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THE LEFT: What Is To Be Done Now?



Jack Sherman

Judith Van Allen and Ben Nichols

Former '60s New Left activist Todd Gitlin would appear to have the credentials to offer a cogent analysis of current Left politics (or the lack thereof) in the U.S. His new book, *The Twilight of Common Dreams*, has gained largely favorable treatment in the popular media, ranging from the *New York Times Book Review* to *The Nation* and *In These Times*, and it has been selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and the History Book Club. We, along with many others, have been distressed by the lack of cohesion (even locally) among the various groups that might comprise the Left, and looked forward to finding in Gitlin's book a useful analysis of what has gone wrong and how we might rebuild a powerful Left. But we were extremely disappointed to discover that, far from providing a critique of identity politics "coming from the Left," Gitlin's book reads like a mainstream attack on the Left, which at least

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Science and the New Cosmology

Steven Chapman

A response to certain criticisms concerning the project for an *Environmental Poetics*:

When the progress of a science comes to a standstill despite the best efforts of many active researchers, the fault usually lies in a certain habitual way of looking at things, to which the majority will acquiesce without further ado, and from which even thinking people tend to extricate themselves only with great difficulty.

These words, penned by Goethe more than two centuries ago, apply with equal vigor today. What Goethe diagnosed in his day as the tyranny of scientific "objectivity" divorced from the essential mystery of life or any human concern remains the prevailing ideology of the mainstream scientific establishment. Old dogmas die hard, and in spite of mounting evidence of the limitations of such a view, most scientists still consider their calling to be a kind of heroically disinterested quest for knowledge. Science alone, we are told, is objective, rational, value-free, and subject to empirical verification. The claims of all other types of discourse—poetic, religious, philosophical, or just personal—must therefore submit to its authority as the ultimate arbiter in matters of truth.

The condemnation of the "attitude problem" of modern science has been in vogue ever since the Enlightenment began to question its own presuppositions, and its historical complicity with anti-democratic tendencies has made the contemporary critique of technology—such as that proffered by Deep Ecology—understandably suspect. But such a critique is necessary now more than ever because it is precisely the notion of value-free, disinterested science which has enabled Western civilization to establish its hegemony over the entire planet, reprocessing the riches of the earth into the raw materials of economic growth, and spewing its inassimilable detritus back into the environment. As Western-style industrialism becomes increasingly globalized, it inevitably destroys the cultures and livelihood of all peoples who do not conform to its vision of an infinitely exploitable world. The earth-shaking power unleashed by modern science, combined with economic liberalism, has led us down a path fundamentally aberrant with regard to the larger economy of nature. The solution proposed by some—yet more science—shows how deeply entrenched our faith in the technological quick-fix remains. What is needed, rather, is a fundamental critique of the assumptions of technological civilization and its underlying ideology of scientific objectivity.

What we call our environmental crisis is really the manifestation of the disorder of a whole project of human civilization which is now brushing against the limits of sustainability. Yet the sheer magnitude of this crisis provides hope that the time may be ripe for a fundamental paradigm shift, including a change in the function and self-understanding of science. Although

some of its claims may be premature, an integrated ecological worldview is now emerging from many quarters as a way for human beings to put their own affairs in order in harmony with the larger household of the biosphere.

What makes such a project feasible now, distinguishing it from countless dreamy utopias, is that the impetus for change is coming from the scientific community itself. As with any scientific revolution, the inadequacy of existing models to address the evidence calls forth new ways of looking at things. After numerous fits and starts, scientists from many fields are now moving away from a dualistic and mechanistic conception of reality to a more holistic or organic worldview.

The new "post-modern" cosmology has come to the fore, most prominently in physics, which, since the beginning of this century, has been moving steadily towards a conception of the universe as a historical, dynamic, evolving whole. As Fritjof Capra writes in *The Turning Point*:

In contrast to the mechanistic Cartesian view of the world, the worldview emerging from modern physics can be characterized by words like organic, holistic, and ecological. [...] The universe is no longer seen as a machine, made up of a multitude of objects, but has to be pictured as one indivisible, dynamic whole whose parts are essentially interrelated and can be understood only as pattern of a cosmic process.

Such changes are at least as epoch-making as the earlier shift from the closed Ptolemaic world to the infinite universe of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton.

In the life sciences as well, nature appears increasingly as she did to the primitive poetic imagination, displaying characteristics of resiliency, creativity, beauty, and purposefulness which can no more easily be explained by the crude mechanisms of Darwinian theory than can dark matter by Newtonian physics. An obvious example of the new thinking is James Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis," in which the ancient goddess is invoked to describe a vision of the biosphere as a single, self-regulating super-organism. Lovelock himself, eager to stay within the good graces of the scientific establishment, insists that Gaia is only a metaphor. But his theory, with its emphasis on symbiotic cooperation among living organisms and its view of nature as a dynamic unity, takes an important step beyond Neo-Darwinism towards a more integrated, ecological view of the world.

The recognition that natural processes are irreducible to any set of mechanical laws has led some scientists to return to a vitalist or even animist conception of life. As Rupert Sheldrake, one of the leading protagonists of the New Biology, writes in *The Rebirth of Nature*:

As science itself develops, the mechanistic worldview is being progressively transcended. Nature is coming to life again within scientific theory. [...] Nothing less than a revolution is at hand.

This revolution corresponds to what Sheldrake calls a "new renaissance," by which he means both a rebirth of nature and a rebirth of humanity within nature.

But science alone—even a reformed science—is insufficient to bring about the deep changes required by our current ecological crisis. Witness the dawdling on global warming, where, in spite of clear scientific evidence, the nations of the world remain unwilling to undertake any commitments which might interfere with economic growth. What is most needed at this juncture is certainly not more science, but a transformation of consciousness, a *metanoia*. For this to happen, we need to open ourselves up once again to the guiding influences of nature, to listen carefully to what the mountains and forests are telling us, and to be born again into the natural world. This is necessarily a religious project, understood in the etymological sense of *religare*: affirming the bonds which tie human beings to each other and to their common home.

This invocation of religion should not be understood as a Neo-Romantic flight into the past, but as forward movement into a greener, healthier, and saner future. If we are to heal the disastrous split between body and soul, science and poetry, intellect and creativity, which remains the peculiar neurosis of the West—and which still divides the modern university into the competing factions of the natural sciences and the humanities—then we have to call upon all the cultural, spiritual, and poetic

resources available to us. The project for an *Environmental Poetics* is intended simply as fieldwork toward the great transformation which the necessities of the age demand, harvesting the poetic wisdom of the ages in the service of an integrated ecocentric cosmology. The figure of Goethe towers magisterially within a still-recognizable historical horizon as evidence that such a unified worldview, combining science with poetry and spirituality, is still possible. Casting about more broadly, we can learn much from what Gary Snyder calls the "Great Subculture of Illuminati": the Zen Buddhists, wandering Sufis, Neo-Platonists, German Pietists, and Beatnik poets who articulate an alternative view of nature to the one taught in our schools under the banner of modern science. And as Americans (for better or for worse), we can call upon the riches of our own cultural tradition: the spiritual ecology of Emerson and Thoreau, the inspired naturalism of John Muir, the poetry of Whitman and Dickinson and Hart Crane, or that most Goethean of modern poets, Robinson Jeffers, who wrote:

I believe that the Universe is one being, all its parts are different expressions of the same energy, and they are all in communication with each other, therefore parts of one organic whole. This is physics, I believe, as well as religion.

Steven Chapman lives in New York City.

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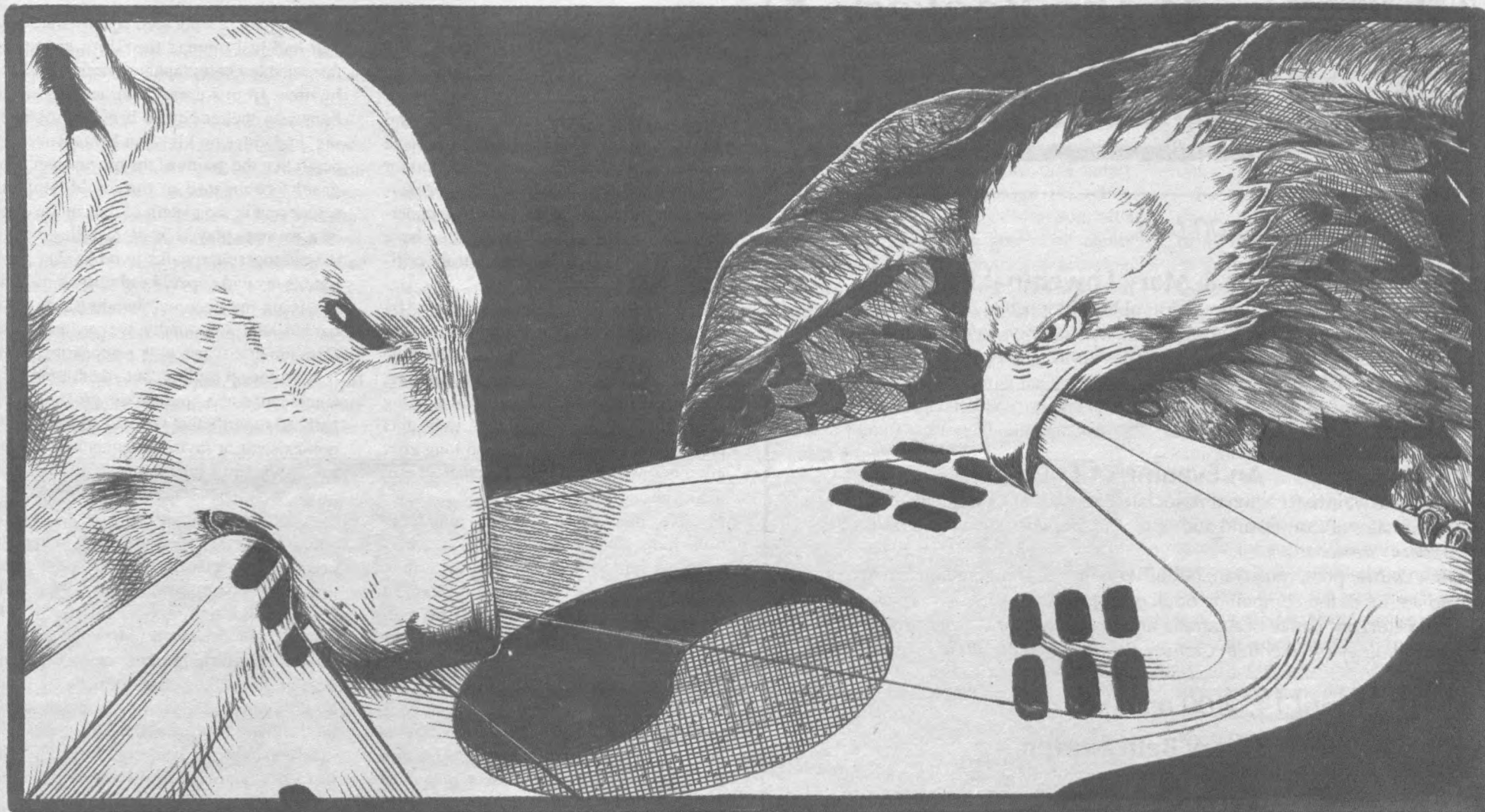
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The Truth Has A Long Fuse



Don Karr

INCIDENT AT SAKHALIN: THE TRUE MISSION OF KAL FLIGHT 007

by Michel Brun translated by Robert Bononno
Four Walls Eight Windows, 326 pages, \$24.95

WARRIORS OF DISINFORMATION

by Alvin A. Snyder
Arcade, 321 pages, \$25.95

Edward T. Chase

Walter Cronkite, America's venerable and revered T.V. pundit, praises Michael Brun's new book:

This book has importance far behind its sensational and dramatic revelations of a Cold War intelligence ploy that turned into a military engagement—an aerial battle that could easily have escalated into World War III. That importance concerns the covenant that exists in a democracy between the government and its people regarding the matter of honesty. A democracy depends on an informed electorate and it ceases to be a democracy when its agents conspire to deny the people the truth.

Unfortunately, Cronkite's blurb, so right in its lofty sentiment about democracy, assumes as fact the unproven and altogether unlikely aerial battle that Brun alleges was fought between Soviet and U.S. military aircraft on September 1, 1983. This dubious allegation sets afloat a new "conspiracy theory," a tic that seems to plague the modern world. What is true is that the Cold War intelligence ploy which caused the KAL 007 disaster might indeed have triggered World War III. Now the impact of Brun's book may lead to Congressional hearings that might finally unearth the whole truth of this calamity, crucial details of which remain a mystery. Otherwise, we may have to wait until the year 2008, when the classified documents on the episode automatically will be disclosed per the welcome and overdue Executive Order 12958 which came into force in October 1995.

