

Clinton's attitude toward his campaign promises is no better or worse than any other President. That is, if you tell an obvious lie, it isn't a lie. You know, like "the check is in the mail" or "of course I don't think your hair looks silly that way" or "sure, I don't mind if you borrow that book." It's like Jack Benny

claiming to be 39, or like telling a kid that a bunny is going to come and leave colorful eggs, or like saying that we can reduce the deficit without raising taxes. These are all silly fantasies that by mutual consent nobody believes. But Clinton said it with a straight face and it is a pleasant fantasy. And the face telling us was so earnest and young! I believe in an orderly universe and that all Presidents have the same number of square inches on their faces. What sets Clinton apart from his last two predecessors is that the two Republicans' skin had accorded into the crevices and wrinkles. That really means old age in a President like they do in anyone else--but for our own comfort we call the wrinkles "character" in a face. Somehow Clinton lacks that character in his face and we all know that the reason is that under all that skin he still has something keeping his face inflated so that he looks young and enthusiastic, but denying him the character of wrinkles. I guess it's like inflating a balloon. His face really looks a lot like a kid from your third grade class and when he purses his lips to talk about the economy you expect to see a big pink bubble of gum come out of that mouth.

Incidentally, the rule that presidents' heads all have the same surface area applies to surface area of all but the ears. Otherwise Lyndon Baines Johnson would quickly disprove the rule. If you upholstered LBJ's head with as much flesh as Clinton's head has, when you were done with the ears you would have only enough left to cover a skull the size of a medium Golden Delicious apple.

Well, I started talking about the budget but I haven't gotten very far so I will have to continue next time.

2. Starting in this issue is our ConFrancisco convention report,

which will run in the next four issues as well. [-ecl]

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I love mankind; it's people I can't stand.
-- Charles Schultz

ConFrancisco 1993
Con report by Evelyn C. Leeper
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(Part 1 of 5)

[Mark has offered to write up some of the panels that he attended that I missed, so this is actually a joint report. The panels that he wrote up are labeled as such.]

ConFrancisco, the 1993 World Science Fiction Convention, and the 51st World Science Fiction Convention, was held September 2 through September 6 in San Francisco, California. The attendance was calculated as 7642. Being that San Francisco is harder to get to from Europe than East Coast conventions, there were fewer Europeans in evidence than usual.

We had arrived in California about a week before the convention, spending the time visiting with Mark's parents and traveling up to the northern California coast around Mendocino. We took the train up from the peninsula Thursday morning and checked

into the Nikko, our hotel, which was about a fifteen-minute walk from the Moscone Convention Center. Kate had already checked in and left us a note saying she was going over to register.

Facilities

The convention facilities were on the whole excellent. The rooms for the panels were right outside the large "concourse" where the dealers room, the art show, the exhibits, and so on were being held. This made dropping into the dealers room or checking the message board between panels a real possibility (although the message board seemed less utilized than at previous conventions--people I knew where there never checked in, and so on). However, the films were in the Nikko and the masquerade and Hugo ceremony were in the other section of the convention center, across the street. The latter was far too small--set up with sufficient backstage area, there was seating for only 2000 people. This meant enormous lines for the masquerade and many people turned away, with the result that a lot of people didn't even try to make it into the Hugo ceremony. I don't know what attendance they were expecting if they thought 2000 seats would be sufficient. Even worse, it was flat seating, as opposed to ramped theater style, so people in the back couldn't see anything. I know, because we ended up in the back for the masquerade. (There was VIP seating for Hugo nominees, but having stood in line with our friends, it seemed crash to dump them. We did move up during the intermission though.) For the Hugo ceremony, we had front-row seats, but I had to write 110,000 words last year to get them. :-)

The parties and Con Suite (open only in

the evnings) were in the Parc 55, which was right across the street from the Nikko--convenient for us, but not for people in the ANA, the main hotel right near the convention center.

The restaurant situation was infinitely better than last year: loads of restaurants within walking distance, including more Japanese restaurants than I've ever seen in one location. We went to a Cambodian restaurant the first night by car (the Angkor Wat), but after that made do with the sushi places and other restaurants between the Nikko and the convention center. The one problem was

getting breakfast on Sunday and Monday--many of the breakfast places in the area cater to the business crowd and were closed.

