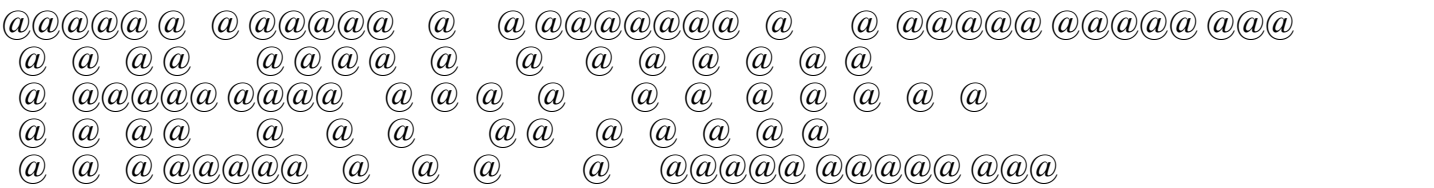

Mt. Holz Science Fiction Society
Club Notice - 3/25/94 -- Vol. 12, No. 39

MEETINGS UPCOMING:

Unless otherwise stated, all meetings are in Middletown 1R-400C
Wednesdays at noon.

_D_A_T_E	_T_O_P_I_C
03/30	THE MIND PARASITES by Colin Wilson
03/31	Hugo Nominations must be postmarked by this date
04/20	VALIS by Philip K. Dick

Outside events:
The Science Fiction Association of Bergen County meets on the second Saturday of every month in Upper Saddle River; call 201-933-2724 for details. The New Jersey Science Fiction Society meets on the third Saturday of every month in Belleville; call 201-432-5965 for details.

HO Chair:	John Jetzt	MT 2G-432	908-957-5087 holly!jetzt
LZ Chair:	Rob Mitchell	HO 1C-523	908-834-1267 holly!jrrt
MT Chair:	Mark Leeper	MT 3D-441	908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
HO Librarian:	Nick Sauer	HO 4F-427	908-949-7076 homxc!11366ns
LZ Librarian:	Lance Larsen	HO 2C-318	908-949-4156 quartet!lfl
MT Librarian:	Mark Leeper	MT 3D-441	908-957-5619 mtgzfs3!leeper
Factotum:	Evelyn Leeper	MT 1F-329	908-957-2070 mtgpfs1!ecl

1. Our next discussion book is _T_h_e _M_i_n_d _P_a_r_a_s_i_t_e_s by Colin Wilson. This book had its origins in a discussion that Wilson had with August Derleth, which resulted in Wilson saying that he could write a Lovecraftian novel that was as good as one Lovecraft could write. The idea of a race of monsters that controls humanity through mental powers was re-used by Wilson in his later, better-known _P_h_i_l_o_s_o_p_h_e_r'_s _S_t_o_n_e. As Neil Barron says in _A_n_a_t_o_m_y _o_f _W_o_n_d_e_r, "Both novels are replete with Wilson's erudition and enormous knowledge of history and culture." Although Wilson maintained his belief that Lovecraft was "a very bad writer," he thought

Lovecraft's vision and literary importance justified making him the subject of the first essay in his 1976 study _T_h_e _S_t_r_e_n_g_t_h _t_o _D_r_e_a_m. Even if you haven't read any Lovecraft, you can enjoy _T_h_e _M_i_n_d _P_a_r_a_s_i_t_e_s, so come join us for the discussion.

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2. There is an old question of whether life imitates art or art imitates life. Actually I think it is clear that both are true to some extent. Art is less and less interested in imitating life as it become more and more abstract. That could be because we have cameras for really realistic art these days and also because really realistic painting is a slow and detailed process. Impressionism is really the art of saving yourself a lot of effort sweating the details and having people impressed by how well you can get away with it.

But it seems true that also life imitates art. There is the old question of whether we are becoming a violent society because that is how we represent ourselves in film. People look at what they see in the big and small screen and try to imitate it in real life. This could be some nimnull seeing Beavis and Butthead play with matches and do the same thing himself. Or it could be Adolf Hitler seeing the destruction at the beginning of the film _T_h_i_n_g_s _T_o _C_o_m_e and saying he needs to be able to create the same effect in real life. That is a true story, at least if an issue of Ripley's "Believe It or Not" is to be believed. (Hitler also really liked the film _M_e_t_r_o_p_o_l_i_s according to Fritz Lang's biography and according to Trivial Pursuit his favorite film was _K_i_n_g _K_o_n_g. Apparently he was a real fan of fantasy films, an historical insight you rarely see in the history books. That's just a slight digression.)

