The not-so-current crazes: moving close to insanity

By Glenn Brownstein

"Statistics indicate the rate of incidence of insanity continues at its present level, the whole booming population of the world will be crazy in the not-too-distant future. Occasionally, people show streaks of behavior which make it believe that this not-too-distant future is already here."

Is this some world leader denouncing the frivolous attitude toward many world problems? Is this a famous psychiatric authority analyzing famous mass murderers? Is this a Harvard professor examining the world economic problem?

It's a shame to disappoint you, O loyal reader, but that was John G. Burr, Jr. '40, Editor of The Tech, complaining about a particular campus fad (goldfish-swallowing) running rmit in 1939. Now, 37 years later, I wish to make some parallels not only to the behavior of popular college fads of the twenties, but to our own major fads (Burr and I) both lived through, and now to deal with them.

Burr equated 1939's epidemic of goldfish-swallowing with a "mere symptom of frustration." Perhaps people, tired of sawdust and demonstration games, were demonstrating the "new morality" of the 1930's somewhat analogous to what we feel of social misfits of all types.

What was it like on March 30, 1939, when Albert E. Hayes, Jr. '42 gained national recognition (even making The New York Times) by consuming 42 goldfish as a single sitting? Perhaps it was similar to the heroes' welcome Charlie Bruno '74 received on that cold snowy February night when he successfully travelled from Baker to Kresge and back wearing only a pair of scissors. It was like the beginning of the "streaking" fad, when every Sunday midnight a large group of Barr and Bricks (and others) repeated Bruno's feat in front of a large group of cheering admirers.

Now we hear of another "streaking" incident in 8.02 lecture Wednesday morning. To make this less disturbing, consider how goldfish are sitting on top of our polio act from 1964. Surely the best student representatives of this nation can come up with a more original, trendy way of expressing individuality.

I'm sure I am not alone in the belief that all this 'fashion' is bad. After all, we veterans of original streaking days put up with complaints from Infrmary officials and morally outraged McCormick women, yet faithfully held our streak every work through the late wintery and spring regardless of whatever protests were made.

I hope that MIT continues a trend for which we gods fads to take place among a restant, dissatisfied student body. Take 1939 (goldfish-swallowing) and 1976 (the return of streaking), for example. MIT students a few years ago were most concerned about seemingly "unfair" exams. To quote my 1939 counterpart, "a number of students find themselves in the delightful position of having a large number of exams in the three days preceding longer finals." Sound familiar?

The pages of The Tech were filled with outcries against the all-too-frequent use of alcohol on campus, as students used the deadly liquid to influence professors shortly before exam periods. Burr wrote, "We can't but look askance at Tech undergraduates who periodically entice their professors to beer parties and then with alcoholic beverages." He also found an 1872 English report that stated that habitual drinking was confined to the lowest group of alcoholics, and promptly drew the obvious parallel with students and faculty.

I am glad to see that three MIT students were arrested for participation in a "snowball war" with Cambridge police. Nowadays sophisticated individuals, décembre 15th habits have been replaced by a less-wary and spring regardless of whatever protests were made.

The late '30s were troubled times, what with a great war looming on the horizon. The events of the Great Depression still vivid in the awareness of MIT. In 1976, there is an almost constant threat of conflict in many world areas, severe urban problems, and a sluggish economy.

It's no wonder, then, that one student sought to take matters into her own hands and express the sort of rebellious dissatisfaction that Al Hayes obviously felt back in '39.

I am impressed with the letter from Mr. Suarez, "A return to behemothism in the Tech of April second. As an officer of the Student Homophile League, I fortunates in with him in many areas. In his letter, Mr. Suarez writes about the 'rights of others to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' and immediately proceeds to deny all of those to a large segment of the population, the gay community. Gay men and women have existed as long as men and women have existed, as any perfunctorily reading of Sappho and Plato will show. Homosexuality is hardly unusual, it is exhibited in many animals other than man, in the wild as well as in captivity. Gayness has been lauded by some societies, such as classical Greece, and lambasted by others, such as the English today. American society is just beginning to emerge from a period of repression, just as it is beginning to emerge from the persecution of women and minorities. MIT, as a major university and bastion of intellectual freedom, has been among the forefronters in trying to alleviate some of these repressions (although it is hardly perfect and often fails miserably). As such, SHL was given recognition as a student activity in 1971, long before any of the other gay student groups in the area. It has always been given exactly the same attention and respect as any other group. Moreover, like any other student activity, it has the right to apply for space and funds. To deny it that right is the equivalent of denying that right to the Black Student Union, the Chinese Student Club, or any other organization simply because its members tend to be of a minority that may be unpopular with some people.

The Student Homophile League, and the Institute by allowing it to exist, are also get to read the pamphlet (which MIT would have to allow in the R/O pamphlets, lest it be accused of gay bias). No doubt thousands of freshmen would be relieved to learn that life at MIT is not all gay.

But you ask, "What can I do?" You can become a charter member of the Student Heterophile League, and help make all these things happen. Just send your name, term address and phone number to the address below (via interdepartmental mail). If there are at least a few heterosexuals on campus, I'm sure we can start a worthwhile activity.