

ARE YOU A TRUE GRADUATE STUDENT?

CUNY GRADUATE CENTER **Advocate**

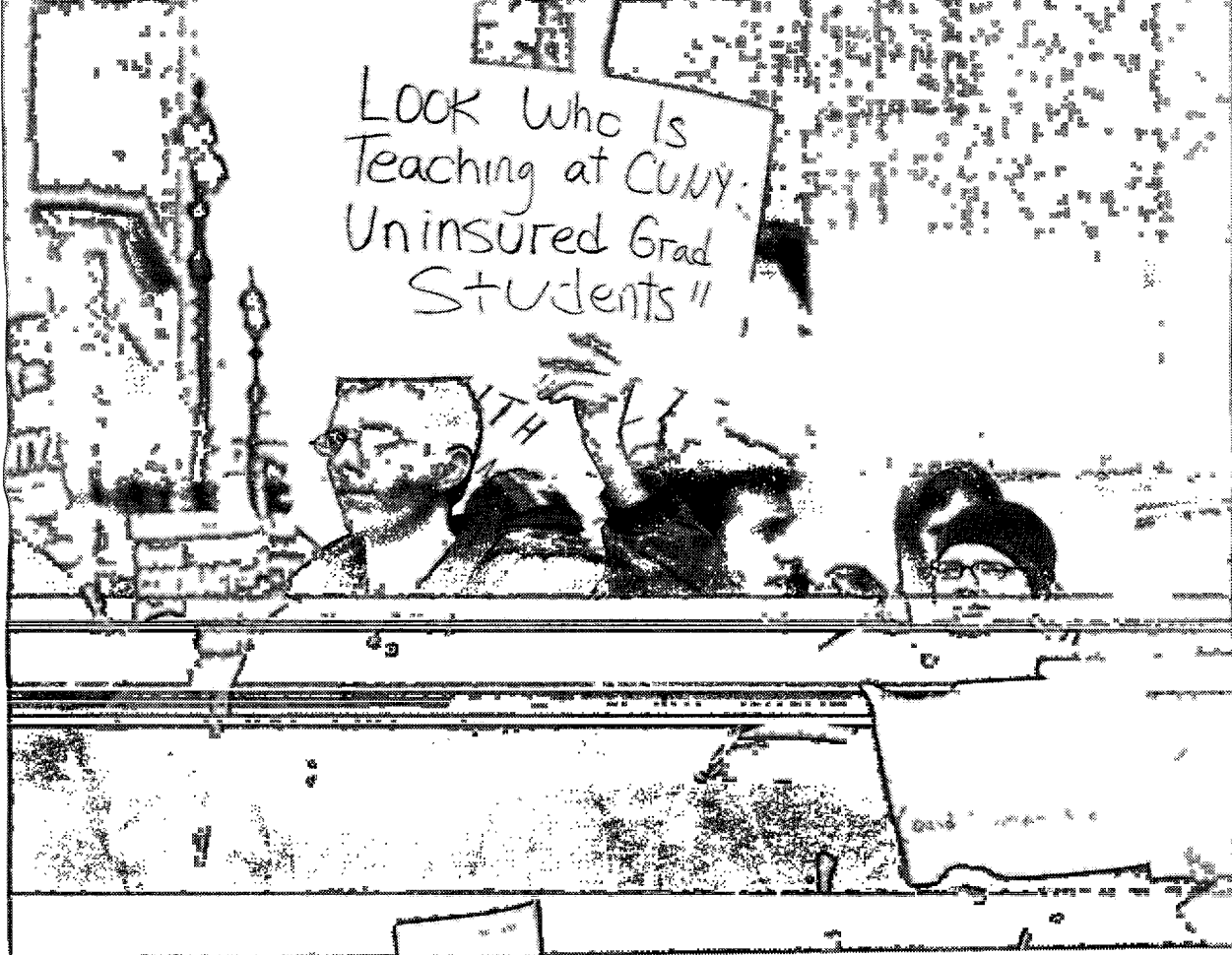
April 2008

<http://gcadvocate.org>

advocate@gc.cuny.edu



GC Students Rally for Better Health Care



We've all heard the stories: the CUNY graduate student who, upon realizing she had probably severed a nerve in her finger, still contemplated whether or not to go to the emergency room; the CUNY graduate student who, with a broken shoulder, gave the hospital a fake name so as to avoid the exorbitant costs of an X-ray; or even worse, the CUNY graduate student who actually had to give up his fellowship in order to qualify for state funded Medicaid care because he simply had no other options. These stories, all true, reveal the desperate need for adequate and affordable health care for CUNY graduate students. Although the Graduate Center offers a number of different health care plans, students and administration alike have begun to realize that the current health insurance options provided for Graduate Center

students, including GHI and the PSC Welfare Fund, are woefully inadequate, and even worse, are often distributed unequally among students.

Although health insurance has been a perennial concern of both students and the administration at CUNY, GC students, the Doctoral Students' Council, the Adjunct Project, and the Professional Staff Congress have all recently stepped up their calls for affordable health insurance, organizing a vigorous campaign of action that has included meetings with CUNY officials and petitions, letters, and phone calls to local and state politicians, all of which culminated in a large demonstration on March 18 in front of the Graduate Center. This demonstration, organized by the Adjunct Project and the PSC, was held to coincide with a visit to the GC from Chancellor

Matthew Goldstein. Estimates from the Adjunct Project suggest that there were between 40 and 50 protestors at the March 18 rally.

Although the GC was already investigating potential solutions to the GC health care crisis, these efforts have successfully stepped up the pressure on the chancellor's office, helping to bring the struggle for decent and affordable health care directly to Albany, where many students and administrators hope to find the funding for improved health care options at CUNY.

Part of the impetus for and one of the most interesting aspects of this continuing struggle is the recent realization that The State University of New York (SUNY) provides all of their teaching graduate students with access to the New York State Health

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Whither Democracy? The Democratic Party's Dilemma in 2008

MAURICE LEACH

The 2008 presidential election campaign has highlighted a number of questionable and problematic practices of the Democratic Party. Indeed, the nomination process, it seems, has become as important as the candidates themselves and many commentators are beginning to question such things as the use of superdelegates in the nominating process, the use of caucuses to select delegates to the national convention, and the recent decision by the Democratic National Committee (DNC) to punish the state parties of Florida and Michigan for re-scheduling their primary dates without permission.

Although these issues are central to any discussion of the current democratic election campaigns, many average voters still do not have a clue what much of this means, so before proceeding any further let's review some basics. First of all, what or who are superdelegates? Also known officially as unpledged delegates, superdelegates are officers in the Democratic Party who also have a vote at the national party convention. Superdelegates are generally former or current office-holders although some are members of the DNC. They hold their status by virtue of being leaders of the party and as such are not selected at state party conventions.

There are currently roughly 795 superdelegates in the Democratic Party. This number is not fixed and is subject to change for various reasons. For instance, Joseph Lieberman, a former Democratic, now Independent, Senator from Connecticut, was stripped of his superdelegate status early in the current campaign cycle; former New York governor Eliot Spitzer, who recently resigned in the midst of a scan-

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Table 1. Hypothetical general election match-ups by state (Obama-McCain versus Clinton-McCain).

General Election Match-up	RCP Average Spread (% by winner)
Pennsylvania	
Obama-McCain	McCain 2.2
Clinton-McCain	McCain 0.4
Iowa	
Obama-McCain	Obama 9.7
Clinton-McCain	McCain 8.0
Ohio	
Obama-McCain	McCain 7.0
Clinton-McCain	Clinton 0.3
Florida	
Obama-McCain	McCain 6.8
Clinton-McCain	McCain 2.8
New Jersey	
Obama-McCain	Obama 2.5
Clinton-McCain	Clinton 6.5

Lockdown America

"Children I want to warn ya, 'cause I've been to California" —Bow Wow Wow

"Until the racial bias and class basis of super-incarceration are attacked head-on, California's prisons will remain graveyards of human rights." — Mike Davis, 2004

In 2004, less than six months before the humiliating defeat of then Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, the author Thomas Frank published a popular book, *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, in which he argued that the largely blue collar workers of the state and their families had been manipulated and duped by years of Republican propaganda into believing that the Democrats were their enemies. Although Frank's book has been widely criticized since (not least by the historian Mike Davis, who showed that the central premise of Frank's book — that the Democrats were better for labor — was fundamentally flawed) the question the book poses is still relevant. The problem is: Frank was looking at the wrong state. A better example for those of us concerned about the future of America might be: "What's the matter with California?"

Formerly known for its amusement parks and beaches, its orange groves and pristine deserts, California is becoming increasingly known for its vast and growing prison population. Currently the nation's largest state prison system, California has roughly 170,000 inmates in its 33 state prisons. That's nearly the same as the number of students enrolled in the entire University of California system, and almost twice the total prison population of New York State. Despite efforts to reduce that population, more inmates, many of them arrested for parole violations, drug charges, or some combination of the two, keep coming every day. Recent events, including the stabbing of four prison guards and a large brawl at the Chino Correctional Facility for Men, have drawn attention to both the incredible overcrowding and the inhumane treatment of prisoners, even as more and more are crammed into institutions already filled beyond capacity. According to the Associated Press, an investigative committee told Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

FROM THE editor's desk

in 2004 that the entire system could safely hold no more than 135,000 prisoners. Although California's prison population has recently declined by about 4,000 inmates, this is due in large part to the forced outsourcing of prisoners to other states, a policy that literally makes prisoners and their confinement a commodity to be traded and bartered for.

The problem, of course, is not merely one of overcrowding, and although California has aggressively and single-mindedly pursued a policy of incarceration as a solution to crime, they are not alone in this pursuit. Indeed, what's the matter with California is indicative of what's the matter with our entire nation. Although there has been little serious talk of it since its initial publication, February's report from the Pew Center on the States revealed that the total prison population of the United States has now exceeded 2.3 million prisoners. This is more than any other nation in the world, with China, whose human rights abuses have recently come under fire from western politicians, coming in a distant second at 1.5 million. However, whereas, China has a population of roughly 1.3 billion, the United States has only about 280 million. This means that while China incarcerates only 0.1 percent of its population, the United States incarcerates close to 1 in 99, nearly 10 times as many people per capita. And yet, China is not plagued by waves of crime. So what does this mean? What's wrong with America? And why have we spent so long doing nothing about it? After all, the Pew Report is really nothing new. The prison population in America, as the report makes clear, has been rising for at least the last 25 years, even as crime has continued, across the board to decrease. As the report states:

"Prison growth and higher incarceration rates do not reflect a parallel increase in crime, or a corresponding surge in the nation's population at large. Instead, more people are behind bars principally because of a wave of policy choices that are sending

more lawbreakers to prison and, through popular "three-strikes" measures and other sentencing laws, imposing longer prison stays on inmates."

These "policy choices," such as California's draconian "three strikes law" and New York's equally harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws, are despite their negative consequences, wildly popular among average middle class citizens, who see crime as a constant threat to their sometimes already tenuous hold on life. That these laws almost always disproportionately affect poor white, black, and Latino populations, whose political voice often goes unheard, is no surprise. Like California's growing fiefdoms of gated communities, surrounded by wrought iron and guarded by armed private security forces, New York City is continuing its own project of economic segregation, slowly pushing out undesirables and threatening poor and ethnic minorities through a combined process of economic black mail and incarceration.

Indeed, the United States prison system has become little more than one of a handful of tools for this increasing project of economic segregation and gentrification of America's urban centers. Whereas white flight led to the decline of urban centers across the country, the recent repopulation of these cities has resulted in a kind of reverse suburbanization, where the poor are forced to the edges of the city, as wealthy residents drive up real estate costs and quality of life in the center. Those who refuse to leave are branded troublemakers and their lifestyles, often the result of poverty and poor education, are literally criminalized through drug laws and quality of life laws, which seem almost designed to introduce and acclimate these young men to a life of institutionalization. Is it any surprise then that the Pew report also cited the staggering figure that 1 in 9 black males between the ages of 20 and 34 are behind bars at any given time? Imagine if one in every nine Tibetans were imprisoned by China? Would the world respond with greater condemnation of what is and what it already sees as a gross violation of human rights? Perhaps it is time that the world turned a spotlight on the United States. ■

"RAIDING NADER"

To the Editor:

You contend [in "What Nader's Bid Really Means," *GC Advocate*, March 2008] that opponents of Ralph Nader's most recent run for the White House are worried about his role as spoiler to any Democratic candidate, concerned with his political idealism, or scornful of third party politics. These reasons have nothing to do with his independent bid. On the contrary, Ralph Nader's candidacy poses more fundamental problems. He shouldn't bother with the presidential race because he has no substantive political agenda, no coherent vision for what his presidency would look like, and no demonstrated commitment to organized party politics.

You trumpet Nader's commitment to "a universal, comprehensive, national single-payer health care system" as proof of his superior candidacy. That's fabulous! I visited Nader's campaign site to learn more about how he proposes to institute such a system, and found the same quote you cite, but absolutely nothing else. Unfortunately, Nader's "Issues" page is little more than a flimsy menu of one-line policy prescriptions with nary a word about why they are worth supporting, nor a mention of how such programs would be implemented. This is change we can believe in? I'm not so sure.

These shortcomings, along with the disappointing absence of a stance on a woman's right to choose, are components of a larger concern. Asked

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recently by a reporter why he wants to be President of the United States, Nader responded,

"We're calling our campaign an '08/'09 campaign and by that we mean that we'd like to bring together in each Congressional district about 1,000 publicly conscious citizens who will form a watchdog lobby on Congress and put before them about 10 major redirections of the country, like single-payer health insurance, etc. As a person who has worked on the Congress for over 40 years and testified and exposed it, I can't overemphasize [that] ... the Congress

can pivot the entire federal government. It's the most powerful branch of government if it chooses to use its Constitutional powers, and that's what we're aiming for."

Huh? This meandering dodge raises a host of questions, but the one that leaps from the page is "why not run for the Congress if it offers the greatest hope for meaningful change?"

One answer may be that Ralph Nader is more committed to the limelight of public attention than seriously affecting political change. If he felt it absolutely necessary to challenge the Democrat's pathetic commitment to the status quo, why wait until now to throw a hat into the ring. Where was Nader three months ago? A year ago?

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Advocate

<http://gcadvocate.org>
CUNY Graduate Center
Rm. 5396
365 Fifth Avenue,
New York, NY 10016
Tel: 212.817.7884

Email: advocate@gc.cuny.edu

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
James Hoff

MANAGING EDITOR
Lindsay Sarah Krasnoff

LAYOUT EDITOR
Mark Wilson

MEDIA BOARD CHAIR
Rob Faunce

CONTRIBUTORS

Michael Busch, Frank Episale, Tim Krause,
Natasha Kurchanova, Matt Lau,
Maurice Leach, Carl Lindskoog,
Mark Schiebel, James Trimarco,
Nicole Wallenbrock, Harriet Zanzibar

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Letters

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Where has he been in the four years since the last presidential race? Not building a viable base of political support, that's for sure.

Nader's unwillingness to engage in sustained political participation in national politics is symptomatic of the general illness sidelining the progressive "movement." Namely, there is no movement. This is captured perfectly in your final rallying call for liberals to dump the Democratic Party. You may be correct to point out that "this system is corrupt. And it's rigged. And it's rigged against you, and we can say 'As long as we get Democrats in, everything's going to be OK.' It's a lie. It's not the truth. Do you really believe if we replace a crowd of corporate Republicans with a crowd of Democrats that anything meaningful is going to change? This has to stop. It's that simple."

Your prescription that liberals should "join the Green Party or the Socialist Party USA, or whatever party tickles your fancy," however, seems a troubling inverse to the dominant political duopoly you attack.

While conservatives have managed to very successfully pursue a sustainable grassroots movement while simultaneously concentrating wildly diverse interests together under the "giant tent" of the Republican Party, liberals whimper and worry and look to disperse themselves as thinly as possible. What they need to do is come together in an organized fashion, not run away from the haunting specter of compromise. An exciting development in this year's Democratic primary battles, especially in the Barack Obama camp, is that the newest generation of political participants is doing just that.

Indeed, young voters seem to have learned the lesson lost on older liberals desperately clinging to Nader's pretend politics. The logic is simple: in order to affect change, you must govern; in order to govern, you must win. Until progressives suck it up, and shed their pretensions to half-baked notions of ideological purity, this country is in serious trouble.

Michael Busch
Political Science

GC Advocate Editor Responds:

I would like to thank Michael Busch for his thoughtful and passionate critique of my March editorial, "What Nader's Bid Really Means." Although I greatly admire Michael's work and agree in spirit with many of the ideas expressed in his letter, especially his argument that progressives must come together united, I feel it necessary to at least briefly respond to two specific critiques which I think are misplaced.

First, I would like to address Busch's argument that Nader has no real plan for the platform that he has put forward on his campaign website and elsewhere, specifically regarding the issue of national health care. Leaving aside the fact that all politicians regu-

larly make promises before actually laying out a plan of action, it is important to note that Nader has already offered at least one proposal for how to generate revenue for a national single payer health care system.

In 2000, when no one else would touch the issue, Nader laid out a plan for national health care that would be funded by a 3.5% payroll levy (much of which would be balanced by the fact that companies would no longer be responsible for providing health care to their workers) and an additional tax on stock transactions. This is a sound proposal that benefits all parties concerned, with the exception of Wall Street traders, perhaps, whose interests have already been disproportionately represented. That the webmasters at Nader's campaign website have not made space for these facts or other policy discussions does say something about the competency of his campaign directors, but should not reflect upon the value of his ideas or his campaign.

The second and far more salient point that Busch raises is the specter of a permanently divided left. This is a serious problem and I sympathize with Busch's argument. No one would like to see the left united and in solidarity more than I would. However, I have to take issue with the false "us/them" dichotomy that underlies Busch's argument regarding the Democrats. Busch seems to assume that all politics is a struggle between Democrats (on the left) and Republicans (on the right). While this has never been true, it has certainly never been less true than it is today. The new generation of Obama supporters, whom Busch touts as somehow more enlightened than the idealistic dinosaurs like myself who support Nader, are precisely the people who need to understand this fact the most. While I admire and would encourage their enthusiasm and their willingness to work hard and fight for change, the supposed divisions within the left are not going to be healed by enthusiastically supporting the Democratic Party — indeed, the Democratic Party has a tendency to simply absorb and appropriate the left. If these young voters are really so committed to change, perhaps their talents would actually be better put to use as one of Nader's 1,000 congressional watchdogs — a plan that recalls the noble efforts of "Nader's Raiders."

