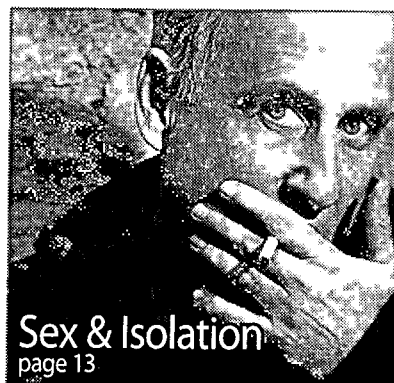


CUNY GRADUATE CENTER **Advocate**

March 2008

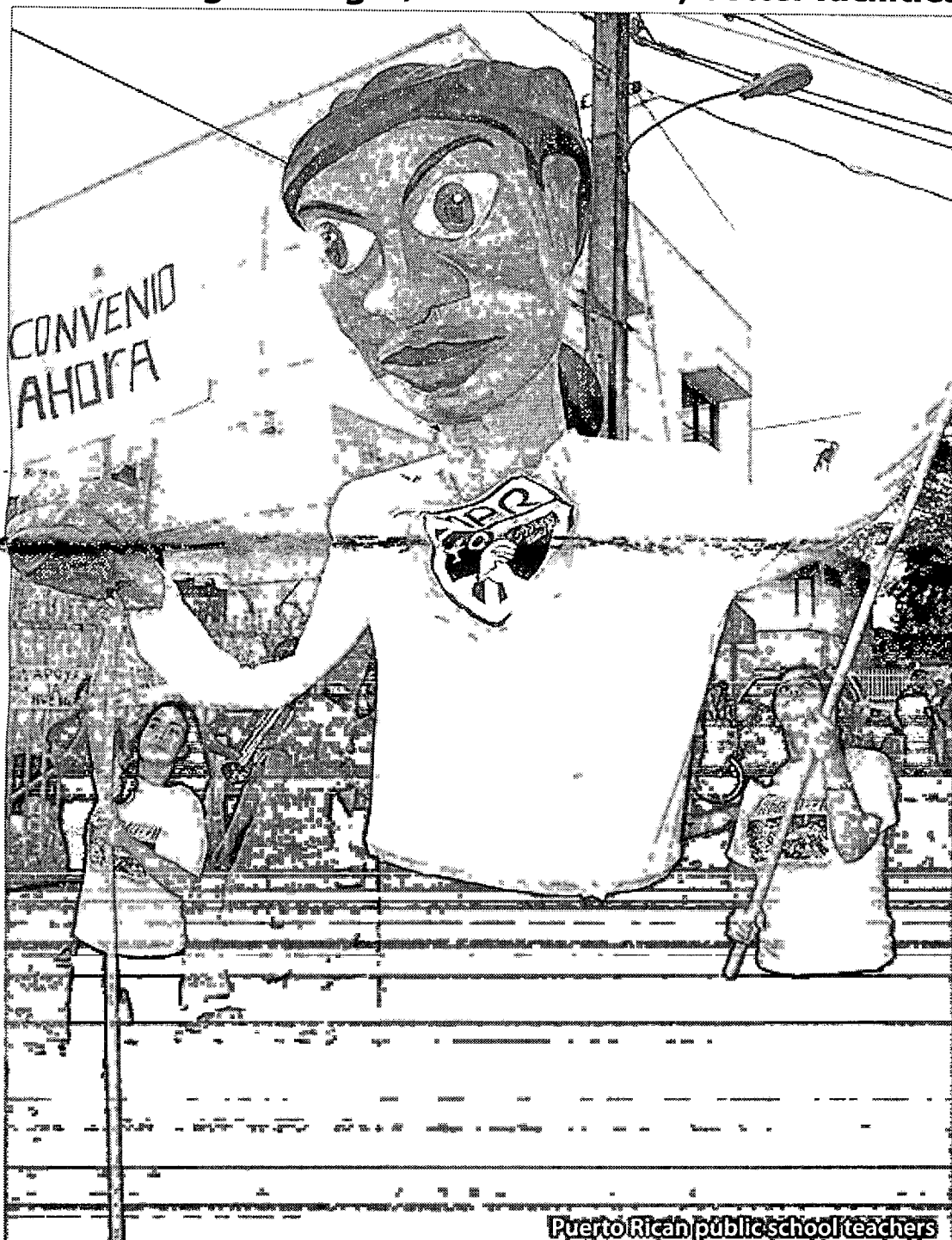
<http://gcadvocate.org>

advocate@gc.cuny.edu



Puerto Rico School Teachers Go on Strike

Demand higher wages, smaller classes, better facilities



Puerto Rican public school teachers demonstrate for better wages and conditions in February

On Feb. 21, after more than 30 months of stalled contract negotiations between the Puerto Rico Teachers' Union and the central government, many thousands of Puerto Rico's 42,000 public school teachers went on strike, closing down schools across the small island territory and sparking violence in some cities.

Although Puerto Rican teachers make a starting

salary of only \$19,200, or approximately one third of the average salary for public school teachers in mainland USA, the lack of any real salary increases was only one of many reasons why teachers went on strike. In addition to higher wages, striking teachers say they are primarily fighting for greater control over their working conditions, including defending the School

Organization Committee, which has given teachers in Puerto Rico, unlike many teachers on the mainland, some limited control over the curriculum and organization of the schools where they work. The state and the education department have threatened to liquidate the School Organization Committee in the current contract negotiations.

Continued page 6

NP on the Way?

Student Affairs says new nurse practitioner could be on campus by mid-April

According to Sharon Lerner, the Director of Student Affairs, the long saga of finding and hiring a new nurse practitioner for the student Health Services Center may finally be at an end. The Health Services Center, located on the sixth floor of the graduate Center, has been without a nurse since the former director of Health Services, Mary Clancy retired July 30, 2007. Since then the Office of Student Affairs has been working with mixed success to find a replacement for Clancy.

Ms. Lerner said that the long and often complicated contract process, which requires state approval, has made finding a replacement for Clancy difficult. Despite the difficulties, however, Lerner said she is confident that the process is quickly reaching its end and that, if all goes as planned, there should be an onsite nurse practitioner in training sometime in mid-April. If this is true it will be welcome news for the many uninsured and increasingly under-insured Graduate Center students, many of whom rely upon the health care provided by the Health Services Center.

Unfortunately this is not the first time that the Office of Student Affairs has made these kinds of optimistic predictions. In September 2007, Matthew Schoengood, the Vice President for Student Affairs, told the *GC Advocate* that he hoped a nurse practitioner would be in place by the end of the fall semester; and in November, Sharon Lerner optimistically told the paper that the GC would have a replacement for Mary Clancy by January, 2008. It has now been more than seven months since Clancy's retirement and nearly a full academic year that the school has been

without a nurse practitioner. Although Student Affairs is clearly optimistic, if their track record is any indication, there is no guarantee that the hiring process will be completed before the end of the spring semester. It is possible that GC Students may have to wait until the summer before the Health Services Center is back on track.

In the meantime, the Doctoral Students' Council is debating how best to spend or invest the \$96,000 in student fees that have gone to help fund the nurse practitioner. Sources in the DSC say that one of the many ideas being considered includes offering to purchase any needed or new equipment for the Health Services Center.

As a temporary solution to this problem, the DSC and the Office of Student Affairs are continuing to work directly with the Urban Family Health Clinics of New York to provide temporary care to GC students who need to see a nurse. Students interested in visiting one of the many clinics available to GC students throughout the city (see list below), should see the Administrative Coordinator of the Wellness Center, Ms. Annabella Bernard (Room 6422) for more details.

Sidney Hillman Family Practice: 16 East 16th Street, New York, NY 10003

East 13th St. Family Practice: 113 East 13th St. New York, NY 10003

Amsterdam Center: 690 Amsterdam Avenue (at 94th St.) New York, NY 10025

Walton Family Health Center: 1894 Walton Avenue Bronx, NY 10453

Mt. Hope Family Practice: 130 West Tremont Avenue Bronx, NY 10453

Parkchester Family Practice: 1597 Unionport Road Bronx, NY 10462

What Nader's Bid Really Means

"If liberty and equality, as is thought by some, are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in government to the utmost." —Aristotle

By the time this goes to press, I am sure we will have all heard the chorus of doom and gloom voices from the moderate left bewailing Ralph Nader's recently announced Green Party bid for President of the United States. There will be the usual pundits saying things such as: "he was a great consumer advocate, but has no business being in politics" or "now is not the time;" and, of course, there will be plenty of arguments about Nader's naive idealism, the inefficacy of third parties, and the paranoid-fueled fear of a Nader driven Republican win in 2008, but there will be little talk about the real implications of his campaign. Indeed the media coverage of Nader has always focused on him as a spoiler and very rarely as a real candidate with real issues. I can still hear, for instance, somewhere in the back of my brain the revered *Nation* columnist Eric Alterman's whiny, petulant, schoolboy voice complaining how Nader cost the Democrats the 2000 election.

"Thank you, Ralph, for the Iraq war. Thank you, Ralph, for the tax cuts. Thank you, Ralph, for the destruction of the environment. Thank you, Ralph, for the destruction of the Constitution."

Of course, Nader could not possibly be responsible for any of these things, and to suggest that he might be is the worst kind of intellectual dishonesty. If Nader had even half of the power embittered Democrats like Alterman think he does, the Democratic Party would have courted him long ago — at least offering to take up some of his positions — rather than demonizing him. As everyone who wasn't living under a rock knows, the Democrats did not lose the 2000 election; the 2000 election was stolen! The Democrats were defeated because the president's brother was the governor of Florida, not because Ralph Nader took away Al Gore's vote. The Democrats were defeated because after the election Al Gore cared more about political stability and the reputation of his party than taking on the Bush campaign, and rolled over precisely when he should have been mobilizing street demonstrations and demanding a thorough recount. The Democrats lost not only because Al Gore lost Florida, but because he failed to win a solid majority of states outside of Florida, which would have protected him against the fraud perpetrated there. And lastly, the Democrats were defeated because they courted members of the Republican Party and "swing voters" and completely failed to energize their base and speak to their real constituency, many of whom stayed home. So thank you Al Gore for losing; thank you Al Gore for the tax cuts; thank you Al Gore for the Iraq War; and, uh, thank you Al Gore, for the impotent, utterly demoralized, and ineffectual party that you left in your wake. And this brings us to the real issue at hand; there is no better reason to support a Nader campaign than the current Democratically controlled congress, which, despite all of its rhetoric, has done nothing to end the War in Iraq, absolutely nothing at all to move toward a real national health care plan — neither Hillary nor Obama are currently offering anything like the kind of national health care plan our country so desperately needs — and very little to repeal the Bush tax cuts or the Patriot Act.

FROM THE editor's desk

Like in 2000, there are still few significant and substantive differences between the two parties. Sure, McCain supports continuing the war if necessary and Obama at least says that he supports bringing the troops home within a year, but Clinton's position on the war is as muddled as most of her fellow Democrats, and any final decisions, regardless of who is elected, will be based on the realities on the ground in Iraq in January and have little to do with campaign promises. The political consequences of a real withdrawal are too much for either of the two big parties to handle. What we do know, however, is that Obama, Clinton, and McCain are all pretty hawkish on US foreign policy, (Obama, for instance, has argued for increasing the military budget and bombing Pakistan if necessary) and all see a continued PNAC style role for the U.S. in controlling and manipulating international affairs. Likewise, Clinton and McCain have little or no interest in repealing or voting against trade pacts like NAFTA and other economically liberal trade policies that destroy local economies, cultures, and workers' rights. Although Obama has very recently paid lip service to criticizing NAFTA, he has also said that not re-negotiating the current trade agreements could lead to what he called "protectionist rhetoric" from the right and the left.

This kind of fear mongering is typical neo-liberal rhetoric and is hardly the position of someone sincerely interested in real trade reform, but rather reflects the position of a true moderate, interested in ameliorating some of the negative impacts of trade agreements like NAFTA but not repealing or significantly changing them. Indeed, "amelioration" is exactly the term that Clinton used in the last debate to describe her response to NAFTA. Of course there are issues where the two parties actually differ significantly (abortion, guns, immigration, gay marriage), but on the big issues, there is simply too much common ground. Who is to say whether Al Gore and the Democrats, for instance, would have invaded Iraq after 9/11 (the Clinton administration, after all, had no qualms about killing innocent Iraqis with its sanctions)? Who can guess whether or not he would have instituted even more draconian surveillance legislation after the attacks? Or whether he would have closed down or expanded Guantanamo? Lastly, who is to say whether or not Gore and his party would have been capable of implementing any of the environmental policies that he ran on in 2000? It is more likely that the Republican run congress would have bullied Gore into a stalemate on probably all of these issues, pushing him into Iraq, stonewalling his environmental policies (or placating him on one or two), and limiting his executive power, just as they expanded the executive power of Bush. George Bush may have been the one in charge for the last eight years, but the groundwork for all of our recent foreign and domestic disasters were laid by both parties — let us never forget the cowardly bi-partisan congressional vote to authorize the use of force against Iraq. As Jonathan Edwards, a Democrat himself, was fond of reminding voters:

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.

It is really no coincidence then that Nader announced his exploratory committee on exactly the same day that Edwards chose to drop out of the Democratic race. Without Edwards and Kucinich running, the Democratic Party nomination has been handed back to the politicians, corporatists, centrists, and moderates of the Clinton era. Like Edwards, Nader recognizes that the real problems facing our nation are not al-Qaida or Iran, but are largely internal and domestic. Nader's campaign, and the Green Party's platform, unlike Obama's or Hillary's, has always been about change; it is about fundamentally changing the nature and structure of our democracy. It's about changing the constitution and moving away from a winner take all two-party system of entrenched interests, toward a more real, more representative, more inclusive, more dynamic, and more diverse democracy, where votes are never wasted, and people's voices are heard. Let us not forget the Green Party either, whose candidacy Nader is seeking, and whose progressive platform of reform would seek to implement such necessary and common sense changes as living wage laws; real national health care, cooperative ownership of enterprise, a steady-state economy, and global disarmament of nuclear weapons, not to mention a dedication to actually doing something about global warming and environmental destruction now rather than later. While Obama and Hillary compete to see who can offer the flimsiest multi-payer health care system, the Green Party supports "a universal, comprehensive, national single-payer health insurance program." This alone should be enough to convince anyone who actually cares about the coming health care crisis to vote for the Green Party.

But it's not just about voting for Ralph Nader or the Green Party. Vote for whomever you like — including Cynthia McKinney, should she win the Green Party nomination — but whatever you do, leave the Democratic Party; join the Green Party or the Socialist Party USA or whatever party tickles your fancy; volunteer to help out in a local campaign; and donate what you can. Nader's presidential bids have obviously never been about winning, but, like all third party campaigns, have always been about gaining support for the movements, the parties, and the platforms that really matter, and raising awareness about the real options and possibilities that are available. Although Nader will not win in 2008, he, once again, has the opportunity to challenge the status quo, force himself into the conversation — and maybe even the debates — garner support for the causes that really matter, and force the Democrats against the wall on the real issues facing our country. The pundits will say what they always say: "Nader is a spoiler;" "it's not time;" "this would be fine if we had a parliamentary democracy," etc. But this is exactly what they've said all along from 1996, to 2000, to 2004. Ask yourself, when will it be time? And how long can we stand to wait before we realize our time has passed? ■

Advocate

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CUNY Grad Students Deserve the Same Health Insurance as SUNY Grad Students

ELLEN ZITANI

With the Democratic campaigns focusing on the subtle differences between Senator Clinton's platform of mandatory (but "affordable") health insurance for all and Senator Obama's platform of mandatory insurance for children and "affordable" insurance for all, the language used in their debates reminds me so much of our own struggle as CUNY graduate students for adequate and affordable health insurance.

In addition to being a graduate student in History at the CUNY Graduate Center and an adjunct in History at Hunter College, I also work at the GC as a part-time student administrator in the Office of Student Affairs, helping my fellow graduate students determine whether or not they are eligible for Healthy NY or Family Health Plus, the New York State public health insurance programs, or if they can afford (or should bother to buy) the GHI or NAGPS student insurance plans. The irony of my employment is that even though I hold two jobs at CUNY, one of which is as a health insurance advocate, I myself remain under-insured because all I can afford is a basic hospitalization policy.