Registration and All That Stuff

Registration was incredibly slow. We arrived at 11:15 AM Thursday and it took an hour. Kate arrived about 10 AM and it took her an hour and a half. One problem was that the materials didn't arrive until late Wednesday night, making a practice run-through with staff impossible. They could have used more stations, and I would strongly suggest that future conventions have the materials on hand by Tuesday morning, with early registration on Wednesday afternoon and evening to ease the crush. Also, the signs indicating the alphabet range from each station should be between six and ten feet off the floor, not resting on the floor, where they can't be seen through the crowds.

Another problem was that after registering, we had to get in another line to pick up the souvenir books and other free books. This was equally long, and someone came by saying people we should leave the line and come back later--there was plenty of stuff and more was being brought in constantly. Silly us, we believed him. The result was that by the time we went back to pick up our stuff (later in the day), they were already out of the free copies of Connie Willis's D_o_o_m_s_d_a_y_B_o_o_k. Second strong suggestion: before you say there will be plenty of X later, make sure that's true. (Third, mild suggestion: make badges available with a choice of pins or clips--it's very hard to clip a badge onto a T-shirt.)

There was also a third line, albeit a short one, for picking up program participant material. At that point I also got what was labeled my "Hugo nominee pin," which turned out to be a square of silver with black paint on it forming a rocket silhouette. The paint flaked off when I peeled the backing out to attach it to my badge. It turned out that these were merely temporary: the real rocket pins were very similar to previous years' (though lacking the year engraved on them), and had been delayed when the luggage they were in was misdirected on the way from Russia!

For the first time at any Worldcon I have been to (and that's a lot), the newsletters were almost always on time, and never more than an hour late. The main drop-off point always had a complete supply of all newsletters.

As always, there were lots of flyers on the freebie tables, and free issues of A_n_a_l_o_g and A_s_i_m_o_v'_s were being handed out. The usual movie buttons were also there. There must have been a sufficient supply; there were still some on Monday.

Program Books

The Pocket Program was universally acclaimed as once of the best ever. It was a 4-inch by 6-inch spiral-bound booklet containing the complete schedule (with descriptions--something which had been missing for the last three years), daily grids, convention center and hotel maps, restaurant listings, and just about everything else. (It did take a somewhat larger pocket than some other "pocket programs," though.) The one thing missing (and handed out separately) was the index by participant. As before, I had pulled a copy off the Net before the convention (and in fact had printed up a customized program for me of what I wanted to see, and gave a copy to Mark so he could find me), but I still found the Pocket Program useful. The Net copy wasn't posted until only thirty-six hours before Mark and I were leaving, which meant we had to scramble to print up customized versions. Suggestion to future conventions: post the schedule at least two weeks before the convention, because many people will go early to spend some vacation time in the area. The schedule is firmed up by then, because program participants have to know what their schedules are.

The Souvenir Book went back to its traditional format of essays and information, with no fiction such as was included last year.

Green Room

The Green Room seemed well laid out, with sufficient coffee and sodas. (I didn't spend much time there.) There were schedules available and it was right across from Program Operations, where one picked up the name cards for the panels. My major complaint again would be with the participants, who showed a distressing tendency n_o_t to show up before the panels in the Green Room as requested, making any pre-planning of introductions, topics, etc., impossible.

Dealers Room

As usual, the Dealers Room (a.k.a., the Hucksters Room) was very large, and seemed to have more books than last year (though it's hard to tell). However, I had made myself a promise not to buy a ton of books which I would have to carry back and having bought a few at used book stores before the convention, only bought two or three books I had been seeking for a while.

