

## Chapter 31: Culture and Taste

Tell me what you like, and I'll tell you what you are.

John Ruskin, *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866)

This chapter started out to be about the distinction between the two cultures – the high culture and the low or “popular” culture, and my attitudes about them – my sentimental allegiance to the high culture and discredibly arrogant disdain for the low. But as I prepared my outline for the first draft, I found that approach unviable for two reasons. First, there is no clear line between the two cultures, and there are uncountably many exchanges between them. For example jazz and film, which are at least in part now elements of the high culture, were once part of the low culture and scorned by high-culture types. And second, as I analyzed my actual tastes, as opposed to my theoretical ones, I found them very mixed. There's a lot in the high culture I don't have much interest in, and lots in the low culture I like a lot.

So I abandoned the two cultures idea as a structure for this chapter, and focused instead on what my tastes really are. Here's what I like, and here's what I don't like, culturally speaking. A lot of these preferences, it turns out, are based on deep experience, and a lot on ignorance and prejudice. I'm not justifying anything – I'm only giving a profile of my tastes to fill out this book's portrait of who I am.

Nevertheless, I identify with the high culture, starting with Homer and still today very distinct from the pop culture of Elton John and Beyoncé and 50 Cent.<sup>1</sup> This just means I'm a snob, right? Do I identify with the high culture as a way of being an insider? Actually I think it is the other way around – because I'm an insider, I identify with the high culture. It is a little like the British game of U and Non-U.<sup>2</sup> I don't feel excluded from the high culture, I feel at home with it, but I feel the pop culture excludes *me*, which is OK with me as I am alienated from it, as it intends me to be, and I don't want to be included.

So which one is the mainstream culture? The pop culture has its origins in the same continuity as the high culture has, and has been going on just as long, and with a wider audience. And yet it is low, and the high is higher. Why do I say that? It seems obvious to me, but why? Only because of how I was acculturated and acclimatized and conditioned? Or is there really a difference of kind between Homer and Elton John?

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<sup>1</sup> Singers of songs, as Tony Curtis put it in *Spartacus* (1960). 50 Cent (Curtis James Jackson III) is a rapper of raps.

<sup>2</sup> U standing for *Upper Class*.

Nowadays both are taught in universities. Does any of this make sense, or am I just raving? Anthony Burgess is very good on this, in books like *Clockwork Orange*, 1985, and *M/F* – him on one side, the yobs on the other. Fortunately I don't have to get to the bottom of this perhaps insoluble question, nor as noted do I have to justify anything – all I have to do in this chapter is say what my tastes happen to be.

- As with so much else in this book, this may be tedious for my contemporaries. Go ahead, contemporaries, take five! Skip this chapter! Never mind, scholars of the 24th and 40th centuries, it is for you I am writing! *Everyone* in the 18th century didn't necessarily like drinking posset and reading Cowper and dancing the minuet! So here's what someone who paid a lot of attention to the elements of culture back there in the 20th and 21st centuries liked and disliked in the culture of his day.

In what follows you may have some difficulty with the antique cultural references. So hit the books, if there still are books – otherwise hit the disks or the data cloud or whatever you have out there.

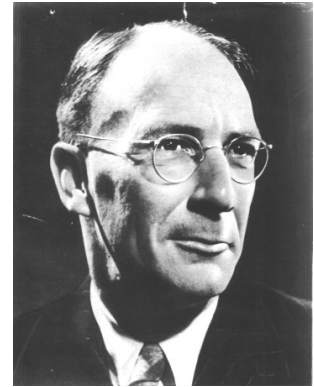
## **A. Books**

I start with books, almost reflexively, because books are so important to me. See Chapter 4. I read all sorts of books, including a lot of nonfiction (the Supplements will include a record of my reading over a typical 20+ year period, taken from my notebooks). I buy books on the Internet, in second-hand bookstores, and in thrift shops and garage sales. In new bookstores (where I have mostly but not completely stopped shopping since retiring in 2008), I usually head for the trade paperback section. I prefer paperbacks to hard-cover books because I always carry my current book around with me, and paperbacks are lighter to carry and easier to hold while reading in bed.

- Note for future historians: *mass paperbacks* are low culture titles like mysteries, science fiction, popular fiction, thrillers, westerns (in the old days – this genre has long been in decline), romance novels, fantasy novels, and the like. These still have the small format of the original paperbacks pioneered in the 1930s, and are usually perfect bound rather than sewn in signatures, printed on low quality paper, and cheaper than trade paperbacks. *Trade paperbacks* are larger, sturdier, and significantly more expensive – lots of non-fiction and even reference books as well as novels are now classified as trade paperbacks.

I like novels. Sometimes I read books of short stories – for example Louis Auchincloss, John Cheever, Damon Runyon, Rudyard Kipling and Somerset Maugham – but usually for me fiction means novels. When I find an author I really like I will read or at least start everything he has written – I sometimes make an exception and read his short story

collections too. There are dozens of 20th century English and American authors who are favorites of mine, whose entire *oeuvre* (or nearly so) I have read through. For example: James Baldwin, Anthony Burgess, Robertson Davies, Robert Graves, Ernest Hemingway, Carl Hiaasen, David Lodge, John O'Hara, Mary Renault, Philip Roth, Tom Sharpe, John Steinbeck, John Updike, Gore Vidal, Evelyn Waugh, P. G. Wodehouse, Tom (not Thomas) Wolfe, and the much under-appreciated C. S. Forester (right, one of the best writers ever). I have a whole bookcase full of books by writers whose books I read over and over. I am working my way systematically through lots of others – for example Martin Amis, James Gould Cozzens, R. K. Narayan and Irwin Shaw – and others of whom I have read little – for example I have finally, in my 60s, just begun reading Edith Wharton and Theodore Dreiser.



I scarcely ever read “popular” fiction. I raise my lip and sneer at authors like Danielle Steel and Stephen King. But this is snobbery rather than educated preference, as I haven't read a single thing by either author. There are a few mass paperback writers, like Carl Hiaasen, whose books I gobble up. But generally I don't read much new fiction, even by high culture writers. I am much more likely to read or even reread books by long-established authors. There are exceptions – for example Martin Amis and Philip Roth – whose newest books I snap up (although often from the library) when they appear. Once in a while I will read a science fiction novel, but generally I don't bother with them. The same is true of mysteries and spy stories and thrillers. But I love comic novels – for example, among authors mentioned, those of Martin Amis, Carl Hiaasen, David Lodge, Tom Sharpe, Evelyn Waugh, and P. G. Wodehouse.

I oscillate among fiction, history, and other non-fiction. I will read a novel or two, and then a work of history, and then a non-fiction book on some offbeat subject like rats or maps or dirt or how to collect antiques (even though I don't collect antiques myself), and then more novels. As noted I buy paperback books freely in garage sales and second-hand stores and library sales so as always to have a good selection on hand. If I think I might feel like reading a certain book someday, and it is a paperback and the price is right, I buy it for the shelf. It may be years before I feel like reading it, but it waits patiently for me, and when I feel like *just that book* it really hits the spot. Now that I am retired I am beginning to work my way through the inventory.

I read history fairly systematically, almost like a collector, deliberately filling in empty spaces in my historical understanding. I am especially fond of historical novels – not bodice-rippers but good, solidly researched evocations of another time, like those of Alfred Duggan, Robert Graves, Zoë Oldenburg, Mary Renault, George Shipway, Gore Vidal, Mika Waltari, Rex Warner, and many others. I learn a lot from them.

I am quick to abandon a book. If it bores me, I toss it aside – there are thousands more where that one came from. Henry James, for example – some people think he’s the cat’s meow, but he bores me, and so I don’t feel a need to slog my way through his books just to be marginally more educated. Virginia Woolf, there’s another one – I couldn’t finish *To the Lighthouse*, even though I recognized how well written it was. I dreaded picking it up again, so why bother doing it? Jane Austen, Samuel Beckett (speaking of his novels here), D. H. Lawrence – lots of people love these writers, but I don’t. No blame – different strokes for different folks! All five of these writers were assigned reading in college, but I’m done with college now, and I don’t have to read them any more.

- I seize this opportunity (who’s going to stop me?) to complain about a constant irritant in scholarly writing of all kinds – endnotes. When the note references require skipping to the end of the chapter, or more likely to the end of the book, the reader either has to skip them or interrupt his concentration. If he does look, half the time there is only a citation, not a substantive comment. I now go through chapters in advance with a yellow highlighter, noting the footnotes that have substantive text so I’ll know which ones to check, and put a tape flag on the page at the back where the current notes are. But this is still needlessly cumbersome. The solution is to continue to put citations into numbered endnotes, out of the way at the back, but put substantive footnotes at the bottom of the page as I have done in this memoir, but marked with a symbol like an asterisk or dagger in the old style, rather than a number. The endnote convention arose when books were set by hand and repositioning footnotes was a complex task – now with modern computer typesetting, it is done automatically (as it is in this manuscript) and there is no need to make endnotes out of all of them. Harrumph.

