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Dialogue

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Like most Michigan residents, I spent the summer holidays outdoors. Memorial Day, traditionally the first day of the beach season, and Labor Day, traditionally the last, found me not at the beach with the rest of the burning masses but in more unusual places to spend a holiday.

On Memorial Day I accompanied my parents and grandparents on a trip to the family farmland near Tustin, Michigan. The story of this land could be the story of any small farm in the area. My great-great grandfather immigrated to Chicago from Sweden and found work with the Street Department laying the bricks which grew into the sidewalks of the city. He and his wife left after the Great Fire, moved to Tustin where they bought a parcel of wooded land from the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad, and in the year 1870 began to clear it of trees and rocks. They built a log cabin, survived the first winter, and eventually farmed the land until becoming too old to work. In their old age, he and his wife were cared for by their two youngest sons. These two great-great uncles of mine never married but lived on and worked the farm until their deaths in the 1970’s. After they died my grandfather bought the land and has kept it as a hobby-farm, using the land to grow Christmas trees. Though no corn or wheat grow in the fields, though the farmhouse is home only to the field mice, though the windmill has not pumped water in years, though the outhouse is falling apart, though no cows drink from the rusting water trough, the land still produces a crop for my family. We are still, in a manner, tied to the farmland of northern Michigan.

Though I had appreciated the chances I had to visit the farm while growing up, I did not realize until my Memorial Day visit that I do not feel the same bond to the land as my great-great grandfather, my great-great uncles, and my grandfather have felt. I can see the proof of their bond in the stones these men collected from the fields over the last century and piled near the road, in the rust-frozen farm machinery rotting on the edges of the fields, in the powerful stone work which forms the foundation of the barn. I can see this bond in the way my grandparents worry about their Christmas trees. I feel a touch of guilt that I too cannot share in this bond to the family land, but I have been raised in the city. The city is my home. The bond I feel is to the traffic, the horns, the pollution, the art, music, and dance. I will never till the earth or grow crops. I will never tend to the land. I realized this on Labor Day.
I spent the time around Labor Day visiting a friend who lives in a large city, his country’s capital. I too have lived in the heart of a nation’s capital, a city filled with museums, galleries, crime, and cafes. I have intermed in New York, walking the streets of the Lower East Side with a camera. My Labor Day visit to the city spurred no new infatuation with city life, just a desire to return. I know now that I will never live near the land of my ancestors; I will have to live in the city.

John Updike tells a similar story of a man who has made a success of himself in New York City and his final visit to the farm on which he grew up. This man feels no bond to his family’s land, even though his mother loves the land as she loves her only son. Because he cannot bond with the soil, Updike writes, this man loses the heritage his mother would so dearly love to share with him in her dying days.

Most of us at some point in our family tree have a relative who is similar to the protagonist in Updike’s novel—someone who left the farm for life in the city. Most of us have lost the direct family tie to a piece of crop-producing soil. Most of us now live in either urban or more probably suburban settings and do not work the land for a living or for pleasure. Most of us feel that Labor Day is essentially an urban holiday—a day to celebrate the industrial power of our nation.

But for most urban and suburban Americans, Labor Day is not spent by traveling to a large city; Labor Day is spent at the beach or picnicking in the country—as far from city life as possible. I, however, spent my Labor Day this year in the city remembering how I spent my Memorial Day just three months earlier. I realized this Labor Day that though I come from rural farming stock I belong in the city. But I, as opposed to Updike’s character, feel that I owe allegiance to my roots. Though I know that I will never bond with a piece of farming soil, I can take the love for the land shown by my ancestors and model after it a response to my urban community. When I realized this, the phrase I have heard countless times on this campus over the past three years made sense to me—a college student of meagre income. Stewardship, I realized this summer, amounts to this for me: holding as a memorial the love of the earth shown by my rural ancestors and laboring to show this same respect for and love of the earth in the urban community in which I have chosen to live.
Gone Gently

The laundry is singing in the wind today, the roses blooming under the line. She stands stoutly in the cool breeze, arms akimbo, testing the air's condensation with tongue and skin, laughing at herself as the rain pelts the shirts, socks, and me.

Later the hot summer sun comes out, bathes the world in steamy dryness, and sets. In the kitchen she hums softly to a tuneless tune, thoughts relaxed and hands busy at the dishes, smiling quietly and pointing irrefutably past my yawn to bed.

Cool clouds cover the sky in the morning, and she pulls a sweater out for school. Breakfast is warm, and already there is a bustling baking. My wave is returned, and I shuffle through the colorful leaves to the bus, watching as she goes back inside.

Far off I can see a cold night snowing over the silent stones, but not yet. Now there is only health and wooly warmth. And when the snow comes and freezes, there'll be at least one warm stone; hers, humming "Gone gently into that good night."

Matthew DeGroot
He’d been mucking about the Fifth Century, snipping out the odd years that no one was absolutely sure about anymore, tightening things up, saving space. He skidded his battered ship, replete with the melting clock emblem of the Chrono-Sanitation Corps, to stop off at 420 AD and scanned the monitor screens. Good hunting, this: Rome was falling, China was in chaos, and hardly a Turning Point anywhere. Plenty of forgotten years just sitting there, taking up valuable space. Ancient history made his job a lot easier, he thought. Back in the Now, over a millennium away, people only saw things in century-sized chunks anyway.

The trouble was that plenty of his mates had been here before him, paring away at the decades, and there wasn’t much left to whittle down. He banged a U-turn at what used to be 418 and gunned it, heading down with the current, speeding up past the five- and six-hundreds, until he was idling off the one-thousands, still too far off from Now for anyone to actually remember details. He avoided 1066, dodging an occasional arrow from William the Conqueror’s men at Hastings, and gazed dourly off a bit to the left. 1065. Big deal. After a perfunctory glance at his monitor to verify that 1065 held no Turning Points, he hit the switch on the gleaming black machine crouched next to his right hip, sat back with casual disinterest, and reached for a beer. The machine hummed cheerfully and 1065 crinkled up in the middle of June and began sucking up toward the great metal maw which dominated the entire port side of his ship. He glanced to his left over the rim of the beer can to see February and November collapse together and disappear. With a final flutter, the last vestiges of two New Years Days slurped past the yellow safety stripe on the metal mouth of the machine which read “CAUTION: TIME INTAKE!” in red letters, and the job was done.

