CONTRIBUTORS

Wendy Levy will return home to Jamaica after graduation. Although she feels she will never come back to Michigan, she has enjoyed her senior year at Calvin and wishes it had not gone by so fast. Sarah Mac Donald majors in English and Spanish, hails from Maine, and likes carnations better than roses. Patti Matuszak has a degree in French and is working toward a degree in education. At present, she student-teaches at Grand Rapids Christian High School. Scott Millen, a sophomore art student and the Prism editor, firmly believes in overcommitting. He was recently given a nifty red cap by his mother and he wears it while drawing. Rey L. D. Romero, a senior political science major, transferred to Calvin from Florida International University this January. He says he bases most of his writing on people and places that have affected him. Ralf Scharnowski, a biology major from Germany, took his photograph in Trafalgar Square while in England over spring break. He has a passion for Volkswagens. J. Alan Speer has lived all over the world but still feels like a redneck from southern Illinois. He will be studying “pretentious film criticism” in Paris this fall. Sarah Taylor, a sophomore who majors in art, raises rabbits where she lives in Clarkston, Michigan. She also likes to quilt. Julie Uken majors in art and education and believes that photography is the only medium of fine art that can capture life in all its seriousness. Mary VanderMeer believes, like Katherine Hepburn, that Satan invented pantyhose. Jon Vandervelde, a recent Calvin graduate, states that he looks forward to a new heaven and new earth where the only mode of mechanized transport is the bicycle. Conrad Bakker is an idealist who drives a mean Ford pick-em-up truck. Rebecca Falb doesn’t want to inject any more mice but thinks bugs will always be neat. After graduation, she hopes to write the greatest bug book ever. Sarah Koops names as her most valued material possessions her cowboy boots, her bicycle, and her eight-inch chef’s knife. She hopes to study the culinary arts in Paris and to land a spot on the varsity wine tasting team at Le Cordon Bleu. Robert Kroese claims that his tendency to procrastinate is one of his best qualities. Kristin Tennant is a graduating senior with an English major and journalism minor. She wants to be a conglomeration of Annie Dillard, Michael Hedges, and Evil Kinevil when she grows up. Rebecca Warren knows how to walk like a New Yorker because she is one.
Constructive Conspiracy

Mister Thomas Benjamin Grierson

walk like a new yorker

J. ALAN SPEER

JON vandervelde

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Constructive Conspiracy

In his short story, “Harrison Bergeron,” Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. depicts a futuristic society in which everyone is finally equal and no one can compete against anyone else, due to “the 211th, 212th, and 213th Amendments to the Constitution and the unceasing vigilance of the agents of the United States Handicapper General.” The Handicapper General enforces laws requiring highly intelligent individuals to wear headsets that emit piercing noises every twenty seconds, so they can’t take unfair advantage of their brains; beautiful people must wear masks; those with strong, graceful bodies are forced to wear weights and cover their contours with scrap metal. No one is smarter or faster or better looking than anyone else, and men and women look almost exactly alike.

What the young, Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Susan Faludi calls a “backlash against feminism” may be, instead, an effort on the part of American women to ward off the spectre of Vonnegut’s Handicapper General. It may be a sign that they are struggling to revitalize and reorient the women’s movement by ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women while fighting off the kind of enforced “equalization” and homogeneousness that a Handicapper General would likely support. Faludi’s new book, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Feminism, explains why she believes women rejected feminism in the 1980s. According to a recent Time magazine cover story featuring Faludi and feminist movement founder Gloria Steinem, there has been a highly effective campaign on the part of Hollywood, the courts, the mass media, politicians, and even the fashion and cosmetics industries to discredit the goals of the feminist movement and to convince women that their newly gained liberation is the source of all their problems. The article sums up these “backlash stereotypes” as follows: “Too much freedom causes women unhappiness, went the antifeminist message of the ’80s. True contentment lies in home, children, and dressing like dolls.” The article cites as examples supporting this thesis the portrayals of blissful mothers and frazzled, crazed career women on television and in movies; the frothy, baby-dollish haute couture that many women rushed out to buy in the late ’80s; and the choice of many women not to work outside the home. The article also states that according to a poll conducted by Time, sixty-three percent of American women do not want to called feminists.

Though Faludi and Steinem should be applauded for their defense of the women’s movement, it is possible that their definitions of feminism are too narrow; American women may have outgrown them. I am confident that women are not deserting the fundamental goals of the feminist movement, but are rejecting its strident, angry tone of earlier years and are trying to find more constructive ways to advance their cause. I conducted an informal poll myself of some of the bright, successful women I know and none of them perceives herself to be in a battle between the sexes or a victim of a conspiracy that seeks to undermine her goals. Some sexist attitudes persist, but the moral turpitude of some members of our society doesn’t constitute a conspiracy against women. With all due respect to Faludi, her “backlash” theory matronizes women and dictates
that women should make certain career and lifestyle choices and not others. If there's any kind of backlash it's against a mentality that seeks to label women as either "feminists" or "traditionalists," as "career women" or "mothers." There is no one "woman's perspective"—all women are different, as are men. Criticism of the women's movement by women can be constructive criticism may be necessary for its growth; it may be a sign that women are pushing and testing the boundaries of what the original movement leaders have redefined as the "appropriate" spheres for them.

