

panies are vying to produce, within three to five years, memory pills that might allow parents to buy an additional 200 points on their kids' SAT scores.

It may not be long before you run into a young lady so seriously modified that you might ask whether she represents a transcendence comparable to the difference between Neanderthals and today's humans. She might have a significantly transformed mind, memory, metabolism, and personality. You'd be curious whether this had changed her immortal soul.

When that day arrives, I propose the Shakespeare Test. You stick this object of curiosity into your hypothetical time machine and dial her back to 1603. You present her to the creator of both Othello and Caliban, who obviously knew something about human nature and humans' reactions to outsiders, and ask Mr. Shakespeare a simple question: "Do you recognize this creature as one of yours? Is she human?"

The deeper question is whether our GRIN technologies can alter the basics of the human condition. Can we imagine them changing the way we shape truth, beauty, love, or happiness? What if our thinking about what is attainable for humans is constrained by our narrow experience? Should we allow for the possibility that as we develop greater capacities, we will discover values that strike us as more profound than those we can realize now, including higher levels of moral excellence? After all, much of what we now consider natural is not necessarily desirable or morally good—cancer, malaria, dementia, aging, starvation, susceptibility to disease, murder, rape, racism.

In 1486, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola eloquently centered all attention on human capabilities in his manifesto of the Italian Renaissance, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. In it, God says to Adam, "We give you no fixed place to live, no form that is peculiar to you, nor any function that is yours alone. According to your desires and judgment, you will have and possess whatever place to live, whatever form, and whatever functions you yourself choose."

We have been attempting to transcend the limits of human nature for a long time. We've tried Socratic reasoning and Buddhist enlightenment and Christian sanctification and Cartesian logic and the New Soviet Man. Our successes have ranged from mixed to limited, at best. Once again, we are trying to improve not just our world but our very selves.

Who knows? Maybe this time we'll get it right.

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## *Will American Culture Heal Itself?*

By CAMILLE PAGLIA

I FORESEE NO RESOLUTION OVER THE NEXT 30 YEARS of the stalemate in American culture between religious conservatives and secular humanists, among whom I number myself. If there is any shift in power, it may well be toward the religious side. Muslim jihadists have forced a confrontation with Western culture, which they portray as irredeemably corrupt, from its callous materialism to its empty hedonism. Unfortunately, from my perspective, the most vigorous defenders of the West against this challenge have come from the right wing, where there is equal rejection of the 1960s legacy of theatrical individualism and unfettered sexual freedom.

Religion has been intrinsic to American culture since the immigration of Puritan dissidents. No force was strong enough to combat it until the rise of Hollywood, the new Babylon, in the early 20th century. I have celebrated Hollywood as an eruption of the West's buried paganism. But now the entertainment industry, which once drew from a vibrant milieu of popular performance (vaudeville, variety shows, operetta, musical comedy), has become a manic world unto itself—the only culture, aside from high-tech gadgetry, that young people know. In current movies, for example, there is an overreliance on glitzy special effects and dizzily rapid cutting, accompanied by neglect of basic matters of character, motivation, and setting. I am pessimistic about the ability of Hollywood to recover its creativity: Market forces are too strong (because of the staggering profits from world distribution), and studio decision-making is dominated by risk-averse corporate values.

The only answer to the competing tyrannies of religion and Hollywood is art. But art has never taken deep root in the United States; there is little sense that art represents the cultural heritage of the nation, as it does in Europe. The United States, which is still relatively young, began as a frontier society pragmatically focused on the future. Art was a luxury and frivolity. Fundamentalist Protestantism also discouraged image making on biblical grounds. Even today, art remains a minority interest. It has been a struggle in recent decades to defend even modest federal arts funding, a situation worsened by a series of bitter controversies over contemporary artworks of antireligious or pornographic content.

My hope is that, over the coming decades, art's spirituality can be demonstrated for a skeptical American public. This effort would require a massive conversion of the educational establishment at the primary and secondary levels. The authentic vision of the 1960s counterculture, which still inspires me, was of the magnitude of both art and nature. Yet over the past 35 years, a nihilistic brand of theory (poststructuralist and postmodernist) invaded American humanities departments. It excluded nature from its discourse and subordinated aesthetics to a crusading politics. I may agree with those politics, but I abhor the distortion and marginalization of art that have resulted.

Theory is thankfully ebbing, but what will rise in its place? I am betting that a young generation of scholars will take up the cause of renewed evangelism for art. Secular humanists who deplore the interference of religious activism in debates over public policy must begin to recognize that rote appeals for "social justice" are simply not enough: The soul too must be fed. Intellectuals must offer a spiritual alternative to religion—the kind of expansion of consciousness and refinement of perception that are the gifts of art.

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## *Will Globalization Make Hatred More Lethal?*

By ROBERT WRIGHT

"LINK FOUND BETWEEN HATRED AND KILLING" IS not a headline that would sell many newspapers. But you might turn a few heads with "Link between hatred and killing changes in ominous way." Or—to put a finer point on it—"Ratio of killing to hatred slated to rise." This is one of the biggest stories of the last 30 years, and, probably, the next 30: the growing lethality of hatred.

Why has terrorism become public enemy number one? The most common answer—the rise of a brand of radical Islam that uses terror as its weapon—is true insofar as it goes. But the reason this weapon is so scary is that something deeper has changed: Technology now makes it possible for clusters of intensely hateful people to cause thousands, even millions, of deaths without using the political

or military machinery of a state. Yes, the hateful people most likely to exploit this fact today are radical Muslims, but even if this threat subsides, the generic threat will remain: Hatred is more lethal than it used to be. And the underlying technological trends will persist over the next three decades, making it more lethal still.

Some of these trends are fairly obvious. Tools for making biological weapons—fermenters, centrifuges, gene sequencers—infiltrate the industrial and academic landscape as biotechnology evolves. And though the spread of weapons-grade nuclear material doesn't have a similarly strong intrinsic impetus, regulation that would stop it has been lacking. Meanwhile, the emerging field of nanotechnology may introduce the inorganic equivalent of bioweapons: self-replicating, invisibly destructive microscopic machines.

But such obviously lethal technologies are only half the problem. There is also the insidious influence of information technology. Infotech, notably the Internet, makes recipes for weapons available to ever-wider circles. It is also a handy administrative aide for the terrorist on the go. A terrorist group can stay fluidly, elusively intact and then suddenly focus its energies to mount attacks.

What could be worse than a world in which technology is making grass-roots hatred more massively lethal? A world in which technology threatens to increase the amount of hatred as well.

The personal computer lets Al Qaeda cheaply generate polished recruiting videos, while the transmission of video gets easier, moving from videotape to DVD to streaming media. Among the emerging niches in the ultra-narrow-casting ecosystem of online video and audio: terro-vangelism. And the blogosphere, though potentially a medium for cross-cultural communication, tends to reinforce tribalism, as people settle into cocoons of the like-minded. (Witness the American Left and Right.)

Fifty years ago, a reasonable lodestone of foreign policy was to make sure all foreign governments either liked us or feared us. Today that won't suffice, because foreign governments no longer mediate all major threats to national security. Essential elements of future security range from the tough international regulation of lethal technologies to a new kind of focus on human well-being around the world. To the extent that people—Muslim or non-Muslim—feel bitterly resentful, alienated, or exploited by America or by globalization, we're all in trouble.