

CONSUME- erism



easy **SALE** WOW FLASH GLITTER GLAM
NO DOWN PAYMENTS
\$ STYLE fashion \$
NEW **BUY** SPEND \$
CONVENIENCE IMPULSE \$\$\$

The Matrix

Pacific Lutheran University December 2005

Table of Contents

The Efficient	2 Nathan Bendickson
Dinner In A Movie	3 Adam Oswald
Plight of the Migrant Chinese Worker	4 Benjamin Rasmus
Buy Less Year!	5 Eric Thompson
Orange Stickers	6 Nathan Bendickson
On Open Source Software	7 A. Gerow
All I Want for Christmas...	8 Anonymous
I Was Once A Patient	9 Zach DeBoard
Blue Light Special	11 Adam Oswald
All Googley-eyed	12 A. Gerow
The Mall	13 Eric Thompson
Random Late-Afternoon Thoughts...	17 Adam Oswald
Buck the System	18 Amy Post
"And I Got It at a Thrift Store!"	19 Andrew Söderlund
"Rampant Consumerism" as an Indicator of Freedom	20 Scott Anderson
30-minute lunch break	20 Amy Post
In Defense of Consumption	21 Adam Oswald
No Catchy Title	22 Tifanie Krebs
Big Little Things	23 Amy Post
Haunted Saloon (A song for the bars)	26 Direct

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The Matrix is dedicated to the creation of a culture of ACTIVE conscience and consciousness in our communities to replace the current culture of fear and silence. To this end, *The Matrix* provides an outlet that engenders dialogue and fights dehumanization.

*Prohibit sharply
the rehearsed
response.*

—W.H. Auden

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"Modern English is the Wal-Mart of languages: convenient, huge, hard to avoid, superficially friendly, and devouring all rivals in its eagerness to expand."

—Mark Abley

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the land of consumerism—a land of buying and selling, cost and benefit, desire and need. On the simplest level, consumption means getting the food and shelter we need to survive. But the word consumerism invokes a more arresting, more pervasive type of consumption. We're talking about wild materialism: the fevered buying and selling of everything. In this place nothing is sacred; everything has a price.

But we can't paint consumerism in black and white, in a simple, good-bad dichotomy. Is consumerism a sign of freedom, or a type of slavery? Is it a necessary evil, or a symptom of indulgence? Even among themselves, lefties and righties don't agree on these issues. Plus, our alleged beliefs often contradict our actions. We want to buy responsibly, yet we feel strapped for cash. We curse the exploitation of natural resources, yet our lifestyles do the devouring we eschew. We want to support independent thinking, yet we rip music from the Internet. No one can claim exemption from the paradoxes of consumerism.

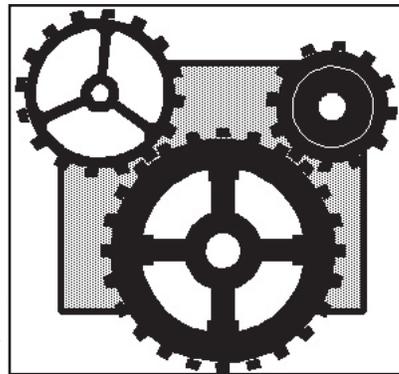
As PLU's social justice publication, *The Matrix* wants to encourage discussion about these things. We want to tread the murky ground between simple labels and assumptions; neither communists nor corporations have all the answers. We want to talk about consumerism in the micro—in the smallest purchases, in the most basic cultural values—and in the macro. Worldwide, the gap between rich and poor is growing and rankling like an open wound—and shows no signs of stopping. Karl Marx told us 150 years ago that capitalism thrives on new markets, and will reach a breaking point when those markets are saturated. The poor will get fed up and call for revolution. If there's any truth in his theory, our economies—and our lives—are rapidly approaching critical mass.

Read on: see what PLU's students think of consumerism.

The Matrix

The Efficient

by Nathan Bendickson



THERE'S a problem with efficiency, and you'd never guess it. The word is so nice, so harmless. Repeat it—efficiency, efficiency, efficiency—and you're gliding across an assembly line's shiny rollers, propelled with a little nudge each time you hit the top. What could be wrong with a word so innocuous, so friendly?

The first assembly lines carried efficiency to poisonous levels. The harm hides inside the hypnotic chorus that repeats, growing louder with each pass of the machine: more, faster, bigger, quicker, now, now, NOW! It never stops. It never tires. No matter how efficient we become, the idea goads us further. We can always make one more, and do it a little more quickly. We can fire one employee without noticeably harming production. And

then another. Oh, maybe just one more.

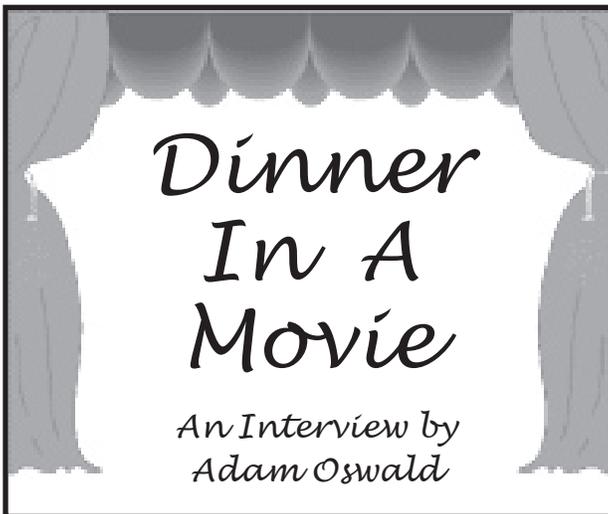
Then things start slipping. We lie to ourselves about the work we do. What do you mean our products fall apart because the developing world had to assemble a million in a day for a couple pennies? What do you mean our kids are growing up shallow and twisted because we took art and music out of our schools? What do you mean there's a problem with converting every plant and animal into a resource to be exploited and depleted? With efficiency as our bottom line, every sacrifice will be trailed by another, and then another, until nothing remains.

And it happens everywhere, on every level. Look at us: is there anyone on this

campus who does *all* his or her homework? No! We cut corners and skim chapters. We live complicit lies with our teachers, let-

ting the mounds of reading and assignments pass down the line without keeping up. As long as we pass class and get our diplomas we'll be fine. We'll have our money's worth of education. And if we rebel, if we try our hardest, scrambling to cram every single piece of learning, what is the cost to our lives, our sanity, our happiness?

No matter—efficient people don't need happiness. The most efficient work is slavery. The most efficient sex is rape. The most efficient person is a computer. Get back to work.



Many of us know the power of media in the modern world economy. According to Plunkett Research, Ltd., movie theaters took a \$9.4 billion chunk of the \$190 billion media industry in 2004.¹ However, the importance of food in cinema revenues is often overlooked. But thanks to the esteemed Nichole Boland, we now know the truth about junk food and movie consumption.

A.O.: So you worked at a movie theater during the summer, yes?

N.B.: Why yes Adam Oswald, I did. And I found out that they don't actually make money off of ticket sales. They make money strictly off of what they sell at the snack bar.² So now, instead of just selling popcorn, soda and candy, you have popcorn, hotdogs, pizza, ice cream, quesadillas, [etc.] There's a Starbucks inside the new Lowe's that just opened in Alderwood, and there's a Starbucks across the other side of the street, but of course you're not allowed to bring it into the theater, so you discard the Starbucks you just bought and buy it again on the inside.

A.O.: So they're no longer theaters, they're essentially...

N.B.: It's a restaurant. It's a restaurant with a really good shtick.

A.O.: With a good draw.

N.B.: Now, though, even after being disgusted with the amount of food people buy, I still go to a movie and can't be comfortable without eating something. I want some

food, and without it I don't fully enjoy the movie experience.

A.O.: So is [eating at the movies] a cultural thing, do you think?

N.B.: I think so. I think it's been very consciously made that way by the corporations that own these theaters. Just about everyone that goes to the movie has some sort of refreshment, because it doesn't feel right without it, and they bombard you with

ads. It used to be as innocent as dancing candy.

A.O.: And now it's the rolling ball that swoops around and the falling cascades of popcorn.

N.B.: Yeah, exactly, and it's popping to your left and popping to your right. You're on a roller coaster of concessions.

A.O.: A visual assault.

N.B.: Yeah.

A.O.: And you said they have carts now?

N.B.: It's called the hawking cart. You walk around like an airline attendant with the soda cart. And, you know: Popcorn? Soda? Pizza? Chicken tenders? And the great thing about the chicken tenders is there's five different dipping sauces too, so the variety is just up. [Long list of pretzel and sauces.] You have all this stuff in a cart, and it's all pre-made, and unbeknownst to [moviegoers], it's probably been sitting there for hours. Whatever I didn't sell at *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, I'm gonna' try to pawn off on Mr. and Mrs. Smith, and they're seeing *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* so they'll buy anything, and they do. So even if you're too lazy to go to the lobby, the lobby comes to you, and there's the pressure. It's great. It makes a lot of money.

A.O.: And it's hideously unhealthy.

N.B.: Yes, hideously unhealthy.

A.O.: So this has nothing to do with eating in the usual sense of the term: my body needs nourishment.

N.B.: Oh, absolutely not. It's a different kind of necessity. I'm going to a movie, so it's necessary that I have the full experience. For a lot of people, going to a movie is their ultimate form of entertainment: sitting in a dark room, staring at a screen, and I think that speaks to a lot about what society has become. For them it is the ultimate getaway. It might be the only fun thing they do.

A.O.: Utterly passive

N.B.: Yeah, it is. But in their mind they're going out, they're out on the town, so they don't care about what they spend or what they put in their body. They're letting loose, so they buy everything, and if they don't—I know, and I've seen it—you don't feel like you're getting the full experience. Like when *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* came out, that was genius. We got Wonka Bars into the theater, just for that movie, and those Wonka Bars—people had never tasted one. Have you ever tried to find a Wonka Bar in a store?

A.O.: I have eaten some, yes.

N.B.: It's very hard to find them. They are good, I do try them, but we were charging five dollars for a Wonka Bar, which you can buy for fifty cents in a store. They were buying these five-dollar Wonka Bars that they had never tasted before. Because they were going to see *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, they needed a Wonka Bar. And that Wonka Bar, for most people, would be gone before the commercials, before the previews, before the movie starts.

A.O.: It's like fantasy is growing out, taking in more and more. By the way, you're spending real money on a real product, but you're doing it for a story.

N.B.: It's like when they came out with smell-o-vision back in the sixties. Scratch a card and smell so, oh, you're really in the movie. Now you can eat the movie too, which is nice.

¹ www.plunkettresearch.com/entertainment/entertainment_statistics.html

² Wikipedia, in its articles on cinema, corroborates Nichole's observations.

PLIGHT OF THE MIGRANT CHINESE WORKER

BY BENJAMIN RASMUS

The social and economic landscape of China is changing faster than the 1000 new skyscrapers scheduled to go up in Shanghai by the end of this decade. In the last 25 years, the country has moved from a command economy, where the government has set production levels and prices, to a market economy. Under this newly integrated system, a billion-plus Chinese are facing a different way of life—one that is increasingly based on consumption.

Economic reforms have led to staggering economic growth, which has been consistent since 1978. Last year China's GDP grew 9.5 percent, compared to 4.5 percent in the United States and 3.1 percent worldwide. Such awesome growth has led China to devour natural resources at an increasingly alarming rate. The country is now the world's largest consumer of basic agricultural and industrial goods, such as grain, meat, coal, and steel.

In this economic transformation, China has changed from one of the most egalitarian countries in Asia to one of the least. According to studies of income inequality and poverty, China now has one of the most imbalanced distributions of wealth in Asia. When China still operated as a command economy, the country's distribution of wealth was much more equal.

This gap is painfully obvious in China's bustling Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The central government of the People's Republic of China established low tax incentives in SEZs, like Shenzhen, to bring in foreign investments and increase Chinese exports to the global market. Perhaps the most well known SEZ is the Pudong district in Shanghai, where one of the world's tallest skyscrapers is set to be built, the 1614-foot Shanghai World Financial Center.

Millions of rural farmers and workers flock to SEZs to try and establish a new life centered on a modern, consumer-based lifestyle. These rural laborers leave behind family and friends in hopes of escaping their agrarian communities. However, once

these migrant workers arrive in an SEZ or other urban center, they struggle to find work, and often wind up working construction or factory jobs. These laborers slave away for months, saving minimal amounts of money, which brings them small purchasing power and an even smaller sense of economic freedom.

