

News & Reviews

Fifth Estate Collective

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Notice: Books reviewed in the "News & Reviews" section are not available through the FE Bookstore unless specifically stated otherwise.

The Alliance for the Liberation of Mental Patients publishes a newsletter from 1427 Walnut Street 4th Floor, Philadelphia PA 19102, and sends it free of charge to all current and former psychiatric inmates...

BLACKOUT, a free anarchist biweekly newsletter is published in Vancouver, British Columbia at POB 65896, Sta. F., Vancouver B.C. Canada...

The new address of the Italian anarchist journal *Revista Anarchica*, is Editrice A, Cas. Post. 17102, 20100 Milano, Italy...

TAP, formerly YIPL, is the newsletter of the exchange of anti-system technical information. According to a notice we received here at the FE, "Considerable information on the rip-off of Pa Bell, Con Ed and other utilities is explored in each issue. Technology of the articles runs from basic to complex... You will also find unique information on lockpicking, getting your moneys worth from vending machines, how some people are hooking up free cable TV, how the phony Birth Certificate ID scheme is run, TWX, Phone Phreaking, TWX Phreaking, Computer Phreaking, Free Postage, Free Xerox, free electricity, free gas, and more." Write to TAP, Room 418, 152 W. 42 Street, New York NY 10036...

"Our desires are raped, our time is whored. Relationships are merely 'tolerated' and activities are empty. A stiff neck is nothing compared to a stiff imagination: The '80s are with us; we must exercise our future." from POST DEPRESSION, P.O. Box 40256, San Francisco CA 94140...

Readers can receive a "wholesale price list for atheists, anarchists and other friends" from Haldeman-Julius Publications/Big Blue Books, "the world's foremost free thought publishing house, from Bob Black, Box 23, Pittsburgh KS 66762...

Last Gasp/Eco Funnies has just released *Young Lust No. 6*, a bizarre conglomeration of fantasies, perversions, true and imagined adventures, and outré combinations which explore the sexual weirdness in American life today. Also, Bill Griffith's latest collection of Zippy comics is out. and includes the epic "E Pluribus Pinhead," showing how Zippy won the 1980 Presidential elections and showing why we don't have to do our laundry any more...

Resistance Komix, starring Smoke Magician and P. Koala are available from Night & Fog Action for 30 cents each postpaid, and may be reprinted and distributed freely, and can be contacted c/o The New Indicator, UC San Diego, B-023, La Jolla CA 92093...

LAYING WASTE: THE POISONING OF AMERICA BY TOXIC CHEMICALS, by Michael Brown, Washington Square Press/Pocket Books, New York, updated and expanded, 1981, \$3.50

"We brush our teeth with fluoride compounds, rub on propylene glycol deodorants, clothe ourselves in rayon—and nylon or treated cotton and wool, drive cars filled with the products of a liver carcinogen called vinyl chloride; talk on plastic phones, walk on synthetic tiles, live within walls coated with chemical-laden paint. Our food, kept fresh in refrigerators by heat-absorbent refrigerants, contains preservatives and chemical additives. And of course,

it has been grown with the aid of chemical fertilizers and insecticides. The detergents, the medicines, the foam rubber, and the floor cleaners—all had their underside of waste, about to make a dramatic public reentry.”—from the introduction.

Michael Brown, the reporter who blew the whistle on Hooker Chemical Company in his award-winning expose on the Love Canal toxic waste scandal in Niagara Falls, NY, now tells the whole story of that horrifying episode, as well as adding other examples of toxic destruction by greedy and totally irresponsible corporations.

His book is a cross between De-foe's *Journal of the Plague Year* and *The Amityville Horror* in its ability to create a vision of human agony and terror which seem to squat on the horizon like a curse. He describes chemical flooding from the Love Canal which destroys wooden fence posts and upon receding leaves the bushes and gardens “withered and scorched, as if by a brush fire.” When one resident punches a hole in his basement wall to discover the cause of a black sludge bleeding through the walls and an accompanying pesticide-like odor, quantities of the dangerous black chemical gunk gush out at him—the foundations of his house are saturated with it.

Another family has given birth to a severely retarded child with multiple birth defects, who later develops an enlarged liver. Another man has missed four months of work because of breathing troubles, and his wife has experienced epilepsy-like seizures which their doctor cannot explain. The newly applied paint is peeling from their house and trees have died on their lot. Pets, too, suffer, losing their fur and exhibiting skin lesions, and developing internal tumors at an early age. A high incidence of cancer and deafness are both noticeable in the area.

