinistas, or is it just their usual inability to seize the initiative on anything?)

PEACH FUZZ, BUMS AND FEMINISTS AGAINST CENSORSHIP

JUDITH HANNA

Three fanzines dealing with topics that struck me as similar dropped on our doorstep at about the same time: Jan Ory's *VSOP 5*, Mog Decarnin's *Rabbitears*, and *Pulp 15*. Rather than a formal "fanzine review" I want to engage with some of the things said in each. I'm going to praise Mog's writing unreservedly, lay into Jan for an off-hand paragraph which actually undermines the argument she's trying to defend, and disagree strongly with Avedon while thoroughly approving the serious stridency of her argument.

Let's start with the particular passage from Jan's *VSOP 5* which got my goat.. Readers may recall that in the previous issue, *VSOP 4*, Jan wrote a con report of *Iconoclasm*, held in the 1989 summer heat, with admiring comments about the bums* of various male fans; her reply to the responses she prints in her letter column is defensive:

"I am not what many people view as a feminist. By that, I mean that I don't go to any social or political or social gatherings aimed at furthering the feminist cause; I do not as a rule go around demanding equal rights; I do not get upset when a man calls me 'love' or 'honey' or when a builder wolf-whistles from the scaffolding.... [dots indicate ellipses, throughout]

"I do, however, embrace the kind of feminism (if such it is) that wishes to open doors to women that perhaps were closed or only slightly ajar. By the same token, I also wish the same towards both sexes. Admittedly the balance is still weighted heavily towards a male dominated society, but I do not wish for a female dominated one either. I do not believe that women should have to behave like men to succeed, any more than I believe that men should be made to feel guilty for being male. Somehow, among some groups, that seems to be the way things are going, and it saddens me....

"Is it any less offensive to generalise and say that women are more sensitive than men than it was for men to assert that women had smaller brains (as they did less than 100 years ago) or for anyone to say that blacks are lazy or that Jews are mean.... I believe in equality I realise this is an idealistic way of viewing things, but personally I can view them in no other way. For this reason I find it strange when confronted with opinions which on the surface are right-on and unprejudiced, but which, when analysed, prove how inequalities survive unnoticed."

The implication is that a mob of humourless feminists have denounced her innocent pleasure in bum-watching; the letters she prints show no evidence of this. Joseph has, as usual, tidied *VSOP 4* away into inaccessibility so I can't check but as I recall, Jan's *Iconoclasm* review was amusing and unoffensive -- I doubt that any of the male fans whose bottoms may have been praised in print were offended; Jan's aesthetic admiration was uncontaminated by "Woorr, wouldn't mind a bit of that!" offensiveness (to which Chuck Connor's "something to beg for at cons" comes perilously close) or by implications that pretty bits of bum-fluff couldn't think, or that any lad who wasn't pretty wasn't worth wasting time talking to. Of the letters she printed, only Walt Willis and Mike Glicksohn seemed to me to imply the sort of criticism Jan spends five pages reacting to.

"No sensible man these days is going to risk writing a humorous article such as mine was intended to be about women's legs for example..." says Jan, "he would probably be slaughtered verbally and in print by 'feminists' of both sexes. I'd like those doors opened, that's all. Any subject should be permissible to write about..."

* Note for US readers: "bum" = botty, posterior, ass.

I think of Nigel Richardson's baroquely humorous fantasies of fragile, vulpine but brainless blondes with legs that go all the way up to their bums, in which Nigel even went to the point of suggesting that women who didn't stir lust weren't worth talking to; I don't recall Nigel being denounced by The Sisterhood. Michael Ashley followed suit, less amusingly, and has been denounced for a variety of transgressions, like winning the Nova. Then there were D West's fantasies of being trampled by Chris Atkinson in stiletto heels and fishnet stockings. I think Jan might be justified to suggest that a double-standard has been called into play against her: not only does similar writing by men go unremarked as commonplace, but also note that it is two men, Mike Glicksohn and Walt Willis, not women, who seem to have been mildly upset into playing the "more feminist than thou" card. But that isn't a point Jan makes.

The question that exercises my mind is: why did Jan find it necessary to start off by putting down "feminism"? It looks like Jan has tried to clarify her thoughts by smoothing lumpy questions into a nice bland custard of generalisation, but they won't go -- the problems remain irreducibly irrational fractions. Or, to put it another way, the metaphorical dish in question shouldn't be thought of as a custard but as a stew where the lumpy bits are what makes it interesting.

Jan's "generalisations" about feminism (as she herself calls them) are well-intentioned, but nonsense. Of course the subject is too complicated, indeed intrinsically contradictory, for any such brief generalisations to be other than shallow. Take for instance the assertion that "women have smaller brains" which Jan condemns as offensive: however, on average, the assertion is mostly true. Brain size is related to body size, so many women do have smaller brains in smaller bodies than do many men. What is untenable is the (once "obvious") inference that therefore women must be less intelligent than men, and therefore women should not be admitted to higher education, could not become doctors, or be allowed the vote, and should therefore confine themselves to making homes comfortable for men and their children. Naturally, everyone these days realises that it is the ratio of brain weight to body weight that counts, and even that relationship is fairly approximate within any species. Similarly, there is evidence that girls learn (through the various expectations which may be short-handed as "cultural conditioning") to look after others, to listen, to acknowledge emotions, the qualities which contribute to "sensitivity" as far as it can be measured, in a way boys generally do not. Jan's memories (in this same issue) of *The Story of Susie the Pig* who sings as she cleans the house and ends up happily marrying Jiminy the Pig epitomise the "cultural conditioning" which does push women towards displaying "sensitivity" while inhibiting men from showing emotion or empathy.

Me, I'm a feminist, and proud of it. Isn't any thinking woman? I contrast my life and opportunities with my mother's time -- in her day, women "didn't do" things like forestry or industrial chemistry, so she had to settle for physiotherapy; or with my grandmother's time -- in her day, young ladies might be permitted to earn pin-money by giving piano lessons but it just wasn't done (in her class) to go out and work in an office, even though there was a war on, but Grandma braved the family storms and vapours to do so. We've come a long way, every step of it fought for by the feminists of the day, who were branded by most men -- and many women -- of their times as "unwomanly", "unnatural", "extremist", "irrational" and so on, just as Jan is doing here. Which raises further questions, like: where does Jan get her ideas about feminism from? I suspect, from *The Sun*, Auberon Waugh and *Private Eye's* "Wimmin" column and their ilk; not the most reliable sources. Dismissing "feminism" because some feminists get things wrong seems to me like dismissing "science" because some scientists get things wrong.

"Feminism" isn't a monolithic Stalinist dogma; the one point from Jan's generalisations above that any feminist would agree with is what she glosses dubiously as "the kind of feminism (if such it is)" which Jan does espouse: a belief that doors should no longer be closed against women because of gender, that there should be no imposed inequality between men and women. In *Pulp*, Avedon, like Jan, has a couple of brief paragraphs about what "feminism" is; her position looks to me like something Jan may well agree with:

"I remember being bloody sick of having people tell me what I, as a woman, was supposed to feel, supposed to like, supposed to be interested in, supposed to want, supposed to know, supposed to do.... So we had this really great idea. This idea was: you don't define women sexually. You don't value women according to who they are sleeping with, living with, married to. You don't define women according to their sexuality. You don't pretend to know what female intellect is really like, what female sexuality is, because you can't know. For chrissakes, after a few thousand years of wholly mythologising women, after we've all been raised with so much hype and paternalism and repression, we just can't imagine that we know! So you don't define women at all, you just have people. There are some rules -- like that you don't pressure people into going to bed with you and doing things they don't want to do, and you don't deny people's experience to them -- and you don't let people do those things to you, either."

Avedon goes on to argue against censorship, which is what Jan has also been saying.