One interesting side-note: NESFA was selling its Cordwainer Smith collection, T_h_e_R_e_d_i_s_c_o_v_e_r_y_o_f_M_a_n (edited by James Mann). The rights to one of the stories in it had originally been sold to Harlan Ellison for the (infamous) L_a_s_t_D_a_n_g_e_r_o_u_s_V_i_s_i_o_n_s anthology. When Ellison heard they were selling it, he claimed he owned the rights to that story and apparently threatened to go over to the table and punch the first NESFA person he saw there for stealing a story they had no right to. What I heard later from NESFA was that Ellison thought he had bought the rights in perpetuity, but had actually bought them for a ten-year period, with an option to renew for five more (which he didn't pick up), and that this was twenty years ago. The net result of all this, however, was that everyone who was at Ellison's panel rushed over to the dealers room and bought a copy, and NESFA ended up selling out their entire at-the-con stock and taking orders to ship a whole lot more.

Art Show

I didn't get to see very much of the art show. Had I realized that the staff was not requiring that people check their bags, I might have tried to fit in some short trips between panels, but I was so used to having a visit to the art show take a minimum of ten minutes just for checking and un-checking bags that I never even tried. I did see a bit of it, especially the Hugo nominees exhibit. A friend commended them on their computerized purchase procedure, but wished that there was a way to pick up purchased artwork before 10 AM Monday, since her flight was not much after that. (There was someone there a little bit earlier, but there was no scheduled time to pick up artwork earlier.) Also, art show close-out was only an hour before the Hugo ceremony, and given the lines (see below), that meant people bidding on artwork had to sacrifice any chance of getting a decent seat at the ceremony.

Programming

There were 492 program items listed (not counting readings and autograph sessions). MagiCon had 420 program items, Chicon V had 520 program items, ConFiction 337, and Noreascon 3 833 (all not counting films or autograph sessions). I have no idea how many videos and films there were: due to family problems, the head of

media programming had to withdraw shortly before the convention and the schedule was totally changed as the convention had to start from scratch at that point. (John L. Flynn came through with what must have been only hours notice with a series of lectures to go with the "Dracula" film festival that was shown one day.) There were also 33 autograph sessions and 29 readings. Once again, there were a _ l_ o_ t of panels at this convention of interest to me, and I ended up with no time for lunch (and occasionally no time for dinner!).

Given that it's impossible to see everything at a Worldcon, I will cover just the programming I attended. However, Mark has

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 5

graciously agreed to write up some of the panels he attended, and these are included as well (and labeled as his).

Panel:

M M M Ma a a ai i i in n n ns s s st t t tr r r re e e ea a a am m m m/ / / /S S
S Sl l l li i i ip p p ps s s st t t tr r r re e e ea a a am m m m

Thursday, 3:00 PM

Jonathan Lethem, Mark V. Ziesing

"'Mainstream' fiction hovering on our borders": Ziesing began by saying that he thought the New Wave was slipstream; Lethem gave only the example of Steve Ericson (_ A_ r_ c_ d'_ X and others). Other examples were Paul Auster (who wrote _ T_ h_ e_ M_ u_ s_ i_ c_ o_ f_ C_ h_ a_ n_ c_ e, the film of which coincidentally we saw Monday after the convention ended), Anthony Burgess (_ A_ C_ l_ o_ c_ k_ w_ o_ r_ k_ O_ r_ a_ n_ g_ e--though this is more into the science fiction area--and others), Jonathan Carroll (_ O_ u_ t_ s_ i_ d_ e_ t_ h_ e_ D_ o_ g_ _ M_ u_ s_ e_ u_ m and others), Jim Dodge (whom I couldn't find in _ B_ o_ o_ k_ s_ i_ n_ _ P_ r_ i_ n_ t), Thomas Palmer (who someone claimed wrote _ D_ r_ e_ a_ m _ S_ c_ i_ e_ n_ c_ e, but I could find neither the author nor the title in _ B_ o_ o_ k_ s_ i_ n_ _ P_ r_ i_ n_ t), Thomas Pynchon (_ G_ r_ a_ v_ i_ t_ y'_ s_ R_ a_ i_ n_ b_ o_ w and others), Lewis Shiner (_ G_ l_ i_ m_ p_ s_ e_ s and others), and Jonathan Lethem's own upcoming _ G_ u_ n, w_ i_ t_ h _ O_ c_ c_ a_ s_ i_ o_ n_ a_ l_ M_ u_ s_ i_ c. Judith Merrill claimed recently that slipstream fiction wasn't really a new phenomenon, but that the sales potential for slipstream books was low and so they never really made a splash.

