

# Letters

Various Authors

## Language I

Dear FE,

Neither the simple abuse by Ratticus nor the extended commentary by George Bradford seemed to me to engage the two most basic points or arguments of "Language: Origin and Meaning" (FE #315, Winter 1984), namely that language is the model of ideology and that it derives from earliest division of labor. Thus they rejected the piece while failing to deal with the essentials referred to by its title, an odd tack possibly reflecting on my craftsmanship as its author.

To evoke the world as it encountered what are perhaps the original viruses of alienation (time, language) and to ask whether they are inevitable is to wonder whether we can supersede a condition in which anguish and repression have been with us so very long.

The old question, 'where did we go wrong?' challenges us to aim our critical inquiry far enough back, into pre-history. If part of the progression is something like time, language, number, art, myth, religion, private property, the state, can we refuse only the latter two or three of these inventions and find this adequate to solve the long, deepening neurosis called civilization?

The madness of today and our desperation within it may be helping us to see how profound the sickness has been, the easier perhaps to raise questions as to how deep the healing must go.

John Zerzan  
Eugene, OR

## Language II

Dear Friends,

Sorry it's taken so long for me to renew my sub. One of the many problems with a money economy is that sometimes you've got it, but most of the time you don't!

I still enjoy seeing every issue of FE. As far as I'm concerned it sets the standard for the rest of us who attempt to propagate a critique of modern civilization as far as readability and coherence are concerned. We will be putting out another of our too infrequent issues of Anarchy as soon as I have the time. It will feature a critique of new age politics, and a discussion of anarchy and radio.

Keep publishing Zerzan. At least his absolutist critiques raise important questions, even if they go overboard on identification of reification with such major aspects of our lives as time and language: Most people don't have the guts to put such things into question. (I am curious though what the two footnotes in Zerzan's essay on language refer to since the references or notes weren't printed.)

I am typing this while working the end of a double-shift at a hospital here in Columbia. So if it seems incoherent please blame Exxon and Blue Cross or something. (I'm certainly not in full possession of my faculties.) Maybe some day when I've reclaimed more of my time I'll write something for FE—I'm curious how it would be received/critiqued. For now...

Smash reality,  
Lev Chernyi  
Columbia, MO

*FE Note:* 61 footnotes to the language essay are available from AAA, POB 11331, Eugene OR 97440. Postage appreciated.

[Footnotes are also included in the online version of FE #315, Winter, 1984.]

## Visions & Criticism

Dear FE folks,

I have just looked over the Winter 1984 FE with a special interest in the pieces on language as I had seen John's piece previously. I could write responses to Ratticus' and Bradford's arguments, but don't wish to fall into that trap, especially since what they said bothered me less than how they said it. There is a tone of mockery and vindictiveness in their writing that is so common to writers participating in the competition of the intellectual marketplace.

However clumsy his attempts and however trapped and deformed by the academic writing style to which he has become accustomed, John was attempting to share a vision, a dream. Visions can be wrong, dreamers can make mistakes even in their dreams, but the appropriate response is never vindictive mockery—such a response can never get at the heart of a vision—only alternative visions can correct wrong visions.

Vindictive mockery has about it the air of scientific rationalism, which denies all vision, when it is aimed at the vision of another. Let us aim our vindictive mockery rather at civilization which represses our visions, and with each other share our alternative visions, playing with them all to discover which ones help us most to dance the dance of life instead of the dance of death.

In the Fall '83 issue, Maple suggested that people share their dreams (or visions). Maybe some of us are afraid to. We are afraid that we will share something that comes from deep inside us with someone we don't know only to be mocked as fools in the language of scientific rationalism.

At present, *Fifth Estate* has the stigma of being an intellectual journal of academic anti-civilization theory. Yet you cry for visions. So, let's share visions! You don't know how? You'd make a fool of yourself? Well, so would I or anybody else crippled by civilization. At first, we'll probably all be tainted by the intellectualism imposed on us; our visions will be clumsy and limited. We'll fear the judgment of others, who tell us we're just pretending, it's all in our imagination, it can never really be. But their voices have the hollow ring of skeletons caught in civilization's dance of death. And though they may dance fluidly and we, at present, clumsily, ours is the dance of life.

