CUNY GRADUATE CENTER
Advocate
March 2009 http://gcadvocate.org advocate@gc.cuny.edu


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FROM THE editor's desk

Give it Back!: Getting New York's Wealthiest to Pay Their Fair Share

> "Experience demands that man is the only animal which devours his own kind, for I can apply no milder term to the general prey of the rich on the poor."
> —Thomas Jefferson

> "Hey baby, nobody suffers like the poor!"
> —Charles Bukowski

I know it's difficult, especially for the majority of GC students facing several years of fruitless job searches and adjunct lecturing in pursuit of that coveted $55,000 a year tenure track gig; but take a minute and imagine what it would be like to make $200,000 a year. For most of us this number must seem outrageously large: four or five times our current yearly wages and a lot more than even the most well paid and distinguished professor makes at CUNY; but nonetheless, give it a shot.

How would your life be different? Would you finally be able to afford your own apartment instead of giving your money to a landlord or living with roommates? Would you finally feel secure enough to let your spouse take time off from work to have a child, and would you take comfort in the fact that your child would grow up in a safe and healthy environment? Would you be able to set aside a college fund and make sure that they received the best education and health care available? Would you take vacations in Europe or the Caribbean, eat at more of the great restaurants New York has to offer, or become a subscriber to the Metropolitan Opera? Of course you could do any or all of these things if you made $200,000 a year. In fact with a lifetime of that kind of income you could easily retire in your early sixties and spend a significant part of your adult life doing whatever you liked, volunteering your time in a meaningful way that helped make the world a better place. Indeed, let's face it, regardless of what you might think about the rich or how much you believe, like Roger Waters, that money "is the root of all evil today," life would be pretty good if you made just that much money wouldn't it?

Now imagine if you were making $250,000 or $300,000 or even $3million; would those extra dollars really make you any happier? Would more vacations or a more expensive house really make your life any more fulfilling? Perhaps for some of you they would, but the fact is that even a moderate amount of income, much less than $250,000 can sustain great happiness. As Harvard University psychologist Daniel Gilbert writes in his book *Stumbling on Happiness*: "Americans who earn $50,000 per year are much happier than those who earn $10,000 per year…but Americans who earn $5 million per year are not much happier than those who earn $100,000 per year." In other words, regardless of the actual dollar amounts, Gilbert's findings make it clear that after a certain level of basic comfort and security, more wealth does not mean more happiness. The sad part is that even that basic level of comfort and security is becoming more and more difficult to attain, as fewer and fewer people control larger amounts of the nation's wealth.

So if many of us would be delighted to make even a mere $150,000 a year, and the facts indicate that much more than that doesn't really seem to make anyone any happier, why does the New York State income tax system insist on taking the same percentage of income from those who have little or nothing to spare as it does from those who already have more than enough, and according to Gilbert would suffer nothing should they take home a little less each year? Why is it that, given the state's record breaking budget deficit, the governor, rather than increasing taxes on those who already have everything they need, is instead proposing to raise costs and slash services for those who can least afford to pay more or to go with less?

Not only does Governor Paterson want to slash Medicaid, which obviously affects only those without adequate health insurance (i.e. the poor) but as we have all heard, he is also planning to increase tuition at CUNY and SUNY campuses by a total of $600 per year. Since many of you reading this are no doubt trying to piece together a meager living teaching CUNY students, I don't have to tell you how little they already have and how hard they work just to stay on top of their tuition bills, much less their course reading and homework. Add to this Paterson's proposals to slash the MTA budget, which will likely result in significant cuts in service as well as a potential fare increase, and it's not hard to see the economic war that is being waged on the working poor of New York. While the poor are being asked to pay more and to get by with less in almost every aspect of their daily lives, those making well above $250,000 a year are being asked to sacrifice absolutely nothing.

Currently the New York State tax on income over $40,000 is 6.85%. That rate applies not only to those making $40,000 a year but to everyone making more than that marginally livable wage, regardless of how many millions of dollars they bring home each year. That means that many of us are probably paying exactly the same percentage of taxes as our esteemed Chancellor Goldstein, who makes $540,000 a year in wages and perks and has largely bent over backwards to accommodate the governor's proposals for tuition hikes, while at the same time giving himself several significant raises. Indeed, since the late '70s New York State has reduced income taxes for the wealthiest New Yorkers by more than 50 percent, while simultaneously slashing services, raising public college and university tuition, and eliminating vital city and state programs. It is precisely this trend: giving tax breaks to the rich, and not the oft-touted economic burden of providing services to the poor that has created the enormous deficit the state now faces. Indeed, as other commentators have aptly noted, this fiscal crisis is very specifically a crisis of revenue, not spending, and to try to solve it by further cutting spending while refusing to increase revenue only goes to show how little our state representatives actually care about the living conditions of the majority of their constituency.

Thankfully, there is a growing number of citizens, unions, and grassroots political organizations who are pushing for a more reasonable and moral solution to the current state budget crisis, one that seeks to distribute the burden of that crisis in a more equitable way. The Working Families Party in conjunction with several state and municipal unions have proposed what they are calling a Fair Share Tax Reform bill. Introduced in the New York State Senate by Senator Eric Schniederman, the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill proposes a modest increase in taxes on those New Yorkers making above $250,000. The bill, which is gaining momentum in the state legislature (Thanks in part to the determined efforts of ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations), would raise the state tax rate on those making more than $250,000 from 6.85 percent to 8.25 percent. Likewise those making more than half a million a year would see their state tax rise to 8.97 percent, while those making more than a million dollars a year would be asked to pay 10.3 percent.

Even at the highest tax bracket proposed in the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill, this is a total increase of only 3.45 percent. That 3.45 percent, however, would, according to Fiscal Policy Institute of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, generate as much as $6 billion a year for New York State. Furthermore, these increases would affect only a small portion of New Yorkers, (only the wealthiest 3.25 percent, according to The Working Families Party) and the few who would actually be affected are, let's face it, uniquely situated to withstand a small decrease in their annual income.

Although there seems to be a growing consensus in the legislature that some kind of progressive tax reform is necessary, opponents of the Fair Share Tax Reform are gearing up to seek major compromises to the bill that would force more of the burden for the budget deficit onto poor working families. As the April 1 deadline for the next New York State budget quickly approaches, now is the time to take action. Contact your state senator and congressperson: send them a handwritten letter, send them a fax, or call them on the phone, and insist that they fully support, without compromise, the Fair Share Tax Reform package currently being considered by the state legislature. Even as the poorest Americans have become increasingly poor, the small minority of wealthy Americans have benefitted from decades of government giveaways. Now's the time to take it back; The Fair Share Tax Reform Bill is a good first step in that direction. Ⓐ

guest editorial

The General's Labyrinth Revealed

PATRICK INGLIS

Thomas Weiss, Presidential Professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center, and moderator of the recent panel discussion entitled "Military Power," held in the Proshansky Auditorium, had asked General Barry McCaffrey (ret.) his thoughts on former military officers acting as analysts in the media. "I'm a determinably non-partisan commentator," McCaffrey responded. As if to prove his point, he then recounted a conversation with Donald Rumsfeld, in which he shared with the former secretary of defense some lessons from his days as a college boxer.