In an attempt to define slipstream, one panelist said that it is marked by the reader's difficulty in distinguishing fantasy from dreams. (Having seen _ T _ h _ e _ M _ u _ s _ i _ c _ o _ f _ C _ h _ a _ n _ c _ e, I understand what he meant.)

Lethem noted that in literature, fantasy had always been the dominant mode, and that it was only recently that "realistic fiction" became the mainstream. Borges and Kafka are examples of fantastic authors who are accepted as mainstream (i.e., "legitimate") authors, but their work was described as mainly pre-genre (whatever that means).

Another related category is non-science-fiction written by science fiction authors for science fiction readers. Lucius Shepard's Central American stories and Bradley Denton's _ B _ l _ a _ c _ k _ b _ u _ r _ n would probably fall into this category.

Slipstream was also characterized by Ziesing as being used by "aging hippies and beat-up love puppies" as a "literary rather than chemical way to alter their consciousness." It tends to produce psychological discomfort.

The panelists cautioned that it was a mistake to think there is a monolithic mainstream, about which the various genres cluster; even the "mainstream" is fragmented. Unfortunately, at this point the panel degenerated into the usual discussion of publishing and marketing.

Panel: S S S St t t ta a a at t t te e e eo o o of f f f
t t t th h h he e e e S S S Sh h h ho o o or r r rt t t t
S S S St t t to o o or r r ry y y

Thursday, 4:00 PM

Maya Kaathryn Bohnhoff, James Brunet, Scott Edelman, Rick Wilber

"How does this form fare in science fiction and fantasy magazines and books, and in the rest of the literary world":
Edelman began by saying that in his opinion, short fiction is where

everything important happens first--it is the cutting edge. Other panelists felt that this might be connected to the fact that short fiction gives the author more immediate feedback or gratification. While a novel could take a year or more to write, a short story can be written in a much shorter length of time. So writers are willing to make the investment in experimenting in the shorter forms. In addition, there are more markets for short fiction now than there were ten years ago. This does not mean it's easy to break into the market, but it is easier than before.

Because it is true that short fiction is not as profitable as novels, many people seem to feel that authors "graduate" from short fiction to novels. (See the introduction to Karen Joy Fowler's collection A_r_t_i_f_i_c_i_a_l_T_h_i_n_g_s for a description of this phenomenon:

she says she prefers short fiction and even got a reputation as "the person who wouldn't write a novel for Bantam.") Wilber also thought that short stories were not only "a good place to get started, but ... also a good place to be." And Harlan Ellison, one of the most respected writers in the field, has never written a science fiction novel (though he has written a couple of non-science-fiction novels).

One problem with short fiction is that magazines have a definite shelf life. Stories may be popular, but after their month or two is up, they become impossible to find. While anthologies have a longer lifetime, they are less predictable or reliable. As Brunet put it, "The anthology is the hot date; the magazine is a long-term relationship." It is true that inclusion in one of the "Year's Best" anthologies will probably assure a story of being available for at least a couple of years, but original anthologies are trickier.

The panelists pointed out, however, that science fiction magazines at least have a readership. Literary magazines stay alive because of the pressures of academia: they provide a place to "publish" instead of "perish" for professors, and they are pretty much required reading for other professors. Science fiction magazines, on the other hand, stay alive because people w_a_n_t to read them. The opinion was expressed that this might even explain some of the hostility toward science fiction from academia: jealousy.

One recent phenomenon is the stand-alone novella from publishers such as Bantam. Priced below the cost of a novel and offering readers a chance to read a "book" without committing to a

600-page odyssey, they are also giving authors more market for novellas, traditionally a hard form to place.

Above all, though, Wilbur says, if you want to break into the short fiction market, "embrace rejection." In agreement, Brunet said that the best experience he got for selling short fiction was his experience dating in his early twenties.