Because of my job in Student Affairs, people often ask me why CUNY students enroll in public health insurance programs — many times these people are faculty, GC staff, or new, unsuspecting graduate students. They are shocked when I tell them that CUNY does not offer its undergraduate or graduate students mandatory, affordable, or even adequate health insurance. The real kicker is that for some reason, the other university system in our state, SUNY, does offer comprehensive, affordable, and mandatory coverage to its graduate students.

The annual premium for individuals at SUNY is \$114.96 and for families is \$996.72 (http://www.sunysb.edu/hr/benefits/state/student_premiums.shtml). Compared to the GHI insurance offered to CUNY Students, which costs \$2,396.76 per year for individuals and \$6,830.88 for families — we are getting a raw deal. Many students cannot afford GHI, and many others find it grossly inadequate. SUNY students get vision, dental, and prescription drugs; CUNY students do not. The NAGPS insurance offered by CUNY is priced by age; many students over 35 cannot afford it and many others find the reimbursements to be inadequate and difficult to obtain.

This disparity is outrageous. I am saddened 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. I encourage everyone to follow President Kelly's email request and go to www.supportcuny.org to encourage legislators to treat CUNY students with more equity. Hopefully a decision will be made to include CUNY students in the SUNY program — an obvious solution to a serious disparity.

In the mean time, CUNY graduate students are left with the decision between inadequate and overpriced student health insurance (GHI or NAGPS) and the NY state public programs. While I know that Albany must be thrilled to hear that some CUNY students are taking advantage of Healthy NY or Family Health Plus, I can tell you that most can't afford or don't qualify for one of the two programs offered. In my experience, CUNY graduate students with fellowships receive stipends of between roughly \$13,000 and \$20,000/year, which is only slightly higher than the requirements to qualify for the free state plan, Family Health Plus, and yet not enough to afford the approximately \$2,772/year for the individual standard Empire BlueCross Plan

guest editorial

with prescription drug coverage through Healthy NY. Additionally, there are many students who elect to sign their children up for the Child Health Plus public insurance, while they themselves, as parents, remain uninsured or under-insured because of the prohibitive costs of NY state public health insurance and CUNY student insurance. Asking CUNY students to rely on NY state public insurance is irresponsible; most don't qualify or can't afford it.

Many students at the CUNY Graduate Center serve either as adjunct lecturers at the other CUNY colleges or as administrators in the various CUNY offices, or both (like me). We are poorly paid in both salary and benefits, while Albany saves money by not having to exclusively employ full-time, competitively salaried professors and administrators (after all, why buy the cow when you can get the milk at a discount?). While the Professional Staff Congress union offers some adjuncts health insurance (after two semesters of service), the graduate students teaching as part of CUNY (state-funded) fellowship packages are excluded from this benefit while they perform the same tasks as those who are paid as adjuncts and receive benefits from the PSC.

The issue of "affordability" that has arisen in the Democratic nomination debates touches a raw nerve with me every day in the Office of Student Affairs as I explain the limited health insurance options to countless, disappointed graduate students. If Senator Clinton thinks that her own state's

Healthy NY program is "affordable" — she's mistaken. I haven't seen any figures from Senator Obama gauging what "affordable" means to him, but I hope whomever wins the nomination will consider the fact that anything over \$50/month is NOT affordable for those on limited incomes. If Clinton thinks that Healthy NY is affordable and CUNY thinks that GHI is affordable — they both are wrong. SUNY's insurance for graduate students is affordable and should serve as a model for CUNY.

Everyone in the GC community should follow President Kelly's advice and lobby Albany to include CUNY in the SUNY program, or offer a comparable benefit to CUNY graduate students. While this would not solve the issue of health insurance for CUNY undergraduates, at least it would be a start.

PS: I welcome any GC student who needs help wading through the sea of underwhelming health insurance options to contact me at the Office of Student Affairs: (212) 817-7408 or ezitani@gc.cuny.edu. Until adequate, affordable insurance is offered, we can sit down together to weigh the differences of the public and student options so that you can make an informed decision that will best serve your and your family's needs. You can also evaluate your options at: http://www.gc.cuny.edu/current_students/StudentHealth/index.htm#C. ■

Ellen Zitani is a Doctoral Student of History, CUNY Graduate Center, an Adjunct Professor of History at Hunter College, and the Graduate Student Administrator for the CUNY Graduate Center Office of Student Affairs.

The opinions in this essay are the opinions of the author and do not represent those of the City University of New York or the Office of Student Affairs at the CUNY Graduate

WINDOWS LIVE EMAIL UPDATE

Following last month's announcement that the Graduate Center's conversion to Windows Live for student email was deferred, Assistant Vice President of Information Technology Robert Campbell said that the IT department is continuing to discuss alternate solutions with students. "We met with the DSC and put together a working group of students," Campbell said, "and crafted some scenarios that are promising." As the GC Advocate goes to press this month, this conversation is ongoing.

HELP DESK

As of March 3, the Help Desk will be in its new location at the foot of the stairs in the C-level of the library. Students can chat online with a Help Desk technician via Windows Live chat account at gchelpdesk@hotmail.com.

PILOT FLAT SCREEN TELEVISION PROGRAM

The IT department is beginning a pilot program to incorporate flat screen televisions into high-usage thesis rooms within various PhD department suites. Campbell said that the first pilot flat screen TV was set up in the Linguistics thesis room on the seventh floor (room 7400.04) and that all EOs and APOs were asked to take

GRADUATE CENTER technology

a look. If the setup is acceptable then the IT department will purchase eight more 46" Sony flat screen televisions and stands for deployment in the eight thesis rooms with the highest demands for audio/visual equipment: Education Psychology, Environmental Psychology, Social Personality Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Math, French, and Sociology. The television stands would serve to provide space for additional AV equipment and a computer, including a cordless keyboard and mouse.

INTERNET PRINTING

There has been no further progress in implementing the GC's planned internet printing and print management software. Campbell stated that the software "hasn't been used in a clustered environment." IT is working to get the software configured properly.

TECH FEE COMMITTEE

The Student Technology Fee committee met this past month and passed a motion that indicated where funding for next year's budget will go.

Although nothing is set in stone until the committee votes on the budget for 2008-09 later this spring, Campbell noted

that presently the committee favors funding for the proposed Mac lab and significant proposed advancements and Citrix upgrades.

A/V FOR STUDENT USE

At press time, Campbell noted that A/V resources are being installed in two student-use activity rooms on the fifth floor of the GC that include projectors, speakers, screens, and computers. One room is already outfitted and the second should be completed this spring.

LINUX PILOT PROGRAM

IT has installed two Linux PCs in the Mathematics department for use by students as a pilot test program.

IT HIRES

The IT department recently hired four new full-time personnel: two web programmers, one systems administrator, and one employee for User Services. Additionally, the Help Desk support staff recently added new staff members (one full-time and one part-time) to help address the GC community's technology needs.

IN MEMORIAM

The IT department wishes to express its sadness at the loss of former colleague Jack Tralongo, who over the years made many significant contributions to the department. ■

Now is the Time for Graduate Student Health Insurance at CUNY!

CARL LINDSKOOG

Don't look now, but the movement for graduate student health insurance is rapidly gaining momentum. Graduate students are speaking publicly about our lack of health insurance and mobilizing a surprising campaign to achieve this urgent need. Here is what has been happening and what is coming up in the future.

Last semester graduate students initiated a new phase in the campaign for health insurance. Since our union, the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), has made graduate student health insurance a core contract demand, we have been working together on this campaign. Capturing the support of graduate faculty has been a critical element. Last semester the Adjunct Project and the PSC collaborated on a letter to Graduate Center faculty informing them of our campaign and asking them to join us as allies. At the same time we began collecting graduate student and graduate faculty signatures on a petition demanding graduate student health insurance (available to sign online at www.gcadvocate.org). The response to these two initiatives has been tremendous! Many Graduate Center faculty members have pledged their support and graduate students have been enthusiastically collecting signatures on the

health insurance petition. At contract negotiations in December, just a short time into our petition drive, we presented CUNY with a stack of petitions signed by more than 700 graduate students and faculty members, and the list of signatures continues to grow.

While our letter and petition campaign represented steps forward for the movement, the most exciting developments have come more recently. On Feb. 8 the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Higher Education held a public hearing examining the Higher Education Commission's preliminary report. Recognizing that the report failed to address some of our key concerns, Graduate Center students attended the hearing to draw attention to the report's deficiencies. We testified to the poor treatment and low wages of graduate student and adjunct faculty. We urged the Commission to recognize the need for more financial support for graduate students. But one message at the hearing stood out above all the rest: we need health insurance and we need it now!

Since the hearing we have seen promising signs that our voice is finally being heard. Deborah Glick, chairperson on the New York State Assembly Committee on Higher Education, was receptive to our call for health insurance and could be a key ally in Albany. Thanks to the energetic leadership of Sean Murray, a doctoral student in Musicology, we have also had a meeting with Assemblyman and Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, Herman D. Farrell Jr., and we have the attention of New York State Senators Schneiderman, Lavalley, and Johnson. We are hopeful that once they hear our call, New York State legislators will respond by appropriating money for a health insurance system for CUNY graduate students that will match the existing system available to SUNY graduate students (see Ellen Zitani's editorial "CUNY Grad Students Deserve the Same Health Insurance as SUNY Grad Students" in this month's issue of *The GC Advocate* [page 3]).

adjuncting

It will, however, take more than a sympathetic response by legislators. Success will require that we take advantage of the momentum coming out of the recent hearings and build a movement that is impossible to ignore. Starting immediately and through the month of March the Adjunct Project and the Health Issues Committee of

the Doctoral Students' Council will be implementing a new phase in the campaign for health insurance. First, we will facilitate a letter-writing campaign and a series of call-in days to push for action by New York State legislators. Second, we will be working with Graduate Center Professor Stanley Aronowitz and other faculty members to continue to build coalitions with Graduate Center faculty. Third, we will continue to collect signatures on the health insurance petition. And finally, we will organize a series of events to protest our lack of health insurance and rally support for the campaign.

We may be on the verge of achieving graduate student health insurance, but we need a strong push to put us over the edge. Please join us to achieve this important goal. We can't do it without you! ■

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 is coordinator of the Adjunct Project.

UPCOMING ADJUNCT PROJECT MEETINGS

- Friday, March 14: 5:30 pm, GC 5489
- Friday, April 4: 6:30 pm, GC 5409
- Friday, May 9: 5:30 pm, GC 5414



Asian American / Asian Research Institute

The City University of New York

2008 CUNY Thomas Tam Scholarship

Application Deadline: Wednesday, April 30, 2008

The Thomas Tam Scholarship is funded by an endowment established by The City University of New York (CUNY) in recognition of Thomas Tam's contributions as a former member of the CUNY Board of Trustees, Executive Director of the AAARI, and leadership in the Asian American community. The Scholarship will award \$1,000 annually to a qualified undergraduate student currently enrolled at any of the twenty-three colleges within CUNY.

The purpose of the Scholarship is to help support and recognize a CUNY undergraduate student, Asian or non-Asian, who has demonstrated creativity in the communication of the concerns of the Asian American community in areas such as Health, Education and Culture. The display of this communication can be in the form of written reports, film, video, new media techniques, and the development of performances or materials in the Arts and Sciences.

2008 CUNY Conference on Asian American Women

Friday, May 16, 2008
9AM to 4PM

CUNY Graduate Center

Fee: \$35 (Non-Member)
\$15 (Member/Student)

Topics To Be Covered Include:

- ♦ Business, Leadership & Professional Development
- ♦ Media, Visual & Performing Art
- ♦ New Demographics
- ♦ Balancing Career & Family
- ♦ Public Administration & Gov't

2008 CUNY Asian American Film Festival

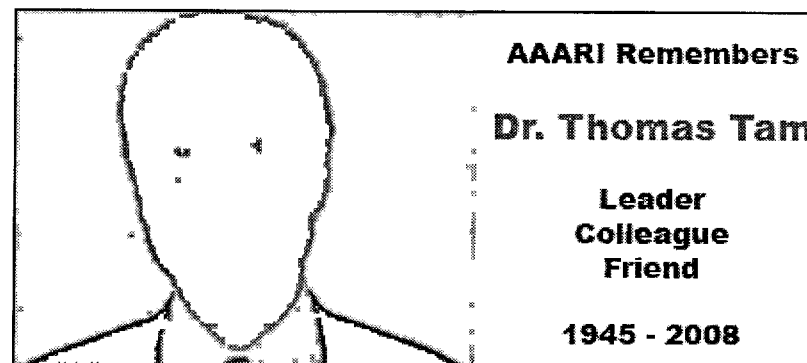
Seeking Entries!

Submission Deadline
Monday, May 5, 2008

Categories

Fiction, Documentary & Experimental

- ♦ Film must have an Asian or Asian American reference
- ♦ All current CUNY students (Asian/Non-Asian) are eligible
- ♦ Length of film is limited to twenty minutes or less



AAARI Remembers

Dr. Thomas Tam

Leader
Colleague
Friend

1945 - 2008

Asian Language Corner

Open your horizons, and learn a new language in just ten sessions!

Fee: \$200 (Non-Member) | \$100* (Member/Student)
* \$120 for Cantonese

Hindi Level 1	6PM~7:30PM	Mondays, Mar 10 to May 12, 2008.
Cantonese Level 1	6PM~7:30PM	Tuesdays, Mar 18 to May 20, 2008
Japanese Level 1	6PM~7:30PM	Mondays, Mar 24 to May 26, 2008

Friday Evening Lectures Series

Admission: \$3 (Non-Member) | Free (Member/Student)

03-07-08	Speech Recognition Dictation Technology
03-14-08	China's Third World Policy from the Maoist Era to the Present
03-21-08	Ethnic Banks and Community Development in New York City
03-29-08	Sensation Seeking and Criminality Cross-Culturally
04-11-08	Taiko in North America: the Dilemma of World Music Performance

For details, to register, or to view past events, please visit our website @

www.aaari.info

Tel: 212-869-0182 Fax: 212-869-0181 E-mail: info@aaari.info

Catching More Flies with . . . Butter?

TRACY E. ROBEY

I don't know why I thought teaching my History 101 class to make butter would be a good idea.

In April of last year I packed two glass mason jars, a pint of heavy cream, some spoons, cheesecloth, bread, and salt before making my long trek to Queens College. As I switched between local subway and express subway, then subway to bus, the jars clanked against each other. I adjusted the cheesecloth to protect my lesson from breaking. I wished I had written a lecture instead.

I couldn't write another lecture on "early modern Europe, 1500-1815" that week. I might drag myself to Queens College, but I couldn't drag myself from behind a net of anxiety and depression that partly coincided with the moment teaching responsibilities had been shoveled on my 23-year-old corpse. My equally young psychiatrist planted pills over my grave, resulting in me coming alive with frightening, whip-like intensity, only to collapse back. I was suffering from what a later practitioner called "medication induced Bipolar Disorder," an illness not yet recognized by the field or by my doctor at the time.

When I reached the office I shoved my butter supplies under my desk. I read memos from my mailbox. Checked e-mail. Made coffee. Talked to the secretaries. Smiled, or rather tried to pull my face into something resembling happiness, at the department chair when he mentioned he enjoyed the class on early modern fairy tales that he had observed the week before. I wondered what he would think if he realized that instead of talking about Little Red Hood taking butter to grandmother we would be making it that day. I felt like a wolf, that if cut open, would reveal 90 students desperate for a lecture on the Thirty-Year's War.

That spring culinary treatises like Harold McGee's *On Food and Cooking* and Jacques Pepin's *Complete Techniques* guided me; I had little use for the self-help of *Feeling Good* and Oprah. I celebrated thickened béarnaise, studied the molecular structure of goat's milk, and put shameless wedding registry abusers to shame with my kitchen tool purchases. I suspect that I found instructions for making butter online, since I don't own *Turn the Kitchen Clock Back 500 Years*.

Making butter at home is simple. Leave heavy cream out overnight to warm and allow the fat molecules to become imperceptibly rancid, giving the butter a more complex flavor. Dump the warm cream into a jar or water bottle about double its volume with a very secure lid and shake for about 20 minutes. The agitation damages the fat molecules, which are otherwise suspended in liquid. After enough shaking you will produce a glob of butter sitting in real, uncultured buttermilk.