Although Busch claims I argue that "liberals" should leave the Democratic Party, I said nothing of the sort. In fact, I don't care at all what liberals do, since to be "liberal" now means little more than to have a lukewarm commitment to social tolerance and a strong commitment to free markets. Thomas Friedman, let's not forget is largely considered a liberal, and yes, the Democratic Party, in this sense, is also liberal. That anyone on the political left and anyone as well informed and clear-minded as Busch would even use the word outside of that context is stunning to me.

What I did say, however was that current members of the Democratic

Party, to whom I would now add this enthusiastic group of young Obama voters, who care about things like democracy, fair elections, national health insurance, global warming, or corporate corruption, should leave the Democratic Party because their party is doing nothing to address those problems. In other words, my argument was that people should stop supporting a party that does not support their interests. If you are convinced that the Democratic Party supports your interests — if you worry about poverty (at least the kind that makes it to your doorstep every now and then) but have a nice upper middle class income and are also worried about taxes — then vote for the Democratic Party. If you work for an HMO and want a raise, but are worried about abortion rights, then vote for the Democratic Party. If you are a professor of Literature and want to marry your gay partner but don't want to have to give up your summer home in the Hamptons, then vote for the Democratic Party.

If you're not well off or content with the status quo however, then you should leave the Democratic Party and support and actively help to promote viable third parties that will address your concerns. Nader is not organizing a third party, and maybe he should be, but he is making a space within the political landscape for those parties' voices to be heard. If you live in a swing state by all means vote against the Republicans — they're bad! — but when it comes to volunteering your time, when it comes to donating money to a campaign or when it comes to city council, state senator, or congressperson, I would urge everyone to give your support to those who address your political and economic interests. This is the coalition that needs to be built (a coalition against the status quo); this is the tent under which real change will be possible. Perhaps when they lose a significant portion of their membership the Democrats may finally get the point; hopefully by then, it won't matter what they think.

"ART AND AUTHENTICITY"

Dear Editor:

I never respond to reviews of my work ["Toward A New Urban Decadence," *GC Advocate*, March 2008] unless it's to correct what I believe is a factual error or misconception. Nor do I normally send letters or emails flattering the author of a good review because I'm all too aware of the self-serving networking that can result from such behavior. However, I was so taken by the lucidity and precision of this writer's review that I cannot resist expressing my gratitude. It's the closest reading of my writing that I've ever seen in the last two decades. Unlike many reviewers and interviewers who normally read only a chapter or two and skim the rest, this writer has obviously put a lot of work into this review. Thank you. That said, I do feel compelled to correct a misconception. Never have I said that writing that issues

directly from cultures of poverty is "inauthentic." On the contrary, I consider Hubert Selby, Jr., for example, one of the writers who was able to write so cogently and movingly about his own underclass experiences that I have enormous regard for him and was inspired by his writing. Another example is novelist Panait Istrati, an impoverished Romanian who taught himself to write in French with the sole purpose of communicating with Romain Rolland, the French humanitarian writer whom he admired the most. I consider those who can effectively communicate the underclass experience without recourse to the usual educational crutches and coddlings awarded middle class writers to be superior to the latter. What I *had* said is that there is a deplorable lack of communication and understanding between the very poor and the middle classes. Often denied an education that would allow them to describe their vivid experiences to other classes, the poor are often left without a voice to communicate the truths of their lives, whereas those more likely to be trained in articulation, the middle class, have no interest in examining or understanding the lives of the poor. It goes without saying that the best literary portraits of underclass life come from the few who have lived it and miraculously articulated it. To find one's voice, one's discipline and one's literary acumen in an environment of need, violence, chaos, and deprivation, all caused by economics, is miraculous, and this has led to the creation of several of the best books in contemporary American literature, from Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, to Panait Istrati's *Kyra Kyralina* to the writings of Donald Goines.

Bruce Benderson

Author of *Sex and Isolation*

Lavelle Porter Responds:

(I appreciate Bruce stopping by the GC Advocate website to respond to my review. The following is a slightly modified version of my online response to his comments):

I admit that point could have been more clear. If I had to write this again I'd express it differently. I wasn't trying to discredit art from the underclass wholesale. The writers you cited, Selby and Goines, are exemplary. I was merely trying to express some reservations about the lust for and emphasis on "authenticity" (whether based on a class or racial authenticity) that comes from some bourgeois intellectuals. I get a little suspicious when work is critically celebrated simply because it (supposedly) came from "the streets" and not because it is valuable or meaningful in any other way. It is precisely this lust for the authentic work that leads us to get duped by certain dishonest and unscrupulous artists who misrepresent their underclass bonafides. Gangsta rap in particular is rife with foolish authenticity posturing, and in recent years we've seen some specific literary examples of this as well. ■

Do You Need to Be Here?

Questions For the Uncertain Graduate Student

JAMES TRIMARCO

Since I dropped out of graduate school in 2005, there have been plenty of ups and downs. Among the ups are the several articles I've published in good magazines, the album I collaborated on with the industrial music group Experiment Haywire, and the many hours of paid and volunteer labor I've been able to contribute to political groups I support, including the Left Forum and the community arts center ABC No Rio.

On the other hand, I often have to take sleazy corporate temp jobs to fund the good stuff. Sometimes, when I'm sitting in front of my computer at work, color correcting another piece of meat porn that some fast-food client wants to post on billboards around the country, the alienation grows strong enough in my vegetarian's heart that, for a moment, I miss graduate school. Then I knew where my life was supposed to go. It was going to be about ideas, theory, text.

All of which was great in the abstract. But there were problems. By taking on the responsibilities of a graduate student, I had more or less eliminated the possibility of participating deeply in politics or the arts. I could dabble, but the demands of studying combined with the need to work for a living left little time for writing, music, or social justice work.

This would have been all right if the theoretical problems with which I was struggling were among the most important things in the world to me, and if I believed that graduate study was the best way to understand them. Another way would have been if I truly wanted the position of tenured professor. In either case, the more indirect path to political action available to the scholar would have made sense. Many faculty members at the Graduate Center have chosen this path, and some have been very effective.

But the theoretical problems were

grad life

not the most important thing for me, and the prospect of becoming a professor left me nonplussed. I became interested in the more concrete problems of fundraising, outreach, communications, and the development of new aesthetics, and my life has been more satisfying since I've begun to dedicate myself more fully to these concerns. My experiences also inform my theoretical perspective in a more integrated way than readings ever could do for me.

I'm convinced there are other graduate students who might, as I did, find life outside of academia happier and more interesting. They might derive more satisfaction from their successes and failures, when their efforts are applied to more direct political goals. And this is particularly true at the current historical moment, when

ecological and economic crises seem poised to combine in dangerous, complex, even unprecedented ways, when intelligent and sophisticated activists are so urgently needed.

I do not aim to disparage higher education, nor to encourage engaged students to abandon the studies in which they've invested years of their lives. What I'm suggesting instead is that graduate students be prepared to ask themselves a series of questions about how their studies fit into their lives, that they answer these questions honestly, and that they take a moment to imagine what a life outside school might mean, the problems it would pose, and the opportunities it might open up.

This might be more difficult than it sounds. After all, many current graduate students have been raised almost entirely within the context of school. When people go from elementary school to high school to college to

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The Pile

TIM KRAUSE

Sometimes, every few weeks during the fall and spring semesters, my home is overrun by a creature I call The Pile. The Pile is a stack of student papers, usually some 25-30 in number, in dry times as few as 10 or 15, at flood-tide (the unholy confluence of, say, two written assignments in a row) some 60 or so. The Pile is squat and thick, in various shades of white, off-white, and cream; it is rarely stacked evenly, but shows throughout its recumbent bulk the edges and corners of the individual papers that compose it, each as sharp and barbed as a strand of razor-wire: The Pile as threatening porcupine, Don't Touch Me. Usually the same paper stays on top until I decide to attack The Pile wholesale, which gives an odd impression, as if this growth of paper and ink had a single author who, instead of typing up one big document, madly split their work into seemingly innumerable smaller parts. Some of the papers are unstapled, which causes them to shift with the bulk of The Pile as it is moved and tossed about — sometimes intentionally, as when I first remove The Pile from its temporary traveling home in my bag and place it, still quivering in the light, in the center of the desk in my office; sometimes unintentionally, as when the accumulated matter that also occupies my desk (books, papers, Star Wars figures, photographs, cups and glasses, a lamp) vies with The Pile for dominance amid the chaos and swirl. I have an odd tenderness for these unstapled papers, the freak offshoots of The Pile's hybrid fecundity: Who will care for them?

This isn't really so much about teaching or pedagogy — the designing of curricula, the grading of papers and tests, or work in the classroom — as it is about the obduracy of mere matter, what the Suprematist painter Kazimir Malevich called "the tyranny of objects." For before The Pile can become a collection of readable texts, before its Word may be made flesh, it must remain simply what it is, a stack of paper, one needing a rough sort of order and care so as to avoid complete dispersal, but little more. (For me, at least, although I know quite a few colleagues with Piles of their own, and the conditions appertaining thereunto.)

dispatches

FROM THE FRONT

Thus it happens that The Pile may take up extended residence on my desk, living there like some half-neglected, half-resented long-term boarder, one whom I didn't invite and who I desperately wish would leave. Grading actual papers, their texts and webs of ideas (or lack thereof), is actually gravy, quite easy, in fact, a cinch, and generally fun to boot. But in The Pile's pupal stage, before the resplendent butterfly of thought can emerge from the chrysalis of printed matter — and sometimes horribly printed: I'm shocked, shocked to find that people still use dot-matrix printers these days, like some abject denizens of a forgotten Soviet satellite state for whom the Cold War never ended — anyway, before The Pile can become the divine Logos, it must fester awhile, lie fallow, sit on brood. My attitude toward The Pile during this incubation stage follows roughly the famous Five Stages of Grief as outlined by the late lamented Swiss psychiatrist Elizabeth Kübler-Ross: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. I say "roughly," because it's actually much closer to a single long unbroken period of the first four stages mixed indiscriminately together — with denial and anger strongly predominating — followed by a quick, bitter acceptance and the beginning of actual grading. I may like to imagine that The Pile needs this time so that it may grow to full maturity, but actually it's I who need this time to stew, fret, and worry. The Pile is almost incidental, a blank slate, like Melville's White Whale, upon which I can project some of my deepest, darkest fears and desires: my love-hate relationship with procrastination, my fears of failure and change, my frequent wish to lie still and be left alone, even my odd, growing

feeling of being a dimly complacent cog in a brutal, inhuman machine, a mechanized beast with the reek of blood on its muzzle — all of this gets imprinted upon The Pile, all goes into the general morass of pity, fear, trembling, and bad vibes. The Pile is voracious, it is never not hungry.

But finally I'm moved to say fuck it all and go at The Pile directly, and actually grade the papers of which it's composed, the papers that, like money-loaned, have been entrusted to me for a brief time only, and which have to be paid back eventually. "Finally" and "eventually" can sometimes take as long as two or three weeks — I'm not proud — and it's often the hangdog look on my students' faces, the dawning realization that not only are they not being catapulted overnight into some pantheon of great writers, but that their eccentric, wild-eyed adjunct lecturer hasn't even read their work yet, that motivates me, like a repentant drunk on a small-town Sunday, with all the bars and liquor stores closed, to clean myself

up and get my act together. Sometimes I'll fortify my assault upon The Pile with a quick jolt of martial inspiration — the testing of the bow scene in the *Odyssey*, for example, "no missing of the mark, see, and no long labor spent to string the bow" (a slacker's mantra), or maybe Siegfried's "Trauermarsch" from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, a real Teutonic stompfest, equal parts grim and grand, fitting music for the

massive girding-of-loins and gritting-of-teeth needed before any grading orgy worthy of the name. Or sometimes I'll dive right into The Pile's textual heap, having spent enough time demonizing it, apostrophizing it, feeding it with my energy and my time. And soon after that The Pile is gone, and it's as if it had never been to see me, and I wonder what all the fuss was about. And soon after that another Pile comes to stay, and I can begin the whole sordid, self-loathing process over again. I think I love The Pile, in all its messy manifestations, its lumpiness like buried sinful treasure, its refusals, and its silence. I really think I do. ■

My attitude toward The Pile follows roughly the famous Five Stages of Grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance.

Grad Life

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graduate school, sometimes without taking a single year off, it's no wonder their principal skills are those of the classroom. There are other things they might be good at and find more enjoyable, but they've never given them an honest chance. So our society is full of pinpoint marksmen who've never fired a shot, moving singers who've never taken the stage, and tireless carpenters who've never hammered a nail.

Many graduate students — perhaps even most — are happy where they are. They enjoy their work and have come to grips with the sacrifices they need to make and the uncertainty of the job market ahead. I have nothing but respect for that. But there are others who may be just biding their time. Could you be one of them? I hope the questions below will help you determine the answer.

Do you read books related to your academic work in your free time?

A friend of mine has an obsession with the origins of certain concepts in political theory, especially concerning Western Marxism and anti-authoritarian thought. It's taken her a long time to get through her orals, but she recently passed them with flying colors. When I talk to her on the phone, she often mentions the heavy writers she's reading with enjoyment: Husserl, Spinoza, Leibniz. While the political work she managed to "squeeze in on the side" has made her progress slow, she clearly loves the material she's engaging with.

This friend is a good — if perhaps extreme — example of someone who should stay in graduate school. She's tried other things in life and she knows these books are her passion. Meanwhile, her need to customize her studies to her own specialized interests — as opposed to just following along with her department's areas of expertise — is a strong sign of her intellectual autonomy.

On the other side of the spectrum are those who read the books only when it's required and perhaps don't enjoy it that much even then. I think this behavior raises questions, especially in the context of a highly scholastic middle class, many of whose members feel more comfortable in a classroom than in a workshop, office, lab, or field. For some of these people, being in school looks like the path of least resistance, despite its obvious difficulties and indignities.

If you're one of these people, and if there's any reason to believe you might be able to contribute to the political movements agitating for the transformation of society today — as an organizer, a writer, a fundraiser, or whatever you see yourself doing — you need to weigh your priorities on an honest scale. There might be something you haven't tried that would feel a lot better.

Are you enthusiastic about teaching for a living?

The anthropology department, where I used to be a student, made a big deal about all the non-academic positions its graduates were getting: many went on to work as researchers, consultants, and organizers. There was also the possibility of working as an ethnographer for a marketing firm, which we used to call "going over to the dark side."

Our professors made sure we knew that only 50% of graduates were getting tenure-track academic positions. This was good news to me because I did not particularly enjoy teaching. The idea that I could use my PhD to get these other jobs excited me. So imagine my surprise when I brought the matter up with workers at the kinds of organizations I wanted to work for, and heard a different line from them. "You're interested in working as a housing advocate?" one organizer said. "Then you should start working with us now. You don't need a PhD to do this stuff."

This is not to say that there isn't a place for some housing organizers with PhDs. But people should know that one does not necessarily need a PhD to get a good job in the non-profit world. And one should also consider the chilling effect on the formation of social movements that occurs when tens of thousands of young people, many of them interested in social justice, take six to 10 years off at a political and historical moment when their organizing is sorely needed.

This situation is not to look different for students in the departments of computer science, engineering, biology, and so forth. It will also look different for those studying for a master's degree, which can generally be earned in a year or two and are helpful in landing nonprofit gigs. I am speaking more directly to PhD students in the humanities and social sciences, who need to know that the one position that *always* requires a PhD in these fields is the increasingly scarce one of tenure-track professor. If you're going to make all the sacrifices involved in getting this degree, you should be enthusiastic about teaching for a living.

Are you comfortable with giving up other kinds of creativity?

Most graduate students find ways to be creative within the limits of their studies. They look for an original angle on a historical question or apply an unexpected theorist to a contemporary phenomenon. But some forms of creativity don't fit well within the limit. You may want to experiment with starting a business, organizing for a certain change in policy, or writing for a broad audience. You may get excited about the neighborhood community garden and want to dedicate time to writing grants to fund it or even to planting tomatoes in its soil. And you may want to do these things without waiting six or more years to get your degree.

Is it worth it to give up these

interests in order to finish school? It depends in part on how you answered the first two questions. If there was one thing that really bothered me when I was in school it was that I felt guilty for every moment I used to pursue an outside interest. Many of my colleagues who had such interests at the beginning abandoned them so that they could focus on teaching and scholarship. For some people this will be worth it and for others it won't.

It's true that tenured professors have more time off than most other professionals, so if you make it to that point you might have the chance to experiment with your other interests again. But remember, only about half of the graduates in the social sciences and humanities will ever hold that position. For instance, a recent study by UC Berkeley researchers found that 53% of their sample of English PhD's were tenured professors 10 years later.¹ So the question of how important other kinds of creativity are for you, and whether you'll be able to make room for them while pursuing scholarly work, is key.

I loved my department when I was in school. I still think it's among the best in the country in its field. I use the insights I gained there, in some form, every day. This is not about the quality of departments, but rather about assessing whether academic life is right for each of us. Because I'm happier and my life makes more sense, I know I did the right thing. My achievements now truly belong to me. The projects I worked on in a class, but emerge from the people I know and the problems around us. The writing doesn't stop at the professor's desk, but is published in magazines and websites. The music gets spun in clubs. The political work has concrete results that affect people's lives, or it fails on its own merits and I learn from that.

These projects are aimed at goals of my own choosing. They are more meaningful to me than the ones I was working towards in school, which sometimes felt like a series of hoops set up in advance for me to jump through. Now I set up my own hoops.

I know that most of you who are in school belong here. But there's a minority that's here by default, still avoiding full engagement with the economic and political world outside, and you might be one of them if you found it hard to answer yes to the questions above.

To these people I want to stress that the door to the Ivory Tower is not locked from the inside. You can come down to the forest below any time you like. It's not that scary and there's plenty of work to be done. We need more clever people like you on our side. We hope to see some of you around soon. ■

When he isn't writing, James Trimarco works as the art director for the Left Forum and volunteers at ABC No Rio. You can reach him at jatrimar@yahoo.com.

¹ <http://www.berkeley.edu/news/media/releases/99legacy/9-2-1999.html>

GRADUATE CENTER technology

LIBRARY CATALOGUE MACHINES

In order to remedy the problem of numerous library catalogue computers breaking each month, the library has purchased 30 licenses for the Deep Freeze software to be loaded onto the 30 library catalogue machines found throughout the library, according to Elaine Montilla, Director of User Services for Information Technology. Deep Freeze protects computer baseline configurations, preventing dangerous viruses or other downloads to remain on the computer from one user to another. This is an important step for, as Montilla pointed out, anyone can use the library catalogue computers — they do not have to log on to the GC system as one normally does with all of the other public computers throughout the building.

Therefore, Deep Freeze will eliminate many of the bugs and crashes that have taken several of the library catalogue machines offline. The installation of the software, to be completed by summer, will ensure that the catalogue machines "will be a lot more secure and stable," said Montilla.

