taptap (foot)

hhhhhhhhhh

taptap (foot)

9:46

tzzzzztt

"Badger Bus Depot.

ya.

7:30

10:00

1:00

5:00

8:00 and

10:30.

ya."

clunk

hhhhhhhhhh

taptap (foot)

9:47

Mark Stephenson
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The Rose Tree

An old and gnarled rose tree stood
On the back forty of the farm land,
Leaned against the stock shed,
And twined its branches over and round
That dear building which, in his youth,
The old man had known and loved so well.
Then the tree had been a bush and, covered every year
With hosts of blazing yellow roses.

Now it stood alone and gnarled, looking
Lonely and forsaken like the old falling-down barn.
But at the end of every branch, hidden from sight
By the barn's roof, shone a brilliant yellow rose.

—Ann Faber
“Never would’ve believed it,” Jason said to his wife as he closed the kitchen door. He unbottoned his heavy hunting jacket with his right hand while he brushed the snow from his shoulders with his left, and stamped the caked snow from his boots in the usual fashion—running in place.

“Do you always have to do that?” questioned his wife. “Someday you’ll fall through into the basement from doing that. It shakes the floor so much I can hardly stand up.” The dish she was washing over the sink slipped from her hand and disappeared beneath a mountain of suds. She heard a muffled clink as it collided with a drinking glass on its way to the bottom of the sink. “There you go,” she said. “Probably broke another glass with that stupid stomping of yours. You yourself can stick your hands in there to fish the broken pieces out, too, ’cause I’m not going to.” With that, she rinsed her forearms free of soap suds and dried them with a hand towel.

By the time she had dried her hands, Jason had unlaced his wet footwear, and he now sat on the kitchen floor with one leg raised, waiting for her to pull off his
boot. As she did so, she asked, "Never would've believed what?"

"I never would've believed we could catch 'coon so easily as we did tonight. If anybody'd told me they'd shot 'coon that way, I'd never believe 'em. Strangest thing."

Still straining on the boot, Lucy asked, "Well then, how do you know I'll believe yeeow?" The last word of this question she transformed into an expletive as Jason's foot suddenly loosened its hold on the boot, allowing Lucy to thrust herself into somewhat of a backward broad jump, which she completed by planting her buttocks squarely on the floor.

"You're gonna be joining me in the basement if you're not careful," Jason remarked. And with a laugh, he held out his hand to his winded wife, which she grasped as she raised herself to her feet.

"You didn't answer my question," she demanded, towering over him. He paused a moment, repeating the question several times in his mind.

During the course of the vociferous conversation, I had been outside, brushing the snow from my own boots and clothing with an old broom of Lucy's, which she had purposely placed on the back step near the kitchen door for her husband and others to use in removing mud, manure, and snow from their apparel before entering her clean kitchen. Having completed such duties, I entered the kitchen from the cold. And before I had a chance to close the door, Jason, eager to find relief from the duty of answering his wife's bewildering question, pointed to me and replied to her, "Ask Tom, he was there. He even held the light for me."

"Ask me what?" I wondered, not having heard the details of the previous conversation.

"Go ahead, ask him," repeated Jason to the woman grinning over him.

She turned to me and said, "He claims that he wouldn't believe anybody telling him they shot 'coon the way you guys did tonight. And I just asked how he expects me to believe him?"

"Well," I said, "we do have two dead 'coons in the truck, so you know we shot 'em somehow. But as for nobody believing how we shot 'em, I wouldn't know about that, even though Jason's been telling me the same thing all night, since tonight's the first night I ever went 'coon hunting."

"Well then, why don't you just tell me how you shot these famous 'coons, and then I'll tell you whether I believe you or not."

"Can't do that yet," Jason asserted.

"Why not?" asked Lucy, her mild curiosity giving way to impatience.

"That's simple," Jason replied. "We can't sit around here and tell a story without Jamie. After all, he was there, too."

"Where is he now?" she asked quickly.

"He'll be in in a minute," I said. "He had to park his car down the street away. And as I was speaking, with my hand still resting on the doorknob, I felt the knob turn, and said, "This must be him now."

Our tall, lean friend ambled into the warm kitchen and shut the door behind him. As he bent down to unlace his hiking boots, he greeted us and muttered, "I'm gettin' awful sick of this cold."

You've got a cold?" Lucy asked. "Here, let me get you some aspirin," she said, reaching for the cupboard. "No, no, I don't have a cold," Jamie said mildly. "What I mean was that I'm tired of the cold weather."

He followed me to the kitchen table, where each of us sat down to an empty coffee mug. As Lucy filled the mugs with the steaming brew, she said, smiling, "Jason, now that Jamie's here, why don't you tell me this incredible story about hunting 'coon?"

"I forgot it already," he joked, and took a sip of coffee. Then, noticing the glimmer of a tear in his beloved wife's eye, he added, "But I think I can force myself to remember the important parts."

Having finished with this brief introduction, he recounted the highlights, along with a few details, of our excursion, and his wife offered him her undivided attention.

"We started tonight in the woods across the road from Tom's house, hoping that the dogs might pick up a hot scent. Jill started barking and pulling me off the trail as soon as we reached the top of the first hill. I unleashed her, then I unleashed Speck, and he tore off after her, howling, you know, with that deep howl." Jason paused here to howl a few times, imitating his prize-winning hound. We always could rely on him to add sound effects to the stories which he told.

"So after we couldn't hear 'em howling any more, we just kept walking, stopping once in a while to listen for 'em, 'cause the sound of the snow crunching under our boots was so loud that we couldn't hear anything while we were walking. We walked all the way up to the piggy, 'cause that's where the dogs went. They were calmed down a bit now, barking only once in a while, so I could tell they weren't on a fresh scent. I think sometimes that she only does it to let Speck know where she is. And all that time we stood in the swamp there behind the pig-house, I didn't hear a peep out of Speck. He only barks if he catches a scent, and if it's a hot one, he'll bark real deep in his throat, short and choppy-like."

He offered a demonstration of Speck's deep, choppy language.

"We shined our lights all through the trees, trying to spot them gold beady eyes that you know can only belong to a 'coon. I figured there must be one or two of them 'coons up there, since the dogs kept circling around and crossing through the swamp, acting like they might 'a' smelled something. But we didn't see any beady eyes, and I was kinda surprised, 'specially after we caught three of 'em there one night last month. Didn't even see a housecat."

I must explain here that, at night, the difference between a housecat and a raccoon is easily discernible to the experienced raccoon hunter, who flashes his light through the trees, hoping that his prey will stare into the bright beam and reveal the color of its eyes. A cat has green eyes, but a raccoon's are a shiny yellow. The dogs, hungry and eager to hunt, often will pick up the scent of a roaming house cat, and will chase the frantic feline up a tree, baying wildly in pursuit as if the cat were a raccoon. Without his ability to distinguish between yellow and green eye color at a distance of more than
fifty feet, Jason would have killed many a charming house cat in the past. He has told me that sometimes he will shoot a treeed cat for the sheer enjoyment of doing so. "Besides," he says, "the dogs need a treat once in awhile."

"We got tired of standing around in the swamp after awhile," he continued, "so we called the dogs in to re-leash 'em so we could head back to the truck. Jill came right away, but Speck, like always, he took his time. He took so much time that I had to go looking for him. I must have been gone for a half-hour looking for that blamed dog. He's good for barking true, but he ain't good for coming back."

I remember waiting in that field behind the piggery for much longer than a half-hour that night. Jamie and I were glad that we had dressed to withstand the cold. The biting wind that howled over the hill pasture would certainly have chilled us had we not bundled up with several layers of sweatshirts and thermal underwear. Even though we didn't follow Jason, we kept moving, running in place and waving our arms in the air, to maintain a warm body temperature. To pass the time, we busied ourselves by scanning the trees at the edge of the field with Jamie's electric lantern, but since the beam widened quickly and could not be adjusted, we could distinguish nothing at distances greater than fifty feet. While shining the light on the leafless treetops nearby, we thought more than once that we had spotted a 'coon fitfully gazing at us from its lofty perch, but the "beady eyes" we soon recognized to be stars fixed in the December sky.

