Remembering Paul Gruchow
by Rhoda Gilman

Thinking about the Future
by Tom Abeles

Rembrandt's Journey a review by Robert Brusic

Political Wavers by David Juncker
Editorial Notes

THINGS often do not turn out as we plan. While it might seem that I am making a statement about current American history, I am in fact talking about this journal. When I asked in the last issue for op-ed pieces on politics, I had in mind an issue with several articles related to the upcoming election. It seemed like a natural—scholarly people sharing opinions with concerned readers. In fact, I received no voluntary submissions about politics; the articles in this issue that deal with politics are those I solicited. I am grateful to Tom Abeles, Robert Brusic, and David Juncker not only for their ideas but also for meeting deadlines and space requirements.

In the meantime, however, three things happened that I could not foresee.

1. The tragic death of Paul Gruchow motivated Rhoda Gilman to capture on paper some of her reminiscences and correspondence with Paul. I am grateful to Rhoda for sharing these memories; they add to the archive of information about Paul’s life and work and give us a frame work for remembering this fine writer. Paul was a member of the Scholars for many years.

2. In April, the MISF board, concerned about declining membership numbers, designed a survey to find out what members want and what they might do to help the organization. The board asked me to run the survey in this journal. It is between pages 4 and 5. I have designed the survey page so that you can remove it and return it without changing the pagination of the issue. Your archive of journals will be complete, and we will know more about what you want and what you might do. If a sufficient number of people return the survey from the newsletter, MISF will be spared the expense of mailing it out again or the agony of calling everyone and asking them the questions. Please do your part. We would like to hear from you.

3. The Scholars have teamed up with the Minneapolis Athenaeum, the Thoreau Society, and Milkweed Editions to sponsor a program in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of Walden. (Part of the celebration is taking place in Minnesota because Thoreau spent a month in Minnesota in 1861.) The program, on May 22 and 23, features two important Thoreau scholars. Complete details appear on the back page of this journal.

Recently I have been reading a book entitled One Vast Winter Count: The American West before Lewis and Clark by Caleb Calloway (University of Nebraska: 2003). Calloway concludes with a probably mythical, but relevant story of a Roman general who had a slave stand behind him in his triumphal chariot; the slave’s job was to whisper in the general’s ear that he should not believe all the accolades, that not all of his plans would actually work out. Some of our politicians could such a voice in their ear; even this editor could sometimes use such a reminder.

The theme for the next issue (if anything like a plan actually works) will be health care. If you have any thoughts on this subject (800 to 1000 words), please considering sharing them. I look forward to hearing from you. The deadline is September 10.

Lucy Brusic

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remembering Paul Gruchow</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking about the Future</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rembrandt's Journey</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Wavers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President's Message</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoreau Celebration</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Remembering Paul Gruchow
by Rhoda Gilman

In the fall of 1993 I was working hard on a preliminary version of my book of selections from the North Country Anvil. At a program—I believe it was in the Landmark Center—I ran into Paul Gruchow. We were only slightly acquainted, but he asked politely what I was doing, and I told him. Paul had never published in the Anvil, and his genuine interest in it came as a surprise to me. We went on to discuss some of the problems and perplexities of the task I was facing.

I had been thinking about the need for an introduction to the collection, so a few days later I wrote to Paul enclosing an outline and some samples of the proposed contents and asked if he had any suggestions about an introduction—or if, just possibly, he might be willing to write one himself. Since there was no funding for the project, I explained that, like the help I had received from Barton Sutter, Emilio De Grazia, Joe Paddock, and several others, it would have to be a labor of love.

By return mail he answered: “Writing an introduction to Ringing in the Wilderness is a project I would very much enjoy, provided that you could wait until sometime in December or early January for it.” In March I received his essay, and through the rest of the year I kept him updated on the various milestones passed on the road to publication.

It was no great surprise, therefore, when I received a letter from him in February, 1995. It was written from Northfield, where he was living while teaching at St. Olaf. Addressing his “Dear Friends,” he said:

As I enter the tenth year of my life as a fulltime writer, I have been taking stock, puzzling about how to find a familiar audience and a deeper sense of purpose for the work I have chosen to do.

This stocktaking has brought me back to a basic principle: writing ought to be first of all a gift. I loathe the way in which writers are forced to become hucksters of their work and peddlers of their personalities in order to succeed in publishing as it is currently organized. I don't want to have to yodel and tap-dance, play the saxophone, cultivate an air of eccentricity, develop a good line of jokes, do publicity tours, make an endless round of “appearances,” and think always of good marketing angles in order to earn the right to express my ideas. So I have decided to make my own small audience, publishing myself, and offering the results in a bimonthly newsletter free of charge, simply as a gift.

