

2015 CHAPBOOK

SHORT TAKES

AMERICAN NOTES

BY

FRED RUSSELL

SCARSONSIVRCS
PUBLICATIONS

CONTENTS

Talking Points	3
Who's To Blame?	6
Education in America	8
The Price of Ignorance	10
A Little Rant About News Broadcasting	12
Newsspeak	14
The Need To Know	17
The Way We Were	19
Old Movies	21
Pro Ball	23
Things as They Are	26
Acknowledgements	28
About the Author	29

TALKING POINTS

Not too long ago Bill O'Reilly gave us another of his takes on American life. This one was inspired by President Obama's falling poll numbers. The problem this time, according to Bill, are Obama's strange ideas about equality:

"Equality" is what is hurting President Obama. The left has seized that word to push its progressive agenda. We have income equality, marriage equality, gender equality, and on and on. So instead of solving real problems, the president is living in a world of theory and is shocked when someone like Putin upsets his idealistic vision. The truth is there will never be equality in this world, it's impossible. I will never have physical equality with Shaquille O'Neal, he's bigger and stronger than I am by nature. I will never be as smart as Einstein, as talented as Mozart, or as kind as Mother Teresa. President Obama has spent five years trying to social engineer this nation and convince the world to act in harmony. In doing so, he has neglected to fix the economy or set up effective deterrents to villains like Putin. The only path to social justice is building a strong country that can provide opportunity, and economically only the private sector can make that happen. We have become a weaker country on President Obama's watch. Most Americans know that, and so do all the villains of the world.

You are almost there, Bill, but the problem isn't that Shaquille O'Neal is bigger and stronger than everyone. The problem is that Shaquille O'Neal makes ten or thirty or fifty times more money than an Einstein or a Mozart and that a Bill O'Reilly makes ten or thirty or fifty times more money than a cleaning woman and that an executive in the dog food industry makes ten or thirty or fifty times more money than a teacher or a nurse. The problem is that we have created an insane social order where people are rewarded for the economic value of their work instead of for its social value. Yes, I know. We don't want none of that pinko socialism stuff here. This is a capitalist country and that's what made America great, so great that the gap between the rich and the poor is greater than anywhere in the Western World. There has never been a time when poor people lived well in America and there has never been a time when there weren't a great many of them.

Bill thinks we should leave it to the private sector – free enterprise – to provide economic opportunity and make the country strong, that is, do what it has never done before, for whenever the private sector has been unleashed and left to its own devices, as in the 1920s or the Bush years, what it has produced is an overheated economy, running on pure greed, that has exploded in its face. Nor has it ever dealt equitably with the working population. It was only government regulation and the unremitting pressure of the labor unions that brought America's sweatshops to an end (transferred now to Southeast Asia). In fact, if it was up to Bill O'Reilly's hallowed free enterprisers we would still have child labor and the 16-hour workday in America.

Certainly Obama isn't governing America very well. Who can? America's problem is not its politicians but its people. The poorest people in America are African Americans: over half live in dire poverty or working class poverty in families with incomes of less than \$35,000 a year and a quarter live on food stamps. Their condition is a direct result of the way they have been treated by white people. It is, after all, white people who created the ghettos and the inner cities, denied African Americans a decent education and decent employment, destroyed black families, consigned black children to lives of poverty and crime. And this after 250 years of slave labor. What exactly is free enterprise and the private sector about to do for them?

The values and character of the American people are the source of America's social and economic problems. Obamacare is a perfect example of how the worship of an economic system makes American health care so difficult to reform. The Affordable Care Act runs to something like 20,000 pages. Israel's 1995 Health Insurance Law runs to fewer than 100. It is very simple: the Government is the payer, the Sick Funds (nonprofit medical organizations) are the providers, and everyone is covered, with monthly payments averaging around 5% of gross income and supplementary insurance costing around \$65 a month. This is socialized medicine, a concept that one might say it took all of Obama's 20,000 pages to get around under a system that, according to doctors' estimates, has been costing America approximately 20,000 lives a year as a direct result of inadequate health care. The inability of Americans to utter the word socialism has cost more American lives than the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Bill O'Reilly likes to talk about safety nets and people pulling themselves up by the bootstraps and achieving the American Dream through hard work. As most of the poor people who work hard in America do not get anywhere, this is Bill's own idealistic vision, though a little less generous than Obama's. As for his safety net, the only thing I have ever heard him say about it is that the government should clamp down on welfare payments and food stamps because there are too many chiselers in the system. Thus, in a macabre reversal of Justice Holmes' famous remark that he would rather see a hundred guilty men go free than one innocent man go to jail, Bill, it seems, would rather see a hundred Americans go hungry than one American get a free ride. Keep talking, Bill.

WHO'S TO BLAME?

In an age of punditry where almost all political and social criticism in the media is in the hands of journalists who are unequipped to understand how societies become what they are, and lack the courage to call into question the foundations of American life, it is not surprising that almost all such criticism is directed against politicians and other public figures. What the journalistic profession is clearly incapable of understanding and certainly does not wish to understand is that America's problems – the crime and poverty, the violence and bigotry, the ignorance and apathy, the greed and selfishness, the resentment and frustration, the anxiety and depression – are not the product or fault of incompetent or wrongheaded government but a direct result of the values and character of the American people. The fiction that the People are never at fault, that the People are great, that the country is great, and that it is their leaders who let them down may be necessary to enable Americans to maintain a good opinion of themselves but in and of itself is one of the greatest obstacles to the healing of America. When people locate the ills of society in government rather than in themselves, they are in effect dooming that society to perpetuate everything that is rotten in it.

It is of course true that America is poorly governed and it is also true to a large extent that politics attract an inferior type of individual, whether in terms of morality or ability, as do entrepreneurship and journalism itself for that matter, so that, ironically, it may be said that the three most important functions of society – its overall management, the provision of its material needs and the control and flow of information – are in the hands of people who are the least suited to carry them out. But at the same time, the problems of America run so deep, are so deeply ingrained in the character of the American people, that the country is virtually ungovernable. This, however, does not mean that it is not as tightly controlled as the harshest dictatorship, not by brute force of course but by the rigid proceduralization of daily life. All Americans live by other people's rules – rules that are established primarily for the convenience of these other people –

and therefore Americans are led around by the nose whenever they come into contact with the bureaucracies that administer and control public or any other kinds of services. The man in the street thus enters a world where rules of behavior have been laid out for him by those who control given segments or sectors of the society. Paradoxically, too, it is Western societies that have the most rules, for they are far more sophisticated in organizing society than less developed countries. Computerization of course augments all this significantly. Everything comes with instructions which we blindly obey. It is in fact virtually impossible to interact with the outside world without acting in a prescribed way.