At least a half-dozen books document the episode, which stands as arguably the most puzzling and misunderstood incident of the Cold War. Besides Brun's book, two others are scheduled for the

coming year. None, so far, is definitive.

For all its bizarre elements, I must say that, as a veteran editor, I find the story of the Brun book typical of many others, in that its initial inspiration eventuated in years of work, yet it falters in the end. However, Brun and his indefatigable colleague, John Keppel, achieve their basic goal—to demonstrate that the United States government has perpetrated a deception and cover-up that must be exposed.

What is notable about the work, besides its improbable inception, is that it deals with a historical event of profound importance, an event that the author shows just might have triggered nuclear warfare between the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. At the very least, the disaster entails the tragic deaths of some 269 innocent passengers and crew, 61 of them Americans.

Incident at Sakhalin is the work of two intelligent, informed men whose obsessive motivation is to tell what they are convinced is the truth about the shootdown of KAL Flight 007. They wish to have the book serve as a cautionary tale in the interests of the world community. As everyone has been told, the "official" story is a simple one: a commercial airliner accidentally flew off course over Soviet territory and was shot down by a Soviet fighter plane on the Soviet assumption it was on a spy mission to evaluate Soviet military defenses. International uproar ensued, and President Reagan in particular used every opportunity to castigate the Soviets. International anxiety was tremendous, and, by and large, the U.S. version of the event was accepted.

Brun's book largely demolishes the U.S. propaganda line. Yet it is impossible for me to agree with all its conclusions. Although I respect his and John Keppel's intent, admire their industry, their skills, and their tenacity, I feel that their work could mislead the public by positing a conspiracy theory that is not credible in key particulars.

Although I, along with other book editors sent the manuscript, became aware of the book at its inception, I was not its editor or publisher, and I write as one of a large-audience of interested citizens profoundly curious about the KAL 007 shoot-down and the tragic deaths of 269 civilians. My awareness of the book began in 1985, when, as Senior Editor of Macmil-

lan/Scribner, I received a letter mailed from Paraguay by Michel Brun, identifying himself as a French investigative agent in transportation. He wrote that he could demonstrate that the official U.S. account of the KAL Flight 007 episode was false. I was deeply skeptical, and I read the early draft of the manuscript he sent along with disbelief. I wrote Brun that I figured he was a provocateur, perhaps a K.G.B. agent (the Cold War was hot then). For all I know, other editors may have shared this reaction. At any rate, I agreed to see Brun, and, when we met in New York, I recognized that he was serious, neither a nut nor a K.G.B. agent. As editors commonly do with potential authors, I invited him to lunch. I felt I could better assess his hypothesis if I had present with me at the luncheon an old acquaintance, Dick Witkin, former aviation editor of the *New York Times*, and David Pearson, unknown by me but the author of an earlier book, *KAL 007: The Cover-up*. We were impressed by Brun's grasp of the known facts about the disaster, and especially by his background as a veteran pilot in the Western Pacific, as well as his intimacy with Japanese sources about the disaster, and his plausible critique of Secretary of State George Shultz's initial condemnatory report on the disaster.

Brun is fluent in Japanese, English, Spanish, and Polynesian. He is also author of a book on his raft voyage from Tahiti to Chili. We urged his further investigation and work on the manuscript.

Learning from Dick Witkin that retired Foreign Service Officer John Keppel, a Harvard graduate, had been a valuable associate of David Pearson in the preparation of Pearson's book, I contacted Keppel as I became increasingly curious about the real truth of the episode. It was arranged for Keppel to telephone Michel Brun, then in Tahiti. Keppel had served in the United Nations and twice served on tours at the Moscow Embassy. Keppel had also been a member of an inter-agency working group in Washington after Francis Gary Powers' U-2 plane went down over Sverdlovsk on May 1, 1960. Keppel writes in the book's preface:

I have taken part myself in official lying,

Not realizing that the Soviets had the U-2's cameras virtually intact and Powers himself alive, we (the members of the working group) very stupidly recommended that President Eisenhower stick to the cover story that the U-2 was a weather plane that had inadvertently flown off course.

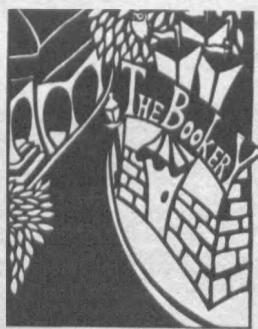
For the American public, this was a bombshell eye-opener: for the first time, most Americans "realized that a U.S. president would lie to them on an important subject."

Keppel and Brun hit it off from the beginning. Together, they plunged into further investigation in Asia, in Europe, indeed wherever the trail led, continually revising the manuscript, with Keppel also raising or generating funds (not least for Robert Bononno's translation of Brun's French manuscript into English) from public-interest parties such as The Fund for Constitutional Government and individuals like Paul Newman. Months, then years went by as the work progressed. Finally, Brun's draft became a finished manuscript, and Brun and Keppel were able to sign a book contract with Four Walls Eight Windows.

Brun's thesis is that, while on flight from Anchorage to Tokyo, KAL 007 was a decoy posing as an innocent flight off course but was really on a spy mission to trigger the electronic and military reactions of the most strategically sensitive Soviet Pacific defense installations, where Soviet missiles were tested and their nuclear submarines trained, so as to give the U.S. military "real time" information. This intelligence ploy failed spectacularly, of course, as the Soviets detected the plane and dispatched fighters to destroy it. Brun asserts that, in conjunction with this action, an air battle ensued between Soviet and American aircraft of at least two hours duration wherein ten U.S. military aircraft were shot down, killing some 30 U.S. military men.

Why the military aircraft were approaching Sakhalin at the same time as KAL 007, a provocation, is left unclear—perhaps to show that the Soviets couldn't control the borders of their own air space, Keppel has suggested. What's more, Brun asserts the Soviets did not shoot down KAL 007 off Sakhalin Island

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Off Campus

At The Bookery

This presentation is part of our ongoing series of readings and talks in our new space, in the Atrium upstairs in the DeWitt Mall.

Tuesday, April 2, 8:00 p.m.

John Felstiner & Mary Lowenthal Felstiner

will be presenting a joint discussion of their respective books, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, and *To Paint Her Life: Charlotte Salomon in the Nazi Era*. Both authors will be showing slides during their presentation.

Friday, April 12, 8:00 p.m.

An Evening of Poetry

Gail Holst-Warhaft, adjunct Associate Professor of Comparative Literature and Classics at Cornell and author of *Theodorakis: Myth and Politics in Modern Greek Music*,

Dick Lourie, poet, musician, publisher-editor of *Hanging Loose* magazine, and author of the compelling book of poetry *Anima*

David Curzon, native of Australia and author of *The Gospels in Our Time: An Anthology of Twentieth Century Poetry Based on Biblical Texts*.

Sunday, April 14, 4:00 p.m.

Mary Beth Norton,

Mary Donlon Alger Professor of American History at Cornell University, will be discussing her new book, *Founding Mothers & Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*, an exploration of the power relationships in early American society, religion, and politics, focusing on the years from 1620 to 1670.

Sunday, April 21, 4:00 p.m.



Paul Cody,

author of the brilliant first novel, *The Stolen Child*, will be returning to Off Campus to read from his much anticipated new novel, *Eyes Like Mine*. Cody earned his MFA from Cornell University and now lives in Ithaca with his wife and son.

Wednesday, April 24, 8:00 p.m.

Nick Salvatore,

winner of both the Bancroft and Dunning prizes, will be discussing *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber*. This chronicle, written by a free African-American from 1854 to 1954 is a unique window into the story of our nation during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Sunday, April 28, 4:00 p.m.



Jeanne Mackin

will be discussing the craft of the historical novel in general and her third novel, *Dreams of Empire*, in particular. Jeanne Mackin lives in Ithaca, and is a free-lance writer, a writing tutor at Ithaca College, and a journalist at Cornell University.

Thursday, May 2, 8:00 p.m.

Geoff Waite,

Associate Professor of German Studies at Cornell University, will be presenting a provocative hypothesis about Nietzsche's philosophical afterlife and the fate of leftist thought and culture in his new book *Nietzsche's Corps/e: Aesthetics, Politics, Prophecy, or the Spectacular Technoculture of Everyday Life*.

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Blowing Up

Howard Aldendorff

Leaving Las Vegas, the recent film by Mike Figgis, has been highly praised and deeply condemned, but in no instance have I encountered, accurately appraised, and for reasons that have much to say about American film criticism and the American understanding of alcoholism, a problem whose proportions are now becoming truly critical.

Ben, the film's main character, played by Nicolas Cage—whom I found admirably over-the-top in *Wild at Heart*—is a likeable alcoholic who, when he has been drinking, aims to be charming but succeeds in being merely louche. His employer, who has kindly been keeping him around long after his screenwriting talents have played out, finally lets him go, with generous severance pay. This Ben invests in alcohol in order to drink himself to death in Las Vegas, where liquor is said to be constantly available. That he is single-minded in this final project may seem to be put in question by his hailing a not-yet-over-the-hill prostitute played by Elisabeth Shue, whose name, Sera, as will be seen, all too appropriately fits (*que sera, sera*), and whose abusive pimp is soon to be rubbed out by a Latvian "mafia." It soon becomes apparent that Ben has not deviated from his central project: in Sera he has accurately identified a person whose vocation as an enabling codependent seems even more deeply rooted than her businesslike professionalism. Though she offers, and even urges, sex, she and Ben do not in fact consummate their relationship until the (literal) end.

It is at this final moment that the old metaphorical/Shakespearean pun on "to die" is translated into image, so that the same event represents both sexual climax and physical death. This is not new to cinema, and was a much better pun when performed in Antonioni's first English-language film, *Blow Up*, a film which I shall use as a reference point of the truly expressive and artistic. As the Dante scholar John Freccero has pointed out, a scene of seemingly gratuitous sexual frolic in *Blow Up* leaves the exhausted male protagonist staring up at a blow-up of a photograph he had lately taken of an older man and a beautiful woman in a park. The photo was taken at the moment when the woman was pulling the man away from the direction of the camera and towards a tree—which becomes for the jaded young photographer something of the tree of the knowledge of life and death, as at the foot of it he begins to see the impression or image of a dead man. The image has been decomposed by the blow-up into grainy particles which nonetheless seem to coagulate into the uncertain shape of a dead body. The photographer goes back to the Eden-like park at night, and sees only a slight hint of a depression in the blowing grass, which might have been left by a now-absent corpse. This erasure (much in the film recalls the Oedipal darkness of Robbe-Grillet's *Les Gommages*) is completed when the photographer returns to his studio from a fashionably decadent drug party (to which he went to tell a friend he finds too stoned to comprehend, about his discovery), only to find all his films and blown-up prints stolen. This texture of composition and decomposition is repeated and reflected throughout *Blow Up*, refracted even in the timing and content of its temporal and visual rhythms, within such scenes (brief as a moment) as that in which a British guard in full red regalia and peaked hat marches, high-stepping, to an about-face as two black-robed nuns approach and pass him, as if an energy of movement had been transmitted from them to him, the effect of a cut without an actual cut, like the clack of one solid ball hitting another in the standard demonstration of transfer of momentum; cut back to an open Land Rover full of yelling clowns

wheeling about a cobbled square (the scene that had just opened the film); cut to the fashionable photographer returning in shabby dress from a dreary charnel-house-like homeless shelter he had been photographing, and entering his open Rolls Royce. A detail like the grains of the blown-up photograph is repeated in the cobbles of the square and in the pattern of dots in the dress of a woman, played by Vera Miles, whom the photographer walks in on as she, prostrate, eyes wide open, head thrown back, is receiving the uncomprehending rutting of her husband. And finally, we see the clowns from the first scene, now reappearing in the last, no longer yelling, but silent, miming a tennis game at a court in the green, rolling park, so expertly that you can almost see the non-existent or invisible tennis ball as they ape a shot and a long return, until their gestures, and the ensuing trajectory of one's eye, follow the imagined object over the court's fence to a spot near the photographer on the lawn. Now their gestures invite, urge him to participate, to throw "the ball" back, so that the game can continue. He does so, and as he walks away, becoming a steadily diminishing figure on an enlarging field of green, faint clicks or pops are heard on the soundtrack, as of a tennis ball being hit back and forth, and the film closes (if I may borrow from Andrew Marvell's "The Garden") "annihilating all that's made / to a green thought in a green shade."

