

Kidder bares *Soul*

By Diana ben-Aaron

Tracy Kidder, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Soul of a New Machine*, explained how he wrote the book and offered remarks on "writing about real people" at a lecture Thursday.

Kidder, a Harvard graduate and regular writer for *The Atlantic*, said his anger at not being able to readily understand science drove him to research and write articles on scientific subjects.

"I was terrified of math and always did very badly at science," he said. "But there are ways of understanding science without knowing calculus. It doesn't cripple you to know very little about the subject you're writing about if you find the right people to explain it to you."

Kidder said he first became interested in computers when his editor at *The Atlantic* suggested he "look into computers" and suggested he approach Tom West, a software engineer at Data General Corporation.

"I knew I didn't want to write a huge book about the computer industry," Kidder said. "I wanted to tell a narrative, one small part. I think the idea of a book — 'I want to write about computers' — is not as important as what you do with it."

Kidder said he gathered the material for his book "mostly by

"Doc" print is returned

(Continued from page 1)

The vandals had stolen the bullet-and-apple print and removed another print from the wall of the first-floor lecture hall, room 34-101, on either the night of Sept. 15 or the morning of Sept. 16.

The two prints will be returned to the lecture hall after the Committee on the Visual Arts makes its recommendations for the future safety of all the prints in the building, and proper security for the prints is established, she said.

Erratum

The founders of EG & G, Prof. Harold E. "Doc" Edgerton '27, Kenneth Germeshausen '31, and Herbert E. Grier '33 — not the company itself, as stated in *The Tech* [Sept. 20] — donated nearly five million dollars for construction of the center.

just hanging around offices and labs in the evenings. It was made clear to me that if I got in the way, I'd be out, so I tried not to get in the way," he explained.

"Clearly, some people [at Data General] felt it was to their advantage" that he write about their work, Kidder said.

While no one at the corporation requested regular progress reports on the book, the firm's vice president at one time requested control of the manuscript, according to Kidder.

"I really don't know what my lawyers said to their lawyers, but I would not trade ultimate control over what I wrote for access to the story. . . . I agreed only not to reveal trade secrets," he said.

While the book was going to press, he "had bad dreams about those pieces of paper I didn't sign," Kidder said. "After publication, the company took umbrage with some of the reviewers, but not with me," he noted.

"I wasn't interested in trade secrets, and, as one of the characters in the book said, I didn't know enough to understand them anyway," Kidder commented. He also omitted some personal information about individual characters to protect their privacy, he said. "I drew a distinction between individuals and the corporation."

Kidder spent two years researching the book and nine months writing it, he said. He lived on an advance from *The Atlantic's* publishing company, Atlantic-Little Brown, while researching and writing.

Although Kidder and his editor judged the book would have limited appeal and agreed on a "conservative" initial press run of 30,000 copies, the book sold out following an unexpected review on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*.

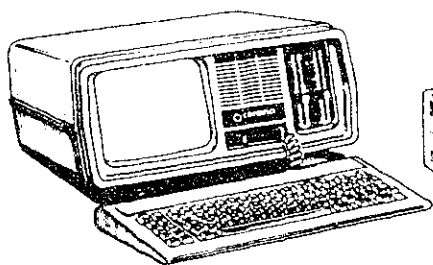
"They ended up printing 100,000 hardcover copies. They printed until they had them sitting around in the warehouse," Kidder said.

Kidder has kept in touch with the main characters in the book, he said. Most of them have left Data General, with the exception of the group's leader, Tom West, now a manager. "He has a big job now," Kidder said. "I feel the exposure has been good for most of them."

"Last night, I got a call from Hollywood about *The Soul of a New Machine*," he said. "I've had these little romances before . . .

