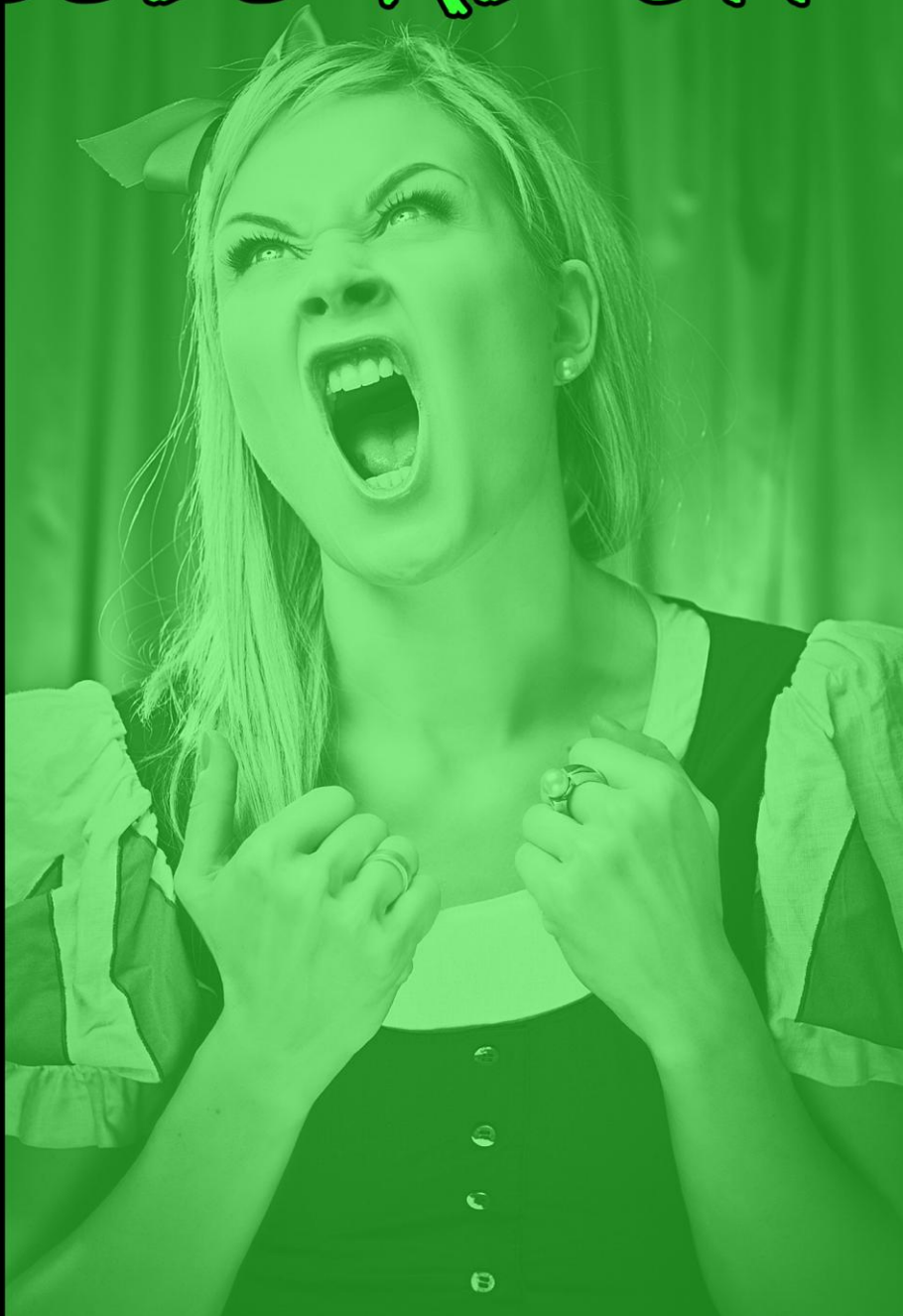


MORE
^ SHIT THAT
PISSES ME OFF

PEG TITTLE



MORE SHIT THAT PISSES ME OFF

Peg Tittle

Magenta

More Shit that Pisses Me Off

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Contents

- [1. God Promised!](#)
- [2. Suicide, Insurance, and Dead Sugar Daddies](#)
- [3. Cell Phone Syndrome](#)
- [4. Whose Violence?](#)
- [5. If she can wear perfume in public, I don't have to wear a shirt](#)
- [6. School Crossing Signs](#)
- [7. Wedding Leave](#)
- [8. Freakonomics Indeed](#)
- [9. The Arithmetic of Morality](#)
- [10. King of the Castle](#)
- [11. The Smiths and their Biochem Cubes](#)
- [12. Vested Interests and Cancers](#)
- [13. Inner Peace is Disturbing](#)
- [14. Figure Skating: A Very Gendered Thing](#)
- [15. We are the Champions](#)
- [16. Let's Talk about Sex](#)
- [17. Grade Ten History](#)
- [18. Making Kids with AIDS](#)
- [19. Why isn't being a soldier more like being a mother?](#)
- [20. Why Do Men Spit?](#)
- [21. Guns](#)
- [22. Christmas Elves](#)
- [23. Free to be—Offensive \(You are *such* an idiot.\)](#)
- [24. First \(and last\) Contact](#)
- [25. What if the right to life...](#)

God Promised!

With such regularity, it really should be the refrain of every national anthem, we hear something along these lines: ‘The land is rightfully ours. God promised it to *us*.’

Yeah well, God lies. Or at least he changes his mind.

Consider this: “And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying... ‘And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession.’” It’s from Genesis 17:3,8. Genesis 13:15 and Exodus 32:13 say pretty much the same thing. But check out Acts 7:5, which says “And he gave him none inheritance in it...yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him...” Promises, promises, eh? But of course the retraction is in the New Testament, which isn’t recognized by those of the Jewish faith.

No matter, there are lots of lies and changing of God’s mind in the Old Testament:

- God said that Adam would die on the day he ate the apple (Gen 2:16,17), but he didn’t—read Gen 3:17 and Gen 5:3.
- Jehoiakim was told that he wouldn’t have a son (Jer 36:30), but he did—read 2Kings 24:6.
- God promised Jacob that he would return from Egypt (Gen 46:3,4), but he didn’t—he died in Egypt (Gen 49).
- Nebuchadnezzar was to have captured and destroyed Tyre (Ezek 26:3-5,7,10,13-14), but he didn’t (surprise!)—Alexander the Great did.
- “‘I am merciful,’ saith the Lord, ‘and I will not keep anger for ever’” (Jer 3:12); “Ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn for ever” (Jer 17:4—well, which is it?)
- Israel shall rise again (Jer 31:4); Israel shall not rise again (Amos 5:2). She loves me, she loves me not.
- “They shall seek me early, but they shall not find me” (Prov 1:28); nope, I lied—“They that seek me early *shall* find me” (Prov 8:17).
- “Every living thing that liveth shall be meat for you” (Gen 9:3); wait, changed my mind—“These shall ye not eat of them that chew the cud or of them that divide the cloven hoof” (Deut 14:7).

Need I go on? To start a war on the basis of what God said is about as ridiculous as you can get. It’s quite possible that he lied when he said the land was yours. It’s quite possible that he changed his mind. Give it up!

Don't misunderstand. I'm not just picking on the Jewish people. I'm picking on *anyone* foolish enough to claim such supernatural support. 'God said so' is not exactly a strong premise for anything, let alone for going to war. 'Whose God?' is a reasonable response to such a claim. So is 'Oh yeah? Prove it!'

For better or worse (and my vote is on worse), our society (well actually, the U.S., aka the U.N.) distinguishes between just and unjust wars. One of the criteria for a just war is that there must be a just cause, a valid reason that justifies the war. Isn't it about time, then, that we consider all religious wars to be *unjust* wars?

* * * * *

Suicide, Insurance, and Dead Sugar Daddies

I've been thinking that, with the exception of those who are paralyzed or severely physically debilitated, people who seek euthanasia are cowards. They are grossly inconsiderate and amazingly irresponsible. If you're ready to die, then die. But do it yourself—don't ask someone else to kill you and then live with it. What an awful request to make, of anyone! It's *your* life—it's *your* death.

However, just recently the insurance connection clicked into place: if you suicide, the company won't pay—so it's for the sake of your loved ones that you endure or entreat—

So all these intellectual and ethical gymnastics we're sweating over—passive/active, terminal sedation or physician-assisted suicide, the double effect, euthanasia or eugenics—it's all because the insurance companies won't pay? Wouldn't it be so much easier, and, I suspect, cheaper, to simply legislate that they must? (Especially when the suicide simply hastens a looming death?) The financial desires of a certain private sector industry shouldn't override our freedom to die!

Well, they don't really. We still have the legal and moral right to die. The insurance companies just override our desire to capitalize on it. Which makes me think instead that we should simply legislate against life insurance. Think about it: we're putting a monetary value on an individual life.