This visual, musical, rhythmic delight of surface enacts the most profound themes of generation, death, absence, presence, destination, alienation and social creation of meaning—a man's peripeteia from jetsetting denial into his own dank mortality. By contrast, in *Leaving Los Vegas*, the brief darkness of a blank, black screen which recurs during the course of the film (at moments where we might logically expect an alcoholic "blackout" or stunned [un]consciousness) serves as a degraded, unnuanced, modern equivalent of the gentler yet far more profound "annihilation of all that's made/ to a green thought ..." of Marvell and Antonioni. Compare the clunky literal rhythm of the blank, stereotypical trope of mortality in *Leaving Los Vegas* to the syncopated reeling of reality/fiction in its aesthetically and thematically treasure filled predecessor.

This integration and interplay of the aesthetic and thematic, of formal, material, and psychological levels, can also be seen in *Blow Up* in the very texture of the blown-up photograph, with its grainy particles that hint at the reconstruction of an uncertain and missing whole. Like the phenomena that Freud describes in his seminal essay, "The Uncanny," these grains of enlarged film (and other briefly snatched intimations of death) are "a coming to light" of connections which "should remain hidden." In the tale that Freud discusses (E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman"), there is of course an Oedipal drama at work, but one which may indeed be more primal, elemental, and mysterious than the highly structured, by now almost stereotypical, scenario that Freud himself alludes to. It is this drama which may also supply some of the subliminal force behind the grainy images of *Blow Up*. The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein has described an early disposition of the infant (which she calls the "paranoid-schizoid position") towards experiencing the mother as parts or fragments (e.g. breast, etc.) rather than as a whole: the rage the infant feels towards these not completely reliable parts can be experienced, through projection, as an external threat. This disposition gives way, at about six months of age, to the "depressive position," with its integration of split, or part, objects into a whole, now the whole person of the mother (and others, such as the father, as well), who are seen as often present and fulfilling, but, alas, often absent, frustratingly gone, lost, destroyed (either by external dangers or by the power of the infant's own aggressive impulses,

Las Vegas

producing guilt to go along with grief). Only when the swirling, fragmentary confusions of part objects are sufficiently integrated can this entirety be experienced as lost, dead, gone, grievable. With the feeling of loss and guilt comes the desire to restore and recreate the grieved object in both the external and the internal world. As Melanie Klein's interpreter, Hanna Segal, writes in "A Psychoanalytical Approach to Aesthetics" (*The Work of Hanna Segal*), Klein theorizes that "mourning in grown-up life is a reliving of the early depressive anxieties"; according to Segal, creative art is born out of the desire to restore "a once loved and once whole, but now lost and ruined object, a ruined internal world and self."¹ It is this desire to "re-create our world anew, reassemble the pieces,

From the beginning, the liberty of existential man and of the supposedly libertine alcoholic would seem to come together in the hero of *Leaving Las Vegas*, who sets a condition for his new-found enabler: "Never ask me to stop drinking." As Sera tells her shrink at the end of the film (the therapist is a virtual presence in Sera's backward-glancing monologues interspersed throughout the film, and occupies the place that a chorus would in a Greek tragedy—except that the therapist's incompetent non-response strips the encounter of any societal weight), Ben respected her free choice and she respected his. Yet this rather complacent conclusion seems to imply that, faced with Ben's determination to drink himself to death, Sera's only choices were

might have involved—as in the made-for-TV movie, *My Name Is Bill*, presenting the inaugural moment of Alcoholics Anonymous (where Bill meets Bob and draws back, rhetorically if not visually, while Bob then leans in)—her actively, ostentatiously refusing to change him, rather than simply passively tolerating, his not changing. Admittedly this is a tricky distinction, but a distinction nonetheless: instead of soppily agreeing not to ask him to stop drinking, she could have given him a paradoxical injunction: "If you stop drinking, you might not leave me enough time to work, and then we'll really have a problem"—a sort of "Please don't throw me in the briarpatch" approach familiar to readers of the Uncle Remus stories. Then again, taking

her needy dependency, either to live her own life or—such is the radical nature of true freedom—even return to live with him, no longer as a martyred participant in his dead-end game, but as a truly loving and accepting, while detached and independent, other.

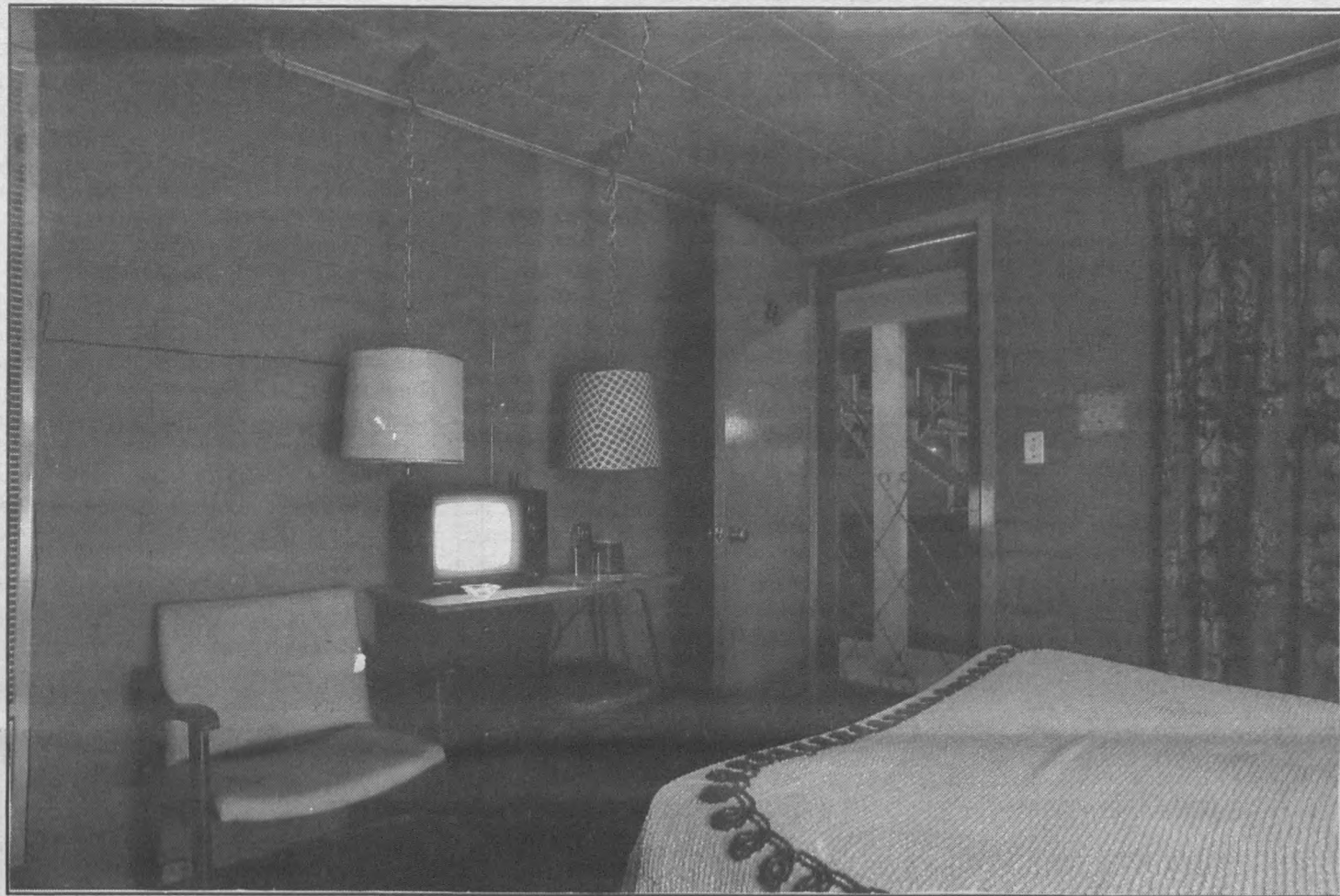
For Ben's part, the drive toward self-destruction, which fuels his decision to drink himself to death in Las Vegas, is admittedly part of the psychology of the alcoholic, or of any addict: self-hatred and low self-worth are important factors in compulsive disorders, and the repetition compulsion and death instinct are linked. But it is an over-simplification, indeed a misrepresentation, to portray addiction as an unambiguous, linear path to self-destruction. In a real-life alcoholic's consciousness, there is often a movement from the scattered to the whole, combined with the opposite movement of retreating from the (whole) pain of loss to the scatterings of dissolution—but never an unadulterated abundance of the negative, never the pure, unalloyed death instinct. Rather, there is always part of the self that would rather not be alcoholic, and always a quest for something more—or something other—than annihilation.

A key element in the mechanism of addiction to alcohol, or to other drugs, substances, people, or processes, as described by Gregory Bateson in his "Cybernetics of Self" (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind*) is the peculiar labyrinth of pride, the problematic attachment to the magic of power. The alcoholic's booze, or the gambler's betting, for example, is not merely—as in *Leaving Las Vegas*—seen by the addict as a compliant ally in his quest to embrace his own death; rather, there exists the all-important element of prideful competitiveness with the addictive substance, over which the addict believes himself to have control and mastery. Thus, an alcoholic will often quit for a period of time in order to prove to himself that he has mastered his compulsion—a starting and stopping that is part of the dialectic of the addictive repetition-compulsion. Just as with the codependent's "fits and starts" about getting fed up and walking out, the apparent oscillation from one pole to another serves ultimately to ensure that the addiction will continue. And so it will, until the addict comes, by one path or another, to a realization of his or her true powerlessness. Until forced by that realization from his or her central illusion, any "existential freedom" he or she might be seen to have to stop drinking—or even to "will" his or her own death—is equally illusory. Unfortunately, *Leaving Las Vegas* implicitly encourages its audience to follow Sera in her misguided, tragico-philosophical "respect" for this pseudo-liberty, rather than to grapple, as do both true art and good therapy, with the complex and paradoxical issues that inhere in addiction, compulsion, and the dilemmas of human freedom.

Endnote

1. Segal writes about how Marcel Proust, in the last volume of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, describes his returning "after a long absence to seek his old friends at a party, and all of them appeared to him as ruins of the real people he knew—useless, ridiculous ... [It was then that] he decided to write, to sacrifice himself to the re-creation of the dying and the dead." In like fashion, our Oedipal photographer in *Blow Up*, after experiencing both the presence-absence of the body of the older man in the photograph, and the appearance and disappearance of the fascinatingly beautiful woman to whom he is attracted (at one point she comes to his apartment to try to get the film back, and then frustratingly vanishes), is so changed as to perceive his old friends, whom he seeks out at a party, in a similar light of ruin and loss.

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(Photo by Gerd Kittel, reprinted from Southwest USA, Thames and Hudson, 1986)

Motel Coronado, Williams, Arizona

infuse life into dead fragments," this resolution of grains, dots, cobblestones, impressions left and absences felt, that is at the beating heart of mystery in *Blow Up*.

Such resolutions, sublimations, symbolizations may also perhaps reinforce Segal's hypothesis about the true work of art—that it is achieved by "a realization and sublimation of the depressive position." In order for artists truly to succeed in their quest for recreation and restoration, according to Segal, they "must acknowledge the death instinct, both in its aggressive and self-destructive aspects, and accept the reality of death ...". In contrast, the less successful work of art may indicate in part "the inability to acknowledge and overcome depressive anxiety." The failure, in *Leaving Las Vegas*, to create more than stereotypically repeated symbols such as the recurring blank black screen, may be related to such an inability.

In *Leaving Las Vegas*, the moment in which the aesthetic and psychological dimensions of the film presumably blend most completely is the concluding scene of Ben's death-agony. Yet this finale, presented as the existential choice of the alcoholic, the teleology of his disease, and as artistic and symbolic culmination, amounts to little more than shallow formalism, driven by the motor of stereotype (climax/culmination, sex-death-blank-void)—more a disavowal of death than a gritty grappling with it. Rather than being motivated from deep within the aesthetic logic of the film, or from within the logic of human psychology, it seems artistically and epistemologically unearned, a quick and easy way to get out of a film which, on the level of psychological truth, may have reached a (formalist) impasse.

to argue with him or to acquiesce in silence. The latter choice, in fact, is one which is all too often made by many real-life therapists as well as by society at large (including, evidently, the makers of this film). *Leaving Las Vegas*, for all its touted realism, courage, and respect for liberty, ultimately presents a banal and one-dimensional picture of alcoholism, death, and human freedom.