Now in the classroom, I couldn't believe what I was about to do. I chastised myself for spending days staring blankly at Mario Batali and Giada de Laurentis on the Food Network instead of typing up the page and a half of notes that would have maintained the illusion that I could handle teaching. I held the big mason jar of cream over my shoulder and moved it like a martini shaker so that my students would replace their looks of disbelief with laughs. I handed the jar to the nearest student and instructed them all to shake for a few moments then pass it on. I talked distractedly about career possibilities in public history for people who like to convey historical knowledge in less conventional learning settings like "living museums" and Civil War battlefields.

dispatches

FROM THE FRONT

I could have written a sociological study on how students reacted to The Jar. The girls in Uggs boots made faces, wrapped their manicures around the jar, gave it one shake, and passed it on. I felt bad for their boyfriends. The boys on the baseball team, which I liked to conflate with the softball team, shook so vigorously that they seemed to stop breathing, leaving their faces flushed deep pink. I reminded myself to discuss early modern gender roles next meeting.

The students who kept up with the reading, took notes during lecture, and answered questions thoughtfully during discussion shook the jar exactly as I did for a few moments, then passed it on. There were the people who looked unshakably uninterested — they passed the jar as soon as it was given to them.

By the time the jar traveled halfway across the room of 45 students something was happening. The shaking started looking like a violent stabbing motion rather than bourgeois cocktail construction. The softball players, Uggs girls, and my pets stared into the jar, some of them making noises as they imagined our project going straight to their hips. Some of the students slowly turned the jar to watch the glob of butter splash in the buttermilk that remained. The public history discussion died as students stood up to see their jar transformed.

As I took back the jar from the last student and poured out the buttermilk I fielded questions. Is this safe to eat?

— yes. Are we going to die?

— yes. But not from this. Is this the way people made butter in early modern Europe?

— yes, although they had other, bigger vessels for agitating the cream. Isn't butter what Little Red Hood was taking to her grandmother in the second ver-

sion of the story that we read?

Yes. In an instant, the net of illness that had secretly separated me from them was gone, and off we went, racing to compare the ingredients of Miss Hood's basket in each of three versions of the tale, talking about respective value of the foodstuffs in her baskets, and how the richer ingredients in later versions betray the movement of fairy tales up the social ranks to the King of France's own secretary. I shared theories about the transmission of culture in early modern Europe. Hands bobbed for attention, voices blurted out questions and answers, and I scribbled some quick notes on the board.

We talked about household economy and the overlooked role of women as household managers in history. We passed through chalk and cheese England, the early modern market, and social divisions that resulted in some people eating roasted peacocks dressed in a robe of their own uncooked feathers while others ate so much gruel or polenta that their facial structure changed due to malnutrition.

I used water borrowed earlier from the department fountain to wash the remaining buttermilk from the wad of butter. I explained that buttermilk left in the butter would make it smell and taste musty after a few weeks. Then I flopped our butter onto a square of cheesecloth — gross! — and used two wooden spoons as

paddles to squeeze any pockets of water and buttermilk from the interior of the butter. I scooped up our project, set it in a bowl and added salt. In this case, the salt was *fleur de sel*, the salt once collected from the sea for the kings of France. Salt was also important at the time because of forced salt taxes, including the French *gabelle* that would play a role in the French Revolution.

I sliced bread, stuck a knife in the butter, and invited my students to sample their work. They approached me like I was a plague victim offering a bowl of fluid from a lanced buboe. One bold, probably hungry student finally grabbed the knife, smeared the soft, faintly yellow butter onto a crust of bakery baguette. And another. Some students came back to the table a few times, others took samples to their friends and relatives.

After the classes ended I packed my bag with the jars, cheesecloth, knife, and spoons. The load was lighter now that the cream and bread were divided among the students. As I glided home I let the jars clank against each other; it sounded like music to me.

I didn't reach every student that day. Some of them left the room as quickly as they could, uninterested in the class's handiwork or prolonging their stay in History 101. But I could see that others were now bonded to the study of the past. In later class meeting they exclaimed over their new knowledge. Some made butter at home for their families. I like to imagine them telling the old versions of fairy tales to unsuspecting relatives and regaling them with the history of the Renaissance as they take turns shaking the jar.

In the year since my experiment, I've found ways to better integrate it into the curriculum. I've included primary source readings from an actual sixteenth-century cookbook on the day that we also

use a Renaissance diary to talk about home life. But

my pedagogical ideas are not without their detractors. One colleague suggested that perhaps next year I would discuss the Black Death by bringing in a rat infected with *Yersinia pestis* and having the students watch it die. I agreed that teaching 90 students in History 101 to make butter does not, on the surface, seem nearly as important a lecture.

I worried the next semester about my failure during the previous year to consistently lecture. I compared myself to my inexperienced psychiatrist, artificially leavening my students then leaving them deflated in the classes of instructors who might expect them to know who signed the Peace of Westphalia. So I started replacing discussions of sleeping arrangements and Marquis de Sade readings with lectures. I poured dates and names into my students and they gave them back to me in their quizzes.

It turned out that lectures in my class are like oxygen and the human body: a bit of it keeps the system pumping, but too much kills. When I couldn't stand that I was covering glowing curiosity with chalk dust and turning faces down to sheets of notes I packed my jars, cream, cheesecloth, and spoon again.

I suspect that making butter may be the best idea I've had as a teacher. It reached kinaesthetic learners, challenged the assumption that history doesn't teach useful information, connected multiple lessons into one very tangible activity, and was a transmission of my love for my chosen field, in the package of my life-giving hobby, to students, some of whom now shout to me across the quad that they are history majors. And if, as postmodernists argue, history is little more than literature, shouldn't studying it be fun? ■

Repetitive Motion Injuries of the Mind

NICHOLE STANFORD

My shocking realization a couple of semesters ago is that graduate students are at high risk for insanity. Yes, insanity. That old proverb that says there's a fine line between brilliance and insanity? Well, that's us, mates.

When I was a kid, I saw the difference between brilliance and insanity in very clear-cut, very segmented and delineated terms. Smart people were on one end, wearing glasses and slightly odd but neat clothes, and these smart people probably did smart things like write books and teach. On the other end of the spectrum were the crazies — wild hair, nervous tics, and probably a lot of externalized inner dialogue. They tended to work in laboratories. Other average humans and I fell in the middle of that band with fashionable (not smart) glasses and fairly decent mind/mouth filters.

Enter grad school. I looked around and noticed most of us have developed eccentricities that make us a little socially odd. For example, it's pretty reasonable around the Graduate Center to be a cat lady or to wear clothes that not only don't match but are intentionally out of date. It's acceptable to be addicted to caffeine (which is a hallucinogen in large quantities), talk to ourselves, and manifest geeky traits that aren't cool in most other places, such as affinities for comic books, puns, or technology. Moreover, I discovered that not only do smart people teach and write books, but so do crazy people.

I began to understand that the brilliance/insanity distinction is on more of a continuum connecting the ends of a circle instead of a polarized scale. Brilliance and insanity truly are separated by a fine line (smudge?), because the mental ability that allows one to think abstractly "outside the box" enough to understand constructs and historical patterns is the same one that allows one to discard societal conventions and lead a life that is "crazy," as it were. Some theorists argue that insanity is not madness at all, but the institutionally defined limit for acceptable societal behavior; the fear of being deemed insane acts, then, as a deterrent to straying from the herd. This is probably true for a lot of unfortunate cases — Nietzsche, arguably — but, on the other hand, there are definitely disabled minds out there, and some of them are actually in here, the Academy.

Before we resign to having "beautiful minds," though, I'd like to point to what I think is a major culprit for us brilliant-slash-crazy academics: repetitive motion of the mind. The more one uses a certain body part, the higher risk one has of injuring it. Employers know this; hence, the field of ergonomics. Likewise, the more we academics use our brains, the greater chance we have of incurring mental injuries. And mental injury, friends, is

grad life

eventually insanity.

So what are our repetitive motions? Think about regular close readings. Or skimming while constantly searching out patterns. Arcane analyses, critically doubting all claims, reading into metaphors, dissecting theory with logic, memorizing details, writing on command, competing with other students, and so on. Think about it: we've gotten to where we are because we're really good at thinking too much. Add to that the other typical occupations of the mind: finances, dating, culture shock for many of us, and daily obstacles from subways to weather.

I'll admit — it didn't take long for me to feel the crazies. It was my first semester of hardcore theory in English when I began to wonder if the thoughts I was having were sane: I worried that I wasn't smart enough, I couldn't turn my mind off, things like that.

I was sane, my professor assured me, but I was internalizing very high doses of convention-stretching theory and seriously engaging my own beliefs, resulting in a sore mind. The mental exercise was

good, but, like an overworked back, my mind was tired, weakened, and less resilient. It needed to lie down and take a rest before tackling more work.

I found myself overworking my mind in other areas too, including one place where minds are not always helpful: relationships — and not just any relationship, but one with a fellow academic. There's nothing quite like two academics who, having been trained and rewarded for over-thinking their entire lives, find themselves in a relationship between semesters. "With nothing else to close-read, critique, analyze, or grade until the next semester began, my partner and I turned on each other and talked way too much about problems we didn't have, but *could* conceivably have one day.

I shamelessly offer examples from my own experience, but I know plenty of other academics (who shall remain anonymous) who are suffering in the head a little too. One is beginning a sixth year of dissertation writing, another has regular panic attacks, and another just can't get it together in general. Plenty of grad students suffer from horrible anxiety, and plenty others turn to mind-numbing or, alternately, mind-revving substances to help them deal with the pressures.

According to "Repetitive Motion Injuries" at E-Medicine Health, it's time to go to the doctor when

you experience "pain with movement of [affected areas], ... pain that wakes you from sleep, [or]... inability to carry on normal activities of daily living" (4). These symptoms refer to physical injuries but cover mental injuries as well. Corresponding injuries as a result of repetitive brain motion may include, respectively: tender egos, insomnia, and paralyzing procrastination. Fortunately, we have free therapy available at the GC for 8-16 visits (their number is (212) 817-7020).

If the mind is like a muscle that can be overworked through repetitive motions, weight-training wisdom can be helpful. As physical fitness trainers say, the key is to stay balanced. A good workout regimen should alternate between different muscle groups on different days. This way, the tiny tears and injuries that occur during workout have a chance to heal before the next workout. Incidentally, it's the rebuilding of that small bit of tissue damage that ultimately makes the muscle bigger and stronger. Accordingly, it's good practice to engage in mental work that deconstructs our theories, but we should

also give our brains a break — before those tiny tears and injuries build up to a more irreversible fragmentation.

Equipped with this new theory during my course work, I began trying to use the rest of my person to achieve mind/body/soul balance — no, really! I didn't want to be a crazy old bat by the time I finish my doctorate, so I

signed up for a ballet class, I made time for coffee talk with friends, and I tried to find some sort of spiritual practice with which I felt comfortable. I made it a point to read for pleasure sometimes, and to simply listen to music on the subway or people-watch instead of force-feeding myself some essay for a class. And when I just couldn't avoid huge amounts of analytical reading, I tried to balance it out by doing something physical at the same time — pacing and reading aloud, alternating arm weights for each page (a good incentive to read faster), working on my ballet *relevés*, or holding some awful yoga position.

Wonder of wonders, it worked. I felt normal again and finished all my course work with no incompletes or extensions. That said, it's a little suspicious when these repetitive brain injuries are epidemic in graduate school, and for that I'd like to thank the Academy. There's clearly something in the graduate school machine that produces procrastination and stress in students so predictably that the GC preemptively offers those specific therapy sessions every semester.

Speaking of procrastination, I've reached that notorious phase in grad school during which all grad students supposedly find themselves awash in a sea of mental torture: orals. I remember one of my professors scoffing when I said I'd finish my orals in six months. With the amount of reading I did for my classes, I thought six months was plenty of time to read 90 texts. Now that I'm here, though, I'm having a hard time getting, uh, motivated. I've tried Spider Solitaire, but it didn't work. In fact, I continue to try it almost daily, and it's still not working, so I don't recommend that route, unless you're practicing for a good cause, such as a Spider Solitaire championship with another grad student on the cusp of crazy, or maybe for one day when a psychotic criminal threatens to destroy the world unless you alone can beat that Spider Solitaire game on difficult (it could happen).

Seriously, colleagues, it's easy to get burned out academically, so let's make sure to schedule a little time off — let our minds lie down and rest a bit when they need it — and engage in some healthy extras like consorting with folks we're fond of and indulging in punny jokes for our inner geeks. ■

With nothing else to close-read, critique, analyze, or grade, my partner and I turned on each other.

Puerto Rico

Continued from page 1

Teachers say they are also very concerned about the overcrowding in their classrooms, outdated equipment, and dilapidated facilities. Teachers are calling for a classroom cap of 15-19 students.

In response to the government's lack of movement on all of these issues, Rafael Feliciano, the head of the Puerto Rican Teachers Federation (FMPR), told the Associated Press on Feb. 20, "the only tool we have to force the government, and in

this case the education secretary, to negotiate is to strike."

Sadly, the strikes have also been marked by a surprising amount of violence, with many teachers being arrested or beaten by police. *The Internationalist* has reported that at least 14 teachers protesting outside the Gabriela Mistral School in San Juan were arrested the first day of the strike and that many others were molested, beaten, or detained.

As Feliciano told *The Internationalist*, "today the police, including members of the *Fuerza de Choque* (Shock Force)

which supposedly hadn't been brought in, went to the Gabriela Mistral School where they beat and dragged off women and men strikers.... We are going to ensure that our picket lines are respected. We will defend ourselves against this aggression."

The FMPR has recently garnered solidarity and support from many other large labor unions in Puerto Rico, including the electrical workers (UTIER) and water workers (UIA) unions, and the Puerto Rican Workers Central (CPT) and it looks like the strike could continue for some time. ■



THE COUNCIL
OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
CITY HALL
NEW YORK, NY 10007

CHRISTINE C. QUINN
SPEAKER

TELEPHONE
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To Whom It May Concern:

On November 29, I met with religious leaders, community advocates, labor leaders, educators, LGBT activists, students of all ages and other elected officials for a "Day Out Against Hate." The goal of our discussions was to create a forum for cultural exchange in a way that would increase tolerance for all New Yorkers.

We were all appalled by the headlines in newspapers around the City that told of nooses and swastikas turning up in our neighborhoods. But the sad fact is that the incidents making headlines are not the end of the story.

Hate crimes have risen by 20 percent in New York City, which means that actions of this magnitude must be happening on a daily basis in every corner of our City.

In New York, where our diversity is our greatest strength, we must have zero tolerance for anyone who would single someone out simply because of who they are or who they may be perceived to be.

Be it swastikas in Brooklyn, nooses in Manhattan, or terrorizing someone because of their sexual orientation or because they are an immigrant, New Yorkers will not stand idly by while threats are made against someone based upon their identity.

That was our message on the "Day Out Against Hate."

But our efforts to eradicate hate in this City must continue beyond that day. We must continue to promote tolerance, to open our hearts and minds to the wealth of cultural diversity that exists in every neighborhood of our City. When we accept people for who they are and not what they appear to be, we send a powerful message to those who act out of hate. When we make every day a day out against hate, we will sound the drumbeat that will drown out the hateful rhetoric and actions of those narrow-minded few.

The more we stand up, the more people in all corners of the City will know what we stand for. I thank all of you who stood with me.

To learn more about what you can do to help stop hate, please visit
<http://www.nycouncil.info/html/initiatives/DayOutAgainstHate.cfm>.

Sincerely,

Christine C. Quinn
Speaker
New York City Council

The Adjunct Trend: Rethinking Composition Curriculums

NATALIE DORFELD

According to oratory experts, every problem/solution investigation needs three key points. The first point, commonly referred to as the problem step, must make readers conscious of the situation and its potentially hazardous outcomes. The second point, the need step, addresses the need for action. The third and final point, otherwise known as the solution step, calls for specific measures, ones explicit to a fault, in order to resolve the problem.

The situation in this analysis is the adjunct phenomenon in English teaching. Beginning as early as the '60s, and gaining more attention in the late '80s with the Wyoming Conference Resolution, part-timers have routinely made a fraction of full-timers' salaries, all the while teaching equivalent (or greater) course loads; been forced to travel hundreds of miles a week in order to make ends meet; and subjected themselves to degrading terminology, such as special, temporary, and emergency faculty, only to be promised no sense of real job security from one semester to the next.

