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Cover: Jody Hemphill Smith, American (former VU Art Department Chair), The Night Blooming Cereus (Queen of the Night), 1987, watercolor and crayon on paper, 18 x 32 inches.

These works are from exhibits in Valparaiso University's February "Romance and the Arts" Festival.
The Rather-Bush Affair

One would probably have to go all the way back to Roger Mudd’s famous interview with Ted Kennedy before the 1980 election—when Kennedy could only respond with mumblings and incoherencies to Mudd’s questions on everything from Chappaquiddick to his qualifications for the presidency—to find anything comparable to the extraordinary exchange late last month between Dan Rather and George Bush on the CBS Evening News. The Rather/Bush confrontation differed radically in tone from the earlier one (Kennedy was passive in response to aggressive questioning, Bush quite the reverse) and its impact may turn out not to be comparable, but it did provide in its own right a compelling moment of political theater. It also provides an occasion for brief reflection on the relationship between politicians and journalists.

First, the incident itself. Despite CBS’s protests to the contrary, the evidence strongly supports Bush’s claim that he was unfairly set up. The original letter from the network on the matter spoke of a “political profile,” and while the Vice President had every reason to expect close questioning on the Iran-contra affair as part of the interview, he had legitimate cause to complain of the exclusive preoccupation with that issue which he in fact encountered. Not enough attention has been paid in this regard to the network’s three-minute lead-in to the interview itself. It not only focused solely on the Iran-contra matter but did so in a hostile and prosecutorial manner, consisting as it did of a series of rapid-fire charges of the “Bush has claimed . . . but the record shows” variety. There is no reason to suppose that Bush’s appearance of outrage when he came on camera was anything other than genuine. When Rather’s questioning continued the tone of antagonistic cross-examination, Bush responded in kind and the verbal battle—details of much of it lost with each man trampling on the words of the other—was on.

We needn’t, of course, be excessively protective of politicians. Bush was no doubt prepared for every eventuality, and once the nastiness started, he gave as good as he got. His reference—irrelevant to the moment but rhetorically effective—to the notorious incident in which Rather walked off the set in a huff when the network let a sports event cut into the news hour and left CBS with several minutes of dead air had apparently been prepared in advance if the occasion required. Bush has in fact developed a technique of taking the offensive on the Iran-contra affair by accusing aggressive questioners of unfair treatment. There’s more than a hint of calculation there, but the fact remains that in this case the Vice President had a legitimate complaint. Rather and CBS would have been far more effective in their quite proper attempt to pursue Bush’s role in Iran-contra had they not turned the occasion into an inquisition. As it is, they handed the Vice President a political benefit, particularly among Republican conservatives for whom CBS in general and Rather in particular represent the heart of a media establishment out to do them in.

Rather went wrong when he turned himself from a commentator on the political scene to a protagonist within it. It is not just that he was uncivil and inappropriately aggressive—though he was both those things—but that his personal outbursts (“You’ve made us hypocrites before the whole world”) and his contemptuous dismissal of Bush at the end made him seem more a rival candidate for office than one standing, as someone in his position should, outside the political drama. Rather has done this sort of thing before, and one wonders when someone at his network will provide him the necessary instruction on his appropriate relation to the news it is his job to report. Can anyone imagine Walter Cronkite engaging in such an attempt at political mugging?

The foregoing comments should not be taken as a general assault on either Dan Rather or CBS News. Rather in fact is most of the time a first-rate anchorman, and the CBS Evening News, in our view, consistently outperforms its network rivals in journalistic competence.

The point instead has to do with the attitude journalists should take toward the politicians they cover. We rightly expect from the media in such circumstances intelligence, diligence, and a dispassionate attitude that lapses neither into credulity nor cynicism. We do not—or should not—expect of reporters that they take on the role of the political opposition. When they do so they mistake their function and distract themselves and us from the proper concerns of political journalism.

Serious and close questioning of candidates for public office? Of course. Badgering and blood sports? Not at all—or not, at least, if journalists expect to hold our respect.
The South African problem is so complex that many outside observers refuse to believe it. It is seen as a simple question of the oppression of the black majority by a white majority. It certainly is that; but if it were no more than that it might even be solved by some of the nostrums advocated with so much rhetoric by the world's politicians. In fact, there are more than two players, and the goal posts are dotted irregularly all over the field. It is in the interest of many of the players to obscure this fact. Many observers come away from the scene, therefore, with confused, contradictory, and mistaken impressions.

One of the most useful books on South Africa to be published in recent years is Dispensations: the Future of South Africa as South Africans See It, by Richard John Neuhaus (Eerdmans, 1986). This book traces the confusion to its source, the South Africans themselves, and judges it with fine perception and insight. The writer does not thrust himself or his opinions on the reader. He has interviewed many people from all parts of the political spectrum; his own contribution is cross-examination and a critical assessment of what his subjects have said. Thus the confusions in South African minds, and the flat contradictions between one witness and another, are brought into focus.

What follows are some thoughts, buttressed by evidence from this book, on the conflicts among the numerous racial and ethnic groups, and within each of them, and even the contortions within individual minds, as they contemplate their options.

In the days of Ian Smith's Rhodesia it used to be said that the definition of a "loyal Rhodesian" was "one who could not sell his house." The definition has a kind of bearing on South Africa. Those who see no hope for the country leave it, if they can. Those who stay, willingly or not, are forced to hope. So some hope for revolution, others for the status quo. The confusion and contradiction arise, I think, largely from the horrifying if unacknowledged realization that this problem has no solution.

No solution? Neuhaus quotes from a report of the constitutional committee of the President's Council: "in foreseeable circumstances in South Africa, the perceived interests of Whites and Blacks are hardly likely to change so as to persuade either population group that its vital interests would be sufficiently promoted and protected by the other." That was as near to "no solution" as a committee charged with finding the solution could go.

The people quoted in this book share with most South Africans who have written or spoken about their problem one curious weakness. They can be specific in pointing to the evils of the present system. But when they have to say what they would put in its place they either become vague or offer plans that are based not on reality but on fantasy. The explanation of this, and of the confusion generally, is found in the particular circumstances of each racial and ethnic group.

Johnny Makatini, the A.N.C.'s chief observer at the United Nations at the time he was interviewed for the book, seemed perfectly confident and clear in speaking to Neuhaus: "there is only one future and that future is ours; whatever happens we win." What could be less confusing? Makatini represented an African National Congress which, after generations of polite protests and moderate demands which brought no response, had decided that nothing short of violent revolution would do. The population figures (74 per cent black) would make his confidence seem plausible. But there is a catch in it: who are "we"?

Makatini, I would guess, was confusing the A.N.C. with the black population as a whole. The A.N.C.
claims to be the sole legitimate representative of that population. Identifying one with the other is a good revolutionary posture but a misleading guide to post-revolutionary politics. The blacks have other organizations and leaders, opposed to the A.N.C. After a revolution these divisions would be important; therefore they are important to the participants while the revolution is still only in prospect.

Some of the opponents of the A.N.C. are equally revolutionary, but like the Pan-Africanist Congress emphasize black nationalism in opposition to the A.N.C.'s anti-racism. But the more important rival movements are opposed to "the revolutionary option."

Neuhaus rightly devotes much space to Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who is Chief Minister of KwaZulu (a non-independent "homeland") but is widely followed and revered by Zulus outside the homeland as well. The Zulus number six million, are the biggest ethnic group (they prefer to call it a "nation") in the country, have an intense national pride, and in their heyday played in black South Africa the role of a "master race." No one knows how many Zulus, if the chips were down, would follow Chief Buthelezi in opposition to other black leaders and parties, but I have been given the figure of three million.

Buthelezi has strengths and weaknesses, as Neuhaus notes. He has many white as well as Zulu admirers. The whites perceive him as a "moderate," and he has continued to oppose divestment, sanctions, and revolution. He prefers negotiation, and since Dispensations was written has brought one important negotiation to a successful conclusion. On the other hand his political organization, Inkatha, does not use kid glove methods in dealing with its opponents. It has many of these, because the supporters of other black movements regard Buthelezi as, next to the government itself, the chief enemy of their struggle.

An entirely different kind of "enemy of the struggle," though it is not so described, is the Zion Christian Church, the largest of the black independent churches. Its members are opposed to violence of any kind, and therefore to the policy of the A.N.C. Their numbers are variously estimated, but are at least two million, and may be nearer to three. Even if we allow for some overlap (there can't be much) between these Zionists and the followers of Buthelezi, we have quite a few million blacks who after the revolution would be opposed to the A.N.C. As some of the revolutionaries, and almost all the other racial groups, would be on that side too, the confidence of the A.N.C. may not be as solidly based as it would like.

Nevertheless there is no doubt that the blacks, of all shades of opinion, are grievously oppressed and repressed. Because it is perceived—partly as a result of the government's own paranoia—as the leading opponent of the regime, the A.N.C. would probably get a majority in a free vote with universal suffrage. But it would not be the kind of majority that its rhetoricians like to imagine, and the free vote is not an immediate prospect.

These divisions can be seen, though they are not emphasized, in the statements of various people interviewed by Neuhaus. They help to explain the jaunty confidence, the rhetoric, the omissions, the vagueness and the double-talk on the revolutionary side. But there are other factors in the explanation, and the confusion becomes more confused as we move from the 74 per cent group to the various minorities.

Some of the opponents of the A.N.C. are equally revolutionary, but like the Pan-Africanist Congress emphasize black nationalism in opposition to the A.N.C.'s anti-racism. But the more important rival movements are opposed to "the revolutionary option."

The Afrikaners are the chief of these. Though a minority of the whole population, they are a majority of the enfranchised (i.e. white) population, and have had a monopoly of power for nearly forty years. Their power is pervasive, reaching down to the pettiest concerns of life. Under the present "dispensation," that is to say the state of emergency, they have almost unlimited control over everyone's life and freedom, over television and radio (their propaganda machine), over what may be published in the press—and the list could go on and on. Their armed forces are the most powerful south of the Sahara. A leading Progressive said to me in 1986, "Don't believe that the revolution is just round the corner. The government hasn't even begun to use the power at its disposal." But about these monopolizers of power the same question arises as in the case of the blacks: who are "they"?

Twenty years ago it was almost possible to regard the Afrikaner people, the National Party, and the Dutch Reformed Church as different aspects of the same thing. It is not possible now. Secessions from the National Party have provided other political homes, chiefly the Conservative Party, for Afrikaners of the far right. An ecclesiastical schism has followed. On the other hand the fear, fostered by government propaganda, of black and red revolution has driven many English-speaking whites to support the National Party.
In the general election of May, 1987, they were said to have voted for it "in droves." Their votes were welcome, but the National Party remains an Afrikaner institution; very many of its members would feel very uncomfortable if it did not. It must always be remembered that the party was formed in 1914 primarily to oppose the English, not the blacks. That tradition has been modified, but not abandoned.

The Afrikaners, however, are no longer afraid of the English. They fear whatever threatens their national identity and existence, and that now means the blacks. How can the Afrikaners remain a separate and independent nation if they are scattered among a huge black majority enjoying, in the words of the slogan, "one man, one vote, in a unitary state'? The Afrikaners of the far right, in the Conservative Party and various cultural and even Nazi-like bodies such as the Afrikaner Weerstands beweging or A.W.B. (which went into mourning for Rudolf Hess), have a simple answer: they cannot do so. Therefore white supremacy must be enforced in all its rigor.

As a long-term policy, this belongs to the realm of fantasy. The leaders, and perhaps most of the articulate followers, of the National Party understand this; yet they fear the danger also. Professor Gerrit Olivier of Pretoria described the dilemma: "most of us recognize that the idea of white control over others doesn't accord with the morals of our society. That is the cause of our bad conscience, and we are terribly torn over what to do about it."

Dispensations was being written at the time when the government was making its most dramatic attempt to square the circle. A new constitution was introduced. (It is in the Afrikaner, and now the South African, tradition that constitutions are made, so can be unmade, by ordinary legislative enactment.) There were to be three houses of Parliament and an executive presidency. The House of Assembly remained as before, representing whites only; the House of Representatives was "Coloured" (mixed race) in both membership and constituency, and the House of Delegates Indian. There was no house for blacks.