To his chagrin, he realized that he’d left a jagged edge on 1064 and a tear running all the way back to November. Messy, very messy. He was a pro. He realigned the crosshairs, hit the switch with the butt of his beer can, and devoured 1064. At the last minute he flicked the machine back and gobbled up ’62 and ’63 for good measure. Hey, space is limited, he muttered to himself, straight from the Chrono-Sanitation
Corps training films. You can’t keep everything.

He was getting bored and the beer cooler was getting low. There was no way he was going to restock in THIS century—who knows what they throw in the vats. He checked his quota display (only one or two years to go and he’d be done for the day!) and headed downstream towards Now. The years, interrupted by occasional gaps where his mates had been working, flickered by on his monitors as he watched hopefully, eyeing potential targets. He’d just drained his penultimate beer when something caught his eye. 1955, smack dab in the middle of the Fifties. NOTHING happened in the Fifties between the Korean War and the ’57 Chevy. What a prize, so near to Now that none of his mates even gave it a glance. But there it was—hanging like a cobweb in the palace of history. He remembered when two of his fellows had managed to snip out over a month from 1963, just after Kennedy’s assassination, when the world was so far into shock that people had never missed it. Heroes, those two had been, pulling off a disposal so close to Now, and they’d been given a bonus and a week off. Now he looked at 1955 and smiled.

But he was a pro. He had to be sure, absolutely sure. He put the scanner on forward to the screen, reading the events that streamed past and lit up his face in green and blue patterns. He let the information trickle to a stop with Old Years’ night. Fluff, that’s all it was, with nary a Turning Point in sight.

He could almost hear the awed cheers of his fellows that would be ringing in his ears when he docked in the Now and casually, oh so casually, downloaded his quota sheets onto the Supervisor’s desk. His smile widened as he glanced once more at the computer readout and reached for the last beer. 1955, goodbye! he thought gleefully, popped the beer, and stabbed at the button.

But then he stopped and stared. No, that wasn’t anything—but wait! He re-read the line on the screen, then sat back in disgust. One little event, insignificant and trite, but . . .

In California, a park opened called Disneyland. That did it, 1955 was out. Turning Point: When Dreams Became Reality. He snarled at the viewer and shut down the machine. His quota wasn’t filled, and he was out of beer.
Daydream I and II

Sometimes I get scared,
And a still, small voice inside me screams
So I turn and face the wall.
My mind sinks in between the bricks
That are pink and red and real.
Thoughts glide on the mortar,
And travel in straight lines and
Ninety degree angles.
My neck gets weak as my
Heavy head snaps back,
And I'm temporarily blinded
By an angelic light.
But soon My eyes focus, and
I'm now on the ceiling
Running the boarders that
Hold up the tiles.
Ninety degrees; straight
And perfect.

Sometimes I laugh,
And a still, small voice inside me roars
So I hand my head and smile.
My mind's on the floor and
I'm two inches tall.
I run under tables and sofas.
I'm scaling the giant wooden leg
Of a soft blue chair
Where I can Jump and bounce
Like a clown.
I'm giggling and laughing and
Doing somersaults
Until I get enveloped in a
Cushion of blue
Where I can close
My eyes
And sleep.

Ryan Gritter
Seductive Advertising: What About Subliminal Techniques?

Subliminal stimulation, some say, is that phenomenon of deceptive advertising that manipulates unwitting consumers into lemming-like purchasing frenzies. Is subliminal perception responsible for the fact that you spend $25 for a Diet Coke at the theater (not the fact that your $25 bucket of popcorn has enough salt on it to kill a laboratory rat)? Does subliminal perception force consumers into purchasing hundreds of dollars of merchandise that they don't even want because some unconscious stimulus has destroyed their defense mechanisms and triggered a raging hormonal imbalance causing them to buy indiscriminately?

Doubtful. Subliminal perception is used in advertising, but it has not been empirically proven to affect consumer behavior. Subliminal perception is the triggering of sensory organs below the threshold of conscious perception. This threshold refers to some intensity or duration of stimulation where a subject can correctly identify (perceive) a stimulus a certain percentage of the time—usually 50%. Therefore, any stimulus below this arbitrary point of identification (e.g. 0 - 49%) is said to be subliminal (Wiener and Schiller).

There are at least three methods of subliminal stimulation which are claimed to have strong behavioral effects on consumers (Moore). The first of these three techniques is a very briefly presented visual stimulus. This stimulus is usually produced by means of a tachistoscope—a machine which has the technological capacity to carefully control the duration of exposure of a presented stimulus. In essence, the tachistoscope provides one with the capability of splicing a visual stimulus into a film so quickly that it is below the threshold of conscious perception.

The second technique said to affect consumer behavior is that of sub-audible messages which are unintelligible and go unnoticed at the conscious level. A message is recorded, accelerated to rates of 2300+ words per minute, and then repeated at very low volumes 8000 or 9000 times per hour.
The third technique is that of embedding sexual words or imagery in pictorial advertisements. This technique is accomplished through airbrushing or using high-speed photography to superimpose messages of erotica on printed advertisements.

How effective are the above techniques when used to influence consumer behavior? As stated before, empirical evidence (or lack thereof) shows that money spent by advertisers on subliminal perception techniques does not demonstrate good business savvy. Research shows that there is little or no effect on goal-directed consumer behavior (being influenced to purchase a beverage) let alone brand-directed consumer behavior (being influenced to purchase, specifically, a Coke) when subliminal stimuli are present. If there is any directed consumer behavior from such techniques, it is so weak and general that these techniques could not be construed as being effective (Hawkins).

