Chaneyville Incident, a professor of history, carefully details his thorough investigation. The novel is the history book that culminates his research. It is a laudatory scheme, and the prose style is workmanlike.

However, while reading the novel, I felt like a person who accidentally enters a room wherein people are vilifying him. John Washington is black—I'm not—and John Washington is a racist.

Naturally, since The Chaneyville Incident is historically oriented, the whole disgusting, depressing story of slavery is recounted. And white people are excoriated for continuing to hold blacks down. Bradley presents an interpretation of black history based on economics; he buttresses his arguments with everything from the credits and debits of the slave trade to the fact that sanitary facilities on buses aren't as nice as those on jet planes (the point here, of course, is that only blacks ride buses and that they never fly, therefore the bathrooms on buses are deliberately lousy so that the blacks are humiliated). Robin W. Winks writes, "The historian is not particularly interested in retribution... . There are a few who enter a room with all guns blazing, and some few who think they are judge and jury... ." Bradley's fictional historian is among the few.

Which brings me back to The MC5 and the White Panthers. Their ancestors didn't come from Africa, and there is nothing they can do about that. But what they could and did do was feel guilty. Thus the comment on the record album and the Party name change. The Black Panthers, as far as I know, have never felt compelled to effect a title change.

But it isn't just those who spout hokum and dress up in silly costumes who feel this ridiculous guilt, this feeling of responsibility for something (i.e. slavery) in which they had absolutely no part. And let's not hear any more about the oppression of minorities in this country. Much of what is said on that score (like Bradley's buses and planes) is just so much nonsense, calculated to do nothing but cause trouble.

How many have the squeamish feeling of guilt? Obviously enough for a publisher like Harper & Row to print Bradley's book. Reading it, I suppose, would be like wearing a hair shirt.

Consider this. What would happen if a person whose "roots" were in Europe wrote a novel that blasted blacks the way that Bradley's novel blasts whites? You can be sure that no leading New York publishing house would get near it. They'd treat the manuscript like Three Mile Island, even if the writer were the most talented person to come along in years. And if the novel were to be published (probably by a small press), one of two things would happen to it. It would be totally ignored and thereby effectively condemned to collect dust on store shelves, or it would be lambasted by critics so fiercely that anyone who picked up the book would feel like a filthy pervert.

If John Sinclair (and Abraham Lincoln, for that matter) is correct and "Separation is doom," then as long as books like the The Chaneyville Incident are published, race relations will not improve, they will deteriorate. The book can cause some people—black or white—to feel anger, sadness, guilt, desperation, or a combination of all or some of them. Such a combination, given the conditions of high unemployment and rising prices, inevitably leads to hatred. Then comes violence, real violence: yelling and screaming and tearing down... and death.

Technique and the Ecology of Choice


by Gordon M. Pradl

By all rights, the machine (and its instantaneous progeny) was going to set us free—any generation now, any day now. At last we would control our own destinies. With science and technology exploding the boundaries of our knowledge, both through time and space, possible connections and options began to multiply exponentially, and the range of possibilities for self-defi-

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nition and personal expression appeared endless. But alas, something came unhinged, some code got reversed, and freedom dissipated into exposure: we exposed the fact that we had lost our sense of an integrated identity and thus had no basis on which to choose and value our futures. We had reduced ourselves to slick means desperately searching for justifying ends, while "technique" rushed blindly onward in the service of amorphous bureaucratic slogans: "the better life."

Such ponderous issues seem far removed from flycasting for brook trout in Michigan, carousing with the cynical new counterculture version of red Chinese youth at the Peace Café in Peking or sipping the restorative seven-o'clock martini in ceremonial fashion throughout America's bedroom communities. Yet in their diverse and idsyncratic ways McGuane, Schell and Edmunds force us to reconsider central questions regarding the phenomenon of choice as it characterizes both our public and private lives—questions that need exploring should we entertain any hope.
of regaining momentum in our own affairs, or realigning reality with the illusions that mark our present condition.

