This Was the Model to Which I Held

This was the model to which I held:
a bee in its hole like a gasp
in my throat. Silence or dirge
as the petals unclasped,
dusted with blush at their folds.
This was the standard—I’d speak no word
when, after your long death, a thrill of bees
thrummed into the air, the chord
of their wings blaring flowers out.
This was my theory—I had no other—the yard like a harlot, but you
still dead. Spring was a terror
of sensuous things—in my throat, a song
where a stinger hurt, where quiet belonged.

—Kevin Prufer
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n Thursday, February 12, 2004, at 10 a.m. in Graham Chapel on the campus of Washington University, there will be a conversation, the third in the series being held in celebration of the University’s sesquicentennial, on the subject of public intellectuals. The panelists include Harvard University English professor Marjorie Garber, freelance writer Stanley Crouch, Boston University economics professor Glenn Loury, all of whom are quite well known as public intellectuals, and history professor Howard Brick and biology professor Ursula Goodenough, both of Washington University. Brick is an intellectual historian who possesses considerable knowledge of the social, cultural, and ideological impact of intellectuals on American history and American institutions. Goodenough is a scientist who has written for the general public particularly about science and religion, and thus can be considered a member of an important cadre of public intellectuals: scientists and scientific writers who write about science for a general audience, tremendously important because science is the most powerful and influential subject in our society today. I shall be serving as moderator.

Those attending the conversation might do well to read Richard Posner’s Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline, which came out a year or so ago on Harvard University Press. The book made quite a stir when it was released. Apparently, very few public intellectuals liked it. Posner is himself a public intellectual of considerable standing. Reading the book, whether or not one agrees with it, will acquaint the reader with a range of issues concerning public intellectuals and some background on who they are and how such people came to be. If nothing else, the reader will learn why Posner thinks the current crop of them do not serve the public well.

This conversation was proposed by the Center for the Humanities, and it is an important undertaking for us. A good many public intellectuals are humanists, in part, because the issues the humanities raise—in general, about symbols; about what things mean; about how meaning operates as a social, political, and cultural currency—are more accessible to a general audience than other liberal arts disciplines immediately are. Moreover, the role and purpose of the humanities, their adequacy or inadequacy, their relevance or irrelevance, their failure or triumph, have become, indeed, a topic of public debate of great importance in our society.

Public intellectuals, though, whether or not they are humanists, are often presented to the public in humanist publications and many of the issues they tackle have humanist implications, and are often rewarded for their work by humanistic organizations or foundations. This conversation is the opening salvo of a sustained preoccupation the Center hopes to have with the subject of public intellectuals. We intend to have noted public intellectuals visit and give lectures. We will be, over the next few years, trying to be as diverse as possible, bringing in public intellectuals from other countries, as well as American public intellectuals who are racial minorities or claim themselves as minority by another measure, conservative as well as liberal. Indeed, probably the most influential public intellectual movement of the last 30 years has been the rise of conservative polemists and scholars, who have a considerable audience and a strong presence in publishing circles. (Regnery Press comes to mind, for instance, as well as a religious press like the Catholic Ignatius Press.) On the other hand, the rise of black and women intellectuals in the last 30 years has had nearly as strong an effect. Keep an eye out for announcements.

Our library continues to grow. We received over the past month more than 300 comic books from a donor. We also will be receiving a considerable number within the next month or so that have African-American characters and themes.

We will be getting subscriptions to a number of children’s magazines. This should be helpful to students who are studying children’s literature or children’s culture, or people who would like to write for the children’s market. We shall list the titles in a future issue.

Also, we received these gifts:
Noted St. Louis children’s writer Jan Greenberg gave these books: • Vincent Van Gogh: Portrait of an Artist by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan • Runaway Girl: The Artist Louise Bourgeois by Jan Greenberg and Sandra Jordan • Romare Bearden: Collage of Memories by Jan Greenberg Also, acclaimed St. Louis children’s poet Constance Levy has donated a copy of her book, I’m Going to Pet a Worm Today and Other Poems.

Finally, African-American children’s writer Eleanor E. Tate contributed the following volumes: • Just an Overnight Guest by Eleanor E. Tate • Front Porch Stories at the One-Room School by Eleanor E. Tate • The Minstrel’s Melody by Eleanor E. Tate

We are very grateful to our donors and wish to acknowledge publicly their support of the Center’s endeavors.
Michael Hoeye’s essays go a long way in demonstrating that no movement is ever “contentless,” as individual expression, or as collective experience, and thus movement is adaptable to many pedagogical ends. In “Education through Dance,” Margaret H’Doubler sounds a corrective call to action that asks us to view dance education as an end in itself, rather than treating performance as its only measurable outcome. Echoing her sentiments, Ruth Grauert argues that, to be more widely taught, movement needs to be integrated with the other arts, in order to not risk becoming ghettoized. In contrast, Emma Sheehy recommends that dance education not always be yoked with music education, so that the spatial imagination has a chance to develop independent of the metric structures of music (“Children Discover Music and Dance”). Carol North’s essay, “Putting it Together: Integrating the Arts in Learning and Living,” offers a timely confirmation for drama majors and art administration majors, among others, that not only are there career opportunities in the arts, but there is genuine ethical reward in being part of arts education.

An example of a liberal education at work, recent research in movement education draws as much from science as from theories of artistic practice and the philosophy of art. The reader of this collection can trace the trajectory of what Dorothy Vislocky calls “the biochemical” to the current emphasis of both child development specialists and movement therapists, whose work relies on a concrete relationship between movement and intelligence, body and self. Several essays in the collection document the growing body of knowledge that informs movement therapy.

In particular, Joanna Harris’s brief history of the birth of the field offers newcomers a portrait of what a career in Dance/Movement Therapy might look like, as well as a selective reading list for future exploration. The Halprin Life/Art Process, discussed in Jamie Nisenbaum’s essay, represents this blend of science and art in what might be best described as both a cosmology and a philosophy of art.

All told, the collection sounds two notes: one of warning, a concern for the fate of movement education, and one of anticipation, for a future generation of artists and movers of all varieties. When Dr. Harold Taylor describes his effort to free the movement arts from the reducational and infantilizing reputation that movement somehow represents “irrational play,” he is also suggesting a larger critique of American culture, warning that what counts as culture is becoming increasingly imitative, commodified, censored, and “safe.” The collection, however, ends on a high note, with Joan Woodbury’s essay, “Sharing the Gift of Dance.” Woodbury reminds us of a wonderful working paradox: Namely, that perhaps more than any other form of expression, movement represents a universal language capable of promoting global cultural exchange, precisely because it requires no translation, and yet movement also represents a concrete language of difference, a multi-tongued expression that does not erase our differences, but keeps them legible.

The Body Can Speak treats the little-known role movement education can play, and is already playing, in our nation’s curriculum.

