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## LETTERS

### Aurally Accurate

One does not usually expect a high level of scholarship in movie reviews, but when the reviewer is Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., one does expect higher standards. In his critique of *Pretty Baby* ["Sweet Bordello Baby," May 27], Schlesinger argues that "except for the tinkling jazz and a few blacks moving softly in the background, Malle's Storyville might almost be a *quartier* of Marseilles. Even the accents are only intermittently southern." In this statement, Schlesinger shows far less feel for New Orleans and its social history than the filmmakers did. The girl Violet is based on a woman interviewed in old age by Al Rose for his book *Storyville, New Orleans: Being an Authentic Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red-light District* (1974). The photographer in the film is closely patterned on the historical Ernest Bellocq; the scenes of some of his most famous photographs are re-created with uncanny precision.

Schlesinger not only has skipped his homework but also has no ear for southern accents. Southerners are tired of hearing everything from tidewater Virginia to Miami played with the voice of Scarlett O'Hara; *Pretty Baby* is a great improvement on that convention. The genuine New Orleans accent is wholly unlike that of the rural countryside 50 or 100 miles away. The authentic New Orleans accent sounds a bit like someone of French extraction who was raised in New York and moved to Atlanta about five years ago. The only aural inaccuracy in the film is doubtless deliberate. The actual Bellocq is said to have had a squeaky voice and a strong French accent. Carradine wisely opted not to try that.

Alan W. Heldman  
Birmingham, Ala.

### The Cost of Health Care

Two fine recent articles by Robert Claiborne ["The Great Health Care Rip-off," January 7, and "Why We Can't Afford National Health Insurance," May 13] certainly make provocative reading. But Claiborne's picture of the world's richest country trying to develop a workable health service, becoming frustrated, and giving up in despair is hard to accept. Surely a nation that put men on the moon can also put health care in the hands of its citizens.

Claiborne makes passing reference to the national health services of Sweden and Britain. Would it not be more helpful to examine the system of his northern neighbor? Canada has had publicly funded hospital and medical services for many years, and no one talks of abandoning them. The specter of crushing health costs has been dispelled for Canadian families; in most provinces they don't even pay premiums because the funding comes from general tax revenue on the basis of ability to pay.

Claiborne suggests several ways to deliver care at more manageable costs, but only at the end of the second article does he suggest we could reduce the need for care by changing our life-style and accepting more responsibility for maintaining our own good health. If we added improvements in workplace health and safety, might not these be the most promising paths to pursue?

Murray Smith  
Health Sciences Centre  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

I read with interest Robert Claiborne's articles on the cost of our health care system. I agree with the assessment of the problem but not with the proposed solution. I feel that in order to give patients the best care, one must evaluate their particular needs. As presently proposed, HMOs are set up for routine preventive care—blood pressure checks, lab work, and immunizations. A patient with a long-term illness requires the ongoing relationship that one gets from physicians in private practice. Of course, nurses and technicians help care for the chronically ill, but they do so under the direction of an M.D. Emergency curative care is improving as more and more physicians' assistants are trained.

In addition to the objections stated in Claiborne's article, HMOs can have an impersonal atmosphere, which makes patients feel like objects, and may impair the quality of health care.

Jean E. Dulaff  
Albuquerque, N. Mex

Robert Claiborne replies: I think the Canadian health care system deserves great credit for containing costs while maintaining quality. But I am not certain that this system is applicable to the United States for many reasons—not

# IBM Reports

## Information: inflation's enemy.

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the least of which is that we are so much bigger.

Dulaff has been misinformed about HMOs; they do *not* deal simply with "routine preventive care." A letter to the Group Health Cooperative in Puget Sound would provide more information. I agree that patients need ongoing relationships with a doctor—but not that the doctor necessarily has to be in private practice.

## Credit to the Choreographer

I was surprised to note in Owen Edwards's interesting article ["A Salute to the High Craftsmen of Photography," May 13] that he credits the photographer Baron Adolf De Meyer with the choreographic stylizations in his photos of *L'Après-midi d'un faune*.

Dancers and scholars value the *faune* photographs for the record they provide of Nijinsky's inimitable choreography. Ballet dancers experienced tremendous difficulty in assuming the very unballistic poses Nijinsky formed—stances with legs and feet parallel rather than turned out, with upper torsos twisted in opposition to the direction taken by the pelvis. It required time and effort for the dancers to learn to move in accordance with this unusual style.

Does Edwards think a photographer—even a remarkable one—could have "posed" the friezelike passage De Meyer photographed? Indeed, if "his dance studies are stylized," De Meyer had the choreographer to thank for the stylizations. We should be grateful to the photographer for preserving Nijinsky's rare choreographic vision on film but not for devising the poses.