Even if a migrant worker is fortunate enough to earn a decent wage at a factory or construction site, restrictive household registration systems often prohibit rural peasants from gaining urban residency. Registered urban residents can gain access to housing, education, medical care, and social security, while non-registered peasants cannot. For example, before the city of Shenzhen was established as an SEZ in 1980, the population was about 300,000. By 2000 the population was over 4 million, of which only 30 percent were considered permanent residents. The other 70 percent were migrant workers who could not register as permanent residents.

Because migrant workers cannot live in most cities legally, they are often forced to live in crowded factory-owned dorms. In these situations there is practically no distinction between their work time and free time, since they live where they work. Forcing workers to live in factory-owned dorms also dramatically reduces the chances for these laborers to organize and demand better working conditions, as their bosses are always watching them. Although China's economy now depends on the mobilization of tens of millions of these migrant workers, they are often ignored in popular culture, and slave away for months, barely earning enough money to take part in the modern-China lifestyle of consumerism. These factory workers can barely save enough to purchase new clothes or enjoy a leisure activity on a weekend, like spending an evening at a karaoke bar or dance club.

Current estimates put the total number of migrant workers in China at 150 million,

and that number is expected to rise. At least another 75 million, of China's rural population of 800 million, are expected to move to cities in the next five years, which will result in greater social inequality and unrest in China.

Life for the economically well-off Chinese is a different story. Millions have embraced and readily adapted to modernity in the booming Chinese cities. This new consumer-conscious class seeks to separate itself from migrant laborers by communicating its social position through accumulation and consumption. Status-enhancing goods once included items like televisions, refrigerators, and washing machines, but now include luxury items like DVD players, computers, other household electronics, and automobiles.

Not surprisingly, migrant laborers increasingly feel ostracized because they cannot participate in the new urban, consumer-based economy. Many women in particular feel the need to attain a degree of contemporary femininity, and therefore spend their tiny wages on make-up, clothes, and jewelry in an effort to keep up with modern Chinese society.

Many images in Chinese popular culture tend to commodify women in an attempt to promote a consumer-oriented culture. For example, advertisements in newspapers and magazines portray modern Chinese women as both thin and voluptuous in an attempt to peddle breast-enhancements and popularize plastic surgery. These new standards of beauty in China illustrate the upper echelon's ability to shape and create their own identity, while poor migrant laborers struggle to simply survive.

The plight for the millions of roaming workers, which was once only visible in the rural/urban divide, is now swelling in metropolises. Over the past year, a number of violent protests have taken place across the country, due in part to the ever-widening inequality gap between the rich and poor. Clearly, a sizable chunk of China's total peasant population of 800 million must feel perplexed and anxious about the economic and social developments taking place in the socially stratified, neon-glistening cities. The new consumer-conscious class of China, and more importantly the Chinese government, must do a better job of integrating these laborers into their society, or else face continued and intensified social unrest.

BUY LESS YEAR!

by Eric Thompson

A newborn baby requires love, attention, care, and concern. And a lot of material goods. We must get that baby things, and lots of them, right away. Wikipedia defines “baby shower” as “a party in which expected parents receive gifts and money for their expected child.” We cut to the chase in the US, even when we define our own cultural phenomenon. A baby shower means buying, consuming. At least we’re honest about it.

My point: even before a baby enters the world, we’re making grand plans for her or his materialistic life in the US. You could argue that infants cannot process information, but I still think a baby shower is a poor introduction to life. “Welcome,” we say. “Here are 341 outfits and 763 assorted baby toys that you will never wear or play with, which your parents will sell at a garage sale in a few years to make more money to buy you more things.”

Consumerism is not merely an attitude or an optional way of life. It is an unavoidable part of American culture that engulfs each of us as soon as we leave the womb, if not before.

When I was young my favorite holiday was Christmas. I had learned through experience that Jesus’ birth consistently brought in more bounty than his resurrection, or even my own birth. I was confused when friends told me Thanksgiving or the 4th of July was their favorite holiday. They didn’t generate any gifts at all! Perhaps they really really liked turkey, or found the founding fathers fascinating.

I’d like to think my present, more mature self is less greedy and materialistic. But I wonder if this change happens to everyone who grows up. Are the adults in our society less materialistic than the children?

Take weddings. In our culture, this ceremony joins two adults. Normally, these responsible, supposedly less-materialistic-than-they-used-to-be adults blow thousands of dollars on everything from elaborate floral arrangements to decorations to food. And some stretch their guest lists as far as the imagination allows, not so that

these guests may share in their matrimonial bliss, but because they could use an extra tablecloth or a stainless steel toaster.

I’m not trying to write a remember-the-true-meaning-of-Christmas Hallmark special, but I do think we’ve systematically substituted things—gifts, money, food—for many holidays’ traditional meanings. For some, even the other significant moments in their lives, like confirmations and graduations, are merely excuses to get rich.

How could such an attitude have become so ubiquitous, even in our cultural celebrations and traditions? How deeply has consumerism, this need for things, been ingrained in our souls?

Webb Keane, a University of Michigan anthropologist, says it goes very deep. He points out that America isn’t the most materialistic country, but Americans complain about their own consumerism the most. We think something is wrong with our behavior. Yet we continue to buy and buy. It’s as if we have no other choice.

“We live in a world where kinship ties are weak and narrow,” Keane says. “Families are small and scattered, the divorce rate is high, and people move around a lot. The giving of gifts is one important ritual that allows people to affirm their social ties and forge new relationships.” Consumerism gets passed down from generation to generation like an heirloom, and we can only break the cycle by passing down a different value—how about simplicity?—to our own children.

But while individuals can create small, positive change, it will not be enough. How can we possibly change something so omnipresent?

For one, we can broaden our thinking. So often we talk about consumerism on a small scale. We have Buy Nothing Day¹, which I support, and certainly makes a statement—but what about the other 364

days? Consumerism is a year-round phenomenon, just like racism and sexism. Would we ever conceive of something like Be Tolerant Day? No, we don’t settle for a single day because we recognize the futility of such a gesture, and realize that we must push for a widespread, large-scale movement towards tolerance.

More productive, I think, would be Buy Less Year. If we could collectively, gradually reduce our excess spending over an entire year, and work to do the same the following year, it would have a lasting effect.

Perhaps the most important thing we can do is stop talking about how something should be done, and *do* something.

Holiday spending has been increasing exponentially each year for the past decade, despite Americans’ repeated insistence that they wish it would stop.

Consumerism is incredibly easy to oppose, but that stance is amazingly difficult to back up with action. We must move from recognizing that our extreme con-

sumerism isn’t sustainable, and whining about how we wish we weren’t so materialistic, to actually refraining from beating the hell out of senior citizens to get ten of this Christmas season’s Tickle-Me Elmo equivalents. But this requires more dedication than many are willing to muster. When it comes to what we buy, hypocrisy is rampant.

For example, look at the gap between what Americans have said and what they have done in past Christmas seasons. I came across an encouraging poll on The Center for a New American Dream website. The poll, from 2002, had the headline, “Americans Find Silver Lining in Sluggish Economy as Holiday Season Approaches, Americans Say Spending Less on Gifts Allowing Them to Focus on Holidays’ True Meaning.”

But then I checked the poll archives, finding polls from 1998-2001 with eerily similar titles: “Poll Shows Commitment to More Meaningful Holiday, Americans

Looking Deeper this Holiday Season in Aftermath of 9/11,” in 2001, “New Poll Shows Americans Want Holiday Celebration That Money Can’t Buy...” in 2000, “Fed Up With Holiday Commercialism, Americans are Starting to Simplify...” in 1999, and, “This Holiday Season Americans Want ‘More Joy, Less Stuff,’” in 1998.

Each year the polls showed staggering numbers, like the 91 percent who claimed the holidays were too commercialized in the 1999 poll. But by the time the following holiday season rolled around, it seems few had acted on that sentiment. Holiday spending has been increasing exponentially each year for the past decade, despite Americans’ repeated insistence that they wish it would stop. The site stopped polling after 2002, apparently realizing the ridiculousness and futility of it all.

I don’t like pessimism or optimism; neither is realistic or healthy. What we need is a healthy dose of each. It can be tempting to throw in the towel and accept the way we are: each year we stuff each other’s stockings with cold, hard cash, and say that all we really want for Christmas is a homemade photo album and some good old fashioned joy. But what a depressing way to exist. Yes, it will be painstakingly difficult to temper America’s inner consumer, but it is doable, and the first step is understanding and acknowledging the obstacles before us: our cultural traditions, our kinship ties, and our upbringings. It’s also important to recognize that the solution will have to go beyond individual lifestyle choices. Any lasting change will require a large-scale societal shift. So let’s start shifting, because if we don’t, our future selves will only dream of credit card debt and all the crap we’ll have to buy our greedy future children.

¹Wikipedia says: “Buy Nothing Day is an informal day of protest against consumerism observed by social activists. It was founded by Vancouver artist Ted Dave and subsequently promoted by the Canadian *Adbusters* magazine. Participants refrain from purchasing anything for 24 hours in a concentrated display of consumer power. The event is intended to raise awareness of what many see as the wasteful consumption habits of [developed] countries. In the United States and Canada, supporters demonstrate on the day after American Thanksgiving.”

Orange Stickers

by

Nathan Bendickson

The orange summer sun sank behind smoky clouds. As the distant hills extinguished the daylight, the air grew thick with the hum of parking lot lights. I stood on the cooling pavement, inside a roped-off pen, amid rows of tables and boxes, alongside customers and discounted merchandise. Mom traipsed through the stacks of shoeboxes. I gazed at the vibrant clouds, crossed my arms, and sighed.

“How about these?” she said. “These are a 9 ½.”

This time I didn’t move to look. Instead I started rotating my upper body back and forth, awkwardly wringing out my torso, trying to squeeze out the uncertainty, the urgency that had been accumulating with each shoe into which I crammed my foot. She was being very generous, I told myself, offering to buy her son running shoes. And I needed the shoes, but the bright orange discount stickers under the pale orange streetlights felt all wrong, like discolored blemishes on the inside of a fruit.

My mother continued handling boxes and lifting lids, her body curled over and small. Yes, I thought. Very generous: an impulsive trip to a discounted parking lot

of goods, where every shoe felt wrong—even the ones that could’ve been right. I’d made too many hasty purchases in the name of a good deal, and I wanted to stop wasting resources, start buying responsibly.

I almost began philosophizing there and then about the dirt of consumerism that grew these shoes—these cheap products that would likely blister and contort my feet, wear out, and demand replacing in a few short years. I didn’t want shoes unless I knew they were the right ones. And that evening nothing felt right.

“I don’t think we’ll find anything tonight,” I finally said. “We should go.”

“Well okay,” she said, grimacing. “At least we tried, right?”

We walked past tables and racks to the entrance of the pen, then back to the car. For a moment I felt relieved. I would not be amassing more *things* to rot in my closet from disuse. But as we

drove away I felt ill. I cracked the window, but the fresh air didn’t alleviate the guilt of refusing Mom’s generosity and ultimately wasting our time.

