

Student lifestyles – berries to bourgeoisie

By BRAD LEMLEY
Of the Emerald

My vacation at home hadn't been enjoyable. I guess it was mostly my fault — I had been over-critical when it was too late for me to expect them to change. But the combination of my just-completed term's study of Marxist theory in Poly Sci 493G, "Bourgeois Abominations" and my parents' conspicuously-consuming gold-plated-Cadillac-lacked life-style had set my ideological teeth on edge. They have so many things they don't need, I had kept thinking, as I mentally converted their manicured lawn into a field of soybeans and their Mercedes-Benz into a tractor. I kept wondering how, while Bolivians squatted in Frigidaire boxes munching locusts, my parents could justify feasting on a sumptuous Wellington beneath the vaulted beams of

our dining room. Somehow, I mused, it just didn't seem right.

That's why I was so glad to be coming back to Eugene. I knew that University students weren't into the I-consume-therefore-I am way of life. Armed with analytic techniques gleaned from sociology, religion and psychology classes, students found self-definitions based on inner-directedness rather than material possessions. They knew, I was sure, that an ounce of perception is worth a pound of cashmere.

I was reflecting on the beauty of this attitude when a good friend of mine called out to me and came whizzing over on a bicycle. I was overjoyed to see him; he was the perfect embodiment of the anti-materialist sentiment that I respected so much. He didn't have a home, first of all, he lived in the woods just off the Springfield bike path, eating roots and berries and

wearing nothing but a wreath of hyacinth. He didn't own a single thing, but he was happy — he spoke to the animals, played games with the wind, and spent hours in blissful meditation on the Glorious Mystery of Existence. Many were the times that I had sought him out in his forest refuge, kneeling respectfully at his feet while he explained that possessions were like dams thrust in the stream of consciousness, causing harmonious, free-flowing thoughts to back up into stagnant cesspools of fermented reasoning.

Because of this I was taken slightly aback by his riding a bicycle, but I decided that he must have found it somewhere and was taking it back to the woods to show the squirrels another manifestation of man's folly.

It looked like an awfully nice bike, though.

"Hello, my friend," I said as he drew up next to me. "I have decided to do as you have shown me and become a true Eugenean. I shall shed all of my material possessions: my home, my vehicle, my clothes, and live in blissful communion with nature."

"You've gotta be nuts," said the man, zipping up an expensive-looking goose-down vest. "You'll freeze your asceticism off in a hurry, believe me."

"Huh?"

"You'd have to be crazy to live out there," he said. "The only reason I did was because my grant got screwed up somehow and I didn't have the bucks to get a place."

"But I thought..."

"Forget what you thought. Now that I'm back on campus I've found out that the name of the game is collecting student status symbols."

"Now I know you're kidding me. There's no such thing as a student status symbol."

"Oh no? What about this?" He hopped off the bike, picked it up with his index finger and held it out in front of me. "Gateaux Sprint — 16 pounds, titanium-beryllium frame, lithium lugs, cotterless crank, alloy rims, sew-ups, nickle-plated rat traps, Smafac racer brakes, Complex derailleur, unborn calfskin seat." As he held it up for my examination a throng of students gathered around, gasping in awe and envy.

"Where'd you get the money for that?"

"Got a loan against my backed-up grant payments," he explained. "Come on over to my place; I'll show you what makes a successful student."

With some reluctance I followed him to his "place," the penthouse of a Buck-Rogerish high-rise just inches from campus.

"What's the rent?" I asked.

"Six hundred eighty dollars a month," he admitted. "But its got everything: built-in dishwasher, disposal, ice-cube maker, water-pic, and hey, the chicks in this building are something else, if you know what I mean."

I was afraid that I did. "But what about the Glorious Mystery of Existence?"

"Look, the only mystery worth worrying about is how I can get those chicks up here, and I've solved that one. Check out my stereo."

He indicated six refrigerator-sized speakers flanking a mass of circuitry that looked like Houston Mission Control.

"It's a sextaphonic," he said. "Each speaker has eight woofers, 32 midranges and 66 tweeters, and the receiver cranks out 3,000 RMS watts per channel when the sunspots are lined up right. The turntable platter weighs 216 pounds, and it runs on a microwave link-up to the earth's axis — no moving parts. I had to get an industrial heavy-use permit from EWEB to put the thing in, but it's worth it. I remember one time we were sitting around smoking and accidentally set the sofa on fire. I just put on "Born to Run," pointed the speakers at the flames, put the volume knob on seven and blew it right out."

"Amazing," I said.

"Yeah, the chicks dug it. But they really went wild when they saw these." He picked up a pair of skis from the coffee table.

"Don't you have any other place to keep those?" I asked.

"What, do you think I paid \$1,200 for these babies so I could stick them in a closet? Just look at them — custom cut to 211 and a quarter, 48-layer paper-thin wood-ply laminate honeycomb, tungsten-impregnated edges, shark-tooth-lathed bottoms, and electro-magnetic thermostat-controlled, cable retracting bindings."

"Incredible," I said. "You must really burn up the slopes in those things."

"Well, to tell the truth, I don't ski," he conceded. "But it sure is a rush to strap them into my Jag's ski rack and cruise the sororities."

Just then the doorbell pealed out the first three chords of "My Favorite Things."

"The chicks!" he cried. "I almost forgot, they said they were coming over to fondle my new Slikkormat 82mm SLR and my Wilstun T-3001. Uh...hey, this could get pretty heavy so could you...uh...?"

"Yeah, sure," I said, shuffling into the service elevator. I poked the "G" button and glided down to the street, lost in thought. Maybe he had the right idea, I reflected, maybe we were, indeed, put here just to accumulate expensive objects. Maybe that's really all there is, and it's pointless to look for...

My concentration was suddenly jarred by an ear-splitting cacophony of twanging, screeching instrumentation followed by the deafening off-key wail, "swееееееет surrrrrrennderrr!" I glanced up at the penthouse just in time to hear my friend scream "overload!" and dive to the floor of the balcony. The volume swelled until I could hardly bear it and the penthouse exploded, belching a mammoth cloud of expensive-looking smoke into the sky and dumping a hail of transistors, wires, knobs, handles and lenses onto the street below.

But then again, I decided, maybe there is a better way.

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