"We finally got back to the truck after about three quarters of an hour, but it was still early, so we decided to try that other swamp on Bater's farm. They've got a big pile of corn silage lying outside that the 'coons love to pick from. As soon as we unloaded the dogs from the truck, I shined my headlamp across the top of the corn pile, and I saw two beady golden eyes staring at me. But before Jamie had a chance to shoot—'cause he had the gun—the blessed 'coon had run over the other side. It took us a few minutes to get around the pile, and when we did, all we could see in the field behind it was a house cat. Tom and Jamie just laughed 'cause they thought I'd seen a cat at the top of that pile, but I know it was a 'coon, 'cause I saw the eyes. "Right then I noticed the dogs seemed confused, as if their smell went bad, but I couldn't figure out why. Well, I shot my light through the trees, to see if I could spot the 'coon again, and then I flashed it down into the swamp below us, and right there, not twenty feet away was a 'coon, waddling through that smelly swamp as if we weren't even there. I hollered at Speck and Jill to get it, but they wouldn't go; they couldn't smell it. So I grabbed the gun from Jamie and shot two bullets into the 'coon. Then I looked over and saw another 'coon waddling just like his friend. I shot at that one, but I missed.

"By this time, the dogs were tearing apart the first 'coon, so I had to stop 'em, to save the pelt. So I gave Jamie back the gun and ran on down into the swamp. I saved the first 'coon from the dogs and gave it to Tom, who followed me, to throw up onto the banking. By now, the other 'coon was up a tree. So Tom got the gun for me from Jamie, and held my hat-lantern, after I adjusted the beam, so I could see to shoot the 'coon. Those beady eyes were looking straight down at us, so I aimed between 'em. When the 'coon came down, Speck and Jill tore into it, but we got it away from them.

He paused a moment for reflection, to make sure he omitted nothing, and added, "Both 'coons were just this year's kits, I think, so we probably won't get much for the furs. But isn't that strange the way we caught 'em? The dogs couldn't smell, and there 'coon was, just walking around."

"I don't think it's so strange," said Lucy. "If the dogs can't smell, you can't expect them to hunt 'coon."

Satisfied with that explanation, she left the table and resumed her dishwashing. After a moment of silence, she said, "You know you're lucky, don't you?"

"Yeah," returned Jason, thinking that she referred to his profitable excursion.

"None of these glasses are broken," she finished. We later learned from a reliable source that Mr. Bater had dumped several truckloads of slaughterhouse waste onto the field by the swamp on his property. He had planned to use the offal as fertilizer in the following spring. The pungent odor from the decaying matter probably saturated the dogs' sense of smell, so that they could not pick up fainter odors.

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self-portrait

James Postema

a figure stands at the window;
blond hair shines in ceiling light
but gaunt jaw harbors shadows
and the eyes loom dark caves
he watches,
wary of the man
reflected in the glass
made mirror by dark
as he turns away
light scours his face
but the man in the glass
stares back
unmoved
The Psalms:
God’s “Especial Treasure”

Dale J. Cooper

Brother Bruno, a saintly monk with an angelic face, left me with a sentence last January which my memory has never been able to erase: “I am so happy that you are studying the Psalms with your students, for if they meditate continually upon them, they’ll never have a problem with their prayers.” Sufficiently intrigued, I not only re-read the entire Psalter for myself, I also inquired what a few early church fathers, sixteenth-century reformers, and contemporary Christians had to say about this precious bundle of 150 poems.

St. Athanasius, 4th century bishop, writing to Marcellinus, says: “Son, all the books of Scripture, both Old Testament and New, are inspired by God and useful for instruction, as the Apostle says, but to those who really study it the Psalter yields especial treasure . . . ”

Fully cognizant that he is unable in his commentary to seize the full range of power and emotion in the psalms, John Calvin remarks: “The varied and resplendent riches which are contained in this treasury are not easy to describe in words; so much so, that I well know that whatever I shall be able to say will be far from approaching the excellence of the subject.” Calvin labels the Psalms “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;” for there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life of all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated . . . In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.”

So rich and dense is the vast labyrinth of the psalter that one at first despairs of some higher unity. For the book begins with: “Blessed is the man . . . ” and closes with: “Let everything that breathes praise the Lord.” But in between these two verses the several poets capture so many and varied emotions from the starkest fits of depression and doubt to the heady and exhilarating outbursts of confidence and joy. Some psalms honor God and mock false gods; others revel in the delights of creation. Some are patriotic, others express personal thanksgiving and trust in God for hurdles overcome.

Diverse though the psalms are, there is, however, a higher unity to them. The first psalm cracks open the mystery. Immediately we find ourselves confronted by two men beginning a journey, the Saintly One headed toward God and the Unrighteous One away from Him. Choice for us is required, for all mankind, unlike ancient Gaul, is divided into two parts only, neither three nor four nor many.

The psalms, then, record the journey of the soul toward God, a journey made arduous by the lurking presence of wicked men inspired by the Evil One himself. Indeed, so crafty is the Evil One and dangerous to the soul’s vitality that the psalmists must employ no less than 112 names, titles, and features to describe make Himself known to us in the mystery of the Psalms.”

Read the psalms and soon you’ll discover yourself, for these 150 captured life experiences probe to the very depths of your being in all its complexity. Indeed, upon reading it, the psalter ceases to be a book, but becomes a “living being who is speaking, and speaking to you; a living being who suffers, who groans and dies, who comes to life again and sings—and all this at the very threshold of eternity” (André Chouraqui) St. Athanasius: “You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill.”

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him. "The wicked plot against the righteous, and gnash their teeth at them" (37:12). The Saint shrieks: "O Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me, or they will tear me like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me" (7:1). How choking and dark the night of suffering through which each of God's Chosen must pass as He exercises and stretches their faith! Harsh though it be, the struggle is nevertheless expedient. It is ascetic, training one as an athlete.

But God's judgment upon the wicked is sure, and his timely intervention spells the end of the night. The way of the wicked will finally perish (1:6), for the Lord shall dash them to pieces like pottery (2:9). Of that the psalmist is sure, and hence he encourages: "Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away" (37:1-2). With the Lord's coming the world turns rightside up again.

Is the psalmist without aid, however, as he makes his perilous way toward the Fatherland, the (new) Jerusalem? Never, for God's will, the Torah, nourishes him while enroute. On it he meditates "day and night" (1:2). Sweeter than honey (19:10) God's Torah revives his weary soul (19:17). It is light upon his pathway (119:105). "Through it [the Saint] comes to know himself as a Son of God, and to recognize his vocation as a child of God. Torah is the way, the truth, the life..." (Chouraqui). Love for God and his Torah is what keeps him going as the Saint; God aiding him, presses on. Torah makes him, though pestered from without and tormented from within, nevertheless willing to endure. Finally Saint arrives. "[God's] way of light finally wins the victory, in the glory of the messianic reign" (Chouraqui). Having subdued his enemies, at long last God welcomes the persevering Saint: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

In a jubilant burst of praise, Saint and his comrades, whose weariness is outstripped only by their enormous excitement, cry forth: "Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth [46:8]. The Lord will write in the register of the peoples: 'This one was born in Zion.' Making music they will sing 'All fountains are in you.' (87:6-7).

Who, other than Jesus the Messiah, provides a more vivid example of walking the way of the righteous? In fact the entire psalter is thoroughly messianic. David's Kingship, whose coronation the Royal Psalms joyously record (cf Ps. 2, 110), prefigures the coming reign of Jesus the Messiah. "The Messiah of sorrows, who incarnates the suffering of Israel in his universal passion, is Just One grappling with his night, facing combat with the Reprobate, offering his own blood out of fidelity of God, abandoned by all, even his own. But at the end of night there is dawn. Death is overcome and the way of the Reprobate vanishes like a nightmare... the seed of David flowers anew, and the horn rises high in the azure sky of the deeds of redemption" (Chouraqui).