First, the general said, before you start a war you must treat your enemy with respect. After all, "when you pick up military tools, you don't know the outcome." Second, "When that gun goes off you step into the ring and try and kill your opponent with a first punch and dominate the fight from the outset." His last piece of advice, incongruent with the first two, was to keep in mind that war "doesn't mean just military power," but also providing humanitarian aid in the aftermath. If only Rumsfeld had listened.

In the story, compelling and well told, McCaffrey neglected to say anything about the personal and financial motivations that drive him to pursue these sorts of conversations with top military brass. So, too, did President William Kelly, who introduced McCaffrey and the other two panelists, *Washington Post* reporter Thomas Ricks and Harvard Humanitarian Initiative Fellow Alex de Waal.

Kelly listed McCaffrey's many accomplishments: a retired four-star general with thirty-two years of service in the US military including four combat tours of duty, and the two-time recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross and winner of the Silver Star of Valor. In retirement, Kelly noted, the general had been named director of National Drug Control Policy in the Clinton administration, and now is "president of his own consulting firm based in Arlington, Virginia."

That consulting firm, BR McCaffrey Associates, as revealed in reports in the *New York Times Magazine* in November 2008 and in *The Nation* in April 2003, works on behalf of military firms seeking the ear and pocketbook of the US military. These reports, in addition to another account from 2000 by Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* that alleges McCaffrey committed war crimes in the first Iraq war, raise serious questions about the general's claims to be a "determinably non-partisan" analyst of the present Iraq war. He is paid undisclosed sums of money by military contractors to advocate on their behalf in the media and in the offices of the Pentagon.

McCaffrey's associations to the military industrial complex don't so much reflect a conflict of interest, but an interest in conflict. His income depends on whether or not the war continues. In this light, President Kelly's vague, and on the surface of it innocuous, mention of some "consulting firm in Arlington, Virginia," is disingenuous and misleading. It was an act of bad faith amidst so many acts of bad faith perpetrated on the American public, notably in the media in the lead up to the Iraq war, but also more recently in the treatment of the financial crisis on Wall Street.

Some members of the Graduate Center community may have preferred that McCaffrey not even speak on the panel. That is not my position. I simply would've preferred open disclosure about the man's ties to the military industrial complex.

Indeed, a group of students and activists, none of whom I know personally, did what President Kelly did not do. They circulated a flyer that presented the general's "other" biography only to have it confiscated by security guards before even a few rows of people were presented with it. Fortunately, the offending activists were permitted to remain in the audience. When one of them spoke up at the end of the event she was summarily removed from the auditorium, as one of the security guards, wearing a bullet proof vest, stood on stage, presumably on the lookout for other disturbances. Thus, the event "Military Power" came to a close.

A great deal may have been gained had McCaffrey's associations been disclosed. Whether or not McCaffrey would've engaged in such a discussion is another matter. There is a good chance he may have declined the invitation. Such disclosure, or analysis of the relationship between the Iraq war and the people who sold it and the goods to fight it, even without McCaffrey in attendance, would've made for a more critical and ultimately more enlightening discussion than the one that occurred.

Instead, what we got was a rather banal rolling out of well known mishaps and blunders by the Bush administration, and, for Ricks and de Wall, but not McCaffrey, the argument that the war was wholly unnecessary. In other words, little, if anything, was said that has not been said a thousand times over by critics of the Iraq war, either from the left or right of the American political spectrum. (The crisis in Darfur and Sudan was also a topic of conversation.)

Nevertheless, one comment did stick out. Ricks, asked about the American public's waning interest in the Iraq war, and disinterest in the broadening of the war in Afghanistan, had this to say, drawing on an apt analogy: "Just because you walk out of a movie halfway through doesn't mean it ends." As for the Iraq war, he said, the American people "have walked out on it," despite unabated conflict, and talk of a lot more fighting in Afghanistan.

But not everyone has walked out on the war. Some, like the people who showed up to listen to the panel on military power, are still fixated on this war, arguably the biggest mistake in US foreign policy history, and have a vested interest, as citizens and taxpayers, in other wars the US may fight in the near future. They deserve to know exactly who the characters in this present theatre of war are. President Kelly, in not fully disclosing the nature of Gen. McCaffrey's relationship to the military industrial complex, deprived them of that. Ⓐ

adjuncting

Naming the Problem

RENEE MCGARRY

They say when it hits the *New York Times* Sunday Style section you know the trend is over, and probably has been for at least a year. I have a distinct memory of such an event, the moment when the Style section did a photo essay on Doc Martens. I think it was 1995, and if I know the paper of record, it wasn't ironic.

I wish this axiom could be applied to everything in the paper, because it would only mean good things for higher education. From a February 18 article on grade inflation in colleges to a March 6 article outlining the difficulties facing those of us searching for jobs, to Stanley Fish's blog detailing what he called Neoliberalism 101, it's not hard to see that Stanley Aronowitz was right when he stopped by the Adjunct Project table in the lobby to tell me that "this is a horrible time in higher education" and that it's time for "adjuncts to take to the streets."

I wish it was as easy as Professor Aronowitz made it sound.

If Fish's blog made anything clear to me, it was the real reasons tenure-track faculty, adjuncts, graduate students, and undergraduates aren't taking to the streets: many of us in the academy are in denial. I don't think it's a denial about how bad the problem is. Most of us will admit that we are overworked and underpaid, and those of us at the Graduate Center may see that as a stepping stone to getting a coveted tenure-track position. (In fact, many of us are fed that exact line by our programs. If I had a dime for every time someone told me that the most valuable piece of my CV isn't my research or publications, but the lengthy section on undergraduate teaching, I wouldn't need to scramble for fellowships to write my dissertation.) Most of our undergraduates know that their classrooms are overcrowded and they aren't getting the attention they deserve. Most tenure-track faculty understand that hiring an army of adjuncts means fewer colleagues, a smaller academic community, less intense and engaging conversation about their scholarly work, fewer and fewer opportunities for collaboration, and an erosion of academic freedom.

It's not that we can't see the problem, or that we can't see how bad the problem actually is. Many of us refuse to name it, and without a name we can just pretend that the problem doesn't exist.