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For scholars and students of the humanities, the dancing body has much to say to us about how different bodies speak, are made to speak, and about how powerful the language of dancing can be. The Body Can Speak (2002), a collection of essays edited by Washington University professor emerita Annelise Mertz and published by Southern Illinois University Press, offers an alternative way to read dance history, and a superior way to evaluate dance education. Instead of conducting a linear march through discrete, competing careers in movement, The Body Can Speak offers a localized history of teacher/student relationships. Paradoxically, it is the very concrete, situated nature of each essay that gives the collection its scope; the sum effect of the "speaking body" can be seen as branching out into diverse disciplines and spheres, from movement therapy to children's theatre, from early childhood development to global cultural exchange, with ample rewards for parents, teachers, students, and general readers. The Body Can Speak is a history of practice and belief that is up to date and, in the most profound way, useful.

Annelise Mertz's essay, "A Teacher Remembers," reads at once as a portrait of a remarkable, multi-faceted career, and as a fable about how a community can learn to cherish dance as a local and national treasure. From her early efforts to move dance at Washington University out of the gym and onto the stage, Mertz went on to create a life-line between St. Louis students and New York companies with her famous summer workshops. Yet Mertz's "Remembering" has implications beyond her legacy at Washington University, for her story challenges disciplinary boundaries that commonly entrap dance on other campuses, and questions the restricted place of dance in the larger culture. As someone who studied "dance as P.E.," I identify with Mertz's cause: to return movement to its status as performance, to its status as speech, rather than skill. This disciplinary debate is not just a matter of snobbery; it's an issue of survival for an art form with a deep American past, at the risk of being lost if not taught in the right contexts.

As part of its implicit project, The Body Can Speak examines how bodies are a source of culture, a resource for culture, and a product of culture. Dorothy Vislocky argues in her tribute to choreographer Alwin Nikolais, "Creative Freedom, a Personal Treasure," that Nikolais's emphasis on objectivity goes a long way in explaining to the general reader why modern dance resists the "star system," seeking instead to make visible the unique performance qualities of different body types. In "As I See It," artistic director of the Murray Louis and Nikolais Dance Company, Murray Louis, also defends the ethic of abstraction as being central to how modern dance functions as a non-narrative form, one that can subvert or reinform other narratives at work in culture. For instance, in "The Journey of a Male Dancer," Hoffman Soto questions the degree to which sports and dance are perceived as exclusively gendered activities. By also asking us to reflect on our own kinetic journey, Shirley Ririe emphasizes that what we have unlearned, or lost, since childhood, in terms of physical literacy, can be re-learned and reclaimed through movement education.

The Body Can Speak treats the little-known role movement education can play, and is already playing, in our nation's curriculum. As Branislav Tomich advocates in his work with incarcerated youth, you can't have self-esteem until you have a "self" to express and defend, and in programs like his, arts education builds this new, articulated self. In a similar vein, Jeff Rehg and...
Who Are Public Intellectuals and Why Talk About Them?

1. An Informal Autobiography of a Reluctant Public Intellectual

“Never trust autobiography,” a writer friend told me once, “it is the least sincere, most bogus form of writing there is.” This exaggeration has its kernel of truth, a great deal, actually. However, you can trust what you are about to read. This piece is only autobiography by accident. If I knew someone else half as well as myself who could have served the purpose, this would have been about that person.

The Wednesday before Thanksgiving, I received an e-mail from the editor of the op-ed page of the Wall Street Journal asking me if I might consider writing a piece on singer Michael Jackson. I do not get these requests “all the time,” as it were, but with enough frequency that I am hardly surprised by them. I was, in this instance, taken aback because I would not have expected the Wall Street Journal would want me to write about that subject for their pages. The WSJ op-ed page is usually conservative, adamantly so, and I wouldn’t characterize myself as such or as much of anything political (My skin color seems to make some people think they know my politics before I utter a word). Indeed, I was mildly amused about being asked because just the week before I was briefly interviewed on NPR’s Talk of the Nation about an essay I wrote on the state of Missouri that appeared in a collection put together by The Nation called These United States. The Nation, I rather thought, was about as far away from the WSJ as one could imagine. Moreover, I would never have dreamed that the WSJ would be interested in a commentary on Michael Jackson, a pop culture figure of, what I thought to be, little significance to their readership or at least to their editorial staff. I chose to write the essay for two reasons, neither having to do with money, as the assignment did not pay much: first, the WSJ has several million readers worldwide, and, second, the editor did not, in any way, suggest or steer how I should write. The main reason to write is not for money but for readers and the best conditions under which to write is when no conditions about what you can say are imposed. Writing is, by its very nature, such an infernal and dizzying set of limitations and traps, mirages and hallucinations that disappear to blankness and banality on re-reading, that one’s task hardly needs to be rendered more difficult by having to deal with anything more than a subject and a word count. Besides, one does not write to suit oneself merely or principally but to serve a subject and practice a craft.

Now, doing this sort of work has made some people, more than a few, think me to be, quite a bit against my own inclination, a public intellectual. Now, doing this sort of work has made some people, more than a few, think me to be, quite a bit against my own inclination, a public intellectual. I would certainly fit the current description of such a person: I am a university professor; I have an advanced degree and a recognized area of academic expertise; I write for publications that enjoy a general, albeit, at times, highly partisan, readership like the WSJ, The Nation, the New York Times, the New Republic, Harper’s, the Atlantic, and other such places. It is not any sort of false modesty that makes me reluctant to be called a public intellectual. How in the world can someone who is quite willing to assert his opinions strongly and publicly, and on more than a few occasions, quite wrong-headedly, ever think himself modest, or, for that matter, would ever really want to be? Although I must admit that I find the term “intellectual” pretentious, though at times useful for me, at least, in talking about certain people, I do not refuse the title because of distaste, either. I wish, to be plain-spoken about it, to call a thing by its right name, as old folk might say, and my right name is simply “writer.” I am a writer, which, however much this naming may strive for a certain purity of effect, possesses, nonetheless, the virtue of being exact, the lean, hard honesty, one might say, of not claiming for itself more than it should. People think me to be prolific. I am always surprised by that. I am a writer. It is how I understand myself and the world. What the hell else am I supposed to be doing with my spare time, such as it is, but write? Writing is a bodily and spiritual function for me, not a job.

I am not sure what the Michael Jackson piece that appeared in the WSJ may have achieved. For me it did nothing more than offer a momentary snapshot of an on-going engagement about a number of issues: race, popular culture, celebrity, art. I wrote about 1,200 words for the assignment. I could have written 12,000 and still felt as if I had not exhausted my thinking on the subject. As a writer, that is basically all I should get from my writing: not an artifact, but a way of thinking about a subject in order to learn how to think about it better.

Now, one may ask, if I feel this way, then why am I conducting a panel discussion, a conversation that will take place in Graham Chapel on Thursday, February 12, 2004, on the subject of public intellectuals, running the obvious risk of being identified as such, indeed, courting such an identification? Sometimes, one must accept what other people think you are, sometimes even with gratitude that they wish to think about you at all. Sometimes you owe the people who read you the kindness of try-
ing to understand why they thought they should read you, and how they decided to do so. Besides, this class of people called public intellectuals fascinates me.