An Outside Chance is ostensibly a collection of 18 essays on sport in the great outdoors—fully half of these essays relate a variety of angling adventures, and the others include tales of motorbike-riding, cow-roping, trail-horse-riding, sailing, hunting and golf. But McGuane's low-keyed celebration of man against nature curiously sets us to thinking about how technique has restricted rather than broadened the body knowledge we used to be able to integrate with what was going on in our heads.

Describing a fishing event in San Francisco, McGuane pinpoints the dilemma of the modern angler:

Fishing for sport is itself an act of racial memory, and in places like the Golden Gate Club it moves toward the purer symbolism of tournaments. The old river-spawned fish have been replaced by pellet-fed and planted simulacra of themselves. Now even the latter seem to be vanishing in favor of plastic target rings and lines depicting increments of distance. It's very cerebral.

The sustaining moral energy derived from the movement and change of the natural landscape, which lies dramatically juxtaposed to the "civilized" forms of urban centers, is lost once simulation and symbol become total surrogates for immediate experiencing. And next, like seemingly all our competitive team sports, angling and hunting will be reduced to the level of the proliferating push-button computer game. Such transformations deny us the visceral correlatives so necessary to judge our human achievements. For what disappears when sport becomes increasingly mechanized, when, in the process of enacting sports, creature comforts and plastic entertainment become the organizing priority, is our cognition of the purpose behind the pursuit. Despite surface appearances to the contrary, our goal is not to triumph over our prey in a literal sense (hook and catch the fish, stalk and kill the deer), for in an age of high technology the results of such a contest, were we to employ all the vast array of firepower at our disposal, would be a foregone conclusion; rather, our goal is to internalize a deeper understanding of the prey, to reach a harmony of respect and equality, so that these ethical qualities which finally determine our character might inform our behavioral choices in a variety of social settings.

Images of pristine relatedness abound throughout McGuane's pages. When he talks about Chink's Benjibaby, a cow horse who hated "confine and machinery, and the twentieth century," we are forced to recognize patterns beyond our own selfish conventions:

The roaring crowd . . . prevented Pat from even hearing the signal that his run was over. People walked toward them across the arena to tell him that the time was up. But Pat and the crazy mare were head to head with a single cow, absolutely alone in an old dance. A cowboy's horse had come home.

Or when McGuane explains to his son the only "acceptable Realpolitik" for a true angler, we see how choice is a function of delicate environmental relationships—upset certain balances and our range of options becomes surprisingly diminished:

... if the trout are lost, smash the state. More than any other fish, trout are dependent upon the ambiance in which they are caught. It would be hard to say whether or not it is the trout or the angler who is more sensitized to the degeneration of habitat, but probably it is the trout. At the first signs of deterioration, the otherwise vigorous trout just politely quits, as though to say, 'If that's how you want it . . .' Meanwhile, the angler qualitatively lapses in citizenship. Other fishermen may toss their baits into the factory shadows. The trout fisherman who doesn't turn dangerously unpatriotic just politely quits, like the trout.

How essential an ingredient of true intelligence is moral correspondence, McGuane's itinerary of sporting episodes makes manifest by indirectness. The analogy to the social emphysema with which the pollution of lib culture has stricken us should come as no surprise here. We need more than plastic target rings to exercise our moral mus-

In the Mail

The Controversy of Zion by Douglas Reed: Bloomsfield Books; Sudbury, Suffolk, England. A routine, virulently antisemitic tract (based on the primitive premise that there is only one source of all mankind's predicaments), whose only distinction is that it comes not from Moscow or Nuremberg but from England. Among Reed's revelations: Jesus was not a Jew and Winston Churchill was a card-carrying Zionist.


Word Memory Power in 30 Days by Peter Funk with Barry Tarshis; Delacorte Press; New York. A revolutionary approach to vocabulary-building by the author of the venerable Reader's Digest column "It Pays to Increase Your Word Power."