Valentina Litvinoff  
New York, N.Y.

## Art for Art's Sake?

In response to Carll Tucker's editorial "A Huzzah for Happy Endings" [The Back Door, April 1], it is nice that there are still some movies that can make him feel good about the world. But I would like to suggest to Tucker that an essay projecting this kind of opinion can probably do a great deal of harm to the plight of the artist. What is being offered here is the same old bromide that the work of the artist is supposed to provide entertainment for the viewer or the listener. Art as entertainment—or entertainment presented as art—is always available for those who find it pleasing. But there are artists whose art can only find its expression in a reflection of the world around them.

If Tucker wishes to seek out the kind of fare that makes him feel good, that is

certainly his prerogative. But it is too bad that he has chosen to use his power as editor of a large and influential magazine to promote the idea that the gap between "serious" art and popular taste is impossible to bridge. Instead, perhaps the promotion of education in the arts would provide more valuable input.

Lisa Bennett  
Berkeley, Calif.

Carll Tucker replies: Art that does not entertain is not art. By *entertain*, I mean hold the attention. The problem with too much contemporary art is that it makes no attempt to appeal to audiences' attention. It sits inertly, expecting audiences to come to it, preferably in a posture of homage.

Great art can be obscure or accessible, but it is never not entertaining. That Bennett thinks that by *entertainment* I mean sentimentality is a sad indicator of the breadth of the gap between many artists and those who might benefit from their creations.

## The Morality of Diplomacy

Don Cook's petulant attack on Arthur Goldberg ["Making America Look Foolish: The Case of the Bungling Diplomat," May 13] for asserting, in accordance with the instructions of his government, the primacy of human rights over commercial and other interests at the Belgrade conference makes *Saturday Review* itself look foolish.

It was precisely Goldberg's lifelong commitment to human decency, which has marked every phase of his distinguished career, that made him the logical choice to underline the administration's position at Belgrade. Cook would abandon victims of naked oppression in order to open new doors for their oppressors. Arthur Goldberg and Jimmy Carter reject that view, and, I am sure, so do the overwhelming majority of the American people.

Albert J. Zack  
AFL-CIO  
Washington, D.C.

I agree with Don Cook that by imposing our moral standards upon other nations we are confusing *jus gentium* with *jus civile*. Aside from the fact that we have our own subtle violations of human rights, this crusade seems as destructive as any since it ignores the real situation in Russia. To insist on individuals' rights is to misunderstand the Communist ideology of society versus the individual. What we call "rights" are through the looking glass of communism bourgeois privileges that oppose the sacrifices necessary to

bring about a better society. What we call an act of oppression toward individuals is a mere curtailment of bourgeois privileges in favor of the masses, an act of freeing them from their self-centered outlook.

Your cartoon should have shown the foreign policy maker blindfolded and with bananas in his ears.

Heidi Owren  
Kent, Wash.

## Necessary Death

The title that Albert Rosenfeld chose for his article ["Are We Afraid of Living Longer? The Strange Resistance to Aging Research," May 27], as well as the piece itself, skirts the real question posed by his last sentence. Dynamic life, either social or physical, for a society depends upon the timely death of its individual members.

The little clock that sends us on our way when our room becomes more valuable than our company has its indispensable counterparts throughout life. The biological systems of molecules, cells, and animals depend upon death for their adaptability. Synthesis and growth must always be balanced by decay and death or else there can be no true growth and no adjustment to change in the surroundings.

Carl Bonhors  
Portland, Oreg

## The Fox vs. Superweasel

I was amazed at the similarities between "The Man from Muck" [From Runners, April 29] and the book *Alvir Fernald, Superweasel*, by Clifford B Hicks. The Man from Muck, a mysterious Chicagoan known as The Fox wages a one-man war against polluters; he delights in scooping up "pollution guck" and letting it fly against the companies that produce it. He apparently derives his name from the heavily polluted Fox River and leaves a limerick at the scene of each retaliation.

In comparison, twelve-year-old Alvin Fernald (alias Superweasel) acquires his name from the Weasel River. For his high school project on pollution, Alvin chooses to secretly retaliate against his town's polluters. Superweasel keeps in close contact with *Daily Bugle* reporter Mr. Moser, and Alvin's sister, fond of writing poetry leaves this verse at the home of the chemical plant's president:

Here are some fish, some poor dead fish  
You killed them with a smell;  
You must be proud, you nasty man,...  
I hope you go to jail.