Fish's opening to his blog anecdotally reports exactly this: "I've been asking colleagues in several departments and disciplines whether they've ever come across the term "neoliberalism" and whether they know what it means. A small number acknowledged having heard the word; a very much smaller number ventured a tentative definition." Luckily in the first half of his post, Fish put together a brief, user-friendly, and relatively unbiased definition of neo-liberalism. He also cites many excellent sources that can teach us more.

When the Adjunct Project first started planning CUNY Equity Week (CEW), we had no idea that the national conversation might turn in a direction that would highlight the neoliberalization of the university, even if articles in the *New York Times* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* don't apply this label. But any time we read of the difficulties of new PhDs finding full-time and tenure-track positions or lowered expectations of undergraduate students or harried and over-worked instructors, the conversation is essentially about neoliberalism. Call it what you want: neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization. Our goals in CUNY Equity Week are to educate our students and each other enough so that we can, and do, call it something.

Call it what you want: neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization. Our goals in CUNY Equity Week are to educate our students and each other enough so that we can, and do, call it something

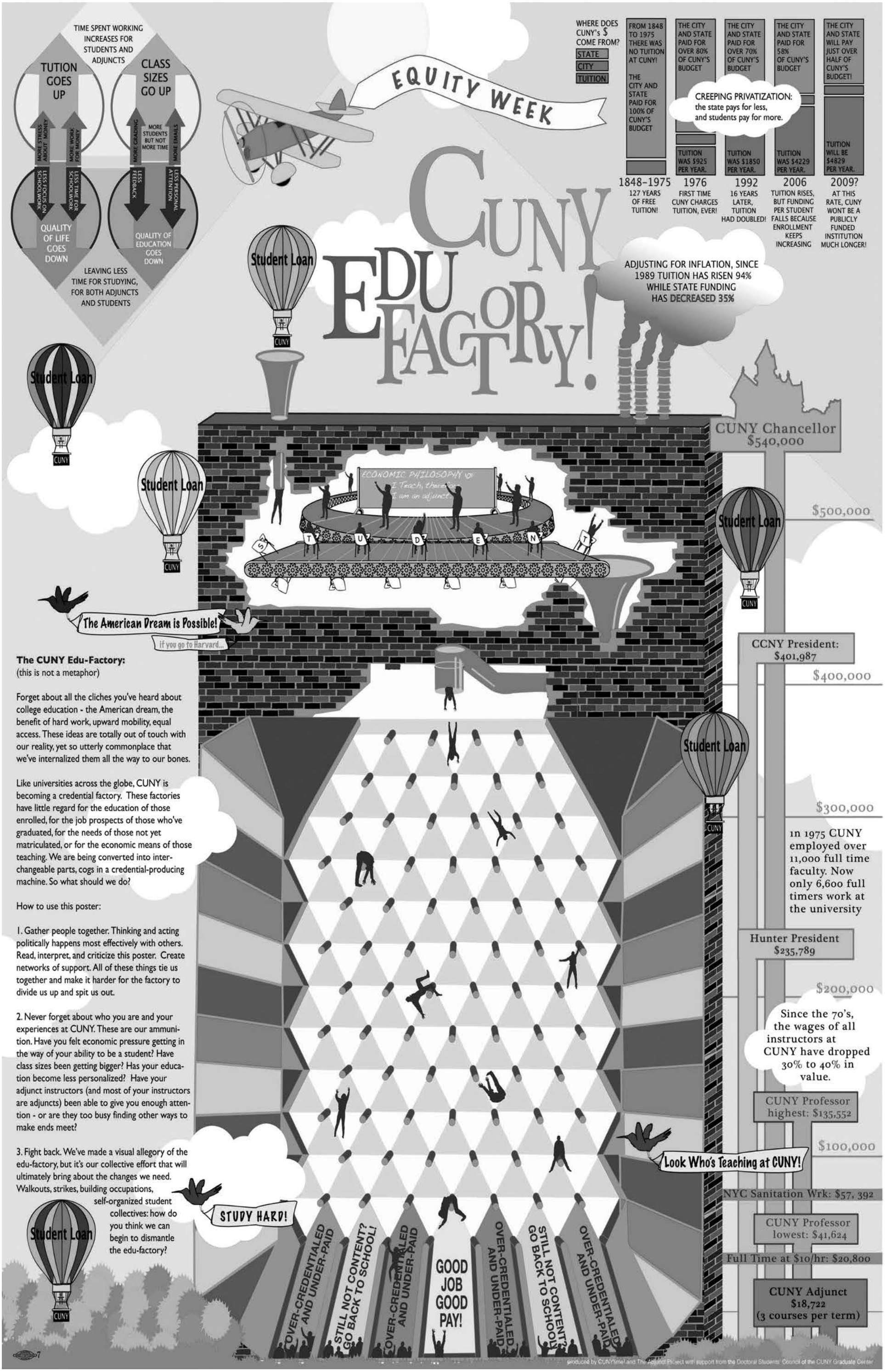
We are educators after all, and we can find power in using our skills. CUNY Equity Week does not aim simply to help us learn facts and figures and regurgitate them to our students. While it is meaningful that 57 percent of the faculty at CUNY are contingent employees, facts and figures themselves do not empower. Nor is Equity Week an outlet for our laundry list of complaints: I hate grading papers on the train, I work three jobs, it's taking me nine years to complete my degree because I have to teach so much, I don't have an office, they took away my mailbox. Complaint does not empower. Recognizing ourselves and our students as victims of a systemic attack that seeks to further oppress those already oppressed, racial, gender, ethnic, sexual, and economic minorities, by disenfranchising those who might help them the most will create a class of active social participants with real power to make changes. CEW serves to inspire faculty, tenure-track and contingent, and students, graduate and undergraduate, to act on a looming social issue that continues to devalue our education system from kindergarten through post-graduate education.

The Adjunct Project invites you to join us in naming the problem of neoliberalization and educating our students and colleagues about how it impacts us here at CUNY. During the week of March 30 through April 3 we ask that you participate in a collective effort to use these unspeakable words, neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization, as much as possible. Use them in your classrooms. Use them with your colleagues. Use them with support staff. Use them with your supervisors.

We also ask that you spend at least fifteen to twenty minutes of one class during CUNY Equity Week engaging your students in a conversation about the CUNY edu-factory and ask them (and maybe yourself) to question our current paradigm of education. Does the university need to be a credential factory? And how can we change the university to meet our needs and demands?