David DeVries  
San Francisco

*Bob B. responds:* Although you are free to consider John's article on language a vision—which it undoubtedly is in part—the conclusion is unavoidable that in marshalling scholarly evidence to support his vision John transports it to a more mundane plane, inevitably calling forth responses and counter-evidence. Besides, if you consider an article replete with footnotes a vision, why aren't Ratticus's and Bradford's responses also visions?

Whatever the degree of "vindictive mockery" (as opposed to witty polemicizing) in Ratticus's response, he was only responding personally—not presenting the FE "line" on language. Furthermore, there is nothing sacred about one's claims to visionary status: chiefs and shamans, the primary orators and sharers of visions in some primitive societies, often find their words mocked, their visions ignored,

by their would-be audiences—who feel no compulsion to accept another’s vision as one’s own. Bradford’s response, moreover, can hardly be called either vindictive or mocking. It is—as is Ratticus’s in its irritable fashion—a sincere attempt to make sense of the tangled question of the meaning of language.

While John’s articles are often criticized, I honestly believe we treat them with appreciation and respect. They are, after all, virtually featured in the paper. And since there are sometimes strong disagreements with his arguments, we often feel compelled to run a response lest readers assume we agree with them. But while objections are often raised to John’s articles, they invariably stimulate thoughtful and probing discussions, often moving us to undertake our own investigations of the questions he raises.

I hope these remarks clarify our intentions and help dispel the image some people have of us as arrogant trashers.

## Where We Are

Dear FE Comrades,

The Winter, 1984 issue of FE, taken as a whole, that is, cross-referencing the various articles into a kind of general proposition as to Where We Are and What’s Going On, is one of the most interesting documents I have read in some time.

I truly empathize with the agony, rage, confusion and, ultimately, defiance which screams out from both of your articles on “Symbolic Protest & the Nuclear State: Two Views” though, in a sense; neither are truly “views” but rather terrified, uncertain cries against the nightmare and madness of the out-of-control juggernaut some choose to call “civilization” we find ourselves existing in. “Existing” in, but certainly not living, and I am overwhelmed by the overall sense of a society, a world headed perhaps inexorably towards its, meaning our own, destruction.

I feel it myself, feel it every time I go to a “national demonstration” as I look out of a bus window at dawn at the Washington skyline as we ride past the Pentagon, the Washington Monument, the other symbols and strongholds of the imperium, and I think to myself but don’t dare say to my comrades, how the hell can we fight this?

I particularly remember one incident back in the seventies when I was active in the anti-nuclear movement in Tucson, Arizona, where a group of us drove up past Phoenix to the future site of what they euphemistically call a “nuclear park” (they use the same term for the Savannah River atomic bomb plant) under Quaker auspices to attend a “silent vigil” at the plant site.

In Tucson, where we focused on local issues like a plant that used radioactive materials to make glow-in-the-dark signs (and which we eventually shut down), I had a certain sense of being empowered. But standing out in the middle of the desert on a lonely road across from the enormous “park” construction site with fifty or so people silently ‘bearing witness’ as the pigs drove up and down the highway and construction crews continued routinely on with their work, I experienced an almost unbearable excruciating sense of futility.

I feel this often. I console myself and others with half-jokes that “after the revolution, we’ll paint the Washington Monument black and redub it the ‘Norman Mayer Memorial’ \* or more seriously with honest evaluations that I believe that nuclear power never became, and never will become what its perpetrators had in mind because of our various actions, direct and indirect; that the more crude banalities of racial segregation in my native South really were brought to an end in a relatively short period right before my eyes by a determined and militant street movement which weaved a complex (and more or less spontaneous) web of nonviolent and violent tactics; that we really did stop the Viet Nam War and military conscription...for a time; and all kinds of positive images of various values and nuances, from the long struggle to abolish slavery to a few hundred Spartans standing off the Persian Empire; and I go through all of these intellectual convolutions, and still I am left feeling we are in the midst of a hierarchical, technological behemoth on a collision course with nuclear annihilation or even an Orwellian dark Something Worse, and I really don’t know what to do about it, and I don’t think anybody else knows, really, either.