But I guess most women do, don't they? They expect their husbands to spend their lives providing them with money. Sure, if there's children, they must be taken care of; in that case, I can understand the desire to have insurance against the potential loss of income that enables such care. But then let's call it income insurance—life is surely a little different, a little more, than income. And if there's no children, then GET A JOB like everyone else! (And let your husband die when and how he wants to.)

* * * * *

Cell Phone Syndrome

Has there been a more transparent advertisement of insecurity?

Look at me, I'm so popular! Everyone's calling me! I have so many friends! Answer that thing one more time when I'm with you, you'll have one less.

Look at me, I'm so busy! I have so many calls to make, so many calls to take! What you have is a total inability to actually enjoy life.

Look at me, I'm so important! Excuse me, I have to take this call! No. You don't. You are not a doctor on call. You are not a top-level executive. Neither your presence nor your opinion is urgently required. Anywhere. By anyone.

Frankly, the whole thing has been rather frightening. Suddenly all these men were making calls on their cell phones while they were driving. Just yesterday they couldn't even dial a phone while sitting at a desk, they had to get their secretaries to do it for them. Didn't take long for *that* law to be passed.

And of course it's annoying as hell. Just what makes people think the rest of the world wants to listen to every word of their unbearably inane conversations? "Hey, Jen. We're at the Van Houtte on St. Laurent. Yeah. Just ordered. No. Not yet. We're waiting. Coffee."

Of course people have been having conversations in cafes and stores, and on sidewalks and buses, for quite some time. It's not an invasion of public space. Unless the person talks loudly enough that others can't escape hearing. Then it's an advertisement of the immaturity of overriding self-importance.

And unless there are too many of them. It used to be that conversations in public happened only when two or more people were together and talking with each other. But now, due to cell phones being both cordless and desperately in need of a signal that is apparently *always* better outdoors, *everyone's phone calls* are now taking place in public. I was awakened one night by some guy having a loud and long conversation with someone. Intrigued because I never heard the other person say anything, I finally got up and looked outside. And saw this guy walking up and down on the sidewalk under my bedroom window, talking into his cell phone. Why in god's name do you have to have your frickin' phone conversation under my frickin' bedroom window, I asked him. Because, apparently, that's where the best reception was.

And it's the not hearing the other person say anything that makes cell phone conversations even more annoying. We have evolved to pay attention to stuff that stands out. That's the way our brains are wired. And half a conversation stands out a lot more than a whole conversation. It's like hearing only every second word in a sentence. So however annoying the whole conversation would be, half of it is even worse.

But what's most worrisome about the widespread use of cell phones is that it indicates not progress, but regress. We are, in fact, now devolving. Imagine, for a moment, what it would've been like to have been the first one in your cave to discover thought, the first one to hear words, inside your head. It's a neat and handy ability—not to have to say out loud everything that occurs to you. And one of the more valuable side-effects of being able to think is being able to evaluate—to deliberate, to compare, to measure. (And to realize that not everything that occurs to you is *worth* saying out loud.) But we've gone backwards—to "I talk, therefore I am." (I wonder if cell phone users can read without moving their lips.)

Given the recent increase in attention deficit (what we used to call 'a short attention span') (usually in reference to children and other less advanced creatures), the cell phone

phenomenon is not surprising: it takes a certain amount of attention or concentration to think—to focus on and follow that little voice inside your head. It used to be that doing two things at once meant your ability to concentrate was so good, you could divide your attention. Now it means that your ability to concentrate is so bad, you can't pay attention to any one thing for more than ten seconds.

(Either that or you don't *care* enough to pay attention to anything or anyone for more than ten seconds.)

* * * * *

Whose Violence?

I read the other day that “Violence in our society continues to be a problem.” One, duh. Two, no wonder. We haven't even got it *named* right yet.

“Violence in our society.” It sounds so—inclusive. So *gender*-inclusive. But about 85% of all violent crime is committed *by men*. The gangs are made up of men, the bar brawls are fought by men, the corner stores are held up by men, the rapists are men, the muggers are men, the drive-by shooters are men. This is sex-specific. The problem is *male* violence.

So it does no good to look at ‘society’, to look at our schools, our workplaces, our televisions. We need to look at our *boys*. We need to look at how we raise them—to *become men*. Because our *girls* don't grow up to commit assault and homicide on a regular basis.

For starters, let's admit that we stunt their emotional growth. From day one, we encourage outright denial: big boys don't cry. They don't cuddle and hug either. So hurt, pain, love, and affection are—not cards in the deck they're playing with.

And then there's the development of empathy. A grade eleven male student once told me that I'd wrecked hunting for him, because I'd described in some detail the awful last few hours of a wolf that'd been shot. The boy said he'd never thought about it before. Seventeen years old, carrying a loaded gun, and he's never thought about it? I guess *Bambi's* become a chick flick, has it? (It's no wonder, of course—you can't imagine in another what you can't even see, won't even see, in yourself.)

As any reflective human being will know, hurt and anger reside pretty close to each other. So if you're blind to the hurt, all you'll recognize is the anger. And anger seems to need explosive expression—if not verbal, then physical. Which brings us to communication skills. As any teacher will tell you, boys lag behind girls in language skills. Why is this? Even if it *is* innate (a boys-are-better-at-spatial-tasks-girls-are-better-at-verbal-tasks thing), well, that's just a reason for doing *more*, not *less*, with boys and communication skills. Because if they can't talk about, they *will* fight about it.

And let's look at nature. What if male violence *isn't* the result of a double standard in nurture? What if it's the testosterone? Or the Y chromosome itself? Then maybe it's the *men* we should be over-tranquillizing. If we can manipulate estrogen levels, surely we can control testosterone levels.

Of course, you're horrified at the thought of such chemical castration. Well, hell, *I'm* horrified at the fact that we have an epidemic of violence that's clearly sex-linked and everyone seems to be busy oohing and aahing at the emperor's new clothes. The truth is *masculinity* (as we seem to have defined it) *kills*.

* * * * *

If she can wear perfume in public, I don't have to wear a shirt

Remember the resistance to fragrance-free environments? What a testament to our inconsistency. Remember the outrage over shirtless women? Why do we respect visual space more than we do olfactory space, and acoustic space, for that matter?

In fact, if we're going to rank order these things, it makes a lot more sense the other way around. Consider ease of avoidance: if you don't want to see something, you don't have to look. But we can't close our ears, and it's a lot more inconvenient to keep putting in and taking out earplugs than it is to just turn the other way for a few moments. As for plugging our nose, that's more inconvenient still. It can result in death.

True, it depends on the situation. If the visual offense is on the wall across from your desk at work, you can hardly be expected to quit your job in order to avoid it. And if the offensive Chanel No.5 is only in your neighbour's home, well, don't go visit. However, it's currently illegal to be nude even on your own property. And it is not illegal to wear Chanel No.5 at work. As I said, inconsistent.

But, you may say, it's not just that nudity is offensive, it's immoral. Okay. That's a new point. (Though I'd really really like to hear why it's immoral for me to bare my chest, but okay for the guy next door to do so.) (Especially when his boobs are bigger than mine.)

However, I'll respond that it's not just that fumes are offensive, they can be harmful. And I think a health risk trumps an immorality. Why? Because you choose your values—if you don't want the pain of immorality, you can just change your values. If I don't want the pain of inflammation with its headache, itching and teary eyes, etc., I can hardly just change the biochemical composition of my body.

For me, it's acoustic space that matters a lot, and I'm tired of people trespassing. Every time my neighbour works around his house, he sings—loudly enough for me to hear. I don't want to listen to him sing. But I have no choice. And oh he must have a lawn (we live in the middle of a fucking forest, for god's sake), and he *must* maintain it with a noisy lawnmower and a noisier weedwhipper. The guy a couple lots down even has a leaf blower. (We're on a lake; sound travels remarkably well across water.) I don't want to listen to it. But I have no choice. Short of leaving my home. *He's* intruding on *my* space—why should *I* be the one who moves?

Frankly, I support the fragrance-free request, if only because it shows us that our attention has been generally limited, to *physical* space, which we value most of all (consider trespassing laws and the many 'no touching' laws). But, as we are now understanding, that's not the only private space to be respected. And as we struggle to

balance our various freedoms and rights, let's at least be consistent: if she can wear Chanel, and if he can sing, I can go shirtless.

* * * * *

School Crossing Signs

You've seen the signs I mean—silhouette figures of two children about to cross the road: one boy, one girl. (How do we tell? One's wearing a skirt.) (That'd be the girl.) (Really, do most girls still wear skirts to school?)

So, yes, let's emphasize *sex*. Boy and Girl. Mr. and Ms. *Nothing else matters*.

And nothing else is possible.

Note that the boy is taller. 'Oh, but they are.' Not at that age! Taller suggests older which suggests more mature, wiser. And just in case you miss this not-so-subtle suggestion of male authority, look, he has his hand on the little girl's shoulder—guiding, protecting, patronizing. It will be there for the rest of her life.