Yet for a very long time Love Canal residents did not associate their illnesses with the chemicals. They looked upon their health problems as personal, “as acts of capricious genes... They were mainly aware that the chemicals were devaluing their property.” They treated the chemical inundations as a “mere nuisance. That it involved chemicals, industrial chemicals, was not particularly significant to them. All their life, all of everyone's life in the city, malodorous fumes had been a tacitly accepted ingredient of the surrounding air.”

As you read this book, you can't believe that they would put up with the pollution, that they would not guess until late in the game, and only be sure when environmental scientists and physicians confirmed their suspicions, that they were being annihilated by the chemical plunderers at Hooker. *Laying Waste* is more than a case history in the vicious, criminal negligence and unconscionable profiteering at the expense of human and environmental well-being by the Hooker Chemical Company, Velsicol and other corporations in collusion with local politicians and government bureaucrats. It is also indirect proof of people's inability to comprehend the proportions of the crisis which confronts us, how we have been lulled to sleep by experts, politicians, and the media in the face of what seems like an all-out war against us by the \$116 billion a year chemical industry.

Brown reveals this complacency in his introduction, when he describes his first exposure to the problem, at a public hearing in Niagara County. A young woman was arguing against the waste plant, claiming that it was destroying her neighborhood. “This issue however, appeared to be well in the hands of the local authorities, with no urgent danger at risk, and I decided that the woman's reaction had been based more on emotion than on facts.” This smug devotion to “the facts,” this denigration of emotional responses to industrial poisoning, this trust in the authorities and the experts to straighten things out runs through the book. The companies seem to be beyond reproach; they make their victims look like eccentrics and “chemophobes” by the very inertia of their own respectability, their social prominence, their expertise and their power. Their business-as-usual facade makes their critics look like kooks and complainers. After all; if they don't understand the problem, who does?

In fact, despite the excellent information that this gallery of horrors provides; it shows the debilities of journalism in confronting the problem. After investigating the Love Canal for himself, the author writes, “My initial perception was wrong.” He sees for himself that the area is being rendered uninhabitable by chemical pollution. He may have thought that young woman overly emotional, but when he walks on the Love Canal himself, he gasps for air, his eyes burn and he has a sour taste in his mouth. It seems “inconceivable that industry and government could have allowed this to happen,” and yet there it is, a stinking cesspool of deadly poisons, slowly seeping into the river through the ground water, and eventually into Lake Erie itself.

The problem is that journalism is always a day late and a dollar short. Taking the existence of chemical manufacturing and waste dumps for granted, it begins by distrusting the common people who speak out against the companies, preferring to look at “both sides,” and ends up being reduced to describing the after effects of the catastrophe when the deed has already been done. In fact, Brown has not learned his own lessons completely. Despite his

sense of urgency, he asserts in his epilogue that to do away with the chemical industry itself would be a “ridiculous proposal.” “It is, after all,” he explains, “the chemical manufacturers who provide six per cent of our gross national product, whose labor force runs into the hundreds of thousands of workers, and whose products are essential in many aspects of our lives.”

He never seems to wonder how it was that we survived these millions of years without chemicals, pesticides, and plastics. He knows full well that the money earned is only relevant to profiteers and not human beings whose health and whose children’s health is at stake. Nor does he volunteer to become one of those hundreds of thousands of workers who have provided the corporations with their enormous profits by sacrificing their health and lives—Mr. Brown is after all a journalist, interested in responsible journalism, not “paranoia” or radical solutions.

Meanwhile, the industrial plague races unabated. There are some 30,000 chemical dumpsites in the United States, and the federal government believes that there are 1200 to 2000 that need to be cleaned up immediately because of their potential health risks. It is “nearly impossible,” as Brown points out, “to remove a landfill once it is there.” The chemical industry, under government supervision, is presently involved in constructing “safer” landfills. Brown would like to see them “properly managed and stringently monitored, and kept out of the hands of irresponsible corporations.” But he admits that government agencies function like any other bureaucracy, and that bureaucrats are more interested in protecting their own jobs and positions of power than the victims of toxic poisoning.