## **B. Theatre**

I have gone to the theatre on a regular basis ever since my early teens. I usually see something every Friday when I’m home in San Francisco, and several times a week when I’m in New York or London. Every week in San Francisco I look at the listings in the free weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, which has good capsule summaries, and choose something to see. I also buy tickets on the Internet, mostly from a free service called Gold Star, which papers the house at local events by inviting members by e-mail to buy tickets at half price. I make it a point to call the box office and get a front-row center seat (or come early if it’s general admission) – I fall asleep if I’m in the balcony or back row, sitting in the dark peering at a distant island of light.

I like serious plays, and historical plays, and political plays, and comedies, and monologues. I usually skip new musicals, although I like the older ones, but I *really* like broad British farces. I try to see any production of a play by “classic” authors like Arthur Miller, Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and others, and plays by outstanding



modern playwrights like Edward Albee, David Hare, Tony Kushner (left), David Mamet, Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard.

My practice in this differs from what it is with novels. I make a point of reading the reviews, even of shows in New York, and of seeing new plays either in New York or on tour. I don't do that with new novels. I will usually go to see Shakespeare if it is offered – I don't know how many productions of *Romeo and Juliet* I have seen by now. I go not only to mainstream theatres but to odd venues and amateur companies and new-work development spaces like The Marsh and Project Artaud, and even school plays – not long ago I saw a terrific production of

*Fiddler on the Roof* at the School of the Arts, and not long before that a good production of *West Side Story* and another of Pinter's *Betrayal* at San Francisco State University. Since retirement I have stopped going to the most expensive theatres like those on Broadway in New York, or the Geary and Curran in San Francisco – there's still plenty to see without paying \$100 for a ticket.

I'm always willing to take a chance on something new or offbeat, or a monologue, or a new approach to a well-known play. As with books, I will abandon a play without hesitation if I am bored. I walk out of lots of plays – when you buy a ticket you run the risk that it will be a dud, and if it is why not leave? But with plays I have more tolerance for substandard elements if there are some good things. I will put up with a bad script if there's a really good performance; I will put up with bad performances if the script is good, or if the subject is especially interesting. If even *one* thing about a play is *really* good, I count the evening a success. Maybe this is because a play is over in two hours, but a book can last a lot longer and I have to do more of the work myself.

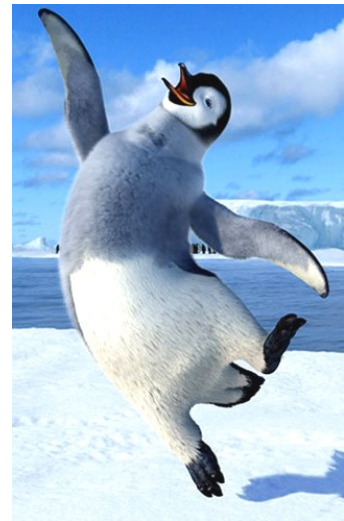
I tend to skip gloomy depressing plays about how someone coped with the death of her grandmother. I have seen enough gay coming-out pieces to last me a good long time. I usually skip spoofs and improvisational revues because they so rarely come off, and when they don't come off they can be excruciating. When I think something might be excruciating I still sit in the front row, but on the aisle nearest the exit so I can make a run for it without insulting the actors.

### C. Film

A lot of what I have said about theatre holds true for film also. I read the reviews and try to see every new movie that interests me (although fewer new movies interest me these days than used to). I don't believe in waiting for the video – there is no substitute for seeing a movie in a movie theatre, in the dark, in a crowd, without distractions, in full size and original aspect ratio. I am a senior citizen now and get a discount on my ticket,

and I don't mind leaving if I'm bored. But as with a play, I will stay if *something* in the film is really good. *Amazing Grace*, for example, which I saw just before writing the first draft of this chapter, is a biopic about William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the English anti-slavery crusader. The script was earnest but flat as a pancake; the characters (except for a few supporting roles) were two-dimensional and uninvolved. But the costumes and production design were stunningly good – the scenes of Parliament circa 1800 could have been drawn by Hogarth.<sup>3</sup> They gave me a fresh look into the time and place – and that was enough to keep me in my seat. Likewise *Agora*, pedestrian in every other respect, was terrific as a recreation of 4th century Alexandria.

I see a lot of independent films with unusual or foreign settings, and lots of documentaries. I avoid action films with gunfights and car chases, and even worthy films like *Letters from Iwo Jima* if there's lots of violence. Who needs it? Films full of sorrow or cruelty like *Slumdog Millionaire* I skip also – who needs that either? I don't object to people making these films, but I don't have to see them. I don't like boy-meets-girl romantic comedies and don't see many of them, but I see almost every major animated feature and usually see them at least twice (the first time for the overall experience, and the second time to watch for details). I thought *Happy Feet* (right, about a dancing penguin) was one of the best films in a long time; I saw *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* four times in the first two weeks after it opened. Although I like independent films, I give Hollywood a chance too – a lot depends on the star, or the premise, or the setting, or even the director, and a very lot depends on my impressions from the trailer and the reviews. I used to read the reviews in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker* and the *Washington Post*, as well as the *San Francisco Chronicle*, to get different takes on new films, but I do that less than I used to.<sup>4</sup> I see every film Woody Allen makes, even though most of them aren't very good any more.



I won't see a horror film under any circumstances, or a Christmas film, or a film focusing on cute children or animals or tender stories of young love or family ties. You couldn't pay me to attend. Well, yes you could, but it would have to be quite a lot. I can tell from the trailer if a film is trying to be heartwarming – I won't submit to it. And here's where the high culture/low culture thing breaks down completely – I can't stand most foreign

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<sup>3</sup> Except he died in 1764. But never mind – this is a metaphor, or maybe a simile.

<sup>4</sup> I have cancelled *The New Yorker* and stopped the daily Internet summary from the *Washington Post*, because I didn't have time to read them and they accumulated in little puddles of reproach.

language films. Every so often I'll go to a French or German or Italian film, just to see if I still feel that way, and I nearly always do. I tried again not long ago – I walked out of *Jules et Jim*, and *La Strada*, and *The Rules of the Game* (all at the Castro Theatre) – three of the most famous and highly regarded European films of all time. All three bored me catatonic. I just don't go foreign films anymore – films made anywhere in English don't count as foreign for this purpose.

There are a few films I'll see as often as I can, on television or wherever. For example: *Moonstruck* (maybe the most perfect film ever made), *Shakespeare in Love*, *The Lion in Winter*, *Manhattan*, *Stardust Memories*, and *Truly, Madly, Deeply*. I love *Casablanca* and *The Maltese Falcon*, too, and *Lawrence of Arabia*, and *Citizen Kane*, but I may have seen them too many times by now – the same with *A Night at the Opera*. I am watching more classic films now that I subscribe to Netflix.<sup>5</sup>

#### **D. Music**

I know what I like: classical (meaning a tradition rather than a specific period), jazz, “modern classical” (meaning recent music in the tradition begun by Stravinsky, Schoenberg and others), and a few other specialized forms like ragtime, klezmer, barbershop, Jewish liturgical music, and North Indian raga.

I taught myself about classical music from FM radio when I was a teenager (see Chapter 9). The Music Humanities course at Columbia explained the history of western music (see Chapter 11.B). When I was living on Cape Cod I learned a lot more about classical music for my own FM radio show (see Chapter 26.A). Favorites include: Bach, Bartók, Beethoven, Boccherini, Brahms, Chopin, Elgar, Haydn, Hindemith, Joplin, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Vivaldi, and lots of others. No orchestral music (too many voices); no organ; no singers (except for operatic arias, but not the whole opera). I especially love string quartets, sonatas for one principal solo instrument, and anything for the cello or saxophone.

But when I left Cape Cod in 1988 and didn't have the show anymore, I stopped listening to music. I kept all those hundreds of carefully collected records for 21 years but never

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<sup>5</sup> Future historians: Netflix is a computer-based service. You go on their website and pick what you like, which goes into a queue. They send you by mail one or two films on DVD disk from the top of your queue (you can also see some of them at once on the computer), and when you're done you send them back in their pre-paid envelope and they send you the next one in your queue. It is very inexpensive, very fast, and remarkably convenient, and unlike video rental stores there is no deadline for returning anything.

played them; finally I sold them so they would not sit there, a constant reproach, occupying space. I can't listen to music while doing something else, and I am usually doing something else like reading or working or watching the news. So for more than 20 years now I have listened to music hardly at all, and the truth is that although I love it when I hear it, I don't much miss not hearing it. Why is this? I don't know, but there it is.

