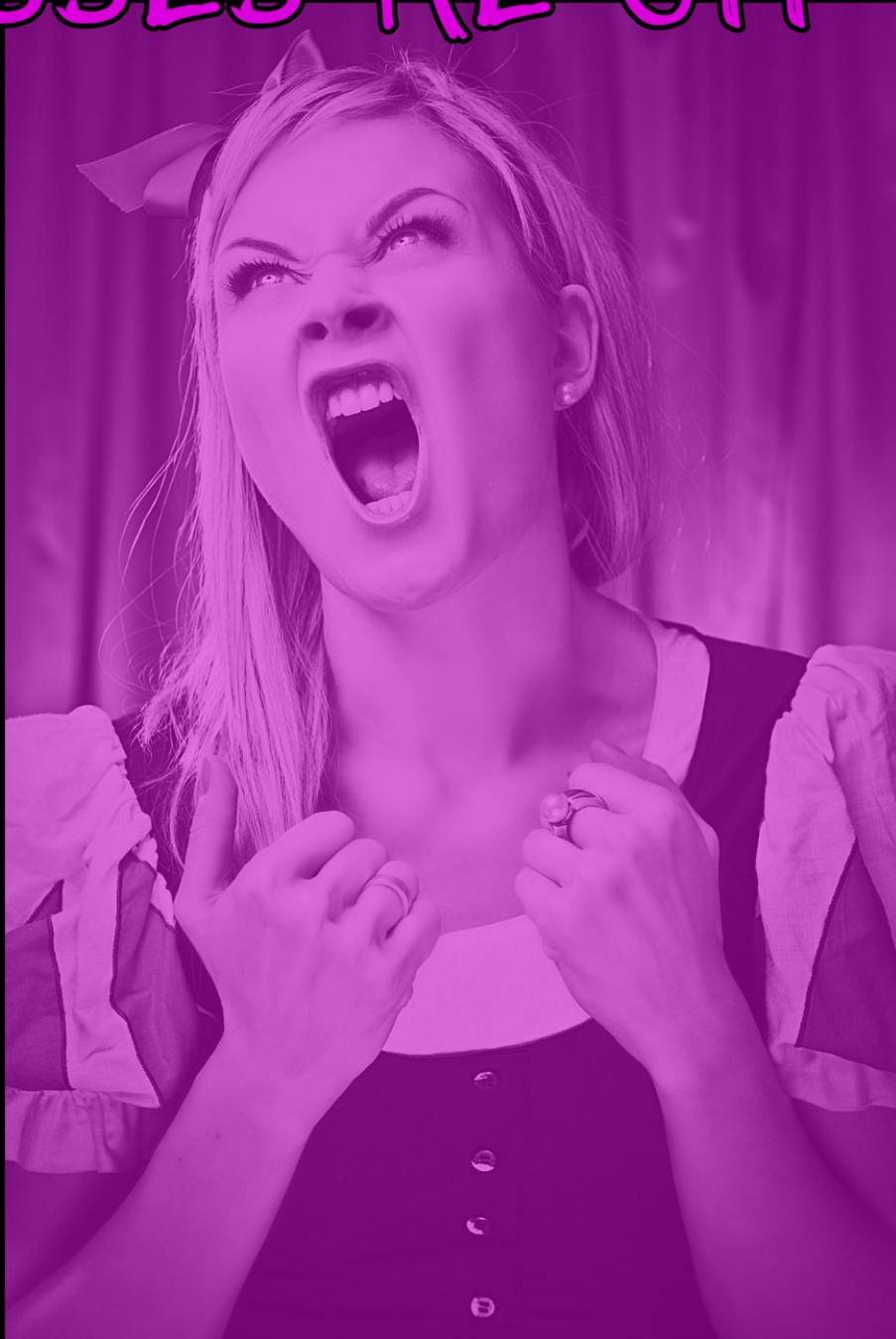


STILL  
MORE  
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SHIT THAT  
PISSSES ME OFF

REG TIT TLE



**STILL MORE SHIT THAT PISSES ME OFF**

Peg Tittle

*Magenta*

Still More Shit that Pisses Me Off

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## To Wail like a Brat—and Advertise

On what basis do ‘you’ claim the right to publicize your desire for money—at my expense? You use forests full of trees for unsolicited mailouts, you produce and then dump tons of nonbiodegradable plastic for oversized packaging, you destroy beautiful landscapes with your signs, and you intrude on my consciousness with your insistent voice—all because you want me to buy your product or service so you can make some money.

Listings in directories—by category of product, service, and so on—should be free of charge; in fact, they are, for many online directories. When we want to purchase something, we’ll find you in the directory. Any other advertising should be illegal. Frivolous depletion and destruction of the planet’s resources is irresponsible. Shouting “I want I want I want” in someone’s face is invasive and assaultive. In short, advertising is immature.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Income Tax Deductions: Financial Reward for Dependence and Replication

In Canada, if one agrees to pay someone else’s way in life, one gets to pay \$7,500 less in income tax. I’m referring, of course, to the spousal deduction.

If one decides to make some people and pay their way, one also gets to pay \$7,500 less. Per person. The deduction for kids.

What’s the ethical basis for these deductions? After all, who picks up the slack created by your reduced payments? People who *haven’t* chosen to pay someone else’s way. People who *haven’t* chosen to replicate themselves. How is that fair?

Maybe we can answer that question if we first answer the question ‘Why are there any deductions at all?’ That is, why shouldn’t we all just pay a percentage of our total income, period? Why do we get certain ‘breaks’ depending on what we’ve chosen to use our income for?

