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Artist James McGarrell on Abstraction within Figuration
A Lutheran Perspective on Science and Theology
Terry Hall: Richard John Neuhaus & the Catholic Moment

Cresset

A review of Literature, the Arts, and Public Affairs
October, 1988
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Cover: Robert Birmelin, American b. 1933. Sweetness and Ashes (Vanitas), 1987, acrylic on canvas, 48 x 78 inches. Courtesy Sherry French Gallery, N.Y.

These paintings plus those reproduced with the James McGarrell article (pp. 16-18) are included in the exhibit Frivolity & Mortality: The Tradition of Vanitas in Contemporary Painting on view at Valparaiso University, Oct. 2 - Nov. 10. Also on view from the VU Museum collection are Adam & Eve by Erlebacher and Still Life with Self Portrait by Beal. McGarrell will speak Oct. 12, 8 p.m., Union.
Campaign Observations

The publishing and mailing schedule of The Cresset is such that while In Luce Tua for November will have to be written before the election occurs most of our readers will only see it after the election has passed. That being the case, there remains only October for Cresset subscribers to enjoy whatever benefit accrues from exposure to In Luce Tua’s election-campaign wisdom. Thus the following not-quite-random observations as of late September.

The First Debate  Who won? On points, Michael Dukakis. He was better organized, more coherent, more thorough. George Bush too often rambled, stepped on his own best lines, interrupted himself in mid-thought, and failed to flesh out his positions.

But a presidential debate, of course, is more than a forensic contest. People do not necessarily side with the candidate who is the most articulate; they identify more with the one whose positions on the issues coincide most closely with their own. On that basis, Bush probably came out ahead. More of his views on salient matters, we suspect, correspond more nearly with those of a majority of voters than is the case with Dukakis (more on this below).

Of perhaps even greater importance than either verbal facility or position on the issues, however, are overall impressions left by the candidates as to traits of personality and character. With which of these two men will we feel more comfortable over the next four years? Which do we trust the most? Which do we trust the more? Whose judgment do we like better? Judgments here are notoriously subjective, of course—and greatly subject to distortion by partisan preferences—but Bush seemed to come across in personally more attractive terms than Dukakis. The Democratic candidate was aggressive to a fault: his aides should remind the Governor that he is running for President, not prosecuting attorney. Dukakis’ intense, relentless manner leaves the observer impressed with his intelligence and force, but wary of his temperament. The Vice President, by contrast, though verbally less adept, seemed more relaxed, more human.

These matters are impossible to quantify or measure with analytical precision, and they may not be the ones we should most emphasize in deciding for whom to vote, but they probably make more difference in the end than anything else—as the continuing personal popularity of Ronald Reagan so vividly illustrates.

So who won? In debate terms, Dukakis. In political terms, by a narrow margin, Bush.

The Campaign  There is something about presidential campaigns that brings out the worst of the goo-goo propensities of the American media. During every campaign in living memory we have been subjected to the same litany of complaints: the candidates are avoiding the issues and trafficking only in personalities and trivia, the campaign and the campaigners are alike unutterably dull, the candidates this time around do not measure up in statesmanship or oratorical eloquence to the great candidates of yore, and the American people, despite their natural civic virtue, have become bored and impatient with the campaign because the lackluster candidates have failed to engage their interest. It’s all entirely predictable and mostly contrary to fact, with the exception of the last item, which offers the uninterested and uninformed specious justification for their invincible political indifference and which therefore tends toward self-fulfillment. Thus does the self-deluding earnestness of the media engender cynicism among the electorate.

All this is part of the long-established conceit among Americans that we are better than our politicians. But it simply is not so. In this specific instance: both George Bush and Michael Dukakis are men of substance and weight, and they are waging campaigns in which the issues are, for the most part, clearly and honestly drawn. If neither is a great speaker or a man of Lincolnian stature (and Lincoln himself became what he is to us only after his election), neither can they individually or jointly be dismissed as insubstantial. If Americans are bored by the campaign being waged, that is a judgment that weighs far more tellingly on them than on the candidates.

As for those who argue that they cannot choose between the candidates because they do not know where the candidates stand, one wonders if such people have been paying attention. We hear much pious blather that the candidates have not addressed themselves in specific terms to such issues as the budget or trade deficits. But such complex issues are not, in fact, reducible to three-point programs, except in terms of high generality. Anyone who claims, for example, that there is some simple set of specific policies by which government can solve the problem of the trade deficit is almost certainly engaging in demagoguery. And short of detailed blueprints on this and other issues, attentive voters have sufficient evidence on which to distinguish between the candidates on ideological and policy grounds. Those who pretend not to know how
to choose between Bush and Dukakis are either dissembling or have not done their homework.

The Issues Which brings us to why Bush has so much improved his standing in the polls since the Republican convention. Most observers credit his comeback either to some presumed new dynamism on his part or to campaign blunders on the part of Dukakis. But there is a simpler and more persuasive explanation. Bush has moved narrowly ahead of Dukakis because, as suggested earlier, he has an advantage on the issues. To reduce the point to its essentials: Bush is a conservative, Dukakis is a liberal, and most Americans, forced to choose, are more conservative than they are liberal.

This is not a partisan judgment. Observe simply the alacrity with which Republicans pin the liberal label on Dukakis and the evasions to which Democrats resort in order to deny that label for their candidate or their party. Democratic liberals flee the L word, Republican conservatives embrace the C word: in those contrary reactions one observes the dynamics of ideology at work in contemporary American politics. It is a most extraordinary and little explored (if widely conceded) reality.

The Pledge Much of the liberal decline and conservative resurgence has to do with social and cultural issues, and Bush is pushing his opponent hard on two of them: Dukakis' prison-furlough program and his veto of a bill requiring teachers in Massachusetts to lead students in the Pledge of Allegiance. On the latter issue, Bush has expanded his attack to associate Dukakis with a whole range of presumably unpopular liberal social positions by turning back on the Governor his declaration that he is a "card-carrying member" of the American Civil Liberties Union.

Some sorting out is required here. The Pledge issue is not in itself illegitimate. Of marginal importance, perhaps; but not illegitimate. Dukakis' claims to the contrary notwithstanding, a law such as the one he vetoed is not clearly unconstitutional. Similar bills have been upheld elsewhere. He could have tested the law by approving it; he chose not to. In so acting, he left himself open to fair criticism for the priorities and predilections revealed in his act. Bush has repeatedly said that it is not the Governor's patriotism that he questions, but his judgment.

And it is a peculiar judgment that says a state may not mandate Pledge exercises in its schools. After all, school boards do so regularly all across the country: are they all behaving in unconstitutional and anti-First Amendment fashion? Remember it is children who are the object of the exercise. It is only common sense to distinguish in such a matter between adults and children. Requiring the exercise for children (while recognizing that those whose religious values are offended must be allowed not to participate) is a way of inculcating patriotic values in them. That's a quite different matter from mandating such an exercise for adults. (The adult teachers involved here are included solely in their roles as instructors of children.) And if the law says that a society is forbidden to require the passing on of patriotic values to its children, then the law, as Mr. Bumble observed in a wholly different context, is a ass.

Which brings us to the ACLU, an invaluable and necessary organization, but one that, in recent years especially, has taken an absolutist and near-monomaniacal attitude toward the proper reading of the First Amendment. What makes the ACLU invaluable is its protection, without regard to ideological leanings, of unpopular political persons and causes. What makes it dangerous is its fundamentalist and literalist reading of the Constitution. Thus it does, as Bush suggests, oppose what it perceives as any form of censorship, right down to rating of movies for parental guidance (this is censorship?) or banning of even the grossest forms of child pornography. It also opposes as constitutionally impermissible intrusion of virtually any expression of religion or religious values into public life, including the granting of tax exemptions to churches or the inclusion of the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Such positions do not have the absolute constitutional foundation that the members of the organization claim for them. Theirs is a doctrinaire and sectarian reading of the First Amendment, one which is by no means self-evidently correct and which in fact many constitutional scholars strongly oppose. It is therefore not a form of McCarthyism for Bush to raise questions about the ACLU or to press Dukakis to explain clearly with which positions of the organization he agrees or disagrees. It is, after all, Mr. Dukakis who first raised the "card-carrying member" issue.

All that said, it is time for the Vice President to move on to other matters. He has made his point, and the issue is not of such a degree of importance that it is worthy of further agitation. There is a point beyond which permissible political hardball shades into demagoguery. Bush is, we suspect, near a point of backlash on the question and he would do well, both in terms of political calculation and of political ethics, to leave the matter alone.

The Prospects Last January we wrote: "In 1988, the Republican candidate (whoever he is) will defeat the Democratic candidate (whoever he is). Remember (unless things turn out otherwise) you read it here first." We hold to that statement, with particular emphasis on the parenthetical clause in the second sentence.
IN PRAISE OF CATHOLICISM

Reflections on a Lutheran Sighting of a Catholic Moment

That a Lutheran pastor should pen a work proclaiming the present to be "the moment in which the Roman Catholic Church in the world can and should be the lead church in proclaiming and exemplifying the Gospel" represents a singular event. When that same pastor is one of the most astute observers of the current religious scene in the United States, with a long record of involvement in the great political and cultural controversies of the past three decades, one must take particular notice.

At the very least, the appearance of Richard John Neuhaus' new book, The Catholic Moment: The Paradox of the Church in the Modern World (Harper & Row, 288 pp., $19.95), furnishes evidence that this century's "golden age" of Christian intellectual achievement—represented by such giants as Reinhold Niebuhr, Will Herberg, Paul Ramsey, John Courtney Murray, and Jacques Maritain—has a worthy heir. The prospect of that level of Christian discourse continuing in our own time is heartening: for Lutherans, for Roman Catholics, indeed for all Christians of good will. Lutherans can justly take pride in so penetrating an intellect in their own midst; Catholics should find bracing Neuhaus' boldly sympathetic engagement with the thought of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger—at present, Catholic Christianity's most powerful champions of tradition and orthodoxy.

It is surely one of the ironies of the age that a Lutheran pastor should take more seriously than do some Catholics the views of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger. To Neuhaus, John Paul and Ratzinger represent the most encouraging prospect in many years for the restoration of the Christian Gospel to its proper role in the life of the Church and in the affairs of men. To some Roman Catholics the two men represent just the opposite: forces of reaction and impediments to authentic Christian renewal and to progressive movements for social justice. Such are the "signs of the times."

It is surely one of the ironies of the age that a Lutheran pastor should take more seriously than do some Catholics the views of Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger.

What, then, is one to make of Neuhaus' major thesis that now is the time for the Catholic Church to take the lead in proclaiming the Christian Gospel? This thesis can be understood in two principal ways. It can first of all be understood as predictive, as claiming that the prospects for Catholicism successfully seizing this moment in history for the renewal of Gospel prerogatives are especially propitious. The warrant for this interpretation of the Neuhaus thesis is, at best, ambiguous. Roman Catholicism is beset with serious internal crises: one need only mention the decline in vocations to the priesthood and the numerous defections from the religious orders in the 1960s and '70s; the rejection among the faithful of key elements of Catholic moral teaching, including contraception and abortion; the strident insistence among Catholic theologians and academicians on the "right to dissent" from official teachings; and the emergence of a radical feminism...
that consigns centuries of settled Christian doctrine and practice to the rubbish heap of "patriarchal oppression." In sum, there is ample evidence of polariza-
tion and disintegration within the Catholic fold.

To be sure, this is the way it has always been, in large outline if not in specifics. The history of Chris-
tianity is the history of bitterly divisive contests over what the Gospel means. Yet when one also takes into
account that the wider culture is, in important re-
spects, post-Christian, the prospects of this being the
Catholic moment take on a rather dim aspect. One can
cite contrasting evidence, of course—for example, the
recent increase in the number of converts to Catholi-
cism and anecdotal evidence, at least, of the encourag-
ing phenomenon of "reverts" (people who stray from
the Catholic communion in their teens and early adul-
thood, then return to full sacramental and doctrinal
fidelity). But this is just to say, again, that the full pic-
ture is ambiguous. One can with justification find
Neuhaus' prognosis of the Catholic moment both comp-
pelling and yet problematic vis-a-vis its prospects for
fulfillment.

The Neuhaus thesis can also be understood as a
normative claim. That is, one can take Neuhaus to be
arguing that Catholicism has the strongest claim to be the focal point for the renewal of Christianity in a
post-Christian era. Whatever one thinks about the pre-
dictive character of Neuhaus' thesis, this, I think, is its
deeper significance. The vagaries of history make em-
pirical predictions about cultural trajectories inher-
ently risky; whether Christianity will in fact reassert its
cultural dominance in the twenty-first century is known
only to Providence. But Christianity's claim to
have a leading role in shaping our culture can be as-
essed on different grounds. Here we are concerned
not with contingencies, but with prerogatives. It is
here that Neuhaus is, to my mind, most provocative
and persuasive.