As for journalism, it is true that the demands of the media, the need to fill time or space and their engagement in meaningless competition with one another, encourage the sloppiness and superficiality that are the chief characteristics of the journalistic profession, and it may well be that in the absence of such constraints, a small number of journalists might emerge as real writers or even historians, just as a small number of bloggers could conceivably emerge as real writers if the absence of standards on the Internet did not encourage even greater sloppiness and superficiality. Of free enterprise and the market economy, the meat and potatoes of the American way of life, the less said the better, for they thrive largely by seducing or manipulating consumers into buying what they don't need or can't afford.

It is truly discouraging to run one's eye over the headlines in the press and on the web or to listen to the sages on the talk shows without ever encountering the suggestion that something is wrong with America other than Washington or Wall Street. This is the great failure of American journalism, a failure of nerve and a failure of perception. Needless to say, novelists and social scientists have done a much better job of representing the realities of American life, but relatively few people read them, and even those who do fall into the habit of viewing America through the eyes of its journalists after being exposed to their "stories" and "opinion pieces" day in and day out for years on end. The blissful ignorance of Americans is thus assured from one generation to the next as they wait to be informed each day about what other people are doing wrong.

EDUCATION IN AMERICA

Bill O'Reilly has discovered that Americans are ignorant "about their own country." He told us so not too long ago, quoting *Newsweek* for the numbers, though he could just as easily have quoted some of Jay Leno's man-in-the-street interviews (it turns out that 29% of Americans don't know who the vice president is and 40% don't know that Germany and Japan were the enemies in World War II). And Bill knows who to blame too: First, the public school system, which is "no longer teaching history, geography and civics in an effective way." Next, the Internet, which allows people to detach themselves from reality. Television too, but that doesn't apply to Fox viewers, who obviously take an interest in current events. There you have it, in a nutshell.

Well, Bill, you are absolutely right. The public school system, first and foremost, is responsible for the ignorance of Americans, but neither you nor your critics understand why. You think they are not teaching the right subjects. I believe you also think that not being able to fire incompetent teachers because of their loathsome unions is also part of the problem. Some people think money or smaller classes will do the trick. Some people think it's the fault of the kids.

The first thing that should be noted is that it isn't just history, geography and civics that Americans are ignorant about. It's everything. And they always have been. That means science, mathematics, literature, art, music, foreign languages, their own language, basic grammar, simple arithmetic, you name it. And the schools are definitely to blame, but not in the way that Bill O'Reilly thinks.

The simple fact of the matter is that children do not learn what the public school system wishes them to learn because school bores them. and it is not their fault either. A four- or five-year-old child wants to know everything. He will drive people crazy with his endless questions. After a year or two in the school system he doesn't want to know anything and will tell anyone within hearing distance that he "hates" reading, composition, arithmetic, science, social studies, whatever – hates school in fact. Within this year or two the public school system has in effect managed to destroy the natural curiosity of the child. The child is no longer eager to learn. Being taught in a school is actually the kiss of death for any subject taught there, guaranteeing that the child will develop a lifelong aversion to it. Are the teachers bad? Not at all. What is the problem then?

The problem is very simply the way these subjects are taught – frontally, or, more precisely, confrontationally, in rigidly structured frameworks where teachers hammer away at the captive child until his head is ready to explode. (Canetti expressed this very well in *Crowds and Power*: “Those most beset by commands are children. It is a miracle that they do not collapse under the burden of commands laid upon them by their parents and teachers. That they in turn, and in an equally cruel form, should give identical commands to their children is as natural as mastication or speech.”) Why subjects are taught in this inappropriate way, completely unattuned to the capacity and temperament of the child, is not very hard to discover: it is to be sought in fact in Bill O’Reilly’s own Church, for until not so long ago, historically speaking, nearly all teachers in the West were churchmen. The view of the Church that as a consequence of Original Sin all men are born evil and must therefore be coerced into doing what is good produced schools that made study a burden and created in the child an aversion to the learning process that persists to this day in these same rigid frameworks. The challenge of an educational system is to make the learning process interesting to the child, not to make the child sit still. This it has not thought to do and does not even know how to do.

The only way to teach schoolchildren is to feed their natural curiosity. This requires innovative teaching methods so far removed from today’s classroom atmosphere that they would be unrecognizable to today’s pedagogues. Some will argue that modern educational systems do their job by supplying society with its elites, but this is of course an illusion. All that is proven by the emergence of elites is that the public schools cannot destroy them, for elites take care of themselves, possessing the talent and ambition to survive the system. As for the nonelite population – say, 80% of students – they are of course shortchanged and consequently turn out to be ignoramuses, just as Bill O’Reilly has discovered. There is after all no reason why the man in the street should not read poetry, listen to symphonies, visit museums, or take an interest in science and history. American education makes sure he won’t, through no fault of his own, for he certainly has the capacity to learn (as anyone knows who has ever listened to middle-aged poolroom bums talking about the history of baseball, for example). It is not enough to teach the right subjects to children. They must be taught imaginatively.

THE PRICE OF IGNORANCE

Americans do not know very much about the world. Historically this is partly a result of distance and isolation and partly a result of arrogance. The arrogance comes into play when Americans consider the importance or relevance of what other people are doing, since it goes without saying that Americans do everything better than everyone else. Why individual Americans find it necessary to identify with the idea of America's greatness may be sought in their need to bolster their self-esteem in the absence of personal distinction and in their feelings of insignificance in the shadow of the American Dream. The consequence of this arrogance and the ignorance it engenders may be found in the results of America's involvement in armed conflicts around the world.

It would perhaps not be so bad if this ignorance afflicted only ordinary Americans, or if it afflicted only journalists, who seldom speak the languages of the countries they report from and comment on and therefore have no real way of understanding these countries. (A historian operating on journalistic standards would simply be laughed off the stage.) It might also not be so bad if this ignorance afflicted only politicians, who cannot be expected to be scholars, as long as they were being advised by people who did understand the world and as long as they possessed the modicum of perspective necessary to evaluate such advice. However, the ignorance is general and consequently decision makers make catastrophic decisions, from Vietnam to Iraq, from the idea of exporting democracy to the Third World to their understanding of what the Arab Spring would unleash.

Leaving aside the Intelligence failure in Iraq with regard to weapons of mass destruction, it may be said without exaggeration that America went into Iraq, just as it had gone into Vietnam, without the slightest idea what it was getting into. That is to say, it had no way to evaluate what the Sunni and Shiite response would be to the fall of Saddam and the presence of the American army. It also had no idea how to fight an irregular war against insurgent groups fueled by the ideology of radical Islam. The result was 4,000 dead Americans and a situation of complete chaos.