I learned quite a lot about Indian classical music while doing my radio show, and I like it a lot and have a pretty good understanding of what I'm listening to, and my hands and feet tap along with the *tabla*. It is great stuff, and if I listened to any music nowadays I would certainly listen to that.



I liked jazz but didn't know much about it. But after watching Ken Burns' television series *Jazz*, I decided to learn more about it in a systematic way. I listened to a lot of it and bought CDs of the artists I liked the most or wanted to learn more about. I love the saxophone the way I love the cello, so these included a lot of saxophonists.<sup>6</sup> And yet, after exploring these musicians and enjoying their music and learning a lot and learning how much more there was to learn, and thoroughly digging the sound (especially the 20s and 30s sound), somehow when I finished the project I went back to silence. Go figure.

Even when I listened to music I never (except for the summer of 1958) listened to contemporary popular music, including rock and roll in the 1960s. The nostalgia people of my generation feel for the music they grew up with passes me right by – I never heard that stuff the first time around. I loathe the sound of rap music and grit my teeth when a car pulls up next to me vibrating with it. I am definitely an alien in Hip Hop Nation. I still don't care for rock and roll or country music, but Elvis Presley and Willie Nelson and Hank Williams and Patsy Cline are exceptions, and the Beatles of course. Wayne Newton yuk; Bruce Springsteen yuk; Bob Dylan tripleyuk! And sensitive singer-songwriters with acoustic guitars – give me a break! But Cole Porter and Rodgers & Hart and Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin and Hoagy Carmichael – well, that's different.

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<sup>6</sup> I reproduce as Document 27A-2 the list I made at the time of jazz musicians I wanted to hear more of. Pictured: Billie Holiday and Lester Young.



- A friend told me she had sung a Bob Dylan song somewhere. I replied (in a 2002 e-mail): I was with you until you mentioned the name of Bob Dylan. As with “Julie Andrews” in *Bedazzled*, the very name of Bob Dylan is enough to shatter any vision.<sup>7</sup> He of the whiny snarl, the snarly whine, the not-quite-human yawping and the harmonies like a rasp on tin, the melodic touch of a rusty drill press. Absolutely the very worst ever to be called an artist in any civilization since the world began. I’d rather hear Nero. Was there not enough Cole Porter to sing, that you had to sing Bob Dylan? (Yes, I know this is a minority view.)

I begin to see, writing this, that the musical cut-off point for me was roughly World War II, except for postwar Broadway musicals my parents were fond of, and “modern classical” music which is really continuous with the work of pre-war pioneers (as is country music). This is odd as I wasn’t even born until the war was almost over. Young people are supposed to reject the music of their parents’ generation and use that of their own as a marker of cultural identity. I begin to see that I didn’t reject it, but used it instead as a marker of cultural identity in *opposition* to that of my own generation, which is also odd as I followed my generation into so much else, like drugs and hippitude.

Every so often I will go to a concert of modern experimental music, for example by Amy X. Neuberg (voice on electronic loops) or one of Alan Tower’s evenings of performances on new instruments, or the Edmund Welles bass clarinet quartet. Why I do that but rarely go to a jazz club or to hear a string quartet (I do go occasionally) is a mystery to me, but one I don’t feel especially motivated to solve. I go to master classes at the Conservatory of Music every so often, and not long ago I went to the Jewish Community Center for a full day of klezmer master classes. I learn more from master classes than I do from actual performances.

I have been to the ballet once or twice, and go to modern dance programs and really enjoy them. But I have not made a habit of following dance. There’s just so much time and attention – something has to give! Opera likewise – I have seen a few, and even liked them (*La Bohème*), but generally I let this cup pass from me. I emphasize that this is not a judgment on *what is good*, only an accounting of *what I like*.

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<sup>7</sup> In the 1967 film *Bedazzled*, the Devil (Peter Cook) promises the hero (Dudley Moore) to set up situations to his specifications, in aid of his lust for a particular woman. Of course Moore always leaves a loophole for Cook to turn the situation against him. When he wants to end a hopeless situation and come back to where he started, Moore has to say “Julie Andrews.”

## E. Broadcasting

On television I watch news, documentaries, and C-SPAN (public affairs programming and panel discussions), and the occasional movie. I like Charlie Rose's midnight talk show and Jim Lehrer's *News Hour* on PBS (the public broadcast channel). Just as I sneer at Stephen King without reading him, I sneer at reality programming and situation comedies without watching them. It had to be explained to me what *Baywatch* was, and now I have forgotten. I don't get the nostalgia for *Gunsmoke* or *Leave It to Beaver* – I didn't watch those shows when they were new. (For what I did watch back then, see Chapter 3B.7.)

But the dark secret is that I like some of the items in the categories I sneer at. For example, I like to watch *Cops* (a show on CourtTV which follows real police officers on their adventures), and sometimes David Letterman (a late-night talk show), and I was devoted to *The West Wing* (a comedy/dramatic hybrid about the White House). I like reruns of *The Sopranos* (a prize-winning fictional series about the New Jersey Mafia – I didn't see it the first time around because it was on HBO).<sup>8</sup> And I will occasionally spend a whole evening with the Discovery Channel, watching shows like *Mythbusters* and *Naked Science* and *Dirty Jobs* and *How It's Made* and other documentary and history shows.<sup>9</sup> I watch the Military and History Channels too. Just yesterday I watched a History Channel documentary about Boadicea. Now I know more than I did before, which means that hour wasn't quite wasted after all, right?

- I don't care about sports, but do very occasionally watch a baseball or even a football game on TV – usually just for the fun of the game, without much interest in who wins.

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<sup>8</sup> Home Box Office, a premium subscription service on cable and satellite television. I don't subscribe to it, despite its superior programming, because I don't want to be drawn into watching more television.

<sup>9</sup> All these shows have Wikipedia articles about them. *Mythbusters* takes myths and legends about the physical world (for example: if someone shoots at you while you're in the water, you will be safe if you dive a foot or so beneath the surface) and subjects them to scientific testing. *How It's Made* documents manufacturing processes. In *Dirty Jobs* people with jobs like roadkill collector, turkey sexer, elevator shaft cleaner, bloodworm harvester and high-rise window washer lead host Mike Rowe through trying to do it himself. *Dirty Jobs* accomplishes brilliantly what I tried to do in my own television show (see Chapter 26.B), but didn't have the budget, equipment, staff, experience or skill to achieve. Scrapping out the inside of a cement mixer! I wish I'd thought of that one.

My radio tastes at home are pretty much limited to KQED-FM, my local public radio station. I listen to *Prairie Home Companion* (a comedy and variety show written and produced by Garrison Keillor, right), *Car Talk* (a very funny car repair program with the jovial Magliozzi Brothers), and Ira Glass' *This American Life* (a collection of radio pieces on a given topic, different each week). These are all on on Saturday, so Saturday is my radio pig-out day, although the shows are repeated at other times. I am so devoted to these shows that I even send a modest automatic monthly contribution to KQED. I have a radio receiver in a headset and usually listen to these shows through that, walking around doing things while the show is on.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes I also listen to Terry Gross' *Fresh Air* interview show, or to Jim Lehrer's *TV News Hour*, which comes on radio at 3 PM when it goes out live from the East Coast.



I don't have a radio in my car, so I don't listen to the radio casually or at other times except when I'm traveling in a rented car. Then I like to listen to radio preachers and Mexican popular songs, as well as the normal run of non-profit (public and college) public affairs, jazz and classical music shows.

## F. Newspapers

There are only three real newspapers in the United States: The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times* is fading fast as newspapers cut back to almost nothing under competitive pressure from the Internet. Maybe four if you count the *Wall Street Journal* – the *Christian Science Monitor* has just gone digital and stopped their daily edition. In theory I get the *New York Times* delivered in hard copy every day but Sunday, but it is often suspended because I don't have time to read it.

I do read the *San Francisco Chronicle* (also maybe about to fail) every day, mainly for the comics and the local news and movie reviews, and a few local columnists. I skip the sports section but look over the business section. But a lot of the daily paper is old news by the time I get it in the morning – I have already seen the news on the Internet.

**San Francisco Chronicle**

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<sup>10</sup> If I can do that, why can't I listen to music on an iPod? Dunno. Maybe I will try it.

My main source for keeping up-to-the-minute now is Google News, which provides a constantly changing array of stories from thousands of sources. I check it two or three times a day when I'm home. And I look at Times Reader every day – it gives me the full-length content of the daily *New York Times* in electronic form (but only because I subscribe to the print edition, which I hardly ever read any more). I used to read the *Washington Post* and the London *Telegraph* every day on line, and usually *Ha'aretz* too for news from Israel, and the Associated Press newswire, and a lot of political newsletters from the Internet (especially during the riveting election of 2008), but I have cut back on that now that the election is over.