Still, I read George Bradford’s little closing anecdote about the young guy who, having apparently seen the non-violent protest at Williams International was inspired to throw nails on Mr. Williams’ driveway. “That could represent a beginning,” says Bradford. I think of his passing reference to Williams’ long-ago counterpart Henry Clay

Frick. I think of Alexander Berkman, and of the ongoing courage of the Vancouver Five, who even at the risk of spending their lives behind bars, refuse to 'depoliticise' their case. Or your own courage in continuing to cover their case and publish their statements.

I think mostly, though, about your headline, "Shoot Down All Their Helicopters!" and I wonder if it's right, moral, ethical, correct, even imperative to do so in El Salvador or Guatemala or Honduras, why it isn't the Thing To Do Elsewhere, as well.

In solidarity,  
Spider Rainbow  
Atlanta

[\* *Web archive note:* Norman David Mayer (March 31, 1916 – December 9, 1982) was an American anti-nuclear weapons activist who was shot and killed by the United States Park Police after threatening to blow up the Washington Monument. See:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman\\_Mayer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Mayer)]

## Five Subway Rides

Dear Fifth Estate:

I stand corrected. I've seen your "newspaper" in only one bookstore in New York—The Eastside Bookstore—and it's always buried amidst the Militants and *Daily Workers* and headlines that yelp "Smash Imperialism." I thought I had you pegged. Then one day Volume 18, No. 4 appeared in my mailbox and it Saw me through five subway rides—a record for a "newspaper." Please don't get a big head, but I've never seen such a glaring discrepancy between form (layouts, etc.) and content. We might as well start printing Adorno on toilet paper. But between Processed World's gloss and your grayness, I would take you any day.

Love to You All,  
Robert  
Brooklyn, NY

## Report on Comiso

Dear Comrades,

After reading your 'Bits of the World in Brief' in the Fall 1983 issue I feel compelled to make a correction to your report of an anarchist occupation of the missile base at Comiso, Sicily. I was a participant and I found the report grossly misleading as are other reports in anarchist papers.

In the year preceding the planned occupation (July 24–26, 1983) the comrades of Anarchismo in Ragusa and of Bratach Dubh had undertaken a campaign to draw the local population into the action.

They formed the 'Coordinamento Leghe Autogestite' to act as a base for the formation of 'self-managed leagues'—a style of collective organization used in Sicilian land struggles in the past. The leagues would be autonomous from pacifist groups and political parties who had limited their actions to watered-down protests and ineffectual rantings.

An appeal was sent to anarchist papers in Italy and abroad in an effort to attract outside support. In a booklet entitled 'insurrection' (published by Bratach Dubh in English) and in other statements (one was printed in last July's issue of 'Emancipation') the impression was created that the people of Comiso were practically ready to revolt against the American incursion. Although most people living there are opposed to the base they are clearly not ready for a militant occupation.

Those who did show up were 200 to 300 anarchists from outside Sicily many of whom were punk rockers from Milano an Napoli who only alienated the locals who concluded that this could be nothing but an invasion by anarchist drug addicts (my long hair didn't create a much better impression).

After the much heralded visit by Mafiosi to the house the Coordinamento was using for a crashpad it was decided that it would be safer to camp in the town park.

On the first day of the 'occupation' (Thursday the 24<sup>th</sup>) the comrades spent their time wandering around the base in small groups, trying to find ways in, and getting hit by the police. After this exercise in futility a general assembly decided to try a rally on Saturday to draw the locals in a march to the base.

The rally was loud and energetic and although it was interrupted by an equally dramatic funeral procession the march took off with much gusto but unfortunately with few if any of the townspeople included.

We arrived at the base, exhausted by the heat, to confront a line of well-armed police and carabinieri. There was an eye-to-eye standoff and one man got hit in the head as the police tried to force our line back. The tension soon let off with a visit by a local ice cream man and our line fell back for some cool refreshment. When nightfall arrived the police commander asked the ice cream man to leave and it became clear that they would make a move soon.

Sure enough, as soon as the sun disappeared, the police attacked without warning. Using flares to light the way they fire their guns over our heads, fired tear gas grenades at us, and began running in formation, clubbing anyone in their path. They threw people into ditches and kicked and beat them. Gas shells set the dry grass on fire. One disabled man in a wheelchair was beaten unconscious and another became paralysed from spinal injuries (fortunately I hear he's recovering). Three others landed in the hospital and fifteen were arrested (they were released two weeks later).