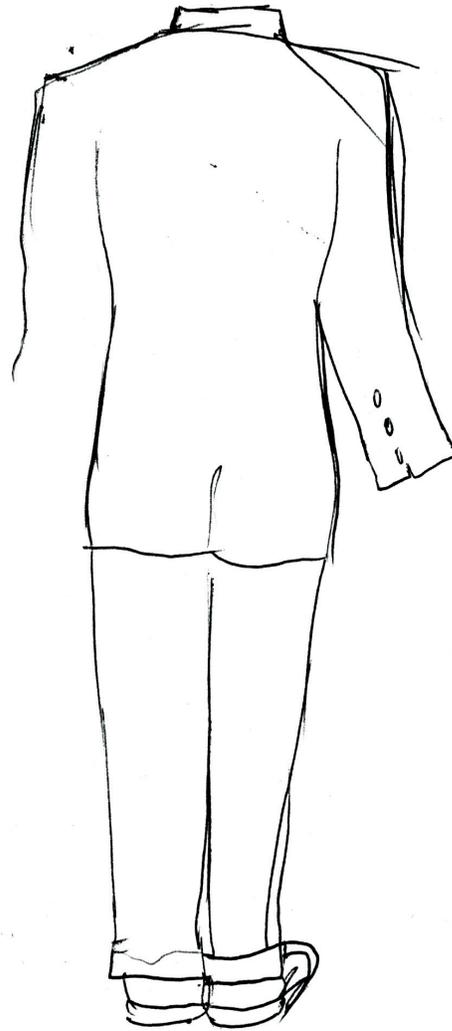


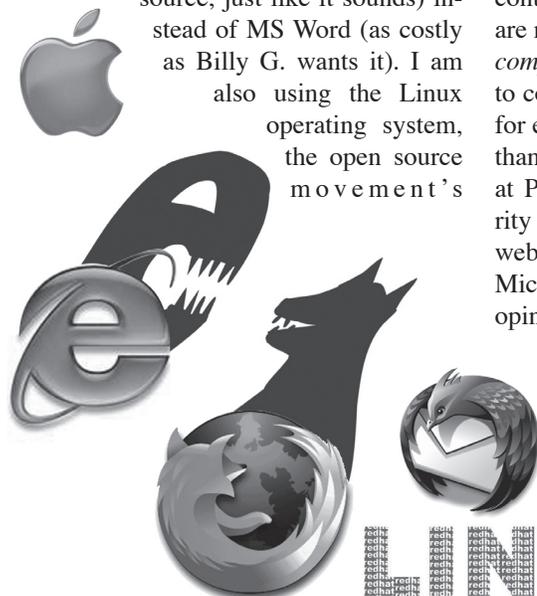
Illustration by Jamie Forslund

ON OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE

by A. Certain Gerow

“I used to steal tons of software until I found the best stuff was free!” A friend from back home said this to me, explaining why he doesn’t deal in pirated goods anymore; the best software is open source and free. The term “open source” refers to the source code of a given computer program. (Source code is to a computer program as words are to a book). Source code is written by software developers, who subsequently compile this source code into unreadable “machine code.” Although people can’t read the “machine code,” the computer needs it to run the program. With open source software, the software producer not only distributes the files that run the program, but also the source code. Thus, anyone can change the code to make a new (hopefully better) program. The open source paradigm, as it is being called, has given way to an entirely new idea in computer application development. It has gained credence everywhere, not just at the hippie universities where it originated (UC Berkeley, to name one). But alas, two major things about open source scare people: quality and support.

The reasons for questioning the integrity of open software applications are understandable. Who wrote it? Who put what bugs in the code? How do *you* expect *me* to trust something so...free!? As I write these words I am using OpenOffice.org 2.0 (open source, just like it sounds) instead of MS Word (as costly as Billy G. wants it). I am also using the Linux operating system, the open source movement’s



poster-child, as opposed to Windows, the poster-child of a crashed computer. And, look! It works! Amazing. Some other big names in open source software are C/C++, Mozilla (Firefox and Thunderbird), and Darwin (on which MacOS X runs). Sometimes this stuff gets a little technical, but it’s the idea that is important—the quality of a product is strongly linked to the paradigm under which it was developed.

The big hoopla comes in when you get these pesky capitalists saying, “One company would steal everything! It would be a big game of who-can-steal-and-rush-to-production-fastest!” But this hasn’t been the case in the software sector. In the computer world, open source giants like Red Hat, Ximian, and Mozilla have made fortunes with products like Linux, Unix, and the Mozilla web-suite. They do so by putting out quality products that are tested by users *before and as* they are used. The open development process is much less goal-oriented and much more product-oriented. The open source paradigm takes the weight off the deadline, takes the focus away from marketing ploys, and gets down to the real issue: good software. This stands in stark contrast to developers like Microsoft, who are notorious for putting out straight-up *incomplete* applications only to be patched to completion later. Take Internet Explorer for example. It took eight hours (that’s less than a typical work day) for a professor at Purdue to find *and publish* three security flaws in Microsoft’s “next generation” web browser. It then took three months for Microsoft to patch the holes. This, in my opinion makes much less sense than open software. Some open source development might be sponsored by conventional companies, like the case with Sun Microsystems’ Solaris

10 operating system. Other types of open source software are coming out of the academic sector. Most renowned is the BSD family of operating systems from Berkeley—FreeBSD, NetBSD, and OpenBSD. Sakai (which will soon replace our very own eCourse) is a completely open source on-line course management system. Even here at PLU there are airy plans to open source (it’s a verb too!) a couple of our in-house applications like Gatekeeper and uEdit (the web tool Lutes can use to make their PLU websites).

How do you expect me to trust something so... free?!

All this relates to consumerism, of course, through money. It makes the world go ‘round, right? Well, it doesn’t make open source software get developed. Because as you may know, you can download Mozilla Firefox, Camino, Thunderbird, and Sunbird for free. Amazing! The

question again comes up: who supports free software? Nobody in the business of making money, that’s who. So people like Red Hat sell big Linux packages to big organizations containing the product along with big support contracts, installation, and configuration services. This means even though the source code comes with Linux, you most likely will have no clue what in the crap to do with it. So, for a price, a nice gentleman on the phone tells you what buttons to press. If you think you can do it yourself, go for it—lots of people do. I do. But I’m not running a server responsible for handing Internet connections to 4000 computers. What else do we open source hippies (or *communists* as one CEO of Microsoft claimed) pay for? It is more blessed to give than to receive right? So many universities and companies are installing staff positions for open source development in order to give back to the community. Foundations like the Apache Software Foundation are certified non-profits that employ about ten full-time employees, while the rest is done communally—as is the case with Linux. This communal development is what makes the software so attractive. And

Graphics
by Kyle
Duba

with students like me, using Linux and its source code to study operating system fundamentals, it has more than a production sector appeal. We wouldn't be able to do a thing with Windows because they won't give us the source code...but who would want it anyway?! Ha!

It might seem as though this open source business is the wave of the future. Maybe. The biggest stumbling block is tech support. Home users may be doomed never to know good tech support. Hot-shot system administrators (like the ones here at PLU) pay thousands a year for 24/7 person-to-person support for critical systems like backup servers and internet connection routers. Here's a scenario: imagine some kid in his basement modifying the Linux source code and then getting the US government to use it in a nuclear power plant. Funny, right? But Linux is indeed used in a couple nuclear power plants, and even a slew of French missile silos. And if *anyone* can modify the source...we're all doomed to nuclear meltdown. If you know the first thing about programming, you understand that the smallest mistake could end up dividing an integer by zero to sink a submarine (like what happened to one such Soviet fish in 1982). The catch that saves open source software from such catastrophes is that if you do modify the source code, you can't redistribute it under the same prod-

uct name. It's still called "Linux," but it's "Johnny-too-much-time-Linux" instead of "Red Hat Linux." This not only saves intellectual rights of good open source developers, it also allows people to qualify a product by naming its developer. Thus, open source software developers—corporate, private, and otherwise—have a chance to gain a reputation without being constantly outdone (or undercut) by punk kids in their basement. This phenomenon has given way to the countless flavors of Linux. Debian and Red Hat are the most corporate, while Gentoo and Slackware maintain some of the old-school DIY attitude. The egalitarian roots of open source offer some sincere problems though. That kid in the basement with his own version of Linux isn't very well going to offer 24/7 person-to-person tech support for his product—and no support means no sales. Slackware doesn't even have a mailing address, much less the ability to provide active support for its product. This is something the open source sector is still overcoming today. This struggle has given way to some strange things: third party support and extra-company certifications for open source systems like Linux have unexpectedly become popular. On the other side, because we have Red Hat, Debian, and SuSe Linux distributions all competing in the enterprise sector, we've seen a snowballing of techni-

cal support in the open source area from the larger names.

Now try to think like a radical for a minute; nix the idea of a company. Cut out all the profit margin, the bottom-line bull. Forget the typical corporate questions; How crappy a product will people pay for? How fast can we crank out useless updates instead of correcting design level problems in the first place? How tightly can we keep a secret on a security flaw that could potentially cost people millions? How can we be the best and one-and-only retailer in the sector? How can I make MORE MONEY? Open source isn't going to save the world, the Internet, the software industry, or your soul—but it might make a beautiful dent in the growing machinery of capitalism. The funny part is that it isn't just a communist's dream come true; the libertarians love it too! Unity through software!

Some open source resources:

www.sourceforge.net: *Gobs of strictly open source projects. Linux-centric but not exclusive.*

www.wikipedia.com: *An interesting experiment in truly open (egalitarian) information.*

www.linux.org: *The Linux hub of choice.*

www.mozilla.org: *A great open source alternative to IE and MS Outlook.*

www.voresoel.dk: *An open source beer!*

All I Want for Christmas is Nothing You Could Buy

by an anonymous student

As a teenager, anything I wanted—anything on my wish list, or any item I'd expressed the slightest interest in—I would be guaranteed to unwrap on my birthday or Christmas. And for a while, this made me happy. What kid wouldn't be? After all, for the early years of my life, I didn't have it all; I wore my sister's hand-me-down pants, my mother patched our clothes, and I received at most three presents for my birthday—any additional ones came from friends.

I'm not sure when things changed. It was sometime after my father's promotion. As the years went on, my parents still asked my sister and me for a wish lists. Soon there were no surprises, except maybe a couple from my mother. The number of presents at Christmas steadily increased, and as they multiplied, so did my discomfort with the

situation.

In tenth grade it started to bother me. By accident, I discovered where my father had hid unwrapped presents. As early as August, I could go searching and find things. One day, the summer before my junior year, I was in a store, and I pointed out to my father something I liked. Two days later I went back to show my mother, and it was gone. The clerk let it slip that my father had come in the next day and bought the item. Once home, I was so upset that I went around the entire house, finding things my father had hidden. The sheer quantity of presents he had stashed made me sick.

His spoiling became worse. Throughout the year, I would come home and sometimes find things on my bed. So I called him on it. Just because I said I liked something,

I said, that didn't mean I wanted it. I had no more room in my overflowing closet for stuff. I asked him to take things back, and I began refusing to accept extra spending money. If I bought things for myself, it would be with money I earned over the summer, because I didn't want presents. I wanted a father who loved me, and who showed his love in ways besides paying my bills and giving me things.

Last year before Christmas, I gave my mother a list of things I was interested in. This year before my birthday, I began to type another list out of habit. I still have the file saved on my computer. But I'm not going to print it out. So I might not get this CD or that book. I don't care, because what I really want for Christmas cannot be bought, sold, traded, or made.

I Was Once A Patient

by Zach DeBoard

Prior to arriving at PLU, I thought that people consumed only manufactured goods: cars, food, clothing, electronics, and the occasional six-pack of Fat Tire. When I came here, I began to prepare myself for a career in medicine—not just by reading about cell membranes and peptide syntheses, but by examining all aspects of health care. It was early on in this endeavor that I met a harsh, disillusioning fact: health care is a commodity. “No shit,” I thought, “you can put a price tag on a basic human right?” It dawned on me that I, and everyone I know, will eventually become a consumer of health care.

I knew health care could have a monetary value tacked onto it, but I never really grasped that it was a commodity. Since having this realization, I’ve noticed that more individuals refer to themselves as “health care consumers” than simply “patients.” While working in hospitals, I’ve overheard patients asking their physician not about their healing progress or their estimated discharge date, but rather, “Hey, doc, how much is this whole thing going to cost?” One might think this question would be posed once the patient is healthy and out of the hospital. But hey, inducing a heart attack by reciting the staggering costs of their operation seems profitable. After all, they’re in the right place if they go arrhythmic.

After my revelation, I wanted to understand this concept of health care consumption. Not being a scholar of the economic discipline, I started off slowly. From my experience I knew that some consume health care like candy. But I was pretty sure they didn’t flash their six pain killer prescriptions or MRI results like a new pair of Hollister Jeans. I also knew that some made decisions rationally and consumed health care responsibly: as needed. So I was stuck. How could BMWs and health care both be commodities?

Sure, you can purchase immunizations, operations, and all sorts of pills, but health care is different from other commodities

because sometimes you *need* immediate health care, instead of just want it. It seems that health care has become a sort of economic cancer (no pun intended), with parts of the medical industry falling into the pit of corporate insatiability. Misleading advertising, overuse of unnecessary services, and rising costs not only plague the health care system, but limit individual choices.

A recent Harvard study indicates that the number one cause of personal bankruptcy in this country is unpaid medical bills.¹ How might this happen? Two different scenarios come to my mind. Some people accidentally become consumers, and some “earn” their health care consumption. The latter dig their own holes as a result of their behavior (i.e. poor diet, smoking, alcoholism, inactive lifestyles, or drug abuse). On the other hand, some people face the unfortunate facts of their genetics, or simply suffer a biological anomaly. Furthermore, the average yearly cost of health care has been rising faster than the inflation rates for over 15 years.² With such high and rising costs and risks of bankruptcy, how are people supposed to continue getting health care? Should anyone have to lose a house or not send a child to college because he or she grows chronically ill?