Most of the complexities must be omitted here, but some essential points must be noted. In addition to the cabinet at the top of the structure there were other cabinets for each of the three houses. The whole business of government and legislation was divided into "general affairs" and "own affairs." "Own affairs" were the business of each house separately, and of its cabinet; "general affairs" of all the houses and of their common cabinet. Education, for example, was an "own affair"; thus white, Coloured, and Indian education belonged to different jurisdictions, and there was no way of providing for schools that were not racially segregated. In the election of the President the three houses participated, but the numbers were so arranged that the decision really lay with the majority party (the National Party has a big majority) in the white chamber. The same arithmetical principle resolved, either directly or through the power of the President, differences among the houses.

The system was trumpeted as a great step in "power-sharing," whereas, as can be seen, all the power remained where it was before, though somewhat more concentrated in the hands of the President. And there was not even a pretense of sharing it with blacks. It was this last omission that precipitated the riots that have now continued for over three years. A minority of Nationalist politicians, and many Afrikaners to the left of that party, realize that genuine power-sharing with all other groups is urgently necessary, but they have not been able to show how this can be reconciled with guarantees for the Afrikaners, or the whites generally. Nor can they offer a program that would not stampede white voters into the camp, or laager, of the far right.

This difficulty has resulted in a semantic curiosity which was pointed out to me in 1986 by a prominent newspaper editor. The government describes its three-chamber system, and indeed any incorporation of non-white persons into the political structure, as "power-sharing," whereas the National Party has kept all the power in its own hands, and has no intention of giving any of it up. When some white liberals go to Lusaka or Dakar for a meeting and discussion with members of the A.N.C., the government and its press call this "negotiating" with the A.N.C. The government's own talk of "negotiating" with black leaders could therefore mean no more than discussion, in which at the end those leaders would merely be informed of what was going to be done. The linguistic confusion is the result of trying to do two mutually incompatible things.

So the blacks have the numbers and, in some way that is still obscure, the future. The Afrikaners have the power, and are masters of the present. Both groups are politically divided, but if a violent confrontation came both would be more united as they came down to the wire. And each would unite behind its own extremists. The rabble-rousing demagogue who leads the Afrikaner Weerstands beweging has said that in the end there will be only two parties, the A.N.C. and the A.W.B. Yet on each side there is a recognition by some people that the hostility is misplaced and tragic: the Afrikaners are Africans too, "the white tribe of Africa."

Between 35 and 40 per cent of the whites are English-speaking. Though this is the community from which I myself sprang, I must say that Neuhaus is
probably right in playing it down in his book. The English cannot play a decisive role in South African politics. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they were dominant politically, culturally, and economically in the Cape Colony and Natal. (Neuhaus refers to an “aristocracy.”) Then the Afrikaners took over.

Though the English have had no political influence since 1948, and very little since 1924, their mind-set inherited from the past has not greatly changed. “A sense of superiority” may be slightly too strong a phrase, but there is absolutely no sense of inferiority or humiliation. Beyond that it is hard to generalize about them. Because they, their culture, and their language are second-class in South Africa but dominant in the world at large, there has long been a tendency among English South Africans to emphasize, in their own minds, their membership in that larger world.

That is one of the reasons why the English are politically weak: they do not have their backs to the wall. The other reason is that they are caught in the middle, between traditional fear of Afrikaner Nationalism and the new fear of African Nationalism.

To quote Johnny Makatini again, “The Afrikaner is not black like I am but he is as much an African. I watch them when they come to New York and you can see they feel the way we do, they are not at home here, they know they belong to Africa. It’s not that way with the English, they fit right in here. I watch them, I tell you. You can pick up the English and put them anywhere and they think they own the world.”

There is some exaggeration there, and too much generalization. Many of the English do feel that they belong to Africa. But, on the whole, Makatini has it right. I, who write this, am a Canadian citizen, believe that I “fit right in here,” and am only one of a huge English South African diaspora spread over the whole English-speaking world. The English, as Neuhaus puts it, still have boats in the harbor. The Afrikaners and the Indians burnt theirs long ago, and the rest never had any.

That is one of the reasons why the English are politically weak: they do not have their backs to the wall. The other reason is that they are caught in the middle. Their political history has been one of resistance to Afrikaner Nationalism, in which they have been helped and led by anti-Nationalist Afrikaners such as J.C. Smuts. But now they look over their shoulders and see the still greater threat of African Nationalism.

As long as this threat was remote, the English for the most part prided themselves on their liberal attitudes to race relations. As the threat comes closer, the liberalism of many evaporates, while that of a few turns to radicalism.

Thirty years ago virtually all the English supported the United Party, which had been the party of Smuts. That party died an inglorious death in the election of 1987, by which time its place in the English community had been taken by the Progressive Federal Party. This, unlike the old U.P., is explicitly liberal, but as it is the only predominantly (though by no means wholly) English party, its supporters range over a very wide political spectrum. In 1987 the P.F.P. was caught on the horns of the same kind of dilemma that has tortured the other groups. It had to stand by its principles, yet appeal to white voters. It seemed to prevaricate. Radicals deserted it—by not voting in the election. Its most conservative former supporters voted Nationalist.

The P.F.P. had previously been deserted by its own leader, Dr. van Zijl Slabbert, and some other prominent members, who decided that only extra-parliamentary opposition was now relevant. This desertion had not happened when Dispensations was being written, so we have no late-1986 interview with Dr. Slabbert. But we are given insights into that extra-parliamentary, mostly black, opposition, which fights a running battle against arrests, banning, and censorship. Most of these organizations are joined under the umbrella of the United Democratic Front, which the government regards as no more than a “front” for the A.N.C.

Perhaps sensing what was to come, Neuhaus paid very little attention to the P.F.P., though the party was at the height of its euphoria in 1985; it was not till 1987 that commentators began to prophesy its doom. In Dispensations there are brief encounters with van Zijl Slabbert but none with Helen Suzman. Some people would say that the P.F.P. is becoming as irrelevant as the English-speaking community which provides most of its supporters. This is unfair, because the Nationalists still rule the country, Parliament is the place where they can be held to account for their misdeeds, and it is the P.F.P. that probes and exposes. But there will never be a P.F.P. government.

The problem would be a little less complex than it is if the population consisted entirely of the divided blacks and the divided whites. But there are two other groups, the “Coloured” and the Indians. The Coloured are mainly concentrated in the western part of the Cape Province, and the Indians in Natal, chiefly in and around Durban. There is also a significant Indian
community in the Transvaal.

The Coloured are usually described as being distinct from the blacks because they are of mixed race, but the important distinction is cultural. The blacks speak various Bantu languages and retain in varying degrees their old indigenous values and customs. The Coloured have none of this. Most are Afrikaans-speaking, Christian, and share the values and lifestyle of the whites, though there is much that is distinctively their own.

In the past they felt close to the whites and distant from the blacks. Today the political leaders insist that all who are not white are black, but this is just another of the myths. Successive Nationalist governments since 1948 have gone to great lengths, committing cruelties and illegalities, to deprive the Coloured people of the rights they had enjoyed. Now there is a revulsion. The Coloured are referred to as “Brown Afrikaners,” which is what they had previously assumed they were. Why add 8.7 per cent of the population to the black political column when it could be in the white?

Hence the House of Representatives, launched with a great flourish in 1984. As we have seen, it has no real power. What those people had before 1955 was votes on the common roll for the House of Assembly, but only in the Cape Province. (Most of them lived in that province anyway.) Therefore the new scheme was a sham, and was generally rejected by the Coloured people. When the House was elected, only 31 per cent of the eligible voters cast votes. (In the Cape peninsula, where the Coloured people are most concentrated, sophisticated, and politicized, the percentage poll was 11.) Thus the Representatives were not representative.

The hostility to the new constitution was due partly to its being, for the Coloured people, a sham, and partly to its exclusion of the blacks. The Coloured community in general supports the extra-parliamentary opposition. Come the revolution, however, it would almost certainly be deeply divided. The vision of the “Brown Afrikaner” will not fade.

If there is fear of the black majority in the hearts of many Coloured people, there is still more among the Indians. They know what the blacks did to the Indians in Uganda and elsewhere in Africa. In 1949 there was a murderous riot in Natal, blacks venting their rage on Indians in their capacities of landlords, employers, and creditors. The memory and fear of 1949 have remained vivid.

A rich Indian merchant, asked by Neuhaus with which side the Indians would be aligned “when the crunch comes,” replied “with the whites, of course, not the blacks.” But it would be important to be on the winning side, which means getting a “certificate” from the blacks that the Indians were on their side before the revolution. Thus the Indian students, generally more radical and revolutionary even than black students, may serve their own community well. Perhaps all this throws some light on the elections for the House of Delegates: the percentage of registered voters that voted was 20; of all qualified voters, 16.

The national motto of South Africa, ex unitate vires, has a hollow ring now; there is neither unity nor strength. They will not be conjured up by the African nationalist slogan “one man, one vote, in a unitary state.” To this the A.N.C. has added its firm opposition to guarantees for minorities. In a free election, as I have said, the A.N.C. would probably in the first instance turn out to be the majority. All of the rest, of all races, colors, and political opinions, would be minorities.

The fate of minorities in many black states in Africa suggests that the onus is on the A.N.C. to show why “it can’t happen here.” Mere promises of good will are not going to be trusted by those who now have power and are asked to give it up.

The fate of minorities—political, ethnic, or religious—in many black states suggests that the onus is on the A.N.C. to show why “it can’t happen here.” Mere promises of good will are not going to be trusted by those who now have power and are asked to give it up. Still less will they give it up if the A.N.C., or any combination of African nationalists, is seen to want power for the purpose of doing to the whites what the present government has done to the blacks.

As the gap between rich and poor in South Africa comes too near to coinciding with the gap between white and black, any black nationalist program is bound to contain radical provisions about the economy. Socialism is a central feature of them. The Freedom Charter drawn up in 1955 is being adopted by an increasing number of black political groups; it provides for the nationalization of banks, mines, and industrial monopolies, and a redivision of the land. The charter includes also some demands that are hardly controversial, such as freedom of speech, movement, and association, protection from arbitrary arrest, and equality of opportunity. But socialism is a basic feature of all black aspirations. Those who have economic power will not tamely surrender it.
If all these opposites were to be reconciled, the necessary condition would be an effective restraint on the power of government. What sort of restraint? A bill of rights? A rigid constitution? Federalism? Those who want a radical remaking of the country will find it hard to accept any of these if it really is effective. The bill of rights is the easiest to accept, perhaps because it is not perceived as a real obstacle to sweeping changes. But South Africa has no experience of a bill of rights. What is more important is a long tradition of hostility—among the whites—to all these safeguards. It is the whites who set the example of centralized, unrestrained power, and so weakened their claim to resist it when it passes into other hands.

The South African constitution of 1909-10 was not rigid, but it had three clauses that could be changed only by special majorities. One of these protected the non-racial franchise in the Cape Province. The Nationalist government wanted to repeal that clause in the 1950s. Unable to get the required majority by legitimate means, it subverted the constitution by packing the Senate and the Supreme Court. Behind this action there was a tradition that began in the old Transvaal republic. The hostility to federalism began with the making of the Union constitution in 1909. Smuts and Merriman were the leading advocates of a centralized, unitary, and flexible system. The glory of this got into the schoolbooks, and apparently into the South African blood. I had some personal experience of this. In 1948 I began to preach the advantages of a federal system for South Africa; I did this in public lectures, articles, and ultimately in a book. The message passed over the heads of most of my hearers and readers; the argument seemed like a dialogue of the deaf.