The first issue of the Cannon River Letter was enclosed. The main essays in it have all appeared in other publications, but tucked away at the back were a few short notes “From the Journal,” which I have not seen elsewhere—although I may simply have missed them. One was:

When all the emphasis, in a circumstance of disadvantage, is placed on altering the environment, the possibilities in adaptation are lost, and these are, perhaps, the most powerful possibilities in the long run. One could argue, for example, that the blues and the renaissance in black literature, both adaptive strategies for survival, are stronger agents for overcoming racism than is affirmative action. Both bring progress, but the one strategy deflects and disempowers hostility by turning it to advantage while the other only intensifies the background noise of hostility in which the change occurs. One makes the music of harmony; the other makes the music of dissonance.

The plants in a bog don’t seek to warm the climate; instead, by finding ways to cope with coldness, they make the environment distinctively their own.

I thanked him for the gift and answered:

I like the idea of your letter, and I predict that your audience won't long remain small—maybe not as small as you’d wish. The writing and reading world is indeed changing. I subscribe to Whole Earth Review and The Alternative Press Review, and the phenomenon of “‘zines” (which they regularly discuss) fascinates me. As publishing houses are bought up by multinationals and book supermarkets proliferate, the really vital currents of literature and social commentary may go underground.

We continued to exchange letters. In April, 1995, I wrote:

Don’t tell Eric Utne, but I’ve been busy xeroxing copies of your article on “Ransacking Our Libraries” in the current Reader. I want to be sure that those responsible for the decision to destroy catalog cards at the Historical Society’s library hear about it. That catalog was an exemplary case of cumulative scholarship. When I came to the Society in the late 1950s an aged band of (female) librarians were toiling over it, and falling further behind each year. The main reason they couldn’t keep up with acquisitions was the extremely meticulous job they were doing. Even separate essays within a volume might be cataloged, if they seemed important enough. As the library goes onto computer, generations of work are being lost—not to mention an invaluable tool for scholars. It may not be altogether coincidental that the present head of the library, although a highly capable organizer, has never done any research in her life.

To this he replied:

Did you notice the reactions to the card catalog piece in the Utne Reader? I wonder if there is any faith so blind as our own in technology. Computers are fine by me; I have used one every day for ten years. But I would have thought that my subject was the destruction of scholarship, which is another

continued on next page
Paul Gruchow... (continued from preceding page)

matter entirely. St. Olaf, you know, has also trashed its card catalog. The old cards are now being used as note paper.

For a while the Cannon River Letter seemed to satisfy his hunger for a community of writers and readers. In issue number three he wrote:

One of the great pleasures of publishing this way is that readers respond with their own news. The week that I mailed the second issue I also published pieces in three periodicals with a combined circulation of about 1.5 million. In the week that followed I had one response to the periodical pieces—a collection of pamphlets promoting vegetarianism. During the same week I had a dozen letters from among the hundred or so readers of this newsletter: witty, thoughtful, provocative, helpful letters, many enclosing excerpts from works in progress, essays, photographs, even books. You’re busy, productive people, laboring hard at lots of wonderful things, and reading your missives restored my optimism, which, given the temerity of the times, was in need of repair.

I was one of those who sent him things. They included some reflections I had written on the question of allowing pets in our Quaker meeting house—an issue that was then being debated with much anguish and is still a divisive and painful one among Twin Cities Friends. He liked it well enough to put it in number six of the Letter. I also sent him one of my daughter’s stories, a fantasy tale set on the prairies of southwestern Minnesota. It was printed in a lively local publication he had never seen before. He wrote:

I can tell that I’m going to have to look up Tales of the Unexpected, which I did not know about. There is, alas, so much interesting work going on that is less well known than it ought to be.

By then his book Grass Roots: The Universe of Home had been published, and it was soon followed by Ringing in the Wilderness, with his introduction. Both were nominated for Minnesota Book awards in the spring of 1996. Grass Roots received one; Ringing did not. In writing to congratulate him, I noted:

Ringing, just like the Anvil itself, is handicapped by the fact that it doesn’t fit into a recognized slot. As Jack [Miller] once observed, it “insists on uniting functions which the culture separates.” The fact came home to me again this week when I read that it hadn’t been included in an Earth Day program honoring Green books to be held next weekend in Duluth.

