

Lost souls

Generation Xers lost amid society's currents

The nineties are six years old, and the decade doesn't have a clue what its identity is.

Lollapalooza, Woodstock '94, rock 'n' roll that sounds like old Poison albums, and no certain clothing trends. It's funny, after years of methodical ins and outs, society has finally lost its mind.

Rock 'n' Roll: modern rock, alternative rock, punk rock, indie rock, country rock, adult rock, classic rock. What the hell, when did we start labeling rock with an adjective?

Everything and everyone has a label, from Pearl Jam to Generation X, our society has created a beast. It's like a Three's Company episode — the same scenario with a slightly different plot.

This decade is a misunderstood Jack Tripper with only one place to go, the year 2000.

It's quite comical; I can walk around campus and see any kind of person. The hippie, the yuppie, the intellectual, the druggie, the greaser — It's like a time warp; who fits in?

The cool thing is that we all fit in; anyone can get away with wearing whatever they want, and why not, it's the end of the century.

But the irony of this decade is that we have to carefully watch every word that comes out of our mouth. Politically Correct — I would rather have a leather mask with a gag ball attached to my face than follow that bogus term.

Our society has become so serious that we're all going to look like Alfred Hitchcock and talk like Katherine Hepburn if we don't stop the insanity.

Yes, I'm a hypocrite, for I have sinned. I have been serious. But I've found it's simply not worth it — being politically correct is boring.

When did we all lose our ability to agree, disagree, and make up?



Bob Ray

"Our society has become so serious that we're all going to look like Alfred Hitchcock and talk like Katherine Hepburn if we don't stop the insanity."

It seems as if nothing makes sense anymore; people don't know whether they're coming or going. Should I be a hippie or join a radical politically correct movement?

Maybe our problem is that more than 50 percent of our parents are divorced. It's logical; many of us have had very hard childhoods because of our parents.

Could it be the divorce rate that has LABELED us Generation X? Maybe the wild seventies and the silk tie eighties have confused us? Our generation has been thrown into this baby boomer society and been expected to succeed.

I could have a 3.9 GPA, be student body president of UNL, do volunteer work with retarded children, work part time at Bryan Memorial Hospital and still not get into medical school. I'm either underqualified or overqualified.

Would someone tell me who's setting these standards?

It sucks that so many of us graduate and have no idea what career we want to pursue. Maybe if employers would give us some motivational credit, we would have the desire to get out there and kick some ass.

I wish some of the egotistical, corporate big-wigs would clear their heads and realize that a master's degree isn't the key to a successful business.

But no, for almost all of our lives the teachers have been telling us how rough and tough it is out there in the REAL WORLD and how we better go to college. Well here we are, and it better pay off.

We are a generation with a lost identity. Lost because I don't think we've found it yet.

This decade appears to be searching as well. The nineties will be remembered for the birth of the information superhighway, the O.J. Simpson trial and the Oklahoma City bombing. But probably the saddest thing will be that no one will look back and laugh.

So far, the nineties are not humorous. People laugh when they talk about the disco in the seventies, and the crazy eighties that produced so many funny 'B' movies.

America is confused — this country is three hundred years old and having a mid-life crisis.

I'm concerned about the future, everything from social security running out to this politically correct liberal movement that has intoxicated our generation and the rest of the country.

The nineties is going through puberty — I can only hope that by 2000 its voice changes.

Ray is a senior broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Even Swedes need some ethnic jokes

As any sensitive person knows, especially those of the modern liberal persuasion, ethnic jokes are considered socially offensive.

So I was appalled by an e-mail letter from a man who actually asked me to tell an ethnic joke in my column.

He said: "Having read you over the years in three Chicago newspapers, I have noted that you manage to upset just about every ethnic and racial group at one time or another."

"However, I can't remember you ever saying anything infuriating about Swedes or any other Scandinavians. In fact, I don't remember ever hearing a Swedish joke in my entire life."

"Because I am of Swedish ancestry, I feel left out and a little hurt at being ignored. So does my wife, who has a little Norwegian in her background."

"We lead quiet lives, except when the holiday season requires that we drink hot glogg, and we would appreciate having you write something that would get our normally tepid Scandinavian blood boiling with rage."

"With your knowledge of ethnic matters and your gift for giving offense, even when it is not intended, I am sure that you have a Scandinavian joke tucked away. If so, please share it so we, too, can feel part of the insulted mainstream of American life."

Well, that is what I call a lot of gall. And selfishness, too.

Just to satisfy his warped need to feel insulted, he expects me to expose myself to the anger of one of the largest and oldest ethnic groups in the Chicago area.

That's all I need these days — thousands of blue-eyed, blond people named Sven and Ole and Inge gathering outside my office, wearing Viking helmets, flinging smoked herrings and boiled potatoes at my window, and chanting: "Fire dee boom."

On the other hand, there is something in what the man says about his feeling left out of the "insulted mainstream" of American life.

His complaint is that he has nothing to complain about. In that sense, he is a victim because he is being made to feel dull.

If I ignore his plea for help, I will be shirking my journalistic duty to try to help society's victims.

So as much as I abhor ethnic humor and ethnic jokes in any shape or form, just this once I will stifle my nausea and fulfill this man's request.

At this point, I will understand if sensitive readers choose to flee to another part of this paper where they can find something more uplifting.

In fact, I encourage it, because I want to offend as few people as possible, which always has been my policy.