Stop by our table in the Graduate Center lobby during the week of March 23 to sign up to teach this in your classes or have a team of students come in and talk to your class about it. Join the Adjunct Project for two workshops that will discuss the specifics of how to teach this topic on Thursday, March 19 and Monday, March 23, both at 7pm in room 5409 of the Graduate Center. There you can sign up to teach this yourself, join a team of presenters at the campus of your choice, and join an ongoing conversation about classroom strategies for equity week. At both the table and these workshops we'll have teaching tools and materials available, including a large color poster (like the one seen opposite) that we hope will serve as a conversation starter and an illustration of the current state of our CUNY edu-factory. For more information or to download these materials now, visit our website (**adjunctproject.org**.)

Our fear of naming the neo-liberalization of CUNY and universities throughout the country allows the process to continue by sustaining its invisibility and furthering the myth of its inevitability. Stanley Fish might think CUNY Equity goes too far, removing us from our isolated cocoon of esoteric pursuits and bringing politics into the classroom. Stanley Aronowitz might think it doesn't go far enough, that we should march down the streets and demand equity. These are important conversations to have and we have important decisions to make as a community. How do we demand we be treated fairly and that we are offered the same opportunities as those who grew up in Fish's and Aroniwitz's generation? And how do we demand that our students are treated fairly and that they have the same opportunities we do? Ⓐ



The CUNY Edu-Factory:
(this is not a metaphor)

Forget about all the cliches you've heard about college education - the American dream, the benefit of hard work, upward mobility, equal access. These ideas are totally out of touch with our reality, yet so utterly commonplace that we've internalized them all the way to our bones.

Like universities across the globe, CUNY is becoming a credential factory. These factories have little regard for the education of those enrolled, for the job prospects of those who've graduated, for the needs of those not yet matriculated, or for the economic means of those teaching. We are being converted into inter-changeable parts, cogs in a credential-producing machine. So what should we do?

How to use this poster:

1. Gather people together. Thinking and acting politically happens most effectively with others. Read, interpret, and criticize this poster. Create networks of support. All of these things tie us together and make it harder for the factory to divide us up and spit us out.

2. Never forget about who you are and your experiences at CUNY. These are our ammunition. Have you felt economic pressure getting in the way of your ability to be a student? Have class sizes been getting bigger? Has your education become less personalized? Have your adjunct instructors (and most of your instructors are adjuncts) been able to give you enough attention - or are they too busy finding other ways to make ends meet?

3. Fight back. We've made a visual allegory of the edu-factory, but it's our collective effort that will ultimately bring about the changes we need. Walkouts, strikes, building occupations, self-organized student collectives: how do you think we can begin to dismantle the edu-factory?

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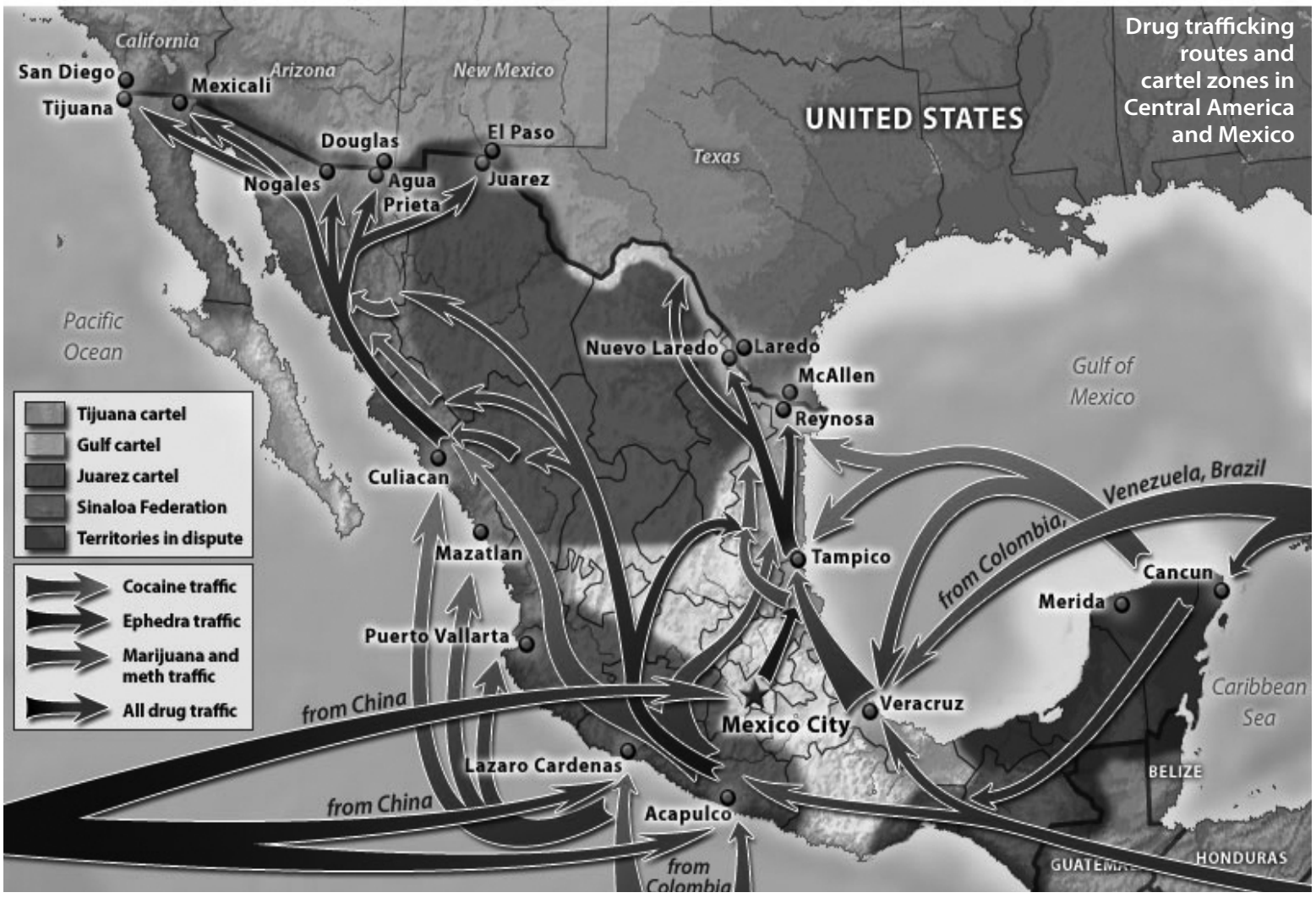
Supply, Demand, and the Mexican Drug War

ANDREW BAST

The war looks eerily familiar: beheadings, assassinations of police and public officials, terrorized businesspeople, extorted schoolteachers, and in five years more than 230 American civilians dead in the crossfire. All this could easily describe the battle in Afghanistan or Iraq, but the reality is closer to home, where an increasingly gruesome war is threatening to boil over the United States' southern border with Mexico.