A study by Eric Zanot, David Pincus, and Joseph Lamp attempts to argue that subliminal advertising is effective simply because the public is aware of the phenomenon. Throughout the study, the authors graphed and put into percentages all responses to their study—with the exception of the response to one question. They summed up the question, “Would your belief that subliminal messages were used in advertising affect whether or not YOU would buy the product being advertised?” with only a summary statement that “many respondents state that [the use of subliminal advertising] would affect their buying behavior.” They fail to quantify what percentage is “many,” and they failed to determine whether consumer behavior would be affected positively or negatively—a rather important determination for an advertising agency weighing whether or not to use the technique. Essentially, the authors proved, through quantification, only that the demographic category of the white, educated male is more aware of the use of subliminal advertising. They did not prove that subliminal techniques are effective because the consumer is aware of the phenomenon.

It has been proven that subliminal techniques using the tachistoscope do trigger measurable effects on aspects of behavior. However, these effects are obtained in laboratories, in controlled environments, with selective exposure mechanisms removed. These circumstances would be difficult, if not impossible, to replicate in the marketplace of the real world.

Further, it has been shown that these measurable responses are more physiological than psychological in nature (Moore). In other words, in your mind’s eye, put yourself in a theater. The advertising agency for Coca-Cola has convinced Coke that it’s worth their money to purchase a tachistoscope and spend money to superimpose the words “DRINK COKE” in lead films that are sent to theaters all over the country.

The words “DRINK COKE” may trigger something in the subconscious to begin a physiological reaction of thirst in one’s hypothalamus. Thus, some reaction has been triggered. But, there is no proof that that reaction is strong enough to compel (influence, manipulate) one to get up and get a drink. And it certainly cannot be proven that one would be influenced to be
thirsty—but only for a Coke: water won’t do, orange soda won’t do, and Pepsi is out of the question. Bottom line—anyone at Coca-Cola who might have approved the above scenario didn’t make a good, money-making decision. And business owners and stock holders don’t particularly like that.

The second technique, sub-auditory stimulation, has a virtual void of any measurable evidence to support the notion that it is an effective technique to influence consumer behavior. In fact, the physiological laws of auditory perception tend to quickly refute any behavioral effect other than irritation for those being exposed to it.

The ear simply cannot take in and process information as presented via sub-auditory stimuli. All information must be fed in bits of sound patterns which have particular meanings. Normal speech is transmitted at a rate of approximately 150 words per minute, and it has been proven that “comprehension declines rapidly at rates beyond 300 word per minute” (Moore). Also, if speech is accelerated, the signal itself (the meaningful sound pattern) is altered and can become unintelligible (remember sitting in a circle and playing the game of “telephone” in grade school?). Thus, when considering that sub-auditory messages are accelerated up to 2300+ (as opposed to the norm of 150 words per minute), AND played back 8000 to 9000 times per hour, AND played at very low volumes, it can be concluded that this technique so distorts sound messages that they become impossible to comprehend—either supraliminally or subliminally. In essence, sub-audible techniques would be akin to a mosquito buzzing in your ear. In summary, Moore says: “. . . because of the fast rate, what may once have been a message is rendered an unintelligible scratching sound. That such stimuli could have any influence on behavior (except to annoy) is a claim totally lacking empirical support.”

The effectiveness (or lack thereof) of the third technique of subliminal stimulation, embedding, was brought to the front of public consciousness by Wilson Bryan Key. It is here that discussions about subliminal perception and how effective it is take a quantum leap from empirical to emotional apologia.

Key states in his book, Subliminal Seduction, that once one reads his book, one will see erotic embeds on every ad that is published! These embeds purportedly go further than influencing consumers, the embeds actually manipulate individuals to purchase whatever it is they’re looking at.

The validity of what Key sees is suspect. Virtually none of these stimuli are visible to the naked eye. In fact, as Moore states, “It apparently takes weeks of analysis for many of them to be discovered, and sometimes they are embedded upside down.” The absurdity of Key’s hypotheses is encapsulated by Moore: “Holding advertisers responsible for one’s erotic musings is analogous to accusing Rorschach of insinuating particular themes into the inkblots.”

The weakness of Key’s hypothesis is apparent. How many of you pick up a magazine and actually spend any amount of time studying the pictures in ads for hidden messages? Never mind that Key claims
that in order to see some of these embeds one would have to hold the magazine upside down, up to the light, or even backwards! Sure, advertising uses subtleties. It does attempt to influence—of course it does. Influencing consumers is the reason advertising exists! The "subtleties" used range from obscure referential hints to overtly blatant psychological freight trains; they certainly aren't hidden. For example, when you hear the word "Ferrari," few of you (if any at all) will conjure up a mental picture of a father driving up to a day care center to pick up his kids at the end of the day. That's because any time Ferrari is advertised, it's advertised with the visual trappings of upper class, high achieving, life-in-the-fast-lane, and, yes, sexy backgrounds. That's by design, folks. And it's doubtful that anyone associated with Ferrari's advertising campaigns would deny that. In fact, they might even get a smug feeling of satisfaction because their campaign successfully conveys what they want their target audience to believe about their product. And their target audience was determined by cold, hard mathematical formulas and demographics, not some secret means of voodoo.

Another issue that Key seldom addresses is that of selective exposure. Empirical evidence shows that selective exposure and comprehension mechanisms will mask or completely blank out a subliminal stimulus if there is a supraliminal (conscious) stimulus present. For instance, unless there is a sufficient blank interval before and after a tachistoscopic insert, the effort will go unnoticed at both the conscious and the subconscious level (Moore).

The research that has been done on the effectiveness of subliminal techniques in advertising cannot prove or replicate James Vicary's claim in the late Fifties that subliminal stimuli (tachistoscopy) dramatically increased sales of Coke and popcorn in a New Jersey theater. There is no clear evidence to substantiate the claim that subliminal stimuli can influence behavior. As noted earlier, effects that have been empirically proven are obtained under near-mentally-sterile laboratory conditions. And those conditions are nearly impossible to replicate in the real world. So to consider subliminal techniques as an effective advertising tool—or a reasonable business investment—does not appear to make sense. There are simply too many uncontrollable variables: there is selective exposure on the part of the individual, there is selective comprehension, and then there is selective retention. There is also the masking effect of supraliminal over subliminal stimuli. As Moore comments: "Completely ignoring a stimulus is an option that people frequently exercise. If you do not actively search for hidden extras, what you see is what you get, and there is nothing subliminal about such perusal. The fine print near the bottom of an ad is likely to be far more important than any concealed genitalia could be."

