

qualms. Her change of attitude produces in him such a pleasant new sense of self-esteem that he allows her to believe he is a murderer. He needs to be respected; she needs a man she can respect. His view of what produces respect is shaped pitifully by movie tough guys. Her view of what warrants respect in a man is morally perverse. Their relationship, that of mother-son as well as lovers, fluctuates as she periodically doubts his strength and he consequently reverts to timid insecurity.

The question of how our lives can be changed radically by others' opinions of us, even when the opinions are based on lies, is intriguing. But this exploration gets little beyond stereotypes. The milk-toast protagonist is, after all, a bookkeeper. His supervisor, true to type, is a cowardly bully. The landlady who admires only men strong enough to kill for what they want was formerly a gangster's moll. The bookkeeper's repeated transitions from meekness to machismo are as abrupt as what happens when Popeye downs a can of spinach or Clark Kent enters a phone booth. The final impression is one of cartoon-level cleverness rather than of penetrating revelation of plausible characters. cc

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WASTE OF MONEY

Not a Prayer

by Steven Hayward

Horst E. Richter: *All Mighty: A Study of the God Complex in Western Man*; Harvest House Publishers; Claremont, CA.

There are several ways of thinking about what has come to be called "the decline of the West." There are the rather sweeping generalizations about secularism by evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer. There are the more formidable authors who identify the decisive break in Western thought with one figure: Leo Strauss points the finger at Machiavelli; Richard Weaver singles out the nominalism of William of Occam; and Eric Voegelin beats up on Joachim of Flora. Then there are the gloomy historicists—redactors of Hegel, really—like Spengler and even Whittaker Chambers, who see large impersonal forces conspiring to foreclose

the greatness and glory of Western civilization.

Each understanding of the "decline of the West" has its merits and demerits, but they all agree on one general point: the heart of modernity is the fatal hubris of thinking we can be our own God, that scientific progress will inevitably yield the perfection of man's estate. At first glance, Horst Richter's *All Mighty* (*Gotteskomplex* is the original German title) seems to affirm this understanding, stating at the outset that "the theme of this book is the disastrous belief of civilization that it is all-powerful, omnipotent." But before one gets very far one realizes that the book is a deception.

All Mighty is very simply an inflated apology for mass psychotherapy. The cause of our "fatal hubris" is not seen as a philosophical or moral problem; it is a psychological problem, a neurosis, due to the arrested adolescence of civilization. Richter likens the development of the Western world view to childhood development, asserting that our troubles are mostly due to not being fully grown up. Therefore, what the West needs is a good therapist. As such, the book is really a manifesto for the West German Green Party, which embraces the gnostic idea of salvation through "consciousness raising." In the preface to the U.S. edition, Richter praises the nuclear freeze movement, the National Council of Churches, Physicians for Social Responsibility, and Helen Caldicott as avatars of the new consciousness. As the old 1960's radicals might have said, this book isn't part of the solution, it's part of the problem. cc

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Snake in the Garden

by Arthur E. Hippler

Andrew Bard Schmooker: *The Parable of the Tribes: The Problem of Power in Social Education*; University of California Press; Berkeley.

In this attempt to integrate moral thought with social science, Andrew Schmooker strains at the problem of evil, which he defines as intergroup human violence resulting from differences in power. Although the pursuit of power is not part of our original human nature, once it did emerge, it was perpetuated, since aggression is reward-

ed through success, and peaceful behavior gets its practitioners killed. These evils are not evidence of a deficiency in man's nature, but of the circumstances he occupies; not derived from free will, but from inappropriate social orderings.

Substituting his own "parable" for Genesis, he once-upon-a-times that humans used to be very nice. One group, however, turned unpleasant and used power on others. This distorted social version of the Old Testament does not square well with anthropological concepts of the continuity of dominance hierarchies among primates and the power of territoriality, but Schmooker does not take advantage of this opportunity to support the idea of human uniqueness.

Instead, he denies the existence of God while Satanizing the abstraction "power." As a balance to this, he appears to deify the power of reason. Everything will be fine in some millenarian temporal paradise, once we have found the way to eliminate power relationships from human society.

Why does Schmooker believe that the emergence of intergroup violence is a "problem"? Why not handle the "problem" of intergroup violence, in the immortal words of Stan Jablonski, by discovering how to "do it to them before they do it to us"? The problem emerges precisely because Schmooker has immanentized good in man. Having denied original (or any other kind of) sin and having ignored free will, he must locate the problem of evil somewhere else, in a parable of social origins.

But an inevitable objection arises. If our evil is only "structural," while our goodness is somehow innate, why has this evil (intergroup violence) existed forever and everywhere under all forms of government and every social structure? Schmooker simply doesn't address this and does a Kierkegaardian 2½ gainer hoping we can somehow redeem ourselves by ourselves, though he has previously provided a staggering historical indictment against the human race.