Had the therapist in the film not remained so smugly silent (this characterization of the therapeutic profession may be another aspect of the film's poverty of philosophy) when Sera speaks of how wonderful it was that she and Ben could have a relationship without her trying to change him, the therapist might have suggested choices that Sera had all along but of which she was unaware. Sera's uncritical, even proud, acceptance of Ben's behavior and his alcoholism is part of her pattern of not taking care of herself. (Witness, in this regard, the scene in which she is beaten by three boys: her brassiness with the boys, which seems so much like street-smart survival skills, is actually the opposite, the first move of the dance in which the boys continue to cruelly abuse her.) This characteristic is, one might add, shared by codependent and addict: the apparent brazen toughness of the addict is often just such an expression of low self-esteem and failure to provide for his/her own survival. In this, Sera and Ben are both making all the same moves in the same game, both compulsively repeating the past.

Had Sera been taking care of herself in her relationship with Ben, she might possibly have opened up the space for him to take care of himself. Taking care of herself

care of herself might have involved taking the same action as Jack Lemon's character in *Days of Wine and Roses*, when he finally decides to separate from his still-drinking wife. Although Sera does indeed walk out when she finds another woman in Ben's bed, that departure is only a brief interruption in a well-established pattern—as evidenced by her speedy return to his side as soon as he telephones her. Often a codependent's (or, equally, an addict's) apparent changes in behavior are actually the necessary moves to ensure the long-term continuance of just such behavior. By seeming to demonstrate that one has the power to stop the destructive game, one merely allows it to go on longer—a game whose bottom line is that one cannot "stay stopped." If Sera was going to walk out on Ben, she might more successfully have done so for the reason that she couldn't tolerate his continued drinking; instead, she allows herself to be manipulated into walking out for a reason that gives him no pause in his addictive behavior. Shortly before the "other woman" scene, Ben proposes to Sera that he leave the apartment to finish his drinking out of her sight—feeling, as he was, guilty, ashamed, and humiliated by her presence—but she shrugs off the idea. He then proceeds to bring about, by indirect means, at least their temporary separation.

Although Sera ultimately stays with the alcoholic to assuage her essential loneliness, had she faced and truly felt this loneliness by leaving Ben, as a part of her plan rather than as a participant in his, she might have been able, with the assistance of a less complicit therapist, perhaps, to transform

Deja-Voodoo Economics:

John P. Wolff

After years of protracted budget battles, New York State Governor George Pataki announced that he had a solution. Instead of submitting an executive budget for the State in the first week of April, he would provide one several weeks earlier in an effort to facilitate the negotiation process with the legislature. In recent times, Pataki argued, the disagreements over budget policy between legislators and the governor have resulted in a politicized process that serves no one. Members of both the Democratic-controlled Assembly and Republican-controlled Senate fully agreed. On December 15, 1995, amid much media fanfare, Governor Pataki

expected all along: more *trickle down* economics. While the proposal lacks details and is intended to be preliminary, its policy implications say much about Pataki's plans for the State.

Pataki justifies cuts in the state income tax with the argument that such cuts will stimulate economic growth. Similarly, his rationale for numerous reductions in government programs is that the money would be better spent if left in taxpayers hands.

But, contrary to Pataki's claims, the historical record indicates no direct relation between tax cuts and economic growth. Furthermore, the cuts in program spending result in cost and burden shifts from the state government to local governments. In the face of increasing demand

welfare of \$240 million, in mental health programs of \$470 million, and in agency cuts of \$359 million. Finally, the proposal would reduce higher education by \$265 million and school aid by \$190 million.

Pataki proposes to reserve \$100 million from State Lottery revenues for reducing school-based property taxes. This is nothing but a public relations ploy, however, since lottery revenues are already constitutionally required to be spent on public education. Thus, funds set aside for the purpose of tax relief that would otherwise have been used to pay for educational services will still leave a budget gap. Ironically, the \$100 million set aside for property tax relief will necessitate a property tax increase of \$100 million in the follow-

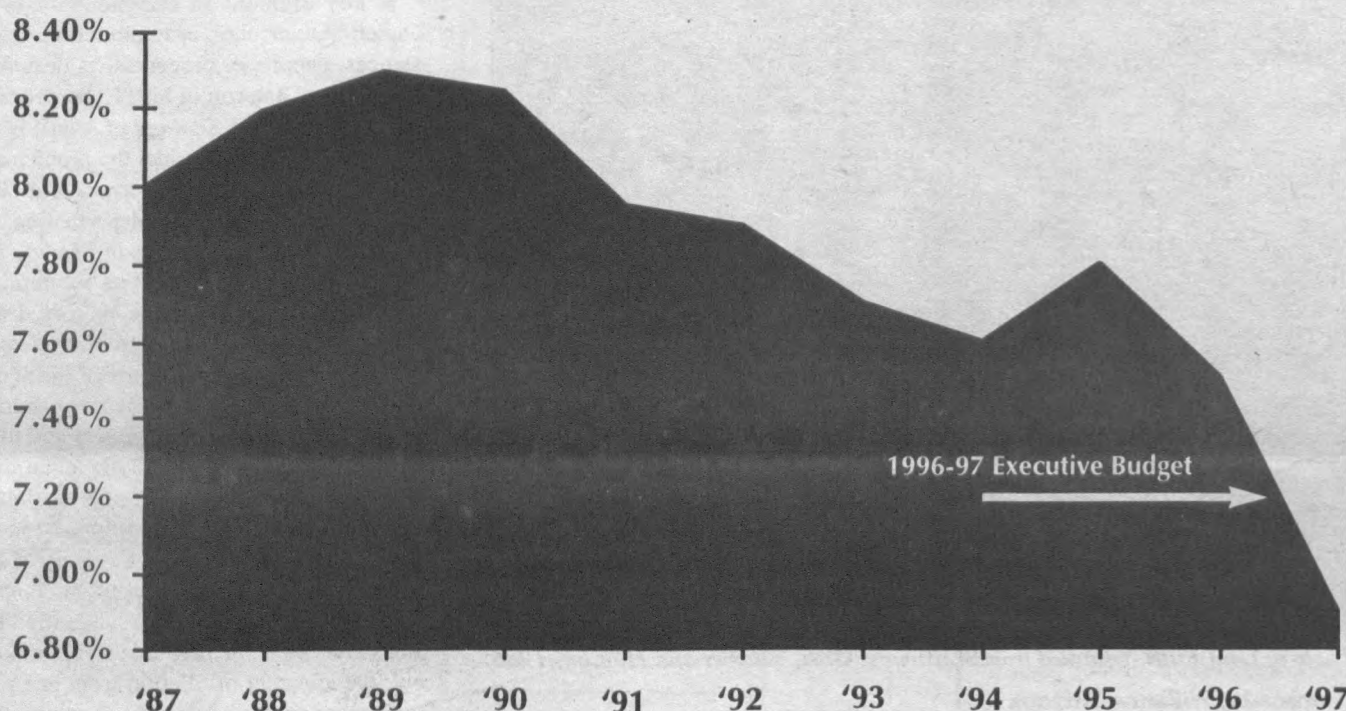
Shortfalls have resulted in large tuition increases. In 1990-1991, State support for public colleges was \$1.9 billion and covered 79 percent of operating costs. This year, Governor Pataki proposes \$265 million in cuts — \$317 million compared with projected need. Under these provisions, State support for higher education will decline to \$1.4 billion, covering only 54 percent of operating expenses. The SUNY/CUNY system will face a cut of \$298 million, and the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) will be reduced by \$119 million. To replace the full value of the cuts to SUNY and CUNY, tuition will have to be raised an additional \$700 per student per year on top of last year's \$750 increase. The governor also proposes to remove the cap on tuition increases, making it difficult to determine how each campus would manage the funding cuts and tuition increases. As a result of these increases, families in New York may be required to pay an additional \$2,000 for higher education. The result of last year's cost increase was clear: many students at the financial margin could no longer afford the cost of higher education and dropped out. Many SUNY/CUNY campuses experienced sharp decreases in student enrollment. This had an adverse economic impact on the schools and their surrounding communities.

The most damaging provisions of Pataki's budget are the \$2.3 billion in cuts to the Medicaid program, a state-federal program that provides health care services to poor families with children, disabled individuals, and the elderly. Cuts this dramatic will hurt not only those who rely on Medicaid for their health care, but the medical profession as well. Including federal and local interactions, the total loss of revenue to health care providers would be \$2.9 billion. A loss of this magnitude will cause a reduction in services, job losses in the health care industry, and damage to local economies. Among Pataki's cost containment proposals for Medicaid are two block grants to counties. Under the guise of reform, funding for home health care services and for the home relief population would be provided to counties as block grants. But the reductions in overall State spending would force counties to either raise local taxes or reduce services. For example, home health services would be underfunded by \$421 million, a shortfall that would lead to the collapse of nearly all home health care services in poorer counties and a substantial reduction of those services in more affluent areas.

Among the hardest hit by these provisions would be hospitals and nursing homes. Including losses attributable to indigent care as well as federal interactions, the funding loss to hospitals could reach \$1.4 billion. Of the 2.1 million elderly New York residents, 15 percent rely on Medicaid to help cover health care expenses. Since aged beneficiaries account for 34 percent of Medicaid expenditures, the elderly are likely to absorb the brunt of the cuts. To make matters worse, Governor Pataki does not propose to pass down to local jurisdictions the \$1.3 billion in anticipated increases in Federal funding for the Medicaid program. Thus, the counties will face the tough decisions of which

During the 1990s, State Spending for Current Services Has Dropped Sharply

Spending from all state funds for current services, as a percent of personal income.



(source: Fiscal Policy Institute)

released a preliminary budget to the Legislature for consideration.

With this early budget submission, Pataki promised a new direction for New York and a new, more efficient, budget-making process. Unfortunately for New Yorkers, there is nothing new about his proposals. His early budget is a gimmick designed to produce good public relations. The content of the budget, essentially a restatement of the proposals contained in his 1995 budget, suggests that Pataki is gearing up for another long budget battle. Most of the provisions of the 1995 budget were modified or eliminated by the Assembly when public outcry against Pataki's proposals provided the Democrats with new-found political muscle. Since last spring, however, Pataki has become more politically astute. He has learned to mask his intentions behind ambiguous and seemingly contradictory actions. A closer examination of this proposed budget reveals what we might have

for services but limited revenues, localities are forced to reduce services and raise property and sales taxes to pay for existing services. This increased taxation at the local level stands in blatant contradiction to the stated purpose of the governor's policies.

Highlights of Pataki's Budget

The budget process in New York this spring is being driven by the anticipated budget gap of \$3.9 billion in State fiscal year 1996-1997. New York is constitutionally required to balance the budget. To close this gap, Governor Pataki's executive budget submission proposes a number of one-shot revenue actions and massive spending cuts in various State programs.

The programs hardest hit are mental health programs, education, welfare, and Medicaid. In fact, a \$2.3-billion reduction in the Medicaid program accounts for 58 percent of the proposed savings. The budget also includes proposed reductions in

ing year, a net gain of zero for taxpayers.

Despite a nominal dollar increase in School Aid of \$27 million, Pataki's proposal would result in a cost increase to local property taxpayers of roughly \$491 million due to projected increases in enrollment, inflation, and other effects of his proposal. Under the provisions of his executive budget, the costs of several school programs are shifted from the State to local school districts and changes in school-aid formulas would result in a substantial increase in costs to local districts. The impact will be devastating to school districts trying to make up budget cuts of \$35 million for BOCES, \$72 million for pre-school education, \$37 million for special education, and \$51 million for summer education.

The governor's proposals regarding higher education reflects a similar cost-shifting pattern. Funding for public university systems and tuition assistance programs have been declining since 1989.

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The Pataki Budget

beneficiaries to serve when budget constraints preclude the provision of health care.

These cuts in funding for public education, higher education, and health care demonstrate a pattern. Funding for programs is reduced at the state level, creating a burden at the local level to either increase local funding or reduce services. It is important to keep in mind what these services represent. At stake are the quality of public schools, the ability of young people to pursue college, and the assurance that all citizens have access to quality health care. Because of State constitutional requirements, as well as moral obligations, localities will likely be required to raise property and sales taxes to make up for budget cuts. The alternative is not a viable option but may become a reality if local school districts are unable to school their children, low enrollment forces SUNY schools to close their doors, and people in need of health care are denied services.

