



Letters to the Editor

Follow Up to the Rat Story

Editor:

Although I have never felt the intense desire to respond to an article written in *The Capital Times*, I felt the sudden and overwhelming urge to write in regard to the article "Opening of New Dorms Tied to Rat Problem in Meade Heights."

As a nontraditional student at PSU, I have never had the opportunity to experience the living quarters at Penn State Harrisburg's excuse, er, rather, concept of student housing.

However, I have known of several students who either have, or currently, reside there.

Needless to say, after reading the article and discovering the true conditions at Meade Heights, I am aghast at the idea of such deplorable living conditions in which these students are expected to reside.

Rats the size of 'coons and cats? Why, such a monstrosity is simply too overwhelming to envision.

Although I am currently an Applied Behavioral Science major and not Biology, I suspect that the enormous size of these rodents could only have resulted from the geographical location of Meade Heights, and that of the toxic waste dump site.

This also, would surely explain the physical stature of the human residents of Meade Heights.

Although the rats are apparently intimidating due to their size, one item which I did notice absent in the article was an obvious lack of aggression within the rat population relating to the residents at Meade Heights.

The rats presence alone does not necessarily indicate aggressive behavior. I suspect that the rats are seeking acceptance from those at Penn State, and actually mean no harm.

As exhibited in the recent display of communications regarding the *Tarnhelm* "Submit" incident, there exist those at Penn State who could certainly learn the philosophy of acceptance and tolerance.

My only question is as such: If the rats are so large in size, and play such an important function in the ecological environment at Meade Heights, then when will PSU administration decide to make them pay a student fee, or at the very least, a parking fee?

Respectfully,
Mary P. Hall

Applied Behavioral Sciences
March 30, 2000

Supporting Gore

Editor:

Recently I worked for the Al Gore campaign in New Hampshire. I am writing to encourage other students to join me in supporting Al Gore for President.

As a student, I am well aware of the demands on time, however, this coming presidential election is simply too important for us to ignore.

Whether it be education, the environment, civil rights, or economic growth, Al Gore has proven himself a true fighter with our best interests at heart. He's dedicated his life to public service, and our lives are better for his work.

As president, he will continue to work towards a more affordable and accessible education system, a cleaner environment, an end to racial profiling, protection of a woman's fundamental right to choose, and economic growth that leaves no one behind.

He shares our vision of America, and I encourage you to work with us in making that vision a reality. Your activism now is invaluable to our future. Penn State and America can't afford another Bush in office.

Vote for Al Gore in November. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Joseph Werner
Public Policy
March 30, 2000

By Crispin Sartwell

Capital Times Advisor

Call it cyborg chic. In popular music we are hearing the merger of human being and machine.

My son Hayes is way into a "band" called Eiffel 65, who recorded the ubiquitous hit "Blue (Da Ba Dee)."

It is hard to tell whether the lead instrument of that song is a human voice or the digital simulation of a human voice. And there are no instruments on the record that people actually pick or blow.

The first stirring of the latest wave of cyborg chic on the pop charts took place last year about this time, with Cher's song "Believe."

You couldn't tell that the voice was Cher's; you couldn't even tell at times whether it was male or female. And perhaps it wasn't either male or female, because in part it was the voice of an electronic device.

And Cher herself is something like a cyborg: so altered by plastic surgery that she seems to have transcended the organic. I wonder what her "hair" is made out of.

Cher has overcome the conditions of mammalian life and now floats freely through different ages and genders and voices.

"Cher" the celebrity is something more or less than human, or something partially human, or something that was once human. But for just that reason, she is an emblem of the current human condition.

Throughout the 20th century, people entered into a more and more intimate relation to machines.

Think about your relation to your car. It's not merely a machine you operate, it is an extension of your body, more and more so as the engineering gets better and better.

Now the car will sense your body and adjust itself to it, and what rolls down the road is a machine/human hybrid, mechanical, electronic and organic.

In the last 20 years of the twentieth century, technology became both much huger and much smaller. Telecommunications and the internet cover the earth like a system of silicon vines.

But the devices that we use to connect to it are becoming tiny

I, Cher

bits of circuitry we carry on our persons: pagers, cellular phones, palm computers.

Soon it will be difficult to imagine human life without electronic connection to the machine/human world of cyberspace.

Medical technologies advance in the direction of a full organic/technological merger.

Through the century we developed devices to inject things into people, or to surround people and breathe for them and keep them alive, and finally to implant into people to replace pieces of themselves.

Twentieth-century popular entertainments betrayed our fascination and fear of the cyborg we are all becoming: the 6 Million Dollar Man, Robocop, Inspector Gadget.

But it seems to me that in this new century we are in the process of reconciling ourselves to the machine.

The human voice seems almost passe: what we find beautiful is the merger of the human

voice with the machine voice in which the distinction no longer makes any sense.

In our merger with machines, we can play with hybrid identities the way Eiffel 65 plays with the human voice.

For Hayes's generation, which never knew an environment without the computer, the electronic/organic merger seems not only inevitable but unquestionable, a baseline fact of life.

There are, of course, many deep ethical and existential problems that arise as we all become cyborgs. But we are being led into this global transformation of and play with identities by popular music.

And that's appropriate, because the question of when and how to merge with a machine is, finally, an aesthetic question, a question about how to make the things we make and ourselves, how to look and sound, and how, as we achieve ever-greater control of our bodies, to become.

Cher's work of art isn't "Believe," it's her self.

Editor's Note

I'll be brief: some stories in the March 29, 2000 edition of the *CapTimes* were fakes. They were included in our annual April Fools issue along side most stories that were real.

There are no raccoon or cat-sized rats in Meade Heights (at least none that I'm aware of). That story was a joke, believable as it may have been.

The Patrice Gaines story was intended to be a real story. It turned out to appear to be a fake and we apologized to Ms. Gaines on the front page for misrepresenting her life story.

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