Just to make sure of that, we have this social understanding that in a couple, the man should be two or three years older than the woman. Such an arrangement gives the illusion, and the excuse, of the man being in a position of authority over the woman—after all, he's older. (But since, as they say, women mature two years ahead of men, such an arrangement merely ensures the two are 'equal'. If they were the same age, they'd see in a minute that the woman should take the lead, being more mature intellectually, emotionally, and socially.)

And to really *really* make sure the message of male authority gets through, mothers encourage their boys to be the man of the house. So a fourteen year old boy comes to consider himself more knowing, more capable, than a woman more than twice his age (his mother). Is it any wonder that at eighteen, he assumes he's more knowing, more capable, than *all* women?

Now I confess that if the crossing sign had things the other way around, a taller, older girl guiding a younger boy, I'd protest the nurturant mommy-in-training role model. Which just goes to show we can't win. As long as we insist on pointing at everything and saying 'male!' or 'female!' As long as we live in an apartheid of sex.

The ironic thing is that the signs point the way to (or from) *school*, the institution at which we supposedly become educated, enlightened. Looks like we just learn how to colour—in pink and blue. (In black and white.)

* * * * *

Wedding Leave

I recently discovered that my workplace has ‘wedding leave’: apparently you can get up to three days off—*with pay*. What the fuck is going on here?

I mean, what’s a wedding? It’s just a big party. Should employees be allowed to have personal parties on company time? I think not.

Oh, but it’s a once-in-a-lifetime party. Well, no, there’s a fifty-fifty chance the marriage will end in divorce, and the happy couple may well try again (presumably after shouting ‘Switch!’). But even allowing *one* party on company time is wrong—unless, of course, *every* employee is so entitled, not just those who choose to marry. Remember, it is a choice: getting married is not like getting sick. (Well, actually, it is, but that’s a separate point.)

So what’s so special about this choice? Getting married is just entering into a legal contract. Why isn’t everyone who enters into a legal contract allowed three days off to celebrate? Why is *this* legal contract cause for exception?

Perhaps because of what else getting married is: it’s a religious ceremony. Well, surely mixing religion and the workplace is a very contentious thing. Can I have three days off to celebrate *my* religious ceremony, the It’s-Time-To-Worship-The-Great-Big-Purple-Platypus-In-The-Sky Weekend?

It seems to me that wedding leave is discrimination pure and simple—if not on religious grounds, then on grounds of marital status-to-be.

But perhaps I shouldn’t be so surprised. Our society has lots of customs that reward those who marry. Both of my siblings got married and therefore had their apartments half-furnished with everything from blenders to stereos before they even moved in. I, on the other hand, have had to buy every single thing I wanted (and I still don’t have a blender). Being married also means that your best friend can get medical benefits through your employer (gee, that’s way better than a blender)—I’m referring, of course, to spousal benefits, another policy that just doesn’t stand up to contemporary scrutiny (based, as it is, on the single breadwinner, half-the-nation’s-adults-are-and/or-need-to-be-kept, premise). Wedding leave is just one more perk for maintaining the status quo (“Settle down, get a job, find a girl, you can marry...” Cat Stevens).

Now I haven’t actually asked about wedding leave, and the fact that most weddings can and do happen on Saturday (one day, and not usually a work day) suggests that I could be mistaken: maybe the three days’ leave with pay is intended for the honeymoon. Oh, so only if I sanctify my sexual-domestic partnership with state permission or superstitious ritual am I allowed to take a holiday with my love on company time? What the fuck—

* * * * *

Freakonomics Indeed

I remember when I first read Levitt and Dubner’s *Freakonomics*, in which they present an astounding connection between access to abortion and crime: twenty years after *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. crime rate dropped.

Astounding indeed. That (just these two?) men are so surprised by that! Just how clueless *are* you guys? About the power, the influence, of parenting, about the effect of being forced to be pregnant, to be saddled with a squalling baby you do not want, on an income you do not have, because you've got a squalling baby you do not want... What did you guys *think* would happen in situations like that? That such women would get "Mother of the Year" awards for raising psychologically healthy adults?

What *I* find surprising is that access to abortion isn't related to infanticide. Pity. Given the *Freakonomics* boys.

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The Arithmetic of Morality

I limit my fuel consumption: I ration myself to one trip into town a week and I haven't taken a 'joy ride' since the '70s. But lately, I'm wondering—for what? My neighbour thinks nothing of going into town three times in one day. Half the men on the continent drive gas-guzzling pick-ups all day, without ever picking up anything, and the other half drive mini-vans, that are mostly empty most of the time.

I keep myself colder than I'd like and I live in a dark house, while the lights and computers stay on 24/7 in some guy's place of business and his advertisements light up the world.

Still, it's the principle that counts. Really? Unless there's a god, it's the consequence that counts. 'Using only what you need' is right because it's wrong to take more than you need if that means others will have less than they need. But if, say, you take more apples than you need because otherwise they'll just rot on the ground, what's wrong with that?

And there are no effects on others, no measurable consequences, if I'm the only one, or one of a few, or at least of *too* few... Of course, if *enough* people decrease their fuel consumption (and a corresponding number don't *increase* their consumption), there *would* be a measurable consequence. And thus a moral consequence. (Though that's arguable: less fossil fuel leads to less carbon emission, which leads to less global warming, which leads to less climate change—tell me when I get to the *moral* good...)

* * * * *

King of the Castle

Octavia Butler got it right in *Xenogenesis* when the aliens identified one of our fatal flaws as that of being hierarchy-driven (they fixed us with a bit of genetic engineering)—but she failed to associate the flaw predominantly with males.

And Steven Goldberg got it right in *Why Men Rule* when he explained that men are

genetically predisposed to hierarchy (fetal masculinization of the central nervous system renders males more sensitive to the dominance-related properties of testosterone)—but he presented that as an explanation for why men rule and not also for why men kill.

And Arthur Koestler got it right in *The Call Girls* when, recognizing that the survival of the human species is unlikely, a select group of geniuses meet at a special ‘Approaches to Survival’ symposium (and fail to agree on a survival plan)—but I’m not sure he realized (oh of course he did) that one of his character’s early reference to a previous symposium on ‘Hierarchic Order in Primate Societies’ was foreshadowing.

The reason the human species will not survive is simple: the males can’t help playing King of the Castle—all the time, everywhere, with everyone. Talk about aggression and violence, greed, and competition is all very good, but these things are secondary: aggression and violence are means to the end of becoming King of the Castle; it’s not really that men are greedy, they just want more than the next guy, they want to be better, higher than the next guy, then the next, and the next, until they get to the top; and competition, well, competition is just another word for trying to become King of the Castle.

And once they *become* King of the Castle, they see, from up there, that there’s another castle to become King of. Once they’ve got the one-bedroom apartment, they go for the two-bedroom. Then the duplex, then the single-family dwelling. Once they get a house, they need a cottage too. And once they get the cottage, then they need a summer home. Then a yacht. They can’t stop adding and upgrading. Whether it’s homes or cars, stereo systems or computers—nothing is ever (good) enough. Nothing satisfies. Sold one million? Let’s aim for two million. This year’s profit is X? Let’s set a target of double X for next year. Consider the business graph of success—more, more, more... They cannot ‘say when’. Contentment forever eludes them. The only joy in their lives is that associated with achievement, with getting a toehold a little higher on the hill, winning an extra inch. They can’t play without keeping score. They can’t go canoeing without a destination *and* an arrival time. They cannot concede, surrender, or lose without shame.

It’s not about the pursuit of excellence, don’t let them kid you: there’s no standard of intrinsic quality involved; comparison is all. And it’s not about self-improvement: being King of the Castle seldom improves the self.

The end result to this deadly game they play will be the same, whether it’s achieved by genocidal war, environmental destruction, or the global marketplace: loss of diversity. It’s the kiss of death for any, for every, species. (Unless, of course, some Nero goes nuclear first.)

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The Smiths and their Biochem Cubes

Suppose the Smiths make biochem cubes—biological-chemical cubes about one metre by one metre with an input for resources required for sustenance and an output for unusable processed resources. Why do they make biochem cubes? Good question. Truth

be told, they're unlikely to make the world a better place. And they doesn't sell them.

Should we make allowances for John Smith with regard to money (salary, income tax, subsidies, etc.)? After all, he has, let's say, ten biochem cubes to support. If they are to stay alive, he needs to provide sustenance. He needs a bigger house. More electricity. More food.

Should we encourage their 'hobby'? Perhaps consider it respectable, or a rite of passage to maturity?

Or should we censure it? Because once their biochem cubes become ambulatory, the rest of us have to go around them in one way or another. And when we're all dead, the Smiths' ecological footprints will have been at least ten times mine. (More, if the biochem cubes they made go out and make other biochem cubes.)

* * * * *

Vested Interests and Cancers

Vested interest. It sounds so solid. So respectable. So endowed with authority. Like a three-piece suit with a watch on a chain. But what does 'vested interest' mean? It means 'self-interest'. A vested interest is nothing less than a self-interest. And nothing more.