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Avedon's "Splinters" editorial in *Pulp* 15 is angry, seriously engaged with serious issues. She starts off being angry about Tiananmen Square and the Nazis -- "People did this." In my heart, I don't think I've ever really believed that people did those things" -- and about how little has come of all the flower child dreams of Woodstock twenty years on. She goes on to be angry about some current feminist developments:

"Roz Kaveney calls me up with one of her periodic reports.... The Women's Press is about to release this book which, among other things, says that women who say they like sex are just brainwashed. Have I heard this before? Is it 1950 yet? Sigh. Real women don't like sex. Women are so dumb that they have to be told whether they like sex. Where is Sigmund Freud now that politically correct non-penetrative lesbians really need him?"

"Like many women who have been involved in the fight against censorship, I have no doubt at all that any laws which purport to keep 'dangerous' sexual material out of circulation, whether they be written by feminists or Moron Majority prigs, will be used to suppress feminist works. It doesn't bother me at all when *Playboy* reminds its readers of that danger while it campaigns against censorship -- after all, we told them. It bloody well does bother me when someone -- whether it is paternalistic men like Michael Moorcock or paternalistic women who think they know my experience better than I do -- tries to tell me that I only think censorship is dangerous because I read it in *Playboy*....

"Most of all, I do not need and have never needed, an alleged feminist movement which merely reiterates all of the same sexist crap that was crushing us all before without any help from these anti-woman women and their femifasc vetting society. I have enough of ordinary sexist cretins and 'I'm not a feminist but' types and even a few wishy-washy 'equal pay but I want to be a housewife' feminists who assume that the men in my life speak my thoughts, or that I don't really mean it when I speak against repressive social institutions (and would like to have some of my very own), or that a man's opinions are carried in his sperm and replace a woman's opinions with a single seminal injection. I mean, I am absolutely surrounded by an entire planet full of precisely the same stifflingly repressive misogyny that inspired me to get into the feminist movement 21 years ago, and the last thing I needed was a whole new set of rules that just narrowed my choices even more according to the same old wretched double-standards and sexual confusion."

Strong stuff: here's a self-proclaimed feminist denouncing feminism. But look closer -- it's not "feminism" Avedon is angry about, but specific points of view she strongly disagrees with. She is quite clear about the positions she's against, and doesn't pull her punches against them. This is real life we're talking about and people do get hurt out there; this could indeed get threatening, intimidating. Now, I disagree with a fair amount of what Avedon is arguing for, which puts me among those she

denounces. But whereas I felt Jan's far less vehement few paragraphs as a personal attack on the validity of feminism with which I identify, I don't feel personally attacked or threatened by Avedon's strong rejection of views I happen to hold. Sure, I don't think she's stated the complexities of my side of the argument fully or fairly -- but that is for those of us who hold those views, since we can't expect those who disagree to make our case. What I found most disturbing in what Jan wrote was, first, the the implication that "feminism" is a monolith and, second, Jan's offhand dismissal which trivialises a vast range of issues which I, like Avedon, think are *serious* -- apparently because, so far as Jan thinks about them they interfere with light-hearted frivolity. (This needn't be so, as Mog's fanzine demonstrates.) Trivialising dismissal is far more threatening than honest straightforward argument, however strident.

Now, my disagreements with Avedon: first, take the question do real women like sex? My immediate response is that sex is all very fine when you happen to want it -- but since the Sexual Revolution of the flower-child 1960s, the pressure for women to fuck or else has been a bloody nuisance. I haven't read the particular book Avedon and Roz were talking about, but *The Guardian Women's Page* extract seemed harmless enough: the brainwashing it was about was the pressures on women to match up to male sexual fantasies of pulsating libidos, the ever-ready ever-willing mistress, what do you mean you'd rather read a good book, you must be frigid. There's a place for books to balance these pressures and tell women it's okay *not* to want to fall into bed, even with blokes you actually quite like. The issue is one of approach, of balance. My lazy approach to life is more in agreement with that idea than with Avedon's more lusty approach -- as long as such books don't undermine or deny the equally valid experience of enjoying sex. I'm not convinced the book in question is "brainwashing" as Avedon says; but I strongly agree is that any prescriptive work which says "all women are", or worse, "all women should" represents an approach we can do without.

The censorship debate is a bigger, quite unmanageable issue. Avedon's point -- that any form of anti-pornography legislation will be administered by the establishment and used to ban feminist, lesbian/gay and sex education materials -- is one that people like me who think that something needs to be done must take on board. But neither Avedon's "Splinters" here, nor the very black and white *Feminists Against Censorship* leaflet she was involved in producing, acknowledge the extent of the problem felt by many women, nor suggest what might be done to tackle it. The problem is superbly described by Lesley Ward in her 1985 article "The Sealed Cauldron, or 'Sex' is Still a Dirty Word" in Steve Green's *Sounding The Ritual Echo* 3:

"The sleazier side of sex began to impinge more and more on my consciousness, as it became increasingly more difficult to buy a packet of cigarettes, read a paper, pass a cinema or watch tv without being confronted with tacky 'sensational' headlines or seeing 'female meat' type photographs on fronts of magazines.... Try to read a newspaper and you'd come across increasing numbers of rape cases, while page three girls and models displaying this month's sensation in French underwear seemed to smile down their assent... Switch on the tv; if it's ITV you're bombarded with sexist advertising. I've had many of what I thought would be good, straightforward adventure, cops'n'robbers or mild horror movies ruined for me by sex scenes, which seemed degrading and, in many cases, downright violent: scenes which, had I known them to be in the film from the write-up, I'd never have had to see and be maddened and upset by, because I'd never have started watching the damn thing in the first place....

"Anyone who's done any basic chemistry will know what a saturated solution is; at a constant temperature, only so much extra chemical can be added before it reaches the point where the smallest particle extra will cause instant crystallisation. Once a solution has reached its crystallisation point, it will ever after be right on the edge of crystallisation... That metaphor describes exactly my feelings on sex. Try as I might to avoid being reminded of its worst aspects, I am constantly, against my will, being reminded, being upset and angered, mostly by the fictional media. I am constantly at saturation point, difficult, sometimes impossible to climb down from once reached; and, like that

small extra particle of chemical, the smallest thing, something I'd have found easy to laugh off years ago, is enough to crystallise me into a seething anger quite out of proportion to that particular event."

It is all too familiar: you sit in a Tube train surrounded by strange men absorbed in 72pt bold headlines that scream RAPIST! and the Page 3 girls simper come-ons. And as you walk home through the dark, past billboards of Pretty Polly legs and more inviting blonde smiles, you tense up against every male figure that approaches, just in case. Over-reacting? How are you supposed to react? What, Avedon, *should* we do about that? Reducing the argument to black vs white name-calling extremes of "pro-censorship" feminists vs "pro-pornography" feminists, which is how much of the debate seems to be going, isn't helpful. I don't feel threatened by the vehemence, but I'm not persuaded by the arguments. But I am impressed by the honest directness with which Avedon outlines what she finds dangerous about the suggested solution some other feminists espouse. The question is one of balance: what can in practice be done about a real problem?

I would have liked Avedon to make some acknowledgement of why other feminists are equally forceful about the need to tackle the sexual saturation Lesley describes. As with any argument, there are a number of positions, issues and alternatives, not just two poles. As I see it the problem that needs tackling is not so much pornography, kept under the counter, which one can avoid. It is that everywhere you walk, everywhere you look, you see splashed on billboards, posters, ads, book-covers that nauseating commercial exploitation of women's sexual images. The crucial question seems to me not whether to ban pornography, but the dividing line between what is acceptable on the streets and in the Tube, and what is for consenting adults in private. A start may be the recent survey by the Advertising Standards Authority here which found that though relatively few women (mostly white middle-class professional *Guardian*-readers) ever wrote in to complain about offensively sexist ads, most women (over 70%) agreed with them in finding far too many ads offensively sexist. At last, the ASA has said that they will treat complaints on those grounds more seriously. One hopes advertisers will note that some 30% of the total market is turned off by sexist imagery, and adjust their ideas of what sells accordingly. Clare Short's "Page Three Bill" and the arguments about what publications the WH Smith chain stock as "generally acceptable" and what they exclude as "offensive" similarly focus on shifting the general perception of what "frightens the horses" rather than making material illegal and unavailable. The issue is not just what effect such imagery may have on men's, and boys', behaviour towards women, but on women's, and girls', ideas and feelings about being female.