HELP DESK

The Help Desk successfully moved to its new home at the bottom of the stairs on the C-level concourse of the library in March. It now sits directly in front of the new printer room, room 196.07, in which the Information Technology department has installed three new Konika Minolta machines. According to Montilla, the two fax machines designated for student use (for outgoing faxes only) will be set up in this new printer room in April. "So far," she said, "we have had no complaints about the noise level in the C-level computer area."

Students should be on the lookout this month for a suggestion box in which they can leave comments or concerns for the IT department to address.

WIRELESS INTERNET COVERAGE

Students interested to learn where their laptops or PDAs receive wireless internet coverage throughout the Graduate Center building can view the floor plans online at www.gcadvocate.org.

NEW HIRES

The IT department recently hired two new full-time employees to help round out its staff. One, Sheldon Grant, joined the User Services division as the Assistant Director. Grant will be managing the Help Desk to provide user support and client service.

Other aspects of his responsibilities include "training, coaching, organizing, planning, and staffing operations," Montilla said. The User Services division looks to implement some of his new ideas (the suggestion box at the Help Desk being one of many). "We're going to see a lot of changes at the Help Desk," she said, including evening out the Help Desk technician coverage.

The second new hire is Gary Kettner as Network Administrator for IT's Enterprise & Network Services. ■

Health Insurance: We Must Keep Pushing

CARL LINDSKOOG

Over the past month the campaign for graduate student health insurance has grown tremendously. Graduate students are signing up for the campaign in large numbers, calling and writing letters to their representatives in the State Assembly and Senate, and insisting that Chancellor Matthew Goldstein and President Bill Kelly hear our urgent appeal: CUNY graduate students need health insurance now!

The most exciting sign of graduate student mobilization was the rally that took place in front of the Graduate Center on March 18. Scheduled to coincide with Chancellor Goldstein's afternoon visit, the rally aimed to make sure the Chancellor understood just how serious our healthcare need really is. Thanks to the many graduate students who marched, chanted, and carried signs, and thanks especially to doctoral students Ellen Zitani and Sean Murray who gave powerful speeches at the event. Our message came through loud and clear! Indeed, according to faculty in attendance at the Chancellor's event inside the Graduate Center, Goldstein devoted

the first portion of his remarks to the rally taking place outside and acknowledged the urgent need to fix the healthcare crisis among CUNY graduate students.

Even before the March 18 rally we received welcome news that the CUNY administration was hearing us and was taking steps to address our healthcare needs. On March 13 Chancellor Goldstein and President Kelly released a letter to Assemblymember Deborah J. Glick and Senator Kenneth P. LaValle requesting support for a state-subsidized health insurance system for doctoral students employed by CUNY. This letter was an encouraging sign that CUNY graduate students and administrators are forming a united front for health insurance, particularly because this represented Chancellor Goldstein's strongest public statement of support yet for this issue.

Graduate students should recognize that the statement by Chancellor Goldstein and President Kelly is very important, and we should be encouraged that the whole CUNY community is starting to move in the same direction on the health insurance issue. Unfortunately, however, gradu-



ate students cannot retire from the campaign now that we have a degree of administration backing, significant though it is.

Crucial issues remain unresolved and questions remain unanswered. A major concern for graduate students is the limited scope of the Chancellor and President's appeal. If CUNY were to implement what Chancellor Goldstein and President Kelly are calling for, doctoral students who are working for CUNY would receive state-subsidized health insurance. But the master's and doctoral students that are not working at CUNY would remain in exactly the same healthcare crisis. Can we accept a system that would leave so many CUNY graduate students uninsured or underinsured?

In addition, while we should welcome the recent statement of support by Goldstein and Kelly, we need to keep pushing for a greater commitment, particularly from the Chancellor. Now that the Chancellor has pledged

his support, we need to know how and when we are going to actually have this system in place and where the money is going to come from. All graduate students should be contacting the Chancellor's office with these crucial questions. The Chancellor can and must do far more to make health insurance for CUNY graduate students a reality.

There is reason to be hopeful. The graduate student community is mobilized, the CUNY administration has strengthened their support, the campaign is growing in Albany, and those outside CUNY are hearing of our campaign. But until all CUNY graduate students actually receive the health insurance we so desperately need, we must struggle on. We are moving in the right direction, but to keep moving we must keep pushing. ■

To find out how you can help win graduate student health insurance contact Carl Lindskoog at clindskoog@gc.cuny.edu or come to the next Adjunct Project meeting. Carl Lindskoog is coordinator of the Adjunct Project of the Doctoral Students' Council.

UPCOMING MEETINGS

- Friday, April 4: 6:30 pm, GC 5409
- Friday, May 9: 5:30 pm, GC 5414

Health Care Rally

Continued from page 1

Insurance Program, or NYSHIP. This program, which is partly subsidized by SUNY, offers full medical and prescription coverage with low co-pays, as well as dental and vision benefits. All SUNY graduate students who work or teach for the university are eligible for this plan, including teaching assistants and fellows who, at CUNY, are currently ineligible for the union sponsored health insurance offered through the PSC Welfare Fund.

This inequity between SUNY and CUNY has outraged students such as Ellen Zitani and Sean Moore, who argue that CUNY graduate students should be receiving no less than the same health insurance that is provided to SUNY graduate students. "SUNY's graduate student workers have had access to subsidized health insurance since the early 1990s," said Sean Murray.

According to Ellen Zitani, the Graduate Student Administrator for the CUNY Graduate Center Office of Student Affairs, the total annual cost of NYSHIP insurance for eligible SUNY graduate students is \$114.96 while the total cost for family coverage is only \$996.72 per year. This cost, says Zitani, is significantly lower than the current options available to many CUNY graduate students and teaching fellows who qualify for the GHI plan offered by CUNY. The GHI plan, said Zitani, costs individuals \$2,396.76 annually, while family coverage is a shocking \$6,830.88 per year. "This disparity is outrageous," said Zitani, adding that the "options available to CUNY graduate students (many of whom are employees of the state of New York through the CUNY

system) are inadequate and generally unaffordable."

Responding, in part to this increasing pressure from students, the Graduate Center administration — including President Bill Kelly and the Office of Student Affairs — along with CUNY Chancellor Goldstein, have begun urging the New York state legislature to earmark funds for the creation of a CUNY Health Insurance program comparable to what is offered at SUNY. Although, according to President Kelly, the Chancellor's office had already requested funds for GC graduate student health insurance in its November budget request, any actual request for a SUNY-style plan did not come until March.

In a letter dated March 13, 2008, to the Chairs of the state Committee on Higher Education, Senator Kenneth LaValle and Assemblyperson Deborah Glick, Chancellor Goldstein and President Kelly requested funds for CUNY graduate student health insurance, and laid out the estimated cost of a SUNY style program at CUNY.

CUNY doctoral student participation in SEPH or a comparable plan would cost New York State approximately \$2.6 million (2,300 students at \$1,125 each, using the 2007 cost of SEPH at SUNY Stony Brook). Funding should come from an appropriate state source outside of CUNY's operating budget.

However, although Kelly is optimistic about these attempts to acquire health insurance in the long run, he has been less than optimistic about the actual chances that any of this will come to fruition shortly. In a recent letter to the GC community Kelly argued that timelines would be disingenuous, suggesting that any health insurance initiatives would be subject to availability of state funds. Said Kelly, "I am convinced that we are

moving in the right direction and that we will ultimately reach our goal, but the current fiscal circumstances of the state, and by extension those of the university, are such that time-lines are disingenuous."

Similarly, Assemblyperson Glick has publicly said she supports finding some kind of solution to the health insurance problem for CUNY students, but her office has been less than enthusiastic about the possibility of providing parity anytime soon. Speaking to *The GC Advocate*, Glick made it clear that there would likely be no movement on the issue during this year's budget debate, saying "It's obviously a very difficult year with deteriorating economic circumstances. Considering what we're facing with the new governor's recent declarations [about 3.35% cuts to SUNY and CUNY] we will be scrambling to maintain basic support."

Glick also said, "We certainly would like to see parity but it's a financial issue that may in part be associated with collective bargaining," suggesting that any graduate student health insurance gains may be put on hold until they can be negotiated by the Professional Staff Congress.

State Senator Liz Krueger's office was also pessimistic about the prospects of getting anything done this budget round. Travis Proulx of Senator Krueger's office said that "she does support equal health care access," but added that "as far as getting it into this year's budget no promises can be made, but people will try."

More enthusiastic about providing parity is Republican state Senator Serphin Maltese of Queens, who is calling on LaValle and Glick to provide money in the budget for CUNY health care now.

Vicky Vattimo, Maltese's chief of staff told *The GC Advocate* that "the senator totally supports providing health insurance parity to CUNY students and has asked that it be put in the 2009 budget." Vattimo added that "the senator has indicated that if it is cut he will try to get it done legislatively."

Although most of the recent discussions about GC student health insurance, both at CUNY and in Albany, have focused on providing parity with SUNY by providing care for working graduate students, some have argued that the proposed plan is still not adequate.

Because the university's proposed plan would cover only graduate students who work for the state, some are arguing that this system would only perpetuate and duplicate many of the inequities that already exist between those graduate students at the GC who are covered by the Welfare Fund and those who do not teach or who have fellowships and therefore are not eligible for the PSC sponsored health insurance program. Carl Lindskoog, who leads the DSC's Adjunct Project, said that he was delighted about the Chancellor's and the President's calls for a health insurance system for doctoral students at CUNY, but added that,

"We are concerned that Chancellor Goldstein and President Kelly are only calling for health insurance for doctoral students and only those that are employed by CUNY. What about master's and doctoral students that are not working at CUNY? We need a health insurance system for all CUNY graduate students, not just doctoral students who are employed as graduate or teaching assistants." ■

Superdelegates

Continued from page 1

dal, was another official who lost his superdelegate status¹.

Superdelegates generally fall into one of the following six categories of party and government officials: 1) elected members of the DNC (about 450 members); 2) governors (50 members); 3) US Senators and Representatives (this includes non-voting delegates from the US Virgin Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia); 4) distinguished party leaders (such as current and former Presidents and Vice Presidents); 5) former leaders of the Senate and House; and 6) former DNC chairmen and unpledged delegates chosen by the DNC.

Superdelegates date back only to the 1984 presidential election. They were instituted following the recommendation of the Hunt Commission, so named after Jim Hunt, a former governor of North Carolina, in response to a couple of nominating controversies. The first was that of George McGovern who, despite winning only one state and less than 40% of the popular vote, still managed to secure the Democratic nomination for president. McGovern then promptly lost the 1972 general election to Richard Nixon. This was followed up in 1976 with the nomination of Jimmy Carter

over some more well-known politicians (such as Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy). As a result, the superdelegates were introduced so as to give the party leadership and political cognoscenti, more of a say in the nominating process.

Since superdelegates have recently come under attack as unrepresentative and potentially a threat to the popular will, why is the Democratic Party using them? Tad Devine, a political consultant for the Gore 2000 presidential campaign, who helped introduce the super-delegate system, said in a recent interview to Jacob Soboroff of WhyTuesday.org, that they exist to provide: a) an independent source of judgment; b) a backstop — in case an unforeseen scandal emerges during a political campaign; or c) closure in

a closely contested campaign. Most superdelegates tend to decide after most of the voting has occurred (typically only 20% decide early in an election cycle). According to Devine, the system is not intended to be entirely democratic and having superdelegates does not undermine democracy (they're only 20% of the nominating process). From his perspective it is all part of the checks and balances in the representative, participatory political system.

The candidates' views on the subject are also pertinent with Senator Barack Obama diverging more from Devine's view than Senator Hillary Clinton. According to ABC News Senator Obama said:

"My strong belief is that if we end up with the most states and the

most pledged delegates from the most voters in the country, that it would be problematic for the political insiders to overturn the judgment of the voters."

In Clinton's view:

"Superdelegates are by design supposed to exercise independent judgment, that is the way the system works," she told reporters after a town hall in Orono, Maine. "If Senator Obama and his campaign continue to push this position which is really contrary to what the definition of a superdelegate has historically been then I look forward to receiving the support of Senator Kennedy and Senator Kerry."

How this problem will be resolved remains in doubt. Each candidate has offered some compelling arguments for the superdelegates to consider. Senator Clinton points to her wins in all of the big primary states (California, New York, Texas, Ohio, and the contested states of Florida and Michigan, with Illinois being the only exception) with the most electoral votes. Obama counters that he has won both more states than Clinton (27 to 14) and more pledged delegates (1,414 to 1,243 according to CNN). Obama's supporters also dispute the notion that because he didn't carry those states in the Democratic primary that it weakens his ability to win them in the general election as many of these states have solid records of voting for the Democratic nominee. Conversely, Obama casts great doubt

over whether Clinton could win in most of the states he carried.

Some recent polls projecting the winner in hypothetical general election match-ups between Obama and Senator John McCain and Clinton and McCain in certain key states, may have cast some doubt on this argument. Realclearpolitics.com has been running an average of recent general election polls taken by such firms as Rasmussen, Gallup, NBC/WSJ, Pew Research, FOX News, and CBS News among others. In the projected general election match-ups Clinton-McCain and Obama-McCain have broken the following way in recent weeks (see Table 1).

Like all polling, general election polls have to be viewed with some caution. They are at best a snapshot of sentiment at a particular point in time and trends are liable to shift direction particularly by the time the general election rolls around. Presently though the Obama-McCain match-up tends to have smaller advantages and larger disadvantages for Democratic voters, relative to the Clinton-McCain match-up. Iowa is the only exception out of the above states.



Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama

WHAT ABOUT THOSE CAUCUSES?

Caucuses are said to be a process by which voters can actually deliberate and vote on policy issues affecting the wider community, and therefore some argue they are much more participatory than ordinary primaries. But Pennsylvania governor Ed Rendell told Tim Russert on *Meet the Press* that caucuses were undemocratic because they don't have an equivalent to the absentee ballot and were inconvenient to workers on shifts.

What Rendell calls the "undemocratic" nature of caucuses was recognized in 1988 when the Washington state legislature reached an agreement that the use of caucuses was a problem issue and voted to run a non-binding primary. According to the Washington Secretary of State, 200,000 voters signed an Initiative to the Legislature in 1988 proposing a presidential primary. The legislature adopted this initiative in 1989 and the revised code of law (Chapter 29A.56) includes the following language:

The...presidential nominating caucus system in Washington State is unnecessarily restrictive of voter participation in that it discriminates against the elderly, the infirm, women, the disabled, evening workers, and others who are unable to attend caucuses and therefore unable to fully participate in this most important quadrennial event that occurs in our democratic system of government.

Table 2. Voter turnout by caucuses, primaries and state ideology²

Caucus	Turnout %	Ideology	Primary	Turnout %	Ideology
Iowa	16.30	Swing	New Hampshire	52.5	Swing
Nevada	9.50	Swing	Ohio	40.5	Swing
Minnesota	7.20	Swing	California	40.0	Blue
North Dakota	5.90	Red	Vermont	39.2	Blue
Colorado	5.50	Swing	Massachusetts	38.7	Blue
Alaska	5.00	Red	Wisconsin	36.5	Swing
Maine	4.80	Swing	Florida	33.8	Swing
Wyoming	2.50	Red	Illinois	33.2	Blue
Idaho	2.10	Red	Georgia	32.7	Red
Kansas	1.90	Red	Missouri	32.6	Swing
Nebraska	1.00	Red	Alabama	31.7	Red
Hawaii	No data	Swing	South Carolina	30.4	Red
Texas	No data	Red	New Jersey	30.2	Blue
Washington	No data	Swing	Oklahoma	28.7	Red

According to the Washington State legislature caucus goers are primarily a self-selected group who comprise the most dedicated partisan activists and not fully representative of the will of the people.

Not everyone agrees that caucuses are a problem, however. The Obama campaign dismissed Rendell's arguments and points to the Iowa caucus, held since the 1800s and chosen over the primary system because it provided a grass roots democracy-in-action method of participation.

So just what is a caucus anyway? A caucus is the name given to the small, separate meetings in which voters can select their preferred presidential candidate. These meetings are run by each political party and can be held in a diverse number of venues such as public schools, firehouses, and even an individual's home. Attendees to a caucus indicate their candidate preference by a show of hands, a sign-in sheet (infamous from recent events in the Texas caucus) or by splitting up into groups representing each candidate. It is notable that unlike primary elections, the secret ballot is not used and the fact that a voter's preference is public knowledge can influence candidate selection.

Even so, caucuses are just an initial step in the nominating process. The plethora of district caucuses select delegates to the county conventions (for instance, the Texas state convention will be held on March 29), where in turn state convention delegates are

chosen. It is theoretically possible that delegates can switch their votes during the process although this is probably quite rare in practice.

In addition to the omission of secret ballot, caucuses are often criticized by their low attendance. As seen in the Table 2, rates are significantly lower in caucuses than in primaries. Fourteen states held caucuses in 2008 (Texas holds both a primary and a caucus — two-thirds of the delegates are selected in the primary and another third in the caucus; Washington State held a caucus on Feb. 9 and a non-binding primary derided as a beauty contest by some observers, on Feb. 19.), but the highest turnout rate was in Iowa at 16.3%. Contrast that with the highest turnout primary state, New Hampshire at 52.5%, and you can see the difference in participation, and thus representativeness.

The before mentioned table illustrates contrasting turnout rates between primaries and caucuses, along with state ideology information (i.e., whether blue, red or swing state). The primaries listed are the top fourteen by voter turnout. But the overall averages for primaries (29%) and caucuses (6%) are also pretty stark contrasts.

SHOULD MICHIGAN AND FLORIDA DELEGATES BE SEATED AT THE CONVENTION?

A little background is in order: Florida's primary was moved up by its state legislature, ostensibly because

bigger and more urban states wanted to have more say in setting the table for the eventual nominee as smaller states, like Iowa and New Hampshire. It was held on January 29 in violation of DNC rules and 185 pledged delegates have been affected. Similarly Michigan, with 128 pledged delegates at stake, moved its primary up to Jan. 15. Both states were warned as early as last summer that if their primaries were moved up without approval then the DNC would not seat their delegates at the national convention held in August 2008 in Denver. In order to counteract this move the DNC did approve earlier elections for the Iowa Caucus (held Jan. 3) and the New Hampshire primary (held Jan. 8). But it wouldn't budge on disapproving of the earlier primaries for Michigan and Florida. Both state parties went ahead with their elections anyway and the DNC has followed through on its threat to not seat the delegates (at least so far). This is happening, despite the very clear memory of the 2000 election debacle in Florida, late of the hanging chads, where Al Gore's candidacy for president went down to defeat.