The Result is Higher Property and Sales Taxes

Governor Pataki's proposal, however extreme, is a reflection of the fiscal reality facing the State. The \$3.9 billion shortfall in the State budget constitutes a budget crisis that must be dealt with. Pataki's assumption is that the budget shortfall is due to excessive taxation. Another assumption is that a reduction in the size of the government will lead to an improvement in the State's economy. Accordingly, Pataki proposes an additional reduction of 7,400 positions in the State workforce, not including layoffs in the SUNY/CUNY system.

The facts, however, contradict the governor's assumptions regarding the size of the State government. It is true that the number of nominal dollars spent by the State government has grown over the past few decades. However, nominal dollar spending does not provide an accurate picture of growth; the economy and population of the State have also increased tremendously. A more accurate way to measure the size of government is to determine the level of spending for current services as a percentage of all personal income in the State. Using this measure, the size of the State government peaked at a level of about 8.3 percent of the New York economy in 1989. Since 1989, however, the relative size of the government has been shrinking. In 1994, the size had declined to just above 7.6 percent. Under Pataki's plan, the size of the State government would decrease to just under 7.3 percent.

The other half of Pataki's argument is equally dubious. According to the supply-side economic principles that Pataki embraces, a reduction of taxes will result in economic growth and activity-generating tax revenues. The underlying assumption is that the income tax burden is the cause of New York's stagnant rate of economic growth. Again, the facts contradict this assumption.

In 1988, State tax revenues as a percentage of percentage of personal income reached a peak of almost 8.0 percent. Since then, the figure has declined to 6.8 percent in 1995. Over the past two

decades, the top marginal income tax rates have actually decreased. In 1976, the top marginal rate in New York State was over 15 percent for both earned income and investment income. During the terms of Hugh Carey and his successor, Mario Cuomo, the top marginal tax rates were lowered on numerous occasions over the course of several budget battles. The top marginal tax rate reached a low of 9 percent in 1989 and has not been increased since. It is important to note that despite a large tax cut in 1989, and another in 1994, there is no data or even anecdotal evidence to suggest that the economy experienced additional growth as a result of tax cuts. In fact, in 1989, following the cuts, New York

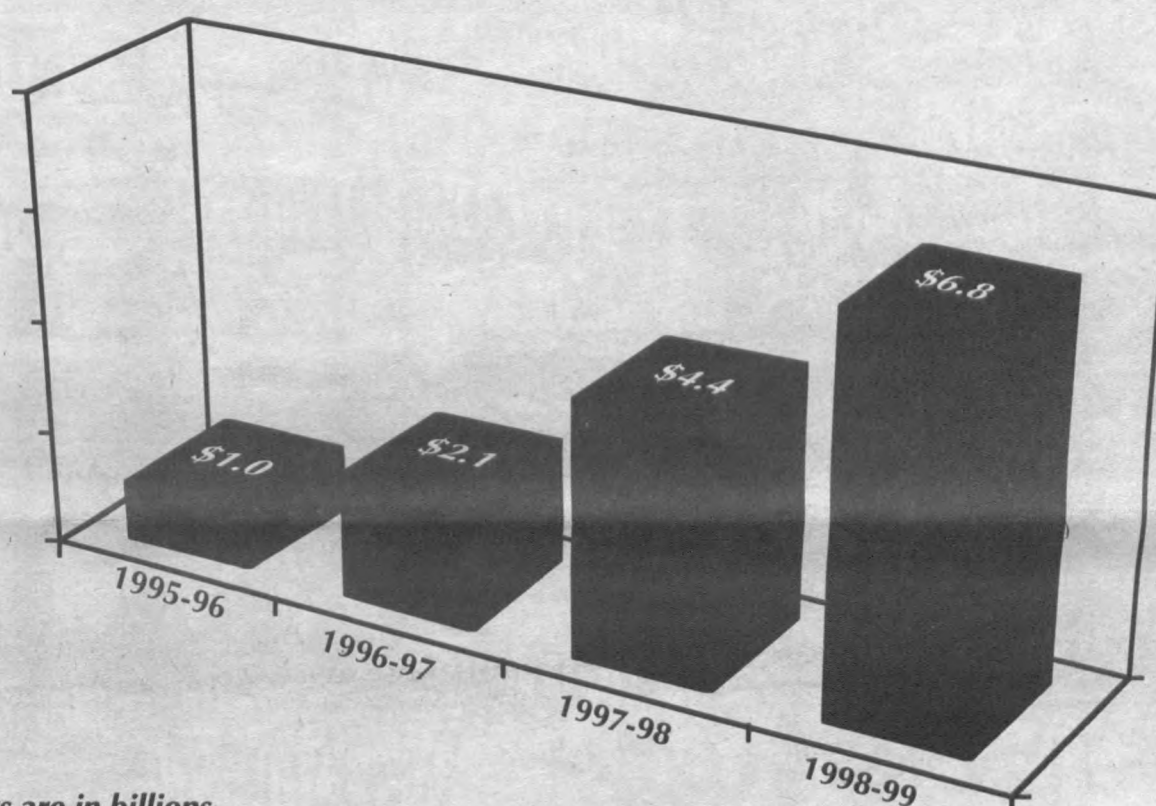
collected from middle and lower income families rather than from wealthier individuals, New York's income tax became regressive. In 1992, wealthier individuals were paying far less in taxes as a percentage of their income compared to lower income families. A family of four with an income of under \$16,000 paid 15.3 percent of their income in taxes, while a family of four making about \$63,000 paid 12.1 percent of their income in taxes. A family making \$1.26 million in income paid only 8.9 percent of their income in taxes. Compounding this effect, lower income tax revenues led to increases in other, more regressive taxes, particularly property and sales taxes.

A second consequence of the income

Increases in property taxes have been a prime cause of the mass exodus of New York residents to other states. (New York's population stays relatively stable due to the influx of immigrants.) This process has been ongoing since tax cuts implemented under Governor Cuomo in 1987. Since then, the rate of growth of personal income tax revenues has been stagnant while revenues from property taxes have grown faster than the economy. The likely effects of Pataki's budget would be to exacerbate this problem.

The second round of Pataki's tax cut will further reduce available revenues. Each year, the budget process is driven by the need to meet budget shortfalls. As the governor and legislature lock into

The Pataki Tax Cut Time Bomb Annual Cost of Gov. Pataki's Income Tax Cuts



Numbers are in billions.

(source: Fiscal Policy Institute)

began a recessionary slide.

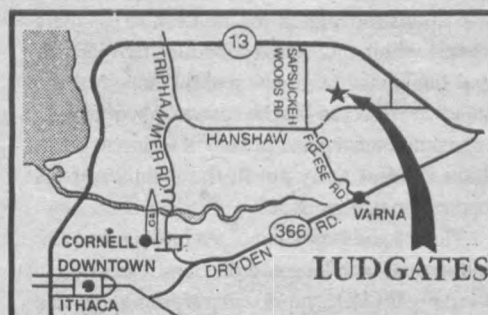
Some economists argue that tax cuts exacerbate adverse economic tendencies. As the theory goes, government expenditures create an expansionary economic effect since the types of things the State spends money on — transfer payments, roads and infrastructure, and education — have a positive impact, not only in terms of immediate employment but by laying the groundwork for further economic development in the private sector. Therefore, reducing these government expenditures has a constrictive effect on the economy. Economic data from 1976 through 1994 support this perspective. The number of jobs in New York State increased steadily from 1976 through 1989, then declined sharply following 1989.

Tax cuts in the '80s and '90s have also had two other important effects. First, as a greater portion of income taxes were

tax reductions were revenue shortfalls that led to chronic gaps in the State budget. The 1994 tax cuts under Governor Cuomo resulted in a projected decrease of \$1.4 billion in revenue in fiscal year 1996-1997, while the 1995 tax cuts under Governor Pataki will result in an additional decrease of almost \$2.4 billion, for a total of \$3.8 billion in lost revenues. About 40 percent of this figure results from tax cuts to families making over \$100,000 per year. This raises serious issues of equity. While reducing state taxes on the more affluent by \$3.8 billion, Governor Pataki is forcing local jurisdictions to either cut vital services or else to raise local property taxes by \$3.9 billion. Property taxes and sales taxes are the prime source of income for local governments, and they are also the most regressive. Property taxes are no longer a fair method of taxation since land is no longer an accurate measure of wealth.

negotiations, long-term planning takes a back seat to political expediency. The politicized nature of recent budget debates has made it difficult for leaders in Albany to see beyond the quick fix necessary to pass the budget, with little discussion of its long term effects. Each year, one-shot measures and cost shifts get the state off the hook by passing the buck to localities, especially in the areas of public education and Medicaid spending. The result is higher property and sales taxes. This year promises more of these same regressive and punitive policies, despite the governor's early submission of an executive budget. It is clear from the provisions of his budget that it will have an adverse effect on the fiscal health of the state.

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The Left: What Is to Be Done Now?

continued from page 1

explains its appeal to the Book-of-the-Month Club. Gitlin's tone often expresses disdain and extreme pessimism, trivializing the concerns of those who engage in identity politics and ignoring any positive signs of Left potential or resurgence. And in the end, he offers no strategy for building a broad Left, only an admonition to return to Enlightenment values.

Certainly, you can find in this book some useful critiques of right-wing attacks on the Left. As Catherine Stimpson noted in her review in *The Nation*, "When he begins to echo the rhetoric of the right about the left, he quickly switches and hits out at the right as well." The book is frustrating to read and to review because it is not a systematic analysis of identity politics or "common dreams," or how to rebuild the Left. It is a series of loosely connected essays in which ideas

aristat group after another; "common dreams" gave way to "identity politics." It is Gitlin's contention that the "retreat" into identity politics by those focused on issues such as feminism, gay rights, and Black nationalism has caused a debilitating fragmentation that has rendered the Left largely ineffectual, even non-existent: "There is no *it* there. What we have instead is an ill-fitting sum of groups only concerned with protecting and purifying what they imagine to be their identities."

Gitlin characterizes the emergence of identity politics as a deep psychological impulse that "ragged through 'the movement' with amazing speed. On the model of [B]lack demands came those of feminists, Chicanos, American Indians, gays, lesbians." Although he acknowledges that some of these groups may have had legitimate grievances against discrimination within the Left, he argues that "the separatist dynamic at work was more than strictly reactive." Separate groups "soon

experienced by those who left the white male-dominated New Left to form their own groups. His recurrent references to members of feminist or gay or multicultural groups' separatist "raptures" and their "preoccupation" with their "inner life" and their "own narrow interests" trivializes them. He shifts his focus almost immediately from the political movements of the '60s and early '70s to the campus programs of the late '80s and '90s, which become his definitions of "feminism" and "multiculturalism." Thus we find Gitlin criticizing "the Left" for focusing on the realm of language instead of the "real" world, for "marching on the English Department," and for treating "culture as surrogate politics, campus as surrogate world." On the other hand, Gitlin echoes Patai and Koertge's (*Professing Feminism*, Basic Books) criticism of Women's Studies programs for actually giving academic credit to student

of rebuilding the Left seems to require that we forget the last 20 years like a bad dream.

Bad History and Left Invisibility

Gitlin's version of Left history ends in 1975 with the "universal Left ... pulverized." Certainly the Left changed significantly after 1975, but not because of Black nationalism and feminism. In 1975 the Vietnam war came to a close, and *therefore the anti-war movement ended*, and with it, any national mass mobilization on the left. However, even with the end of the anti-war movement, there was more going on after 1975 than the identity politics which Gitlin blames for the demise of the Left. Though racially divided, Black and white groups continued to work in coalitions, such as opposition to apartheid in South Africa. What replaced the white, male-dominated "universal" Left praised by Gitlin was not total fragmentation but multiple overlapping efforts by various progressive groups and organizations.

In the very San Francisco Bay Area where Gitlin lived, there was an extremely active off-campus Left that seriously struggled to be feminist, antiracist, anti-homophobic, environmentalist and internationalist, and to figure out how to relate to labor. This Left included New American Movement chapters that later merged into Democratic Socialist of America locals, San Francisco and East Bay Socialist Schools, African liberation support groups, Latin American solidarity groups, Gay Rights marches, publication collectives, conferences, lecture series, demonstrations, not to mention participation in lobbying, voter registration, local elections and the Jackson campaign.