Federalism had become a dirty word; or worse, an unintelligible word. The political climate obscured it. Today the Progressive Federal Party advocates federalism, but does not emphasize it. One of the more widely accepted of the many current proposals is a federation of small units comparable to Swiss cantons, but the scheme is commonly described as “cantonal” rather than “federal” (the dirty word is avoided). The only paper read by one of the white delegates to the Dakar conference that I have seen in print proposes “intensive devolution of power geographically to numerous second, third, and fourth tier governments so that power is delegated upwards instead of downwards, and lower tiers have autonomy over purely domestic matters.” Again the dirty word is avoided, but that is not very important. The big difficulty is that restraint on the central power is an idea that can sprout and grow only in a favorable soil and climate. In South Africa they are not favorable, and we have to thank the euphoria and short-sightedness of 1909 for that.

But in the end this may not matter much. History is important—indispensable—for understanding all these conflicts, but for practical purposes now what matters is one simple fact: the gap between the minimum that the radical blacks will accept and the maximum that the great majority of the whites will concede is too wide to be bridged. That is why South Africa is a problem with no solution.

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**Perspective**

In the old cities the sidewalks buckle up beneath the trees. Slow, slow cataclysms, subtle heavings, crack the smoothness, tilt the trueness out of kilter. Roots grow there: down where they are once were but threads too small to bother when the mason slid the trowel with such care and craft.

I laugh to think how all that labor now is lost; and how beneath the smooth, true planes I laid down decades past, the tender, secret fibers, grown to gnarled, knowing serpents, now with patient, constant increase push with monstrous gentle force the surfaces asunder.

Let me wonder less why solid, smooth, and true things that I counted on are cracked, askew, and bent; and see more worth in unplanned angles where I walk.

Gerald Gibson

February, 1988
ON THE RENEWING OF THE MIND

Reflections on the Calling of Christian Intellectuals

During the time set aside to compose this essay, I confirmed Allan Bloom's suspicions about my intellect by following the crowd and reading his book. Especially the middle section is a much better book than I expected.

*The Closing of the American Mind* is a meditation on the state of American intellect, over against two landmark and remarkably paired diagnoses of Western history. The one is Nietzsche's: that the outcome of philosophy, of the West's multi-millennial effort to be reasonable at all costs, is the discovery that there is no reason to be reasonable—and indeed that there is no reason to be anything else that we are not already. If history is not to halt in bourgeois self-satisfaction, we will therefore have to tap irrational passion and arbitrary decision precisely to move us to reason. The other is de Tocqueville's suspicion that the regime founded on reason, the democratic republic, must prove inhospitable to the actual exercise of the reason on which it is founded.

Prof. Bloom judges that de Tocqueville's fears have been fulfilled. The nation built on Enlightenment has not merely become ignorant and unthinking, but is becoming incapable of thought. Now—if de Tocqueville is as right as Bloom thinks, that would seem to be an historical confirmation of Nietzsche's position. Vice versa, if Nietzsche is right, then de Tocqueville's prediction was not a warning but a prophecy. And both of these are, I think, what Bloom in fact believes—which would seem to leave Nietzsche as the only true guide.

Yet what may come of acting on Nietzsche's kerygma has already been tested in Europe, and none of us will favor further experiments on those lines. In this interesting situation, Bloom can suggest only a last-ditch defense of the liberal regime, for however long this proves possible. Huddling around the embers is his image.

The place of defense or huddling is to be, despite everything, the "university," a term which he so uses as to encompass many institutions not officially so denominated; indeed, it is first of all the colleges of liberal arts, in or out of "universities," which he has in mind. The university must again become the place where reason can be advocated against the hostility of reason's regime. It must be the haven, for the sake of democracy, of dissatisfaction with democracy, the place where all those questions are asked that democratic folk need to hear but that are natural only to aristocratic and monarchic regimes. It must administer...
Nietzsche straight, to awake us from the sleep induced by Nietzsche diluted.

It may reasonably (!) be doubted that academia can perform the Munchhausen trick which Bloom proposes for it. How exactly are we to persuade a society as hostile to reason as Bloom says ours is to license a privileged class whose sole function is to be rational? And how are the deep thinkers to be studied seriously when it is known that they are being used as calculated medicines for the health of the regime they abominate?

It is the insight of the whole line from Rousseau to Nietzsche that reason undoes itself because it undoes God, without whom reason—as every other interesting virtue—is groundless. And Bloom hammers this point home. But with respect to it he has no proposal. The university is to be democracy's temple, but it is to house no God. The Closing of the American Mind ends very much as did another recently influential book, Alisdair MacIntyre's After Virtue. MacIntyre ended by saying that what our civilization must have to survive is something like the Benedictine order. Many who read this wondered how there could be Benedictines without St. Benedict, or a saint without God. MacIntyre appears to have read his own book and wondered the same things, whereupon he reconverted to the faith.

II

There is one part of Bloom's book where the scholarship is demonstrably slipshod: his account of the university's origin. Most certainly, even the "modern" university was not created from nothing by the decision of Enlighteners to extend Aristotle's educational program to the many, in the unlikely case that there ever was such a decision. Bloom seems to have stopped reading with Aristotle, not to have started again until Machiavelli, and to have hypothesized what happened between from thin air.

The Enlightenment may have conceived the university as the place of "reason." But in its medieval origins and in some strands of its self-understanding to this day, the university is not a universitas rationis, a world of reason, but a world of letters, a universitas litterarum, the gathering into one place and one discourse of all those arts whose substance is books and argument. In the university's founding period, instruction was thus accomplished by the minute examination of texts and by the institution of debates; and anyone who has examined the record of one of those debates or read a medieval commentary on Aristotle will not suppose that this method was in any way inferior to the methods inaugurated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as to openness, dedication to logic, or pedagogical impact. The university may properly and faithfully be conceived, alternatively to liberalism's conception, as the place of discourse, of the word.

Reason as the Enlightenment understood it is a sheer capacity and as such an individual endowment. The Enlightenment proposed to establish a regime by harnessing the elemental passions to reason, by turning them into rights; also passions and rights are private possessions. Thus if reason and rights are our foundation, we are bound to individualism; then our choice is indeed between clinging to Locke and capitulating to Nietzsche.

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And in that case, bowdlerized Nietzsche will surely win in the end, nor is it easy to see how a university founded on reason and rights can do anything but exacerbate the problem. Foundationally, however, the university was not the place of reason but the place of discourse; and the word is no one's private endowment. It is the ontological status of community and of the word in which community is constituted that was forgotten by the Enlightenment—and has not been remembered by Prof. Bloom.

For some generations, topics such as that of this conference have been discussed on the assumption that we know what an "intellectual"—or "the liberal arts" or "the university" or whatever—are and have only to consider how Christians can be called to this field. I have begun with Bloom in order to summon witness for the bankruptcy of this assumption. I doubt that the traditional way of putting the question was ever appropriate; it is anyway now antique. If there ever was a separately definable "intellectual" office or community or fate out there, to which believers might be called, there is none now. If we have a calling, it is not to join a predefined intellectual enterprise, but to re-invent one. And there is nothing preposterous about the notion, since we invented the West's intellectual enterprise in the first place. For of course, that the word has ontological status—so that the arts of the
word might together make a universe—is an insight from the Bible.

III

Mediterranean antiquity’s specific ideal of knowledge would never by itself have made the university. The organ of truth, in the classic tradition, is the “mind’s eye”; knowledge is *theoria*, seeing. Every self-interpretation of the knowing subject takes one of the senses as its metaphor; Western antiquity’s metaphor was sight. And the thing about sight is, it objectifies the other.

It is a point I have found illuminating in many contexts: we have flaps on our eyes and none on our ears, and we can easily aim our eyes and only with great difficulty aim our ears. Which is to say: I control what I see but can always be surprised by what I hear. It is with the eye that I fix the other in space and time, that I nail down what you/it are/is, so as to be able to get back to you/it. It is, oppositely, by the ear that you grab me, also when I am trying to overlook (!) you. An ideal of knowledge which takes sight for its metaphor makes the other the object of knowledge but does not solicit reciprocity, does not offer the knowing subject to be the object of the other.

That is, to knowledge for which sight is the metaphor, the response or solicitation of the other is not *constitutive*. In the final versions of Greek reflection, which became the theology of all late antiquity’s cults, this ideal of knowledge is paradigmatically and foundationally instantiated, in Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover under various aliases. This God is a sheer act of vision, wholly agent and not at all sufferer, received, made the other the object of knowledge but does not solicit reciprocity, does not offer the knowing subject to be the object of the other.

The difference between Christian theology and pagan antiquity’s theology is that the latter, for all that it consists in talk, *leads* to silence, is the handmaiden of cognition as pure seeing, while Christianity’s talk leads precisely to more talk, to the purification and enlivening of a message. And also the gospel’s ideal of knowledge is instantiated, in the God who is his own Word.

Pagan antiquity had many and very talkative circles of seekers. But what they sought was silence. A “university,” per contra, is a *universitas litterarum*, an independent world founded on and for discourse, a world in which discourse is its own justification, which some enter never to leave and which initiates also those who are to leave into precisely the talkative callings. The university was founded by believers, to have a place in which to exegete their Book and argue interpretations of their message. Just so, no book and no argument could be foreign to it. In particular, the practice of ancient philosophy and the books that documented it were simply adopted, now in service of speech rather than of silence.

When the Enlightenment revolted against theology in the name of reason, it thus revolted also against philosophy as ancienly practiced, since it was theology by which that practice was now carried on. Thus in the Enlightenment’s understanding and practice of “reason,” the countervailing factor is gone. Reason becomes what even Aristotle did not make it: sheerly the individual’s ability to see truth. And for that, the university is, when push comes to shove, not really needed at all. It is that last point which Prof. Bloom’s book—to make one last reference to it—finally lays before us, willy-nilly.

IV

Christians’ calling to intellect is the calling to nurture the word, to tend books and foster argument. This was always the case, but in our present cir-
circumstances we must be unwontedly clear about it. We serve a talkative God, who does not even seem to be able to do without a library. In his service, we will be concerned for talk and libraries. And some of us will have the privilege of spending a lot of time at that concern; if anyone wishes to call these "Christian intellectuals," there is no great reason to interdict the label.

The model and origin of our care of books is the church's care of that library, the Bible. I understand that this is backward to the usual conceptions, but the usual conceptions, if they were ever appropriate, are anyway now mere anachronisms. So I will reverse the usual conception, and inquire first what the church does with the Bible and second what the university might therefore do with its books.

The church, first, reads the Bible liturgically. The writings that are canon for the church and that together we call the Bible are recited in the gathered community, to shape its imagination, suggest its argumentative warrants, cast its moral vision. The university, the community of Western intellect, also has a canon of writings. It is not quite so clearly marked as the canon of Scripture—though the contrast must not be overplayed, since also the canon of Scripture is intrinsically open—but it will serve; at least its center is indicable. In a living university, the sheer shared experience—never mind interpretation or understanding!—of such as Plato and Augustine and Newton would be the foundation of everything else. That experience is now indeed embers, but the embers need blowers, not huddlers. Christians are the only ones around who have clear and arguable and imperative reason to blow on them.

Second, the church researches the Bible, it labors on its book with the kind of reading which is misleadingly called "historical-critical method" as if with old texts there were some other. We persistently ask: What did the author say? What really happened? These are life-and-death questions for the believer. The first need not commit the famous "intentional fallacy"; we cannot ask what the author intended to say, but we must ask what s/he in fact got—past tense!—said. Neither is the second question hopeless of answer nor does it lead us necessarily into historical relativism, though there is no opportunity here to retrace theology's long and in my judgment hopeful struggle with "hermeneutics."

Christianity did not invent such reading, but only for Christianity does salvation ride on it. Thus the techniques which we all assume and which created the nineteenth-century German university, still more or less our model, were all invented to deal with the Bible—if in many cases only to get clear of it. In a living university, a certain historicism would always infuse the various undertakings; not even natural science would regard its own history and great texts as beside its enterprise. A world which forgot historical-critical reading would be one in which the church could not live; our calling here is imperative.

Finally, the church looks to the Bible for paradigms of its reflection, of "theology." The church is to preach the gospel, and all its thinking is about what to say to be doing that. But "the gospel" is simply a label for what the apostles said. So while the apostles' theology, that is the thinking they did to form their message, may not have been and for the most part was not very good theology, we can at least be sure it was theology. The theological authority of Scripture is fundamentally methodological: we look to it to see what the reflective labor was like that we are now to undertake.