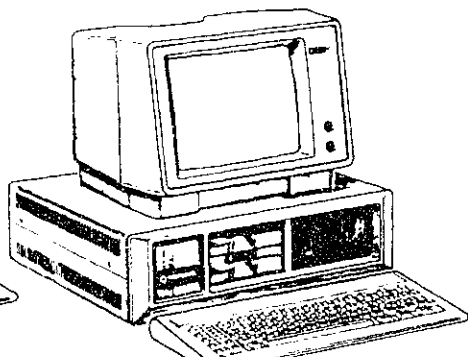
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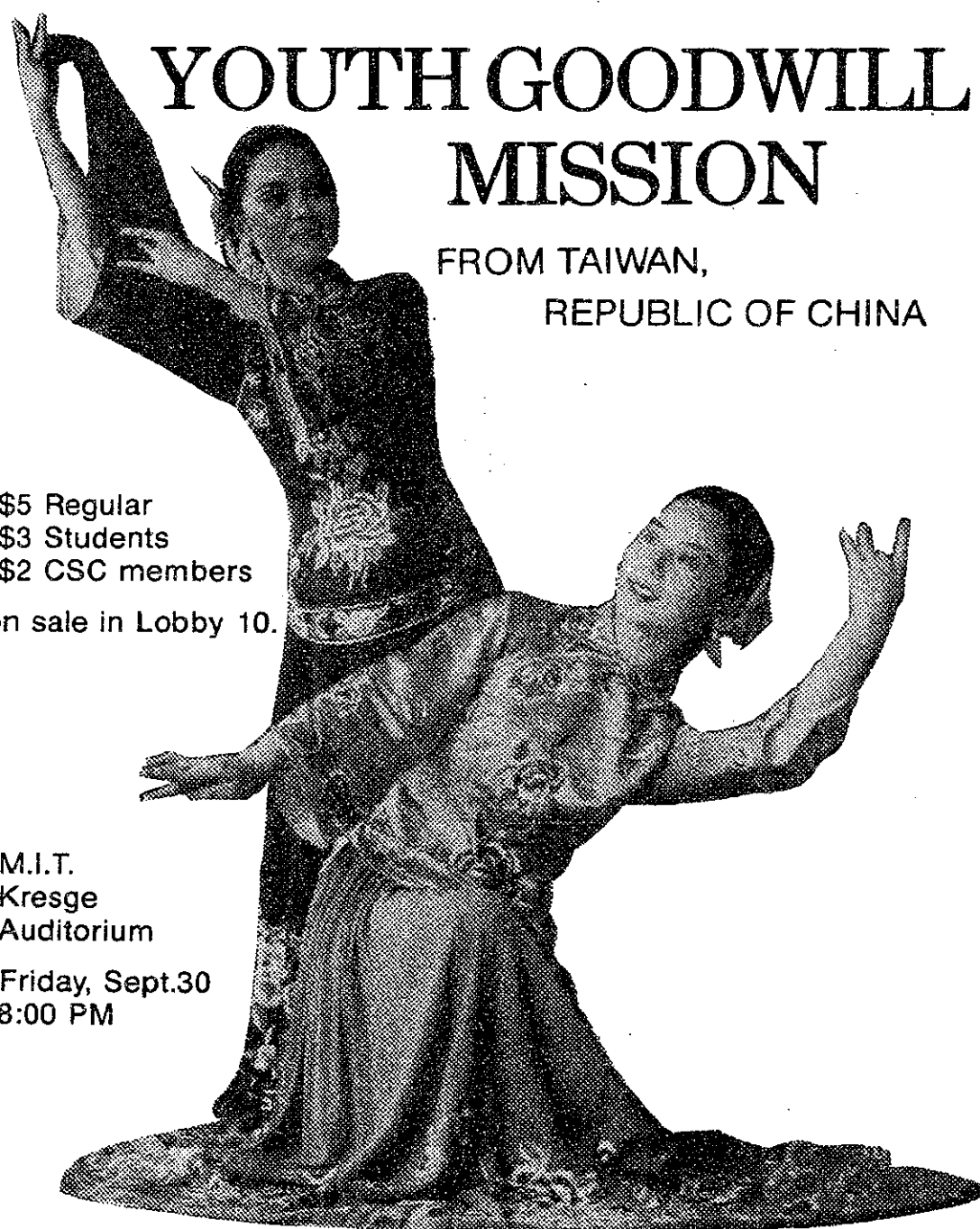
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