A Promise to Adam

Kevin Paul DuPont
Boston Globe

Those of us who have more than we need, and those of us with something less, are asked regularly to sign on to something. It’s very much part of the American way, all the more because of the Internet, with all of us now so easily reached, connected, offered entrance into our friends’ lives and causes, joys and sorrows.

A neighbor is walking to raise money for breast cancer and asks us to pledge maybe 5, 10, or 15 cents a mile. Our church is sending its youth group out of state for charity work, so before we leave Sunday’s service, we sign the clipboard to assure them they can count on our $25. The office, reminding us to be good citizens all, partners with the United Way and our e-mails ding with the reminder to give what we can. A fellow Red Sox fan with an ailing child at Dana-Farber mentions the Jimmy Fund and we say, “Tell me where to send the check.”

Howard London and Barbara Spivak aren’t asking you for a penny. They want you, they need you, perhaps more than they’ve wanted or needed anything or anyone in their lives. They’d like you and your friends, your kids, your nephews, your half-cousins, your girlfriend’s boyfriend, your stepbrother’s best buddy, anyone and everyone to sign on to the short list of obligations they call “A Promise to Adam.” Pay nothing up front. Pay nothing ever.

Just keep in mind what happened to their son, Adam London.

Especially if you are a high schooler, Adam’s grief-stricken parents would like you to think of Adam as your “BFFL” whenever you are in a car. Adam is no longer here to share your love and friendship, his life brought to an end in an instant, at 9:46 p.m. on Aug. 23, the fatal consequence of his speeding a car down a wet, winding, hilly Newton street on his way to a party. The crash site was about one mile from his home. The party he never made it to was only one more mile away.

About to enter his senior year at Newton North High School as the varsity lacrosse team’s stellar goalie, Adam only minutes earlier left his family’s home on Blake Street when he lost control of his 2003 Honda Civic. He was not wearing a seatbelt. He was racing down Bellevue Street at a speed upward of 60 m.p.h, based on what the police have told his mother, on a night when an experienced, prudent driver would have poked along at 20-25.

“A 17-year-old with a 17-year-old’s brain,” lamented Howard London, 63, the Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at Bridgewater State. “He thought he was invincible, not unlike most 17-year-olds who believe the same thing, I suppose.”

Driving too fast was something Adam’s dad cautioned him about routinely during the 5-6 weeks Adam owned his driver’s license. His dad worried that the message wasn’t getting through, but Adam nonchalantly assured his father he was listening.

“You know, I think he did hear me,” said his dad, “but like I say . . . invincible. He didn’t think it could happen to him.”

Adam’s mother, Dr. Barbara Spivak, is an internist and the head of the Mount Auburn Cambridge Independent Practice Association. Like Howard, her ex-husband, she reminded her youngest son over and over to mind the speed limits.

“Was it enough to take the car keys away? No, it wasn’t,” she said. “Do I wish that I had taken the keys away? Yes.”

Parents know the struggle inherent in that kind of decision. We want our children to grow, thrive, learn, make their way in life. For that to happen, they need to do for themselves, and we hope their mistakes are minor, tiny slips of judgment that translate nicely into teachable moments. We cautiously set them free, all the while silently praying that the day never comes that the phone rings and we are told it’s best we get to the emergency room immediately.

“I worried about his speeding, I did,” said Spivak. “Adam was a good, bright, loving kid. He loved his friends. He loved lacrosse. I never thought he would be dumb enough to get in his car, on a rainy night, on a treacherous, curvy road and do 50-60 miles an hour. Never. I think he made a tragic mistake and it cost him his life.”

(Story continues on inside back cover)
Bridgewater Review

ON THE COVER
Margot Hurley - My Face Confronts You Everyday
Paper, Charcoal and Adhesives 6' x 4'
This collaged self-portrait is a testament to the artist’s resilience after being sexually assaulted by another student in her university art class. The eyes are meticulously built from very small scraps of paper in contrast to other areas of the face that become larger and more abstract, representing how fractured she felt after she was assaulted. She made the piece on the floor of her dorm room (which was so small she had to work with part of the piece under the bed) because she didn’t feel safe enough to work in the studio. Her face does indeed confront and implicate the viewer, and it is hard not to feel its power. At the same time, it serves as a reminder of the transformative potential of artmaking as a means of coming to terms with and transcending violence. (For more on Violence Transformed, see Jonathan Shirland’s article starting on page 15.)

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English

DESIGN
Philip McCormick’s Design works., Inc.
Stoughton, MA

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Editor’s Notebook

William C Levin

“You’re Kind”
Words and music by Paul Simon

It’s probably a good thing that Paul lived with this particular girlfriend long enough to discover the tragic flaw in their relationship. The alternative is horrible to imagine. On the strength of her kindness (“You’re good, so good, you introduced me to your neighborhood”) and generosity (“Seems like I never had so many friends before”) Paul marries the woman, only to discover on the first night of their honeymoon the truth of her bizarre sleeping habits.

We’ve been worried about bad marriages for a long time now, and I don’t just mean at the individual level. Over the last century divorce rates in America have increased sharply. In 1915 the rate was just 1 per thousand members of the population. By 1950, just after World War II ended, the rate was 2.6 per thousand Americans and by 1980 it was 5.3 per thousand. It has actually been declining since (along with marriage rates) and is now at about 3.6 per thousand Americans. But that figure is not very heartening when you realize that since the 1980’s for every hundred marriages that take place in America, there are approximately fifty divorces.

Cohabitation, living with a person out of wedlock, became a favored American strategy for dealing with the risks of failed marriages. Thanks to cohabitation, a post-World War II phenomenon in the United States (it was culturally verboten before then) we increasingly have been able to “try out” a relationship before making commitments. It seems logical that if you test-drive the car you are more likely to avoid a lemon, so to speak. The trouble is that according to the last forty years of social research on the topic, cohabiting doesn’t work, at least not the way we thought it would.

Beginning in the 1980’s, with divorce rates having doubled over the previous twenty-five years, and cohabitation widely practiced in America, social scientists began serious study of the phenomenon. What they found went directly opposite their hypotheses. Cohabitation was found to be negatively associated with both marital stability and quality. People who reported that they had lived together out of marriage were found to have shorter and worse marriages than did those who had not lived together out of wedlock. These findings so ran counter to common sense that early studies were repeated with differing samples and measures of the variables expecting to find that the first findings were merely the consequence of weird methodological errors. They weren’t. Study after study reaffirmed the negative relationship between cohabitation and marital success.

When findings run counter to both common sense and the practices of the general population we generally try to figure out why. So studies of cohabitation have controlled for confounding variables for the relationship. Did these findings occur because the subjects were too young to know their own minds? As it turns out no, since the relationship was found among older subjects as well. Perhaps the ethnicity of the subjects mattered? No. Educational level? Not really. Maybe the subjects had been people with inadequate experience of marriage. Again, no. In fact, in August 2010 a study published in the well-respected Journal of Marriage and the Family found that cohabitation after a failed first marriage and in preparation for remarriage had even higher associations with failed and unhappy second marriages than for first marriages.

So, what’s the deal? After thirty years of research into the matter, more recent studies have concluded that people’s attitudes towards marriage are the key issue. Cohabitation reveals a contingent view of marriage, as in “If we get along, we’ll get married.” The practice of cohabitation selects for this contingent view and, therefore, is associated with marital unhappiness and dissolution when the challenges of married life appear. Those who do not see marriage as contingent, tend not to cohabit. When they say “for better or worse,” they apparently mean it. The times have changed to the extent that in my parent’s generation, even unhappy marriages tended not to end in divorce. My parents often told me that if they had gotten married in the 1960’s their marriage would not have lasted five years. I wouldn’t have been born. For better or worse, indeed.

“For better or worse, indeed.”

—So goodbye, goodbye
I’m going to leave you now and here’s the reason why
You like to sleep with the window opened
And I keep the window closed
So goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.”
Frank Scott, a sketch artist from Ohio, loved landscape design and as a student spent a summer in New York with the foremost nineteenth-century landscape designers Andrew Jackson Downing and Calvert Vaux. In 1870, Scott wrote *The Art of Beautifying Home Grounds*, a book primarily for the suburban homeowner. Architect and historian David Handlin calls it the commuter's manual. Scott relied heavily on the English picturesque garden style in the book, which he introduced with these words: “In the specialty of decorative gardening, adapted to the small grounds of most suburban homes, there is much need of other works than have yet appeared.” In that short line, Scott indicated the need for homeowners to learn about landscaping or what he called “decorative gardening.” His book informed generations of American gardening, but his own inspiration came from across the Atlantic. American landscape designers like Scott and Downing readily admitted the superiority of English gardens, which had taken a distinctive style by the early nineteenth century.

For all their prominence, however, it was not elite designers who popularized the English garden in nineteenth-century America; it was their commercial brethren, seed and nursery companies, who conveyed their ideas to middle-

![Image of a suburban home landscape](image_url)
class consumers who were hungry for instruction on how to create artful or tasteful landscapes. In his magazine *Gardener's Monthly and Horticulturalist*, Philadelphia nurseryman Thomas Meehan hailed the new edition of Scott's book (Figure 1) when it was published in 1886: “It is a work of which American horticulturalists have cause to be proud. Its influence on landscape gardening must be very great, and now, where there promises to be a revival in the lovely art, its presence is particularly timely.” Scott was not alone in teaching the homeowner landscape design. Seed and nursery catalogs took his messages and broadcast them widely.

The landscape recommended in the catalogs was predominantly the English style, which throughout the nineteenth century took several forms, such as the naturalistic view, the gardenesque layout, Victorian carpet bedding and the wild garden and a more formal trimmed look; but in all cases the landscape included a lawn. American seed and nursery companies took on the role of a reliable source from which the middle class could learn how to landscape the home lot, no matter what the size. A homeowner who wanted to design and plant his own home landscape could look to the catalog for both instruction and support and, of course, where to purchase grass seed and plants.

As early as mid-century, the seed and nursery companies wrote about the importance of home landscapes for everyone, not only the wealthy estate owners. Overman and Mann said in 1862: “It is now deemed rational to adorn and beautify the surroundings of house, however humble. And what more sensible idea can the owner of the soil entertain than to draw in his mind from its wanderings, and to surround his family with the cheap comforts and delights of home?” Home symbolized a sense of national identity as the country entered the Civil War. That same Overman and Mann catalog of 1862–63 said: “The foregoing is premised upon the fact that notwithstanding the hard times, and the horrors of war, no former season has been so characterized by the tree planting spirit as the past. Everywhere the prevailing disposition seems to be to circumscribe ambition and concentrate its energies within the domestic circle — to make home what it should be.”