In Gitlin's Berkeley apparently none of this happened. We wouldn't claim that these activities added up to a mass movement. But in terms of consciousness and action about class, race, gender, sexual preference and the environment, it was a tremendous improvement over the "universal" white male-dominated Left whose demise Gitlin mourns. Those of us who have been active in Left politics during the last 20 years know that in many communities besides Berkeley there were and are active progressive networks and activities broader than identity politics (many of them now networked on the Internet), but no one is going to learn any of this from Gitlin's book, where such efforts are reduced to a narrowly selected, disdainfully described campus "left." In the end, Gitlin's "analysis" only provides grist for the mainstream media: Look, here's an ex-head of SDS who says that most "leftists" are engaged in petty, self-serving name-calling, instead of dealing with real problems.

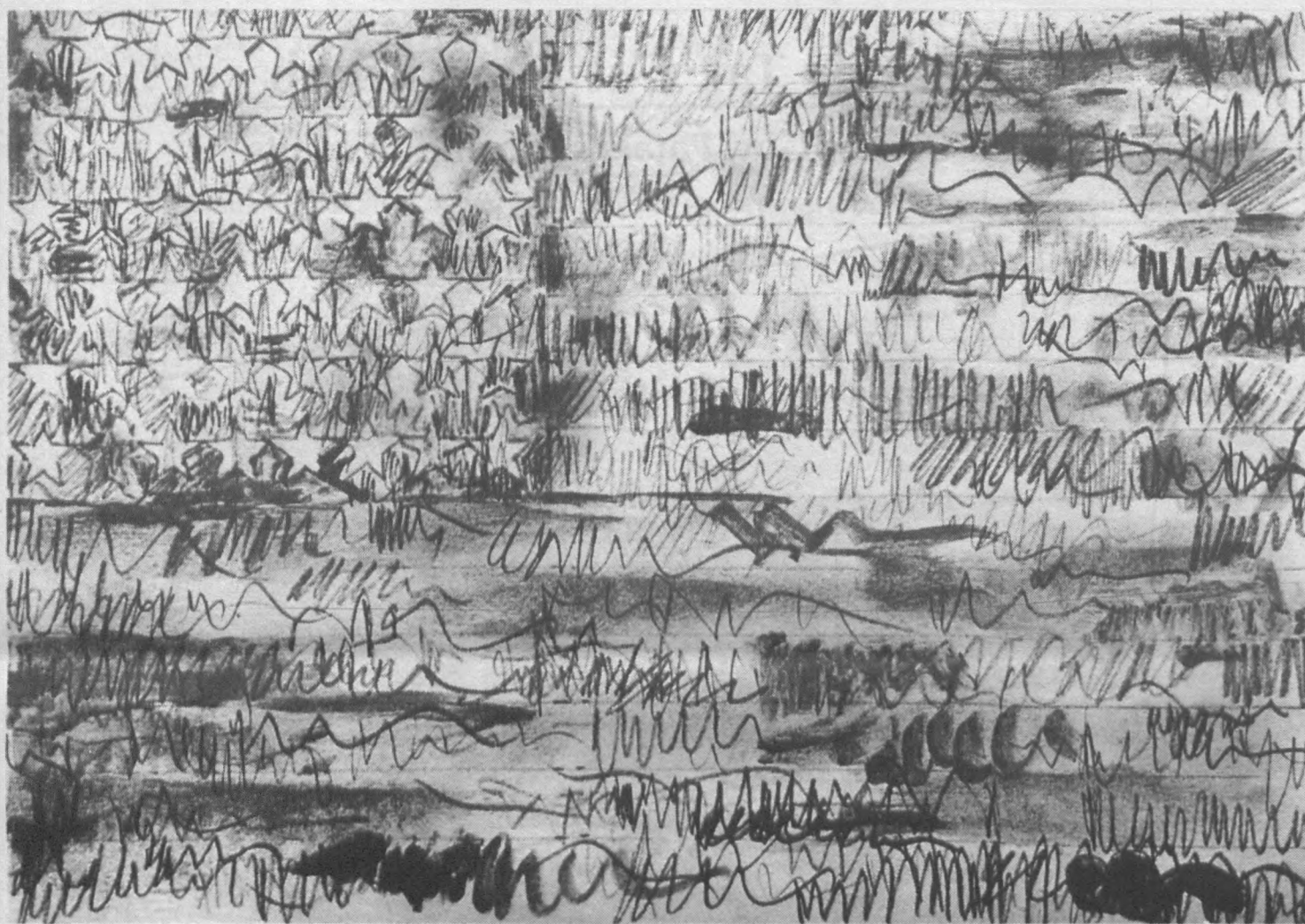
"Liberal Democratic Americanism" for All

After placing the blame for the decline of the "universal" Left with identity politics and postmodernism, Gitlin proposes a return to the ideals of the Enlightenment—freedom and equality—as written into American political practice by the Founding Fathers. But the limitation of the Founding Fathers' "liberal democratic Americanism" that Gitlin offers as our hope for the future is that it locates tyranny only in the state and the church. It locates the economy and economic relations in the realm of freedom, the "private" realm, and therefore provides no justification or guidance for combatting the power of capitalism over our lives. When even the *New York Times* runs a front-page series on downsizing that talks repeatedly about the power of corporate capitalism to shape (and destroy) people's lives, and *Times*' columnist Bob Herbert calls for "a campaign to address the tyrannical power of the great corporations, we need to look elsewhere than Gitlin's book for any help in building a broad-based, vital Left.

Acting Left

We see signs that at the same time mass fear and anger at corporate ravaging of the economy are growing, thereby creating potentially favorable conditions for support for the Left, so too more people within the "hodgepodge" of Left identity and single-interest groups see that individual and group interests can best be advanced by recognizing common concerns instead of trying to be, as Lani Guinier aptly put it, the "winner of the oppression sweepstakes."

There is the beginning of a rebirth in the labor movement, with long overdue new leadership in the AFL-CIO. Organized labor's progressive role is returning after a long and devastating post-World War II decline in labor militancy, fueled



Flag, by Jasper Johns

(reprinted from Jasper Johns, Harry N. Abrams, Inc.)

appear and reappear, but in which coherent arguments are not developed.

"Universalism" vs. "Identity Politics"

In Gitlin's words, "this book is about the fates of two ideas: that of America as a force for freedom, and that of the Left as a force for equality ... our secular twentieth century has known two great universalizing passions...on the one side, liberal democratic Americanism; on the other, socialism ... Today, both are damaged—one fatally, the other perhaps not." Having consigned Marxism and socialism to the trashbin of history, Gitlin turns to "liberal democratic Americanism" as our only hope for a better future.

In Gitlin's view of American history, the Founding Fathers established "America as a force for freedom" by writing Enlightenment ideals into the Constitution, thereby establishing the basis for originally excluded groups to claim equal rights and equal freedoms. He starts the book with a quotation from Frederick Douglass embodying this position: "The slaveholder, were he kind or cruel, was a slaveholder still, the every-hour violator of the just and inalienable rights of man, and he was therefore every hour silently but surely whetting the knife of vengeance for his own throat. He never lisped a syllable in commendation of the fathers of the republic without inviting the sword, and asserting the right of rebellion for his own slaves." The best strategy for any oppressed group, in Gitlin's view, and the one he sees as historically pursued by a united American Left, is to claim equal access to these "universal" rights, and thus to extend freedom and equality, bit by bit, to all.

But in the late '60s, he argues, this universalist strategy was replaced by the formation of one sep-

discovered the rapture of declaring psychic independence," quickly hardened their boundaries and turned inward into "purifying" their "imagined" identities. This "New Left politics of separatist rage" was carried into the academy and "institutionalized (or interred)" there, so that by "1975, the universalist Left was thoroughly defeated—pulverized, in fact." In its place, identity politics infused with postmodernism reigned, and feminists and multiculturalists were arguing over language, substituting "affirmative action...for economic reconstruction," and "marching on the English Department" while the Right was taking the White House.

But Gitlin offers no economic or political analysis, no alternative organizational strategy for the Left. From time to time he asserts the need to combat economic inequality and particularly the inequality between whites and African-Americans, the "central wound" in American society. He asserts that to wage this battle we need "the emergence of a vital Left..." but not, presumably, a Marxist or socialist Left, since with the "collapse of Communism" and the "crisis ... of European social democracy ... [d]efenders of some Platonic ideal of a Left have only a tattered flag to wave, and are today, like their counterparts on the Right, more adept at vituperation against their enemies than at reflecting upon, let alone practicing, human arrangements that would make life more supportable and dignified for humanity at large." Nor can this necessary "vital Left" draw any lessons or strengths from identity politics. The emergence of a vital Left "is precisely what is thwarted by the obsession with group difference."

Gitlin's account of the origins of identity politics egregiously understates the oppression

interns engaged in off-campus activism with community organizations. So "marching on the English department" is only a literary device for trashing all identity politics whether on or off campus.

Missing the Point

Even more significant than the contradictions and confusions in Gitlin's criticisms of identity groups is that he seems to miss the main point of feminist or nationalist or multiculturalist politics. Such groups developed out of the New Left not merely to pursue their own "interests" or to demand equal rights, but to change *everyone's* understanding of American and world history and current social relations. They posed theoretical challenges and demanded "paradigm" changes, insisting that white males think differently not just about "others" but about themselves. It was the refusal by members of dominant groups to change their behavior—or even to acknowledge any problems—that led Black nationalists and women and gays to form their own organizations.

In Gitlin's book, these alternative perspectives are as invisible as they were in the 1960s New Left. The syntheses of feminist theory and practice that have deeply transformed most of the Left are never even alluded to; for Gitlin, "feminists" went directly from seeking "the rights and powers guaranteed for all by the Enlightenment" to "a preoccupation with the inner life of feminism and the distinct needs of feminists." The political and intellectual work that has been done toward a multicultural perception of society is dismissed by Gitlin as a waste of time, a distraction from organizing "against rock-bottom class inequalities and racial discrimination." Gitlin's idea

by the adoption by the major union hierarchy of anti-communism as a tool to eliminate the most active organizers advocating broad union democracy and opposing labor racketeers, and manifest in the AFL-CIO's support for overt and covert U. S. wars against the peoples of Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic and Cuba. The recent demonstration called by the Syracuse Labor Council on the occasion of a visit by Newt Gingrich was impressive in its size, enthusiasm, and call for solidarity with a broad range of social movements. In addition to the obvious need to put resources into the organization of new workers, there is a stated commitment to a new politics of social solidarity and economic justice. Those who are working to rebuild the house of labor are winning the internal battles against the longstanding racism and sexism within its ranks.

Among African-Americans there is a growing movement toward a race-conscious class strategy, which is directed toward broad economic benefit but insistent on recognition of the obstacles posed by racism toward achieving that goal. (In April, South End Press will publish *Beyond Identity Politics: Emerging Social Justice Movements in Communities of Color*, edited by John Anner, and commended by Salim Muwakkil, who is currently the best reason for reading *In These Times*.) A recent meeting sponsored by the Feminist Majority Foundation brought 3000 young feminists together with veterans of the women's movement in defense of affirmative action and other feminist issues under attack. They called for a Freedom Summer '96 in which college women will try to "save women's rights and civil rights." In the words of one young feminist, "the Republicans have done us a tremendous favor by trying to turn back the clock. They've galvanized a new generation. We have our own ideas about what is important. A lot of what we're talking about are class issues and race issues." Many participants in the environmental movement recognize that their long-range goals can only be achieved in a less corporate-dominated society, and it is clear that there is a broad consensus on the Left for the need to protect the environment.

Joel Rogers' "How Divided Progressives Might Unite," in the March/April 1995 issue of *new left review* offers some potentially fruitful ideas for where we might go from here. As Rogers says, "Progressives can make a list and ensure each other of their sincerity in embracing all these values and concerns. But ideology is not about lists—it is about giving people enough of a common view that they are willing to do things with each other." What we need as a starting place, we believe we already have within our grasp—a "good enough" common view made up of overlapping perspectives, a willingness to gamble that people with different concerns can still understand one another well enough to develop and work toward common goals. No, of course we don't understand other peoples' experiences the way we understand our own. But that doesn't mean that I can't understand your viewpoint, your needs, your interests well enough to work with you, to stand with you, to fight for you. With time and effort and "good enough" trust, we might even be able to forge a transformed common consciousness—for if a common theory is going to come from anywhere, it will come from our common practice.

So what might that common practice be? Rogers aims big, at projects that could be pursued throughout the country, and each is worth serious discussion. His first proposal is "Democracy Now," state and eventual federal reform "that would aim to equip all citizens with the tools (rights, remedies, organizational resources) they need to practice democracy under twentieth-century circumstances ... the broad goal ... would be (hey, why aim small?) a new, refurbished, truly democratic civic infrastructure for life in these United States. "If, as progressives, we do genuinely believe, in Rogers' words, that "people of ordinary means and intelligence, if properly organized and equipped, can govern themselves, and that if they do the results will be better than if they do not," then an increase in democracy would have to be good for progressives and our political goals, and good for the broader society.