The recommendations on rectifying this mess have centered around two main options: 1) seat the delegates according to the results of the primaries; or 2) do a re-vote. The first option has gotten bogged down in disagreements between the two campaigns. The Clinton campaign would seat the delegates as is, but she has also been a strong advocate of the revote option. The Obama campaign would seat the delegates but only if they were split evenly between the two candidates. The latter option, however, is not too enticing to a candidate that carried both states.

A revote has encountered a number of problems from both candidates, the state Democratic Party, state representatives and Florida's delegation to Congress. Initially the cost of a revote was thought to be prohibitive until a number of private donors came forward to help pay for a do-over vote. In order to reduce expenses the revote was variously to take the form of a mail-in revote or a firehouse primary. The mail-in revote encountered immense opposition from both the state delegation and the Obama campaign with issues of potential fraud being a major concern. Also, Florida has never undertaken a mail-in vote previously and logistical concerns were also raised.

As of this writing a revote is clearly not going to happen. Clinton supporter and Florida congressional representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz was quoted as saying:

It was clear that a mail-in was not going to work. It was too risky. You don't want to start experimenting with a new voting method when the stakes are as high as a presidential election ...there were a variety of major problems with it.

The only real options left now is to seat the delegates based on the January primary or omit them completely as per DNC rules.

Meanwhile, despite the best efforts of the Clinton campaign and her congressional supporters, the Michigan legislature adjourned for a two week holiday without voting on whether there should be any revote in Michigan. Since there is a tight deadline to make a June 3 revote happen, not passing any legislation in the week-ending March 22 essentially kills the revote there too. Like Florida, Michigan was also considering a mail-in revote. The Michigan co-chair of the Obama campaign and state senator Tupac Hunter was quoted as saying, "an overwhelming number of members had concerns and unreadiness to go this route ... and when I say overwhelming, I mean overwhelming."³ Of a mail-in primary he told the *Detroit News* that it "is clearly the wrong path." He added:

"We don't like it one bit ... it disenfranchises people who need to participate and there are many questions with regard to security."

Hunter said the Obama campaign will accept nothing but a 50-50 split of Michigan delegates between Clinton and Obama, who removed his name from the January ballot here in protest of the early date.⁴

It is noteworthy that the Obama campaign backed a revote if it was done over as a caucus rather than a primary. Since we have already seen the problems with caucuses (and it should be pointed out: Clinton's abysmal performance in them), this is another area where a lack of consensus has led to a muddying of the process.

The next step in deciding the future of the Florida state delegation now rests with the DNC's Rules and Bylaws Committee, which plans to meet in April where it will consider two challenges by a member of the Florida DNC. The first challenge concerns seating the superdelegates and the second challenge seeks to seat half of the pledged delegates from the disputed election.⁵ If that doesn't yield a resolution then the fate of both states' delegates rests with the DNC credentials committee in July. If resolutions do emerge from either one of these committees they will be adopted at the national convention in Denver. An unsatisfactory resolution has the potential to do serious damage to the Democratic Party in the general election because recent polls suggest a large number of voters, in Florida at least, will either sit this election out or vote for Senator John McCain in protest if their votes are not counted.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A good source for all things super-delegate related is <http://demconwatch.blogspot.com>. Other good sources are: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/primaries/results/scorecard/#D> and <http://uspolitics.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?zi=1/XJ&sdn=uspolitics&cdn=newsissues&tm=251&f=00&tt=3&bt=1&bt=1&zu=http%3A/www.thegreenpapers.com/P03/D-Alloc.phtml%23Alph>.
- 2 State ideology data is taken from electoralvote.com; turnout data is from: http://elections.gmu.edu/Voter_Turnout_2008_Primary.htm.
- 3 http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0308/Michian_redo_on_the_ropes.html
- 4 <http://www.detroitnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080312/POLITICS01/803120367>
- 5 http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/03/20/dnc_wont_give_in_on_flamich_official_warns/?page=2

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The Revolution in Venezuela



Venezuelan
president
Hugo Chávez

MICHAEL BUSCH

Splashed along the walls of Caracas' *Parque Central* metro stop, billboards advertise all manner of consumer goods: beauty creams, thirst-quenching Polar Beer, the latest movies. As I stand waiting for the next train headed downtown, a row of three ads catches my attention. Bookending this triplet are posters celebrating Hollywood's blockbuster hit *Transformers*. Each ad features a huge, robotic head: a good Autobot on the left, an evil Decepticon to the right. In the middle, a third head

that of Hugo Chávez— smiles out onto the crowded platform, promoting his Bolivarian Revolution to the people of Venezuela. Chávez's political project has been a polarizing flashpoint of controversy, leaving an indelible mark on Venezuelan politics. Some rejoice at Chávez's stated commitment to the poor. Others see his vision for the future as singularly dangerous. Yet whether they feel that Chávez embodies the good of Autobotic valor, or more the fiendishness of Decepticonic destruction, citizens agree that their president is a transformer.

But is he a revolutionary? Answers are difficult to come by in an age where regime change has replaced revolution in the lexicon of political transitions. Don't look for help from the mainstream press. Their coverage of Venezuela under Chávez tends to focus on mismanaged oil reserves, and "Hurricane Hugo's" eccentric antics on the international stage. Policy journals haven't fared much better. Elite publications cleave to the contours of Jorge Castaneda's inventory of the Latin American left, painting Chávez as a cancer threatening the region's liberal progress. Yet Castaneda's simplistic "Right Left, Wrong Left" dichotomy

seems more properly suited to the pen of Samuel Huntington than to serious political analysis. Even in the academy, where one might expect the emergence of research agendas specifically tailored to Chávez-brand populism, scholars have remained largely silent. To be sure, a handful of area experts labor on the topic, but they are hopelessly alone in the galaxy of Latin American studies.

Perhaps it stands to reason. After all, the vogue of revolutions in the classical sense has passed. What initially promised to be a new brand of political upheaval on display in Nicaragua and Iran in 1979 seems in retrospect little more than the last gasps of a dying fad. If anything, civil war and state breakup replaced revolution as the *piece de resistance* of social unrest. This trend gained steam with the demise of the Soviet Union, producing one installment of mass bloodshed after another. In Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Zaire, state collapse was all the rage. Accordingly, analysts shifted their attention away from revolution, to topics associated with "new wars" being fought in the international arena. But while all eyes were on the stomach-turning carnage decimating large swathes of Africa, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe, a different malignancy was consuming countries in Latin America.

The rapid acceleration of global interconnectedness following the Cold War produced startling structural change in the world economy. Neoliberalism became the order of the day, filling myriad vacuums left by Soviet withdrawal. Despite claims that this new economic order would allow the Global South to compete on equal footing with their Northern counterparts, real-

ity has failed to meet these utopian expectations. If anything, inequality in Latin America has grown substantially worse. At the start of the 21st century, much of Latin America is a mess, having been raked over the coals of corporate exploitation and financial crisis. While the wealthiest 10% of the population earn nearly half the total income in Latin America, the poorest 10th earn less than 2%, rendering the region the most inequitable in the world.

Meanwhile, neoliberalism has asserted hegemonic dominance over the region. Those who have resisted its authority have been made to heel by the strong arms of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, not to mention the threatening specter of physical coercion by the United States. A quick roll call of regional leaders who once dared confront the Washington Consensus, only to suffer the consequences, includes Peru's prodigal president Alan Garcia, and none other than Hugo Chávez himself, who in 2002 was briefly ousted from power by a coup largely believed to be the handiwork of a tripartite team of affluent Venezuelans, a small group of disgruntled soldiers, and the guiding hand of American assistance. Chávez dramatically returned to power days later, but the fact remains: economic decision-making in Latin America issues not from sovereign self-determination, but from the rulebook of neoliberal economics.

Except in Venezuela, where Chávez claims the mantle of vanguard leadership in revolution's revival against the Washington-sponsored neoliberal order. Since recovering from the attempted coup, Chávez has ramped up his revolutionary rhetoric, and grown increasingly aggressive in his practical politics.

Yet, while he fires the imaginations of supporters at home and sparks hope in the international Left, significant questions linger concerning the nature of Chávez's "revolutionary" politics. If anything, the Bolivarian Revolution resembles a patchwork of contradictory policies without a clear ideological vision providing a roadmap for progress. At some points, the revolution seems dedicated to democracy, while at others, Chávez is distinctly autocratic. In certain instances, government ministers profess their dedication to socialist ideals, yet Chávez's constitutional Fifth Republic is unambiguously anchored in the right to private property. While Chávez offers himself as the defender of the poor, the Venezuelan rich have never been richer, and the disparity in income between rich and poor has grown worse. What's going on here?

In order to begin getting a grip on the character of the Bolivarian Revolution, it serves well to briefly catalogue the rich tradition of populist rule in Latin America. Steve Ellner, an American political scientist living in Venezuela, correctly points out that Latin American populist movements traditionally exhibit one of two tendencies. On the one hand, periods of acute social crisis open opportunities for hardline revolutionary leaders to pursue radical change in sociopolitical structures. Thus, as Ellner says "the concept of *revolutionary opportunity* has led some members of populist movements to favor a course wherein diverse strategic changes set the stage for a socialist or anti-imperialist revolution" [emphasis in original]. On the other hand, some populist movements favor policies intended to institute meaningful change without drawing the state into full-blown revolution. These policies, which Ellner

deposits into the category of "non-revolutionary transformations," include "the creation of mass-based parties and democratic institutions and a political style often labeled the 'politics of the masses.'"

This register of populist politics helps shed light on recent developments in Venezuela during the rule of Hugo Chávez. Indeed, the Bolivarian Revolution is very much the product of schizophrenic oscillation between the two poles of populist-sponsored social change. While Chávez serves as the charismatic focal point for both criticism and praise, the Bolivarian project progresses according to tensions between the president's coterie of advisors who bitterly disagree on the direction of Venezuela's revolution. Hard line *chavistas* argue that the government should aggressively foster parallel institutions that decisively break from the sociopolitical order of the past. Softline elements push to consolidate political gains won since 1999 through the establishment of mass-based single-party politics, a program of constitutional amendments, and gradual institutional reform. In the middle sits Chávez, who seemingly leads through a process of a la carte decision-making, choosing between options proposed by each camp as he sees fit.

Of the collection of issues, policies, and tools that combine to animate the Bolivarian project, no two are more important and inextricably linked than poverty and oil. These enduring features of the Venezuelan state, combined with the split personality of Chávez's

populist politics, produces the most startling misperception of the Bolivarian Revolution. On the one hand, state-sponsored anti-poverty measures are seen by many to be the gentle face of the Venezuelan revolution, while on the other hand, Chávez's efforts to nationalize the country's petroleum industry are seen to be the radical edge of Bolivarian politics. Upon closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that this assessment is exactly backwards. State-sponsored Bolivarian Missions are the product of hard-line revolutionary thinking, while Chávez's petro politics represent a moderate agenda of limited change. The tension between these two critical pieces of the Bolivarian project will determine the future success of not just Hugo Chávez and his political legacy, but indeed the country as a whole.

* * *

Chávez swept into power in 1999 on a platform built around three principle objectives. First, Chávez promised to do away with politics-as-usual under the decrepit *Punto Fijo* Pact system. Second, Chávez pledged to end corruption, which by the turn of the century had a stranglehold on Venezuelan politics and any prospects for social development. Finally, he promised the elec-

torate that he would lead the charge in the fight against poverty. Chávez effectively bundled these three aims together with the string of anti-neoliberal rhetoric during his run for the presidency. But since taking office, Chávez has staked his political career on fighting poverty. While the constitutional reforms undertaken in late 1999 largely disposed with the political power arrangements of the old regime, and corruption remains a menace to political progress,

anti-poverty programs have come to form the heart of the Bolivarian Revolution.

After assuming elected office in 1999, Chávez developed a style of populist leadership that reflected moderate, soft-line influence. This "non-revolution-

ary transformation" approach displayed itself most noticeably in Chávez's initial stab at alleviating poverty. In early 1999, the government announced the launch of an anti-poverty project that would tie together military and civic leaders in bonds of cooperation. Plan Bolívar 2000 outlined an ambitious mandate requiring various military outfits to utilize their peaceful capabilities for the public good. Chávez ordered the military to attack a broad menu of tasks: the army rebuilt crumbling roads, deteriorating schools, and dilapidated hospitals; the National Guard took up

old-fashioned policing in underserved urban environments, and helped residents repair and rebuild their houses; the Air Force began offering emergency transport services to poor Venezuelans that otherwise could not afford to travel; and the Navy helped restore fleets of boats belonging to local fisherman to revitalize their trade.

Yet by the end of 2001, Plan Bolívar was clearly pathological. On the political front, it differed little from previous ploys by populist leaders to win favor with the majority poor. While its focus on military engagement with short-term social welfare projects pleased soft-line *chavistas*, Plan Bolívar began to resemble for many Venezuelans a rerun of previously failed government initiatives. Meanwhile, the scheme was an administrative nightmare. Despite its grand ambitions, Plan Bolívar lacked centralized protocol. Individual initiatives were pursued on a case-by-case basis, often at the whim of Chávez or his associates. As a result, mismanagement was widespread and opportunities abounded for corruption and graft. Moreover, Plan Bolívar affected the morale of military personnel, disgruntled at having to perform duties outside their job description. Alternatively, many civilians were alarmed at what was perceived as the increased militarization of the country under a demagogic strongman. In sum, Plan Bolívar's negative balance sheet grew too cumbersome by the start of 2002, and the project was abandoned.

The 2002 coup, however, marked the end of Bolivarian moderation in the

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fight against poverty. When Chávez returned to power, he brought with him a radical agenda of anti-poverty initiatives, and windfall oil profits to sponsor them. At the heart of these initiatives were the "Bolivarian Missions," a series of state-subsidized associations tasked with alleviating inequities in education, health, and housing suffered by the poor. As the missions have taken root in poor communities throughout the country, however, it has become increasingly clear that they represent alternative structures of state power, designed to supplant government institutions. If anything can be isolated as a hallmark of all revolutions, the replacement of old institutions with new is certainly it.

When I arrive in Caracas, I'm told straightaway that witnessing real mission work will be difficult. Because most mission activity takes place in slum communities hostile to outsiders, interested parties have two options. A friendly, older man I meet on my first day in town outlines the first. "You can go with a group of American and European volunteers, which is the easiest way. But the problem is that you won't have a true experience. It will be tourism. You'll see the nice face of mission work, but it will be a show. In and out, everyone feels good." The second option is more daunting. "Go down to the main plaza every morning. There are many movement people there. Some have connections to the missions. If you find them, talk with them and convince them you can be trusted. Go everyday. With time, you might be invited to attend mission meetings, which is the first step to becoming involved. If you are fortunate, it should take about a month." Unfortunately, I don't have a month to spend sitting around the park in hopes of developing contacts. But I decide daily trips to the Plaza Bolívar might yield insights into the missions nonetheless.

Caracas' Plaza de Bolívar may be one of the most democratically designed public spaces in Latin America. In sharp contrast to the main plaza of the same name in Bogotá, with its dreary architecture, massive center, and lack of seating, the Venezuelan square is small, leafy, and comfortable. Park benches are everywhere, and children scamper through the park's gardens in hot pursuit of pigeons that seem to be everywhere. And sure enough, politics dominates the scene. Lining one side of the square, old men sit by piles of socialist-inspired pamphlets and newspapers, smoking cigarettes and distributing literature to those who show interest. Buzzing around these hubs, young men and women scour the plaza for targets of propaganda and commerce. As I circle through, a young woman comes up to me with pamphlets on Marxism in one hand, and a bag of t-shirts sporting the dual visages of Chávez and Che in the other.

Directly across the park, in earshot of the pro-Chávez assembly, sit another group of strongly-opinionated loiterers. Here, talk centers on the ills of Bolivarian politics. "Chávez is shit!" shouts a legless old man, nearly falling off his seat from drink. "He has

ruined Venezuela, ruined it!" One of his companions picks up the thread as I walk by, clearly offering his comments for my benefit. "Venezuela was the greatest country in South America, but now?" "Shit!" screams the legless drunk.

I'm approached by one young man speaking in English. "Excuse me, mister, would you like to know about the revolution? The revolution is here, now!" Dressed all in black, with Converse sneakers, Buddy Holly glasses, and long hair loosely tied at the back, the young man introduces himself as Luis, and then feeds me the official line on recent Venezuelan history. "Before, the politicians controlled everything, and they were very corrupt. While they became rich from the oil, the rest of us were very poor. But then President Chávez won the elections and changed the country. Now we have better lives, and we will build socialism, here in Venezuela. Now the government helps the people. President Chávez helps the people."

"Are all the politicians doing good work for the people?" I ask.

A pause, then a chuckle. "No. There is still corruption, still lots of corruption!" he says as he spreads his arms wide. "But it is not Chávez's fault. The people that work in the ministries, they are corrupt, but they will be gone soon. So will the corrupt police. As the revolution grows stronger, the people who stand in the way will be defeated."

What about the missions? Again, I'm treated to the standard rhetoric.

"The missions are the revolution! They help the poor in our country, by teaching them to read and giving them free medicine. There are millions of poor people involved. The *ranchos* (slum communities) are not ignored anymore." When I ask if Luis himself is involved in mission activities, he blushes and shakes his head. "No. I am a student in university. I am studying literature."

Over the course of a week in the plaza, I make contact with Marie, a French mission volunteer who has lived on and off in Venezuela for the past four years. She invites me to have dinner one evening, where we discuss the sorry state of American politics, and playfully debate which is superior: New York or Paris. All the while, Marie chain smokes Belmont filters, lighting each cigarette with the one before, and builds a mountain of mangled butts on top of her ashtray. When talk turns to Venezuela, Marie becomes animated.

"You should have seen Caracas when I first arrived! People were excited by the idea of revolution, and planning meetings for *misión* work were simply unbelievable. The *misiones* were brand new then, and there was such hope. The *ranchos* were filled with activity, it seemed everyone was involved. Old people, young people, parents, little kids, they all came out. We were excited about the revolution. We believed in the revolution." She pauses. "It seems to me that people felt empowered, then,

to change their lives."

And today?

"The movement is slowing considerably" Marie laments. "At meetings, the people say 'Yes, yes, revolution. But I work all day long, every day, always without a break. Revolution, yes, but I am tired.' It used to be that meetings were focused, plans were eagerly discussed, and progress was easy to see. There was a sense of partnership. Now it is different, more political. Now we have meetings to discuss when we'll have more meetings." Marie laughs, and looks pointedly at me over her glasses. "This place is turning into Cuba," she says. Then she takes a drag from her cigarette, and with raised eyebrows, shrugs her shoulders in res-



ignation.