After 1870, the advances of industrialization brought about larger seed and nursery inventories, easier shipping, cheaper printing and increased advertising and allowed the garden to assume a central role for middle-class homeowners. Seeds and plants from national companies enabled homeowners to create landscapes much like the ones pictured in their catalog, as in Henderson’s in 1886 (Figure 2). Through his landscaped grounds the homeowner felt linked with other Americans of the same status. While the wealthy needed gardeners to tend the landscape on their large estates, middle-class home gardeners — often referred to as “amateur gardeners” — could, according to the catalogs, easily maintain home gardens without hired help on their smaller parcels of land.

Like so many other mail-order garden catalogs, the Lovett nursery in 1882 gave the homeowner lessons in landscaping. “[This] is a handbook of all that is necessary to aid in improving and adorning the home grounds, with a complete catalogue of species and...
varieties, naming and describing them so fully and accurately and in such a clear and instructive manner that it is a task of ease and pleasure to make judicious selections and to plan out intelligently the proposed improvements. Nothing has been neglected that will teach the reader how to lay out home grounds to advantage.”

If it was important for them to landscape the home property, homeowners also knew that nurseries and seed companies would supply the necessary plants. In 1894, Lines and Coe of New Haven, Connecticut, wrote about how necessary the landscape was: “Through the zeal of the collectors [plant collectors, often from England, who supplied the nursery], ‘nature’s scattered excellencies’ are now available. Instead of being restricted to the varieties that grow native about us, we have the whole flora, practically, of the world at our command, as well as the greatest number of the varieties that have been fostered into existence by much care and painstaking.” Seed companies and nurseries helped their suburban middle-class readers enjoy exotic plants that at one time only the wealthy could cultivate. Now middling Americans could show off their own Chinese shrubs on the lawn, Japanese vines clinging to the walls of their houses or South American alternanthera plants in containers or carpet beds. In 1898, Boston seedsman Joseph Breck illustrated the importance of the home landscape at a time when the middle class was becoming wealthier (Figure 3). He wrote in his catalog: “As this country grows in taste and wealth, the importance of the house and grounds, which together constitute the home, making an harmonious whole, is becoming more and more apparent, and these remarks are as applicable, if not more so, to the lot containing five or ten thousand square feet, as to the great estate comprising many acres.”

The picturesque, and later the gardenesque, English style demanded first a lawn, and then the careful placement of trees and shrubs, so that the lawn would keep its sweeping look and not be lost by the overuse of trees and shrubs. In his book’s introduction, Scott credited John Claudius Loudon and Edward Kemp with teaching landscape gardening to the English. He saw his task as providing Americans the principles of English landscape gardening. Although Scott recognized that, compared to the English, “we are yet novices in the fine arts of gardening,” he considered the well-kept lawn as the essential element in the American domestic landscape. To the English, the lawn was a status symbol by which one was judged by his peers. The lawn, Scott suggested, should be open so that neighbors and passers-by could see and enjoy it. His book presented landscape plans along with a list- ing of trees, shrubs, and vines suitable for the suburban home landscape. In his book Scott borrowed from New Jersey seedsman Peter Henderson’s book Manual of Floriculture in recommending the amount of seed needed for a lawn. The lawn was the essential ingredient of the home grounds because it created a picturesque, park-like look. The lawn connected one house to the next by its placement at the front of the property, along the street and sides of the house. Thus one property seemed to flow right into the next, forming a sense of neighborhood.

Discussion of the English lawn as the basis of the home landscape was quite common in the seed and nursery catalogs. In 1886 the seedsman C.A. Reeser wrote: “A beautiful lawn, it is hardly necessary to say, is one of the most satisfactory and pleasing outside adornments that can be procured, and is rightly deemed a most essential adjunct to rural and suburban homes.” Verdant, sweeping front lawns began to appear in the early nineteenth century among the homes of wealthy Americans but later became a symbol of the middle class. The lots in the Maryland suburb Takoma Park, for example, included a large setback from the street to provide for a lawn. The seed companies, of course, offered lawn seed. They were happy to tell the reader the amount of seed needed for the size of a particular property. Down- ing in his book wrote about the lawn in these words: “We advise him who desires to have speedily a handsome turf, to follow the English practice, and sow three to four bushels of seeds to the acre.” In his 1873 catalog, Rochester seedsman James Vick echoed the words...
of Scott: “In the first place, I would remark that the space in front of the house, and generally the sides exposed to view from the street, should be in grass. No arrangement of beds, or borders of box, or anything else, will look so neat and tasteful as a well kept piece of grass.”

Once planned and grown, the lawn had to be adorned. By the end of the century the cast iron garden vase or urn had become a sign of status for the middle class. Vick recommended in the Floral Guide of 1873 that on the lawn the owner place two vases, filled usually with annuals: “Of all the adornments of the lawn, nothing is more effective than a well filled and well kept vase. All the ornamental-leaved plants are appropriate for the top or center of the vase, while a few drooping plants should be placed near the edges and allowed to hang or droop at least half way to the ground. For this purpose the verbena or the petunia will answer. We often see several small vases scattered over the lawn, but the effect is bad. It is best to have one or two that command attention by their size and beauty.” Figure 4 shows two vases in this style on the lawn of a nineteenth-century middle-class residence in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Beyond the lawn, ornamental trees were often recommended in the catalogs’ articles. The E.D. Putney Company from Brentwood, New York, wrote about the use of evergreen trees to give an all-year beauty to the property: “Where only deciduous trees are grown there is a lack of tone and character to the landscape. This is particularly so in winter, when the barrenness is really depressing. In bleak localities they are indispensable as wind breaks. Single specimens of Norway spruce, hemlock, juniper and the Retinisporas are very effective in small yards.”

As the country expanded into the west, Overman and Mann from Illinois wrote in their 1860 catalog about the importance of planting trees in the landscape:

In our heart we pity the man who can dole out a lifetime, and rear a family on the bare prairie, without a vestige of a tree or a shrub, to shield his tenement from the scorching heat of summer, or the howling blast of winter. Such anomalies of the ‘genus homo’ we have seen, and their souls are as desolate as the arid desert their homes so aptly represent … It is the duty of everyone to plant trees — in the orchard — in the door-

The Mina Lobata Vine

The Currie Brothers Seed Company in Milwaukee had a successful business in the 1880s and 90s. Like other seed and plant companies, they published a garden magazine; theirs was called Currie’s Monthly (CM). In an 1888 issue of CM, the editor mentioned a vine called mina lobata. “This is one of the most beautiful climbing plants we are acquainted with, and one that is well worthy the attention of all plant lovers. It was introduced into this country last year for the first time, and, judging from the reports we have received regarding it, no climbing plant has ever given more satisfaction.” This is high praise for a simple vine. English gardeners had acquired this vine as early as the 1840s when the plant was brought from Mexico and named after Mexican minister Don Francisco Xavier Mina. The Royal Horticultural Society of London featured it in its gardens, according to the Botanical Register of 1842. Mina lobata is easy to grow in any garden and features long colorful white, red, and orange flowers at the end of the summer. This vine is one that English gardeners first enjoyed forty years before it appeared in American gardens.
ing tree varieties: “That the utility and beauty of ornamental trees and plants are now becoming generally recognized and appreciated, no better proof is afforded than the great demand which has been created for them. They have become a necessity in the garden, and every one who has a garden must have them.” Joseph T. Phillips from West Grove, Chester County, Pennsylvania, summed it up in that same year when he wrote in his catalog: “In no department of cultivation is improvement of taste to be more distinctly seen than in the decoration of our grounds and the universal love of trees.”

Thus English landscape design, with its lawn, carefully spotted trees, and grouped shrubs, became popular among nineteenth-century American homeowners. The M.V. Johnston Nursery in Ohio presented a before-and-after look to the landscape according to the nursery catalog (Figure 5). The home garden provided the middle class with a taste of the country. Well-tended grounds became a place of both connection to a rapidly disappearing rural way of life and isolation from the city and its disturbing chaos. Seed and nursery catalogs taught the middle class how to design home grounds themselves. The landscape they recommended—picturesque or gardenesque—followed the recommendations of English writers such as J.C. Loudon and his American followers, such as Downing and Scott. The nineteenth-century American seed company and nursery industry promoted the English model of landscape in the catalogs, books, and magazines they published. And we have loved that style ever since.

Thomas J. Mickey is a Professor in the Department of Communication Studies. This article is an edited excerpt from his book Seduction of the English Garden: The Story of American Gardening according to the Nineteenth Century Seed and Nursery Catalogs which the University Press of Kentucky will publish next year.

Figure 5. The Johnston Nursery from Ohio in the 1870s included this image in the book that their tree peddlers used to sell the nursery’s plants. Notice the dramatic change to the ‘Pleasant Home’ represents the English style of landscape. The D.M. Hewey Company in Rochester produced the lithographs for this collection. Courtesy of the Newton Historical Society, Newton, MA.
The traditional narrative of Western films tells a story of good versus bad. There are ‘good guys,’ heroes like Marshall Will Kane in *High Noon* and Shane in *Shane*, who are courageous and ready to save the day from evildoers. There are ‘bad guys,’ villains like Jack Wilson in *Shane* and Coy LaHood in *Pale Rider*, who are driven by their own selfish desires for power, and who serve as moral counterparts to the heroes. These moral poles of good and bad provide stability and order to traditional Westerns. With the dualism between good and bad implicit in the film, the narrative is able to interweave these components so that good always triumphs over bad. But this sort of moral framework is shattered in the Coen Brothers’ film *No Country for Old Men*, a pattern that is increasingly visible in modern popular culture in America.

Westerns have at least three central features: a hero, a villain and a narrative of confrontation between them. The hero is the morally good guy who always makes the right decision and always seems to save the day through his actions. In the film *Shane*, for example, Shane encounters a battle between a small community of homesteaders and the villainous cattle baron, Rufus Ryker. Shane saves the day by eventually confronting Ryker and his hired gun, Jack Wilson, killing both of them and ending the battle. We feel Shane did the right thing and saved the day, but what makes his actions moral?

There are at least two moral theories that can help us explain Shane’s heroism. One theory is *virtue-ethics*, a system of ethics, that is concerned primarily with the acquisition of virtues such as courage and temperament. Following Aristotle, we can say that virtue is a state of character that involves the individual making a decision to act, where the correct decision leads to the action that is the moderation, or “mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect.” For example, courage is a virtue in the sense that it is a character trait that is exemplified in action, where that action lies in between two extremes: the excess of courage (recklessness), and deficiency of courage (cowardice). Under this theory, Shane is courageous in his showdown with Ryker and Wilson. Even though he is outnumbered and risking his life, Shane is not reckless, since he is aware of his own abilities and the abilities of his enemies. By virtue-ethics, then, Shane is the good guy of the film because he is a courageous hero.