This is the same world Jan lives in and writes in, though her light-hearted frame of discourse tries to ignore it; this serious and worrying real world -- of which Avedon and Lesley write -- is the locus of feminism, and that is why it strikes me as a rhetorical shot in her own foot for Jan to start off her own defence by putting feminism in the dock and trying to frame it. Blaming the serious world for existing because it spoils the jest and you'd rather not think about it, which seems the essence of Jan's objection to feminism, doesn't strike me as a tenable position. On the other hand, as Mog shows, by acknowledging the ironies feminism can provide a neat, sharp tool for tackling life's pretty little frivolities.

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Rabbitears is 30 pages of Mog writing about watching television, and is quite simply the best fanzine I can recall. Mog explores the problem that mired Jan: how do you deal with the enjoyable erotic *frisson* of watching pretty young men, without casting yourself as a female chauvinist sow?

"I'll confess it just once: beautiful boys influence just about everything I write. As Mums Mabley put it so eloquently 'Young boys....is my weakness'."

Mog's confession is amplified in an article "Peach Fuzz" about a cop show series, *21 Jump Street*, notable for "beautiful guys in superior scripts". Mog gives various

snapshots of the characters, as they're developed in various episodes, and how "parenthetical" details subvert the narrow network norms. Watch how she teases out the contradictions, plays with them. Let's concentrate on the frame of reference. Mog leads in with:

"There is no term for a male starlet. There are whole industries -- notably the fan magazine and pop music industries -- heavily or entirely dependent on their existence, yet no word exists to define them. You can put jiggle into a show, but what is it you put in when the sex object has only vestigial breasts? It isn't beefcake, which implies slabs of muscle; it's something softer and prettier, and there are a couple of producers in Hollywood who know exactly what it is, but I wonder if even they have a word for it....

"There's no term for the guys whose stock in trade it is. Critics talk about them in terms of their fans, usually: specifically, how gullible, mindless and contemptible the fans must be. Notice where this is the case, the fans are depicted as female. The various interchangeable Angels are not put down in terms of contemptible young boys jacking off to (say) Farrah Fawcett-Majors fantasies; no, in those cases, the critics generously attribute a show's vacuity to its stars' 'mere' looks. By an amazing coincidence, either way the female half of the equation is the primary cause and target of reviewer disdain.... no one seems to look directly at the male role in the star-fan interaction..."

In short, these pretty guys are there to attract female audiences, but you're not supposed to talk seriously about that. After showing how the main characters are developed and react in different scripts, Mog's conclusion returns to this question: responses to male beauty, the same question Jan is dealing with. What's quoted here are short fragments from several discursive pages; I've quoted Mog's own words because she sets out so distinctly the complications amongst which she is navigating. The trouble with writing this good is that the critic or interlocutor is left little to contribute, so well has so much been stated.

"It is traditional among critics to adopt a condescending attitude toward mere attractiveness in younger actors. But visual entertainment industries rely on very little else... Female actors are supposed to retain youth-oriented sexual appeal as long as they can -- and be taken less seriously for it. Young sexy male actors, on the other hand, outright annoy male critics: their audience is too blatantly female, they are therefore undignified. The derogation of Eros and consequent positioning of the erotic among 'women's concerns' is a necessity in patriarchal culture. To be completely erotically aware is to be overwhelmed, vulnerable and passive to one's own perception of beauty... Such responses are inconsistent with the invulnerability required in a ruling class... Beautiful young male stars are cast specifically to evoke such 'undignified' responses from female audiences, and are, therefore, themselves tainted with the erotic devaluation. It's all embarrassing, and desperately close to what any sensible patriarch keeps hidden.

"Of course men do respond to gorgeous women stars, but the archetypal overt male reaction is one of acquisitiveness, not devotion. They are supposed to use, not adore."

If you think the point may be over-stated, consider the idea of "sissy". "Sissy" dismisses all those things that are to do with girls as unfit for any self-respecting male. And "sissy" is any male who displays undue interest in girls and their things. It's only by keeping up a blustering, bully-boy front that you can escape the taunt. These seem like "sissy" programmes, "sissy" stars, that Mog is describing.

"To maintain patriarchy, men must actively shun this type of perception if they are to deal on a day-to-day basis with women... Receptivity to erotic stimulus, then, is only one among many forms of receptivity in which the patriarchal male is (generally speaking) defective, but it is one whose role has been somewhat overlooked. There is a tendency even among feminist theorists to regard the typically female response to human beauty as abnormal -- a result of low self-esteem -- and the male pattern as nearer the human ideal. This is an assumption

I question. The lack of erotic -- as opposed to specifically sexual -- response in patriarchal man is his induced deficiency of veneration (Latin *venerari*, to worship, reverence from *venus, veneris*, love). Without this response something quintessentially human is missing from a person's character, and I believe it to be one of patriarchy's more serious mutilations.

"One observable result is the weird critical lacuna around the young and beautiful male actors.... The only aspect of such boys' and mens' work that is ever seriously discussed is the nefariousness of their use to attract viewers (ie, buyers). The marketing of human beauty should certainly not be exempt from analysis and criticism. But is that within us that allows us to be manipulated by this means necessarily a deplorable characteristic? The distrust of positive response to beauty is a Puritan trait. Look around at what the distrust has done to our landscape.... When we respond to human beauty we participate in a rather more complex aesthetic activity than is often acknowledged."

Nothing intimidating or threatening in talking about TV and how it uses pretty guys to attract (female) audiences, and Mog does so entertainingly. But going on to relate serious critical neglect of the phenomenon to "the patriarchy" no doubt unsettles some readers, whether because they don't want to think too hard about what flashes on the goggle box, let alone about real life, or because they suspect that if "the patriarchy" exists they are its agents. Now, is that the sort of heavy "feminism" Jan would disown, suggesting as it does that there is some patriarchal establishment that conspires against "female" values? Or is Mog an ally for Jan, providing a model of how "to look and having looked to comment"? A crucial difference is that Mog deals with the problematic nature of both activities, in this unbalanced world. Part of Mog's confidence in doing so is a feminist perspective that affirms validity of personal experience and one's right to speak as one sees. But I doubt that Mog anticipates total agreement: the reason her address is not given at the end of this article is that reactions she's had to past writing have included threats of personal violence.

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Intellectualism, in any form, can be threatening: big words, long sentences, too much like hard work. Women intellectuals may be especially intimidating -- surely women ought to confine themselves to being fluffy-headed, entertaining and frivolous; it's not just many men but many women who find us Bluestockings threatening. Intellectualism is equally rejected by some feminists who, accepting the "male" stereotypes of science and experts, make the serious mistake of rejecting "logic" and "rationality" in favour of intuition, emotion, and personal experience: sticking up for the validity of these is a good thing but most women find themselves also perfectly capable of exercising logic and reason as much, or as little, as any other human being. Basically, intellectualism is thinking seriously about the world and its ways. The Chinese Cultural Revolution dealt with the subversive threat of intellectuals by sending them to labour in the fields and factories; in Tiananmen Square they shot them. The western democratic way is to ignore or ridicule them. In the case of feminism, the favoured put-down is "strident", or as Joanna Russ phrases it in *The Female Man*, "We would gladly have listened", they said, 'if only she had spoken like a lady.'"