Are the deductions corrections for other errors? University tuition is too high, so those who choose to pay it get to deduct a certain amount on their income tax as compensation? Well, fix the high tuition! And in the case of spousal and dependent deductions, what error is being corrected?

Or are deductions a sort of social engineering? Is the spousal deduction meant to encourage men to have wives? Why? Why is it such a good thing to have, or to be, a ‘kept woman’? Or, in the relatively few cases in which it’s reversed, a ‘kept man’? And is the species in danger of becoming extinct? Is that why we need to encourage people to reproduce?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Entertain me. Hurt him.**

Given the violent content of many prime time dramas and sports, both of which are considered entertainment, it is apparent that many of us consider it entertaining when people hurt other people. What does that say about us?

That so many people find violence entertaining should be deeply disturbing. Instead, it's so normal, it's unremarkable. (And what does that say about us?)

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Paying Stay-at-Home Moms**

Every now and then, we hear the proposal that women be paid to stay at home and be moms. That women are paid to be surrogate mothers suggests that regular mothers also deserve payment. So. Should we pay regular mothers the same as surrogate mothers?

For starters, who is this 'we'? Surrogate mothers are paid by the people who want their labor. Who wants the children of non-surrogate mothers? The state? If so, for what? There is no civil service labor shortage. We aren't at war. And if we were, we would need more soldiers, not more children. So the job paid for should be not 'making a child' but 'making a soldier'.

Because if we're going to pay, it would be a job. You'd have to wait for an opening and then apply. And, so, not only would the state, should it be the employer of mothers, have the right to be quite specific about the job description ("Women wanted to make soldiers"), it would also have the right to be quite specific about the qualifications ("genetic make-up must include average IQ or lower, above average physical health and fitness, pliant personality..."). And it would have the right to be quite specific about the performance standards—no drinking on the job, or substance abuse of any kind except that prescribed by the employer, etc.

You want to be paid for being a mother? Well, he who pays the piper picks the tune.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **No People Skills. And proud of it.**

I've always been rather proud of not having any 'people skills'. Of not being able to

‘talk to people’, smooth things over, talk them out of their way of seeing things, talk them over to my way, persuade, influence, manipulate, control. No wonder supervisors, salespeople, and customer relations people need good people skills. And no wonder I resent those skills: I’ve always been the subordinate, the consumer, the customer—I’m the one the people skills are used on.

Of course, subordinates are expected to have good people skills too, but what’s meant *then* is the ability to get along, follow, fold, obey. And, well, as I said, I’m not very good at that.

But no, no, I’m told, you’ve got it all wrong. People skills are *communication* skills. Hm. And what might skilful communication be? Putting your message in words the other person will most likely understand, instead of in words that most easily come to mind? That’s okay. That’s just courtesy. But choosing your language, your vocabulary and sentence structure, to increase the likelihood not of *understanding*, but of *agreement*—that’s manipulation. (And if you abandon the meaning in order to get that agreement, that’s just plain lying.)

There’s a difference in intent. And loading your language shows that you don’t respect the other person’s rationality. (Nor do you respect your own—if your reasons were good, you wouldn’t have to resort to manipulation.) Such wilful discouragement of dissent also slows little respect for their autonomy. (What exactly are you afraid of?).

But no, again, it seems I’ve got it wrong: communication skills just refer to the ability to listen to what the other person is saying, and the ability to express yourself clearly. Still thinking about control, and insecurity, it occurs to me that *men* must’ve introduced the term. Because women *grow up* with *those* people skills. It’s such a no big deal, we don’t have to name it. And if we did, we’d call it maturity, and self-knowledge.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **What’s so funny about a man getting pregnant?**

I recently read *The Fourth Procedure* by Stanley Pottinger, in which, during a surgical procedure, a man is given a uterus containing a fertilized egg. He is enraged when he finds out, afraid that if it becomes public knowledge he’ll be a laughingstock. Turns out he’s right. But I don’t get it. What’s so funny about a man getting pregnant?

Is it like laughing at the guy who slips on a banana peel—laughing at another’s adversities? Because when pregnancy is unwanted and occurs in a world without abortion, it is certainly an adversity. Forget going to college, forget that career. You’re screwed. (The double meaning of that phrase is no coincidence.) Even if you give the child to someone else, a good year of your life has been derailed.

It takes—I was going to say immaturity, but that’s an insult to the many children who do *not* laugh when another kid falls down and hurts him/herself. And then I was going to say it takes a lack of empathy, but those who laugh at others’ adversities seem fully aware that they *are* adversities. So what is it then? Well it’s sick. (There’s a philosophically precise term.) To laugh at others’ adversities.

Perhaps it's not the adversity that's funny, but the unexpectedness. But there are many unexpected things we don't laugh at, so that can't be right.

Then I read that one of the characters who laughed at the situation called the guy a 'wuss'—which, of course, means the man is effeminate, feminine, womanly, womanish, whatever. So how does that fit in? To be pregnant is to be female, and to be female is—laughable?

*And why is that exactly?*

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Poor Little Kids**

So I heard on the news the other day about the poor little kids whose school backpacks are so full of books they're developing debilitating back pain... Oh please.

If they'd worked on their homework during the time allotted for just that purpose, instead of text messaging the person next to them, one painstaking letter at a time, to send the monumentally important query 'HEY BRITTINY HIG', they wouldn't have so much left over to take home.