Another moral theory is *deontological ethics*, most famously presented by Immanuel Kant. Deontology is a system of ethics which maintains that an action is considered to be good or bad in and of itself, without any appeal to the consequences or ends to which the action may lead. For Kant, an action is considered to be good so long as it conforms to, and is motivated by, our moral duties, or specific moral obligations, such as being honest, helping others in need, etc. Following Kant, Shane acts morally since he chooses to defend the homesteaders. His decision to fight is not only in accordance with his duty, but his motivation stems from his duty. In this sense, Shane is the moral hero insofar as he recognizes his moral duties, is motivated to follow such duties, and acts accordingly.

The second feature of Westerns is the villain, the bad guy who acts from selfish motivations and desires and can always be understood as acting immorally. We can see this exemplified in Shane’s counterparts, Ryker and Wilson. Ryker...
is the powerful businessman who acts with an unconditional drive for power. Meanwhile, Wilson is the cold-hearted gunslinger who is hired by Ryker to help drive out the homesteaders. Both are considered the villains of the film because we can understand their actions as immoral in the sense that they are rooted in self-interest. Ryker acts with a selfish desire for power, while Wilson acts out of a selfish desire for money and notoriety.

The third feature of Westerns is the narrative, where the confrontation between the hero and the villain, between good and bad, is played out. Westerns move forward on the force of a moral dilemma (such as the war between Ryker and the homesteaders), where the hero must determine how to respond to this dilemma (such as Shane’s decision to fight the villains). There is usually an opportunity for the hero and the villain to meet, foreshadowing the ultimate showdown. Lastly, there is the final showdown between the hero and the villain, always leaving the villain dead and the hero triumphant. The hero must be able to save the day so that the moral dilemma is finally resolved and all is set right in the Western country.

No Country for Old Men is sharply different from the traditional Western. The hero of the film is Sherriff Ed Tom Bell. Like Shane, Kane and other traditional heroes of Westerns, Bell is a good guy. But it is now 1980, and times have changed in at least three ways. First, the western frontier is no longer characterized as the ‘wild west,’ where the land is unpopulated and unsettled and legal order is yet to be established. Second, though the ‘wild west’ has been ‘tamed’ in one respect, it has also led to a new breed of lawlessness. The ‘bad guys’ now act irrationally and without criminal passion. Third, the hero of the west has grown old. Bell is no longer a young sheriff, ready and willing to act according to his moral duties and with courage. Instead, he is now weary and cautious.

We can see these changes unfold as the film follows the trail of the villain, Anton Chigurh. Bell initially looks like a traditional Western hero. He rides a horse, wears a white hat and seems he will do his duty as sheriff in fighting the bad guys. However, though his experience and wisdom are part of his heroic (and moral) qualities, they are also his downfall. Since Bell relies on his ability to know the villain, he is at a loss when he cannot understand Chigurh. The more Bell learns about Chigurh’s ‘methods’ (such as using a cattle gun to kill his victims), the more frightful he becomes. This fear is encapsulated when Bell returns to the El Paso Motel. Though Bell is courageous enough to enter the motel room (knowing that Chigurh could be in the room), there is no confrontation with Chigurh. Feeling “overmatched” and “discouraged,” Bell retires. He acknowledges that the country has changed, and though in his youth he had the moral integrity to be “willing to die” to perform his duty as sheriff, he finds now that he doesn’t want to be part of this world.

So, Bell walks away. The hero has grown old and cannot make sense of his world. He cannot carry on with the same courage and proud dedication to his duties as did the heroes of the old Westerns. But this aging is not simply physical. It is also metaphorical and philosophical, with implications for the moral lessons of the Western genre. The world has changed so drastically that the hero of yesterday, whether it’s Bell, Shane or Kane, can no longer survive in today’s world.

Just as the hero has changed, so, too, has the villain. The traditional villain is immoral, and we hate him for acting that way. Nevertheless, we can understand him as selfish, greedy and driven by money and power. Chigurh is no traditional villain. He does bad things, but we cannot understand why.

Another way Chigurh is different is the fact that he murders two of his associates, Carson Wells and his boss, characters in the film who play the parts of traditional villains. Wells is the hired gunslinger, and the ‘boss’ is the greedy business tycoon. These murders suggest another alteration of the villain. As Wells
suggests, Chigurh has “principles that transcend drugs and money” [i.e., the motives of the classic villain]. But these principles are twisted in the sense that he acts with moral consistency, but applies this consistency in horrible ways. For instance, upon killing his boss, Chigurh explains that the boss was wrong to hire more men than just Chigurh to look for the money. Another example occurs when he offers a deal to Llewelyn Moss. Chigurh tells Llewelyn that if he returns the money, Chigurh will kill only him, but not his wife, Carla Jean. Llewelyn refuses this offer and so Chigurh tracks down Carla Jean, and tells her that though he has no reason to hurt her, he must kill her, since he gave Llewelyn his word. These cases suggest that Chigurh does not act purely out of self-interest. He gains nothing from these murders. Further, Chigurh justifies his actions insofar as whether or not the actions are ‘good’ in themselves. Following Kant, he kills his boss on the principle that his boss made a wrong decision. Likewise, Chigurh kills Carla Jean only because he made a promise, and, as Kant would argue, we are morally obligated to keep our promises (whether we like it or not) because to do so is part of our moral duty. Chigurh’s deontological reasoning helps place him on a new level of immorality. To an extent, his actions are grounded on what appear to be moral principles, similar to the moral justifications made by the hero of the Western genre. But when the villain uses the hero’s line of reasoning, the polarity between good and bad weakens.

The distortion of the first two ingredients of the Western film, namely, the moral decay of the hero and the moral perplexity of the villain, contributes to the distortion of the third ingredient, the traditional narrative in the Western genre. No Country for Old Men shows the hero’s moral dilemma, but it occurs toward the end of the narrative. Having failed to save Llewelyn, and having learned more about the villain, should Bell choose to have the final showdown with Chigurh? Ultimately, Bell declines to do so. Instead of giving himself the hero’s triumphant ride into the sunset, Bell retires and heads home. Thus, by failing to follow the hero’s path in the traditional Western framework, Bell’s decision violates the moral simplicity of the classic Western. It is not the case that good will always triumph over the bad.

By eliminating the three central ingredients of the Western film, No Country for Old Men shatters both the moral framework and the stability that Westerns have provided us. First, the moral framework is dismantled in the sense that the duality between the ideal good figure and the ideal bad figure has been erased. The hero is no longer a hero and the villain is now more horrible, more twisted, and more disturbing than ever. Second, the stability of the Western film collapses in the sense that we lose the order of the Western narrative that provides us with the happy ending where good triumphs over evil. In No Country for Old Men, without the final showdown between the hero and the villain, good cannot triumph. And so we see that the good either is killed (Llewelyn) or runs away (Bell).

But this doesn’t necessarily mean that bad triumphs over good. Though the deaths of bad guys like Wells and Chigurh’s boss seem to suggest that in the end bad wins, the film ultimately suggests something even worse: that what is good and what is bad are matters of chance. A number of deaths in the film, such as Carla Jean’s, are chance events or otherwise irrational. The western frontier has become nihilistic. According to nihilism, life and the world is meaningless because there is no inherent structure, stability, order or framework to it. As such, all the values that were once held to be significant are now seen as empty.

The country is “crazy” in the sense that it is irrational. Those who were once seen as good and heroic are now old and feeble, unable to uphold the standards of morality of the traditional Western genre. Meanwhile, the villains have become so maniacal and twisted as to render them incomprehensible. As such, the West becomes a world in which there is neither rhyme nor reason, and those inhabiting it are never held accountable. It has become a country without meaning and without any inherent value. The country, in short, has collapsed into nihilism.

No Country for Old Men illustrates how the morality of the traditional Western film is being challenged by a new, more nihilistic form. More generally, this pattern also appears in other media, such as television. Consider some popular television protagonists. On the one hand, there are heroes such as Tony Soprano (a character who, ironically, idolizes the Western hero Gary Cooper) and Omar Little (The Wire), who are strikingly similar to traditional Western villains who act out of self-interest and a drive for personal gain. On the other hand, there are heroes like Andy Sipowicz (NYPD Blue) and Dexter Morgan (Dexter) who do immoral things, albeit for morally good reasons. Such shows blur distinctions between good and bad, leaving a moral ambiguity and vagueness. If film and television are reflections of realities in our larger culture, then our country is possibly becoming not only “no country for old men,” but “no country for moral men” as well.

William Devlin is Assistant Professor of Philosophy.
Calligraphy Tablets in the Forbidden City
Jianrong Wang

First built in 1406, the Forbidden City witnessed three dynasties’ imperial administration work and royal family life for about five hundred years before Chinese feudalist history ended in 1911. Located in the very center of Beijing, the 7.8 million-square-foot palace complex houses within its 980 surviving buildings some 1.17 million items of artwork and artifacts.

The calligraphy tablets hung over each main gate and building, although often neglected by visitors, actually are special embodiments of traditional Chinese concepts either well known or maybe unexpected by their readers. Besides explaining architectural functions, the tablets also can be read as means of decorating the architecture, conveying political ideals, advocating academic achievements, expressing good wishes and depicting charming sceneries.

The Forbidden City was designed by Kuai Xiang (1398-1481), an architect master of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). He strictly applied to the layout of the royal palace the classical ritual orthodox described in Rites of Chou, one of the Confucian classics, first published in the second century BC. The buildings in the palace, therefore, were mainly divided into two groups: the front one for court work and important ritual ceremonies and the rear one occupied as residential quarters for the royal family. From Kuai Xiang’s blueprint, we can see every building in the Forbidden City had a calligraphy tablet hanging above to designate its specific function.

The three great front halls used for work and ceremonies, for example, have inscriptions of “Hall of Supreme Harmony,” “Hall of Central Harmony,” and “Hall of Preserving Harmony” on the tablets, since the emperor was believed to be enthroned to rule the
people as son of Heaven. His highest goal was established to achieve harmony among Heaven, the Earth and the human being. Thus harmony was repeatedly emphasized on the tablets to idealize the effectiveness of the court. On the other hand, the three main rear halls have tablets bearing words conveying different functions. “Palace of Heavenly Purity,” “Hall of Union,” and “Palace of Earthly Tranquility” express the marital significance of the emperor. According to the dualist principle of yin and yang, all life and phenomena can be attributed to the interaction of the two opposite elements. Yin is feminine and absorbing. The Earth is yin. Yang is thought of as masculine and penetrating and also associated with the Heaven. The Palace of Heavenly Purity was the dwelling place of the emperor and the Palace of Earthly Tranquility of the empress. Between them lies the Hall of Union. This was a place to hold the wedding ceremony for the emperor. “Union” means the harmony between yin and yang, and the unity of the Heaven and the Earth. The auspicious effects were heightened by the power of language embodied in the tablet.

