own actions, and in the perceptions of those actions out beyond the spinners, in the concentric orbits of partisan politics, government policies, and public opinion.

A siege atmosphere pervades *Spin Cycle*, suggesting that the scandals will bring down either the president or the media. But big news stories have a perverse way of ending small. Having promised a stark climax, the O. J. Simpson saga closed with two contrary verdicts and a truckload of memoirs. The stand-off that Kurtz details may simply drag on until the president's term expires. By then, most of the media will have moved on to the next presidential show.

—Michael Cornfield

Science & Technology

OUR BABIES, OURSELVES: Why We Raise Our Children the Way We Do.
By Meredith Small. Anchorbooks.
320 pp. $24.95

Dr. Spock once astutely observed that "two women who in actual practice would handle a child just about the same could still argue till kingdom come about [child-rearing] theory"—and probably would in America. The converse also holds true. Two women (or two men) who agree about child-rearing theory could easily proceed to treat a child quite differently. Ask them how the differences might affect the growth of a child into a citizen, and the honest answer will be an uneasy "Who knows?"

Small, a professor of anthropology at Cornell University, seeks new clarity for the messy business of child rearing through a pioneering science called "ethnopediatrics"—"a mix of cultural anthropology and developmental psychology, with a soupçon of evolutionary biology thrown in." The goal of the group of pediatricians, child development researchers, and anthropologists who gave the field its name is twofold: to highlight the culturally relative functions served by "parenting styles," and to explore the effects those styles might have on the biologically fixed needs of infants. Put in the more prescriptive terms that Small often uses in her lucidly accessible book, "These scientists want to uncover whether mismatches might exist between the biology of the baby and the cultural styles of the parents, with an eye toward realigning parents and babies into a smoother, better-adjusted biological and psychological relationship."

The ethnopediatricians do discover mismatches, particularly in advanced Western cultures such as America's, where child-rearing theories and methods have changed so often. Babies, according to the evolutionary view that underpins the field, are equipped with "Pleistocene biology" that has changed very little since the hunter-gatherer "era of evolutionary adaptedness" in which our genus, *Homo*, emerged. Faced with the dilemmas of maturation posed by big-brained bipeds, the process of natural selection produced infants designed to develop within a closely entwined relationship with a caretaker.

Proof, or at least illustration (in this necessarily speculative endeavor, the two blend), lies in contemporary cross-cultural evidence that babies who are carried all the time, cuddled through the night, and fed constantly, as their ancestors presumably were—and as infants in some non-Western cultures still are—cry very little. Babies obviously can cope with less intensive bonding, but their developing neurological and biochemical systems will be in greater disequi-

librium. Hence the colicky, cranky tendencies so commonly displayed among infants subjected to the more detached nurturing favored in urban-industrial societies, where babies sleep alone, breast-feed on a schedule, if at all, and can't expect their cries to elicit prompt human contact.

Ethnopediatricians are not preaching a return to hunter-gatherer habits, though they believe such a style is better for babies. They appreciate the cultural pressures that have given rise to a great variety of "caretaking packages," which represent "trade-offs in which parents weigh the needs of infants against the constraints of daily life." But it would help, this new breed of scientist wisely feels, if we scrutinized those trade-offs more carefully. Instead, we tend to blur them in "parenting ethnotheories" that generally purport to prove that whatever methods suit adults in a particular social context are also best for molding children to fit the culture.

Small believes Americans would do well to give babies at least a little more say. Then we might appreciate the wisdom of fostering attachment, rather than fixating on independence—"the chief, overriding goal of American culture, whether stated overtly or not," she believes. In fact, we and our experts are already obsessed with bonding, as well as with autonomy. The truly novel service ethnopediatrics may provide is to expose how contradictory, or complementary, our socializing goals often are—and how difficult it can be to judge whether specific child-rearing styles, especially those used with babies, help or hinder us in achieving them. As parents and babies fuss in confusion, these scientists at their unreductive best suggest where some of our child-rearing conflicts come from. The tensions can be eased, ethnopediatricians propose, but they avoid the foolish promise that they will ever disappear.

—Ann Hulbert

REMAKING THE WORLD: Adventures in Engineering.

By Henry Petroski. Knopf. 239 pp. $24

Just after World War I, the irascible sociologist Thorstein Veblen proposed a way to bring about a fair distribution of wealth and well-being: let engineers run society. Veblen's suggestion would appeal to few people today. Those who have remade our material world are rarely consulted on social reform or economic development policy, or accorded the kind of recognition lavished on leading scientists.

In these essays, Petroski, a professor of history and engineering at Duke University, renews our esteem for the social and cultural accomplishments of engineers. In one piece, he overturns the perverse symbolism of a famous photograph showing Albert Einstein towering over the hunchbacked electrical engineer Charles Steinmetz. In another, he recounts the history of how the prizes endowed by mechanical engineer Alfred Nobel came to be awarded to scientists but only rarely to engineers.

As a counterpoint to such hints of professional defensiveness, the author's essay on Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers—the tallest buildings in the world—lauds the genius of the engineers who solved the extremely difficult and dramatic problems presented by so vast an undertaking. In one sense, these towers are the latest in a long line of ambitious projects that Petroski examines in other essays—the Eiffel Tower, Ferris's Wheel, the Panama Canal, Hoover Dam—all of which required skill and imagination to solve a multitude of structural and construction challenges. But he also points out the political impacts of such projects. Gigantic business towers especially function as status symbols, announcing the arrival of a nation into the powerful club of industrializing societies. He ends the essay by recounting how the towers' engineers transferred knowledge and know-how from their own societies to other regions. By establishing networks of businesses, suppliers, technical schools, workers, and communications media, they helped invent the organizational systems that make such massive projects possible.

In a few of the essays (most of which appeared in the *American Scientist*), one wishes for less of Petroski's reasoned description and more of the conflict, indecision, ambition, and even humiliation that engineers experience when they juggle the givens of the physical world with the unpredictabilities of social, political, and economic interests. The author's talent, however, is a writing style characterized by seemingly effortless serendipity, drawing the nonspecialist as well as the technical expert into his topics in pleasurable and unexpected ways.

—Miriam R. Levin