So life does imitate art. But in an odd cessation of the laws of causality, prehistoric life seems to also imitate contemporary art. It used to be that paleontologists laughed at dinosaur movies because the dinosaurs shown were just too big. Not only did they out-scale any of the fossils that had been found, they were bigger than any fossils that ever would be found. After all there are

theoretical limits to how big you can have a reptile before it becomes structurally unsound. And the dinosaurs in films are just too darn big. And they started telling us how big a reptile can get.

Well naturally, just a short time later they discovered the remains of flying reptiles that were impossibly large. They called them Rodans after the monster in a Japanese sci-fi movie. What we think of a gentle sauropods started turning uncooperative. Both seismosaurus and supersaurus, subsequently discovered, go beyond the theoretical size limits of reptiles. Now the people who used to trumpet loudly about size limitations on dinosaurs are just quietly waiting to see what else will be discovered. Mother Nature does not like having limitations put on what she can do. They haven't found any two-hundred-foot-tall Godzillas (four hundred feet feet in the English-language version) and probably never will, but nobody is really sure what the limits are anymore.

The latest is that Spielberg's _J_u_r_a_s_s_i_c _P_a_r_k exaggerated the size of velociraptors for artistic effect. Raptors were nasty but they were not as big as they appeared in the film ... it was thought. And his advisors complained that Raptors were just not that big. Apparently Mother Nature saw the film and said "I got to get me some of those." Before the film even was released fossils twenty-foot-long, 1500-pound Raptors were found in Utah. They called them Spielberg's Raptors (or Utahraptors for the state where they were discovered). It's not nice to underestimate Mother Nature.

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3. JEDI SEARCH by Kevin J. Anderson (read by Anthony Heald) (Bantam, ISBN 0-553-47199-6, audio cassette, 180 min, 1994, US$16.99) (an audiocassette review by Mark R. Leeper):

I don't often have much opportunity to review cassette readings of abridgements of novels, though I will frequently take the sting out of work around the house by listening to novels on cassette via Walkman. It certainly isn't my preferred way to read a novel, but it is the just about the most entertaining way I know of doing

housework. I usually listen to novels like _T_h_e _F_i_r_m, but when a review copy of _J_e_d_i _S_e_a_r_c_h showed up in the house, I figured, what the heck.

_J_e_d_i _S_e_a_r_c_h is the first novel of Kevin Anderson's Jedi Academy Trilogy. The series continues the adventures where the film series left off, with a story of Luke Skywalker trying to rekindle the order of Jedi Knights by finding and training new adepts in the Force. What can you say about the plot? It is just about what you would expect from a new "Star Wars" film. Anderson was clearly trying to translate the experience of seeing a new "Star Wars" installment into book--or in this case cassette--form. We have new threats from the nasty Empire with bigger and more powerful weapons. We have the dubious joy of visiting the spice mines of Kessel, mentioned in the first film. Anderson has very consciously tried to tie the events, locations, and even objects of the series' films as if they were Anderson's series all along.

This cassette production is read by Anthony Heald, who will be familiar to some as Hannibal Lecter's obnoxious psychiatrist and keeper from the film _T_h_e _S_i_l_e_n_c_e _o_f _t_h_e _L_a_m_b_s. There are a few artificial touches to make an attempt to use the medium to increase the cinematic feel. Chewbacca doesn't speak any language that sounds to us humans as articulate. He just sort of mornfully bellows. They have gotten the sound of one bellow off the soundtrack and they play it whenever Chewbacca is supposed to be speaking. I believe that is the only sound effect taken from the films, but it is used profusely. At times the production team over-use it and it becomes obvious that they have only one bellow

which they use for all moods and messages. The cassette also uses the original John Williams score to add excitement to many of the scenes. Though they are, of course, limited to music that is already familiar--they hardly were going to hire Williams or anyone else to add to the original three scores. That is sort of the spirit of the whole production. It does as many simple and inexpensive touches it can to recreate the feel of what has gone before without adding too much that is original or new.