Calligraphy tablets can always enhance the aesthetic charm of architecture as a whole, which can explain why they have developed as a common feature of Chinese traditional architecture, and are found on almost every main gate, wall and building of those historic palaces, mansions, temples and gardens. The tablets in the Forbidden City distinguish themselves also with magnificent decorations. Gold-gilded wood frames, flying dragons in relief, and gold characters in blue backgrounds are widely applied here, for such elements as gold and dragons were regarded as symbols unique to imperial authority. These elements match the luxurious paintings of the complex with perfection.

To achieve the best decorative effect, the tablets take horizontal shapes sometimes to meet with the outer appearance of a specific architecture (for example, when the space between the roof and the purlin above the gate is not wide enough) and also avoid the visual dullness of too many repetitions of vertical ones. The decorations on the tablets are sometimes changed to create a friendly and intimate feeling. So-called volume-tablets above a study look like an open scroll book, with neither heavy color nor intricate patterns, to imply the academic isolation and quietness within both the place and the owner.

In practice, the extents and functions of tablets have gone far beyond Kuai Xiang’s original design. The popularity of tablets throughout the long, recorded history of China has been deeply rooted in one of the five essential Confucian concepts “the rectification of names.” The concept first appeared in The Analects by Confucius. To keep a sound social order, Confucius argues for the priority of rectification of names. Without a proper name, rank cannot obtain its supposed power, the expression in language does not sound reasonable and the action though taken is always subject to failure. Convinced by this basic concept, people believed tablets taking the solemn form of public communication were an effective means to help rectify names.
Many influential literati would keep tablets around their working or/dwelling places to exalt to the public their highest moral or behavior principles. Those poetic words and handsome handwriting could always win audiences’ hearts. Following those great examples, emperors also occupied the small yet influential communicative platforms to promote their governing ideologies. Chinese people categorize this kind of influence as “to educate with non-verbal actions.” The influence intended, or maybe unintended, thus began to work out silently from the tablets.

The tablets also contributed to the regulation of the official languages in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). After the conquest of China in 1644, the Manchu emperors endeavored to balance between Man, their native language, and Han, the Chinese dominant language. The emperor ordered the former tablets of Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) with only Chinese characters changed into trilingual ones — in Man, Mongolian, and Han. Manchu people only had oral language at the very beginning. When Nurharchi ordered a written Man language system, Mongolian written language was used as a stereotype. In private, some royal family members also used Mongolian due to the frequent marriage ties among those tribes. In court, however, either Man or Han was acceptable as the working language for many years. In 1657, Emperor Shunzhi (r. 1644–1661) decreed to preserve only Man and Han versions on the tablets in the palace, so only a couple of trilingual ones can be found now. Those bilingual tablets are commonly known as the “combined jade of Man and Han,” with Man words always taking the right position to prove the language’s superior position. With time passing, more and more Han people were working for the empire. At the same time, Man language was gradually receding away. The tablets show that many inscriptions written by the emperors themselves are only in Chinese characters.

Actually, the Qing Dynasty’s experience was a gradual process of sinicization. Though the Qing despots must answer for the final fall of China’s feudalist empire, at least three of them were enlightened ones with quite high political awareness and achievements. Good government under Kangxi (r.1622–1722), Yongzheng (r. 1723–35) and Qianlong (r.1736–95) gave China a prolonged period of peace and stability. There was expansion in the empire’s territorial reach, population and general level of wealth. Their governing ideologies and working guidelines were explicitly expressed in their handwriting on the tablets and tried to exert their influence on their ministers and citizens.

The “Non-Action” tablet in the Hall of Union is the handwriting of Kangxi. Non-action is the essential philosophy of Taoism. When applied to government, non-action asks a sage ruler to govern the world with no interference in its own way. Instead of deserting the world, the ruler should understand that the truth lies in Tao, the way of nature. Keeping a sympathetic heart open to his people and avoiding turning into a trouble-maker, the ruler is likely to grasp the essence of non-action and to create a harmonious society.

Yongzheng also left his own handwritings in the Hall of Mental Cultivation and the Hall of West Warmth. One is “Mediocre, Upright, Benevolent, and Harmonious.” The other is “Diligent in Governance and Intimate with the Sages.” These admirable moral and behavioral principles could have inspired the emperor himself and his officials to work better. Meanwhile they could have been dangerous when used as criteria to evaluate an emperor and his empire. Well known for his extreme diligence and strictness, Yongzheng is believed to at least deserve the latter.
Qianlong had a more lively and romantic character than either his grandfather or father. He secretly visited many famous scenic places around China. There are many stories about his experiences disguised as a common traveler around his enormous land. As a collector and connoisseur, he yearned to be identified with the great artists and literati of the past whose works he admired. Calligraphy on many tablets in the Forbidden City was contributed by him. Outside the palace, he also left a large number of works. He even set up a small studio and workshop in the Forbidden City to appreciate those collections of extraordinary value and also to turn out his own poems, paintings, and calligraphy works. The tablet within this room is inscribed with “Hall of Three Rarities” in his handwriting.

In Chinese literary tradition, almost all the master calligraphers were at the same time highly accomplished scholars or poets. People believe “one’s handwriting is like one’s person.” All his personalities, accomplishments and cultivation can be reflected in this mirror. This metaphor does support the fact that the three emperors did better than their successors.

Expressing good wishes is one of the common themes conveyed in Chinese tablet inscriptions. The imperial tablets are not exceptional. Happiness, longevity and tranquility are the frequent words to note, especially in the rear quarters. The themes are exemplified in the tablets as “Hall of Peaceful Longevity,” “Hall of Eternal Longevity,” “Gate of Great Happiness” and “Garden of the Palace of Benevolent Tranquility,” among many other similar ones.

Traditional Chinese artists hold the belief that poetry and painting are of the same root. The aesthetic spirit is echoed also in architectures. As poetry is colorless painting and painting is colored poetry, so architecture has its beauty embodied in the subtle combination of its man-made structures and natural surroundings to evoke inner intoxication and purification. Poetic language of the tablet inscriptions helps enhance the aesthetic effect of the whole architecture due to its brevity in poetic expression and weight in pertinent meaning. Many calligraphy tablets in the Forbidden City win the visitors’ notice in this way, especially “Pavilion of Rain of Flowers,” “Palace of Concentrated Beauty” and “Lodge of Fresh Fragrance.”

Attentive visitors will notice the character “door” does not preserve its original form “門” with a small hook at the right foot. It is believed that there was a severe fire in the Imperial Palace. Because of its dominant wood structure, there seemingly would be no end until every building was burned to nothing. Before it jumped to a next hall, an experienced minister arrived and instantly pulled down the tablet with “門” above the door and threw it into the merciless fire. The fire finally died just in time. Since then, in addition to the necessary fire-fighting facilities such as big bronze jars in front of each building, the “fire-hook” in the character was totally avoided as taboo on the tablets. A famous calligrapher was put to death for his ignorance of this imperial superstition.

Jianrong Wang is a Visiting Scholar from Beijing Jiaotong University, China.
Violence Transformed is an annual series of exhibitions, performances and collaborative art-making events that are held in the greater Boston area. Since its beginnings five years ago, Violence Transformed has been composed of professionals from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines, including art historians, studio artists, and specialists from the museum world. It has also included social workers, community service providers, clinical psychologists, art therapists, victims’ rights advocates and social activists. The individuals and organizations involved are also geographically and ethnically diverse, and change yearly. What firmly unites us is our conviction that art, artists and art-making are powerful means of confronting and mediating violence in contemporary society. We adopt a very broad definition of what violence is and develop exhibitions that engage with issues of political, domestic, racial and sexual violence in their myriad forms. Every year the project culminates with an exhibition of visual works displayed at the Massachusetts State House, timed to coincide with National Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week and the annual conference of the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA). The following images represent a small fraction of the artistic expressions that Violence Transformed has presented to the viewing public. I hope they give you a sense of the many ways in which violence can be transformed to humane ends by the act of making art.

Plans for Violence Transformed 2011 are now well under way, with the exhibition at the State House scheduled for April 11-23. Please visit www.violencetransformed.com for more information about the history of the project and the exhibitions and events planned for 2011.

(Below) Detail from Urbano Project Display, Doric Hall, Massachusetts State House

From its inception, Violence Transformed has been committed to exhibiting art made by youth and teens alongside works by college students, community members, and professional artists. Part of the 2010 State House exhibit was curated by the teen visual arts curatorial program at the Urbano Project and was composed of works selected by them from their call for art, open to teens throughout the wider Boston area. The Teen Spoken Word Curators of the Urbano Project have also contributed a series of spoken word poetry and performance art pieces to Violence Transformed.
In April 2010, Violence Transformed was honored to co-organize and sponsor an exhibition of works by the Combat Paper Project in the Gutman Library of Harvard University, designed in conjunction with the main State House exhibit, at which further pieces by Combat Paper were on display. An artist collective based in Vermont, the project utilizes artmaking workshops to assist veterans in reconciling and sharing their personal experiences as well as broadening the traditional narrative surrounding service and the military culture. Through innovative papermaking workshops veterans use their uniforms as the medium for cathartic works of art. The uniforms are transformed into pulp and then into sheets of paper. The paper is used to create journals, broadsides, paintings and sculptures. The piece reproduced here powerfully arrests this transition, leaving the uniform and the paper produced from it in a state of suspended metamorphosis, highlighting the importance of the process as well as the artifact. As the leaders of the project Drew Cameron and Drew Matott explain, “there is power to the ritual… each act is highly personal and liberating. It is called liberating rag. It is the first step in recognizing the story held within the fiber.”

(Opposite page, top left) These printed articles of clothing are the work of Khalid Kodi. He was inspired by the story of Hawa Haggam, a high school teacher from Darfur whose family was killed by janjawid militia. The trauma caused her to lose the ability to walk or speak. The garments, an upside-down T-Shirt and dirtied dress, are crusty and appear stained with mud and blood. They are sensually animate, and as such powerfully resonate with the trauma of loss. They also have prints of Hawa’s lost family members on them, as if visualizing the ingraining of memory via material artifacts. They seem powerfully physical, yet at the same time evocative of the loss of physicality. We are left with traces of the bodies that once wore these ordinary clothes. The clothes themselves seem eerily like evidence at a crime scene. Kodi’s work was included in the portion of the exhibit curated by Edmund Barry Gaither, Director of The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists.

(Opposite page, top right) John W. Hooker – Some Say More with Their Hands
Cast plastic, steel
John Hooker’s sculpture was a centerpiece at Violence Transformed 2010. Each beautifully cast hand was from a different member of his community, representing the daily choices we make with our hands. Together those choices become the building blocks of our society. The composition of blocks refers both to architecture and machinery, each a symbol of complex individual parts together forming one collective body. The base references the Bunker Hill Monument, a symbol of Boston communities since 1823.