I follow politics, and world and national events, like a serious fan of a spectator sport. But I do not care about which starlet is having whose love child, or celebrity trials or murders or plane crashes. I do make exceptions, though, such as for the bizarre contest over the body of Anna Nicole Smith.<sup>11</sup> On the road, and abroad unless I can find a *Herald Tribune*, I often skip the news entirely and hardly miss it. *USA Today* is the journal of the low culture, and I despise it so much I won't even read it when it is given to me free in a hotel, or where it is the only national newspaper available in some remote area.

I used to get three legal news services daily – Cal Law (based largely on the California legal press), Findlaw (national legal stories) and IP360 (intellectual property legal news). When I retired I dropped the last two, but still get Cal Law (now the electronic *Recorder*). I used to get Salon and Huffington Post by daily e-mail, too, but I dropped the Huffington Post and scan Salon mostly for comics and Garrison Keillor's column. Still, there isn't much that happens that I'm interested in that I don't hear about pretty quickly.

If something is going on that I do care about, I can quickly dial up to immersion levels with a Google news search, or by going to the website of a local newspaper (for example *Tonga Matangi* when there was a constitutional crisis in Tonga I wanted to follow). In my youth I read a lot of magazines, but I don't bother with them anymore – *The New Yorker* and *Private Eye* (a British satirical magazine) were the last to go. I liked them but ended up not reading them, and copies piled up. After I retired I tried *The New Yorker* again – still great, but they piled up again. Can't read everything just because it's great!<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Anna Nicole Smith (1967-2007) was a stripper who married an 89-year-old millionaire, and then litigated his will with his survivors, and died mysteriously of an overdose in the Bahamas, shortly after her 20-year-old son who was visiting her hospital room also died, and leaving a baby whose father was ... but why go on? See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna\\_Nicole\\_Smith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Nicole_Smith).

<sup>12</sup> I still get, and actually read, technical publications like *Flag Bulletin* and *American Philatelist* and *Journal of the Orders and Medals Society of America*.

## G. Painting

I started going to museums as a child – as discussed in my childhood chapters 3A and 3B, I lived on the same street as the Frick (free in those days), and less than a mile from the Metropolitan (also free), the Guggenheim, and the Whitney. As a teenager I was also a member of the Museum of Modern Art and spent a lot of time there too, and Madison Avenue with its galleries was a block from my house. By the time I got to college I had seen a lot of paintings, and although my eye was not well educated I knew the visual vocabulary. In college I had a terrific art history teacher, David Rosand (see Chapter 11.B), who explained how to look at paintings. Without that, knowing the vocabulary would not have been enough; but without the vocabulary and the experience of all those years of museum-going, Rosand's course would have been too much too quickly. The two together gave me an educated eye almost at once, and I have continued to learn and train my eye ever since.

So what do I like? I like the portraits of the high medieval period, and a lot of the painting of the Gothic period, and the painted pages in books like the Lindesfarne Gospel and the Book of Kells. Right now I have on my desk a reproduction from a 12th century *Life of St. Cuthbert*, showing the saint in a boat on a wave shaped like a mountain. Terrific!



I like Fra Angelico and Giotto and the Flemish masters like Rogier van der Weyden. I like the portraits of Cranach and Holbein and Pisanello and Bronzino and Titian and Rembrandt and Memling and Van Eyck. I like Botticelli (below left) a lot, and Gozzoli and Ghirlandaio and Carpaccio, and the drawings of Piranesi (which Rosand introduced me to). I really like Breughel (the Elder) and Vermeer. I like the English landscape



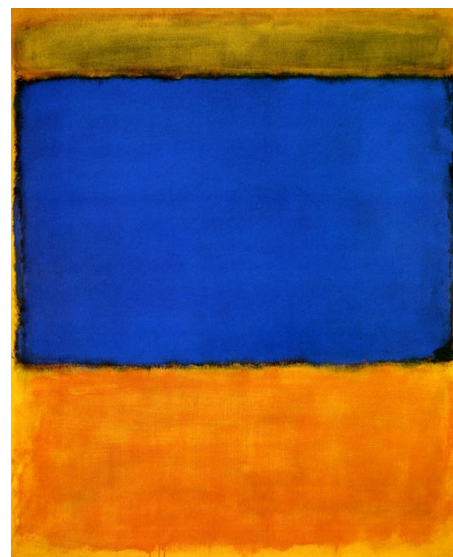
painters like Constable and especially Turner (right) and French ones like Corot. I like Velázquez and Goya and David and Ingres. I like Sargent and Whistler and





Eakins and Winslow Homer.

I like the academic art of the 19th century, for example Orientalists like Jean-Léon Gérôme (for an example see Document 4-3) and Neo-Classical painters like Lawrence Alma-Tadema and Symbolists like Elihu Vedder, and also like the Impressionists who rebelled against the Academy, especially Monet, Cézanne, Van Gogh and Degas. I like the Fauves, especially Vlaminck and Derain; I like Gauguin and Matisse. I like pre-Raphaelites such as Rossetti and Burne-Jones (below left) and William Holman Hunt, and Art Nouveau, and Art Deco. I like Chagall and Rousseau. I like jazzy modern (i.e., 20th century) painters like Joseph Stella (below center) and Georgia O'Keeffe and Marsden Hartley and Stuart Davis and Piet Mondrian. I like modern figurative painters like Edward Hopper and Wayne Thiebaud and Richard Diebenkorn. I like color field painters like Barnett Newman and Clifford Still and Mark Rothko (below right). And I have a few guilty pleasures: Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hart Benton, Rockwell Kent and Norman Rockwell. I like “naïve” or “primitive” artists, too – I see a lot of the same things in them I like so much in Romanesque painters, and in Breughel.<sup>13</sup>



And what don't I like? I don't like Christian religious art – all that torture and (later) the soppy rewards of *goyish* heaven are a real turnoff, even though it can be fun to identify the iconography. In European galleries like the Uffizi I go through the rooms as fast as I can, looking at the parquet floors and baroque ceilings but avoiding the horrible scenes of

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<sup>13</sup> The paintings illustrated are: Miniature from Durham *Life of St. Cuthbert* (late 12C); Botticelli's *Giuliano de' Medici* (1478-80); Turner's *Sunrise with Sea Monsters* (1845); Burne-Jones' *Angel Playing a Flageolet* (1878); Stella's *The Brooklyn Bridge: Variation on an Old Theme* (1939), and Rothko's *Untitled* (can't date this one).

crucifixion and martyrdom on the walls – I am only there at all to see Botticelli and Bronzino. This means I don't enjoy most of the paintings of great artists like Raphael. Gauzy scenes by Tiepolo or Bouguereau of *putti* looking down on us from fluffy clouds bore me. I don't like most of the painters of the baroque and rococo, and scenes by Fragonard and Watteau and that crowd bore me a *lot*. I know Rubens and Gainsborough are great artists but they don't do much for me. I don't like El Greco one bit, or the mannerists. Maybe I'd feel differently about these painters if I knew more about them. But there's so much to look at that I *don't* have to coax myself to like!

Most of the cubists leave me cold – I see what they were doing, and how important it was, but it is so *over*. That goes for Picasso, too, mostly, except for his drawings and sculpture. Abstract expressionists like Pollock and de Kooning – you can have them, and most of the surrealists (as a teenager I loved them, but no longer). Pointillism – you can have that too. Andy Warhol, Roy Liechtenstein, Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon – no thanks. In my youth I really liked Miró and Kandinsky and Klee – now not so much. The same for Bosch. I don't follow contemporary art at all.