Some secretaries of state, like Kissinger and Condoleezza Rice, have been scholars and some have not. It has made very little difference, for the simple reason that none of them can know everything. The people who should know everything were, among others, the 35,000 employees of the State Department. Of these, getting back to Iraq and the Middle East in general, fewer than ten were fluent in Arabic. This is, quite simply, incredible. It made it impossible for America to understand what was happening in the Middle East and to know how to act there. It makes, in fact, Benghazi entirely comprehensible. Similar dilemmas present themselves all around the world, from China to Russia and from Iran to North Korea.

The debate in America about how America should act in the world, from the days of Vietnam to the present, has unfortunately always revolved around questions of morality, attacking, on the left, the notion of American “exceptionalism,” or the use of excessive force, or the presumptuousness of trying to be the world’s policeman. Such arguments have done more harm than good, only succeeding in provoking defenses of American morality on the right and deflecting the debate from the real issue, which is America’s capability, and preparedness. After all, when a course of action is disqualified on the grounds that it cannot succeed, there is no real need to debate its morality other than on a theoretical or academic level. When the focus is on morality, on the other hand, the debate must always be inconclusive and the defenders of aggressive war will never be challenged on the likelihood of its success. The war in Vietnam was probably prolonged by a few years because there was no one among its opponents, in the Johnson years, who thought, or was able, to make out an informed case for its futility and thereby shift the public debate from the outset to the plane of America’s military capabilities.

America will not be able to contend with radical Islam in any effective way until it understands it, and it will not be able to understand it until it overcomes its ignorance about the world and its peoples, which may be irrelevant when you are dropping bombs on their heads but becomes a real obstacle when the rules of conventional warfare no longer apply and you find yourself facing guerrillas, insurgents or terrorists fighting out of deep inner conviction that you are incapable of assessing or even recognizing. What Americans in their arrogance are also incapable of recognizing is that these ragheads are their equals as fighting men in terms of training, discipline and motivation. Such ignorance, and arrogance, guarantee that Americans will experience such horrors in the current century as cannot even be imagined.

A LITTLE RANT ABOUT NEWS BROADCASTING

Here in Israel we do not get to see American commercials on cable TV. On the American news networks, what we get instead of the commercials are fillers. These are naturally as superficial as the actual broadcasts. Fox, for example, gives us “extras,” very often focusing on health, though, not surprisingly, not a word is said about how the American food industry is destroying it. MSNBC, on the other hand, gives us its Lean Forward promos, where its anchor people and other superstars make “statements,” that is, deliver something in the way of personal credos. These are meant to be trenchant but are in fact ludicrous. Two of these mini-editorials in particular captured my attention, underscoring for me the entire absurdity of news broadcasting. In one segment, Andrea Mitchell talks about how breaking through the barrier of being a woman reporter taught her how “to take on powerful politicians and dictators alike” and not allow herself to be pushed aside. And then an anecdote. “Once,” she tells us with a self-satisfied little laugh, “when I asked the president of Sudan why he was supporting violence against the people of Darfur, his security guys literally pulled me out of the room.” The lesson? Hang tough. Women can do the job too. Ed Schultz, on the other hand, is all modesty: “The response you get from people when you go on the road I think gives you a pulse, it gives you a sensibility of where the country is on issues. You don’t have to meet a thousand people, you just have to hear all of a sudden the same narrative come back at you, whether it’s about health care, or whether it’s about outsourcing, or whether it’s about what we’re doing overseas. And I think it’s important we listen to people ...”

Yes, Ed, of course you get the same narrative coming back at you. It’s the one that you yourself and people like you put out there in the first place. Where do you think people get their information, where do you think they get their understanding of health care and outsourcing and “what we’re doing overseas” if not from the media? What you get from the people is therefore an echo and nothing more. Who and what is echoed depends of course on the biases of the viewer. Some people get their “facts” from Fox, some get them from MSNBC. In every case, journalists who “listen” to the people are listening to themselves.

Andrea, on the other hand, is deceiving herself, and us, in a different way. For what if she hadn't been hustled out of that room by those security guys? What if the president of Sudan had answered her "tough question"? What kind of an answer did she really expect to get from the president of Sudan, or from any of the other "powerful politicians and dictators" that she puts these questions to? Did she expect the president of Sudan to roll over and say, "You got me, sister. I'm a murderer"? I am in fact willing to bet that never in the entire history of journalism has a tough question been asked that a single one of these powerful politicians and dictators hasn't been able to slide around with the ease of a Michael Jordan sidestepping a ten-year-old child. Pretending that tough questions fulfill the role of journalism and serve the public is a joke, as is pretending that the public has an informed opinion about anything that isn't a mirror image of what it hears in the news from journalists like Ed Schultz. If Andrea Mitchell really wants to serve the public, she might start by learning Arabic before she flies out to Sudan with her tough questions and then she might be in a position to understand what is going on over there and inform the public accordingly. The ignorance of journalists is just a single notch below the ignorance of the public. Together they constitute a community in which the blind lead the blind. Andrea thinks that asking questions that aren't answered is journalism. Ed thinks that listening to people repeat what they hear on the news is journalism. Neither of them is equipped to evaluate "what we're doing overseas" because neither of them has any real understanding of the world, which involves, at the very least, understanding the language of the country you are reporting from or commenting on. Neither of them, I believe, has any real understanding of America either, which has very little to do with politicians and everything to do with the character and values of the American people, which neither of them has the courage or the insight to identify as the source of America's problems.

The genius of both the news broadcasters and print journalists has been to get people to accept the terms in which they represent the world as valid and meaningful. What they are giving us in fact is a kind of alternate reality where stories are chosen for their dramatic value and rarely coincide with real historical processes. They are forms of entertainment and little else. Andrea Mitchell interviewing a dictator is spectacle, not news. Talk show sages telling us what is going to happen in a week or a month when they don't know what is going to happen in the next five minutes is self-indulgence, not history. In either case the exercise is pointless. That we have been habituated into craving "live coverage" and instant analysis in the same way that we have been habituated into craving Coca-Cola is perhaps the only real achievement of the news industry.

NEWS SPEAK

Journalists talk and write in platitudes. This is not surprising. They are not, after all, writers. Their command of the language is limited. Their minds are commonplace. They are also not scholars or political scientists. I occasionally watch Fox News, but what is true of Fox is true of any other news organization. The ideologies may be different but the mediocrity isn't, except for a kind of starry-eyed machoism among Fox's noncombatants whenever the subject is the military or national security, and hence their breezy, insiderish tone and the penchant for hardass army talk, referring now to soldiers as warriors and speaking incessantly about boots on the ground, gridlock, lockdown, Intel, recon, choppers, nukes, and all the rest. It is true that journalists lack the talent to invent anything. They are the middlemen of language, picking up on words and phrases that are in the air and wearing them out through excessive use. The Bush administration, for example, gave them troop surges and enhanced interrogation techniques, which sounds a lot better than reinforcements and torture, though it is supposedly the job of journalists to cut through the crap and call a euphemism a euphemism. Fox fields an all-star lineup of nonstop talkers. What they say doesn't have very much value or meaning. It plays to the biases of their viewers, gives them new scandals and new arguments, but doesn't have the slightest effect on how the country is governed. On the whole, in their superficiality, journalists contribute only to the ignorance of the public and of course to the degeneration of language.