In other words, one sees and remembers and is influenced by what one chooses to see, remember, and be influence by. Human beings are created with the capability to make discriminating choices. We're not lemmings blindly following the back in front of us. We're intelligently selective. For instance, at a party, one can carry on
an intimate conversation with another even though they are surrounded by enough noise to make many an inspector at OSHA start dreaming of new bureaucratic regulations. The brain filters out or shuts out what is not necessary to perceive; it simply does not deal with it.

Another example of selective perception can be demonstrated in any shopping mall, especially around the holidays. Consumers come in focused on purchasing. All around them is a barrage of visual and audio pollution (the work of advertisers) vying on the assumption the THEIR ads will influence consumers to purchase THEIR stuff. Ads are designed to capture a person’s attention. Immediately. Consciously. Because, as you know, when you go to the mall, especially around the holidays, it takes an ad with the subtlety of a freight train to break through and make a memorable impression. One certainly is not going to take pause (as Key would have us believe) and scrutinize an ad, perhaps even having to stand on one’s head in the middle of the mall, to see the unconscious airbrushed embeds Key claims are present on every ad to seduce the unsuspecting consumer and lure him into a purchase.

Embeds in every ad? Maybe. If you look long enough. Just like you can see horsies and duckies in the clouds overhead.

Key’s postulate is possible, but not probable. First, subliminal techniques are simply not cost-effective. And advertising is business. And business makes money. Second, even if subliminal techniques were effective, more effort would be spent attempting to influence the conscious than the subconscious, as a person’s conscious motivations control purchase behavior.

You need not lose sleep worrying about whether advertising agencies have manipulated you, unconsciously, into casting your morals—or maybe just your good sense—to the wind. It is highly unlikely that any subliminal stimulation will bypass your conscious, personal, vigilant defense system.

WORKS CITED


Skinheads and Cemeteries

Skinheads desecrate the cemetery,
And what could you do,
Dust of the ground?

And pacifists vandalize
Blackwall memorials;
Unable to leave the violence
Of the past behind them.

And MLK, a legacy of peace,
If you could march Cicero again
Would the riots be less vile?

And death doesn’t change things.
Bald bastard punks piss on their own graves.

Daniel Hutt
...and the room vibrated with his very soul...
Every day now, it seems, I come home and sit in the flat sullen warmth of the sun. I do nothing, I don’t even watch T.V. I only sit, hands folded, waiting for the deep breathing of the night. My mind cringes from the indefiniteness of the night. It is neither hot nor cold, windy nor calm, and the sun has not yet penetrated the consciousness of my bones. Yet I sit in it, a patch of yellow light, waiting. But I am dead.

I discovered this last week sometime. I was on the way home from work, dully reading yet another advertisement on the tube. It read: “Western Canada. Only you’ll know what you’ll find there.” I have never seen an advertisement so silly, so ambivalent. Yet it was typical of British advertising: understated, subtle, sometimes corny in the hopes of evoking a laugh. What perturbed me more was the fact that this appalling poster came out of the industry that I work in, and the fact that just the other day George had mentioned it to me and how successful it was. Something like fifty more passengers per month were heading to Edmonton on British Airways. I’ve heard about Edmonton. There’s nothing there except for the biggest mall in the world. Yet the advertisement hadn’t mentioned anything about the mall. It had only pictured an Indian with his full head dress on, a cowboy, and... some other character, I can’t remember. I know a Canadian: she would not be at all impressed by this representation of the people in her country. Anyway, the reason he mentioned it to me was because I was having trouble figuring out a line for Topol toothpaste. He suggested: “Try Topol—only you’ll know how good it works.” What’s worse is that I fell for the bait, and thinking about it later on the tube, I came to the unhappy, deafening realization that I am dead, and that I have been dying a little every day for the past few months.

While this realization ought to have jarred anyone into action, I have instead fallen into a heaviness. Have you ever lifted a dead person’s hand? I lifted my grandfather’s hand when he died, to place it on his chest. It was heavy, cold, pasty, like a lump of dough. This is how I feel. My body still breathes, functions, warms that hallow in my bed at night, but the warmth does not penetrate me, my bones, my soul.
So I sit, and when night comes I move my chair out onto my iron grill of a balcony, shivering. I'm trying to shiver the life back into me. If the warmth can't penetrate, maybe the cold can. Maybe, like water, it would have a waking-up effect. But the night, comforting a little, is still too dark, too lonely. After a few hours I creep back inside, and crawl into bed with all my clothes on. I can't cry. I can't feel anything. My mind tells me how horrible this all is, but my heart does not react. It is too crusted over, like the hard lumps of snow crusted on a frozen lake, snow which has become like the ice, inseparable, but which is still of a different quality of matter.

This morning I mechanically got up as soon as my irritating buzz of an alarm went off. It used to be irritating. Now I accept it calmly, rather than sending a hand out from beneath the blankets to crash about on the night table. I took a shower, washed, drank some orange juice, and left for work. On the tube I saw an advertisement for a play at the Barbican, Shakespeare's The Tempest. I don't know why this advertisement grabbed me. Its only picture was that of a slithy-looking creature stretching up a hand to a young woman. No jingle. Just the title of the play and where it was showing. Suddenly I felt like seeing a play. Perhaps a play would startle me into life; perhaps it would chip away some of that snowy crust on my heart. It would take chipping. I can't imagine anything being moving enough to melt it.

At lunch time I walked to Leicester Square, which is very near where I work. I bought a ticket—only one, I didn't want to make a date out of it, I only wanted to go by myself. I managed to get a ticket for that evening's performance, and for some reason I felt as excited as a child. I was doing something, I was going out, I was going to see a play, I was going to escape—at least for a little while. I spent the rest of the afternoon dreaming emptily about what I was going to wear. Should I dress up? Does anyone dress up to go to the theatre anymore? I decided I would wear something in between. Most of my clothes are like that anyway: they are simple, classic things. I opted for a longish cotton skirt and a matching blouse. No heels, just flats.