The next day we were ordered to leave Comiso or face arrest and possible deportation.

The pacifist camp issued a statement, which, though condemning the police attack, also condemned the anarchists for being "provocative"! This is bullshit. Not once did we hit a cop before the attack.

Ten days later the pacifists were attacked while doing their Nagasaki Day blockade. It obviously doesn't take much to provoke the police. The pacifist blockade received wide attention in national and peace papers (partly due to there being several Radical and Proletarian Unity MP's there at the time), but the anarchists were ignored (the one exception being the local La Sicilia, which printed lies).

The anarchist press, on the other hand, has reported everything from implying a successful occupation (Fifth Estate), to thousands of participants (Freedom).

There are many questions being debated about the Comiso action amongst the comrades in Italy. Two that stand out are both related to our credibility as a movement. How can we expect to win people to anarchist ideas when we distort reality to our own comrades? I am not blaming FE or Freedom since they rely on outside information but Anarchismo and Bratach Dubh are certainly guilty of this. The latest Overthrow reports the events in glowing terms.

The "occupation" was a complete mess and if anything, was a step backward for the movement in Italy.

My other question I leave open for debate. Anarchists have long upheld the right of free self-expression and have tried to set an example by living their philosophy. The anarchist punk scene is partly a manifestation of this tradition. How can we bridge the gap between living our ideals and trying to reach working class people who haven't any notion of them?

Christopher Hooton  
Berkeley, California

## **Culture Crisis**

Dear Folks:

Culture crisis begins in character crisis. The culture is cynical, mediocre, decadent, insipid, shallow, hypocritical, boring; addicted to fetishism, voyeurism, domesticity, technology, delusion and death. Democracy is average, leveling; exchanging intensity and responsibility for the polling booth.

Christianity is negative, death seeking, spirit crushing. Materialism is technomechanical scientism, opposing living truth with sterility, decadence, and "fact." Survival of the fittest is infinite hate doctrine, annihilating meaning and harmony. These are our spirits.

The cities are the spleen of this death being, concentrating all of the worst poisons. Why are so many radicals inhabiting cities? Essential character—freedom in accord with love, truth, and will—self realization if you will—is swallowed in that fetid, murky environment. What one is takes the place of who one is. (Am I—what?—a lickspittle!?) Personal journey turns to death struggle. How much of one's days are spent in struggle with Leviathan rather than in enhancing life-forces?

More tentatively: Anarchism is a mutually trusting environment where individuals grow freely on their own personal journeys. Growth of freedom in each individual is, concomitantly, the process which leads to anarchism. Self realization leads toward anarchism in the world.

To Anarchists: is Anarchism wallowing in doublethink? Rationalization? Petty expedience? Hooliganism? Nihilism? Is Anarchism compromised with everything else? Does making anarchism issue-oriented automatically signal its futility? Does nominally labeling an active concept begin to kill its essential life-force? (A truth, to truth, Anarchism?) How can one deal with the "fact world" without beginning to isolate freedom from its dynamic essence? Will anarchism be forever pigeonholed as an anti-state terrorist doctrine, an all negative criticizing mode of existence? Can anarchism grow?

Anarchism has criticized virtually all as being false, contra-human endeavor. What is left of us? Who is left of us? Where is our creativity? Spontaneity? Joy in living? Can we dance? Internal dynamics are sapped by having to always fight external "fact reality." I am frustrated, isolated. But I search, grow, fill with hope: not in the future, but in me.

How about you? Who are you?

Best Regards from a Hole in the Woods,

Oscar

West Virginia

## **Xian Left**

To the Fifth Estate:

Three cheers for both N. Bates and George Bradford's articles on "Symbolic Protest & the Nuclear State," (see Winter 1984 Fifth Estate).

As a radical Christian and frequenter of Catholic Worker circles myself, I don't think it is my job either to attempt to defend myself or counterattack some of Mr. Bradford's more harsh words about the new Christian left. Rather, I rejoice that the issue has been dealt with in such a forthright and solid manner as it has in these two articles. I only wish every religious radical could read them.