2. The Unillustrated, Incompleat Sociology of Public Intellectuals in the United States

Before addressing the question of who are public intellectuals, it might serve to ask why they are. The answer might be articulated severally: first, people only agree on matters that are fundamentally unimportant, that they feel will affect them only superficially, if at all; that on things that matter people are passionate in their disagreement as it strikes at the heart of who they are. Public intellectuals can not only express for people the various facets of conflict and difference from the several perspectives where they exist but create, what Richard Posner, whose book Public Intellectuals is the most famous on the subject, calls “solidarity.” In short, public intellectuals tell people who intuitively feel a certain way about a subject how to think about it; how to be an apologist or defender of a view; to take heart, indeed, that the view is defensible and that others feel as you do.

By writing about that view in certain publications and being heard in the media expressing it, these public intellectuals also legitimate the view. Every faction wants a set of public intellectuals with access to the buzz and chatter, the cultural noise of opinion shaping, in order not to be marginalized. There is also the element or hope of persuasion here, as all factions wish not only to express their opposition to all other factions on a particular issue but to control the behavior of the public by winning it over to their side. Everyone with a passionate view in a democracy hopes to be an authoritarian of sorts before he or she dies and compel others to accept his or her view.

Second, and this is closely related to point one, as Walter Lippmann observed in his 1927 book, The Phantom Public, “...although public business is my main interest, and I give most of my time to watching it, I cannot find the time to do what is expected of me in the theory of democracy; that is, to know what is going on and to have an opinion worth expressing on every question which confronts a self-governing community.” Public intellectuals, in highly urbanized, highly industrialized democratic countries (of course, public intellectuals exist in all countries now) serve to explain to the public what is going on, at least in some superficial way, because, indeed, so much is going on that a person feels hopelessly ignorant about most things, the important issues and conflicts and debates that seem to be driving the culture itself. This cultural and political function of education is probably why, as education has grown as an industry in the United States and has tended to absorb so many pedagogical functions that were not always and did not necessarily need to be professionalized, public intellectuals tend, today, to come from the university. This assures the public, in some way, the public intellectual has some recognized training and expertise that has been both vetted and given an official stamp of approval. However, many public intellectuals who are university professors do not, in their role as public intellectuals, confine themselves merely to the area of expertise they possess as academics. This suggests two things: first, that the public is willing to accept university prestige as a warrant that the person who is speaking or writing is smart enough to do so, no matter what the person is talking about; second, that the public desperately wants people to fill the role of all-purpose sages, despite this era of specialization or maybe because of it. It probably makes

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Reading List for the Morality of War Workshop

Session I.
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, (c. 1265), Part II (Second Part). Q. 40, art. 1 and 3; Q. 64, art. 3, 6, 7; Q. 69, art. 4, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, London: Burns Oates & Washburne, LTD, 1922.

Session II.
Francisco Suarez, De Triplici Virtute Theologica: Charitate, Disputation XIII (On War), (c. 1610), sec. 1, 2, 4, translated by Gwladys L. Williams, Ammi Brown, and John Waldron, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944.
Hugo Grotius, De Jure Belli ac Pacis (On The Law of War and Peace), (1625), Bk. I, Ch. 2, sec. 1 and 2; Bk. II., Ch. 1, sec. 1-7, Ch. 20, sec. 48; Bk. III, Ch. 10, sec. 1-4, translated by Francis W. Kelsey, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925.

Session III.

Session IV.
I attended Larry May’s “Morality of War” workshop, sponsored by The Center for the Humanities, for a number of reasons, some quite specific and others very general. Specifically, I’m finishing a book (for publication next year) on the 13th-century Albigensian crusade into southern France, and as this twenty-one-year campaign was the first sanctioned holy war of Christians against other Christians, I had been thinking about the morality and justification of war for some time now. More generally, questions about the morality of war, especially warfare dressed up as either reformist crusades or as divinely sanctioned violence, possessed for me (and for so many other people) a powerful relevance since the first year of the new century. The “Morality of War” workshop fortuitously combined these professional and personal issues (as a medieval scholar, as a modern democratic citizen) with a series of fascinating readings from the second to the twentieth century that inspired lively weekly discussions under Larry May’s thoughtful guidance (and occasional good-humored patience).

The workshop was an exercise in how to think precisely and, if possible, objectively about when it is moral for a state to wage a war, what is the ethical conduct of soldiers during a battle, and the guilt or innocence of a state (whether victor or vanquished) in the aftermath of war and in the hindsight of peace. The intellectual framework of the workshop, although resolutely legal and philosophical, and so in a sense always attempting to articulate idealized universal moral categories, nevertheless moved back and forth through time and struggled with the problem of how culturally specific moral arguments (Augustine, Averroes, Alberico Gentili, Hannah Arendt) and actual historical wars (the Crusades, the American Civil War, the First World War, the Vietnam, the Six Day War, and the First Gulf War) allow for depth and force in arguing about the morality of war. As a historian I am always wary about making moral judgements on the past—all too easily done and, in the end, pointless; observing that the Crusades were bad is hardly a thunderbolt but, leaving such moral platitudes aside, trying to explain them will always be difficult—yet I came away from the workshop powerfully convinced that the philosophy of war could inspire new insights in my search for precise ways of understanding sacred warfare in the Middle Ages.

What helped make the workshop discussions so enlightening was the fact that the participants came from a variety of disciplines (philosophy, politics, literature, psychology, biology, classics, history) and the effort to reconcile (often-irreconcilable) differences in approaches to moral questions not only gave insights into the morality of war but also into the ways of thinking in other fields. In this way the workshop was an exemplary exercise in scholarly rigor and intellectual generosity that are the great gifts of humanistic learning to a university community and, even more importantly, to society at large. Larry May is to be warmly congratulated and The Center for the Humanities strongly encouraged to sponsor more workshops.

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the culture seem less atomized if there are people who can speak with seeming intelligence about many aspects of it.

Third, in a society of great leisure and with a great preoccupation with education, public intellectuals are entertainers. They could hardly escape this role as virtually everything public in the United States tends to sucked into the vortex of helping the public stave off boredom. Most people, even if they read a competent book on a subject, are only acquainted with the subject superficially, having inevitably misread portions of the book and being confined, in the end, to the author’s view of the subject in any case. If they like the view or the book happens to be popular, most people aren’t likely to read another on the subject that might take a different or opposing view. (When people do read an opposing view they don’t like, the public intellectual, by infuriating readers, simply serves as a perverse therapist or an objectified devil. I have served this function many times.) They aren’t likely to study the subject objectively or deeply. Most people do not have the time or energy to undertake such a task. They merely want the polemicist’s reassurances about a subject, enough to be able to say they know something of the subject so as not to appear completely ignorant, something that particularly embarrasses the educated. This, in essence, amounts to being entertained by the subject, not truly informed about it. When public intellectuals write book reviews, music criticism, movie analysis for popular and even high-brow publications, they function largely as entertaining consumer guides, as, actually, a division of the marketing departments of the commercial arts industry. This is, in part, why intellectuals sometimes are not trusted by the general public, (certainly the intellectuals who say something you don’t like); and as Jacques Barzun pointed out in his classic work, House of Intellect, it is wise for the public to exercise some skepticism about intellectuals even when these people are writing about what they know. They are minds for hire, after all. And snobbery drives intellectuals as much as it does anyone else who thinks he or she is a bit more refined than his or her neighbor.