I remember going to the newly refurbished Museum of Modern Art in New York a few years ago, and being shocked at how my tastes had changed since I used to go there as a teenager learning to see art. The floor with the Impressionists was still terrific, but on the other floors, even though I recognized many important and influential pieces, there wasn't a whole lot I *actually wanted to look at*. Maybe my tastes have become crabbed now that I am in my 60s – another way to say that now is that I am well educated enough to know what I like and not to bother with what I don't like. I don't say it's *bad* – just that *I don't like to look at it*. I went to the opening show of the new San Francisco Jewish Museum and was appalled at the poverty of the contemporary art. Duchamp was a genius, and he was right to decree that whatever an artist says is art, is art. But just saying it's art doesn't make it *any good*. The dreary collection of *objets trouvés* and aimless scribbles so solemnly displayed in plexiglass cases at the Jewish Museum made me long to hear what Cellini would have said about it. From an e-mail in 2006:

“Actually looking at the work and enjoying it,” as you put it, went out earlier than Pop – it died with abstract impressionism, which usually (there are exceptions) could not be looked at with enjoyment, only with connoisseurship, which is not at all the same thing. Visited the new MOMA in NYC in October, much enjoyed the top floor (Monet, Gauguin, Van Gogh, Cézanne &c.), but couldn't find anything after about 1940 to enjoy at all. A bunch of crap, if you ask me, which of course you didn't. That is all looking kind of dated now, as is Pop and Op and Slop – my hope is we work our way out of that and conceptual post-modernism and all the rest back to representational. Impressionism was fine but to paint in that style now would be derivative. Everything that can be said in that style was said by the above-mentioned masters – painting in the style of Cézanne would be a dead end today, assuming anyone had the talent to do it. But painting in the style of Holbein or Van Eyck or Van der Weyden or Bronzino or Leonardo or Cranach or Botticelli or Fra

Angelico, again assuming someone had the talent to do it, would still look fresh as a daisy. Or course hell would have to freeze over first, but with the climate changing so fast who knows? I'd trade you ten Jackson Pollocks for one Botticelli. Make that twenty. As many as you like.

## H. Decorative arts

Painting is not the only kind of art that interests me. I have a special interest in decorative art, that is, art applied to practical objects. Maybe my heraldic studies sensitized me to this, as heraldic decoration is found on every kind of object – metalwork, woodwork, glass, jewelry and enamels, plaster, stone, books, paper, even on heavy machinery like locomotives. But heraldic art is just a small subset – decorative art is at least as good as painting as a vehicle for expression of the spirit of an age or culture.



There is something very satisfying about the fusion of form and function. Gothic style in an altarpiece is one thing, but its only function (besides aiding Christian devotion) is to be looked at. The same style in an aquamanile (see 8th century example from Iraq, above left) works on an extra level, because it has to succeed not only visually but practically. This is as true of ancient objects as of an iPod.<sup>14</sup> My teenage visits to the Museum of Modern Art, which was a pioneer in this attitude, taught me to look at industrial design and practical objects in the same sort of way I looked at “art.” Another thing I like about decorative art is the way it reflects the style of the period, whether ancient, gothic, baroque, deco, or whatever. What better way is there to wallow in Art Deco than with furniture by Émile-Jacques Ruhlmann, or industrial design by Raymond Loewy (pencil sharpener, above center)? Was there ever a greater master of Art Nouveau than René Lalique (above right)?

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<sup>14</sup> Future historians: an elegantly designed 21st century device for listening to sound recordings.



Thomas P. F. Hoving's ten steps for encountering an object of art are relevant here (from his book *King of the Confessors* (1981)).

1. Write quickly your initial split-second reaction.
2. Scribble down a detailed, pedantic description.
3. What is the object's physical condition? Wear, age, repair, corrosion, etc.
4. Did it have a use? [How did function influence form, etc.]
5. Style. Identifiable, datable, consistent? If inconsistent why: transitional or multi-influence, etc.
6. Comparisons for subject matter?
7. Iconography.
8. Documentation.
9. Scientific testing.
10. Back to #1. What is your reaction now?



The decorative arts collection is one of the first places I check out in any major art museum. There are such wonderful things there – furniture and jewelry and silver and small domestic objects and sometimes whole interiors, all (with luck) executed in the highest taste of whatever period or style it was. The Empire style, for example, is perhaps better appreciated in furniture and mantel ornaments than in any number of paintings.

I have a great fondness for jewelry – maybe this comes from heraldic studies, too, with all the crowns and scepters and regalia. Seeing it in a succession of styles – from the delicate gold leaf diadems of antiquity through Roman cameos and their recycling into medieval and renaissance ornaments and right up to the present day, is very pleasing.



But there are so many areas – ceramics, for example: della Robbia roundels and colorful Majolica ware (left) and Islamic plates and Art Deco tea sets. Graphics and the Art of the Book, from late antiquity through medieval manuscripts to 20th century bindings. Cellini salt cellars. The little wooden ball the Metropolitan Museum has which opens to reveal intricately carved devotional scenes inside. Tiffany lamps. Ancient Egyptian perfume bottles. Enamels by Fabergé. Japanese *netsuke*. I could go on and on. There is something deeply engaging about the dual nature of decorative objects. Indeed, every object, even the most naïve and unselfconscious one, reveals its style – the basket, the dishcloth, the tool. Those Roman flasks were not made as art, but that's how we think of them now.

As I said, I could go on and on. But this is not an



essay in art, but just an attempt to give some idea of what pleases my taste. I should not leave



out the arts of other cultures, which I have learned a lot about from museums. The ancient world: Egypt, Greece, Rome. Islam. Japan. India. African and Oceanic art, which I first explored at the Metropolitan Museum – indeed, now that I look back on it, those museums were schools for me. American Indian art, especially that of the Northwest Coast – Haida, for example (above right), and Kwakiutl.

There is a formal vocabulary and grammar to decorative art, which I have studied in such hugely fascinating books as *Handbook of Ornament*, by Franz Sales Meyer (1888), *Styles of Ornament*, by

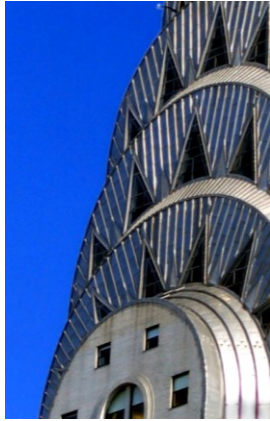
Alexander Speltz (1904), and *Pattern Design*, by Archibald H. Christie (1910). Any art lover who doesn't know these books, get to the library! (Or the bookstore – Meyer and Christie are now Dover reprints.) There is also a long tradition of beautiful lithographed books of color plates, each combining dozens of examples of a particular style of ornament into a pleasing whole. The grandfather of these was Owen Jones' *Grammar of Ornament* (1856; see much reduced plate above left) – I have reprints of quite a lot of these books, and get a huge charge out of letting the patterns wash over me, even removed from the objects they were applied to.

I haven't mentioned sculpture – is that decorative art or not? *Winged Victory*, Michelangelo's *David*, Brancusi's *Bird in Space* (right), Picasso's *She-Goat* – so much wonderful stuff in the world. It is inexhaustible.



## I. Architecture

I pay a lot of attention to architecture and always have. Even as a teenager, and maybe earlier, I walked around Manhattan taking in the buildings (see Chapter 3B.7). New York was a good place to learn about architecture as there was so much of it. Just a little joke, but there's a lot of truth to it – all styles were represented from classical revival (Stock Exchange) to Federal (my Aunt Louise lived in a Federal house in Greenwich Village once owned by Aaron Burr) through all kinds of Renaissance *palazzi* (which



inspired the details of the Park Avenue apartment houses) and Loire *châteaux* (the mansions on Fifth Avenue) and Dutch stepped gables (Collegiate School). There were brownstones and elegant private houses on the Upper East side, Richardson Romanesque (American Museum of Natural History) and Gothic churches (St. Patrick's Cathedral) and Art Deco masterpieces (Rockefeller Center,



Chrysler Building (left), Empire State Building, Chanin Building). There was also a lot of ordinary vernacular city architecture (right) in row houses and apartment blocks and tenements and 19th century cast-iron commercial buildings all over the city, and some of the most distinguished skyscrapers in the world. And “modern,” which in my youth was still called the International Style, such as Lever House and the United Nations.

I grew to know a lot about architecture; the more I saw the more I learned, and the more I learned the more I saw. One of the things I saw was that with Lever House, distinguished building though it was in 1951, something went terribly wrong. When the accountants heard from Mies van der Rohe that less was more, they took that to mean that they could always get away with less. And that was the end of ornament – after that it was just boxes.<sup>15</sup> It wasn't the technology of skyscrapers that did it – the first skyscrapers, by great architects like Louis Sullivan, were rich in ornament. The superb skyscrapers of the Art Deco era were new buildings once. Now what had been architecture became nothing more than construction, straight lines, and office space in the sky.

Not that there were not some good buildings even in that impoverished style – the Seagram Building, for instance, and Black Rock (CBS headquarters). And even unornamented surfaces could make a beautifully faceted building – the Bank of America

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<sup>15</sup> The phrase *less is more* was popularized by the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) as a watchword of minimalism. But he was trying to emphasize the beauty of clarity, simplicity and pure line as a basis for architectural style, and it isn't his fault the concept was so misused. The phrase is not actually original with him, but first appeared in Robert Browning's poem “Andrea del Sarto” (1855), about the Renaissance painter.



Building in San Francisco (right) is a good example.<sup>16</sup> But the general run of new buildings were just enormous boxes, and whole districts arose (like Sixth Avenue in New York and the new South of Market district in San Francisco) which were nothing more than that. It was a catastrophe.