I, too, was rather depressed by the advent of 1984, but as long as there are people thinking and acting so lucidly, I see no cause to give up hope. And rather than leaping into total paranoia and ambiguity, maybe the nuclear issue could be the thing to really bring us together. But if we are to affect the progress of the Beast, we need each other.

We religious rebels have to expand our horizons to see that simply "being nice" and setting up another bureaucracy on the ruins of the old is not going to solve the problem, while you political anarchists have to admit that the Christian left is the force in the '80's that is truly moving people, while the old "New Left" of the '60's has either gone home or split into 1000 fragments. It is the Berrigans and friends who are still on the front line fighting.

I, too, would like to see our protests become more creative and challenging. God knows the other side is continually raising the stakes. Of course, this is all easy to say in a general vein; how coalition and creativity work themselves out in terms of personal dynamics is an infinitely more complex matter. In any case, as a first step towards breaking down some of that complexity, atheists and infidels of the world, I embrace you.

I challenge other Christians to throw off some of their middle-class trappings (which George would correctly point out are bought only at the point of the policeman's gun) and do the same. After all, wasn't our founder known to associate with people of "ill-repute?"

Now, Fifth Estate readers, will you do the same for me?

Bill McCormick

The Open Door Community

Atlanta, Georgia

*Tomega Therion Responds:* Your characterization of us ignores the possibility that many of us who currently have little or no spiritual content to our lives do not find the situation necessarily desirable. However, it seems to me to be a situation preferable to affixing oneself to a spirituality so flawed by both its history and its tenets.

Leaving aside the dubious proposition of the existence of the Christian's god, a religion which posits the view that humans are inherently flawed through sin, that woman is the carrier of evil and that we all bear an almost unresolvable guilt for the death of the god's son is just a bad story and an unfitting one for those who desire a liberating view of humanity.

I share with other members of the *Fifth Estate* staff a respect for the engaged commitment that many members of the Christian left exhibit; but perhaps Bill is incapable of seeing the larger role of his religion in the world. For every Daniel Berrigan or Bill McCormick present to act out Christian radicalism, there are 10,000 book burning, abortion-banning, flesh-hating, authority-loving, war-mongering, nation-worshipping, race-hating, punitive mean spirited mainstream Christians who in their numbers make the former almost irrelevant.

The seemingly innate desire for a spiritual connection to each other and to the earth will not be realized by trying to resuscitate a corpse—a typically Christian undertaking—but rather by attempting to fashion a new spirituality as we create a new world.

*FE Staff Note:* A longer exchange on radical Christianity, anarchism and civilization will appear in the next issue.

## Sanity Helped

Hello,

I'm glad to see your paper still publishing. As a long-time subscriber you've helped my sanity. Just knowing others are out there thinking of a better world and exposing this corrupt and soon bankrupt one helps me as I plod along—working, thinking of things I'd rather do. I got rid of my TV a few years back and found a "lot" of new freedom. I'm glad I got to miss this year's election hysteria. Living up here in the U.P. of Michigan is not bad. I can't recommend it too highly.

I'm glad to see the anti-tech slant of your paper. I lived for several years in a 12' x 16' shack I built up here miles from electrical lines and no plumbing. It was the happiest time of my life so far. It's surprising the amount of superfluous junk which is unneeded. My water came from a little spring-fed creek and wood fuel I cut with an axe and hand saw. I'm back working now to pay off the land but dream of the day I move back there for good.

I know I will. I guess that's what keeps me here working and buying and driving around.

Jerry Mohlman  
Manistique MI

## "A Snob Who Doesn't Like Funk"

*E staff note:* Below is the second section of a letter commenting on the Summer 1983 FE. The first section appeared last issue. [See "Tech examined," Letters, FE #315, Winter, 1984.]

Dear F E,

I would like to address E.B. Maple's asking of anyone to compare the music of various jazz artists in their contemporary style with their style in the early '60s. The statement by Hayley that jazz musicians of the early '60s were

scornful of the use of electrified instruments was a harmless enough misconception but since Maple decided to make a point of it I am compelled not to ignore it.