But say 'vested interest' and, well, say no more. Literally. If I object to a zoning bylaw change that will probably lead to more traffic and tourists because that will destroy the silence and solitude of where I live, well, I'm just expressing my own personal interests. But if the guy who runs the gas station says the change should be approved because it will be good for business, well, that's different. He has a business—he has a vested interest in the zoning bylaws. So suddenly his opinion, his desires, count more. It's magic. It certainly isn't rational.

Because it *isn't* different. I want silence and solitude; he wants money. We're both expressing what we want for ourselves, what we're interested in—we're both expressing self-interest.

"But he has all that money invested in his business!" Which just means he spent a lot of money expecting a certain future. Well, so did I. I bought a house, expecting a certain future. 'Invest' is just a business word for 'gamble'—you do X hoping for Y in the future.

But say 'business' and the red carpet rolls out. (Rather like saying 'religion' or 'kids'.) "I've got a business to run!" can legitimize almost anything. Business is important. Business gets special treatment. It gets the right of way. Quite literally—we are to step aside and let business proceed unimpeded, unchallenged.

I think this is partly because business has this 'social good' thing going for it. Business is good for the economy. It creates jobs. It provides us with much needed goods and services. Yeah right. Business 'provides' jobs the way people 'provide' labour. There's no charity or social service on either end. Business people expect to be paid for those goods and services. They don't contribute their stuff to society; they sell it. So business isn't doing anything for the social good, for society—it's doing for the self.

Despite attempts to convince us otherwise.

For example, “We’re just following consumer demand.” But society isn’t just a conglomerate of consumers, so even if you *are* just following consumer demand, you’re still not acting for the social good. Depending on *what* exactly consumers demand, you could be doing just the opposite. (And note the use of ‘demand’. It makes it sound like their behavior is *required*. It’s not. They have a choice. But ‘demand’ is far more compelling than ‘desire’: it implies that resistance, their resistance, is futile, which implies that they’re without power here, and hence without responsibility. So even what they do *is* correctly identified as self-interested, well, they can hardly be blamed.) And of course consumers ‘demand’ lots of things, but companies provide only those that generate profit *for the company*—that is, for the owner/s of the company. (And there’s another one: “Our shareholders demand high returns.” It’s yet another way of saying ‘Hey don’t blame us, we’re just doing what’s demanded of us, and we’re not doing it for ourselves, we’re doing it for our shareholders.’ As if you don’t own any shares. As if pleasing shareholders isn’t in your own interests...) In truth, companies provide things they expect to generate profit even if consumers *don’t* demand them: if people really wanted product X or service Y, companies wouldn’t (have to) spend millions of dollars on advertising (to persuade them to buy it). Quite simply, many of those goods and services are *not* ‘much needed’.

The CEO of a bank once said “Return on equity is [an] important measure of a banks’ success.” Not the amount of good it does, not the amount of happiness it creates, no, these things don’t matter. Success isn’t even justice, it isn’t even getting back what you put out, no, success is getting back *more* than you put out. Self-interest. Literally, *interest*. For *oneself*.

The same CEO also responded to a question about the obligation to create and maintain jobs with “If we are to attract ... we need to create exciting new job opportunities ... to keep top talent ... and move forward ...” Embarrassing is his assumption that the question referred just to his bank—he understood ‘obligation’ to mean obligation *to the bank*, to the interests of the bank. I don’t think the phrase ‘society as a whole’ is even in his vocabulary.

Lurking somewhere in here is the notion that those with a vested interest in something will take better care of it and *that’s* what justifies the greater weight to such interests. But first, that assumes a very ego-centered view of human beings; some of us are capable of taking good care of things for others. Second, it assumes a certain wisdom on the part of the self in question, and there are a lot of people who don’t take good care of stuff even when it’s their own. Third, *self-interest* tends to be *short-term* interest, if only because the self is a very short-term enterprise. And much of what we’re talking about is long-term stuff, like natural resources, so taking good care of it requires a long-term perspective that by definition is precluded by self-interest. For example, that same CEO referred to “every stage of the life cycle” as “right through to start-up and then growth”. Excuse me? What about stasis? What about decline? They are stages of the *entire* life cycle. Unless, of course, you’re a cancer.

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Inner Peace is Disturbing

The problem with inner peace is that it's really just resignation. It's giving up. It's refusing to accept responsibility for one's actions by refusing to accept that one *can* act. It's the epitome of passivity.

Consider the following 'symptoms' of inner peace (they're on several internet sites).

A tendency to think and act spontaneously. That is, without careful deliberation, without thorough consideration. So when one thinks at all, one's thought will necessarily be superficial and shallow. Actually, perhaps one *won't* think at all; after all, to "act spontaneously" is to act *without* thinking. So how, exactly, *does* one "think spontaneously"? Furthermore, one is to think and act spontaneously *rather than on fears based on past experience*. Well, past experience is what guides us (at least those of us who are rational): the last time we put our hand on a hot stove, it hurt—so the bright ones among us stopped doing that. Granted, if we use only the *fears* of our past experience, we are being a bit lopsided, but that doesn't seem to be the point being made here.

Loss of interest in judging other people. So *that's* how an actor got to be president of the most powerful country on earth. Could account for a lot of those battered wives too. D'ya suppose they're feeling innerly peaceful? (I'll bet they have *frequent attacks of smiling*.)

Loss of interest in interpreting the actions of others. This pretty much goes hand in hand with the previous symptom: if you're not going to judge, there's no point in interpreting. Though for the life of me, I can't see how failing to interpret the actions of someone who is loading and aiming a gun at my friend will lead to my inner peace.

An increased tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen. This one says it all. A complete abdication of responsibility. Que sera sera. If someone blows up the world, well hey, stuff happens.

There you have it. Inner Peace. Aka Resignation. If you don't care about X or Y, losing X or seeing Y hurt won't bother you. And an unbothered person is a peaceful person. Don't worry, be happy.

But, then, a peaceful person is an uncaring person: it's the *absence* of inner peace, the *presence* of frustration, anger, and disappointment that is a measure of one's caring. The more one cares about X or Y, the more one will be agitated, *not* at peace, if one loses X or sees Y hurt.

The only thing that makes sense of all this inner peace crap is the belief that someone else, perhaps someone more qualified, is being thoughtful, judgemental, and active. Hm. Could it be God? Well, yes it could. *That's* why we don't have to worry about anything: God will take care of it, what will be will be by God's will.

The problem with this is that there are no gods.

So the route to inner peace is the route to death. Not thinking, not judging, not interpreting, not acting—sounds a lot like the comatose, who, without someone *else* to be responsible for them, would die. (And when's the last time you saw *God* change a catheter?)

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Figure Skating: A Very Gendered Thing

Many call figure skating a sissy sport, a feminine thing. To the contrary, and to my unrelenting irritation, it is a very gender-inclusive sport, a sport of *both* sexes, a sport where men must be men and women must be, well, girls.

Consider the costumes. The men usually wear ordinary long pants and a more or less ordinary shirt. The women, on the other hand, with such consistency I suspect an actual rule, show their legs—their *whole* legs—and as much of their upper body as they can get away with. And they always wear that cutesy short little girl skirt. What is it with that? Or they wear a negligée. —ah. It's the standard bipolar turn-on for sick men: sexy-child. And why is 'child' sexy to men? Because 'child' guarantees power over. And that's what sex is to men—power, not pleasure. Or rather, the power *is* the pleasure. Probably because they don't recognize the responsibility of power. So even in a sport *without* frequent legs-wide-apart positions, the woman's costume would be questionable. (And actually, it *is* a rule—ISU #612 says the female skaters have to wear skirts, that is, have to show leg. Like most rules women are expected to follow, this one surely was made by men, for men. As if women exist for men's viewing pleasure.)

Too, no doubt there's some compensation going on: the stronger women get, the more feminine (i.e., weaker), they're told to be. Men can't accept women's superior fitness, physical ability, endurance, and agility; so the women are encouraged to compensate by being child (I'm really young, small, and no threat at all) and by being sexy (I'll still please you).

In no other sport—I think of track, basketball, volleyball—do the men and women wear such different outfits. And in fact, not even in figure skating, at least not in *practice*, do they wear such different outfits: most skaters, whatever their sex, wear some sort of spandex bodysuit, perhaps with sweats, when they work on the ice. You can't tell them apart then: there's no difference in speed, in line, in movement. —ah. *That's* the problem: that we won't be able to tell them apart. Men define themselves as not-women; the greater the difference, the stronger their identity. And yet, as one male student of mine once explained, 'It's natural to pick a fight with whatever's different.' (Men are so confused.) (Then again, maybe not—maybe they just like to fight. Hence the need to ensure there's always something different nearby.) (Men are so confused.)[\[1\]](#)

Consider, too, the pairs. Always male and female. There are same-sex pairs in other sports (for example, tennis)—why the obsession with mixed-sex pairs in figure skating? And yes, there are mixed doubles in other sports, but only in this one is the strong boy–weak girl thing so prevalent, only in this one does the man routinely (seem to) support the woman: he is the subject who throws, pulls, pushes, lifts, and carries her, the object. It's the perfect metaphor for our deluded masculinist world: the man lifts the woman, displaying his strength as he puts her on a pedestal. Deluded, because, of course, the woman, despite her incredible physical strength and skill, appears to be a mere object moved by the man when, in fact, the success of the move depends as much on her: her strength, her balance, her timing.