What is the Christian life today but an imitation of the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, the One who blazed the trail into the Kingdom?

How kind is our God in providing for us a Savior who died and rose again for us. What is more, as our first born Brother, the Saint par excellence, He left us an example that we should follow in his steps.

But God did even more. Knowing how weak we are, as Athanasius says, "before He came among us, [God] sketched the likeness of his perfect life for us in words, in this same book of Psalms, in order that, just as He was revealed in flesh to be the perfect, heavenly Man, so in the Psalms also men of goodwill might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own.

"And, just as one who draws near to an earthly king observes the formalities in regard to dress and bearing and the correct forms of words—lest, transgressing in these matters, he be deemed a boor—so he who seeks to live the good life and learn about the Savior's in the body is by the reading of this holy book first put in mind of his soul's own condition and then supplied with fit words for a suppliant's use" (St. Athanasius).
Paul Klee created his art at the beginning of the twentieth century, seeking to develop a fantastic world that dealt with issues foremost in his mind. The world that results from his work appears whimsical, but a sense of foreboding mystery lies beneath the surface. He goes back to the simplicity of primitive art and the brief nature of children’s art to express what comes from the mind and spirit of man. Frequently, as in this example, he dwells on the subject of death. The central figure takes on the white pallor of death. Dark lines against the pale face hollow and add the starkness of the image. The bright oranges and yellows warm up the central figure enough to bring the whole piece closer to the child’s perception again while still adding to the intensity of the work.
Man is the Measure

Darrell Davis

Film is an extremely powerful medium. Its power to draw us into its world of images, sound, action, and conceptual and emotional framework is almost frightening. Furthermore, the technical development of film and associated research seems to be going in a direction increasingly simulative of a total experience. Color was one of the greatest developments in the history of film, and is now used almost exclusively. Three-dimensional and special effects have been around for a long time but are enjoying a modern revival coupled with unprecedented technological sophistication. Dolby sound surrounds us in thunderous volume levels and contributes to the total effect to a degree never possible before. Of course there are the 180 and 360 degree screens which show special films to the bafflement of our senses. And at the cutting edge of these developments are experimental movies employing “Odorama” (supplementing the film with appropriate smells) and seats which shift and vibrate according to the action on screen.

What sorts of assumptions about film underlie these developments? Are they correct, or do they need critical revamping in order to do full justice to the potentials inherent in film? What sort of attitudes should filmmaker and audience bring to this medium? These sorts of questions cannot be answered definitively, but neither are they rhetorical questions. Certain steps need to be taken in the right direction in this matter, even if it is unlikely that a final decision will ever be known, much less reached.

A few general observations about film itself are in order. Film is ineluctably visual. The word “film” means, among other things, a strip of cellulose treated with chemicals that react to light and record images. The amazing thing about film is that it approximates the way most of us record images with our own eyes. And vision (at least in Western culture) can hardly be disputed to be our foremost sensory apparatus. The notion of vision permeates our lives in the way we act, speak, and think. When we think we understand something or have become “enlightened” we say, “I see.” This enormous reliance on vision is probably the result of the rise of empiricism in the 17th-century with John Locke, which was the philosophical offspring of the rapid development of the scientific method as seen in the scientific discoveries of Bacon, Galileo, and Newton, to name just a few. This is not to say that film is a direct outgrowth of the scientific method, but rather that the pervasive influence of film in our society can be attributed in part to our naturalistic and scientific Zeitgeist which rises directly out of the need for observation and measurement. In short, we have a reliance on sensuously verifiable experience, which is exemplified in the empiricism of modern scientific method but also can be seen to have crept into contemporary culture in general.

In addition to the rather obvious point that film is visual (and that its impact as visual medium has a powerful advantage) is another observation that seems trivial: film is dynamic. This is what distinguishes film from other visual arts which are essentially static (e.g., drawing, painting, sculpture, even photography); film moves, and there is a dynamic unfolding of images before the viewer. On this score film is similar to performing arts like music in that it takes place in time, but, unlike music, it incorporates images into its temporal form and, by virtue of this, can manipulate time in terms of these images. A basic kind of time manipulation would be the operation of the camera at a higher or lower rate of speed, hence fast or slow motion. But, in common with literature, there is also dramatic or narrative time manipulation, where action can skip ahead dozens or thousands of years, or can be reversed through flashback. Thus film can condense or expand action according to its purposes. In the realm of non-dramatic film, time-lapse photography makes visible an otherwise imperceptible change, and swiftly moving film can capture action which is normally too fast for us to be able to see. Finally, some filmmakers are so bold as to use the passage of time outside the sphere of images to con-

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tribute to the microcosm within the film. For instance, Keith Carradine is reputedly shooting a film whose time schedule corresponds to the maturation of his daughter. This will certainly be a long film to make, since he plans on capturing her successive growth from infancy to adulthood. Perhaps Carradine is on to something most of us have been "enjoying" for decades: home movies. Or if the classical unities were in vogue today, perhaps Louis Malle's My Dinner With Andre would fit the bill for unity in time and space, for the film, taking place in a restaurant, depicts one evening's dinner conversation between two men. In these and many other ways the dynamic character of film can be seen, along with the consequent manipulation of time. The significance of this lies not only in intrinsic artistic capability, but also in an extrinsic factor: our daily experience of reality is also dynamic.

Also contributing to the power of the film is its eclectic character. For its soundtrack, film relies directly upon music, sound effects, and dramatic dialogue. Here alone can be seen two arts (music and screenwriting) and one science (sound recording and reproduction) which are indispensable parts of the film medium. More obvious yet is the art/science of the film itself: shooting, processing, and editing. But more in keeping with what is meant by film's eclectic character is not what goes on behind the camera but what is portrayed on screen: first and foremost, screen acting, but also music and choreography in musicals, as well as visual art in the way of set design and construction to lend atmosphere and credibility to the action. Special effects and animation have recently become arts-sciences in their own right. Then, too, there is the action itself which can take up the compositions of an artist, poet, playwright, or musician, the issues which face a doctor, lawyer, scientist, or priest. Practically every aspect of life—artistic, psychological, scientific, social, and religious—can be and has been captured on film dramatically or documentarily. With documentary filming, the medium is capable of incorporating live drama, sports, or concerts into the celluloid world simply by being there to film it. The world of domestic and international politics is vulnerable in the same way to journalistic film.

There is question whether a concert or a play ceases to be truly musical or dramatic when seen mediated via film, or even whether soundtrack music is real music and screenacting real acting because of their service to the larger artistic demands of film which may be seen as manipulating and adulterating the purity of the arts which it incorporates. Though this is not an issue to be dealt with at this point, suffice it to say that film more often than not enhances, rather than restricts, an evening of music, drama, or sport by using various camera angles, panning, zooming, and the like, things impossible to do in person without wandering all over the auditorium. But, obviously, to see a play or concert on film is to give up a certain degree of authenticity, since the viewer is not seeing the performance in person and needs to rely on a mediating apparatus. Seeing the Rolling Stones on cable television is a world away from experiencing the pulsating ecstasy of the stadium, but one certainly could not move smoothly around the hall without fighting the crowds, or be within a few inches of Mick Jagger's face, or walk blithely backstage if one were there in person. Authenticity has its costs, and perhaps mediating performing arts through film should be thought of as a trade-off between accessibility and authenticity.