Summing up decades of policy, three former Latin American heads of state recently declared, "The war on drugs has failed." Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil, César Gaviria of Colombia and Ernesto Zedillo of Mexico, working together on the Latin American Commission on Drugs and Democracy, argued, "Prohibitionist policies based on eradication, interdiction and criminalization of consumption simply haven't worked. . . . Today, we are further than ever from the goal of eradicating drugs."

Considering the money and resources committed to the War on Drugs over the years, the claim is mind-boggling. Pinning down exact figures is difficult, but some experts estimate that nearly $1 trillion has been spent in total. In 2009, $14 billion more has been budgeted to programs spanning twelve agencies of the US federal government, from the Small Business Administration and Veterans Affairs to State, Interior, and Defense Departments. Every one of them, according to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, is an "important partner." Experts at the Drug Policy Alliance say the money spent this year by state and local governments could top $40 billion, noting that many others would place the number higher.

A recent sweep cracked down on cartels operating in Canada, Mexico and across the United States, demonstrating that this is still the same old war. Without a doubt, the 755 arrests yanked offenders off the streets. But the strategy of stemming supply has, over the long home rather than waging a bigger battle abroad.

Arresting traffickers and aiding the Mexican government to combat the cartels focuses on the supply side of the problem. Accordingly, Congress passed the Merida Initiative last June, providing a half-billion dollars in aid annually to Mexico as a partner in trying to shut down the supply chain. As the cartels grow more capable, as well as more brazen, it seems that taking them down is a logical first step. But a few harsh realities suggest that stepping up the offensive will do little, if anything, to actually cut the flow of narcotics into American cities.

In his testimony before Congress last year, John Walsh of the Washington Office on Latin America offered three convincing arguments why US drug policy has to "move beyond the self-defeating supply-control fixation." First, the "balloon effect" turns the war against drug cartels into a game of whack-a-mole. Narco-supply chains are too vast and sprawling to turn off like a spigot. Controlling supply is like squeezing a balloon: A pinch in one place expands it in another. Walsh says this is exactly what happened in the early 1990s. Enforcement officials clamped down on supply routes through the Caribbean and South Florida. In turn, Colombian traffickers quickly struck new alliances with illicit groups in Mexico, laying the groundwork for the eruption of warfare today.

Second, Walsh points matter-of-factly to the ready availability of cocaine, despite the time and money spent to stem supply. Targeting cartels was supposed to drive up cocaine prices inside the United States. But as Walsh noted, "Cocaine prices have in fact been falling, not rising." Since peaking in the early 1980s, both retail and wholesale prices of cocaine subsequently dropped to about a third of what they were, where they have remained for the last two decades.

Lastly, there is the "needle in a haystack" problem with regard to Mexico, the United States' second largest trading partner. Recent statistics show that a million people and 300,000 cars cross the border each day, as do tens of millions of shipping containers each year. With the benefits of all this trade comes the impossible challenge of picking out the illicit from the licit.

At some point, one has to consider the demand side of the equation. First, no matter how much aid is delivered to Colombia or Mexico, stopping the flow at the source will prove impossible. And more importantly, if no one in America wanted to buy all these drugs, the cartels would have to take their business elsewhere.

"The traditional approach to addressing demand has been to throw them in prison," Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of Drug Policy Alliance Network explained to me in a recent conversation. "Why not define treatment more broadly?"

Nadelmann said that many tend to think that tackling demand means instituting more D.A.R.E. programs to keep kids off drugs, but it is actually hardcore users who account for the bulk of consumption. However, serious addicts have few options to get themselves out of the downward spiral of addiction.

"It's more and more difficult to get treatment unless you get arrested," Nadelmann said.

For instance, users now can only get methadone in a clinic. Making it available in pharmacies by prescription—as is done in many European countries—would make a popular treatment far more accessible. Accessibility to treatment would mean fewer users, reduced demand and less incentive for cartels to angle for power and position on the country's border.

Nadelmann offered two more options. The first is legalization. Across the country there is a widening discussion, and greater policy momentum, toward decriminalization and a new understanding of what is acceptable. Second, Nadelmann said, "The most effective form of treatment is actually not the threat of incarceration, but it is actually paying users for staying clean, like a reward." Nadelmann acknowledged the difficult politics involved, but pointed out, "It actually costs less than locking them up."

> "The most effective form of treatment is actually paying users for staying clean, like a reward. … It actually costs less than locking them up."

Both proposals, in fact, are politically flammable. But in the face of ineffective policies and the threatening violence next door, all options have to be on the table.

Few foreign policy issues are so intimately tied to domestic policy as the War on Drugs. For the first time in decades, America is faced with the gruesome reality of a nearby war. A recent Pentagon study suggested that Mexico could soon be the world's newest "failed state," pushing refugees into the United States and creating havoc in a region that has been wholly at peace for more than a century. Yet, demand at home drives the conflict as much, if not more, than ills abroad. Facing that fact will put users, and not cartels, at the heart of a new policy.

Stop The Presses: Republicans Love CUNY

In an effort to provide short-term relief to a budget under duress, Republican lawmakers in the New York State Senate have proposed a plan designed to attract students to CUNY and SUNY while they're still in the cradle.

The plan, open to all children under the age of fourteen, offers parents the opportunity to lock-in future tuition costs at current rates. For example, parents of newborns can begin planning for the future by purchasing their child's future tuition at $98 per credit. Rates increase as the child gets older, but parents can continue to purchase credits on the cheap until the prospective student reaches the age of eighteen.

Interestingly, under the Republican proposal, revenue collected from prepaid tuition credits would be funneled back into the university system. Under similar plans instituted throughout the country, revenue monies have been invested in the stock market to maximize future gains. But with the market in flux, and increasingly unreliable, Republican lawmakers are arguing that available funds should be invested immediately into public campuses throughout the state.

Speaking as if the plan were a done deal, State Senator Kenneth LaValle announced that "We are letting them make decisions on how they want to grow that money and how they want to spend that money."

Nevertheless, the proposal will likely face steep opposition from Democrats currently controlling the legislature. Even Governor David Paterson, usually the "staunchest defender" of New York's public education system, raised doubts about the proposal.

"These kinds of structures should never be looked at as a way of providing near-term fiscal relief" a governor spokesperson cautioned, "as they only create a hole down the road when the students arrive and the funds have been spent." Of course, the governor's office failed to mention that much of this necessary "near-term" relief is the consequence of Paterson's rape-and-pillage campaign against the state education budget. But whatever.

According to its Republican sponsors, the plan offers a win-win solution to parents and public universities alike, each facing mounting constraints. On the one hand, the plan looks to generate roughly $8 billion in revenue over the course of the next decade.