Panel:

I I I In n n nt t t tr r r ro o o od d d du u u uc c c ct t t ti i i io o o on n n n
t t t to o o C C C Co o o om m m mp p p pu u u ut t t te e e er r r r
N N N Ne e e et t t tw w w wo o o or r r rk k k ki i i in n n ng g g g

Thursday, 5:00 PM

Seth Breidbart, Daniel Dern, Tom Galloway,
Mark L. Olson, Martha Soukup (m)

"Discussion of the world of electronic mail and beyond-- CompuServe, GENie, Prodigy, BIX, the WELL and the Internet": The first item of business was asking what networks audience members were on. All the networks seemed to be represented except Prodigy, which got a bunch of loud boo's instead of hands raised. The room was packed, mostly with people already networked, though there were a few people who had not gotten connected and were hoping to get some advice.

After a brief history of computer networking (with the note that S F L o v e r s D i g e s t was originally a secret because of the restricted nature of the early Internet, and went public only in January of 1984), discussion turned to the recent announcement that some cable companies were going to start providing Internet connections via cable (at a fairly high price compared to public access services, though). The popularity of the Internet in general was thought by some to be leading to "death by success," to which a large number of people responded in chorus, "Imminent death of the Net predicted...." (With every change or growth spurt, people have been posting to the Net predicting that this would be the cause of the final collapse. Yet like that pink rabbit, it keeps on going. Or if you're older, like Timex, it keeps on ticking.)

Differences between commercial networks and the Internet were touched on. The commercial culture is a very top-down culture with rules and organization being dictated from above. The Internet is a "cooperative anarchy"; everything is bottom-up. If you want a connection, you just find someone already on it willing to provide one, as opposed to having to contact a central organization.

The major problem--how to solve infoglut--was not addressed.

There are so many panels on computers and networking, one wonders when conventions will start providing terminal rooms.

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 8

Panel: T T T To o o od d d da a a ay y y y I I I Is s s s
T T T To o o om m m mo o o or r r rr r r ro o o ow w w w' ' ' 's s s s
Y Y Y Ye e e es s s st t t te e e er r r rd d d da a a ay y y y

Thursday, 6:00 PM

Barbara Delaplace, John Hertz, Harry Turtledove (m)

"Likely errors in future historical fiction about our era":

The panel started by defining "today" as the period from 1945 to the present. The most obvious errors, they said, would be simple anachronisms: pot-smoking free love in 1951 or a Beatles concert in 1947. Authors writing about a historical period need to throw in details like this to create verisimilitude--as Hertz said, "Verisimilitude is very tricky stuff"--but it is very easy to get it wrong. Suggesting a few details allows the reader to fill in the rest, and authors aren't always careful about the details, especially if they think their audience is unfamiliar with the period.

Of course, unfamiliarity may not be the case. After all, there is a flood of information available for the present. Byzantine history (Turtledove's specialty) requires inference from the documents surviving, but we are absolutely swimming in documents. Even with some of them unreadable due to obsolete media (such as music stored on eight-track tapes), there will be so much that it will be impossible to avoid verifiable errors with only a finite amount of research.

Another error is that people forget how quickly attitudes can change. This is what Mark calls the "Happy Days" Syndrome: the show took place in the 1950s, but everyone had the attitudes of the 1980s. This is also one reason that feminist Regency novels don't work very well. (Hertz suggested that you think of a viewpoint as a geographic thing.) It's easy to eat the food of people of another

period and wear their clothing, but it's hard to think their thoughts and feel their feelings. Turtledove warns, however, that you often have to tone down attitudes or the audience will be turned off by them. For example, the attitude that blacks were sub-human was very common in earlier centuries, yet having a "hero" who espoused this attitude, however accurately, would not be acceptable to modern audiences. Rest assured, though, that we will suffer the same fate or, as Turtledove put it, "Whatever you think about X will be considered absurd five hundred years from now," where X could be religion, abortion, meat-eating, or any other subject. Yes, we think we have proof that our beliefs are right, but then previous generations also thought they had proof. Panelists also noted that some facts need to be left out--they are too convenient and people will think you have made them up.

One thing that Hertz felt characterizes our period as different that might very well seem absurd in the future is that we are as compulsively casual as previous cultures were formal. Whether the pendulum will swing completely back is not clear, but he feels that some return to formality will occur, and we will look absurd to

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 9

future readers.