We are not over that catastrophe by any means. Most of those buildings (44 Montgomery Street in San Francisco is a typical ghastly example) will be around for a long time. Unfortunately post-modernism does not mean restoration of ornament. Most post-modern buildings have the same soulless approach, and just tack on a few varied shapes for show (as required by the local building code) like the specially shaped blocks in a child's block set. But they have no integrity and no spirit. The current reaction to the wasteland of modern architecture is to destroy everything that went before, yielding explosions like those of Frank Gehry and Daniel Liebeskind that hardly even look like buildings. I would take one Louis Sullivan over ten Frank Gehrys. It is all very sad.

Almost equally sad is the destruction of the ground floor of almost every commercial building in the larger cities. The only way to see what these buildings were, and what the street was like before the vandalism, is to ignore the hideous blank renovated storefronts and keep your eyes on higher stories. When you do that some of the grace and beauty of our older cities returns – but the devastation below becomes even more painful. A building with fine decoration and proportion above will have been gutted below and the street floor replaced with aluminum and glass, the hallmarks of esthetic poverty. Some of these replacements clearly date from the 1950s, others from later, but they always degrade the building, never improve it. It is heartbreaking. I'm with Prince Charles on this one. He said that while the British could blame the Germans for knocking down huge sections of central London, they had to blame themselves for what they put up in its place.

So what are my tastes? It's not *just* that I'm a curmudgeon, although I am one. Before World War II a builder could choose from at least a dozen well-developed styles. Any of those styles, well done, would have been pleasing enough – that they did not all match

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<sup>16</sup> When I was in the Humanities masters program at San Francisco State University, and I had to write an essay about a sculpture, I chose that building as my subject – the essay is included in one of the Supplements.

just added to the richness of the urban fabric. After the war it is as if a giant eraser has rubbed out all the beauty and most of the life in the city's structures. Brutalism is just the final stage. So there I am on the despoiled city streets, keeping my eyes on the higher stories.

And it is not much better inside, where if there is any architecture at all and not just construction, it is often measured by how much space can be wasted with huge atriums and useless angled areas and sweeping swaths of emptiness. The main goal is to show how bold the architect can be in wasting the client's space. The actual human uses of the building are deliberately – indeed ostentatiously – ignored. The new San Francisco Public Library is a revolting example; the new San Francisco Jewish Museum (by Liebeskind) is another, and the horrible new De Young Museum by Christopher Haas, with its entryway like a prison yard, replacing the graceful cozy old building we had loved for years, is yet another. Don't get me started – oops, too late!

Suburbia, being mostly postwar, is even worse than downtown, and most of America is suburbia now. I am fortunate to live in the Sunset District of San Francisco, which although suburban in spirit when it was laid out and built by developers in the 1930s, preceded the plague, and so has block after block of low-rise row houses, not identical and often with pleasing Art Deco detailing. But after the war, the deluge. And what has happened to other cities is incomparably worse.

I can't go on – it's too sad.

## **J. Comics**

I read the comics every day in the newspaper – it is almost the first thing I turn to. Sometimes when I've been traveling I'll go to the library and catch up on the comics that were published while I was away. They are quite important to me, and I am a lifelong fan. I remember reading the comics in the New York papers when I was a very small child, and there were a lot more New York papers then than there are today.

I have made a kind of study of American comics – I am speaking here only of newspaper comics, not comic books. There have been lots of good collections and I studied them too from an early age. I still take a keen interest in comic strips past and present. I used to know the great comics scholar and collector Bill Blackbeard, and would visit him in his fabulous warren on Ulloa Street and look through newsprint originals of the greatest

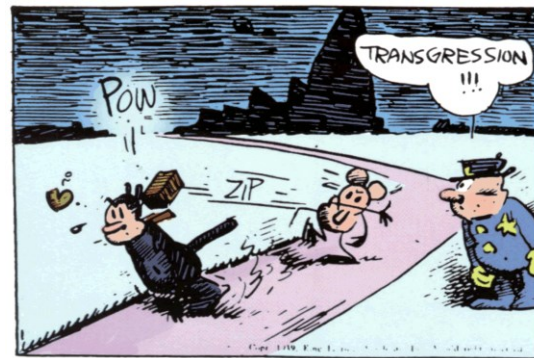


strips of the past, like Krazy Kat and the amazing Polly & Her Pals (above). He finally sold his collection to Ohio State University.

Here are some of my favorites. Mostly the ones I remember best, and which have made this list, are the ones with the most original drawing styles or the most original humor. Researchers of the future: you will have to go to the digitized newspaper archives to find these, but when you do, you will get at least as good an insight into 20th and 21st century America as you would have from the news or opinion sections.

- Old strips I knew mainly from collections: *Alphonse & Gaston*, *Barney Google*, *Moon Mullins*, *The Sad Sack* (which I knew from my father's collection reprinted from *Yank*), *Happy Hooligan*, *Toonerville Folks* (with the famous trolley).

- Four of such outstanding artistic merit and originality I have to name them separately: George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* (right), Cliff Sterrett's *Polly & Her Pals*, Winsor McKay's *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, and Bill Holman's *Smokey Stover*. These are classics of American art. Another genius work was the panel by Rube Goldberg, with his astounding inventions – he lived in my grandmother's building at 140 West 57th Street.<sup>17</sup>

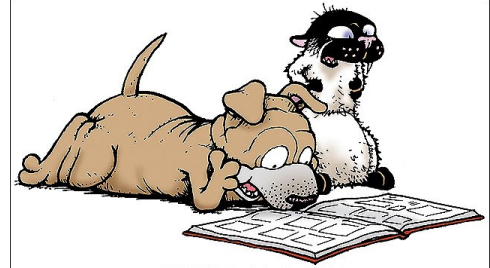


- Panels I read in the newspapers of my youth: H. T. Webster (*The Timid Soul* [Casper Milquetoast] and *Life's Darkest Moment*), J. R. Williams' *Out Our Way*, Gene Ahern's *Our Boarding House* (Major Hoople), all important interpreters of rural and small town life of the time; and Jimmy Hatlo's *They'll Do It Every Time*, which interpreted city life. *Ripley's Believe It or Not* was not quite a comic, but close in visual style.
- Strips now extinct which I followed in the paper: *Alley Oop*, *Bringing Up Father* (with Maggie and Jiggs), *The Katzenjammer Kids*, *Penny*, *Peanuts* (good in the old days – now I count it as extinct even though it still appears in reruns), *Li'l Abner*, *Dick Tracy*, *Miss Peach*, *Moon Mullins*, *Calvin & Hobbes*, *Bloom County*. *The Far Side* (a panel), and *Opus*, a successor to *Bloom County*, belong here too. *FoxTrot* is not quite extinct but is now Sunday only.
- Continuity strips (as opposed to gag strips) now extinct, which I followed in the paper: *The Phantom*, *Gasoline Alley*, *Steve Roper* and *Mike Nomad*, *Prince*

<sup>17</sup> A *panel* differs from a *strip* in that a single drawing in a frame, rather than a series of frames (also called panels), constitutes the day's offering.

*Valiant*. *For Better or For Worse* is a superb modern example, although there is a gag in every strip.<sup>18</sup>

- Current favorite strips: *Doonesbury* (Pulitzer Prize 1975), *Get Fuzzy* (below), *Zits*, *For Better or Worse*, *Pearls Before Swine*, and *Dilbert*. *Ernie and Zippy the Pinhead* are still active strips but they don't appear in San Francisco, so I rarely get to see them. Current favorite panels: the highly original *Bizarro*, and *Mr. Boffo* (recently cut by the *Chronicle*).
- I still read most of the strips in the *Chronicle*. I even enjoy some of the pedestrian ones like *Luann* and *Sally Forth*, but I wouldn't miss them much if they were gone. A strip has to be pretty bad for me not to read it in the daily paper. But there are some – *Mutts*, for example, and *Elderpark*. *Cathy* was fun once became too boring to read; also *Garfield*.<sup>19</sup>



There are a few others I should mention, which I encountered in other formats: Walt Kelly's *Pogo* (which I knew from the books), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (also from books – it was never daily strip), Bill Mauldin's GIs Willie and Joe from World War II (which I knew from later collections), *Batman* (which I followed in comic books), Walt Disney's Uncle Scrooge McDuck and Donald Duck's nephews (also comic books, although *Donald Duck* was also a very uninspired gag strip), and underground "comix" such as *Fritz the Cat* and *Mr. Natural* (both by the great R. Crumb) and other drug-soaked period pieces. Underground comix are still produced in great profusion, but I hardly ever see them now.

For more on almost all of these, with samples, see [www.toonopedia.com](http://www.toonopedia.com). I have not even mentioned editorial cartoons, of which I have long been a devoted fan. I have attached an Oliphant cartoon as Document 13-2.