Paul replied:

I share your disappointment about Ringing in the Wilderness, but I must say that nothing involving the Minnesota Book Awards surprises me. All prize events produce odd results, I think, but the MBAs, over the years, have seemed to me to push the envelope in this regard.

When I received Letter number eight I realized that two issues had failed to reach me. (A friend later gave me her copy of number six.) Paul explained:

The reason you didn’t get Number 7 was that there wasn’t one. I lost count. You’ll see that the next issue, which should arrive in a few days, is Number 8.5.

It came, but number nine never did. Instead, in July I received a neatly printed card informing me that Paul had been ill and there would not be another letter until fall. None came then, either. At Christmas I sent a note, hoping that he was better. He thanked me briefly and replied:

I wish I could say I’d been up to anything useful, but I can’t.

I am, however, gradually emerging into the world again, and there will be a Cannon River Letter again one day soon.

Number ten arrived, dated January-February, 1997, but that was the last I ever heard from Paul. Having had some experience with depression in a close friend of mine for many years, I suspected what the illness was, although I had no other source of information about him.

I treasure my collection of the Cannon River Letter. Most of the writing is his, and most of it has been published elsewhere in more permanent and acclaimed form. But there is a privacy about the ragged little white paper booklets with their erratic style and numbering. They speak to me of the silent collaboration between writer and reader without which creation drops into emptiness. They speak to me of Paul’s yearning for close communion and an intimacy of shared experience.

The last issue includes a long essay about Isle Royale. In essence it is a meditation on the many questions surrounding the preservation of wilderness. As I leafed through it, one passage jumped out at me. He was discussing the rise and decline of the wolf population on the island. Only eleven were left at the time he visited.

One night while I was camped, I heard far away the cry of a lone wolf. Sometimes that cry has sounded to me exuberant, sometimes mournful, and sometimes it has made the hair on the back of my neck rise, as the hair on the back of a wolf bristles when the animal is threatened. But that night the cry sounded to me defiant. “Yooowww!” the wolf seemed to be saying. “Yoooooooow!” The accusation echoed through the narrow valley and across the waters of the lake, as through deserted city streets.

“Listen up,” the wolf said. “Pay attention. I intend to survive. Do you?”

At first the passage struck me with sad irony. Then I saw a message of hope. Paul is no longer with us, but his words and his heart will survive among us for a long, long time to come.

Rhoda Gilman is a historian, political activist, and longtime member of MISP. Her most recent book is Henry Hastings Sibley: Divided Heart (Minnesota Historical Society: 2004).
MISF Membership Survey May 2004

The April meeting of the MISF board of directors voted to conduct a survey of the current membership with the intent of finding ways to increase participation in the organization. The survey questions are printed below. You are encouraged to fill out the questionnaire and return it to the MISF post office box. If enough people return the survey at this time, we will save ourselves the cost of a second mailing. **Please take a few minutes to answer these questions** and return the form to Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum, PO Box 80235, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis MN 55408-8235. The survey has been designed so that you may cut this page from the journal, fold it in half, tape it, put on a 37-cent stamp, and drop it in the mail.

1. What do you value most about MISF?

2. What is your main field of interest? Would you be willing to tell others about that field?

3. Are you currently working on a research project and would you be willing to share your findings?

4. Do you use a computer to search the Internet? If so, is an MISF website of value to you? What would you like to see on it?

5. Currently there are two on-going discussion groups in MISF: Philosophy Group and Voices of Concern. Would you like a study group around another topic?

   Would you be willing to host such a group?

6. If you could make one suggestion for increasing membership in MISF what would it be?

7. Are there any issues you’d like to see addressed by scholars with background in that area?

If you like to return this form anonymously, you are free to do so. However, if you have indicated willingness to give a program, share results of your research, or start a study group, we need to know your name in order to follow through. The space below is for your name and telephone number and/or e-mail address.

Name_________________________________________E-mail__________________________________

Phone________________________________________

If you are not a current member, and would like to receive membership information, please give your address.

Street________________________________________

City and ZIP code________________________________
If you have other comments to share please use this space:

Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum
PO Box 80235 Lake Street Station
Minneapolis MN 55408-8235
Thinking about the Future
by Tom Abeles

Pick a point in time, Now, and think about the future. We can look behind us and gather the past elements in order to test whether there is a trend which points to a future. We can hope that we have identified and assembled the “right” elements to paint the picture of the future. We may have picked the right points, close to the right points, or we may have been off base a little or a lot. Weather forecasting, stock market timing, or when to take a vacation are simple examples of choices which we often make based on past experience. Whether it is race horse handicapping or one chooses a chartist or fundamentalist approach in the stock markets, there are a lot of extrapolist models for future prediction.