Public intellectuals can make a very handsome living. They sell a lot of books; they appear on television and can be heard on radio all the time; they usually have marquee jobs at high status universities, where they can, in many instances, teach a little and tour a lot on the public speaking circuit. Some, like Martha Nussbaum, Stanley Fish, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Henry Louis Gates, Cornel West, James Q. Wilson, the late Stephen Jay Gould, Elaine Pagels, Noam Chomsky, Gore Vidal, Shelby Steele, and Susan Sontag, are very famous, nearly household names, and even, in many instances, celebrities, and behave as we expect our celebrities to behave: as highly privileged, fawned-over people. The United States has often been called anti-intellectual but, in one regard, that would be hard to substantiate when one looks at how well we support our intellectual elite. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to tell whether such intellectuals are actually pop culture figures who are trying to elevate the level of general discourse or high brow elitists who are out slumming for a buck and a mass audience.

I honestly do not see myself as one of these people, but I do see myself as someone who has been shaped by them and who has often been deeply attracted to them. I’d rather read a book by a public intellectual than virtually any other kind of book. And I see myself as someone who lives in a culture that has been shaped by such people and their example, in more intricate and unusual ways than many might think. Here is an instance: It is often thought that African Americans are strongly anti-intellectual. This is not an idea that has been promulgated over the years by some whites only, although some whites do promote the idea, but by black intellectuals themselves. One has only to read E. Franklin Frazier’s Black Bourgeoisie, for instance, or Richard Wright, or James Baldwin, or early LeRoi Jones, to know this to be true. And, certainly, blacks are anti-intellectual but no more so than whites and, often, far less so than people might think. The public talks a great deal about gangsta rap and its “evil” influence, but it neglects a strong vein of rap music where the rappers present themselves as teachers, where the virtues of knowledge are extolled. People who know black cultural life well know that this emphasis on knowledge, learning, teaching is not new or unique. This sort of “knowledge” rap reflects the culture that produced it, a culture quite fixated on the idea of knowledge as truth and liberation, and these rappers are striving to be public intellectuals of sorts. (I used to visit Nation of Islam temples quite frequently when I was young, and they emphasized the acquisition of knowledge far more than the Episcopal church in which I grew up.) There are names in the black community like Ivan Van Sertima, Josef Ben-Jochannan, the late Chancellor Williams, the late John Henrik Clarke, Tony Martin, Frances Cress Welsing, whose books are popular, not particularly easy to read, and who are, in effect, public intellectuals as they would be listened to on virtually any subject. The “knowledge” rappers have often read these authors and are trying to emulate them; certainly they try to encourage their audience to read. Their model is someone like the black poet/songwriter of the 1970s Gil Scot-Heron, who saw himself in his music, clearly, as a teacher. Indeed, one of the striking things about black popular music, considered historically, is how much the subject of reading, education, and knowledge appear (think of James Brown, for instance), more than in most white popular music, although, to be sure, neither music can be considered remotely intellectual. In many ways in the United States, intellectual aspiration and popular culture meet. This relatively minor, complex example is one reason why the cultural phenomenon of the public intellectual is worth having a conversation about.

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On a recent trip to the republic of Georgia, I saw a newspaper that featured the names and photos of 30 people on its “black list.” This publication, whose motto is “Orthodoxy or Death!” is published by a group headed by Basil Mkalavishvili, a former Georgian Orthodox priest who was excommunicated in 1997 by that church’s leaders. For the past few years he has led a fringe group whose ideology is a mix of extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism. This group comes largely from a poor neighborhood in Tbilisi (the capital of Georgia) that has been settled by displaced agricultural workers, and its formation reflects the frustration borne of a decade of poverty, armed conflict, and social upheaval.

Noting the completely open and free-wheeling nature of today’s media in Georgia, many of my colleagues were not unduly alarmed by this publication. In fact, several of them jokingly complained about not being included on the list and expressed envy for those who had been so honored. The list included political figures, leaders of non-governmental organizations, and other public intellectuals in Georgia, but also the Pope and a Georgian Orthodox priest who had been deemed overly moderate (indeed the hierarchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church has been a regular target of this splinter group).

But for one problem, I might have been able to dismiss this as just another episode in the wide-open public debate one finds in contemporary Georgia. The problem was that the list included David Zurabishvili, a colleague of mine who has been the victim of violence, almost certainly perpetrated by Basil Mkalavishvili’s group.

I met David in Tbilisi in the summer of 2003, where I heard him talk about his work, both as an award-winning author of children’s books and as a leader of the Liberty Institute, a non-governmental watchdog organization that works for open society and religious freedom in Georgia. We had some laughs as he struggled to communicate in English, but his seriousness and force of character came through clearly once we switched to Russian, a language he had mastered during his student years. In his presentation and discussion I could see that I was dealing with a pleasant, but very determined, individual.

At the close of the first morning session of that July meeting in Tbilisi, a group of us prepared to go to lunch, and we invited David to come along. After reflecting for a moment he declined, saying he really needed to get back to the Liberty Institute to finish some work there. The rest of us then went off to a typically lavish Georgian meal, accompanied by wonderful wine and toasts, after which we returned to our meeting. David did not show up for this afternoon session, but I thought little of it until I watched the evening news on Georgian television. I do not understand Georgian, but it was clear from the pictures alone that something terrible had happened to David and one of his colleagues. The television cameras showed their ransacked office and both of them holding ice packs to their bruised and bloodied faces.

As my Georgian colleagues explained that evening, an organized gang of young thugs had boldly strolled into David’s offices, severely beaten him and his colleague, and destroyed as much computer equipment as possible while we had been at our lunch. After spending nearly a half hour in the offices of the Liberty Institute, this group walked out and melted away into the city.

As disturbing as the incident itself was the response of the police. They claimed to have no leads on the culprits and showed little sign of conducting a serious investigation (months later,
tion history could not calculate.

On paper, where Edwards lived much of his life, writing on scraps and discarded fans, even the title-page verso of his farewell sermon, logical contradiction was almost as detestable as sin. And yet Edwards’ energies seemed empowered by their suspension between opposites; metaphysical rationalizing of the emotions, reasoned defenses of emotional religion, scientific curiosity about a material world represented in the private writings as an emanation of the divine mind, a play of signs legible if at all only to the gracious mind. By his fuller consideration of the domestic Edwards and building on previous studies, Marsden adds gender to this list of polarities. Growing up in a household of ten sisters, which his father Timothy referred to as his “sixty-feet of daughters,” then the father of eight daughters himself, Edwards turned to his wife Sarah for the consummate example of spiritual exaltation in his portrait of an unnamed “young lady” of a “wonderful sweetness, calmness and universal benevolence of mind” – this despite her bearing eleven children from 1728 to 1750 and managing a house and later a wilderness mission in which visitors, short- and long-term, were the exception rather than the rule. Edwards’ sinners are threatened by a tyrannical father who hates them for their inheritance of humanness. Their deliverance is marked, as in Sarah’s case, by virtues gendered female, imaged as flowers opening themselves to the sun, willing the good of the whole, their consent a harmony sometimes hinted at in song.