On the other hand, says State Senator Dean Skelos, Republican Senator from Rockville Center, "This program will give parents and their children an opportunity for an affordable, first-rate education."

Added LaValle, while the program does not ensure admission to any CUNY or SUNY colleges, it "will help parents secure a quality education for their children, while making a worthwhile investment in our public higher education system."

John Forte to Teach at City College

Just months after being released from prison on a cocaine possession charge, rapper John Forte has been hired to teach at City College. Forte, who was busted by authorities in New Jersey in 2001 carrying over a million dollars worth of liquid cocaine, was released in January after serving seven years of a fourteen year sentence. He received a pardon for his troubles from George W. Bush.

Starting in early April, Forte will begin teaching a music therapy course as part of City College's "In Arms Reach" program for at-risk youth, specifically those with incarcerated parents. The three month program will teach students between the ages of twelve and fifteen how to cope with the feelings of fear, anger and frustration common among those with parents in prison.

According to a Forte representative who spoke with AllHipHop.com, "John hopes that the catharsis of song composition will help children deal with the stigma of having a family member who is incarcerated and rebuild the spirit of those who have been traumatized or abandoned." Former president Bush could not be reached for comment.

Hunter Students Stand in Solidarity against Budget Cuts to Universities

On March 5, thousands of students from across New York's public and private university systems, marched on City Hall to protest Governor David Paterson's proposed cuts to the state's higher education budget. The CUNY contingent was represented most heavily by the hundreds of Hunter students that walked out of classes that afternoon to protest proposed tuition hikes. In a show of their frustration, Hunter students abandoned their classrooms at 2:00 PM, and headed south to Borough of Manhattan Community College where they joined with other protestors headed to City Hall.

"CUNY is made up of working-class students and students of color who really can't afford to go anywhere else," Hunter sophomore Jackelyn Mariano told Washington Square News. "It was supposed to be free when it opened up, and tuition has been increasing ever since."

The rally was the latest in a string of actions taken by a nascent alliance developing between students at public and private institutions throughout the city. In January, students closed the New School in protest, followed the next month by the occupation of NYU's Kimmel Center in the name of university accountability. According to the Graduate Center's own Doug Singsen,

"Our next goal is: now we build something bigger than this. Our strategy is that students and faculty are the people who make CUNY run, and we have the capacity to shut it down. By doing that we can force them to meet our demands." Ⓐ

Continued next page

Hampshire College and the Politics of Divestment

The Johnson Library at Hampshire College

ADVOCATE STAFF

In 1977, Hampshire College became the first US institution of higher learning to divest from companies that did business with and helped to support apartheid South Africa. Shortly after this divestment, the college president and administration took steps to distance themselves from that landmark decision. Now, thirty-two years later, history is repeating itself. Students for Justice in Palestine, a Hampshire-based social justice group, is claiming that the college has become the first academic institution to effectively divest its holdings in several companies that do business with the Israeli military. And, once again, the president and the board of trustees—responding to pressure from outside interest groups—have sought to play down and effectively deny this claim. Despite a significant change in its investment policy, which supports SJP's claims of Israeli divestment, the administration asserts that there has not been any kind of selective divestment and that the changes are simply consistent with their policy of socially responsible investing. So who's right? Has Hampshire become the first college to tackle the ethical dilemmas of investing in occupation or is this all just a case of overly enthusiastic undergraduates with good PR skills? The answers to those questions depend on who you ask and how exactly you choose to define divestment.

On February 7, the Hampshire College Board of Trustees, after reviewing its investment portfolio (the State Street global Advisor's index fund), agreed to temporarily suspend its current investment policy and authorized the creation of an *ad hoc* committee to investigate alternatives for future investment to be completed by November 2009. The decision to investigate the fund was made immediately following a formal petition for divestment that was brought to the Finance Committee by members of the group Students for Justice in Palestine. The college's investment policy was then suspended after a commissioned investigation by KLD research group, which screens companies and portfolios for socially responsible investing, found that several of the companies in the State Street index were in violation of the college's current investment policy. According to an official statement dated February 24 from the college president, Ralph Hexter:

> KLD found that of the fund's 455 holdings, well over 200 raised significant concerns relative to Hampshire College's socially responsible investment policy and were in violation of values of socially responsible investing. It was on this basis that the investment committee voted as it did to exit from the fund when an alternative fund has been identified.

President Hexter then went out of his way to strenuously deny that the board's decision had anything to do with divestment from Israel, claiming that the decision was based solely on the college's policy of responsible investing.

Despite his attempts to distance the college's actions from the divestment, the president nonetheless admitted that "it was the good work of SJP that brought this issue to the attention of the committee." This statement, as well as the series of press releases that were issued by SJP following the February 7 decision claiming victory for their efforts to achieve divestment, set off a firestorm of criticism led by none other than Harvard University Law School professor and staunch pro-Israel advocate Alan Dershowitz, who condemned the college's actions as anti-Semitic and out of proportion, claiming that divestment was "motivated purely by hatred for the Jewish state."

It was only after this response from Dershowitz and the media blitz that followed the SJP's publicity campaign that Hexter responded with his February 24 statement. Indeed, although President Hexter and the board have done everything they can to deny that there has been any kind of divestment from Israel, both critics and supporters of the idea seem to agree that the college's actions are potentially groundbreaking and could potentially mark a serious milestone in the ongoing efforts to form a mass divestment movement.

Since at least 2007, the SJP organized to force Hampshire to divest all funds from six companies that the group claims are complicit in the occupation and destruction of the Palestinian territories. These six companies include United Technologies, which manufactures Blackhawk helicopters used by the Israeli military, General Electric, which supplies the propulsions systems for Apache helicopter gunships, also used by the Israeli Defense Forces, ITT Corporation, which provides night vision goggles to the Israeli military, Motorola, which is engaged in a $400 million project to provide radar systems for enhancing security at illegal West Bank settlements Terex, which provides trucks for logistical support to the Israeli military, and Caterpillar, which provides many of the bulldozers and construction equipment used to build new settlements and to destroy Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Hampshire student group, which has been calling for divestment from Israel for several years, and which had stepped up their calls for divestment in response to the recent Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza in January, has claimed responsibility for the Board of Trustees decision. In an official statement issued the day of the decision, SJP stated:

> This landmark move is a direct result of a two-year intensive campaign by the campus group, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). The group pressured Hampshire College's Board of Trustees to divest from six specific companies due to human rights concerns in occupied Palestine. Over 800 students, professors, and alumni have signed SJP's "institutional statement" calling for the divestment.