What we need to remember is that we choose these points based on where we are standing in the “Now.” Time moves inexorably forward and the future of the Now becomes the new present, one which may force us to see the past differently, a different view of the proverbial elephant of the blind men. One may essentially see the same perspective or one may have been catapulted from the tail to the trunk of the elephant in a catastrophic position change.

Instead of collecting the information to predict where we will be in the future, one can, instead, dream about a possible future, a target, or a goal worthy of achieving. It may be as small as the next meal or a vision for world peace. Now the data we collect has a different purpose. We don’t want to know where the past will take us; we want to understand how to bend the curve to our will and create a path to where we want to go, a normative future. If we grew up in a small village in a family home with a picket fence, a couple of siblings and two cars in the garage, we may see this as the ultimate goal, a world similar to that of our parents. Past history might show that this path was successfully followed by our grandparents and our parents and thus might be a sensible and achievable future for ourselves. But, our near term “history” gives us serious pause. The world beyond us seems to cast doubts that, outside of a world in Disney Land, such a stable future still exists.

David Gelernter, in his historical novel, 1939: The Lost World of the Fair (1), points out that at the end of World War II, all the dreams and visions of a technological society, predicted by the Fair, were achieved through the miracles of modern science. Yet, in the end, the problems that lay at the feet of humanity were as yet unsolved; issues of human relations transnationally, human response to environmental problems, and interpersonal relationships have not yielded to the genius of a technological society and its largess. The friendly village in the United States is either decaying—having been bypassed by the interstate system—or it’s become a growing regional center or part of an urban/suburban ring of growth. How big/rapid are these changes?

For an aging grandparent who remembers horse and buggy and the outhouse and who has seen changes which include international air travel and heart transplants, much has changed. For the youth, the cyber native of today, the changes seem less catastrophic and more in line with expectations of change. For the giant redwood, measuring life over centuries, much has happened in a short time and for the mayfly with a lifespan of hours, changes seem strangely stable and unchanging. Thus we have added another dimension to our thinking about future, the perception of time’s passage, not just the ticking of the millennial clock, but how we see a point in the future. And, interestingly, that perception also changes over time. How do we see the future at age 10, 20, or 50? Some say that middle age begins at 80. Will Christmas ever come? What, me, retire at age 65?

The moving finger writes...

Next, we add, perhaps the most interesting factor, discontinuities. “The Moving Finger writes, and having writ, Moves on” inexorably; but events in time, be they natural or “made by humans” are not so steady. Earthquakes, giant meteors that change entire ecosystems, births and deaths are punctuations in the passage of life on earth. They are so important that we even note their happenings. Yet these “points” may occur over vastly different intervals. The extinction of the dinosaurs, due apparently to a giant meteor, took longer than modern humans have existed, the fall of Rome took centuries and the spanning of the United States by train and then by plane took a few score, while the development of nuclear power took less than a decade.

How, then, do we think about the future? If Nature is pretty steady on her course then the birds and butterflies can plan their migrations in a timely fashion and navigate through space, across oceans. Animals can anticipate the winter and grow their coats. And the wily brown weasel can change from brown to ermine white for winter snows. Humans can develop technologies for locating oil, develop plans for growing and harvesting corn, and plan for potential tsunamis, floods, and earthquakes. What humans have not been very good at is either predicting effects of humans in the past on humans in the future or creating constructive paths to some normative future based on human potential. And as they say, “there’s the rub.”

There are several variances of the basic idea that when Nature created humans she took a chance. Intelligence is not necessarily a survival characteristic. As far as humans can ascertain, planet earth has gone through many transformations and the geological records have recorded the rise and fall of
Thinking about... continued from previous page
many species. And humans claim that they have followed such an evolutionary past. Dougal Dixon, in his Man After Man (2) has strongly suggested that this biological evolution has not ceased and that humans may become active participants in their evolutionary future. Vonnegut, in his novel Galapagos (3), has suggested that humans may capitulate and regress to an ocean past.