If they'd paid attention during class, engaged their minds in the mental effort required to learn something, they might have even finished it during that allotted time.

If they wore their backpacks properly with both straps over their shoulders and high up, instead of oh-so-fashionably slung low over one shoulder, they wouldn't develop such back pain.

If mandatory physical education hadn't've been cancelled, or if they actually played outside after school instead of watching tv, or walked the five blocks to and from school instead of getting chauffeured by mom or dad, they might have enough strength in their little backs—wait a minute—are these the same kids for whom pens with rubberized grips are designed because the user's thumbs and forefingers are too weak to hold onto it otherwise?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Dolly—what's in a name.**

Wilmut's team named the sheep cloned from a single adult cell "Dolly" because that cell had come from a mammary gland. I'm tempted, *on that basis alone*, to cast my vote against human cloning. I mean, if that kind of short-sightedness or immaturity is going to be in charge, things are bound to go horribly wrong.

Did they really not foresee that "Dolly" would become headline news? Or did they not even recognize how juvenile they were being (and therefore not 'fear' the publicity)?



Mammaries = women = mammaries. Women are not seen as people, or perhaps colleagues, certainly never as bosses. Really, need I go on? This is all so old. And yet, grown men, brilliant men, on the cutting edge of science, who become headline news, are apparently still forcing farts at the dinner table and snickering about it.

So, cloning? I don't think so. Not until the other half of the species grows up.

(Then again, since cloning means we finally don't need them at all, not even to maintain the species, let's go for it.) (Could it be they never thought of that either? That cloning makes males totally redundant?)

\* \* \* \* \*

## A Gold Watch

At one of my previous workplaces, we had a little ceremony each year honouring employees who had worked there for five, ten, or fifteen years. I used to go. (There was free pizza.) But then I stopped. (After three years, I could afford my own pizza.)

It's a curious thing, this esteem we have for longevity. Why is an anniversary cause for celebration? I can see it in some Purple Heart sense—congratulations for surviving—but that doesn't seem to be the spirit in which such celebrations are intended. (Then again...)

So what's the big deal about being married to the same person, or working for the same company, for so many years? Is it supposed to be some expression of loyalty, which is then rewarded? But what's loyalty? And why is it good? Excuse me, but the day my partner or my employer starts making weapons or selling unsafe products, I'm outta there.

Let's admit it, 'seniority' rewards quantity rather than quality. What if it were a shitty marriage? Why applaud someone for staying in it? (Do you want fries with that?)

And what if the person's a mediocre employee? We give them a raise every year just because they've been there one more year. But we don't give a raise to the guy who's doing a good job. Is it any wonder then that so many employees develop a clock-punching mentality, that they figure just being there, just putting in time, is enough? Because apparently, it is. If they put in enough time, they get a wage increase, extra holidays, protection from lay-off, and eventually, so very appropriately, a gold watch.

Granted, sometimes there's a connection between quantity and quality: the longer you work at it, the better you get, the more you know. Sometimes. (In which case why not just reward that increase in quality directly.) But unless you get moved to a different position, the level of mastery is often achieved before five years, certainly usually before ten or fifteen years. So seniority means stagnation, complacency. It could also mean cowardice, fear of trying something new. (Or it could simply mean the absence of other opportunities.) And of course, if one hangs on *because* of the rewards, it means self-interestedness.

My guess is that after a certain point, performance *declines*, rather than *inclines*, with seniority. You know you can't be easily fired, you feel secure, you feel comfortable. So

you don't try as hard, you get a little lazy. And you get a little bored, you get a little dull.  
So seniority should not be rewarded. And rather than penalizing the person who's changed jobs every few years, we should be recruiting them.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Porn's Harmless and Pigs Fly**

The fact that 'you' claim porn doesn't harm women is proof that it does. Such a claim indicates that you're so accustomed to seeing women sexually subordinated you think there's nothing wrong with it. Such a claim proves that that porn has skewed your perceptions so much you actually *believe* the women are enjoying, asking for, whatever it is you see. (They're *pretending*, asshole. They're *acting*. According to some guy's fantasy script. And they're doing so because they're getting *paid*.)

Such a claim also proves you haven't read the research: for example, compared to those who did not watch porn, men who watched porn were more likely to have aggressive and hostile sexual fantasies, more likely to say that women enjoy forced sex, less likely to be bothered by rape and slashing, and more likely to consider women subordinate and submissive. This is not opinion. This is fact.

To those who nevertheless deny it: if you can imagine the women in the porn you watch replaced with men and not be bothered by it, then okay, I'll retract. And if you really don't know what I'm talking about, do a search for "erotica" (heterosexual) made by women instead of "porn" and watch the difference.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **God: The Quintessential Deadbeat Dad**

He left almost 2,000 years ago. Said he'd be back real soon. Whatever. He never writes. He never calls. He left us these notes, but half are so cryptic, the rest so contradictory, he must've been sloshed at the time.

'Wait 'till your father gets home.' Yeah, that got tired real quick.

And child support? It's not just that so many of us don't have enough to eat. A lot of us are starving to death. We have no roof over our heads. And we could use new clothes. 'Cheque's in the mail.' Right.

They say the typical dad interacts with his kids for just two minutes a day. Half of us would weep with gratitude just to hear his voice for two minutes period.

Role model? 'Like father, like son' is an understatement. Lots of us have a temper, and we're a vengeful lot. We kill, we torture, we loot, we lie. We're racist. And women, well, they're just not very important.

