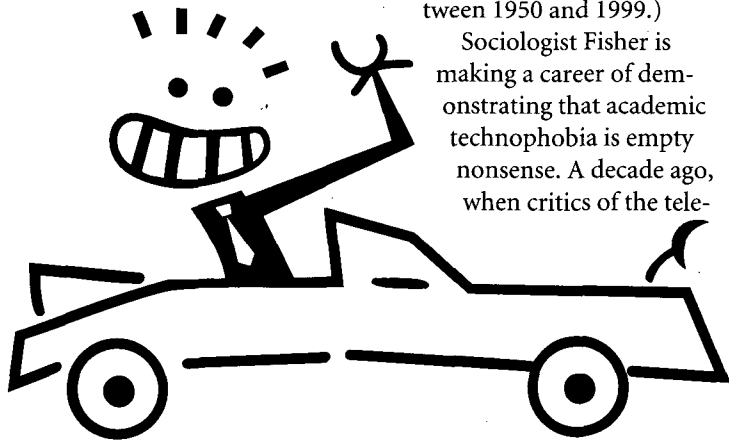


The Geography of Somewhere

By Charles Paul Freund

The crimes of the car are manifold, or so say academics and others who have blamed it for—among other sins—atmospheric pollution, environmental scarification, highway carnage, personal over-indebtedness, back-seat



immorality, and a sense of rootlessness often summed up by author James Kunstler's titular phrase, *The Geography of Nowhere*. (That is, you may no longer have much fealty to any place, but then there's hardly any places worth identifying with anyway.)

Yet lots of people continue to buy cars. Presumably, they're getting something in exchange for such horrors. One of the things they're getting, according to University of California at Berkeley sociologist Claude Fisher, is—well, a sense of “rootedness” in their communities. In his recent paper, “Ever-More Rooted Americans,” published by the Russell Sage Foundation, Fisher argues that automotive mobility has allowed Americans to move to better jobs while remain-

ing in the communities they like.

“When living a couple of miles from one's job was impractical,” Fisher declares, “changing jobs required changing homes. When half an hour's drive easily covers a dozen miles, people can change jobs and stay in their homes.” Fisher's study uses Census data to demonstrate the point. (For instance: Rates of residential mobility actually declined from the 19th to the 20th centuries, and continued to decline between 1950 and 1999.)

Sociologist Fisher is making a career of demonstrating that academic technophobia is empty nonsense. A decade ago, when critics of the tele-

phone were arguing that phones were responsible for creating “a palpable emptiness across which voices seemed uniquely disembodied and remote,” he released a study that demonstrated that the telephone had, from its introduction, “solidified and deepened social relationships, most notably for women, isolated farm wives, the middle aged and the elderly.”

Elementary Biometrics

By Sara Rimensnyder

A technological revolution is brewing in an unlikely locale: elementary school cafeterias. In a few Pennsylvania schools, kids can now pay for lunches with their fingerprints. It's one of

Balance Sheet

By Jeff A. Taylor

ASSETS

▲ **Border Pass.** A NAFTA arbitration panel rules in favor of Mexico and against the U.S. in a trucking dispute. As a result, Texas, California, New Mexico, and Arizona must allow access to Mexican trucks, provided they pass state safety standards.



▲ **Bit Nation.** The Net goes unhip as a survey by the Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that most people now have Net access. Fully 56 percent of the adult population—or 104 million people—now go online for their porn, stock quotes, and bomb recipes.

▲ **Crop Flop.** Greenpeace backs away from opposition to field trials of “golden” rice, a vitamin A-enriched grain that could help stop blindness in the Third World.

▲ **Good Sports.** Members of a Florida gay and lesbian softball league oppose quotas for straight players. Heteros are now capped at two per team lest they dominate the league. “That's ridiculous. That's like saying all African-Americans are fantastic basketball players,” one gay activist notes.



▲ **Click Through.** A federal appeals court gives Barnes & Noble's Internet wing the right to keep using Amazon.com's “single-click technology” pending a trial over Amazon's 1999 patent. Jeff Bezos' gang thinks they are the first merchants in history to remember a customer.

▲ **Game Trading.** File-trading network Aimster tries to avoid the liabilities of Napster by using the Digital Millennium Copyright Act against the content owners who wrote it. Users are officially barred—wink-wink—from opening the files they download. Any attempt by anyone to check up on that would violate DMCA bans on encryption hacking.

the first consumer applications of biometrics, an industry that offers an uneasy tradeoff, some argue, between efficiency and privacy. At schools such as Welsh Valley, in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, children have been speeding through the lunch line. They press their finger to a scanner, which records 17 grid points that are then used to identify their personal school lunch accounts. (The actual fingerprints are not recorded.)

Officials love the system: It's fast, kids can't lose their lunch money, and it helps

schools comply with a federal law protecting students on the free lunch program from their classmates' scrutiny. The system is optional, and only a few parents have declined to let their kids participate in it.