- I had a large collection of comic books – only those by Walt Disney interested me. Somehow they vanished. My favorites were the elaborate tales by Carl Barks, under Disney's name, about Uncle Scrooge McDuck and Donald's nephews Huey, Louie and Dewey – *aficionados* will recall that all three were ten-star generals in the Junior Woodchucks. I detested the very idea of Classic Comics, although I read them occasionally when I found a copy lying around – that anyone would

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<sup>18</sup> The first series (1979-2008) is more carefully drawn (by Lynn Johnston) than the second series.

<sup>19</sup> Since this was written *Cathy* was retired as an active strip.

read a comic book version of a real book instead of the book itself appalled me, and still does.

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It doesn't have to be all culture – since this is *all about me*, here's something on my taste in other things.<sup>20</sup>

## K. Clothes

Most people who know me would be surprised to hear that I have any taste at all in clothes. I usually look kind of rumpled and schlumpy. Part of this is that I am so fat it is hard to get clothes to fit me. Part of it is that I never iron anything, but just stuff shirts into a drawer and put them on wrinkled – even if they were starched and ironed they would wrinkle pretty quickly just by my wearing them. And part of it is that I do not really care very much about clothes.

But I do have some tastes. When I was growing up I adopted the preppy look of my contemporaries in the private-school world – dress shirt, jacket and tie, woolen trousers, dress shoes. I shopped at Brooks Brothers and favored button-down shirts – I liked them made of white or blue Oxford cloth. Jackets were plain wool, or of herringbone tweed. Later when I went to a progressive school (Walden) in the 11th grade, I stuck to this look even though my classmates dressed more informally, and I took some ribbing for continuing to wear a tie. In college and law school I may have dropped the tie sometimes, but it was still tweed jackets and button-down shirts and wool slacks rather than jeans. I don't think I ever wore jeans until I was in my late 30s. Even through the hippie era and on Cape Cod I stuck with this look (except no tie).

Back at work in the 90s, I explored pinstriped suits, but that was as adventuresome as I got. As I grew fatter and could no longer buy shirts and jackets off the rack, I started having them made for me inexpensively in India, which I still do. The shirts I got in India still look much like those I grew up with, except now I favor conservative stripes. I only wear them when I need to wear a tie (very rare) or am traveling on an airplane, when I need the breast pocket – on my next trip there I won't order any.

The slacks look much the same too, except not always of wool, and now I wear suspenders as belts don't work (try putting a belt on a beach ball). But the jackets have had to change a little, as it is hard to get herringbone tweed in India, and whatever I do

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<sup>20</sup> Yes, I *know* these “other” things are also elements of culture. Give me a break, will you, future historians?



and however I insist on no shoulder padding, Indian tailors seem unable to do a natural shoulder, but just make a padded shoulder without pads. If I could afford it I would have all my clothes made for me at Brooks Brothers.

My clothing habits changed in my 50s as my working conditions changed. When I started at Farella in 1989 I went to the office every day in a suit, or at least a jacket and tie. But the world went casual – “business casual” became *la mode*, and candidates run for President in a blazer and an open shirt. And I went to the office less and less, and now not at all. I now have one Indian suit I wear on formal occasions, or for business meetings or funerals or in court, but I don’t think I have worn a tie five times in the past year. I still wear tweed jackets – I like all the pockets. And I wear khakis now, along with my Indian slacks, and T-shirts and turtle-neck jerseys instead of button-down neckband shirts. I have started buying jerseys on eBay.<sup>21</sup> For hot climates I have a kind of safari shirt made in India. I bought one in a department store in the 1970s, refined the design, and have copies made whenever I go to India.<sup>22</sup> Capacious pockets – they also work worn open over a T-shirt.

I have found a kind of informal laceless rubber-soled cloth shoe by Airwalk which I’m very fond of, \$20 at Payless, and have given up on the laced-up leather shoes I had worn since childhood. Usually I even wear them without socks, an unimaginable thing in former years – socks are too hard to put on now, and medicines swell my feet, but no one seems to care any more how casual a person looks.

I carry a shoulder bag every day. My friend Jack Tobin gave me a Chinese bag in Taiwan in the 1970s; I have refined the design over the years and now have them made for me by a seamstress in Mill Valley. A raincoat is the only coat I have – I almost never go to cold places, and if I had to go there the optional lining would keep me warm. I wear berets to keep my head warm – they are good because they also work to shield my eyes from overhead lights, and can be stuffed into pockets and bags. In keeping with my new informality I sometimes wear baseball caps now in warm weather. I always have to wear a hat outside because otherwise the sun will beat on my bald head and fry my brains.

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<sup>21</sup> An on-line auction site – they have great bargains in my size, which is a hard size to find in shops but on line you can just include the size in your search parameters. I like pre-worn turtlenecks – they are already broken in, and don’t shrink in the wash.

<sup>22</sup> Or other cheap places – I had clothes made in Egypt, and will try Ethiopia this fall.

## L. Food

What are my tastes? Breakfast: fried eggs, very runny, or scrambled eggs, so loose as to be what the French Canadians unappetizingly call *baveuse* (like dog-slobber). And good thick bacon – British or Canadian style if available – and hash brown potatoes with lots of onions in them. Or fried eggs can be put between pancakes, with a little salt on top and sausages on the side. English muffins with butter and salt and maybe an avocado. Delicious. I skip the potatoes and pancakes now, but this is about my *tastes*. On the road I find McDonald's Egg McMuffin® sets me up well for the day.<sup>23</sup>

Lunch: A bacon-lettuce-and-tomato sandwich on white toast, with cole slaw on the side. Chicken salad makes a good sandwich, too – so does grilled ham and cheese. Or a rare hamburger with lots of raw onions. A hearty soup like clam chowder, beef barley, chicken gumbo, and a salad on the side (thousand island and honey mustard are good dressings – hold the croutons or I'll have to pick them out one by one). Fizzy water or iced tea with lemon in it – I especially like the sweetened iced tea they serve in the American South. Ice cream – put some pancake syrup on it – or key lime pie (or pumpkin, or pecan, or cherry). Apple pie with brandy hard sauce.



Dinner: A good thick steak, rare, is an ideal dinner. Pork chops are pretty good too, and meat loaf, and baked ham or turkey (dark meat please). Corned beef and cabbage. Almost any kind of sea food – southern fried catfish, for example (if it doesn't have bones in it), or scallops, or grilled salmon. Baked potato or yam, or rice (especially wild rice). Vegetables I will usually ignore, but I can be tempted with eggplant, zucchini or mushrooms if they're not overcooked. Cooked carrots I pick out of a dish one by one. Caesar salad, or heart of lettuce, or endive. Fresh warm French bread or San Francisco sourdough. Lots of sweet desserts – crème caramel, chocolate mousse, more pies.

- Italian food: spaghetti marinara, *osso bucco*, squid in its own ink Venetian style.
- Japanese food: sushi (almost every kind), chicken teriyaki, *miso* soup.
- Jewish food: cabbage borscht, gefilte fish, pickled herring, matzo ball soup, pastrami sandwiches, new pickles.
- Philadelphia cheesesteaks with extra sweet peppers. Also scrapple.

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<sup>23</sup> A round piece of ham and an egg fried in a round container, and a piece of melted American cheese, all on a round English muffin. Very fast and convenient.

- Chinese food: I used to love it, but many years of eating it in local San Francisco restaurants day in and day out have dulled my appetite for it. I still like some dishes, though, like Szechuan eggplant, pan-fried string beans, and roast pork.
- Korean food: nice once in a while, even with peppery kimchee.
- Indian food: I can't stand it, which is odd because I love almost everything else about India.
- Mexican food: not my favorite either, although a taco with fresh ingredients is good sometimes.
- Pizza: OK once in a while, if not too doughy, and light on the cheese.
- Fruit of almost any kind, especially bosc pears, melons, dates, berries, figs, persimmons, and Chinese apple-pears.
- Endives, celery, raw onions, radishes, *dai kon*, sweet peppers – crunchiness is the key here. Garlic in almost anything. Avocados. Strong horseradish.
- Stinky cheese – the stronger the better. Stilton, gorgonzola, St. André, limburger. Let it sit out for a day or so to ripen (under glass or in a plastic bag). Also rich creamy cheeses like Brie and Camembert, and sharp aged Swiss.
- Freshly opened clams or oysters – I can eat dozens at a time, and sometimes do. I especially love Cape Cod quahogs, oysters, huge sea clams that take three or four bites each. Big, juicy shrimp – cold but cooked only lightly, or done quickly in a wok in the Chinese style (not breaded).
- Organ meats like sweetbreads, liver (especially chicken livers) if severely undercooked, brains, tripe, chicken gizzards, and prairie oysters.<sup>24</sup> Yum! Also steak *tartare* – lean raw hamburger with chopped onions and a raw egg yolk on top.