Rogers' second proposal is "Sustainable America," organizing to turn around the low-wage restructuring currently underway by challenging corporate power through a more democratic state. Key to any such project is the understanding that the current

pattern of restructuring is the result of political choices, not economic or technologically determined "necessities." As C. Wright Mills said a long time ago, we know that someone is making crucial decisions about our lives, and we know that it isn't us. *That*, not technology, is the problem. If technological development means that fewer labor hours are needed to produce the goods we "need," then layoffs are a *management choice*. Cutting the work day or week while maintaining living wage levels is a better choice for workers and for the society as a whole; it just isn't as great for super profits.

Finally, Rogers calls for the formation of a New Party, an organized progressive party to contest elections, raise issues in a sustained way, tie together progressives across time and distance, and, not least important, "pressure the Democrats and Republicans toward actually representing the interests of ordinary Americans. "Recognizing the tremendous difficulties that our electoral system poses for new parties, Rogers suggests—as have other "third party" advocates—that such a party could start by focusing on local elections.

We believe that all three of these proposals—in the fuller detail provided by Rogers—deserve serious discussion. We need to keep in mind the "longer view," that if the Left is to have any meaning, it must have as a goal the eventual replacement of capitalism with a truly democratic social order. But what we need to work for in the near future in U.S. politics is a broad left-based coalition that can win electoral victories, and the first step toward that is to build a transformed Left movement that is itself fairly broad in definition.

Locally, we see the beginnings of people coming together in new forms, such as the Coalition for Children First/Bias-Free Schools and the recently-formed Justice for All, that could grow into a powerful local Left movement. The Coalition embodies the kind of organization we've tried to describe: one that brings people together across the lines of "identity politics" to pursue common goals of justice in structures that enable people to build bonds by working together. We hope others can learn from their experience, and that the Coalition itself might join with a larger Left. Justice for All attracted almost 150 people to its Town Speak Out, focusing on the state and federal budgets and the Right's economic attacks on working people, the poor, children, the elderly—all of us who aren't rich. Its media committee is working on ways to create additional local sources of alternative information and analysis. Its Justice Summer '96 committee is beginning plans for voter education and registration. Justice for All has the potential to grow and build a genuinely universalist Left movement if its current members work seriously and determinedly to reach beyond groups now represented. Perhaps opportunities for more collaboration and connection will come from campaigns in the May Ithaca School Board election. Certainly, in order to fight on the state and federal budget fronts as well as for other progressive issues, we must re-elect the two very progressive Democrats representing us in the Assembly and Congress, Marty Luster and Maurice Hinchey (despite disagreement with his opposition to the "assault weapons" ban). They both need our vigorous support to fight off right-wing challenges in this year's elections and we urge all local progressives to join in that support.

We're not socialist polyannas. These are tough times, but they are potentially transformative times. We need what we have always needed in the long haul of Left politics: passion, perseverance, humor—and singing and dancing to keep our spirits up! The danger that fearful Americans will buy into right-wing scapegoating of the powerless as a "solution" to their economic problems is real. But so is the possibility that a revitalized Left can attract a majority of Americans fearful for their futures in a profit-driven system. We believe that *if we build it*—a politically identifiable, potentially powerful, genuinely universalist Left—they will come. But if we are to build it, we must begin by talking and listening to each other. We must learn to hear each others' stories, to feel each others' rage, to fight each others' fights *as our own*.

Judith Van Allen and Ben Nichols are now, or have been, active in (almost) every organization or movement mentioned in this article. They live, together, in Ithaca, New York. (e-mail: bn15@cornell.edu)

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My Mother's Walk

Today
 With your wide-brimmed hat of smiles
 You emerge from the house
 Leaving behind
 The flowers of the poet
 The sad little flowers of the past
 And of little sins so green
 That grow alongside
 Words in the solarium
 Next to the cacti
 Violets
 Ivy

Going out now
 To the crazy breeze
 And the stained leaves
 And the showering sun
 Your steps retrace
 The past and the future —

In this leaf I see my country
 In this one my mother's countenance
 And in the midst of all this greenery
 Where is the smile for me?

There
 Outside my neighbors' houses
 I see regular yards
 With colored flowers
 That reflect the tastes of that one
 But where are my daughters' sentiments
 And plans?

There comes the breeze
 Running in-between grass fingers
 Shaking up the rows of tulips
 The brim of my hat
 And there my house
 With its singular arrangements
 Daffodils by the doorstep
 Sewn by the sun

And now I enter my house
 My room of words
 And see there
 Underneath the window
 The garden of my protests

And I feed them water
 I offer them my promises.
 — Francesca Breton

Faithful

Faithless words I had collected scattered
 and escaped me. Every word must

Have its say, they argued: some pronounced
 a gloomy sentence; some were beautiful

shining in their leather sheathes, arranging
 tragic assignments; some were my allies

others old temptations. Ancient words I heard
 and the modern words of madmen, words

of naive genius newly pressed from petals,
 the wild words that people purchase like a cure

for the disease of words. Words clustered
 and ripened at the apex, metasized

in the abyss, words multiplied like murderers
 in my ears, and divided the grains from the wheat

waiting at the ports to feed the hungry. Words were
 selling words, were buying a winter's worth

wearing the names of numbers, wearing the smiles
 of liars. Nothing but a contract spelled in blood

means much, I said, and had to eat those words.
 Only politicians can survive on such a diet.

Poets distrust words, I said, and we have been
 betrayed by them, maligned and sometimes

magnified by words that survive us.
 I know not one wise word is ever what it seems.

The wisest of all is a sign which only the faithful
 can interpret, who believe already they live

like words in the middle of air.
 — Peter Fortunato

Sacraments

DANCING AFTER HOURS
 by Andre Dubus
 Knopf, 234 pages, \$23.00

Jon Michaud

It was *Broken Vessels*, a collection of essays, that first made me admire Andre Dubus, a writer best known for his short stories. The first half of *Broken Vessels* contains essays on a variety of topics, from baseball to family to religion and writing. These are marvelous, elegant essays, and worth every reader's attention. But it was the second half of the book—in which Dubus describes the aftermath of an automobile accident that cost him his legs—that really got my attention. You could not help but sense that writing these essays was a matter of life and death for Dubus. What is most remarkable about them is that they display his unswerving affection for the world and its objects—an affection that appears to have been sweetened rather than soured by the horrific experience he endured. "I am forever a cripple," he writes in "Light of the Long Night," "but I am alive, and I am a father and a husband, and in 1987 I am sitting in the sunlight of June and writing this."

Broken Vessels was published in 1992 and there have been no new books from Dubus since. Until now. Knopf has just published *Dancing After Hours*, his first book of new stories in a decade. In these stories, Dubus picks up where the essays in *Broken Vessels* left off.

One of the pleasures of the short story form is that it is loosely defined. The boundaries that separate the poem from the short story and the short story from the novel are vague at best, and often invisible. In *Dancing After Hours*, Dubus offers stories from both ends of this spectrum. The shortest story in the book, "At Night," is barely two pages long and is written in the compact, cadenced language of a poem. In it, an elderly woman wakes to discover that her husband, who lies beside her, has just passed away:

She rolled toward him and touched his face, and she wept for what it had done to him, crept up and taken him while he slept and dreamed. Maybe it came out of a dream and the dream became it. Wept, lying on her side, with her hand on his cheek, because he had been alone with it, surprised, maybe confused now as he wandered while the birds sang, seeing the birds, seeing her lying beside his flesh, touching his cheek, saying: "Oh, hon—"

Elsewhere in the collection there are four stories that feature Ted Briggs, a veteran of the Vietnam War; three of these stories also feature LuAnn Arceneaux, the woman who becomes his wife. It's possible to see these stories as chapters from a novel about their marriage—but that would be missing the point. Each story stands on its own and is not directly connected to the others save by the characters' names. In fact, all of the pieces in *Dancing After Hours*—with the exception of the opening story—are linked by geography and a recurring set of themes. They all occur in Massachusetts, either in or near Boston. They all feature characters concerned with moral dilemmas of a kind that get short shrift in literary fiction these days: fidelity, guilt, and the nature of sin. In "Falling in Love," a woman breaks up with her lover when he tries to persuade her against having an abortion. In "The Colonel's Wife," a retired military officer is forced to come to terms with the ways he has failed his wife. In "The Timing of Sin," a woman must decide whether to commit adultery. In

"The Last Moon," a woman plots to murder her husband. Dubus is a Catholic writer, and he has produced a suite of stories that should be read together in the way that we read a suite of stories by another Catholic writer: Joyce's *Dubliners*.

But Dubus' religious concerns do not prevent his characters from taking pleasure in the sensible world. One of the joys of this collection is that the men and women in it eat and drink heartily; they make love; they watch deer standing by a lake; they smell the snow as it falls around them; they listen to music; they masturbate and dance and exercise. They enjoy being alive, even though their lives may not always be happy. Preparing breakfast for her family, LuAnn Arceneaux thinks,

...the essence of life was in the simplest of tasks, and in kindness to the people in your life. Watching the brown sugar bubbling in the light of the flames, smelling it and the cinnamon, and listening to her family talking about snow, she told herself that this toast and oatmeal were a sacrament, the physical form that love assumed in the moment, as last night's lovemaking was, as most of her actions were. When she was able to remember this and concentrate on it, she knew the significance of what she was doing...

Dubus has written about this before in his essay "On Charon's Wharf":

I believe in love's possibility, in its presence on the earth; as I believe I can approach the altar on any morning of any day which may be the last and receive the touch that does not, for me, say: There is not death; but does say: In this instant, I recognize, with you, that you must die. And I believe I can do this in an ordinary kitchen with an ordinary woman and five eggs...we are not simply eating; we are pausing in the march to perform an act together; we are in love; and the meal offered and received is a sacrament which says: I know you will die; I am sharing food with you; it is all I can do, and it is everything.

It is a measure of the power of the stories in *Dancing After Hours* that they offer the same kind of solace as the sacraments described in their pages. One can't help but think that this sensitivity, present in his earlier stories, was made more acute by Dubus' accident and injuries. At a reading in March, Dubus said, "We are all cripples, but only some of us come to know it." These stories are populated by wounded characters. Ted Briggs walks with a cane because of shrapnel received at Khe Sanh. There is a sexually abused girl in "The Timing of Sin" and a man in a wheelchair in the title story. The colonel in "The Colonel's Wife" is severely injured from a riding accident. Dubus leaves little doubt that his characters' appreciation of the world's pleasures has its origins in their pain. The colonel says to his wife: "I'm glad that damned horse fell on me. It made me lie still in one place and look at you."

In the title story, which comes at the end of the book and seems to gather all of the book's themes, a woman thinks about love. She sees it as "something ineffable that comes from outside and fills us; something that changes the way we see what we see; something that allows us to see what we don't." This is also an apt description of the stories collected in *Dancing After Hours*.

Jon Michaud lives in Brooklyn.

The Truth Has A Long Fuse

continued from page 3

but that it was destroyed by unknown means about 300 to 400 miles to the south, off the shore of Honshu, Japan's main island, and over three quarters of an hour later than the "official" U.S. line alleged.

Among the many questions Brun's work poses is that while U.S. and perhaps Japanese intelligence had to have known at the time where KAL 007 was destroyed, apparently no search-and-rescue operation was conducted for the passengers and crew. In fact, so far as the lay world knows, the wreckage and bodies never have been located—this despite Brun's book, two official investigations, and numerous media attempts—all frustrated by a conspiratorial cover-up, claims Brun. Indeed, how and why the plane was destroyed remain open questions, writes Brun. For that matter, if the plane was, per the official U.S. party line, just innocently off course by some 300 miles in the skies over the Sea of Okhotsk, how come the U.S. air controllers tracking the plane didn't warn the crew? It remains an open question, of course, unless you accept that the plane indeed was on a spy mission.

Besides his own investigation, including actually searching Japanese beaches himself for debris, Brun has analyzed all the records and reports of the U.S., Russian, Korean, and Japanese governments and the June 1993 report of the International Civil Aviation Organization (a U.N. entity).

Brun's book makes very onerous reading for the layman. To follow his meticulous analysis of navigational and minute time discrepancies among the various transcripts and reports is a daunting task, rivaling in difficulty interpretations of texts by Kant or Derrida. However, his argument does demolish the official single-intrusion, single-deception, single-shootdown theory.