Having said that, I will now grit my teeth and get to this



Mike Royko

"I will understand if sensitive readers choose to flee to another part of this paper where they can find something more uplifting."

distasteful business.

One day this Swedish guy walks into a dingy little storefront travel agency, holds up a page out of a newspaper, and says: "You say in this ad that you have a vooonderful luxury cruise for only \$69.95. I want to go on this vooonderful luxury cruise."

The guy behind the counter says: "Sure, do you have the \$69.95 in cash?"

"I sure do," says the Swede, plunking the money on the counter.

At that point, two big thugs leap out of a closet, whack the Swede on the head, drag his unconscious body out the back door, stuff him in a barrel and drop the barrel into a river that flows past.

A few moments later, a Norwegian guy walks into the same dingy storefront travel agency, holds up the newspaper and says: "I want to go on this \$69.95 vooonderful luxury cruise."

The guy behind the counter says: "Sure, you got the fare in cash?"

"You betcha," says the Norwegian, slapping the money on the counter.

Again, the two big thugs leap out, pound him on the head, drag his limp form out the back door, shove him in a barrel and drop it in the river.

After a while, the Swede and the Norwegian regain consciousness, and they find that their barrels are bobbing along together.

The Norwegian says: "Good afternoon. Tell me, do you happen to know if they serve dinner on this cruise?"

The Swede shakes his head and says: "No, I don't think so. They didn't last year."

There, the foul deed is done and I really feel dirty. So I must go and bathe before someone asks me to tell the really disgusting one about the Italian general and the German field marshal.

(C) 1996 by The Chicago Tribune

Losing focus

Technology changes humans and the world

My bedtime reading for some time now has been "The Portable Scatalog," a collection of excerpts from a much older book with a much longer title: "Scatalogic Rites of All Nations: A Dissertation upon the Employment of Excrementitious Remedial Agents in Religion, Therapeutics, Divination, Witchcraft, Love-Philters, etc., in all Parts of the Globe."

Actually, it's a longer title than that, but I got bored typing it all in.

As you might guess, it's about sh*t, both human and animal, taken in a variety of ways — including internally — to effect cures, cast spells and worship the gods.

Obviously its author, one John G. Bourke, writing at the turn of the century, was heavily influenced by Frazer's "The Golden Bough"; his "Scatalog" was a voluminous compendium of all things excremental, with chapters like "Human Excrement Used in Food," "Latrines," and "The Ordure of the Grand Lama of Thibet."

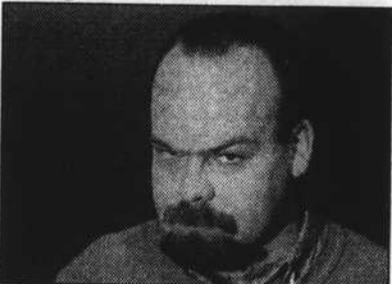
It was a closet classic in its day, and the 1913 German translation bore a foreword by no less a personage than Sigmund Freud.

So it's a shame, really, that it appears now, in a version much edited by Louis P. Kaplan, as a sort of joke — toilet-tank library material with a condescending introduction full of puns and a strong sense that there is something to smirk at in this fascinating work of, if not scholarship, immense research.

Don't get me wrong, I'm glad to have even this pared-down version of the original — and you can bet I'll keep an eye peeled for the whole volume at book fairs and auctions for years to come.

Because this little book has changed my mind.

Reading it, I have been struck repeatedly with the difference



Mark Baldrige

"... this little book has changed my mind."

between the world it documents and the world we now inhabit. What has changed?

Recipes handed down from generation to generation for the preparation of sh*t sausages in the treatment of epilepsy, anecdotes about wealthy Parisians with a taste for the excrement of small children (to be devoured with a golden spoon) and the proper rites of the Roman goddess of latrines — all have been lost in so few generations.

I blame technology. No longer content with living in the slow, past-bound present, we have fled into a technological future of our own devising, cut free from the past, from the limits of history, of our own biology.

We are now at the point where the future is consumed at a faster rate than it can be generated by even the most inventive science fiction writers. We crave new paradigms into which to project our selves, routes through death into a sustained hyperreal fiction.

And it all started with the invention of the Swiss Army Knife.

The Swiss Army Knife was developed by Karl Elsner in,

coincidentally, the same year as the publication of the original "Scatalog," 1891. It was a year that marked the advent of cyber culture.

Far more than just another tool, the Swiss Army Knife was a symbol of ourselves. It was a tool with unfulfillable desires.

The largest of the Swiss Army Knives weighed more than seven ounces and had 29 attachments — including a magnifying lens, a ballpoint pen and a leather stitching needle.

It could see, write and, like Adam and Eve, clothe itself in the skins of animals.

It was like ourselves, and so created a new possibility. After aeons of devising tools, human beings could finally identify themselves with a tool, become their tools, and vanish, once and for all, into technology.

The Swiss Army, not known for aggression, had succeeded in conquering the world.

Now, a lot of energy goes into debunking machines these days — not surprisingly. We are obsessed with technologies, and it's only natural they should become the focus of all of our negative feelings as well as our hopes and dreams.

But this column is not intended as an attack.

The shift of projection toward devices of our own construction is a torture test of human nature. There is very little chance we will come out of this age knowing less about ourselves than we knew at the end of the last century, going into it.

Even if that knowledge is purchased as the result of irreversible transformations in that nature, the price of technology is not too high.

I sing the body electric.

Baldrige is a senior English major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