This cassette was nothing earth-shaking, but it considerably

improved the dreary task of shoveling my driveway. And I'll tell you I had one heck of a lot of empathy for Han Solo's back-breaking labors in the spice mines of Kessel. There is such a thing as going too far to make the listener think he is part of the story.

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4. Boskone 31 (con report by Evelyn C. Leeper) (part 2 of 3):

Sources of Fear in Horror
Friday, 11 PM
David G. Hartwell (mod), Constance Hirsch,
Lawrence Schimel, Darrell Schweitzer

The panelists started with some opening thoughts. Hirsch said that we read horror for the thrill (caused by the fear, I suppose). Schimel said that the most effective sources of horror are family relationships and abusive relationships. Hartwell claimed that horror "jumpstarts" the emotions. This was reminiscent of Tanith Lee's claim at another convention that the purpose of horror is to give us practice in being frightened. When I asked about this, Hirsch noted that this was not true, because in reading horror you could always stop if things got too scary. Schweitzer had a different view: "There are certain stories that are too dumb to be done straight." We're not afraid of where our teeth go, he said; it's not about _h_o_n_e_s_t emotion. He also said, "Horror is a series of recognizable tropes and images" rather than a certain plot. He pointed out that if you take a horror story and set it in Atlantis, suddenly it becomes fantasy.

Someone cited Kathleen Koja's observation that horror is written for two audiences: teenage boys afraid of castration and women afraid of men. Even knowing this, panelists thought it was hard to write about fear on demand. Hartwell said that to get twenty-five stories for an anthology of horror stories he was putting together, he needed to ask two hundred fifty people.

There is also a difference between being disturbed by a novel and being scared. Hartwell said his rule of thumb was, "If a horror story is done with art, then it is as illuminating as any other

art. If a horror story of done without art, then it is horror performed on me and I do not like it." Horror should be honest, not gimmicky. Hirsch feels that one purpose of horror is to let the reader vicariously triumph. There is a "right way" to read horror, according to Hartwell. You need to find the trope that jumpstarts your emotions, he said, and then read for those effects which are awesome (in the literal sense of creating fear and wonder).

There was brief note of the difference between supernatural and psychological horror. Five years ago the psychological horror was gaining, but now that is not as true. Horror is now found all over the bookstore: the mystery section, the fiction section, the suspense section, etc. ("Dark Suspense" is the marketing term for non-fantasy horror, if that helps.) For example, Susan Palwick's _F_l_y_i_n_g _i_n _P_l_a_c_e was marketed as a mainstream women's novel. Whether or not the supernatural is involved, Hartwell said, "horror is convincing the reader that something absurd in the real world is real for the time of the book." It's all about the "infusion of the irrational into the rational."

Schweitzer noted that people's reactions to horror change as they age/mature. When you're young (immature) you laugh at horror. Not laughing, and being disturbed by it, is a sign of maturity.

Someone quoted H. P. Lovecraft as saying, "The real connoisseurs of horror have to make do with parts of literary works," which Hartwell called "moments of discovery."

There was brief mention made of why there was so little horror poetry: it's hard to write it well. (Apropos of nothing here, someone noted that Gilbert & Sullivan rhyme with three or more syllables for comic effect. I think the drift was that rhyming things gives them a touch of humor--rhyming with multiple syllables multiplies the humor.)

Panelists recommended Roald Dahl, Shirley Jackson, John Collier, Tanith Lee, Gene Wolfe, Barry N. Malzberg, H. P. Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith. (NESFA Press will be publishing Malzberg's _P_a_s_s_a_g_e _o_f _t_h_e _L_i_g_h_t.) Schweitzer claimed that Jonathan Carroll's _L_a_n_d _o_f _L_a_u_g_h_s is "the best horror novel of the last twenty-five years," and described it as what would have resulted if "Philip K. Dick and [someone else] conspired to write L. Frank Baum." _T_h_e _S_c_a_r_f by Robert Bloch was also heavily recommended, and Schweitzer said that _ D_ a_ r_ k _ D_ e_ s_ c_ e_ n_ t edited by Hartwell was _ t_ h_ e standard anthology. Ramsey Campbell's _ C_ o_ u_ n_ t _ o_ f _ E_ l_ e_ v_ e_ n was cited as a funny serial killer novel (if you're looking for that sort of thing). On the other hand, Hartwell said that Bradford Morrow and Patrick McGrath's _ N_ e_ w _ G_ o_ t_ h_ i_ c anthology was a "pile of shit."