For the first time in a long time I felt a pang of happiness. It was a pang, because I was aware of a constant nagging fear that this play might not work, that it might not help me. I don't want to see a therapist. There ought to be better ways . . . Still, I took the tube home in a bit of a daze. The sun was shining lamely as I walked from the station to home, but it didn't affect me. I was aware that something was warming me, just slightly, from the inside.

Just a few hours later I was sitting in the theatre, in the front row of the dress circle. Everyone around me looked so sophisticated, so happy in their couples. This made me moody and self-conscious. I looked down at the suddenly conspicuous outfit I had chosen. No one does dress up to go to the theatre anymore. Not here. Plays are common, and people wear jeans and T-shirts. Not even the already abundant tourists were making much of an occasion out of the thing. Still, I wrapped myself in a dream, and as soon as the play began I lost all consciousness to those around me. The set was magnificent, strange. I looked at my program to see who could have created such a thing: some girl named Jennifer Muir, an up and coming set designer, the blurb about her read. I could see why: the set captured my imagination. The island was an artist's palette, and Prospero was the painter, the master artist. Caliban, that slithy creature pictured on the advertisement, came up out of the hole into which the artist's thumb would go when holding the palette. He was subservient to art, a mediocre misfit, a slave. For some rea-
son my heart went out to him, creepy though he was.

And then it happened. The set, as it were, prepared my heart for a wee miracle. I realized more about myself in one moment than I had in years. Caliban said:

* * *

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; sometimes voices,
That if I then wak’d after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and in dreaming,
That clouds methought would open, and show riches,
Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak’d
I cried to dream again.

I cried to dream again. My mind focused on this line and expanded, as though a tiny little knot of a tangle was unraveling, and its ropes swelling in the thickness threatened to burst my head. My heart, my heart. No chipping. The snow had disappeared. I took my heart into my hands, as it were, held it, cried over it, cried and cried, in the middle of this theatre. For the heart is where dreams reside. I cried to dream again. If I thought that I was waking up to a new reality, I was really falling asleep to dream those dreams which keep me alive, keep me throbbing. My ears heard the noises, the thousand twangling instruments, and I believe they were the instruments of angels.

* * *

I took the tube home that night, oblivious to all except the singing in my ears. I came out of my trance once to find someone looking at me in the strangest way. I glanced at my reflection in the window, and started. I was smiling. I was smiling. Was this Gweneth? Was this me? Transformed in one evening? Healed? Dreaming. I had absorbed myself once again in the sensation of this new power.

I went to bed as soon as I got home. Even going to bed had become a new event. Too aware of this, I undressed and went to the dresser to get my nightie. I had not worn it in a long time. It was creased from the folds. I smoothed it out, put it on with the eerie sensation that I was being watched. Not by anyone strange. At least, not too strange. I was being watched by me. I was hanging loose from my body, drifting about, looking. I went to the mirror and stood there staring. Awkwardly I reached up to tuck a strand of hair behind my ear. Impudent eyes stared back at me, green and sharp. I stood there for a long time… I do not know how long. I do not know what conclusions I came to. I only know that when I woke up the next morning, I was tired but comfortable in my bed, and I was tingling like a live wire. It was Saturday.

For some reason this knowledge overjoyed me, and this was a shocking change. Before I dreaded weekends, for they were the times when I most had to face the fact that I was not living, that I was only functioning. All I’m supposed to do at work is function, so this did not bother me so much there. Work had become a convenient way to avoid the knowledge of being dead. Paradoxically, work was what was killing me.

I lay in bed a while, contemplating the ceiling and its crack. My eyes focussed on it, then fuzzed it. Suddenly it was the thin branch of a tree, spring-tiny leaves sprouting out. I was six, lying on my back in the grass of my parents’ backyard. I often lay beneath that tree. Starring up through its branches to the spots of sky and sun, that was where I dreamed. Childish dreams, at first, fairy-tale fantasies. I once thought that gnomes lived inside the tree. My parents had a book about gnomes given to them by a Dutch friend. I read it cover to cover. I was convinced that gnomes existed. I imagined them peeking out at me from between the
roots of the tree, but every time I looked
to see them they ducked, I thought.

I thought of everything beneath
that tree. I put my own roots down,
spared up the life, stretched my arms
up to the sky. "Heaven and earth are
very close, and the angels and saints
surround us," a voice would say. A
voice said. Startled, my branch became
a crack in the ceiling again, and I looked
around my room. Nobody was there.
But I was thinking more clearly than I
had in a long time. I got out of bed, and
went to the window to open the cur­
tains, starved for a sight of the world.
The sun, high in its zenith, clear and
flinging rays into my room and onto my
face, stung me so that I had to step back.
But carefully I unsquinted my eyes
enough to step forward again and open
the window. I leaned out into the late
morning. The street was still quiet. But
a child was playing with a ball. And
look. There was a bird’s nest below my
windowsill, balanced in the vine. Three
blue eggs were in it. A robin. So this is
spring. I looked to the sky. The haze of
the past few weeks had sunk and slith­
ered away, and the blue was clear and
blank. I felt I wanted to write my name
there. My name of new significance: it
now represented someone again.

But it represented someone
filled with an empty craving. A craving,
certainly, but for what? I cried to dream
again, but what to dream? Where was I
to go from here? I needed direction. It
isn’t enough to be able to dream. One
must have something to dream. So I
entered my weekend quakily, like a child
learning to walk. I felt so strange, so
uncertain. As though I was either on the
verge of flying or on the verge of falling.
And I prayed to fly. I prayed to be filled,
clear and empty as I was. I prayed to feel
someone’s touch. I didn’t know then
whose. But I was on my way to discov­
ery.

the old men
sleep
remembering the sun

the old men
listen
to echoes
of the moon

i see the night
in daydreams of the sun
i hear the moon
in the old man’s laugh

Dan Emshoff
The fragile silence
of the librarian
stands so still

Her bone-old hand
in resting motion
turning older

Her hair passively silver to
somewhat grey
slow growing down

Over eyes shadowing:
light illumination
depth deep in
revelation

Her kingdom, a library
sitting so still
the Fragile silence
Ages older.)
(Still

Dan Emshoff
On the afternoon of June 19, 99 of 183 delegates to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church voted to open the offices of minister, elder, deacon, and evangelist "to all confessing members of the church who meet the biblical requirements"—thus opening those offices to qualified women as well as men. This decision, however, must be ratified by the Synod in 1992 before women actually start filling the positions of elder and minister. The grounds for the decision are three-fold. First, according to several studies done by Synod, including Report 26 (a 1987 report on the "headship principle" produced by a study committee), there are no Biblical grounds for extending the headship principle from marriage to the church. Second, in 1989 Synod established that the ordination of women is an issue of church order and not a creedal one. Finally, previous Synods have permitted local congregations to make changes in church order.

The cover of the July 2 issue of the Banner holds a poignant picture of some intensely emotional reactions to Synod's decision as expressed in the faces of a few women—foreheads are creased and mouths held taut in strain and anticipation, hands fly to faces as tears of joy, relief, and surprise begin to flow. The four women I interviewed for Dialogue also express varying emotions and reactions in the wake of this historic decision. These women—Reverend Marchiene Rienstra, Ruth Hofman, Gladys Verhulst, and Reverend Laura Smit—speak with voices of surprise, joy, circumspection, thankful reverence, concern, and cynicism. Each brings her unique perspective to the issue.

All, I found, possess a single-minded and purposeful commitment to their calling to the ministry and a peculiar and wonderful patience, calmness, and absolute certainty that the church would indeed allow women to use their gifts in all offices of the church. None of these women is a brash, abrasive, militant feminist. All seem broad-minded and
concerned with the spiritual health of the entire church, not just its female members.

Reverend Marchiene Rienstra, a graduate of Calvin Seminary, is at present an ordained minister in the Reformed Church of America. She attempted to go through every channel and "court of appeals" in the hope that she would be ordained into the CRC. After Synod rejected her appeals in 1978, she was called by the Presbyterian Church to help start a new congregation and was ordained in 1979. She remained with that particular congregation until 1984, when she was called to be the senior pastor of Hope Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. She accepted the call and served there for five years. During the past few years, Rienstra has been on a sabbatical—"not the kind of sabbatical where you're going to go back where you came from, but a sabbatical which is an 'in between' time—in order to write and teach at Western Seminary in Holland, MI, which she is presently doing.

Rienstra speaks with a voice which is maternal, warm, and reassuring, sounding like the mothers of my Christian school friends—the kind of strong, busy, sturdy women who bake pies and mow large suburban lawns in cut-off shorts and bandanas and involve themselves in too many worthy causes. She is at once smart, articulate and down-to-earth. Rienstra says she reacted with joy and a bit of surprise to Synod's decision this summer, though she recalls having a kind of intuition which came to her in prayer making her feel that it would happen: "I didn't know what they were going to say, but I have to confess that I had an inner intuition that they were going to say yes." However, she says that if someone had asked her the week before if she thought that Synod would come to this decision so soon, she would have said that it would be another five or ten years. "I always thought it was a matter of when, not if, but I wasn't sure I'd live to see it happen!" she says, laughing.

She found that Synod's decision meant a great deal to her personally because of the hurt she felt after having to leave her own church in order to serve in the ministry. "I found it personally a very healing experience... I had felt more hurt than I even realized was still left after ten or twelve years because this is the church of my roots. It's the church of my grandparents and of my husband—it's real family. So even though I've disagreed with many of its stands and actions, shoot, I disagree with things my family members do but I love them. I feel that I belong to them."

Rienstra looks forward to returning to the CRC because it is, as she calls it, the church of her nurturing. However, she has no regrets about the twelve years she spent in the Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church of America, calling them "rich and wonderful years. I never would have had those opportunities if I hadn't had to leave. So even though it hurt, I'm grateful, because God turned it into all kinds of good for me and I think for others, too."

She believes that the CRC will not split over the issue of women in office, though some in the denomination are unhappy with the decision and a handful of congregations, she thinks, will leave the denomination. Rienstra says

_I always thought it would be a matter of when, not if, but I wasn't sure I'd live to see it happen!_  
– Rev. Marchiene Rienstra
thoughtfully, “I think that even the majority who aren't happy with the decision will stick with it because of loyalty and because of so much else that is good about the church that they do like. I'm not worried about that.”

Recalling her time at Calvin Seminary, Rienstra has mixed emotions. “In terms of how I was treated in the classroom—the way I was treated by the professors and most of the students was always with courtesy. I was never badgered or harassed or treated in an unkind manner except by one or two students,” she says, “but I didn’t feel fully equal. The way a lot of students who felt threatened by me handled it was to give me the silent treatment. Sometimes I felt as if I were invisible.

—Rev. Marchiene Rienstra

d called and gifted,’ and the potential is there for this decision to make all women—even those who do not feel any call to ministry in those offices—to feel a greater sense of self-respect and dignity.” Rienstra believes that, allowed to serve in all offices of the church, women will be able to bring unique and special gifts to the church: “I think there’s going to be a wonderful renewal in the church both because of the new freedom for women, but also because of the general shift of attitude that it permits. It’s a departure from the rigid literalism of the past and I think it’s a signal of a shift that’s really significant and will affect more than just women. As more and more women begin to function in these various positions, there will be a melting away like snow in the sun of a lot of people’s fears.”

Ruth Hofman, a third-year student in the Masters of Divinity program at Calvin Seminary who spent her first year at Fuller Theological Seminary, describes her reaction to Synod’s decision this summer as “delighted” and “stunned.” Hofman is a petite, pretty, young-looking woman who speaks slowly, succinctly, and in a dignified manner. She says thoughtfully, “At the moment of the decision I was a little stunned because I think that no one, including myself, expected it to come this year. If I projected optimistically, [I thought it would happen] in the next five years.”