To understand fully the grounds for this claim in-
volves one, of course, in the entire scope of The Cath-
olic Moment. The "hermeneutical key" to Neuhaus'
thesis, however, is plain enough; it resides in his use
of the notion of "paradox." Neuhaus' overarching aim
is to articulate the relationship of the Church to the
world. Christianity is anchored in a promise that is
both already operative in history and that still awaits
its ultimate fulfillment. The Christian Church, that is,
lives "between the times": on the one hand, Christ's re-
demptive act has already redeemed the fallen world;
on the other hand, the world still awaits the es-
chatological fulfillment of this redemption. (Catholics
sometimes speak of this relation as "already but not
yet.")

Neuhaus advances this understanding of the Church
and the world not only because he believes it does jus-
tice to historical/theological realities but also because it
makes clear what the Church can give to the world. To
emphasize the eschatological pole of the redemptive
promise is to employ a "horizontal perspective"
whereby all this-worldly projects and aspirations are
understood to be inherently imperfect, hence always
subject to reform, and therefore limited in the claim
they have on us. In Neuhaus' formulation, paradox
"remind[s] the world of its incompleteness by prevent-
ing prideful or despairing acts of premature closure,
by keeping the world open to the prominent transfor-
mation that is the destiny of Church and world alike." Recog-nition of the transcendent destiny of man pro-
claimed by Christianity is the antidote to utopian
dreams of creating the "new man," of establishing the
perfectly just polity, and similar exercises in immodu-
eration.

Viewed under the aegis of paradox, then, any sense
of the world as an arena in which to seek for ultimate,
final resolutions of the contradictions and shortcom-
ings of human existence constitutes a dangerously
skewed perspective. Neuhaus reminds us that "the
paradox of the Church in the world cannot be solved;
it can only be superseded"—the latter event coinciding
with the initiation of the Kingdom of God in its full
disclosure.

Neuhaus believes that Christianity should engage
the world; his is no aloof perspective. Some urge that
the Church, to be true to its nature, must be against
the world, that it manifests itself most truly and fulfills
its mission most faithfully when it sets itself in oppo-
sition to the "principalities and powers" of the world.
On this view, the Church is called to be the quintes-
sential "countercultural" institution. (Historically, the
Anabaptist tradition has understood itself in this way.
Contemporary American examples include the Sojourn-
ers community in Washington, D.C., and the editors
and many of the writers associated with the New Oxford
Review.)

Neuhaus, however, has a more complicated notion
of the relation of the Church to the world. That no-
tion is encapsulated in the formula that the Church
should be against the world, for the world. This,
again, is another way of expressing the paradox or
riddle of which Neuhaus speaks. This way of under-
standing the relation of Church and world allows the
former to engage the world without being captured by
it. Because of its transcendent character and es-
chatological destiny, the Church must always be to
some extent against the world; it must always be a sign
of contradiction in the sense that no worldly projects
or ideologies are identifiable with divine purposes.
Sometimes compatible, yes; identifiable, no. All
worldly projects, judged from the far horizon (Augustine's heavenly city), can be criticized and found wanting. This judgment and the bringing to bear of this transcendent perspective on the world, however, is not undertaken simply to render an anathema on the world. In an important sense (though not only in this sense) it is undertaken for the sake of reforming the world. To be against the world, for the world, is to seek to transform human endeavors in the light of a transcendent ideal. Though Neuhaus does not use the term, one might call this paradoxical perspective "transcendent incarnationalism."

The nub of the problem with liberation theology is that it has relinquished the central force of the Christian Gospel: the supernatural grace won for us in Christ's sacrificial act.

Much of The Catholic Moment is occupied with what happens when the paradoxical character of the Church/world relation is forgotten or when its "resolution" is attempted. When either of these occur, the transcendent pole of human destiny is invariably attenuated, if it is not lost altogether. In either case, it is the purely human drama in this world that becomes the sole source of ultimate meaning and the focus of one's allegiance. Part of what is meant in describing our present era as post-Christian is that it no longer believes in the supernatural character of the Christian faith; this is true also of some of those who identify themselves, and are identified by others, as bona fide Christians, including some with professional standing as Christian theologians. Most of these Christians nonetheless retain the vocabulary Christians have used down through the centuries. But now this language is reinterpreted to refer only to what is immanent. For such people, as Neuhaus puts it, theology becomes anthropology, and to speak of the transcendent "is to speak of man's effort to transcend himself."

At least here in North America, those Catholic theologians who are embarked on the effort to reduce theology to anthropology, the transcendent to the immanent, represent a "soft" version of the capitulation to modernity. Harder versions are contained in radical feminism and in Latin American liberation theology. Clearly, Neuhaus judges liberation theology to be the most powerful contemporary challenge to Christian faith. His critique of it is as penetrating as it is fair-minded, and it is simply the best treatment, for its length, I know of.

To those with only a general notion of what liberation theology is about, it often seems merely an attempt to emphasize the plight of the poor and urge Christians to work to end economic exploitation and political oppression. Liberation theology consists of more than this, however. Underlying its efforts at "consciousness raising" on behalf of the poor is a theology that tends to dilute the force of the transcendent in the Christian message; that is, it has a pronounced proclivity for translating theology into anthropology and sociology.

Neuhaus focuses on the work of Juan Luis Segundo, whom he regards as the most candid exponent of liberation theology. Segundo reinterprets the divine and transcendent to mean the "social"; the notion of the Trinity, for example, means merely that "God is social." Neuhaus quotes Segundo's stipulation that the Christian sacraments are significant "solely in terms of contributing to community building" (Segundo's emphasis). Resolving class conflict, eliminating economic exploitation, liberating the mass of people from oppressive social structures, furthering the revolution whereby the poor regain control of their earthly destiny—this is the real business of the Church. Of this reinterpretation Neuhaus observes: "The future is not [according to liberation theology] a matter of eschatological arrival but of evolutionary unfolding." And again: "In short, the culmination of this understanding of history is the relentless exclusion of the traditional understanding of hope for the coming of the Kingdom of God as the eschatological fulfillment of history."

Neuhaus' strictures against Segundo and his liberationist colleagues stem not from his indifference to the plight of the poor, and certainly not from a belief that the Church has nothing to contribute to the alleviation of poverty and social injustice. The nub of the problem with liberation theology is that it has relinquished the central force of the Christian Gospel, viz., the supernatural grace Christ's sacrificial act has made available to men, regardless of their social-economic situation. Thus Segundo characterizes as "magic" the notion that Christ brings any saving grace from outside the historical process. Liberation theology rejects on principle any notion of salvific activity initiated by the power of an Other who dwells outside nature and history and who has founded a Church to be the instrument of this grace. Such ideas, in the liberationist scheme of things, belong to a superstitious, naive age, excessively preoccupied with the individual and his personal destiny.

Neuhaus' analysis of liberation theology helps one to see that liberation theology's great flaw is its tendency to replace the salvation of souls, as traditionally under-
stood, with justice, which becomes man’s highest good. Justice, of course, is the great political preoccupation. Hence, in the hands of the liberation theologians, theology is, in the strict sense of the term, politicized. It is against this tendency in liberation theology that John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger have raised some of their most forceful objections, insisting that while the Church commands “the preferential option for the poor” its primary mission is to bring the Good News of Christ’s redemptive act to everyone, rich or poor. It is that redemptive grace which represents liberation in the most profound sense.

Given Neuhaus’ penetrating criticism of liberation theology, one might wish to ask: What gives that theology any privileged status in the revolutionary struggle? Surely not because it approximates transcendent ideals better than revolutionary movements lacking an identification with Christianity, for, as Neuhaus convincingly argues, the ideals put forth by liberation theology are not transcendent ideals. Perhaps, then, because it aligns itself with the “movement of history”? But the historical dialectic doesn’t require for its legitimation the religious concepts employed by liberation theology. The laws of history, in dialectical perspective, operate in autonomous fashion.

Liberation theology, it would seem, brings nothing of value to the revolution except more bodies and, perhaps, a set of emotional intensifiers. It can, that is, provide some additional motivation for its adherents to participate in the class struggle. Still, insofar as liberation theology has relinquished belief in man’s ultimate fulfillment beyond time and history it is, at bottom, superfluous to the meaning of the revolution. Marx, Lenin, and the other great theoreticians of revolutionary praxis have already done the spade work here, without need for reliance on theological notions.

A further problem plagues liberation theology. Unless they maintain a transcendent referent, liberation theologians cannot, Neuhaus insists, maintain a critical distance from the revolutionary movements with which they are in sympathy. Liberation theology possesses no vantage point from outside the historical process by which to measure and criticize it. The process itself is thus “the measure of all things.” Neuhaus understands this with admirable clarity. He sees that liberation theology—at least in the version propounded by Juan Luis Segundo—represents the attempt to measure man by man. If one believes that man is the measure of all things—if the transcendent is immanentized—then one has greatly-diminished resources to resist whatever agenda the men with power happen to conceive. The necessity of maintaining a critical distance from all this-worldly projects is the political meaning of transcendence. Thus, as John Paul II keeps on insisting (and Neuhaus emphatically agrees) the Church must not be a “partisan Church.”

A major reason why Neuhaus is convinced that this is “the Catholic moment” is that he believes the Roman Catholic Church, increasingly alone among the Christian churches, continues to resist modernity’s attempt to neutralize the transcendent. Liberal Protestantism in particular is very far gone down the road to replacing the supernatural with the natural. In many cases its convictions are indistinguishable from those of the wider, nonbelieving culture. Neuhaus is sympathetic to the work of John Paul II and Joseph Ratzinger because they are so steadfast in opposing this movement. Their insistence on preserving the uniqueness of the Church’s mission, Neuhaus believes, positions Roman Catholicism at the cutting edge of resistance to the corrosive forces of modernity.

“Successful ecumenical dialogue,” Neuhaus insists, “must produce not a synthetic new tradition but a confession in which both parties . . . can recognize their own tradition.”

Though Neuhaus comes to praise Catholicism he gives no evidence of converting to it. Indeed, part of what he finds so encouraging about the current Catholic Church is its openness to ecumenism, as enunciated at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and as reiterated in more recent statements by John Paul II. Neuhaus is himself a vigorous ecumenist. His is no “vulgar” ecumenism, however—by which I mean an ecumenism that is ready to dilute the content of a faith tradition until there is nothing which gives offense or to which anyone can object. Vulgar ecumenism is like bland, generic wine: it appeals to the widest possible tastes, and offends the fewest, because it possesses no strong character of its own. It wishes to exclude as little as possible, to jettison any doctrine that is “hard,” that draws distinct boundaries, that excludes.

Neuhaus will have none of this sort of ecumenism. He wants people to maintain the integrity of their own tradition. “Successful ecumenical dialogue,” he insists, “must produce not a synthetic new tradition but a confession in which both parties to the dialogue can recognize their own tradition.” To be sure, the traditions which Neuhaus believes have the strongest claim to participate in this dialogue are the “confessing” churches: preeminently Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and (one presumes) such similar bodies as Eastern Or-
thodox, Ukrainian Catholic, and perhaps a few others. Absent fidelity to a credal affirmation of faith at the very center of worship, there is little basis for fruitful ecumenism.

As a Catholic who wholeheartedly shares Pastor Neuhaus' admiration for John Paul II, I also cannot help but admire his stance on ecumenism. While I would rejoice in his joining the Catholic fold—he is already, in a sense, a splendiferous Catholic—I also find something admirable in his steadfast loyalty to his own communion. And on the common ground of what C. S. Lewis called "mere Christianity" he stands like a "stone wall": against the prevailing cultural zeitgeist he sets himself as hard as granite, ever in fidelity to Christ.

The one facet of Pastor Neuhaus' work that I find discordant is his treatment of authority—or rather his distinction between authority and the authoritative. (Perhaps such an area of disagreement is to be expected between a Catholic and a Lutheran.) It is startling, indeed puzzling, to encounter the following assertion:

The present Roman Catholic preoccupation with church authority is theologically debased and ecumenically sterile. It is theologically debased because it fixes attention not upon the truth claims derived from God's self-revelation but upon who is authorized to set the rules for addressing such truths. . . . This tends to confirm the cynic's view that theology is not a deliberation about truths but a contestation over power.

A Catholic who aligns himself with John Paul II and the traditional role of the magisterium is not likely to find such an assertion persuasive. For he will not so easily separate "the truth claims derived from God's self-revelation" from the issue of authority. What Neuhaus takes to be merely an internecine quarrel among Catholics and so of marginal theological importance—e.g., Rome's disciplining of Catholic theologians who presume to teach, as Roman Catholics, what is contrary to officially established Catholic doctrine—an orthodox Catholic takes to be a central issue for the Church. Neuhaus wants to replace the category of "authority" with the putatively more important category of "the authoritative." Authority is about power; the authoritative points to the truth of the Gospel.