When asked for the most horrific thing they had read recently, panelists listed M. R. James's work (Schweitzer), Billie Sue Mosiman's "No Restrictions" in _ P_ u_ l_ p_ h_ o_ u_ s_ e 516 (Hirsch), W. Somerset Maugham's stories (Schimel), and a Frank Robinson manuscript and a Gene Wolfe story (Hartwell). Also mentioned was Susan Wade's "White Rook, Black Pawn," which will appear in an Ellen Datlow anthology in 1996.

I note that there was not much discussion about the purported subject of the panel, the sources of fear in horror, other than the comment about family and abusive relationships.

Saturday Morning

Last year we could not go out for breakfast because our car battery was dead. This year we did go out, and I concluded that the hotel was better than Friendly's.

Immoral Fiction?
Saturday, 10 AM
Thomas A. Easton (mod), Michael F. Flynn, Patrick Nielsen Hayden, Melissa Scott, Jane Yolen

The panelists began by saying that they would be talking primarily about adult fiction, since children's fiction required a somewhat different approach.

Yolen opened by saying that the author has to be honest about his or her fiction (shades of what Will Shetterly said in the "Comic Books and Alternate History" panel and what David Hartwell said in the "Sources of Fear in Horror" panel). Nielsen Hayden added that fiction is a sort of experiment (where the author postulates a situation and then plays it out). The reader, however, may read things into novels that are not there.

Flynn summarized what most panelists (and probably most of the audience) believed: that when someone talks about "immoral fiction" he or she means "that which I do not believe" or "that which I disagree with." Examples of fiction which are often called immoral under this definition were given as Robert A. Heinlein's _ S_ t_ a_ r_ s_ h_ i_ p

_ T_ r_ o_ o_ p_ e_ r_ s, William Golding's _ L_ o_ r_ d _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ F_ l_ i_ e_ s, and all the works of John Norman.

Easton thought it was important to distinguish between morality and ethics, his distinction being that the former is grounded in religion and the latter is not. The other panelists, however, felt that this was merely a word game and wanted to consider the two as just different terms for the same concept.

Someone said that "moral fiction" is sometimes defined as fiction that concerns itself with the issues of right and wrong. But then

if English were a logical language, "immoral fiction" would be fiction that does not concern itself with the issue of right and wrong. However, English is not a logical language. The latter sort of fiction might be termed "amoral fiction," but clearly "immoral fiction" means fiction that concerns itself with the issue of right and wrong, but comes up with the "wrong" answers. Scott later gave as an example of this novels written by African women which consider female "circumcision" a good thing.

Nielsen Hayden said that one thing to remember in all this is that science fiction is a didactic form; Yolen responded by saying that all fiction is inherently didactic. Nielsen Hayden agreed that might be true, but still felt that science fiction was more didactic than realistic fiction. Easton pointed out that because science fiction relied on hypothetical scenarios ("what if?"), it was easier for it to break tabus than for realistic fiction to do so. But was doing so immoral? Consider the film _ T_ h_ e _ P_ r_ o_ g_ r_ a_ m, which had a scene of students lying down on the center line of a road. After someone who had seen the film did this--and was killed--Touchstone removed that scene from all prints. Was the film (in legal terms) an "attractive nuisance"? (The classic "attractive nuisance" is a backyard swimming pool. The owners are supposed to _ k_ n_ o_ w that neighborhood kids will be attracted to it and put a locked fence around it.) By the way, the audience seemed to feel the action in the film was less an "attractive nuisance" and more a case of "evolution in action." My example of this would be the Bible: is Christianity (or God) responsible for the misuse and

misinterpretation of the Bible? If Christians claim not, then it hardly seems fair for them then to attack other authors for the misuse of _ t_ h_ e_ i_ r works.

Nielsen Hayden observed that this--and much of the criticism of fiction as immoral--seemed to assume that authors have some power to change society. "If we really did had the power to change society by our writing, we'd use it in a much more focused way," he said.