Finally, film is versatile. Its versatility can be seen in two ways: in its subject matter and the functional approach to the subject matter, and in the treatment such subject matter receives in the film. There is no limit to the subjects film can deal with, no matter how trivial or abstruse. Several years back, it was all the rage for...
Encyclopaedia Brittanica to make long, boring films on literary criticism in which long-winded professors forthrightly lectured head-on into the camera (the angle of which never varied) without benefit even of readings from the text on which they were lecturing. These films were supposed to educate their viewers, but film can also have divertive (entertainment), informative (journalistic film), and in some cases even unabashedly exploitative functions. Every aspect of human experience is fair game to depiction on film, in a large variety of cinematic functions. The very same Shakespeare clip could be used to entertain, illustrate an academic point, inform the community of an upcoming Shakespeare series, or sell tickets to that series. Film's versatility can also be seen in the limitless treatment a certain phenomenon, human or natural, can be given. This is closely related to a film's function, but in some cases functions can coincide while treatment can vastly differ. For instance, a fundamentalist Moody science film could treat a given subject, evolution, in a completely different manner from the way an average high-school biology film would treat evolution, yet the educative function of both might be the same. In most cases, versatility of treatment is much subtler than this, but the point remains that the ways film can treat its subject, not to mention the subject matter itself, are virtually infinite.

These four basic characteristics of film contribute to a conception of film in the West (and especially in America) which is highly empirical, pragmatic, and, above all, realistic. By "realism" we mean here not a narrative method, which is a valid use of cinema, but a way of seeing which demands that every detail be faithfully and literally reproduced for the viewer, instead of using the evocative power of images to suggest or connote certain situations, mental and physical. Extreme examples of this sort of "literalism" might include films like The Texas Chainsaw Massacre or the uncut Caligula, films that are by no accident also exploitative. At the other extreme might be the films of Bergman, which plumb psychological and emotional depths, or Fellini, which indirectly approach the complexities of the filmmaker's own mind. However, our predominantly naturalistic mindset possesses an optimism which assumes that "what we see is what we get," without taking the almost inexorable step further into materialism, which would constrain us to deny the existence of personal selfhood which does the seeing. Film, when combined with sound effects and dialogue, does a fair job of reproducing the sense impressions of most sane and healthy people, hence the reproduction of "reality." Filmmakers today emphasize the aspects of film which correspond to our usual ways of experiencing life (e.g., a visual, dynamic, eclectic, and versatile experience) while largely ignoring the ways a film departs from experience. Instead of making artistic use of film's two-dimensionality, the delimitation of the picture, the absence of space-time continuum, and all the other ways in which film differs from reality (precisely in which the pioneer film theoretician, Rudolf Arnheim, thinks film's artistic potential lies) modern film dwells on film's ability to reproduce "reality." Film thus is seen as simulation of experience (more precisely sense experience) which is equivalent to reality as it is perceived by a normal, naturalistic person whose senses are intact. When sense experience is in this way identified with reality, we can see the rationale for the development of what Andre Bazin calls "Total Cinema," or the proliferation of high-technology enhancers of the sensory experience of watching (and listening to, smelling, and feeling) a film. Because life also is visual, dynamic, eclectic, and versatile, film producers and directors seem to assume not that film is capable of pre-senting a vast array of images, sounds, and thought that can illumine life but, that film is a simulation of life, "real" life as it is grasped by the senses. As Arnheim says, "The complete film is the fulfillment of the age-old striving for the complete illusion" (Film as Art).

The confusion should by now be clean: with the confusion of "reality" and sense experience comes a misconception of film as a simulation of life, only because film can reproduce the sense impressions we receive outside the theater, though in organized and coherent fashion. In this view, film tends to neglect that part of reality not apprehended by the senses because it doesn't take into account the projective functions of human thought and feeling. Film as simulation of experience is an aesthetic of absorption, similar to Locke's epistemological conception of the mind as a
tabula rasa open to the accumulation of sense data. As such, this aesthetic is self-referentially incoherent, since the unquestioned premise that reality consists of accumulated sensory experience is just as much a projection of the mind as the worst sort of subjectivism. Worse, this attitude does violence to an effective use of film, not only by including unpleasant and unnecessary images and dialogue, but by insulting the intelligence of a sensitive audience by the compulsive literal representation of the components which link scenes together to comprise the whole film. A good filmmaker will carefully select his shots and sequences in order to provoke or suggest or imply certain narrative and psychological connections which the viewer can make for himself. Rudolf Arnheim’s favorite example is in Josef Von Sternberg’s The Docks of New York where the “disadvantage” of the silent film is ingeniously compensated for by the picture of a rising flock of startled birds to signify the report of a gunshot. Or to take two modern comic examples, compare Jacques Tati’s Traffic with National Lampoon’s Animal House. Tati allows the viewer to make the comic connections of incongruity between scenes and characters without overtly handing them to the audience on a platter. Animal House, conversely, doesn’t leave much to the imagination in the way it belabors the incongruity between an Ivy League institution and the bacchanalian antics of one of the local fraternities. And oddly enough, Traffic, without resorting to the literalistic obviousness employed by Animal House, is the more realistic of the two, as far as its closeness to daily experience is concerned. This does not mean that “realistic” is necessarily better. Realism is primarily a method which can be used with artistry or abused. Its abuse, like that of most good things, comes in the inordinate emphasis upon one of its constituents to the neglect of the rest, which results in distortion. Most films today, like Animal House, emphasize an explicit visual forthrightness which admits of no subtlety in its presentation of events and characters. This emphasis degrades deficient convincing acting, intelligent dialogue, and, most importantly (to the demise of honest realism), discriminating and revealing (not brazenly obvious) images, all in the name of “realism.”

There is a characteristic naivete on the part of some filmmakers like Michael Cimino in their faith in the indubitable reality of the world according to the senses, which comes out in their underlying assumptions about film as a recording device. They sink millions into reconstructing a historical set to the minutest detail, rather than carefully constructing sound characters and good narrative though the discriminate use of images and dialogue. Such a naivete is ignorant at best and condescending at worst toward the contributions of the human imagination to film, both in its making and in its viewing. Abstract thought, psychological complexities, religious impulses, and use of emotion which goes beyond manipulative commercialism are all discarded in favor of the reproduction to our senses of some sort of visual spectacle. Our scientific, naturalistic bent discourages us from recognizing full-fledged reality in anything which is not amenable to the demands of empirical scrutiny.

Thus we should appreciate the film medium not as a simulative “slice of life,” but as a dialectic between material “reality” as captured on film and the immaterial contributions of our imagination. Films should be constructed with this in mind. The filmmaker should challenge the viewer, engaging all of his mental faculties, not just his senses, by investing each frame with a significance which relates to the film as a whole. Each shot should be regarded as a symbol, building upon the action preceding it and pointing toward the climax or final resolution which lies ahead. Antonioni’s Blowup is of this calibre. Though realistic in that it is a plausible extraction from experience, the viewer knows that each segment relates to the larger theme, which is not specified in any one scene. The integrating connections, implicit in the film, are left for the viewer to make.

But even before our imagination actively becomes involved in a film we must first make an imaginative assent, a basic mental or even unconscious agreement to watch the film “as if” this did or could happen, regardless of whether the action is based on truth or not—what Coleridge called “poetic faith.” This is an audience’s “projective” obligation: to see a film through without renouncing that initial, mutual assent between viewer and filmmaker that “these images and sounds are put together in such a way that is meaningful.” This is not to say, of course, that viewers are not to be critical about the film’s plausibility or technical style. But what the meaning of the film is, how well it is expressed, whether the viewer is satisfied with what he found, and how he reacts, is up to the viewer to decide, within the context of the viewer’s trust that there is food for thought, as well as food for eyes and ears, in the film.