(Opposite page, bottom) Rania Matar – Defiant Haret Hreik, Beirut 2006
Photographic Print on archival warm-tone fiber paper 24” x 36”
Rania Matar was born and raised in Lebanon before moving to the United States in 1984. Originally trained as an architect, from 2002 she started photographing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon during one of her visits back to her homeland. She has returned every summer since. This photo captures a moment in the southern suburbs of Beirut, devastated by war in 2006. A boy with a Spiderman T-Shirt snacks on an apple, a young girl in her best dress holds her half-eaten core away from her and rather too close to her mother’s back, whilst propping a hand on her maturing hip. The mother takes a break in a plastic chair where her house once was, calling out, perhaps to her neighbors. It is an ordinary moment in time in a setting that is anything but ordinary. It is literally the human, cross-generational face of war’s immediate aftermath. The gestures, especially the cocky yet brittle assertiveness of adolescence, is beautifully captured here, and is surely universally recognizable. She is posing for the camera in her best dress, and the destruction is literally in the background - a backdrop to a human narrative of ordinary lives in Beirut. Here are three nameless victims, but they seem neither nameless nor helpless, and seeing them as victims feels like a disservice to them. In war, everyday moments become poignant. People have gone back to their destroyed homes to survey the damage and look for belongings in the rubble. But they have also gone back to socialize and keep in touch, to see and be seen. Their resilience is humbling.
The young performers of the Roxbury-based dance collective Endless Knot created a new routine for the opening reception of the *Violence Transformed* exhibition in 2008. Over the last five years, over 25 different groups of musicians, spoken-word performers and dancers have contributed to the project by performing at the State House. The diversity of these pieces, ranging from taiko drumming to classical Indian dance, rap to opera, is symbolic of *Violence Transformed*’s commitment to bring together and celebrate the transformative power of all forms of creative expression.

Mark Rooney has performed three times as part of the opening events of *Violence Transformed*, and his powerful drumming always focused the attention of the State House on our project despite the cacophony of other events and activities going on at the same time. Marshall Hughes is the founder and director of Opera UnMet, an urban opera company that has performed in major venues over the past decade including the Hatch Shell, Symphony Hall and First Night ceremonies. Marshall is also the Director of Visual, Performing and Media Arts at Roxbury Community College, and served as the curator of performing arts for *Violence Transformed* in 2008 and 2009. He continues to serve as a Consultant for the project, and facilitates the exhibition *Violence Transformed: The Artists Voice* at the Resnikoff Gallery at RCC that has followed the State House show the past two years. We also stage annual exhibitions at Wheelock College, Lesley University and the Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists as part of the *Violence Transformed* calendar of events.

Jessica Langella’s wonderfully sensuous, imposing work about childhood proved irresistible to many visitors to the State House during 2008’s exhibition. She began with the intention of creating a life-sized horse as a fulfillment of a frustrated early fantasy of owning a pony. But the decision to cover the wire mesh frame with old soft toys adds a compelling tension to the piece. The toys were bought on-line from a children’s home and the act of cutting them up and splicing them together was surprisingly traumatic given that they were once crucial objects of comfort and refuge for children with little else to cling to. Nonetheless, this process created one large toy and a memorial to the importance of childhood fantasy and play as a space of refuge. Visitors were unable to resist touching it, even putting their heads inside the body cavity, and many commented on how a particular detail of the piece reminded them of a toy they once had. The unicorn served as a cross-cultural symbol of remembered innocence.

Jonathan Shirland is Assistant Professor of Art.
Martha Stewart’s Graphic Design for Living
Melanie McNaughton

Martha Stewart, as every American knows, is a living brand...a force of nature, the most influential person alive in terms of giving shape to our living spaces.
- Kevin Kelly

Martha Stewart is a witch...Nobody could do that much decoupage without calling on the powers of darkness.
- “Wrecked,” Buffy the Vampire Slayer

A living brand or a force of darkness, Martha Stewart is an indomitable figure in 20th-century domestic life and her place in North American domestic history is tied to the success of Martha Stewart Living, the flagship publication of the Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia (MSLO) empire. The success of Living is tied to its graphic design. Living typographically enacts the values it argues for by fusing traditional elements with modern edges to present a vision of homemaking that is soft and appealing yet also a statement of skilled precision and quality. Tacking between broad, more theoretical analysis and close textual analysis of specific MSLO texts, this project thus collectively ties theory on design to particular practices of design.

Typeface: The Currency of Surface

I begin this investigation with the smallest, most ubiquitous element of typography: typeface. Just as the very language we use to communicate shapes others’ responses to and interpretation of these ideas, the typeface used to communicate content likewise shape others’ response to and interpretation of said content. Having a unique typeface sets an organization apart from its peers. Martha Stewart Living’s fonts are an especially strong illustration of this. In late 2000, Living began the long, careful process of renovating its typography. Typeface ranked high on the list. Changing the typeface was a very specific move designed to create an identity for Living that would remain singular and matchless.

Developing a proprietary typeface that cannot be copied also speaks to the organization’s argument for painstaking and careful artistic execution. The projects that Stewart and her team advocate within the pages of Living are ones that cannot be easily reproduced. Living celebrates the handmade, the exceptional, the singular. Likewise with its type.

Hoefler & Frere-Jones designed two fonts for Living: a text (called a front-of-book) font which operates as the “workhorse” of the magazine, and a display (feature well) font to catch the eye of the reader. The well font designed by Hoefler & Frere-Jones is named Surveyor, and is a light serif font (Figure 1). Suggested by its name, Surveyor is “inspired by old, hand-drawn maps.” Hoefler notes that one of the design goals of this font was to make a “typeface that felt very handmade, to evoke the craft philosophy of the magazine.” Today, engraved letters still very much connote formality, careful elegance and tradition. The front-of-book font designed by Hoefler & Frere-Jones is named Archer, and is a slab serif font (Figure 2). The slab serifs drive out with more forceful, geometric lines, a contrasting use to the more rounded finials. Hence Living’s slab serif font marries modern aesthetic boldness and elegant tradition, echoing the move made by the magazine’s content.

Structure and Flow: The Shape of Eye-Catching Transparency

Moving from typeface to how typeface is arranged on a page, a document’s visual structure plays an important role in engaging the reader as well as communicating the purpose, tone, and persona of the content. This role holds a peculiar function: it must be both eye-catching and transparent. Typography with anything to say therefore aspires to a kind of “statuesque transparency.” The statuesque transparency of typography takes its shape from two sets of interrelated features, which I am calling first principles of graphic design and the use of space. To understand the rhetorical function of these typographic elements, I explore first principles of graphic design by closely analyzing the front cover of Living’s January 2008 cover.
First principles

Turning to the typography of *Living*, I want to focus on three central functions: inviting the reader into the text, revealing tenor and meaning of the text, and making the content of the text stick. In no place is the visual structure of magazines more important than the cover, since that is the first point of contact with the reader.

There are two primary ways in which *Living* invites readers into the cover: the use of color and the cover image itself (Figure 3). *Living*’s cover first grabs readers’ attention by the bright, cheery yellow in which the title is rendered. This color is pulled directly from the cover image, which contains a number of yellow elements: (from top to bottom) Stewart’s yellow sweater, a toaster and a Kitchen-Aid mixer, a striped kitchen towel, the keyboard tray for the kitchen computer/TV, a stoneware mixing bowl, a stick of butter placed near the mixing bowl and two stools arranged near the island.

Because the title of the magazine draws from colors in the image, the color works to harmoniously bring readers into the whole of the image, especially with respect to the way the yellow elements are centered on the page, drawing the eye down the cover in a smooth line. Starting with the title text, the yellow elements form an inverted triangle on the page, a shape known for its dynamic nature. The yellow elements bid viewers’ eyes to travel from the inverted base (top of the page) to the apex of the triangle (bottom of the page).

The yellow title text is narrowly bordered in white, which both brings a crisp cleanness to the text and brightens the yellow by contrast. The white border also creates a clean boundary between the title and the image on which it is superimposed. Like the yellow elements, the white provides a smooth visual flow of color that draws the reader’s eye across and into the image.

Readers are also invited in by the appealing image on the cover, which features a medium-length shot of a beautifully appointed kitchen. The photographic distance is important here. In a medium-length shot, the viewer is positioned at close social distance, as an inhabitant, literally invited in by offering the sightline one would have if perched on a stool just on the other side of the kitchen island.

Once invited into the text, the typography of *Living*’s cover reveals the tenor (elegant quality) and meaning (the act of living) of the content of the magazine through three aspects: the primacy of the title text, the careful craftsmanship of the typography and the aesthetics of the cover. As shelter magazines, *Living* and its peers uniformly emphasize quality of life. Among the rhetorical choices made on the *Living* cover, the title text may be the most important. The most prominent element on the cover is the word “Living” and takes up one fifth of the height of the page. Beyond catching the reader’s attention and communicating the tenor and meaning of the content,
the typography of Living's cover also emphasizes important content items. To start, the image on the cover is accentuated by the absence of text (unlike Living's competitors), with only a few lines of text. What stands out is the image of gracious living adorning the cover.

The use of color is another key way to make particular content items stick in the mind of the reader. Over and above rendering the title important and eye-catching, the yellow items on the cover, the items emphasized through use of color, are tools for quality living, including Stewart herself. This is precisely the message Living is hoping to communicate and make stick in the minds of readers. The few textual elements on the page work to make each of the visual components of the cover more memorable.

Use of space

Moving from first principles to the use of space, the literal structure of a page is an important feature of compelling typography. Simplicity is important to good graphic design. According to Alex White, author of The Elements of Graphic Design, like good writing, good graphic design “eliminates unnecessary elements and structures those that remain in a logical, consistent system.” By doing so, good graphic design makes information more comprehensible by rendering information more compelling and absorbable.

The simplicity of Living's cover has been a hallmark of its production from the very first test issue issued in December 1990 (Figure 4). Comparing Living's December 1990 and Living’s January 2008 covers, the 1990 cover might seem busier and more disjointed than its present-day counterpart. However, when compared to the competitor magazines of the day, Living's cover clearly outperforms. Living's December 1990 cover has one minimal image (Stewart seated on an outdoor bench) and a limited amount of text in a single font rendered in a color pulled from Stewart’s plaid flannel blouse. Living’s simplicity, what Alex White describes as its ability to “[d]istill the essential from the mass of confusing muchness,” is what made it stand out on newsstand and grocery store magazine displays in 1990 and what makes it compelling to consumers today.