SJP believes that the board's decision, regardless of the several other companies involved, represents a divestment from the six companies associated with the Israeli occupation, which is precisely what they were calling for. While the administration may deny that the changes, which actually only affect four of the six companies on SJP's list, have anything to do with criticizing or punishing Israel, the effect is the same. Beyond the semantic argument at the heart of this debate SJP argues that regardless of the administration's position, the movement belongs to the students, and that the more than 800 signatures (on a campus with little more than 1,200 students) represent their "collective desire to see the end of the Occupation and the

restoration of justice to the Palestinian people."

Shortly after the board's meeting, several left wing newspapers, blogs, and news programs around the nation began to run stories, based on SJP press releases, that claimed Hampshire had become the first US college to officially divest from Israel. *Grit TV* and *Democracy Now!*, for instance, both ran brief stories suggesting that Hampshire had divested from Israel. In response to these stories, Dershowitz published an article in the *Jerusalem Post* on February 15 claiming, among other things, that the SJP's goal was to "end the existence of Israel." In that same editorial he called on "all decent people—supporters and critics of Israel alike—to make no further contributions to a school that now promotes discrimination and is complicit in evil."


Hampshire College president Ralph Hexter


Alan Dershowitz

In other words, Dershowitz issued his own call for divestment, essentially seeking to force the Hampshire administration to repudiate and denounce its own students. Sadly, Dershowitz's gambit succeeded. Rather than defend the rights of their students to speak freely and to interpret the political situation as they saw it, Hexter and the Hampshire administration caved in to the powerful fear of being labeled anti-Semitic.

As the author Howard Friel reported in ZNet, Hexter and the Hampshire administration essentially threw their own students under the bus in their response to Dershowitz. In a conciliatory letter to Dershowitz and the *Jerusalem Post* Hexter wrote

> "[we] urge you to understand us clearly, when we say that students do not speak for the college and may not willfully misrepresent the school. It will be, and must be, the college's task to undertake any disciplinary action, according to its established rules and procedures. Discipline is an internal process that is not shared with the public."

As Friel explained, this talk of disciplinary punishment only furthers Dershowitz's false claims that the Hampshire divestment movement—a peaceful, nonviolent attempt to end a hostile and racist occupation—is, in effect, driven by bigotry and hatred instead of a desire for peace and justice.

As of the publication of this article, there seems to have been no disciplinary action taken against any of the students involved in the divestment movement, and for their part, the students seem genuinely unperturbed by the series of events. As Adam Horowitz put it in one SJP blog post: "The bottom line is that before February 7, Hampshire College was invested in companies that directly profited from the occupation. Today, we are not. This is a direct result of pressure and efforts by SJP."

Leaving aside the contentious issue of who divested from what and why, the movement that began at Hampshire, has, as Dershowitz feared, exploded. Divestment from Israel has become an increasingly debated topic on campuses across the country, an issue that previously enjoyed little or no activism on its behalf. Students and student governments at UMass Amherst, Columbia, and NYU have all begun to talk about divestment, while closer to home, the Campus Antiwar Network will be hosting a Student Divestment Strategy Day at Hunter College on Sunday March 29. Whether or not these movements can attain the same level of success as Hampshire College remains to be seen, but clearly Hampshire has once again set the standard for successful, if controversial, student social activism. Ⓐ

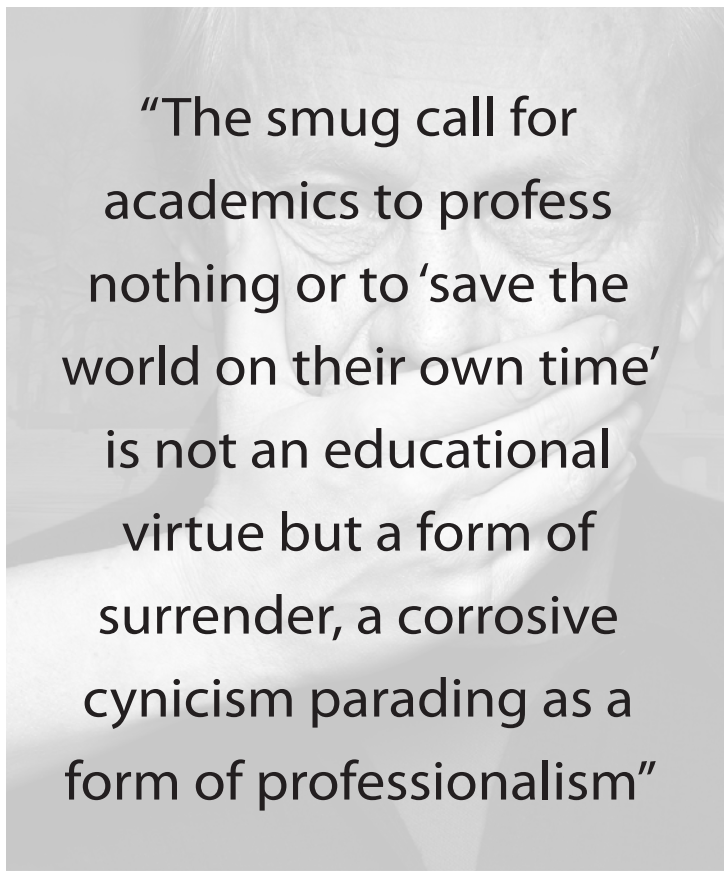
Academic Labor Under Siege

Towards a Politically Engaged Professionalism

HENRY A. GIROUX

> I do not believe that a student of human reality may be ethically neutral. The sole choice we face is one between loyalty to the humiliated and to beauty, and indifference to both. It is like any other choice a moral being confronts: between taking and refusing to take responsibility for one's responsibility.
>
> — *Zygmunt Bauman*[1]

In his sobering analysis of recent democratic decline, Sheldon Wolin has rightly argued that in a "genuinely democratic system, as opposed to a pseudo democratic one in which a 'representative sample' of the population is asked whether it 'approves' or 'disapproves,' citizens would be viewed as *agents* actively involved in the exercise of power and in contributing to the direction of policy."[2] There is a long tradition of critical intellectuals in American higher education extending from Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey, Edward Said, and Howard Zinn, who have all insisted that the university is one of the few spaces where the task of educating students to become critical agents and socially engaged citizens is not only crucial to the meaning of education but also an essential condition of academic labour and democracy itself. As a vast array of public spheres, including some of the nation's major newspapers, either fall prey to corporate control or simply disappear, higher education becomes one of the few remaining sites where a society might question itself, where it might reflectively consider how lived realities measure against democratic practices and ideals. Universities thus provide the pedagogical conditions for existing and future generations both to defend democratic principles and to incorporate them into their own understanding of what it means to define themselves as engaged citizens and socially responsible adults.