Am I suggesting that maybe one reason Jan rejects "feminism" is that she sees it as intimidating? It's not just Jan, it seems a widespread reservation among women in this country: "I'm not a feminist but..." is the catchcry, as Avedon noted. "But..." what? They wish feminists weren't so strident, and that they didn't hold the weird views the tabloid and conservative press attribute to them. So they react by rejecting what they've been told "feminism" is, keeping their distance uncontaminated by any contact with the movement generally held to stand for women's equality. Which leaves women's equality issues where? Marginalised by women as well as men: women's pay rates slipping behind men's, part-timers without job protection, no childcare, and Child Benefit under threat. Perhaps my faith in women's ability to reason, to see through spurious clap-trap, is ill-founded? Yet look again at what Jan said, and

she's saying that she doesn't qualify as a feminist because she lacks the commitment to attend meetings, to stand up against the injustices -- a feminist must be Superwoman, she's out there somewhere, ordinary little me doesn't measure up. Again, bollocks. But, logically, a double-bind: if feminism is right-on and I am not, then I can't be a "feminist"; if some feminists aren't always absolutely perfectly right in all circumstances about everything, then I disown "feminism". I'll just potter along being frivolous and confused.

Innocently ignore the inequalities, the double-standards -- as Jan did in her light-hearted, harmless iconoclasm report -- and they still leap up and bite you, which comes as a nasty shock. Put on your shining feminist armour to challenge them, and at least you're ready for the buggers.

LONG-STANDING READERS MAY RECALL The Saga Of The Mouse in issue 3: how it scuttled uncaught through 22 Denbigh Street for several weeks before surrendering to Judith rather than be smashed flat by Joseph. Mere weeks after we'd moved into 5A Frinton Road, we discovered evidence of another -- holes nibbled in bags of rice and small black droppings on the shelves. So we mouse-proofed our food, put out the baited trap, and waited. With no result; weeks later, with the trap untouched, we assumed it was either hibernating for the winter or had been caught by one of the neighbour's cats. Until, entering the kitchen one morning in March, Joseph found it lying neatly alongside the cooker. What killed it is a mystery -- but as we recycled it into our local ecology (by throwing it over the garden wall onto the railway embankment) we thanked it for not haunting us with the smell of its decomposition but having the courtesy to come out of its hiding place and die where we could find it.

PERFORMANCE

Some years ago D. West wrote about fandom as performance. Not the sitting on panels at cons in front of an audience so much as the really vital arenas of chatting yourself an image in the bar and projecting your "paper persona". It was a multi-faceted magnum opus of scintillating complexity which said many other things on all sorts of aspects of the topic. It boosted the enigmatic D. West mythos, generated a whole fleeting social context which boiled itself down to the tag "Cafe Fandom", and had the lasting result of making it impossible to write about "performance" in a fanzine without knowing that your readers will immediately think of D.'s thesis, so you might as well start by saying that you want to write about something completely different to what D was talking about. Even if similarities do emerge along the way.

Working as a campaigner is basically being paid to be an exhibitionist. Press and media ring up wanting briefings and interviews on various aspects of transport and environment so you hold forth as if you were an expert; people want someone to come and speak at meetings; getting the message over means standing up at conferences and press conferences asking awkward questions or putting the Transport 2000 point of view. Being shy just doesn't come into the job description.

It occurred to me one afternoon, as I sat listening to someone who obviously didn't enjoy being in front of an audience, that the way I cope with the performance aspect of the job draws on a combination of amateur theatricals and cattlework. The theatricals help you see it as putting over a character: the voice of a responsible organisation articulating the concerns of ordinary people, with a script based on relevant research and case studies. But not too po-faced, smile dear, you've got to even camp it up a bit, risk being outrageous or they'll fall asleep on you. You remember what you were told about breathing out deeply to "centre" yourself and relax the voice which makes it carry better, and about making eye contact with people in the sea of faces you're talking to -- and concentrate on the message you're trying to get across, worrying about yourself just gets in the way. All that's obvious enough, as theory; but what about working with cattle?

Cattle are bigger and heavier than you are, huge intimidating beasts especially when you're walking right alongside them with just a thin pole to persuade them along. People assure you that they're perfectly safe, you just have to have confidence, don't show any fear, let them know who's boss. Then they go and tell stories about playful bulls and how mother cows can be even more savage, and send you out on your own.... Just like outfacing an audience -- at least an audience is less likely to gore or trample you.

THE GLASS OF FASHION, OR THE MOULD OF FORM?

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

To travel again; to visit more cities; to explore their museums. In late February, we went to Paris for a long weekend, to be greeted by warmer-than-usual spring weather, bright sunshine, and -- on the day we'd earmarked for outdoors sightseeing -- a haze which made trying to spot anything from the tops of the buildings very difficult. Peering down the Champs Elysees from the roof of l'Arc de Triomphe, we knew that Place de la Concorde had to be out there somewhere, because that's where we'd started from not half-an-hour earlier; and as for seeing the gleaming white basilica of Sacre Coeur on Montmartre.... The haze dissipated as the day went on, and the following day was quite clear, but that was the one we'd set aside for the museums. And we didn't go to the Louvre.

Gasps of horror from all and sundry, I shouldn't wonder. But at weekends it doesn't open in the mornings, and by the time we got there the queue -- shuffling slowly forward through the rather incongruous glass pyramid that covers the new underground entrance -- was simply too long. (*The Guardian* later reported that an estimated 4.7 million people visited the Louvre last year, but that a fifth of them only got as far as the pyramid.) Besides, I only wanted to see the Mona Lisa....don't much care for seventeenth and eighteenth century painting....much more interested in the Impressionists -- in fact, we'd just come from the Musee d'Orsay on the other side of the Seine, surfeited with Manets, Cezannes, Gauguins and Pissarros, and could probably have done with a rest from looking at paintings. Instead, we meandered on through Les Halles to the crowded and bustling Pompidou Centre before finishing the day in the seventeenth-century (and often overlooked) Place de la Vosges.

But if there is one museum in Paris that I think everyone should visit, then it's the Musee d'Orsay, simply because it looks so good and feels so right. It's been converted from the shell of a former railway station, the high, vaulted glass roof of which has been left in place to allow natural light to flood down on the sculpture collection that runs down the centre of the station; on either side are the painting galleries, the bulk of them in the former station hotel that runs along one of the long sides of the building. Its windows face the Seine; and through those windows comes the cool, clear northern light to illuminate the paintings. With a setting like this, it's not surprising to learn that since it opened a couple of years ago its entrance receipts have risen without limit.

Another museum worth visiting, although one that receives few mentions in the guide books, is the Musee Cluny, a treasure-trove of medieval tapestries, misericords, reliquaries, swords, illuminated manuscripts, decorated chests and religious iconography. This collection is housed in the restored buildings of the Abbey Cluny, a medieval pilgrims' hotel, which in turn (or so we deciphered from the notice in the gardens alongside) incorporates some of the buildings of the Gallo-Roman baths of Lutetia. At one point, as we wandered through the ground-floor rooms inspecting the recovered fragments of Roman and medieval statuary, we realised that we were standing in the caldarium -- not its foundations or its shell, but the building itself. The roof might have been replaced, and some of the plaster renewed; but the brick walls were as solid now as they were then. We were, literally, sunk into the past, for the modern ground-level was some seven or eight feet higher; and were simultaneously surprised and delighted by it.