When the university has been healthy, it has looked to its books in much the same way. In the high

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Boar

By moonlight they come, rat grey or dusky blue, one candle power purer than shadow. Impossible how they move all that bulk without twig-snap or crunch of leaves, and the old cartoon about pigs as ballerinas is no joke now as they sweep the orchard for fruit. They step silently, or stand stock-still, until you see stars through them or a further field littered with boulders, or the boles of trees, pear or cherry or apple, or you see nothing at all. The gift they leave you with is night, writhingly alive in apparitions and a thrill of imminent peril—that, had you stood in their way, or stumbled upon one of their young by mistake, tusks would have instantly encompassed all that the world will ever hold for you, and the godawful weight.

Frank Polite
medieval period, reverence for Aristotle did not mean unwillingness to disagree with him; it meant that he was the master of analysis, to whom those who sought to analyze should be apprenticed. In the eighteenth century, the authority of Newton and Locke did not mean there was no more to be discovered; it meant precisely that if one did as they did one might discover as much as or more than they did. The fundamental collapse of the university in our time is that it does not know what specifically it is to do, and it does not know what it is to do because the triumph of Enlightenment reason deprives the university of its drillmasters, including the Enlighteners. Here, too, Christians may have a word of quite specific comfort: do not be afraid to look to Western intellect's masters and see what they did.

So much—in this lecture—for the Book and books. Discourse does not consist in books, it consists in argument using books. Christians' calling to nurture argument can be very bluntly and so quickly stated. Since the message we have for the world contradicts everything the world could possibly suppose, argument is guaranteed whenever we show up—unless we have forgotten ourselves. It is not Nietzsche who will effectively challenge our current discursive sloth, or rather, it is Nietzsche precisely in that the challenge he made was a version—an unbelieving and despairing, but nonetheless faithful version—of the Christian challenge. Proclamation of the meaninglessness of the world will not now startle anyone—if it really ever did; the claim that a first-century Palestinian is the meaning of things is another matter.

I do not mean that direct proclamation of the gospel is our calling to the intellect—though a bit more of that could hardly hurt. But those involved in the gospel's general argument with the world will necessarily fall afoul also of whatever are the self-evidencies of their special "disciplines." I have arrived at my next and last main matter.

V

The title of this essay is "The Renewing of the Mind." The title is intended in a double sense. In the one sense, it refers to our calling to re-establish the intellectual enterprise, as I have just been discussing that calling. The other sense depends more directly on the passage from Paul's letter to Rome from which my title is a citation. "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your minds." (Romans 12:2) The passage's location is significant: Romans 12:1-3 is Paul's capsule description of Christian existence, a thesis set at the beginning of the whole parenetic section of his most reflective writing.

The word translated "mind" is that same big word of antique reflection, "nous." A survey of its appearances in Paul's writings quickly makes his use apparent. Paul's "nous" is not theoria; rather, it is much the same as Kant's "judgment" or Jonathan Edwards' "sense of the heart." "Nous" is moral choice that is not mere—i.e. arbitrary—choice but is precisely as moral choice the discernment of what is really out there. To use Edwards' favorite example, borrowed by him from a long tradition: if I "like" honey, that is my choice, and yet my taste for honey registers reality, for honey does in fact taste good.

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It is characteristic of the modern West to suppose that knowledge of facts and choice of goods are two separate acts, so that knowledge is morally irrelevant and choice of the good arbitrary; when I first began to teach philosophy, I regarded this as a dogma beyond challenge. But of course the whole previous tradition supposed that the two must be somehow united, that somewhere in the structure of personhood there must be a grasp on reality that is inseparably knowledge of fact and choice of good, that is precisely taste for what is good. Such was Paul's "nous.

But if there is such a thing as judgment, it must guide all intellectual activity, since it is their unity. Vice versa, the dogma that there cannot be any such thing as judgment is the foundation dogma of the intellectual tradition that is dying around us. Christians' calling to renew argument is a guaranteed success if only we are faithful. For we must invariably dissent from the founding dogma of the—barely—existing intellectual world.

Paul's summary of the Christian life is that it consists in the "renewing" (anakainosis) of judgment. Paul does not ask how judgment is possible in the first place, not being much of a philosopher. But what he thinks does appear. The transformed judgment has as its object "to agathon kai euareston kai teleion," which are expository upon "the will of God." And indeed and of course, the reality of God is the necessary condition of an act of mind which as choice of the good is also knowledge of
the fact. That I choose "such-and-such is good" is in itself a fact only about me; that the Creator chooses so is a fact about the facts. Within an intellectual enterprise that either denies God or relegates him to the fringes, judgment is indeed not possible.

Christians are called to renew the "apologetic" enterprise, not so much to enable converts as to tell why judgment is after all possible, since there is God. Each temporal whole has a schema, a pattern of how things go in it, the lines of which our judgment can bend to, or not. Since an aion is a temporal whole, its schema is determined by what it seeks. In Paul's understanding, what this aion seeks is hate, the perfected encapsulation of each thing in what it already is. But there is to be a miracle; what will in fact come of this age is a new one. And what that age will seek is love, the perfected opening of each thing to the future the other is for it.

We do not live in the coming age. But we can already, since in the resurrection we see what the scheme of that age will be, bend our judgment to its temporal contours. At least Paul says we can, and that this bending is the whole substance of Christian life. Besides supposing that judgment is possible and that it is the mind's controlling unity, Christians suppose that we rightly judge when we judge each item and sector of reality by how it opens to the love that is to come of it.

Only when—believers will say—we consider how, for example, the polity will finally undergo revolution into mutuality can we claim to know it. Alisdair MacIntyre has pointed out the peculiarity that the social sciences have found no "laws" in the proper sense at all, yet are not discredited thereby. He suggests that there can be only one explanation: the predictions made by these disciplines are not of that sort at all, they are not of the sort that can be falsified by one contrary event. Of what sort are they then? Readers of the Bible can hardly refrain from suggesting: perhaps they are prophecies, to be verified or falsified conclusively only by the character of the Kingdom when it comes. A renewal of argument, where such opinions turn up, would seem assured.

For another and historical example, Jonathan Edwards, a far more careful reader of Newton than all his contemporary vulgar Enlighteners put together, proposed that the physical world is the intersubjectivity of universal personal communion between God and created persons and between the latter, that the physical world is what God thinks in order to think a community that can include others than himself. Edwards argued that such an interpretation sticks closer to the actual features of Newtonian science than does interpretation by the metaphor of machinery, which was dominant around him. Moreover, if that is so, then what it is to be physical is malleable to transformations of relations in the universal community. The saints, Edwards once speculated, "will be able to see from one side of the universe to the other" since they will not see "by such slow rays of light that are several years travelling . . . " (Miscellanies, 926)

Perhaps such thoughts may not seem quite so ridiculous as they once did; the boundary between science and its philosophical self-interpretation is not nearly so plainly marked as formerly. Why should such speculation be barred from physics classrooms? And how do we know that the movement of science itself
must be immune to them?

Or again, whatever are the "humanities"? Somehow, they are the disciplines that study humanity, yet are not social sciences. But what can that distinction mean? In practice, the humanities seem to comprise the several activities of interpretation of the arts, plus about half of what historians do. Perhaps this is not so unsensible a grouping, and perhaps those made contrary by the gospel may have something to say to it.

Western reflection has traditionally—prior to romanticism, which opens other questions—traced the fissure in human life as running between the true and the good, what is and what ought to be, and has looked to the beautiful as the possible reconciliation. The arts are thus interpreted as judgment in action—we may think of Kant’s interpretation of the beautiful as serendipitous good or of Aquinas’ interpretation of it as truth’s attraction. If now the good is eschatological, if the good is the aion to come, the arts are the presence of the future, the enacted “groaning” and “longing” of creation for what it is not but will be. Christian interpreters might tell of what it is not but will be. On such a basis, there might even be reason to practice and teach the humanities.

**VI**

I could continue with examples—or anyway, someone could. But there is instead one final point that must be made. The Christian calling of the intellect, whether because of its nature or because of our present situation, is not an individual calling. It is communities that can be dedicated to discourse, and to the renovation of judgment. And a dedicated community is an institutionalized one: it is institutions, like those here represented, that might undertake to re-invent the West’s intellectual enterprise.

It is the enterprise as such that needs to be re-invented, the total discourse of the university that we are called to renew. Readers will divine that I conclude with the traditional insistence on what is usually and disastrously named “interdisciplinary” discourse, and with the not quite so traditional insistence on its institutionalization. But perhaps there is one difference between my insistence and that which we have so often heard, which may even make mine a bit more plausible.

The failure of good resolutions to get the disciplines together is easily explained: for the most part, they are given nothing to do together except to be together, or they are given some momentous “topic” artificially invented for the purpose. But Christians are now called to nothing less than the re-institution of that common discourse within which and only within which our several “disciplines” can exist at all—at least, as human undertakings. We have decidedly urgent “interdisciplinary topics”: restoration of the liturgical, scholarly, and paradigmatic experience of the books by which the university lives, and the institution of a university-saving argument between the prejudices of modernity and the truth of the gospel.

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**The Hiroshima Baby**

That Saturday the humidity bloomed Early. When my father finished the last Sweet roll, the dawn birds were already gone.

What he heard was the bakery filled with The end of the Armco shift. What he knew Was my mother was waiting, afraid to Subtract one hour from his wage-time. He stepped Into the last decent hour of August, And they listened to none of the day’s chant About the city turned into a cloud. They lived in smoke; the mill was overhead, Hologram of need. Though there is nothing Of my birth in any of the papers My mother saved except the local one. It features the last Etna serviceman Killed in action; it leaves Hiroshima Out, and I think that sailor probably Thought he had made it, that I came as close to the post-war boom as the doctor dared; Overdue, long and silent and frightening My parents into doubting his judgment. So quiet—I might have been listening For an explanation, Japan’s tremor Brushing each unused nerve. I might have been Waiting for the list Of the dead who were Related to me.

**Gary Fincke**
I was once challenged by Dr. Mary Kime, professor of music and dean of the graduate college at the University of Denver, to consider the following: if an extraterrestrial being landed and asked me (as a musician) what I do here, why I do it, and how it fits in with the rest of humanity, what (on earth!) would be my response? One may believe either that Dr. Kime should be burned at the stake for inflicting mental anguish upon her academic fold, or, conversely, that any supposed teacher of music who does not periodically raise some form of her question should be flogged. Whether she is asking the impossible or the issue should have been resolved generations ago, the questions remain, glistening and grinning. What is aesthetic experience? What is art? Are they the same? Why does art exist? Why do some people respond? Why doesn't everyone respond? What is aesthetic response?—which completes the seemingly impenetrable circle back to "What is aesthetic experience?" These questions surround an imperturbable Art like Conestoga wagons in the Old West. The millenia have brought hundreds of war-painted philosophers and artists to the camp to whoop and holler and circle and circle and circle. And still the secret is kept.

Modern thought has made even this comparison seem grossly inept, for many who claim to be responsive to art insist that it is not over there at all, but here within the individual. It would seem that an externalized Beauty discovered by the artist has been replaced by the artist as the center of attention, the artist as revealer of the inner life. Of the three theoreticians, Susanne K. Langer is unquestionably the most intellectually challenging to grasp. Hers is the most comprehensive theory and the best developed. My interpretations of her ideas are drawn from two of her books, *Philosophy in a New Key* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942) and *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art Developed from "Philosophy in a New Key"* (New York, 1953). There exists the centuries-old idea of Beauty being an externalized perfection of form, a separate and invisible entity in this profane world which the artist attempts to uncover. Langer, however, joins the stream of humanistic philosophy which not only posits man as the measure of all things but declares that Beauty exists only within man. A thing of beauty is a thing of beauty if and only if man perceives it as beautiful. There is no beauty apart from man's perception. (If a tree grew in the forest with perfect health and form and no one was there to see it . . .) This has led to the notion that art is a representation of the artist's emotional experience of perceiving.