One might argue that the great paradox of Edwards’ career, its resolution brief and unstable, derived from conflicting gender constructions as pervasive as they were unacknowledged in his thinking. History was warfare, its warriors inevitably male as ministers, governors, and their captains. But reformed Christendom’s visible victories were only shadowy extensions of the heart transformed, a she who loves to walk in “fields and groves and seems to have someone invisible always conversing with her ….” By determined will, one might say, Edwards held his paradox together. Surrender the Father-Judge who knows our dark intent and one has the blithe optimism of an Enlightenment Pangloss, even eventually of Pollyanna. But surrender the hope of an unbidden gift of sweetness and the cosmos turns rattling atoms, the battlefield, like the congregation, an array of smug titans whose unexamined victories are said to speak for themselves. It would remain for daughters of Puritanism, like Catharine Sedgwick and Harriet Beecher Stowe, to throw clarifying light on the way gender informed the Edwardsian paradox, though by benevolently undoing its knot they also banished the spider whose dangling peril images more than ever an indefinite postponement of the millennium about which even Edwards may have been too optimistic.

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From a synoptic height though, Edwards unfailingly reconciled the most minute events with the great sweep of redemption history, the history to which all others were sub-plot. In his early career, as pastor to his Northampton congregation, he engendered, anatomized, and was apologist for the microcosmic site of the divine will’s unfolding in time: the individual human heart, whose gracious, affective deliverance from the otherwise irresistible gravity of sin would be called conversion. At his death, as president of the College that would become Princeton, Edwards was working on a History of Redemption which would have been in effect his macrocosmic view, through scripture, of the global tide of conversions leading to the promised millennium when the saints would rule at last over their ungodly antagonists — history’s losers understood as having their hearts in the wrong place, set on self or Pope or any of Satan’s numerous avatars. Northampton history and the coastal Great Awakening of the 1730s and 40s, which Edwards championed, therefore took place on a cosmic stage in which, he believed, “the least atom has an influence on the motion, rest and direction of every body in the universe.” Satan’s opposing army — most nearly visible in the French and Indians — could suffer important defeats as in 1745 at Cape Breton, but the very success of Protestant England and of waves of conversion could also be expected to provoke even more vicious counterattacks. While Edwards scanned the news for signs that a wrathful sixth vial (of seven prophesied) was being poured out as part of New England’s destiny, and speculated that the year 2000 might initiate the promised days, he was also aware that especially for God’s favored nation the war would get worse before it got better.

History founded on the human heart was admittedly subject to ebbs and flows of piety, as Edwards found in his own melancholy case and as he observed in his own congregation, which discharged him from the pulpit in the aftermath of more secular awakenings, among young men taunting young women with the gynecological lore they had garnered from a midwife’s manual; and among their elders, who resented salary complaints from the minister who proposed to judge their heart’s fitness for church membership. And rebellious hearts could co-exist with, even gain energy from, the kind of demotic piety that took precedence over the social hierarchy tellingly illustrated in the seating chart of Northampton’s meeting house. As Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher, a friend to Edwardsean true religion, complained in 1741, the people had “grown so brassy and hard, as to be now combining in a body to raise a rebellion.” The heart had a mind of its own, in ways redemp-

On paper, where Edwards lived much of his life, writing on scraps and discarded fans, even the title-page verso of his farewell sermon, logical contradiction was almost as detestable as sin.

there had been no progress on the case). At the time of the attack, every informed observer in Georgia suspected that it was an attempt to intimidate David and his colleagues as they sought to defend the rights of foreign religious groups to proselytize in their country. And this meant that Basil Mkhalovishvili’s group should have been at the center of the investigation. As self-appointed protectors of the purity of Georgian national and religious identity, members of his fundamentalist group had a reputation of having little tolerance for representatives of other faiths.

My concern over the personal safety of David Zurabishvili and the situation he was in increased when colleagues told me what he had said to the media as he sat there with blood running down his face. He stated that it was no accident that this group of thugs had been able to do their damage and walk freely out of his office, and he accused the authorities of being complicit in the attack. Upon hearing this, I was unsure whether this was courage or foolhardiness, but I realized that in such a situation I would have been far more circumspect. But there was David coolly accusing state authorities of not living up to their responsibilities.

Considered from the perspective of the past several decades, this episode involves no little irony. After all, people in David Zurabishvili’s generation spent their early years trying to escape the ubiquitous surveillance and heavy-handed control of an oppressive Soviet state. After gaining independence, Georgia experienced a quick, bewildering transition from this totalitarian setting to one where organized public authority seems to have evaporated. By many criteria today’s Georgia is a failed state, leaving its citizens with the task of how to re-establish some semblance of civil society and healthy public discourse.

What is interesting—and inspiring—in this chaotic context is how public intellectuals have taken up the gauntlet of building a new public sphere and civil society.

What is interesting—and inspiring—in this chaotic context is how public intellectuals have taken up the gauntlet of building a new public sphere and civil society. After an initial period of euphoria and relentless criticism of the Soviet past and its crimes, public intellectuals in Georgia came to understand that they had a serious new role to play, a role that is far more demanding than sitting on the sidelines as vocal, but powerless, critics.

Their efforts have had their ups and downs. The first post-Soviet years witnessed an attempt to build a post-Soviet Georgian state that could have had even more power—as well as demagogic tendencies—than what preceded it. The failure of that effort, as well as the trauma of a civil war, has been followed by a period of disintegrating state control. In this trying context, public intellectuals have been asked to carry out their work without roadmaps or official invitations to undertake the task. Instead, there is only a vacuum—and a dangerous one at that.

David Zurabishvili experienced some of the dangers that arise in this setting, the alarming persistence of which should not be misunderstood. But in the end there is an optimistic message to be taken away from his encounter with Basil Mkhalovishvili’s thugs. The fact is that he and his colleagues have not been the victims of any further attacks, in part, because their risky public campaign about the dangers of religious and nationalist fundamentalism is working. Several months after his attack, I asked Zurabishvili whether he had heard anything further from this group. His response was just to laugh and say that he had raised such a scandal in the media that no further trouble had occurred.

As is the case for any weak state, the big question is how to break out of the spiral of corruption and distrust and the resulting fundamentalist backlash without reverting to heavy-handed authoritarian measures.

This is precisely what David Zurabishvili and his colleagues are working toward in today’s Georgia. To be sure, the progress is frustrating and slow, and the work can be dangerous. But the rewards may be starting to appear. People seem to be increasingly able to sort out which sources of information and forms of public discourse can be trusted and which sources amount to shrill and destructive demagoguery. That is why a fringe group can publish a black list of enemies and not be the object of undue concern. Conversely, public discussions of fundamentalist violence and police corruption can be carried out and actually have some effect. In the absence of economic development, more positive relations with Russia, and an effective crackdown on corruption, this will clearly not be enough. It is, however, a necessary condition for progress, and in this sense public intellectuals in Georgia today are doing more than their share of the work.

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Michel Petrucciani, the grand master of jazz piano, gave his solo performance at the Tbilisi Philharmonic Hall on September 30. Standing ovations, cheers, admiration. Our public, like that of the former Soviet Baltic States, has been “spoiled,” to a certain extent, by the occasional live appearances of American and European jazz celebrities. This was usually linked to the whims of our Kremlin leaders. I was a kid when my uncle took me to see Benny Goodman, as far back as 1963, the “Khrushchev Thaw,” to be sure. Alas, due to my tender age I remember almost nothing of the event. Later I saw the documentary: couples excited by Swing, and KGB guys delivering glances. Then came Earl “Fatha” Hines, and later, in the time of Brezhnev Devetene, we saw Thed Jones & Mel Lewis Orchestra (1972), which astounded me — at that time a teen-ager. The 1989 Tbilisi Jazz Festival (Gorbatchov Perestroyka) featured the genuine pleiad of Masters: Art Blakey, Freddie Hubbard, Jimmy Smith, Sun Ra, Niels Pedersen, Charley Mingus Dynasty, et al.

It was not simply the musical entertainment that most of us sought in jazz, rather it was an escape from being mere Homo Sovieticus. Or, maybe, such a jazz-fetishism was another trait of that very Homo Sovieticus. Willis Conover, the Voice Of America Time For Jazz man, in his deep voice would preach this swingy and funky syncopated gospel, which sounded more fascinating to us than the dream of national independence.

Later, when that very independence came, with clashes in the streets, economic collapse, and turmoil, there was no “time to jazz.” However, as things are starting to look up, we are beginning to see the light at the other end of the dark tunnel – let’s hope that is not the headlamp of an oncoming train. Or if it is, then may it be the Duke Ellington’s “A” train… This very image occurred to me when Petrucciani embarked upon the “A” Train tune, imitating locomotion, and the audience was carried away by the vertigo.

Petrucciani has mastered all the spectrum of the jazz piano technique. With no rhythm group at the background, he displayed his art in its very originality. He played medleys of jazz standards, rendering them in comprehensive stylistic variety. A true shape-shifter, Petrucciani, as if from an alchemical vessel, was producing Erroll Garner, Thelonius Monk, Oscar Peterson, Keith Jarrett, and, of course, - himself. The French Impressionist awareness was also there.

After the recital I spoke to Eteri Anjaparidze, our classical piano lady, who had just arrived from New York, where she permanently resides. Though critical about a certain lack of “structural dramatization” and immediate rendering of standard tunes, she could not help admiring the “pearls of sounds” at his fingertips running across the key board. Indeed, Petrucciani is almost meticulous about the quality and volume of each tone he produces, as if contemplating, playing catlike with it, in his peculiar manner, no jazzy slip-sliding.

The Maestro did two encores, and was doing the third one when the loudspeaker died – the second grimace of the “transition period.” The first one was the cellular phone in the pocket of a local nouveau riche, ringing right in the midst of the softest piano.

At the Ajara Hotel Jazz Club, where he jammed with local musicians, Petrucciani expressed his deep appreciation for the audience and the hearty welcome he received and promised to come back next spring. By the way, because this time he performed for free, people could afford the tickets.

The evening was marvelous, inspiring. We came out of the Philharmonic Hall and took a stroll down the avenue. Then we dropped into a pub for a beer. “Who would have ever imagined this, some ten years ago,” Sandro Chanishvili said to me, a medical doctor and the don of local jazz fans, “you attend the live performance of somebody like Petrucciani, and after this sit in a pub, enjoying Guinness and friendly talk…” At that very moment the lights went out – all over the city. “Verily so,” said I, “what used to be banal and quotidian in Soviet times—like electricity, hot water, social security—has become luxury. Whereas, the ‘fancy stuff,’ like an after jazz Guinness in the pub, Marlboro, salami, etc., have become quotidian.” Now that’s weird.

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Pianist Michel Petrucciani died of pulmonary infection on January 6, 1999, at the age of 36.
Jonathan Edwards and Pollyanna. Among American culture's odder couples, the last and most brilliant defender of New England Calvinism and the child-icon of transformative positive thinking would share a stage more awkwardly than most. And yet when the Disney studio chose a counter-text for their 1963 film adaptation of Eleanor Porter's 1913 novel, Edwards' methodically terrifying sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," must have proposed itself instantly to the (English major?) scriptwriter who gave actor Karl Malden some of the sermon's most chilling lines precisely so that Hayley Mills as the eponymous heroine could warm them even unto melting.

George Marsden's new biography of Edwards, unlikely to be challenged on its own solid ground for decades to come, makes clear that opposed representations of individualism's defining trait as depravity or benevolence, far from being accidental curiosities of American popular culture, suggest the very structure of an American dialectic beginning to take definitive shape in Edwards' lifetime (1703-58). That thesis in itself is not a new one. Marsden's achievement is to ground it in a more fully constituted historical Edwards whose intellectual life and ministerial career unfolded within concentric circles of family, contentious frontier village, British colony, and trans-Atlantic revivalism. With the Yale edition of Edwards' writings now at 23 volumes, including previously unpublished sermons and miscellanies, Marsden has gained access to dimensions of the historical Edwards that earlier and more tendentious scholars were free to ignore.

First among those scholars was Perry Miller, founder of mid-twentieth-century studies of New England Puritanism, whose intellectual biography of Edwards was at once the deconstruction of Menckenesque stereotypes and the positing of an incipiently modern thinker who needed only a perusal of Marx and Freud to join a post-Holocaust generation for whom depravity, though an inadequate sign, nevertheless pointed in the right direction and gave the lie to progressivism. Marsden honors Miller as an "intellectual hero" even as he describes Miller's biography as a work of the imagination.

Marsden's sympathy with his subject is evident but for the most part decorous and unobtrusive. His view that Edwards "was a saint according to the highest Reformed spiritual standards to which he aspired," given its logically closed circle, can be conceded without difficulty. More important, Marsden's painstakingly detailed research will enable and stimulate new work, much of it likely to be conceived from different kinds of curiosity. Working quietly, the biographer does not need to tell the student of American culture that he writes in the shadow of 9/11 when he adopts a phrase like "providential patriotism" to describe the mood in which Edwards sought news of French (i.e. papist) defeats. By setting Edwards' birth against the background of the 1704 "Deerfield massacre," he establishes a context from which Edwards will assimilate the colonists' view that they had suffered a "terrorist massacre of innocents" (39 settlers killed, 112 captured). By a fuller treatment of the Stockbridge mission years, he makes clear the complications for Edwards' worldview that arose from close contact with devout Mahawk (sic) students — Jonathan Edwards Jr. joined their classes and learned their language — and land-hungry fellow Christians.

Northampton's third meeting house (1737)
“The great lie”: Schickel circles back, again and again, to the manifold ways in which the period's films shaded or flat-out denied important truths: Germany's persecution and extermination of Europe's Jews, the full extent of Japan's atrocities in places such as Nanking and Manila, the civilian casualties inflicted by U.S. bombing of Dresden and Hamburg. Schickel includes sometimes-extended asides on these topics — and such related matters as the efficacy of strategic bombing and the ethical and practical considerations of using atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki — adding still more threads of discussion to the book's already-dense weave of personal recollection and cultural criticism.

Although he sometimes stretches to make tenuous connections, Schickel is largely successful in his blending of these disparate elements. He's particularly adept at drawing parallels between the deceptions at work in film and in his family: Both attempt to hide disappointments and failures behind a smiling mask of placidity, the smooth surface hiding a dangerous undertow. Schickel, in fact, is ruthless sharp and critical in his assessments of his family and himself. He notes at the outset that his book does not “recount tales of childhood abuse or adult addiction” — there are no commercially exploitable horrors to reveal — but he owns up to less dramatic (and altogether common) problems that his parents preferred to ignore rather than confront. Schickel adds that movies, with their grand adventures and romantic heroes, enabled such avoidance. When he grew to adulthood and began a career as a professional critic, Schickel says, “I began to sense that I had used pop narrative not merely as a way of

He's particularly adept at drawing parallels between the deceptions at work in film and in his family.

adding a touch of glamour to my routine little life but as a means of escaping from certain failures my family was prone to but that I did not wish to admit — sad failures of ambition, more subtle failures of love.” Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip is Schickel's acknowledgement of the failures of his grandfather and father, in particular. His handling of his grandfather is especially compelling: Introduced as a beneficent, larger-than-life figure, he shrinks in stature as the maturing Schickel becomes increasingly aware of his grandfather's thwarted hopes and controlling nature.

Schickel is equally self-critical and takes an unflattering view of his work as a critic. “I don't know what good it has done,” he laments. “Most of what I have written about, often enough in hot passion, has simply disappeared from everyone's memory. Who cares what anyone thinks about old movies? Or, for that matter, last week's movies? … A very rich producer, in the process of a failed attempt to corrupt me, once said: 'You know what your trouble is? You're a smart guy in a dumb job.'”

Clearly, Schickel excoriates himself unduly — among other accomplishments, he's written fine critical biographies of D.W. Griffith, Walt Disney, and Clint Eastwood and a pioneering work on the cult of celebrity — but his insistence on deflating his own worth is of a piece with another significant topic the book explores and decries: the heroizing of the common man. Schickel despises the way in which the films of the time elevated the ordinary American. Although Schickel was himself anti-McCarthy, he blames “the Popular Front writers” for most of the “patronizing ‘little guy’ tropes” of World War II films. (His almost universally negative assessments of work by blacklisted screenwriters seem influenced by Schickel's hard-to-read politics, but he claims his criticisms are purely aesthetic: “All you can say of this lot is that if their political sins were minimal, their rhetorical ones were heinous.”)

Schickel's just as condemnatory of latter-day commentators such as Tom Brokaw who have extolled the World War II soldiers as America's “greatest generation.” He writes: “Brokaw and the rest are still in the business of celebrating the virtues of American ordinariness in the old-fashioned way. They implicitly posit some mystical connection between the dumb, dutiful decency of the average American and the great and necessary moral task they accomplished.” Schickel will have none of it. He cites the experience of director Samuel Fuller, a combat veteran of D-Day: “Sam always insisted that we are all heroes and that we are all cowards. The difference between the one status and the other is as thin as the paper on which citations for bravery are written up. It is all a matter of circumstances. And of chance.”

At a time when government and mass media again conspire to promote a war — and assert America's inherent virtue — Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip serves a valuable function. As Schickel writes in his concluding chapter, “The Evil of Banality”: “If we cannot remember truthfully, we cannot think clearly or behave decently. That is one important thing a critic — that curious, not to say exotic, creature I have become — tries to do: recall honestly, so as to measure new experience in such light as memory can shed on the case.”

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“The Finest in Jazz Since 1939”: The Blue Note Stories


The “life story” of Blue Note Records, arguably the most distinguished recording label in the history of jazz, has been told a number of times before, in a number of ways. If you had the time, the money, and the inclination, you could invest in The Blue Note Label: A Discography, Revised and Expanded, compiled and written by Michael Cuscuna and Michel Ruppli. Or, if you are more visually inclined, you could look at Blue Note: The Album Cover Art and Blue Note 2: The Album Cover Art: The Finest in Jazz Since 1939, edited by Graham Marsh, et al. You could also look at The Blue Note Years: The Jazz Photography of Francis Wolff, edited by Cuscuna, Charlie Lourie, and Oscar Schnider. Of, if you prefer to stay near your TV-VCR-DVD, you can buy or rent Blue Note: A Story of Modern Jazz. All of these texts, published over the last 15 years, are handsomely and lovingly produced, and jazz fans throughout the world consider them to be valuable, if not indispensable, keepsakes.

Richard Cook, co-author of The Penguin Guide to Jazz on CD and the editor of the British journal Jazz Review, manages a tad grandly in Blue Note Records: The History to tell the story, or stories, in yet new ways. While each of the above sources provides information on the lives and careers of Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff, the founders of Blue Note, Cook provides more and better information on, indeed analysis of, them and their labors of love in jazz.

Cook’s story does not start and stop with Lion and Wolff either, but includes extended commentaries on Reid K. Miles, Blue Note’s “designer-in-chief,” and Rudy Van Gelder, the dean of jazz recording engineers and the co-creator of the “Blue Note sound.” Then there are Cuscuna, Lourie, and Bruce Lundvall, who took “new Blue Note” into the 21st century. Then this year Lundvall took Norah Jones to the Grammy Awards and on to the bank. Lion and Wolff would never have believed it.

More importantly, though, Cook chronicles the activities of Lion and Wolff precisely where they were most comfortable: in the recording studio. They were attracted to America for several reasons, mainly the desire to leave Nazi Germany and settle in New York in the late 1930s, where they immersed themselves in the world of jazz. Wading into the jazz recording business together, Lion handled the contacts with musicians and technical details and Wolff the visual aspects of production and the finances. Cook quotes Chicago pianist Art Hodes, who recorded 10 dates in 1944-45 for Blue Note on the atmosphere of the sessions:

“You walk in and there’s a big bag of food. Once we started playing, you didn’t have to leave the building for nothin’. Alfred hung his hat in the control room, while Frank was all over the place taking pictures. After a while you got used to him almost in your lap. Took good pictures too. There was a feeling of ‘at ease.’ And considering the times, the bread was good. Eventually the records were released, and no one got hurt.