Writing this is making me really hungry.

This is what I *like*. I can't always have what I like. Now that I am a diabetic my diet is restricted, not only for sugar but also bread and carbohydrates in general. What I want more than almost anything else is lots of sugar – candy bars and ice cream and pies and cookies and puddings and syrup right out of the bottle, and *dulce de leche* and maple sugar. But I don't eat much of that any more (I do wolf down diabetic candies). I am also restricted in starches, so favorite dishes like pancakes and hash browns and corn on the cob and baked potatoes are mostly out, and spaghetti and sushi (because rice-based) although not quite out, have become rare treats. Meat is still OK – I have other

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<sup>24</sup> Prairie oysters are fried cattle testicles.

conditions meat is not so great for, but I have to eat *something*, and can diet for only one condition at a time.

After I retired, to save money I stopped eating every meal in a restaurant. But my cooking skills have never gone much beyond a frying pan on the top of the stove. I eat a lot of chicken now, and I make tuna and chicken and egg salads with lots of crunchy celery and onions and some raisins thrown in. And packaged Italian sausages which I cook up in the microwave – not good for cholesterol! I make batches of sugar-free drinks with packaged powders and sweeteners so they are *really* sweet, but actually contain nothing but unhealthy chemicals and red dye, and keep them in the fridge to guzzle down. Yum! Diabetes makes a person thirsty.

Alcohol: not really much interested. I almost never drink wine, except once in a great while some red wine with French bread. Beer occasionally – one is enough except in England, where I can drink quite a lot of Guinness and real ale. Dubonnet (sweet red French vermouth) on the rocks with a twist of lemon is nice before dinner, or a Bushmill's Irish whiskey straight up (ice only dilutes it), or a whiskey sour after a long day on the road.

## M. Cars

I drive a beat-up rusty 1988 red Subaru Justy, now 20 years old. It cost me \$700 12 years ago, plus a \$100 finder's fee when my agent found it on the street. It is reliable and needs little maintenance, has front-wheel drive, works beautifully even if it does groan and creak a bit, and is so small I can park it just about anywhere (but it still carries a lot in the back). I have put a presidential seal on each door (just visible in the photo at right) and sometimes tell people it is Bill Clinton's old limousine.

Since it is worth nothing, I don't have to carry collision or theft insurance (liability yes of course), it costs me about \$50 a year to register, and when it finally rusts away, as my last two cars have done, I will replace it with another old car for under \$1000 and drive *that* one for another ten years or so. Old cars are easier to repair than new ones. I have covered the rust spots with aluminum tape. It looks like something from Tobacco Road, but I don't care.<sup>25</sup>



<sup>25</sup> *Tobacco Road*, by Erskine Caldwell (1932), is a novel about Georgia sharecroppers.

My first car, pictured in Chapter 14, a pumpkin-colored Austin America bought in 1970 for \$2000, was my only new car, and my most expensive one. Since then almost every successive car has cost me less than the preceding one – there have been a Dodge Dart, two Volkswagens, and two Toyota Corollas. They all lasted me many years. I have not yet paid even \$10,000 total for all the cars I have had over the past 40 years. It would take me another 40 years at this rate to get up to the current price of bottom-of-the-line new car, by which time I would be well over 100 years old.<sup>26</sup> I don't understand why people who are not filthy rich pay twenty or thirty thousand dollars for a car – it makes no sense to me. I'd rather amortize \$100 a year and use what would be my car payments for something else.

However, since we're talking about my *tastes*, I have to admit that if I had the money to indulge myself in whatever I liked, I would not drive a 20-year-old Subaru. I would like a fancy convertible sports car, also small enough to park easily. Something like a Jaguar, perhaps, with luxurious leather seats and walnut paneling. But they have no cargo capacity. I would also like a nifty roomy modern four-door sedan with power steering, power brakes, automatic transmission, cruise control and a working radio. When I travel and rent a car I have these things and I love them – especially automatic transmission and power steering. And one of those GPS devices with a read-out screen.<sup>27</sup> If I had a car like that someone would probably steal it, though – no one steals my rusted-out old jalopies.

As long as I'm *imagining* here, though, why even bother about my Subaru's small turning radius and easy-to-park short frame if I'm not driving myself? A chauffeur-driven limousine would be terrific, with a reading light in the back and a reclining seat I could take a nap in. If I had the money I would never drive again. I would have Ryan (my father's childhood chauffeur) take care of all that. He would drive me where I wanted to go, wait patiently for me, and then drive me back again. I would pay him well. I do just that in third world countries. And for road trips I would like one of those vast Winnebagos with a comfortable living space and a kitchen and bathroom and shower, and a dining room table and bookcases and a reserve battery for the lights, and a porch that opens up when you stop to enjoy the view. And since it's a fantasy, who cares about parking on the street, or how much it costs to run?

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<sup>26</sup> Sticker price of a new Subaru as of August 7, 2010: \$19,000 for a stick shift, \$20,000 for an automatic.

<sup>27</sup> I tried one for the first time in 2010 in a rented car in Boston and loved it – no maps, no worries, just do what the nice lady tells you.

## N. Tattoos and piercings.

I don't have any myself, and shrink at the thought. I think both piercings and tattoos are pretty gross, especially on women. I am appalled to see young women defacing their arms and bosoms and shoulders and backs and even hands with tattoos – even the tattoos with a lot of style and elaborate colors are very disturbing to me, and the simple ones which seem like no more than doodles are even more so. Vandalism! I can't stand to look at it on women. On men it is not quite so bad, and I can even admire some of the more elaborate and artistic ones. And I have to admit that a few of the new tattoos of the stark geometric kind, especially as bands around the upper arm, look pretty snappy.

Piercings I find loathsome, too. A ring through the nose or lip or eyebrow or navel, or especially a nipple, or a stud through the tongue – like tattoos these are the mark of a generation whose esthetic I really don't get. Of course that's one of the main reason it *is* so popular – just *because* geezers like me don't get it. But future historians: if you want to know if those piercings and tattoos retained the power to shock and disgust even broad-minded people in 2010, the answer is yes, you bet.<sup>28</sup>

A part of me has always wanted a distinctive tattoo somewhere, and a gold ring in my ear like a pirate. But not a very big part, and not very much.

## O. Ceremonial

I am a great fan of ceremonial of almost every kind. I enjoy the hidden meanings in small gestures and juxtapositions – it is much the same satisfaction I draw from heraldry (see Chapter 6). This is a large part of the fun of military insignia, too – I can read quite a lot of occult details from a uniform, occult in the sense that the meaning is hidden from most people but obvious to adepts.

I never miss a state funeral on television, for example – I love the standard bearer walking behind the coffin, and volley fired over it, and *Hail to the Chief*, and the saluting battery, and the folding of the flag, and the flyover with the missing plane or the sudden

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<sup>28</sup> Except for earrings, which are still pretty savage, but more acceptable. I see how culture-bound I am about these things – I don't mind nose-studs on women in India. But I find a ring through the nasal septum, bull-style, pretty freaky, whether on a girl punker or an Indian in Panama.

peel-off. Inaugurations are good too, and university commencements, and other formal ceremonies where people dress up and do ritual things. I love church ceremonies, the higher the better, except for boring parts – never mind the mass, let's stick to the processional! I have read a good deal about these in books like James Charles Noonan's *Church Visible: The Ceremonial Life and Protocol of the Roman Catholic Church* (1996). I have a good eye – I once went to a



ceremony where some Franciscan brothers were renewing their vows, and it was not lost on me that the brothers knelt in supplication but their superior stayed seated. Royal ceremonies like coronations and royal weddings, and Mountbatten's funeral, with his orders carried before the coffin by pages with velvet cushions – I can't get enough of these on television.<sup>29</sup> I even like the national anthem!

I was at a rodeo in Montana not long ago, and the National Guard brought a tank on the field, and when the music started the tank raised its barrel to the saluting position. I enjoy noticing that kind of thing. When the Presidio was still an active military base I used to go to change-of-command ceremonies, and attended the last one when the colors were cased and the post handed over to the National Park Service, and the Sixth Army band marched out the Lyon Street gate. Great stuff!



Tailpiece: Unattributed,  
from the Internet

<sup>29</sup> Admiral of the Fleet the Right Honourable the Earl Mountbatten of Burma, KG, GCB, OM, GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, DSO, PC, FRS (1901-1979), a semi-royal war hero and last Viceroy of India, was one of the most decorated military officers ever. He was assassinated in 1979; I watched his funeral on television in London. The image above shows his admiral's cocked hat and naval sword on his flag-draped coffin.