Bottom line is he's guilty of neglect and abuse. His kids wouldn't recognize him even if he did show up. As for duty and responsibility, let alone love and affection, he may as well not even exist.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Boy Books

Boy books. You're thinking *The Boys' Book of Trains* and *The Hardy Boys*, right? I'm thinking most of the books I had to read in high school English.

Consider Knowles' *A Separate Peace*. Separate indeed. It takes place at a boys' boarding school. The boys are obsessed with jumping out of a tree. This involves considerable risk of crippling injury. And yet they do it, for no other reason than 'to prove themselves'. Now my question is 'What are they proving themselves to be—other than complete idiots?' We don't get it.

They are also obsessed with going off to war. While this again involves risk of injury, it could, at least, be done for some lofty and heroic reason. But the reasons for the war are not once discussed. So it seems to be just another peer pressured ego thing: 'My dick's as big as yours.' Again, we don't get it.

Consider also Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In all three, a major theme is the loss of innocence—not through the discovery of evil in the world, but through the discovery of evil within. The boys discover their heart of darkness, their capacity for cruelty. Well, we can't identify with that—after all, *we* didn't spend our childhoods tearing the legs off harmless flies and putting fish hooks through live frogs.

We especially can't identify with the feelings of *pride*, which lie just beneath the pretensions of horror, that accompany this discovery. For make no mistake, in forests and on farms, and on foreign battlefields, killing is still the rite of passage, the test of *maturity*, for boys to men. Hands up, does anyone else see this as sick?

Let's go back to *Lord of the Flies* for a minute. Again, all boys. Plane-crashed on an island, their task is simple: co-exist. They must figure out how to live with each other. They can't do this. Instead, they figure out how to kill each other.

Would girls have done any better? Well, yes, I think they would have. Would they have splintered into rival groups? Probably. Would they have picked on the fat ugly girl? Sigh. Probably. But they would not have killed the pig, especially like that, laughing at its squeals of pain. (Especially not with all that fruit around.) And the little 'uns would've had lots of mommies to look after them. And at the end, they would *not* have been discovered smeared with blood and war paint. Instead, they probably would have been found on the beach singing and doing the Macarena. (And the really horrible thing is that many men reading this won't see that as *unquestionably* better.)

So don't tell me these novels are universal. They're not. They're boy books. By boys about boys. And I'm a girl. Was a girl. I can't tell you the effect *Lord of the Flies* had on me. First of all, *I had to change sex to even be a part of the world*. Read that sentence again. Then I saw myself as seven parts Simon, two parts Ralph, and one part Piggy. And

I saw my options: insanity or death. Quite the education.

But even when the theme *is* universal, we get boy books. Consider Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Duddy wants to buy some land. As a *person*, I can identify with that. Unlike much of the previously-mentioned novels, this is not a boy thing. But still, Duddy is a boy. Very much a boy. So there's not much else I can identify with.

However, also unlike the previously-mentioned novels, this one has a few female characters in it. Actually, so does *A Separate Peace*: one is Leper's mother and she is *just* that—Leper's mother; the other is Hazel Brewster—the 'town belle', a mere object to be observed and perhaps used by the boys. Yvette, in *Duddy Kravitz*, is seen, by both Richler and Duddy, as either sexual or secretarial. Am I supposed to identify with that?

Consider Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Now I can *really* identify with saving books, with perpetuating the intellectual heritage of civilization. But the five men Montag meets at the end who are doing just that *are* just that—five *men*. So are the *thousands* of others: "Each *man* had a book he wanted to remember..." Where am *I*? What was *I* supposed to be wanting? (Another television wall—recall Mildred, Montag's wife.)

I'm so thankful for Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. For Scout. She's one of the two main kid characters in the book. And she's a girl. A spunky girl. A girl who runs, and thinks, and feels. *There* I am!

(But, alas, she doesn't have a mom. She has a father and a brother; if she had a mom, if there were an adult woman like her, like her dad, that would even it up a bit—Scout wouldn't be the female minority in her world. But that would be too much, I guess. Equal representation is going too far.)

And I'm thankful for Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. It's about a woman. An old woman. A feisty, sarcastic old woman who embraces her inner bitch. I wanna be Hagar when I grow old.

But what do I want to be when I grow up? There's this huge void between Scout and Hagar. Why? What the hell happens to girls when they turn thirteen? I'm an adolescent, was an adolescent, presumably discovering and creating my identity. If I stay within the boundaries of the familiar, the apparently possible, I— Where are the girl books? Where are the books set at girls' boarding schools? Where are the books about 'girls only' islands?

*And what would happen if boys read them*—what would happen if adolescent boys experienced Gilman's *Herland* and Tepper's *The Gate to Woman's Country* instead of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*? (and Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy*, and Newman's *A Share of the World* and McCarthy's *The Group* and...)

Maybe, eventually, instead of boys and girls, we could have kids, and then people; kids, and people, would read kids' books, and people's books.

\* \* \* \* \*

## The Part-time Ghetto

What is the difference between people with part-time jobs and people with full-time jobs?

If you're part-time, you don't get sick days (so when you're sick for a day, you lose a day's pay); you don't get time and a half for overtime (time and a half starts after 44 hours, not after the numbers of hours you've been hired to work); you don't get seniority (it simply doesn't apply to part-timers); you have to pay for your own dentist appointments, your prescription drugs, and your glasses (so you don't make dentist appointments just for check-ups, you don't buy prescription drugs unless they're absolutely essential, and your glasses are for your eyes of five years ago); and your only pension plan is the CPP and whatever you save on your own (which is not a lot if you're only part-time).