Given that, why aren't they called aerial balances instead of lifts? Or better yet, more fair, lifted balances? The very name—lifts—describes only what the *man* does. As if the woman does nothing, as if she's completely passive. *You* try holding your body

horizontal in mid-air and see how much sheer strength it takes, along with amazing balance. Go ahead: climb a tree; now hang over a branch; okay, now straighten your body and hold it; now, add a couple pounds of skate to one end; and now lift both ends not just even with the branch but *higher* than the branch, that's it, arch; okay now let's make the tree move; now smile.

And now get down. But you can't just jump down. You have to land in the man's arms. Without slicing his balls off with your blades. That takes some skill. (And yeah, okay, some concern.)

And why aren't they called throws instead of throws? Or better yet, more active, soars? Contrary to popular belief, the woman doesn't need the man to throw her high into the air in order to do a couple twists before she lands. The side-by-side triple jumps show that she is quite capable of throwing herself. And, in fact, wouldn't it be *harder*, at least to land, when you've been thrown by someone else?

The answer to this question about the names is that figure skating, like so much else, is defined by men. The quad is deemed to be the most difficult move; it is the benchmark of superior ability; it is more noteworthy than a spin or a spiral. This is not surprising. The quad is a short-burst feat of speed and strength. These are male obsessions. Perhaps because they are easily mastered by the male body.^[2] The spin, less lauded, is a feat of balance (as well as speed and strength). And more easily mastered by the female body. (Unless, of course, you're Surya Bonaly—she can do both a quad and a spin.) (Sometimes even while wearing a cute little skirt.) The spiral, less lauded still, a feat of flexibility (as well as balance and strength). The quad covers more ground, conquers more territory. The spin stays in one place. The spiral also covers a lot of ground, more, in fact, than the quad, but it's static, and beautiful, and is therefore less valued. The quad is also subject to quantification—it's *more than* a triple. The spin is also subject to quantification, more, in fact, than the quad, but as I said, it stays in one spot and it's very small. That there is more comment about women not doing quads (or rather, more presumption that because they can do only triples, they're not as good as the men) than there is about men not doing the Biellmann spin, a difficult cross between a spin and a spiral (let alone the presumption that they're not as good as the women because they can't do it) indicates that the measure of ability, the standard, the norm of reference in figure skating, is male.

Perhaps the polarization, in costume as well as in movement, is perpetuated not by men in general, but by insecure men who are reacting to the 'real men don't figure skate' view. So they emphasize a 'masculine' physicality.

There are, of course, thankfully, exceptions. The "Marbles" piece of Gary Beacom and Gia Guddat is one example: skating on their hands as well as their feet, in identical striped three-quarter bodysuits, they emphasize not sex, but technique and humour. The Duchesnays provide another example: in one piece, they each wear the same simple blue pants-and-shirt outfit, and the choreography has no heterosexual romantic undertone whatsoever, they are simply two skaters on the ice, each as apt to support the other; the piece is about, again not sex, but art and athletics.

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^[1] This need to differentiate would explain the prevalence of the military theme, the warrior figure, in the men's solos: I'm not a sissy, I'm a real man, I'm physically strong and emotionally flat, I like to

fight. (And kill. So it suddenly occurred to me, when I happened to watch a figure skating competition right after a newscast during the Serbia/Croatia ‘conflict’, what poor taste it was—to act out, on the ice, killing someone, with such pride, such celebration. Especially if there’s a nationalistic edge to the performance, as there often is because of the accompanying music.) (Well, duh. Of course. From toy guns to action movies, it’s not just poor taste, it’s sick—to portray, and to consider, hurting and killing as entertaining.)

Consider too the male habit of thrusting (!) his *fist* into the air after a successful performance (in any sport), showing this unsettling association of victory with violence, pleasure with power.

[2] Consider the fact that women leave the sport (or have to re-learn it) once they reach puberty—i.e., once they actually develop female bodies. As is the case with gymnastics. And track. There have got to be moves that a woman’s body can do, for which hips and breasts and a certain amount of body fat aren’t debilitating. Why haven’t we made sports out of those? Well, we have. But the media, and society, in which men call the shots, don’t put a lot of attention, time, energy, or money into distance swimming. (*There*, our fat is good—the buoyancy makes it easier. *There*, our anaerobic superiority is good—we *last longer*, we finish.) Or synchronized swimming. (Which men simply couldn’t do.) (Or at least couldn’t do very well.) (Or, most importantly, couldn’t do better than women. They don’t have that anaerobic efficiency. They’d drown. And they certainly couldn’t get their legs very high out of the water—what with their poor buoyancy and their top heaviness, they’d be, well, pathetic. And few—only the young ones, the boys—could split them to the horizontal. And anyway, that complete relinquishing of the ego—absolutely no grandstanding, no upstaging, allowed—and that continuous adjustment which requires a sensitivity to others, is beyond them.)

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We are the Champions

A while ago, I happened to watch the IAAF World Cross Country Championships, with Kenyans in the lead of course, just after I saw the news about a famine in east Africa, in particular, in Kenya.

So it occurred to me that any one Kenyan runner (there are always several leading the pack) would have had to eat the entire village’s food just to develop the strength and stamina to become a world class runner. Should a village make, or be made to make, such a sacrifice? How does a country full of bloated bellies, with half its population under fifteen, and so malnourished they’re brain-damaged, how can such a country produce and sustain a team of elite athletes? (Then again, with first prize at \$40,000 and a clean team sweep, not unusual for Kenya, totalling almost \$100,000, how can it not?)

Seeing a Canadian with the front runners, I wonder on what grounds could it be morally acceptable for that Canadian, who probably has a job that pays about \$30,000, to beat the Kenyan, whose annual income is more like \$3,000? That’s 15 years’ wages waiting at the finish line for her. (Would winning and turning over the prize money to the Kenyan be any better?) (Should such races be segregated by economic status?)

As the Canadian runner, looking terribly overfed, falls behind, it occurs to me that the Kenyan may well have had to spend a whole year’s salary just to get to the race. Though of course maybe her airfare and accommodations were paid for. And I rather

suspect she won't keep the \$40,000 for herself. (Would it be wrong if she did?)

As the Canadian runner falls further back, I see another runner move ahead, and realize Kenya and Ethiopia are racing against each other for the gold. How sick is that? I know there are a number of reasons for the starvation and some of them, such as overpopulation, are their own fault. But some of them are not. They don't control the climate (and if anyone does, we, the first world countries with our climate-changing industry, do). And then there's the interest on third world debt that I keep hearing about—the principal has been paid back over and over, but still, due to the wonder of compound interest, they're supposed to keep paying and paying.

It's a commercial break, time for a word from the sponsors: a bank—a big bank. (Is there any other kind now?) Of course. So let me summarize: one of the largest and most powerful financial institutions stages a race, dangles \$100,000 at the finish line, and then watches representatives of two starving countries compete for it. (How sick is that.)

The Kenyans win. Easily. And I wonder whether the immorality lies not in having these races, but in not having more of them.

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Let's Talk About Sex

Disc jockeys generally come in two sexes: male and female. So what, you may think, sex doesn't matter. Oh but it does, so sad to say.

I used to deejay for weddings and other parties, and on any given night, one or two of several things might happen. For a long time, I never gave them much thought. But when all of these things happened during a single night, it suddenly seemed clear to me that all those hitherto separate things were, in fact, related. They were all related to my sex.

On the night in question, I had agreed to fill in for a friend, to do his regular gig at a basement bar. When I arrived early for a show-and-tell with his system, I was immediately struck by—size. Mike and I had started out as deejays at the same time: we went through the training together, we apprenticed with the same outfit, and then we each bought out our identical systems and started our own businesses. I had pretty much kept the same system—a couple cassette players, a search deck, a mixer, an amp, and a pair of 12" x 16" speakers on tripods. Mike, I saw, had added. And he'd added big: he now had *two* pairs of speakers, each 3' by 2', a second amp of course, and a couple CD players.

What is it with men? They get suckered in to the 'bigger is better' mentality every time. (And it's not just immature, it's dangerous: look around—continual growth is *not* good, we *can't* keep expanding, getting bigger and bigger, using more and more.) I asked him if the smaller set-up wasn't loud enough, if he'd gotten too many complaints. Of course he had to say no. But this looks better, he said. And that *really* pisses me off. Most people—most men—are stupid that way: they see Mike's huge array of equipment, compare it to my little set-up, and figure he's a better deejay. There's no logic to it. And either Mike knows it and he's taking advantage of it (and making it that much harder for

the rest of us who refuse to be taken in by size) or he doesn't know it and he's just as big a fool as the rest of them (unknowingly at my expense).