A couple of weeks later, we spent a weekend in York, a city so full of old buildings it feels as though it should have some sort of theme to it -- "Yorkworld, home of.... whatever". There are no Roman buildings still standing, alas -- although portions of the Roman fortifications were incorporated into the medieval city walls, mostly as foundations buried in their supporting earth banks -- but one can descend to the

undercroft beneath the Minster to examine, as we did, the fragments of wall from a Roman barracks block uncovered in the late sixties during work to underpin the foundations of the central tower, together with part of a painted wall that somehow survived in York's waterlogged soil and a length of culvert installed to drain it: a culvert which still functions today, a stream of water gurgling through it, and must no doubt be one of dozens extending across the site of the Roman town. And, too, there are the foundations of the early, smaller Norman cathedral that the Gothic Minster replaced, the bases of the old cathedral's external buttresses incorporated into its floors and a well-shaft that was once outside the building now firmly inside (but equally firmly filled-in). The whole gave us a vivid sense of the evolution of the site itself, and of the demolition and renewal that had taken place there over the centuries; how one age's structures are appropriated by another, sometimes entire and sometimes only as building material. This is what the process of change is all about; what history is like, and what it actually means.

Of far more modern provenance -- it even has an example of an early CD player -- is the York Castle Museum of Everyday Life, founded on a collection of "bygones" amassed by an Edwardian country doctor named John Kirk who recognised that a way of life was ending and from the 1890s onward began hoovering up crockery, glassware, cutlery, toys, clothes, furniture, farm implements and anything else he could get. Growing continuously -- he tried exhibiting it himself, but never found a large enough venue -- the collection was eventually taken over by the city and is now displayed in what used to be the Female and the Debtors' Prisons, themselves built on the site of the castle's bailey. Its highlights include two "streets" of salvaged Victorian and Edwardian shop fronts (which, the guide book solemnly informed us, were in great demand as film and television sets) and mountains of stuff you'd think was so ordinary that it shouldn't be in a museum at all -- bicycles, gramophones, suitcases, vacuum cleaners, toilet cisterns and other things we use on a daily basis. But then if history is all around us, why shouldn't it have such things, evidence not just of the way we once lived but also of the way we live now, including a CD player (and an early television set replaying a video of 1950s Transport Minister Ernest Marples telling everyone how wonderful the new M1 motorway would be)? And why shouldn't it have a set of furniture from the early 1950s, arranged as a typical living room of 1953, with the new television set installed for the coronation of Elizabeth II? The mirror above the fireplace was exactly like the one my parents had. Their three-piece suite didn't look quite like this one, but....but wasn't our living room carpet then the same sort of gungy brown? And although we didn't get our first television until, oh, 1960 or 1961....

Yes, I was born in 1953. And this display made me feel quite old.

But if York is these days known for one thing (apart from the Minster), it's the Jorvik Viking Centre, featuring a reconstructed Viking settlement on the site of an excavation of a part of the original. On one level, this is quite striking -- everything you can see is based on what was actually dug up, supplemented as necessary by historical evidence gleaned from elsewhere -- but on another level rather suspect and even a bit naff: a Disneyland of plaster figures, stuffed animals, taped sounds and piped smells, to semi-quote from Colin Greenland's letter in the previous issue. But then how much of this naffness is attributable to itself and its designers, and how much to its successors and imitators? Once, it was the first such recreation, an attempt to dispense with the traditional format of labelled objects in glass cases by demonstrating the context in which they were developed and used: the everyday life of ordinary people. The spirit that animated its designers is the same as that which moves the curators of York Castle Museum, and by ensuring that visitors to the Viking Centre have to go through the recreation to reach the small museum containing a selection of the objects recovered from the excavation it thereby hopes to make them more interested in those objects: coins, buckles, needles, combs, wooden cups and bowls, even socks and shoes. How much better, therefore, than the proliferating recreation for the sake of it that now seems to be springing up on all sides, all of which we have avoided because they seem so completely false -- the Crusader Exhibition in Winchester mentioned in issue 7, which had nothing whatever to do with the town's own history; the Pilgrim Cavalcade in Canterbury, straight out of

Chaucer; and the completely unhistorical "Robin of Sherwood" exhibition in Nottingham, as full of plaster figures and taped sounds as the Jorvik Viking Centre, and which (I am appalled to discover) has in the year since it opened become one of the East Midlands' top tourist attractions. Ye gods and little fishes, what on Earth is anyone going to learn from *that*?

Nothing. The average visitor (schoolchild or tourist) is likely to take away the same sort of vague but vivid impression one might get from watching a historical film on TV. Like Wigan Pier, like Beamish Open Air Museum, like (even) Jorvik Viking Centre, people go there primarily for fun; and it is this notion of fun which is doubtless responsible for the steady rise in museum admission figures during the past decade. More people are poking about in the past than ever before, and taking their children and grandparents along with them; and while one would like to think that this is the product of a straightforward thirst for knowledge the truth is that it's due largely to museums' own switch away from their Victorian role as places of instruction to become more places of entertainment. And if you're on that track you might just as well go the whole hog and set up a museum of entertainment, like MOMI.

MOMI is the Museum of the Moving Image, on London's South Bank, and such an introduction makes it sound rather awful. In fact, it's quite good at what it sets out to do, which is to purvey a straightforward history of film and television from the days before film was invented, and anyone interested in the subject should certainly visit it. As well as the standard stuff -- the silent comedy stars, the coming of sound, the Hollywood studio system, the ups and downs of the British film industry -- there are interesting bits which attempt to locate film in its socio-cultural context: the panic over the alleged immorality of the cinema and the rise of the censors, the British documentary-makers of the thirties and their contribution to the progressive consensus that elected Attlee in 1945, the consumerist expectations fed by the television of the fifties, and so on. But there are also some striking omissions -- the section on animation, for example, concentrates entirely on methods and techniques, and manages to display some models and screen some clips from various East European productions without for one moment stating why Czech and Polish film-makers spent so much time retelling traditional fairy-tales with bleak or ironic twists: because it was the only way they could get anything vaguely controversial past the political censors. In the current post-Communist climate, it's perhaps easy to forget this -- and if it isn't incorporated into the display soon then it probably will be forgotten.

And then you have to cope with the actors in period costume attached to certain displays -- the First World War "kinematographer", the Russian propaganda train attendants, the thirties' Hollywood producers, the fifties' cinema usherettes...all playing a character, all insistently interacting with the punters, all helping to present film as something that "merely" entertains. Children probably love them. We found them bloody irritating.

Perhaps I'm a bit like Colin Greenland, who said (in the same letter from which I semi-quoted earlier) that he preferred well-labelled exhibits in a glass case to recreations, because they provided "direct stimulus of historical imagination" and allowed him to fill in the context for himself. This is fine if you have some historical knowledge to start with, and thus something on which to found the imagined context, otherwise you'd be inventing in a void. It's also fine if the exhibits in the case are striking enough to hold your attention in themselves -- such as the delicate and intricate filigree of Dark Age Irish metalwork in the British Museum's recent "The Work Of Angels" exhibition. But a rotted Viking sock, a fragment of a silk cap, a sample from the privies of a turd which indicates the standard components of a tenth-century diet? Though important to scholarship, these obviously don't have the same fascination as the Tara Brooch, which has the not insignificant virtue of looking bloody marvellous. Otherwise, without some entertainment, the ordinary punter might just as well stay home and read a book as wear out their feet in a museum.

But then Colin freely admits that he's not a typical museum visitor; and neither am I. Perhaps I just want more context than him: better and bigger labels, longer and more

expansive explanations, something other than just the bald exhibits. Which is where the York Castle Museum of Everyday Life comes adrift, since the labels on their displays didn't provide enough information for people to place the objects in their wider context. And, like MOMI's Czech animations, there was a lack of detailed explanations -- the Children's Gallery, for example, featured case upon case of model soldiers, guns and toy trains for boys and dolls and little housewife kits for girls without any comment on the extent to which this division between "boys' toys" and "girls' toys" both reflected the condition of adult society and perpetuated it in the minds of its new recruits. Although such labels could be taken as telling the visitor what to think, they also offer us the possibility of making comparisons between different museums' approach to the same subject.

