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# PROCESSED WORLD 2.001

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# Talking Heads

**W**e're back! It's been 20 years since the first issue of *ProcessedWorld* was sold on the streets of downtown San Francisco. We published 32 issues from 1981-1994, a body of work still in circulation as tens of thousands of magazines and increasingly available on our website. The demise of the collective after issue 32 prevented the publication of issue 33 1/3 which is on the website as of late-2000.

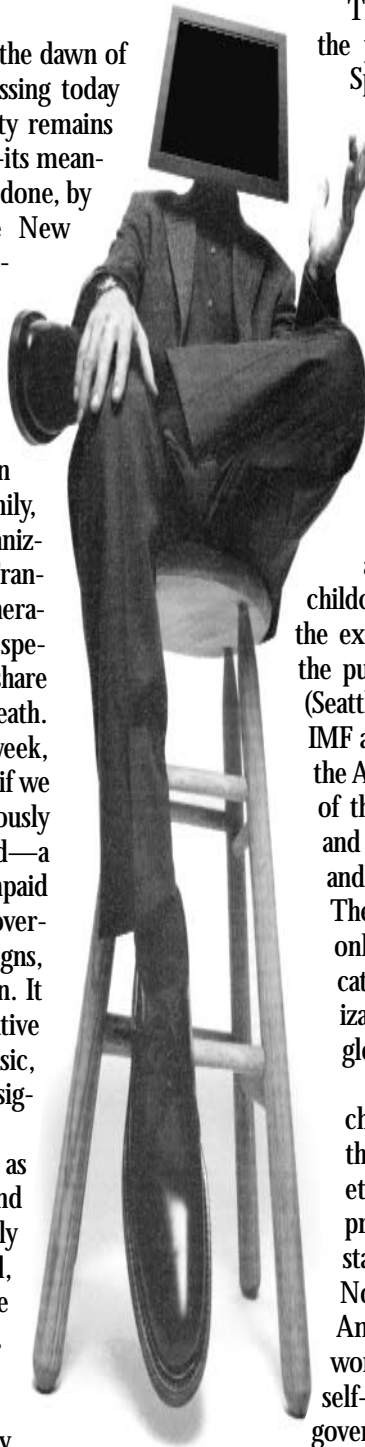
The issues pioneered in *ProcessedWorld* at the dawn of the so-called Information Age are more pressing today than they were when we started. Our society remains largely mute about the experience of work—its meaning, its purpose, who decides what should get done, by whom, and how. The glorification of the New Economy, reinforced by the astounding speculative bubble that has only recently burst, makes a handy target. But it only scratches the surface.

It has been a mighty effort to find the time to produce this special issue of *Processed World*. In fact, since the last issue came out in 1994, we've all been terribly busy! Work, family, writing projects, street theater, political organizing, a sprawling digital social history of San Francisco, housing crises, mid-life crises, psychotherapy, relationships. . . some of our activities are specific to us, but the larger truth is one we share with everyone: we are working ourselves to death. Most people work more than 40 hours a week, remarkably often without any extra pay. Even if we have managed to maintain a life with a previously 'normal' 40-hour week, or—heaven forbid—a part-time job (!), we tend to be busy with unpaid creative projects, raising families, fixing up overpriced homes, engaging in political campaigns, exploring the meaning of our lives, and so on. It is common to have a paid job, an unpaid creative career in writing, photography, dance or music, on top of a commitment to a family, mate or significant other.

Our social lives are as tightly scheduled as our work lives. A chance to see an old friend and catch up over lunch or dinner can easily take a half dozen communications by email, voice mail or phone tag attempting to juggle schedules. Few of us can drop in on anyone, or easily accommodate anyone dropping in on us. Fewer still have time to stop and remember that we didn't always live this way.

"Everything from novel writing to philosophizing to the experience of laboring or making a home, has to face the challenge of accelerating turnover time and the rapid write-off of traditional and historically acquired values. The temporary contract in everything then becomes the hallmark of postmodern living."

—David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity*



The radical reconfiguration of everyday life over the past generation is what we call "The Great Speedup." There are so many aspects to this phenomenon that it is difficult to quickly summarize the changes or to offer a simple or clear explanation of its causes. The great speedup encompasses much more than the greater number of hours we work, both as paid wage-workers and as free humans grasping for meaning and fulfillment. The dramatic intensification of work, ostensibly because computers have made us so much more productive, is one example. The expansion of buying and selling into more hours of the day (the 24 hour supermarket being a visible example) as well as into more areas of human life (therapy, prepared foods, childcare, housecleaners, etc.) are others. Further, the expansion of the world market, dramatized by the public protests at international trade meetings (Seattle—WTO; Washington DC and Prague—IMF and World Bank; Quebec—Free Trade Area of the Americas, FTAA), is reaching every last corner of the globe, from the exploding cities of China and India to the remotest regions of the Amazon and the tropical forests of Indonesia and Malaysia. The world market is several centuries old, but only in the past quarter century have communications technologies combined with containerization and falling trade barriers to make the global factory a reality.