Schmooker is all too representative of the secular scholars who, in their efforts to rise above mere man, end up abasing themselves before the total state. As Chesterton observed: "When men stop believing in God they do not then believe in nothing, they then believe in anything." cc

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SCREEN

Yawning in the Aisles

by Stephen Macaulay

Stranger Than Paradise; A film by Jim Jarmusch; Samuel Goldwyn.

Stop Making Sense; A film by Jonathan Demme and Talking Heads; Cinecom/Island Alive.

All the praise that has been heaped on these films might lead you to suppose that Jarmusch and Demme—and the assembled Talking Heads, under the direction and supervision of David Byrne—have created cinematic texts of the first order. But the best that *Stranger Than Paradise* and *Stop Making Sense* can say for themselves is that they are, to use a phrase that will identify the group to which I am referring, “talkin’ about my ge-ge-gen-generation.” If they are as good as it gets, then the Baby Boomers ought to stick to Trivial Pursuit.

Stranger Than Paradise is a cut above art movies—the type of thing the same people are now making with their VCR equipment. Here we have a collection of vignettes about two New York hipsters and a Hungarian immigrant, the cousin of one of the beboppers. As we watch the banality of life lived in a run-down, one-room apartment—sleeping, drinking beer, watching the Yankees play on the small black-and-white set—another title for the film begins to emerge: *Welcome to America?* The question mark is vital. The only thing that could be more yawn-inspiring would be a trip to Cleveland in the dead of winter—and sure enough, Jarmusch provides one. To be sure, *Stranger Than Paradise* is one of the most unpretentious films to make it beyond small college auditoriums and coffee-house backrooms, but so what?

Stop Making Sense is a concert film. It shows the once avant-garde

and now quasi-mainstream Talking Heads in action. Unlike *Gimme Shelter*, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*, *Concert for Bangladesh*, or any of the others, *Stop Making Sense* concentrates on the performers instead of the woman in the front row shakin’ it, or the paramedics carting out limp bodies. David Byrne, stumbling around like a spastic, is the thing. If *Stop Making Sense* is *cinema verité*, then it’s no longer a sin to tell a lie. cc

Long Ride Home

by Herbert London

Lost in America; Produced by Marty Katz; Directed by Albert Brooks; Written by Albert Brooks and Monica Johnson.

Whatever happened to the “dropped out, turned on” Captain America of *Easy Rider*, who for a brief time captured the hearts of Hollywood moguls and the minds of hip urbanites longing for a life free of convention and restraints? In the age of Reagan, this mythological figure reappears as a yuppie in Albert Brooks’s *Lost in America*. This guileless tale of two urban professionals attempting to drop out of the proverbial rat race reveals another side of the *Easy Rider* experience.

Albert Brooks is an advertising executive with a major firm. He is responsible—a word perceived as a pejorative. He is imaginative, as his boss readily concedes. He is on a fast track, as his dreams of a Mercedes with dark brown exterior and tan interior suggest. But one day he finds himself derailed. Instead of getting the vice presidency he was almost sure of, he is asked to relocate to New York for a minor position. Incensed at the suggestion, he quits his job to relive the exploits in his *Easy Rider* fantasies.

But this is the 80’s, and Brooks is a yuppie, not a yippie. He buys an elegant motor home to cross the country (Harley Davidsons don’t have in-

door plumbing). He cashes in his assets for a “nest egg”—no need to live off the land or depend on his friends. But life on the road isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. At his stop in Las Vegas, his wife discovers a compulsion for gambling. By the time he awakens, she has blown their nest egg at the roulette table. This dream of carefree travel among the indigenes is shattered like the hippie vision of an unrestrained social paradise.

It quickly dawns on our hero that he and his wife had better find jobs. But opportunities in a small Arizona town are not what they are in Los Angeles. The \$100,000 a year executive is obliged to become a school crossing guard and his charming wife, who used to be a personnel director, is tickled pink to find employment at a fast-food stand. By now, husband and wife have begun to realize that their dream of discovering America is a fraud. Instead of driving out into the sunset, destination unknown, they speed as quickly as their motor home will permit to New York. The adventurer has had enough of adventure to know that if he must eat crow to regain his position, so be it. The grass isn’t greener on the other side of bourgeois America; those who have been there know.

Brooks’s comedy reveals more about contemporary life—I believe—than its writers may have intended. For one thing, the dream of wanderlust hasn’t vanished; it has been remodeled to suit ambitious, acquisitive executives. For another thing, the 60’s are now as alien as the 30’s. If anything, *Lost in America* is making fun of the *Big Chill* generation, who cling to their interred visions with all the passion of necrophiliacs.

Most people finally realize that you don’t have to travel or undergo analysis or divest yourself of possessions to find yourself. The search is coming to an end because the Eden Express always returns home. There is no magic in the search; there is only the hard and sometimes unrewarding work of being