The National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, for instance, has a gallery of ship models dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The documentation which accompanied their original construction is fragmentary, and the purposes for which they were built is thus now unknown; but the museum suggests that they probably fulfilled a number of functions -- testing new theories of naval architecture, assisting at inquiries into sinkings, and of course models to which the builders of the real ships could refer when transferring the plans from paper to wood. The Maritime Heritage Centre in Bristol also has a number a seventeenth and eighteenth century ship models, again with little original documentation to accompany them, but in this case the function the museum suggests for them is quite straightforward: because most people couldn't read plans, and wanted to see what sort of ship they were getting before they laid out money to pay for its construction.

These different explanations doubtless reflect the two museums' different conceptions of themselves -- the one as the national repository of Britain's naval prowess, and of the captains and admirals who made Britannia great, and the other a local museum of the role of ship-building in the commerce of what was once Britain's busiest port. But they also reflect different views of the past: the National Maritime Museum offering a decidedly establishmentarian perspective of the sea as an expression of our cultural and historical identity, and Bristol's Maritime Heritage Centre demonstrating what ships and the sea actually meant to individual people: local shipbuilders, merchants, sailors and their families. So the latter manages to subvert a part of the former; because if it is supposed that the mercantilist burgers of Bristol couldn't read plans, why should the noble-born Lords of the Admiralty have been able to understand them either?

So we come back to a subject I was addressing two issues ago: history from above versus history from below, generals and politicians against soldiers and shopkeepers. Perhaps the key question here is not by how much the "official" perspective on the past contradicts the experience of "ordinary" people, but how much they complement each other. As always, with all history, it's a question of interpretation -- the events are fixed, but the explanations subject to all manner of partiality, amendment and ideological in-fighting. Which, I find, is what makes it all so interesting, even on trips abroad where you don't speak much of the language and aren't aware of the detail of the cultural relativities that inform popular debate. Here are these wonderful old buildings; there are those wonderful old paintings; over there....but how much of this is the "official" past, the tourist sights the government wants you to see, and how much the "ordinary" everyday experience that state records habitually overlook? Always, I suspect it is the former -- because, after all, is not an overseas visitor to Britain being offered much the same?

GARDENING TIME

We have a new pastime for sunny weekends. In *FTT* 8 I described how, in autumn when we moved in, I hacked down the dreaded jungle-weed to clear our potential garden. Now it's spring again, the dreaded jungle-weed is gathering its forces to re-invade. Its thick pink shoots poke up all over the place, through chinks in the concrete and through the garden beds, looking just like so many questing penises erecting themselves. We don't just weed, we *castrate* our garden.

THE LETTER COLUMN

Edited by JOSEPH NICHOLAS, in consultation with JUDITH HANNA

Not many letters this time -- although this is hardly surprising, given that this issue will be published before the previous one has reached our overseas readers. (And if things go according to plan the North American readers may even receive this one before that!) Which means that in the next issue we'll be breaking our unwritten guidelines and quoting from "late letters". So we might as well break them now, with Andy Sawyer's belated response to my piece on the heritage industry in FTT 7:

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South Wirral
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"Your article is relevant to what's been happening here with the *Alabama* project. Briefly, this is a scheme to construct a replica of the Confederate steamship *Alabama* in Birkenhead Docks, where it was built in secret during the American Civil War and launched to raid Northern merchant shipping until finally sunk off the coast of France. Not a very creditable series of events, but it was a famous ship in its day and certainly part of Birkenhead's history. What a lot of people have found objectionable, though, is the apparent glorification of Britain's support for the Southern slave states in the Civil War, and Wirral Council has taken a fair amount of criticism from (especially) Liverpool black organisations and individuals.

"The current display about the project reveals, I think, everything I dislike and distrust about the 'heritage' game, and your question 'Whose history are we talking about here?' is grimly apposite. From what I remember of American history, it's probably true to say that the causes of the Civil War owed little to the moral question of slavery and more to the economic question of whether the industrial North should dominate the agricultural South (the rise of capitalism, and all that). But the description of the causes of the war as given to the public here in the attempt to sell the *Alabama* project says nothing about slavery and the Confederate states' attempts to defend it, and the ship's role in supporting a system in which the ancestors of many Merseysiders were sold as property. It's like mounting an exhibition of the technology used in Nazi concentration camps and saying that World War Two broke out because of German dissatisfaction with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles: technically true, perhaps, but it leaves a lot of questions unasked and a lot of historical gaps unfilled.

"I object strongly to the use of the term 'heritage' in such contexts, because anyone with half a brain cell can see that the heritage of the people not directly affected by such things has been conveniently ignored. Certainly in the *Alabama* case, I would imagine that the present incarnation of Cammell Laird (who still build ships in Birkenhead) would not care to be reminded that one of their predecessor firms was guilty of deceit and complicity in piracy -- but if so it's interesting that it is that sensibility which is regarded as the norm and that of black Merseysiders which is deemed 'extremist'."

Quite. Indeed, British mercantile support for the Confederate states in the American Civil War is something that's usually glossed over in the "official" histories (which portray us as unflinchingly neutral throughout), simply because it was based on the grubbiest and most mercenary of motives: the need for cheap cotton to feed the Lancastrian textile mills. Apropos the *Alabama*, however, there was an interesting article on Liverpool's part in the Civil War in the March 1990 issue of *History Today*, which concluded that "Since any threat to maritime commerce was, by necessity, closely felt by the island nation of Great Britain, fitting out belligerent warships in neutral ports ultimately endangered British interests". Or: capitalism rules again!

Andy also goes on to talk about the effect of the poll tax on local services:

"Wirral Council, for which I work, has acquired the dubious honour of being one of the two Tory councils outside London to have set a poll tax lower than the government's target figure. The result? £300,000 of cuts in the library service, which means among other things that I, along with the two main children's libraries, lose two staff, and opening hours have been cut right back. The first week of March

was pretty dreadful, with nearly forty people being told that they'll have to move from their present jobs, and general gloom all around. Other departments are being cut as well, and at the moment no one knows what the outcome will actually be: I've no idea what the unions are planning, but I can't say that the future looks bright! Ironically, the day this was written was spent at a symposium intended to chart some new directions in service provision; and it was damage limitation all the way."

Until very recently, our own council, Labour-led Haringey, had the highest poll tax in Britain, at £572.89 -- £0.11 below the government's target figure. One might wonder what excuse the government could therefore have for "capping" the charge, or indeed for ordering reductions in anyone else's poll tax rates; but it nevertheless led the list of those local authorities which are to have their spending restricted. All other authorities on the list are also Labour-led; not a Tory among them. Readers are invited to consider the following formula (quoted from the front-page report in The Guardian for 4 April 1990) by which the list was compiled, and decide for themselves whether it represents the highest achievement of statistical science or a process of taking away the number you first thought of: "Mr Patten....first drew up a list of councils 12.5% above the government Standard Spending Assessment. He then eliminated all those spending less than £75 a head above their SSA. Several Tory councils would have qualified if only one of these criteria had been used. The resulting list of 34 councils was narrowed to 21 by choosing those spending at least £26 a head above this threshold". The nakedly partisan nature of this is so obvious that one wonders how the courts will ever let the government get away with it... although we know that some of the ermine-clad fools who inhabit same (take a bow, Lords Denning and Lane) are capable of deluding themselves about anything.

Ken Cheslin has also been responding to the poll tax:

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"I was a Sun reader -- well, it may have been *The People*; I can't remember -- but I picked one up in a barber's shop and what caught my eye was an article about some bloke in Cornwall who says that if you own shares in the Royal Cornish Consul United Tin Mining Cost Book Company you're exempt from 'any new taxes', and thus the poll tax, under a law passed by Henry VII in 1508.

I thought this was interesting, though I couldn't see the government letting him or anyone else get away with it, but I sent him a letter and some money for a share for everyone in the family; it's been a couple of weeks, but I've heard nothing from him. I did meet someone at the anti-poll tax rally outside Dudley town hall who had sent for a share, and got one, so there's hope yet. (Although I've since been told that the Department of Trade got a High Court injunction freezing the company's affairs until after Easter -- that is, after the poll tax bills will have gone out -- so that anyone who hasn't already got a share will be out of luck.)