Here Langer parts company with the pack. Her position is that art is not the artist's projection of the outer sensuous life (Beauty) nor a direct representation of his delight in perceiving beauty. Art does not have semantic or literal symbolic meaning based on the perception of the outside world, nor is it a literal emotional re-enactment of the world within. As language is a manifestation of the logical thought which organizes the outer world, art is the manifestation of the logical process which organizes the life of feeling. This logic of emotion is an extraordinary notion in light of our modern views of the human psyche.

Tod M. Trimble is chairman of the Music Department and conductor of the college choir at Thiel College. He has earned a B.A. in French at Millikan University, an M.S. in Psychology at the University of Wyoming, and an M.A. in Conducting from the Lamont School of Music at the University of Denver. He is nearing completion of a D.M.A. degree in Choral Music at the University of Illinois.

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Langer posits two modes of organization with which the mind processes the complexities of existence. The first is discursive logic, known to us in its end-product of language. It moves in a linear fashion, one step (thought) at a time. Discursive logic has developed its own rational powers to the point at which, by its own standards, human emotion is a slough of incomprehensible inconsistencies, obviously a vestigial reminder of our alleged history of apes. In fact, says Langer, emotion is organized by what she calls presentational thinking, which functions perfectly logically in whole blocks of (emotional) information. It corresponds roughly to the ideas of Gestalt psychology, and its lack of linear logic is what makes it so incomprehensible to rationalism and so unnamable to language.

Susanne Langer posits two modes of organization with which the mind processes the complexities of existence. The first is discursive logic, known to us in its end-product of language. It moves in a linear fashion, one step (thought) at a time.

As language is the end-product of the organization of linear logic (and yet participates in its further development), so art is the end-product of sentient logic (and yet participates in its further development). The crucial distinction to be made is this: Art is not feeling nor does it symbolize nor represent specific feelings. Unlike language, it does not denote. Art represents the course of feelings, the path they follow, how one (unidentified) feeling can meld into another.

Art for Langer is perceived as an analog to the life of feeling. This explains how two people can share an emotive response to a work and yet be perplexed at their difference in interpretation. For each, the movement of feeling has been sensed, and this is primary. Secondarily, the sensation of sentient movement has probably evoked the different associations in the two beholders. If I may be allowed a poor analogy (which the more disciplined Langer avoids), the successful artist constructs a watercourse and the receptive beholder senses and identifies with the flow. If you suddenly found yourself blindfolded in a swiftly moving raft, you might not be able to tell immediately whether you were in the Grand Canyon's Colorado River, in the middle of the Mississippi, or surging through the Atlantic in the Gulf Stream, but you would have a strong sense of movement nonetheless.

Each work of art offers a "virtual image," its presentation to the beholder's perceptions. The virtual image is completely dependent upon, yet supersedes technique. The better the technique, the more completely is it swallowed up in the power of this virtual image. One sees David—matter meeting space—not chisel gougings in stone. We do not watch the dancer relax the muscles in her lower back and fold over. We witness the swan's death, the power of death over the power of life. Each artistic genre produces its own class of virtual images, which evoke aesthetic response corresponding to a specific aspect of human experience.

Langer carefully develops the individual experiential frame of reference for most of the plastic and literary forms. Painting corresponds to the emotional conception of a "scene." Sculpture represents the presentational conceptualization of volume and its interfacing with space. Drama conceptualizes our feelingful experience of Destiny, whether in the form of Fate (tragedy) or Fortune (comedy). "The primary illusion of music," she says in Feeling and Form, "is the sonorous image of passage [time as transience], abstracted from actuality to become free and plastic and entirely perceptible."

Perhaps if I were better versed in the other art forms, I wouldn't feel her success was so uneven, but I do believe that Langer makes better correspondence between technique and result for the literary and plastic forms than she does for music. Chapter-by-chapter, with her success in developing each of the other arts in relation to its presentational logic, I all the more anticipated a similar exposition of music, but it unfortunately never came. Leonard Bernstein's theory will later give a clue as to why this may be so.

By the end of Feeling and Form, Langer has lapsed into a metaphysical perspective which she has consciously struggled to avoid. Her vocabulary has become absolutely religious, especially in her reporting of how we "offer ourselves up" to art. I take this not as a failure of logic on her part, but as an instance of the apparent inability of the human being to be completely self-satisfied or even totally nurtured by other humans. (This is one of the broken promises and false hopes of humanism, but no more of that here.)

Langer's work is so insightful and so revealing that one can only be grateful for her perspective-changing contribution. But I do sense a gap, not in her logic but in her system, between the technique and craft of music, its "parts," and the finished work—the sonorous objectification of the subjective experience of the passage of time. Bernstein's model doesn't begin to fill in this gap, but may help explain why Langer has been
able to bridge it for other arts but not for music.

In The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), Bernstein follows the same star as Langer, looking in language for a model of music. He seizes upon a linguistic model of Noam Chomsky called "transformational grammar." According to Chomsky, normal theories of language, which might be typified by the diagramming of sentences, do not account for the transformation of a positive statement into its corresponding negative, or its interrogative, or a change in tense. Simply stated Chomsky poses a "deep structure" in which every thinkable notion exists in its positive, present-tense, and active form. The transformational grammar is responsible, by means of deletion, interposition, condensation, and other techniques, for aligning the various strings of meaning into clauses with a correct syntactical relation to one another, and for producing the (hopefully) most appropriate version from among the almost countless variations that any given subject-action-object conception can generate. What is uttered Chomsky calls the "surface structure."

In The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard, Leonard Bernstein follows the same star as Langer, looking in language for a model of music. He seizes upon a linguistic model of Noam Chomsky called "transformational grammar."

Bernstein proposes that a similar process of transformation may be extrapolated from Chomsky to explain the relationship between ordinary discourse and literary art. As the deep structure is to the surface structure, so is the surface structure to artistic utterance. Note that many of the transformational grammar processes (deletion, interposition, and so forth) have been identified previously as rhetorical methods. This in no way detracts from Bernstein's suggestions. It may rather point to a consistency among mental processes. The science of rhetoric may be a conscious and deliberate portion of procedures normally carried out instantaneously and subconsciously by transformational grammar. That is not to suggest that rhetoric is a method of, or produces art. Rather, it may serve as a partial model of artistic process.

Beneath the deep structure of language there lie the lowest common denominators of linguistic analysis, which are phonemes (sounds) and morphemes (smallest units of meaning—one level up from phonemes [I, anti-, carry, etc.]). Bernstein proposes that the musical analogs to these phonemes are musical sounds, or individual notes. He claims the origin of the particular notes in Western music is in the overtone series and relates this rather convincingly to the history of consonance in Western European music. It would seem that the order in which intervals were accepted as consonant is roughly the order of intervals produced by each succeeding overtone relative to the fundamental. The first accepted consonance was presumably the octave, then the fifth, and so on.

Now there are, of course, problems with this, as with anything. Whether or not the octave is innately sensed as unity or as one, or whether this is a learned perception has yet to be established. Until it is, the "naturalness" of the diatonic scale based on the harmonic series can only be speculation. Bernstein moves on. Though he never makes it clear, I presume that Bernstein's musical deep structure includes scalar progressions, modal sequences, conceptions of harmonic tension, and other "stock" musical entities which might be thought of as being the smallest units of musical meaning. I'm not sure whether this corresponds more exactly to the linguistic deep structure per se (complete ideas amenable to transformation) or to the levels beneath (phonemes and morphemes). The reason this must remain unclear will be discussed presently. For now it doesn't matter because the strength of Bernstein's assertion rests on the extraordinary relationship of this incompletely defined musical deep structure to the level of musical art.

Remember that in language, Bernstein develops a progression in which Chomsky's deep structure is to the surface structure as the surface structure is to literary art. The difference between this model and music's model, Bernstein contends, is that with music there is no intervening level between the deep structure and art. Musical art makes a quantum leap, as it were, from its deep structure, without an intervening surface structure as in language.

Now here is an insight which is most promising in terms of explaining music's continuing resistance to explanation in general, and Susanne Langer's greater
success in relating the material to the response in the literary and plastic forms than in music. In language, it is the surface structure that serves as a key to determining the make-up of the supposed deep structure. It is the semantic, or meaning, of a given surface structure statement and consideration of all this statement’s possible permutations (negative, interrogative, active/passive, etc.) that allow Chomsky to deduce the semantic or meaning of the deep structure. The elements of surface structure have semantic identities that allow us to infer the make-up of the linguistic deep structure. Without a surface structure in music, we really have no workable semantic to deduce the smallest units of musical meaning, or music’s deep structure. So we cannot begin to relate music’s elements to the end-product because we don’t know exactly what the “elements” are nor what the deep structure is.

It can be supposed that the deep structure is the level at which a music exists in its untransformed state, subject to the subsequent modifications (a musical transformational grammar) that can transform it into art. But we haven’t the vaguest idea of the elemental form. Without a mid-point to examine (surface structure), how can we deduce the smallest organization of meaning? Is it a note? A phrase? A harmonic interval? A melodic interval? A chord? A scale? A rhythm? A tone-row?

Bernstein has some fine ideas about the end-product. I appreciate the clarity with which he demonstrates denied expectation and can only agree that repetition and the role of memory must play a more significant role than they are usually accorded. But his discussion about the make-up of the elemental units of music is as fuzzy as Langer’s is absent, though I believe his own theory may tell us why.

Let us look briefly at meaning, because the reader well-versed in Langer may be protesting that Langer devotes perhaps half of her work to argument against a literal meaning in art. She carefully works out a distinction between signaling/denoting and symbolizing, so that she can make herself clear that art does not function by delivering literal semantic meaning. It does not represent things or even feelings; rather it symbolizes the inner movement or life of feeling. If symbols do not function primarily to carry meaning in literary art (Bernstein’s upper level), does it matter whether or not we have a musical surface structure to illuminate the meaning of the elemental units in the deep structure?

The matter can also be considered as follows: If we bring Langer’s and Chomsky’s/Bernstein’s models side-by-side, we have, in literature, a surface structure rich in specific meaning, from which we can deduce the smallest units of meaning operating unconsciously in the deep structure. But according to Langer, the art at Bernstein’s highest level does not succeed because it conveys these literal meanings. If literal meanings don’t function in art, does it matter that we don’t know what the literal meanings are of units of music?

I think it does. I think Langer sees her primary goal as explaining the separation of literal meaning from artistic process, and rightly so. The idea of art expressing literal meaning is so much a part of our thinking that it does take her two volumes to make a strong case. However, that is not to say that the literal meanings of the individual elements of a work are voided once they are part of a piece of art. A play that uses themes of motherhood may not be written to represent maternal feelings at all (Oedipus Rex, for example). Yet the skillful use of the “mother” semantic provides an analog to a certain aspect of the life of feeling (which need not or perhaps cannot be defined [except, perhaps as Langer’s Destiny and Fate]). This analog

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**Poems with No Names:**

**The Sacred Pathway IV**

*(After Lao Tzu)*

8.

May the root thrive is carved on my mantle.

Be rooted, then, in the sacred pathway,

Plant yourself like Godric, and standfast,

Receiving the blessedness this pathway

Wants you to feel.

Then take this blessing of rootedness

To your labors

To your temples

To your court

To your market

To your home

And all will, with you

Become rooted in virtue.

How did the pathway become so clear?

As God said to Moses, the sign that I am

With you is that you are there.

*Travis DuPriest*
could not be provided in exactly the same way by any other semantic, even though the term "mother" may have lost its directly symbolic function in the work.

The meanings of words and recognizable visible forms may be thought of as tools that contribute to the work's form whether or not these symbols are apparent or even functioning in the finished product. Granted, the idea that it is our loss that there exists no musical intermediate usage between "feeling and form" may be important only to the musician. Whether or not a brick wall is constructed of "Z-brick" paste-ups or the real thing wouldn't make much difference to the casual admirer of a decor. But it would matter very much to a brickmason.