Whatever, he walked me through and in a few minutes I was fine—unless I got a lot of requests. And this is another problem with more, more, more: there were at least four different places to look up a title: there was one directory for the old cassettes, a separate directory for the new cassettes, a third directory for the CDs (except for the ones which weren't listed anywhere), and a fourth 'hits' directory. This is crazy, I thought as he left. I took some time to familiarize myself with what was where, and saw a ridiculous amount of duplication—there had to be at least a hundred songs I could find in at least two places. And altogether he had ten times more music than he could ever hope to play in a night.

Well, the requests started coming in at 10:00. The bartender told me to play Seger's "Rock and Roll", "Dance Mix 95", and "The Macarena". Gee, none of those would've occurred to me, thanks. Then the other bartender came up and asked for something. A little later I got a note with seven or eight titles on it. It occurred to me at that point that I was getting a lot more requests than Mike usually got. (He had said this gig would be a piece of cake.) And I wondered, is it because I'm a woman, so people think I'm more approachable? Or is it because I'm a woman, so probably I have to be told what to play, because I probably don't know. (And half the time it is just that: I'm *told*, not asked, to play such-and-such.)

At around 10:30, this guy came up to chat. He opened with 'So are you Mike's helper?' Excuse me? Mike's *helper*? I told him no, I have my own business (I gave him my card), I'm just doing this gig for him tonight as a favour. The guy continued the small talk. I was trying to be polite, but I was also listening for the end of the piece, and trying to find at least *one* of the requested songs in at least one of the directories or boxes of music—and then it dawned on me that this guy was trying to stretch out the conversation, because he was, in fact, 'hitting on me'. And I was, in fact, trying to work.

The same thing happened again later on. Only with the second guy, we got into this ridiculous competition of 'I know more about deejaying than you'. I'm sure you know the type, there's one in every crowd who comes up to tell you 'Yeah, I used to do this, how many watts do you have?' But this guy *really* wanted to win—and it occurred to me that this man-woman thing was getting in the way again, it was complicating simple shop talk, because he refused to lose to a woman. Listen, I'm trying to *work* here—

And then this *third* guy came up and said, 'Play some rock, this stuff is shit.' I smiled and said, 'This shit was requested, but I'll certainly put on some rock for you'. I did so within two songs. He came up again, and this time sat himself down in my chair, behind my table (I've never seen *anyone* do that to a male deejay). He told me he had been drinking since 2:00. He thought he was bragging rather than proclaiming how pathetic he was, and I realized, geez, he's hitting on me too. 'Play some rock,' he said again. 'I've *been* playing rock,' I said, 'what specifically do you want to hear, what do you mean when you say 'rock'?' 'Any rock,' he exploded, then insulted, 'Anyone knows what rock is!' He came up a third time, and said he'd taken a survey and no one wanted to hear this shit ("Dance Mix", requested three times), play some rock and roll! By now, I was just trying to ignore him. I'd already played Seger, Springsteen, the Stones, Cochrane, and Adams; I'd played Tragically Hip and Pearl Jam; I'd played Hootie and I'd played the Smashing Pumpkins. This was one drunken asshole I would not be able to

please. He persisted from the end of the bar, yelling ‘Rock and Roll!’ every time I put on some dance or country (also requested several times).

I almost lost it when at around midnight the bartender came up and asked me to play some rock and roll—’He keeps asking us to come up and tell the girl to play a little rock!’ ‘*The girl.*’ Any man pushing forty would be, I think, insulted to be called a boy. Wake up call, guys: most adult women are just as insulted to be called a girl.

Shortly after, the first guy came back up to tell me he thought I was doing a fine job, he saw the shit I was getting from the other guy. Part of me wanted to take that at face value, it was a really nice thing to do. But another part of me was thinking ‘Yeah but he’s only nice like that because you’re a woman’: there’s a subtext of either making the moves on me or patronizing me. (Did he think I was about to burst into tears? Actually I was thinking about just hauling back and decking the drunk—but I didn’t want to have to pay Mike for damage to his equipment.)

The night finally ended and I left.

The next night, I had a wedding to do. And it was just like any other wedding I’d done, but after the previous night, well, it was just like that night...

‘I don’t think this is gonna go, you should play something faster,’ I heard someone say to me. I looked at him and wondered if he thought his being male and my being female gave him the right to criticize, to give advice to someone old enough to be his parent. Thirty seconds into the (slow) piece I’d chosen, the dance floor was full. Had I proved myself? Of course not—I’d just ‘lucked out’. ‘Again’, I mused sarcastically.

Another guy came up, walked around my table, and stood beside me. No, he didn’t have a request, he just wanted to introduce himself and say hi, how’s it going. He stayed, in my way, for three whole songs, oblivious to my suggestions that he join the party, it looked good.

A little later, an older guy, fifty-something, gave me a gentle warning, ‘You can’t please everyone, but just try a bit of 50s and 60s.’ ‘I know,’ I told him, not pointing out that I’d already done a 50s-60s set, ‘I’ve been doing this for over five years now.’ ‘Oh you *have*?’ He was so surprised. What, do I have ‘novice’ written on my forehead? Did the way I set up my equipment suggest that I didn’t know what I was doing? (Single-handedly and in fifteen minutes flat.) No—I’m female. So it just goes without saying that I probably don’t know what I’m doing.

I just wanted to be a deejay. But people, especially men, kept insisting by their behaviour, that I was a *female* deejay. Sex shouldn’t make a difference. But they make it make a difference. Do male deejays get questioned? Are they expected to chat pleasantly while working? Do they have to deal with a constant stream of unsolicited and unnecessary guidance and advice?

Frankly, it’s irritating, insulting, and exhausting.

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Grade Ten History

Remember grade ten history? Okay, quick question: history of what? Of ideas? Of art? Of really stupid jokes? No! Of conflict! And mostly interpersonal conflict charading as intergroup conflict. *That's* what grade ten history was all about.

And grade eleven history and grade twelve history too.

So first, let's call it what it is. And this is not a minor point. It's like teaching nothing but limericks in a course called "Poetry". It would be bad enough for kids to grow up thinking that's all there is to poetry, but if they grow up thinking that's all there is to history, well, Houston, we have a problem. No history of ideas, or art, no history of discovery, no history of cultural development—what an incredible disservice not only to those who made such history, but of course to those denied that knowledge.

But that's minor damage compared to this: by focussing solely, relentless, on *that* history—on conflict, on fighting, and winning or losing, and more fighting, competing for this and that, again and again, fighting—we grow up thinking it's central to life. Fighting, and winning or losing.

And we grow up thinking it's inevitable.

So first, let's call it what it is: "History of Conflict".

And second, let's make it an elective, not a compulsory, course.

Unless, third, we teach it like this. Every student starts with 50 marks. So if they do nothing, if they remain neutral, they pass—barely, but they do pass. Now for every act of violence, direct or indirect, covert or overt, implicit or explicit, physical or psychological, they lose marks. A week can be spent just coming to a consensus about how many marks for which acts. (Good luck.) And for every act of peace, mediation, or compromise, students gain marks. Again, a week to come up with a fair, and comprehensive, marking scheme.

Then spend two weeks per conflict: two weeks on World War I, two weeks on World War II, on Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf War, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan... One week to cover the background, the context, the events giving rise to the conflict. (Good luck.) And one week, and here's the crucial part, for the students to role play, each student assigned-out-of-a-hat to be one of the key figures, or backroom powers, or soldiers, or civilians. The assignment for the second week is *resolve* the conflict—avoid the war, avoid the pain, the suffering, the killing.

Mind you, this will only work in a school with metal detectors.

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Making Kids with AIDS

What has been glaringly absent in news stories about children with AIDS in Africa is comment about *why* there are so many children with AIDS in Africa. "We are going down," a woman says, "Theft will go up, rape all over will be high. People—" Wait a minute. Back up. "Rape all over will be high"? And that's just one more unfortunate circumstance beyond their control, is it? What, as in 'boys will be boys'?

Excuse me, but when someone knowingly infects another person with a fatal disease,

he's killing her. And if someone takes away someone else's right to life, I say he forfeits his own.

And not only is the HIV-infected rapist guilty of murdering the woman he rapes, he's guilty of murdering in advance the child he creates (whether he himself is HIV-infected or whether he rapes an HIV-infected woman). There's something incredibly sick about knowingly creating a human being with a fatal disease. It's not unlike walking into an IVF clinic with a syringe and putting, say, a bit of leukemia into each Petri dish.