The intensity and speed of these global changes have disrupted societies everywhere. In the Third World, traditional agricultural societies are enduring the enclosures and forced proletarianization that characterized the earliest stages of the industrial revolution in Europe and North America. Meanwhile, in Europe, North America and all earlier industrialized areas, working class communities with various forms of self-defense and control—from trade unions to government regulations—have been systematical-

ly uprooted and broken down. Classical Marxism would call this the decomposition of the working class. During the 1990s, the consolidation of media ownership reinforced a self-congratulatory ideological offensive that brazenly declared the end of history. Culturally (esp. in the United States) all vestiges of class awareness were buried under a cacophony of triumphalist capitalism. Everyone was either middle class, insanely rich or living in such poverty that it could only be understood as the moral failure of those who let themselves fall so low in a society so rife with opportunity. That real wages have fallen since 1973 and many more people are much poorer today than they were a generation ago is conveniently ignored. Our ability to understand our condition as a shared predicament, a class-wide experience rather than an individual and isolated phenomenon, is at an all-time low.

“Capital flight, deindustrialization of some regions, and the industrialization of others, the destruction of traditional working class communities as power bases in class struggle, become leitmotifs of spatial transformation under more flexible conditions of accumulation.”

—David Harvey,  
*The Condition of Post-Modernity*

In hindsight we can see that the real turning point came in the early 1970s. The social movements lumped under the misleading rubric of “the sixties” had climaxed. New technologies in communications and transportation combined with the re-emergence of world market competition to begin the decades-long process of radically expanding globalization. Living standards for working people reached their peak around 1973 and have fallen ever since on an aggregate scale. (In the U.S. the minimum wage has fallen by 40% in real spending power since that time). Old style industrial production underwent rapid restructuring, accelerating and expanding all the way to the present. The demise of old industrial centers and the accompanying disintegration of working class communities throughout the U.S. and Europe were essential components of a powerful attack by capital that ultimately broke down the “deal” in place since WWII. Marxist economists have labeled this the move from Fordism-Keynesianism to a regime of “flexible accumulation,” in which capital has decentralized production around the globe while increasing concentration of wealth and power.

The rise of temporariness and precarious work arrangements (first addressed in *PW* #2, summer 1981, “The Rise of the Six-Month Worker”) has forced us to inter-

nalize the values of capitalist business and apply them to the one resource we “control”: our labor power. Thus we have to be flexible, multi-skilled multi-taskers, able to continually master new skills and technologies. R. Dennis Hayes, a prolific contributor to *ProcessedWorld* from issue 10-23 (and author of *Behind the Silicon Curtain: The Seductions of Work in a Lonely Era*, South End Press 1989), returns with this issue’s lead article “Farce or Figleaf? The Promise of Leisure in the Computer Age.” Hayes takes on the glowing claims and real catastrophe imposed on daily life in the U.S. by the Great Speedup. In the process he reveals that the New Economy has no clothes.

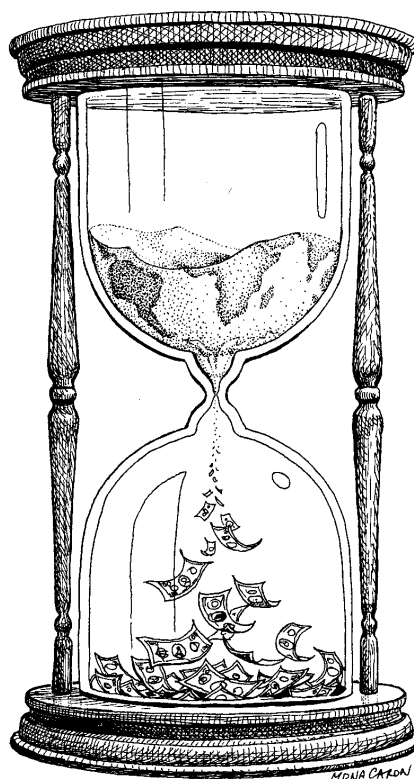
Jesse Drew (issue 14) returns with a critique of distance education in “Fast Times at Ronald McDonald U.” He details how the introduction of information technology becomes a mediated way to produce education for sale. It is woefully inadequate as a replacement for the live teacher-student-classroom experience, and a glaring example of the overall corporatization of university life.