But more significant than these monetary differences are the differences in your perceived value: your input is less often solicited, whether regarding shift schedules or company policy; your work is thought to be less important, no matter what you're doing (your paycheque is also thought to be less important, so you often have to wait longer for it); you're automatically considered a beginner who needs more supervision, who's expected to prove herself. In short, if you're part-time, you don't get treated or taken seriously. And don't kid yourself, the differences exist along the whole job spectrum: the differences between the part-time and full-time waitresses are the same as the differences between the part-time and full-time professors.

So let me ask again, what's the difference between part-time and full-time? Usually, about ten hours. Why is this such a big deal? (Apart from 'It's a man-made world and men are obsessed with quantity differences.[\[1\]](#)) There's no difference between the cleaning done by the part-time custodian and that done by the full-time custodian; there's no difference between the lawyering done by the attorney who's part-time with the firm and that done by the one who's full-time.

Quite simply, an elementary but serious error in logic is made by those who perpetuate this two-class system: they have assumed a causal relationship between quantity and quality. (Again, *who* is it who keeps connecting quantity with quality, who keeps believing bigger is better?) They have assumed that those working fewer than 40 hours/week are not doing as good a job.

Good as in as committed? But it's often not a person's choice to be part-time instead of full-time; they'd be full-time if they could! And in fact, the desire to become full-time often leads to *more*, not less, commitment to one's duties.

Good as in competent? The part-time worker is *not* necessarily less qualified or less experienced. In fact, given the glutted job market, the younger employees who must settle for part-time work are often *more* qualified than the older full-time workers. (And again, they have good reason to try harder, to *be* more competent.)

Good as in enthusiastic? Wouldn't it make more sense to assume that the *more* hours one works, the more tired and burned out, i.e., the *less* enthusiastic, one is? In fact, how can one be a healthy individual, how can one live a balanced life, when 80% of one's waking hours are spent in the same place, doing the same thing?

It doesn't make sense. That's all there is to it. Why should the number of hours per week determine whether you are a first-class employee or a second-class employee? What's so magical about the number 40? And will the magic disappear if and when we scale down to a 30-hour work week?

[1] It's not insignificant that most part-time jobs, the second-class group, are filled by women. And I wonder which came first, the chicken or the egg: was part-time work devalued because women did it or were women put in the part-time positions because such positions were devalued?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **The Gender of Business**

Business is male. Make no mistake. Everything about it smacks of the male mentality.

First, the obsession with competition. You have to be #1, you have to outcompete your competition. So hierarchy, rank, is everything. As is, therefore, an adversarial attitude. It doesn't have to be that way. Business could be a huge network of co-operative ventures, each seeking to better the whole. But no, we have to be better than, stronger than, faster than—

And bigger than. Business is obsessed with size. Mergers, acquisitions, expansion. Bigger is better. Bigger wins. The business suit has padded shoulders to make its wearer look bigger. They're always talking about new opportunities for growth. Unlimited growth. They never talk about cancer.

Closely related to size is number. Business measures success in numbers, in quantifiable units. Units manufactured, units sold, profits, paycheques. (Not the number of customer service reps though.) It also measures value in numbers. It puts a price on beautiful views. And on lives. Doesn't have to be that way. When some people say something is priceless, they mean it.

Another characteristic derivative of the obsession with competition is the obsession with power. Power over others. Responsibility is the flip side of power, but the only responsibility business talks about is the responsibility to its shareholders—to be competitive, to be big, to produce high returns. All other responsibilities are swept under the carpet and called externalities.

And of course if you're going to compete, you have to take risks. Business is all about taking risks. Again, doesn't have to be that way. Safe is good. The system could be set up so risk isn't required. (Actually, if you're big enough, it is. Can you spell 'bail-out'?)

And it almost goes without saying that, given competition, the emphasis is on the self. Business is egotistic. One collaborates only in order to compete, to win. Communalism and socialism are dirty words. Altruism is simply denied.

And perhaps the most dangerous: women are devalued. Half the species just doesn't count, as far as business is concerned. 80% of male city finance workers visit strip clubs for 'corporate entertainment' ("On Bankers and Lap Dancers" M. Lynn, *International Herald Tribune* Jan12/06).

This is why men go into business. It has what they are.

It's also why business is male. They make it what it is.  
It's a vicious circle. A self-perpetuating feedback loop.  
And that's why we're never going to change business, we're never going to stop its crippling effect on the quality of our lives. We'd have to stop making men first.  
(We could, you know. We could make just people instead.)

\* \* \* \* \*

## Better than Speech Codes

Instead of prohibiting 'hate speech', we should just prohibit all claims made without reasons.

Oh how our society would change! If we were legally compelled to provide reasons, justifications, evidence, for every claim we made in public...

No exemptions for politicians—every speech, every statement to the press...

No exemptions for business—every ad, my god, that one alone gives one pause...

Go ahead. Say whatever you think. But only if you also say *why* you think it.

How ridiculous most of us would sound most of the time. Our almost complete dependence on immature appeals to emotion, our thin and pathetic appeals to custom, tradition, past practice, majorities, questionable authorities—all exposed by expression. How silent we would suddenly fall after the unwarranted, self-righteous 'because—'  
How quickly we would just shut up.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Men's Precision Teams

Have you ever wondered why, in the sport of figure skating, there are no *men's* precision teams?

Sure, precision skating requires attention to detail and a highly developed spatial sense. But both are surely male capabilities; in fact, aren't they male superiorities? Isn't that why (so we're told) men dominate science and engineering?