Like simplicity, white space is a critical component in structuring content so that it is both compelling and absorbable. Living’s use of white space may be the characteristic that gives the magazine its design unity, aside from its imagery. The magazine’s deliberate and dramatic use of white space renders content scannable because with fewer elements on the page competing for space, it is not only easier to discern the important information but also to read since there are fewer elements demanding a reader’s attention.

Unlike simplicity, white space carries strong cultural connotations separate from its utility in organizing information. Alex White feels that white space “is considered extravagant, exclusive, classy. It symbolizes wealth and luxury.” One popular analogy used to explain this rhetorical quality is likening white space on a page to deliberately empty space in a store, for example the difference between shopping a couture store...
and a bargain chain. Prada stores, for example, have very little merchandise on display and great expanses of polished expensive flooring, whereas T.J. Maxx is so filled with merchandise one can hardly see the floor. *Living*’s 2002 redesign worked to maximize the amount of white space, including cutting 10% of the content text. The sense of quality and anticipation offered by the use of white space is tangibly affirmed by the weight of the page. *Living*’s pages are of a higher and thicker quality of paper than those of its competitors and have a beautiful glossy sheen to them. The high quality of the paper is what also makes it technically feasible for *Living* to use so much white space. In competitor magazines with thinner, cheaper pages, content on other side bleeds through the white space, making it muddy and unclear instead of open and dramatic.

**Imagery: The Heroic Overlooked**

*Living*’s imagery is an exceptionally important element of its typography, which is noted by magazine personnel and industry reviewers alike. *Living*’s photography is easily characterized as still life. Still lifes are typified by their subject matter, the material of daily living. This subject matter is hardly unique nor exclusive to *Martha Stewart Living*. What is unique to *Living* as a shelter magazine is how they photographically treat this subject matter. *Living*’s magazine covers are typified by an absence of text. More than its peers, *Living*’s content pages rely on what I am calling artistic photography (imagery offered for its own merits, without accompanying text). For instance, in the January 2008 issue, *Living* had 68 content pages dominated by text and 33 pages dominated by images. Of these 33 pages, 22 were full-page images unaccompanied by text.

Moreover, though other magazines focus on similar content, the style of imagery in *Living* is more cohesively characterized as still life. Mariët Westermann, an art historian specializing in 17th-century Dutch painting, the great age of the still life, directly compares *Living*’s style of photography to the tableware paintings of 17th-century painter Abraham Van Beyeren, stating that both “beguile” viewers with images “of elegant dining.” There are some interesting corollaries between *Living*, Dutch still lifes, and the social contexts of both. To start, Stewart’s elevation and celebration of the elements of daily life, exhibited in MSLO’s mission statement, shares much in common with the artistic project of still lifes:

Our community of how-to experts is committed to teaching, innovating, designing, and inspiring with ideas and products that make every day more meaningful, more functional, and more beautiful. We elevate the familiar elements of daily life, infusing them with the pleasure and confidence that come from the growing sense of mastery and discovery we foster in our customers and ourselves. Our
product and our style are distinctive, with a consistently high level of quality. Though our content is timeless, we deliver it in the most current ways: wherever, whenever, and however our customers need and want it.

As both the foundational and flagship publication of MSLO, Living is the medium through which MSLO’s values are most ardently realized.

Beyond subject matter and their celebration of domestic space and pursuits, golden age art and Living’s imagery share the affirmation of Herculean hand labor and testify to the rhetorical power of rational order and control. For example, if we compare Living’s June 2006 cover to Willem Van Leen’s 1821 painting “Still Life with Roses, Iris, a Bird and a Dragonfly” (Figure 5), we can see a striking similarity in artistic vision, composition and focus. The art historian Norman Bryson asserts that Dutch flower paintings “are non-pastoral and even anti-pastoral in that the flowers chosen for depiction are those which require for their existence a high level of horticultural sophistication.” The flowers depicted in these paintings are varieties that require intensive caretaking and meticulous cultivation, as are the flowers in Living’s June 2006 cover.

The arrangement of these flowers is a similarly technical skill: these are not loosely gathered wild flowers, but carefully selected blooms arrayed in an artful composition. Be it golden age art or Living’s photography, the artistic eye needed to compose the floral arrangement and the technical skill needed to complete it are abilities that take time and care to develop—labor valorized in these images.

Robert Bringhurst, an influential authority on typography, argues that typography “is to literature as magical performance is to composition: an essential act of interpretation, full of endless opportunities for insight or obtuseness.” Living’s typeface is a tangible affirmation and an enactment of its self-defined identity as a “unique and pioneering influence both as a business and as a voice inspiring people to live creatively, beautifully, and well.” Further, by connecting with the visual tradition of Dutch still lifes, Living renders its content timeless at the same time as it celebrates the ability of the human hand to pleasingly order the world around it.

What distinguishes Living from its peers is its visual emphasis on hand-crafted projects, a focus central to the ways that Living reforges still life imagery to elevate the human subject and to reclaim the home as a space of hand production. Living’s typographic interpretation of its content is an essential component of its success.

Melanie McNaughton is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies.
TEACHING NOTE
Then and Now: Canadian and American Students Discover Each Other
Andrew Holman

Few educators will have missed the messages delivered in a series of recent television advertisements for Cisco© starring Canadian actor Ellen Page (Juno, 2007; Inception, 2010), who returns to her rustic “hometown” of Lunenburg, Nova Scotia to find that while she has been away in Tinseltown, her fellow townspeople became experts in modern communications technology. In one ad, Page visits her old elementary school, whose children report that the class was just about to go on a field trip… to China! “Wow,” responds Page sheepishly, “when I was a kid, we would just go to the farm,” while a scene of children being intimidated by a barnyard animal plays. “No, seriously, where are you guys going?” The students point to a large monitor at the front of the room where a classful of white-shirted, red-scarfed Chinese children burst out of their seats waving and shouting: nǐ hǎo! “Ni hǎo!” the youthful Nova Scotians shout back, and the commercial ends with the company’s tag: “The new classroom. See it. Live it. Share it. On the human network. Cisco.”

The ads are light and humorous, but the real cleverness in them resides in some-thing more urgent and unsaid. They play on the premise that, even in bumpkinville, people can be connected in ways that make them more knowledgeable and worldly, so those of us in more civilized locales have no excuse. “See how video on the human network is changing the way we live,” the company’s website chirps, “[o]ne town at a time.” It might have added “or get left behind.”

As a cultural artifact, the ad campaign resonates with people like me who teach and write about Canadian-American relations. Little Lunenburg (pop. 2,317) is caricatured by a large American corporation as the essence of quaintness, its people a collection of harmless, well-intentioned rubes with funny accents. A small Canadian town becomes Anywhere, America to convey how easy it is to operate the “human network.” For me, the Cisco education ad looms largest because of what it says about students. It champions video conferencing as a window on the world, the way through which North American students can discover others. The students are the active agents and there is no going back to Page’s day, when a passive farm tour constituted discovery. “How ya gonna keep ’em down on the farm, after they seen Paree?” or Beijing.

Via high technology, or not, students have been doing this for a long time. Long before the days of “connectivity” or “human networks,” students have been our most prodigious ambassadors, conducting their own public diplomacy, describing and explaining their own countries to their fellows internationally through formal student exchanges and conferences and informally through their own travels. There is no scholarly study of Canadian or American students abroad, but maybe there should be. Folks like me have credited diplomats, businessmen and NGOs perhaps too much as our nations’ public faces. Popular diplomacy has always been conducted at a more grassroots level. At least two groups of Canadian and American students provide good cases in point.

Then

More than half a century ago, scholars from two little schools in the middle of the continent lamented how little Canadians and Americans really knew about one another. Invited to a routine meeting of business and professional men from Winnipeg, Manitoba and St Paul, Minnesota in spring 1939, Arthur Lower, then Chairman of the History Department at Winnipeg’s United College and Charles J. Turck, President of St Paul’s Macalester College gravitated toward one another. As Turck recalled, “Dr Lower came to my home and we talked about Canadian-American matters...’If business and professional men from our two countries should talk about these matters, isn’t it more important to get young people in college to talk about them?’

So we decided to press for a student conference.” Founded in 1941, the Canadian-American Conference (CAC) was an annual colloquium that brought together students and faculty members from Macalester and United (now University of Winnipeg) for an impressive run of thirty-one years.

The conferences rotated between Winnipeg and St Paul, a 12-hour trip by train. Discussion topics, determined by student leaders, were remarkably wide-ranging, sometimes focusing on Canadian and American history and foreign policy, but often addressing events further afield, in Africa, eastern Europe and southeast Asia. Keynote speeches were delivered by prominent journalists, statesmen or scholars. Students were billeted with host families and there
were grand banquets and dances. Every autumn, United and Macalester students engaged each other in informed public debate, which was sometimes reported in newspaper stories and broadcast in radio debates. The exchanges were cordial, but always vigorous and shaped by the contexts of World War II and the Cold War, which placed Canadians (sometimes uncomfortably) within the new American empire. By 1971, as the Vietnam conflict heightened, the conference series ended amidst waning interest and, one suspects, a concern that the tone of the deliberations had become unacceptably shrill.

Discovering the “other” was the central goal for Canadian-American Conference participants. What is most striking is the earnestness, even urgency, of their commitment, and the documents on the CAC collected and preserved at Macalester and the University of Winnipeg (conference programs, private correspondence, newspaper clippings and other notes) reflect this well. What they really did discover about each other is harder to get at, but some evidence is revealing. Without doubt, Winnipeg and Macalester students learned from one another something about the substance of the issues they debated – about diplomacy and economics in the Pacific theatre, for example, or the power dynamics within the United Nations. But they also learned together something about the spirit of scholarly inquiry and the thrill of academic endeavor. “It scarcely seems possible that the Canadians have come and gone already” Macalester student Corinne Tibbetts wrote to her faculty supervisor J.H. Dupre in mid-November 1952.

“I felt, as I know everyone did, the deepest feeling of unity among the group. It seems incredible that such a bond could spring up in so short a time. But something else impressed me, and that was, if I may use a trite phrase, the intellectual challenge. It was people living and using knowledge and minds, caught up [in] the passion of a purpose outside themselves. I feel as if I have a CAC hangover, but it’s the kind I hope will never leave me.”