America, apparently, has discovered a solution to this problem: insurance against risky lifestyles or potential ailments. With coverage, consumers can use as many health care services as they wish—or as many services as their plan allows. Many individuals, however, cannot afford privatized health care insurance. Others cannot obtain social insurance, such as Medicaid, because they fall right above the poverty level cut-off. These people can still get medical assistance, but they can’t pay for it. So, the overall cost of their treatment is defrayed by insured consumers in a process known as cost shifting. In other words, insurance premiums rise because our fellow Americans cannot pay their bills. Ultimately, as the costs of insurance plans rise, those who were once insured can no longer

afford it. This again raises the cost of insurance premiums to cover the loss of plan participants. And it continues.

About a week ago, I came across a definition of consumerism. It read: **Con·sum·er·ism:** (*n.*) *The movement seeking to protect and inform consumers by requiring such practices as honest packaging and advertising, product guarantees, and improved safety standards.*³

Curious. I never knew that the notion of consumerism originated in a philosophy intended to benefit and protect the populace. Let’s examine a few parts of this definition, in respect to health care.

Because health care is unique, it’s hard to analyze using the practices defined above (honest packaging and advertising, product guarantees, and improved safety standards). Guarantees on a product are somewhat nullified in health care, as one person’s biochemical makeup may be significantly different from the next person, leading to different medical results. Some treatments may not work as well as others, or they may not work at all. With other consumer goods, this uncertainty is much less prevalent. A consumer can be certain that the car they purchase will get them from here to there. Health care however, is riddled with patient uncertainty. This is one reason people buy insurance. So, theoretically, this uncertainty should boost the consumption of health care.

Safety standards seem to be well maintained and strictly regulated, as medical practices are under constant review and revision. Nevertheless, there are loopholes—some test results get overlooked, or worthwhile tests are never performed. Consider the cases of Vioxx and Celebrex, two anti-inflammatory agents that were recently taken off the market. The makers of these drugs failed to inform the public (and a significant portion of the medical community) that they could cause gastric ulcers. Clinical data pointed to the risks, but it was never reported. Why did this happen? Was it in the interest of profit, or of medical integrity? The data was not reported for the safety of the patients, which I would hope is one of the ultimate goals of health care companies. Unfortunately, this might not always be the case, which raises questions of ethical business practices in the health care field.

What about the advertising portion of the above definition? We have a remark-

ably capable, technologically advanced, and skilled health care field. Yet, the United States is the only country, to my knowledge, that permits pharmaceutical companies to advertise their medications. That's right—there are lots of pretty pictures of people curing acid reflux with a purple pill on one page, and the next page tells you why the green pill works better. I am all for multiple therapeutic options; in most cases, any and all methods that enhance an individual's quality of life are worthwhile. I am, however, a proponent for the reduction or total elimination of pharmaceutical advertising. Individuals should avoid third-party or corporate biases, and should make their treatment and purchase choices with their physician, therefore retaining freedom of choice.

Anyone who's skimmed the pages of any mainstream periodical have likely seen ads for Viagra on one page, then Levitra a few pages later. If you examine the chemical structure of these two drugs (used to treat the same thing), you'll notice that they differ only by two hydrogens, one carbon, and an oxygen. Those four atoms cost hundreds of millions of dollars to research and put together—and who will pay for it? The health care consumer. Those same drugs can be obtained for a cheaper price through Canadian imports, but of course, our government would like you to believe that those are unsafe. Free market, anyone? It seems that limits have been imposed on an individual's choices in their acquisition of a consumer good. In health care especially, consumers want control of their decisions, monetary and otherwise—why restrict that?

Our country purports to value the freedom of choice. Free market societies like ours should promote individual consumer choices. Yet, as we move further into the realm of managed care, options become limited. Managed care was implemented to make health care more affordable, thus raising consumption. In many cases, patients purchase an insurance plan because of financial constraints. Once inside the plan, they may consume a given amount of care, but only within a defined group of physicians, which limits choice. Say an individual in an HMO receives poor care from an assigned physician. If they go to a different physician outside of the group, they pay out of pocket—regardless of how much better the care or relationship with

the physician is. Thus, the ability to afford other goods decreases.

If it's not apparent yet, I would ultimately like to see the end of health care as a commodity. A socialist health care system would work beautifully in our country—imagine paying no more than \$100 per year to be fully covered. But with current politics, this is unlikely to occur. Many individuals say our country's economic structure would crumble. I argue that attendance and efficiency at work rely on an individual's health, and subsequently, their finances. Maintaining health first, it seems, would yield a higher output of goods and services, generating wages, with which people would buy other goods, stimulating the economy. Nevertheless, our government and many of our peers don't seem to grasp this logic.

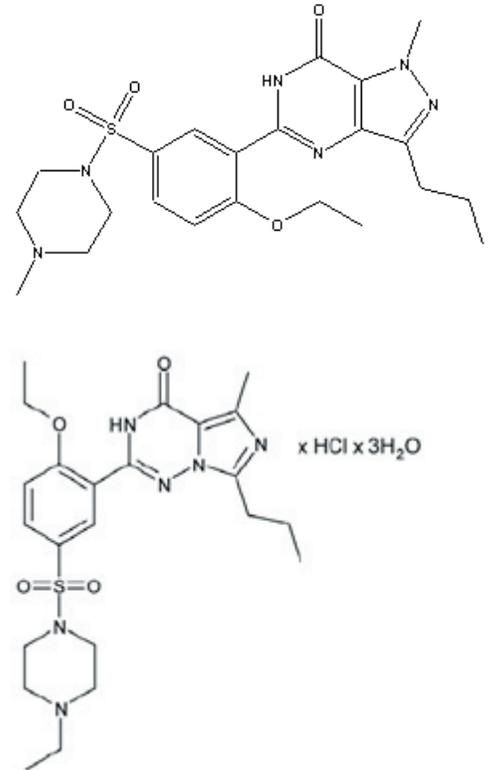
How about you? Do you think health care should be a commodity? Is it a basic human right that should be provided for all? Would you rather be a consumer or a patient?

¹ *Health Affairs*. February 2005.

² *Annals of Internal Medicine*, 2005, 142(10).

³ *American Heritage Dictionary*, 4th Edition. 2000.

Can you tell which one of the drugs below works better without a full page advertisement or catchy slogan?



Images from Pfizer® and GlaxoSmithKline®



Those two erectile dysfunction drugs look awfully similar to me.

Could there be any real difference?

*Illustration by
Jamie Forslund*

BLUE LIGHT SPECIAL

BY ADAM OSWALD

Graphic by Kyle Duba

Freedom is not free. What a powerful phrase. It snaps with sober nobility: the sweetness of liberty chased by a savory jolt of the necessary price. No easy meals, no free tickets, and definitely no mooching.

Freedom is not free: this is serious business. Our nation was born in a war, a revolution, in fact. Our political chains were washed away by the blood of martyrs. Americans know the cost of freedom, and forgetting that cost would mean losing an essential element of our national identity.

That, at least, is how I interpret the message behind the phrase on recruitment posters, websites, and bumper stickers.

But there's another meaning, hidden in plain sight, which helps explain why the phrase is so terribly perverted into a justification for, of all things, something as oppressive as war. The words are right there: free, cost, price, serious business. Freedom isn't free—true, but in the same sense that gas isn't free? Liberty has a price, sure, but so does a car or a hamburger. When our government reminds us the price of freedom, is it in the same manner that any store clerk yells about the cost of his produce? Those cabbages ain't free, and neither is freedom! I'd like to think this is merely a quirk of the English language (Spanish, after all, has *gratis* to connote a lack of monetary cost) but I have my doubts when paying the price of our freedom takes the form of conquering and occupying two countries.

How to explain this contradiction? How can our own freedom be used to justify denying someone else's? It all depends on who is justifying what. Freedom is not free: somebody is trying to sell us something. The ubiquity of this phrase in the polemics of this war-mongering culture and government tells us more about arrogance than anything about the vast and subtle topic of genuine freedom. Our government (and the executive administration especially) thinks it has set the world market price on freedom. We've got something to sell to the world, and by damn, our freedom is the only patented brand! This reflects our

American cultural mythology, which somehow maintains that the shining beacon of human liberty is monopolized within its own political and social institutions. Freedom is not free: trade within our market or watch out! If you don't pay the price we set, you are a thief, or worse, a communist or a terrorist.

Quietly and insidiously, freedom has become a commodity. And it's no surprise. In a corporate culture, dominated by media messages demanding that we buy, sell,



and consume, this development was perhaps inevitable. Freedom is not free: well, gee, I sure hope that inflation isn't too high and that the market doesn't drop out. Better get while the getting's good. Hopefully the government will always be rolling back prices, so that the cost of freedom will remain as low and easy as a trip to the nearest recruitment station.

At last we come to the obvious question: what it is we are paying as a population? Freedom is not free (after all, that's what the government tells us) so what do they want in return for this commodity? What have we been giving in exchange? My market analogy fails here because the warmongers in your government (like Bush, Rumsfeld, and Cheney) are not selling you your freedom but their freedom: their freedom to invade, their freedom to pillage, their freedom to torture without trial, their freedom to bleed public resources. Imagine all your tax dollars flowing into the profit margins of corporations that have decided to make money by "nation building" in Iraq and Afghanistan. I thought war profiteering was a crime, but the current market is so hot,

what with the trading of public allegiance for executive-branch impunity, that *laissez-faire* economics seems like the best bet. It's a capitalist dream; for the moment (because not paying your taxes is still illegal) government regulations are functioning to transfer public wealth into private coffers. This is better than anything Adam Smith thought up. Public law is working to fleece the very public it is supposed to promote. Freedom, of course, is commodified with everything else, but that particular market somehow remains cornered by the government. But what about my freedom to live in a nation where economic justice is fostered by government policy instead of tax breaks for the already wealthy? What about my freedom to live on a planet safe from ecological disaster, where sane environmental policy is not actively crippled or destroyed? What about the freedom of indigenous peoples to not be developed, or of any nation to not be involved in globalization? What about my freedom to not be a consumer? What about my freedom to be...free? Let the market decide.

Context is always important. If a powerless yet contumacious person challenges me with language about the frightening and beautiful necessity of liberty balanced by the inevitable sacrifices in the fight for it, I listen. When the most potent military force in the world demands that I pay its price for my freedom, I listen in alarm. This is about power. "Freedom is not free" is the mirror image of "Freedom is Slavery," an ideological pillar of the State in 1984. Let your understanding of that last word, free, change just a little, vary just a bit from the party line, and we are one step away from: "To be free is not freedom," or "Freedom is not to be free," or "You will pay the cost of our freedom."

The creation of a commodity, in the end, is about controlling other people's access to it. Air is not a consumer product... yet. Potable water, land, food, education, and freedom are. Think about what it means when our government has control over our access to freedom—when we hand over obedience for whatever commodity our government feels like doling out.

Freedom, real freedom, cannot be consumed, given, granted, exchanged, or traded.

It can only be taken.

All Googley-eyed

By A. Gerow

My name is Gerow, and I am a computer science student. Today I would like to leak some inside information about how the Interweb works. The search engine behemoth Google didn't come into popularity overnight. It took years of boring searching until one day...an update was implemented! Dubbed "Update Florida" by Google internal sources, the application of Google's Hilltop and PageRank algorithms¹ (patent pending) took them to a new level of Internet searching.

Indeed, Google uses a slew of ways to get information to you, three of which are important here. First is the obvious and renowned "smart advertising" scheme. If you search for "spoon," the first results will be littered with places to learn about, talk about, and (!) buy spoons. These links are essentially sponsored search results. This doesn't sound very strange, but back in the day, Google was at the forefront with this idea. It is this scheme that made Google rich.

Item number two: Google's PageRank algorithm. This little ditty does a lot for you Interweb junkies! It searches the content of the website, instead of just the descriptors (which are like keywords) of the website. So when you search for "spoon" you not only get sites about spoons, but sites about kitchen utensils too. Okay, very nice job Google; this tactic is used by almost all search engines... Google just did it better.