Granted, many administrative powers view part-time faculty members as

fine merchandise at warehouse prices, but their monetary value to any given institution is only one slice of the pie; one must look at the scuttling effect these individuals perpetuate. Because adjuncts are constantly on the move due to poor pay and various other conditions, department chairs often have to hustle at the last minute, sometimes only a day or two before a class is scheduled to begin, to fill sections. This scrambling leads to anxiety, thus creating an uncomfortable working environment for everyone involved.

Moreover, students, particularly incoming freshmen, could potentially leave any given class with an acidic taste in his/her mouth due to a bad experience with a flighty, frustrated, and frazzled instructor. While this may or may not be the adjunct's fault, the lifestyle is certainly not conducive to any sort of balance.

Because the job pays so little and requires so much, stability is hard to find. Subsequently, adjuncts are often rootless, administrators plan out schedules on a day-to-day basis, and students are, regrettably, the casualties of this irreverent practice. Something must be done soon before

higher education's so-called best-kept secret further degenerates.

Indeed, while every person, city, and situation is different, practical solutions, multiple ones at that, are desperately needed at this time. According to Carroll, author of "We Exploited, Not Unqualified," we all need to stick together and fight this educational scam. If we do not, tribulations will continue plodding along at a flat lined status quo rate, and adjuncts will continue to be abused and alienated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In a better world, adjuncts would be given the same opportunities and privileges that full-time faculty enjoy, and perhaps all too often, take for granted. That includes everything from office space, access to computers, and library resources to conference funding, sabbatical leave, and medical benefits. As much as possible, the part-time positions should resemble competitive tenure tracks.

Sadly, however, we do not live in a perfect world. And as long as there is an overabundance of part-timers willing to live on poverty-like wages, few changes are likely to occur. Ehrenreich, author of "What Yale Is Teaching Us," states, "it's like finding out that an elegant old gentleman you've always admired at a distance has a secret life as a mugger and a thug. It's painful to watch. But of course it's happening everywhere."

What used to be employed as a stopgap measure, simply filling a position when someone retired or when institutions were in a pinch, has now become the norm. This unfortunate lifestyle has the capability to discourage many young people from going into the academy. In fact, many believe it already has to some extent.

Therefore, what can be done? I feel there are several new directions which might be productively pursued in order to improve the current situation of adjuncts: work to better unite the literature and composition divide, reconfigure the research and teaching hierarchy, and diversify current master's and doctoral level programs to include alternatives to academic work.

UNITING LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION

One possible way English Departments could rectify the adjunct situation in the humanities is to bridge the long standing, and often unnecessary, literature vs. composition divide.

Historically speaking, literature has always had the upper hand. According to Downing, author of "Global Capitalism, Scientific Management, and Disciplinary English," literature has been considered "privileged" since the Romantic period in 1770-1830. It

"could better meet the requirements for the disciplinary discourse. This was particularly the case when corporate models of management were tied to the political mission of the nation-states." Literature was also tied to lofty themes, such as "nationalist identity and cultural pride."

Two hundred years later, the same value systems persist. "Teachers of literature became the priests and theologians of English, while teachers of composition were the nuns, barred from the priesthood, doing the shit-work of the field," states Scholes in *The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline*. The supposed shitty work entails teaching a plethora of introductory composition classes, otherwise known as service courses for the university, and graduate students and/or adjunct faculty make up over 90% of the throwaway instructor pool assigned to this duty.

This, in turn, creates an unsettling division in many departments. Full-timers teach literature, and part-timers teach composition. There are rarely exceptions. Thus, various tensions can arise, and individuals may be less likely to socialize and assist one another in a variety of ways.

However, if professors, both full-time and part-time alike, were given the opportunity to teach literature and composition courses, many disconcerting labels (the full-timers vs. the emergency hirer workers) could be removed and discarded once and for all.

Tilly Warnock, author of "Making Do, Making, and Making Sense: Burkean Magic and the Essence of English Departments," believes we are all educators of composition. She states, "we are all committed to teaching language and literature as strategies for coping and as equipment for living." Literature should not be valued over composition or vice versa.

A progressive department, she feels, should be diversified in every aspect, including course schedules, opportunities, and rotation.

If this division was to be united in the future, and professors were given the opportunity to teach on both sides of the English fence, it would certainly eliminate an influx of us vs. them nuisances. Furthermore, it could create a newfound respect for leverage, equitable labor, and disciplinary unity within the academic workplace.

Clearly, all of the above would take a considerable amount of time. Unification is a radically new concept for many administrations and/or educators to swallow, let alone follow. The prestige of teaching literature may never fully disappear due to various political reasons, but by reorganizing the playing field, a more even distribution between both parities could be reached.

THE Nation.

The Nation is currently offering a FREE digital subscription to the weekly magazine (*The Student Nation*) to students coast to coast. Both undergraduates and graduate students are FREE to sign up for the electronic subscriptions at www.studentnation.us.

One of the country's leading political publications, *The Nation* has emerged as the place to turn for progressives and all thinking people eager for serious, critical (but seldom shrill) commentary. This new campus initiative is aimed at allowing any students interested in engaging with the issues of the day an opportunity to do so with a publication that takes them seriously.

The Nation is America's oldest weekly magazine, and has been pissing off the powerful since 1865. It is today, one of the country's leading sources of news, investigative reporting and cultural commentary.

RECONFIGURING THE RESEARCH AND TEACHING HIERARCHY

A second possible way that English Departments could improve the part-time predicament is to reconfigure the research vs. teaching load for graduate students and/or adjuncts. Positions are available, but the work is being parceled out in despotic ways: part-time and no benefits.

Much like the literature vs. composition divide mentioned above, there is often an unspoken division between the celebrities of a department, the researchers and/or notable authors, and those who undertake the undesirable of the field, the teachers of composition. The question then becomes: What is a simple graduate student and/or adjunct to do? Research and teach?

For obvious reasons, such as the poor pay, incessant traveling, and heavy emotional burdens, it is hard to effectively tackle both at the same time. Hence, I suggest an unusual alternative. Graduate students and/or adjuncts should have the option to be assigned to a higher-ranking member of the department on alternating teaching, researching, teaching, and researching semesters.

Teaching, obviously, brings money into the institution. That is a given. However, much could be gained by inviting graduate students and/or adjuncts to study with senior mem-

bers of the department. On the senior members' behalf, they could have an extra set of eyes, ears, and hands at their disposal, a Mini-Me research assistant if you will. And on the behalf of the graduate students and/or adjuncts, they could learn valuable research skills while making connections in the field.

Paula Caplan, author of *Lifting a Ton of Feathers: A Woman's Guide to Surviving in the Academic World*, considers mentoring is absolutely necessary to one's growth if he/she wants to progress from A to B in academia. If individuals are engaged in their own research, they're more likely to get excited when they teach their specialty, so everyone involved benefits.

Furthermore, and on a personal note, when graduate students and/or adjuncts work with full-time members of the department, and accompany them on conference trips, it is a great plug for the university.

As a graduate student of Slippery Rock University, I was able to attend a National Council of Teachers of English conference with my Writing Center Director, Dr. Joseph McCarren. He introduced our lively cohort to several Indiana University of Pennsylvania

students and past alumni members, all of whom were presenting. I was so impressed by their simultaneous mixture of approachability and professionalism that I decided to apply to the school shortly thereafter.

Hence, by offering graduate students and/or adjuncts the opportunity to teach and research in alternating semesters, they could maintain a more realistic workload, obtain invaluable skills and connections, and add a few lines to their vitae. In both cases, teaching and researching, institutions would continue to make money by attracting a larger pool of potential students.

NEW TYPES OF PROGRAMS

The third possible way English Departments could enrich the lives of adjuncts is revamp the current master's and doctoral level curriculums in order to include greater diversity and/or alternatives to academic work.

In "How to Reform the MLA: An Opening Proposal," which calls for a reduction in the number of Ph.D. programs, Nelson claims, "meanwhile, a long-term job crisis that leaves many new PhDs either unemployed or mar-

ginally employed in part-time jobs had become semi-permanent." Known as rejects, these individuals are told — "Don't bet on it" — when they drop hints about landing a full-time, tenure track position.

The cold hard fact remains that even if the literature and composition bridge were to be united, and the research vs. teaching hierarchy allowed multiple options, the market is simply too overcrowded, and it does not look like it is going to change any time in the near future.

Therefore, I recommend that English Departments become more responsible, perhaps more realistic is a better word choice, with their core curriculums. While it is certainly a blessing to have courses like Topics in British Literature Before 1660 and Second Language Teaching out there, according to humanities statistics, more than half of us will be underemployed and ultimately looking for work outside of the academia.

As a result, I suggest we catch up with the times, and update many of our archaic programs to better accommodate the needs of our current academic landscape. According to the *Profession and Occupational Outlook Handbook*, three of the most popular alternatives for English majors working outside of the academy can be found in the high-tech industry, in print as qualified writers and editors, and in the public relations realm.

LEFT FORUM 2008

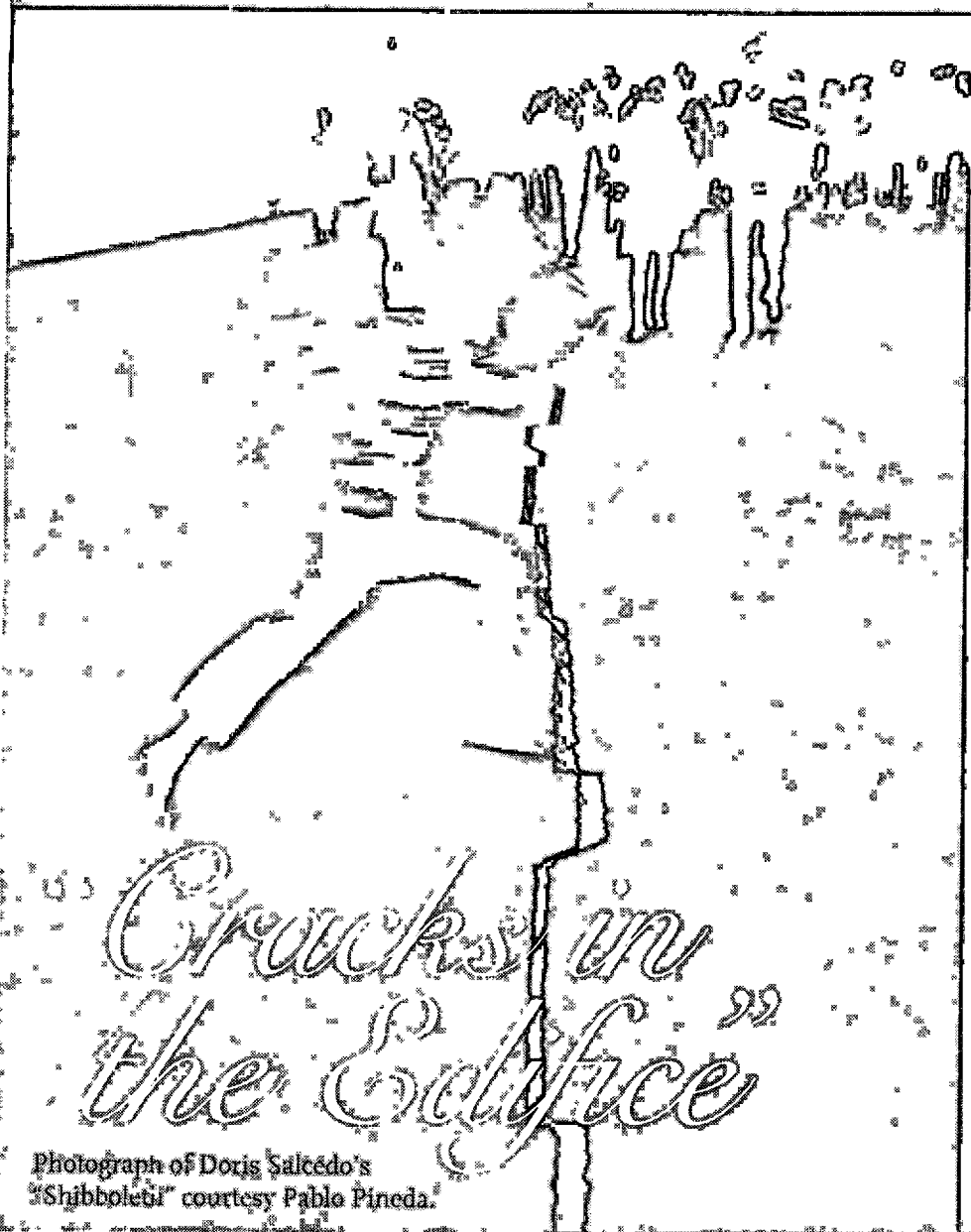
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HIGH-TECH INDUSTRY

Mark Johnson, author of "Professions Beyond the Academy," earned his Ph.D. in English in 1995. After an unsuccessful search to land a full-time job, and a subsequent unwillingness to place himself at the mercy of a kind of academic Great Depression, he took a job at Intuit, a highly influential California-based software company.

While it is hard for many graduate students and/or adjuncts to think of a life outside academia, thanks in part, he says, to the "clone factories" created by departments and advisors, the corporate world is hungry for creative individuals who know how to meet deadlines.

In Johnson's department alone, which includes 18 writers, there are two other Ph.D.s. His boss also has a master's degree in creative writing from University of California, Irvine. He says the trick is to keep an open mind. Explore the corporate world. Think outside the box.

Current programs are geared for educators, for those who want pursue opportunities in higher education. We're led to believe any other career, unfortunately, is a second rate. However, such sentiments are damaging. There is a whole other world, an extremely thriving one at that, just waiting for us outside the ivory tower.

WRITERS AND EDITORS

According to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, the employment

of writers and editors is "expected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations through the year 2014." It further states:

1. College degrees are required for most writing and editorial positions. While some employers prefer broad liberal arts backgrounds, most favor specific degrees, such as English and Journalism.
2. Writers and editors held over 320,000 jobs in 2004.
3. The average salary for writers and authors was just under \$45,000 in May 2004. The mid-50 percent roughly earned between \$32,000 and \$62,000.

Considering some Ph.D.s make a measly \$16,000 a year, \$44,350 (with merely a BA degree) does not look too shabby.

Unlike working within the academy, many writers and/or editors can also work from home, and they don't have to move with regards to freelance work. They can simply write their articles, save them, and send them off with the push of the button. It is, indeed, an appealing option worth investigating.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations, much like working with technology, creativity, and deadlines, can be yet another attractive employment prospect for English majors. The Public Relations Society of America maintains that individuals with strong backgrounds in research, media relations, cultivating relation-

ships, speaking, and writing and editing are perfect fits for such a calling.

Thoughtful and progressing English Departments could develop additional courses that nurture the skills needed for careers in public relations, as well as everything mentioned above.

I am not saying courses, such as Topics in Postmodern Literature, Comparative Literary Theory Applied to Traditional and Special Literatures, and Observation in Teaching English do not have their place. They most certainly do. However, they are more geared towards those who wish to continue and teach within the academy.

I am saying it may be more useful for departments to offer additional courses, even at the master's and doctoral level, such as Advanced Technical and Scientific Writing (for those who relish working with computers); Seminar in Professional Writing (for those who excel in editing); and Advanced Technical and Scientific Writing (for those who wish to pursue a career in a public relations firm), to keep in step with today's ever-changing job market.

By revamping programs to include more up-to-date courses, colleges and/or universities could still hold onto those who wish to pursue a career in academia while attracting new students, and innovative professors, ones who wish to break the mold and explore various avenues outside the institution. With today's glutted market in the humanities, such an

expansion in curriculums may not become a question of when, but why not earlier?

SUMMARY

If all three suggested solutions to the adjunct phenomenon were to come to light (the fusion of literature and composition, a reconfiguration of the research and teaching hierarchy, and a curriculum facelift at the master's and doctoral level), I sincerely think the situation would improve tenfold.

For one, a level playing field would be created. Full-timers and part-timers alike would teach literature and composition, which could breed a newfound respect in many areas. Secondly, if graduate students and/or adjuncts could team up with senior members of the department, their teaching and researching skills would improve, and institutions could reach larger audiences. Finally, by revamping current programs to include more timely courses, graduates would have more than one lone opportunity upon graduation.