Yolen said that what she thought of as immoral fiction was fiction that was slickly sentimental and manipulative, such as Robert James Waller's _ B_ r_ i_ d_ g_ e_ s _ o_ f _ M_ a_ d_ i_ s_ o_ n _ C_ o_ u_ n_ t_ y, David Eastman's _ V_ e_ l_ v_ e_ t_ e_ e_ n _ R_ a_ b_ b_ i_ t, and Shel Silverstein's _ G_ i_ v_ i_ n_ g _ T_ r_ e_ e. As Yolen said, "It's easy to make a reader cry, but harder to make a reader think." "Comfy books" are okay, she continued, but they should not be considered on the same level as more thought-provoking works. Easton tried to rephrase this as, "It's the excess that makes them immoral," but with that definition I think you have the problem that you cannot say that a book is _ i_ n_ h_ e_ r_ e_ n_ t_ l_ y immoral--and I suspect that there are books that people would say are inherently immoral.

Flynn noted, "We seem to be saying that moral books question rather than affirm," and in science fiction it is difficult to affirm because science fiction is a questioning ("what if?" again) genre. And what disturbs people is not asking the questions, it's the answers that are arrived at.

Nielsen Hayden did say that wrong-headed writers have a purpose: they are useful to argue with. They also give one the experience of being "seduced by garbage" and teach one to read critically. Of course, this process takes place only after you realize that what you had believed is in fact garbage, and this may take time, but as you grow up you often change your mind about books you read earlier in life. The examples he gave of this were Robert A. Heinlein and Ayn Rand.

Talking about children's books, someone in the audience said that she often has parents ask for a recommendation, but then they add, "I don't want my child disturbed." (Of course, this may just mean "please don't pick a book that will give my three-year-old nightmares.")

The panelists also mentioned John Gardner's _ O_ n _ M_ o_ r_ a_ l _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n.

Neglected SF and Fantasy Films
Saturday, 12 noon
Daniel Kimmel (mod), W. Michael Henigan, Mark R. Leeper

(I had wanted to see the "Catholicism and Science Fiction" panel (held somewhat ironically in the King Henry room), but loyalty demanded I attend this one. Henigan and Kimmel were both wearing SF-Lovers Digest T-shirts, but I was wearing ours instead of Mark wearing it. Moderators should let people know what the dress code is. :-))

What can one say about a panel on neglected films where panelists volunteer such "neglected" films as _ F_ o_ r_ b_ i_ d_ d_ e_ n _ P_ l_ a_ n_ e_ t?

Well, ARRGGHH! is about the only comment that comes to mind.

It started off well enough, with panelists noting that many factors lead to films being neglected: being in black and white, having no special effects, getting bad reviews, and so on. Then Kimmel listed some films that he thought were unfairly neglected: _ C_ o_ n_ e_ h_ e_ a_ d_ s, _ H_ e_ a_ r_ t_ b_ e_ e_ p_ s, _ I_ n_ n_ e_ r _ S_ p_ a_ c_ e, and _ Q_ u_ i_ n_ t_ e_ t. All, you will note, are relatively recent (the oldest, _ Q_ u_ i_ n_ t_ e_ t, is from 1979). Leeper's films, on the other hand, were older: _ T_ h_ e _ M_ i_ n_ d _ B_ e_ n_ d_ e_ r_ s, _ U_ n_ e_ a_ r_ t_ h_ l_ y _ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e_ r, _ D_ a_ r_ k _ I_ n_ t_ r_ u_ d_ e_ r, and _ Q_ u_ e_ s_ t _ f_ o_ r _ L_ o_ v_ e. Henigan listed _ L_ o_ g_ a_ n'_ s _ R_ u_ n, _ S_ o_ y_ l_ e_ n_ t _ G_ r_ e_ e_ n, and _ F_ a_ h_ r_ e_ n_ h_ e_ i_ t _ 4_ 5_ 1.