First of all, jazz musicians were among the first to employ electrified guitars and organs and this practice goes back to the forties. Aside from this general practice (which was common for almost any jazz combos) there was an interest in experimenting with electronic music well before the sixties. It is no secret that Charlie Parker approached Varese to teach him ways on expanding his concept. Sun Ra was experimenting with various electronic keyboards and other electronic instruments from 1957 on. The use of amplification to bring up the base or piano was also common practice. What would have happened to a Lionel Hampton and Charlie Christian performance if somebody pulled the plug? If there were no electrified instruments in jazz before the sixties where would Milt Jackson, Barney Kessel, Wes Montgomery, Groove Holmes, Kenny Burrell and Jimmy Smith be? What Hayley had in mind could only be one of two things, either certain jazz musicians had a predilection for acoustic instruments to articulate a particular style or perform a given piece, or they—had disdain for a particular way in which electrified instruments were used. If musicians prefer to limit their performance to acoustical instruments it doesn't preclude their ability to work with vibes or a guitar on another occasion. Musicians hear a composition in the context of certain instruments. From this they decide the piece would have a certain sound on say the grand and not the organ. They may form an ensemble around a certain sound because at that time the concept they hear is in terms of those voices.

In the late '50s many jazz musicians heard the funk concept which led to the forming of various organ combos. People like Gene Ammons, Lou Donaldson, Stanley Turrentine, Sonny Stitt were amongst the horn players who participated in the generation of this concept. Maple, who typically mixes historical periods to score points against Hayley, tries to say Stitt, Turrentine and Donaldson got into funk as a product of degeneration of the '60s sound at a later period. Herbie too, his first big break was "Watermelon Man," which he recorded with Dexter long before he got into his avant-garde things. Now Maple, if you don't like funk, that's one thing, but that doesn't justify you depicting an integral part of the music which led to what you call "the height" of jazz creativity as a mere degeneration from that height. Of course Maple doesn't just say funk but rather pop/funk, a strange qualification.

This brings into question the whole relationship of jazz to popular music, a relationship which although complex is in the final analysis determined by the market. Jazz coming to blossom in the twentieth century has a parallel development with the music industry. Before the arrival of jazz the folk song had already given way to the popular song in its sway over the culture. The musical milieu which jazz developed from was already an admixture of folk and popular forms (blues, cakewalk, marches, ragtime, minstrel shows, etc.). Jazz has always borrowed popular themes and elaborated on them or subverted them (if you will) to its own end. Since commodity relations already dominated the culture in which jazz was born the jazz artists like everybody else had to sell their time and their skills. If they were "lucky" enough they could do this as jazz artist but more often than not (and this is still the case) they would have to play "other people's music."

Most jazz artists have been by and large working musicians and for them the struggle was mostly trying to survive playing their art form and not having to play "Micky Mouse." For the most part they saw no contradiction in making their art more popular, indeed they couldn't understand why it shouldn't be.

I can't see any reasons why these considerations should detract from the beauty or vitality of their music. How can anyone expect any kind of music to break out of the same commercial bind we are all in? The popularity of a Louis Armstrong or a Count Basie was uncontested in their day, yet who can deny their serious contribution to the music's evolution. The essence of jazz is not popularity (market potential) but it is likewise not unpopularity.

Most of what goes on in jazz is underground, styles develop for years before even the most "enlightened" critics and record companies take note. Musicians have their own attitudes about who is an innovator and why, which in most cases has nothing to do with what is said in Downbeat or other rags. This is what is most disturbing about Maple's statement that jazz was at the height of its creativity in the early '60s. I have met hard-core bop fans who would insist that jazz was at its height in the 40s and that nothing has happened since Yard. They would go on to say that Stitt has degenerated from that time and that Donaldson has gone down since he was with Clifford Brown. Have also met some codgers who say that the 20s was the height of creativity and that Armstrong sold out after the Hot Five. These people are serious and they don't bug me because I know that that is their way of saying they love their music.