While I admit that the logic of the terms admits of a distinction between them, I would also submit that one cannot secure the authoritative without authority. Eric Voegelin has pointed out that Plato, in the Republic, is the first to employ the term "theology." There Plato introduces the necessity for "tupoi peri theologias": models, or criteria, for speech about the gods. Theology is speech about God. There is always not just one speech about God, however, but many. Not all are compatible with one another. How are we to discriminate among them? Which are authoritative, and which are not? Which are anchored in God's revelation to man, and which are anchored merely in man's own self-image, his own projects? As the history of Christianity vividly demonstrates, one person's orthodoxy is another's heresy. We need criteria for speech about God. Yet even the criteria frequently are matters of dispute.

In order to secure the authoritative, the true Gospel one must have recourse to authority—more precisely, to institutions of authority. Recognition of the authoritative is as crucial as Neuhaus argues. But that recognition cannot safely be allowed to reside solely in the ratio of men. It cannot be "free floating." An institution able to command assent, communal as well as intellectual, is required for the authoritative to be operative. Neuhaus is right to assert that reducing the issue to being merely about power is to debase it. The issue is about more than that. Yet it is at least that.

For the question is, who is going to make his truth claims stick? What can produce sufficient pressure (or, if you will, power) to bend rival formulations of God's self-disclosure to its own or, failing that, to rule them out of court? Only an authoritative voice that is instantiated in an institution with the power, if it comes to that, to make the authoritative actually authoritative, i.e., make it the norm. This is why many Catholics, including John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger, emphasize the importance of submission to the Church's authority: on it hangs the fate of the authoritative itself.

Notwithstanding the sharp cleavage Neuhaus appears to discern between the two notions, the disagreement I have marked may be to his mind more apparent than real. In any case, I am certain that Pastor Neuhaus is the sort of man with whom disagreement, no less than agreement, can be both exhilarating and fruitful. For he is that rare man with a passion for genuine conversation (the word in fact signifies what he means by ecumenism): the meeting of minds in an atmosphere of seriousness, an attitude of ideological disengagement, a common practice of civility, and in common fidelity to the canons of veracity.

Meeting the mind of Richard Neuhaus, even in some disagreement, opens one to a capacity for wisdom and charity that has few contemporary rivals. And throughout his pages one encounters a deep love of Christ and his saving grace. One is, I think, simply better, in addition to being better informed about the contemporary crises facing the Church, for pondering this rich and discerning book.
There are times and situations in Christian apologetics in which a basic expression of the catholic faith common to all Christians should be our primary concern. Especially in our dealings with the non-Christian world, the doctrine expressed in the ecumenical creeds should be central, and any extensive discussion of theological differences among denominations is likely to be counterproductive. When the task is one of presenting a Christian perspective adequate for the modern world with its views conditioned by science and technology, such a limitation to the common core of the faith is usually taken for granted.

But there are also times and situations in which it is important for us to be conscious of our confessional tradition, and I suggest that this is to some extent the case when we wish to deal with the relationship between science and theology. Intelligent discussion of the points of contact between Christianity and the modern scientific understanding of the world is very important, and our specific theological tradition will mark the ways in which we deal with that concern. One only has to note, for example, the clear stigmata of Roman Catholic theology on the work of Teilhard de Chardin1 or the use of the Reformed tradition by Thomas Torrance in his writings on theology-science questions2 to realize this. I believe that an explicit use of some elements of Lutheran theology could be helpful in the enterprise of relating natural science and Christian faith. This certainly does not mean that Lutherans should ignore or deprecate the insights of other traditions, but simply that they should not be hesitant about sharing the valuable contributions which their own tradition has to offer.

A full discussion of the relevance of Lutheran thought for science-theology relationships is, of course, a topic for more than a brief article. But it is possible here to point out some major themes which the Lutheran tradition can present in the science-theology dialogue. In particular, we will see that Luther's "theology of the cross" and the Lutheran belief that divine properties are communicated to the humanity of Christ in the Incarnation have the potential to illuminate science-theology relationships in a helpful way.

II

Modern science arose with the conviction that both experiment and theory were necessary for an understanding of the physical universe. In order to be able to understand the world, we have to observe it carefully and apply our reason diligently to the results of our observations. One result of our study may be pleasure in the harmonious workings of the world, but we will also discover things that are disconcerting. Even casual observation will notice suffering, death, and destruction in the universe. That is difficult to reconcile with any simplistic notion that we will automatically discover a loving God through scientific investigation of the world. In the nineteenth century, Darwin even gave starvation and the extinction of species a central

role in the development of life in his theory of biological evolution through natural selection. And there have been many people in the century since Darwin who have turned away from any belief in God because the basis for the processes of life seems to be "nature red in tooth and claw."

Certainly the rational order which science is continually discovering in the universe is impressive, but scientific discoveries do not compel people toward belief in a benevolent Creator. In fact, at the beginning of the Reformation Luther warned against any such obvious way of "finding" God:

That person does not deserve to be called a theologian who looks upon the invisible things of God as though they were clearly perceptible in those things which have actually happened [Rom.1:20].

He deserves to be called a theologian, however, who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross.

A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.

On one level, this flatly contradicts any idea that we are to find God by reflecting on the results of scientific study of the universe.

But this means only a rejection of the search for God in observable phenomena as an independent enterprise, a search which attempts to take the place of God's self-revelation in Christ crucified. Luther insists that we must first see God where God chooses to be revealed to us, in "suffering and the cross." If we have not been brought to see God in the indivisible cross-resurrection event, we do not have the true God. Our genuine knowledge of God must originate in that event and in those divine actions which point toward or flow from Calvary, such as the creation of the world out of nothing, the Exodus, the justification of the ungodly, and the resurrection of the dead. Then, having seen God revealed in the crucified One, we may legitimately try to discern the presence and activity of this one true God in the world of observable phenomena. We are even encouraged to make this attempt because of the fundamental Christian belief that the God revealed to us in Jesus is the Creator of the universe.

This means, first of all, that in God's "glorious" works, in the beauties of the flowers, the power of a supernova, or the order of the genetic code, we do not have any basis for a theology of glory which overshadows or supplants the theology of the cross. Rather, such phenomena can show the Christian believer ever more clearly the identify of the Crucified. The One who spread the galaxies across the universe is the One who is spread upon the cross.

And secondly, the theology of the cross enables us to see God at work in situations of suffering, death, loss, and hopelessness in the world. Perhaps pre-eminent among these is the process of evolution through natural selection to which Darwin called our attention.

Luther insists that we must first see God where God chooses to be revealed to us, in "suffering and the cross."
If we have not been brought to see God in the indivisible cross-resurrection event, we do not have the true God.

There are, roughly speaking, two ways in which people have tried to think of the mechanism of biological evolution. Usually associated with the name of Lamarck is the idea of "inheritance of acquired characters." This would mean that the characteristics which an organism acquired during its lifetime could be passed on to its descendants. An animal which strained to run as fast as possible to escape from predators would be able to pass on to its offspring the speed and stamina which it had gained. In a sense, organisms which "worked hard" would be rewarded by increased chances of survival not only for themselves but also for their descendants. If this idea were correct, there would be a gradual improvement of plants and animals which would represent genuine progress through the evolutionary process.

According to Darwin, on the other hand, evolution takes place through the mechanism of natural selection. There will be a "struggle for survival" among organisms because an environment will generally not support all the organisms which are produced. Since there will always be variations among members of a species, some members will be better suited for survival in a given environment than will others. They will be more likely to do well in competition for food, in reproducing, in surviving predation or disease, or in some combination of these qualities. These better suited organisms will be the ones most likely to have offspring who will inherit their characteristics. In this theory there is no long-term reward for "trying hard." Competition for scarce resources, death of those not as well equipped to survive, and the extinction of species

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would play a major role in the evolutionary process. And Darwin seems to have been right. There is no evidence for the transmission of properties which an organism gains during its lifetime. (Cutting the tails off laboratory mice generation after generation does not eventually produce a breed of tailless mice, and a child will not be born with stronger arms if its father has been working as a blacksmith rather than at a desk job. The understanding of modern biology is that information goes from the genes to the rest of the organism, but not the other way.) Thus suffering, deprivation, death, and extinction seem to have been a basic part of the way in which life on earth, and human life in particular, has developed.

It is perhaps not surprising that Darwin, who originally intended to study theology at Cambridge, ended his life unsure whether or not to believe in God. For the development of life through natural selection, bringing the human race out of the death of many species, is not at all the way people expect God to work. Already before Darwin the discovery of fossils showing that some species had become extinct had posed a serious problem for people who wanted a God who would always maintain life basically the same. The idea that life developed out of extinction presents an even more radical challenge to such a commonsense idea of God.

**The fundamental problem which Darwinian evolution poses for all theologies of glory is not any supposed conflict with Genesis; it is rather the idea of “natural selection.”**

The fundamental problem which Darwinian evolution poses for all theologies of glory is not any supposed conflict with Genesis. It is not difficult to read the creation stories of Scripture in a way that sees the development of life as a gradual process, as the great theologian Gregory of Nyssa realized 1,600 years ago. Where difficulty arises is with the “natural selection” aspect of evolution. It is significant that both the liberal theologies of the nineteenth century and the modern thought of Teilhard de Chardin, while seeing no difficulty with the idea of evolutionary development of life, had serious problems with Darwin's mechanism of natural selection. The Lamarckian mechanism, in which “striving for excellence” is in a way rewarded, is more congenial with theologies which place some stress on human cooperation with God in the work of salvation.

It is important to note this especially in Teilhard's work just because of the fact that he did make valuable contributions toward our theological understanding of evolution. His pioneering attempts to gain a genuinely Christ-centered view of the evolutionary process have been very important, and his portrayal of the future of human evolution in terms of the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ represents a profound insight. But throughout his writings, the Roman Catholic concept that “grace perfects nature,” rather than the idea of God creating out of nothing, is prominent. For Teilhard, suffering represents potential:

> Human suffering, the sum total of suffering poured out

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**Connecticut Walk**

Two miles into my walk
The pain tore through again.
No voice, it's been so long
Since I could tell you things.

I pass an old woman in a straw hat.
She is thin in a brown sweater and blue dress
Raking leaves into burlap off a sea of green.
I remember the yellow bee on my glove this morning.

A world of fall colors rolling toward the sky
White clouds pour down to their edge;
A fat crow on a rock,
I want to tell you, but beautifully.

Now a row of Christmas trees safe
In the ground by a board fence,
A cricket sings somewhere in October
As leaves blow falling in crisp puffs beside me.

"Visitors and Deliveries"—Here I am and I'm waiting.

Syida H. Long
at each moment over the whole earth, is like an immeasurable ocean. But what makes up this immensity? Is it blackness, emptiness, barren wastes? No, indeed: it is potential energy. Suffering holds hidden within it, in extreme intensity, the ascensional force of the world.¹⁰

Contrast this with the Lutheran view of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who sees the death suffered by Jesus Christ as nothingness from which only God can create. (And it is quite significant that this statement about the cross and resurrection of Christ is part of a discussion of Genesis 1.)

The dead Jesus Christ of Good Friday—and the resurrected Kupios (Lord) of Easter Sunday: that is creation out of nothing, creation from the beginning. The fact that Christ was dead did not mean the possibility of the resurrection, but its impossibility; it was the void itself, it was the nihil negativum. There is absolutely no transition or continuity between the dead and resurrected Christ except the freedom of God which, in the beginning, created his work out of nothing.¹¹

I believe that here the spirit of Luther's theology of the cross can be of tremendous value in our attempts to understand God's activity in the world. That theology calls our attention to the fact that the true God's self-revelation takes place in situations of pain, loss, and apparent hopelessness. And those are exactly the kinds of situations to which Darwinian evolution also directs our attention. The survival and propagation of some organisms takes place at the expense of others which starve or are devoured. Not only individuals but whole species or even larger groups die. And from the standpoint of our dinosaur or Neanderthal relatives there was no obvious reason for hope as they faced extinction.

But God creates out of nothing, in spite of all the reasons we might be able to think of why creation is impossible (Lk.1:37). The sign of God's new creation is a sign of death. The cross. God creates out of suffering and death, not because suffering and death have some kind of potential for good, but because God is the One who creates out of nothing and who justifies by grace alone. Paul sets this out clearly in Romans 4, where God is the One who "justifies the ungodly" (4:5), "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (4:17), so that we may be able to hope against hope (4:18).

Evolution through natural selection is not the way that people naturally expect God Almighty to create, but I Cor.1:18-31 warns us against expecting commonsense ways of working from God. In this profound passage setting out the theology of the cross, Paul reminds his readers that God's power comes through what people normally judge to be foolishness, the word of the cross. God's chosen instruments are things weak and despised by the world—even those things which are nothing at all.