Admittedly, the panelists did start moving backward in time a bit, naming _ C_ r_ e_ a_ t_ i_ o_ n _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ H_ u_ m_ a_ n_ o_ i_ d_ s, _ D_ r_ a_ g_ o_ n_ s_ l_ a_ y_ e_ r, _ D_ u_ n_ e (this is a

neglected film? Badly thought of maybe, but hardly neglected), _ I _ M_ a_ r_ r_ i_ e_ d _ a _ M_ o_ n_ s_ t_ e_ r _ f_ r_ o_ m _ O_ u_ t_ e_ r _ S_ p_ a_ c_ e, _ L_ i_ f_ e _ f_ o_ r_ c_ e, _ P_ h_ a_ s_ e _ I_ V, _ S_ p_ a_ c_ e_ d _ I_ n_ v_ a_ d_ e_ r_ s, _ S_ t_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e _ I_ n_ v_ a_ d_ e_ r_ s, _ T_ h_ e _ T_ w_ o_ n_ k_ y, and _ V_ i_ d_ e_ o_ d_ r_ o_ m_ e. Other films mentioned included _ Y_ e_ u_ x _ s_ a_ n_ s _ V_ i_ s_ a_ g_ e, _ C_ a_ r_ n_ i_ v_ a_ l _ o_ f _ S_ o_ u_ l_ s, _ D_ e_ l_ i_ c_ a_ t_ e_ s_ s_ e_ n, _ T_ h_ e _ E_ n_ d _ o_ f _ A_ u_ g_ u_ s_ t _ i_ n _ t_ h_ e _ H_ o_ t_ e_ l _ O_ z_ o_ n_ e, _ T_ h_ e _ D_ y_ b_ b_ u_ k, _ F_ a_ n_ t_ a_ s_ t_ i_ c _ P_ l_ a_ n_ e_ t, _ T_ h_ e _ L_ a_ t_ h_ e _ o_ f _ H_ e_ a_ v_ e_ n, _ T_ h_ e _ M_ a_ n _ W_ h_ o _ L_ a_ u_ g_ h_ s, _ R_ e_ t_ u_ r_ n _ t_ o _ O_ z, _ S_ e_ c_ o_ n_ d_ s, _ S_ o_ m_ e_ t_ h_ i_ n_ g _ W_ i_ c_ k_ e_ d _ T_ h_ i_ s _ W_ a_ y _ C_ o_ m_ e_ s, and something called _ B_ e_ r_ n_ a_ r_ d _ a_ n_ d _ G_ e_ n_ i_ e (sp?) from the Arts & Entertainment Network.

Kimmel also mentioned _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ e_ d _ S_ t_ a_ t_ e_ s, noting that it opened the same weekend as _ S_ c_ a_ n_ n_ e_ r_ s and was eclipsed by that film.

Leeper provided a handout of his list of "neglected films," with commentary; it has already run in the MT VOID.

Turbulence and Psychohistory
Saturday, 1 PM
Evelyn C. Leeper (mod), Michael F. Flynn, Robert Glaub,
Mark Keller, Andrew Nisbet, Mark Olson

(Thanks to Mark Leeper for taking copious notes at this panel.)

The panelists began by introducing themselves (before I arrived, because I managed to get lost finding the room--my own personal turbulence, I guess). Flynn said that he had written a novel about psychohistory, _ I_ n _ t_ h_ e _ C_ o_ u_ n_ t_ r_ y _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ B_ l_ i_ n_ d. Robert Glaub works for the Department of Defense and is an amateur historian. Mark Keller is a well-known alternate history buff. Mark Olson started with alternate history and went on to become interested in real history. And I got to do something that I have complained for years about others doing--promote a published work of mine, in this case an article in the first issue of _ A_ l_ t_ e_ r_ n_ a_ t_ e _ W_ o_ r_ l_ d_ s. So I guess I should complain about myself. Take it as read.

I began by couching the panel's topic in terms of chaos theory. If chaos theory is correct, and very small changes in initial conditions can effect enormous changes in results, then how is the prediction of the future affected, or the prediction of what might have happened if something had gone differently?

Nesbit said that the function of history is to present the past, not to predict the future, and that psychohistory has little to do

with history. Olson said that sounded like what astronomers used to say, that we can never find out the makeup of the stars, so it was pointless to speculate. Should our view of history be based on whether we have the means to determine it? The Bernoullis applied probability theory to history; should we? Flynn said that most people trained in history are not trained in mathematics and statistics, so trying to apply those to history is something few experts can do. (And then a few minutes later proceeded to do so

in great detail.) Keller felt that prediction was not unreasonable, and that we could use the lessons of history. Everyone knows of Santayana's statement that "those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it" (though I cannot find a source for this citation), but Keller quoted Kliuchevsky as saying, "History doesn't teach us anything, but it punishes those who don't learn the lessons." (Of course, Hegel said, "What experience and history teach is this--that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it" [introduction, _ P_ h_ i_ l_ o_ s_ o_ p_ h_ y _ o_ f _ H_ i_ s_ t_ o_ r_ y].)

