

PROVINCETOWN

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1989 \$5.00



*"That was the great
advantage of writing
about insects and rocks:
you never hurt their
feelings."*

— ANNIE DILLARD

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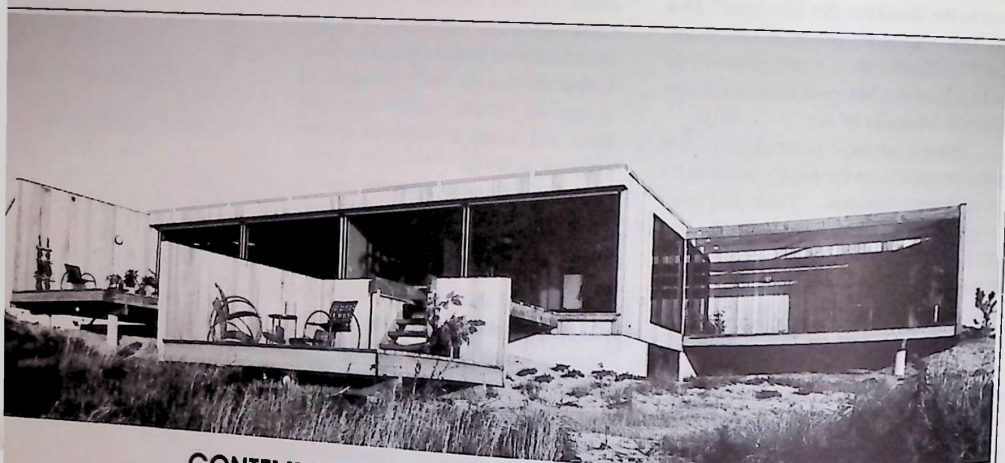
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LEWIS BERGMAN

Harvey Shapiro

wrote the article. And, unfortunately, while Lewis was on the *Times*, I never wrote for him either. The closest I came was a discussion about a piece on Norman Mailer's fiftieth birthday party in 1973. However, immediately after the event, which was quickly and widely covered in newspapers and weeklies, Lewis killed the assignment with a single word, "overexposed."

Three years later, as editor of *across the board*, and eager to lift the cultural tone of what amounted to the industrial Conference Board's house organ, Lewis implored me to write a book review for him. I said, "I'm not qualified to write on economics."

"This is a novel," he replied, "Muriel Spark's *The Takeover*. A mixture of Greek mythology and contemporary business. Your meat." He waited for me to say yes. He continued to wait. "It's short and we pay well."

"How well?"

"Five hundred. For, say, between 500 and 1500 words." I said yes, read the book, and turned in two typed pages. After a few days he called. "I don't know how you did it," he said. "Exactly 500 words. A dollar a word. The most I've ever paid."

In retrospect, I wish I'd written for him again. And I wish I could once again listen to his Indian-dialect description of Med Vehta at a cocktail party groping for caviar and women's breasts. I wish we were drinking screwdrivers together. I wish I could hear him insist on *fresh* orange juice. I wish we were eating lobster *a l'americaine* that he prepared so professionally. I wish we could trade jokes, as we did at the funeral of Harvey Breit: "I'll speak at your funeral if you'll speak at mine." Perhaps most of all, now, in the gloom of remembering not only Lewis but Fifi and Monica, I wish that the next time I come to Provincetown, it will be for a wedding. Meanwhile, I can only hope that Marybeth, Eliza, and Nick will find here what Lewis would have wanted for them: fun.

B. H. Friedman is the author of seven novels, several monographs on artists, and the biography Jackson Pollock: Energy Made Visible.

continued from page 43)
commercial services of close friends. East
Provincetown, where we had summered before
Provincetown and where we have returned
was also where we went for those
events, starting with Jackson Pol-
lock's funeral in the summer of 1956 and
Frank O'Hara's almost exactly ten years
later. It never occurred to us that, after
leaving Provincetown, our next trip here
would be for Fritz Bultman's funeral in
1965, and then, in much too rapid succe-
ssion, for Myron Stout's memorial service
last year—after which Chris Busa wrote
shillingly to me, "next summer and an-
other death (whose?)"—and now Lewis's.

The loss of three very close friends,
as many years, is no fun. Of the three,
Abby and I had known Lewis the longest,
and yet we don't remember exactly how
we met. Probably with the Staffords in the
mid-fifties, surely in New York City, and
surely outside the art world. Soon after our
reunion in Provincetown, Lewis became
editor of the *New York Times Magazine*
and remained in that job until 1975, after
which he worked for about seven years as
editor of *across the board*. So, almost until
the end of our years together, he was a
newspaperman and an editor. It was his
sense of his profession, of his interest in
life as an ongoing news story, that made
him stimulating to be with and to work
with. And it was entirely appropriate that,
a month ago at his funeral, the major
eulogies—really reminiscences—were given
by colleagues at the *Times*, all of whom
recognized Lewis's keen intelligence, his
wit, his desire for clarity and order and,
conversely, his abhorrence of pieties and
fuzzy generalizations.

It didn't matter what Lewis was doing
or reading, he always saw *stories*—in sci-
entific journals, in art magazines, in pri-
vate and public events, everywhere. One
time we were talking to a mutual friend
who is a top bridge player, and the friend
argued that not only had there never been
a first-rate woman player but that there
never would be. Lewis's eyes lighted up.
"How about an article?" he asked. "Could
you support your position?" And then the
climber: "specifically?" Our friend never

It's very jolting to come directly
from the offices of the *Magazine*, where
Lewis spent so much of his life, to say
goodbye to him in Provincetown. I met
Lewis at the *Times* in 1957. It was a very
different world then—I sat in the large open
room on the eighth floor with Charlie
Palmer and his green eyeshade, an urbane
man and an urbane writer; a character
named the "swamp fox," who would quietly
inspect the room and then dive for a bottle
of bourbon he kept in his lower desk drawer;
Barney Lefferts, who spent his spare time
writing scurrilous "I Worked with Him"
obituaries about his colleagues surround-
ing him. A colorful world, I must admit.
The three-martini lunch was the normal
way of life.

Lewis, slim, somewhat formal, in
his cramped office near the entrance to the
room, dealt with us all with unfailing
courtesy and a ready wit. He acted that
way partly as balm, for there were many
bruised egos in that room; we weren't
exactly working for a scout leader.

Of the editors I've observed at
Commentary, *The New Yorker*, and the
New York Times, Lewis was, above them
all, the artist as editor. There was a style
and a swagger to the way he worked, and
a pleasure he took in getting the details
right. He affected the normal anti-intel-
lectualism of the newspaper office, but in
fact had a keen eye for trends in the arts
and in the culture. When Susan Sontag
published her "Notes on Camp" in *Parti-
san Review*, pointing to a new style and a
new sensibility in the culture, Lewis rec-
ognized that as news and we covered it in
the *Magazine*, as we covered the signifi-
cant differences between the way law was
taught at Yale and Harvard, or the emer-
gence of the then obscure religious phi-
losopher Martin Buber. All of this is
routine stuff today when stories on intel-
lectual trends abound in the daily paper.
But it wasn't so then.

Lewis also saw to it that we didn't
take ourselves too seriously. When I was
awarded a Rockefeller Foundation fellow-
ship in poetry in 1967, Lewis presented me