On their own and as a unit, these suggestions are highly feasible, and it wouldn't cost institutions a great deal of money. The wheels of change may take time, as nothing moves quickly in academia, but if graduate students and/or adjuncts are aware that there is room for change and growth, it may offer a glimmer of hope on an otherwise austere horizon. ■

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Poet communicates through rhyming couplets and email



J.C. Rocwell

ROISIN O'CONNOR-MCGINN

Their eyes met for little more than a second. "Cool" J.C. Rocwell acted instinctively. He sprang from where he sat and fell into step with the white-haired passer-by. At 6'2", Rocwell towered above his new friend.

"Hello buddy," he said as he intercepted the man's path and pulled papers from the black Polo Sport bag slung around his shoulder. He thrust the bundle towards the captive observer. "Let me ask you a question," he said. "Do you like poetry?"

When Rocwell returned to the bench outside the Adam Clayton Powell State Office Building on West 125th Street, he clutched a crisply folded bill. He smiled, showing an expanse of pink gum and the quarter inch gap between his two front teeth. Then, just as spontaneously as his grin had appeared, his jaw slackened, his lower lip drooped and the smile vanished. His eyes recovered their former seriousness as he peered over the small, oval spectacles that rested midway down his nose.

"Did you just see that?" he said. "That guy just gave me ten dollars. You know why? He wanted to make a human connection."

Rocwell has been making connections like this for years. It's the way he's been able to make ends meet and defy the stereotype of a homeless man in Harlem as a bum or a drug addict.

"I don't hang around with the homeless because I'm not like them," he said. "I know how to take care of myself."

"I don't hang around with the homeless because I'm not like them," he said. "I know how to take care of myself."

But, at 61, Rocwell allows it is getting harder and harder to continue the life of a poet on the street.

In his native New Haven, Rocwell had sat in on some classes at Yale University where he had a job scouring dishes at the college's cafeterias. Lessons he learned at Yale helped his career as a street poet in New York. "I learned how to take a theme and create a story," he said.

"I had a concept in the '70s. It was a big hit in the subway," said Rocwell, continuing in his own staccato rhyming style, "Everybody's high on faxes! / Commuters are high on the daily news/ People who like music get high listening to the blues/ Midgits get high in elevated shoes/ I get high on different peoples' views and listening to the blues too, and I get high on you."

In 1972, Rocwell arrived in New York, age 26, to pursue a career as a poet and musician. There he met "D-Train" poet Rich Bartee and together they founded the "Poettential Unlimited Theatre." Located on the third floor of a commercial building on West 125th, the theater became Rocwell's first home in New York City.

"He and Rich Bartee were very closely associated in the '70s and '80s," said poet and essayist Louis Reyes Rivera, who described Rocwell and Bartee riding the subway preaching about poetry and love.

Rivera emphasized the importance of the Poettential Unlimited Theater as a platform to showcase talent in the early '70s.

Black poetry took a resurgent stand in the

'70s with institutions like Poettential," said Rivera. "Poetry has always proliferated in spite of politics."

However, for Poettential, economic realities pre-

vailed. No longer able to keep up with the rent the theater closed its doors for good in 1978. With nowhere else to go, Rocwell became a drifter, renting cheap rooms when he could or relying on friends to let him sleep on a couch. Often he sought shelter on buses, subway trains and in abandoned buildings.

For a stint, Rocwell got by as a saxophone player in the subway before money got tight and he pawned the instrument. For a while he dressed as a clown and earned a living as a children's entertainer using the name Chili Pepper Pearl-Lee Winkle. More recently he has returned to poetry, which he sells on the street or in the subway for a donation.

"When people pay for something, they pay attention to it," he said. "If they didn't pay for it, they'd throw it away."

When he's not selling his poems, Rocwell spends his time writing them at various city libraries, or, three times a week, at the Verizon Technology and Education Center in Harlem. James D. Carter, the center's director, recalled that Rocwell had a functioning email account before coming to the center.

Since printing is not free at the Verizon Center, Rocwell must go to a library to avail of the free

printing. Often he takes the bus to the library at Morningside Heights, swiping himself onboard with the metrocard bought with his poetry money.

"Normally on a Saturday I'm one of the first people in there so I can use the computers before it gets crowded," he said. "I'm homeless. I haven't got no place else to go. Sometimes when it rains, I come in the library."

Experts say homelessness is becoming an increasing problem in New York. Lindsay Davis of the Coalition for the Homeless estimated that more than 35,700 people sleep in city shelters each night.

A 2007 report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated that the older population will mushroom between 2010 and 2030 when the "baby boom" generation reaches "older age." Rocwell will be one of the estimated 40 million Americans age 65 or over in 2010.

With population numbers going up across the economic spectrum, inevitably so will the number of older Americans — classified as those 65 or above — living under the poverty line.

The growth of this particular cross section of society poses new and complex challenges to policymakers, families, businesses and health care providers. In its most recent strategic plan, the Social Security Administration cited increased beneficiaries one of its major future challenges.

Sometimes Rocwell takes the M102 bus from 125th Street to Malcolm X Boulevard and West 139th Street. From here he can walk to the Central Harlem Senior Center.

Inside the center on 140th Street, Rocwell meandered down a corridor that smelled of disinfectant. A mop in a yellow bucket of sudless water provided evidence of the smell. At the end of the hall, he



entered a large room through the already open door, and positioned himself at the table where four other guests were already seated. A television rested on a bracket above the doorway and showed a movie with close captioning.

"Whose movie is that?" said an elderly lady looking up at the television through her thick spectacles. "Too much cussing. Nobody want to hear that."

A large woman who wore a plastic apron and thick braids leisurely walked around the table and deposited a lunch tray in front of a frail woman with thinning hair.

Lunch consisted of two slices of bread, meatballs, noodles, and a salad served with milk and tea and, for dessert, pineapple chunks in a polystyrene cup.

"Aren't you sick of meatballs?" said the bespectacled woman to no-one in particular. "We had meatballs twice last week."

Rocwell comes here because the food is good and lunch only costs a dollar. The center also offers nutrition seminars, recreational activities, and computer classes. His only complaint is that the senior center is "full of old people." Rocwell's lifestyle all these years has required him to stay active and alert — he said doesn't feel old like them.

"That's Ms. Campbell," he said scooping up a plastic forkful of noodles and nodding in the direction of a woman who sat knitting in the corner. "And that's Pierre — he's been all around the world."

Across the room, an elderly Pierre sat with Jack who had recently come into the room to claim his "cussing" movie. They talked about downloading movies from the Internet onto rewritable CDs.

At the library in Morningside Heights one afternoon, Rocwell selected a volume of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poetry and opened it at the first poem, "Mariana." "Look at the way he writes," he said. "So visual. Look how he rhymes 'latch' and 'thatch':

"The broken sheds look'd sad and strange/
Unlifted was the clinking latch/
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch," Rocwell read. Then he lifted his eyes from the page, "and then the flick'd match

set the whole place a' fire! That's how I'd finish that poem. That's the kind of poet I am."

After he had replaced the book on the shelf, Rocwell used his library card — registered to an old address at a homeless shelter — to reserve a computer so that he could work on his poetry.

The 11-inch slips of paper that Rocwell prints his poems on are decorated with smiley-faces, hearts, stars, and musical notes. Occasional words of text

are selected, and emboldened or the font changed, to make for a more interesting read, said Rocwell. A variation of Rich Bartee's mantra "More Hugging, Less Mugging" ran vertically along the boarder of the poem: "More Hugging, Less Bugging."

Even though Poettential Unlimited Theater it is no longer a physical space, and Rich Bartee — fellow founder and friend — has been dead since 2003, the theater continues to exist as a concept, a "theater of the mind," as Rocwell is fond of telling his unsuspecting patrons.

But Harlem today is very different place to Harlem 35 years ago. If rents on 125th Street were expensive then, they are — many locals would argue — now extortionate.

While New York may have dispensed with its mean streets image, competition underground is tough. In the subway Rocwell must jostle with Mexican guitarrons for performing rights and compete to be heard over MP3 players.

"I'm older, everything's changed. People have all sorts of devices over their ears now and more taken by other stuff," he said. "In the '70s it was beautiful. They didn't have all these other devices, they were looking for entertainment."

Rocwell stood on Broadway, outside the Morningside Heights library, scanning the faces of passers-by, searching for favorable recipients to his poetry.

A young woman strolled past sipping coffee from a paper cup. Their eyes met for little more than a second. Rocwell acted instinctively. "Excuse me, miss," he said as he fell into step beside her, "Do you have a minute? Do you like poetry?" ■





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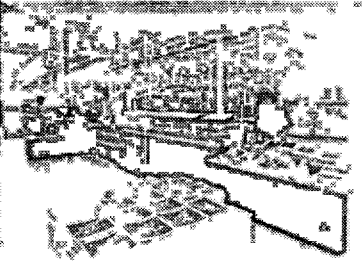
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Toward a New Urban Decadence

LAVELLE PORTER

These are interesting times for queer politics. Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. In the time before non-discrimination laws, LGBT studies programs, and corporate sponsored gay pride parades, living as an openly gay person required a life of uncommon courage, intelligence, and fortitude. These days one comes out of the closet armed to the teeth with ready-made political slogans and support systems. The activism of the Gay Liberation Front has been replaced with *Brokeback Mountain* and the LOGO channel. While the far leftists among us are loathe to admit it, the prevalence of mainstream gay visibility is progress of a sort. Now gay people have the privilege of being as dull and slow as the rest of the American populace. But in the age of *Project Runway*, what's a sex radical to do? Bruce Benderson, for one, thumbs his nose at the sort of bourgeois identity politics behind all the niche marketing and the feeble gestures toward inclusiveness spouted by American politicians on the campaign trail. As he writes in *Sex and Isolation*, "whether a particular voice of today's 'multiculturalism' has a black face, a woman's face, a gay face or a working-class face is now beside the point. All speak the language of the well fed."

I first heard of Bruce Benderson here at the Graduate Center, appropriately enough. He was a nominee at the 2005 Lambda Literary Awards hosted at the GC by The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies. I later recognized his name in the dedication to Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999) and hunted down some of Benderson's own writing about Times Square — including the short story collection *Pretending to Say No* (1990) and the novel *User* (1994). Readers familiar with *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* and Delany's argument about the dissolution of public space and interclass contact in post-Giuliani New York will find similar ideas in Bruce Benderson's writing. Benderson's world is one populated by outcasts and iconoclasts of all sorts, whether they be down and out drug-using hustlers, or obscure artists and intellectuals. He often writes of his sexual exploits with young men from the underclasses here in America and abroad, many of whom eschew self-identifying as gay or bisexual. His 2006 erotic memoir *The Romanian: Story of an Obsession*, tells of his travels in Europe beginning in Budapest where he was sent on assignment by Nerve.com to write an article about brothels. Benderson eventually takes up with a young Romanian hustler, and *The Romanian* tells the story of their jaunts together in Europe, with Benderson weaving in his trenchant observations on sex, lust, love, and history. His latest book, *Sex & Isolation: and Other Essays*, brings together some of his previously published essays, including several that were only published in France.

The essays in *Sex and Isolation* contain an intriguing mix of memoir, sociological observation, and cultural criticism. The collection is anchored by two major essays, the titular "Sex and Isolation," and "Toward the New Degeneracy," a somewhat popular essay published first in French, and now available in the U.S. for the first time. (It was an excerpted online version of the latter essay titled "The New Degenerate Narrative" which piqued my interest in getting my hands on *Sex and Isolation*.) The two essays complement each other well. "Sex and Isolation" explores the changes wrought by the triumph of neo-liberalism and its ideology of favoring the "safety" of the private sphere over the "danger"

book REVIEW

• *Sex & Isolation: And Other Essays* by Bruce Benderson. U. of Wisconsin Press, 2007, 208pp.

of the public. "Toward the New Degeneracy" examines how the artist can make some intervention in the midst of this prevailing ideology. It is a proposal for how the next generation of creative artists might break through this vicious rhetoric of safety and security to create vibrant and transformative cultural work.

"Sex and Isolation" (the essay) ties together several definitive markers of our times: the rise of the information age, the decline of urban public space, the rhetoric of the bourgeois family (emanating from Left and Right), and the ever-growing hysteria over children's sexuality. In Foucauldian fashion, Benderson sees these phenomena not as matters of increasing repression, but as matters of *disclosure*. He describes disclosure as a Protestant Christian mode of confession that insists upon the importance and sanctity of revealing the secret life, and he stresses that this is distinctly different from the Catholic version of confession. "Thus secret spaces, commensurate with urban space and adolescent sexual experiments, are disappearing to make room for a new, mindless kind of transparency." I can't say the disclosure distinction is entirely clear and valid, but it is a provocative one. It certainly helps to make sense of all those suburban married couples on Oprah confessing about their illicit affairs. Their vacuous emotional exhibitionism seems to have no real purpose and make no real difference in the world save for keeping Oprah's self-help industry humming along.

Like Delany, Benderson was a frequent visitor to (and careful observer of) the old Times Square, a libidinous playground with its hustler bars, peep shows, and porn theaters. "Sex and Isolation" begins with Benderson not out in the streets of Manhattan, but securely in his apartment sitting in front of his computer screen in a webcam session with an anonymous young man from Egypt. Benderson calls attention to the shift in location. He'd rather be out in the streets. While the Internet makes such improbable connections possible, this form of distant, mediated electronic interaction pales in comparison to the physical sensuality of cruising the streets. About the demise of the old Times Square Benderson writes, "It wasn't so much the assault on eroticism in New York as the new prohibition against interclass interaction that really depressed me." His observation is timely, with rapid overdevelopment and gentrification continuing in New York unabated.

In "Toward the New Degeneracy," Benderson draws on the work of several iconoclastic thinkers to make sense of the current cultural moment at the beginning of the 21st century, and also to make some propositions about how to infuse this moment with new cultural vitality. The title of the piece alludes to an 1892 book titled *Degeneracy* written by Max Nordau, a Jewish Hungarian journalist who saw the countercultural lifestyle as pathological. One of the epigraphs of the essay is taken from Nordau: "Degenerates are not always criminals, prostitutes,

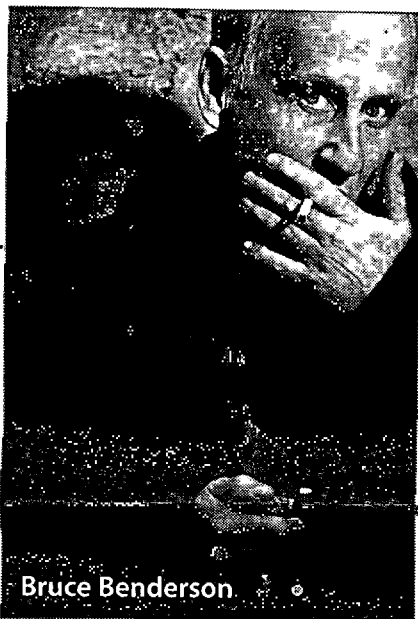
anarchists, and pronounced lunatics; they are often authors and artists." Benderson finds in Nordau's theories of degeneracy some unsettling similarities to the rhetoric of contemporary middle-class liberal values, particularly in the emphasis on clean living, individual moral uprightness, and accessible art for the masses. In making the connection to Nordau's theories Benderson reveals the contemporary middle-class liberal — with her yoga classes, organic foods, fastidious exercise regimens, and abstinence from tobacco and alcohol — as a closet Puritan.

In fact, Benderson goes on to argue that the self-preservationism among America's centrist liberals is a direct outgrowth of the '60s counterculture. The usual nostalgic lamentation about the hippie movement is that it was viciously hijacked by a corporate machine all too willing to co-opt anything it deems commercially viable. But Benderson persuasively argues that these puritanical tendencies come from a built-in flaw in the political logic of '60s radicalism itself. While he is himself a member of the boomer generation, Benderson makes it clear that his political and intellectual allegiance is to the urban decadence of the '40s and '50s *hipsters* rather than to the rural commune utopia of the '60s *hippies*. "Unlike the Beats whose philosophical tone was colored by European café existentialism and by the old dichotomy between the avant-garde and the bourgeoisie, the hippies of the sixties believed that heavy intellectualizing hampered creative and spontaneous behavior and that art sprang from the popular culture that they already liked."