Sadat's Strategy by Paul Eidelberg; Dawn Books; Quebec, Canada. An unusual examination of Egyptian President Sadat's strategy and motives concerning peace in the Middle East, and Israel in particular.
cles. The decline of outdoor sport in this sense is but an early warning signal that having things done for us is not the road to autonomy.

The tyranny of a different kind of technique, cultural amnesia, is represented in Orville Schell's journalistic account of the recent opening of China to Western capitalism, Watch Out for the Foreign Guests! Just as an unchecked reliance on the mechanical imitation of natural phenomena robs us of autonomy, so too when the past is no longer present with us the new overwhelsms because we are stripped of any moral context with which to judge (I almost said "monitor") our decisions, our relationship to the body politic. One of Schell's informants puts the problem this way:

We Chinese have traditionally been cut off from outside influences. I think we often resist foreign ideas at first. But when foreign influences finally do make an impact, we don't seem to know where to stop. We don't seem to know how to balance. Suddenly some people want to get rid of everything Chinese and have everything foreign.

What is our own response today in America to cultural forces that would swamp generations of accumulated wisdom (as opposed to prejudice)?

When outside influences dictate our choices we need to question what inner powers have been abandoned. For choice, after all, is a matter of identity, and identity leans heavily on harmonious transactions among self and others. China's fall from grace ("grace" conceived, of course, entirely from China's own perspective) points to a peculiar moral dilemma endemic to totalitarian societies: when initiative flows downward rather than surges upward along the social/political hierarchy, we witness the ablation of a people's ethical resolve. Indeed, Schell wonders "...how a people once so involved in using their history as a guide can now seem so dis-connected from it; how they can start anew without either truly taking stock or losing nerve over the series of self-confessed failures which lie behind them."

The point of the cultural drama being played out here has little to do with the incompatibility of our ideological systems. Instead, to understand China's dilemma is to become aware of the mounting pressures on the integrity of our own connectedness, and thus to realize the extent to which our choices in life result from the continuity of an earned identity or are merely jerk-kneed responses to seductive expediency. The image of a group of Chinese youngsters scrambling after some Polaroid snapshots dispensed magically by an American tourist graphically illustrates how fragile is our autonomy in such tempting situations. Indeed, the episode forces us to question, along with Schell, "how the Chinese will ever keep their minds on their revolution and maintain a belief in their own strength if they are constantly subjected to such distracting demonstrations of Western consumer prowess." Success lies in getting us to forget our reasons (as opposed to our excuses) for purchasing the product in the first place.

All too many of the character transformations Schell describes are startling, and equally depressing, for they leave us merely with a caricature of what liberty might hold forth for the individual:

For Wang to sit here in this den of Peking iniquity, boasting with insouciance that his father got him into the army 'through the back door,' is something akin to the Reverend Billy Graham suddenly announcing that he has joined a cult of Satan worshippers.

Here self-expression and the new freedom have become a pretext for self-indulgence. Yet, how ironic it is that instances of such "self-indulgence" yield a self-righteous "I told you so" response in our minds.

The Western community has always been skeptical of what motivated Maoist China. It is sad to think that it takes China's emerging problems of crime and corruption, unemployment and inflation to establish a common bond of understanding and recognition. China's failures should not be viewed smugly by America; rather, these failures should give us pause to scrutinize the shortcomings of our own institutions. One of the introspective women Schell talked with in Peking locates the central issue of choice that we share with the Chinese: "You know, I still think about that contradiction, between the need to serve one's country and one's self. And I still don't know how to make the two harmonious." Freedom has little to do with the individual satisfying externally stimulated desires; it has everything to do with responsibility. Responsibility is choice connected with a past. Lib culture rejoices whenever another tie is broken—all in the name of progress.

The self-social paradox—with which neither the left nor the right has ade-quately dealt since the cogent theorizing of our unequaled founding fathers—suggests a final technique galloping out of control: symbolic behavior and its felonious drift toward invisibility and the unassailable. The gestures of our lives roll merrily along, their content seemingly hidden from us. The more these patterns of social exchange and status become routinized, the more our
choices become constrained. The trick is to keep things swirling from the outside so the inner sources of meaning need never be faced—the ultimate commercial heaven. Not all outer forms, of course, are to be condemned; rather, it is our powerless relationship with them that needs examining, a relationship that binds us helplessly in its grip even when we wish to alter our course of events.