Flynn cited the science of cliometrics (after Clio, the Muse of History), which claims that there are laws in the way society works. Until cliometrics was discovered (or invented, depending on your point of view), human society was considered an invention of the gods. We still question, however, whether human society is somehow "hard-wired" into our brains or not.

Regarding predicting the future, Ben Yalow (in the audience) said that a while back someone was predicting how the Supreme Court would rule on various issues. Keller noted that was only predicting what nine people would decide and was not that difficult, given their past decision history. The Germans, for example, had a big file on Patton in an attempt to predict his actions. Nesbit said that what worried him was that examples of psychohistory were fallacious and started to explain why, and then it became clear that I had failed in a primary task of a moderator: I had not had us define our terms. Most of us were using Asimov's definition of psychohistory, involving predicting the course of the future based on the idea that, while the behavior of individuals

cannot be predicted, the behavior of large groups of individuals can. (Asimov got this idea by analogy from the action of gas molecules.) But Nesbit was interpreting psychohistory as being about applying psychology and psychoanalysis to individuals to predict their actions. Having cleared up this confusion, and established that we would be using the Asmovian concept, we proceeded.

And where we proceeded was to cycles. Flynn first mentioned the concept, and after responding to an audience member who thought C. Northcote Parkinson was the greatest thinker of the West and that Parkinson had said that there was a rhythm of history in which China has a three-hundred-year cycle, Flynn produced dozens of viewgraphs showing the various cycles of history that he (and others) had discovered.

Flynn began by discussing correlations. For example, there is a 95% correlation between the percentage of women working and the percentage of imported automobiles versus the domestic market. The conclusion one might come to, therefore, is that to reduce foreign trade one should get women back into the kitchen. But _ a_ n_ y two

increasing trends will correlate (and discounting the "Rosie the Riveter" bump in 1944, the working-women trend has been an increasing one all this century).

The first cycle Flynn showed on a viewgraph was the cycle of the number of slave revolts and race riots, starting with a slave revolt in 1837. This is stable with occasional spikes, the spikes occurring at regular intervals about two generations apart. ("Be out of town in 2010," was his advice.)

Flynn noted that, oddly enough, random processes produce predictable patterns. Trends and cycles that Flynn discussed were the number of wars per decade (random), the number of homicides versus gun control, and the number of children per family versus family income (as people get richer, they have fewer children, but there was a drop in 1919 and a post-World War II baby boom, as well as another baby boom in the 1980s). And often we do not realize that we have been in an atypical period. If we look at

unemployment over a long period of time, we discover that median unemployment of 5% is normal. It's just that we were in a boom time from World War II and the Cold War and did not realize that it was not going to last. Sometimes a change in the process can change a trend. For example, business failures dropped after the Great Depression, but that was because not because the economics had gotten so much better, but that laws made it harder to go out of business.

On a depressing note, Flynn showed the graph for the money the United States collects, as a percentage of the GNP. In the 1940s, it starts going up, not in an exponential curve, but a super-exponential one!

As the panelists noted, this cyclic nature of history does not really help the predictor. One can predict approximately how many coups there will be in the world in a decade, for example, but this does not help predict that there will be a coup in Urago on May 17 of next year. (Which of course means that Hari Seldon's right-on-the-date predictions were pure fiction.) You can say that some areas of the country are prone to thunderstorms, but you cannot say when there will be one. Nesbit said that some people may think that all of human behavior can be predicted with a straight edge and semi-log paper, but it's more complex than that. Even the motion of the planets is a chaotic system, and while it can be predicted in the short term, the longer the period, the less accurate the predictions become.

And even cycles can be perturbed (as has already been noted). Nesbit cited a power plant whose proponents said that it would meet the growing energy needs of the area. But after it was built, the demand for energy either went down, or did not go up as fast as predicted. However, the reason for this was that the cost of

building the plant had been so high as to raise the cost of electricity, and that made people cut back on their usage! Another example was the number of suicides by gas in Britain. At some point it was made more difficult to commit suicide by gas (I forget how) and so that trend changed. (But possibly other types of suicides went up.) Flynn said that science is deciding what

produces trend lines and whether it can it be depended on.