Despite Marie's concerns that the mission movement may be flagging in the face of entrenched poverty, its gains have been remarkable. The mission used to serve as favorite whipping boy for the anti-Chávez movement. Some critics of Bolivarian politics openly mocked these programs, attacking Chávez for wasting precious oil returns on social welfare programs dependent on grassroots participation. Others simply dismissed them as the temporary tool of populist governance. Yet in the nearly five years of their existence, missions have produced palpable results, and critics no longer target them.

The numbers speak for themselves. Within one year of operation, *Misión Robinson* enrolled nearly 1.5 million Venezuelans, and helped reduce the country's illiteracy rate to less than 4% of the population. The program's success prompted monitors from the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to celebrate Venezuela as a leader in the march to meet Millennium Development Goals for literacy. A related *misión*, *Ribas*, has sought to consolidate these achievements by providing basic education in all content areas to its enrollees. Targeted primarily to young men and women who have recently dropped out of school, the program claims a membership roster of roughly 1 million young people. *Ribas* provides services through night school classes in 30,000 separate locations across the country. And to sweeten the deal, it pays students a stipend for attendance.

But the *misiones* don't end with education. Providing health assistance to the poor has been another focus. Spearheading this endeavor, *Misión Barrio Adentro* pursues its mandate to

serve the needy through construction of brand-new health clinics, staffed by a formidable team of volunteer doctors from Cuba. In exchange for cut-rate oil, Cuba has sent an army of over 15,000 doctors to Venezuela since 2003, as well as free medicine and equipment to facilitate their work. From routine dental visits, to major surgery, estimates suggest that tens of millions of impoverished Venezuelans have received their basic right to free health care.

A slew of other missions have undertaken similarly Herculean tasks. *Misión Identidad* looks to provide every Venezuelan resident with an identity card, and ensure that all eligible citizens are registered to vote.

Since its launch in 2004, *Identidad* has issued 18 million new cards to residents (which entitle them to the entire menu of government social services), registered 5.5 million new voters, and naturalized three quarters of a million immigrants and marginalized indigenous peoples. The political impact has been huge. Voter participation in elections and referendums has jumped from roughly 55% of registered citizens in 2000 to over 75% in 2007.

In addition to producing positive indicators of social progress, however, the missions serve a tactical purpose as well. *Chavistas* point out that the collective associations of medical doctors, farmers, grocers, and educators provide a layer of insulation for the revolutionary government against the potentially paralyzing disturbances of opposition groups. Says Ellner in his review of the missions, "the government-subsidized agricultural cooperatives and 'MERCAL' food outlets compete with large producers and commercial supermarkets, which withheld their products...during the 10-week general strike [in 2002]." By relying on the loyal workers and recipients of mission work, the state cannot be held hostage by private sector actors looking to cause the government trouble.

Regardless, in the immediate term Bolivarian Missions represent a victory for hardline factions within the government. According to their logic, missions allow Chávez to circumvent the ineffective, corrupt institutions of previous regimes. While moderate *chavistas* argue that mission work should be of short duration, and complementary to existing state structures serving the public welfare, revolutionary members of the movement argue that these parallel structures will come to fully dislodge the old order. Were this to come to pass, Chávez could reasonably lay claim to completion of a peaceful revolutionary process.

This excerpt is part one of a two part feature on Chávez's Venezuela. To read the rest of the article see the GC Advocate's May issue, due out on May 7, 2008. ■

The Lives of the Composers

MATT LAU

The opening sequence of Michael Haneke's 1997 and 2008 film, *Funny Games*, features a happy couple and their prepubescent son passing the time on a road trip by playing "guess the composer." The game is simple. Insert a CD, give the contestant no more than a few seconds of music, and then ask, "Well?" The music is opera from the genre's Golden Age, and the husband and wife are so good they even hazard naming the exact arias and the performers. Then, out of nowhere, the movie's titles appear in massive, red Helvetica script across the entire screen and the avant-rock chaos of John Zorn's band, *Naked City*, begins to play as the soundtrack. Haneke is, of course, counting on the effect of contrariety in juxtaposing Caruso singing over a Strauss-led orchestra and Mike Patton screaming over a noisy Alphabet City nightspot. Yet, the stranger fact is that there is no contradiction here. Western classical music, or art music, or whatever you're supposed to call it now, includes both these works — tonal opera AND hardcore avant-rock. There IS a genealogy between the former and the latter. But who could possibly explain how we got from one to the other, along with everything that went on in between? This is the heroic, if not impossible, task that Alex Ross has set for himself in his magisterial history of twentieth-century classical music, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*. He really does it too, although you have to wait a lot longer than in Haneke's torture flick to finally get to Maestro Zorn (page 521 to be exact).

I flatter myself to think that Mr. Ross might appreciate my opening apologue. His is a book that abounds with rhetorical devices — such as daring, yet insightful comparisons, or, as they are more commonly known, metaphors. In Berg, harmonies "smear" the canvas of audiences' sensibilities; in Messiaen, "the hunger for the missing chord becomes almost unbearable." Prokofiev's melodies dance in ironical protest against the restrictions of the bourgeois imagination; Strauss' slither into it with the civilized discontent Freud talked about. When music has neither of those things (melody or harmony), as in Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke*, "sounds ricochet from the top to the bottom of the piano, as if the instrument were a pinball machine." Much later, John Adams' music "sounds like [Northern California's] Highway 1. It is a cut-up paradise, a stream of familiar sounds arranged in unfamiliar ways." When Alfred Schnittke's First Symphony violates the taboo on Romanticism, "the opening theme of Tchaikovsky's 'First Piano Concerto' fights like a wounded animal against a fusillade of sound."

Ironically, but happily, Ross saves some of his best metaphors for music he isn't even supposed to be discussing. Charlie Parker's music couldn't be danced to, "you had to sit back and listen as [he] scribbled lightning in the air," and "at the height of bop, electric strings of notes lashed around like downed power lines on wet pavement." Hip-hop is mentioned even less than jazz, but here too Ross doesn't disappoint. "Lacking instruments of their own, rappers from America's ruined inner cities built up tracks by playing fragments on turntables, placing themselves in a circuitous line of descent that goes back, by way

book REVIEW

♦ *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* by Alex Ross. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007, 640 pp.

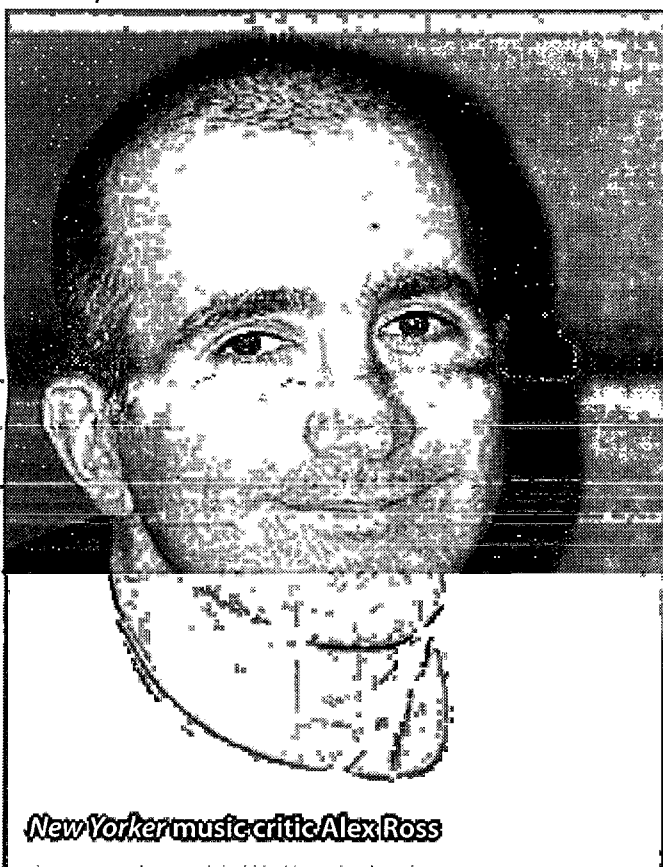
of Cage's *Imaginary Landscape No. 1*, to Wolpe and Hindemith's [simultaneous-phonograph] 'concerts in pre-Nazi Germany.' After a genealogy of such imagination that even Nietzsche would approve, Ross becomes comically concise: "Public Enemy's 'Welcome to the Terrordome' is the *Rite of Spring* of black America." Hip-hop is Dada; Stravinsky, as Henry Louis Gates might say, is black.

But a knack for molding the spirit of the letter is a prerequisite for writing about a century as surreal as the last. Literal descriptions of its events seem, in no small way, to require figurative language. The early performance history of Shostakovich's "Seventh Symphony" is a case in point. It's first performance took place in the middle of the Nazi assault on Leningrad (which is the symphony's eponym); in preparing the work for its premiere several musicians died of starvation, others scurried between their

frontline duties and rehearsals. The Nazis wanted to prevent the premiere, but the Soviets preempted them with an assault of their own, effectively giving the concert cover. When it was over and had been broadcast worldwide, Shostakovich, Anna Akhmatova, and the former's manuscript for his kirsch masterpiece were all airlifted to safety. At which point this reader began to feel that novelists

like Thomas Pynchon lack imagination. Indeed, if a German general didn't name an operation after a Wagner character during the Great War, he risked demotion. And who can argue with such an unwritten rule? Operation Iraqi Freedom just doesn't have the same ring to it as Operation Klingsor.

But a writer of Ross' caliber doesn't stop at metaphor; you have to have a "complete game" to write a book like this. Maybe the most artful figure he employs is anacoluthon, which simply means an abrupt shift in the logic of a sentence or series of sentences — frequently towards its end, like a punchline. The following one is nearly as delightful as the music it describes: "The texture then subsides toward a summery, humid kind of stillness. A new ostinato gets under way, one of alternating half-diminished sevenths, recalling [Berg's] *Wozzeck* again — Marie's song of 'Eia popeia' to her child. Gershwin even uses his chords for the same scenic purpose, to accompany a mother's soothing lullaby. If the kid from the Lower East Side seems in danger of losing himself in European arcana, there is no reason to worry. We are listening to one of the best-loved melodies of the twentieth century: 'Summertime and the living is easy...'"



New Yorker music critic Alex Ross

The extremes of patience and craft which Ross demonstrates in extended figures like this only make his straightforward approach to figures he has little sympathy for that much more conspicuous, however. I'm thinking particularly of two of my heroes who come in for harsh treatment in this book: Lenin and Brecht. There's no anacoluthon for Lenin, just a platitudinous appositive: "Lenin, the prototype of the twentieth-century dictator." This friendly description is reinforced by Lenin's famous lines about how he didn't want to listen to Beethoven: "It affects your nerves, makes you want to say stupid nice things, and stroke the heads of people who could create such beauty while living in this vile hell." But why, might I ask, does this stand as a proof that Lenin was the prototypical dictator? Even if we understand prototype as a kind of inferior early model, isn't Lenin still a bad choice in musicological terms?

If every twentieth century dictator, from Adolf Hitler's obsession with Wagner to Saddam Hussein's fascination with Whitney Houston, hypocritically listened to music after carrying out their terrifying plans, couldn't Ross at least acknowledge that Lenin was refreshingly consistent in his stance against Beethoven? And rather than repeatedly comparing Schoenberg's arguments in *Harmonielehre* to the Nazis, it would surely have been more original and less predictable to see them as a kind of musical Bolshevism. Schoenberg didn't want to listen to Beethoven anymore either. As for Brecht, here I would have been more than happy with an appositive: like Brecht's learning plays, the most original contribution to Western theater since ancient Athens. No one would argue that Brecht was a warm, friendly person. And yes, he told lies about Weill, crediting himself with much of the latter's music, but Weill told lies about him too. Only Weill's lies were true.

But this is not, after all, a work of political insights by a would-be tenured radical. It's a book about breathtakingly original music and the musicians who made it during a century when much of humanity lost faith in itself. None of the major characters here are surprising choices. Mahler, Strauss, Schoenberg, and Stravinsky's lives are portrayed and traced with care, as are countless other luminaries — in later chapters, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Steve Reich are also prominent. It's also no surprise that Ross' taste in anecdotes and his judgment as to which pieces to analyze in detail gives his heroes real auras. Not the false auras they all cultivated for themselves to varying degrees, but auras that are lovingly and often comically deconstructed. And for that very reason they shine all the brighter — because of the cracks in the surface of the object. Thus the same Arnold Schoenberg who theorized atonal music in the wake of his first wife's lover's suicide, and famously described his exile in Los Angeles as being "driven into paradise," is later perfectly content to drive his Ford up to Pismo Beach for the afternoon, follow the UCLA football team, and show up to class dressed more like how one imagines Charles Mingus would have been dressed for a Saturday night show on Central Avenue. The young Stravinsky had elegant manners, impeccable clothes, and lethal jokes. And yet when he's finally invited to the Kennedy White House for dinner, he gets drunk and has to go home early. "Nice kids," he was heard saying on the way out. On his "defection" to atonal music after decades as the avatar of experiment without it, we discover that Stravinsky made the decision on his way back from a lunch of barbeque food in the Mojave Desert. So it wasn't Adorno's argument in *The Philosophy of New Music* that set him straight; it was "the itis".

For all the hostility and rivalry between compos-

eth century — Pierre Boulez is Ross' main villain in this regard, Theodor Adorno is another — there are some unlikely and for that reason all the more beautiful friendships that develop too. Shostakovich, the Soviet stool pigeon/closet dissident, hit it off, with the cellist Mstislav Rostropovich's help, with England's finest composer, Benjamin Britten. The two trade quotations from each other's work in their late music the way youngster's once traded baseball cards. Morton Feldman and John Cage also stand out for their camaraderie. Their first meeting was magically serendipitous. They each had gone to Carnegie Hall to see Webern's *Symphony*, and they each left early in order to avoid the hostility of the audience and Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances*. "When their paths cross by the door, Feldman turned to Cage and asked, 'Wasn't that beautiful?' A life-long friendship began."

"Don't get any big ideas; they're not gonna happen." So begins Radiohead's most beautiful song in some years, "Nude," from the 2007 album, *In Rainbows*. At first glance, Mr. Ross seems to have totally disregarded this warning from one of his favorite rock groups. Here is his big idea as he expresses it in the preface: "articulating the connection between music and the outer world remains devilishly difficult. Musical meaning is vague, mutable, and, in the end, deeply personal. Still, even if history can never tell us exactly what music means, music can tell us something about history. My subtitle is meant literally; this is the twentieth century heard through its music." If I understand this important passage correctly, Ross' portrait of the century seems to proceed by the logic of what in optics is known as a parallax shift. When we adopt a new line of sight (classical music)

in reference to an object (the twentieth century) we gain new knowledge about the object.

So what new knowledge is gained from listening to the twentieth century rather than looking at its images, watching its movies, or readings its principle literary and theoretical texts? Here's what this humble reader came up with. America fought the cultural aspect of the Cold War with both low culture and high art, with both Coke and Pepsi AND Milton Babbitt's total serialism. If you listen to the latter you might wonder how we ever won.

While Stalin and Hitler both loved and actively cultivated art music in their dictatorships, Stalin wanted to control it as much as possible, while Hitler was more of a liberal mother with his composer-children, letting them go their own ways to greater degree. All he wanted to do was listen to *Parsifal* and *Tristan* and reminisce about a world that never existed in the first place. Yet, like Monarchs of old they each reserved the right to totally contradict themselves. Hitler vexed Strauss repeatedly; Stalin could show capricious generosity from time to time. But most surprisingly of all, I learned that I have something very much in common with all the very late and very high modernists of the post-war period: Boulez, Berio, Stockhausen, even Cage. We all went to music camp in the summer! Of course theirs, The Darmstadt Summer Courses for New Music, was funded by the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) with the purpose of purg-

ing Nazi taste and occluding Soviet influence from European music culture, and featured astonishingly difficult music, along with lectures on the proverbial "crisis in modern music." Mine was funded by the desire of my parents to be rid of their children and the sound of beginning violin-playing for a couple weeks every summer. I don't think Boulez has ever sung a James Taylor song around a campfire. But God, what if he had?

But perhaps Radiohead is right after all. Ross' big idea doesn't ultimately happen. But that's okay. As Paul de Man once said when reviewing Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*, "like most good books, this one is by no means what it pretends to be." So if Ross' book isn't the soundtrack of the century, what is it instead? I think it's a surpassingly entertaining collection of anecdotes. A collection so rich, so nourishing to the reader's imagination, that it should be compared only to the greats in the genre. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* comes to mind, but above all Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Philosophers* stands out.

Hegel is famous for the idea that the Owl of Minerva, of wisdom, that is, takes flight only at twilight. Only as an era is ending can we balance its philosophical account. Wisdom is the period at the end of the sentence, not the comma in the middle. This is why, in his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel analyzes monarchy: because the institution was in its twilight, or so he thought. For Alex Ross, these days the Owl of Minerva absolutely must wear headphones, probably the nice ones that cancel noise and what not, so that he can follow the soundtrack of the previous century without disturbance. And it is my sincere wish that Mr. Ross should live to see the end of the twenty-first century, so that he might write another elegant book of wisdom and insight about the music and musicians that await us in the future. ■

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PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

The Installation Haven and Less Is More

The Two Faces of the Whitney Biennial

NATASHA KURCHANOVA

The current Whitney biennial, which runs from March 6 until June 1, has two notable characteristics: it is dominated by installations and it is surprisingly subdued, despite many politically-inspired pieces. "Lessness," Beckett's word used by curator Henriette Huldisch as the title of her catalogue essay, can be applied to summarize the exhibition as well. In her article, Huldisch explains that contemporary art is governed by the "sensitivity of the less" and focuses on "local," "specific" problems rather than facing the global overarching issues of the increasingly interconnected world. This approach can also explain the unusually high percentage of women included in the show. The exhibition points, however, to yet another interpretation of the suggestive title. The restrained tone of the show stems not from the limit of its spectrum of vision nor from its monotony — the curators, Huldisch and Shamim Momin, have done a good job presenting the varied media of today's art scene and installing it in a comprehensive way — but from the emphatically self-reflexive character of several works that abound with art-historical references. It is certainly unnecessary — not to say impossible — to ignore the burden of knowledge that shapes today's art in many obvious and obscure ways, but it also seems that the art wins when these historical allusions are not the first thing that strike us when we encounter the work.

The two prominent features of the biennial are announced by the introductory pieces, all of which are, in a way, memorials or symbols of the past. The exhibition room on the ground floor commemorates Jason Rhoades, a maverick artist from California who died two years ago, with his installation *The Grand Machine/THE AREOLA* from 2002, which epitomizes his messy style with plenty of Styrofoam, CDs by Johnny Cash and Neil Diamond, and a large poster featuring porn star Marilyn Chambers. Likewise, the entrance to every floor is prefaced by a historical reference, be it a painting by Mary Heilmann on the second floor, a three-dimensional archival print by John Baldessari on the third, or an emphatically cryptic message by Shannon Ebner on the fourth.

