Rabbit Suits & Sailor Tongues. I took an instant liking to the editor of this journal when the first day of my three-week stay at The Hastings Center turned out to be Report deadline day. I’ve always liked an editor who can talk like a sailor, and my desk, just down the hall from the Report’s part of the beautiful new Center, turned out to be well within broadcast range. When, at a Hastings picnic several days later, Bette and I realized simultaneously that four Budweisers and twenty people represented a thorny lifeboat dilemma, my mind was set—this was a very cool place to be.

Truth be known, Hastings turned out be both cooler and less cool than the next stop on my summer research docket, the Norfolk, Virginia, offices of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). PETA is absolutely top of the heap in tying 1990s moral life to hip good times, using rock stars and supermodels to float their message through the popular ether. But like Hastings, twelve years PETA’s senior, both organizations are part of a more general questioning of the ethics of medical science over the past three decades. Visiting both places, I feel duty-bound to offer a couple of careful ethnographic observations.

First, there were fewer human rabbit and pig suits per capita at Hastings than at PETA. Now I should admit that there was a pretty constant traffic of the Hastings folks to exotic conference locales like Paris and Salina, Kansas, when I was there, so the animal suit thing may be part of what they do on special occasions. Still it seems to me that the bioethics crowd is a little less into spectacle than their animal rights counterparts, and not quite ready for a supermodel driven “I’d Rather Go Naked than Simplify the Complexities of New Reproductive Technologies” campaign.

Second, the military is louder in Norfolk than Garrison. Hastings resides in a grand nineteenth-century mansion, probably the result of predatory capitalism turned noblesse oblige, and sits directly across the Hudson from the citadel of U.S. military elite, West Point. With the exception of a few ceremonial cannon shots, the cadets kept the noise down while I was there and had the good taste to limit their air displays mostly to parachuting—dreamily, billowing fabric floating against the backdrop that has charmed so many painters. PETA, on the other hand, is smack in the middle of one of the largest concentrations of military in the U.S., and we’re talking motor sports here—lots and lots of fighter jets flying about twenty feet off the ground, engines blowing out turbo sounds that would thrill any fan of NASCAR infields. Instead of a mansion on a hill, PETA has an office building on short stilts. Both places have logos.

Whatever it may have lacked in popular spectacle, though, Hastings more than made up in conviviality and intellectual milling about. Between a constant stream of international visitors (I can now distinguish a New Zealand accent, I’m happy to say) and a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary staff (fewer philosophers than I had imagined), it stimulated continuously. Even if the four Budweisers were still sitting there at the end of the picnic.

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