That the filmmaker also has “projective” responsibilities goes without saying. Having many limitations
within which to work—the function or genre of his film, his subject matter and treatment of it, and mundane responsibilities like shooting schedules and budgets—he must work with and around his resources in order to form a coherent piece of cinema which must fulfill certain aesthetic and often commercial criteria. Most importantly, there must be meaning beyond the excitement of our senses in the sensible realities of the images and sound. There must be an overarching coherence and unity to the work which should be evident to a wide-ranging audience which is willing to volunteer its imaginative capabilities. The unity of a good film is best served by a specifiable structure, not just a series of episodes, which illuminates the “point” of the finished film. Within this structure should be the individual scenes and shots, made up of images which are carefully designed to suggest or evoke certain relations to other scenes, to the film as a whole, and to the world outside the film. No film should indulge in indiscriminate, literalistic “reporting” of disparate actions in the name of “realistic” treatment; this only confirms its triviality and distance from experiential reality, while taking liberties with the intelligence of an audience which might have expected to be engaged and challenged. Images and dialogue should capitalize on their suggestive capabilities, understating and exaggerating in the attempt to circuitously provoke its intended reaction in the viewer. Finally, a film’s “point” should be intelligible and accessible to the audience. Ideally, it should have several levels of meaning, delighting and challenging at the same time. A film like *Performance* (Mick Jagger) is an example of a work which ostensibly has structure, unity, and meaning but is virtually unintelligible (at least on one viewing) and therefore cancels out anything else it might have had going for it.

This is only a cursory list of objectives for which a good film must strive, and some of these criteria look to be inconsistent or even contradictory. Add to this the necessity of technical expertise and financial diplomacy and it would seem that the possibility of making a good film is as attainable as the objective of Sisyphus. Of course making a good film isn’t easy, but I would venture very few filmmakers bring to the location a list of theoretical criteria like the one above. They are more interested in the translation of their vision (artistic, commercial, or both) to the screen, and it is they who are ultimately responsible for the content of a film, whether that film is meaningful and unified or is a simulation for the audience of a sequence of spectacular, but meaningless, episodes. It is the filmmaker who invests his images with meaning; meaning is not a concomitant byproduct of the simulation of material reality. It should be remembered that behind the camera is always a human eye which manages and regulates the flow of images so that the eyes that see these images can understand themselves and the world around them in a new and enriched light. Only in this understanding can filmmaker and viewer embark on a joint pursuit of insight into the complexities of the material and immaterial realities of being human.
"Our pool dried up," Tom said despondently.

Anthony Nyman

"I prefer brown bread," Tom said wryly.

Jeff German

"It's moving!" Tom exclaimed ecstatically.

Ed Kluitenberg

"Do you really like my new wool sweater?" asked Doris sheepishly.

Todd de Stigter

"Take off to the Great White North," he said giddily.

William Postma

Tom Swiftsmas

"Lettuce be married since we canteloupe," Tom punned engagingly.

Ed Kluitenberg

"Yes, it's a subtle case of love for money," Tom agreed.

John Hillis

"Of all the authors that I may know, My favorite is Edgar Allen Poe," he poetized.

Joel Koedoot

"That doesn't add up, but that's OK," Tom said, non-plussed.

Suzanne Shaffer

"Pardon my accent," said Hegel dialectically.

George Marsden

"There's only one ethical imperative," said Kant categorically.

J.G. Westra

"I don't care what you say, Vonnegut is still my favorite author," said John curtly.

Todd de Stigter

"The wind has died down," cried the first mate disgustedly.

David Van Baak

"My bra strap broke," she burst out.

Anonymous

"My hair is all messed up," Absalom snarled.

Graffito

"I made some wine again," Tom reported.

Ed Kluitenberg
A rock riddles the surface and sinks.  
Another skims the razor edge between fact and faith,  
Plunges finally,  
Rippling the rigid, enigmatic lake.

Don has sort of wanted to go to college, he said. But his father couldn't afford it. Pop was going to sell the car but I told him to forget it, Don said. Don was a lot like me. He liked to read. He even wrote a little. He wouldn't have minded being a writer but he was a garbageman and that was that.

I worked with him the summer before I started college. I showed up for work the first day feeling apprehensive and pretentious with my lunch bag prepared by my mother the night before, tucked neatly beneath my arm, brand new white work gloves in hand, shiny black steel-toe work boots holding down my feet. I felt light as a pillow feather as I walked up to the garbage. I tried to look on the upcoming summer as a challenge, as a chance for work experience making some real money, but something in the faces of the men who milled about in the manner of experienced workers, resigned and business-like, scared me and I knew that I'd be miserable. My only objective became survival. I became suddenly intensely aware that I was only a soft, skinny, half-asleep kid. I found the foreman and was put on a truck with two men introduced to me as Don and Sal. After five minutes in the truck I began to feel dizzy, breathing in diesel fumes and cigarette smoke.

Don, the driver, smoked a lazy cigarette. It hung limply from his lips. His eyes were swollen with sleep, or rather the lack of it; his dark brown hair was thick and knotted. He had a bushy mustache that dropped around the corners of his mouth down to his chin and what looked like three or four day's growth of beard. His face was sallow and droopy and he looked like some kind of sad-faced hound. He drove fluidly, his motions well-oiled with experience, incorporating the necessary motions for smoking effortlessly into those needed for driving. His expression was so vague and placid that I was struck with the thought that he might actually be asleep.
but we drove on without hitting anything, so I figured it was just his natural look. On my right sat Sal, a big, round, dark, Italian. He had a thick neck and the bulging stomach of a weightlifter who drank a lot of beer. His eyes were closed, his head bobbed with the bumps; he looked almost dead. The atmosphere was sullen, as if we had all had some great disappointment, and I wished I was back home cozy in bed, dreaming about high school, sports, and cheerleaders.

What's a garbageman? I had a stereotypical view of garbagemen which Sal reinforced—pot-bellied, greasy, dirty, and stupid. But Don was different. Something about him wasn't appropriate, wasn't garbagy. I attributed it to the fact that he reminded me of a child, somewhat—the palpable expression on his face, his aura of playfulness—in short, he reminded me of me. Don said very little at first. It was clear he and Sal weren't the best of friends. Sal was a lazy talker, a mumbler, who always managed to speak in sentence fragments.

"Easy," he said to me after I'd begun to work with all the reserve of an unplugged fire hydrant. "Long way to go."

Sal wasn't much of a talker but he was right about the need to pace myself. The garbage seemed endless. Everytime we finished a stretch of garbage I'd look back at the neat rows of empty cans with a certain amount of satisfaction but there was always another street, another alley to pick up. And the next week it started over again. My boot rubbed my heel and I developed a big purple bruise and a limp. My fingers blistered. My hands cramped. The muscles in my arms and lower back mutinied and refused to lift things that I'd lifted easily earlier in the day. I had been right about one thing—I was miserable.

We pulled an average of three loads of garbage every day. After loading the truck, of course, we'd have to ride to the landfill and unload. The rides to the dump were little havens of rest for me, little oases in my little desert of drudgery. The dump, though, was not a pleasant place to go. Its roads were potholed and often jolted us out of our seats and put us in close (very close) proximity to the ceiling. Its smell was a menace to olfactory organs everywhere. The hole they happened to be filling at the time required us to climb a steep hill (which in turn required a running start for our feeble truck) and to traverse a quarter of a mile of rough terrain—a circumstance unwelcome to my rebellious kidneys—during which time we viewed literally breathtaking scenes: deep canyon-like holes at the bottom of which festered pools of the foulest mire pumped in, black foaming, from some unknown underground source; piles of chopped pavement which from a distance looked like mountains of discarded tombstones; gray clouds of earth kicked up by other trucks; and, finally, at the dumping spot, rows of garbage trucks with their tails raised, relieving themselves hydraulically of their burden while some of the workers relieved themselves and their bladder's burden naturally alongside the large rear tires of their trucks. It was, in simpler terms, a burial ground for the fruits of our labors. It was like a cemetery and we were the pall bearers. When the dump was full it was to be covered over with a layer of fresh dirt and become a golf course for some country club.

After I worked a week or so Don seemed to come to life. He began to make little comments to me, give me tips to make the job easier. He began to make jokes and laugh. Sal never showed any sign of interest, but I did. I couldn't help it. Don and I just hit it off. We even began to form our own language: we called the dump the "wasteland"—both of us having read Eliot in high school (and not understood him); behind his back we called Sal "Mr. Buddha."