So, the solution? Drugs, yes. The kind vets use when they euthanase an animal. Or, if mere prevention rather than justice is the goal, castration. At the very least, vasectomy. I mean, let's have some accountability here! Those 20,000 kids with AIDS didn't just appear in a pumpkin patch one morning. *Someone made them. With a conscious, chosen, deliberate act.*

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Why isn't being a soldier more like being a mother?

Motherhood is unfair to women in a way fatherhood most definitely is not. Not only are there the physical risks (pregnancy and childbirth puts a woman at risk for nausea, fatigue, backaches, headaches, skin rashes, changes in her sense of smell and taste, chemical imbalances, high blood pressure, diabetes, anemia, embolism, changes in vision, stroke, circulatory collapse, cardiopulmonary arrest, convulsions, and coma), there's the permanent damage to one's career: if she stays at home, the loss of at least six years' experience and/or seniority; if she doesn't, the loss of a significant portion of her income, that which she must use, then, to pay for full-time childcare. (And even if she can swing holding a full-time job and paying for full-time childcare, she probably won't get promoted because she typically uses all 'her' sick days, she's reluctant to stay late or come in early, she won't work on weekends, and she occasionally has to leave in the middle of the day, perhaps even in the middle of an important meeting. In short, she can't be counted on. *Such* a lack of commitment.)

Either way, it's necessary, then, for all but a few mothers to be attached to another income (typically a man's) in order to even *be* a mother: very few women make enough money to support herself and a child, let alone a full-time childcare provider. A mother *must* be a kept woman; she must become dependent, financially, on a man. (So *of course* after a divorce, the man's standard of living increases 42% and the woman's standard decreases 73%: he no longer has to support *two* people, and she is no longer supported—she has to pay her own way and start from scratch to do so.)

Cut to the man who becomes a soldier. After all, notes Barrington Moore, Jr., “for a young man it's much more fun to prance around with a gun, or to kill several enemies with a bomb, than it is to sit at a desk day after day, bored by a dead-end job” (“How Ethnic Enmities End”). What if he *weren't* paid to do all that prancing around? Would he be so eager then? Why should we pay men to *be* a soldier when we don't pay women to *make* a soldier? Why should we pay men to actualize their hormonal impulse when we

don't pay women to actualize theirs? (I say hormonal because neither desire is very rational: before she 'signed up', she really didn't like kids much—now she wants to be with one 24/7?; before *he* signed up, he probably didn't give other people the time of day—now he's willing to die for them?)

How many men would do it if they lost six years of seniority or work experience (let's say, and I can make a good argument here, that the experience they gain is considered as nontransferable to the workplace as the experience gained by women as they raise a child)? How many would do it if they didn't get paid for the duration? If they had to depend on their wife to buy them their food and accommodations, their guns and bullets?

* * * * *

Why Do Men Spit?

Why do men spit? (And women don't.) I mean, is it physiological? Do males produce a larger amount of saliva?

Even if so, why the need to spit it out? Why not just swallow it? Would that remind them of swallowing semen? Which is female, effeminate, gay? (I'll ignore for the moment the assumption that all, or even most, women swallow semen.)

But no, that can't be right: it seems too...reasoned. Spitting seems to be more of a reflex, a habit, a that's-the-way-I-was-raised sort of thing, a cultural thing, a *subcultural* thing: to spit is to be manly. Little boys spit to appear grown up. Grown up *men*. So what's the connection between spitting and masculinity?

Consider the way men spit. It's not a chin-dribbling drooling kind of getting rid of saliva. It's a forceful ejac—ah—is that it? Is spitting a little pseudo sex act? Every time a man spits, does he experience a sort of orgasmic release? Both do involve a forceful expulsion of bodily fluids.

Hm—the pissing contest now comes to mind. What *is* it about expelling one's bodily fluids with some degree of force that proves one's manhood?

Is it just the forcefulness? Whether it's throwing a ball or—this could explain the unnecessarily loud, kleenex-devastating way many men blow their noses. Bodily fluids there too. But then why don't men wail when they cry?

There must be something more to spitting. There seems to be a certain contempt in the gesture. Certainly to spit *on someone*, like pissing on them, (and ejaculating on them?), is to defile, is to degrade, them.

But what about the man just walking down the street who hacks up a glob and spits every few seconds? Is that, then, just a continuous display of contempt—for everything? *I am male: I am better than everything*. That rings true. (As does the corollary: *I am so insecure I have to display my superiority every few seconds*.)

Perhaps men see saliva, like mucous, as germ-filled and rightly expelled from the body. But then why don't they spit into a handkerchief or a kleenex? Spitting, according to this interpretation, *increases* the contemptuousness, the utter disregard for the other,

the one who shares the sidewalk.

Men used to spit into spittoons, back when tobacco chewing was all the rage. So perhaps modern day spitting is like any tradition: a practice whose rationale has long since disappeared, but whose emotional value lingers, on a barely conscious level—maybe there's some Marlboro-man feel about it...

Or it could just be that men are slobs. But, again, what's the connection? Why do men associate lack of hygiene with masculinity? I recall a female auto mechanic explaining that the perpetually greasy hands thing was totally unnecessary, it was just a macho thing. Why are clean hands unmanly? Surely few women would want to be touched, inside or out, by greasy black fingers. (And isn't touching women proof of one's manhood?) Maybe it's just that it's so opposite to women: *women are clean, so if I am a man, I am dirty.*

For surely there's something about the liquidity of saliva. Liquids are soft; soft is feminine. So they must dissociate themselves from it, get rid of it. After all, you don't see men hacking off their tough, hard, fingernails and hurling them away so contemptuously. Actually, maybe you do—long fingernails are a female thing.

Hm. Do men think hard stools are more masculine than soft stools—do real men brag about hard it is to shit? Is that what that pile of magazines in their washrooms is all about?

* * * * *

Guns

Guns have a tendency to kill people. Usually when injury would have sufficed. What to do. (Assuming killing people isn't always a good thing.) Hm. I know! Let's replace bullet guns with dart guns. Darts filled with something that temporarily disables or immobilizes the person, causes an hour of paralysis or unconsciousness. Or severe nausea. Or diarrhoea.

Nah, that's too humane. It's okay for elephants, but for people?

Or probably, more importantly, it's too expensive. I would guess that a dart costs more than a bullet. But probably only because of supply and demand. And surely if we add in the lawsuits for accidental injury and death, the price of bullets increases substantially. (We won't add in the loss of limb or life because apparently that doesn't count for much—otherwise we wouldn't have so many bullet guns in the first place.)

Or well, it wouldn't work. What if you missed, what if, in a shoot-out, the police shot some innocent bystanders instead of the bad guys? *They'd* be the ones lying there unconscious. Well gee. Some might think better that than lying there dead.

The police might even think that. Even for the bad guys. In fact, I can't think of any policing situation in which instant and total, though temporary, disability wouldn't serve the purpose. (Reluctant cops might want to take a minute here to review that purpose.) Permanent injury and death is simply unnecessary. (Well, except for the *really* bad guys. That's why we'd bring back the death penalty right after we ban all the bullet guns.)

And as for non-police situations, well, again, a dart gun would be sufficient: if attacked, one could just fire the thing and then watch one's assailant collapse; an hour should be long enough to escape and arrange for police to be present when he or she regains consciousness. (And if not, well, let's make it for two hours. We surely have the technology—the elephants, remember?)

As for illegitimate uses, well, first, any adult who without just cause uses a dart gun would probably have done the same with a bullet gun. Second, such an idiot could safely assume that his or her victim would return fire later. Probably on more than one well-timed occasion.

What if said victim didn't have a dart gun with which to return fire? Well, why wouldn't he or she? I mean, why not allow every adult to own one? Most men already have the ability to knock someone unconscious for an hour. So do most women, but they tend to be crippled by socialization. This would just even things out.

But it would make fighting so easy, surely violence would triple overnight. Hm. One, to judge by young male behaviour, fighting is already pretty easy. Two, my guess is that a fight in which one of the guys goes unconscious immediately, and stays that way for an hour—or starts vomiting copiously or suddenly gets severe diarrhoea—I don't think that's going to be a very fun fight. So I don't think dart guns will detract from the popularity of fists, knives, or baseball bats.

* * * * *

Christmas Elves

Generally speaking, I don't do Christmas. At all. But when I see an ad in the classifieds for "Three female elves to work in a mall during the Christmas season", well, I have to say something.

And the first thing I have to say is, I don't think they're going to find any—male *or* female. They may find three women to play the part, but I doubt they'll find three elves.

Which brings me to the second thing I have to say: why do they have to be female? What must a Santa's elf do that a man can't do?

One, Santa's elves are industrious; they're notorious for being hard workers. Well, men are hard workers. No, seriously, some are!

Two, elves are pretty handy in the workshop, making all those toys. Again, I think men can meet this requirement. (Some men are even quite good with their tools, given a little instruction.)