Of course, if we look at evolutionary time, such changes represent time frames which transcend generations. To quote MAD Magazine’s Alfred E. Newman, “What, Me Worry?” And this may be the sense from certain segments of the population. Others based on religious revelation might arrive at similar conclusions for different reasons. Yet many, be they extrapolists, or normative futurists seem to ascribe to the idea of time compression: the ability of “big brained” humans to effectively precipitate significant changes in humans—whether these are physiologically noticeable (the common way of differentiating evolutionary changes), or intellectually noticeable, (that is, primarily manifest in the evolution of humans from primitive tool makers to creators of biological transformation, advances in nanotechnology, or artificial intelligence). What indeed will happen when your refrigerator magnet becomes your psychologist; when those proverbial one thousand monkeys set to work on typewriters to create the works of Shakespeare are displaced by a microchip on the back of a soup can; or when nanobots start turning carbon dioxide into oxygen and carbon fiber products, reducing global warming?

Yet, as Gelman points out, there appears to be no wizardry that offers a solution to the problems which arose with the fall of the Tower of Babel. Universal translators do not offer a convergent path between disparate social and ethnic differences. And, many have concluded that while logic and reason have served well to unlock the secrets of the natural world, they have not solved the problem of the human heart and soul. How do we think about the future?


Dr. Abeles consults in the arena of post-secondary education futures. He is president of Sagacity, Inc, a firm specializing in renewable energy technology, products and services and socially and environmentally responsible investments. He can be reached at <tabeles@attglobal.net>.

Notes and News

Book Reviewers Needed

Tom Abeles is the editor of On the Horizon, a scholarly academic journal. He is looking for reviewers of books sent to him or of other books that are current and might be of interest to readers of On the Horizon. Reviewers get international exposure in an academic journal and keep the copy of the book. These are extensive articles (5000 words) and thus should serve as an academic publication for those who publish. He would also welcome suggestions of books that might be of interest to readers of OTH. Contact him at <tabeles@attglobal.net>.

Voices of Concern

Voices of Concern will meet Sunday, May 16, 2004, 2 to 4 P.M. at the First Unitarian Society, 900 Mt. Curve in Minneapolis. Discussion will focus on the broad topic “The Future and the Independent Scholar” which will be outlined at the May presentation. The speakers will come from several organizations including the Minnesota Chapter of the World Future Society and CREED, an environmental/education organization, and will use materials being developed for the World Future Society’s international conference pre-conference workshop on applied foresight and knowledge management.

Philosophy Study Group

The MISF Philosophy Study Group continues to generate lively discussions on a broad array of philosophical topics. To this point, however, we have not been notably successful in solving any of them. We were totally unable to make any progress with Bell’s inequalities and its implications for what quantum theory has to say about the universe. And we have most recently gone back to nearly the beginnings of Western philosophy to study some of Plato’s early dialogues (Euthyphro and The Republic). The latter was to prepare us for our current reading of Karl Popper’s book on political philosophy, The Open Society and Its Enemies, Vol. 1: the Spell of Plato.

The Philosophy Study Group meets at Curran’s Restaurant in Minneapolis approximately every three weeks. For more information contact Curt Hillstrom (612-823-5132 or <mailto:curthillstrom@hotmail.com>.

Member News

Phil Dahlén, recently elected to the MISF board, is adopting two boys from Brazil.
Politics in Rembrandt's Journey

by Robert Brusic

TRAVELERS who call up certain Map quest programs find a variety of choices for the selected destination. One may choose the most direct route; another may select the least expensive or, perhaps, the most scenic route. In other words, travelers may get to the same destination by a variety of means. In visiting an art exhibit, viewers may also invoke a variety of routes. One may take a highlights tour or perhaps an audio tour; the viewer with more time may elect to view the exhibit from the point of view of the artist’s biography, historical or cultural background, or even iconographic themes.

When I expressed interest in seeing Rembrandt’s Journey, the magisterial exhibition of the artist’s work as painter, draftsman, and etcher, my editor-spouse invited (vide challenged) me to view and review the exhibit from the perspective of politics. The exhibition of over 200 works by the great 17th-century Dutch artist was on view at the Art Institute of Chicago from February 14 to May 9, 2004. Could these works be viewed with an eye toward making some political commentary? Or would that be an exercise in eisegesis, even political correctness? On the face of it, seeing politics in the work of Rembrandt was like tasting a grain of salt in a gallon of water. One can obviously get involved in the artist’s life and see it reflected in his art. One can surely derive a measure of satisfaction in visualizing the cultural life of Amsterdam in the 1600s. Most obviously, a viewer can be enriched by the palpable human and religious sensitivity of one of the world’s greatest artistic geniuses. But politics does not seem to arise to the viewing surface of the man’s prints, drawings, and paintings—at least not directly.