He quotes one grand jury report which states, “The evidence indicates the response of federal, state, and local governments to the problems posed by hazardous waste has been characterized by ignorance, neglect, laxity, and the fractionalization of responsibility.” No wonder that the U.S. is suffering what can only be described as an epidemic of cancer. He points out that cancer accounts for nearly twenty percent of deaths each year, and that between 1970 and 1976 alone, the increase in cancer was ten percent—not only among old people but children and young people as well.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 126 million pounds of hazardous waste will be-produced this year, and that about ninety percent of the waste—byproducts of pesticides, paints and industrial cleaners—will be disposed of improperly, creating chemical time bombs. One EPA scientist said to the Chicago Tribune, “There just might not be enough money in the world to clean up the mess we have made.”

We have not failed to notice that speaking of wastes being disposed of “improperly” tends to imply that their very existence may be legitimate as long as they are dealt with properly. What is clearer each day is that such materials should never have been developed at all, and that their production should cease sooner than immediately.

Though Michael Brown’s book stops short of coming to conclusions consistent with the material it presents, it at least succeeds in providing a sense of the immensity of the problem of the chemical and industrial plague that we all face.

—P. Solis

THE NEXT WHOLE EARTH CATALOG by Stewart Brand, Point/Random House, 1980, 608 pp., \$12.50.

As with the earlier catalogs (Whole Earth Catalog, 1969, *The Last Whole Earth Catalog*, 1971, and *The Whole Earth Epilog*, 1974) *The Next* is awesome, both in its very size (18X12 inches and weighing a hefty six pounds) and certainly in its undertaking—where to find information on how to do almost everything.

I was always a closet *Catalog* reader—fascinated by their contents, but always a little put off by their implicit (or sometimes very explicit) New Age consumerism and good vibes bullshit. When they first appeared in the midst of the Nixon/Vietnam era, it always struck me as a bit self-indulgent to be reading about constructing yurts or learning to navigate by the stars when U.S. bombers were destroying a foreign country. Also, I always detected a note of passivity and acceptance in a period which called for confrontation and stridency.

When this tome arrived, although it certainly is a different era, those same feelings persisted in me—almost like I was taking home a *Penthouse* magazine on the sly. It seemed like material outside our political values; however once into the compendium of catalogs and books, I was soon lost in the *Whole Earth* world.

Ever want to know how to coppice? or plan space colonies? (me neither) or build, well, almost anything for house or farm? want to know about chainsaws, biogas, eating road kills, bees, caves, boats, tools for every purpose, hot tubs, dying, roofing, horses, cannabis, yoga, eco-ethics, grinders & juicers, restoring homes, building with adobe, logs, brick, stone, junk, water use, every solar and water system available, etc., etc., etc., etc. And I mean, etc., etc.,

etc., etc. for the list of topics is endless and almost exhausting to read when you start trying to sort out in your mind which of the possibilities could actually be transformed from book to reality.

Also, the range of human knowledge is almost staggering when presented all together and almost all of it small scale. Large scale technologies begin to diminish in importance when you realize what can be constructed on a small scale using available skills and resources.

Going back, however, to my initial feelings about all of the *Catalogs*: The book presents itself as an objective encyclopedia of technique, but superimposed on it all is Whole Earth editor Stewart Brand's very specific view of the world and its possibilities.

Brand is everywhere in the *Catalog*—he is the ultimate New Age consumer, having seemingly tried almost everything once, from the tools to therapies to hang gliding to hot tubs. And it is Brand who supplies the politicization of scattered information and transforms it into an ideology. It is a single clear message: great change is possible within our daily lives without a fundamental alteration of capitalism, or, as I'm sure he would insist, the small is beautiful project can fundamentally alter capitalism.

To that end, Brand exhibits capitalist society's mania to systematize everything and declares that a multitude of individual and independent activity is, in fact, part of a movement or trend that he has adduced. This is the role of the politician and not an enviable one in my view.

Much in keeping with the small' entrepreneurial outlook implicit throughout, Brand, in one of his ubiquitous comments, lauds the reactionary economist Milton Friedman, referring to him as an "astute analyst" who has "good ideas." It is apparently lost on Brand that Friedman and his "Chicago Boys" were the architects of the economy of General Pinochet's Chile (which didn't work) as well as being a favorite of Reagan.

Brand addresses the book, in part, to "Our contemporaries, who have aged into positions of responsibility (one of us governs California..."

"This is really sick! All of the Catalog's wealth of information on how people can make do for themselves is seen by Brand, apparently, as a manner of survival until the leap to being a politician is made.

I could rant on about Brand and New Ageism almost endlessly, but would instead recommend the *Catalog* with a weary eye peeled for the Brandism that imposes itself everywhere. But even Brand cannot take away from the value of what he and His cohorts have assembled.