Synod’s decision affects Hofman immediately and personally. She had formerly planned to return to Fuller Seminary to complete her degree and then either go into ministry in another denomination or into a church setting which would permit her to be ordained. With Synod’s recent decision allowing women to
function in roles of church office, Hofman will joyfully remain in the CRC, which she, like Rienstra and the others I interviewed, consider the church of their nurture. She will remain at Calvin Seminary, hoping to be ordained into this denomination. “I had resisted going into another denomination,” she says. “When I anticipated having to do that, it wasn’t happily. Many [people] will tell you that it’s difficult to leave the church of their nurturing and that’s true, but I also think that the CRC is in need of women ministers. I’m not just thinking of a female perspective on ministry and interpretation. The church needs to have the freshness and openness of anyone who’s inspired and called of God, and [all women] who have come this far in the process [of becoming ministers] do have a unique story to tell.”

Hofman says that the CRC’s decision to allow women to function in all offices of the church has been tremendously affirming for her. “[Now] I feel that I don’t have to apologize for being an M.Div. student and for wishing to be ordained. My sense of call has been strengthened, and I am very hopeful about my future in the CRC.”

During her time at seminary, she has not always felt completely sure of her calling to the ministry because of the barriers against women put up by the CRC. She describes the feeling of being a woman at the seminary of a denomination which didn’t ordain women as “withholding yourself a little bit, not daring to make it public, and wondering if this is actually the will of God.” However, Hofman says, despite the fact that there are a lot of students at seminary who do not believe in the ordination of women, it has not kept her from making friends and receiving the support of many students and faculty members. Part of that, she feels, has been due to her own attitude. “I approached my time at seminary by first becoming friends with people and determining to get to know the community and not letting feminist issues become a rallying point for myself. It had everything to do with my initial attitude—was I going to come off as militant or was I going to be part of this community? If I hadn’t had an open and caring attitude I might have been treated differently and therefore I might have found more difficulty,” Hofman states.

Though optimistic about her future in the CRC and that of the church itself, Hofman is saddened that many will choose to leave the denomination over this decision. “It’s amazing how long we’ve been in this gestation period and now the birth pains are starting,” she says. “And I expect that enough people are disturbed about this for some congregations to consider secession from the CRC. I’m saddened by that. It gives me great grief to think that people would leave the church simply on this point.” But she believes that attitudes can and will change. “As soon as you see someone performing in a role [in which] you once thought they couldn’t possibly perform and [you see] they’re doing it well and with spiritual maturity, you have to take a second look,” she states.

Hofman hopes that second look at women performing in leadership roles in the CRC will be a warm and
receptive one.

Gladys Verhulst, a member of the CRC and a student in the M.Div. program at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, never had any plan to leave the CRC and was pleasantly surprised by Synod’s decision. Verhulst is a very matter-of-fact, independent woman. Quick and birdlike, she speaks in a sharp, staccato rhythm, thinking quickly and articulating her ideas in intense spurts.

She is pleased about the decision, although her immediate goal is not ordination in the church, but rather to work as part of a team at a parish. Verhulst states, “I’ve been assuming it would happen [Synod would decide to allow women into the offices of minister and elder] but I thought it would be five to ten years more. I sort of expected that this would come in stages and that women would be allowed to be elders first. Theologically, it makes sense to do both at the same time, though I’m not sure that [before this] the church has been operating theologically anyway,” she adds with a chuckle.

She says of Synod’s decision, “It speaks well of the CRC and the integrity of the CRC. We have struggled with this long and hard . . . and I don’t think that’s bad,” she adds after a moment of hesitation. Verhulst is grateful for the two year period before the Synod must ratify this decision; she sees it as a necessary step in making a decision of that magnitude. She goes on to say, “My biggest concern is that we be one church and that we be reconciled to each other and that we listen to where other people are coming from. We’ve got a long way to go yet and I’m glad that Synod gave us two years to wrestle with it. We need to be praying together for understanding and leadership from God.”

Verhulst notes that she was never discriminated against during her time at McCormick, a Presbyterian Seminary. “It’s interesting that at McCormick, roughly 50% of the students are women, and in many of my classes there are more women than men. Women are taken fully as seriously as students as anyone else by the administration and faculty.”

Laura Smit, like Marchiene Rienstra, is a graduate of Calvin Seminary and had to leave the CRC in order to become a minister. Smit is presently the pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Clayton, New Jersey and has been there for nearly a year. She graduated from Calvin Seminary in 1987 and then joined the Presbyterian Church. Unlike Rienstra, Smit has no plans to return to the CRC, and in her words, she has “never been happier” and is “very blessed” in her present position.

Smit strikes me as being strong, capable, and sophisticated. She speaks quietly but clearly and decisively and is admittedly a bit cynical about the issue of women in office in the CRC. She is content to be somewhat distanced from the Grand Rapids CRC community.

Despite her self-admitted cynicism, and although Synod’s decision doesn’t affect her personally, she is “pleasantly surprised” because it gives friends and members of her family who still belong to the CRC the possibilities of leadership in their churches. “It was very startling for me,” Smit says, “I had cynically been saying that it would be the next century!”
“[Synod’s decision] resolves some things for me and makes some things seem worthwhile, but it’s not going to change my present situation,” she continues. “I am very content being Presbyterian; it’s a very different arena and I seem to fit it better.”

When asked in what ways the Presbyterian denomination is a different arena, Smit says that she often has a difficult time explaining that to her Christian Reformed friends, but that she believes “It’s a much broader arena theologically.” She goes on to say that, in the Presbyterian Church, “I am very much on the conservative end of things, which I prefer. It seems to me that within the CRC there is the tendency for people to define themselves in terms of one another and to be very inward-looking. A lot of that self-definition has revolved around the issue of women in office. There are people within the CRC who see themselves as very liberal and very progressive because they accept the idea that women should be ordained; whereas in the Presbyterian Church, that’s not grounds for liberalism. That’s just standard!” This tendency for people in the CRC to be inward-looking and for some to define themselves in terms of women’s issues in the church, says Smit, inhibits the church from achieving its true purpose. Freed from having to spend time talking about women in ministry, she adds, she can focus on “what [she is] supposed to be doing as a pastor—preaching, teaching the gospel, and evangelism.”