Nevertheless, as one selects a particular map for a journey, one can, with the proper lens, ponder paint and politics to find what may not be obvious on the surface. For instance, one might look at Rembrandt’s dramatic painting of Samson Betrayed by Delilah (1630) or his erotic, moralistic etching of Joseph and Potiphar’s Wife (1634) and come away content merely to have seen two depictions of biblical stories. On the other hand, further reflection on these scenes might open the window of imagination to discern that these—and many other biblical scenes—are stories freighted with latent political import.

Whatever personal or physical relationship may have existed between Samson and Delilah, there can be no doubt that Delilah was manipulated by the Philistine political machine of her day. Here, as in other instances throughout history, a woman has been manipulated by political expediency, by a system that wanted to preserve its power. In the case of the frustrated seduction of Joseph by Potiphar’s wife, the woman’s deflected lust turned into revenge. The story goes on to say that Joseph was arrested and imprisoned on trumped up charges of rape. Later, because of his character and dream-interpreting skills, Joseph was raised to the second most important political position in Egypt. These paintings and the stories that they tell remind us that politics and sex have been entwined for much longer than our present history.

Rembrandt’s stunning painting of Daniel and Cyrus before the Idol Bel (1633) also provokes something more than idle thought. On one level this painting is rich in color and drama. One can easily get lost in the light and shadow that both reveal and hide. Beyond the sheer painterly beauty of the rendering of face and fabric, however, one comes to realize that the story of Daniel, Cyrus, and Bel contains the lineaments of one of the earliest mystery thrillers. Daniel shows (in Sherlock Holmes fashion) that the idol in the locked room is not a living being; he spreads ashes on the floor, thus revealing the footprints of living culprits. Beyond the whodunit appeal, however, this painting tells a story of the power of arbitrary politics over individual conscience and religious convictions. By viewing this painting at its deepest level, we are reminded that history is replete with conflict between the questionable policies of those in power and the questioning convictions of the powerless.

Rembrandt and the underclass

The subtext of politics and powerlessness is very evident in Rembrandt’s depictions of the Dutch underclass. Often described as “picturesque,” Rembrandt’s etchings of beggars and other struggling common folk are twice-told tales. On the one hand, one can use a magnifying lens and get up close to Beggar in a High Cap Leaning on a Stick, (about 1629) and marvel at the burnishing, the biting, and the etched granular tone in the piece. Up close all one can see is a seemingly random program of lines and squiggles. Further back, however, the figure resolves and the viewer sees a pathetic creature of gnarls and rags. This pitiable human being is one of many whom we and our economic system would rather not see. Like the beggars in a Dickens novel, the street people of Rembrandt’s day were customarily sent to workhouses to get them off the street and make them into “more productive” members of society. The hand of the artist does more than scratch a copperplate; he etches haunting images that call us to consider what we have done socially and politically with those who are disadvantaged and ostracized in our society.

It is clear that in general an exhibition like Rembrandt’s Journey contains works that are beautiful and deeply moving. The wall-to-wall crowds doubtless went to this show in Chicago just to be near—and to be touched by—the works of this great Dutch artist. If, however, discerning viewers are willing and able to shift the focus just a bit and choose a different visual map, they can become aware of stories that are nuanced by experience, sorrow, and even politics. These themes are there to be seen by those who have eyes to see.

Robert Brusic is a Lutheran pastor with interest in the arts and in Sherlock Holmes.
Political Wavers

by David Juncker

In the past few years we have once again been reminded how important it is in a democracy for ordinary individuals to become involved in the political process. When we don’t get involved our rights and privileges can soon begin to erode.

Years ago, I had the opportunity to review some of the methods and techniques of John Sununu (chief of staff to former president Bush) in national politics. John’s a fraternity brother of mine from back in our MIT college days in the early 1960s. The thing that struck me the hardest was his view that United States politics, especially between Republicans and Democrats, has become, and remains, a game. It is a game that has few, if any, rules; where the ends justify the means, and where you design and spread untruths strategically timed with elections—“before your opponent might have the chance to do the same to you.” It is a sort-of an “anything goes” and “do unto others before they do unto you” policy set.

There is increasing evidence that our current administration is basking many of its decisions and policies on just such a philosophy.

The strong warnings by the outgoing Clinton team concerning Osama bin Laden were most likely perceived by the new team as a political trick to get the new team to over-react. Little attention was paid to the information; then came the 9/11 tragedy.