The third is where the trouble lies: the Hilltop algorithm! (If you're not scared, you should be.) This algorithm provides search-result-preference to websites that are most people's first choice in the list of search results. Google keeps this one under a tight wrap because it is so successful. They even sell small, private (Pacific Lutheran) universities network appliances that implement this bad boy on hardware, so Lutes can find things when searching the school website. The name Hilltop is a Google-specific pseudonym for something like "make-it-take-it" searching, or "that-dude-liked-it-and-you-will-too." The idea is that if a bazillion people search for "spoon" and end up going to websites about monkeys, eventually the monkey sites will become more relevant

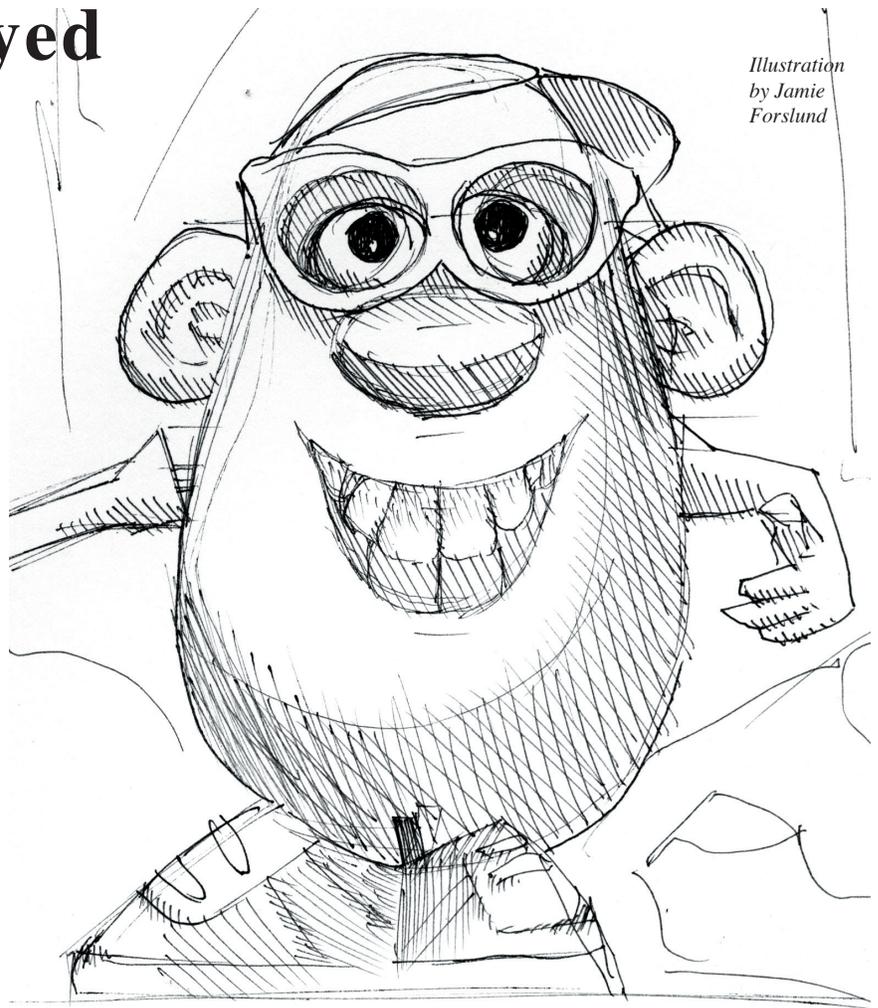


Illustration
by Jamie
Forstlund

to spoons. Weird, right? But it works so well!

A case study of the Hilltop algorithm: there is no question among scientists that global warming is not only occurring, but is posing a significant problem to life on this planet.² Search for "global warming" on Google; the fourth hit is that of a skeptic—"the media myths about global warming." Judging from the search results, one might conclude that one out of four reliable sources are skeptical about global warming, but scientific evidence is to the contrary. The problem (this is the deep part) is that websites that represent a minority position can get skipped over, thus getting further neglected in search results. On the flip side, popular sites can over represent a minority position. The fun part...a computer hacker can make a program to completely hose up the system. Ha!

An example:

To do your part in thwarting the war machine: go to www.google.com and type

"failure" into the search bar. Then click the "I'm feeling lucky" button. Before you do that, understand that this button takes you directly to what Google thinks is the most relevant site for your search (based on its algorithms). This site would be the first in your normal list of results. Done? Good. See what I mean? The Democrats may have botched the election but they'll own you in cyberspace gimmicks.

I am an anarchist.

Have fun searching. If this scares you, check out the recently implemented Google Earth system that can fly up to your house. (To find this on the Interweb, Google "Google Earth.") Nowhere is safe!

¹ Definition of algorithm (from MSWord's dictionary): a logical sequence of steps for solving a problem, often written out as a flow chart, that can be translated into a computer program.

² The IPCC (International Panel of Climate Change) conducted a survey of 364 scientists. All but three said global warming is "a serious problem." This is 3 of 364 is quite misrepresented in Google's 1 in 4.

THE MALL

The Busiest Shopping Day at the Largest Mall in the United States

A Photo Essay
by Eric Thompson



November 25, 2005,
Mall of America,
Bloomington, Minnesota







THE following is a press release from the Wal-Mart website.¹ If by publishing it in *The Matrix* I help their drive for a profitable Christmas season, I will want to dash to the nearest Wal-Mart and choke myself to death on their smiley-faced low-prices signs in a ritualistic suicide so ironic it will BLOW their money-addled minds. However, if by publishing their own words I help reveal the sheer scale of effort put into altering cultural traditions to serve corporate bottom lines, I won't feel the desire for something so drastic. Please read on.

"We're responding to our customers with an assertive, new-style marketing approach to ensure that they know we're the place to shop for the widest variety of gifts at the best value this holiday season," says John Fleming, Wal-Mart's chief marketing officer. "This campaign corresponds to our overall objective of being more relevant to the broad range of customers who shop in our stores. We expect our focus on familiar celebrities who are enjoying themselves at home with family and friends to resonate well with everyone who is looking forward to being home for the holidays this year."

Based on the theme "Home for the Holidays," Wal-Mart's holiday campaign celebrates the holiday style of some of Wal-Mart customers' favorite celebrities, including Garth Brooks, Destiny's Child, Martina McBride, Jesse McCartney, and Queen Latifah, each enjoying the holidays at their actual homes. Together with a wide and varied selection of gifts, they are featured across all media channels—print, TV, radio, on-line, and in-store signage.

Random late-afternoon thoughts on Christmas, Wal-Mart, and the future of economic production

by Adam Oswald

will think of Wal-Mart as their primary holiday shopping destination."

"For the first time, customers who walk the aisles of Wal-Mart stores or visit Walmart.com will be seeing signage and graphics consistent with the ads they've seen in their newspapers or on TV," said Fleming. "Our campaign is designed to help customers identify this season's hottest gifts and to make sure that they know they can find them, as well as everything they need for a great holiday, at Wal-Mart."

The full holiday campaign will feature six 30-second television spots and one 60-second spot, which will run on network and national cable stations and in national syndication and local markets, as well as a two-minute video for video-on-demand, which will be run by various cable providers. Additionally, four print ads are set to run in November and December magazines including In Style; O, The Oprah Magazine; Entertainment Weekly; Redbook; People and Us Weekly. The holiday marketing will showcase three different key gift categories—home décor, electronics and toys—covering a range of price points.

"By starting earlier and building consistent and dynamic messaging around these key categories, we want to show our customers that we have the holiday merchandise they want, when they want it, at the affordable prices they trust from Wal-Mart," said Fleming. "With a message this strong, we believe people

The past 14 years, since the end of the Soviet Union, have seen capitalism march triumphantly across the entire planet. Even China has succumbed and adopted Western-style economics. I find this horrifying, especially when I examine how capitalist organizations like Wal-Mart have defined human beings. All cultures, all expression, all physical activity, and all thinking must serve the market structure they have set up. If there is space where non-mediated or non-marketed human activity or culture can take place on Earth, I have never been there. All of our educations, from business to philosophy majors, exist for us to make a living, not necessarily to live as we choose. How many of us have chosen our field of study on account of the career's profitability? I think, however, that businesses like Wal-Mart (not to pick on it, but use it as an epitome of current capitalist practices) show just where profitability leads us. There is no light at the end of their tunnel. Consumption, when defined as a personal and social goal, transforms us from people into mouths and stomachs—digestive tracts. The Earth has been broken ecologically by the development, industrialization, and economic activity that got us here, and still capitalists say we must keep growing! We must stop pretending that the victory of capitalism is something that went right. If we do not break out of this current madness, which is showing up in almost every human arena (after all, if we turned Jesus' birth into a shopping spree, we can do anything), I think we will see more of the same. The genuine value of experience, culture, holidays, and people will continue to be subverted to the brutally simple equation of profitability.

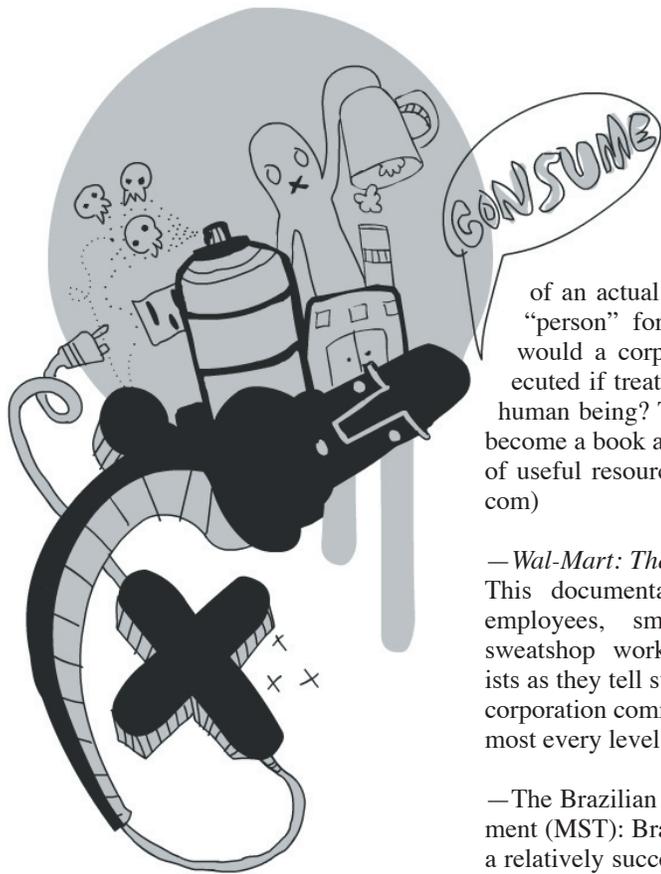


¹<http://walmartstores.com/GlobalWMStoresWeb/navigate.do?catg=26&contId=5741#jump>

Buck the System

by Amy Post

Art by Scott Matsumura



of an actual person and a corporation “person” for the same crimes? How would a corporation *actually* be prosecuted if treated like a living, breathing human being? The documentary has also become a book and a website with all sorts of useful resources. (www.thecorporation.com)

—*Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*: This documentary interviews Wal-Mart employees, small-town shop owners, sweatshop workers, and environmentalists as they tell stories about how this huge corporation commits gross injustices on almost every level.

—The Brazilian Landless Worker’s Movement (MST): Brazil is a huge country with a relatively successful economy. However, it also has one of largest disparities of income between rich and poor in the world. The Brazilian Landless Worker’s Movement is an organization of peasant farmers who directly take land back from large landowners who hoard the land and often don’t use it for production. Their unique tactics involve occupying land they want for peasant farmers, building squatter settlements, and going through the legal system to obtain titles to the land.

—idealist.org: This website is a resource for those who want to either volunteer or get jobs doing some good in the world. Many non-profits have listings. A very useful resource for recent grads with “useless” majors that don’t want to end up working retail.

—Ecological Footprint: This ecological tool allows you to calculate your “footprint,” or how many acres of productive land you use each year based on different lifestyle factors (such as the food you eat, your transportation, and the kind of residence you live in). You can calculate your own footprint online at www.ecofoot.org. At the end of the quiz, you can compare your footprint to the average person in your region and also to the 4.5 acres per person available to every person on the planet. Just

taking the quiz requires you to think about your consumer choices and your effect on the environment.