Thus God does use the destructive forces present in our world, but God is not indifferent to whether good or evil takes place. Another distinction made by Luther, that between God's "proper work" and God's "alien work," is useful here.¹² God's proper work is love and mercy, bringing about life. God's alien work is destruction, perhaps bringing death. To put it very crudely, God's proper work is "what God really wants to do." But in a world in which there is evil, God is able to use destructive forces in order to bring about that proper work. Thus God takes no pleasure in death (Ez.18:32, Wisd.1:13), but can bring life out of death.

The true God's self-revelation takes place in situations of pain, loss, and apparent hopelessness. And those are exactly the kinds of situations to which evolution points our attention.

Once the theology of the cross has come home to us, the development of life out of suffering and death will perhaps not seem so surprising. It may still be a scandal, but one of a piece with the scandal of the cross. This does not mean that people can discover the gospel of Christ by studying the processes of evolution. Understanding must move in the other direction. Once a person has heard and believed the gospel of Christ, it is possible to view the world from the standpoint of the cross and in the light of the cross. And then, in the processes of evolution which scientific work has uncovered, it may be possible for the Christian to see the activity of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ. We will be encouraged to see evolution as one indication that the sign of the cross has been placed upon the universe.¹³

Lest there be any confusion, a couple of disclaimers should be made at this point. Information about the evolutionary process must come first from science, and not from theology. Theology can, however, speak about the significance of what science discovers. And

no claim is being made here that Luther was a supporter of evolution, which would of course be a gross anachronism. The purpose here has been to suggest ways in which Luther’s basic insights can help us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between science and Christian faith today.

III

In the resurrection of the crucified Christ and his ascension to the right hand of the Father, the universe is moved toward its fulfillment. In the sixteenth-century controversies over the Lord’s Supper and the Person of Christ, Luther and his followers developed a genuinely cosmic view of the significance of Christ. According to them, the personal union of the human and divine in Christ is so intimate that the infinite properties of God are truly shared with Christ’s human nature without destroying his full humanity. When their opponents argued that Christ’s true body and blood could not really be present in the Sacrament because Christ was in heaven, “seated at the right hand of the Father,” Luther replied that “God’s right hand is everywhere.” The doctrine of the omnipresence of Christ, which finds expression in the seventh and eighth articles of the Formula of Concord, means that the humanity of Christ is immediately present to the entire universe. The human nature which was permanently united with the Word of God in the Incarnation is seated on the throne of the cosmos, not as an absentee landlord but as the present King.14

The Lutheran position is sometimes expressed with the phrase finitum capax infiniti, “the finite is capable of the infinite.” Human nature is able to participate in the infinite attributes of God. God is so united with humanity in the Incarnation that there is no Son of God “outside” Jesus of Nazareth. Nothing is “left out” of the Incarnation. Such a radical understanding of Christ may, indeed, require a complete re-evaluation of traditional ideas about the way in which God is related to our space and time. And yet it is simply a spelling out of the line from Luther’s great hymn in which he says of Christ, “And there’s none other God.”

It is important to realize that this Lutheran understanding of the omnipresence of Christ’s humanity does not stem from accepting “the finite is capable of the infinite” as an a priori philosophical principle, or from any particular understanding of space.15 Rather, it comes from taking the sacramental words “This is my body” with radical seriousness.

And this leads in turn to a proper sacramental understanding of nature. Paul Tillich has pointed out the significance of the Lutheran view for our appreciation of the world and described how the difference between Lutheran and Reformed views on the presence of Christ could be expressed in as simple a thing as the decoration of a village church with flowers.16 The universe is not to be thought of as sacramental in any pantheistic sense. It is not in itself divine, for the Christian doctrine of creation insists on a clear separation between God and the world which God has made. But the universe may be understood in a sacramental way when it is seen in the light of the Sacrament instituted by God Incarnate, “in the night in which he was betrayed.” And that reference should assure us, if we are concerned about the direction in which such glorification of humanity and nature might take us, that we are always operating within the framework of the theology of the cross.

The Lutheran insistence that “the finite is capable of the infinite” is for the sake of the belief that the human Jesus is endowed with the almighty rule of the world. Jesus is not somehow confined to a heavenly part of reality since his ascension, but he “ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.” (Eph.4:10) It is in Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, that the universe finds its fulfillment.

It is possible at this point to make contact with a significant area of development in science during recent years, that connected with the so-called “anthropic principles.”17 Modern cosmologists have come to realize that a universe significantly different from ours would not have allowed the development of intelligent life. For example, in a universe in which the basic electric charge on elementary particles was several times the latter point must be borne in mind in connection with Torrance’s discussion in Space, Time, and Incarnation (Reference 2). “The finite is capable of the infinite” is not intended primarily as a mathematical statement, but a first acquaintance with mathematical concepts of the finite and the infinite may make it seem plausible to deny the Lutheran idea. But it is worthwhile to point out that in a certain sense the finite is capable of the infinite mathematically. The rational numbers between 0 and 1 can be put in a one-to-one correspondence with the infinite set of positive integers \[1, 2, 3, \ldots\]. That set of rational numbers is thus infinite, but is included within a finite interval. See, e.g., Angus E. Taylor, Advanced Calculus (Ginn: Boston, 1955), p.479.

14See, e.g., the quotations of Chrysostom in the “Catalog of Testimonies” accompanying the Formula of Concord, Concordia Triglotta (Concordia: St. Louis, 1921), pp.1125-1127.

15The Cresset

16See, e.g., the quotations of Chrysostom in the “Catalog of Testimonies” accompanying the Formula of Concord, Concordia Triglotta (Concordia: St. Louis, 1921), pp.1125-1127.

17See, e.g., the quotations of Chrysostom in the “Catalog of Testimonies” accompanying the Formula of Concord, Concordia Triglotta (Concordia: St. Louis, 1921), pp.1125-1127.


what it actually is in our universe, atomic nuclei such as carbon, which are necessary for life, would not have been able to hold together against the electrical repulsion tending to disrupt them. Life then would not have been able to develop. If gravity were a somewhat weaker force than it is, the universe would have expanded so quickly from the Big Bang that galaxies, stars, and planets would not have been able to form, and there would have been no sites suitable for the development of life. But if gravity had been significantly stronger than it is, the universe would have collapsed before life had had time to evolve. Our existence seems to depend on a rather delicate balance of the various factors which characterize the physical universe. And the basic fact underlying the anthropic principles is the observation that, fortunately for us, the necessary balance does exist.

Strong versions of the anthropic principle go beyond the mere observation that our universe does in fact allow the development of life. Modern quantum theory deals with probabilities for events to take place, and in some interpretations it is necessary for an observation of a physical system actually to take place in order to make any outcome of an experiment on that system become a reality. If observers are in that sense necessary, it has been argued, then the universe must allow the development of intelligent life, and that life must continue to evolve and will never disappear. It is a relatively small step from that to the argument that this intelligent life will continue to grow in knowledge and in control of the world.

Of course these ideas are rather speculative. It would be a serious mistake to wed our theology too closely to them in the way that medieval theologians did with Aristotelian concepts. But it would also be a serious mistake for theologians to ignore such wide-ranging ideas. Proceeding with all due caution, we should call attention to the fact that the Lutheran tradition, with its high view of the destiny of humanity through the Incarnation, can see an anthropic principle as one aspect of its basic theanthropic principle. We do not look for the goal and fulfillment of the universe merely in the human race, but in humanity indwelt by God through the Incarnation.

The Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians are of particular interest here. The latter speaks of the kind of cosmic vision we may have of the fulfillment of the created universe in the person of the crucified God Incarnate:

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the first-born from the dead, that in everything we might be pre-eminent. For in him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col.1:17-20)

The human Jesus Christ, given divine rule of the universe, is the One who brings the universe to its intended goal. And he brings this fulfillment through the Church, the body of which he is the head. The human race is indeed called to a high destiny in the cosmos, not simply on its own account but because “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” (Jn.1:14)

At the very least, this Lutheran teaching about Christ can put us in a good frame of mind for thinking about the theological implications of modern scientific cosmology. But this is not a call for Lutherans to rest content with past doctrinal formulations. The anthropic principles suggest that we should not focus too narrowly on Christ as a single human, but should consider the cosmic importance of the people of God united in Christ, the old Lutheran doctrine of the “mystical union” of believers with God, and the Biblical idea of the Church as the Body of Christ to which Teilhard de Chardin called our attention.

IV

The preceding discussion should be recognized for what it intends to be—suggestions for ways in which the Lutheran tradition can illumine the dialogue between science and theology. I have not intended to give either scientific proofs of theological doctrines or theological proofs of scientific theories. Nor do I think that any such attempts would be helpful. The argument in Section II is that the theology of the cross provides one way of holding together the scientific idea of evolution through natural selection and the Christian doctrine of creation. In Section III, I have argued that the Lutheran concept of the divine majesty imparted to the humanity of Jesus gives a theological framework in which the anthropic principles of modern cosmology can be discussed. If these arguments provide stimulus and suggestions for the further study of science-theology issues, then they will have achieved their purpose.

In work at the intersection of science and theology, Lutherans should by all means be open to learn from other theological traditions. But they should also remember and use their own tradition, which has a great deal to offer to the whole Christian community as we work together on the difficult questions which science and technology present to us.

ABSTRACTION WITHIN FIGURATION

Observations on the Fabrication of Figurative Art

For a long time I have entertained the suspicion that twentieth-century eyes have been made lazy by early-twentieth-century painting. The special culprit may have been Cubism, which spelled out painterly architecture so explicitly that even a visual illiterate could not ignore it, thus rendering visual literacy an atrophied function in the equipment of an otherwise educated art public. When even an avid and dedicated art student needs to have pointed out the incredible richness of pictorial invention in a painting by Titian, we should not be astonished if average gallery viewers are unable to distinguish between the complex visual abstractions of Edwin Dickenson or Fairfield Porter and the bland simplicities of Jim Dine or Eric Fischl, perhaps even preferring the latter to the former.

Every painting, whether abstract or realist, if it is going to come alive as a work of art, must be simultaneously two things. It must be a human-made concrete object which asserts physical presence in the most palpable way, and it must at the same time become a world, though not necessarily an illusionist one. Abstract painting that is any good always has that transformation beyond its own physical presence, just as figurative painting that is any good always has a strongly-asserted concrete flesh.

Some figurative artists find their subject matter in intense observation of the visible world, some from memory, some from schematic formulation, some from the impulses of their nerve endings in the kinetic act of painting, and some from a combination of these or other sources including photography and the art of the past. I think I can say, however, that important as this subject may be for each of us, it is only the beginning of a complicated process of building, arranging, rejecting, selecting, and rearranging that is the real game of the fabrication of our work. This is so because there is no significant painting, abstract or figurative, which does not come to terms with issues like rhythmic beat; the proportioning of color and light to color and darkness; how one enters the pictorial space and what barriers one encounters in doing so; what the skin of the surface will be; and the deployment of force and counterforce, major thrust and supporting buttress, projection and recession, and the dialogue between volume, void, and plane.

I have noticed that in dealing with abstract paintings which have no subject matter, most serious critics will get right down to the business of formal qualities and try to relate them to ultimate content. But when subject matter is present, particularly subject matter which is not neutral in its associative implications, it seems to blot out consideration of this marvelous game going on under the surface. It is as if the artist made the painting out of whole cloth from the subjects alone.

Many critics, for example, of the Balthus exhibition a few years ago at the Metropolitan Museum of Art seemed to write about the paintings as if they were little girls primping themselves. Of the grand schematic elements which must have given the painter the greatest difficulty and the most winning delight there was...
often no mention at all. Of course there is no more reason why the non-professional general viewer should be expected to be constantly aware of the rhythms of a painting than that the reader for enjoyment be conscious of the technical metrics of poetry. However, when influential critics, viewers who consider themselves sophisticated, and, above all, otherwise ambitious art students often seem to think that the mere presence of an arresting image renders unnecessary coming to terms with its rigorous visual presentation, those of us who are the practitioners of figurative art might need to reexamine and reassert the elements of our work which are the music to the subject's words.

If one accepts the proposition that the dominant strategy of twentieth-century modernism has been one of reductivism and exclusion, and that the principal entity reduced and finally the decisive exclusion was that of subject matter, one understands why so much of the discussion of a resurgent post-modernist figurative or realist painting revolves around represented subjects; why so many exhibitions of this work, for example, are organized according to traditional categories of subject matter: still life, landscape, narrative, portrait, etc. It is my hope that more attention might be paid to all those phenomena of figurative art which do not have to do with the representation of subject.

