

Here I am, perhaps not isolated in this feeling, but neither am I palpably bolstered by the sight of someone likeminded in this parched desert of conformity. As I see it, the *Village Voice*, a New York weekly publication, is the incarnation of evil. Not the refined sin that has the power to fascinate; nor the miserable vice that might be rescued through broadmindedness and compassion; nor even that brutal wickedness that inspires noble outrage. The *VV*'s kind of evil is disgusting and contemptible, an accumulation of iniquitous proclivities in politics and tastes that makes one wince at having to defile one's shoe in order to push it aside. William Blake wrote about how "to see the earth in the grain of sand/Heaven in a wildflower . . ." The *VV* people see the universe in a drop of sperm; any means to promote this vision as the ultimate in human aspirations their editorial offices pursue as a sacred mission, and they saturate their efforts with an idiosyncratic brand of fanaticism and intolerance. In short, insofar as one can summarize an obese issue of *VV*, it is a journal in which British apologists and exegetes for Arafat, or discreet pro-Khadafy propagandists, preach the moral arguments of updated Bolshevism. It is the *Pravda* of the American behavioral left, dedicated to covering this land with the slime of incoherent instincts presented as *joie de vivre*, to drowning it in coquettishly perfumed sludge of incommensurable human secretions. It is a Bill of Rights for any imaginable sexual deviation and debasement, the holy writ of post-Marcusian casuists and postsituational-ethics sophists whose only quest is to divest the American middle class from its last remnants of civilized urbanity and quickly peddle this striptease to their radic-bourgeois clientele. It's the conceptual organ for muckrakers of bodily and mental effluvia, for deodorized Neanderthals who, together with the cynical claqueurs for international communism (they occasionally snub the Soviets to flaunt the sophistication of their political emotions) are dead-determined to turn this country into

an institutional tyranny of specious ideas and smelly propensities. Their ideological vapors pollute the intelligentsia's collective mind more insidiously than anything that ever oozed out of Love Canal. If I were ever to abandon for a moment my innate addiction to poise and restraint, I would say that the paper stinks.

The *Village Voice* is owned by a

IN MY
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cosmopolitan press tycoon who, I read, considers and describes himself as a conservative.

Now, I, like everyone else, am a composite of two selves which have long been in fierce conflict. Half of me is tormented by the question: How could anyone animated by a conservative impulse not feel guilt for selling such detriment to a society still clinging to the vestiges of a civilizational order? Is it his belief in diversity, in seminal differences, in latitude for even the most noxious view, that makes him tick? Is it the conservative tradition of forbearance that prevents him from influencing the national psyche in keeping with his own principles? Is the gentleman who retains *Village Voice* actually a genteel and delicate pluralist who knows that equity is a conservative value, the glory of his persuasion, and that granting unconditional editorial freedom is an expression of faith in fairness?

Yet the other side of me, that part of me that's small and narrowminded, corruptible, misanthropic, secular, irascible, peevish, reactionary, and vilely ungenerous with other people's merits, keeps telling me that scummy impurity of body and mind is what sells best in to-

day's journalistic market. It says that the hottest merchandise appeals to the low pleasures of derangement, especially when it is expertly blended with base, shrill, radical leftism featured as tender social conscience. And that the anarchy of inclinations and standards is the most profitable commodity in the midst of the American affluence that was achieved by appeals diametrically opposed to those of the *Village Voice*—namely to civic and moral virtues.

I must admit that my ignoble self wins, hands down. Not long ago, a text was made public in the *Voice* which proved that some conservative illusions belong to history's dustbin. It came to the fore in an open letter from some of the *Village Voice*'s doctrinal storm troopers (who considered themselves underpaid for their chores, demanded cushier benefits, and considered a strike) which stated *urbi et orbi*:

The editorial freedom enjoyed by *Voice* writers is not granted by Murdoch as a reward for the docility of his staff. Murdoch has a keen enough business sense to know that the readers who provide his substantial profits would be less than receptive to anti-abortion diatribes or articles supporting increases in military spending. Strike or not strike, editorial freedom at the *Voice* continues to be a lucrative proposition for its owner.

Mr. Murdoch is, of course, the *Village Voice*'s proprietor. He also owns the *New York Post*, *New York* magazine and the *Times* of London. So varied a motley of publishing ventures and stances in both America and England seems not to ruin his sleep—he's an Australian. He is also a businessman, a capitalist and a prim citizen, according to the gossip columns. I wonder what the word "pluralism" brings to his mind—the opposite of a *single* dollar? And why is he called conservative? "There won't be an answer . . ." as they used to announce in old melodramas when someone's respectability was being pondered.

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