And of course, it requires skating skill. But countless men—Kurt Browning, Alexei Yagudin, Elvis Stojko, Brian Boitano, to name a few—have proven this to be Y-chromosome-compatible.

Perhaps it's the degree of cooperation required that's simply beyond men. Yes, men are capable of cooperation—that's what *team* sports are all about. But in hockey, football, basketball, and the like, there's always room to be a star; there's always room for grandstanding, for upstaging. In a precision skating team, there's no room for even the teeniest of egos. (Synchronized swimming—there's another sport men simply couldn't

handle. There'd be way too many deaths by drowning.)

And yes, men are capable of the timing that cooperation entails. Quarterbacks and their receivers demonstrate this all the time. But the perfect synchrony of a precision team performance is not achieved by such *discrete* instances of cooperation. It's a matter of *continuous* cooperation. The sport requires continuous adjustment to others, which requires awareness of and sensitivity to others, not to mention patience, and persistence, with the practice. It's not only about relationships—to the ice, to the music, to each other: it's about *maintaining* those relationships. (Hey, this sport should be mandatory for boys 13 to 18.)

But no, this can't be right. Consider marching bands and drill displays. They have as much precision and uniformity as a skating team. (Oh, well, give a man a gun—)

Maybe it's because so few boys go into figure skating that after the channelling into solo, pairs, and dance, there aren't enough left over for precision teams. Hm. There are no *male* corps de ballet either. Is it really just a matter of supply and demand?

Well, maybe. Or maybe it's just that members of a precision team have to put their arms around each other.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Dr. Frankenstein, meet Dr. Spock**

Thanks to genetic research, we may soon see people making sure their kids are born-to-succeed, parents paying to guarantee their kids have the right stuff. I'm not talking about a straightened spine or a functional optic nerve. I'm talking about designer kids: those made with healthy bodies, intelligent minds, and perhaps a certain specific ability or two to boot.

First, success isn't happiness. Let's be clear about that at the start.

Second, having intelligence or ability is not nearly as important as knowing what to do with it. So success isn't necessarily goodness either.

Third, this ain't a meritocracy. Sure, there are certain attributes that are favoured, but as far as I can tell, intelligence and ability aren't among them. Sex is. Colour is. And a certain freedom from physical abnormality. And yes, tall men, especially those with deep voices, get more respect than short ones who squeak. But *at best*, these are *necessary* attributes. They are certainly not *sufficient* attributes.

Success more often depends on being in the right place at the right time. Have we found the good luck gene yet? Success also depends on who you know. The schmooze gene? And who you know often depends on how much money you have. In which case, the kids of people rich enough to design them don't need to be designed.

The thing is this: only to the extent that our genes control us should we get excited about controlling them. Those advocating, and fearing, genetic engineering for its designer kids application seem to be forgetting that we are products of both nature *and* nurture. There are many people whose natural intelligence remained undeveloped for lack of encouragement or crippled because of excess criticism. There are many with great



bodies who were not even allowed to try out for the team. How many Beethovens have we lost because a kid with musical ability was introduced to practice as punishment? How many recess geniuses were never told on career day about life as a diplomat?

True, if everyone's going to be creating tall, smart, white men, then we will experience loss of diversity—which is the kiss of death for any species. But we're way past kisses. As a species, we've been fucked for a long time.

To judge by what comes out of our education system, as well as what goes into it (listen to any grade one teacher), we don't have the nurture bit under control. At all. So why jump up and down about controlling the nature part?

Ah—*because* we don't have the nurture bit under control.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Testicular Battery and Tranquilizer Guns (what the world needs now is)**

Given the relative vulnerability of men to sexual assault (all it takes to disable them is a swift forceful kick, or, at closer quarters, a good grab, pull, twist—almost anything, really) (whereas women have to be partially undressed and then immobilized), it's surprising that we hear far more often about rape than—well, we don't even have a special name for it. Testicular battery?

Since most women are physically capable of such an assault, the reason must be some psychological social inhibition. And, of course, this is so. Girls are not permitted, encouraged, or taught to fight; boys are. All three. Women are socialized to see men as their protectors, not their enemies. Men are—well, this is the interesting bit: men used to be socialized to see women as in need of protection, and so would never dream of raping them (well, okay, they'd dream of it—perhaps often and in technicolor—but there was a strong social stigma against assaulting the fair sex: boys were shamed if they ever hit a girl, and if you ever hit your wife, let alone another woman, well what kind of man are you?), but feminism got rid of such patronizing chivalry.

And rightly so. Unfortunately, it has yet to make its replacement, self-defence, as commonplace.

And there's another problem. We're afraid that if we hurt them, they'll come back (when they can walk again) and kill us. Which is why women's self-defence should include a small tranquilizer gun.

(Course they might still come back and kill us. After all, to be decommissioned by a woman! It'll be a new kind of honor killing...)

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Comedown**

It was such a—comedown. All those years, SETI was watching so closely, so persistently, and then this. A surprise visit. No one saw it coming.

Suddenly there was this small ship out there, heading our way. Well, not *our* way. It looked like it was going to land in the States. Washington, probably.

So everyone scrambled to meet it. The President, of course, with lots of security. Men with guns. And some sort of first contact team. A linguist? An anthropologist? A biologist? Robert J. Sawyer? Of course not. More men with guns.

And press. Lots of press. And aides pushing last minute speech revisions at the President.

