



SNAPSHOT

'Winter, Redding Woods, CT' (1963) by Paul Caponigro

In 1960, Ansel Adams introduced Boston's Polaroid Corporation to the work of a 28-year-old photographer. His name was Paul Caponigro and Polaroid was so enamoured with his images that it decided to make him a company consultant, testing out various types of film.

Over the following decade, Caponigro put forward some of his most acclaimed work.

Caponigro and Adams are similar in ways, both capturing the timeless sublimity of the natural world. But

where Adams zooms out, Caponigro's lens zooms in, interrogating essence and inspecting "the thread which holds all things together".

These are nature studies, landscapes and still lifes, from the Fibonacci centre of a sunflower to the image shown here of a winter-stricken Redding Woods, Connecticut.

Miles Ellingham

Paul Caponigro: Polaroids 1960-1969 is showing at Obscura Gallery, Santa Fe, to January 15 2022; obscuragallery.net

The world Christopher Hitchens left behind

Janan Ganesh

Citizen of nowhere



I cannot work up much anger at Big Tech, it is because, by the providence of YouTube, Christopher Hitchens lives on. See him explain the Tea Party to Sydneysiders ("All politics is yoke!") or drum some manners into a heckling Diana-griever in London. Even a languid night on 1980s C-Span has 1.5m views.

The trouble is, the artist dwarfed his canvas. Hitchens had the misfortune to peak during one of world history's blander interludes. If he overcommitted to the war on terror, it was because here, at last, was a worthier foe than a long-retired Henry Kissinger and the ghostliness of the Clintons. His atheism aged better (no, it is not "his own kind of religion") but the resort to a celestial target rather shows how thin the pickings were on Earth.

He was made for our time, not his own. The great vacancy in today's public life is for an equal scourge of the censorious left and the feral right: a fanatical sceptic. Sam Harris is too clinical in speech and thought. Joe Rogan is too much the opposite. Emmanuel Macron has a country to run. Hitchens would have been in his element. As the decennial of his death nears, I don't think it is understood that the loss of 10 Decembers ago was more than aesthetic.

Had he lived, Hitchens might have become one of those rare writers who put a thumb on the scales of public life: not an Emile Zola, no, but something equidistant between a man of words and the man of action he saw in his

naval father. The opportunities to impose himself, to speak for an unspoken for mass, would have been greater now than in, say, 2005, when politics was so temperate that I forgot to vote.

Hitchens understood dogma as only a former sucker for it could. He knew that it can't be studied as a glitch of the intellect but of the psyche. It is, at bottom, an almost childlike craving for the world to have order and structure. It is an intolerance of ambiguity. Disabuse a Marxist of their creed, and watch them embrace the Chicago School. (Or, indeed, liberal military intervention.) Life must answer to a

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system of thought: exactly which one is a secondary thought. That he himself never entirely threw off this mental habit only made him a more credible witness against it.

Seen from this angle, his devotion to the western canon was not an appendage to his politics, but its reinforcement. Grasp the complexity of an individual, as rendered by a novelist, and all ideologies look absurd. "Politics is the great generaliser," said Philip Roth, "and literature the great particulariser." Hitchens read Evelyn Waugh and (one of his last reviews) GK Chesterton more closely and

sensitively than most of the fatheds who happened to share their politics. If, in the end, he spat them out, it was only after a discerning will.

None of which is to canonise him. He never wrote a great book. Like Gore Vidal, to whom he was both dauphin and rival, he couldn't say no to a deft but glib epigram. He didn't account for or even wholly renounce his Trotskyism, and floundered out of one interview (with Matthew Parris, the greater 1949-born journalist, to my mind) when pressed on it. Nor was that draw and rocco syntax for everyone. Having emigrated in 1981, he kept up a kind of Britishness that now only exists in the US, where it beguiles the credulous.

I am inclined to forgive a lot, though, for bodily courage. A man who let Salman Rushdie lodge with him during the fatwa wouldn't cringe before some hot-up 22-year-olds armed mainly with jargon. As for the right, he would have met them beyond the comfort zone of liberal talk shows (to whom, at one point, he gave the literal finger) in Red America. His godless evangelism was so potent precisely because it engaged pastors on their own southern and Midwestern turf.

It is just a shame that Anglo-America only really came off its hinges when he was no longer around to try to right it. In tribal times, his speeches and essays impart the only lesson worth teaching to those who care for truth and its dazzling expression. Never, ever join a team.