Few people theorized the lifestyle of the hipster better than the late Norman Mailer in "The White Negro." (Mailer passed away in November 2007.) Benderson boldly draws on and defends Mailer whose work is still a lightning rod, particularly among black studies scholars. Like Mailer, Benderson dares to suggest that there is such a thing as a culture of poverty, that life among the underclass is strikingly different from life in the more comfortable classes. This is intentional sacrilege. Left-leaning sociologists have spent many years and research dollars combating this kind of talk. Benderson also enlists the work of Oscar Lewis who wrote *La Vida: A Puerto Rican family in the Culture of Poverty — San Juan and New York*. (1966), a little known work not read much now outside of the circle of academic sociology. To be fair, there are many reasons to reject this culture of poverty position. More often than not culture of poverty arguments have been used by social conservatives to blame the poor for the own failings, to dismantle state-funded programs and privatize pretty much everything including the schools and the prison systems. However, Benderson argues that Lewis merely pointed out that "economics and political control could create a lasting, uniform, inherited culture that was even more powerful than inherited ethnicity." There's a way in which such arguments could actually dismantle the racist (and racist) logic of pathology arguments. Further, Lewis and Mailer audaciously suggested that there were positive aspects to the culture of poverty, traits that made it more humane than life in the middle-classes, namely "the sensuality, spontaneity, sense of adventure, and indulgence of impulses that come from living in the present time."

I can't say I'm on board with all of this. There is certainly a long tradition of the artist romanticizing the lives of the irredeemable, rebellious outsider. The problem with such a paradigm is that the artists romanticize rebelliousness so much that anyone from the underclass who might have intellectual or artistic aspirations and the discipline required to produce creative work of their own is always rendered "inauthentic." Furthermore, con-

Continued page 15



Bruce Benderson

The Hunger Question

KATE MAZZA

Hunger is with us, and has been with us. Yet, in looking through a standard modern history textbook of Europe or the United States, hunger barely makes an appearance. Border's shelves in the history section are filled with military history and works on the statesmen, but there are few books that deal with the history of hunger. Perhaps this is due to a politics of hunger that does not honor its victims, but instead tends to blame them for their own plight.

What makes hunger difficult to tackle is its omnipresence. This has led to some innovative approaches in the field of global history and the history of colonization such as Mike Davis's *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino and the Making of the Third World*. Davis's book is a global history and a clear indictment of imperialism. In it he argues that imperialist governments took advantage of El Nino droughts in the last part of the 19th century and the early 20th century to exploit their colonies. For instance, the British continued to charge high rents to Indian tenants, undermine traditional communal economic structures and export wheat from the country, as millions died of starvation. This led to the creation of a Third World.

Yet, famine does not play a large role in James Vernon's *Hunger: A Modern History*. This work is a cultural and political history of hunger centered on Britain. For Vernon, hunger is a cultural category. In this work he examines multiple discourse of hunger to illustrate that, "how hunger was understood shaped who actually experienced it, and how." He argues that people viewed hunger in three different ways throughout this period: divine, moral and social. Vernon's main question is how did hunger change from being viewed as a moral problem which blamed the hungry, to a social problem for which the government should take responsibility? Coming to consider hunger a social problem was a long process and one that Vernon thinks may not

book REVIEW

- *Hunger: A Modern History* by James Vernon. Harvard UP, 2007, 384pp.

ever have been fully achieved.

He uses hunger as a way to examine British history between 1850 and 1950 which was a period of transition from liberalism to social democracy. He holds that the progress of history did not march a straight path towards the welfare state in Britain. Rather, there were twists and turns along the way that reflected many different agents within the state, beyond the state, and beyond Britain, who were responsible for making food entitlement a priority. For Vernon, hunger is significant because it provides a way to measure the growth of the welfare state, the idea of the right not to be hungry. He states his work illustrates that "hunger was one of the core dilemmas of British liberalism that helped determine where the boundaries would be drawn between the market and the state, the subject and the citizen, the individual and the collective, the nation and the empire."

He begins the work with a discussion of the early theories of hunger. Starvation had long been considered a natural part of life or part of God's plan. The hungry also came to be seen as lazy, idle and therefore, immoral and irresponsible. Thomas Malthus popularized the idea in the late 18th century that the population of the world will grow at a faster rate than food production, and that starvation was part of a natural law that controlled overpopulation. It was also the threat of hunger and starvation that motivated these supposedly lazy and immoral people to work. In addition, Adam Smith's laissez-faire liberalism influenced policy during this time, and made the victims of famine responsible for their

plight while exonerating the state from any blame.

Vernon credits 19th century journalists with exposing starvation as a problem to the British population. The journalists focused first on Britain's own poor, and then on the awful famine in India at the turn of the century. The use of new journalistic techniques such as including gruesome photographs, eyewitness testimony, and quotes from the hungry helped readers to sympathize with, rather than blame, the subjects. Thus, according to Vernon, the mass media played a role in the "humanitarian discovery of hunger."

During the late 19th and early 20th century hunger became a way to challenge British rule within the British Empire. It was a way for Indian and Irish nationalists to illustrate Britain's exploitation. In the early 1900s the unemployed in Britain began hunger marches, which they would return to as a strategy during the Great Depression. All of these forms of protest had a similar result: to help move away from the idea that the hungry were immoral and to blame for their plight. Yet, hunger also became a powerful instrument of protest in the method of the hunger strike. In this method, hunger was used to illustrate the higher morality of the faster. Irish and Indian nationalists, notably Gandhi, as well as British suffragists used the hunger strike in their protests. The work of the suffragists caused uproar in the media and a political dilemma for the government. In illustrating their discipline and intense commitment to their causes, these individuals elevated hunger into the realm of higher morality, and helped sever the connection between hunger and immorality.

Once hunger became politicized, many scientists were involved in trying to objectively study it. Scientists and politicians began to see hunger as a problem that had effects on the nation's health, productivity, and efficiency. They came to compare the body to a "human motor," whose care should be organized by the value of efficiency. Here, he

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Benderson

Continued from page 13

temporary gangsta rap has certainly shown that a supposedly oppositional urban culture can easily reinforce dominant bourgeois values of materialism and individuality.

Among the other highlights in *Sex and Isolation* is "The Spider Woman's Mother," a moving remembrance of Manuel Puig, the Argentinean author of *Kiss of the Spider Woman*. Puig was a close friend of Benderson's and stayed in his apartment during visits to New York. There's also "America's New Networkers," a hilarious satirical tale about a social climbing young musician who comes to Benderson to look for contacts to market his mediocre CDs. (Bruce is an "established" writer of course so the kid figures he *must* know some people who can help him.) Benderson uses the story to unleash a relentless tirade on the current generation of young artists, weaned on media and advertising, who

have turned shameless self-promotion into a way of life. I find Benderson's observations particularly prescient given the rise of a new culture bearing the name "hipster." This new generation, raised under an unprecedented saturation of mass media, has perfected the look and artifice of rebellion. All the while they have spurred on the most vigorous era of gentrification and class stratification this city has ever seen. He nails the zeitgeist of this vapid contemporary hipster culture when he writes: "All you baby networkers are hip to the value of the seductive, sleazy come-on. If you've mastered any art to perfection, it's how to project flirtation without ever delivering."

Benderson is clearly drawn to stories about decadent and contradictory larger than life figures, like Puig, or the infamous boxer Emile Griffith (who Benderson knew from the seedy Times Square bars) or drag performer Consuela Cosmetic (the subject of one essay here about a film documenting the last days of her life). Like the subjects and characters

he writes about Benderson is himself full of contradiction. There is no shortage of bourgeois artists who have gone slumming for ideas or inspiration, trying to invigorate their work with the vitality of the underclass. But to his credit he is unapologetic about the incongruities, and is willing to cop to his own sometimes unflattering desires and motivations. His writing directly addresses this tension between his own middle class upbringing in upstate New York, and the life he now leads as a cool, cosmopolitan urban flâneur in New York and Paris. In the foreword to *Sex and Isolation* Catherine Texier locates Benderson in the tradition of the "bohemian bourgeois," naming Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence, and Paul Bowles among his antecedents. Benderson's writing is the wrong place to look if you want anything like public policy or rigid political programs aimed at curing social ills. However, this collection is full of valuable and provocative observations about the country and society that we are becoming. ■

Vernon

Continued from page 14

follows Anson Rabinbach's *Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity*. Rabinbach traces how fatigue was first understood in moral terms of idleness and laziness and then, towards the end of the 19th century, began to be studied scientifically as a state that could be both managed and prevented. Similar to fatigue, hunger was transitioning into a social problem.

Around the turn of the century, those who practiced the science of nutrition sought to investigate the actual food intake of different classes of people within Britain, to test the nutritional value of food in calories, and to discover the optimal level of nutrition for the average person. Using a variety of sources, Vernon guides the reader through the work of various groups from government health agencies such as the Food War Committee that emerged during WWI, to the state-sponsored nutrition laboratories at Cambridge and Aberdeen, spanning internationally to the work of the Carnegie Corporation in Africa. Deciphering the optimal amount of caloric intake of certain types of food was a difficult task. Similar to our own time, as seen in the changing categories of the "Food Pyramid," nutritionists had a variety of opinions about which foods were necessary and the optimal caloric intake. Many scientists who studied the eating habits of the poor wondered why they valued certain foods over others. For instance, the poor of Britain shied away from porridge and wet foods that were cheaper because they were known as poverty foods. They would rather save money for small amounts of meat than depend on these foods associated with the workhouse. Health experts judged this as inefficient and tried to impose their "scientific" rules of eating on the poor, while some anthropologists such as Margaret Mead tried to illustrate that the cultural values placed on certain foods was more important to them than following scientific advice.

By the 1930s, the idea of hunger expanded into a category of malnutrition, due to the preponderance of the scientific quantifications of nutrition. This period was known as the "hungry Thirties" in Britain and Vernon claims there was a "rediscovery" of Britain's undernourished. The "hungry Thirties" was an interlude of escalating research aimed to learn more about the lives of the poor. It involved increasing intrusiveness by government workers into people's homes, harkening back to women's charity work of the mid-19th century, and also looking forward to the intrusive government workers in postwar Britain, who sought to make the poor sell their valuables before becoming eligible for aid.

With the Second World War, social nutrition, planning of food for the state, was an important part of Britain's governance, and after the war, with the creation of the United Nations, there was some

discussion of governing the world's food in order to eliminate global hunger. As director of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, John Boyd Orr, saw his internationalist plans for a global food board die in the Cold War atmosphere where the United States used its surplus as a political tool which his plan would undermine. Orr appears as a visionary, who, upon receiving a Nobel Peace Prize in 1949, warned the rest of the world against ignoring the problems of poverty in Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

Vernon also focuses heavily on the rise of the canteen and community restaurants in the first half of the 20th century, which offered food at reduced prices. Yet, his interpretation of this form of welfare is not one of humanitarian progress. He believed the rise of collective feeding, "demonstrates how inseparable are the history of welfare and that of discipline or punishment." Using Michel Foucault's theories, he illustrates how "discipline took the form less of punishment than of a new set of obligations and social responsibilities. Its champions saw the canteen as a new social form capable of producing greater health, efficiency, civility and solidarity."

These canteens drew inspiration from earlier school lunch programs and workplace cafeterias that were established to help increase the health and productivity of students and workers. He includes images of the original architectural designs and analyzes the meaning of the setup in terms of social engineering. He illustrates the double-sidedness of welfare, benevolence and discipline, and also shows the negative reaction of the population towards the types of food that were served. This discussion is interesting for those who credit Foucault's insights and are curious to see how institutions that he does not fully discuss have disciplined and punished the population through social engineering.

In discussing the canteen movement, Vernon credits nutritionists, doctors, teachers, and architects with playing a role in the creation of these institutions. In his analysis of the growing discourse of consumerism in the interwar period, housewives emerge as agents that take more responsibility for providing healthful meals for their families. Theories of scientific management, which had invaded the workplace and government were now becoming part of the household, in the advice they gave to women about cooking and in the construction of scientific kitchens. Vernon explains, "not only did these kitchens make the social responsi-

bility for producing domestic health and hygiene a commercial aspiration, but they imposed efficiency even upon those who failed to aspire, by engineering spaces that unwittingly transformed the practices of the people who worked in them." The growing idea that the nation was comprised of consuming citizenship gave individuals more responsibility for their own health.

Vernon illustrates how various types of discipline were a part of government health and welfare planning. He also argues that relief for the unemployed in the 1930s took the form of punishment, rather than mere discipline. Relief was inadequate and people seeking it were often treated disrespectfully. In response to the economic crisis, once again, unemployed men began hunger marches from parts of Britain and into London to illustrate that the unemployed deserved respect. This appears to be a lesson that must be taught again to every generation. The idea of the "hungry Thirties," Vernon argues, was part of a memory that the Labour Party wished

to evoke in the postwar years to support social democracy. It's a period that he considered to be mythologized and demythologized depending on what side of the political spectrum is doing the storytelling.

Vernon's study is impressive in its use of diverse sources spanning over 100 years and various parts of the globe. Although it is chiefly a history centered on Britain, it is necessary to include different parts of the world because the histories often intersected.

The narrative moves from studying the discourse of hunger in the first half and shifts to the politics of the welfare state. He uses a very loose chronological structure, yet chapters can range over a hundred or fifty years in order to develop a theme or an argument. Some may fault his organization, but it is fitting for examining institutions and ideologies that developed over decades.

Vernon has taken the field of study hunger to a new level, one that studies the meanings of hunger in Western culture, much like Rabinbach studied the meanings of fatigue during a similar period. Vernon illustrates how these perceptions of hunger are created and how they were dealt with by various agents — the state, level of government experts, scientists, the labor movement, restaurant owners, cooks. Questions remain about people's rights to resources and the right to not be hungry. Challenging perceived notions of hunger and the hungry is a good way to help approach the problem of hunger, once we all realize that scarcity is most often not the issue. ■



James Vernon

Still a Thriller, 25 Years Later

PATRICK RIVERS

Reminiscing about a time and place 25 years ago and a record that put the music industry of the 1980s on a "fundamentally different path" is perhaps the reason why this anniversary edition was released. Perhaps. With over \$100,000,000 in worldwide sales and a successful 2001 re-release of the album, perhaps Sony/Epic wants to make sure that the album's sales records are not threatened by Celine Dion or the possibly hit record Paul McCartney will make when his memory or ego is filled. Perhaps. Or, perhaps, 25 is a great anniversary year, as are 30, 40, 50, 60...etc...100. I digress, and before this review becomes a lecture about the great revenue generator that anniversary releases are for a fraught music industry lets considered what this seminal album is in the present music market and the difficult task that was presented to and accepted by pop artists will.i.am, Akon, Fergie, and Kanye West.

What is *Thriller* today? Who is it for? When an album is as infectious as *Thriller* was throughout the

'80s it can be difficult to argue that it cannot stand the test of time, and, for all intents and purposes, *Thriller* has. Along with "Monster Mash," the title song is still a usual suspect at Halloween parties and NBA opening night festivities. Walking through some Manhattan subway mezzanines it is not uncommon to see a Jackson impersonator kicking and crotch grabbing to "Billie Jean" or young B-boys popping, locking, and performing an array of acrobatics to "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin'." And while '80s parties can be sustained with Cyndi Lauper, Prince, Madonna, and a sprinkle of Tears for Fears and Cameo, without the grooves of *Thriller* the throwback party is just not hittin'.

The relevance of these songs can also be understood through the appearance of "Thriller" in a recent \$5.4 million Superbowl commercial featuring dancing lizards. This indication of staying power and the others listed above, though, are situations in which the music of *Thriller* is used to attract partygoers and patrons who generally fall outside of the 16-25 age demographic, people the media industry have dubbed baby-boomers and Generation X-ers. While these experienced age groups are the industry's consistent purchasers of CDs, it is the younger generation that commands the inevitable digital format future of the music industry.