Surrealism holds the place of honor in the pantheon of citations in the biennial. In the three images by Heilmann, for example, we are confronted with a ground; it is an ambiguous ground — either a literal or a painterly one, but the point of view she adopts goes from "above" to "below," the ground, which she paints with professionalism and wit. Her brushstrokes are measured and vigorous, her composition inventive, and her use of the double-entendre between abstraction and representation is both delicate and emphatic. In a recorded interview, Heilmann reveals that she "plays with" subjects that can be considered "vulgar" because they are "seductive." The connection to the "low," "formless" concern of Surrealism is ubiquitous and accords with the theme of the exhibition.

Baldessari, the scion of the 1960s avant-garde whose tongue-in-cheek sensibility is cited as an inspiration to the current generation of artists, presented his "body parts" prints in part, as he explains, to "deal with absence" in representation of a human figure. The discombobulated arms and legs, torsos, and ears retain their "real-life" vertical orientation, but are juxtaposed against brightly colored backgrounds and engaged in seemingly senseless actions. Baldessari's uncanny and puzzling compositions evoke the work of Magritte, whose show the artist curated at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2006-7. However, unlike Magritte and



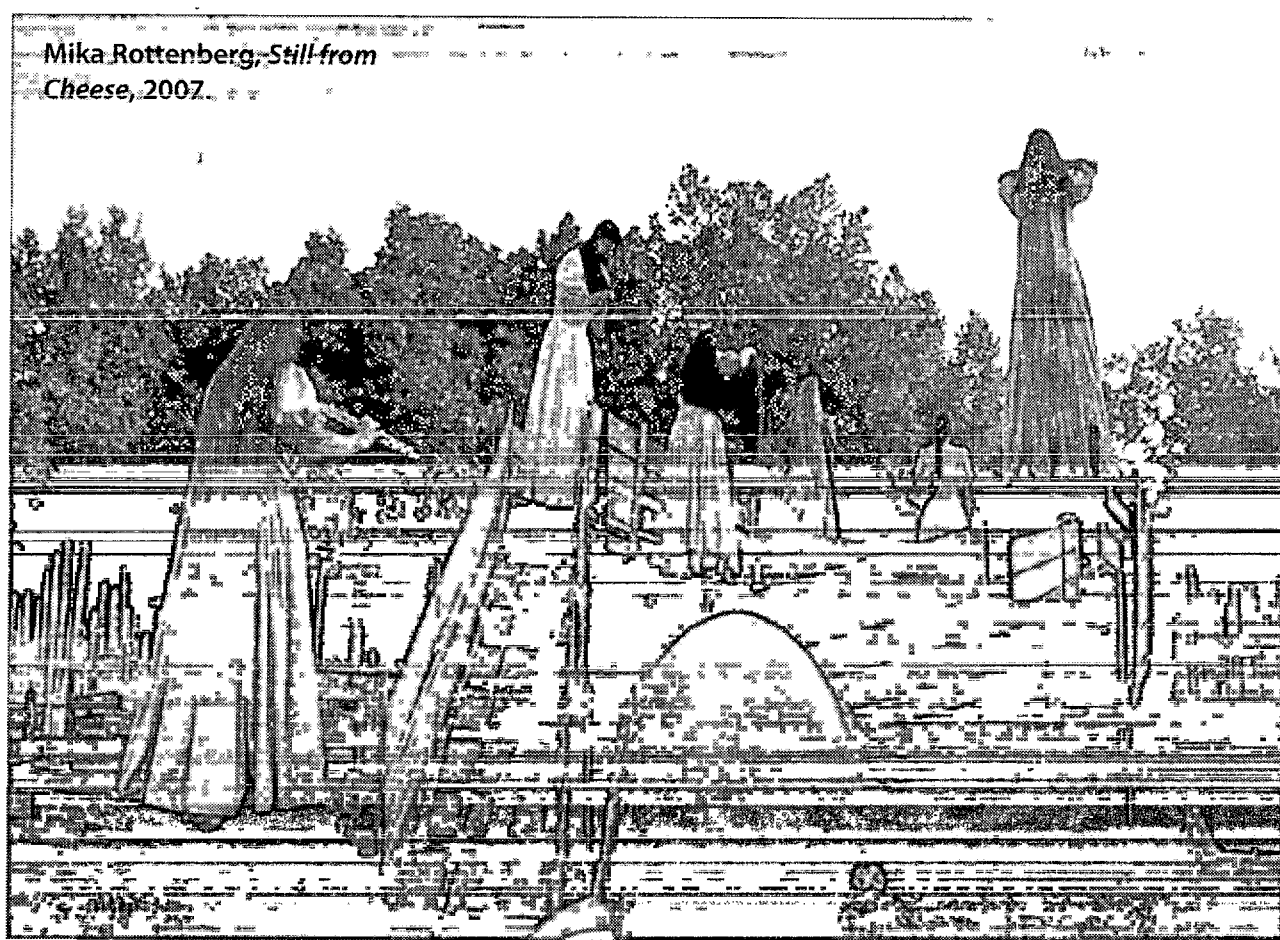
Whitney Biennial, March 6–Jun 11, Whitney Museum of American Art.

the other Surrealists, Baldessari is not interested in mining the depths of the unconscious, but in making fun of it and exposing the meaninglessness of it all. Because of this, his works are not mysterious and foreboding, but eerily cheerful.

This homage to Surrealism is continued at the entrance to the fourth floor, where a younger artist, Shannon Ebner, exhibits two works. *Sculptures Involontaires* is a crate with one side wide open, through which we see stacked up layers of cardboard, paper, or some such material, explicitly referring in its name to Brassai's photographs of found objects. In contrast to the Surrealists who tried to liberate the unconscious through found objects, Ebner leaves us a prisoner of our consciousness because, without the knowledge of what is in the box, the work is hermetic; it does not reveal anything about itself. Only by learning that the crate contains several photographs by the artist of her language-oriented installations that react to the post-September 11th world can we begin to arrive at the work's signification. Similar to *Sculptures Involontaires*, Ebner's other work, *Strike*, is not easy to decipher. One has to ponder the rows of letters for a while or listen to a recorded explanation by the artist to realize that they are palindromes. Palindromes are purely formal exercises that are hermetically locked into each other in an endless grid. Ebner's rueful return to Conceptualism and mourning of the utopian aspirations of modern art contributes to a profound pessimism in her work.

Fortunately, the emphatic preoccupation with the past greets the visitors only at the entrance. Once we make our way through the entrance halls, the explicitness of the focus on art history shifts away and it becomes increasingly clear that the relative late-comers to the stage of modernist artistic media — video, film, and particularly installation — hold sway over the "traditional" ones — painting, sculpture, and even photography. Although installations pervade the biennial, the most spectacular ones, all by women-artists, are spaced evenly throughout its four floors. On the second floor, the prize goes to *Cheese* by Mika Rottenberg, who built a rustic-looking shed out of rough-hewn wood, which one can enter to be confronted with multiple video screens tucked into every corner. The subject of the videos are six beautiful women with very long hair and long white dresses milking goats and making cheese. The videos show different scenes from the women's lives simultaneously. We learn that they work on a farm set in a lavish landscape and engage mostly in a very ineffective labor: while one woman is collecting vapor from a waterfall with a funnel connected to a hose, another is serving as a conduit for this water by laying down and letting her long hair fall to the lower level, where the rest of the women are holding a bucket gathering the water dripped from the hair. In this work, Rottenberg explores the myth of women as the creatures of nature, who are most at ease with making their living through directly engaging their bodies, sometimes with the help of primitive technology. By enclosing the viewers inside a claustrophobic space, which appears to be an extension of the space shown in the screens, the artist conflates our senses of vision and of touch, contributing to the strange ambiguity between real and digital space and making us voyeurs of the women's futile actions.

On the third floor, Amanda Ross-Ho combined



Photographs by Louise Lawler unobtrusively greeting visitors to the left of every floor entrance diffuse the focus on Surrealism and provide a respite from continuous self-reference by offering an unencumbered critique. Lawler's pictures of empty exhibition walls turn the viewers' attention to the construction of the museum as an institution, a space of social interaction, an archive that not only includes, but also excludes.

several photographs, prints, photocopies, and mixed media works in an installation centered around an enormous cat litter box. Ross-Ho's allusion to low- and middle-class domesticity and the lack of sheen in the choice and the finish of her objects — photocopies, out-of-focus photographs, newspapers, blown-up imitation of embroidery and macramé cut out of synthetic polymer — continues

Continued page 19

You Speak My Language

MARK SCHIEBE

Contemporary jazz icons Pat Metheny, Chick Corea, and Gary Burton have all released new albums in 2008. Metheny's *Day Trip* marks the first recorded statement from the guitarist's newest version of his trio, which includes Christian McBride on bass and Antonio Sanchez on drums. Pianist Corea and vibraphonist Burton, longtime jazz partners; pair up once again to celebrate the 35th anniversary of their classic ECM album, *Crystal Silence*.

Both of these outstanding records demonstrate once again that all three of these contemporary musical giants are "in on" the same jazz secret their predecessors knew: that staying inspired is often about finding fresh ways of saying something very old, and doing so at such a highly creative level is reserved for the few. In the expansive and daunting universe of postbop jazz, Metheny, Corea, and Burton possess three of the most highly distinctive voices, each forged from a variety of styles. Whereas so many talented players have pigeonholed themselves into one style and become mere technicians after the initial creative burst, and equally as many seem to move from style to style as musical fashion dictates, these three musicians are rare examples of the integrity of voice, which transcends time while continuing to adapt to and incorporate changes in the musical climate.

An interesting connecting point between these artists is the city of Boston, since the jazz scene that centered around Berklee College of Music was central to the development of all three musicians. Corea grew up in Chelsea, Mass., listening to Boston-based players, while Burton and Metheny, both from the Midwest, moved to Boston as young musicians. Burton attended Berkeley in the early 1960s and quickly joined Stan Getz's band, where he was later replaced by Corea. Metheny moved to Boston in 1974 and joined Burton's quartet the following year. By that time, the vibraphonist was a staff member at Berklee. While certainly not rivaling New York in scope and diversity of talent, this scene, featuring talented and forward-looking Latin, jazz, and rock musicians, proved a fertile soil for all three musicians. Thus while each has developed an idiom all his own, all three draw from the same larger vocabulary of melodic and harmonic ideas at least in part derived from their experiences in the city.

Listening to Chick Corea and Gary Burton play together today, we hear the empathy of each for the other's idiosyncrasies, the virtuosity worn lightly, the easy confidence and joy of togetherness, the marks of two uncommon talents who have continued to co-evolve even as a younger generation of jazz musicians have reached maturity. But then again with these two the deeper elements were there from the beginning. Says Burton about first playing with Chick in 1967: "We discovered an immediate connection, like two people who speak the same obscure language." And that language probably has something to do with Boston; and it definitely has something to do with deep study of the best and most demanding in the bebop and postbop traditions. For

music REVIEW

- Pat Metheny Trio: *Day Trip* (Nonesuch, January 2008)
- Chick Corea/Gary Burton: *The New Crystal Silence* (Concord, February 2008)

Burton and Corea (along with Metheny) belong to the smaller group of players associated with 1970's fusion who were masterfully fluent in a "straight ahead" jazz context, and this separates them from the larger group who merely appropriated elements of jazz in order to create a (then fashionable) fusion sound. The result is that when the duo went into the studio to record *Crystal Silence* (ECM, 1973), they achieved something strange and beautiful. They improvised with the intricate logic and melodic/harmonic density of jazz virtuosos over unorthodox new song structures, ranging from the title track, a

stark and spacious tone poem, to the achingly beautiful "Falling Grace" (penned by bassist and fellow Bostonian Steve Swallow), which has become a contemporary jazz standard thanks in part to the version they recorded. "Falling Grace" relies on a newer harmonic conception (both new types of chords and

new ways of chordal movement) and poses challenges for the improviser not unlike the harmonic "problems" John Coltrane posed and solved so brilliantly on *Giant Steps* (Atlantic, 1959). The difference is that instead of the lone virtuoso treading new ground, Corea and Burton improvise simultaneously, in many cases literally finishing each other's phrases, a feat all the more remarkable given that it was their first joint effort.

While both, and especially Corea, went on to greater fame leading their own bands in the 1970s and 1980s, there is something special in this pairing, as each seems to bring out submerged elements

in the musical personality of the other. Perhaps most significantly, Burton's understated playing teases out the introspective side in Corea, who is noted among jazz players for his outspoken (and Scientology-driven) attitudes about playing in an extroverted way that easily communicates his ideas to the audience. Since 1973, the pair have made several more albums, including *Duet* (ECM, 1978), the live album follow up *In Concert, Zurich* (ECM, 1980), and *Native Sense* (ECM, 1997).

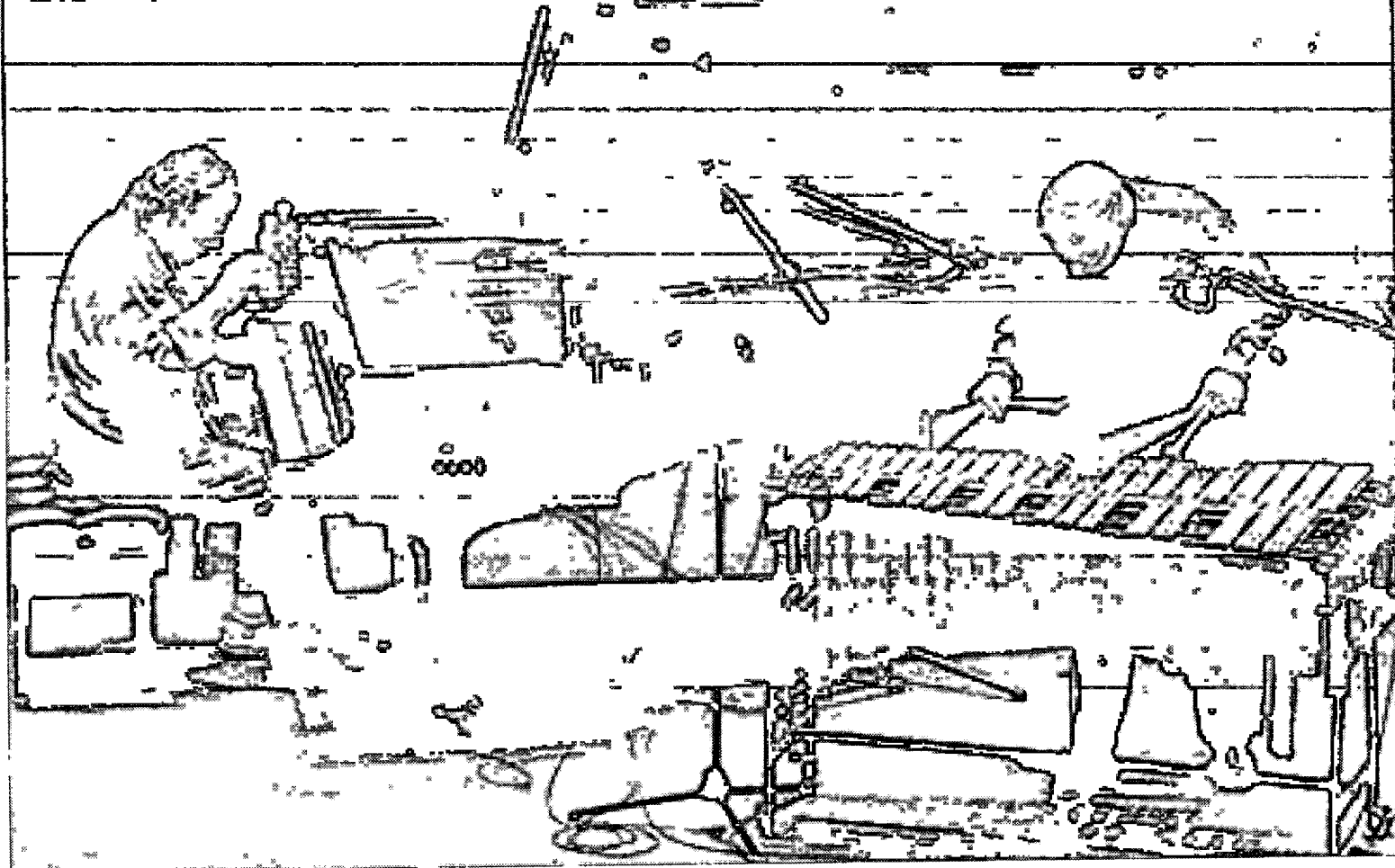
The New Crystal Silence is a double album featuring a live concert performance in Australia with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, and a live performance at the Molde Jazz Festival in Norway, both part of an international tour in 2007. Five compositions, three old and two new, set the two improvisers within lush orchestral backdrops arranged by reed player Tim Garland, a longtime collaborator with Corea and former member of his band Origin. The effect is bracing, recalling the "third stream" experiments of the 1950s and 1960s (Gil Evans and Miles Davis' *Sketches in Spain* is most relevant, given Corea's Spanish-tinged sensibility) yet spread on an even larger canvas.

"Love Castle" begins in a glowing pool of sound with the pianist and vibraphonist alone together carefully creating a rich texture as if mixing paints in a pre-composition ritual, before being gently enveloped in a soft atmosphere of flutes and eventually strings. Clear, bell-like trumpets herald the end of the beginning, and Corea's jubilant melody winds its snaky way between him and Burton in that complex dynamic unison that characterizes their sound (they never play at the same volume at the same time). Both performers are clearly inspired by the new environment and play daring solos, couched around an ensemble interlude. The orchestral passages that follow the solos have a Stravinskian sweep that deliver in full bloom the majesty only implied in earlier versions of the song. After a restatement of the melody the duo "trade eights" in an inspired coda.

In the new version of the title track, the orchestra explores in greater depth some of the tonal possibilities outlined in the somber and haunting 1973 original. Garland again admirably uses the spectrum of the orchestra to imagine in detail what was really just a sketch 35 years earlier. (And hav-

Both performers are clearly inspired by the new environment and play daring solos, couched around an ensemble interlude.

Chick Corea and Gary Burton performing live at the 2007 Portland Jazz Festival.



ing just gone back to the original, I can attest it asserts a retroactive influence). Overall, the performance, to my mind, represents a highly successful blending of orchestral and jazz traditions, perhaps even a definitive advance over anything that has been done, at least in terms of the range of ways in which the orchestra is used to support the improvisers.