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Putting the 'giving' into Thanksgiving

Enuma Okoro

The Art of Life



It's Thanksgiving weekend in the US, four days about which I often feel ambivalent because, though I love any excuse to eat pumpkin pie and watch movies all day, I'm not exactly sure what we're celebrating. Besides being good at self-indulgence.

The weekend starts with Thanksgiving Thursday, a day with troubling colonial associations, strangely sanctioned for stuffing ourselves full of an excess of food until all we can do is sleep the evening away. That is followed by Black Friday, the biggest shopping day of the year, officially set aside for going out into overcrowded stores that open at the crack of dawn, and waiting in long lines to spend money buying a range of things we probably don't need but can't resist because they are 50 per cent off. The four-day holiday is followed by Cyber Monday, the biggest online shopping day of the year. It's not just in the US. Black Friday and Cyber Monday are global phenomena now.

But almost two years into the global pandemic, many people's financial circumstances have changed, and many of us have also been reconsidering what is worth our time and energy. I can't help but wonder what the data will look like on consumer spending after this weekend. But even if we still find ourselves heading to the shops or clicking "Complete Purchase" on our computers, it seems a fitting time to pay extra attention to what happens after this holiday weekend.

Giving Tuesday, the one day globally recognised as a day of generosity, is always the Tuesday after Thanksgiving. It came about because nine years ago, in the autumn of 2012, Henry Timms, a British man living in New York, was sitting at his kitchen table reflecting on the cultural phenomena of millions of people around the world committing these particular days entirely to consumerism. He wondered if, given the opportunity, people would also commit an entire day to giving to

others, to being generous. No one had claimed Tuesdays, so Timms did. He came up with "giving Tuesday", the idea that the Tuesday after Thanksgiving could be focused on generosity.

At the time Timms was working as the head of innovation at the 92nd Street Y, a cultural centre renowned for its programming in the performing, literary and visual arts (today, Timms is president and chief executive of the Lincoln Center, New York's largest centre for performing arts). He shared the idea with his co-workers, and the seed for a day for philanthropy was planted. The 92nd Street Y elaborated on the idea and, to their credit, agreed not to brand Giving Tuesday specifically to the organisation, in the hope that other organisations and

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individuals would grasp the notion of radical generosity and create their own version of the day. What happened next is an inspiring testament to the other sorts of things to which we are capable of giving our time, resources and energy.

Individuals, communities and organisations around the world took the idea, tweaked it, and created generosity campaigns that meet the needs of their locations. And in 2019, Giving Tuesday spun off from the originating organisation and became an independent non-profit, supporting other campaigns worldwide.

For Giving Tuesday 2020, during the pandemic, the health organisation Amref Health Africa launched "Fund Her Future" as their Giving Tuesday campaign for Kenya, "to support girls at risk of FGM [female genital mutilation] and child marriage". In the US, people gave \$2.47bn in donations

and support, a 25 per cent increase from 2019. This year, organisers in the Philippines, who joined the movement in 2020, have two campaigns focused on making a small dent in hunger and literacy, dire issues in the country.

I may be uncertain about Thanksgiving and the days following, but a global day of generosity is a thoughtful and powerful movement to celebrate and participate in. Especially in times of adversity when our tendency may be to worry about our own little pods of people and things. We may hesitate to give because of a number of fears we have about our own wellbeing. But I do believe that in a healthy natural state, people understand the value of generosity and want to be giving to others. I like to think it's connected in some way to our instinctive sense that we really do need one another to survive. I also like to think that practising generosity shapes us towards trust in an economy of abundance rather than one of scarcity. Living in Côte d'Ivoire in the early 1990s, one of the phrases I heard endlessly from my mother, much to my childish chagrin, was: "No matter how much you have, you always have enough to give to someone who has less than you." She would say this each time she stopped the car and handed money or food to one of the many people we saw asking for help daily. She would say it each time we saw her trying to figure out a way to make life a little easier for one more person from Liberia, someone she'd met in church who'd fled the civil war.

Capitalist societies don't school us in the art of communal care, or steer us towards any true understanding of the idea of "enough". But to give freely to others, whether it's our money, or our time, or our skills, is also a way of expressing gratitude for what we do have. And it's a powerful witness to the type of world we want our children to live in, and the type of people we want our children to become.

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