It is sometimes hard to distinguish between an idiom and a platitude. For this reason, one of the few real services that journalists provide, aside from giving us the weather report and ball scores, is to draw the line for us, as though they were themselves lexicographers. A platitude then becomes simply a word or phrase used repeatedly by journalists, which grates so abrasively against the ear that no real writer would ever think to use it. Here are a few: slippery slope, fiscal cliff, crunching numbers, growing the economy, do the math, level playing field, cutting edge, no brainer, game changer, harm's way, take a listen, sound byte, outside the box, under the radar, in the loop, proactive, Obamacare, outsourcing, win-win, toxic, viral, uber, czar, buzz, spin.

What kind of mind uses such language? Clearly a lazy one, and that is a fair characterization of the journalist's mind. Because his use of language is so narrow, and his ideas are so banal, the first word or phrase that pops into his head when he tries to express a thought is naturally one that he has used before, that is, a platitude. Unfortunately, he lacks the critical sense to reject it and look for something better. He finds the familiar comforting and feels that he is using the language well when he comes up with a hackneyed phrase. For the journalist the platitude represents clear and incisive language. It would never occur to him that it is dull. This is the standard. When he reaches into the barrel, nothing is there. That is why he is a journalist and not a writer.

The news networks and journalists in general are forever assuring us that they are keeping an eye on things for us. That is their job, they tell us. They are always working for us, bringing us the news, so that we can – what? The idea, I suppose, is so that we can make the right decisions at election time, penalize the politicians who let us down and reward those who don't. But of course the net result of the entire political process is to elect representatives with whom the public is invariably dissatisfied and holds in very low esteem, so it is hard to see what the news networks accomplish other than sensationalizing events to hold our attention until the next commercial break – now a scandal, now a decomposing body in someone's garage, now some disaster footage from Nepal or New Orleans, and then the endless commentary, day after day with the same tedious arguments – Benghazi, ISIS, the IRS, the Ebola epidemic, whatever. They never let up. They are like dogs with a bone.

If any of this did some good, made a difference, gave us something other than drama and spectacle – that is, entertainment – then there might be some justification for the enormous price the media demand for their supposed services. The price they demand is the right to invade people's privacy and to conceal sources of defamatory or illegally obtained information. That is quite a price, but since they do not really deliver what they promise to deliver, they are in effect engaging in a species of fraud, representing themselves as the guardians of democracy and of the public's "right to know" when they clearly are not. Both legislators and law courts have been completely taken in by this deceit and habitually pay lip service to the notion that the press really is the watchdog of democracy and thus deserving of the widest latitude. But the cornerstone of a democracy is in fact its legal system and the traditions that sustain it. The guardians of democracy are the courts. All the investigative reporting and all the talk shows in the world have not had the remotest impact on how governments operate.

I am not suggesting that we shut down the news organizations, any more than I would suggest that we ban poorly written books. By all means, let them go on doing exactly what they have always done if that's what people want or need, but without their special privileges. Let them be hauled into court for hounding and harassing whomever they deem newsworthy and sued, fined or prosecuted for stalking them. Let them pay a price that hurts for their gossip, innuendo and calumny.

This would obviously inhibit them. The question is whether the public would suffer, no longer know what is really going on, as if it does now, become more ignorant than it already is, as if this is possible. The answer is of course no. It wouldn't make the slightest difference. It would not make the slightest difference if people were or were not told who smoked marijuana thirty years ago or slept with his neighbor's wife, or for that matter were or were not told what is going to happen in a week or a month by talk show sages who don't know what is going to happen in the next five minutes. We think we are being kept up to date when we get the news. What we are in fact getting is a kind of alternate reality, the journalistic equivalent of pulp fiction where "stories" are selected for their dramatic value and seldom coincide with real historical or social processes. This too is not surprising. Journalists are not equipped to give us anything more. If they were they would be historians or even novelists.

THE NEED TO KNOW

News organizations are the beneficiaries of two basic but unrelated principles: the right to know and the need to know. The first is grounded politically and gives these organizations the license to invade our privacy and conceal sources of defamatory or illegally obtained information. The second is grounded existentially and is related to our survival, and like all evolutionary principles, once it is established it operates blindly and indiscriminately. Therefore, just as all dreams are reflexively distorted in order to protect us (the Freudian censor), whether or not their secrets are potentially harmful to our peace of mind, so the need to know operates in us whether or not a given piece of information is essential to our well-being, and therefore it expresses itself even when nothing is at stake but the satisfaction of our curiosity. This curiosity does not require a correct reading of events to satisfy itself. Any plausible set of facts will do. Curiosity then is very much like hunger: any food will alleviate it. Ironically, this is precisely what enables the news organizations to flourish despite the fact that more often than not their reading of events is anything but correct.

Evolution provides us with the tools of self-preservation. One of the most essential of these tools is our ability to recognize danger, namely the ability to read the environment correctly. Consequently, when matters are in doubt, the ensuing state of uncertainty produces anxiety and unrest as an evolutionary response, driving us, as it were, to clarify matters, whether they are life-threatening or trivial. Unless we are unconnected to the world or to ourselves, we always want to know what we do not know, what ISIS is up to, if it's going to rain in the afternoon and who is sleeping with whom in Hollywood. And since very little that is labeled "news" has a direct and immediate effect on us, it is, again, really irrelevant what version of events we receive. Any version that is the least bit plausible will serve to establish order, satisfy curiosity, alleviate anxiety, calm the nerves. No one is keeping score. No one holds the pundits accountable for what they said a week ago or a month ago. No one even remembers. Nor does anyone remember who said the latest serial killer was twenty-five years old or who said he was twenty-eight years old, married or unmarried, born in Florida or Mississippi. It doesn't matter which set of circumstances applies. It is not knowledge that we seek in the news but reassurance.

This is paradoxical of course, since the journalistic profession represents itself as setting great store by getting the facts straight. That is its entire *raison d'être*. Yet not only do journalists fail at this, it isn't even required of them. It is not required because these facts are for the most part irrelevant to our daily concerns, though at the same time facts as such, any facts, are necessary for our peace of mind. Does this call into question the entire value of truth? Certainly it does insofar as journalistic truth is concerned, for when they aren't entirely irrelevant, journalistic truths are generally shortsighted. They do not reveal social and historical processes, for the simple reason that journalists are not equipped to recognize such processes. They are not historians, scholars or political scientists. They are not writers or thinkers.