One morning, after about a month, Mr. Buddha didn't show up. Rumor had it that he was in jail for drunk driving. Don and I were told to go out alone and we acted as if we'd just gotten a glimpse of Mount Zion. All signs of irritation dropped from Don's face. We spent the day in a joyous, celebrative mood, stopping at 7-11 for coke and a twinkie several times.

At the end of the day Don was in such good spirits that he insisted on my seeing his new van. It had a mural of seagulls soaring above the ocean on the sides and the words "ANGEL WINGS" painted across the back doors. It struck me funny but I didn't dare laugh or kid him about it. He said it was slightly used—20,000 miles—but it ran good. He told me excitedly about all his plans to carpet it, put in a small bed, a table, ice-box, and cassette deck. Already he had started the carpet job but he was having trouble stapling it all down securely. He said he hoped to win enough money at the next Friday afternoon craps game to buy the cassette deck. I acted excited and
asked questions about it but on my way home I felt a little depressed.

It turned out Sal was to be off work for five weeks. There was no replacement so Don and I made the best of it. Don had quite a vivid imagination. He told me that in high school he always did well on compositions and essays and stories and I had no reason not to believe him. He turned huge trailered boats that we'd see into dinghies for his collosal ship. I made the mistake of asking him once how big his ship was. He asked me if I'd ever heard of the Mississippi River. I had. Well, he said, that's one of the rivers on my ship. That's pretty big, I acknowledged. That was just one of his larger dinghies, he said, and had I ever heard of the Pacific Ocean. We laughed a lot. He taught me how to swear. He almost made me forget I was miserable.

Once a monstrous rat jumped out of a can Don was dumping and scurried over his arm and away to some hole in the side of a garage. After he watched the rat disappear into the hole, he turned to me calmly and said in a high-pitched British accent, "Oh, how perfectly ghastly. We must call the exterminator at once!" He sat the can down and walked off in a huff. I laughed but I was trembling a little at the sight of the huge rat.

Sometimes, though, Don would be irritable and looking like a droopy-faced hound again. The money he'd been expecting on Friday afternoons wasn't finding its way into his pockets. His wife was sick a lot and his baby kept him up all night and he had to sell his van to make the mortgage and his in-laws hassled him about his drinking and...; he was very destructive on these days. His chief victims were maggots. He'd kill as many as he could as cruelly as he could without going out of his way. No sense wasting energy when there's too many of them to kill them all.

Maggots are truly wonderful creatures. They feel so warm and lively squirming around inside your work gloves. We'd run across a can alive inside with swarming maggots at nearly every stop late in the summer. You can smell a maggot before you even take off the lid. It's a smell that might be close to the smell of rotten hamburger, Pampers, and stagnant water all mixed together. Usually I'd be sticky with sweat and as I'd dump the garbage, falling maggots would stick to my forearms. It got to be a little annoying. Maggots are usually an off-white, fried rice color. I suppose when you're conceived in garbage some of it's got to rub off on you. I've never seen any but I'll bet laboratory maggots are pure white—like steamed white rice, only moving, of course. Don used to complain that he couldn't bring himself to eat at Chinese restaurants anymore. It didn't bother me although sometimes I could swear the rice was moving. What bothered me was that I'd dream about them. They'd be everywhere: squirming under my feet and between my toes; dripping off garbage can lids into my gloves, infesting my ham sandwiches—you know how it is in dreams—and Don would be there trying to smash them all, flailing and flailing.

About a week and a half before the end of summer, Don looked sleepier than usual. His eyes were nearly swollen shut. He looked so terrible that I worked a little harder and longer to give him a break. I told him half-jokingly as we drove to the dump that he looked like he hadn't slept all night. He said "I didn't" with such a malicious snarl that I got a little hurt. He looked at me and his face softened a little.

"I'm just real sick of working, that's all," he said.
I didn't know what to say. "Oh."

He looked ahead and seemed about ready to say something else when his eyes widened and I heard a muffled thump and a quick whelp. Don slammed on the brakes. He jumped down and ran back to where the dog lay, a beautiful German Shepherd, its neck broken, its leg twitching, its long pink tongue hanging out and lying partly on the street. I felt sick. Don stood stunned, then walked slowly around the side of the truck—I assumed back to the cab. I went around to ask him what we ought to do but he was collapsed against the gritty steel body of the truck facing away from me in the dark shadow thrown by the truck, his head down, his body trembling. I left him alone.

The last day came and I had a splitting headache. Diesel fumes finally got to me, I guess. Don hardly said a word to me. I think he wished he could quit work and go to college too and loaf. He probably deserved to more than I did. He certainly had a more fertile imagination than I did. College has made me quite pretentious, actually. Makes me think I have a right to write.

The last garbage can was dumped, the last trip to the dump was run, and it was over. Sal was scheduled to start working with Don again the next Monday. I don't remember if Don ever said goodbye or not. The last thing I remember was watching Don pull away in his new rusty Pinto, grim-faced and solemn; the exhaust pipe scraped and sparked on the road.

That night I dreamt the maggots followed me to school.
night time alone in my room
(I had my own being the oldest)
chased down by mutant monsters
now hiding in the dust in the closet
behind my gray suitcase
or huddled under the bed with my socks
or downstairs
waiting for me to breathe
to find out where I am
clutching the covers to my neck
trembling a little
afraid to close my eyes
strange things live in there
(in my head that is behind my eyes)
they come out at night in the dark
faceless and frenzied
after me

muffled crying wakes me—
not a nightmare—
mom's footsteps on the stairs
the hall light flicks on
squinting sleep away mom pads through the light
in her frayed pink bathrobe and slippers
dark and familiar into little brother's room
I listen
"I was thinking about dying"
I feel cold
like after standing in the rain when it soaks in
"shsh don't think about that
that won't happen for a long long time"
I believe her too and when I say "mom?" as she
passes by she says "go to sleep"
the light flicks off
I close my eyes to the dark hall
and sleep

no satisfaction

My primary aim in writing is satisfaction. If it feels right, I write. And if it's not good, maybe it's satisfying. I try to give each line a life of its own and I never worry about diction until I've finished a first draft. I just let the words flow naturally, almost conversationally, enjoying the sounds, the feelings, the associations spurred by each word. If there is something that wants to be written, I let it write itself. The fun of writing for me is the surprise I feel each time a new phrase, word, idea, pops into my head. Words seem eager to be used and I use them. If I have to work hard to find words I know I'm not writing for satisfaction but for something else—a grade, perhaps. Drudgery rarely, if ever, brings satisfaction. (That is not to say that hard work never brings satisfaction.) I used to toil and toil over a poem, agonize over each word, each idea, each connotation, until I felt I had mastered every aspect of the poem. That is not a good approach. If a poem can be mastered that way it probably is not a good poem—if it is a poem at all. Too much satisfaction, however, may spell death to a poet's creative drive. For me, satisfaction is found in the striving for satisfaction. Being completely satisfied seems to me a horrible state for a poet or a person to be in because it means no more discovery, no more surprise.

There they are: my lunatic ravings. Don't take them too seriously. The truth is: I don't know. And so I write.
Twilight, Really
The sun becomes the
Literal light at the end of 34th Street.
The pebble's shadow measures
18 inches.
The modern end,
Non-finale,
Time for reflection
Off unlit brake lights, and
Chrome bumpers.
Soul-searching communion
In rooms where it's too
Dark for lights which aren't needed.
Sharing what
Conscious communion conceived
Of sharing, although
Not in a
Non-candlelit crypt.
And then the afterglow of having experienced
Such anti-experience
Fading as surely as the sun-vacant beyond.