Women, like men, must be able to choose their modes of being which are free of stereotypes and ideologies, including the ideologies of extremist feminists. Unfortunately, some women insist on remaining firmly entrenched in stereotypes. What do we say about women whose cars bear bumper stickers like "A woman's place is in the mall"? Such sentiments, even in jest, make it clear to me that men alone aren't responsible for sexism in society; many women, too, have a distorted view of God's image in both sexes. Though I often encounter obstacles in the form of chauvinistic men, I also often meet women who themselves reinforce stereotypes. I know many men who are progressive-thinking and morally impassioned about equal rights for women and some women who insist on perpetuating harmful stereotypes by acting like clingy, terminally cute airheads. It's their right to do so, although they certainly make it more difficult for other women who desire to escape from such stereotypes. Men and women alike must be held responsible for attitudes about gender, and fixing on one sex the label of "oppressor" and calling the other "the victim" is not constructive behavior. Nor is women's maintaining a hostile, defensive attitude toward men. Or Steinem's telling women that the only alternative to "feminism" (on her terms, I assume) is "masochism" (as she says in the *Time* interview), implying that women who choose to work in the home as mothers are essentially selling themselves back into slavery. The path that Steinem or Faludi has chosen is not the path that all liberated, independent women must take. There is no one exemplar of what constitutes a successful and liberated woman's lifestyle, though Christians should be able to think of someone whose life to emulate.

An anonymous English reviewer of a Jane Austen novel notes the attractive possibility Austen holds out for us of experiencing "the community of intelligent love." A Christian community should be such a place. It seems to me that the way to build and maintain such a community is not to focus on sexual politics and anger and the kind of enforced "equalization" inherent in some strains of militant feminism. We—Christian women and men—should acknowledge our debt to feminist movement leaders for the progress they have helped women make, but we must also resist the conformity and, ultimately, the oppression that could result from extreme versions of this ideology. Seeing the image of God in all women and men empowers us to love each other intelligently and to become more and more obedient servants.
On Life and M. Blanchot

And when the darkness dissolved
there was a dew-drenched world

of no impossibility

and I became
and there put down roots
fair foliage flourished
  Mine green and shining
  with the dew of that dawn

and you all grey-plumed nested in my branches
as was the way of winged creatures
  with rooted ones

i trembled at Your touch
  the breach of air made by your passing
  as your wing cut the liquid depth
  of that reality

light filtered through my leaves
  your silent grey began to sing
  but only i could hear it
    all otherwords were silence

to me
  all othercolors grey
    beside the riot of shades you had become

Patti Matuszak
Editor's note: "Mister Thomas Benjamin Grierson" is based on William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily." Faulkner's short story depicts Miss Emily Grierson, one of the last members of the dying Southern aristocracy.
My momma was born in the year 1837. She was the daughter of a long line of houseniggers. When I was a child no one knew who my daddy was, but I guess everybody know about him now. I got to write all this down cause I’m old and I’m tired. My name is Thomas Benjamin. I am seventy-five years old and I feel black and yellow and grey all over. I live in this old house all by myself. I have no children or woman or any other kin. I leave the house only to buy my food. In the store nobody ever say hello to me. They just stare and keep to themselves all the questions that they would like to ask me. When I leave I can always hear them say behind me, “Dear God that yellow old nigger is gone dumb.”

This town has changed too. The people are not the same. Boys round here are no good. You can see them all day sitting outside the store—they smoke and drink and fight. They say that their nigger hands ain't going to pick no cotton for nobody. All the boys want to go up north to find real jobs.

I was born about 1857, just a few years before the war. I was born on the Grierson plantation. Momma told me that I came to the world inside the main house, three rooms away from the master’s room. I really don’t remember much about the plantation. All I know is that it was burned down by yankee soldiers. Momma told me that all the fieldhands and slaves ran away with the soldiers. She said that they burned the fields and the cotton and killed most of the livestock that was left. Master Grierson say we almost starved to death that winter. I remember coming to live here in this big old house in town. I came here with Master
Grierson, his daughter Miss Emily, and Momma. I believe that Miss Emily’s momma died when Miss Emily was a little girl, long before I was born cause I sure don’t remember her.

I was about fifteen when Momma died. I remember Master Grierson was very sad after my momma died. A few days after the funeral I was doing Momma’s chores around the house when Master Grierson called from the parlor. He had promised my momma to send me to school in Alabama. I learned to read and write and do my numbers and I lived almost ten years in Alabama. I returned to find that Master Grierson had died two years before. Miss Emily be living all by herself with no one to do the chores. Miss Emily gave me a room downstairs. I thought she be real funny cause she gave me her daddy’s old room instead of the service quarters.

When I been living in the house for about a year Miss Emily asked me if I knew how to read. I said yes and she gave me a big yellow envelope with many papers inside. She told me to read them and to ask her any questions if I had any. Them papers inside were letters written to me by Master Grierson. In them letters he told me who I was and who be my daddy. I understood the papers well but Miss Emily and I never spoke about them until many years later. Imagine that—I was the master’s son. Now I understand why he be so kind to me. Also reckon why they always called me a yellow nigger. Somehow I was not surprised. I remember when I was bout ten years old I used to hide inside this big chifferobe in Momma’s room. Many times I would see her hugging and kissing Master Grierson and Momma be smiling and saying funny things. Master Grierson be ontop her talking like a fieldhand. I sure
was scared that Momma would find me in that chifferobe. Years later Miss Emily gave me a picture of my momma that the master had paid a man to take.

It was about a year later I remember Mister Homer Barron coming to town and entering Miss Emily's life. I thought he was no good for her. That man drink too much and loved to gamble and visit a nasty woman across the railroad tracks. He was white trash I said to myself. In town they say he killed a man in Baltimore. I told this to Miss Emily, about what folk in town be saying, but she don't care. Miss Emily say she can forgive all.

One night I let Mister Homer Barron in by the back door since Miss Emily always told me to keep the front door closed. He go up the stairs and into Miss Emily's room. About an hour later Miss Emily be screaming about something and Mister Homer Barron be yelling too. I say about an hour later than that everything calmed down. They both be quiet and I went to bed. In the morning Miss Emily rang my bell and I went up to her room with the morning coffee and biscuits.

I found Miss Emily in bed. She jumped up when I came into the room. I saw that she was only wearing her nightgown. I was about to turn back when she reached out and pulled me by my arm. "Oh, Tobe! I killed him, I killed him!" she screamed.

Now we were both too afraid to tell anybody so in the end we left Mister Homer Barron in bed and locked the door behind him. Years later Miss Emily told me that she had hit him over the head with a candlestick but she never told me why. For about the next twenty years Miss Emily and I let no one in the house. We talked a lot. She told me about her family and gave me her
daddy’s Bible. Many times we would sit around the old piano and I’d try to remember the songs my momma taught me on the plantation. Miss Emily taught me how to play board games and I showed her how to play cards. Whatever Miss Emily and I did was always away from the windows so no one could see us. When she became ill I would have to carry her and sit her at the kitchen table so I could feed her. Later when I got old and weak myself I had to feed her in bed most of the time. One night she held my hand as I was brushing her hair. “We are the last of a clan, Tobe. We are the last of our kin left, my dear brother, the last of our kin,” she said.

Before Miss Emily died she called the judge to tell him about me and she paid her taxes too by selling her daddy’s watch. The judge agreed to let me keep this old house til I died and then the town could tear it all down. Things be changing all round us then. Yet Miss Emily and I kept to our old ways til the day she died. We were old and dying so we kept to our old ways, the only ones we could live with, the only ones we understood. They were the ways of her momma and my momma and our daddy. They were old ways which had died a long time ago. They burned down with the plantation. This new world I reckon I don’t understand. People be hollering bout so many things nowadays.

On her deathbed Miss Emily gave me the key to Mister Homer Barron’s room. I took the key and dropped it in the well. I reckon someday soon I’ll stand before God himself to explain that crime. I guess the town knew all along what happened to Mister Homer Barron. A few days after Miss Emily’s funeral they found Mister Homer Barron’s body. That was the last time I talked to anyone in
town. No use in trying to explain to folks what they don’t want to understand anyway. I got no will, nothing to leave behind, nothing to say that I was a man and that I was here. Maybe all yellow and black and white and grey all over, but a man nevertheless. Soon I’ll be with my kin again, in God’s plantation.

This account was found next to the body of Thomas Benjamin Grierson on November 2, 1933. Since he had no living relatives, the town aldermen agreed to have him buried in the white cemetery next to Miss Emily Grierson and her father. Mister Grierson holds the distinct honor of being the first black person to own property in his county.
One
bare chested man
in purple sweats
stood on a ladder
painted red
and hoisted himself up
into the window of this yellow house

life continues

and I am not
the same.

Mary VanderMeer
I spent my first two spring vacations at Calvin in service and Christian contemplation on Student Volunteer Service projects, but this year I wanted to devote my break to hedonism. Florida sounded entirely banal; in fact, anywhere with sun seemed too conventional. Why not buck convention and avoid nature entirely? So I toyed with the oxymoronic idea of an urban vacation. After having lived in or wandered around places like Istanbul, Minneapolis, Paris, Tokyo, New Orleans, London, and Ankara, I developed a distinct taste for urban life. Yet one city remained a fearsome enigma, a labyrinth of as many mortal dangers as corporeal delights: New York City. For years it taunted me as an untasted paragon of urban adventure, but its reputation for physical harm paralyzed me. Finally, my lifelong obsession with cinema bolstered my courage to purchase a train ticket. Besides Paris, there is no better opportunity to visit a multitude of art-film houses than in Manhattan.

What follows are excerpts from the one hundred-page journal I kept. A journal is worth a thousand pictures, I argue. Appropriately, I only took six photographs over the course of the week.

**Thursday 19 March (Grand Rapids)**

The whole idea of New York City makes me nervous. I have this idea that walking around at any time of the day is extremely dangerous. I feel like something awful is going to happen to ruin the whole trip. I want to be careful.
Saturday 21 March (riding Amtrak)

7:59 AM: Oh, my Lord, my Lord.
NEVER has this happened to me before. And it had to happen today, of course. I set my alarm for PM instead of AM. (My roommate) Mark woke up at 7:07, and said, “Alan, do we have to go?” I sat up, and it registered that we had half an hour to get to the train station downtown. Within ten minutes I was dressed and packed with contacts in and hair wet, in Mark’s car. The drive seemed unbearably slow. We found the Amtrak station, as per both our foggy memories. Two minutes later the train arrived. I CANNOT RELAX!

I hope New York and Chicago aren’t too cold. I am banking on spring. I demand spring. Defiantly I did not bring my winter coat.

Sunday 22 March

9:00 AM: Awake.

My trip has been very pleasant. I think I will do the Amtrak thing again in the future.

Right now we’re passing rocks, trees, greenery—all is very green, and there are many bucolic, tacky houses reminiscent of rural Illinois. Armies of grey clouds above and wet roads below but no trace of snow. That pleases me.

Vines, churches, truck depots . . .

3:10 PM: Now we’re passing through Virginia. I swear I can just stare out of the window and never blink, never move. I could pass the whole day just turning my head to the left. Built-in entertainment on a train. It beats a TV.

Read a bunch of George Orwell essays and Henry Miller. Miller I’m not sure if I like or not. I don’t think I’d like him in person, because I’m sure he likes very few people himself. He’s very cynical, iconoclastic, shameless . . . cocky? I’m not sure what his intentions are in writing . . . frustrating. His essay on the death of cinema (in 1935!!) was disconcerting but possibly correct in every way. This darkens my future aspirations, though.

I love going by train! You see so much of wild America that you wouldn’t see by car. It’s a big Chinese picture scroll unrolling before us. This train ride is half the vacation!

Very expressive short trees beside us. Like crooked, spread-out hands. Like Dr. Seuss trees. Like frozen dancers.

[New York City eventually appeared. An old Calvin friend who goes to NYU grad school, Gerard Hammink, met me at the train station. He was to offer me lodging for the week in his apartment in the East Village of Manhattan.]
Monday 23 March

3:50 PM: I am sitting in the cafe of the Angelika Film Center on HOW-ston (though it’s spelled Houston) Street, eating carrot ‘n’ curry soup after having seen Derek Jarman’s “Edward II.” A really great film. The text was based on Christopher Marlowe’s history play of the same name. All the Elizabethan verse was fun. But what Jarman has done with the play! The set simply consisted of stucco-stone walls with a dirt ground and some throne-like furniture. And the actors certainly weren’t in period dress. Edward and his lover, Gaveston, wore tuxes or J. Crew clothing; the ultra-chic and powdered Queen Isabella wore Yves-Saint-Laurent or something haute like that; and the army was dressed in British police gear. Anachronistic. A neat visual display.

The focus of the film was very different from that of the original play. In the original Marlowe only insinuates that Edward and Gaveston had a gay relationship, but this was a “Queer-Nation—Edward-was-gay-FACE-IT!” film. Jarman certainly rearranged the text to suit his agenda.

Edward was different from any other gay character I’ve seen. He was real . . . kingly. Well done and touching.

4:25 PM: Currently sitting in a cement playground in between the Angelika and Film Forum. I purchased a ticket for the British documentary “35 UP.” The weather is perfect—a chilly wind but no precipitation.

This area is not as nasty and dirty as I predicted all of New York would be. It’s quite normal, acceptable. Plenty of ethnic restaurants wherever I look. So I won’t starve. Some Hispanic boys playing basketball on the other side of the playground. Loads of taxis and bikes. An orthodox church about a block away behind a row of leafless trees. White graffiti ornamenting a gray wall. All is brick, several stories tall. The sky is half blue, half cloudy.

10:45 PM: “35 UP” has to be the most novel documentary I will ever see. In 1964 the director interviewed about fifteen British kids, all age seven, from different walks of life. He then issued a film, “7 UP,” showing the results. Seven years later he interviewed the same kids again, and put out “14 UP,” then “21 UP,” “28 UP,” and now in 1992, “35 UP.” How weird! To compare how the kids answered questions like “What do you want to be when you grow up?” when they were seven, and their opinions on love and marriage with how they really turned out. And the director said he’s going to continue this until the year 2000. Can’t wait.

Of course while you’re watching it you put yourself in the interviewee’s spot. What would you have said? To what degree at age thirty-five would you
be called a success? What would you look like? One guy ended up homeless and mentally off-balance. At age seven he was a completely healthy, happy child. That’s scary. I guess we really can’t be sure of how things will turn out for us.

**Tuesday 24 March**

8:05 PM: Today was “Walk Like a New Yorker” day. I hate being touristy, so I refused to go to the Empire State Building or anywhere like that. I want to see real New York. Thus I decided to just walk the streets and get a mental map of Manhattan. I figured out that the Avenues go north-south and the streets go east-west. That is in itself a huge accomplishment.

So I started walking. Avoided screaming women in fur coats, spent plenty of change on beggars (I’m such a sucker), and stood confused as a tall black man screamed at me, “You’re just a stupid nigger!” One guy came up and offered me drugs.

Did plenty of people-watching. Checked people’s clothing styles, hair—such diversity. As a white person I felt like an oddity most of the time. Only saw one stray cat. That’s a whole lot different than gross Istanbul. In comparison to what I expected (the worst), New York is nice. Lots cleaner. And I haven’t been assaulted yet!

**Wednesday 25 March**

3:50 PM: I just got out of “American Dream” by Barbara Kopple. It won the Academy Award for best documentary last year. I guess documentary filmmaking is indeed an art form. The filmmaker tries to convey a message visually and verbally, like in any film.

“Dream” was about the 1984 Hormel strike in Austin, Minnesota. It was quite a fight, went on for a year. The strikers used every radical union tactic in the book. The film was a head rush, because I didn’t know whose side I was on. It was the idealists versus the realists (isn’t it always?), “dignity” versus “supporting your family.” Were the Hormel executives ultimately the bad guys? Were they indeed being unjustly money-hungry by lowering their wages even in the face of huge profits, or were they truly looking out for the company’s welfare? Was the P-9 union earning more than enough to begin with? I think the filmmaker recognized that the Austin workers received a lot more than other meat packing employees. Even so, that wouldn’t necessarily make a cut right. I can understand the blow to the P-9’s dignity. I can understand their reasons to fight. But how much power did they really have?
Ultimately, were they fighting for their survival or for the sake of the union? To preserve the principle of a union? Was it any longer relevant? What did unions stand for in the first place?

The thought of crossing the picket line—"You’re a scab!"—horrifying pressure. Brother against brother: “He ain’t my brother if he crosses the line . . .”. People standing up for their principles. The final irony: after all the striking P-9ers and their supporters at other plants were fired and replaced, the new workers ended up with essentially the original wages as before the cut. What an indignity. What mistakes were made, if any, and by whom? Could the P-9 have won? People jogging on the roof of the building across the street. I’m in sitting in Angelika’s café, sipping an iced coffee. Next film in ten minutes: E. M. Forster’s “Where Angels Fear to Tread”—with Judy Davis!! I worship her.

8:42 PM: “Angels” was enjoyable. Obviously that bland word doesn’t connote a monstrous amount of enthusiasm. It wasn’t bed per se, but there was one point in the narrative where I became confused, and that threw me off for the rest of the film. Was it me, or did the English man’s return to the Italian guy’s home after the carriage make no sense? There were some clear messages in the film—mostly criticisms of Victorian England—but the extent to which the characters resolved anything personally is unclear. Maybe Forster wrote the novel that way, and the film is being faithful to the text. Judy Davis was riotously stuffy. I always love Helen Mirren, and I was disappointed when she died so early in the film. And a question: Is Helena Bonham-Carter in every Forster film adaptation for a reason? Does she have some sort of control in casting? Just asking.

**Thursday 26 March**

8:45 PM: Why the heck was I laughing? I am shameless. It turned out that two blocks over from Gerard’s place was the “Third Annual Extra Sick-and-Twisted Festival of Animation” that I’d seen advertised in the *Village Voice* for the past month. I couldn’t resist adding an animated film to my list. And the label “Sick-and-Twisted” didn’t deter me—I thought nothing could shock me anymore.

But they followed through! They delivered the goods: several animated features that were absolutely tasteless. I didn’t think anyone could stoop so low and get it produced! Cruelty to animals, cruelty to children, gratuitous violence, deafening expletives, desecration of decorum and dignity. But it makes you wonder about yourself when you find this stuff funny even
occasionally. Sick and twisted, indeed. Case in point: the short "How Much Is That Window In the Doggie?" in which a window pane skewers a little puppy. I can't believe I laughed.

A statement at the end of one of the shorts was particularly indicting but was intended in fun: "Dedicated to those who disapprove but continue to watch."

**Friday 27 March**

1:44 PM: Gerard and I are wandering the Metropolitan Museum of Art for the day, doing some humanist worship, and looking for the spots where they filmed "When Harry Met Sally." (Hey, we rode the subway here! My first time on a New York subway. But please note that the oldest subway in the world is in Istanbul, and I've been on it hundreds of times.)

We wanted to progress chronologically through our art history textbooks. Instantly upon walking through a rebuilt Egyptian temple I started grappling with the contextualist versus formalist debate that Professor Young kept bringing up in class. This temple seemed so incongruous here, of course: can we truly appreciate an artwork when it's wrenched from its natural, original setting? It seemed initially so absurd, staring at this carved wall that used to sit in a desert, and now it's got lighting and glass panels and signposts, and air conditioning. Can I truly appreciate this as an ancient Egyptian work? We concluded that we could appreciate it, but to a limited extent. Certainly we could appreciate it more if we were surrounded by Arabs and camels.

Right now I'm sitting before the Temple of Dendur, fully reconstructed on a platform in a high-ceilinged room with one wall all glass to illuminate the place naturally. I'm awed by the sense of worship this culture had. All their sarcophagi, their emphasis on the afterlife. How I want that! To unthinkingly worship! But in my culture the mind has squeezed out all the worship, I'm afraid. I want to let something find me, grip me, shake me, crush me. I simply want to stop thinking for awhile. Yet here I am writing away.

[The rest of the day was a binge of Impressionist painting. My notes were scattered. Fleeting impressions.]

Rubens, "A Forest at Dawn with a Deer Hunt." Depth! It looks like a 30-foot-deep painting set in a wall, proceeding beyond the wall in this little frame. I am thrown into the shade.

El Greco, "View of Toledo." The clouds! Direction, movement, energy. All is silver, dark blue, grey, green. Real depth, distance.

Van Gogh, "L'Arlesienne." Somehow this kind of portraiture is more
effective than the hyper-realism of earlier times. It conveys more feeling. Yellow!

Monet's "The Thaw." Bazille, Pissarro: my skin feels these places . . .


I always feel a particular pressure when entering a museum. I'm sure many people share this anxiety: you feel as though every piece on display should overwhelm you with its formal and textual brilliance, and you stand before each piece and few things really act on upon in any significant way and thus you feel inadequate and frustrated because you're not sophisticated enough to profoundly enjoy everything you see.

Ultimately I find this to be an unnecessary and unrealistic expectation. If you can just find one work that deeply engages you, then you have really "done your job."

For me, besides my Impressionist overdose, the ancient Assyrian works were the most impressive. I'm not sure what it was about these tall low relief sculptures that rocked me. They had such ferocity, such presence. Which is what the artists intended. Imagine the effect of these things on the common folk back then! The sculpted figures of men and women were tall, smooth like real skin, but with amazingly huge muscles. The lions were smooth and lifelike. Their curves . . . Gerard and I just sat in the Assyrian room and stared at these ancient massive people parading by on the walls and their cuneiform script striped across their midsections—a neat, unexpected graphic design. Visual and verbal text.

I really wish that all this art was out in the world doing some good. I mean, it's fine here in the museum, accessible, but I think it would be better if were in common people's homes, making a difference.

I also finally realized why my eyes always go blurry in museums: museum air is kept especially dry so as to protect the artworks from destructive condensation. So my contacts crumple up on my eyes. Aha! All is clear now—mentally, not visually.

Saturday 28 March

11:01 PM: My whole conception of New York is revamped. What is this silly stereotype about rude New Yorkers?

Spent most of the morning walking around and buying some NYU sweatshirts and such with my remaining funds. Didn't see any movies, strangely. (I just realized that I have spent over seventy dollars on movies. How decadent!) I guess I needed a break from art. Anyway, a couple hours
after lunch I was up in Midtown standing on a corner wondering which
direction to head when this huge Italian guy came up to me—from latissimus
dorsi to latissimus dorsi he was as wide as I was tall!—and said, “Hey, are you
a tourist?” His accent was movie-stereotypical Brooklyn. I looked around for
movie cameras to make sure this was indeed reality. This beast could take my
face off with one blow . . . . Do I answer “heck no”? Do I run? Or do I revert
to my stupid self and say yes?

I said yes and waited to get pulled into some alley or car.

He actually, truly, honestly just wanted to talk. He asked if I wanted to
meet a real Italian from Brooklyn. I said, let’s do coffee. We talked for hours.
His name’s Vinny and he’s a police officer, twenty-nine years old. And I have
never met anyone as big as he is. And I’m not talking fat cells. I asked why the
heck he came up to me. He said I looked like a “nice kid.” He just likes to meet
new people, see what they do with their lives while he sits around risking his
neck in “crazy” Brooklyn. He’s lived here all his life. He asked if I’d been up
to the Empire State Building. I said I wasn’t into the tourist thing. He winced,
“Aaw, Man, ya gotta go up there! If I had time I’d drag ya up there with my bare
hands.” I’m sure he could. I said I’d follow his advice next time I came around.

After a few hours of cross-cultural bonding, I took off. What a very strange
evening. My first friend named Vinny. Won’t get many of those at Calvin.

Sunday 29 March
8:56 PM: I’m back on the train in a crowded rear car colored a nauseating
kidney bean-burgundy. Very cramped, very dreary. Oh well. At least I have
a window seat.

This time I have a talkative seatmate. Beside me sits Tammy, a short,
purple-haired twenty-one-year-old. She plopped down in her combat boots,
and we immediately started talking. I needed that. I’m already missing New
York, and I needed someone to reminisce with. We realized we’d been to the
same places, walked through the same thunderstorm a few nights ago, et
cetera. It means I was really there. I have conquered the fierce city. But now
it’s in my system. Will I like trees and grass when I get back to Calvin? There’s
the risk.
Carnations

Carnations
perch
in the window
ragged pink happy-go-lucky
through
smudged glass

you smile
at me so I smile
back and Someone

pulls down the shade.

