

SURELY THERE IS NO LANGUAGE OTHER THAN YIDDISH that has such a nuanced vocabulary to denote the many and varied forms of repulsive male humans: *nebbish*, *nudnyik*, *putz*, *schlmazel*, *schlemiel*, *schlub*, *schmo*, *schmendrik*, *schmuck*, *schlump*, *schnook*, *schtunk*. For some reason, members of the female gender have been spared the humiliation of an equivalent lexicon. Half of these words describing men are so familiar and assimilated into English that spell-check accepts them without a whimper.

The Schlub

Fluent Yiddish speakers could probably double this list. Even not so fluent Yiddish speakers can readily identify each of these characters in a crowd, and agree instantly on who is who. They might, however, be hard pressed to put into words (as opposed to gestures) what exactly the differences are among these seriously unattractive individuals. The Yiddish terms, because they are so much more nuanced and accurate than their approximate translations, are useful to people trapped in the vagaries of English.

When it comes to our discussion of the continuous city and the ruptured city, the term *schlub* is of particular utility to us. *Schlubiness* begins with outward appearance. Dress and posture denote an essence that radiates from the surface of a person out into the world and inward to the soul. The *schlub* doesn't stand straight; his ribs don't knit tightly together; his abdomen enters a room first, even if he is not fat. His dress is not merely slovenly, it is militantly slovenly; slovenliness as polemic, as a belief system.

It used to be that boys could not wait to be grown men. *Schlubiness* was anathema, and youth was a temporary condition, easily cured and not contagious. Scotch and cigarettes helped. Think how Mickey Rooney dressed at sixteen, how eager he was to assume the burdens of *menschlichkeit*. He could tap dance like mad (Judy Garland could barely keep up), but he did it in a three-piece tweed suit and a snappy fedora.

It's all backwards now. For a variety of reasons, some of them good reasons, manhood is a discredited concept, and grown-ups are rarer all the time. Hardly anyone wants to be a grown-up, and most of the world's wealth is generated by adolescents of various ages. Access to serious big-time venture capital depends on looking like an undergraduate. Late-onset adulthood is the norm and maturity is a grade most people want to skip on the way to the grave.

The ubiquitous *schlub* in his contemporary form has his origins in Silicon Valley—the archetypal ruptured city, where all communications are virtual, and people e mail or text someone who is ten feet away. There are no sartorial dimensions to social media. The workplace is the dorm room writ large, where one rolls out of bed in a grubby tee-shirt, dons flip-flops and a pair of

shorts with lots of pockets and settles in for fourteen hours of staring at a computer screen.

Steve Jobs was a transitional, somewhat contradictory figure, part way to the schlub hegemony. He was fastidious and impeccable, but always in a black tee-shirt for all occasions, presumably including his own burial. With his early demise, the style issue is settled. The universal role model is the reigning King of the Schlubs, Mark Zuckerberg - an ideal man, as Fred Astaire, Cary Grant and Gregory Peck were in their respective days. It's easier to look like Mark Zuckerberg, the guy who's got it all - multi-billions of his own making, his very own Silicon Valley campus, the unweathered countenance and insolent slouch of a twelve-year-old, and a wardrobe that is pure genius.

But we are not completely done with Steve Jobs yet. As he left us on earth, he bequeathed (with considerable help from architect Norman Foster) the purest vision of ruptured city utopia, the design for the forthcoming Apple Headquarters in the not-a-town of Cupertino, California. This perfect, round ring-of-a-thing, is a completely hermetic private cosmos floating in the undifferentiated space of an idealized landscape (landscape?) like a Starship, connected (tenuously) to the rest of the world by automobiles, freeways and a vast parking garage. It is the embodiment of the principal and founding myth of the ruptured city, the rationale for its being: The Ruptured City is Safe.