Post 9/11 reactions included senior White House statements to the effect that “we can’t attack Afghanistan—there’s nothing left to bomb”; and the focus on Iraq rather than Saudi Arabia or Afghanistan. There was a strong case for the deployment of a police action in Iraq—but we ignored our former allies and the United Nations in favor of a “preemptive war” against “weapons of mass destruction.”

Now, in addition, we’re seeing an apparent focus on fear as the preferred way to govern:
- Our awesome power (fear) will make short work of the war —“It will be all over in one, two, maybe five months.”
- We may have been wrong on “Weapons of Mass Destruction” and in preemptively invading Iraq...
- but we must not mention, print, or admit it, as it might adversely affect our troops in the field.
- We arrest photographers for releasing photographs of our dead soldiers returning home.
- We attack cartoonists for drawing cartoon strips depicting the horrors of war.
- We arrest photographers for taking pictures of United States mistreatment of prisoners.

In the background, erosions have been made nationally by:
- changing / removing scientific facts from national scientific reports (one example: “Report on health care disparities doctored” 22 Feb 2004 NYT);
- holding hundreds of citizens and hundreds of non-citizens without charges for months or years at a time;
- blurring, if not eroding, the separation of church and state;
- ignoring the responsibility of corporate CEOs for the companies they run.

What can be done?

Here I’m not at all sure as to what’s possible, but I’m emboldened by a statement from a Massachusetts legislator of long ago, who said, “On almost any public issue, 10% of the public will be for themselves only; 10% will be working for the better of the whole, and 80% will be along for the ride. One only has to beat the first 10%.”

- Minnesota has spawned a new grassroots organization called Wellstone Action! It’s now active nationally and is geared toward training a new generation of activists and leaders to build movements for progressive change throughout the country. Over 2,500 people have received training (23 Camp Wellstones in twelve states) to improve their skills in community organizing and leadership. The concept is based on the observation that “most every major social or economic change in our country has been the result of local peoples coming together with determination, skill, and effective leadership.”

Nationally and internationally, there are some other up-and-coming organizations that go beyond the older missionary concept of giving the “truth” to heathens, using instead the equally ancient, but very effective, axiom that “giving a man a fish feeds him for a day; but teaching a man to fish feeds him/her for a lifetime”:

- Habitat for Humanity: an organization that strives to engage the receiver in applying sweat equity toward a house and then in learning how to finance, manage and run their ‘new’ home.

- Compatible Technology International (CTI) of the Twin Cities, and Educate the Children (ETC) of Ithaca, New York: CTI channels food technology and tools (geared for the location), local energy sources, and local inhabitants to enable micro-industries to start, grow, and flourish. ETC focussed initially on improving local educational offerings by teaching the young and simultaneously training local teachers (primarily women) in Nepal; ETC then discovered that the educated also needed increased opportunities to use their education. ETC has developed a micro-loan program and tied it to the development of needed local services and agricultural opportunities.

- There are many other recently developed, and quite successful micro-loan organizations.

David Juncker is a consulting physiologist.
President's Column

“Chaos is Part of the Nature of Nature.” Dave Wiggins

“Can we learn to think globally?” Dave Wiggins, past president of MISF, asked this question in The Forum, Winter, 2002, issue. The importance of the question, and Wiggins’s treatment of it cannot be overestimated. I urge you to reread his article as the points he makes seem crucial to an understanding of our situation today.

Wiggins quotes Edward Wilson, The Future of Life, who states that for most of human history the brain has attended to its immediate surroundings, its immediate kinsmen, and looked only two or three generations into the future.

The issue for us then becomes: given the limitations of this brain we’ve inherited, how can we learn to think globally when survival is of the essence? In other words, can our brains change fast enough to save us?

An important tool of brain change is the feedback loop. We’re all familiar with the various forms this can take: we realize a mistake, make a correction, and try again. Some brains are more agile than others at anticipating mistakes, thus avoiding them before they occur. Others have to make the mistake in order to see it concretely and then may be able to imagine a correction; still others will persevere, making the same mistake over and over and not learning from it. These, we say, are caught in a loop. We have other words for them also, depending on the social arena, i.e. children, repeat offenders, politicians...

Wiggins’s statement on chaos is economical yet so descriptive of the problem. Humans have been on the earth for millennia — yet only recently are we coming in contact with dissimilar versions of ourselves, on a scale we can barely tolerate or understand. Historically, fighting has resulted when tribes meet—clumsy attempts at intimacy, some might say. Today television and the computer magnify the encounters and strain our abilities to process the thousands of images put before us.