Sarah MacDonald
Chances are that even if you have never heard of William Fyfe, he’s had a significant impact on you. If you’ve spent any amount of time on the Calvin College campus, a number of questions about this grassy knoll have probably surfaced in your mind. For example: why can you only enter the library on the third floor? Why do the hallways in the College Center look more like the result of geological shifts than the product of careful design? And why is it virtually impossible to give directions to any place on campus without resorting to the phrase “… and they ought to be able to tell you where to go from there”? 
As the architect who drew up the master plan for Calvin's campus, William Fyfe knows more about the answers to these questions than anyone. To hear Fyfe speak about his profession is to realize the careful thought and planning that went into the campus we know.

Fyfe's interest in architecture was sparked by his father, an architect and engineer, and by Frank Lloyd Wright. Growing up in Oak Park, Illinois, Fyfe was exposed to a good deal of Wright's earliest work. "As a high school student," he recalls, "I delivered newspapers all over town. I would see these houses that appealed to me greatly, and they all turned out to be by Frank Lloyd Wright." These houses dated from Wright's "Golden Period," roughly 1890-1910. "It is certainly the work of this period that appealed to me the most," Fyfe remarks.

After graduating from Antioch College in Ohio, Fyfe attended Yale's graduate school of architecture, where he came across a notice on a bulletin board that stated Wright was starting a school of sorts. "I don't know if he called it that," says Fyfe. "It was set up more like an apprenticeship program. The following summer I traveled to his school in Wisconsin and got hooked."

Wright's influence is evident both in speaking with Fyfe and in viewing his work. "I once defined good architecture as resulting from a good program [the purpose of the building]," Fyfe says. "I also believe that architecture must be related to or be kind to the site. It should improve the site if possible, and certainly not destroy it. At Calvin we never leveled a piece of property in order to build a building. Many buildings on Calvin's campus have entrances on different levels, which came about because of the ideal of leaving the landscape intact."

Of course, the buildings Fyfe designs are ultimately for use by people, and he is well aware of this fact. "I try to make whatever I design humane in the sense that I want the people who use the buildings to feel good about where they are. I want to design something that is an aid to whatever is supposed to be happening there."

Fyfe believes that the program of Calvin's campus is reflected in Luke 2:52, which describes Jesus after he returned with his parents from the Passover celebrations in Jerusalem: "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Fyfe comments, "That verse was always in the back of my mind when I worked on designs for the campus, because that is what ought to happen for students in a Christian college."
Fyfe was assigned by his employer, Perkins and Will, to draw up the master plan for Calvin. He recalls that he spent about a year getting acquainted with the property. "I ripped a few of my best trousers in the process," he remarks. "It was such a beautiful site. It had woods, hedgerows, hills, and valleys . . . ."

Quick to discount the idea that he is fully responsible for Calvin’s campus, Fyfe notes the importance of the three other principal architects and the contributions of the faculty and staff to the campus’ design. "I just get more credit than I should," he insists. "One of the first decisions about the campus was to keep an open space in the center. I believe absolutely that this should never be compromised. A few years back, there was an offer of funds to build a chapel if they would build it in that site," Fyfe states. This construction, thankfully, was never approved. Fyfe adds, "One thing that is quite unusual is that the campus developed exactly as we wanted it to from that initial plan of 1959."

Fyfe admits that the master plan for Calvin did change the contour of the land somewhat. "We scooped out the ground a bit between the Commons and the library. I was trying to visually bring the gymnasium in towards the other buildings. The gymnasium already had a location because of the athletic fields, but if that direct connection had not been needed, we would have physically brought the gym into the academic circle to downplay the distinction between athletics and other kinds of academic work."

"The triad formed by the library, chapel, and science building was always part of the master plan and came about largely through Dr. William Spoelhof’s instigation. He always said that a chapel does not bespeak a Christian college any more than the gymnasium or the academic buildings. This seems to me to be the essence of the Reformed faith. It affects all of life, so a classroom is just as religious a place as a chapel. Because of this belief, and the fact that money was never in abundance, the other buildings always took precedence over the chapel." Fyfe concedes, however, that the highest point on the campus was intentionally chosen as the chapel site in the master plan.

Budgetary constraints also help to explain some of the campus’s quirks. Fyfe explains, "Since we were often on a tight budget, we designed very close to the programming needs of each of the buildings. Once and a while we tried to incorporate certain features into the building that wouldn’t cost much but would make it a little more
gracious and maybe even fun. For instance, I would make a corridor bend in such a way as to make you wonder what’s around the corner. Someone once complained that this building didn’t have any straight corridors. He was right, but it was intentional.”

Fyfe’s comments about the thought processes which led to the design of Calvin’s campus are sometimes reminiscent of a twelve-year-old’s excited exclamations about model airplanes. He uses words like “fun” and “super” as often as “Postmodernism” and “cohesiveness.” Designing the campus was obviously a very personal experience for him. “In the science building we designed these meeting areas in the hallways. The professors told me it was a wonderful place to meet with students outside of class. I hold very much to the thought that a lot of education, and sometimes the better learning, occurs outside of the classroom. Anything we could do to promote that was to the good of the college. These meeting areas were repeated in North Hall.

“Another fun feature is the glazed stairways. I was eager to have the stairways with openings in them so that people on the stairs would be able to see what’s going on outside, and so that at night you would see life going up and down the stairs.