In response to this some people 30 and older may say, "Who cares? *Thriller* is the '80s, and if young listeners of today want to listen to Kanye West, Fergie, or whoever, let them. *Thriller* is the greatest album ever and I want the 25th Anniversary Edition!" Though things are not that black and white and people over 30 listen to current pop artists, the extra tracks on the *Thriller* 25 release begs the question of, who is this edition for? The people at Sony/Epic and Michael himself certainly thought about this as well. To entice those that remember the impact the album had in the '80s the package includes the then unreleased "For All Time," a song

music REVIEW

• *Thriller 25* (Sony/Epic Records)

similar to "Human Nature" in melodic contour and overall feel but lacking the poeticism and vocal performance of the latter. For the remaining extras, the decision to remix songs that really did not need tampering with and to feature (and pay for) will.i.am, Akon, Fergie, and Kanye West is an indication that today's young generation is being handed the torch and is expected to keep this album viable for future anniversaries, through sales of course.

With the predicament of having to please old fans and introduce new ones, will.i.am, Akon, and West re-imagined five of the album's unforgettable singles; interestingly but reassuring, they each avoided or were not requested to remix the title track. "The

Girl is Mine 2008" is up first with will.i.am at the helm and minus Sir Paul. Without the two legends going back and forth the song loses most of its fun and will.i.am's repetitive "she like the way I rock" is as mind numbing as M.I.M.S.'s "this is why I'm hot" onslaught (score one for youth predilection!). In addition, the production of the track conflicts with the lyrical content, the hard hip-hop beat featuring the industrial thumps originally exploited by The Neptunes in "Grindin'" seems out of place with a line like "the doggone girl is mine."

The Black Peas front man gets another shot

with the remix of "P.Y.T. (Pretty Young Thing). While these first two tracks are the only ones in which the grooves and textures are completely reinvented, "P.Y.T. 2008" is far more successful. Like the original, the remix induces shoulder and head bobbing, though at a slower tempo, and could probably get a "grown and sexy" club crowd on the dance floor (score one for the 30 and ups!), but that is where the familiarity ends. What distinguishes this remix is that it includes unused vocal parts from the original recording sessions, and while I did not question the choosing of will.i.am for the production work, upon realizing this I began to wonder how this decision was made. The use of unused vocal parts was clever in The Beatles' *Love* as Giles Martin and his esteemed father and long time Beatles producer George Martin approached the vocal parts from a developed relationship to the music and the creators of the music. Chances are that QD3 (the production pseudonym of Quincy Jones' son) could have achieved more with the unused material, and one can only imagine what contemporary inflections could have resulted with *Thriller*'s original producer and his son in the studio. If the pair was not up to it, Kanye West should have been giving this opportunity due to his prior deconstructions of the song. He first sampled "P.Y.T" for the 2003 song "I Wanna Love You" by Memphis Bleek and last year

he slowed the sample down and surrounded it with synthesizers to show us the "Good Life." With the license to reinterpret Jackson's vocal part and rearrange the instrumental his remix would probably have been more worthwhile.

The three remaining remixes play it relatively safe by just enhancing the aural presence of the original recordings through re-mastering and supplementing the instrumentation. "Wanna Be Startin' Somethin' 2008" is just as funky and heart pounding as it was 25 years ago. Louis Johnson's thumping bass is still all over the record, giving it, as well as "Billie Jean," its signature sound. Akon's vocal is tolerable but lacks early '80s popular vocal nuances that adorn Jackson's performance; just to reiterate, these songs do not need to be redone, but contemporary popular artists attract contemporary teenagers and young adults. For the will.i.am produced "Beat It 2008" Fergie is brought in to duel with Michael over the rock-based track. While Fergie's talent for singing in a pseudo rap vocal style has been displayed in songs like "London Bridge" and "Fergalicious," in this remix her lack of a controlled vocal vigor of the likes of an Alicia Keys or Christina Aguilera finds her failing to equal the brash, short, accentuated vocal line that Jackson belts out. Beyond the vocals, the instrumental is refreshed with the addition of an unused Steve Lukather bass groove that will.i.am places sparsely in the mix, including once under the famous chorus. Kanye West brings back "Billie Jean" with one of his bouncy off beat kick patterns, and that is all that is really added. More significant in this remix is what is missing, particularly the bass line. A main component to the dramatic and enigmatic quality of the song, the absence of the bass has Kanye imposing that drama through an omnipresent string accompaniment and drum breaks. West also shortchanges the track by not rapping a verse, though he teases the idea with his ad-libs during the guitar break down. The lack of bass is the largest transgression and probably will exclude people looking to experience *Thriller*.

The majority of these remixes are for younger pop music listeners. Older listeners will feel at home with the re-mastered originals, and since there has been much said and proclaimed about the album I will not add to the assortment. I will, though, declare that "Lady In My Life" has spent too much time being overlooked because of the shadow cast by the album's mega-hits and should be recognized as one of Jackson's great vocal performances (In fact, play it for your significant other this evening to begin spreading the word). In addition, 25 years of technological development has allowed the *Thriller* 25 package to highlight a main reason that *Thriller* resonated through the U.S. and overseas, the music video. While music videos existed before the Michael Jackson and John Landis epic and before MTV itself, the videos for "Thriller," "Billie Jean," and "Beat It" pushed the medium to new heights as lyrics, narrative, and choreography melded into eight to 14 minute pop vignettes. These videos showed the theatrical narrative possibilities for music compositions and are all featured on a DVD along with Jackson's unveiling the moonwalk at the Motown 25 celebration.

If re-mastered tracks or contemporary remixes do not excite you, this may not be the edition you need. Current pop stars attempted to reestablish *Thriller* as the greatest world wide album to young music listeners, and though that remains to be seen, there is much respect for the history of this album and that history should be passed down to a younger generation that may only recognize Michael Jackson through his court cases and bizarre public moments. Perhaps this is the reason why the anniversary edition was released. ■



Michael Jackson decked out in the famous *Thriller* duds

Dropped Calls

FRANK EPISALE

Sarah Ruhl's *Dead Man's Cell Phone*, now enjoying its New York premiere at Playwrights Horizons, is a very strange play.

Jean (Mary-Louise Parker) sits in a café, enjoying a lunchtime lobster bisque and quietly reading a book when a cell begins to ring somewhere nearby. She ignores the sound at first but then begins to shoot annoyed glances in the direction of the sound, glaring at Gordon (T. Ryder Smith) and eventually demanding he answer his phone. When Gordon does not respond, Jean marches over to his table and answers the phone herself, politely taking several messages for Gordon even as she begins to realize that he is not just ignoring the world around him. He is, quite literally, dead to it.

As Jean waits for Gordon's body to be taken away, she begins to feel a sense of connection and obligation. She keeps his incessantly ringing phone and begins to tell what she believes to be lies to his friends and family, telling them the sweet things Gordon said about them before he died. Before long, she is caught up in the dead man's shady business-dealings and dysfunctional family relations, adopting his problems as her own and desperately trying to make things right.

Wackiness ensues.

The twists and turns of Ruhl's plotting take Jean from the upscale dining room of Gordon's carnivorous mother (Kathleen Chalfant), to the supply closet of a stationery store with his nebbishy brother Dwight (David Aaron Baker), to a cocktail bar with his repressed wife Hermia (Kelly Maurer). It also takes her to an airport in South Africa where she finds herself in an *Alias*-style fight for her life with Gordon's mistress (Carla Harting) and to a vision of an afterlife where the dead spend an eternity with the love of their life, in the place where they made the decision to fall in love. As it turns out, the dead can also listen in on our cell phone calls which, in Ruhl's conception of heaven/hell, provide the "music of the spheres."

Laying out the foundation of Ruhl's labyrinthine dramatic structure, though, doesn't really amount to an adequate description of the play or of this production, which matches the eccentricities of the text with a great many eccentricities of its own. Anne Bogart's well-deserved reputation for virtuosity has always had a distinct (if minimalist) quirkiness at its core, and Mary-Louise Parker has built a career on playing adorably, even joyfully, unstable characters.

Expectations have been extremely high for this show. Ruhl, Bogart, Parker, and Chalfant all have considerable followings and the role of Gordon was originally scheduled to be played by Bill Camp, increasingly recognized as one of the country's finest actors. Many of the performances have been sold out for quite some time (the publicist for the show mentioned that it has been difficult even to get adequate numbers of press tickets). Given the buzz, it is unsurprising that *Dead Man's Cell Phone* doesn't quite meet expectations.

Indeed, many in the audience were unsure what to make of the play. The Playwrights Horizons subscriber base is similar to the off-Broadway subscriber base in general. The median age of the audience members on the night I attended was probably over sixty, and there was no skin pigmentation to be found. White hair, white skin. The quirkiness of



Mary-Louise Parker

theater REVIEW

- *Dead Man's Cell Phone* by Sarah Ruhl. Directed by Anne Bogart. At Playwrights Horizons.
- *Betrayed* by George Packer. Directed by Pippin Parker. At The Culture Project.

Ruhl's text and of the production as a whole provoked a lot of chuckles but few belly-laughs. After the show, I heard one man pronounce to one of his friends that this was "one of those shows you have to think about."

Parker put a somewhat different spin on her usual persona by endowing Jean with a nasal voice, an awkward walk, and a palpable discomfort with herself and the world around her. She made sense of Ruhl's plotting by framing Gordon's death as a chance for Jean to connect to someone, to something. Jean, an office drone at a Holocaust Museum, seems desperately to need to comfort the living and, more significantly, finds in Gordon's cell phone (she does not have one of her own) a connection to the world around her and to a man who she can love because she can project onto his memory any fantasy she likes.

As expected the performances are generally strong. Chalfant is, as per usual, magnificent, and shows impeccable timing and wit. Smith, while suffering somewhat by comparison to the anticipated brilliance of Bill Camp, demonstrates the same precision and intelligence that characterized his performances in Will Eno's *Thom Payne* and Glen Berger's *Under the Lintel* (though, it should be noted, both of those performances were also criticized for an aloof chilliness that is present here as well). Maurer, a long-time Bogart collaborator, gleefully embraces the production's over-the-top approach to character and garners some of the evenings biggest laughs.

Bogart works well with her actors and with her design team to create a production stylized enough to justify the strangeness of the play but approachable enough to engage the audience at least most of the time. Scenic and costume designer G.W. Mercier and Lighting Designer Brian H. Scott do particularly strong work, working with immense flats, a couple of tables, and several chairs that are reconfigured by stagehands dressed as butlers as almost physically tangible washes of light determine the atmosphere of the various settings. Unfortunately, Darron L. West's "soundscape" suffers from trying to be too clever by half, juxtaposing obviously ironic Romanticism with uninterestingly ambient scene-change music.

The end-result is probably not the production that any of these individuals will ultimately be remembered for, but the chance to see them all working together on a genuinely provocative mixture of parody, cultural commentary, and romantic comedy is welcome nevertheless.

* * *

The recent No Passport conference at the Martin E. Segal Center (housed at the GC) centered in no small part around the question of how to evaluate "political" theatre. Keynote speaker Stephen Duncombe (NYU) suggested a number of ways in which the "success" of such performances might be measured; his final point was that "bad art makes for bad politics." In order for a theatrical performance

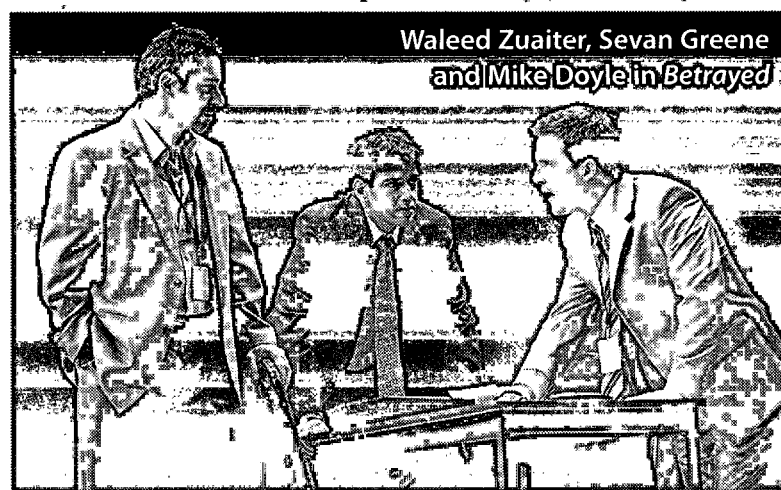
with a political agenda to be successful politically, it must first be successful artistically.

Of course what constitutes "good art" is an open question, but having gone out of my way to see as much politically engaged theatre as possible in recent years, I must admit that it often feels more like a duty than an artistic encounter.

Betrayed, the first play by journalist George Packer, is based on his article of the same name that appeared some months ago in *The New Yorker*. The article is heart-wrenching and harrowing, a fine piece of activist journalism that focuses on the plight of Iraqis working as translators, etc. for the Americans forces and administration in Baghdad. Because the article centers around a series of interviews with such workers, it makes a kind of sense to have created a theatrical adaptation of the material. And, to be fair, *Betrayed* isn't bad at all. It's not particularly good or particularly interesting, but it's not bad.

The problem is, it's not as good as the article that inspired it. Still available on the *New Yorker* website, the article is free (as opposed to the up-to-\$60 ticket price of the show), readily available (as opposed to the frequently sold out show), and a relatively quick read. It is also infinitely transmittable, via hyperlink, email, or printer.

The play, expensive, difficult to obtain tickets to, and inconvenient for many is competently produced and acted, but why go so far out of your way for "competence?" Prominent theatre scholar Jill Dolan would likely say that the answer is "communitas," an idea derived from Victor Turner that goes some way towards explaining the impulse to witness live performances as a shared experience. Shows at The Culture Project, like *Betrayed*, provide relief from the suffocating feeling of political and cultural isolation. It's a decent piece of theatre and a cathartic moment of political engagement.



the show, which should be depressing, the audience rises to its feet to applaud not only the performance, but themselves.

I have often been critical of such self-congratulation among politically-minded theatre-goers but I must also admit that these experiences serve a purpose. If not for occasional bouts of self-righteousness it would be all too easy for indignation and frustration to turn to despair. Sometimes it feels better to cry angry tears in a room full of the like-minded than alone in front of a computer screen. ▢

Dead Man's Cell Phone, by Sarah Ruhl. Directed by Anne Bogart. Featuring Mary-Louise Parker, Kathleen Chalfant, T. Ryder Smith, David Aaron Baker, Carla Harting, and Kelly Maurer. At Playwrights Horizons, 416 West 42nd Street (between 9th and 10th Avenues.) Through March 25. Tickets are \$75 but \$15 student rush and \$20 general rush tickets are available at the box office the day of the performance. Deeply discounted subscriptions (4 tickets for \$40) are also available. See the PH website for details. www.playwrightshorizons.org. Or call Ticket Central at (212) 279-4200.

Betrayed by George Packer. Directed by Pippin Parker. Featuring Jeremy Beck, Aadya Bedi, Mike Doyle, Ramsey Faragallah, Sevan Greene, and Waleed F. Zuaiter. At The Culture Project, 55 Mercer Street (at Broome). Through March 16. Tickets: \$25 - \$60 at (212) 352-3101 or at www.cultureproject.org.

Lost Love Among the New Ruins

TIM KRAUSE

Now at Cinema Village after more than a month's limited release, Jia Zhangke's lovely, haunting *Still Life* (2006) is as provocative and disturbing a look at human life as any yet produced on film in the 21st century. Set at the site of the Three Gorges dam on China's Yangtze River, the film's concerns and motifs are imme-



Director Jia Zhangke after winning the best director prize for *Still Life* at the 2007 Asian Film Awards in Hong Kong

diately, grippingly apparent: the fate of everyday human life under the onslaught of transglobal capitalism; the devastating, large-scale ecological ravages of the same, felt across the developing world from the Amazon to India, from the *favelas* of São Paulo to the poisonous, smog-choked streets of Beijing; and the terrifying global encroachment on human rights, privacy, dignity, and even security, as increasingly authoritarian governments pursue plans of governmental expansion, civilian surveillance, and social control. A lynchpin of China's dynamically expanding economy, the Three Gorges dam — which upon its projected completion in 2011 will be the largest in the world — has to date displaced an alarmingly large number of inhabitants of the Three Gorges Valley, some one- to two million people depending on one's source. Entire villages, towns, and cities have been demolished to make way for the dam.

It is a humanitarian and environmental crisis of epic proportions.