As I write this, our president is speaking to the Arab press regarding images of abuse by Americans in an Iraqi prison. All the world, it seems, is becoming a classroom and the lessons are in front of us for all to see.

Our dignity has been diminished

I feel, as many Americans must, that our dignity has been diminished. To have the luck to be born into the richest country in the world, and see it act so heedless of the obligations that go with that status, defies belief. We seem to have knowledge and information in abundance, but many of us are searching for wisdom. As many have said, and Thoreau put succinctly, “The savage in man is never quite eradicated.”

How impotent scholarship can feel against the flood of high tech images that pour into our body politic, along with the endless chatter by hucksters and hacks, when even our democracy seems for sale.

It seems more important than ever that each of us take ourselves and our efforts seriously; to return to our roots and read what our founders really said and meant. When a presidential candidate says, as Howard Dean did say, “It’s time to take our country back,” it is frightening to look into faces that don’t understand what he means.

I take what comfort I can in the work done by scholars I admire, those who’ve explored the correspondences between the outer and the inner life, between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, between the extraverted and introverted attitudes, and who’ve brought forth their individual, authentic truth to share with us. As Thoreau said, “Books must be read as deliberately and reservedly as they were written.”

In keeping, then, with our MISF mission, we are examining ways that MISF can strengthen its support of our scholars’ efforts. To that extent, we are revitalizing our “Works in Progress” series. Each of us, in our individual way, matters as a model to others. Each of us is processing our portion of chaos. We need each other for support and guidance. In the words of Emerson, “Everything in Nature contains all the powers of Nature. Everything is made of one hidden stuff.”

And if that isn’t comfort enough, he also said: “Whoso would be a man must be a non-conformist.” And I’m sure, today, he’d include women, too. Shirley Whiting

Membership Application
Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household</td>
<td>$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustaining</td>
<td>$75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefactor</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate (organizations)</td>
<td>$40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate (journal only)</td>
<td>$25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual scholarships are available—contact Curt Hillstrom at curthillstrom@hotmail.com. All contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent permitted by law.

Name

Address

City

State ZIP

Telephone (home)

(work)

Clip this coupon and mail it to:
Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum
PO Box 80235, Lake Street Station
Minneapolis MN 55408-8235
From Walden to the West:
Thoreau’s Spiritual and Savage Journeys

Date: Saturday, May 22
Time: Reception 3:00 P.M., Lecture 4:00 P.M.
Location: Campus Club, Coffman Memorial Union (4th floor)

"Walden 2004" is a national celebration of the 150th anniversary of the publication of Henry David Thoreau’s Walden. Special events have been planned by the Thoreau Society in eighteen states, plus Japan and England. Minnesota, the state Thoreau visited for a month in 1861, is honored to be one of these locations.

Jayne Gordon, Executive Director of the Thoreau Society, will speak during the reception. Her talk is entitled, “Shots Heard ‘Round the World.” She will address the result of Thoreau’s timeless, provocative questions about the ways we live our lives. Jayne has worked for over thirty years developing educational programs and resource materials to connect historic and literary sites, museums, national parks, and state parks with classroom curricula. She has done extensive work with teachers, planning and leading seminars linking landscape, literature, history, science, and ethics. She is an adjunct faculty member at Tufts University, teaching courses in both the Museum Studies Program and the Graduate School of Education. Jayne has served as Director of Orchard House (home of Louisa May Alcott), Director of Education at the Concord Museum, and as educational consultant for dozens of non-profits, academic and government organizations.

The main lecture, “From Walden to the West,” will be presented by Dr. Ronald A. Bosco. Dr. Bosco is President of the Thoreau Society and Distinguished Service Professor of English and American Literature at the State University of New York at Albany. He has edited The Poems of Michael Wigglesworth (1989) and Paterna: The Autobiography of Cotton Mather (1976). He has also edited the Emerson Family Papers at the Houghton Library of Harvard University. A former President of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society, he received the Society’s Distinguished Achievement Award in 2002.

A second event is planned for Sunday, May 23, at the Marshall Field’s Performance Hall, Open Book, 1011 Washington Ave. South, from 2:00 to 4:00 P.M. "Walden at 150: A Discussion of the Book," will be led by Dr. Ronald Bosco and Jayne Gordon. Bring your copy of Walden and join in the discussion. The discussion is sponsored by the Thoreau Society, the Minneapolis Athenaeum, the Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum, and Milkweed Editions. Admission is free to both events.

Terry Dinovo and Dale Schwie

Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum
PO Box 80235 Lake Street Station
Minneapolis MN 55408-8235

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED