

THE ARISTOCRATS

The black machinists wore golden necklaces
and silky disco shirts
and dress pants
and panama hats.
They bent and contorted their bodies over their machines,
twisting around grimy, oily
handles and spindles and fixtures
without once touching their clothes
to machine or tool or part.
They were constantly blowing every inch of their clothes
down with their air guns,
to make sure that not one metal chip or speck of dirt
spoilied their look.

Radios in their pockets and headphone wires to their ears,
they disco danced up and down the wooden platforms
in front of their machines,
and disco danced across the aisles
to each other's machines,
slapping hands and grinning,
triumphant.

PROGRESS

To check out a 2-3" micrometer
for a few minutes,
the machinist steps across the aisle
to the tool crib
where Gloria without looking up
will hand him a 2-3" micrometer
and a computer terminal print-out
that has his name, employee number,
job classification, pay rate
and seniority date on it in triplicate,
as well as a 300-word tool loaning contract
which he must sign and date,
receiving his pink copy.

When the machinist steps back across the aisle
10 minutes later
to return the 2-3" micrometer to Gloria,
he hands in his pink copy
and she takes it and puts it on top of
the stack of folded computer paper
and rips all of the paper up and throws it into
the garbage can,
taking back the 2-3" micrometer
without looking up.