The main motive behind the Apple Headquarters or the Facebook campus is quest for two kinds of absolute safety. First is old-fashioned physical safety—separation from the poor, the crazy, the dangerous and the unknown - all those characters running around loose and unavoidable in the continuous city. But there is a new kind of security demanded in these places that has to do with the privatization and commodification of knowledge—knowledge as private capital. The internet provides free access to information, but ironically, the means of doing it are the most jealously kept secrets. At Facebook, Twitter and Google, they keep the kids inside so they don't spill the codes, the software, or the business plan at recess; they keep them amused (ping pong, massage, whatever they want) and extremely well-fed for free so they stay inside for every waking hour. That is the motivation behind the basic typology of every Silicon Valley campus, of which Apple is the apotheosis.

Most of these "campuses" have an outer ring consisting of a vast parking lot like an NFL stadium or a super-mall. The parking separates the buildings from the rest of the world, and to get from the parking inside one must pass through a security gauntlet that makes Tel Aviv Airport seem lax. Inside the complex, past the multiple security hurdles, there is usually something that looks like a street, lined with restaurants, gyms, dry cleaners, and amusements of various wholesome sorts. All that is missing from these "streets" is the sense of gritty urban reality as one might find on Disneyland's Main Street. At Disneyland there are actually people of different hues, some fat people and enough children and oldsters to make the idea of mortality palpable. Not here.

This is where schlubiness comes into the picture. There are three elements to the cult of schlubiness. First is the idealization of youth. Jackpot ideas, the great venture capital bonanzas, come from—or are thought to come from—the very young. Don't approach the great titans of the VC world with an idea for a start-up, if you look like a grown-up.

Second is the virtuality of everything—connection throughout the day to 200 million at the click of a mouse is at the expense of the immediate. Electronic immersion is total, and it makes the rustle of leaves or the people at the next table unobservable. The 200 million couldn't care less what you look like.

Third is busyness. There is just so much to do, so many messages to answer that there is no time to bother wearing anything but flip-flops and shorts. Plus, if you did bother and anyone actually noticed, they would think you are nuts.

The anti-type to the schlub is the flaneur, the idle urban spectator, celebrated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the essential citizen of the modern city. He was idealized by Walter Benjamin as the hero of urban civilization. Baudelaire described him as the "gentleman stroller of city streets... the crowd his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes."

One important thing about the flaneur is that he dressed really well. As part of the public spectacle, as the spectator of his own public presence, he was or is a narcissist. Narcissism is part of urbanity, heretofore at least, an essential part. It is why people still look so good in New York, Paris, and Milan.

The flaneur is dressed for a stroll, for the café, for flirtation. He may work sometimes, but that is an interruption to what he really does. The city of the flaneur is inherently not dangerous. Everybody is there, including all the crazies, but everybody is watching. That is what they all are doing – watching each other, and learning surprising and new things. The schlub in his natural environment has the protection of gates, walls, cameras, guards. The flaneur moves in safety through fascinating and dangerous waters, protected by the eyes of a million other flaneurs. Jane Jacobs, Richard Sennet and Oscar Newman are among those who have made this observation.

In the very recent past, something strange has happened to the schlubs. Large numbers of them have escaped from their native habitat in Silicon Valley. Like the rampaging simians who made it out of the primate lab in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, they have invaded the territories of the flaneur. There are swarms of them in San Francisco; you see them in New York, and they have even been spotted in Paris.

The apparent cause of this migration is boredom – utter, hopeless boredom with the routine, the environment and lily-white blandness of life exclusively amongst their own kind. Why else do the biggest players - Twitter, Google, Zynga, Salesforce - despite their security phobias and their

deep-rooted culture of insularity, feel an urgent need to establish themselves in eternally messy San Francisco to recruit and retain their talent? Why are a dozen San Francisco neighborhoods and classic urban spaces all over, from Place des Vosges to Rittenhouse Square teeming with the young people who are the beating heart of the tech economy? What was missing from their lives in ruptureland? Why are hundreds of thousands of little Mark Zuckerbergs bidding every apartment in the best cities up into the stratosphere? Do the junior schlubs feel some inner need to transform themselves into flaneurs for those few hours a week they are not working or sleeping?

It is not, as if everything is going smoothly in the transmigration of modern schlubs from the ruptured cities of their birth to the continuous cities of their choosing. Many San Franciscans welcome the hordes of dot-com schlubs with the warmth that Parisians greeted the Wehrmacht. One San Francisco neighborhood newspaper attributed damaged street trees to “a typical after-hours rampage of over-age frat boys with a decidedly Google odor.” The presence of private shuttle buses using city bus stops to ferry urban dwelling Googletes to their Silicon Valley campus literally caused riots, stoning of shuttle buses and the storming of City Hall in protest.

The big tech-companies’ infusion of billions of dollars into inner city economies is a probably good thing, but with a steep price. For many the impact on real estate is devastating. In San Francisco, 20% per year inflation is now piled upon what was already the most expensive city in the country. The displacers are the highly paid schlubs - overwhelmingly male, white, under thirty, and many with a loutish cast. The displaced are the city’s middle class, its minorities, and most important, the infinitely varied, unclassifiable human miscellany that make up the texture of a city. They are furious.

What is most distressing is that the tech giants who have devoured vast chunks of San Francisco’s commercial real estate, have so far failed to grasp what it means to be part of the city, even why their own young staff want to be there. As of this writing, each of them has replicated its ruptured city environment with its full-security apparatus and total insularity in the middle of the city – new offices with their own gyms, games, meditation rooms, the cuisine of the world – all inside, private and behind layers of guards. The city gave millions in tax abatement to get Twitter to put thousands of employees into a vast vacant hulk near City Hall, hoping that Twitter would catalyze revival of derelict blocks. Legions of Twitterites are there now, but the nice Filipino lady who makes excellent sandwiches directly across the street has never seen one of them. It is too early to say what the outcome will be in this struggle for urban turf and its clash of culture and style.

When you look at pictures of San Francisco from fifty or seventy years ago, the differences and similarities between then and now are striking. Depending upon where you look, much of the physical city is astonishingly unchanged. The streets are filled with cars that are somewhat more primitive than today’s, but many of the people on the old sidewalks are decidedly less primi-

tive looking than today. Thousands of men are the dapper hatted, suited grown-ups that Mickey Rooney was so eager to become. The ladies (ladies is the right word) are those of my mother's generation. A pre-requisite for going downtown was a veiled hat, a string of pearls, gloves and a purse to match.

One can look at these photographs and hope that the City has the same civilizing effect on a generation of loutish dot.com schlubs that Rome had on the Visigoths fifteen hundred years ago or Peking on its Manchu conquerors a little more recently. That that may happen (it would be nice), but it is not the main thing that is going on.

The main thing is transformation. Transformation is the historical process that makes the continuous city a living organism. San Francisco is very young – only 165 years old, and just think who has come and gone in that short time: the wild-ass hooligans of the Gold Rush; the proper bourgeoisie of 1900; the stevedores and merchant seamen of the once working port; the big-time bankers when the City was a banking capital; beatniks – a big deal at the time; then hippies – a big deal everywhere, but born in San Francisco. Some of these characters have vanished without a trace; some have left a lingering presence.

It may be that these generations of ghosts are exerting an unseen magnetism, drawing the dot.com schlubs out of the ruptures of Silicon Valley, as sweetmeats draw ants. One thinks of Aldo Rossi's gorgeous sentence, Cities are great encampments of the living and the dead. This communion with the dead may be a necessary form of human nourishment, something we crave and need to be fully alive. As the ghosts of the city exert their inexorable force, the schlubs change and the city changes. They are the next layer of over-painting, a future archeological discovery now forming. Over-painting with transparent layers is the essence of the continuous city.

Welcome schlubs.