—Earth Economics: This local environmental organization works on ecological economics, which is a branch of economics that works to incorporate the environment into economic assessments. One of the most important projects of this organization is to measure the economic value of the ecosystem and its services (such as providing clean air, clean water, noise reduction, biodiversity, and pretty things to look at). This assessment of economic value is then used to show policy makers the importance of conservation. (www.eartheconomics.org)

—Community Supported Agriculture (CSA): CSAs are farms, often organic, that are supported by local members who buy shares of the farm, and in return, receive fresh produce on a regular basis. CSAs eliminate long-distance food shipping and provide security for farmers. Terry’s Berries in Puyallup is a local CSA. (www.terrysberries.com)

—Biodiesel: Biodiesel is fuel made from vegetable oil and animal fats (your basic kitchen grease) that can be used in motor vehicles. You just mix up the biodiesel fuel and pour it into the tank of your diesel engine (it *must* be a diesel engine). Then you don’t have to buy gas anymore! It’s safer, nicer for the environment, and cheap if not free. Most people who drive biodiesel vehicles get their fuel from local restaurants. (www.biodiesellamerica.org)

—The Morken Center at PLU: Our very own Morken Center for Learning and Technology, soon to be the home of math, computer science, and business at PLU, meets LEED certification standards. This means it meets certain standards of environmental sustainability. Specifically, it means the Morken Center was built with recycled materials, increased energy efficiency, and landscaping that will reduce storm water runoff.

HERE are some examples of ways people are subverting consumerism and capitalism, for your information and inspiration:

—*Adbusters*: Visually challenging, intellectually stimulating, and cynical as hell, this magazine is like none other I have seen. Great fodder for the anti-consumerist and political thoughts for the radical. (adbusters.org)

—*Evasion*: A modern-day punk-rock *Huck Finn* or *On the Road*, this book follows the adventures of a teenage kid as he hitchhikes, hops trains, shoplifts, dumpster dives, and squats for a living. Although full of practical information for those interested in learning about the aforementioned activities, it’s also an inspirational story for anyone who has ever dreamed of dropping out and damning The Man. This book is from the CrimethInc. Ex-workers Collective. (www.crimethinc.com)

—*The Corporation*: This documentary analyzes the laws that say a corporation is treated the same as a person in the legal system. If this is true, then why do huge differences exist between the prosecution

“And I Got It at a Thrift Store!”

by Andrew Söderlund

My freshman year at PLU was the first time I lived within a short drive of not one, but two malls. At home, the closest mall was 45 minutes away. As a freshman I would go to the mall at least once a month, largely because I could. Unlike home, I didn't need to make a list of things I could only find at mall stores, and then go sometime in November to fulfill the list and do some Christmas shopping all at once.

Now I walk into a mall and wonder why I'm there. Usually it's because a friend of mine needs something and I'm going with, or because I need some more pipe tobacco from The Tinderbox. What happened, you ask? Thrift stores, that's what.

In addition to shopping malls, PLU is also placed between two very respectable thrift stores: Value Village and Goodwill. My friends introduced me to these stores, and we began to haunt them regularly. Soon after, my wardrobe was 30 percent

originally worn by old men golfing or walking their dogs. Upon re-entering malls, I found that I had lost tolerance for the advertising, the lack of choice, (is that Old Navy or American Eagle? What's the difference?) and the *plastic*. Plastic! Plastic everywhere,

on the billboards and on the mannequins, on the dull cheeks of over-make-upped high school girls trying desperately to stress out their parents, and plastic on the glazed-over faces of mall employees who stared at me like I didn't belong there anymore.

I agreed with them. So I stopped going. I didn't need to be sold to, advertised at, or gawked at (is that a kid with *dreadlocks* in PacSun?). I just needed a shirt or a jacket from time to time.

Of course, I got into second-hand shopping when such practices were popular (maybe that's how it got to me). Boutique stores now sell new clothes made to *look* like old clothes. This just added to the hilarity of my now-infrequent mall visits. But, what I found at thrift stores has be-

come equally unsatisfying.

The reasons to go to Value Village or Goodwill are numerous. Aside from the cheap clothing, it's always nice to avoid supporting outsourced slave-wage companies, not to mention the people—the amazing run-ins with the most caricatured Americana you can imagine—and of course, the chief of all reasons: The Amazingly Hideous Find.

“Dude, check out this shirt! Isn't this the tackiest thing you've ever seen? Whoa! It's only four bucks! I'm getting it.”

I've said it. I say it at least once per thrift store visit. I have heard all of my friends say it. I've seen squads of college students and high school kids plowing through the aisles like Amazon ants on the warpath, all reciting the above phrases like a national anthem. And why not? At least they're not supporting slave labor and pillaging both theirs and their parents' bank accounts

Hey, they have 40 old coffee makers for sale for \$5 a pop; we could buy them all and make 480 cups of coffee at once!

to do so. However, when seeing the attitude with which people (myself included) were going at this old crap—the same droning attitude with which I used to go at all that new crap freshman year—I couldn't help but ask, is this the point?

Yes, buying ethically is important. Yes, buying things for the lowest price possible is important (especially for college students). But is that it? While there is definitely something awesome about finding something cheap, it seems that the price of an item alone should not sell it.

Hey, they have 40 old coffee makers for sale for \$5 a pop; we could buy them all and make 480 cups of coffee at once! We'd be awake and peeing for days at a time!

What a terrible (though funny) idea. But, is it any worse than The Amazingly Hideous Find? What is the point of owning something you don't need? For that matter, what is the point of owning plants? You don't need them—well, not in your room anyway. (You need some somewhere,

sometime, if you like breathing). Why own carpet? You *can* just walk on whatever's underneath your carpet right? And what about a car? You made it sixteen years without one! Obviously, this can go on in lots of directions, most of them unproductive. But still, is there something there? Most of us have probably decided not to buy *at least* one thing because we didn't need it. Lately I have been trying not to buy things unless I actually *do* need them. But where does need fit into this picture?

Most people I know don't go to a thrift store to get clothes they need. Ironically, need is the last thing you will see in a mall (or any other place that sells new stuff). Need doesn't keep a store in business. Does that mean we have more stores than we need? But what about the people who work there? They need their jobs, right? Well, they need *a* job, though most of them probably didn't go to college to work at Sears. So maybe we have more stores than we need; what else could those people do?

I have yet to find an answer to that one, but I have found that we spend a lot of money on things we don't need, and our country spends a lot of time on things that *no one* needs. Our economy as a whole, for that matter, has by and large left need behind. However, I don't think many of our needs have been filled. Yes, most people in the United States get the basic foodclothingshelter needs, but there is great disparity concerning those lucky few who have the opportunity to pursue the more complex educationlovepurposefulfillment needs—which, while not keeping a person alive, help create the person who needs to be kept alive. What happened to those? If we got rid of them I should be able to find them at a thrift store. Right?



"Rampant Consumerism" as an Indicator of Freedom

by Scott Anderson

Pairs of pre-torn jeans for \$150, heated car seats, Beanie Babies, and Electronic Singing Bass. Many would argue that people don't need these things, and they could be entirely cut out of our lives. Furthermore, the resources used by this type of frivolous consumption could be better used on different, more useful things. The obvious question is: why are people buying all this seemingly useless stuff? The obvious answer: they believe it is best for them.

People who buy \$150 pairs of jeans aren't going hungry. Nor do they have to worry about finding shelter. In fact, I would guess that most people who buy such items live comfortably. I would also guess that most have a reasonable income. The person who buys those jeans has made a conscious decision to buy them and has taken into account all the other options available. Even so, they buy the jeans. That means, by their thinking, this purchase was the best way to use the money to further their interests. I might think this is a complete waste of money because I am too practical to waste all that money on ripped-up jeans. This, however,

is because I have a different set of values and preferences concerning what I buy.

To me, the idea of buying those jeans is a total waste. However, am I so high-minded that I could call it a waste for them too? Am I so much smarter that I should tell



them what to do with their money? People should be free to buy whatever they want, no matter what it is. Trying to tell people how to use their money implies that we are smarter than they are, and that they should forego their own judgment and listen to us. That type of thinking leads down a dangerous road where personal decision-making is marginalized. Freedom is about being able to choose whatever you want, wrong or right, foolish or smart, wasteful or thrifty.

Any free, healthy society will include people using money in ways that don't make a lot of sense. If people with different preferences are free to buy what they please, of course they'll buy things that others think are wasteful and stupid, simply because they think differently. If we want a free society, we should expect a market that sometimes seems wasteful.

30-minute lunch break

by Amy Post

I tap my toes and
stare earnestly at the clock.

The nice Vietnamese woman
she can't really work any faster.

Ice chinks in the glass
and shifts. The sound is

deafening over the roar
of the fan and the machines.

Tea leaves float in the
bottom of my cup and

settle in some meaningless
pattern.

A Scarcely Abundant Moment of Those-Things-We-Speak-With Deprivation

i once met a consumeragma
a most hideous, hairy, sharp-
toothed creature
we looked at each other
eye to eye
and in a momentous gulp
it consumed my words
and now—
this is all i got



by an
anonymous
staff member

IN DEFENSE OF CONSUMPTION

BY ADAM OSWALD

Since arriving at PLU, I've often found myself defending the practice of hunting. Many of my friends are from cities and have never held a rifle. Many others are activists and vegetarians, and so they react with surprise or outrage when they discover that I'm a hunter.

I unapologetically kill animals in order to eat them. I have deliberately killed and eaten deer, fish, grouse, and on one occasion, a pigeon. I hunt every chance I get, and I regret my autumns not spent in Montana. If I had my way, I'd only eat the meat of animals I've killed myself.

It's hard to convey what hunting means to people who have never hunted. I can't explain in words what it's like to eat meat and know, "I killed you. I watched the light slowly die in your eyes. I heard those mountains swallow the crack of my gunshot, an unworthy eulogy for your beautiful flight and jarring death." I can't reproduce on paper that lucid moment when thought bridges the gap between self and animal, between its body and your eye, when space shrinks and you *are* your body making that decision far deeper and more real than anything mental, and you feel yourself fluidly folding into that firing position and in a moment it's all over. Once more, life rebounds into physicality, and you realize that it's a body lying in the twisted grass at the edge of that clearing, just a body, and you've turned this incredible animal, this breathing, reproducing interface of land and evolution into meat, into part of you. "I made you die so that I might live. I took what you might have been so that I may yet be, but I am changed for it. You travel with me now, knit in my flesh, woven in my memory. I am not alone."

The most common objection I hear is that hunting is unnecessary, that as a citi-

zen of a developed country I need not do something so savage and time-consuming as hunting. Meat is readily available, pre-packaged and cheap, and vegetarianism is even easier. Immediately a barrier between worldviews is erected, due to the difference between how the objector and I understand eating. *Meat* is available. Those who disagree with my hunting have never told me that part of the land, a piece of my home, a memory and taste of an ecosystem, is available. Only meat. Meat that is cut, refrigerated, and packaged far away. People who say that I'm immoral, or worse, wasting my time, have never said that animals, formerly living creatures, with experiences of stalking and the warmth of a body cavity, are within easy reach for purchase. Just meat.

"The public," even though it's the target of industrial meat production, maintains a remarkable isolation from the process. I would be surprised if over ten *Matrix* readers have shot an animal, cut a deer's throat, gutted a large mammal, skinned and butchered a carcass, or pulled the head off a bird. I have, and therefore viscerally understand that *every* time I eat meat, I am part of that process, whether or not I was there. And so is everyone else. I am not trying to disgust you, but when you eat meat you must realize that such flesh, sold to you as product, once quivered with life. It was a living animal that did not want to die. It did not live for you or any market. It was autonomous, as all things (living and non-living) are. If you eat meat you are part of a process every bit as lethal and gory as hunting—only on an industrial scale. If you eat plants you are doing the same thing: killing organisms that are not there for the grocery store, that do not exist for humans. I think this covers the entire human race. If you are reading

this and don't have to eat living things to stay alive, please call *The Matrix* at x7489. We need to talk.

The rest of us, who do eat, need to rethink consumption. Most messages in this issue tell us what not to do. And the sanctity of life, when invoked to oppose hunting, is about leaving life alone. Life is sacred, certainly, but not in the put-it-on-a-pedestal sense. We must embrace life, draw it in, eat it. There is sanctity in eating. It is our closest link to the rest of life on this planet. Your body, literally, consists of the molecules of other living things. You are a flame; your fuel is provided by organisms you will break open for your glow. You expel smoke and ash, soon to be drawn in by other living creatures. Those deer I extinguished did not end; they continue burning in me. They help tie me to my home and my native habitat. I hope to be eaten myself someday.