What journalists generally do get right are their headlines or news bulletins. Anything beyond this basic recitation of information that is gleaned from official sources, including the weather report and ball scores, quickly degenerates into opinion, speculation, gossip, innuendo and calumny. That is how talk shows and newspaper columns fill their time and space. At the end of the day an extremely distorted picture of the world is obtained, put together by people who rarely understand the languages and consequently the culture, religion, history and politics of the countries they report from and comment on and also lack the perception to understand their own country. For the public, this suffices. Half-digested in any case, it gives ordinary people something to hold on to, a version of reality that does not necessarily correspond to anything but is at least coherent and thus helps them get through the day.

THE WAY WE WERE

Sometimes the amateur anthropologist finds things where he isn't looking for them. METV – Middle East Television – is a Christian TV network transmitting from Cyprus to the entire Middle East. In addition to its Christian messages it broadcasts “wholesome family entertainment.” This mostly consists of TV series from the 1950s – *Lassie*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Bonanza*, *The Lucy Show* – and films from the 1930s and 1940s, with a predilection for Westerns featuring John Wayne or Roy Rogers. One can't help thinking that METV must have gotten one helluva deal on these old films, buying up the entire lot probably, but that isn't the point. Clearly the clincher was their wholesomeness, for it goes without saying that anything produced for mass audiences back then must have reflected a “moral” America where sex was hidden and Christian virtues always triumphed. The value of these films and TV shows is that they serve as a barometer of the American psyche, for nothing reflects the basic, unspoken assumptions of American life more clearly than Hollywood films and the old family TV shows. What Americans responded to in those years tells us what America was. It documents, indirectly, how Americans saw the world, life, themselves, as no other source does.

You know how these Westerns operate. A morally and sexually pure hero overcomes the forces of evil and gets the chaste girl. This is the central myth of American life. The male audience lives vicariously through the hero. His triumphs, always involving violence, address the viewer's feelings of inadequacy and resentment, of *smallness*, especially when the villain is rich and powerful. The purity masks guilt. The Western is therefore emblematic, if not therapeutic, operating on an unconscious level. The viewer finds it satisfying but doesn't really know why, that is, doesn't make the connection between the hero and himself in any explicit way, though he identifies with him and often becomes a hero himself in his daydreams. The feelings of inadequacy and resentment derive from the sense of failure that most Americans live with, for the great prizes go to the few, not the many, and for most Americans the great dream is the dream of wealth and fame. These feelings have persisted into the present century and continue to be addressed by Hollywood. On the other hand, the idea of sexual purity and the anguish of sexual guilt went out the window in the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The sexually pure hero is no longer a model, serves no purpose; the culture itself took care of the problem, setting up new

norms, except among the Christian fundamentalists. Heroes, however, remain moral in the larger sense, as moral purity continues to remain an American ideal. Americans want to be decent but often are not. The hero – an honest cop, a crusading reporter, a self-sacrificing everyman – allows us to inhabit our better selves. The difference now is that the greater sophistication of Americans allows for a more realistic representation of moral ambiguity.

By reviving these films, METV does a great service, providing a snapshot of America's inner life at its crudest level. By studying them we can discover who we are. It is these films too that will be studied in a hundred and a thousand years to tell future generations what America was. Let us hope that METV preserves them.

OLD MOVIES

Now that my cable provider has gotten ahold of a batch of old Samuel Goldwyn movies, no doubt at a bargain price, I have had the opportunity in recent weeks to see some real classics, like *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) and *The Little Foxes* (1941), for example. But classic or not, these films are worth watching as anthropological treasure troves, telling us more about America than a thousand books, for what they reveal are the unspoken assumptions of American life. However, there is another side to them as well, an ironic side. The characters in these films have no idea what is just around the corner. Their innocence – the innocence of people living in the 1940s about what was coming in the 1950s, the innocence of people living in the 1950s about what was coming in the 1960s – casts America's social history into very broad relief. One such film is *Our Very Own* (1950). The story is simple: Gail Macaulay (Ann Blyth) learns just before her eighteenth birthday that she was adopted and sets out to find her biological mother, discovering in the end that what really counts is her adoptive family, which has always been there for her. The genre is neo-sentimental, with a suitable sound track. The dialogue is wooden. It is Dickens transposed to an American milieu, but without the Dickensian humor, or grotesqueness.

The Macaulays have everything you could want: three daughters, a dog, a cheerful black maid, and a new television set. We are on the threshold of the 1950s. This is a world where children ask to be excused from the dinner table and are sent to their rooms when they misbehave. Momentous things are about to happen: rock 'n' roll, fast food, the pill, suburbia, the beatniks, Communism, integration, and most of all – television. In fact, in the opening scene, the new television set is just being installed, and Natalie Wood as the precocious kid sister is pestering the TV men. It matters very little what the film had to say about adoption, which is not very profound. What matters is what it couldn't say about the shape of things to come.

Television, as we all know, was one of the factors that contributed to the breakdown of family life in America. The Macaulays are not shown actually watching TV but we know that they are going to be watching an awful lot of it in the coming decade, each in his or her private cocoon. Henceforth, too, they will be getting most of their information about the world from their television set. This information will be served up to them by reporters and analysts who lack the talent, knowledge and understand-

ing to be historians, scholars, political scientists or even novelists. Such being the standards of journalism, most will not even speak the languages of the countries they report from and comment on, so you can say that it will be a case of the blind leading the blind. And while news broadcasts will themselves become a form of entertainment, with plenty of red meat for the voyeurs and the bloodthirsty, shamelessly exploiting the grief and misery of real people to get their most “powerful” moments, others will be in charge of entertainment proper at the TV networks, bringing viewers game shows, variety shows, sitcoms, dramas (*Bonanza*, *Gunsmoke*, *Maverick*, *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Ed Sullivan*, *Jack Benny*, *Lassie*, *Leave It To Beaver*, *What’s My Line?*). Television of course can’t be blamed for everything. Personal computers, cell phones and social networking were quite some distance away, but the idea of wiring consumers into a communications system that made a lot of money for a lot of people was now in place. It should be understood that if there was no money in all of this, none of it would exist. Creating better products for better living is not an end in itself, as Marx pointed out. It is an intermediate stage, “a necessary evil of money making.” If money grew on trees, there would be no industry and certainly no sitcoms.