—Coquilles St. Jacques

Postscript: An unfortunate note: Between the Nov. 1980 edition I received as a review copy and a Dec. 1980 copy I purchased as a gift, the cover price had been raised \$1.50. I hear ya!

THE CURSE: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF MENSTRUATION by Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton and Emily Toth, E.P. Dutton, 1976. A Mentor paperback, \$1.95.

From "ride the cotton pony" to "time for the Red King," to most men and women the subject of menstruation is so embarrassing or distasteful that it requires a euphemistic disguise. Researched and written by three Ph.D.s, this book states as its purpose the liberation of men and women from the fear, ignorance and misconceptions of the "unmentionable" subject by lifting the Curse.

The authors have provided a wide range of information on the taboos, myths, rituals, symbolism and overall influence of the menstrual cycle on women, men and the particular society they inhabit. This book contends that while man envies woman's ability to create (i.e., have babies), he also fears this power, which produces an ambivalence that leads to woman's historical subjection to man based on their physical differences, exemplified most glaringly in women's monthly bleeding. In an attempt to "protect" himself, man has created many taboos:

The Taboo of Exclusion: In many primitive societies menstruating women were believed to emit a supernatural power, especially threatening to men, and so were to be avoided or often totally isolated during these times in order that their deadly influences be escaped. The Taboo of Sex: Not only in primitive societies, but still currently observed by Orthodox Jews and Islamics, among others, women are thought to be unclean during menstruation, and therefore intercourse is to be avoided at those times as a danger to male purity before God.

The Curse contains a wealth of information on the physical and mental processes set in motion in a woman's body during menstruation and later in life, during menopause. It also presents some rather bizarre examples of simulated menstruation in males (using one example of primitive societies' puberty rites for boys which cause them to bleed from the genitals, thereby marking their initiation into adulthood with a dramatic physical sign which can

be equated with female menstruation), as well as a description of the effects of cycles and rhythms in men's lives. The authors assert that men too, like women, are subject to a flux in hormones, moods, strengths and weaknesses throughout their lives.

From the psychoanalytical and medical myths surrounding menstruation, to the public appearance of the menstrual products industry (prohibited by network policy from television advertising until November of 1972), the book is filled with interesting tidbits, such as the 1973 episode of "All in the Family" which broke the menstrual barrier with a situation comedy concerning the daughter's irritability during her period. According to the authors, this "menstrual episode" shocked the audience and generated more mail than any other show that season, most of it objecting to the material saying: "there is nothing funny about a menstrual period..."

The Curse describes the influence of menstruation in literary images as well as on those contemporary artists who have shocked many viewers with their brazen use of sanitary napkins, tampons and vaginas in such constructions as California artist Judy Chicago's hand-made lithograph, "Red Flag" (1971) which shows a hand removing a reddened tampon, or her "Menstruation Bathroom" construction which Chicago claims "especially fascinates men." Menstruation as a growing subject for artists is presented further in the authors' description of tapes, collages and ceramics all presenting variations on this theme. A political science student at the University of California in Los Angeles, Isabel Welsh, has created a traveling theatre piece, "Menstrual Blood," and two writer-artists in Laguna Beach have produced the "hilariously funny," "Tits and Clits," an adult comic book, while Womanspace, a Los Angeles gallery, has sponsored "menstruation weekends."

In one of the stories in "Tits and Clits," the heroine tries to do away with messy menstrual napkins by using instead a sponge which she cuts into the shape of a phallus and finding how good it feels, decides to wear it all the time. ("The hell with the old man! This is fun!"—page 223).

The authors explore menstrual humor beginning with the derogatory nature of jokes such as those which imply the unclean nature of bleeding women, to that currently displayed by women, as exemplified by those mentioned above, which the authors categorize as part of the "new menstrual shows."

Through 24 chapters and 196 pages, *The Curse* remains informative, enlightening, clever, and humorous, in its attempt to offer a new respect for what the authors call their sisters' "most elementary and obvious aspect of womanhood." However, beginning with a chapter entitled, "Escaping the Monthlies," we are suddenly presented with the somewhat contradictory idea that perhaps they are not so enamored with this sign of our womanhood after all.