In fact, it is for me the very contention between the painting as an object touched with pigmented stuff, constructed and rigorously disposed, and the painting as an evoked world observed, remembered, or envisioned that creates the big thrill in the best imagistic art of any epoch. When the concrete pictorial structure is uninventive and predictable—as it is in most recent neo-expressionist/graffiti figurative art—no accumulation of interesting subject matter can take up the slack, any more than the deprivation of human spirit in much of the mute Minimalist and Pop art of the 1960s and 1970s could be compensated for by formal gadgetry.

Those of us who paint figuratively and perhaps also those who respond to our work may need reminding at this time that paintings are made objects. They are constructed, they are invented, they are fiction, they are synthetic. No matter how referential, they are not reflections of something else, or records of something else; they don't grow naturally, they are a willed something. The power of the thing they are may be a derived power, but never a borrowed one, for it can not be given back, and it refuses testing by its original sources.

We need greater discussion in the art world of "abstraction inside realism," or what I might call pictorial invention in the framework of associative images, and the focus of that discussion should go beyond the subject building blocks from which our paintings are made to the ways they are stacked, moved around, knocked down, and redeployed to make an object thing greater than the sum of its subjects' parts.

Jack Beal, Self-Portrait with Anatomy #3, 1987, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 in., Courtesy: Frumkin/Adams Gallery, N.Y.
A Constitutional Parable

Fred Somkin

Once upon a time there was a man who was always getting sick. Whatever was going around, he got it. If it wasn't pinkeye or warts, it was typhoid or salmonella. Pyorrhea, jaundice, hepatitis, lympho granuloma inguinale—he had them all. Things became so bad that he couldn't leave the house to work any more and his family fell into poverty. They sold the VCR and the three TV sets, and his wife and children went around in such ragged jeans that they were mistaken for undergraduates.

The man's relatives deeply felt the shame of this, so they asked a famous doctor to examine him. The doctor concluded that the man's problems were due to a lack of personal hygiene, in short, not washing his hands before eating, and so forth. He explained to the man about the germ theory of disease, and how germs were everywhere around us, and how necessary it was to wash hands properly according to what the doctor called due aseptic process and equal microbial protection.

The man was greatly impressed, and he immediately set up a hand washing routine in accordance with the doctor's prescription. The results were gratifying: his impetigo cleared up, his boils disappeared, and when his neighbors came down with Castelnuovo-Tedesco he was the only one on the block who was spared. In a short time he returned to work, the VCR and TV sets were replaced, and a BMW did not seem beyond possibility.

By this time the man began to think himself an expert on germs. From the library he borrowed medical texts and pondered how the doctor's doctrine could be improved and expanded. Soon he bought a microscope and made daily cultures from his hands, face, and skin. He was horrified to discover that germs remained even after a thorough washing. Determined to get them all, he switched to special anti-bacterial soap and installed a surgeon's wash-up sink such as he'd seen in TV hospital dramas. When he still found germs he took to spraying doorknobs and washing his hands five times before eating, followed by a three-stage bacterial review. Finally, he came to the table only in a doctor's gown and wearing rubber gloves. With all these preparations and procedures, by the time he was ready to eat the family had long left the house and flies had time to deposit intestinal parasites on the food, which gave the man painful stomach disorders. Still convinced he was on the right track, he pressed on.

The man's wife became alarmed and remonstrated with him, but he proved to her by the culture slides that he was gaining on the germs and that total victory was almost within grasp. Again the doctor was called in, and he pointed out to the man that his antiseptic measures had become self-defeating and far exceeded the plain meaning and original intent of due aseptic process and equal microbial protection.

But donning his surgical robe and calling to mind his high school Latin, the man informed the doctor that plain meaning and original intent were old-fashioned and superseded. Everything was now in the umbra, or else in the penumbra, and if not there—and here he paused to look at the ceiling—in the emanations. Whereupon he treated the doctor to a discourse drawn from the ancient Greek philosopher Plotinus, whose writings he'd been looking into along with the medical texts because, as he said, doctors didn't know everything.

By this time the man hardly went out to work anymore, and when his wife begged him to give up the emanations and come back to being a normal husband and father, he put her off with assurances that he'd already advanced beyond that stage and had entered upon the ultimate area of septic combat, zones of non-bacterial proliferation. When he stopped working entirely to engage in fulltime handwashing his last business contacts were lost and the family fell into poverty. No one dreamed anymore of the BMW, the VCR went, and then the televisions. His wife and children wore ragged jeans and were again mistaken for undergraduates.

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We've always understood that Satan is the Prince of Lawyers, and recently it has been reliably reported that "in hell there will be nothing but due process." Yet Mark Twain once warned his readers that anyone finding a moral in his tale would be shot. But perhaps we should have listened to the advice of an American philosopher greater than Plotinus, James Thurber, who concluded a story by saying: You might as well fall flat on your face as lean over too far backward.
Soul Purpose

Richard Lee

It’s the Ides of August in incendiary Indiana, the campus parches, and the greatest boon to the life of the mind seems to be air conditioning in the Library. Now is the hottest and holiest time of the year when the University’s work recesses and its life is lived to the fullest. That means the students are blissfully on vacation and the teachers are here happily researching their subject matters and sharpening their judgments of the things most worth teaching.

When our students return tanned at the end of this month, and the University’s work resumes alongside its life, they will be buying our better judgments of them and our subject matters. The deepest value of the University for students is good judgment of their work by teachers able to help them do worthwhile work well. While some students strangely seem to think less is better, to be well judged is to get your money’s worth of higher education.

This autumn, however, both students and teachers take the heat of Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind, a sizzling commercial if not intellectual event of the past year. No less than the New York Times says Bloom’s unlikely bestseller hits American higher education “with the approximate force and effect of electric shock therapy.” That overheated metaphor suggests the full effect of Bloom’s argument may be torpor and loss of memory, but—if my mind is not muddled—I believe he makes a good case for half a truth.

One need not even agree with Bloom’s analysis of How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students to suspect that the condition of our students’ souls will become another item on some faculty agendas this fall. While many college teachers still struggle manfully and womanfully to remedy the deficiencies of their students’ basic skills in reading, writing, and computation, the agenda after Bloom may also lay upon them a heavier responsibility for their students’ “impoverished souls.”

It is possible that teachers in Christian colleges and universities, where the care of souls is part of their calling, may have some modest wisdom to bring to this agenda. Certainly these teachers bring a wholesome caution to their judgments of the condition of their students’ souls and the recognition that all souls, including their own, are in some degree “impoverished” until they rest in God. They know the primary admonition in the care of souls is “Physician, heal thyself,” and the deepest injunction in teaching students is “First, do no harm.”

Christian faculty also know the soul is deep. The mysterious vitality that organizes and animates each human being toward personal wholeness and the completion of the world is very difficultly accessible by education, and it is possible for a student to cultivate a critical mind, exquisite feelings, a fertile imagination—even a glittering resume—and remain “impoverished” in soul. Education may widen the range of the soul, but it cannot assure that a wider ranging soul is not poorer in more places. The soul is not reducible to anything that can be fully conditioned by experience, much less the fleeting college experience. Despite their occasional catalog claims, Christian colleges and universities possibly know best there is no “formation of character” and “inculcation of values” that the intrepid soul cannot overthrow—for better as well as worse.

Finally, Christian faculty tend to suspect there is some constancy, within a range, in the condition of the human soul. The utterly damnable usually remain as rare as saints. These faculty would not be surprised to discover that the souls of their students are not unlike those of their teachers and parents. If we are disinclined to believe all plenitude of soul is in the young and the rest of us are damaged goods, so we are also wary of reports that today’s students are some great falling off from the human race. At least my students do not strike me as mutants, and when several of them discerned some “impoverishment” in Allan Bloom’s soul, by his own means of discerning souls, I had to approve their judgment.

None of the Christian caution in judging the condition of the souls of our students, however, relieves the teacher of the necessity of making that judgment. As Bloom writes, “There is no real teacher who in practice does not believe in the existence of the soul, or in the magic that acts on it through speech. The soul . . . may at the outset of education require extrinsic rewards and punishments to motivate its activity; but in the end that activity is its own reward and is self-sufficient.” With some philosophical misgivings over

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Bloom’s tendency to merge the mind with the soul, and the usual Christian caveat against simple notions of the “self-sufficient” soul, teachers in Christian higher education must also take their readings of the souls of their students in order to teach them as well as they can now be taught.

Bloom is more right than not about the state of our students’ souls.

This diarist believes Bloom is more right than wrong about the “impoverished souls” of today’s students, though rarely for the reasons he offers. Wonderful exceptions are notable, but if forced to generalize I find more students only faintly curious beyond their own immediately perceived needs. Where there is some curiosity about the wider world, it is too often manipulative and without concern. While most students are keen to “present themselves” likely, not as many are moved to “know themselves” beyond their own reflexes. Here Bloom possibly underestimates some of the sleazier forces at work in academia today which flatter and cosset students, eagerly taking them as they are and leaving them there.

The notion that self-knowledge might require engaging traditions of other, preferably greater, souls than their own eludes more students today, even in (pace Bloom) required courses designed partly for that purpose. Near as one can tell, fewer students’ souls aspire to complement the wider world by the hard work of knowing a larger portion of it, and more students seem steadfast in seeking just enough instrumental knowledge to secure, as they now think, their private lives. In all this constriction of hope, they do not blush.

Since the college years are notoriously the least religious in the life cycle, I attach little importance to the tendency of today’s students to keep their religious commitments tepid, not could I wish them to wear their souls on their sleeves. Indeed, many dutifully consume American religion as it is presently processed (“Our McStudents make good McChristians,” one of my colleagues wryly opines), but little of it seems likely to link soul to soul and all mightily to God. While no education occurs which does not meet a felt need and no religion arises which does not begin in the soul’s own hunger, both faith and learning dry up when the student’s final question remains “What’s in it for me?”

There are, I repeat, splendid exceptions to the “impoverished souls” assessment of today’s students, but it is neither choleric nor neoconservative to think that Bloom is generally more right than wrong about them. If for no other reason, he could be commended for taking the heat of raising the issue of their souls, even if he exhausts much of his argument against higher education by showing us that at least his students’ souls are shriveled before they undertake it. His own cures for higher education (a critique of positivism in the disciplines, universally required and genuine general education, more Platonism, less pragmatism, etc.) deserve appraisal outside this column. See, for starters, Mark Schwehn’s lively Bloom in Love in the October 1987 Cresset.

Whatever is the right assessment of the relative rise of undergraduate acedia in academia, it is certain that higher education is no more likely to be its only cure than its only cause. Passionate reasoning about a wider world and the nature of things goes only part of the way to enrich the soul, though teachers are surely called upon to polish that “magic that acts upon it through speech.” The soul is also assaulted and aroused by events, sometimes seen only by faith, and perhaps at stages of life more propitious than youth.

The August heat rises faster than the Library air conditioning can lower it, and the usual prayer and fasting for the right speech and the right events properly begin a new academic year. The words we must coolly work on, the events fervently await.

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October, 1988
Lee Blessing, Michael Weller, and David Henry Hwang. These were the plays which I attended. I missed new plays by Terence McNally, Jim Leonard, Jr., and August Wilson, and new productions of Eugene O'Neill's Long Day's Journey Into Night and Ah, Wilderness!, starring Jason Robards and Colleen Dewhurst.

Why this abundance? According to Frank Rich, the eloquent drama critic for the Times who spoke to the annual meeting of the Southeastern Theatre Conference, the reason more new plays are making it to Broadway is the current system of play development. In the "old days," plays were produced and booked into try-out cities: New Haven, Connecticut, the most storied, but Boston, Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chicago, and even Columbus, Ohio, hosted new plays on their way to Broadway. Known as the "tributary theatre," these stops along the way afforded the play's producers—indepedent businessmen—opportunities to gauge audience and critical reaction to the property. Those aspects of the play that proved problematic or unpopular were ordered revised by the original playwright or a "play doctor." If a play appeared to be unfixable, meaning unprofitable, the producer might close it before ever bringing it to New York. There are instances of important plays that "closed out of town," among them Eugene O'Neill's A Moon for the Misbegotten in 1947.

Over the past quarter-century, fewer and fewer persons have been willing to assume the risk of play production, and the risk itself has become monstrously large. With fewer independent producers able to foot the bill, the responsibility for introducing new plays has been assumed to a large extent by the non-profit institutional theatre. A/k/a the "regional theatre," the institutional theatre spreads the risk of play production over a much larger number of investors, who expect no return on their investment other than good theatre on a continuing basis. Investors in the institutional theatre include corporations, governments, universities and colleges, individual donors, and season subscribers. Among the most important institutional theatres at present are the Seattle Repertory, the Actors Theatre (Louisville), the La Jolla Playhouse, the Goodman Theatre (Chicago), the Lincoln Center Theatre Company, the New York Shakespeare Festival, the American Repertory Theatre (Cambridge, Mass.), and the Yale Repertory Theatre.