The rest of Bernstein's book is something of a disappointment. Rather than really developing a transformational grammar for music, he applies his knowledge of twentieth-century music to an insightful comparison with contemporary literature. He proposes that literature of our time works backwards through the linguistic succession of phonemes-morphemes-syntax-semantics, and that music does the same. Modern forms concern themselves with sounds, not words or sentences, certainly not meaning. This is a particular convenience for music, since the meanings have never been pinned down anyway. But this breakdown in meaning (which began long before our century) is not transformational grammar but an abrogation of it, the undoing of logical process.

I agree totally with Bernstein's analysis of these developments but find it impossible to share his enthusiasm for them. I don't believe that modern art is moving us toward a mystical union of love and death, nor that this would be in the least desirable. But if Bernstein has brought us to the portal of the metaphysical, it's time to move on to one much better equipped to usher us in and show us around.

Carl Jung may have had as much to say about symbols as any author of our time. Unfortunately for our purposes, his work was almost exclusively devoted to visual symbols. This is understandable in that his interest in symbolic information stemmed from an endeavor to interpret dream material in order to understand the life of the psyche and the subconscious. According to Jung the psyche makes sense of the world through its own manipulation of symbols. While this is similar to Langer in general, it differs considerably in detail. Jung gives relatively less importance to thinking, that is to Langer's discursive logic. This is because he believes there are four modes for processing experience, existing in complementary pairs. The primary pair is thinking and feeling. The more the person relies upon one, the less developed the other. The second pair, analogous to the first and sometimes behind the scenes, is sensation and intuition. Jung develops all this into a rather elaborate personality theory with personality types based on the four-way interaction of modes. What is important here is that he does put the four processing modes on more-or-less equal footing. He accords each a logic of its own, though placing far less emphasis on rational (Langer discursive) logic than do Langer and many other moderns.

I have always admired Carl Jung for his ability to deal with religious phenomena. So many intellectuals who claim to explain religion feel matter-bound (duty is passé) to explain it away, usually saying nothing in a very precise manner.

Logical thinking is probably less important for Jung because all four modes give us clues to the rich "world within," the complex life of the psyche where symbols exist as larger entities than they do for Langer. For Langer, symbols are the rational intellect's (and society's) creation used to organize experience. They are utilitarian in a sense. It is probably fair to say that for Jung, symbols are experience itself, strong enough to be independent of direct experience. That is to say that symbols can come to reside in the individual psyche by way of the Collective Unconscious.

The Collective Unconscious may be understood in one or both of two ways. In works like Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York, 1933), it is sort of a genetic memory, biologically acquired, a type of intellectual instinct. I believe in his later workings, however, as in Man and His Symbols (New York, 1964) Jung is more willing to accord a metaphysical reality to the Collective Unconscious.

I have always admired Dr. Jung for his ability to deal with religious phenomena. So many intellectuals who claim to explain religion feel matter-bound (duty is passé) to explain it away, usually saying absolutely nothing in a very precise manner. The challenge accepted by Jung (to work with religious experience on its own terms) is far greater, of course, and perfectly consistent with his four-way model of mental process. If he is willing to admit that there are ways to process experience apart from thinking (logic), then the existence of entities in the universe not discoverable (much less sanctioned) by logic is perfectly plausible. If he gives place to intuition (which most of us do informally, at least), then there is no reason to assume that sensation and its child empiricism are always going to
have the last word.

It is in Jung that we come back to the ancient notion that art directly represents experience in the Great Beyond. Jung's Great Beyond is primarily in the unconscious, though he does not rule out the possibility that the inner life corresponds to and may even be in contact with an outer reality beyond cognition.

It must be said that Jung's aesthetic theory is not very developed. In the first place, it was not a life's goal for him as it has been for Langer, nor a matter of professional interest, as for Bernstein. Secondly, his worldview has less need of an articulated aesthetic doctrine. He would agree with Langer that art does not imitate nor represent nature. They could probably agree in such terms as art being the objective manifestation of psychic symbols. Here Jung can rest content because for him psychic symbols are life and experience itself.

But Langer must continue. For all her talk about the "life" of feeling, she struggles hard (without apology) to keep life in the real world, the sensation-reinforced concrete domain comfortable to rationalists. The inner realms function as a means to the end of making sense of the outer, tangible world. And yet in the end, as mentioned before, she arrives at her own Great Beyond. She stands before what can only be a deified Art. We are to "offer ourselves up" to Art, which alone can instruct us about our feelings. Though she herself does not say so, she entertains, without refutation, quotations which claim that there is no real order in nature save that which Art has taught us to see. For the inheritor of an intellectual tradition that claims to have long since outgrown mysticism, she can pen quite a paean of praise to Art set high on its pedestal.

Langer and her beautifully elaborated symbolic transformation, Bernstein borrowing Chomsky's transformational grammar, and Jung's symbols as experience itself all attempt to come to grips with aesthetic experience. The concepts of "symbol" and "transformation" are the common interests of the three. Symbol, meaning, the meanings of life, and transformation, the processes of living, come together in the works of these thinkers. And emotion is the means, end, or both.

So what would I tell the extraterrestrial who is curious about earthlings and music? I would say that we humans perceive the unfolding of our lives as an event in itself, something quite apart from the sum of our observable experiences. We come to know the dimension of time in our lives not as an unvarying, linear, and constant check-list of seconds attained, but as an utterly plastic phenomenon, sometimes menacing, sometimes forgiving. Our adventure with time is sensed as passage that ebbs and flows, waxes and wanes, crawls almost to a stop, then hurtles with aching speed. Our chronometers may succeed in dividing time into tidy units of equal value, but our dreams and our memories know nothing of this.

For some, this sense of unfolding becomes so intense that we look for symbols whose courses run parallel to our own transformations or we seek out occasions to experience the symbols created by others. Music is this sonorous objectification of the sense of passage through time. Music is not timeless. Its smallest units of meaning remain a mystery, but whatever they are, these aural symbols must move through time in order to have any meaning at all. The composer and performer coordinate several layers of dynamic elements—the sound symbols of a particular music tradition. The listener who recognizes those symbols on hearing is offered a powerful experience of pure time. It is the subjectivity of our experience of time that lends the composer and performer this power. Strikingly, they must be masters at manipulating sound in real time in order to create the illusion of perceived time. This is paradox. And this is music.

Poems with No Names:
The Sacred Pathway V
(After Lao Tzu)

9.

Plant the seed and never touch it again.
If it does not rain, do not water the ground.
The seed has life in itself.
If it rains too much, do not replant it.
The seed can withstand abuse.

Keep your hands off. Wait.
Watch the sprout, enjoy the tuberous green.
Glance one day at the flower,
Sit one day under the tree, lean against its bark.

Arrange the seats in the garden but no more.
Invite guests in to sit with you in the cool silence,
To enjoy the shade of the tree
You never touched.
All will be restored.

Travis DuPriest
Women of 1987

Gail McGrew Eifrig

It's already a little late, but it seems a good idea to look back on certain political events of 1987, a year that ended with all of us reeling from the thrill of having Gary Hart back in the presidential campaign (as if the tireless and tirelessly self-deceived senator could ever have been said to be out of it). This event seemed nearly perfect to round out a year in which the way our society thinks of women dropped to a new low. Since it's popular to blame nearly everything we don't like on the Reagan administration, I guess they can take this one too, but I don't think there has been a year of my lifetime in which women looked worse.

And I'm not referring to hemlines. During the year women were relentlessly demeaned in the media. Not all the beings so demeaned appeared to notice, and some of them got very rich in the course of it; I'm thinking here of such charmers as Jessica Hahn and Donna Rice. Others seemed positively to bask in the sunshine of the delighted gaze of the American public, rapt in glassy-eyed amazement at Fawn Hall doing her duty by God and country. The elevation to favorite candidate status of a prominent woman-trasher like Hart is what we could expect, I suppose, when what we expect of women is a question nobody has a very good answer for anymore.

I am not so much talking here about individual relations, or about the view of sex roles and gender difference that we work out personally with the people we know and live with. I think that we have experienced some small gains in these areas; among people I work with, women are expected to be honest, hard-working teachers like everybody else. In general, the people I know seem to expect that women will be about as good, or as bad, or as trustworthy, or as bad-tempered, or as generous as the rest of the human race.

But what a spectacle we watched in the news. We may have slid into 1987 prepared for Woman as Dope by the kind of coverage given to Imelda Marcos. Interesting that though she apparently is a woman of a considerably nasty degree of political toughness, we remember her chiefly for her closets full of shoes. It is difficult in fact to know where the true Imelda is; we have seen her primarily in a succession of images which clearly show her as the typical Bad Lady—she spends too much money, she is bossy when she ought to be quiet, she is pushy and managerial, she is temperamentally unstable.

If we move quickly past Donna Rice and Fawn Hall and Jessica Hahn, and admittedly there are some distinctions that could be made among them, we could look in passing at Tammy Bakker, smiling bravely at her husband's side, the smeary ideal of Southern womanhood, Snopes style. Of course, she was great copy. Sinclair Lewis couldn't have made her up if he had tried all his life. Domesticity, piety, loyalty, sweetness and light—she made a long list of qualities look bad. So we had plenty of her, what with one thing and another.

If we were tempted to think that surely motherhood must be a role in which women could know what to do and how to behave, we had the Baby M case to contend with. Watching Mary Beth Whitehead and Elizabeth Stern go head to head over whose baby it should be, who was "fit" and who wasn't, who knew the words to the appropriate nursery rhyme and could send the infant to Radcliffe, was a pretty depressing sight. No argument that either side could make was a good argument. If we were looking for the image of the ideal mother we didn't get it, unless that now means the one who can hire the cankiest lawyer.

Then, of course, since we like our characters good or bad, nice or nasty, we got lots and lots of political wives. Here again smiles were de rigueur, as was the inoffensive suit, the pearl necklace, the gold knot earrings, the pleasant shoes, and the 2.3 children, all smiling. Perhaps they like it, and so one shouldn't feel sorry for them, all having to match some PR consultant's checklist under "Candidate, Wife." Some of them smiled bravely, some exuberantly, some shyly, some bouncily, some soberly—but there they all were... off to the side of the picture, not exactly out of focus, hair back from the eyes, teeth straight, not one of them overweight or loud or drunk or intelligent or cranky or anything that anyone could object to. And why is this? Why does anyone care a bit about a presidential candidate's wife?

Well, here we are back at the Reagans again. Of all the egregious examples of the wife as appropriate appendage, we had to look over and over and over again at Nancy...
Reagan. The apotheosis of the perfect smile, all the time. Her contributions to the public welfare? About on a par with speaking for the Apple Pie Association. Cheerful, supportive (an occasional dust-up like the one over Donald Regan, but never mind), adoring, trustful, not a worry in her pretty little head as long as Ronnie is running the show.

Is this why we need those public good women permanently attached to public men? Are they to be exemplars of us as citizens? Trustful, adoring, passive—Daddy will take care of everything. Isn't he wonderful? What a big, strong Man. Why does our public life seem more and more to resemble old movies?

It must be one of the more amazing aspects of life in the new Soviet Union to see a Russian version of this phenomenon. The press loved this business: see the battling first ladies turn the summit into a regular feminine catfight. Girls will be girls.

These public versions of famous women, however, do not mean an improvement in women's status in public life. Sadly, they simply reiterate the ancient Lilith-Mary dichotomy, in which women are either too bad or too good for the real world in which active, important, real things happen. When our most potent images of women today are still looking like Anne Baxter in All About Eve, or like Donna Reed in It's a Wonderful Life, women still have a long, long way to go.

Cats in the High Rises of Izmir

Cats in the high rises of Izmir plummet off the balconies. Cats suddenly in mid-air going six storeys down, or twenty, it's all the same. One crouches and thinks the pigeon within reach, a quick leap to a railing and a snatch. One spys a butterfly at its height and forgets the edge that is forever. "Look! a cat falling out of the sky," a child cries. But not all cats die that take the plunge. Some hit awnings and bounce into other lives. Some come down through trees, grateful for the little green fingers that abide. And some, a rare few, gripped to their prize pigeon or butterfly, fly.