The vast panorama of the seemingly insignificant martini is at last given its full due in a semiotic study by Lowell Edmunds, sometime professor of classics at Boston College. In The Silver Bullet Professor Edmunds dissects, with scholarly wit that knows no bounds, the range of symbolic meanings—intended, unintended and otherwise—that are brought into play whenever the preeminent American cocktail appears in our midst.

The form of the martini, consists, then, of coldness, dryness, clarity and purity. It is a simple, strict, one might say puritanical, drink. Its pleasure, which is not voluptuous but astringent, can only be expressed by oxymoron—sensual coldness, opulent dryness, mysterious clarity, alluring purity.

In short, the urbane and refined martini is able to make such penetrating statements about us because it is “disruptive of civilized values,” indeed, suggesting such values are only a veneer.

We need to see our behavior turned back on itself—scrutinize it in context—because it usually marks a humbling ambiguity in which all appearances are not necessarily so benign or innocent. Semiotic study involves the teasing out of the landscape of opposites that the symbol system is hiding. For instance, with all the status that supposedly accrues to the martini, the well-heeled alcoholic can mask the true nature of his yearnings by going completely dry and covering up his olives with straight gin. And so we initially label the behavior sophisticated rather than calling the man a drunk.

When such behavior is merely routine, choice is thrown out of control, but we realize this only if we occasionally apply a literary, critical stance toward life. Such a stance on the part of Professor Edmunds reveals a case of mixed motives in our cultural undertakings—a dangerous condition because of what gets left unstated.

The ultimate ambiguity of the Martini, on which all others rest, is its dangerous purity, its simultaneous clarity and blackness, its civilized barbarism and the barbaric civility.

The bonding of the martini drinker to his caste (it is an upper not lower, male not female, urban not rural, Wasp not ethnic, American not European, drink) suggests a curious withholding of self—in a sense the game is over, the winners predetermined. Who would have guessed what a tipped glass might expose about the crosscurrents of American life?

When we deny our natural connections, forget the hold our cultural past has on our future, or ignore the manifest content of our symbolic behavior we risk eliminating the art characteristics of our existence. Perhaps our current obsession with avoiding real art is bound up with our civilization's mission to avoid pain at all cost. It is the pain of choice that allows for self-recognition. We find out (define) who we are through these choices; thus our flight away from such self-energy-expanding activity signals the latest nirvana—the anesthesia of outer technique. To get back to a chosen self we must be willing to invest new inner forms of suffering.

In the Mail

Looking Back by Edwin J. Feulner, Jr.; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, D.C. A collection of columns written prior to January 1981 addressing such problems as government bureaucracy, inflation, radical environmentalism and other areas of liberal policy failure.


The Cape Route: Imperiled Western Lifeline by Robert J. Hanks/USN (Ret.); Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis; Cambridge, Massachusetts. An analysis of the maritime anatomy of the Cape of Good Hope and the possible dangers it could present to international shipping.

A Bonhoeffer Legacy: Essays in Understanding edited by A. J. Klassen; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan. A collection of essays on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thoughts on such subjects as theological method, history, religion and secularization and ethics by several religious scholars.

Does Big Business Rule America? edited by Robert Hessen; Ethics and Public Policy Center; Washington, D.C. Seven critical essays on Charles Lindblom's Politics and Markets by James Q. Wilson, David Stockman and others.

“The Transition to a New Administration” by Edwin Meese III; The Hoover Institution; Stanford, California. Meese's analysis of the transition period, from a speech given in January 1981.

Economic Freedom in the Eighties: For the Individual, the Nation, the World edited by Paul C. Goels; St. Mary's University Press; San Antonio, Texas. A volume containing the proceedings of the Second National Symposium on the Philosophy of Free Enterprise conducted by St. Mary's University.