The problem arises when we try to keep our flames lit without acknowledging the fuel. For this reason I cannot stand queasy whining about hunting, saying that it's violent and unnecessarily brutal. Wrong! It is our modern industrial meat and agricultural machine that is brutal, that kills according to the dictates of the market instead of body and soul, that takes without knowledge or gratitude or empathy, that encourages (nay—demands!) the separation of person and land, eater and eaten. It is the market system that has arrogated life and turned eating into a business enterprise that cuts us off from the processes of life. Eating is sacred. Putting part of the world into you, if done properly, is a form of worship. Our physical and moral connection to life must be fortified, never diminished. It was not money or convenience or advertising that legitimized my taking of those

deer—such things never could. I claim deer in the same way I claim sunlight, water, air, and a night sky filled with stars. Although I often failed when younger, now I must discipline my hunting. I must temper it with a moral obligation. I know as I watch them die that someday, I too will join them. My eyes will darken, my legs will stop quivering, and my chest will shudder and then lie still.

As living creatures we cannot avoid life. Even if we stop eating until we die we remain “caught” by life. Think, however, about how terribly unnatural—how profane—our modern food has become. In any market we see fish in cans, meat in Styrofoam, milk in cartons, vegetables in plastic bags: food as product, not as a sacred piece of the universe. Life is trapped in many places by the demands of money. Factory farms, managed forests, and industrial agriculture abound. Human beings are the most trapped of all. Eating has become a dead act of consumption in obedience to the market, instead of a joyful obligation to fulfill life.

But this much I know, and hunting has taught it to me: we are only fooling ourselves. If you eat tuna, you have a moral obligation to the well being of the North Pacific subtropical gyre ecosystem. If you eat bread, you are bound to whatever temperate grassland it was grown upon. This morning I ate an orange. Tropical fruits are available to a temperate climate like PLU’s due to economic conquest, preceded by political conquest, preceded by environmental conquest. We need to take responsibility for what we eat, or else stop eating. After all, the idea undergirding all advertisements and business transactions is that we can “own” or “possess” or “eat” without any cost besides money. Is it possible for the market to justify *anything* we do, let alone something as sacred as eating? When confronted by the extraordinary realities of our interaction with the universe, exemplified by hunting, can any action undertaken for profit be legitimate?

I do not want to end on such a dour note. Please, by all means, consume! May your bellies grow fat and your cheeks rosy from the good things of this world. Eat a pomegranate—no, *hunt* a pomegranate. Just remember, always remember, the lives that end so that yours may continue. If you are a hunter, some day you will be hunted.

No Catchy Title

(What am I trying to sell you on anyway?)

By Tifanie Krebs

Why isn’t “I love you” a good enough gift? Love costs more than anything at REI or Nordstrom and is so dangerous to give. Love requires emotional involvement and risk. Are you a risk-taker? I am not a risk taker. Risk scares the H-E-L-L out of me, to be frank (or not to be Frank, as the case may be). Yet love can come from more places than the little shawl thing you were ogling before reading this publication. Think about it: parents, siblings, relatives, friends, mentors, teachers, co-workers, yourself...the list goes on. Fill in your own blanks. Even without the Big Three, each of those people can feel compassion for you, concern for your well being, and happiness for your successes. I struggle to comprehend why we feel that we need—no, that we are entitled to—anything beyond this. I agree that money is a force to be reckoned with. How much is required? If 3 billion people live on under \$2 per day, why must I have the Kanye CD?

I had a conversation with a group of amazing inner-city high school youth this summer about values and the reality of their world versus the reality of the rest of the world. Imagine their shock when they learned that the money they spend on McDonald’s or teriyaki chicken on a daily basis could be what a family in Ghana lives on for a week! Or that, while their family can’t always afford breakfast, in some places X number of people die from starvation daily. These sixteen-year-olds stunned me by taking all of this to heart, and during our prayer time they shared what are the most impor-

tant parts of their lives: the love of a mother, mentors who care about them, teachers who go the extra little bit, having a book to read, being able to have a job to support their needs/wants, access to food and water, and the option of a bed to sleep in (even if the household dynamics surrounding that bed could be better). The list goes on. The only person who tried to justify the horrendous spending habits of Americans was a petite 24-year-old female, whose husband had a dreadful look on his face while she pleaded her case. “But things are more expensive here,” she said. “We can’t do anything about inflation. I’m entitled to a little extra every now and again.” What??? Here is the thing: for every “extra” bit she has, someone on some planet far, far away (you know, Asia, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe, the Indian subcontinent) still works for a pittance an hour, still has malaria, and/or still watches her entire extended family die from AIDS/HIV. You may never meet this person, and you may choose to banish him or her from your mind, but you cannot make this person disappear. There are millions just like her living all over the world.

Thanksgiving and Christmas are the perfect times to think about consumerism. It is EV-ER-Y-WHERE. Buy this thing, win her love. Buy that thing, win his respect. Shouldn’t your words and actions have already taken care of this? Showing will do much more than giving any day of the week. And if it doesn’t work, move on.

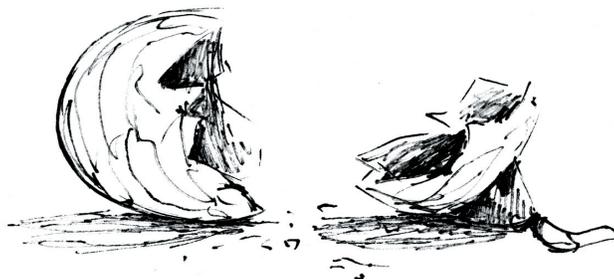


Illustration
by Jamie
Forslund

Big Little Things

by Amy Post

A few weeks ago I had a bad day. To make myself feel better, I did something I rarely do: I went to the mall and bought shoes. The last thing I need is another pair of shoes, but I did it anyway. (Well, I suppose the last thing I need is a ferret, a ball gown, another car, or something ridiculous like that.) Did the experience make me feel good? Well, my new Converse All Stars are stylish, and I like them. But do I feel guilty about it? Yes, yes I do. Converse is owned by Nike, which is notorious for using sweatshop labor.

I usually try to be a conscious consumer, which means I try to spend my money on products or in places where I know it will go to a good cause, or do more good than harm to everyone connected to that product or place. I admit, sometimes I'm weak and give in, buying the cheapest or most convenient product, even if I know it's from a big corporation that does bad things—like exploit its labor force, pollute the environment, or concentrate the majority of the profits in the upper-echelons of the company. To a certain degree, it's impossible *not* to buy into consumer culture; everyone has to eat, live somewhere, and drink water. Most people wear clothes and use electricity. As college students, most of us live on a limited budget, and so don't spend a lot on commercial products. Even so, we indulge in luxuries such as coffee, pizza, gasoline, a movie, or alcohol from time to time (or fairly often, as the case may be). Even the most independent of us are influenced by advertisements and fashion, which create commercial desires, whether we are conscious of them or not. And don't forget those tuition dollars: they must come from and go somewhere.

My point is that commercialism and the capitalist economy are very hard to

escape, even if we'd like to escape them. As professor Peter Grosvenor said after the PLU Democrats' screening of the new movie about Wal-Mart, "Things we want as citizens are often in conflict with what we want as consumers." As citizens, many of us want environmental protection and fair wages for labor—but as consumers we want low prices.

Luckily, there is a way to compromise.

Conscious consumerism is a grassroots movement that works toward making good decisions when it comes to money. It is important to remember that the US dollar is powerful, and so every time you use it, you are making a powerful statement that has influence. So the next time you buy something, think about whether or not you are making the kind of statement you want to be making. This is the first step toward becoming a conscious consumer.

Before I describe a few ways to be a conscious consumer, I have a caveat: it's very easy to become discouraged when it comes to consumerism. Like me and my new shoes, it's easy to give in, and it's also easy to get down on yourself when you mess up. So, rather than giving up altogether, try to make a better decision the next time you spend money. Think of it this way: if you normally buy products from corporations, making one decision to spend your money more wisely will make a difference. If you make two decisions to spend your money more wisely, you will make twice the difference you made before. It only gets better from there. Conscious consumerism will not save the world, but it's a good place to start thinking about how you personally affect the world in which you exist.

Here's a list of things you can do to be a more conscious consumer:

—Simply buy less. Consider if you really need an item before you buy it. If you can't live without it, try to buy it second-hand, or figure out how to get it for free; you will make less of a negative effect on the environment, and won't be supporting socially irresponsible companies.

—Repair and fix things before buying them new. Get yourself a screwdriver, a hammer, and a needle and thread.

—Learn to sew, knit or crochet. These skills can be fun ways to make yourself things you need or want.

—Support local businesses (as opposed to big corporate chain stores). This is a good way to ensure that your money goes to improving the community in which you live, rather than some rich CEO's bank account.

—Conserve electricity by turning off lights and appliances when you don't need 'em. Buy those low-watt fluorescent light bulbs; they're expensive, but they last forever and reduce your electricity bills.

—Conserve water. One way to do this is to not flush the toilet every time you pee. It's not gross and not necessary. I'm also a proponent of not showering everyday. Believe me, it's not necessary.

—Recycle, of course.

—Cook food "from scratch," rather than eating prepackaged meals. It affects the environment less because all that packaging and processing create waste, and they waste resources you can avoid using by cutting up your own vegetables or baking your own bread.

—Grow/raise your own food by keeping a garden, raising your own chickens, etc. This one is rather impractical for college kids, so...

—Buy your food from local producers. There is a farmer's market in Tacoma every Thursday from 10 AM to 3 PM, May through October. There are two locations: downtown Tacoma on Broadway, between

*Things we want
as citizens
are often in
conflict with
what we want
as consumers.*

—Professor Grosvenor

9th and 11th, and also between Freighthouse Square and the Tacoma Dome Station. The website is www.tacomafarmersmarket.com. To get to both locations, take the number one bus from the Tacoma Transit Center.

—Go dumpster diving! This one is not for the squeamish, and could be seen as illegal if a store owner thinks you are trespassing. But stores throw out a lot of perfectly good things, found under the lid of a dumpster near you!

—Eat organic food. It's better for the environment, better for your body, and tastes better than food from a factory farm. The UC has a lot more organic options this year than in the past. It's difficult to buy organic foods in Parkland, as most local grocery stores carry a very limited selection of organic produce and dairy products. However, Fred Meyer and Marlene's Market and Deli carry a large selection of organic foods. It can be more expensive, but the better taste alone is usually worth it.

—When you do buy stuff at the store, buy products that maximize the quantity and minimize the packaging because it creates less waste. Or buy in bulk. You can often find nuts, grains, beans, dried fruit, cereal, popcorn, and other stuff sold in this fashion. And besides reducing packaging, it's cheaper. Locally, Fred Meyer, Cash and Carry (located at the intersection of 116th and Pac Ave), and Marlene's have large bulk foods sections.

—Shop at Marlene's Market and Deli, for that matter. It is locally owned, and they sell organic and natural foods. It's near the Tacoma Mall, on 38th Street. To get there on the bus, take the 55 bus from the Parkland Transit Center to the Tacoma Mall Transit Center, and then transfer to the 52 bus. The website is www.marlenesmarket-deli.com.