Frank Polite

The Joy of Sleaze

James Combs

Wandering through a videotape rental store the other day, I thought of Jose Ortega y Gasset. Ortega's book The Revolt of the Masses is still a work worth pondering, and a tape rental store is a good place to ponder objections to democracy. Ortega was a brilliant Spanish philosopher who was representative of the aristocratic critique of the rise of democratic civilization, such as it is. The "revolt of the masses" augured the rise to power not only of the many, but also the principle of the many, what I like to call the logic of a popular society.

Ortega y Gasset and other aristocratic critics of "mass society" understood—and much disliked—what was only dimly understood at the beginning of the democratic and egalitarian revolutions of the past two centuries: that the sovereignty of the people has not only political but also economic and cultural consequences. The logic of a popular society dictates that politics becomes populist, at least in the sense of catering to popular whim and style. Economics are under pressure not only to create prosperity but also the objects of mass consumption. And culture is less...
and less the province of elite guardians and more and more the product of the common denominators of the mass marketplace.

Consider, for a moment, just one aspect of this process: popularity. A society based on the principle of the popular suggests the selection of those who are to lead or be acclaimed on the criteria of widespread popularity. Popular heroes, villains, and fools are all people we love to love, love to hate, and love to laugh at. Those who would be President, or the king of comedy, or on the cover of People magazine tend to be personalities who seek public affection, notoriety, or plaudits.

Their demon is popularity, and they are most alive when they are the objects of collective attention. Their fear is not so much being out of action or out of power as being out of sight. They are constrained to not do those things that would make them unpopular. Playing to the crowd is the source of their strength and indeed the determinant of their being. They do not vindicate tradition, they vindicate self. But they obey the canons of popular logic: they are creatures of popular age. (I am tempted to take Vico's ancient conception of history one better: we descend from mythic ages of the gods, to heroic ages of aristocratic authority vested in institutions, to popular ages of the vulgar with power vested in public opinion.) We are reluctant to criticize a god-term such as "democracy" in a country where it has taken such widespread root, but we are only now beginning to see some of the long-term effects of mass society and democratic order.

We are reluctant to criticize a god-term like democracy in a country where it has taken such widespread root.

Politically, the dangers of demagoguery and instability have always existed; but what we are more aware of now is the potential of government that is mediocre and irresponsible by design. Democratic masses often fear excellence, and seek in leaders not cream but dishwater. Further, it is easy for such governments to get into the habit of avoiding painful choices because they are unpopular. Our next President, taking a hard look at the balance sheets, will be faced with that choice, and may eventually go down in political flames for suggesting draconian remedies.

The economic consequences of a popular society include not only catering to consumer whims, but also a tendency towards tawdry products that are quickly discarded, reinforcing the ethos of a "throw-away society" where not only every thing but also every relationship becomes dispensable. In such a popular economy, obsolescence and waste, both of products and of people, become an important and ever-growing feature justified as necessary for producing the greatest good for the greatest number.

But it is on democratic culture that the aristocratic critics vented the most contempt and scorn. As a popular principle, culture becomes something mediated by the exploitation of fashion and desire. It becomes the province of a popular aesthetic, something created for its popularity—appeal across a public—rather than its inherent beauty. A popular aesthetic is bluntly exploitative, and it is here the purveyors of popular culture leap to their own defense by arguing that they are giving people what they want. The aristocratic critics of old, as well as their descendants among, oddly enough, both neo-Marxists and neo-conservatives, are quick to agree: giving people what they want is precisely what they fear.

Both Left and Right believe in aesthetic standards and what used to be called "moral uplift," although what people should appreciate and what kind of morality should be upheld they part company on, to say the least. But both sides to this debate do sense that democratic culture has superseded either restraint or direction, and that authority has transferred from ideology or institution to popular will: whatever is popular, is right. It is such an assertion of popular authority that has always made those who claim commitment to the principle of democracy lose their nerve: yes, but what if the hoi polloi choose to enjoy things that we find to be, uh, distasteful?

It is here that I must obey my populist and libertarian instincts, and defend a bit of popular cultural choice as a legitimate corollary of economic and political choice. Dialecticians can make dis-
tinctions about why these different areas of modern life are not equivalences, but I feel sure that many people do not see it: if I can vote for whomever I want, and buy whatever I want, why can't I watch whatever I want?

As a popular principle, such logic is impeccable. But what if people want to watch things that are bad for them? Well, it can be argued alternatively that Ronald Reagan and franchise food are also bad for them, but nobody would suggest that people should be stopped from choosing those things. Both Presidential propaganda and McDonald's ads may be no less exploitative or kitsch than what one finds in tape rental stores or magazine racks. If both politics and economics are exploitative, then why should we expect that culture would be otherwise? Perhaps the essence of democracy is the right of the people to choose what or what they will be exploited by.

Indeed, I would press the argument to a point that would make even John Stuart Mill nervous. The popular culture explosion in this century—exploitative, ungenteeel, often outrageous—has served several aesthetic and social functions. For one thing, it has scrambled aesthetic distinctions between high and popular art, highbrow and lowbrow, what is worth appreciating and what is not until such time as someone has the power to enforce standards. Such an atmosphere stimulates much lively debate over the status of aesthetics, and probably even gives impetus to artistic creativity.

If much of popular culture is bad and should be condemned, ignored, or banned, then the guardians of cultural standards should say why convincingly. It must be conceded that they do not lack for instances of massive bad taste in our culture: wrestling, strip joints, tattoo parlors, romance novels, Elvis imitators, demolition derbies, girlie magazines, wet T-shirt contests, velvet art.

Yet bad taste needs to be defended. If the First Amendment does not defend bad taste, it defends nothing at all. If there is any basic democratic cultural right, it is the right of vulgarity. If there is any creative stimulus that emerges from the miasma of popular culture, it is the creativity born of unrespectability.

**Yet bad taste needs to be defended. If the First Amendment does not defend bad taste, it defends nothing at all.**

High art, standards of aesthetic distinction, and even cultural snobbery could not exist without popular taste. When they merge (as with, say, films such as Chinatown, art such as that of Duane Hanson, or the music of Harry Chapin), they even offer hope of a blending of critical and popular appreciation. But such appreciation proceeds on the knowledge of the truly bad, cheap, irresponsible, and offensive. I suggest that we not only need courses in the appreciation of art and literature and music, but also of sleaze. We need to educate people in the joy of sleaze.

I define sleaze as those popular creations that are epitomes of bad taste, made purely for exploitative motives, and without the slightest pretense of enduring value. Let us return to our tape rental store. Ortega y Gasset would no doubt point to the pornographic section, and he would be right: here is the extreme form of sleaze, the stuff that tests the limits of tolerance and demonstrates the lure of the obscene. Anyone who examines the statistics of videotape rentals knows that pornography is downright popular.

Why this is so is undoubtedly understood. It is surely not merely availability or novelty; pornography has been and apparently always will be around, with or without censorship. But at least in prelapsarian days it had the thrill of being surreptitious. Now easy availability doesn't lessen consumption, and the supply seems inexhaustible. This is for me not so much shocking as puzzling: why do people want to watch incredibly boring and repetitious rituals of graphic sex? Are their own sex lives so awful that this is more exciting? Do people prefer to watch sex than risk engaging in it?

We do not fully understand why so many people exercise such bad taste, but a case can be made, given the logic of popular choice, that such a choice is their business. But it does edge us uncomfortably close to the demonics of sleaze.

Aside from porn, popular sleaze is more preposterous than sinister, and indeed now an object of nostalgic celebration. A glance at video catalogs reveals the availability of many of the more delightful products of Hollywood's "poverty row" studios that cranked out the fare for serials, drive-in audiences, cheap theaters—all in all the sleazy fringe of moviemaking. The catalogs suggest the wide range and interest in the varieties of sleaze.

In the 1930s, you and your pals could have snuck off to see the marvelous Reefer Madness, a cautionary tale about marijuana way ahead of Judge Ginsburg; now you can watch it on tape or catch it on the college "camp" film festivals, along with Child Bride and High School Girl. You can also obtain the B-serials kids growing up in the 1940s enjoyed so much; 12 to 15 episodes of awful acting, incredible escapes, cheap sets and costumes,
with titles like *Zombies of the Stratosphere* and *Radar Men from the Moon*, with "Commando Cody, Sky Marshal of the Universe." They were great. In the Fifties, you would hit the drive-ins to catch the now-classic teenpics such as *Don't Knock the Rock* and *I Was a Teenage Werewolf*. Later on you could thrill to the immortal *Blood Feast* and *2000 Maniacs*, still popular rentals.

**Sleaze is dying of respectability. They are taking the joy out of it. It is acquiring an aura of terrible harmlessness.**

You can enjoy the entire sleaze subgenre of women-in-chains movies, from the trend-setting *The Big Doll House* to the recent *Slave Girls from Beyond Infinity*. The venerable tradition of the sleaze movie has recently been revived by Troma Studios, with such contributions to the art as *The Toxic Avenger*, *I Was a Teenage TV Terrorist*, and *Demented Death Farm Massacre*. Troma is on the ramparts of sleaze, exploiting our every guilty pleasure and childish desire for cheap thrills.

Unfortunately, the glory days of sleaze may be passing. For one thing, sleaze is in. There are now societies, festivals, and awards for the celebration and study of sleaze. The raw insouciance of sleaze may be destroyed by the students of cinema taking it seriously, or by Yuppie consumers making it self-conscious. Recent tiresome parodies such as *Reform School Girls* and *The Class of Nuke 'Em High* suggest exhaustion of the sleaze mystique.

At the Cannes Film Festival, there is a corollary festival that last year showed *Assault of the Killer Bimbos* and *Surf Nazis Must Die*. Chicago has a Psychotronic Film Society that shows such classics as *Switchblade Sisters* and *School Girl Ninjas*. The Golden Turkey Awards of Michael Medved give stamps of sleazy approval to various videotapes. There are various collections, such as *Sleazomania* and the "Cool Ghoul" Zacherley's *Horrible Horror*. There is an off-Broadway parody entitled *Vampire Lesbians of Sodom*.

All of this has the smell of death about it. They are killing sleaze not by making it an object of scorn, which it needs to retain its vitality, but rather by making it an object of approval. To paraphrase Noah Cross, like whores, politicians, and ugly buildings, sleaze is now becoming venerable by lasting so long and at last seeming oh, so delightful in retrospect.

Sleaze is dying of respectability. They are taking the joy out of it. Like everything else reduced to being an object of nostalgia, sleaze is acquiring an aura of terrible harmlessness. It is well on the way to losing its prurient interest, and in danger of acquiring socially redeeming value.

Ortega y Gasset would no doubt argue that giving respectable status to sleaze is another symptom of our descent into barbarism, tolerating the cheap, irresponsible, and tawdry, and indeed even exalting it as worthwhile, something to be amused by. Gibbon had thought that freakishness in the arts was

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**Poems with No Names:**

**The Sacred Pathway VI**

*(After Lao Tzu)*

10.

Everything I write is true,
Also simple to understand.
To follow it is likewise
Easy,
Yet when someone glimpses the truth
And how to live it,
Alas, he turns the truth back into words.
Why can he not leave the word flesh?

11.

She would have been a decent woman
If someone had held a gun to her everyday,
Or would she have grown even colder?
Nothing is ever really gained by force,
Even the force of love,
Especially the force of love
Called death.

*Travis DuPriest*
one of the signs of the decay of Roman civitas, the sense of standards of public and private conduct, and of gravitas, the ability to distinguish between the serious and the playful. There is a good bit of that in our current condition, I think, and something else too: our astonishing ability to legitimate anything, to tolerate anything, to acquiesce in everything.