The genius of modern communications has been to take human needs – the need for information, the need to be entertained, the need to be heard – and to commercialize them around the lowest common denominator. I call this genius because whereas we would think that the natural tendency of an organized society would be to elevate this common denominator, as the educational system indeed attempts to do, however unsuccessfully, the media operate to drag it down even further, habitually playing to our worst impulses and thereby capturing our attention in spite of ourselves.

Does this mean that the Macaulays lived in a better America? Not really. Greed was always part of American life, as were conformity, bigotry and hypocrisy. The Sixties would at least tone down sexual repression and racial discrimination but it would not liberate Americans from the American Dream. This was the dream of the Macaulays in 1949 and this would be the dream of Gail Macaulay’s children in 1969. Television would bring the dream into even sharper focus, assuring them that anyone could be rich and famous. Television would also show old movies of course, making Gail Macaulay’s children wonder, maybe, how they had become what they were.

PRO BALL

All games are child's play. This includes the games played by adults, though not all adults who play games are childish. There is, after all, a lot of money to be made playing games, so you can't really blame anyone who has the knack for it for devoting the best years of his life to frivolous pursuits like hitting a ball with a stick or jumping up and down. The essential stupidity of adult games, of sports as a profession, of what grown men and women are actually engaged in doing with a golf club or a tennis racket or a baseball bat or a hockey stick, has less to do with the athletes themselves than with the society that glorifies them, that *watches*, not just sports but everything else – in a word, the viewing audience.

Not even the Ancient Romans or Byzantines in their most degenerate phases attached themselves so enthusiastically to the heroes of the arena. We all understand pretty well what is behind all this, for nothing is more boring, even for the diehard sports fan, than watching a game where you aren't rooting for one side or the other. We do not watch a game for its own sake but for the sake of living vicariously through a surrogate self. We require this in societies such as ours in the absence of personal distinction, which is the fate of the vast majority of mankind. It is a sad commentary on our society that the heroes we choose to idolize are not scientists, artists, doctors, teachers or simply decent human beings, but ballplayers, and of course movie stars.

From time to time, ballplayers and movie stars get together for some gala event, and then you have a curious situation where you can't really say who is going to be starstruck over whom. The ballplayers, after all, are actually doing something and doing it very well while the actors are only pretending to be what they are not and have no real skills. On the other hand, the celebrity of the actor is greater than the celebrity of the ballplayer, his offscreen life is more interesting to the viewing audience, and what is more he usually has a lively personality whereas the athlete usually does not, is in fact pretty dull, talking in platitudes or mumbling something about going out there and having fun. In all of pro basketball, I can think of very few players you would have wanted to listen to for more than 30 seconds: Shaquille O'Neal certainly, Dennis Rodman, Charles Barkley, Allen Iverson for his edge, Michael Jordan for his presence. As for baseball, I have never heard any player say anything that would interest a 10-year-old child. And in boxing there is only the incomparable Ali.

It is a basic feature of modern societies that people are rewarded for the economic value of their work rather than for its social value. This is natural and desirable from the entrepreneur's point of view. Work that produces money is worth more on the market than work that doesn't, and therefore executives in the dog food industry make a lot more money than teachers and nurses and baseball players make a lot more money than cleaning women, though the work of the latter has considerably more social value than the work of the former, since without cleanliness we would get disease while without entertainment we would only get boredom. In this respect, medieval man was far more sensible than modern man, rewarding jesters and jongleurs modestly and holding them in fairly low esteem in contrast to our own times where clowns become idols and sometimes even get their own talk shows.

It may be said that, if not for social or intellectual achievement, surely we might have chosen to idolize manly heroes of a more worthy kind instead of frivolous ones: military men, law enforcers, fire fighters, for example; and many of us do in fact admire them greatly, especially when they are portrayed on the screen by Hollywood stars. In real life, however, their careers interest us less, for the simple reason that their lives have not been sufficiently commercialized to keep them in front of us wherever we look: no live broadcasts, no instant replays, no postgame interviews, no endorsements, no bubble gum cards. Also, their contests are less dramatic, less sharply focused. On the ballfield you get a winner in just a few hours, each and every day, so the rush is bigger and better when it comes. Soldiers and fire fighters can't compete with baseball players when it comes to giving the viewing audience the fix that it needs.

The really diehard fan, it has to be said, the fan that professional sports organizations are always thanking, the fan who inspires the players, the fan for whom they are playing, is a pathetic figure. He lives and dies with his team. His destiny is bound up with it. He has invested everything he has in it. Days before big games his stomach is already in knots. You can't talk to him. He won't even take out the garbage. And after a loss he is inconsolable. It takes him days to recover. Not everyone is this sick of course. There is a kind of recovery index that will tell you just how sick one is, running from seconds for healthy individuals to days for terminal cases. The fan is an inseparable part of sports culture. Now that we have talkbacks you will find him in front of a computer cursing everyone in sight from morning till night. Without such fans, where would professional sports be?

The status of ballplayers, like the status of movie stars, is indicative of a very sick society, a society whose members look around desperately for some source of satisfaction, something to lift them up, something outside themselves to which they can attach themselves when it becomes clear that they aren't going to get any satisfaction from within themselves. They are not to blame. This is the ethos. The American Dream is a hollow dream, of wealth and fame. It leaves very little room for other dreams, it seduces and captivates and dooms an entire society to chasing after distant stars.

THINGS AS THEY ARE

Evolution deceives us. We believe that it always leads us in the right direction, higher and higher, and therefore that things always turn out for the best in the best of possible worlds. Of course we understand that there are wrong turns but these seem to iron themselves out and are quickly abandoned like the saber-toothed tiger and other extinct species, leaving us with what is viable or meant to be. We ourselves are thought to develop in just this way, always creating improved models, moving from tyranny to democracy, from crude tool making to hi-tech, in what we think of as a natural and inevitable evolutionary process.

This basic misunderstanding of evolution, coupled with the feeling that on the whole society functions fairly well, is perhaps what inclines us, at least philosophically, to tolerate the institutions that control our lives. We do not question the rules that these institutions devise for their own convenience but obey them like sheep, arrive at the appointed hours, stand in lines, sit in waiting rooms, fill out the forms, follow procedures. We believe that this is the most rational way for societies to organize themselves. We understand too that wherever there is tragedy, armies of reporters will stick their microphones into people's faces to squeeze a screaming headline out of their grief and misery or that commercial enterprises will enter our homes via the television screen to sell us their breakfast cereals and carcinogenic hamburgers. Free enterprise is seen as the cornerstone of capitalism and capitalism, in America, is seen as the most advanced and efficient economic system the world has ever known. A free press is seen as the cornerstone of democracy and journalists are seen as its guardians. These two fallacies are so prevalent that it is almost impossible to conceive of a world in which journalists are not given the license to invade people's privacy and free enterprisers are not permitted to sell their merchandise by exploiting the vulnerabilities of consumers.