While the Russians have stuck to the general "establishment" line, as Brun would put it, that the Korean commercial airliner was violating Soviet air space despite warnings by Soviet fighters, and hence deserved to be shot down, the Russians' behavior has been bizarre. The two black boxes Yeltsin submitted as from KAL 007 in late 1992 and early 1993 are passing strange, apparently phonies, says Brun, adopted from other planes. According to Brun, they were designed to justify the Soviets' actions, so savagely condemned by Reagan as "an act of premeditated barbarism." Brun's proof of the falsity of these black boxes is one of the compelling sections of his argument.

Interestingly, for evidence of multiple intrusions by U.S. military aircraft resulting in a major air battle, Brun largely depends on analysis of Russian transcripts of communications between various command posts on the ground at Sakhalin, from the Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Air Force Far East Military District, General Kamenski, down to lower-ranking officers. But Brun asserts the Russians tampered in draconian fashion in editing these transcripts, so that "in every instance Russian and International Civil Aviation Organization falsifications have the effect of minimizing rather than exaggerating the clash that took place."

Why? one asks. Brun's rationale for the Russian behavior is that, at first, the Soviets chose to downplay the intrusion for genuine fear the episode could escalate into war. Later, after the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the Russians, desperately in need of economic help through such U.S.-dominated institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the world financial market, opted for the U.S. party line of off-course error single-intrusion single-shootdown—in a word, an essen-

tially accidental calamity. The Japanese, too, after initial resistance by their military, acquiesced in accepting the government of Japan's "switch to the American version of events." Ditto the International Civil Aviation Organization, as noted, a creature of some 40 U.N. member governments. Brun, of course, assumes the ICAO is under the thumb of the U.S.

Such is the Brun charge of deception and cover-up. Obviously, it poses a dicey job for the "managers" of the cover-up "to keep the flow of news" like the black boxes, unaccounted-for military aircraft debris, etc., etc. "from upsetting the acceptance by the media and public of the official account of the events."

John Keppel's "preface" is an integral part of the book, and it spares no punches in indicting the U.S., Russian, Japanese, and South Korean governments as well as the ICAO for a conspiratorial cover-up. "Through the manipulation of evidence, lying, and the subornation of witnesses," writes Keppel,

the Reagan Administration turned its own ghastly blunder into a renewed political attack on the Soviet Union. In doing so it further committed itself to its mistaken quest for a decisive victory rather than striving for a gradual way of bringing U.S.-Soviet relations into a viable accommodation. The disastrous results are only now beginning to dawn on us—Chechnya, economic disintegration, the spread of disease, the illicit sale of nuclear materials.

What's more, Keppel infers that the Bush and Clinton administrations have gone along with the cover-up to protect our intelligence sources and techniques.

For Keppel to link the KAL 007 disaster with Chechnya and other calamities is to project a complex, one might say outlandish theory so questionable as to undermine the book's positive and compelling aspects. The likelihood of a conspiratorial cover-up, of suppression, distortion, and silence of this magnitude and duration seems remote. Consider, for starters, the problem of erasing the evidence of the deaths of 30 U.S. servicemen. The networking and gossip among service aviation personnel and their kin is well known. Yet, not a word seems to have surfaced. Indeed, the evidence Brun uses to demonstrate that this air battle occurred is all circumstantial, painstakingly argued, but, for me and for experts I have queried, unconvincing to say the least. Nor do Brun or Keppel ever clarify the connection between the KAL 007 flight and the intrusion of U.S. military planes around the same time and place.

One wishes Brun and Keppel had confined their charge to the persuasive facts they elicit—that there was a deliberate

intrusion of breathtaking recklessness and stupidity that has been lied about ever since, and that the episode demands full, truthful disclosure.

Another recent book, *Warriors of Disinformation* by Alvin A. Snyder, an excellent work highly praised by Mike Wallace and Marvin Kalb among others, powerfully supports Brun's charge of government lying in the KAL 007 disaster. Snyder is a veteran insider who ran Worldnet, the United States Information Agency's satellite T.V. service, and was formerly an executive with CBS and NBC. Snyder was the official who organized and presented the T.V. account of the shootdown of KAL 007 at the United Nations and then the world, using tape recordings of the Soviet fighter pilot's radio transmissions—picked up by both U.S. and Japanese intelligence—when the pilot shot down the plane. This, of course, was one of the sensations of the Cold War and was widely deemed at the time to be America's greatest propaganda triumph.

What Snyder reveals is that the tapes were doctored, cut to give a false scenario supporting the U.S. line. Contrary to that line, Snyder reports that the full transcripts of the tapes show that, contrary to the U.S. allegations at the U.N., the Soviet pilot did fire warning shots, did circle 007 to get its attention, and tilted its wings to force the plane down, after being asked repeatedly by his ground controllers to do so. The Soviets never realized that the airliner was a commercial plane. Snyder reveals that the National Security Agency deleted five crucial minutes from the tape shown to the U.N. and the world. He also labels as a "whopper" the lie by U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick that "at no point

did the [Soviet] pilots raise the question of the identity of the target aircraft." Snyder's whole book is first-rate, and his integrity comes across as unquestioned.

What is clear is that there has been provocation and deception by the United States government on a grand scale. Innocent lives were lost that should never have been exposed to danger and could have readily been saved were this just an accident of navigation. There was also a needless risk of nuclear war. The time is long overdue for the United States to come clean and release the classified materials that can give us the truth.

Edward T. Chase is former Editor-in-Chief of New York Times Books and senior editor at Scribner.



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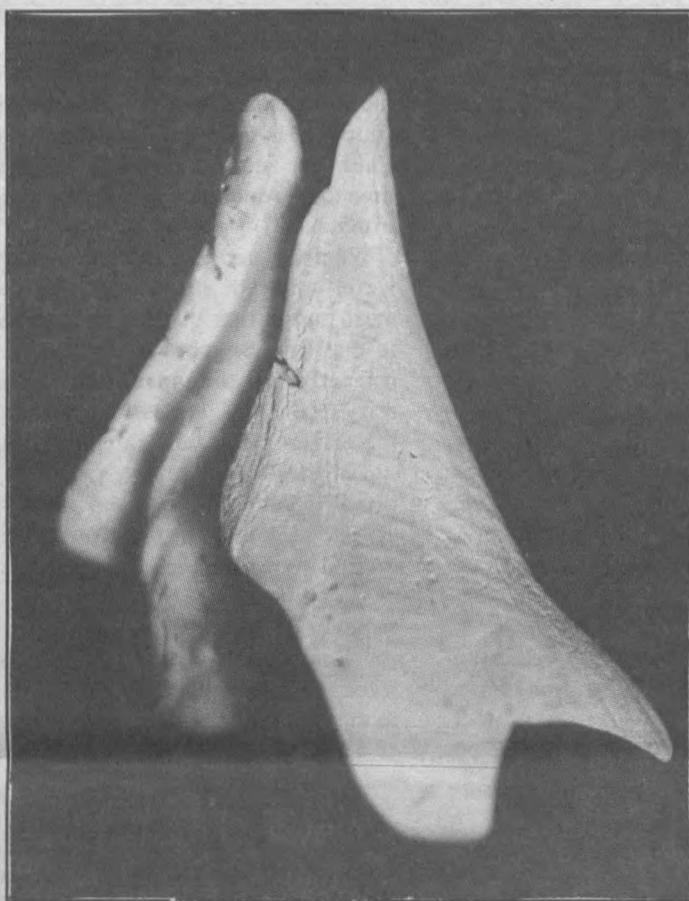
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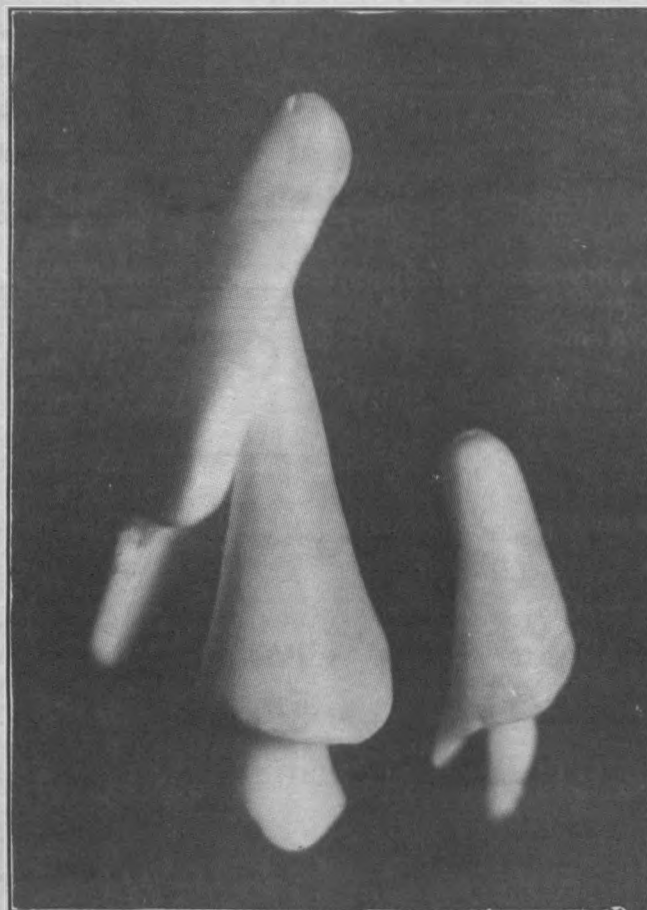
Shells

For those of us who love insects, Florida in the summer has a special allure. Tourists are scarce because of the heat, and one can usually have one's favorite haunts to oneself. For years my wife and I have been journeying to Florida in midsummer to do research on "bugs." We go by car to a destination in the center of the peninsula, where we have a laboratory on the grounds of a biological station. The route, both down and back, takes us along the coast, where we've made it a point to stop at beaches to cool off and do a bit of "combing." We fell in love with shells and like all collectors would concentrate on finding the occasional rare ones that were preserved in perfect condition. With time, however, we came to realize that what was most beautiful on the beach was commonplace — the broken weathered pieces of shell that were strewn everywhere. We began seeing figures in these fragments, shapes and forms that were in motion, evocative, and expressive. I began arranging the pieces for the camera, and realized that they could be brought to life. The photos shown here are of shell pieces from just south of St. Augustine.

—Tom Eisner



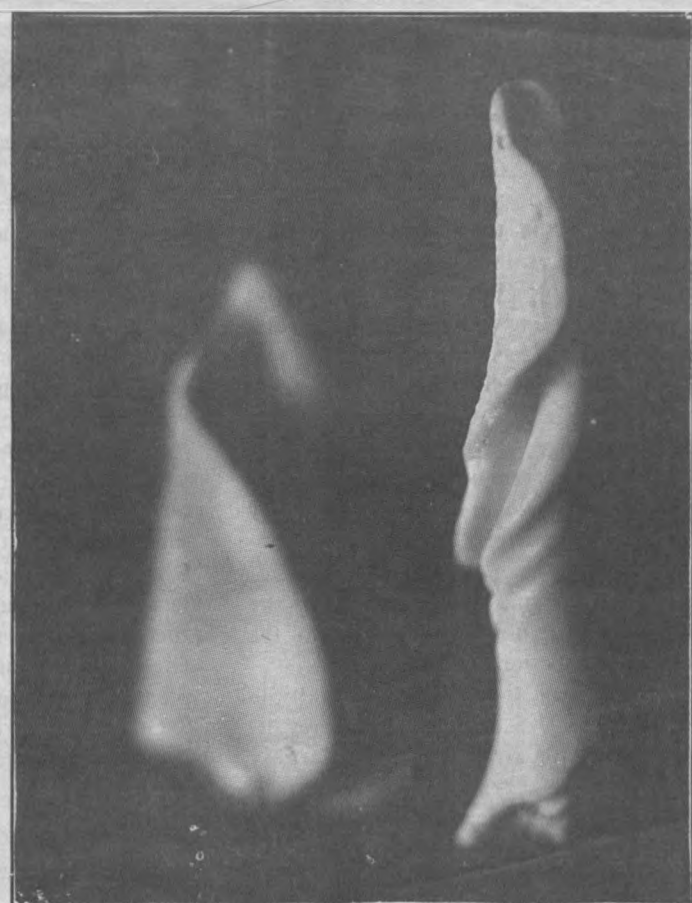
Tenderness



A Mother's Love



The Secret



Courtship