Returning to the predictive powers of historians, Keller claimed that many people say the future was predicted in Revelation, Nostradamus, and Cayce. I noted that the "predictions" all seemed to have been noticed only after the fact, and that no one could figure out what was meant before something happened. I also said that while it is easy to explain why things happened in the past and make it at least plausible, when people turn these theories to the future, they do not seem to work. For example, Paul Kennedy explained at great length why countries rose and fell in _ T_ h_ e _ R_ i_ s_ e _ a_ n_ d _ F_ a_ l_ l _ o_ f _ t_ h_ e _ G_ r_ e_ a_ t _ P_ o_ w_ e_ r_ s, but then blew it all by claiming (in the late 1980s) that Germany would never re-unite, and explaining why. (Nesbit responded that Kennedy's explanations of history were not entirely convincing, and claimed that Kennedy had said that the rise of Bohemia was due to brass mines there.)

Olson asked, "If you had a time machine, could you make a change?" Well, of course you could (I pointed out you could kill the Beatles, which would certainly be _ a change), so Olson clarified that he was looking for whether one could change history _ e_ f_ f_ e_ c_ t_ i_ v_ e_ l_ y. Ben Yalow (in the audience) thought that just occasionally you could catch the cusp and do so. Olson replied that he did not believe in cusps, because any small change changes who gets born. (In other words, he supports the "Great Man" theory rather than the "Tide of History" theory.) Olson claimed that the change in who is born would be the same as replacing people by fraternal twins, though why he chooses fraternal twins instead of ordinary siblings is not clear to me. Yalow said that meant that Olson was claiming you could change history, to which Olson replied that yes, he could _ c_ h_ a_ n_ g_ e history, but he could not predict (or control) the direction the new history would take. Glaub also backed the "Great Man" theory. Keller said the trick was in knowing what the critical changes are. Flynn said that no matter what random events are changed, certain results will occur (i.e., he backs the "Tide of History" theory). He used the analogy of a fern leaf, where there are alternate branchings, but they all tend to go in the same direction. Nesbit did not think he could manipulate history effectively, but thought it would be interesting to experiment and see what would happen if things were changed. (I had the same feeling this last election. I would be curious to know what would have happened if Perot had been elected, but not curious enough to commit myself to that future!) By repeating the experiment over and over, one might detect patterns. Olson somewhat humorously asked Nesbit how he would get informed consent

from his experimental subjects. Flynn said that the problem with all this is that all you can do is fiddle with epiphenomena--individual events--while factors of the population as a whole are hard to change. How can you change the literacy rate, for example? You could sink Columbus, but someone else would have made that trip--the Americas are just too close to Europe to avoid being "discovered."

In regards to all this, Olson recommended a new book called _ T_ i_ m_ e _ M_ a_ c_ h_ i_ n_ e_ s: _ T_ i_ m_ e _ T_ r_ a_ v_ e_ l _ i_ n _ P_ h_ y_ s_ i_ c_ s, _ M_ e_ t_ a_ p_ h_ y_ s_ i_ c_ s, & _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ F_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n by Paul J. Nahin. And the book that Flynn used for many of his viewgraphs, and has quoted on many other alternate history panels, is _ C_ y_ c_ l_ e_ s, _ t_ h_ e _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e _ o_ f _ P_ r_ e_ d_ i_ c_ t_ i_ o_ n by Edward R. Dewey and Edwin F. Dakin, which in 1947 predicted the economic cycles that we seem to be living through: a big recession in the early 1980s, another smaller one in the early 1990s, an upturn in January 1993, and a big upturn in 2006. (This is supposedly still in print from the Foundation for the Study of Cycles, 1964, 255pp, $15.) (Regarding the economic cycles, Olson said, "Even if I believed history was mechanical, I would be skeptical." The charts were too accurate; you would not expect that sort of accuracy, he said. And books keep predicting that there is a recession coming: there has been one predicted for just about every year in the last couple of decades, and the year 2000 is particularly popular for all these sort of predictions. Of course, my feeling is that predicting all sorts of things for the year 2000 may be a self-fulfilling prophecy. If people expect some sort of disaster, their actions may cause one.)

(to be continued)

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Manners are especially the need of the plain.
The pretty can get away with anything.
-- Evelyn Waugh

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