Maple, on the other hand, I suspect isn't really interested in jazz or else how could we explain such unqualified statements? The spectacle has a way of isolating various artists from stylistic development which could only be the product of the experiments of a wide range of groups and putting them forward as the "innovators" of this development. While in actuality there are innovators of various techniques and approaches the spectacle rarely locates or understands them. The purpose of the media spectacle of course is not to understand the music but to find "giants," to find "stars." Again, what goes on in jazz is largely underground and not so determined by what goes on on the big labels as the outsider is led to believe

The type of approach which Trane developed in the early '60s (and later abandoned in the late '60s) was an extension of the hard bop style which is still flourishing throughout the country. I say flourishing because not only do I enjoy this music, but because I recognize that there are new compositions and technical expansions in this arena. We also know that Trane's music did not stop developing in the early '60s. From the fast change playing approach of "Giant Steps" and "Countdown" he went on in the late '60s to develop a style based on the modal approach which included overtones, extended range and what were called "extra-musical" devices. This was the period which "A Love Supreme" opened the door to and led to "Meditations," "Ascension," "Kulu Se Mama", etc.

In this development Trane was not alone as he borrowed from the parallel development of John Gilmore, Roland Kirk and Eric Dolphy. These three outlived him and along with thousands of lesser known Jazz artists developed this approach further. Kirk lived well into the '70s and his music never regressed in its far reaching goals, but at the same time Kirk dug funk and continued to play it the way he did with organ combos in the '50s, he also dabbled in the use of contemporary pop tunes. A snob who really doesn't dig funk would see a contradiction in his ability to synthesize it along with New Orleans style, swing, bop and sheets of sound style modal pieces at a given performance.

Kirk knew it was all the music. The critics would call his approach "eclectic," which only shows how little they understand the music and the way jazz artists look at it. John Gilmore, who is still alive today, has devoted most of his energies to Sun Ra's ensembles as he did in the '50s when they amongst other unknowns were developing the hard bop sound. Ra's band was the first to experiment extensively with electronic music (in Jazz) as well as unleashing new forms of compositions which the critics, for lack of a better term, call "free form." Ra's groups are also subject to the accusation of "eclecticism" because they combine those developments with swing, bop and funk at a given performance. I invite Maple to check out a performance of Ra's group but that assumes a genuine interest is there.

The choices of representative jazz artists of the 80s by Maple I suspect is just an attempt to rationalize the conclusion that jazz has degenerated since the '60s. I have already pointed out that most of the individuals named were already deep in a funk bag in the '50s. I wonder why Maple ignored Art Blakey, Mingus (who died recently, as did Stitt), Kirk, Ra as well as new-comers like Richie Cole and Arthur Blythe? These along with thousands of unknowns were and are involved with the development of the music to new frontiers. The reason for ignoring them can only be they would disrupt Maple's neat little scenario.

As for Miles, Maple may prefer the Miles of the '60s, but that hardly justifies calling "Bitch's Brew" or "Live Evil" pop, funky as they may be. Pop is Al Martino, or Paul McCarthy, or even Devo, but hardly Bennie Maupin blowing on the bass clarinet (Bitches Brew).

Jeffrey Vega  
Chicago, Illinois

*E.B. Maple replies:* In the 2 copy inches of remarks I made concerning jazz, its utilization of electronics and its commercialization (see Summer 1983 FE), I asked that readers not be dissuaded from commenting; it appears as though Jeffery Vega took me seriously. His history of jazz is a thorough one and I have little to disagree with in it. However, to assert that "Golden Ages" do not exist within particular art forms is to ignore cultural history. Ultimately, these observations are culture bound and matters of personal taste, but most would agree that the Classical period of Mozart and Hayden was a musically richer one than that of the Italian comic opera period of Rossini.

In many ways I may have aided the confusion by not making a sharp enough distinction between the discussion of technology in instrumentation and amplification and that of commercialism. The latter

may not have been the direct cause of the former, but there is a coincidence in time involved and I think a link can be suggested.

Jazz musicians of the '50's and '60's expressed a bitterness that there was not a more popular acceptance of their music and always desired a popularity beyond the limited amount they received. However, once the integration of jazz with funk and rock began and the market became more accessible to the players, it seems to me that their motivation became less an expression of creativity and more a conscious production for consumption.

It seems shortsighted at best to not realize that just as in all spheres of our lives, the more machines intervene in human activity, the more our humanity is diminished. I have always enjoyed the amplified enhancement of instruments in both jazz and rock, but personally I couldn't care less if the plug was pulled permanently on all of it. People have made music for perhaps 50,000 years without electricity and I think could continue easily without it.



Various Authors  
Letters

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/316-spring-1984/letters>  
Fifth Estate #316, Spring, 1984

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