But in the mall, Santa's elves will probably have to stand on their feet all day long. I must admit that I think women have an edge here. At least they do if I'm to judge by all the checkout cashiers and bank tellers I see, *all* of whom are women, and apparently subject to some insane rule that prohibits them from sitting down on the job. (I've never understood that one: surely their work wouldn't worsen if they were able to sit down; in fact, it would probably improve—freedom from chronic back pain would have that effect, I should think.)

And, well, Santa's elves have to smile a lot. All the time, actually. And I'm afraid women again have the advantage. Unfortunately, smiling has become second nature for women; those caught *not* grinning like the idiots men like to believe them to be are often reprimanded.

Now I'm willing to grant that men, because of their much-publicized superior strength, would be able to handle the standing. *And* the smiling (I suspect that it takes fewer muscles to smile than to maintain that tough and serious look so many men seem to favour).

But can they handle the subservience? Santa's elves get paid minimum wage, which is less than what Santa gets paid, and they clearly play the part of Santa's subordinates.

Despite that, Santa's elves are really quite important. Ask any Santa who's had to work with an elf with an attitude. (I can give you some names.) A good elf intercepts the sucker that will get stuck in the beard; a good elf tells Santa the difficult names so the kid won't start bawling because Santa doesn't even know his name; a good elf has 'pee-my-pants radar' and uses it at all times. And a good elf does all that while *appearing* to be merely ornamental. I'm not sure men would be very good at that. Most men I've known who are important act like it. ('Course, so do the ones who aren't important.)

Lastly, let's not forget that Santa's elves must be good with kids. And this one really makes me hesitate. Men can *make* kids, with hardly a second thought. But can they *interact* with them? *Can they pay attention to kids for eight hours at a time?*

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say yes. Yes they can. Oh I know they don't, most of them. I've read the stats on dead-beat dads who keep up their car payments while ignoring their child support payments. And I've read the stats showing that fathers spend, what is it, less than an hour a day with their kids (their *own* kids—it hasn't escaped me that Santa's elves have to pay attention to *other* people's kids—to phrase it in a way apparently significant to men, other *men's* kids). But well, just because they don't doesn't mean they can't. After all, if women can be lawyers and mechanics, why can't men be Santa's elves?

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Free to be—Offensive (You are *such* an idiot.)

What does it mean to say you're offended?

If it means merely that you disagree with what I have said, then surely we have a right to offend. Surely the freedom of speech allows the expression of dissent. Even if your disagreement includes any number of unpleasant emotions (embarrassment, shame, displeasure, irritation, annoyance, anger, distress, outrage, shock, fear, disappointment, frustration, envy, humiliation, guilt, sadness, anxiety, discomfort, disgust, and/or a vague sense that my words are inappropriate or indecent—whatever the hell that means). Though it must be said that often there is no awareness of disagreement; there is only the unpleasant emotion.

If 'offend' is the verb form of 'offence' as in 'offences', then to offend is (also) to do

wrong. But why/how is it wrong for me to express a view with which you disagree? Are you hurt by dissent? Harmed in any way? Disagreement aside, *can* words harm? Well, yes. Insults, in part, can cause psychological injury, which in turn may or may not cause physical distress. If I call Dick an idiot, and you disagree, do you feel hurt? Probably not. (Though I suppose it depends on whether Dick is your boss or your son.) But if I call *you* an idiot, you may feel hurt. Your blood pressure may rise. (Though that may depend on whether I'm your boss.) (Or your son.) So the real questions are do you have a right not to hurt in such a way, do I have a duty not to call you an idiot, and is it (therefore) wrong for me to do so?

Okay, are we talking about *moral* right, duty, and wrong or are we talking about a *legal* right, duty, and wrong? Because it may be morally wrong to do X and yet we may want to retain the legal right to do so—some moral wrongs are not 'worth' illegalizing. Is my calling you, or Dick, an idiot one of these?

We might want to distinguish between dissenting opinions ('Dick is an idiot') and insults ('You are an idiot')—after all, insults are generally characterized by *intent* to harm whereas dissenting opinions, generally, are not. But perhaps all we need do is distinguish on the basis of severity (rather than on the basis of kind). That would cover threats as well. ('If you continue to be an idiot, I'm going to kill you.') If I'm your mom (or otherwise important to you) (let's just say) and you are young (or perhaps otherwise psychologically weak), then my calling you an idiot, especially on an hourly basis, is likely to cause permanent damage. You'll never develop sufficient confidence or esteem to become a rocket scientist.

But surely at some point we are responsible for our psychological weaknesses. If you are an adult and such an idiot that you take to your bed at being called an idiot, or at hearing Dick called an idiot, surely the blame for such severe injury is not all mine. (And if instead you take up arms, then it is *I* who is the idiot.)

What if you don't take to your bed? What if you continue to show up for work, but my continuous insults (or dissenting opinions?) just annoy the hell out of you all day, but so much so that you become exhausted by the effort *not* to take up arms against me and so become less exceptional at your job? (Which means you don't get the promotions or commissions that would've meant you could send your son, Dick, to college.) (So he could become a rocket scientist.) Surely I'm in the wrong here. Should you therefore have legal as well as moral grounds for—something short of taking up arms? Even if—and perhaps *especially* if—I'm unaware that my remarks (jokes, taunts, full-page ads, and billboards) are causing you such distress?

And surely we are responsible for our own opinions and beliefs, those opinions and beliefs which may be the target of insult or dissenting opinion. I know people say they were 'born Catholic' or whatever, but don't they really mean they were born to Catholic parents? You can't be born *believing* anything, let alone the tenets of Catholicism. Our opinions, our beliefs, our values, and attitudes—these are within our control, we *voluntarily* hold them.

Does it matter whether or not you actually *are* an idiot? Taking to your bed, or taking up arms would seem to prove its truth—but does truth put me wholly in the right?

Another consideration is the practical consequences. If we prohibit offence—my god, if every time I opened my mouth I had to be sure not to offend, not to in some way challenge every opinion, every belief, every value, every attitude, even if said opinions,

beliefs, values, and attitudes are held unconsciously such that disagreement is bypassed and the unpleasant emotion is just a sort of psychological... well, I don't even know what to call that unawareness, that mental laziness, that apparently vehemently felt response whose cause is unknown to the one experiencing it, perhaps usually occurring with "offences to one's moral, religious, or patriotic sensibilities" (what the hell are 'sensibilities'?)—well, I wouldn't've gotten past 'my god'.

Which brings us to another consideration: the standard of reasonableness. If because of your unreasonable beliefs, you are offended by my expression of a reasonable opinion, doesn't that put *you* in the wrong? (As well as make you an idiot?)

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First (and last) Contact

Women have a long tradition of being diplomats. "Historically... marriage has been the major alliance mechanism of every society, and little girls are trained for roles as intervillage family diplomats... the married woman straddles two kin networks, two villages, sometimes two cultures" (*The Underside of History*, Elise Boulding, p.53-54).

Many women have decades of experience, settling a dozen disputes a day. To whom do the kids go crying "It's not fair!?" Mom. She's the mediator, the negotiator extraordinaire.

Girls develop language skills before boys, and their level of proficiency continues throughout their lives to be superior. Women in languages and linguistics degree programs outnumber men. Translators? Women. Writers? Women. In short, women are better at communication.

(And) (So) We talk a lot. (At least we do when there are no men present to interrupt and hog the floor; see Spender, James and Drakich, Tannen, and others.) Although 'gossip' can be superficial and mean, much talk among women is unjustly dismissed with that term—when women talk, they're doing social cohesion work.

But of course communication doesn't involve just words. And women are also better than men at reading facial expression and body language. And they go deeper: men actually avoid any kind of psychological understanding (of themselves as well as others); women actively embrace such knowledge ("But *why* did you do that?").

Lastly, women, whether by nature or nurture, are more predisposed to cooperate, whereas men are more predisposed to compete. We prefer a win-win solution; men love a win-lose one.

So why is it that when presidents fill their ambassador and diplomat positions, they appoint men? Is it because their ambassadors and diplomats will be talking with men? And men are more comfortable talking to other men? That would mean ambassadors and diplomats are men because they're men.

Or is it (also) because the goal of a diplomatic exchange is not to cooperate, not to resolve conflict, but to conquer, to come away 'one up' on the other? Diplomats are really just smoke screens; mediation isn't the goal at all.

And why is that? It could be as simple, and as awful, as (1) Women are good at mediation; (2) Whatever women are good at is devalued; therefore, (3) Mediation is devalued.

But look at where that's gotten us. Planet-wide, we spend more on weapons than food, clothing, and entertainment put together. (Unless of course you consider weapons to be entertainment. Which apparently men do. Turn on any tv show during prime time, and nine times out of ten a gun will be fired in the first five minutes.)

But hey, when *the aliens* come, NASA's first contact team had better include a bunch of women. Because please, guys, all those weapons of yours? They will surely be but slingshots.

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What if the right to life...

What if the right to life was a natural, inalienable human right to age eighteen (you had it automatically and no one could take it away), but after that it was an acquired, alienable right? So you had to deserve it somehow, you had to *deserve* to be alive...

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