The truth is that not all the wrong turns in our evolutionary development iron themselves out. Some become institutionalized and therefore permanent, leaving vital social functions in the wrong hands. Yes, it is natural for people who like to write but lack the talent to become novelists or historians to create a subsidiary branch of the writing trade called journalism, and yes it is natural for the greediest among us to try to sell us what we don't need or can't afford, not to mention what may kill us. Consequently, two of the most important functions of a society – the provision of its material needs and the control of information – have been taken over by individuals who are the least suited to carry them out.

Evolution is blind. It does not recognize its own wrong turns but relies on natural forces to work things out. Certainly it has rules, but even at the most primitive level of human society these rules are easily circumvented, for better or for worse: nature is suppressed, the unfit survive, and the unworthy develop skills that enable them to prevail. The result is a world controlled by the wrong people. Among them are of course politicians, whose greatest skill is not the management of society, which one would expect, but the ability to win elections, which consists largely of talking smoothly. Evolution has therefore let us down. It did not foresee how things were going to turn out. It believed, perhaps, that a higher type would prevail and instead it got what is secondrate. Only we can save ourselves.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Essays in this collection were originally published in the following journals:

Talking Points – *The Recusant*, April 2014 (writing as Fred Skolnik)

Who's To Blame? – *In Parenthesis*, vol. 2, issue 3, Jan. 2014

Education in America – *Gadfly*, May 2014

The Price of Ignorance *Scholars and Rogues*, Aug. 2014 (writing as Fred Skolnik)

A Little Rant About News Broadcasting – *En Pointe*, Jan. 2014

Newsspeak – *Neglected Ratio*, Nov. 2014

The Need To Know – *CounterPunch*, Dec. 30, 2014

The Way We Were – *Ragazine*, July 2014

Old Movies – *Gadfly*, July 2014

Pro Ball – *Neglected Ratio*, Nov. 2014

Things as They Are – *In Parenthesis*, vol. 3, issue 1, July 2014

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Fred Russell is the pen name of an American-born writer living in Israel. His novels *Rafi's World* (Fomite Press), dealing with Israel's emerging criminal class, and *The Links in the Chain* (CCLaP), a thriller set in New York with an Arab-Israel background, were both published in 2014. His stories and essays have appeared in *Third Coast*, *Polluto*, *Fiction on the Web*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Ontologica*, *Unlikely Stories: Episode 4*, *The Satirist*, *CounterPunch*, *Gadfly*, *Cultural Weekly*, *Ragazine*, etc.

As Fred Skolnik, he is best known as the editor in chief of the 22-volume second edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, winner of the 2007 Dartmouth Medal. He is also the author of *The Other Shore* (Aqueous Books, 2011), an epic novel depicting Israeli society at a critical juncture in its recent history. A second novel, *Death*, will be published by Spuyten Duyvil in 2015. His stories and essays have appeared in over 100 journals, including *TriQuarterly*, *Gargoyle*, *The MacGuffin*, *Los Angeles Review*, *Prism Review*, *Words & Images*, *Literary House Review*, *Montréal Review*, *Underground Voices*, *Third Coast*, *Word Riot*, *The Recusant*, and *Polluto*.

SHORT TAKES BY FRED RUSSELL

SCARS PUBLICATIONS

editor@scars.tv <http://scars.tv> ✂

Writing Copyright © 2015 retained by the author.
Design Copyright © 2015 Scars Publications and Design

Magazines: *Children, Churches and Daddies* (sci-fi magazine), founded June 1993, *Down in the Dirt*, conceived 1994, founded 2000