But clearly the most enlightening “take away” for these students involved perspective: how even neighbors as close as Canadians and Americans could see the world differently. The exchanges were generally reciprocal but asymmetrical. Macalester students discovered that their United College counterparts
knew a great deal about the U.S. and had decided opinions about it. To one observer of the 1958 conference, it felt odd to hear Canadians “telling Americans the reasons for the nature of the American Revolution.” In this, he continued, “Canadians showed broad tolerant understanding.” But as the 1960s progressed, Canadian students used the CAC to voice concern about American Cold War foreign policy, which made their knowledge of American affairs less flattering and these gatherings less comfortable. For their part, Macalester students struggled to understand the perspective of their Canadian neighbors. They scrambled to learn as much about Canada as they could in the months before the conferences took place and they presented creditable historical and position papers. But the documents betray a lasting frustration with the inscrutability of the Canadians – the familiar, “unexotic” other who, for example, could willingly fight alongside Americans in World War II and Korea, but sit it out in Vietnam. In the end, this recognition of difference (and not necessarily its reconciliation) was what the CAC was really all about. And I had a good idea in early summer 2008. Though I had known of Dr. Bangarth’s scholarship, our paths had just crossed for the first time in Scotland, when we presented separate papers at a conference on migration at the university’s Centre for Canadian Studies. Loath to let the changing of sessions end our discussion, we resolved to carry on at a local establishment, and least until we were each due to meet our respective supper arrangements. We each teach courses on Canadian-American relations and our talk turned, perhaps inevitably, to our students. The problem with my students, she offered, is that they think they know a lot about the United States and have formed some pretty rigid ideas; the challenge with my students, I responded, is that they haven’t been exposed much to Canada, and

American Cold War foreign policy, which made their knowledge of American affairs less flattering and these gatherings less comfortable. For their part, Macalester students struggled to understand the perspective of their Canadian neighbors. They scrambled to learn as much about Canada as they could in the months before the conferences took place and they presented creditable historical and position papers. But the documents betray a lasting frustration with the inscrutability of the Canadians – the familiar, “unexotic” other who, for example, could willingly fight alongside Americans in World War II and Korea, but sit it out in Vietnam. In the end, this recognition of difference (and not necessarily its reconciliation) was what the CAC was really all about. Now

There’s a little pub not too far from the University of Edinburgh called William McEwan’s Ale House, whose doors have probably been darkened by more than their share of professors seeking respite and refreshment. Like many British pubs, it is dark (and a little sour), but well stocked with a variety of libations. It is there where Stephanie Bangarth and I had a good idea in early summer 2008. Though I had known of Dr. Bangarth’s scholarship, our paths had just crossed for the first time in Scotland, when we presented separate papers at a conference on migration at the university’s Centre for Canadian Studies. Loath to let the changing of sessions end our discussion, we resolved to carry on at a local establishment, and least until we were each due to meet our respective supper arrangements. We each teach courses on Canadian-American relations and our talk turned, perhaps inevitably, to our students. The problem with my students, she offered, is that they think they know a lot about the United States and have formed some pretty rigid ideas; the challenge with my students, I responded, is that they haven’t been exposed much to Canada, and

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From that first pilot session in Spring 2009, we have spawned others. In September 2009 and March 2010, we repeated the experiment with our respective classes. The first webinar in Spring 2009 discussed “the Melting Pot versus Multiculturalism;” since then we chose more focused subjects, the War of 1812 (which polite Canadian historians assert that both sides won) and French-Canadian identity. In Fall 2010, we wove into our respective classes three webinar sessions, reprising the War of 1812 session and adding two new subjects—Canadian-American Relations during World War II and Sport and North American nationalisms. In all of our sessions, the students performed very well and asked to continue the discussion beyond our planned schedule so that they could talk informally about a variety of subjects, including the recent health care debate in the U.S. and the Canadian model. In Fall 2010, Dr. Bangarth suggested that we add an online, post-webinar Message Board so that all students can follow up our classroom colloquy with online chat. Early observations showed us that our students have much more to say about these subjects than our webinar schedule permitted; and the Message Board allows for students of all participatory comfort-levels to contribute.

Here, as in Winnipeg and St. Paul so many decades ago, the goal of these webinars is to allow our students to discover the other. There are key differences, of course. The internet has replaced the train as the technology that enables these meetings. They are virtual, moreover, and cannot replace the immediacy of face-to-face colloquy. And yet, it is clear that our students’ “take away” is very similar to those involved in the CAC. I am too close to the experience just yet to draw objective conclusions, still the students’ responses to assessment questionnaires circulated after every webinar session are telling. They, like the United and Macalester students, are enthusiastically positive about the experience. One of them, BSU’s Tim Brown, echoed Ms. Tibbetts’ sentiment of 60 years ago: “The webinar is worth doing again… and again… and again,” he noted. “It was exciting and encouraging to be involved in a classroom that was so actively thinking, contributing, and listening.” But most revealing to them were the differences in perspective. Almost all of the respondents found the experience both jarring and enlightening. In response to a lively webinar segment on the World War II-era internment of those of Japanese descent in both Canada and the U.S., one respondent remarked: “Not only did people have very different views of things such as racism and nationalism, but each class was also able to teach the other more about their own cultures and politics.”

Among our BSU students, most were surprised to find out how much interest Canadian students had in U.S. and American history and how much more there is to know about their neighbors. And as I write this, our Can-Am Message Board is abuzz with entries about Roosevelt, Mackenzie King and World War II, the future of the Canadian oil sands, and the merits and faults of hockey fights! And now I think I understand what Professor Lower and President Turck knew. I am humbled by the students’ intellectual curiosity and by their drive to be active agents in their own discoveries of “other.”

Andrew Holman is Professor of History and Associate Editor of Bridgewater Review. He is grateful to Ann Brunjes, Michelle Cox and his partners in the BSU Summer Writing Institute for their support and comments on an earlier draft of this article.
On the Perfection of Broccoli: Talking to Ed Brush

Lee Torda

Just saying, Ed Brush doesn’t care if you double-side your handouts.

That’s not entirely true, of course. He cares.

But after years of working as co-director of the Bridgewater State University Center for Sustainability, it gets tedious having everyone confess their environmental sins to you.“Double-siding your handout is not going to be the thing that saves the planet,” Ed says. He shakes his head in (almost) despair. “It’s so much bigger than that. That’s what I’ve been trying to get people on campus to see.”

I’ll confess to confessing to Ed myself on occasion. How can you help it? Ed is one of those people at Bridgewater whose name you know—even if you don’t know him personally. He is the electronic voice of sustainability as well as its public face. Defender of the planet. Crusader for Green. It’s not as romantic as I want to make it look, I think, being the voice of the planet for the campus, but Ed takes on the work because, in many ways, his very public work in sustainability is just the most visible evidence of a life committed to sustaining the people and the planet around him.

I often find that I understand the word sustainability rather narrowly—and I suspect others do as well, which contributes to all the confessions about single-sided handouts. So I asked Ed to define sustainability for me. He took a deep breath, because, it’s clear to me, Ed understands a truly sustainable world requires the sort of work for which one needs vast stores of energy.“It’s the capacity of the earth to support life. It’s fairness to the earth and to the people that inhabit the planet.” And then he thought a moment longer and added “—and to future generations.”He apologized for not having a more concrete—or technical or succinct or practical—definition of the movement. But all I was thinking was, my goodness, Ed Brush is a poet.

Ed got started in sustainability in the Fall of 1998 when colleagues Kevin Curry and Tammy King got a grant to purchase equipment that would allow for research in and on the environment. This was also around the same time that the related if more technical field of Green Chemistry was coming to be recognized within Chemical Sciences generally. Ed is careful to say that the field was not new.“The terminology was new, but the idea of green chemistry—thinking about the field in terms of the toxicity of the chemicals we are using and creating—has been around for a long time. Green Chemistry is Chemistry.”

Ed’s current research involves building small organic molecules—chemical arrows, according to Ed—that are designed to target certain cancers. I told Ed that when I was in undergraduate research every chemistry proposal I ever read always ended with “and, one day, this particular thingamajig will help cure cancer.” Ed laughed. “Well,
in his lab developed a rash. The rash disappeared into nothing, but Ed stopped the project immediately. “I started to think seriously about how the chemicals we were using and the compounds we were creating were affecting the world we were introducing them into. I was shocked to realize that Chemistry so rarely considered these things—and that I had not been trained to think about them.” That’s when Ed got involved in what has been called non-violent chemistry. Ed is quick to point out that the professor who came up with the phrase was in Literature. Acknowledging Ed’s good sense to trust a literature scholar to come up such a good name, I thought again, Ed Brush is a poet.

Ed is also a gardener. He and his wife tend a large and varied plot. When I asked him what his favorite plant was he seemed flummoxed for a moment. “Well, honestly, it’s broccoli.” Of course it is. None of the stuff of ornament for Ed Brush, his is a sturdy and productive vegetable garden. Ed’s own research even revolves around *Brassica oleracea*. The chemical arrows that Ed is on the hunt for depend on a chemical compound in Broccoli. That’s the powerful molecular soup that naturally gives broccoli its cancer-fighting agents. The humble broccoli is often overcooked and under-appreciated, but it is an infinitely useful and lovely plant. Its flower and stalk are equally edible. It’s an efficient plant that way. The color of a young plant is named for the planet’s most astonishing season: spring green. It’s more than a color, really. It is an odd compound verb of sorts. Spring-green. Move forward, quickly, wisely, in fairness to the planet and her people. Broccoli is very good for us. So is Ed Brush.

Lee Torda is Assistant Professor of English and Associate Editor of *Bridgewater Review*.

Ed Brush was deeply affected by his summer reading of Barbara Kingsolver’s *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. In the book, Kingsolver chronicles a year of trying to eat food produced, almost exclusively, from local farms, and, most importantly, her own back yard garden. Inspired by the idea, Ed is currently busy researching how he might do the same. In addition to his own large backyard, Ed and his wife tend a plot in the Bridgewater Community Garden—a project just completing its first pretty successful year under the stewardship of Arthur Lizie, incoming Director for the Center For Sustainability. Vegetables are one thing, but where one procures meat, dairy, bread is more complicated. There is a growing interest in eating locally and sustainably, inspired by things like Kingsolver’s experiment and other writers such as Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore’s Dilemma*) and Jonathan Safran Foer (*Eating Animals*), but also by the Slow-Food movement (there is a Bridgewater slow-food chapter), and documentaries like *King Corn* that records the fate of an acre of Iowa corn through the food chain.
NOT BROKE, BUT BADLY BENT.

Gary Rivlin, *Broke, USA: From Pawnshops to Poverty, Inc.—How the Working Poor Became Big Business*

Ellen Rupell Shell, *Cheap: The High Cost of Discount Culture*

Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*

*Charles Angell*

The meltdown in the American economy has dominated the news for months and generated a shelf of books endeavoring to explain what went wrong and who was responsible. What went wrong ain’t that difficult to figure out. The country, its citizens and its government, took on a crushing load of debt, much of it based essentially on monopoly money.