And people. My god, Americans like to crowd. If Woodstock had 400,000 people, there must have been over a million there in Washington. Waiting. For what? That was the question.

The ship landed nice as you please. After a while, the door opened. A ramp unfolded. It was just like all the sci-fi novels said it would be.

A figure appeared. Humanoid. It looked out at all the people, then focused on the ones nearest to him. All of whom were just staring. Stunned, I suspect.

“This is yours, yeah?” He—the voice sounded male—did something to the clipboard thing he was holding and the American flag planted on the Moon wavered in the air, projected as a hologram. “I’m in the right place?”

The President reacted. He took a step forward, then launched into his speech, in his stentorian voice.

“We greet you, we welcome you, to this great nation, the United States of America. A nation of which we’re proud—”

“No— “

“A nation strong and—”

“Well, that’s good, but— “

“And free—”

“No, you’ve got it wrong—”

“A nation that—”

“I’m Collections.”

The President stopped speaking.

“You’re in arrears?” He consulted his clipboard. “Fifty years, actually. Comes to— oh my—967 trillion.”

Everyone was still silent.

“U. S. dollars,” he added helpfully.

They still didn’t get it.

He tried again. “Property taxes?”

\* \* \* \* \*

## **The Academy Awards: Separate and *Not* Equal**

Why is the acting category of the Academy Awards sex-segregated (Best Actor in a

Lead/Supporting Role, Best Actress in a Leading/Supporting Role)? We don't have separate awards for male and female directors. Or screenwriters, cinematographers, costume designers, film editors, soundtrack composers, or make up persons. Is one's sex really relevant to one's acting ability? In a way that justifies separate awards?

Of course not. My guess is that it's because the award isn't really for the actor/actress, but for the character portrayed. Probably partly because most people can't distinguish the two. I'll bet George Clooney still gets asked what to do by moms whose kid has a fever.

Even so, why do we have separate categories? Because if we didn't, women would never win. Not because they're worse actors (remember the award isn't for acting ability), but because we award the heroes. And women never get to play hero.

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## **Transgendered Courage**

Transgendered people are often seen as courageous; they have the guts to take radical steps to become the people they really are. But I don't see them as any different from people, mostly women, who get nip-and-tuck surgeries, botox injections, and breast enlargements. After all, they too take radical steps to become the people they feel they really are—youthful and sexually attractive.

I understand the mismatch between what's inside and what's outside. Really I do. I look like a middle-aged woman. But I don't feel like a middle-aged woman. At all. I feel like a young gun, still burning at both ends. Mixed metaphor and all.

Furthermore, transgendered people aren't snubbing sex stereotypes; they're reinforcing them. You're in a woman's body but you don't feel like a woman? You don't want to wear make-up, high heels, and a dress? You're not into gossip and giggles? You'd rather play football and fix the car? So do it. You don't need to get a male body first. You're in a male body but you'd really like to wear lavender chiffon and spend the day baking cupcakes and arranging flowers? So do it. You don't need a female body in order to do those things.

If we had more people with the courage to just do what they wanted to do, regardless of what others think they should do based on their indefensible notion of a sexual dichotomy, people who were willing to stand up to the consequent taunts and ostracization, maybe eventually the taunts and ostracization would disappear.

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## **Population Growth (i.e., rape)**

I'm amazed at the number of population growth analyses that don't mention rape. So far I've read, let me see...none. And if they don't even *mention* rape, they sure as hell can't consider it *a major causal factor*. I mean, think about it. Do you really believe that millions of women *want* to be pregnant for five to ten years? Do you really believe that most women would actually *consent* to child number four when the other three are still under six?

And look! The lower the status of women, the higher the birth rate. Compare Bangladesh's birth rate of 3.7 with Sweden's 1.9. Gee. What a coincidence! "Women of low status have less control over their lives, including decisions involving their fertility" (Diana M. Brown, "Population Growth and Human Rights" in *Humanist in Canada* 30.1:29). Go ahead! Say it! They're more likely to be raped! That's what they were bought for!

"Son preference is strong when females are undervalued, so parents go on increasing their family until they have the desired number of sons" (Brown, as above). *Parents?* Don't go all gender-inclusive on me *now!* *Men* are the ones with the obsession for progeny, *their* progeny, *male* progeny.

And also look! Iraq and Gaza top the chart with birth rates of 6.7 and 8.0 respectively. I wonder what the figures were for Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia—really, do you think that after a hard day of castrating the enemy and raping its women, the Man of the House is going to come home to bed and *ask* first? I don't think so. And don't forget, this is war! *We* have to outnumber *them!* (Why does the Pope come to mind just now?)

"We know from research in many countries that if women were allowed to choose for themselves and had unfettered access to suitable family planning methods, fertility would be falling much faster than it is" (Brown, as above). Go ahead, say it! The population growth problem is due to *men*—who *rape*.

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## **In Praise of AIDS**

AIDS could be a good thing.

First, if we need a 'die off', if we need a major decrease in the human population, in order for the planet (the human species included) to survive, well then AIDS gets my vote.

War would do it. But, whether biochemical or nuclear, it would also destroy a lot of the environment. Which kind of defeats the purpose. Furthermore, a lot of innocent people tend to die in wars.

And that's the problem with major environmental catastrophe, another contender. Sure, a lot more earthquakes or droughts would do it—droughts are especially effective because they can cause mega-famines—but again, lots of innocent people would die.