On the other hand, novels written about their own period can often skip important details that would be obvious to those of the author's time, but completely lost on an audience a hundred years later. As one panelist said, he could tell when reading a Jane Austen that _ s _ o _ m _ e _ t _ h _ i _ n _ g important was going on, but he didn't have the knowledge of the period to figure out what. Writers writing about earlier historical periods have to give the reader enough to understand what is happening. Georgette Heyer is supposedly good at this.

Turtledove observed that writing about the past was dangerous because "you have more excuse for making mistakes about the future than about the past." Even so, some literary license is permitted since "historians deal with facts, novelists deal with truth."

More basic questions raised were: Will anyone care about us? Why do we do the strange things we do? What are the future

stereotypes of our age? These were not answered, but the last one brought about the observation that an era of history is only noticed after it is over. (As Kim Stanley Robinson noted in his lecture on Postmodernism people didn't sit around in Europe and say, "Well, last year was the Dark Ages, but now is the Renaissance.") Someone compared this to the cloud in Poul Anderson's B _ r _ a _ i _ n _ W _ a _ v _ e: you only realize it exists once you're out of it.

P P P Pa a a ar r r rt t t ti i i ie e e es s s s
Thursday, 10:00 PM

We returned from dinner at the Angkor Wat too late for the opening ceremonies, so I settled for dropping in to a couple of parties, the MagiCon Thank You Party (where I won a water bottle in their free give-a-ways), and the Boston in '01 Party. At the latter I discussed the various bids for 1998, none of which fills me with confidence. I have heard a rumor that Atlanta might throw its hat into the ring for 1998 (since their 1995 convention is the NASFiC rather than the Worldcon, they can do this). By the way, voters should realize that if Boston wins in 1998, it is ineligible in 2001.

I didn't really run into people I was looking for at the parties, but I did see several people other times of day: Lan at registration, Mike Ward by the elevators, and so on. This was good, because I was going to be immersing myself in panels for the next few days and wouldn't have much chance to meet people unless they were going to the same panels.

ConFrancisco September 6, 1993 Page 10

Panel: S S S Sh h h ho o o ou u u ul l l ld d d d
S S S SF F F F / / / /F F F FS S S St t t tr r r ri i i iv v v ve e e e
f f f fo o o or r r rL L L Li i i it t t te e e er r r ra a a ar r r ry y y y
R R R Re e e es s s sp p p pe e e ec c c ct t t ta a a ab b b bi i i il l l li i i it
t t ty y y y

Friday, 10:00 AM
Gregory Benford, David G. Hartwell, Ron Montana (m)

"A debate over whether or not mainstream literary respectability is a desirable goal": Benford began by saying that he was working under a disadvantage, because English was not his first language--he's from southern Alabama. But he worked on getting rid of his accent because he realized at age 14 that people deduct twenty points from someone's IQ if they hear a southern accent.

The panelists felt that one approach to literary respectability was that of Deena Brown: "Let's get science fiction back in the gutter where it belongs." That seems to be the literary establishment's view: a proposal submitted to the National Science Foundation and the National Endowment of the Arts to use science fiction to teach science was rated high by the NSF and low by the NEA. But all is not lost, Hartwell reassured us: "Science fiction has escalated from the respectability of pornography to the respectability of the average Western." However, Hartwell, who teaches a science fiction course at Harvard during the summer, was turned down when he offered to teach one during the regular school year. "Hell would freeze over before Harvard would allow science fiction to be taught during the regular school year," he said he was told (though perhaps not exactly in those words).

Benford doesn't think respectability is worth very much, because it is too easy to compromise one's art to gain respectability, and quoted Dylan as having said, "To live outside the law, you must be honest." (That's Bob Dylan, not Dylan Thomas.) For one thing, he thought much of the cynicism in today's mainstream was un-earned. People point to today's crises, such as AIDS, as the reason for this cynicism, but he reminded the audience that the 1919 influenza epidemic was much worse.

I asked if fantasy was more acceptable than science fiction to the literary establishment and Hartwell said that was certainly true. (This meshes with Lethem's comment yesterday on the "Slipstream" panel--literature was mostly fantastic for a long time.)