In *Broke, USA* Gary Rivlin documents how banks, payday loan shops, check cashing stores, and subprime mortgage lenders enriched themselves by ensnaring working people unable to secure—or unaware that they could secure—credit from more legitimate financial institutions. (Whether these days such an entity as a ‘legitimate’ financial institution exists is a question best left unspoken.) Ellen Shell looks into the American desire to find a bargain, to find, in Wal-Mart’s slogan, “Always Low Prices—Always.” She comes perilously close to concluding à la Oscar Wilde that we Americans know the price of everything and the value of nothing. Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Bright-Sided* casts a skeptical gaze at our propensity to put on a smiley face on even the worst of circumstances, an optimism over which the recent financial meltdown has cast a fleeting shadow. Taken together the three studies define a nation many of whose citizens are woefully ignorant of how money and credit work, too easily persuaded to sign contracts they haven’t taken the time to understand, and too willing to say, when financial disaster arrives, that it was their own fault and things will work out for the best.

Rivlin uses the ‘you don’t have to criticize’em, just quote ‘em’ approach to his exposition of the poverty industry. He asks: “All these major corporations, chain franchises, and newly hatched enterprises specifically catering to the working poor—were they financial angels to the country’s great hardworking masses…or were these businesses tilling the country’s working-class neighborhoods so aggressively that they endangered the very survival of these communities?” He questions the morality of making higher profits from the working poor than from “more prosperous citizens.” The industry defends itself by pointing out that it lends money to people often referred to as the ‘unbanked’ who can’t secure credit from established (and regulated) financial institutions. One industry executive told Rivlin that “if his life were a movie, he wouldn’t be Mr. Potter in *It’s a Wonderful Life* but rather the man who protects the working stiff from the rapacious and coldhearted financier. ‘We’re the George Baileys here,’ he blurted. ‘We’re Jimmy Stewart!’” But, when Rivlin lets the poverty industry entrepreneurs talk, what one hears is Gordon Gekko’s “Greed is Good!”

Nonetheless, to take one example, it’s difficult not to like Allan Jones, a Tennessee self-made payday loan millionaire. “I created the [payday loan] industry and the rest of ‘em just copied me.” Basically a payday loan is a cash advance against an anticipated paycheck. The lender then charges a fee—interest—when the borrower repays the loan, the fee ranging anywhere from $15 per $100 borrowed to as much as $33 per $100 borrowed, the rate depending on how strictly individual states regulate interest charges. Critics quickly referred to payday loans as “legal loan-sharking” and called for legislation that would require the industry to post the annual percentage rate. APRs could range from 391% in the stricter states to as much as 858% in a loosely regulated state like Indiana. Jones opened his first Check into Cash store in 1993 and managed by the end of 1994 to open seven more in Tennessee where “he collected nearly $1 million in fees” on $486,000 in overhead. Bilkling the poor brought him big profits.
Big profits also accrue to merchants who promise the consumer goods at the lowest possible price. Ellen Ruppel Shell’s *Cheap* tells us that “in the Age of Cheap we are all tourists, blindly reliant on the seller to wring out the best price from his suppliers and to reliably pass those savings on to us.” But, she tells the reader, since no consumer in the global economy understands the forces that determine prices—viz., the rise and fall of fuel prices with no apparent relation to supply and demand—we become victims of Gresham’s Law where bad money drives out good or adulterated products drive out quality products. As Shell writes “in discount nation, what once was solid, permanent, and dependable has become disposable, ephemeral, and dicey.”

Wal-Mart has provided the usual target for critics of the big box store discount marketplace. Shell raises the usual questions about “always low prices—always” and whether shopping for the discounts makes us wealthier. However, she saves her most trenchant criticism for a retailer often cited as the darling of the discount merchandisers—stylish, environmentally friendly, and progressive: IKEA. IKEA’S success has relied on its ability, first, to design for price and, second, to shift costs from seller to buyer. Where other discount retailers like Target and Wal-Mart seek out the lowest costs, IKEA tells its suppliers to design a product for sale at a stipulated price. IKEA then packages the product in a way that permits the purchaser to transport it home and undertake its assembly. IKEA’s cheap, as the reader learns, comes at a price. While, for instance, the company makes an effort to monitor its forest products suppliers, the sheer volume of wood needed for manufacturing—much of it coming from Russian, Vietnamese, and Chinese forests—makes impossible guaranteeing that all the timber has been legally harvested. Like other discount giants, IKEA takes advantage of cheap foreign labor. Shell quotes one commentator as saying “the effect of bringing into the global labor pool hundreds of millions of low-wage workers—people whose wages are held in check by both capital mobility and communist repression—is to hold down wages in democratic nations with advanced economies.”

IKEA also locates its stores in areas where real estate is cheap and taxes low. Traffic jams around the stores, especially on weekends, consume gallons of fuel. “The ‘value’ of IKEA,” Shell observes, “resides not in the shopping experience, which most agree tends toward the frustrating. Nor does it necessarily reside in the merchandise. The value resides in the manufactured ‘adventure’ of hunting down, hauling home, and using one’s own hands to cobble together a well-designed object. And the most fun by far is in the price itself.”

Americans like to believe that in finding a bargain and a good deal, they’re enjoying a positive experience. In *Bright-sided: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking Has Undermined America*, Barbara Ehrenreich undertakes to show how “positive thinking…has …entered into a kind of symbiotic relationship with American capitalism,” especially modern consumer capitalism with its insistent promotion of “the individual’s hunger for more and the firm’s imperative of growth.” Her chapter “How Positive Thinking Destroyed the Economy” documents the enormous inequality in wealth distribution in the USA and argues that Americans’ belief in opportunity and upward mobility
allows them to tolerate this inequality despite compelling evidence that virtually no one will overcome it. People see the entrepreneurial Allan Jones and the riches he’s amassed with his Check Into Cash stores but are blind to his predation on the working poor. People believe that with hard work and luck they too will beat the odds. Rather than admit that their standard of living has declined and continues to decline, people compensate by purchasing expensive TVs, home entertainment systems, SUVs, and all manner of consumer gadgets that, while they display an aura of prosperity, are all too often financed by unsecured consumer debt. And, of course, this indebtedness makes not only the Allan Joneses of the world possible but produces the conditions for the inevitable and foreseeable bubble burst.

“Corporate leaders,” Ehrenreich writes, “in the finance sector and elsewhere, had ascended into a shimmering bubble of wealth floating miles above the anxieties and cares of everyone else. Between 1965 and 2000, the ratio of CEO pay to that of a typical worker soared from 24:1 to 300:1…” The CEOs isolated from everyone else by their wealth believed themselves infallible and were as flummoxed as everyone else when the downturn hit. They quickly recovered, bonus money underwritten by the taxpayers proving a great restorative. Their employees whose employment became uncertain, whose benefits and retirement savings depreciated, and whose homes lost considerable value suddenly had to make do with a lot less. The CEOs hired positive thinkers to counsel employees to stop whining and complaining and to “work ever harder on themselves—monitoring their thoughts, adjusting their emotions, focusing more intently on their desires.” Don’t be negative and blame the company that outsourced your job for your under-or unemployment. Stay positive and see your distress and anxiety as an opportunity for reinventing your life.

Emerson wrote in his transcendental manifesto “Self-Reliance” that “Whoso would be a man, must be a nonconformist.” Ehrenreich notes that for Emerson “Transcendent Oneness does not require self-examination, self-help, or self-work. It requires self-loss.” The gurus of positive thinking have managed to reverse Emerson’s call for contrariness into transcendentalism-lite, where continual self-examination and self-improvement advance group conformity. The nonconformist, the critic, the whistleblower threaten and subvert the dominant interests. Ehrenreich’s, Rivlin’s and Shell’s monographs illustrate what happens to those critics who promote a social agenda that would level the economic playing field, would advance social justice in housing, and that would acknowledge the true environmental costs of our consumerism. The critics, treated like so many Cassandras, faced continual pressure from vested and monied interests to reduce their demands, to compromise, to cease railing on prosperity’s parade. As we now know, the critics correctly read the facts. But, why be gloomy about them? Christmas is coming.

Charles Angell is Professor of English and Book Review Editor of Bridgewater Review.
Within minutes after learning their son was dead, Howard and Barbara turned to his many school friends gathered in the ER at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital. One by one, they cradled the faces of those sobbing teenagers and implored them, from that day on, always to wear seatbelts, be responsible drivers.

The following day, Barbara and Howard met again with scores of Adam’s friends in the cafeteria of the sparkling new Newton North High, each parent pleading with the kids to be smart on the road. Another parent in attendance, Claire Masinton, encouraged Adam’s parents to formalize their heartfelt request as “A Promise to Adam.”

While his family sat Shiva, the Jewish custom of grief and mourning, the words of one of Adam’s English teachers struck Adam’s mom and dad. According to Howard London, Jim Lallas told them their son “ignited” his class. Adam, with his infectious enthusiasm — forever “connecting dots in unique and curious ways,” according to his dad — was that kid in class who really got the conversation going. When Adam began to talk, his classmates eagerly followed. “A Promise to Adam” offers that opportunity once more.

The Newton North lacrosse team this spring will honor Adam, at the very least with his No. 6 fixed to the goal posts he guarded. Coach Russell “Bussy” Adam said Adam soon was to learn that he would be one of the club’s captains. His goalie spot is left now for either John Hogan, a sophomore, or Josh Wolf, a junior, to fill. For his family, his friends, his teammates, for everyone who knew Adam, the unspeakable void he leaves behind remains impossible to fill.

The lacrosse team attended Adam’s chapel and graveside services en masse. His uncle, Ken London, recalls being struck by the players’ solidarity, as well as their obvious hurt and sorrow.

“You can’t pretend to love a teammate,” said Adam’s uncle. “When a kid’s your teammate, you know everything about him — how he plays, how he lives, if he cares about you. You could see those kids loved him.”

Adam’s teammates stood by until the end, to see his mother kneel at his open gravesite for her last goodbye, to watch his father, adhering to Jewish tradition, toss a shovel full of dirt over the casket and say for all to hear, “I love you, my son.”

“My brother’s voice was cracking,” said Ken London. “Several hundred people there gasped and wept. The dirt hit the casket with the rawest, darkest thud you can imagine.”

Days later, Howard and Barbara visited the Newton firehouse to thank rescue workers for their valiant efforts to save their son. So silent was the room, Howard recalled, that he felt it would have been possible to hear a feather hit the floor.

“The hardest thing imaginable, still, and I’ve yet to come to grips with this,” said Adam’s dad, slow to verbalize his thoughts, “is the realization that I won’t see him again ... I’ll never talk to him again. Kids have to know ... they have to think what this does to families. If the pledge saves one kid, we’ll never know it, but the whole effort will have been worth it.”

A Promise to Adam. The pledge is free, the payoff immeasurable. The cost behind it beyond words.

Kevin Paul Dupont
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