Our easy acceptance of the sleazy extends to the pornography of power in politics and economics. Gary Hart becomes Son of Nixon, Michael Deaver and Ivan Boesky proclaim their lack of culpability, Gordon Liddy and Oliver North become rehabilitated as a sage, enrich themselves on the lecture circuit. Having eliminated shame and guilt, everything after a decent interval becomes respectable. Nixon becomes a sage, Boesky and North become folk heroes, Irangate is brushed off as a thing, to tolerate anything, to accommodate. Sleaze, be it lowbrow movies or insider trading or political irresponsibility, no longer has an air of opprobrium. Those who deal in political hype or junk bonds are as much epitomes of bad standards of public and private conduct, and of civitas, the sense of gravitas, the ability to distinguish between the serious and the playful. There is a good bit of that in our current condition, I think, and something else too: our astonishing ability to legitimate anything, to tolerate anything, to acquiesce in everything.

Our easy acceptance of the sleazy extends to the pornography of power in politics. Gary Hart becomes Son of Nixon. It is, I suppose, our Protean character: like a sponge, we can absorb everything. Sleaze, be it lowbrow movies or insider trading or political irresponsibility, no longer has an air of opprobrium. Those who deal in political hype or junk bonds are as much epitomes of bad taste as Bloodsucking Freaks, are as exploitative as any sleazebag horror flick producer, and can make no more pretense to enduring value than Chain Gang Women. Such figures are giving sleaze a good name. Ilsa, Harem Keeper of the Oil Sheiks, should be outraged.

Richard Maxwell teaches English at Valparaiso University and writes regularly on Film for The Cresset. He is also chairman of the Film Studies program at VU.
Satanas' cannon first rolls out from behind the mantelpiece in a little Montmartre flat; or when the gang is discovered in black body stockings skulking over the roofs of Paris, with Notre-Dame towering in the background; or when the notorious Irma Vep makes her reappearance at the Howling Cat cabaret after her apparent exile to Algeria. Even apparently nondescript scenes, like the shot of Irma described above, possess a strange poignancy: they generate more feeling, more mystery, than a hundred such vignettes from later movies in the vein of intrigue and mystery.

Though Feuillade's political and religious opinions were conservative, he seems—despite himself—to have fashioned a surrealist epic. Les Vampires apparently suggests that everyday life is full of inexplicable forces, working on us without our conscious knowledge; it revels in bizarre imagery that wells up out of nowhere; it presses the notion of the criminal as a kind of artist and, by a typical surrealist twist, the artist as a kind of criminal. We get our thrills from the notion that Feuillade unwittingly wandered into this territory; as Roud puts it, in an essay from *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary*, Feuillade's films are compelling because of "the tensions set up... between his consciously held views... and the fascination he found in women like Irma Vep."

So Roud—and so the rest of us—have supposed. The supposition is sensible, I think, and in some respects quite near to the spirit of Les Vampires, but recently I began noticing another movie within the one everybody has been praising since its rediscovery in the early 1940s: a movie created not so much by its viewers, especially by viewers like Buñuel, or by its critics, especially critics like Roud, as by the conscious intention of the director.

The story of how this second film emerged is worth hearing, even for readers who have never seen Feuillade's epic. It shows that a critical tradition can shape the way we receive works of art; it presses home the importance of that obscure figure, the film archivist and restorer; it gives us, in the last analysis, a work more puzzling and more powerful than the version of Les Vampires many of us have learned to love.

The crucial point is this: every time a print of Feuillade's masterpiece arrives on these shores, the film is longer, a bit more complete. As recently as the mid- or late Seventies, in the essay already quoted, Roud supposed that "the inter-titles for the film... long ago vanished"; he went on to argue that "this is all to the good since present-day audiences are more sophisticated as to film narrative than audiences in 1915. We really don't need a title to say 'The Next Day.'"

It is received critical doctrine—correct as far as it goes—that Feuillade had a brilliant visual imagination, that he was supremely excellent at telling a story in pictures. This is surely Roud's point. On the other hand, to dismiss the words ahead of time, to assume that they make no difference, turns out to have been rather brash. The latest version of Les Vampires, shown at the New York Film Festival during September 1987, included those supposedly vanished intertitles. There were a few hitches in the presentation, largely due to an unfortunate young person who was assigned the task of translating the words and failed all too often.

All the same, the new Vampires demonstrated the importance of titles to Feuillade's cumulative accomplishment. Given access to narration and dialogue previously withheld, we discovered that we were watching a new film. To confront Les Vampires fully restored was to realize that it is less a delirious surrealist collage bursting from the subterranean recesses of a repressed mind than it is a vast novel, extravagant but also sober, impulsive but also purposeful.

The film's new effect can be suggested through a brief look at one of its ten episodes. I focus on "La Bague qui tue" (The Ring That Kills) because, as the second installment, it sets the tone of much that follows. For the sake of clarity, cues from the previously unavailable intertitles will be italicized.

"La Bague" begins at what Feuillade describes as an elegant and expensive club. Seated to the side of a table in the foreground, the Count of Noirmoutier is reading his newspaper. He notes a column of back-stage gossip: a ballet, "Les Vampires," is to be performed tonight by Marfa Koutilloff, whom "all Paris" knows is the fiancée of Philippe Guerande. The Vampires hate publicity. They have been getting more than their share from Philippe, a newspaper reporter. Now his girlfriend is aiding and abetting him. As the Count reads, a sleazy-looking club member detaches himself from a group in the

As director of the New York Film Festival, Roud has been particularly influential in bringing Les Vampires to America; indeed, the film might never have been exhibited here were it not for his efforts.

\(^3\)Like earlier works in the literary tradition from which it derived (Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* would be an outstanding example), Les Vampires is pervaded by written words: telegrams, letters, business cards, etc. In a sense, then, even the prints without titles provide us with generous word clues. However, my primary concern here is not for the words within the images but the words which comment on the images. The distinction between these two kinds of verbal guides needs further thinking-out, something I'm not going to attempt at the moment.

February, 1988
background. He passes a ring to the Count, informing him that the slightest scratch is fatal.

If we have not done so before, we recognize that Noirmoutier is the Grand Vampire himself in one of his many disguises. Just before Marfa's performance he presents her with the ring. She dies on stage, in the middle of the Vampire ballet, as the Count watches. Philippe, who is there also, recognizes the Count as a Vampire and follows him to the abandoned fortifications outside Paris where Noirmoutier's confederates kidnap him. They decide to kill him according to an elaborate ritual (they will be linked by crime, "lié par le crime").

Before this execution can be accomplished, however, the police arrive. They manage to shoot and kill one Vampire, the Grand Inquisitor (all the others escape through a trap door which they lock behind them). The dead man proves to be the sleazy fellow who originally gave Noirmoutier the ring. He is identified as the President of the Supreme Court ("Cour de Cassation," not an exact counterpart of the American Supreme Court but . . . close enough for our present purposes.)

Philippe observes that this victim is not really so important; he was only a supernumerary, a conjuror's confederate, an ally in trickery (the French word, "comparse," has no exact English equivalent but suggests a certain amount of contempt). He then makes a gesture that will recur through the film as a sort of leitmotif: holding both hands out as though to grab at something—which then slips through his fingers.

Some of the cues from the intertitles add little. We know that the ring is poisoned from the title of the episode and, of course, from Marfa's eventual death. Others have the effect of underlining. We can see how elegant and expensive the Count's club must be—there is a huge fireplace in the background with carved storks in relief—but having the characterizing adjectives allows us to focus on these qualities more exclusively.

A third sort of cue articulates ideas that are present but (extremely) latent. It is useful for us to know why the Vampires are killing Philippe: not just as a means of revenge (that motive will become central later in the film) and not just as a random act of violence but rather as a way of affirming their community, their bonds with one another. This notion of the Vampires as a little society within a society will run throughout all ten episodes, allowing Feuillade to pose fundamental questions about social contracts and social agreements.

Finally—perhaps most importantly—there are cues which give us vital information otherwise unprovided. "La Bague qui tue" moves from an elegant and expensive club to a hideout of the Vampires, yet we find the same people in both places. Most especially, we discover the President of the Supreme Court, who has a secret identity as another and more sinister sort of judge.

The New York audience for the fresh print of Les Vampires laughed raucously when the line about the Supreme Court was translated for them. This may have been because the Bork nomination was in the news, but there is, of course, a better reason to find Feuillade's words remarkable. He has gone out of his way to suggest that there is corruption at the very top of French society. One wants to discover why a conservative Catholic Monarchist would make this sort of extravagant claim: imagine a contemporary American film directed by (say) John Milius which implied that William Rehnquist was an agent of Libyan terrorists, then showed him lying dead in Cabrini-Green, slaughtered by the FBI.

We begin to understand that the much-vaunted subversiveness of Les Vampires is not altogether subliminal, but must have a planned and intentional role in the film, however unexpected it may be. We start to become interested in the circumstances—this was, after all, the first year of the Great War—that might have brought Feuillade to this peculiar juncture in his career, in his relation to the Third Republic, and perhaps even in his thinking about the future of civili-
There's a lot more I want to know about Feuillade's early films and about France in the first decades of our century before I venture my own solution to the puzzle. Much of the pre-Vampire Feuillade is now being studied for the first time. The history of the Third Republic is, of course, well-known: the Dreyfus affair, and the backlash against anti-republicans that followed it may figure here, as well as the terrorist gangs often cited when Les Vampires is discussed.

For the purposes of this essay, it is perhaps enough to cite a single clue—once again, from an intertitle. The word "comparse," glossed above, implies a theatrical metaphor observable elsewhere in "La Bague" (e.g., when Marfa dances). Everyone in Les Vampires—heroes and villains alike—is obsessed with creating illusions, doing tricks, putting on a show.

It is possible that the unspeakable reality of World War I has pointed Feuillade towards this notion of his society as a kind of huge audition, with the players getting more and more out of control, more liable to mix their play-acting with real violence, real death. He would not be the only right-wing, high-church type to experience the destruction of the old Europe on these terms. I can think of a prominent parallel: Eliot laboring on The Waste Land, a Jeremiad—reshaped by Jacobean drama—against the depredations of modern culture.

In any case, whatever the historical significance of Les Vampires may prove to be, the archivists have presented us with a film which can never again be seen as a mainly unconscious work, a nightmare despite itself. The surrealists loved the films of Feuillade, but loved them as the expression of a collective, therefore unattributable dream. Irma strolling down the sidewalk expressed more than Feuillade knew, or knew that he knew. We now begin to understand that Les Vampires belongs to Feuillade: that its dreams are dreamt on purpose.

The Lazarus Reflex

Today a woman draws blood from me,
The simplest lab test, and I pale
And sweat and start the falling forward
Humiliation of panic. "Are you ok?"

She says, meaning "Of course not"
Or "Who is this fool?" and I answer

"Yes," lying like a salesman, someone
Whose last dream drove him over a railing,

His car launched in a hopeless arc.
She's playing the Top Forty Countdown,

#27, a tune I've been hearing
For months suddenly tumbling

Off the play list. She breaks
The ammonia capsule and, jerked,

Upright, I see the next patient
Staring at me, his face thinned

By God knows what, and I'm ashamed
Enough to let loose my panic jokes:

The stress test faints, the flu shot
Collapses, all of those quizzes

For the Lazarus reflex, their hammers
On my knees of fear, something else

Mysterious, holding my leg still
Or letting it jerk, and never

A comment from the doctor,
Whichever patient I choose to be.

Gary Fincke
The Soft Answer

Dot Nuechterlein

It is important that you understand the background. I was mad. No, that isn't strong enough: I was white-hot, boiling over, furious, MAD!

Someone had stolen something of mine, something I had made, something in which I had invested not only my time and creativity, but myself. All the evidence pointed to it having been taken by an undergraduate, and a male at that—probably someone engaged with friends in a prank. So I was predisposed to be especially angry at anonymous young men.

To work off some steam I went to my favorite place, the indoor track, to run a few miles. Mistake. Not only was this the site of the theft, so that every lap brought the track, to run a few miles. Mistake. No, that isn't strong enough: I was finishing even the first eighth-mile, it having been taken by an undergraduate, and a male at that—probably someone engaged with friends in a prank. So I was predisposed to be especially angry at anonymous young men.

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