

Another cream of passion

By John Safran.

The Melbourne Age. Tuesday 24 October 2000.

The Steve Bracks Cream Pie. Call it harmless, call it disgraceful, just don't call it original. Many are familiar with Microsoft boss Bill Gates having a sticky meringue uploaded into his face a couple of years back. But from what I can pull out from the baking oven of history, this year is actually the 30th anniversary of the first political pie throw.

To please pie pedants I'll acknowledge that in 1969 Belgian anarchist Noel Godin planted one in the uptight mug of French novelist Marguerite Duras. This is seen by many as the seminal toss. However, for a more overtly political pie splat, we had to wait one more year.

Tom Forcade was the founder of the bucketbong periodical High Times, still on sale to this day. In May, 1970, he was testifying before a US Senate Commission on Obscenity and Pornography. After summing up the various strands of his thesis with "f... off and f... censorship", he smacked one of the members of the Commission in the kisser with a creamy one.

And they've been flying fluffy and fast ever since. In fact, publishing friends of Forcade seemed to treat the 1970s as one, big, Three Stooges pie fight. Keeping in mind that Hippies and Yippies exaggerate the past (for example: "the Grateful Dead are good") Forcades' pals claim the scalps of guru leader Maharaj Ji, taxlobbyist Howard Jarvis, Rolling Stone publisher Jann Wenner and, curiously, Star Trek's William Shatner.

These pieoneers may have broken down the walls, but fate chose Aron Kay as the Right Place Right Time guy, who would capture the American public's imagination. William F. Buckley, the muchloathed founder of the archconservative National Review magazine, was speaking at New York University. Aron Kay threw a pie which landed on his head. People began referring to him as "The Pieman".

Buoyed by the infamy, Kay went on to sticky the heads of many. He lists as his hits a San Francisco police supervisor, a former New York mayor, a Watergate associate of Richard Nixon, a couple of conservative lobbyists and the odd politician.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, Noel Godin was continuing his campaign. He also became know as "The Pieman", except in a French accent.

However, "Le Pieman" wasn't trying to smash the state, just prick the bubble of pretension. Arthouse director JeanLuc Godard. Splat! Philosopher BernardHenri Levy. Bam! Choreographer Maurice Bejart. Pif! Like some sort of psychoyobbo at a arthouse festival, Godin went after anything in a beret.

Now in his mid 50s, Godin never really stopped. He even claims credit for organising the 1998 pieing of Gates. Which brings us to the modernday splatterfest.

Recent bigwigs who've had to have their suits drycleaned include economist Milton Friedman and Robert Shapiro, CEO of Monsanto, the genetically modified seed company.

A number of these modernday Lee Harvey Oswalds, sitting up in their book depositories, creamy cakes in hand, work under the banner of the Biotic Baking Brigade. Just this year various folk from various chapters list the following hits: the Canadian Prime Minister, the Canadian federal Minister for Health, the United States Agriculture Secretary, the managing director of the IMF, the governor of Illinois, a former Californian mayor, the director of biotechnology at the University of California and the bloke who created Dolly the sheep.

This new pie war seems to be riding the same wave as other sorts of culturejamming - like parodies of multinational websites - which attempt to put new variations on Yippiestyle stunts.

Yet with the pie, the message can be lost in the soufflemedium. In November 1998, three activists planted a puffy one square in the dial of San Francisco mayor Willie Brown. They splattered him to protest at the city's homeless policies. Alas, because Brown was black and the pie was pale, the act was misinterpreted as a racist attack. One of the Cherry Pie Three snapped her collarbone in the scuffle, and all were found guilty of battery.

So what of the Bracks splat? I guess pie throwers have to keep in mind that the five seconds of news vision won't come with historical footnotes. And there's something annoyingly French and highfarce about cream pies that may get lost in the translation to Australia.

But why listen to me. I'm the guy who was in court last year for sending a remote-control, fag-puffing seagull out to Warney at the MCG, so I'm hardly qualified as an arbitrator of good sense.