Speaking of the limitations of writing science fiction, especially strictly accurate science fiction, Benford felt that a genre flourishes because of its restraints. He did allow authors to make o n e change to current science if they had to, but he himself tries to avoid that. He is, for example, one of the few science fiction authors who won't use faster-than-light travel.

From the audience, Maia Cowan pointed out that it was somewhat futile to try to write books that would have respectability: books

written to be literary classics aren't, and books written for a quick buck have outlasted them. Arthur Conan Doyle is the perfect example of this: he assumed his fame would rest on his historical novels (quick, can you name even one of them?), while his Sherlock Holmes (and Edward Challenger) stories were written to pay the bills. And tastes in literature change. James Fenimore Cooper's works used to be considered classics; today no one reads them (except possibly to make a movie of them--and then they make a lot of changes).

Talking about best-sellers, Hartwell said that he loved Michael Crichton's C o n g o, but Benford complained that Crichton, Robin Cook, and Stephen King use "the sizzle of science" to preach that science is bad for you.

Someone asked whether anyone would ever win a Nobel Prize for science fiction, and were told that it had already happened (Harry Martinson for A n i a r a). Other possibilities for the future are Stanislaw Lem and whichever Strugatsky brother is still alive (Arkady or Boris). In other countries, science fiction is respected more in general.

Benford said he wasn't sure what "literature" was: "If literature merely means pretty sentences, count me out." (Someone noted that Ernest Hemingway is considered literature, and as the "Grandfather of Minimalism" was n o t a purveyor of pretty sentences.) For the scientifically-inclined in the audience, Benford said that one problem is that "the literary world is dominated by the inertial term."

In a side note, Benford said that one reason that John W. Campbell liked dictatorships so much in stories submitted to him was that that was how he ran his magazine. (By the way, Benford has a new book out, C h i l l e r, written under the pseudonym of Sterling Blake. I believe it's being marketed as a techno-thriller.)

Lecture:

P P P Po o o os s s st t t tm m m mo o o od d d de e e er r r rn n n ni i i is s
s sm m m ma a a an n n nd d d d S S S SF F F F

Friday, 11:00 AM

Kim Stanley Robinson

Well, coming out of this I felt that I finally understood what Postmodernism was.

Robinson began by saying that all the adjectives being used to talk about Postmodernism today used to be used to talk about science fiction, so it was natural that there should seem to be a connection. But Postmodernism is a historical period, not a style. Now is different than the Modernist period, and so needs a new name. (Robinson described this whole process as "periodization," and noted that people did not suddenly say, "It's not the Dark Ages anymore; it's the Renaissance." Only later did these labels get applied.) A

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 12

period corresponds to a structure for feeling. But even within a period there are "residual" and "emergent" aspects. For one thing, he said, this allows people to dispose of anomalies easily.

Postmodernism, as a period, follows Modernism. Modernism, in turn, followed Romanticism, which was represented by Realism. Various aspects of Modernism included Impressionism, stream of consciousness, existentialism, and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. This is not to say everyone was Modern; rural areas were in most cases pre-Modern (still feudal in many ways). But in the arts the basic "structure of feeling" or zeitgeist was alienation. People found themselves between the modern city and the rural area, and not really _ o_ f either. Modernism was also characterized by a functioning avant garde and a concern with history.

The change "point" between Modernism and Postmodernism was the period from 1939 to 1969. This was the end of the old world order, brought about partly by World War II, and partly by the end of colonialism, or as Jean Paul Sartre put it, "All the natives of the world proclaimed that they were people." Fragmentation is the basic "structure of feeling" or zeitgeist in Postmodernism. There is a loss of purpose or of self. Robinson later said that to deal with this loss, we have a nostalgia for tribal cultures because tribalism is an attempt to create social groups we can recognize and deal with.