There are other diseases which, in epidemic proportions, would do the trick. Tuberculosis and the Bubonic Plague, for instance. But see, here's where the beauty of AIDS comes in: those other diseases can be caught quite accidentally, because they're

airborne or spread by very casual contact; to get AIDS, you have to do something pretty definite, pretty intentional. Except for in utero transmission, blood transfusion, and rape, getting AIDS can never be called an accident; getting AIDS is always voluntary.

And, well, that makes for a pretty neat self-selection thing: if you're the kind of person who's stupid enough not to know that you can get HIV/AIDS by having sex (or even stupider, to think that having sex is worth dying for), or if you're the kind of person who shoots up with any old needle, then frankly, you're the kind of person the human species can do without.

Second, AIDS is the best thing that's happened to women in a long time: it can make rape the equivalent of murder. And the significance of this lies in the law regarding self-defence law: typically, killing is justified, excusable, self-defence as long as you think your life might be at stake and you believe, on reasonable grounds, that you have no other way of protecting yourself.

Well, how do I know my rapist-wannabe isn't HIV-positive? It's reasonable to assume he has a sexual history of multiple partners and rough sex. And it's reasonable to assume he's not going to put on a condom. Or if he does, that it'll break. So it's reasonable to assume that any rape could turn out to be murder—he might be killing me while he's raping me. Consider it death by lethal injection. So, thanks to AIDS, I now have legal licence to kill the sonuvabitch.

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## **Politics in Government: The Problem with Representation**

Long ago and far away, I was one of several high school students to participate in a regional simgame: a federal-provincial government simulation. Each of us took on the role of a provincial or federal minister and met for three days of plenary sessions, committee meetings, and caucuses.

I was the federal Minister of State for Science and Technology (and no, I wasn't particularly strong in science or technology) (lesson number one), and I remember well the instructions of our Prime Minister: be vague; don't commit yourself to anything; if you don't know what they're talking about, tell them they're out of order; constantly assure them with such phrases as "We will consider that," "You have our support," and "That will be discussed at a later date"—in other words, *don't* say "I don't know," "That's a good point," or "This is a weakness with our policy, any suggestions?" I was to represent and defend the federal government's position. Period. (That and always disagree with the opposition's position.)

I did my job well. And I guess because so many others did the same, it was three days of go-nowhere, achieve nothing head-butting and face-saving. Any strategizing at caucus was not to solve a real problem, but simply to protect ego: insist, and be confident about it, that our way is the best way. Obviously there weren't any real discussions.

I went away disillusioned and discouraged. But I realize now that it was a *political* simulation, not a *government* simulation.

Then again, who am I kidding? After reading one issue of *Hansard* or watching one televised parliamentary session, I know it *was* a government simulation. So my question is, how did government ever get mixed up with politics?

Let me approach the problem from a different angle. I remember clearly a feeling of “You’re not playing fair!” at one meeting during which some other students started arguing with me as themselves and not as provincial representatives. I wanted to shout “I know this is stupid, I’m not an idiot, but I can’t say it’s stupid, and you’re not supposed to say it’s stupid either because your province *supports* the federal government on this issue; and you, you’re supposed to disagree, but not for the reasons you are—what you’re saying is right, but it’s not your party’s position on the matter!”

So the problem is this: if we’re all duty-bound to represent pre-determined positions, who’s free to really discuss the problems and come up with a solution? I never thought I’d be saying representative government was bad, but that seems to be the case. (But then I’ve always thought that ‘representative government’ meant representative of *constituency*, not representative of *party*—my MP corrected my error just recently.)

So perhaps we should elect to the House some people responsible to neither party nor constituency—just a bunch of intelligent, analytic, and creative people (and multidisciplinary too, no more lawyers or CEOs please). While I hesitate to suggest adding *more* people to the process, I think the presence of such free agents would do wonders for the quality of the discussion. Having such independents present might take the face-saving obsession down a few notches, as it might be easier to be corrected by a no-name, a neutral, than by the opposition. And new ideas might actually be judged on their own merit if they came from nowhere, so to speak.

However, while this is all very good for parliamentary discussion, what about parliamentary voting? Shouldn’t the people elected by constituencies vote according to their *constituency’s* wishes? Well, yes, only if constituents hear, and understand, the discussion. (Otherwise, what’s the point in improving the discussion?) But by the time representatives polled the members of their, well, we might as well have had a binding referendum. Which may not be a bad idea actually.

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## **Intelligent Design vs. Evolution**

It’s ironic, isn’t it? That the stupid people are backing intelligent design, and the intelligent people are backing dumbfuck non-design. That’s essentially what evolution is: whatever traits lead to increased reproduction, those are the ones that survive.

And what traits lead to reproduction? Not intelligence, that’s for sure. Intelligent women don’t want to have ten kids. They’d rather be discovering cures, composing sonatas, studying society. And intelligent men? They’re not cruising the bars. They’re home with a good book if they’re not still in the office or the lab. It’s stupid women who forget to take the pill or don’t get a tubal ligation. And it’s stupid men who don’t use a condom or get a vasectomy. And it’s stupid brute force that rapes. And those men aren’t

targeting the intellectuals. (Well, they are—but for murder, not rape. The Montreal Massacre.) So we're evolving all right. Right into propagated species-wide stupidity.

But isn't evolution all about survival of the fittest? Yeah...fittest to the environment. And since stupid people, the ones reproducing, don't even know what an 'ecological footprint' is, let alone have the character (and here I include both a certain morality and self-discipline) to minimize their ecological footprint, we're *not* going to survive.

Which means maybe evolution is intelligent design after all.

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