Cook often quotes other musicians on the ease of recording for Blue Note, the freedom and control the musicians were given. Yet Lion knew what he liked and what he wanted too. Only after he and Wolff died did countless unreleased, poorly labeled tapes surface, the basis of numerous later reissues and remasterings. But the two of them successfully navigated Blue Note through the swing, bebop, hard bop (Blue Note’s metier), and the avant garde eras of jazz. Cook’s book, in focusing on key sessions recorded by Blue Note over more than 30 years, can be read as a history of modern jazz, particularly in its evolution in the 1950s and ‘60s as “art music.”

Cook’s role as co-author of the Penguin Guide is evident in his Blue Note book, not only in his chronicling of tunes and players but also in his crisp assessments of the performances and the significance of the recordings. Here’s Cook on Horace Silver, who recorded for Blue Note for close to 20 years and more than anyone had a defining influence on the character of the label:

Silver’s albums were outstanding because they worked as albums. As jazz had grown accustomed to the long-playing format, its LP records became more like entities and less like collections of tracks or jams or strings of solos. More than almost anyone else, Silver was fashioning balanced, cogent programmes of music, matched together for the forty minutes of a typical LP duration.
improved remastering techniques have allowed experienced jazz
listeners of the new millennium the opportunity to retrieve the
masterpieces of the Blue Note catalogue and new listeners the
chance to discover them in the RVG Edition Series, with Rudy
Van Gelder delivering his own remasterings. The same kind of
revisitation holds true at Columbia, Verve, Impulse!, and other
prominent jazz labels, though in Cook’s estimation throughout
the book, these labels never quite measured
up to Blue Note in the quality and consisten-
cy of its artistic and technical standards.

Jazz keeps changing now, as always, and
Blue Note remains successful because it con-
tinues to discover new and diverse talents
and expand the range of the music. Greg
Osby, Jason Moran, Bill Charlap, and Stefon
Harris are jazz cats to watch. Cook recog-
nizes that the old Blue Note hardly ever
recorded a singer, but now vocalists such as
Kurt Elling, Patricia Barber, Cassandra
Wilson, and Ms. Jones are among the most
popular artists on the label. More world
music and crossover artists weaned on rock
and blues appear now too. But perhaps with
the old Blue Note as their model, “today
there are more than five hundred independent jazz labels . . . doc-
umenting the work of thousands of players.” A bit strangely, one
might even leave Cook’s book with a renewed confidence about
the future of jazz, a view not always easily taken these days.

Worth a special look is the book’s Appendix, “The Blue Note
Label: A Basic Discography of the Classic Period.” It simply lists
the recordings produced by Alfred Lion and Francis Wolff. In the
end, they are the true heroes of the Blue Note story.

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Richard Schickel. Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip: Movies, Memory, and World War II, Ivan R. Dee, 329 pages, $27.50

In his odd and astringent memoir Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip, Time magazine film critic Richard Schickel insists on truth-telling: no sugared lies or nostalgic sentiment, no filigreed scrim obscuring a clean window on the past. Subtitled “Movies, Memory, and World War II,” the book examines all three subjects – intertwining the cultural, personal, and sociopolitical – with the same uncompromising honesty. “The lost past was not golden,” Schickel insists in his prologue, and he wants us to recognize that unpleasant fact, to look back with clear-eyed skepticism rather than teary fondness.

Having been duped as a child by comforting falsehoods – from family secrets to national myths – Schickel uses Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip to reveal those lies and condemn the prevaricators. He offers a relatively tolerant view of his relatives and the stolid burghers of his suburban Milwaukee home. Schickel allows that they “were doing the best they could to raise useful, optimistic, good-hearted little citizens. You can’t blame them for hiding the more dangerous and bitter truths from us.” But Schickel insists on holding other, higher powers accountable: “One obviously cannot blame wartime adulthood for failing to imagine a permanently insecure ‘homeland,’” he admits. “On the other hand, about the larger institutions that manipulated them during World War II – the government, the mass media – I am less forgiving. I do believe they knew more than they were telling (and selling), that they deliberately distorted much of what they put forth in those days in order to keep us bent pliantly to their will.”

A one-man war-crimes tribunal, Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip allows Schickel to belatedly point an accusatory finger and pass judgment: “I am calling to account these institutions and, above all I hope, my all too innocent self, attempting to identify at least some of what we missed or were misled about.”

Given Schickel’s basic intent, Good Morning, Mr. Zip Zip Zip proves a distinctly unconventional memoir. Although at least half the book provides finely detailed reminiscences of his youth during World War II in Wauwatosa, Wis., the other is given over to reassessments of key films from the era. Occasionally, Schickel devotes himself to analyzing movies that have specific relevance to his own life, films that struck an especially resonant chord, both then and now, or that related strongly to his particular circumstance. A Tree Grows in Brooklyn, for example, Schickel “took to heart” because of his identification with the central character’s “passion for reading and writing, her sense that they somehow offered her a way out.” He adds, “I may also have seen in her parents’ marriage something akin to my own mother and father’s marriage.” Throughout, Schickel foregrounds his personal connection to the films under discussion and the ways in which they shaped his worldview, but he doesn’t limit the book’s perspective to his own vantage: his larger goal is to illuminate the role of Hollywood film (and popular culture generally) in inculcating within us all a dangerously naïve set of values, an illusory sense of security, and a falsely heroic vision of America.

In broad terms, what Schickel objects to was the way in which most films of the era refused to confront – or, more accurately, willfully suppressed – the harsher realities of everyday existence (and not just during wartime). The movies he singles out for praise are those that don’t attempt to hide grim truths but that reveal them. Schickel praises Meet Me in St. Louis, a film that superficially appears the sort of nostalgic evocation of a gentler time that he condemns, because “it allowed the hint of a darker current running beneath the bubbling surface,” especially in the character of the “neurotically troubled” 6-year-old Tootie (Margaret O’Brien). “She was one weird little kid,” he notes, and Schickel particularly credits Meet Me in St. Louis because it doesn’t “elide Tootie’s strangeness; a lot of the time it runs on it. She has, to put it bluntly, a morbid interest in morbidity.”

So, frankly, does Schickel. One of his most strongly stated criticisms of World War II films – he specifically exempts They Were Expendable and The Story of G.I. Joe from his otherwise-sweeping condemnation – is their transfiguration of death into glory. Death is almost always portrayed as noble self-sacrifice, never the result of random chance, and is honored with a sweet, pillowy-soft heavenly reward. “It is doubtless too much to ask of wartime movies that they fully acknowledge the absurdity and panic of sudden, youthful death,” Schickel acknowledges. “That was for a later time – for Bonnie and Clyde and Chinatown, for Pulp Fiction and Fargo – though I do think that the way death is now portrayed in our best movies is one of the great improvements on the past. But it seems to me that the imposition of heroic meaning upon it – not to mention the many promises of an agreeable and useful afterlife – is, when all is said and done, the salient defect, the great lie of wartime movies.”