So new plays are still given a close look in New Haven before they come to New York, but, under the aegis of the institutional theatre, "development" has replaced the "try-out." Even established playwrights often take their newest work to new-play festivals, the most prominent of several being those at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center in Connecticut and the Actors Theatre of Louisville. Anyone is welcome to attend the festival productions, but the key members of the audience are artistic directors of institutional theatres, producers, dramaturgs, and critics. The festival process provides the playwright with the critical feedback he needs to revise the play without drowning him in a flood of negative publicity.

From the festival, the best of the new plays then appear on the stages of such institutional theatres around the country. And the best of those productions, featuring plays that have been tested and revisited around the country, may attract New York producers. It is at this point that the producers rent a Broadway or off-Broadway theatre (the main difference is in the number of seats in the house) and give the show its New York pro-
duction. Now the play is fair game for the powerful New York critics and the jaded New York audiences, but in the meantime it has been tempered by the development process and, in addition, entertained audiences in other parts of the country.

The result of this process is reflected in the presence of more high-quality, legitimate theatre in New York. This spring there were four plays that transferred from the Yale Repertory Theatre alone: two by August Wilson, Fences and Joe Turner's Come and Gone; Athol Fugard's latest, The Road to Mecca; and, after a second production at La Jolla playhouse, A Walk in the Woods, by Lee Blessing.

"A walk in the woods" was the name given to a stroll through a forest on the outskirts of Geneva, Switzerland, taken by diplomats Yuli A. Kvitinsky and Paul H. Nitze in 1982. On the walk, the two broke protocol and made a private arms agreement. Lee Blessing took the phrase for the title of his play about a developing friendship between the representatives of two international enemies. In this dramatic form of "faction," Nitze has become John Honeyman; the Russian is named Andre Botvinik; and the strolls are not one but four in number, one for each season of the year.

Different also from historical fact is the relative age of the two men. In the play, Botvinik is the aging veteran of the diplomatic wars, and Honeyman the younger newcomer. The Russian, known for his frustrating rigidity at the negotiating table, is the first to proffer friendship in the woods. Seeking escape from discussions about world-ending weaponry, he invites, pleads, and bargains with his counterpart to speak of trivialities. His passionate interest in elements of American popular culture and the state of his counterpart's feelings or the origin of his clothing turn the tenacious Russian bear into a Teddy.

Not surprisingly, given that drama requires conflict, Honeyman resolutely resists Botvinik's overtures. He cultivates the adversarial tension in order to keep himself sharp. He keeps himself ever mindful of his personal goal, which is nothing less than saving the world from destroying itself. Shouldering such a burden turns the American precisionist into a drudge.

In the end, the Russian shruggingly announces his plan to resign his post, and the American grimly vows to stick by his own.

Each of the four walks has its own theme. In the summer, the Russian tries to approach the American and the American resists; in the fall, the American practically begs the Russian to use his personal influence to convince the Kremlin to agree to an American initiative. On their winter walk, the American rages over the failure of his plan and the Russian accuses the President of the United States of publicizing the plan for political gain. In the spring, the Russian shruggingly announces his plan to resign his post, and the American grimly vows to stick by his own.

What emerges during the walks is Botvinik's deep cynicism over the formal arms control process and his pessimism about the possible outcome. He, Honeyman, and their delegations can do nothing to put the arms race off course, he asserts, as long as they continue to meet in Switzerland. He proposes that their table be set up in the bottom of a missile silo. There they would be more likely to negotiate with the sense of urgency required. In Swit-zerland, where things are almost idyllically civilized and peaceful, that sense of urgency dissipates.

Botvinik's curiously and amusingly persistent desire for an informal relationship with Honeyman comes from a man who has perceived the dehumanizing effect the negotiations have on the negotiators. Diplomats are ever vulnerable to the danger of losing sight of the link between their negotiations and the fate of human beings. Thus the entire enterprise becomes a tedious haggling over technicalities. In seeking to draw out his counterpart's humanity, the older man is trying to reinforce that link, and to alert his young opposite to the danger.

Many aspects of international negotiating—the posturing, the strategic use of language, the obsession with image and information control—are ripe for ridicule. By giving Botvinik an acute sense of irony and making a straight man out of the solemn Honeyman, playwright Blessing has turned A Walk in the Woods into a funny play. Some of the repartee is worthy of Neil Simon. This is fortunate, for we otherwise have but two actors and a park bench, a risky formula for two and a half hours' traffic on the stage.

The park bench was the only essential piece of scenery, but the stage itself was a study in Broadway's continuing commitment to illusionism, often called "the magic of the theatre." Designer Bill Clarke hung the stage, floor to grid, with tree trunks, towering perfectly straight over the actors' heads. The floor itself was topographically defined by miniature hills and vales. When the summer turned to autumn, we were treated to a spectacular display of falling leaves, which, for our further entertainment, were vacuumed up during intermission. Winter blew in on the breath of fog machines.
And in the springtime our attention was misdirected by the use of an intensely bright spotlight, and, when we turned our heads back to the stage, plastic flowers had sprouted all over the ground.

The phony scenery did nothing to help me suspend my disbelief and enter into the illusion of A Walk in the Woods. One wishes that the future of the world could be determined by sensitive, caring persons like Botvinik and Honeyman who break the shackles of international mistrust and reach out to one another’s humanity. Could it be that a century of disillusionment and decades of realpolitik have made it impossible to believe in the reality of such a breakthrough?

No such thoughts were able to detract, however, from the performances of a pair of our finest actors: Sam Waterston and Robert Prosky. Waterston will be familiar from such roles as Nick in the Redford-Farrow Great Gatsby and as J. Robert Oppenheimer in the recent PBS program; Prosky received his widest exposure as the desk sergeant in the latter days of TV’s Hill Street Blues. Prosky brings a wonderful mixture of grandfatherly wisdom, elfish twinkle, repressed rage, and welschmerz to the role of Botvinik. While Prosky keeps the Russian’s toughness just below the surface, Waterston covers his irrepressible humanity with a veneer of sternness. Together, they keep the encroaching vaudevillianism of Blessing’s dialogue at bay, reaching into the ample reserve of humor at those moments when the drama threatens to become tedious or grim.

As we sat expectantly in the Booth Theatre seconds before Waterston and Prosky were to take the stage, drama intersected with real life. Progress toward “curtain up” was suspended while several security personnel swept into the theatre and eyed the auditorium.

The seats next to me had been reserved for a special member of the audience and his entourage. Following them was a distinguished looking foreigner (are there “foreigners” in New York?) dressed in clothing that would mirror the actors’ costumes. Clearly, the man was a diplomat who had come to see this diplomatic comedy. His knowing laughs, groans, and sighs verified Blessing’s version of the diplomatic ritual. Yet as the man enjoyed the clever by-play on stage, his constant manipulation of a set of elegant “worry beads” suggested that the intractable problems of the real world were never completely out of his mind.

In The Road to Mecca, another of the plays transferred to New York from the Yale Repertory, the South African playwright Athol Fugard takes his American audiences on a journey away from the world of the familiar. It is a walk, not into the woods, but into the desert, and it is long, sometimes tortuous, yet deeply satisfying. At the end of the road is an old woman, known as Miss Helen, an artist living in the desert village of New Bethesda.

“Mecca” itself is a world Miss Helen has created in the fifteen years following her husband’s death. Outside her house is a sculpture garden filled with fantastical cement figures: owls, peacocks, mermaids, pyramids, camels, and wise men. The inside of the house is as fanciful as the garden. The floors and ceiling are decorated with bold geometrical patterns; the walls covered with reflective glitter and hung with mirror after mirror. On nearly every surface there is a sculpture, a lamp, or a candle. Candles are Miss Helen’s glorious weapons against the darkness, her bete noir. Her husband’s death brought to an end an unsatisfying marriage, but it left Miss Helen without emotional resources for continuing her life. She describes her fear of the future, like that of a little girl afraid of the dark who prolongs her bedtime prayers so that her mother will leave the candle burning a little longer.

Following the burial of her husband, Miss Helen’s minister, Marius Byleveld, took her home and closed the shutters against the curiosity of the villagers. He lit one candle to illuminate the room. That single candle not only spared Miss Helen from the terror of darkness, but gave her a purpose for the rest of her life, “to banish darkness.” She sought to banish it by creating her own “Mecca,” a mystical, exotic, romantic city of which she actually knew nothing but one that symbolized vision, wisdom, enlightenment, light.

Miss Helen has had to pay a heavy fare for her journey to Mecca. She has had to go her way alone and along the way she has become increasingly isolated from the human community. Her fantastic sculptures have disturbed the villagers and frightened their children. Her minister deems them idols. To all of them, Miss Helen is either pathetic or simply mad.

At the beginning of Fugard’s play, the old woman believes she is nearing the end of her road. She is almost completely alone. Her hands are arthritic, she can no longer sculpt; her eyes are going bad, her vision increasingly dim. Fearing the onset of permanent darkness from blindness, Miss Helen has attempted suicide. Enter again Pastor Marius Byleveld, who had once, unwittingly, saved her from darkness, and now, fearing for her safety and her sanity, has a plan. Miss Helen must leave her house and live in the old people’s home operated by the church. The minister might almost have convinced the old lady to join him in the home had not Elsa Barlow come along and complicated the situation.
Elsa is a young schoolteacher from Capetown who met Helen several years ago while on a visit to New Bethesda. Elsa was enchanted by Helen's sculpture and also by her free spirit—rare in an Afrikaner. After her first acquaintance with Miss Helen and her Mecca, Elsa became a disciple. The young woman's devotion to the old was as important to her as was the old woman's spirit to the young. Elsa's enthusiasm and support brought Miss Helen out of an emotional and artistic depression. She began to create again.

Now several years and regular visits after their first meeting, Elsa has driven eight hundred miles into the desert to come to Miss Helen's aid. She arrives on the night the minister is to come for the old woman's signature on papers that will bind her to live in the old people's home. Full of the strength and spirit Helen has passed on to her, Elsa confronts the old minister and forces him to admit that his concern for Helen's health and safety is really a desire to bring her back into conformity with the village's religious and social standards, to quash her free spirit.

As the battle for her spirit reaches its peak, Helen recalls the beginning of her journey to Mecca, her journey from backward, unenlightened girl that she was to the artist that she is. It began with the lighting of a single candle and it seems now to have ended with the completion of her Mecca. In order to reach her destination, Helen became an artisan, working with hands in cement and wire, textiles, glass, and ceramics. Her art may be mystical but its genesis is not mysterious. Always, she sought to create, choreograph, celebrate light.

As the brilliant Yvonne Bryce­land, Athol Fugard's longtime associate in the South African theatre, delivered Miss Helen's marvelous speech about her artistic journey, Amy Irving, who played Elsa Barlow, walked about the stage lighting the candles and lamps in Miss Helen's house. There were at least fifty little fires on John Lee Beatty's wonderful set, and as each one was lit it shot its light onto the reflective surfaces of the mirrors and crushed-glass glitter on the walls. By the end of the speech, the stage was glowing and flickering with candles. The light has vanquished not only the darkness, but also old Marius Byleveld (acted by Fugard himself), who has not the strength to pursue Helen all the way to Mecca. And Miss Helen is too old to make the journey back, though she knows now that just as she learned to light the candles, she must also learn to blow them out.

In The Road to Mecca, Fugard seems for the moment to have left his themes of racial injustice and South Africa's apartheid-anguish behind. Yet the need for the spirit to be unbound is as important in MASTER HAROLD . . . and the boys as it is in Mecca. Although she might not have articulated it as such, Miss Helen knew Mecca was meant to be the opposite of all the oppressive conventions, forms, and prejudices of Christianity in the Dutch Reformed tradition. In Mecca, her spirit could soar and light and luxuriate in the rich variety of color, texture, and luminescence denied it by the austerity of Protestant Christianity. The goal of her life became the creation of that world in her little New Bethesda house.

A Walk in the Woods and The Road to Mecca, two plays about journeys. The former less truthful and more superficial, owing, perhaps, to the fundamental disingenuousness of the diplomatic process. The latter more satisfying because of its length, its dangers, its demands, its challenge to all of us faced with choosing a personal road. 

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Through Wolfe's "New Yawkers," we see the impossibility of it all. They accept everything and everyone. They condemn nothing. They have no time to discriminate. "Fuhgedaboudit!" This frequently used, one-word dismissal clearly conveys the New Yorker's reaction to getting involved. Survival is the objective. Insulation from the environment is the necessary means to that end—perhaps easier for the rich who can afford Park Avenue and limousines but sought by everyone. The effort must be made on every street in every neighborhood in every borough. "If you want to live in New York," says one of Wolfe's characters, "you've got to insulate, insulate, insulate," meaning insulate yourself from those people.