—Buy fair trade products. Fair trade (not to be confused with free trade) is a movement to, well, make trade fairer. This means cutting out the intermediary, paying producers or artisans a living wage for their products, and empowering customers to recognize fair trade products. There is an organization called Fair Trade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) that certifies fair trade products, literally giving them a recognizable stamp

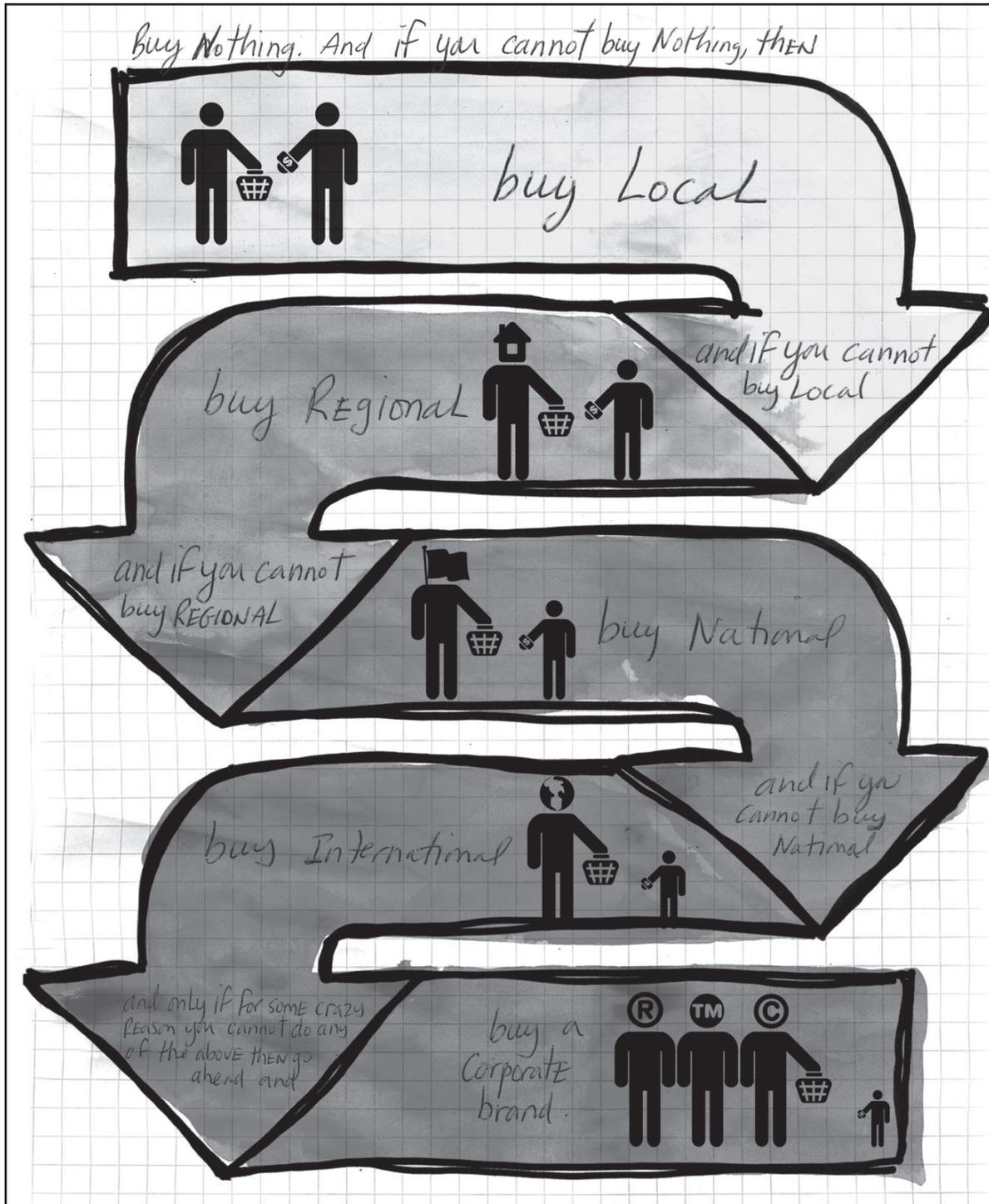


Image courtesy of www.adbusters.org

of approval. The biggest fair trade product around is coffee, but the label is also applied to certified chocolate, tea, tropical fruit, and artisan crafts. You can sometimes find fair trade coffee at Albertson's and QFC. The Urge on Garfield Street carries some fair trade items. Check out www.globalexchange.org for more information and products.

—Walk, bike, skateboard, roller skate, dance, or ride a horse to get places. They don't use gas. Speaking of which...

—Take the bus and save gas. I don't take the bus as often as I feel I should, but when I do, I always have a good time. You can meet some cool and interesting people, and you get to look around, which is more fun than driving. It usually takes longer than driving a car, but you can read on the bus, which you shouldn't do while driving. A tip: if you don't want people to talk to you on the bus, wear earphones (they don't even have to be plugged in). The number one bus runs all the way through downtown Tacoma, and it runs late. The 204 runs to the SR 512 Park and Ride, where you can catch express busses to Seattle and the airport. The 55 bus goes to the Tacoma Mall. The website has bus schedules and a trip planner: www.piercettransit.org.

—Buy used clothing. Goodwill and Value Village are top local choices. The Urge on Garfield Street also sells used or "vintage" clothes. The stuff at The Urge is more expensive than what you'd find at a thrift store, but they also only carry quality items, which means you don't have to wade through 80 percent crap to find some good stuff. So if you believe time really is money, this is an advantage.

—Check out craigslist.com. This free, online classifieds is like Ebay, but not as complicated. The idea is that you communicate with real, local people through online posts or e-mail to sell or trade your used items. It's rather informal and effective.

—Support local musicians and artists instead of supporting major labels, which are huge media conglomerates. There are tons of coffee shops and bars that feature local musicians. Every third Thursday in Tacoma is Art Walk. The Tacoma Art Museum is free all day, the Museum of Glass is free

from 5 to 8 PM, and many art galleries have shows. Take the number one bus. The website: www.artwalktacoma.com.

—See a movie at The Grand Cinema in Tacoma. This old-fashioned theatre features independent, foreign and art films, and is staffed by volunteers. Take the number one bus. The website: www.grandcinema.com

—Listen to public radio! Our very own KPLU plays jazz music and features NPR news. Listen at 88.5 FM or www.kplu.org. KEXP is a Seattle-based listener-supported radio station that plays all sorts of music, including but not limited to hip indie bands, punk, "world" music, blues, and an awesome Saturday morning reggae show. Listen at 91.7 FM in Tacoma, 90.3 FM, or www.kexp.org. If you feel so inclined, you can donate money to them for rocking so hard without commercials.

—Don't buy things from corporations that do bad things. Take part in boycotts against corporations with bad reputations. I'll give you a few to start with: Wal-Mart is the obvious first example. They're the biggest and one of the worst—they treat their employees poorly, selling them very expensive health care, paying them a very low wage, and discriminating against minorities, in addition to racking up many environmental violations and using sweat shop labor. Altria is another company with a bad rap. Altria owns Phillip Morris, Kraft, Nabisco, Marlboro, and Parliament—all companies that make very unhealthy products. Find a list of international boycotts at <http://www.ethicalconsumer.org/boycotts/boycotts.htm>

—Support companies that do good stuff. There are companies out there that use all union labor and/or sustainable materials in their products. Also, some large corporations have a good corporate responsibility record. Some examples:

*No Sweat apparel. Hip, simple, union-made, and not outrageously expensive clothes. (www.nosweatapparel.com)

*Antipreneur (found at www.adbusters.org) brings us the Blackspot sneaker, a union-made, vegan, hemp, recycled alternative to my recent Converse acquisition.

*Union Jean Company makes union-made jeans and other clothes. www.unionjean-company.com

*Global Exchange (again), in addition

to coffee and chocolate, carries jewelry and accessories. (<http://store.gxonlinestore.org/>)

*Maggie's Organics sells clothes from a worker-owned cooperative in Nicaragua. (www.organicclothes.com)

*I like wine! (www.organicwinecompany.com)

—New American Dream has a Responsible Shopper Guide that evaluates and ranks major corporations on their social and environmental ethics. Each company profile includes positive and negative things the company has done. You can even compare all the major labels of a particular product. For example, Patagonia is the best, and the Gap and Dillard's are the worst companies for clothing. This website is amazing. (<http://www.newdream.org/consumer/shop.html>)

—GreenBiz (greenbiz.com) is a similar website with many resources for figuring out which companies are environmentally responsible. According to this site, AT&T, Hewlett-Packard, and Bank of America are pretty good.

—BuyBlue (buyblue.org) is an organization that endorses progressive companies that have good social and environmental records, but also do well as companies. It also has a guide for the corporate responsibility of various corporations, including information on where companies gave their political contributions for the last presidential campaign. For example, Halliburton gave 91 percent of its political contributions to the Republican Party (\$188,370) and 9 percent to the Democrats (\$18,630).

—If you just can't give up a certain product from a company with a poor record, write the company, tell them you are a customer, and demand that they adopt ethical business practices. Starbucks is one of the most ethical big corporations, and they became that way because environmentally and socially-conscious Seattle-ites and customers demanded that they pay the coffee farmers well, treat their employees well, and minimize their environmental impact.

This list is far from exhaustive, but it has become exhausting, so I will stop here. Happy conscious consuming!

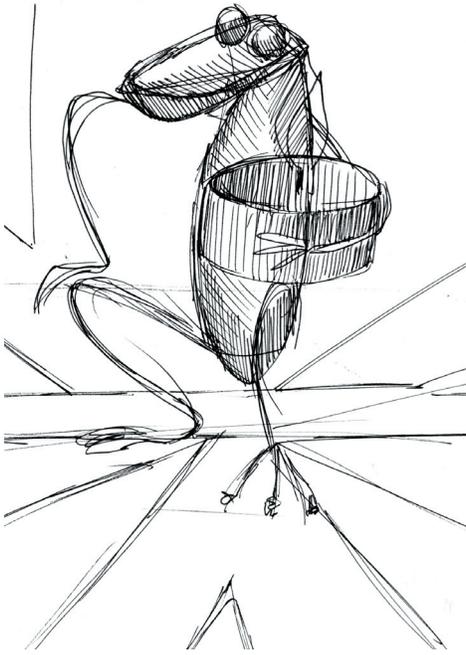


Illustration by Jamie Forslund

Haunted Saloon

by Direct,
a student

(A song for the bars)

Bandit, grizzled mug on a punitive pamphlet
 Passed out to towns where I haven't even landed once
 "You were the prize of every man" hunt
 "The town sheriff and his raucous" bunch
 "Sent you out on a rail with a..."
 Hunch that I'd been disturbin' the peace for months
 People refer to me as a cowpoke specter
 Waving a lariat of Beelzebub's nectar
 Sheerly mad, clearly dead nearly human texture
 Never seen in daylight, or clever
 But every ghost that I've ever chased came here
 The barkeep said welcome in my lame ear
 I threw a nickel to the organist
 Because I gave my two cents at the corporeal orphanage
 Sat down where I met a man wanted, tellin' me how
 "You seem uh, rather haunted" And I was, he had a stare broken
 and worn

Bone marrow exposed and cartilage torn
 This man had a legend that preceded him
 A dry smoke wafted from his evil grin
 And I could see that this was a beginning of a friendship
 So we lifted up our cups and drank to sin

Chorus:

"Feast your eyes on the Haunted Saloon
 Where people talk for free and the drinks are on the room
 Feast your thoughts on the Haunted Saloon
 Where your life is the disease, and the demons are you."

Brass Taxes (a verse for mediocrity, from the perspective of the
 "average" teenage male):

There's a market for disparaged youths like myself
 So removed from the social sphere that my peers dealt
 My ears felt boxed bloody by my former buddies
 So I grabbed a friendly tinted image
 Put it in my cubby safe
 Now I'm the prep chap, step back, finessed cat
 A tan-in-a-can handed a grand for my test lap
 Being so fashion savvy
 Basking drably in the washed up compassion that I'm masking gladly
 Behind a mall-bought sweater and a two-bit smile
 I'm a child, up in a suburban dirt pile
 Strawberry blonde locks only down for debutante posh
 Cuz I've probably never had a boss
 I stay locked to every advertisement, makin' certain that
 capitalism's got a purpose surfacin', cuz I wanna believe that I'm
 taking part in something nourishin', but all I can refer to is the
 self I'm refurbishing

Curtain Call

VERSE ONE:

Inside out stomach coated in lambskin
 On the lam jammed in Route 66 encampments
 Ghost town exile, robbing southern belles
 Wanderer covered in a stubborn smell
 Faceless shadow of my past self
 Knife cuts on my cheeks full of grief inside felt
 Whiskey on my breath absinthe in my veins
 Open range, open wound hopeless name
 Gripped in fear, a travellin' minstrel
 Pistol whipped wisp in the wind
 Fistfuls of wishful letters written in my own blood
 To a lost love or the god below us
 Sit on my belt buckle, traded my soul for a couple devils
 Disheveled, with a spitfire hustle
 Two headed coin pioneer telling tales of misery
 Mom left never taught me chivalry
 Six years old
 Had a six-shooter then
 Smoking gun with a sandpaper tongue
 Who learned to run quick
 A vagrant son split with holes in his boots full of burdens and grit
 Took to the high plains, took to loneliness
 Took mens' lives when they felt the coziest
 Rode into midnight, scars on my back
 A collector of demons from a country shack

Chorus (Sung by a band of rowdy, cigar-smoking skeletons):

"Feast your eyes on the Haunted Saloon
 Where people talk for free and the drinks are on the room
 Feast your thoughts on the Haunted Saloon
 Where your life is the disease and the demons are you"

Verse Two:

I am not a being of moral fiber
 Black stone rider, eye-to-eye conniver