Rob Schreur
I suppose most students enter Calvin with the idea that they are preparing themselves for a career of some sort or another. And most have held an assortment of summer jobs in order to finance, in part, such an educational venture—jobs which, if they were anything like the jobs I had as a college student, were tolerable only because they were guaranteed to last no longer than three months at a time. I can remember rearranging clods of dirt with a rusty rake in a housing development on the outskirts of Pittsburgh—that was called “landscaping”—or blowing particles of cow flesh off band saws in a supermarket in the southwest suburbs of Chicago—that was called “cleaning up the butcher department.” It wouldn’t surprise me, as a matter of fact, to find out that going to college is to a large degree an effort to avoid being saddled for life with precisely these kinds of jobs. We are concerned about the kind of work we do or will be doing, especially in those days of the incredible Shrinking Economy. Isn’t it odd, then, that while the majority of the courses one takes at Calvin are oriented towards some type of work, there is not one course offered on a regular basis which deals with work per se? Its nature, its history, its shape and place in our society?

It was a reflection on this oddity that led me to the idea of offering an interim course on work, or “the philosophy of labor.” In the description of the course in the college catalogue I alluded to a certain ambivalence in our general attitudes towards work. Most of us would not hesitate, for instance, to contrast work with play or fun. Work is no fun. In fact, if the interviews conducted in Studs Terkel’s book Working are in any way a representative sample, it would be fair to say that at least nine out of ten Americans absolutely loathe their daily occupations. And if the drudgery of the weekdays were not redeemed by horsing around on the weekends, most would find their work to be simply unbearable. This not only holds for “blue-collar” type work, it cuts across all the professions. On the other hand, no one really wants to be out of work and that’s not just because of the money. Rather, it has to do, I would guess, with one’s self-esteem—knowing that one has skills and talents which are both recognized and needed, knowing that one “fits in” somewhere and knowing what one is supposed to do on a day-by-day basis. The job that one eventually winds up with will, in fact, go a long way in determining what kind of person one is, and where and how one will live. In our society the marketplace is undeniably the chief integrator of persons. To be unemployed is to be afflicted with a kind of social leprosy. We all want work. But most of us, as it turns out, hate it.

It hasn’t always been like that. Take ancient Greek society as represented in the philosophical works of Plato and especially Aristotle. There the primary qualification for full participation in the political community was unemployment. Far from being outcasts, the unemployed persons were the upstanding members of the Greek city-state. Sound peculiar? Let me explain. The Greeks, like us, didn’t like work. They were just a little more consistent. Work to them was something that is forced upon us by the unfortunate fact that we inhabit bodies which need to be fed and clothed and protected from the elements. So farming, food preparation, weaving, sewing, construction and roadwork, etc., were all activities that were bound to the biological order of necessity. To spend one entire life engaged in this type of activity was to sweat and toil and eventually die like an animal, to pass on into oblivion without having left a mark in this world. The trick was to come into a position whereby one would not have to engage in such necessary activities in order to stay alive but, rather, have one’s time freed up for activities which are pursued for their own sake—like great deeds in the political realm, or courageous acts in military conflict; that is, deeds that would ensure a certain measure of immortality by virtue of living on in the memory of future
generations.

Both Plato and Aristotle recognized the superiority of the free "political" life over against the necessary "productive" life. But they thought there was an even higher form of life: the contemplative life. We might have expected as much, they themselves being philosophers. What did they think was so great about just sitting around thinking all the time? Well, it has to do with the degree of self-sufficiency which attends an activity. Productive activity, that is, working, is highly dependent upon the order of nature. In fact, the activity is almost completely dictated by the needs of the body and the character of the raw materials one has to work with. Political, or practical, activity too is not wholly self-sufficient, for it depends upon others as its occasion. How could one be courageous apart from conflict with others, or merciful apart from the suffering of others, or beneficent apart from the poverty of others? Thinking, contemplative activity, on the other hand, is, in itself, not dependent upon others. Its objects are always available for thought. Just sit down and think! Of all human activities it is the most self-sufficient. Furthermore, the objects of thought are eternally true and they are thought of by that part in us which is immortal, the mind—Aristotle called it the "divine part" in man. Therefore, of all activities, thought was the most divinely-like. Aristotle thought of God as a big mind in the sky which knew everything all at once and forever. As such, God, the perfect mind, was wholly eternal and self-sufficient, in need of nothing. We have minds too, but they are not perfect. We mortals start largely from a position of ignorance, and knowledge is arrived at only after the long process of induction. Furthermore, our minds are connected with a body, which is terribly needy and regularly prevents us from entering into interrupted periods of contemplative bliss. We have to feed our body, allow it to sleep, get along with other bodies, etc.

Given all the demands that our bodies place upon us, how could a person ever find time to engage in the higher activities? Aristotle's answer could be summarized in a word: slavery. If you were fortunate enough to own a bunch of slaves, then they could do all the work for you, giving you the leisure to engage in practical or theoretical activity as you wished. We moderns undoubtedly find this solution repugnant. But Aristotle thought that his answer was squarely rooted in the order of nature itself. There are some people who were just cut out to be slaves. Who are they? Those who, to put it as delicately as possible, have an underdeveloped capacity for rational thought and deliberation. The dumb ones, in other words. Especially the dumb ones with big bodies. These are the kind of people Aristotle called "natural slaves," and they were to do the work in Greek society, making it possible for the freemen to engage in practical or theoretical activity (cf. Politics, Book I). Furthermore, those engaged in practical activity served the function of securing the political conditions under which a few men could engage in the highest and most divine-like of human activities, namely, thought. So we have, in essence here, an elitist social hierarchy: the activity of the slaves makes the activity of the men of public affairs possible, while the activity of the men of public affairs makes the activity of the philosophers possible. Thought was the most god-like of human activities, work the most animal-like, fit only for natural slaves, the most animal-like of human beings. The whole of human society was to be organized so that a few men could actualize the highest of human potentials.

The basic Greek attitude towards work and its place in human life, along with its corresponding social hierarchy, was essentially preserved during the Christian Middle Ages. The gospel was given out in a culture largely dominated by the thought-forms of Greek philosophy. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that the fathers of the church often interpreted the gospel in terms of the basic categories of Greek thought. They often give the impression, for instance, that the good news amounts to the promise of an eternally disembodied life spent in the undisturbed contemplation of the highest possible object of thought, namely God. In this life it meant the promise of sporadic victories over the sensuous desires of the flesh so that the mind could catch a fleeting glimpse of God as a foretaste of the life to come. The Greek definition of man as a rational animal was largely retained by the thinkers of the Middle Ages. The highest human activity, was intellectual activity. Therefore, salvation, as the fulfillment of human life, was primarily seen in intellectual terms—entering into a full intuitive knowledge of God, the 'beatific vision,' unhindered by the distracting demands of this temporal bodily life. Work, which pertained to the needs of this temporal body, therefore was of no lasting religious significance. It merely hinders the individual's relation to God, which can only be cultivated in the leisure of contemplative thought.

Even practical activity, what the medievals called the "active life," which involved virtuous acts towards one's neighbor, was seen as an impediment to the religious life. This becomes strikingly apparent in Thomas Aquinas' discussion of the summary of the requirements of the law: to love God and one's neighbor as
The love of God leads to the contemplative life. The love of God calls in the desire to think about Him, to know Him. The two requirements of the law are in conflict with each other. One can't care for your neighbor while you are in the midst of deep contemplation, nor can you contemplate while you are caught up in the activity of caring for your neighbor. The two requirements of the law are in conflict with each other. They compete for an individual's time. To which one ought we give priority? The contemplative life, says Aquinas, is much more meritorious than the active. A man could give no more eloquent proof of his love for God than by renouncing everything which belongs to this life and giving himself over completely to divine contemplation. For the need for the active life is but temporary, but the contemplation of God shall continue on into the life hereafter.