"The poll tax rally was quite interesting -- about three hundred folk, possibly more, eventually turned up....with only about six or eight policemen that I could see. It was cold -- but then it always is cold in Dudley, up on its ridge between the Severn and Trent watersheds -- but it wasn't raining, although I think the councillors wished it had been. They let thirty-five people into the public gallery before the council meeting started, and every so often some of the councillors would come out onto the balcony to look down on those outside. Judging from their rather sneering expressions, I don't think I was imagining the two sense of their look. The sodding Labour councillors should have been down there with us, having resigned, not stayed up there as lackeys of the boss classes....

"There were a couple of dozen people from the Socialist Workers' Party, going by the banners, and maybe four to six Militants selling their papers -- and to begin with, six o'clock, these were the core of the protest. As time went on, all sorts of other folk turned up: 'respectable' people, some hale, some hobbling, a few West Indians, a couple of dozen or more Asians. The demonstration would have been bigger, but the meeting wasn't publicised except on local radio at 3.00 or 4.00pm the same day. I think that was a mistake by those who had any sort of organisation, like the SWP and the Militants, though I don't blame them so much since they at least turned out! If the Labour Party had anything about it instead of being run by a lot of bloody wimps and retreated Tories, they would have been organising a nation-wide opposition to the poll tax and their councillors would have been resigning with great

cries of '1381!' and 'Wat Tyler lives!' and -- well...."

Ken was writing before the Trafalgar Square riot of 31 March; but the fact that some vanguardist wankers besotted with dreams of proletarian revolution chose to exploit that day's anti-poll tax demonstration for their own ends shouldn't blind anyone to the reality that the tax is the most widely-hated product of late-period Thatcherite ideology, and if current trends prove themselves the one most likely to destroy her. Keeping up the pressure isn't likely to affect her directly -- her bunker's too deep and too thick-walled for that -- but the more jittery her backbenchers get the more vociferously the Conservatives will squabble among themselves....to, one hopes, their ultimate detriment at the next general election. But in the short term -- and despite the fact that in the wake of the policy review's abandonment of independent British nuclear disarmament, environmentalism and constitutional reform I'm no longer a member of the Labour Party and wouldn't vote for it -- I can't see what a mass resignation of Labour councillors in protest against the tax could possibly achieve. They'd have to be replaced somehow; the replacements would probably come from their right rather than their left; and the political constitution of the "new" councils would probably be such that they'd enthusiastically hack services to pieces in order to reduce the rate of tax still further.

Someone else who's been thinking about public spending recently is:

Chuck Harris "What I really want to write about was the little comment about
32 Lake Crescent the motorway through Naseby.... It's just down the road, about
Daventry twelve miles the other side of Market Harborough. We drive
Northants through it occasionally on the way to Leicester. We stopped once
NN11 5EB to read the bronze plate on the little stone plinth that marks
 the battlefield, admire a couple of pretty thatched cottages in
the village, and try the beer. The pub, inevitably, is called *The Royal Oak*, but it's
no big deal. Every town in Northamptonshire has a pub with an identical sign.

"And, sadly, that's it. It's damn near five hundred years since the Battle of Naseby. The fields are hedged and cultivated. It's a nice piece of farmland, but....

"This country is gradually choking itself to death. Our road system is a bloody farce with London and every large town so congested that nineteenth century horses and carts could traverse them faster than today's cars. For me, the highest revelation in the USA was the ease in driving from one place to another; the motorways with a dozen lanes, the universal acceptance that good roads are the essential arterial system of any modern state. We have the M1, with its endless crawl of lorries and the eternal hour-long hold-up at the Luton roadworks. And yet in our British fashion we still flaunt our lovely quaintness and our bosky byways.

"I pay my Greenpeace dues. I protect the environment as best I can. I try hard not to be a Philistine, but there are limits. There is nothing to protect at Naseby except a daydream of chivalry, and we need a motorway a damn sight more than a daydream. It's the logical, cheapest route; and I think it's time to stop pissing about and get the concrete down now."

I agree that "this country is gradually choking itself to death"; but not with the claims advanced by the Ministry of Transport that the solution to all our present transport problems is to build more roads to meet the continuing demand for private car use. Weird though it sounds, building more roads simply generates more traffic to clog them as much as the existing ones, and requires more roads to be built in their turn; and so on. The M25, for example, was supposedly built to relieve congestion in London by routing motor traffic around the city, it has in practice done nothing more than provide additional space for additional traffic jams. (Cecil Parkinson's law at work: cars proliferate to fill the roads available.

The solution to our transport problems, therefore, is a policy that pays due consideration to the mobility and flexibility cars confer while recognising that only 25% of the British population actually own one and that -- because over half of all journeys are less than two miles long -- the answer is cheap and frequent public transport between and within cities and built-up areas, using a mix of systems appropriate for their operating environments and passenger numbers: bus, trolley-bus, light rail or tram, metro or underground, long-distance rail. And a transport policy, too, that recognises what the Ministry of Transport is persistently reluctant to: that

walking and cycling are also forms of transport, and need to be catered for as well.

At root, your argument for more roads utterly contradicts your membership of Greenpeace. The "land take" for road-building is not just the countryside (no matter how ordinary) that disappears under tarmac, but the countryside ripped up to extract the minerals needed to build the road in the first place, the wildlife habitats, woodlands, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cut down or cut through or restricted or degraded by the road, the ancient monuments it destroys, and the huge quantities of pollutant gases pumped out by the internal combustion engine -- no matter how much unleaded petrol you use, your car will still produce carbon dioxide, the biggest contributor to the greenhouse effect. And Parkinson wants to allow for a 143% rise in car use over the next 30 years!

Gosh, and I thought Judith -- Assistant Director of the environmental transport campaign Transport 2000 -- was supposed to be the transport expert! It must be catching. Here also to talk about transport is Sue Thomason, responding to remarks Judith made in the letter column of the previous issue:

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"The cycletracks-as-leylines vision I had was indeed inspired by Sustrans (a group that turns old railway lines into cycleways), who have produced a York-Selby cycletrack. The seven miles or so out from York is along an abandoned railway, and is very well used for weekend walking and cycling for York residents. There are banks of wild flowers, newly planted trees, evidence of lots of wildlife....good stuff. Converting the motorways to railways or cycleways would suit me fine! I can't understand at all the current government's obsession with building lots more roads, which will simply make the problems worse.

"But Judith's comments about moving and personal space make me feel somewhat guilty, since I've been sharing a whole house for two years now with only one other human and three cats. I really don't need all this space. I wouldn't need all the space I take up here if the place wasn't filled with badly designed and unwanted furniture (my landlady's idea of necessary basics). If I could take the huge wardrobe and huge dressing-table out of the bedroom I use I could put a real desk in there rather than monopolising the front room a lot of the time and leaving Jen the dining-room table. I probably won't be here for much longer, though, as my landlady wants to re-let the house to law college students and make more money from them."

Heidi Lyshol
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Norway

"News for F77's gardening supplement: burning your waste is ecologically unsound because low temperature combustion release masses of carbon dioxide and smoke particles. Greenhouse effect, here we go! The lesson for the month is compost. Being a compulsive gatherer of information, I've picked up a couple of books about the subject and, though sadly lacking a garden, would really like to try it on my own. At school, between the ages of 9 and 12, I stayed behind after the lessons for gardening twice a week -- and we had a wonderful compost heap. Britain has perfect weather for them, too -- that's what to do with orange peel and grass cuttings, dead branches and dead sparrows. It generates loads of free fertiliser, too, and doesn't smell bad. A theoretical article could be composed (ahem) on the subject."