“The covered walkways were built to shield students from inclement weather. If we could build a bridge from the Science Building to the College Center and from the Commons to the Fine Arts Center, then all the buildings would be connected except for the gymnasium. When the idea first occurred to me it wasn’t financially feasible. But more recently we have come against the problem of expanding the bookstore, and it occurred to me that this bridge over the parking lot to the FAC would be a great location for the bookstore. That plan is pretty far along.”

Another aspect of the Knollcrest campus is something which Fyfe terms “expansion and contraction.” He remarks, “I love the fact that you have this open meadow in the middle of the campus and then Timmer and North Hall kind of pinch you together, and then it opens up again when you move toward the gymnasium.”

As a point of comparison for Calvin’s campus, Fyfe relates a recent experience involving another college on the East Coast: “I was asked by this college to review their campus. It’s a very old campus—much
smaller than Calvin's—about thirteen buildings, the oldest ones dating from 1712 and 1722. The whole campus up to the last building was super. The buildings had a great deal of cohesiveness, unity, and respect for each other and the total campus. The last building, however, which was designed by a Modernist architect in 1958, was just gruesome. It had no feel for the buildings surrounding it.”

“That got me thinking about Calvin’s campus, which right now holds together very well. I hope and pray that as it gets added to, and it will, that the additions respect what is already there. Largely this is a matter of scale and using materials as a unifying force.” Fyfe notes that at Calvin brick serves as this unifying component. “Brick has very much the feel of human scale, just the way it fits in your hand. I was in a building this morning where they used a larger brick, and even though the brick had a nice finish and color to it, the larger size just ruined the scale.”

Fyfe bemoans the lack of respect for these basic principles of scale and unity among many architects. “I have the feeling that too many architects today build for their own ego expansion or for the ego of the corporation or person for whom they are designing. This bothers the heck out of me. Although Postmodernism has freed the designer to do things that had been eliminated when the International Style [Modernist steel and glass skyscrapers] came into prominence, so much of what is happening today is that the designers are just tacking on design elements from some historical style or out of something they’ve seen someone else do. Invariably, these choices have not come out of the needs of the building. That is, the outer appearance of the building has not been dictated from within. While I’m delighted to see the freedom to explore, with few exceptions I don’t see this freedom handled very well. I’ll bet you that in twenty years this period of architecture will be looked back at with intense scorn.”

More than thirty years after the master plan was created, Fyfe says he is very proud of the way the campus has ended up. “Just the way we envisioned it in the beginning,” he remarks. “I don’t think there is a lot I would change about the campus if I could do it all over again. I can go back to some campuses I have worked on and just cringe at what’s happening in certain buildings. But I’ve always felt comfortable returning to Calvin’s campus.”
I asked the Night
a thousand times
as I lay on my back,
"If these are just the spillings
of light on your windowsill,
how many are still in the oven?"

At college
I eagerly took a class,
to learn from a man with three degrees.
This teacher took his three degrees
and pouring, tried to fill my
questions.
Questions, half empty,
turn into dreams.

I dream
there is a teacher like a Dad.
He would lie on the moist Earth
with my eyes near to his,
and point with my finger to Jupiter,
to Betelgeuse
and Sirius,
to Vega
and the sterling moon.
He would say like a son,
"My Father has made this
all for me.
I even know
some of His secrets—shall I tell you a few?"
And the pictures he’d paint would widen the sky,
give it faces, names, and traits.
Some day when I am older,
I will lie on the moist earth next to my child.
With our faces to heaven
we’ll both fall in love,
not with the secrets that make it wide,
but the Maker
who, small as we are,
has named us,
each and every one.
I will say,
“My Father has made all this
for you.”

And I will speak of Abraham
whose sons have filled the earth with
sins
enough to fill His wounded side and then
spill into Hell.

From here I just see angels’ eyes,
winking and watching and waiting
for me.

Mary VanderMeer
The Instant Spring Poem

We at Dialogue have created a do-it-yourself project to help you express your deepest feelings of love and angst. Fill in the blanks and send copies to the one you love and to next year's Dialogue editor.

____________________________________________________________________
(intense emotion) tears from the depths of my _______.

____________________________________________________________________
form of lament) for you. I __________ (an even more intense form of lament) for you.

I can not live with a mere memory of you.

____________________________________________________________________
(act of affection) my _________ like the inferno of _______.

____________________________________________________________________
carnivorous animal) a wild beast, prowling for your _______.

O my _______ , my _______, take me into your _______.

and never let me _______.

____________________________________________________________________
(term of endearment) (dessert) (appendage) (form of escape)

Do you not realize that to be _______ is like _______?

____________________________________________________________________
(negative state of being) (a torturous act)

I am _______, fueled by your love.

____________________________________________________________________
(expression of intense fire)

My _______ would cave in without your love.

____________________________________________________________________
(sphere of orientation)

Just say that one word of approval, to bring me in from this _______.

____________________________________________________________________
(inclement weather)

Then I will _______ more fully and my _______ will be healed.

____________________________________________________________________
(a bodily function) (physical impairment)

I will be whole.

____________________________________________________________________
in utmost sincerity, _______

(your name)