Smit’s fear is that what she calls “the strong institution which exists only to agitate for the ordination of women” will not disband even though its goal has been accomplished, and that “this issue is going to continue to be pivotal for a lot of people because they’ve defined themselves in terms of it for so long. Once you’ve achieved the real goal you start creating new goals that can be less legitimate,” Smit worries.

“The victory has been won,” Smit states. “But for some people it’s hard to accept victory, and I hope they don’t create something new to fight over. I hope that what happens in the CRC is that people stop fighting and realize that, actually, the difference between the most liberal person and the most conservative person in the CRC is not a big distance. There are all evangelical Christians and it would be nice for them to realize that their unity really outweighs their diversity and start using that unity to do evangelism and outreach and proclaim the gospel. That’s what I’d like to see in the CRC but I’m not real optimistic about it,” she concludes dryly, “and I guess that’s why I’m not coming back.”

Smit recalls that during her years at seminary, Calvin Seminary was a “tense place.” Though she feels that she received a good education, was adequately equipped for the ministry, and was treated with respect and courtesy, she has ambivalent feelings towards the institution, partly because of the CRC’s stand on the issue of women in office at that time. She recalls being struck by a speech given by Richard Mouw a number of years ago in which he said that the CRC has an amazing education system which takes its children and trains them to have a kingdom vision and go...
out and claim the world for Christ. In this system girls as well as boys are trained, but when they get to the age at which they select a career, and naturally some want to do ministry, at that point we close the door to half of them. Hence, Smit feels that the CRC has lost a lot of qualified women—and men—who couldn’t work in good conscience in a church that didn’t accept women as equals, and that those in the CRC shouldn’t expect all those women to “come flooding back” in the wake of Synod’s decision.

Smit’s look back at her time in the CRC is somewhat bittersweet; despite the frustration she has felt with policies and attitudes within the church, she calls Calvin CRC, here in Grand Rapids, her home church. She contentedly and confidently looks ahead to another year as an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church.

Marchiene Rienstra will return to the CRC and for the next three months will serve in a temporary capacity as co-pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC. She claims that this position is exactly what she needs and wants right now.

Ruth Hofman eagerly anticipates the 1992 ratification of Synod’s decision to allow women in office in the CRC, which will coincide with her expected date of graduation from Calvin Seminary. She hopes to be ordained at that time, and is confident that she will be ready to pastor a church.

Gladys Verhulst will continue to study at McCormick Theological Seminary, attain some practical experience in ministry, and will complete her Masters of Divinity degree at Calvin Seminary.

Six to Go

I saw the crow
and I knew my duty

“Seven dead crows in a month makes an Ace.”

Loaded, cocked, scoped, pumped 28 times
Out of David’s window and on the fence

“You got him Dan, can’t miss this one.”

“Screeawhh.” the gasp echoed the gun.
Feathers, black, float.
Bird corpse still on frozen ground.
Life trickles-
Red blood on white snow.
Gold ball lodged
In black feathered brain
Base of head on neck
Debased.

“One down six to go, buddy.”

I buried the bird,
With a spade.

Daniel Hutt
Sand, Glass, and Solitude

The Glassmaker mixes the fine white sands of solitude, each grain a minute, each dram a day, precious in small amounts.

Heated in fires of crafted skill, worked with elderly hands, brilliant light emerges in the form of a crystalline figure of robust beauty and quiet pride. The master in his triumph attacks the desert itself, raining firestorms and whirlwinds on the barren wasteland of despair, forming a scintillate liquid glass ocean, the setting sun bleeding light on the sea.

Matthew DeGroot
Dear upperclasspersons,

Once again we are gathered together, devoting ourselves to the purposes of higher learning and gender-neutral speech. It is good to take time to reflect on why we are here, and it is good also to reflect on how much better it is to be at a school like Calvin which is built on solid principles, rather than at, say, a state university. I don’t care if we do pay triple the tuition. Calvin is easily worth the extra five grand because, as I said, it’s built on the solid principles of scholarship and fellowship. At Secular U. where all your friends went, all they care about is having fun. For example, this nation’s Universities of Unbelief have become so corrupt that they do mean things to impressionable freshpersons just for amusement! To keep you from regret about never having a football team, a fraternity, or sorority, Dialogue offers this sample of the kind of cruel treatment that might be inflicted on freshperson dorm residents had Calvin not stayed on the straight and narrow all these years:

Ten Fun Lies To Tell Freshpersons

1. Tell your freshperson suitemate that chapel attendance is mandatory. Since her last name is in the J-M category, her attendance time is 10:30; you won’t see her there because you go at 11:22.

2. On the first rainy day of the year, ask a freshperson why her hair is wet. Tell her there is a tunnel connecting her dorm to Hiemenga Hall and act surprised that she has never used it.

3. While you’re at it, tell her there is a jacuzzi in the basement of her dorm. Let her know that you just have to ask the deskie for the key to the complex council room and let
yourself in through the trapdoor.

4. Just before open house, act like you're in a big hurry getting ready for a date. Then give your freshperson suitemate seventy-five cents and ask him to run down to the basement and buy you a package of condoms from the vending machine.

5. Tell a freshperson that his dorm's archrival is the fraternity Phi Delta Diek, which has its house right by the Lake Drive entrance to campus. Tell him the absolute coolest thing he could ever do would be to paint “Schultz Rules” on the side of that house.

6. Ask a freshperson if she knows when the dorm CD players are coming, and ask her what color she ordered.

7. Tell a freshperson in your political science class that you have a lot of studying to do and that you're going to eat in the library basement cafeteria. Then ask him to meet you there.

8. Tell a freshperson on your floor that she needs a note from the RD to skip class.

9. Tell a freshperson that the “core” in “core classes” means middle; therefore, he isn't supposed to take any of them until his sophomore and junior years.

10. Tell a freshperson who never leaves the library that every male resident of his dorm is responsible for mowing a section of the grounds. Then harass him because his section is getting too long.
I am
(smarter than everyone I know
and dumber than everyone I respect)
alone

Dan Emshoff