

Making the Big Spring Scene

In the reign of Spring, the young Techman's fancy turns to a great deal more than love. First and foremost in his nimble mind is the thought of his possible GPA for the term, as of midterms. Then, when there is no cramming for tests, he daintily snatches at intellectual stimulation — the harder to grasp, the better.

In the last few weeks, the stimulus has been provided in a way that could only help to lower the prestige of Caltech in the surrounding community. On two consecutive days, the Y lounge was the scene of small, subversive group discussions with representatives of lower San Francisco society. The first was one Eric Nord, the "big daddy of the Beatniks." When Nord arrived some ten minutes late, the room was already filled with shabbily dressed, bearded fanatics. Nord (all 350 pounds of him) stooped to get through the door, and, on seeing the crowd, smiled broadly through his red beard. He felt at home.

As soon as he had settled down in the big easy chair, the proteges closed in a little so that they could hear every word and hang on to every sentence to catch its fuller implications. Nord talked all about the big scene up in San Fran and how the L.A. cats could make the same scene out in Venice and really that this was the way to live and the nine-to-five scene was a drag and society was a rat race and the beats can't make their own scene because the nine-to-fivers are trying to make it for them. Mainly the cops. The room was absolutely quiet when Nord wasn't speaking; an outsider could feel the relationship that had been established between this big man and his prospective followers. Only trouble could result from such a union.

As if this weren't enough, a Congregational missionary from North Beach arrived the next day to further incite the subversives. Even though Pierre Delattre was supposed to be nothing more than an observer and source of aid to these beat people, he very unsubtly colored his statements to make the beat ones appear better and their philosophy more appealing to young, moldable minds. He actually thought that only working a couple of days a week and wasting the rest of your time thinking or "self-

relating" was good for some people. Worse, some Techmen believed him.

In the next few days, the increase in sandals worn and beards in the process of growing was astounding. One downtown record store claims to have completely sold out Theodore Bickel in one afternoon — mostly to Techniks. An instructor was actually heard by more than fifteen students to say, "Let's see if we can dig this problem." Chaos reigned as classes became meaningless. In reply to inquiries as to the whereabouts of some of the missing students, friends would casually rub their stomachs through faded yellow T shirts, lick their lips, and answer, "Man, don't bug me. How should I know? He makes *his* scene and I make *my* scene. Dig?" Or, if the friend happened to be in a more relating mood: "Yes, yes, yes. Man, he's up in San Fran visiting old Dean Moriarty. Yes, yes, yes. He knows, man."

The completely amoral effects of this movement were most felt, however, not on campus. The stalwart citizens of fair Pasadena soon became conscious of dirty, unkempt young men sitting on bus-stop benches, seemingly waiting for one of the popular Pasadena buses to speed them to their rendezvous. But the buses came and left, and the scowling young men were still there on the benches; sometimes the buses even brought new young men from areas where the stops had no benches.

At an exchange with a group of women on the Friday night of Delattre's visit, one of the brooders, who had been sitting in the dining room since dinner contemplating the pitiful piece of meat he had found on his sparerib, was approached by a do-gooder coed. After talking to the Techman for about seven or eight minutes and receiving absolutely no response, the poor girl decided that it was really *true* what she had heard about Techmen and she began to walk away. Just then, he uttered, "What a drag," and resumed contemplation. The coed turned around. She looked as if she had been struck with a large heavy object. Quivering with delight, she ran to his side and amid sobs managed to blurt out, "You spoke! You actually said something!"

"Materialism is a drag," the brooder continued.

"The nine-to-fivers can have it. Man, all I want to do is live; to understand; to know; to relate with life. All I want is just once to walk to my arbitrarily chosen place in this out dining room and find some meat on my spareribs. How come all the other cats get meat and I don't? I'll tell you why—it's because of the bomb and materialism and the rat race and the nine-to-fivers—that's why!"

The coed's mouth dropped a little, and she panted ever so slightly; ever so gently her breath warmed his cold buttered broccoli. "Let's go to my pad," he said, still searching his sparerib. He got up and walked away without waiting for an answer. She followed, not knowing why nor questioning.

The whole scene was in quite poor taste.

Luckily for everyone, this potentially harmful fad quickly died out as midterms approached, and the necessary preparation for future work in the "big world outside," took on added urgency. The men began to realize that all this beat stuff was simply an escape from reality, and that they must assume their responsibility as good little citizens along with everybody else. There was no question that studying and going to college and succumbing to the social pressures of the student houses (i.e., wise up and get

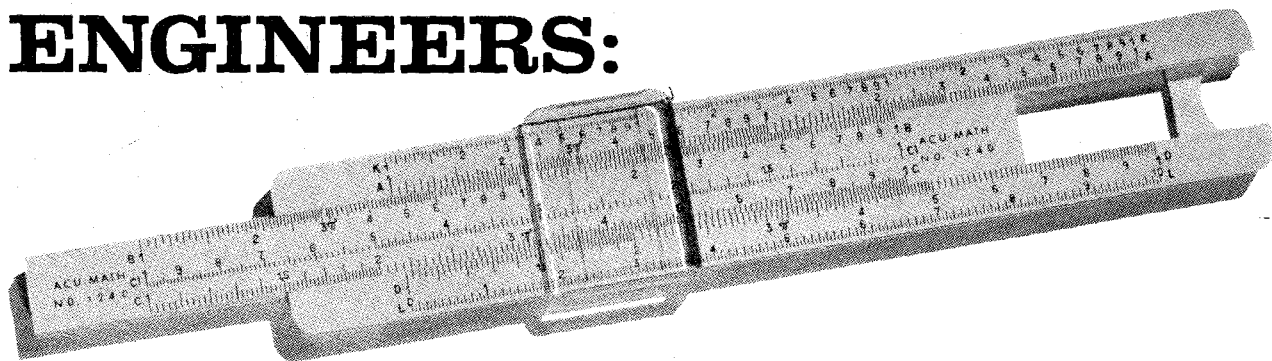
humble) was not the ideal way to live, but after all, it was as good as any other. So why fight it and be considered a radical and lose friends and have a lower GPA than your roommate? One has to plan for the future, does one not? And when you graduate from Caltech, you get great jobs—so what if it is from nine-to-five? Look at all the things you can buy with the money you earn—television, three cars, a lovely home, vacation for two in Europe in all the best places.

Well, you don't get to read all the books or write very much or get to do some of the things you want to, but you've got all those tremendous things to make life easier and more relaxing—things that everybody wants because they're so good. And besides, socially you're accepted and you can raise your children in a healthy atmosphere and they will never feel that the neighbors' children have more than they do.

And when you come home in the evening after a hard day of robust creativity, you can sit in front of the TV set for a couple of hours or go bowling with the boys like you do every Thursday or play bridge like you do every Sunday. You're comfortable and secure—and ignorant. That's the Right Way To Live.

—Martin Carnoy, '60

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