Wolfe's Manhattanites are cynical, insensitive, and paranoid. They have five locks on every door and no expectation of either justice or order. They don't want to be seen wearing anything valuable on the subway; they avoid edges of subway platforms, and under the vaulted ceiling and elegant chandeliers of Grand Central Station, they may drop a few coins into a panhandler's cup (a superstition, perhaps?), but for the most part, they ignore the homeless, the reek of urine, the stench of the unwashed, and the ranting of the mentally ill. New Yorkers avoid eye contact. No friendly "Good Mornings" during a morning stroll: they don't stroll, and they don't say, "Good Morning."

As Wolfe says, they view the world with a "stroked-out look." (I recall once looking a man right in the eyes on a New York City subway, and my heart raced as I suddenly felt vulnerable.) Yuppie New Yorkers compete to enroll their yet-to-be born children in the "right" schools, drink imported beer, eat sushi, go to the theater, hear Pavarotti sing on opening night at the Met, and are unimpressed when they see Jacqueline Onassis jogging in Central Park. Other Gotham citizens sell drugs, use drugs, strip cars, paint graffiti on public and private property, sleep on park benches and sidewalks, grab other people's purses, and urinate on and in sidewalks, subways, phone booths, store windows, train stations, and bridges. But Wolfe's New Yorkers are the heartbeat of the city, the masses, the majority, the everyday folks.

Wolfe's Manhattanites are cynical, insensitive, and paranoid. They have five locks on every door and no expectation of encountering either justice or order.

I know Wolfe's New Yorkers. I lived in New York City for a year. I loved the city. (However, I don't think New Yorkers consciously love New York. It just doesn't occur to them that there is anywhere else.) I was excited by it. I was caught in the irresistible intensity of a daily routine in which "good day" or "bad day" was measured by the length of time needed to commute from home to work and back. I thought I wanted to stay there. That was four years ago. In retrospect, and from my more serene vantage point on a midwestern university campus, I can't imagine how I thought I could keep up that pace for any significant part of a lifetime. But oh, what a place to spend a year!

The competition to survive is as intense on Park Avenue as it is in the Bronx. In Bonfire of the Vanities we see New York City life through the eyes of Sherman ("Shuhhhmum" to his mistress) McCoy, a Wall Street financier—old wealth and a 14-room Park Avenue co-op with 12-foot ceilings and marble floors; Lawrence Kramer, a 32-year-old assistant district attorney in the Bronx who has had the great good fortune to move into a 3 1/2-room apartment (one room has a window) with his wife, infant child, and a nanny; Roland Auburn, a five-foot-seven muscular young black drug pusher, whose arrogant insulation is in his ability to manage the Pimp Roll with his hands cuffed behind his back; Abe Weiss, Kramer's district attorney boss, beleaguered in his reelection campaign by a press that has dubbed his jurisdiction "Johannesbronx"; the Rev. Reginald Bacon, self-ordained black evangelist building a personal fortune by exploiting downtrodden minorities to the constant political chagrin of the city's Koch-type major; Peter Fallow, an alcoholic, unethical, and broke newspaper reporter whose career is on the skids; and finally, the Mayor himself, who takes pride in his ability to handle hecklers, and who perceives himself as mayor of "the greatest city on earth" (though he secretly considers most of its inhabitants to be idiots). Each in his own way is striving to reach the top, to acquire the trappings which identify success in New York City.

The drive to "make it there" motivates all of Wolfe's men. Wolfe's women, however, are only pawns in the game. There is no love, no gentleness, no femininity, no sense of accomplishment, and no respect. The cast includes Sherman's wife, a shallow, simpering, and sexless woman, who has little on her mind except social climbing (she started from the bottom of the heap as the daughter of a mere heap as the daughter of a mere midwestern college professor); Kramer's wife, whose one-time sophistication as a former book editor and N.Y.U. graduate has been replaced, in her husband's eyes, by
her “first subcutaneous layer of Matron”; Sherman’s wealthy mistress, Maria, all body, no scruples, no brains—so uninterested in the people around her that she can’t even remember that her maid’s name is Cora, not Nora; and finally, Kramer’s would-be-mistress, “the girl with the brown lipstick”—the epitome of New York gum-chewing femininity with “mauve and purple rainbows on her eyelids and occipital orbits.” Kramer fantasizes about bedding her (and she is willing), but he can’t afford a love nest in New York on a D.A.’s salary. Each female is a bauble—not to be loved or cherished—but to be flaunted as a symbol of male success. Sadly, the women seem content with their roles, not because the men make them happy, but because they provide a means of survival—insulation.

To succeed is to survive, and to survive is to insulate from “all those people.” That is the crux of Wolfe’s story.

To succeed, then, is to survive, and to survive is to insulate from “all those people.” That is the crux of Wolfe’s story. Sherman is unable to insulate because he is rich, and Kramer fails because he is not. Where else but in New York City could such disparate characters change the course of each other’s lives? Sherman, with his mistress at his side, makes a wrong turn off a crowded Manhattan expressway at night and finds himself lost in the Bronx. His $48,000 Mercedes apparently strikes one of two would-be black car strippers who menacingly approach as the couple makes a frantic attempt to escape a roadblock presumably set by the youths. Although Sherman makes it back to “safe” territory, his nightmare sets the scene for Abe Weiss to get reelected, the Rev. Bacon to campaign against the mayor, Peter Fallow to reactivate his career, Roland Auburn to plea-bargain his case, and Lawrence Kramer to impress the girl of his dreams. Even the mayor is forced to exploit the situation because his advisers tell him the matter has become a touchstone issue in the black community, where only one interpretation of the facts will be acceptable. (Our hit-and-run victim has been translated by the press from car thief to “young black honor student.”)

Fear and greed provide the impetus. No one trusts anyone, and self-respect and personal dignity are out of reach. Sherman’s mistress cheats on him, and Kramer’s “girl with the brown lipstick” finds him boring. Sherman, heady with dollar deals, fancies himself the “Master of the Universe” but can’t even answer the question asked by his six-year-old daughter: “What do you do, Daddy?” Truth is used sparingly—when it will produce desired results—but it’s a flip-of-the coin that determines whether truth or falsehood will prevail. There are no community values, no moral or religious standards, no civic pride, no time for families, no common work ethic, and no leisure—not even space to park a car. There are no winners, just survivors.

The novel’s humor plays a supporting and delightful role in demonstrating the futility, or worse yet, the disgrace of getting involved. Scenes in an outdoor phone booth and a funeral parlor exemplify the point. In the first, Sherman has just left his Park Avenue apartment having informed his wife, Judy, that he is taking their dog for a walk. It is a half-truth since his objective is to call his mistress to set up a liaison. A driving rainstorm, a bally, leashed dog, and a phone booth too small for man and dog complicate the mission. When the frustrated Sherman absent-mindedly dials his own number, his wife answers, and before he can collect his startled thoughts, he responds, “Maria?” In the funeral scene, a not-so-dearly departed is being memorialized in a perfunctory service planned by his not-so-grieving, but dutiful, widow. To supplement the strained and desultory eulogies, she has asked a jazz pianist to play one of the deceased’s all-time favorites, “The Flight of the Bumblebee.” He does so and, forgetting where he is, gets carried away, finishing with a flourish and spinning 180 degrees on the piano stool with arms outstretched expecting thunderous applause. Instead, he confronts the open coffin and the astonished stares of the mourners.

Fear and greed provide the impetus. No one trusts anyone, and self-respect and personal dignity are out of reach.

That which makes New York the greatest city in the world to many is not the New York of Wolfe’s characters. Wolfe’s New Yorkers don’t go to Lincoln Center, the Metropolitan Opera, Central Park, the Public Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Radio City Music Hall, Carnegie Hall, the United Nations, or the World Trade Center. To them, New York is not the place where creativity flourishes, where culture and art and cuisine rival the best in the world, where prestigious universities attract outstanding faculty and students, where Broadway glitter and celebrities abound, and where the brightest people gravitate. Those treasures are available.
only to the precious few who can afford them, and many of those, like Sherman McCoy, are too busy clawing their way to the top to have time for them.

Wolfe's novel manifests a love/hate relationship between him and the city. The unlovable characters are unable to flourish in any noble sense of the word, but the world in which they live presents a plethora of delights for a writer with Wolfe's unique talent for using sights, sounds, and inner thoughts to tell a story. The mix of people and situations could happen only in New York and is made to order for a writer like Wolfe, who has become a chronicler of life in America by telling of that life through the experiences of those living it.

New York's essence, its life breath, its aura of unreality are unmistakably word-painted just as I remember them.

Bonfires of the Vanities is Wolfe's first work of fiction. Ironically, its success arises from a writing style which made Wolfe a self-confessed failure in the world of traditional journalism, where editors mistrusted his reporting of events through the eyes (and prejudices) of the sources. But it was that same style, combined with his precise and humane attention to details and his master craftsmanship, which won Wolfe acclaim as a non-fiction author (The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby, The Pump House Gang, The Right Stuff), and which has handsomely rewarded his exploitation of the eccentricities and the eccentricities of the "greatest city in the world." Its essence, its life breath, its aura of unreality are unmistakably word-painted just as I remember them.

Post-Graduate Study in Film

Edward Byrne

I just want to say one word to you . . . "plastics." There's a great future in plastics. Think about it.

—Advice to Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman) in The Graduate

As the 1988-89 school year starts and seniors at colleges and universities across the nation advance towards completion of final requirements for graduation, a significant period in American culture, politics, and society also will be coming to a close. A large number of the graduates of the class of '89 were born in 1967, a year which for many of its graduating seniors signalled the opening to a new era of social and political possibilities. Thus, an entire generation has grown to adulthood in the intervening years and a time for some summary, reassessment, and evaluation has arrived.

Such a task of review is not an easy one. Certainly, tomes can be written (and several already have) which would attempt to analyze the impact of the generation of post-

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World War II baby-boomers on the last two decades of America history. Likewise, an estimate of the separation between the liberal idealism associated with a multitude of the graduates of 1967 and the conservative pragmatism of the majority of the class of 1989 would require a full symposium. However, since motion pictures, like all other art forms, often serve as mirrors to society—reflecting its morals and values, as well as its political and social concerns—an examination of the evolution of American culture, politics, and society, the accompanying accomplishments and failures, during the lifetime of this current generation might be just as valid through the microcosm of a film study.

The Graduate, released in late 1967, appears to be the perfect candidate as the inception for at least a minimal effort at such a study. The Graduate, ranked second only to The Sound of Music (1965) as the top box-office hit of its decade, was the first major film to indicate the emerging sense of alienation among young people in the Sixties. (A similar film directed by the yet unknown Francis Ford Coppola, You're a Big Boy Now, was screened the same year but received much less recognition.) The widespread popularity, or in some circles notoriety, of The Graduate, the technical mastery of director Mike Nichols, and the subtle influence felt by many of the viewers transformed this wry comedy by screenwriter Buck Henry into a movie classic and a landmark film.

Admittedly, in 1967 initial resistance to the Vietnam War was only beginning to increase. Also, the film preceded by months the stormy events of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, as well as the awakening of the country's consciousness by the conflicts surrounding the 1968 Democratic
National Convention in Chicago. In addition, it would be nearly two years before the cultural, or counter-cultural, explosions of the play, *Hair*, the film, *Easy Rider*, and the music festival, Woodstock, that confirmed the arrival of a separate sub-society which had been developing and enlarging since the folk music and the Berkeley free-speech movements of the early '60s shocked many and held up for display the frayed threads of communication between the generations.

Nevertheless, it is the foreboding, rather than forbidding, nature of *The Graduate* which contributes to the film’s status as a prophetic exposition, which gives it the resonance of a distinct thunderclap signalling the coming storm of protest and upheaval. Indeed, the impact of the film is heightened by the fact that Benjamin, expertly played by Dustin Hoffman in his first starring role, is not a “typical” anti-establishment type; instead, he is portrayed as the model son, an exemplary student-athlete. In fact, he and his girlfriend Elaine find themselves turned-off by “hippies” when they stop at a drive-in diner and complain about the loudness of the rock music. The “calm-before-the-storm” feeling of the film is increased by the absence of any evidence of the war already wounding the country or of the mounting anti-war sentiments sprouting at colleges nationwide. Even though Elaine attends the University of California at Berkeley, a prime center of protest, when Ben makes an extended visit to the campus the only acknowledgement of turmoil to take place in the film occurs when his landlord asks if he’s “one of those outside agitators.”

The upper-class society of Ben’s family and friends also appears to exist totally isolated from the real world. Ben’s parents and neighbors are as far removed from the domestic and foreign troubles about to dominate the nightly newscasts as Ben, seen in full diving gear standing alone submerged in the family swimming pool, is symbolically severed from the goals and values shared by his parents and the other members of their generation. *The Graduate* seen 21 years later seems even more disconcerting because of Ben’s inability to replace the values harbored by his parents’ generation with ones of his own.