Such popularity suggests a future in which biometrics are a daily part of doing business—assuming that parents are as willing to offer up their own fingerprints as their children's. The technology has also turned up in welfare offices and at international customs desks, and as it gets cheaper, it could crop up all

SOURCE

Not every movie is made for entertainment purposes—or intended to endure. **There are also “ephemeral” films**, archivist Rick Prelinger notes, **including “advertising, educational, industrial, documentary, amateur and government” pictures.** Prelinger has now set up a Web site (archive.org/movies) where scholars and browsers can download, watch, and reuse about 750 such movies for free, “with no restrictions other than that the films cannot be resold or licensed by anyone in their entirety or as stock footage.”

QUOTES

“No one should have to leave their hometown, their families, and their roots to find a good job in America.”

—former Illinois, Connecticut, and Arkansas resident Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) in a Senate floor speech, March 1, 2001

“What we have is government inaction and a response by auto-makers to pressure from a number of sources.”

—the Sierra Club’s Daniel Becker, commenting on Detroit’s upcoming line of hybrid vehicles, in the February 20 *New York Times*

International Biometrics Association told the Associated Press.

If you aren’t ready to believe him, at least you can still opt out. In that, one hopes, the Pennsylvania program will set the standard.

Cleaning Out the Stacks

By Sara Rimensnyder

A new federal law orders libraries to install “filtering” software, to prevent kids from tapping the Internet’s seamier educational offerings. The measure, part of the Children’s Internet Protection Act signed last December, denies federal funding to libraries that don’t set up blocking software. Meanwhile, several states—including Maine, Montana, and Arkansas—are considering their own versions of the federal mandate.

Now the American Library Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, and a growing list of additional plaintiffs are suing to stop the law. They charge that the filters block access to constitutionally protected material, a claim backed in a recent *Consumer Reports* study that tested six filtering programs on the market today. All of the programs blocked some child-friendly sites. (In a separate study, the program I-Gear blocked even such asexual political groups as the Electronic Frontier Foundation.)

Meanwhile, five out of six failed to deny access to 20 percent of the “bad” sites. The bottom line? A kid looking for boobs will still probably find them; a kid writing a report on breast cancer might have to look elsewhere.

Of course, that isn’t likely ▶



LIABILITIES

▼ **Phased and Confused.** The Institute for Research on the Economics of Taxation calculates that thanks to various phase-outs and credits in the tax code, marginal rates can jump to over 50 percent in some cases. Phase-outs for the Roth IRA, for example, can add up to 12 percentage points to a tax bracket.

▼ **Irish Green.** European Union finance ministers scold Ireland for its pro-growth policies. Noise is made about the Emerald Isle’s “high inflation rate,” but that’s just a function of the weak Euro and lot of trade with the U.S., particularly in high tech. The E.U. also disses Ireland’s planned tax cuts.

▼ **Berry Funny.** The Food and Drug Administration decides it can regulate Web content if health claims are made about a foodstuff and product labels have Web addresses on them. Ocean Spray Cranberries is told to stop making claims about its juices, which, the FDA helpfully notes, are not drugs.

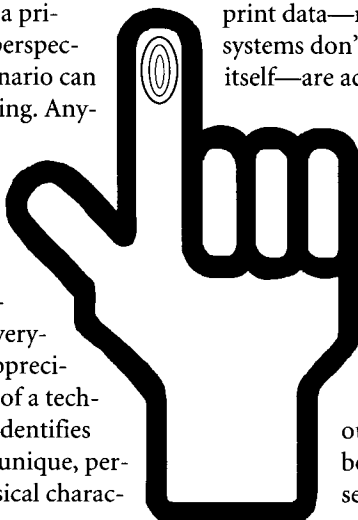
▼ **Buffalo Chips.** A Buffalo, New York–area service provider pleads guilty to the charge of knowingly providing Net access to child pornography, the first plea of its kind. BuffNET was charged with failing to excise the newsgroup “Pedo University” after users complained about its content. The ISP says it is cheaper to pay the \$5,000 fine than fight.

▼ **Too Fair.** The Justice Department says Tenet Healthcare Corp. paid “above fair market” salaries to physicians so the docs would send patients to a Tenet hospital in Florida.

▼ **Ballot Bogey.** An Oregon judge rules that the limits state voters approved on state and local government last November were unconstitutional. Ballot measure 7 forced government to compensate property owners when regulations reduce the value of their property. The judge says the measure was too broad and should not have been presented as a single provision.

over the private sector, perhaps ultimately rendering the debit card obsolete.

But from a privacy-rights perspective, that scenario can seem unsettling. Anyone who has longed for the days before Social Security numbers followed you everywhere can appreciate the costs of a technology that identifies users with a unique, permanent physical charac-



teristic such as a fingerprint.

Biometrics advocates argue that numerical fingerprint data—remember, these systems don’t file the print itself—are actually a lot

easier to keep private than traditional records. “You can’t take a look at a biometric, which is a string of ones and zeros, and find out who somebody is,” a representative from the