Books: *Hope Cherish in the Attic, the Window, Close Cover Before Striking*, (Woman), *Autumn Reason, Contents Under Pressure, the Average Guy's Guide to Feminism, Changing Gears, the Key to Believing, Domestic Blasters, etc.*, *Queer, Exare Versus, L'arte, The Other Side, The Best Lady's Editorials* (regular and 2005 Expanded Edition), *Duality, Seeing Things Differently, Change/Rearrange, Death Comes in Threes, Moving Performances, Six Eleven, Life at Cafe Aloha, Creams, Rough Mixes, The Entropy Project, The Other Side* (2006 Edition), *Step, Sing Your Life, The Beauty and the Destruction*, ccd# v167.5 (*Writing to Honour & Cherish, editor edition*), *Bliaster & Burn* (the Apocypses edition), *S&M*, ccd# v170.5 (*Distinguished Writing* editor edition, *Living in Chaos, Silent Swells, Taking It All In, It All Comes Down, Rising to the Surface, Galapagos, Chapter 38* (v1, v2 & v3), *Finally, Literature for the Savvy and Elite* (v1, v2 & part 1), a Wake-Up Call from Tradition, (recovery), *Dark Matter: the Mind of Janet Kaypers, Evolution, (tweet), Get Your Buzz On, Janet & Jean Together, po-em, Tapping Poetry to the Streets, the Cane-Dixie Chi-Jewet Union, the Written Word, Duel, Prepare Her for This, Uncorrect, Living in a Big World, Pulled the Trigger, Venture to the Unknown, Janet Kaypers Enriched, She's an Open Book, "40", Sexism and Other Stories, the Stories of Women, Prominent Pen* (Kaypers edition), *Elemental, the 2012 Databook, Prominent Tongue, Chaotic Elements, Fusion, Stability Stability Stab Stab, a Picture's Worth 1,000 words* (color art book and b&w art book), *Life, in Color, Post-Apocalyptic, Burn Through Me, Under the Sea* (photo book), *Partial Nudity, Revealed, 100 Haikus, Give me the News, Let me See you Stripped, Part of my Pain, Rape Sexism Life & Death, Say Nothing, Twitterat, when you Dream tonight, Sulphur & Sawdust, Slate & Marrow, Bliaster & Burn, Rinse & Repeat, Survive & Thrive, (not so) Warm & Fuzzy, Torture & Triumph, Oh, the Elements, Side A/Side B, Balance, Chaos Theory, Writing to Honour & Cherish, Distinguished Writings, Breaking Silences, Unlocking the Mysteries, the Book of Scars, We the Poets, Life on the Edge, Revealing all your Dirty Little Secrets, Deceptit Remains, Charred Remnants, Hope & Creation, Bending the Curve, Layers of Creation, Dark Matter, Survival of the Fittest, Crawling through the Dirt, Laying the Groundwork, Weathered, echo, link in my Blood, (bound) (4 editions), Enriched Poetry, ccd# Enriched Prose, Enriched with Dirt, An Open Book, Literary Town Hall (2 editions), Prominent Pen (2 editions), 100 Words, 1,000 Words, the 2012 Literary Date Book, It Was All Preordained, Cultural Touchstone, the Mission (issue edition and chapbooks edition), Purpose, Falling, Cheap Thrills, After the Apocalypse 2013 date book, After the Apocalypse (poetry edition), After the Apocalypse (prose edition), Entanglement, Guilt by Association, don't forget it, don't Esten, read, bare minimum, Poet as Sociopath, Drawing, Art is not Meant to be Touched, the Beaten Path, a New Pen, Need to Know Basis (reduced edition and extended edition), the "need to know" 2015 literary date book, one Solitary Word, What Must Be Done, Sulphur & Sawdust, Slate & Marrow, Bliaster & Burn, Rinse & Repeat, Survive & Thrive, (not so) Warm & Fuzzy, Torture & Triumph, Oh, the Elements, Side A/Side B, Balance, Chaos Theory, Writing to Honour & Cherish, Distinguished Writings, Breaking Silences, Unlocking the Mysteries, the Book of Scars, We the Poets, Life on the Edge, Revealing all your Dirty Little Secrets, Deceptit Remains, Charred Remnants, Hope & Creation, Bending the Curve, Layers of Creation, Dark Matter, Survival of the Fittest, Crawling through the Dirt, Laying the Groundwork, Weathered, echo, link in my Blood, (bound) (4 editions), Enriched Poetry, ccd# Enriched Prose, Enriched with Dirt, An Open Book, Literary Town Hall (2 editions), Prominent Pen (2 editions), 100 Words, 1,000 Words, the 2012 Literary Date Book, It Was All Preordained, Cultural Touchstone, the Mission (issue edition and chapbooks edition), Purpose, Falling, Cheap Thrills, After the Apocalypse 2013 date book, After the Apocalypse (poetry edition), After the Apocalypse (prose edition), Entanglement, Guilt by Association, don't forget it, don't Esten, read, bare minimum, Poet as Sociopath, Drawing, Art is not Meant to be Touched, the Beaten Path, a New Pen, Need to Know Basis (reduced edition and extended edition), the "need to know" 2015 literary date book, one Solitary Word, What Must Be Done, Infamous in our Prime, Anis: Nine on Understanding of her Art, the Electronic Window, Changing Women, the Swam Road, the Significance of the Frontier, The Sweetswaters Unapologetic, Harvest of Gems, the Little Monk, Death in Midago, Moments Mori, in the Palace of Creation, R.I.P., Bob the Bumble Bee, Remnants and Shadows, I Saw This, He Dives, Thromes at Tea, Crashing Down Nineteenth, Blue Collar Ballet, nopen, In Your Heart the African's Teardrop of God, the Adventurers of the Key to Believing Bear, Anis: Nin on Understanding of her Art (second printing), *Dodard Kluter / Charlie Newman, 12 Times 12 Equals Gross, a Marble Nude Paulina Barchese with a Marble Apple in her Marble Hand, Challenge of Night and Day and Chicago Poems, Lighten Up, Not Far from Here, Watershed, You Have Finally Won, Avenue C, Suburban Rhythms, Downs Syndrome, the Dark Side of Love, The pill is a man's best friend, Angel's Syllable is Good Boss of Devil's Spine, Poems and Stories from the Blue Collar Book of the Dead, Cat People, Death of an Angel, Ghost, Silence: A Curmudgeon's View, Ghost Dancers Leaping from a Tome, the 4-D Window, Open Wounds, Anime Junkie, Interscience, Gunther, Cats, Scream Cloud Island, When the World was Black and White, a Petal Under Pavement, The Holy Sea of CEE, Book 15 "Thailand to Volcanoes, Lost in an Echo, I Was Charles Bronson's Secret Hostage, Erasable Bond, Royal Don's Death Scene "His of Them, Understood, Alaskan Shotgun, Champagne - Hot Water, How a Buller Behaves, the Thing in the Lounge at WagonWheel (I Came in Avatica), Postcards from Exile, the Five Steps of Mochel, Step in Formation, Shadowing Other Footprints, the Girl Next Door and Other Poems, Major Arcano**

Compact Discs: *Man's Favorite Vice* the demo tapes, *Kaypers the Tied* (MP3 inclusive), *Woods and Flowers* the beauty & the desolation, *The Second Aging* Something is Sweeting, *The Second Aging* Live in Alaska, *Peltus & Kaypers Live* in Cafe Aloha, *Painless Orchestra* Rough Mixes, *Kaypers Seeing Things Differently, SD/SD Tick Tock, Kaypers Change Rearrange, Order From Chaos* The Entropy Project, *Kaypers Six One One, Kaypers Stop, Kaypers Masterful Performances mp3 CD*, *Kaypers Death Comes in Threes, Kaypers Changing Gears, Kaypers Dreams, Kaypers How Do I Get There?, Kaypers Content+Conflict+Control, the DMJ Art Connection* the DMJ Art Connection, *Kaypers Questions in a World Without Answers, Kaypers SIN, Kaypers WZRD Radio* (2 CD set), *Man's Favorite Vice* and *The Second Aging* These Treasures, *assorted artist* String Theory, Oh (audio CD), *Life At The Cafe* (3 CD set), *the DMJ Art Connection Indian Flux, the DMJ Art Connection* Most Depressive or Something, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #1, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #2, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #3, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #4, *Chaotic Radio* Chaotic Radio Week #5, *Chaotic Radio* the Chaotic Collection Collection #01-05 (5 CD set) etc. (audio CD, 2 CD set), *Chaotic Elements* (2 CD set), *Class in Motion* (3 CD set), *SD/SD Searching to a Hall (EP)*, *PBEK*, *You're the Price of Day (EP)*, *Kiki, Jake and Haystack* An American Parrot, *Kaypers/He Beated/Hill/Red/Bar/The Japanese Parrots* Free Fusion (4 CD set), *podcast* the Evolution of Performance Art (13 CD set), *Kaypers Live* (14 CD set), *the DMJ Art Connection* the Things They Did to You (2 CD set), *Kaypers Seeing & Psychiatric* (3 CD set), *Kaypers St. Paul's* (3 CD set), *Kaypers the 2009 Poetry Game Show* (3 CD set), *Kaypers and the Return of South Africa Burn* Through Me (2 CD set), *Kaypers "40"*, *Kaypers Sexism and Other Stories, Kaypers the Stories of Women* (amazon.com release), *Kaypers "Dobro Vecer"* (4 CD set) *Kaypers "Hmmm"* (4 CD set) *Kaypers "Tattoo in All Out"*, *Kaypers "What We Had in Life"* (CD single), *Kaypers "Made Any Difference"* (CD single), *Kaypers "hardwork"* "across the Pond" (3 CD set).