Against this vast backdrop *Still Life* presents two humble stories of loss and searching. The first is that of Han Sanming (played by Han Sanming), a coalminer looking for his runaway wife and child, whom he last saw 16 years ago; the second that of Shen Hong (Zhao Tao), a nurse in search

of her husband, who is a contractor on the dam and who, she fears, has been unfaithful to her. The two protagonists never meet in the film; rather, the film's beginning is devoted to the beginning of Han's story, which then gives place to Shen's narrative in the film's middle, which in turn is followed the end of Han's story and the end of the film. While both plots are devoted to the respective protagonists' search for their missing spouses, the film has a loose, aleatory, dreamlike feel, occupying itself much more with the random sights and sounds encountered on Han's and Shen's journeys: the crumbling walls and tenantless homes of the dead city of Fengjie, in which hosts of men demolish, with hammer and pickaxe, the once-populated buildings, now in the way of the dam's rising waters; a brothel in the same city, in which the women appear from the shadows of a wrecked apartment house to stand on a broken terrace, offering themselves reluctantly, self-consciously to Han; a team of mysterious men in green-and-white biohazard suits busily spraying down the rubble with an unknown chemical; a massy, newly-built bridge across the Yangtze, hulk-

film
REVIEW

• *Still Life*, directed by Jia Zhangke

ing dark against the river and the mountains above until a contractor orders its lights turned on to impress his party guests.

These images, and many more throughout the film, are deeply, richly ambiguous, as suggestive as anything I've seen recently. The bridge, for example: is it a rainbow bridge to China's industrialized future, shining with utopian hope and promise, or is it another of the dam's nightmarish offspring, a gaudily blazing monument to centralized state power and the wholesale misuse of human and natural resources? At times the film seems to leave its protagonists totally behind, the camera moving from the actors' faces and bodies to take in a stray bit of the landscape: a boat, some graffiti, a stray dog wandering among the ruins. Indeed, the landscape, both natural and manmade, of Fengjie and its environs is a central presence in the film, often dwarfing the humans who inhabit it: *Still Life's* repeated tableaux of destruction and creation, of the destroyed Fengjie and the mighty dam itself, thus take on an iconic, mythic status, the quality of parable and prophecy for our troubled times.

One of the film's recurring motifs is also one of its most disturbing: that of human beings as units of currency and as objects of exchange, mere pawns in the inhumanly large scale of China's superheated capitalism. Thus we learn that Han's wife Missy Ma (Ma Lizhen) was originally a child bride, bought by Han for 3,000 yuan; reunited near the end of the film at last, Missy tells Han that she

now works aboard a steamboat, and sleeps with the captain for food. Han's daughter has met, we must assume, with a similarly grim fate: Han never finds her, and she remains absent throughout the film, a rumor, her last reported whereabouts an unnamed factory somewhere south on the river. Even acts of friendship revolve around money: in one of the film's most touching moments, Han can only recognize the home province of the men he works with — a province he has already traveled through by river to get to Fengjie and the Three Gorges but has, like a sleepwalker, forgotten — after being shown its image on the back of a 10-yuan note. Thus *Still Life* suggests that even memory and identity are commodities, subject to being traded or possessed by others or even to being lost, forgotten. (Many of the minor characters of the film are upset by Han's and Shen's attempts at remembrance, and tell them to forget the past, to stop dredging up painful recollections.)

At times China's relentless drive toward modernization, its obliteration of entire ways of life in the quest of progress, is counterpointed against its ancient history, as when a Communist Party member, defending the lateness of reparation payments to the displaced, yells "Everything takes time! It took two years to demolish a 2,000-year-old city!"; or when Shen, looking for her husband, visits the workplace of their mutual friend, an archaeologist grubbing in the dirt of a 2,200-year-old tomb from the Han Dynasty. At its best moments and they are plentiful — *Still Life* achieves this delicate, Benjaminian poise between modernity's manifest depredations and its unfulfilled promises, facing, like the Angel of History, the ruins of the past upon which our tenuous future is being built. ■

A scene from *Sanxia Haoren* (*Still Life*)



NEWS FROM THE *doctoral students' council*

CH-CH-CH-CHANGES?

Please attend upcoming plenaries to discuss the myriad issues in the Graduate Center, and to hear from GC administrators addressing student concerns. Plenaries are always open to the public — our next one is at 6:00pm on March 14, and will feature Assistant Vice President for IT, Robert Campbell, Vice President for Student Affairs, Matthew Schoengood, and Associate Provost and Dean for Doctoral Science, Daniel Lemons. The April 11 meeting will feature President William Kelly.

We will continue to keep abreast of developments and post to our website, www.cunydisc.org, and continue to invite speakers to our plenaries who can speak directly to student needs and concerns.

MOVIES, MOVIES, MOVIES

For a mere \$6 per pass, you; too, can go to the movies using our AMC Silver movie passes. Drop by the office (GC 5495) during office hours (check www.cunydisc.org for up-to-the-minute office hours), and remember to bring your current GC ID and

a checkbook to buy movie passes. For more information, drop by the DSC office!

TO-DO LIST: NOMINATIONS, CHECK. ELECTIONS, UPCOMING!

Nominations are done! Thank you so much for nominating yourself, your friend, your peers, and everyone and anyone else who has been nominated for various DSC positions. Now, the Steering Committee is tabulating, formulating, and creating the ballot for Elections, which begin April 1: keep checking www.cunydisc.org/vote 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...)

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

DSC SPRING PARTY

The DSC Spring Party will be held on the evening of March 14, from 8:30-

11:00 p.m., in rooms 5414 and 5409. Beverages and snacks will be served. We're still working on a theme, but St. Paddy's wares are never out of fashion in mid-March, right? Please join your fellow students, your hard-working peers, and enjoy some mid-semester merriment and mirth!

DSC CALENDAR

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

PLENARY MEETINGS

(all plenary meetings are held in room GC 5414)

- March 14, 6:00 p.m.
- 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 MEETINGS

(all SC meetings are held in room GC 5489 except as noted)

- April 4, 6:00 p.m.
- 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

SCHOLARLY AWARDS

COMMITTEE MEETING

- March 14, 4:30 p.m., room 5414

SPRING DSC PARTY

- March 14, 8:30 p.m., room 5414

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.

HELP WANTED: ADJUNCT PROJECT COORDINATOR

The DSC will be hiring a new Adjunct Coordinator for 2008-9. This is a paid position.

Further information about the job can be found at the DSC website, www.cunydisc.org.

Please send resumes to robfaunce@gmail.com or DSC, Attn: Communications, 365 Fifth Avenue, Suite 5491, New York, NY 10016. ■

Troubled by stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, insomnia, life crises?

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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

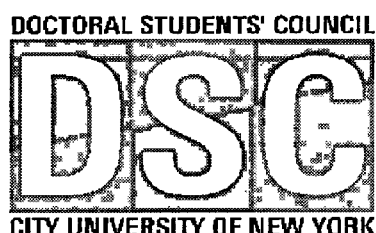
To vote in elections for DSC positions(s), follow these three steps:

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!

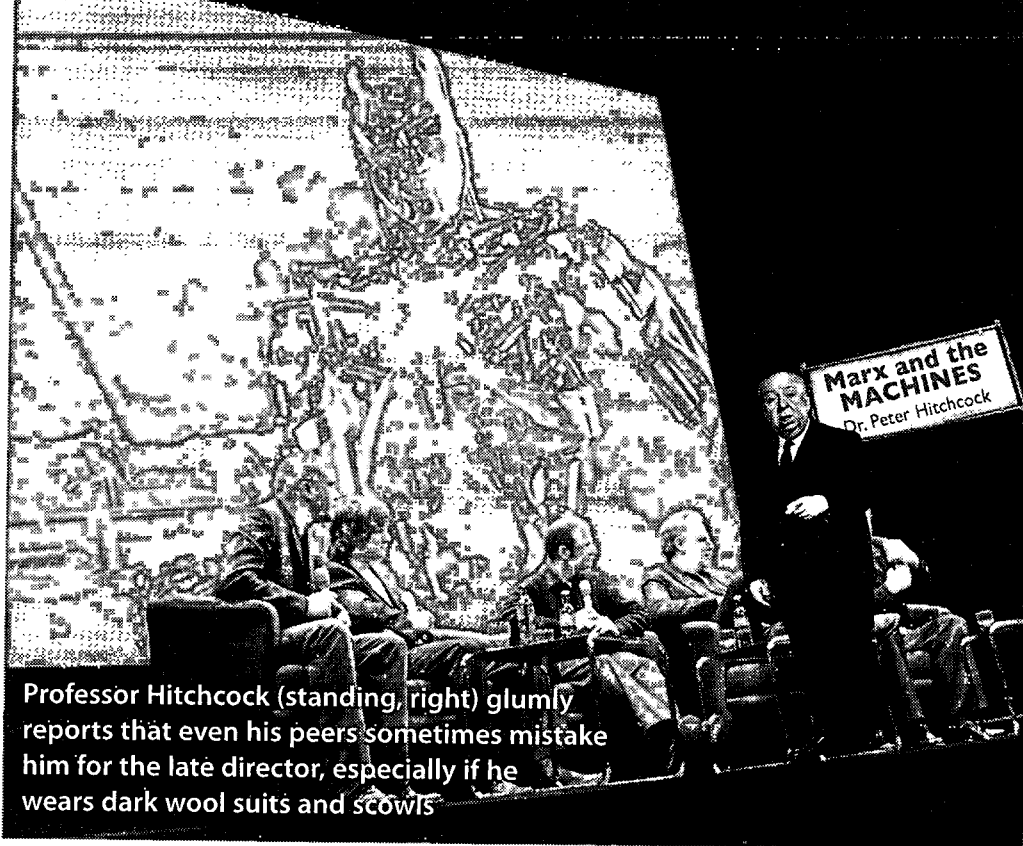
Once you have logged in, a personalized election ballot will be made available to you.



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>

Alfred Hitchcock, Professor Pëter Hitchcock Not Related



Professor Hitchcock (standing, right) glumly reports that even his peers sometimes mistake him for the late director, especially if he wears dark wool suits and scowls

Last Tuesday was a special day for the Grad Center's favorite post-colonial theorist, Peter Hitchcock, Professor of English and Film Studies.

For exactly the 100,000th time in his short sojourn here on Earth, someone asked him if he was related to motion picture legend and fellow UK native Alfred Hitchcock. And as he has in practically all previous instances, the professor responded in the negative.

"I'm not sure when I started keeping count," he told this intrepid reporter. "But over the years it's developed into a strangely rewarding little hobby of mine, mate."

Before I could steer the conversation back to the ostensible purpose of our meeting, my second exams for my degree, he continued, "I think if I didn't give so many courses in film, I probably wouldn't be asked so often. You don't know how many students at Baruch have approached me thinking I am some kind of Hollywood insider: like I can get them a job bringing coffee to Aaron Spelling."

Actually, given Hitchcock's academic milieu, it's really a good thing he's not related to the great auteur. White, male, heterosexual, mainstream, and known for almost autocratic control on set and in pre- and post-production, Alfred Hitchcock is everything post-colonial studies resents.

"Oh, it would have been the kiss of death, mate," said Hitchcock. "Spivak and Bhabha are already reluctant to be seen in public with someone as white and as British as me, no matter how much colonial guilt I confess to. I've even considered inventing other politically obligatory emotions in order to show how much I hate Europe, freedom, and myself. Can you imagine if on top

of being completely white I was part of postmodern capitalism's cultural nobility? It would have ruined my career."

Still, by not immediately disclaiming that he's not related to Alfred Hitchcock, Hitchcock (the professor) creates an electric atmosphere in his classes. Students usually spend the first few weeks of smoking cigarettes before and after class discussing whether they should ask him for free passes to Universal Studios, for notes on their MA thesis about the trope of the phallic mother in the late Hitchcock, or if he would let them bring him a coffee beverage from a nearby Starbucks.

Of course, it doesn't help matters that certain students (who will remain anonymous) with a talent for lying convincingly insist of spreading the rumor that Professor Hitchcock is in fact a descendent of the master of suspense.

But the biggest problem with this unhappy coincidence of names isn't the way doe-eyed hipster girls stare at him while he discusses the correspondences between certain passages in Marx's *Capital Vol. III* and *The Terminator*. Nor is it the fact that some of his students would try to embarrass him by publishing articles lampooning his name in poorly edited and little-read student newspapers that everyone thinks are gay. No, his biggest problem is that someday soon he will have to explain to his darling children that not only is he not related to Alfred Hitchcock, but neither are they.

But with probably at least another 100,000 times of being asked the question, Hitchcock (the professor) was heroically defiant in assessing his future. "It's not all bad, mate. Next week when Zizek is here for his talk, it'll be a nice ice-breaker." ■



Dear Harriet,

I just came out so I'm new to the whole relationship thing. Yesterday I caught my boyfriend checking my internet history when he used my computer to check his email. I didn't say anything at the time, but — is that acceptable curiosity, or spying?
— Confused About Privacy

I'm going to assume you and Mr. Nosey are a relatively recent item, CAP. If you guys have been together for a while, then chances are he already knows all about what piques your interest online, even if you think he doesn't. You can't hide what you're into with someone you share underwear with. I know this from sad personal experience. Many sad, personal experiences, but mainly the time I found out that my boyfriend, oh, let's call him "Ted," actually was sharing my underwear. Fortunately Victoria's Secret has a little-known pick-up-and-incinerate service for those unmentionables you *never want to see again* because you'll always picture them (shudder) trying to hide your boyfriend's junk.

But that's not your problem, CAP. For all I know your honey's junk looks just fine in your boxer briefs. What we're talking about here, though, is your internet junk. And in a way, it's just like what you're packing downstairs: when you're single, no one ever sees it but you (however often that might be for you). But when you're with someone, you're naked to them. That's great when you're messing around, but it still means you're completely exposed. And that's true not just for your biscuits and gravy, but for your whole life. Your boyfriend just pantsed you, metaphorically speaking.

Whether this is acceptable behavior or a violation punishable by some ruthless form of retribution, like forcing him to watch an entire episode of *Lipstick Jungle*, depends on how serious you two are. If you invite a trick over for an afternoon session of mattress rugby, his privacy access level is pretty much limited to speculation about your favorite color based on the Hanes you have on when you meet him at the door. He's really not entitled to know about the crayon allergies your childhood dog suffered from (discovered entirely by accident, I swear).

But if you've crossed that nebulous line into being "together," which this talk of boyfriends and relationships suggests, then the time for secrecy is over. He's entitled to know what he's getting into. If you want a relationship to explode spectacularly in your face, leaving you scarred for life like the Phantom of the Opera (the Lon Chaney monster version, I mean, not the Gerard Butler mask-accessorized oh-so-pretty GQ-cover boy version), or that whack Korean villain guy from *Die Another Day* with the freaking diamonds in his face, there's no better way to go about making that happen than hiding from your boyfriend what's important to you. And there's nothing — *nothing* — more important than what turns you on.

I hear you protesting, CAP, that you never said you had porn or anything prurient on your internet history. Neither did I. If you're a secret Dick Cheney in 2008 booster (if you haven't heard about the campaign, that means it's working, you naïve, naïve fools), that's part of what turns you on. If you visit the [ijustlovelovegilmoregirls](#) facebook group three or four or 100 times a day, that's part of what turns you on. If you regularly visit the *New York Times* humor page and keep trying to contribute lame amateur "late night" jokes even though the shows are all back and we have professionally lame monologues again, well, that's part of what turns you on as well, you pathetic weirdo.

That said — c'mon, it's porn, right? And if you're having vanilla butt-sex with him all night but then waiting until he leaves for work and then monkey-spanking all morning to kinky stories about guys who fellate powertools or get off on using Vick's Vaporub for lube (owwww!!), it'll all seem fun and innocent and harmless to you right up until the absolutely unavoidable day he finds out and realizes (a) he doesn't know you and (b) you don't trust him.

The worst part is, you might be missing out on a boyfriend game enough to mix your internet persona into your real-life intimate encounters. Sure, he *might* be horrified, but since there's nothing more real about you than your turn-ons, that means he's horrified by you and what you have together is fake and ephemeral — which then goes under the heading of screwing around, not a relationship. But if you're "together," there's a good chance he'll accept whatever side of you you're hiding, as long as you haven't been hiding it for so long that when it comes out it feels like a deleted scene from *All About Eve*. And you might even find someone to go with you to those midnight Cheney rallies down at the secret meeting hall downtown everyone thinks is an abandoned Elks Lodge. Wouldn't that be sweet? ■