We are not fully modernized, Robinson said. (I might dispute this, having seen rural farms in China. Actually, Robinson did later qualify this by saying there were still unmodernized areas. But communication has changed a lot of that. When we were trekking in northern Thailand a couple of years ago, our guide turned out to

be a Bon Jovi fan and to play in a heavy metal group.) Our architecture is learning from Las Vegas. Robinson pointed to the Marriott near the convention center that looks like a 1950s jukebox. (This was also mentioned in the "Future and Movies" panel.) Architecture is now historical jumbles or melanges. I find this amusing as there is a painting which shows a city with just such a jumble of styles, and it is titled "The Architect's Nightmare." Architecture now shows a sense of humor: in Atlanta there is a ten-story Gothic castle as the base of a seventy-story skyscraper, which is in turn topped with a cupola.

Pop art (such as Andy Warhol's work) is another aspect of Postmodernism. In fact, there is no big split between high art and popular art. Movies have glossy production values, even when portraying Depression dives in T_h_e_S_t_i_n_g (which Robinson said looked like Hollywood fern bars) or the life of migrant farm workers in O_f_M_i_c_e_a_n_d_M_e_n. New art forms arise. Fiona Jones in Boston hired people to go around and make other people happy as an art form. (It ended when the bank clerks she hired started giving money out to customers to make them happy!)

ConFrancisco

September 6, 1993

Page 13

This lack of division between high art and popular art means that science fiction is the equal of any other art; there is no hierarchy any more. But this lack of division also means that to a Postmodernist, R_e_a_d_e_r_s_D_i_g_e_s t joke columns are equal to James Joyce. And much of the academic study of Postmodernism is horrendous writing and what's more, it considers itself art just as much as what it is discussing. (Robinson said that just about the only person worth reading on this topic was Frederick Jameson [P_o_s_t_m_o_d_e_r_n_i_s_m, o_r, t_h_e_C_u_l_t_u_r_a_l_L_o_g_i_c_o_f_L_a_t_e_C_a_p_i_t_a_l_i_s_m], though he was tough going.) What's more, the criticism tends to be political, even if Postmodernism itself isn't. There is also no avant garde, because it's impossible to shock the bourgeoisie. Mapplethorne is not avant garde so much as nostalgia for the avant garde.

Now, consider science fiction in the 1970s. It had shallow characters, a distortion of time and space, and so on. In fact, it looked like an emergent Postmodern art form, especially since art

forms can go through periods vary quickly to catch up with the prevailing feeling. Elvis was Romanticist/Realist, the Beatles were Modernist, and Madonna is Postmodernist. In science fiction, John W. Campbell pushed realism, the New Wave pushed Modernism (with John Brunner's S_t_a_n_d_o_n_Z_a_n_z_i_b_a_r modeled after John Dos Passos and Brian

Aldiss's B_a_r_e_f_o_o_t_i_n_t_h_e_H_e_a_d modeled after James Joyce), and now we

have Postmodernism. From the outside science fiction looked like an emergent form; from inside, it appeared to be an accelerated form. In science fiction art we have gone from the 1950s and Richard Powers's Modernist art to Realist art. Or is it just Postmodern glossy? Sometimes it's hard to tell.

Science fiction is an intermediate form between high and low art. (The nostalgia for the science fiction ghetto is really residual.) One reason that Postmodernism is often confused with science fiction is that "Postmodernism" literally means "after the now." "After the now" i_s science fiction, but in this case (as in many others) a literal translation of the component parts of a word gives an incorrect meaning.

But science fiction is really anti-Postmodernism. Postmodernism says that we are beyond historical styles because history has stopped--in other words, it takes an ahistorical view of the world. It is First-World-oriented (as was noted earlier). But science fiction has a sense of history proceeding into the future, and is n_o_t apolitical.

Science fiction is interested in utopianism. As Robinson said, "The future is going to be different depending on what we do," a theme I later stressed in the panel "Turning the Wheels of If." (And a theme of Robinson's work in general as well.) "The world is a braided science fiction novel," he added, "that we're all co-authoring right now."

The reading protocols of science fiction have to be explained to Postmodernists. It may appear to be part of the "movement," but appearances are deceiving.

Although cyberpunk claims to be an emergent form, Robinson said, we cannot predict emergent forms; they can only be recognized in hindsight, the same as historical periods.

(End of Part 1)