Following some bad examples of escape from menstruation (such as various diseases and/or physical abnormalities, as well as an attempt in the 1930s by a physician to stop the menstrual flow through a process he invented called "Naturizing"), the authors introduce us to "the beginning of a new era for women": "real control over our bodies"—menstrual extraction:

"Menstrual extraction was developed by women for women. A group of feminists in Los Angeles, at the self-help clinic of the Feminist Women's Health Center, were troubled by menstruation and decided to end it... a woman or one of her friends may end her period almost as soon as it starts... inserting into her uterus a tube... attached to a collection bottle and to a syringe ... that literally pumps out the period ... enthusiasts claim a sixty-second period..." (page 200)

In November of 1973 some Los Angeles feminists presented a menstrual extraction demonstration before an American Public Health Association conference. This "historic event" was recorded on video tape before a "wildly enthusiastic" audience of all women (the men were asked to leave). The authors of *The Curse* contend that menstrual extraction is "the most exciting discovery of the women's health movement," one that offers "complete control over your body" (even serving as a self-induced mini-abortion if the woman happens to be pregnant).

In discussing the controversy surrounding this new procedure, the authors cite numerous questions raised by medical and religious authorities, among others, concerning its safety and legality, as well as its political considerations, such as its use in Third World countries for population control.

There are a lot of unanswered questions about menstrual extraction, but unfortunately the most alarming of them all is never raised in this book. Why do the authors, who spent years of research and writing to present an enlightened view of menstruation, a major element in women's reproductive abilities, want to remove this process from existence?

Perhaps it is their contention that it is much less interesting and fulfilling to bleed monthly with the concurrent potential for reproducing the species than it is to be a bank president, a politician or an astronaut. Complete control over one's body and the ability to eliminate even natural functions, would certainly make you more salable in the marketplace of a society which even now barely differentiates between its machinery and the people who run it.

Could it be, sisters, that you have so unwittingly accepted the male definitions of the norm that you wish to cast aside your womanhood completely in order to more fully emulate the bastions of power and take your place among them? This particular feminist view of the future unfortunately offers its sisters nothing more than another spot on the assembly line of capitalism, with not even the occasional respite of her "monthlies" ("... be she housewife or career woman, or both, today's woman is determined to prove that she can do her job 'like a man' even when she is feeling most like a woman...")—page 12.

In exchange for this society's empty economic and cultural equality, many feminists appear willing to abandon motherhood as a human potential, replacing it instead with an unlimited array of careers. Nowhere in *The Curse* does there appear a discussion of the link between menstruation and motherhood on any but the most basic physiological level. Women bleed, and sometimes they have babies, and then they bleed again. But what about having these babies and raising families?

Somehow pregnancy and child rearing does not sit well with a growing number of feminists who appear to view motherhood as barely even an option these days, preferring instead a futuristic view which bases their "liberation" on a technology which will allow them to do away with motherhood altogether.

This new age of Techno-Feminism, in which we will all be re-programmed, like computers to fit the needs of a society which worships the machine above all else, is best exemplified in Shulamith Firestone's book *The Dialectics of Sex: The Case for a Feminist Revolution* (1971). In her book, Firestone says about pregnancy: "It is barbaric... the temporary deformation of the body for the sake of the species... it isn't good for you... it is not fun." (page 198–99)

Firestone also sees the necessity of a "feminist revolution" based on advanced technology and "cybernetic socialism." The future she proposes will include the development of artificial reproduction and "the eventual elimination of childhood, aging, and even death" with a final culmination in the achievement of "universal consciousness." Her view of progress brings to mind a '50s science fiction movie in which humanity had finally evolved into nothing more than a small group of very large heads containing the knowledge of the centuries, the need for their bodies having long fallen by the wayside. One thing they maintained, though, was "complete control."

Perhaps it may appear as unfair to link up Firestone's bizarre visions of a cybernetic future with the goals of the authors of *The Curse*. Not so, however, if you view the institution of menstrual extraction as a further step toward the final denial of our basic humanity. Modern technology is currently perverting our land, water and air; its application to the restructuring of human biological functions can only result in a grotesque parody of our species.

What is wrong with bleeding and the potential of having babies? The human race has existed and reproduced itself by this means for millions of years. Rather than redesigning ourselves as if we were machines to fit the needs of an increasingly inhuman environment, we should be demanding the affirmation of our humanity in every way possible. We may otherwise find ourselves programmed slowly out of existence.

"Of course they didn't content themselves with merely hatching out embryos; any cow could do that. We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future... World Controllers..." (BRAVE NEW WORLD, A. Huxley)

—review by Ruby Lips

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