**Ben is unable to replace the values of his parents with ones of his own.**

In 1967 a budding anti-establishment attitude and a blossoming awareness about social inequity can be distinguished simply by looking at the films which garnered the six top Academy Awards—*In the Heat of the Night* (Best Picture and Best Actor), *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner* (Best Actress), *Cool Hand Luke* (Best Supporting Actor), *Bonnie and Clyde* (Best Supporting Actress), and *The Graduate* (Best Director). The Grammy Awards’ Album of the Year went to the Beatles for Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band; William Styron’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Confessions of Nat Turner*, was published; and the Pulitzer Prize for non-fiction was granted to David Brion Davis for *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*.

Still, most who were casting off the convictions and values of the past had not yet discovered a substitute set of beliefs and morals, and few had begun to embrace the alternative lifestyle later celebrated at Woodstock. Like Benjamin, who declares his only ambition is that he wants his “future to be . . . different,” the common responses by young people to the questions about their futures were vague. Because of this uncertainty, Ben’s confusion serves as an appropriate metaphor for his fellow classmates of 1967. If one remembers the closing scene of the film, Ben has spirited Elaine away from her marriage to a fraternity “make-out king,” and the two are shown sitting in the back seat of a bus, Ben looking like a defrocked monk and Elaine still in her wedding gown, travelling tentatively forward but not knowing where they are headed, dubiously leaving behind the world of their parents, staring silently into the camera’s eye and at the late-'60s audience, and like the theatre patrons gazing back at the couple, unsure of what lies before them.

What lay before them is now history, and for a large portion of this year’s graduating class it has been a lifetime. Many conversations and, I’m sure, dissertations have been engendered by debate concerning *The Graduate*’s status as a breakthrough film, its innovative characteristics, and its treatment or non-treatment of various topics, including the following: the emphasis placed upon wealth and the materials money can buy, the priority of career, the place or lack of space for politics and religion in one’s life, the evolution of society’s attitudes towards sexual stereotyping and sexual lifestyles, the conflict between conformity and individualism in beliefs and customs, the fickleness of fashion, and the frankness of artistic expression. Any historical, political, or social examinations by experts of the past two decades will reveal the major changes which have occurred in each of these areas. However, despite the perceived transformation of American society since the late '60s, an irony exists which today’s viewers or, more likely, *re*-viewers of *The Graduate* may discover and find discomfiting: while no one was looking, the closed, sterile soci-
ety, with all its symbols of isolationism and materialism, against which Ben seems to be rebelling in the film apparently became the ideal society for many of the graduates in the 1980s.

By scanning some of the films which have been popular and influential for young adults since the release of The Graduate, it is possible to trace the evolution away from the revolution of the late '60s and early '70s as if one were tracking a forceful storm's progress across the country and out to sea, leading to an eventual stillness, to some a stagnation. At the same time, any pattern that forms could be extended and, upon further study, might guide one to an understanding of the direction future cultural, political, or social movements of the current generation of graduates may take.

Films of the late '60s and early '70s popular with the younger audience followed the 1967 anti-establishment, anti-hero leads of The Graduate and Bonnie and Clyde. In addition, as the Sixties ended and the Seventies began, the visions and goals of the rebels and protesters started to sharpen, centering upon a discontinuation of the Vietnam War, a halt to racial discrimination, and a guarantee of equality for the sexes, as well as a celebration of individualism. Films such as Easy Rider (1969), Goodbye, Columbus (1969), Alice's Restaurant (1969), M*A*S*H (1970), Getting Straight (1970), and Harold and Maude (1972) mirrored in various ways these concerns and completed the rejection started by The Graduate of many of the previously set social standards. Even an anti-hero, anti-establishment western such as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) can be added to the list of movies expressing a generation's general sense of exasperation with figures of authority and the status quo. (Later heroes in such films as Dirty Harry, An Officer and a Gentleman, Beverly Hills Cop, Rambo, Top Gun, and Die Hard, although renegades, are all figures of recognized establishment authority, usually either in the police or the military.)

**Even Hoffman's preppy clothes and short haircut are now back in style.**

In the middle '70s, after the pull-out of American troops from Vietnam and the resignation of Richard Nixon over Watergate, after integration of the South seemed closer to a reality with the elections of a number of black leaders to political office, and after women came to account for nearly half the workforce, the prime targets of the revolution began to fade from view. Ten years after The Graduate broke new ground a shift occurred on the part of the young audience away from films which posed political or social questions, which spoke to current issues, and towards films which once again offered escapism from the real world just as the most popular films of the early '60s had.

Although the middle and late '70s delivered some fine films which dealt with complex contemporary issues, such as Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore (1975), One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), Taxi Driver (1976), An Unmarried Woman (1978), and Kramer vs. Kramer (1979)—not to mention a trio of post-Vietnam pictures, The Deer Hunter (1978), Coming Home (1978), and Apocalypse Now (1979)—those movies which avoided the contemporary by looking at the past with nostalgia or, more often, to the far future in fantasy have become legendary as the biggest box-office hits of all time. The unprecedented success of Close Encounters of the Third Kind (1977), Star Wars (1977), and the early '80s entry of E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982) announced a new era of diversion from reality, in these instances by averting one's eyes from the entire planet Earth itself. Heroes in the most popular films of the late '70s and early '80s (some of the most popular films in cinema history) like Rocky Balboa, Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker, Hans Solo, and Johnny Rambo resembled the invincible characters in children's comic books. Even the horror, slapstick comedy, and romantic comedy genres were not immune, as witnessed by the overwhelming prosperity of Alien (1979), Ghostbusters (1984), and Splash (1984).

By the early 1980s it seemed that the only battle to which "real" contemporary characters of high school or college age committed themselves was the friendly fight against authority figures for the right to party. The four most influential films to demonstrate this theme were Animal House (1978), Porky's (1981), Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982), and Risky Business (1983). Perhaps the most noteworthy of this grouping is Risky Business, in which director Paul Brickman consciously evokes images of The Graduate. Like The Graduate, Risky Business is a witty satire of a young man's alienation and coming of age. With the opening moments of the film, in which Joel, played by Tom Cruise, is lying on a lounge wearing sunglasses, the image of Hoffman's Benjamin floating in his family's swimming pool on an inflated mattress and wearing dark glasses is easily recalled. Brickman's use of juxtaposed shots and camera angles that "see" through the eyes of Joel is also reminiscent of techniques associated with Nichols' direction of The Graduate. Even Hoffman's preppy clothes and short haircut have come back into style.

A decade and a half after The
to attend the funeral following the suicide of an eighth classmate, Alex, who had seemed to embody the spirit of their younger selves. He was the non-conformist, the promising scientist who refused to follow the staid academic life, instead choosing to develop the ideals nurtured in those earlier years. His friends are left to face the fact that they have drifted from their ideals and to try to regain a sense of togetherness in new roles, under new rules. “The big chill,” the long cooling of youthful fervor, is halted for one warm weekend of thawing, but the unattainable ideals and utopian expectations of the Sixties are finally, like Alex, respectfully laid to rest.

In 1985 the stage was cleared for a new gathering of classmates to voice their own set of concerns in The Breakfast Club, in which director John Hughes introduced an assorted, admittedly stereotypical, group of high school students—the local hood, the insecure loner, the jock, the honor student, and the popularity queen—to prove that teenage alienation, although now primarily social, and the presence of a generation gap remain painful experiences for many in the Eighties.

Perhaps the most dominant image of the 1980s teenager for many Americans, though, is another Alex. Certainly, Michael J. Fox's portrayal of Alex Keaton on television's Family Ties is an extreme exaggeration, a caricature, which considerably overstates the case of materialism, conservatism, and conformity in today's teenagers. However, an examination of a few of Fox's feature films hints at the movement youth-oriented movies have taken in recent years. Fox's first major film success was the enormously popular Back to the Future (1985) which, along with the similar Peggy Sue Got Married the next year, continued the nostalgic, backward gaze of the early '80s. However, his second hit film, The Secret of My Success (1987), comically presented a young, ambitious capitalist, not far removed from the Alex Keaton character, looking to make his first million on Wall Street. A third film, Bright Lights, Big City, released this year, offers a dispiriting glance into the world of a young man living in New York City's fast lane and the personal destruction to which such a lifestyle leads.

A number of other recent films have heralded the same theme and might be seen as forerunners of future film projects. Wall Street (1987), Less than Zero (1988), and Cocktail (1988) are among the movies that contain young characters disillusioned by the easy attainment of money, sex, drugs, and alcohol. It is as if the pounding of the judges' gavels at the trials disclosing the insider trading scandals and the fears generated by the Wall Street crash of last October also reverberated throughout Hollywood and struck blows against film characters' expectations of happiness through monetary or material excess. This proliferation of moralistic films may also be attributed to growing concerns over the AIDS epidemic (a topic many saw metaphorically represented in last year's blockbuster, Fatal Attraction) and substance abuse.

Nevertheless, twenty years after The Graduate reflected the gathering uncertainty and distrust about the materialistic measures of success recognized by society and the plastic personalities rewarded by society, these new films are beginning to move in the same direction. The pendulum swing may now be complete. A generation of graduates later, we may discover that we are back where we started, that the tranquility brought about after one storm is merely the calm before another.
Why I Like Buses
More than Planes

Dot Nuechterlein

In recent years I have enjoyed a fair bit of work-related travel, and this summer, when in the same week I made a couple of plane trips and then picked up my son at a bus station, I noticed an interesting development in public transportation.

Back in the '50s, when I regularly rode "The Dog" (Greyhound) and had my first airplane encounters, one knew immediately upon stepping foot in a terminal whether one was among the elite or the hoi polloi. Airport waiting rooms were sedate places; women wore high heels and white gloves, men had suits and hats, and every thing and every body reeked of clean and quiet. Bus lounges, on the other hand, meant dungarees (what we used to call jeans, children) and ducktails (long, greasy, Elvis-style haircuts) and—sprawled everywhere—disheveled bodies.

As a penniless college student I fit comfortably into the latter milieu, which made my encounters with the former seem surrealistic and exotic. When my university began a new scholastic program I was part of its first class and took some trips to publicize what we had and exotic. When my university

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comfort rules and anyone can wear anything, has brought us to the point where slovenliness now appears to be the order of the day in most airports.

Meanwhile, bus companies and their patrons got so fed up with the loitering and pandering that had become common on their premises that often now only passengers with tickets are allowed inside lounge areas, and many former waiting rooms no longer even provide chairs for visitors. If the bus you are meeting is late, you lean against the wall or sit on the floor, watched by a guard. The passengers themselves may be a scruffy lot, but the surroundings seem almost pristine compared to their past and the jetports' present.

This illustrates two transformations in our society: Americans today increasingly resemble one another, and we are an uncommonly mobile lot. Both of these facts are related to the growth of mass media in that we now know much more about how everyone else lives. Thus the less privileged find it easier to imitate the looks and customs of the more affluent; and, upon learning of intriguing places at home or abroad, we are more likely than earlier generations to go and see for ourselves.

People who also want to see what's along the way, who have extra time, or who are traveling to isolated areas take the bus, while those in a hurry go by plane.

Of course once inside the vehicle of choice a difference in behavior may be evident. Some plane passengers get loud and disorderly, but usually everyone's deportment is polite, civilized. The bus is more likely to attract drunks, or rowdy riders. When I met my son that morning he was followed off the bus by a weird fellow noisily picking a fight with another guy—and John said this had been going on all night. It reminded me of an incidenent I hadn't thought of for years.

A few months before I got married I drove a thousand miles to borrow my sister-in-law's wedding gown; partway home my car broke down, so late at night I caught a bus to continue my trip. As I headed toward the only empty seat in the back, carrying that precious transparent garment bag, a loud, crude, slurry voice sang out: "Hey, everybody, wake up—here comes a girlie with a wedding dress!" Then for miles and miles he leaned across the aisle shouting questions about when and where and to whom and why I was getting married. Understandably, sleepy passengers felt murderous; some towards him, others towards me for provoking him.

On another wee hours occasion my bus driver got lost trying to find the downtown Detroit depot, and what should have been express from Chicago was hopelessly late as passengers took turns trying to convince him of the directions. That would never happen in the air, of course.

So bus rides can be less pleasant, but somehow they're more fun than planes. I enjoy conversing with seatmates in the air, but they seem to fit a narrow range: business people, well-heeled vacationers, travel agents, and the like. Bus travelers are of more types—more students, working-class people, grandparents, even ex-cons—so they are more memorable.

It used to be intriguing to watch the ground from the air, to see the miniature buildings and cars and trace the path of streets and highways. Today you look out a plane window and see clouds.

To be honest, though, the main reason I prefer buses is that I have passed the great divide between youth and old age and I'm now more conscious of mortality than previously. You don't very often hear of death by bus crash.