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Another (Even More) Modest Proposal

by Nancy N. Shontz



GVSU made great strides this past summer in its war against nature, a condition referred to in administrative circles as Disorder or Anti-civilization. Past victories have included such minor skirmishes as bulldozing natural fields of local trees and wildflowers in order to plant an artificial forest (called an arboretum) complete with non-native species of trees in carefully crafted configurations. Soon there will also be artificial water in fountains as well as man-made rocks called sculptures.

With this project well in hand, the forces of Civilization moved on to the back entrance of campus where more Disordered land was covered with beautiful smooth asphalt decorated with neat rows of geometric designs. Artificial hills were built around the edges of this asphalt field, large trees which provided a jarring contrast were removed, and, best of all, a particularly nasty bit of Disorder called a marsh was filled. This marsh was not in the way of the asphaltting process, but it was admittedly messy and a disgrace to the champions of Order.

No longer will those who prefer music from car stereos or those who like the sounds of car engines gunning for a parking spot be forced to hear frogs and red-winged blackbirds call from this untidy little corner. No longer will Administrators, driving past the corner of 42nd Avenue and Campus Drive, be forced to look at cattails growing in uneven array. The area can now be properly mowed and treated with an arsenal of chemicals to discourage the growth of anything which is not manicured lawn. Protests by a few subversive, Anti-civilization members of the faculty were dismissed with the scorn that they deserved.

As encouraging as these signs of a total victory for Order/Civilization are, I believe that if we put our minds, energy and other resources behind this cause, much more rapid progress could be made, perhaps in areas which have not been considered by the generals waging this war.

Nancy N. Shontz is an associate professor in the Biology Department. She started at Grand Valley in 1975 but her first ten years "don't count," as she puts it, since she worked then as an adjunct and visitor. She began her tenure track position in 1985.

Consider the manicured acres of grass which already exist. The order which they appear to have is at best turf deep. The leaves of grass grow at different angles; the plants have to be mowed and watered regularly to keep them looking look like golf greens, and underneath is a chamber of horrors: disordered roots, earthworms, soil bacteria and fungi, all growing in haphazard arrays which are most Uncivilized.

The earthworms are particularly noxious, since they periodically venture out of the soil to clutter the walkways and offend the eyes (and occasionally the noses) of the more fastidious minions of Civilization. It should be no great matter to sterilize the soil for some distance underneath the grass to prevent this unwanted Disorder. Of course, the grass might not thrive under these conditions, but (as indicated above) it is only a half-Civilized compromise. How much better if it were all replaced by artificial turf!

Now, lest the armies who currently take care of the grass be concerned that they will be out of jobs, I want to allay their fears. There are so many tasks before us that I doubt their children's children will see the end of this Taming of the Mice, Rabbits, Shrews, and other Wildlife. There is the ravine to be filled, since the task of making the ravine trees and trilliums grow in neat, orderly rows is an outcome devoutly to be wished, but one perhaps out of reach. But the trees which now grow on campus can be killed through Chemical Magic and artificial leaves can be tied to the branches. These leaves (green for spring and summer, red for fall to create the proper ambiance) can be tied in ordered ranks to the branches on the same days each year, thus removing any doubt about whether the campus will appear at its Best for Special Occasions.

The leaves can be removed in the winter, placed in boxes, and the boxes stored in orderly fashion. Flowering trees can be decked in similar manner with tidy artificial flowers which will keep the desired appearance for a scheduled period of time (longer than Disorder now permits), flowers which may then be removed before they scatter on the artificial grass and make a mess.

The birds which currently fly in apparently random (and therefore undesirable, of course) patterns in the sky will doubtless be discouraged by the lack of Anti-civilized trees. Most will move on and in time be unable to find nesting sites or food. It is historically interesting to note that the Ban the Birds movement began on a small scale when disordered, non-asphalt-covered fields existed on the campus;

these were ordered mowed at the very time when meadowlarks and killdeers were nesting on the ground in these fields. Should anyone be so misguided as to miss these flying felons who bombard Civilized cars lined up in neat rows in the asphalt parking lots, I am sure that some enterprising researchers could obtain a large grant to design mechanical birds which fly only in rigid patterns and sing correct songs four times an hour.

Of course, the wind has the potential to cause disarray of the artificial leaves and flowers. Prospective students and their parents who visit campus might be offended by this lack of Order. The construction of much higher artificial mountains covered with tidy artificial grass would be a temporary solution to this problem until total climate control becomes a reality.

Having now dealt with all the Natural Disasters, some alert captain in Zumberge Hall will notice that the students are not Tidy. They wear different clothing, they walk at different speeds; in short, they will mar the Perfection of the campus appearance. Uniforms, platoons, military haircuts, and counted cadence are the obvious solutions. Faculty — who tend to be the least amenable to regimentation — can be treated with electroshock to encourage their complacent conformity — under the Health Plan for only a \$75 deductible charge. Those who still manage to express any vestige of individuality or disapprobation with the process of becoming Civilized can be replaced with a videotape which can be edited to remove any undesirable uniqueness. ♣