So again we have a ranking of human activities, with work at the very bottom and thought at the top. This ranking reflects itself in the general hierarchal stucture of medieval society, which was in many ways similar to the one suggested by Aristotle, with only a couple exceptions: there were two domains of practical life, ecclesiastical and political, and the philosophers were replaced by the monks, who bided their time in the exercise of the spiritual disciplines in an attempt to draw nearer to God in contemplation. The entire edifice was supported by an enserfed peasantry and craftsmen who belonged to the guilds. By virtue of the earthly character of their occupations, the peasants and craftsmen could not directly participate in the religious life, but would have to remain content to have their life, such as it was, sanctified from without by the church. They themselves would receive grace through the church by means of the sacraments.

With the Renaissance the western attitude towards work underwent a complete inversion. The Renaissance attitude towards work took its point of departure from the consideration of God as the creator of the universe. Man was now to become like God not through mere thinking, but through creating, through free productive activity. God created nature out of nothing. Man would now become a demi-god by creating a world for himself out of nature. And just as nature glorifies God in His wisdom and power, so the world of culture would glorify man in his wisdom and power. The ideal man was not the thinker, but the artist, the one who would not merely contemplate the idea of beauty but who would shape his world according to that idea. Nature was not considered to be something that entraps men and burdens him with the drudgery of work; rather, it represents the infinite field for the exercise of man's free creative power, where man realizes himself as free and creative through work. What the Ancients took to be beneath the dignity of a free man, the Renaissance thinkers took to be the very way in which man expresses his freedom; what the Medievals took to be a hindrance imposed upon them by the necessity of nature, the Renaissance thinkers took to be an opportunity to exert man's control over nature. Work was that activity with which man could establish himself as sovereign over a world of his own making.

Karl Marx, the philosopher of labor par excellence and perhaps the most influential philosopher of the modern period, stands squarely in the Renaissance tradition thus characterized. What distinguishes man from the animals, according to Marx, is not consciousness, or thought, but free productive activity. Granted, in its primitive stages, the productive activity of man had not worked itself out from under the necessity of nature. But with the steady development of technology man was on the road to self-realization through the free production of his own world. The problem is that whenever the means of production are privately owned the productive activity of man becomes distorted so that it is impossible for him to realize himself through it. Marx refers to this phenomenon as "alienated labor." This is especially true under capitalism, where ample technology has been developed for the possibility of truly free production but has been used only to augment profit while at the same time creating a generation of "wageslaves." The solution will come, Marx predicts, when the working class's lot in life becomes so intolerable that they will rise up in revolution and make the means of production public property. The production process will then be used in the interest of the public good, rather than the private interests of a few, and no one will be able to use the production process as a means for exploiting others. After the revolution, man will come into his own—free, autonomous, the center of a world which he himself has created, somewhat like God.

There has been, then, a striking divergence in western man's attitude towards work: it has been seen as either an activity which debases man to the level of the animals, or ennobles him to the point of being like God Himself. We might wonder if there is not a mean between the extremes, perhaps a way of thinking of work as a typically human activity, neither brutish or divine. I think the biblical notion of work offers an alternative along these lines; I further think that we have to go back to Martin Luther and his notion of 'vocation' in connection with his critique of the elitist character of monastic life in order to get a handle on this alternative.
Luther's notion of vocation was formulated largely in reaction to the predominant medieval denigration of work. The necessity of work, it was thought, is rooted in the unfortunate circumstances of this natural life. In and of itself work is of little or no spiritual significance. The religious life was lifted to the fullest in the monasteries, where the discipline of the body and pursuit of devotional contemplation was practiced on a daily basis. In fact, many members of the monasteries believed that by going through the rigors of the devout life they would actually merit their own salvation. Because of such acts of self-denial God would surely have mercy on them. Luther was one of these monks, and it is a well-known biographical fact that for many years he was tortured by the idea that even after his scrupulous observance of the prescribed religious practices he might still not be saved. Perhaps he didn’t pray hard enough, or deny himself enough, or meditate long enough. As we all know, it was Luther's re-discovery of the fact that we are saved by God's grace through faith and not by our own works that sparked the Reformation in whose tradition we ourselves stand. But it also provided the kind of leverage he needed to develop a new conception of the meaning of work in human life and to form a critique of the medieval social hierarchy.

In order to correctly place Luther’s notion of vocation within the compass of his thought, it’s important to recall a basic theological distinction he draws between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of Earth. To the Kingdom of Heaven belongs our relationship to God, which should be based on faith; to the Kingdom of Earth belongs our relationship to our neighbors, which should be based on love. A vocation is simply one’s earthly occupation. The idea is that one is called to a certain “office” or “station” in life. This “station” is not necessarily a paid occupation, although it may be. It is conceived of by Luther widely enough to include being a mother, or a father, or a magistrate, as well as a baker, cobbler, or farmer. All of these represent specific ways of concretely loving and serving one's neighbor, as we are commanded to do by God Himself. Furthermore, the order of stations in this earthly life has been instituted by God and is His way of seeing that the needs of mankind are met on a day-to-day basis. That is, the institution of the order of stations in human life and their occupation is an act of God's providence. In working we actually participate, according to Luther, in God's providence for the human race. We neither debase ourselves to the level of animals, nor make ourselves into gods. Rather, work is the typically human way of being a vice-regent for God on this earth. It is charged with a religious significance—a significance which has generally been either wholly ignored or perverted by non-biblical attitudes towards work.

We are now in a position to see what was wrong-headed, in Luther's opinion, with those who pursued the monastic way of life. In the Kingdom of Heaven they replaced faith with works in attempting to merit their own salvation, while in the Earthly realm they withdrew from their neighbors into the isolated life of the cloister because of a self-centered concern for the eternal destiny of their own souls. In the monasteries that Luther was acquainted with, one could find neither genuine faith in God nor love of one’s neighbor. By maintaining that one’s relation to God is established through faith and relocating “works” in the earthly realm, Luther showed how it was possible to discharge one’s religious duty in the mundane occupations of this life. Virtually all occupations were modes of divine service—except those of the monk and the prostitute. The religious life was not one occupation among others, reserved for the clergy; rather, the religious life could be lived in and through all legitimate earthly occupations.

I stated earlier that to get a grip on the biblical doctrine of work we would do well to go back to Luther’s notion of vocation. He correctly ascertained, I think, the meaning of human work by directly connecting it with the doctrine of divine providence. God provides through the work of human hands. Furthermore, work is a way of service. It is not primarily seen as the road to self-fulfillment or self-aggrandizement. Rather, it will always involve a degree of self-sacrifice for the sake of others, just as Christ sacrificed Himself for the sake of others.
After all,

An apple falls. That is a proven fact.
As sure as autumn, as sure as the force
Of attraction or the whim of desire.
Nothing never lasts.
The apple’s roundness hides the other side
And *necessitates* use of The Mirror—
An image to perceive reds, yellows, and greens
Of some unknown surface.
Colored snapshots of the skin are reflected
Without a back-side scribble to explain;
Merely to be passed from one to the next
And undoubted as the three dimensions.
The camera reports another foray
Of bombs, of bullets,
On Lebanon, on Morazan.

Anwar got killed in the midst of a fire
Of bullets from twenty-foot range
Nobody there to protect him except
A twenty-one man television crew.

For when assassins are out shooting bullets,
Cameramen are out shooting film,
Smearing the apple in shadows they see fit.

The peasants of El Salvador opt for Karl Marx
As do a billion others.
But the camera does not understand
This changing of the skin;
As if one part of the apple
Can tell another part of the apple
What color it should be.

The thin, painted skin of the apple:
The apple of the camera’s eye.

And
During nothing.
The apple rots. That is easy to see.
As sure as breath. As sure as the future
Follows the past or, as the curse of death.
Nothing never lasts.
The Mirror men rally round the rot
They send their best worms to announce the fade
Though their best reflection is a skinscrath.
(Apple juice ain’t all that sour)

The apple is still in flight. But, after all,
The apple’s fall lasts but a split-moment
When compared to the length of its rest;
Between the alls of all, nothing is nothing.

William Postma