Howard Besser examines the misuse of copyright law to shed light on the regrettably obscure battle over intellectual property rights in cyberspace. His research shows that the current business-driven agenda to protect intellectual property is a direct contravention of copyright’s original intent. Moreover, it represents an enclosure of the public commons that so many have expected of the Internet.

In “Space Wars,” Tom Wetzel (*PW* 12 and others) starts from San Francisco’s Mission District to illuminate the vicious battle over the cost of space, and its role in intensifying class divisions in the city. His story of the Dotcom Boom and Bust and how it has permanently altered the landscape of the city is a key part of the extreme speedup imposed by the so-called New Economy. Zoe Noe offers a

brief memoir of his early days in San Francisco in the long-ago early 1980s—a time when you could land here without money or a job and find your way.

San Francisco is home to Critical Mass, the monthly bike-in that has spread to some 100-odd cities worldwide. Few realize, however, that a century earlier San Franciscans took to their bicycles by the thousands to demand good roads and asphalt! The 1896 Good Roads/Bicycle Movement gets a look from Hank Chapot in “The Great San Francisco Bicycle Protest of 1896.” (It is curiously ironic that the bicycling movement at the end of the 19th century opened the way for the car culture that contemporary bicyclists are critiquing at the end of the 20th century.)



graphic by Mona Caron

The bicyclists' critical but hopeful sensibility finds its most inspiring expression in the Duboce Bikeway Mural of San Francisco's middle hills, a two-story, 360 foot-long panorama depicting the path followed by most bicyclists on their way west from downtown. The path follows the bed of a vanished creek, one of many ecological connections brought out in this uniquely effective project of the SF Bicycle Coalition. Check out our interview with the artists in "The Wiggle Mural," and then check out the mural as it was meant to be seen: on wheels!



photos by D.S. Black

The Billboard Liberation Front returns to *Processed World* (their how-to manual graced the pages of *PW* #25) with a manifesto and history of their jarring interventions into the public space of billboard advertising. Other public artists from the SF Print Collective and the California Department of Corrections show up throughout the issue.

In "Green Days in the Concrete Jungle," documentary filmmaker Ted White takes a break from chronicling the bike movement to give us the true confessions of a *gangsta floribunda*, tending to the ferns, agave and lavender beds of homeowners too busy to enjoy their own gardens.

Of course, it's not just homeowners who are too busy to appreciate their surroundings. Workers of all types aren't getting out much these days—and if they do it's never far from a laptop and cell phone. Tales of Toil by Netizen X ("My Life in the Search Engine"), Clayton Peacock ("The Filing Cabinet is on Fire") and Texas Frank ("Notes on an Outstanding Day at Image") reveal the daily experiences of an overworked, email-driven generation who rarely question the economic system until their company tanks, their disk crashes, or they find themselves out on the street harassing pedestrians for cash and pushing shampoo.

The good news is that catastrophes aren't always necessary to throw inequities of capital and labor into relief. Resistance still appears in the most unexpected places—including the network help desk of General Electric and Canada's third largest university. Read about it in Hot Under the Collar, where our correspondent recounts a spontaneous act of solidarity among his colleagues, and concludes, "Revolution is about living differently, not as iso-

lated individuals, but in struggle."

That message reappears in this issue's final essay, in which *PW*'s usual suspect, Chris Carlsson, takes a critical look at 20 years of political activity, urging radicals to create living examples of the world for which they're fighting. Special kudos to Mona Caron for her wonderful cover, simultaneously lampooning the hero of economics textbooks Joseph Schumpeter and the adoration so widely heaped on the deified New Economy. Klipschutz returns (*PW* 4 and on) with some wonderful poems, but also saved you, dear reader, from a great deal of under-edited, over-inflated prose, thanks to his steady copy-editing hand. Adam Cornford, one of *ProcessedWorld*'s founders is back, too, with a couple of remarkable poems. And James Brook appears for the first time with an incisive series of short poems largely composed on the streets of San Francisco during the recent New Economy tidal wave. Marina Lazzara and Thomas Daulton contribute our fictional pieces this time.

This 20th anniversary issue of *PW* was produced by a persistent, shifting, shifty, shiftless collective who had a lot of fun doing another *Processed World*. And no one, save the printer, got paid.

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