Er, well, um. Smacked bottles for us, I shouldn't wonder. But, in our defence, we should point out that the garden is very small, and we were therefore faced with a choice of either compost and no garden or garden and no compost. As proper little suburbanites, we naturally plumped for the latter -- although in fact the greenhouse effect is not greatly exacerbated by the burning of ordinary garden rubbish, since natural rotting would give off the same gases. It's the fossil fuels that are tipping the balance -- coal, oil, petrol....

Transport again? But this provides a convenient link back to the beginning of Chuck Harris's letter, where he discussed the current state of the Naseby battlefield. Presumably he thought he was disagreeing with me, but in fact he was only amplifying a point I'd made in my long article in issue 7 about the changes landscapes undergo with the passage of different eras. Someone who also has some comments to make on this subject is:

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"Arguments still rage about 'restoring' or 'preserving' ancient buildings and archaeological sites, and what we need is a strong application of common sense. To me, it goes something like this: the world is full of antiquities, and we haven't room for them all -- we have too many people for that, and the people need food and homes. But we should not destroy all our connections with the past, nor should we stop people from having the opportunity to actually experience what life was like in earlier times.

"I have never been able to stand in an archaeological dig and see anything other than bits and pieces and holes in the ground: no matter how carefully an artist shows me what it used to look like, I can't feel it. I want, instead, every important archaeological dig, every important antiquity, to be restored to precisely how it was at a given time. Although places will have changed over the decades and centuries during which they were inhabited, for each of the sites selected for restoration the experts should pick the period of which that site is most typical, or most easily restored, or most extensive, or whatever criterion is selected that makes sense for that site (and no other). We can then go to 'A' and experience life in a second-century Romano-British palace, to 'B' for life in a Saxon settlement, to 'C' for a Dark Ages hillfort. Let the experts write their papers about this or that earlier or later development, based on their excavations before the site was restored, but *the value of an ancient site lies in its use as a resource for those who visit it.*

"The problem lies in my using the word 'important', for every archaeologist believes that everything is important. Put it this way: in a country town with fifty Georgian houses, we only need one to be kept; the others may be redeveloped or demolished to provide what people need, be it homes, bingo halls, video shops or takeaways. In a town with only one medieval house left, that one must be kept -- unless in the surrounding towns and villges there are better examples. I should stress that this is not a plea for the destruction of our past, but for regarding people and their present needs as paramount, and for identifying one of those needs as to be kept in touch with the past as a living entity."

This idea strikes me as completely daft. It is impossible to provide a picture of the past simply by selecting one site as representative of a culture or an era and doing it up "as new"; to do so would be, firstly, to dispense with the evidence from other sites that contributes to our understanding of past societies, and secondly to present the past not as the living entity you claim it would be but something static, isolated from us in both time and space, and above all unconnected to our present. And who are these "experts" who are to select the sites to preserve? How will they be chosen, and to whom will they be accountable? The proposal sounds like an extreme example of the "history from above" school I criticised in my article in issue 7, and one that I can't imagine even its most dogged advocates supporting.

Ken also sent us several pages, inspired by my Soviet travelogue, on recent global political developments, but unfortunately it's far too long to quote -- even in part. Well, maybe this part:

"You suggest that 'the arms race is almost over'; I'm afraid I disagree. I know you wrote that before the Iraqi attempt to smuggle nuclear triggers through Heathrow was discovered, but with the example of the biowar against the Kurds, the internecine conflict in Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq War, the Tadjik and Uzbek and other Soviet areas suffering from rampant Fundamentalist Islam, the threats to Salman Rushdie, the Lockerbie bomb and all the other appalling demonstrations of Islamic Jihad for the east and West to disarm now would be to court disaster."

This is deeply confused, and looks to me like nothing so much as another of the pro-deterrence theorists' frantic attempts to find a new enemy now that the old one is melting away. Fundamentalist Islam (sic)? But if deterrence had worked in the first place, the Lockerbie bombing et al would never have happened, would it? And it does no good to confuse the theological sectarianism of Islamic Jihad with the ethnic hostilities being vented throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, which have been under way in one form or another since recorded history started and are likely to continue regardless of what weapons the combatants possess. But if you really want to set an example to the Iraqis -- and all the other states that are developing their

own nuclear weapons -- then you ought to be lobbying for the full implementation of the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty, which comes up for review in Geneva later this year and which supposedly binds non-nuclear-armed states not to develop such weapons if the nuclear-armed ones dispense with theirs. And if the latter won't, then how do you hope to persuade the former?

The arms race is almost over for East and West for the simple reason that people are no longer prepared to pay for it. Building up huge arsenals has damaged the economies of the countries concerned -- it's no coincidence that over the past forty years the two Western nations which have outperformed everyone else, Japan and West Germany, have spent less than 6% of their government R & D on the military while the two countries which have done worst, Britain and the USA, have devoted over 50% of their government R & D to it -- and there is growing pressure for that money to be spent elsewhere. The Cold War is over; the cultural paradigm has shifted; and the threat of environmental destruction is the issue on which everyone bar the fading post-war generation of political leaders now concentrates. I'm afraid that talk of new enemies and the need to stay alert simply shows how out of touch you are.

AND WITH THAT WE'RE RIGHT OUT OF ROOM -- so here's the WAHFs. Terry Broome (who began by talking about my Soviet travelogue but then got sidetracked into some TV programme about the Soviet Union presented by one Ruby Wax....whoever she may be), Brian Earl Brown (with a late comment on issue 7 that accurately points out that the recent revolutions in Eastern Europe are an example of history from below), John Doucet, Steve Green, Ahrvid Engholm (still going on and on about the 1987 SEFF "scandal", and forwarding a copy of a letter to Critical Wave which among other things accuses its editors of accepting bribes to suppress "the truth" -- and then he wondered why they hadn't published it!), Pavel Gregorić, Sarah Prince, Alan Sullivan, and Pascal Thomas. Our thanks to everyone for writing.

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT THE GREENHOUSE EFFECT?

At Mexicon 3 in Nottingham last year, I remember a conversation with John Fairey. He had spent three hours or maybe more in the Bank Holiday weekend traffic jam on the M1, and was complaining about it. I suggest that it serves him right for driving a nasty polluting car instead of standing all the way sardined into an environmentally-friendly train. He murmurs some feeble excuse about bringing a vanload of sound and lighting equipment.

"Besides," says John, "if you're so worried about CO₂ and the greenhouse effect, how can you justify breathing. That gives off CO₂. Why should you expect me to give up driving if you're not prepared to give up breathing." The time being well past my bedtime, I do not immediately perceive how this line of reasoning could lead to a solution to the global problem. Next day, I explain it to him.

"What is needed, John," I say, "is a simple, fair system that allots everyone a permitted CO₂ output quota for their lifetime. When you use it up, that's it. So if you want to consume your CO₂ quota driving, that's your choice. It just means you run out of breathing time sooner. Perfectly fair."

THE PATTERN OF LITTLE NEEDLES

There we were at the 1989 Annual Conference of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, pretending to be activists again, listening to speaker after speaker agree with the worthy resolutions put forward. Detente certainly reduces internal debate in the peace movement; when the superpowers take away your ball to play with it themselves, what's left is keeping watch from the sidelines and trying to get Thatcher to join in the disarmament game. I'd brought my knitting, which gave me the comforting sense of getting something constructive done while the Chair appealed unsuccessfully for "a speaker against the motion".

Eventually Joseph obliged, to achieve anonymous fame in the next day's *Independent* in a report which began "'Sod the Labour Party' said a delegate with a pony tail and dangling earring" and continued: "His point of view won laughter and some sympathy from the five hundred disarmers in attendance, many of them party members". Meanwhile, the woman sitting behind us, with whom we'd been discussing policies and personalities (mainly the latter), leaned forward to ask what small thing I was knitting. "Are you expecting the sound of tiny feet?"

"No," I said, "I'm knitting a jumper for my Barbie doll."