Album two, the Norway concert, features the duo again alone together and delivering inspired renditions of tunes from their previous albums mixed with a selection of standards from the traditional and contemporary jazz songbook. They always manage to get something different out of Corea's cheeky Spanish-sounding "Senor Mouse," and the performance here is no exception. They try Gus Arnheim's Bing Crosby vehicle "Sweet and Lovely" and nod to Monk (who warped the poor tune forever); and they display their unbelievable bebop chops on "Bud Powell." The version of Bill Evans' "Waltz for Debby" simultaneously demonstrates the debt owed the master and the distance both have traveled since the apprenticeship. And something about the triple meter and the intricate harmonies of the tune bring out the wonderfully percussive sounds that both players get out of their instruments. (It is noteworthy that Corea started his musical life as a drummer). The album closes with the swift, bright Corea favorite "Fiesta," which emphasizes his signature pun-

gent "Spanish key" harmonies and percussive staccato rhythms, over which Burton glides with virtuosic ease.

Starting with his debut *Bright Size Life* (ECM) in 1975, Pat Metheny has produced a slender body of guitar trio recordings that constitute the most significant work in this lineup configuration since his hero Wes Montgomery was making records in the 1960s. Metheny has changed the accompanying bassist and drummer on each album, and *Day Trip* continues that tradition, featuring Christian McBride, a "young lion" who matured during the 1980s neo-bop era, and one of the most sought-after bassists on the scene over the past fifteen-years; and Antonio Sanchez, the extraordinary drummer from Mexico who is now a regular member in Metheny's larger group.

For this record, Metheny chose what he dubs the "old school" method of recording after rather than before a tour. *Day Trip*, though released this



year, was in fact recorded in one October day (thus the album title) in 2005, after a year on the road with the trio. (The group has subsequently toured extensively as well, as is standard for Metheny who averages over 200 performances a year!) This is a variation on the method for 1989's *Question and Answer* (Geffen), where, after a year on the road with his larger Pat Metheny Group, the guitarist simply called up two guys he had always wanted to record with (bassist Dave Holland and the legendary drummer Roy Haynes) and laid down an album's worth of tracks one day in New York City. And if the current trio reminds us of the 1989 trio it is probably also because bassist McBride possesses technique on the level of Holland, something few in the jazz world can say. Every note he plays, even during, especially during, the lightning speed solo lines is executed with bell-like clarity, almost to a level of distraction (sometimes I have to remind myself to listen to the content and stop being mystified by the technique!) But McBride plays more squarely in the center of the beat, whereas Holland was always pushing. This opens extra space for Metheny and Sanchez to dance around the center, alternately pushing forward and pulling back the groove.

On the title track, a medium-up tempo swing, the opening track, "Son of Thirteen," an up tempo Latin reminiscent of the classic "Lone Jack," and the folkish triple metered "At Last You're Here," Metheny favors the intensely chromatic style that characterizes his playing on *Question & Answer*, darting in and around the chords, spilling breathtakingly "over the bar" and somehow always landing on his feet. But with Metheny, the acrobatics have always been in the service of the deep lyrical vision that is his music, and the case is no different here. As with prior efforts, the evolutionary wrinkles in the guitarists' lines from album to album may escape the casual listener, but the power of the overall vision surely won't.

"Is this America? (Katrina 2005),"

is a musical meditation on the aftermath of the hurricane (the title echoes the Metheny/David Bowie collaboration "This is not America" from the soundtrack to 1983's *The Falcon and the Snowman*). The guitarist plays his signature electrified nylon string acoustic guitar in a vein recalling his work with bassist Charlie Haden. The melancholy folk melody, which Metheny begins unaccompanied, later picks up momentum as McBride and Sanchez join in. The emotional weight of the song climaxes in the bassist's arco solo, McBride bowing surprisingly "countrified" lines and leaving plenty of space between them, before eventually giving way to the guitar again.

It is an idiosyncrasy of Metheny's genius that he has invented completely original idioms for himself not just within the tradition of "straight ahead" playing, where he uses a conventional electric hollowbody jazz guitar, but also in a Brazilian inflected folk-Americana mode on acoustic and a fusion oriented style where he plays a custom designed guitar synthesizer, getting a sound that is somewhere in between a violin and a trumpet. "The Red One" (Metheny previously recorded it with guitarist John Scofield on *I Can See Your House From Here*, Blue Note, 1994) is a vehicle for the guitar synth. McBride and Sanchez make explicit the reggae feel only implied in the earlier version and Metheny responds on McBride's solo with the only reggae comping you will ever hear from him on record. (It is more accurately somewhere between reggae and Steve Reich.) The energy of the trio on this track is thrilling and Metheny's reharmonized "power chords" on the melody restatement send shivers.

While *Day Trip* doesn't break ground the way Metheny's first three trio albums (*Bright Size Life*, *Rejoicing* (ECM, 1984), *Question and Answer*) did, it does deepen and expand, in interesting and emotionally fulfilling ways, upon territory the guitarist already discovered, which is perhaps all we have a right to ask for. ■



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Major Playwrights, Minor Work

FRANK EPISALE

In a 2007 interview with the *LA Weekly*, Edward Albee made some controversial statements about the state of the American theatre: "The big problem is the assumption that writing a play is a collaborative act. It isn't. It's a creative act, and then other people come in. The interpretation should be for the accuracy of what the playwright wrote. Playwrights are expected to have their text changed by actors they never wanted. Directors seem to feel they are as creative as the playwright." He went on to say that "[m]ost of these changes are for commercial reasons," clarifying his target somewhat, but he has long been known for his resistance to and skepticism of "conceptual" directors as well as meddling producers.

The three-time Pulitzer Prize winner, who recently turned 80, has earned the right to make curmudgeonly statements from time to time. In celebration of his long, prolific career, theatres around the city (and around the country) have been feting him with something of an unofficial Albee-fest and the playwright has had many opportunities to hold forth. But high-profile statements about the nature and function of directing have, in my eyes, put some pressure on Albee given that he has been making forays into directing his own work. Most recently, he tried his hand at staging two of his early one-acts, *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox*. Unfortunately, this production is something of a stumble; the formidable playwright has shown himself to be a less formidable director, having failed to realize on stage the potential of his written texts.

Written shortly after *Zoo Story* marked Albee as a major talent, neither *The American Dream* (1960) nor *The Sandbox* (1959) is likely to be remembered as among his major works. Nevertheless, they remain intriguing absurdist novelties, darkly comic indictments of the hypocrisy and casual cruelty of Albee's America.

In *The American Dream*, Mommy (Judith Ivey) and Daddy (George Barteneff), a wealthy aging couple who spend most of their time (in classic absurdist manner) waiting for someone to show up and fix something, debate whether and how they can make their lives more fulfilling. Can they send Grandma (Lois Markle) to a retirement home? Can they adopt a child? Can they rise in social status? Busybody socialite Mrs. Barker (Kathleen Butler) stops by and learns (so that the audience can) a terrible family secret and a generically beautiful young man (Harmon Walsh) knocks on the door looking for work but may have a deeper connection to the family than is at first apparent.

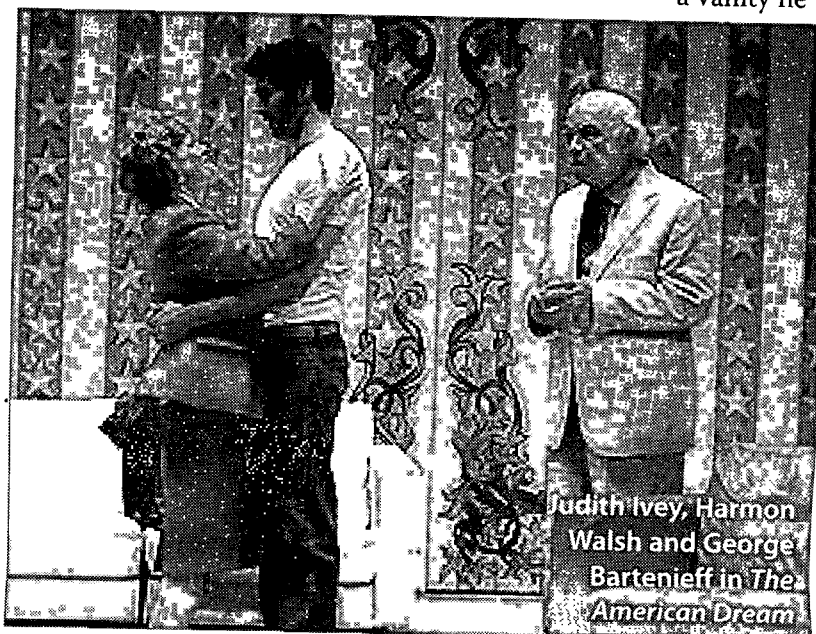
The Sandbox features three of the same characters — Mommy, Daddy, and Grandma — but in a different setting. This time we find them on a family trip to the beach, where they have come to wait for Grandma to die. A violist plays disorienting music while a beautiful and vacuous Angel of Death flaps his arms in a Tai Chi-like motion.

Both plays feature deceit, desperation, and emasculation both literal and metaphorical: themes and images Albee would bring back again and again, in somewhat more sophisticated ways, throughout his career. The intent is that we will laugh at Albee's clever way with words and the deadpan absurdity

theater REVIEW

- *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* by Edward Albee. Directed by Mr. Albee. At the Cherry Lane Theatre.
- *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* by Caryl Churchill. Directed by James MacDonald. At the Public Theater.

of his plotting while also recoiling as we realize that these characters are funhouse-mirror images of our selves. *The American Dream* in particular, with its explicit critique of the plastic duplicity of American domestic life, is meant to interrupt our nervous laughter with a shock of recognition. Descriptions of the play often include words like "startling" and "searing" and "uproarious."



Judith Ivey, Harmon Walsh and George Barteneff in *The American Dream*

It is impossible for me to know just how shocking these plays were when they were debuted nearly 50 years ago, but in 2008 they read as curiosities, objects of nostalgia and study. This is not to say that the cultural critiques Albee is making don't still have some weight, or that the plays are no longer tenable for performance, but these absurdist representations of

cruelty now come across more as preciously naughty than as shockingly trenchant. Albee, much to his credit, continued to grow as he continued to write, and would soon produce his magnificent *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1961) which dealt with many of the same issues more successfully, more elegantly, and with a greater sophistication. Plays like *A Delicate Balance* (1966), *Three Tall Women* (1990), and *The Goat* (2000) proved again and again that *Virginia Woolf* was no fluke.

Still, I suspect that *The American Dream* and *The Sandbox* could still work on stage in the hands of a more skilled director. They are solid texts from a young but impressive talent, and the cast ranges

from competent to strong (the wonderful Judith Ivey delivers a particularly notable performance). Somehow, though, the production feels slack, unimaginative, and listless. I suspect that the narcissism of Mr. Albee's statements about directing may have something to do with it.

Albee is far from the only person to believe that actors and directors exist primarily to serve the integrity of the text and the vision of the playwright,

but even the most stalwart proponents of this point of view acknowledge that theatre (if not playwriting) is a collaborative, interdisciplinary form. Moreover, while a skilled director can often bring out the latent brilliance of a text, this is not what Albee is doing — or even trying to do — with these productions. In celebrating his own vision, he has turned these plays in on themselves; the production now running at the Cherry Lane Theatre does not crackle with righteous indignation and bitter humor, it collapses under the weight of a smug self-satisfaction.

At some point in the past several decades, Edward Albee has come to fully agree with those who have been calling him brilliant for so long; as such, his direction of his own work does not even attempt to show the actors and designers in their best light. Instead, he has crafted an evening for no other reason than to exalt himself. He doesn't want us to see the production, he wants us to see how clever he is, a vanity he would deplore in one of his characters.

When I am asked to name my favorite living playwrights, Caryl Churchill is always near the top of the list. From *Cloud Nine* to *Top Girls* to *The Skriker* she has repeatedly produced fiercely intelligent, emotionally complex, politically engaged work that avoids easy answers and subverts even her own ideological leanings, leaving the audience simultaneously entertained and uncomfortable.

When Churchill's newest play, *Drunk Enough to Say I Love You?* opened in London last year, I heard rumors that it was a disappointment. It is.

A simple and simplistic political allegory about America's illegal foreign policy decisions and Britain's complicity in them, this new play finds Churchill too angry and too tired to bother with her trademark complexity, sophistication, and wit. She doesn't want to risk being misunderstood, so she has written something so obvious that it has nothing left to say after the first 10 minutes. The validity of her indignation makes the play's failure all the more frustrating.

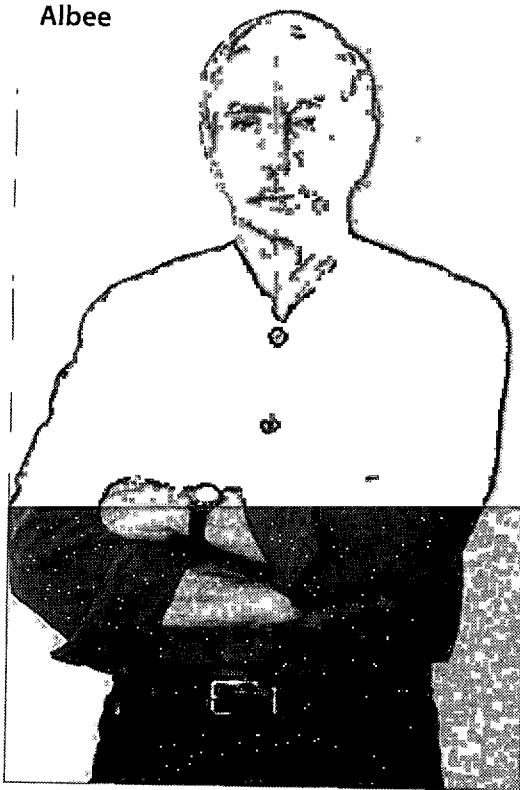
Drunk Enough to Say I Love You? is Caryl Churchill yelling "Fuck you!" at the world for 45 minutes, only not nearly so exciting as that sounds. Overly long despite its modest running time, this play feels like an exercise by a graduate student, not the return of a major playwright to one of New York's premier cultural institutions. Despite the best efforts of director James MacDonald and the virtuosity of his design team, there is just not enough here to justify the price of admission.

Churchill's *Top Girls* is coming to Broadway soon. I look forward to being reminded of why I usually think she's brilliant. ■

The American Dream and *The Sandbox* by Edward Albee. Directed by Mr. Albee. Featuring Judith Ivey, George Barteneff, Lois Markle, Harmon Walsh, and Jesse Williams. At the Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce Street (near Seventh Avenue). Tuesdays at 7pm. Wednesdays through Saturdays at 8pm. Wednesdays and Saturdays at 2pm. Through April 19. Running time approx. 90 minutes. Student Advance Tickets: \$20. Student Rush Tickets: \$10 (at the box-office, 30 minutes before show time). Individual Tickets: \$60. For tickets call 212-239-6200 or visit telecharge.com. For more information, visit cherrylanetheatre.org

Drunk Enough to Say I Love You? by Caryl Churchill. Directed by James MacDonald. Featuring Scott Cohen and Samuel West. At the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Street. Tuesdays at 7. Wednesdays through Fridays at 8pm. Saturdays at 2pm and 8pm. Sundays at 3pm. Running time, approx. 45 minutes. Student Advance Tickets \$25 (at the box office). Rush tickets \$20 (at the box office one hour before show time). Individual Tickets \$50. Call 212-967-7555 or visit publictheater.org

Edward Albee



Meditation on American Adolescence

NICOLE WALLENBROCK

Paranoid Park, like the majority of Gus Van Sant's films, explores the confusion and rush of male adolescence. Frequently in his films, (*My Own Private Idaho*, *Finding Forrester*, *Good Will Hunting*) a teenage boy orients himself through the tangled maze of family, sex, and school to at last become an individual. These are not always typical coming of age stories; in *Elephant*, the primary character finds his identity through the decision to shoot himself and his fellow students, and even more profoundly in his goal's traumatic realization.

In fact, primarily because of its setting, *Paranoid Park* is eerily reminiscent of that haunting masterpiece of high school massacre. Both films reveal how the American high school structure, portrayed as a blur of long locker filled hallways complete with faceless teachers and monotone voices, destroys the curiosity and spirit of the contained youth. However, *Paranoid Park*, also offers a foil to the high school tedium, the skate park, an alternative configuration of male teen culture, which in its broad slides and graffitied swirls aggressively opposes the straight halls and boxed rooms typical of a teen's daytime ennui.

The narrator and principal character, Alex (Gabe Nevins), is a 16-year-old amateur skater, whose parents are in the middle of a divorce. Alex's confusion and struggle to verbalize a shocking accidental murder he committed drive the disheveled plot into suspenseful anticipation, just as Alex's somber brown eyes clothe the most artistic visual experiments in a stark point of view. The actor Gabe Nevins was not previously a professional actor, and while the character is often awkward with speech, he is

physically at ease before the camera, appearing natural in a way most professional actors never could. Many sequences begin and end with a close-up of Nevins, zooming still closer on his eyes as a meditation on the act of seeing. In this manner, we as spectators are continually reminded that the events put before us, are narratively, a visual memory, a memory that is simultaneously becoming one of our own.

This park, labeled "Paranoid" because it is rumored to be a dangerous place (not only in the rink with the riskiest skaters, but surrounding



♦ *Paranoid Park*, directed by Gus Van Sant

and curve upwards individually, to eventually reveal with distance a frenetic board ballet. Sounds of breaking glass and high echoes add an eerie quality to the slow motion rolling shots, breaking filmic frontiers to offer a new cinematic space in which all sound and movement is possible

chooses to explain, as well as his fear and hesitation to divulge the truth, which guides the repetitive, non-linear plot.

With *Paranoid Park* Van Sant builds thematically and artistically on the work of his trilogy (*Elephant*, *Gerry*, and *Last Days*). In these films the efficiency of language is questioned to at last suggest in the conclusion of *Last Days*, when the wordless Blake (aka Kurt Cobain) dies to become a naked glimmering spirit, that sense itself is more powerful than words or death. Alex, like Blake, is desperately grasping for the language needed to describe



Gabe Nevins in *Paranoid Park*.

the park, as it has been built and is maintained by punks and degenerate squatters), represents a complete freedom of movement, and the camera is equally liberated in its tracking shots that appear as directionless and chaotic as the boys on their boards do. Photographer Christopher Doyle, most famous for his collaborations with Wong Kar Wai, closely follows the man-boys as they flip their boards

and yet fluid, inspiring both the spectator's eye and ear.

Paranoid Park is introduced and reintroduced to the spectator several times throughout the course of the film, for the plot of *Paranoid Park*, like its namesake, is not bound by order. Thus the chronology of events, which is at last unwound at the film's conclusion, is never prioritized. Rather it is the order in which our narrator Alex

his experience (which will not fail to shock the audience). However, Alex, unlike the distant Blake, shares with the viewer, his subconscious or imaginary friend, the truth of his memory. Perhaps not in the composed confession he reads throughout the film, but rather in the compelling images and their accompanying sounds that appear as the unique testimony of Alex's forlorn eyes. ■

Art Review

Continued from page 14

the legacy of the feminist projects of the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of entitling her assemblage, however, Ross-Ho brings it together by physically perforating the walls of the exhibition space.