David Sanni  
Greeneville, Tenn



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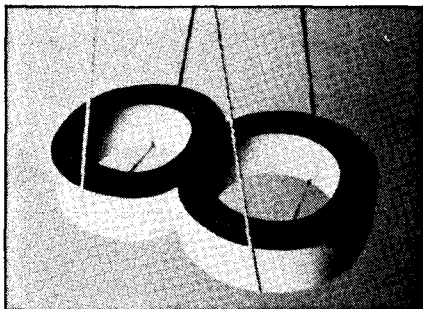


## Western Electric

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# FRONT RUNNERS

Melanie M. Kienle



## Mournful Numbers

Great puzzlement at a Hanover, New Hampshire, hospital when patients balked at undergoing surgery in operating room number eight. The hospital had long since bowed to popular taste by phasing out thirteen as an operating room number. But

why the aversion to *eight*? The trouble was quickly traced to Robin Cook's popular novel (and movie) *Coma*, in which operating room eight is the scene of Dastardly Goings-on that we won't describe here for fear of spoiling the movie for you—let alone your appetite. Taking its cue from the balky patients, the hospital quietly changed the room number from eight to eighteen, and now things are going swimmingly.

## Breakthrough

Two quasi-amateurs in Britain have developed a device for putting Chinese ideographs into a computer—and getting them out in English translation. In addition to turning Chinese into English, their invention could well revolutionize communications for the many millions of people (roughly 30 percent of the world's population) who speak and read Chinese. Instantaneous, point-to-point Telex messages in written Chinese are at last possible, and the typesetting of Chinese characters—formerly a laboriously slow hand process—can from now on be accomplished electronically.

The heroes of this remarkable story are Robert Sloss, fifty, and Peter Nancarrow, thirty-eight, both of whom are attached to the Faculty of Oriental Studies at the University of Cambridge. Together they have been engaged for several years in compiling a new Chinese-English dictionary that will reflect contemporary terminology and usage.

As their work progressed, the dictionary team gathered together a large collection of English-into-Chinese technical glossaries. A computer seemed the obvious tool for digesting all this data, for re-sorting it in the proper order, and for turning it around into Chinese-English entries. "To our considerable astonishment," Sloss relates, "we discovered after a worldwide search that there was no sensible way of putting Chinese characters into a computer."

Necessity became the mother of invention. Relying on common sense and without massive grants or sophisticated equipment, Sloss and

Nancarrow devised a method of digitizing Chinese characters in a way that could be "read" by a computer. The most commonly used characters—4,356 in all—were laid out on a grid, each box of which could be identified in digital form. The grid was then wrapped around a rotating drum, and a laterally moving scanner, or "cursor," was added so that an operator could swiftly zero in on the wanted ideograph. "It's a fairly simple concept," Sloss says, "but until we did it, nobody believed you could get valid digital readings from Chinese characters."

Now back to the revolution in Chinese communications. Digital readings from the Sloss-Nancarrow device are fed into a computer that has been programmed to write Chinese characters. An operator selects a character on the rotating drum and presses a button. Instantaneously, the same character is reproduced at the other end of the electronic circuit. In short, a Chinese Telex. Already, rights to the invention have been acquired by a major international communications firm, Cable and Wireless, Ltd.

The same digital techniques used for Telexing can also be adapted for typesetting (and perhaps even for typewriting) Chinese characters. Because it lacks an alphabet, Chinese cannot be composed on a keyboard. There is no such thing as a Chinese Linotype. Books and newspapers have literally to be hand-set from formidable fonts of metal type. Now, thanks to this new technology, Chinese newspapers should be able to make the giant leap from metal type to computer print-outs (as have many papers in America). "The capability is there," Nancarrow says. "It's simply a matter of solving the

economics."

Meanwhile, the inventors are back at work on the dictionary—and on a system for translating Chinese into English by means of data processing techniques. Chinese and English are both noninflected languages that employ the same basic sentence structure. Because of their syntactical similarities, a computer can—with some relatively simple programmed transpositions—substitute English for Chinese and produce a rough translation.

To quote Sloss again: "It works only where each character carries a quantum of meaning, so that by processing characters you are effectively processing meaning. It won't work for philosophy or literature, but it does an adequate job of translating straightforward prose, such as scientific descriptions."

Here is the opening sentence taken from a Chinese textbook on magnetism, followed by the computer's translation of it into somewhat halting but enormously useful pidgin English:

在日常生活中，我們經常碰到「磁」，  
例如用指南針 辨別方向，  
用半導體收音機收聽廣播，  
用電視機觀看節目等。

Within everyday life, we often encounter (to) "magnetism," for example use(ing) compass needle(s) distinguish direction(s), use(ing) semiconductor(s), radio(s), hear broadcast(ing)/s, use(ing) television set(s) watch program(s), etc.

"It's a halfway house," Sloss concedes, "but the process can at least tell a scientific researcher whether the text in question is worth a careful human translation."