Phoebe Washburn's cheerful wooden construction on the fourth floor, built to fit the space of the room and awash in liquid of light-yellow color — bottled, contained in aquariums, or circulating through several tubes — is dedicated to J. Robert Cade, the inventor of Gatorade, who passed away in November last year. Like Cade's life and career, always in flux, filled with experimenting, puttering about, trial and error, the installation looks like a work-in-process, always changing and alive. Daffodils growing in glass containers and the sound of splashing water contribute to the atmosphere of growth and organicity.

Not only does installation dominate the biennial, it also subsumes other media, because paintings, photographs, and sculpture function most effec-

tively as parts of installations. Such is the case with painters Karen Kilimnik, Lisa Sigal, Ellen Harvey; photographers Leslie Hewitt, Walead Beshty; and sculptors Charles Long and Carol Bove. Kilimnik, for example, alludes to the atmosphere of refinement and exclusivity by transforming a small room she's been allotted into an imitation of a mansion through sparsely hung miniature canvases depicting contemporary flashbacks to aristocratic pre-modernity, including ornately decorated stairwells of castles, sumptuously saddled horses, and exotic birds. A lavish crystal chandelier in the middle of the room completes the decor. Sigal also creates enclosed environments for her work by interconnecting painting and three-dimensional media such as sculpture and architecture.

Harvey makes what she calls "the failure of painting" the subject of her project. She places an opaque screen between the viewer and the work, partially blocking access to her paintings. The screen has engravings of several blank canvases and one square opening through which a few works on the back wall can be glimpsed. In order to see the work in its total-

ity, the viewer has to walk around the screen, but even then she'd be disappointed, because instead of the totality she will discover only painted fragments of the artist's studio. Harvey's "failure of painting" resonates with Hewitt's stance on the "failure" of photography, with her large framed digital prints placed on the floor to create, according to the artist, a "sculptural balance." Hewitt's images are mostly empty, apart from sparse snapshots of civil right gatherings and two books: *Black Protest* and *Report on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. The empty space in Hewitt's photographs is amplified by a completely blank framed rectangle placed in the middle of her composition, making a statement on the impossibility of photography as an art form when life is permeated by suffering and social injustice.

Apart from installations, the biennial also offers an extensive program of videos and independent films. Some videos are shown in galleries and some are screened together with films in two rooms on the second and fourth floors. The daily screening program can be found on the museum's website. ■

NEWS FROM THE *doctoral students' council*

HEALTH INSURANCE

It's been a busy month in the struggle to get health insurance. Members of the DSC participated in lobbying trips to Albany to speak directly to lawmakers about this fundamental need that is not being met currently. The Adjunct Project has been particularly active (as you can see from Carl Lindscoog's article on this topic elsewhere in this issue).

Please keep up the fight! Send emails and letters to your assemblypeople and senators. Up-to-the-minute information can always be found on www.cunydisc.org! Continue to press for your needs to be fulfilled — we need health insurance now!

RESERVATIONS!

If you check in at www.cunydisc.org, you'll find that you can now check Room Reservations for 5414, 5409, and 5489 along the left-side tabs. Similarly, you can now retrieve the form for room reservations at our website, www.cunydisc.org, and submit to dsc@cunydisc.org for processing via email. Very easy!

If you wish to borrow our coffee urns, that form is also at www.cunydisc.org! Isn't progress wonderful!

Please note the various rules and responsibilities that go with reserving DSC rooms and coffee urns — up to and including accountability for the student events that go on in the rooms, and the care and upkeep of DSC property.

These rules and responsibilities are clearly delineated in the forms you fill out, so there are no surprises!

TO-DO LIST: ELECTIONS!

As you read this, elections have begun: keep checking www.cunydisc.org for constant updates on the election, and for complete instructions on how to participate (the same ones you hopefully received on a beautiful blue-green-on-white postcard, or in print in *The GC Advocate*, or in an email forwarded from your APO or EO or DSC rep. or someone else...). Your voice matters! It always does!

Remember: no paper ballots this year! Go green, and participate. It's your vote, your voice, your DSC!

THE DSC WEBPAGE

Have you checked out the website lately? www.cunydisc.org continues to be a hotbed of excitement, with much news, information, and direction on the issues of the day. Keep visiting www.cunydisc.org to keep up to date with the DSC!

DSC GROUP PAGE

Have you joined the DSC's Google Groups page? It is free and available to all students, and provides you with direct access to many important announcements, as well as allowing students to post their own messages and receive replies from other students.

Of course you can elect to receive no messages through this system, even after you are registered.

Once you are registered with the group, you can configure your profile so that you receive messages in one of four ways:

(1) No emails at all (you go to the

group page to view posted messages)

(2) Individual emails

(3) Digest emails in abridged form (you receive one email per day with the headings of recent postings)

(4) Digest emails (you receive one email per day with the full body of recent messages)

It takes less than a minute to sign up and gives you more control over how you receive information. You don't have to have a Gmail account to register with the group. You can visit the group at <http://groups.google.com/group/cunydisc>.

DSC CALENDAR

The DSC has the following meetings scheduled. Guests are always welcome.

Plenary Meetings (all plenary meetings are held in room GC 5414)

- April 11, 6:00 p.m.
- May 9, 5:00 p.m. (2007-8 reps)
- May 9, 6:00 p.m. (2008-9 reps)

Steering Committee Meeting

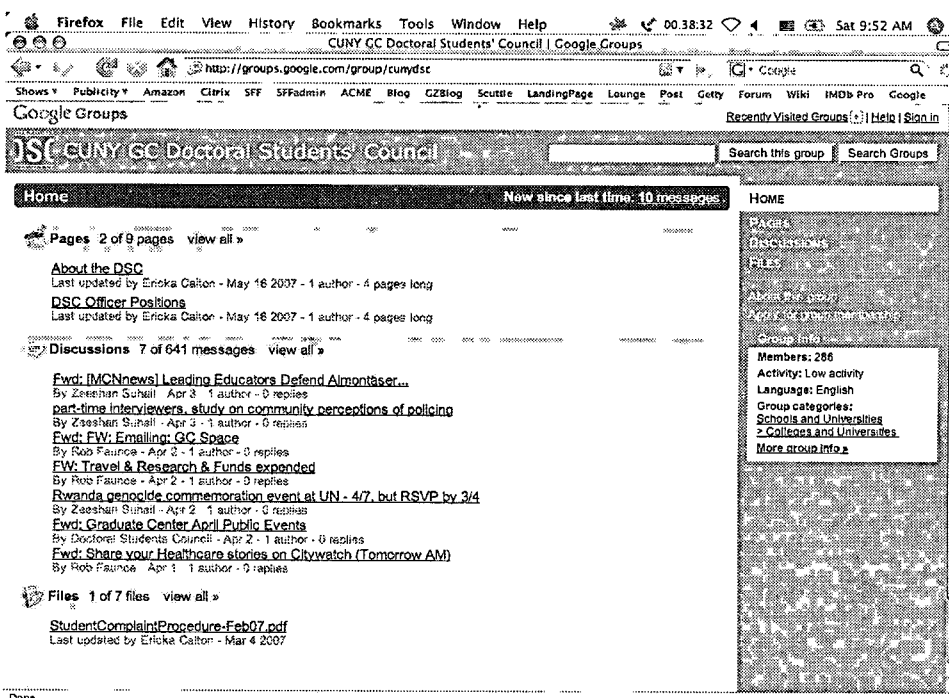
- May 16, 6:00 p.m., room 5409 (2007-8 and 2008-9 Steering Committee members)

Media Board Meeting

- April 18, 5:00 p.m., room 5489

Other Committees of the DSC

- Please check our website, www.cunydisc.org, for listings of other meetings of the DSC as they are scheduled and published to our website. ■



Dear Student:

The Doctoral Students' Council (DSC) is pleased to announce that our nominations and elections process for the 2008-09 academic year will be held online. **NO PAPER BALLOTS** will be mailed. Here are the instructions on how and when to participate:

NOMINATIONS – 02/01/08 – 03/03/08

To make nominations for DSC positions(s), follow these three steps:

STEP 1 – Go to <https://eballot3.votenet.com/dsc/>
Your nomination ballot will be accessible from this internet address from 02/01/08 to 03/03/08.

STEP 2 – Login with your username and password:
USERNAME: (Your 9-digit banner ID #)
PASSWORD: (Your surname, in all lowercase)

STEP 3 – NOMINATE!

Once you have logged in, a personalized nomination ballot will be made available to you.

ELECTIONS – 04/01/08 – 05/01/08

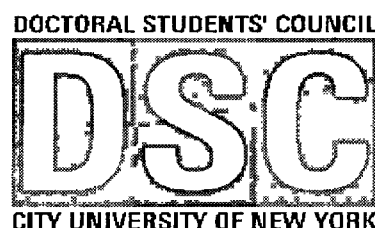
To vote in elections for DSC positions(s), follow these three steps:

STEP 1 – Go to <https://eballot3.votenet.com/dsc/>
Your election ballot will be accessible from this internet address from 04/01/08 to 05/01/08.

STEP 2 – Login with your username and password:
USERNAME: (Your 9-digit banner ID #)
PASSWORD: (Your surname, in all lowercase)

STEP 3 – ELECT!

Once you have logged in, a personalized election ballot will be made available to you.



FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE WITH THE ONLINE VOTING PROCESS, PLEASE VISIT: <http://www.cunydisc.org/vote>

NOTE: If you would like to receive email reminders with election-related news, please join our Google Group at: <http://groups.google.com/group/cunydisc>

Graduate Center Introduces "Chancellor's Club" Fellowships

MATT LAU

Officials at the Graduate Center have announced an innovative new series of fellowship awards that are among the richest in the nation. If approved by the trustees, the new awards will immediately make the Graduate Center one of the most desirable doctoral institutions in the nation, if not the world.

"Chancellor's Club Fellows should expect to make anywhere from \$14,000 to \$16,000 a week!" said one ecstatic official at CUNY headquarters on 80th Street. "We're killing, or rather, nailing two birds with one stone. First, we're filling the gap in student funding that has and continues to haunt so many of our talented but impoverished students. And second, we're plugging into a market where demand has recently exceeded supply."

The market the official is referring to is of course the oldest of them all, which recently lost one its key local players. "The shut down of the Emperor's Club was a huge blow to the tri-state area's escort industry," said an analyst at the Manhattan Institute, a market-oriented, pro-growth think tank in midtown. "We're committed to increased personal choice in all sectors of the economy, and right now it isn't happening in the escort business. This market is shrinking for the first time."

That's where CUNY comes in, as it were, like a Viagra tablet of economic stimulation. "Our fellows will not be just your ordinary call-girls, call-guys, and call-G.I.B.Ts. They will be the most educated sex-workers in the history of sex-working," said another 80th Street official.

He continued, "You will be able to have a prostitute give you a lecture on the history of prostitution in ancient Athens before your lecture in her anatomy begins. And talk about role-playing, your escort will be able to do some serious weapons inspections, if you catch my

drift, when they're actually a PhD student in nuclear physics. As for that embarrassing story about former-Governor Spitzer having to ask his aides to fetch him a CD of mood-setting classical music, there will be no need for that when your escort is getting a DMA in cello performance. But you might have to wear a condom while they play the prelude to Bach's 'G Major Cello Suite.'"

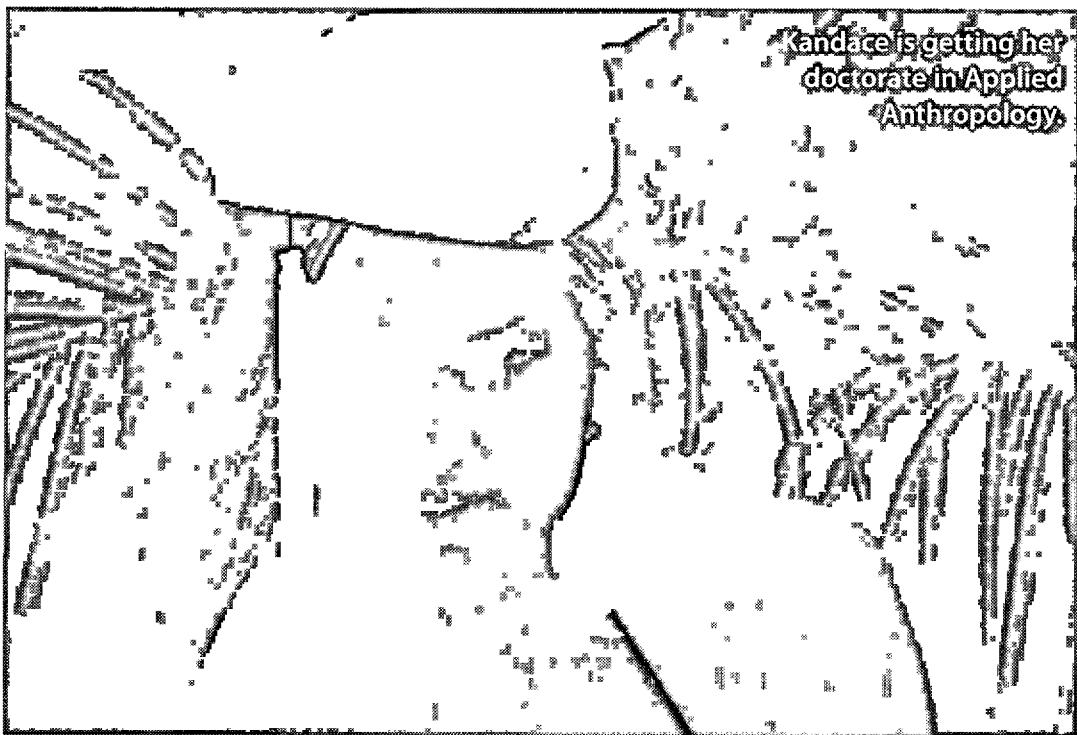
When a skeptical student journalist began to ask questions, the official retorted, "Oh sure we considered that some students would earn more money than others, that's why we've decided that all their earnings will go directly into an account controlled by the Chancellor himself."

"But doesn't that make him a pimp?" asked another reporter.

"And your point is?" responded the Chancellor's spokesperson. "As for concerns about ugly students not getting any clients at all, they shouldn't worry; there will always be legally blind customers like our current governor. Or just somebody with lots of cash who wants to beat and humiliate someone unattractive."

There are other benefits to the cash-only structure of the new fellowships. Since fellows will be paid mostly in perks, like carte blanche town car services and no cost Upper East Side apartments, their official income will be well below the poverty line. This will allow them all to qualify for Medicaid.

"Everyone wins with this new plan," said the CUNY press-official. "Students live in the lap of luxury, finally get health insurance, and never have to kiss a client on the mouth. CUNY will attract better, more sexually mature students, and a new class of donors, and I'm not just talking about sperm donors, folks. Sorry, little joke there. Finally, desperate, lonely, powerful people can get back to putting their mouths where their money is. When the Spitzer story broke *The Post* headline said, 'Ho No!' We're saying, 'Ho Yes!'"



ask harriet

by HARRIET-ZANZIBAR

Dear Harriet,

My girlfriend just told me that she's not sure I'm the right one for her, because she knows she wants to have kids and she's pegged me as not being ready to, you know, pitch in. I really love her and I want to be with her, but I'm not sure about bringing a third person into the relationship. What should I do?

— Desperate About Diapers

This is a classic dilemma, DAD, going back to the dawn of time. Scratched into a wall somewhere in Neolithic France are cave paintings of Igga pointing to her vagina and explaining her needs, and Oog standing off to the side with his hands over his ears mouthing whatever would have been the caveman equivalent of "La la la, can't hear you."

One of the things you need to figure out is exactly where this is coming from on her end. It could be one of a number of things. On the one hand, perhaps she's feeling like it's time for her to start thinking about kids. In that case it may have nothing to do with you; you just happen to be lying around handy, like the pen that happens to be closest when you start to start to write a letter to grandma. If that pen runs dry, you know what happens. You shake it a few times, try pushing it into the paper a little harder, then toss it aside in disgust and find another one as quickly as possible.

Or it could be that one of her girlfriends or a sister has settled down and started planting pumpkins. In that case it might be something that seems really cool for a while, like a fetching orange windbreaker that looked so good on the mannequin that you might stop in and pick up the next time around. But sooner or later you walk past the window one time too many and you realize that orange windbreakers are *nasty*, and you can't believe you were thinking of getting one.

Or it could have nothing to do with maternity. She might have accurately pegged you as being kid-leery and decided to conceal her bone-weariness with the way you snort when you laugh or your avid devotion to *So You Think You Can Dance Like a Fifth Grader* behind this highly effective way of getting you to get rid of yourself without her ever having to break out the shovel and bust it on your ass. The ideal revenge, of course, for such a ploy is to step up and say, "Kids? I want 10! And we'll train them in ballroom dancing and right-wing inflammatory blogging!" Then watch her face curdle like a dairy cow in an acid bath.

Most of these don't reflect back on you. But the real sticking point is door number four: she's decided she wants kids because she wants them with you. She wants kids with your eyes and her ears and either her junk or your junk depending on the gender as appropriate. She wants to make the kind of love with you that makes babies. Here the balls are in your court.

But the decision isn't what you think it is. You don't have to decide whether you want kids, either with her or at all. Because I already know what the answer is. There's one rule common to all of humanity, which is that guys don't want kids. Not a single one. On this score, Ward Cleaver is on the same page with Dexter the serial killer. The mental line of reasoning with respect to having kids is, for a guy, something like an endless tape loop of a sound pitched halfway between a whine and a growl. Translated into English it would be something like, "Aw Mom, do I have to?"

It's no great mystery why, either: guys want to do the procreative act while totally pretending nothing will come of it. That's the only way guys can even make it to third base in the first place: knowing you can run off the field at top speed if you win the game.

But here's the thing: Guys change into a totally different species once the kid pops out and opens its eyes and looks at you and you go, "I'm a dad!" and you're startled at how good that feels. No matter how you feel about kids now, you'll change your mind.

The real question is: Do you want to be with this woman, now, tomorrow, in the unforeseeable future? Imagine you're Sinbad (the sailor, not the "comedian"), and you're sailing into a mist-shrouded sea. Can you picture facing the unknown with her as your only crew? If the answer's yes, then, kids or no kids, you're solid. Step up, son, and someday you might say the same thing to a son of your own.

Got problems? Email questions for Harriet to advocate@gc.cuny.edu.