Understanding higher education as a democratic public sphere means fully recognizing the purpose and meaning of education and the role of academic labor, which assumes among its basic goals promoting the well-being of students, a goal that far exceeds the oft-stated mandate of either preparing students for the workforce or engagement with a rigorous search for truth. While such objectives are not without merit, they narrow the focus of human agency, depoliticize education, and ignore the issue of civic responsibility, among other generally unacknowledged shortcomings. Defining education as a search for the truth and preparing students for the workforce says little about the role that academics might play in influencing the fate of future citizens and the state of democracy itself. Surely academics are required to speak a kind of truth, but as Stuart Hall points out, "maybe not truth with a capital T, but ... some kind of truth, the best truth they know or can discover [and] to speak that truth to power."[3] Implicit in Hall's statement is an awareness that the priorities of big business and other powerful interests are not always, or even routinely, the priorities that shape intellectual commitment or pedagogical practice. To speak truth to power is not a temporary and unfortunate lapse into politics on the part of academics: it is central to opposing all those modes of ignorance, market-based or otherwise instrumental rationalities, and fundamentalist ideologies that make judgments difficult and democracy dysfunctional.

Amy Gutmann broadens the truth-seeking function of universities by insisting that "education is always political because it is connected to the acquisition of agency, the ability to struggle with ongoing relations of power, and is a precondition for creating informed and critical citizens. For Gutmann, what is unique about academics is the crucial role they play in linking education to democracy and recognizing pedagogy as an ethical and political practice tied to modes of authority in which the "democratic state recognizes the value of political education in predisposing [students] to accept those ways of life that are consistent with sharing the rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society."[4] And higher education, if it is to take its democratic ideals seriously, must be recognized as more than an outpost of business culture simply there to do the bidding of corporate power.[5] Democratic societies need educated citizens who are steeped in more than workplace skills and the formal competencies of textual analysis. And it is precisely this democratic project that affirms the critical function of education and academic labor, while refusing to narrow its goals and aspirations to instrumental or methodological considerations. This is what makes intellectual labor different from other provincial notions of teaching, largely restricted to teaching the canon or the conflicts, and other narrowly defined pedagogical commitments. And it is precisely the failure to connect learning to its democratic functions and possibilities that creates the conditions for those pedagogical approaches that ignore what it means to receive a critical education.[6]

The goals of higher education and the demands of academic labor must also include teaching students to be responsive to the conflicts of our times, learning how to identify anti-democratic forces in the wider society, and connecting knowledge, power, and critical modes of agency to the task of imagining a more just world and demonstrating a willingness to struggle for it. Academics have a moral and pedagogical responsibility to unsettle and oppose all orthodoxies, to make problematic the commonsense assumptions that often shape students' lives and their understanding of the world, but also to energize them to come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents. Higher education, in this instance, as Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, Stanley Aronowitz, and others have reminded us, cannot be removed from the hard realities of those political, economic, and social forces that both support it and consistently, though in diverse ways, attempt to shape its sense of mission and purpose.[7] Politics is not alien to higher education but central to comprehending the institutional, economic, ideological, and social forces that give it meaning and direction. Politics also references the outgrowth of historical conflicts that mark higher education as an important site of struggle. As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, politics illuminates the complex ideological and institutional conditions that enable universities to function as democratic public spheres. At the same time, it makes visible the fact that such conditions are the outcome of "fragile social achievements that open up the possibility of more equality and justice, and to sacrifice them is to step backwards, whether this step is masked by a deterministic analysis of the 'market' or a naked assertion of self-interest by the wealthy and powerful."[8] Politics is thus not the bane of either education or academic research but rather a primary register of their complex relation to matters of power, ideology, freedom, justice, and democracy. The real enemies of education are those modes of politicizing education in which matters of critical dialogue, judgment, debate, and engagement are disabled through allegiance to domains of ideological purity, certainty, dogma, and assured knowledge—a species of fundamentalist thinking and practice that is not limited to any one ideological position or disciplinary terrain.

Nurturing critical agency is part of a pedagogical process that must be self-reflective, empowering, and directive, but not propagandistic. When the distinction between a political and politicizing education is collapsed or lost, the role of academics is reduced to that of either corporate clerks, hermetic specialists, or jargon-ridden, clever apologists for established power who justify their unthreatening combativeness by gleefully claiming "to profess nothing."[9] The smug call for academics to profess nothing or to "save the world on their own time" is not an educational virtue but a form of surrender, a corrosive cynicism parading as a form of professionalism, an ethical refusal to educate students to question official dogma, to create the pedagogical conditions for them to become moral agents and critical citizens, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to engage the tension between existing reality and the promise of democracy. The "save the world on your own time" creed aligns too closely with the neoliberal incantation that "there is no alternative" and in the end means complicity with the established order. In this discourse, education as a fundamental basis for engaged citizenship, like politics itself, becomes a temporary irritant to be quickly removed from the hallowed halls of academia. In this stillborn conception of academic labor, faculty and students are scrubbed clean of any illusions about

1) Zygmunt Bauman and Keith Tester, *Conversations with Zygmunt Bauman* (Malden: Polity Press, 2001), 47.
2) Sheldon S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 60.
3) Stuart Hall, "Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life," in Brian Meeks, ed., *Culture, Politics, Race, and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall* (Miami: Ian Rundle Publishers, 2007), 289–290.
4) Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 42.
5) Ian Angus, "Academic Freedom in the Corporate University," ed. Mark Cote, Richard J. F. Day, and Greig de Peuter, *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments against Neoliberal Globalization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 64–75.
6) This position is brilliantly articulated in Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
7) See also Henry A. Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux, *Take Back Higher Education* (New York: Palgrave, 2004).
8) Craig Calhoun and Loïc Wacquant, "Social Science with Conscience: Remembering Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002)," *Thesis Eleven* 70, no. 1 (2002), 10.
9) Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

THE CENTER FOR THE HUMANITIES
The Graduate Center
The City University of New York

great issues forum
POWER


PHILIP GORSKI

March 26

What is Faith Today?

BRYAN TURNER & PHILIP GORSKI

in Conversation
Thursday, 6:30 pm,
The Skylight Room (9100)

Two leading social scientific analysts of global religion discuss the nature of religious faith today, the controversial debate over secularization, and the prospects for better understanding of the everelusive problem of religious faith in modern society. Bryan Turner is Director of the Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies at the University of Western Sydney and Visiting Professor of Sociology at Wellesley College. Philip Gorski is a Professor of Sociology at Yale University and Co-Director (with Julia Adams) of Yale's Center for Comparative Research (CCR). Moderated by John Torpey, Professor of Sociology at The Graduate Center, CUNY.


MALLIKA DUTT

April 6

Power & Law: Immigration Reform

JUDY RABINOVITZ, MALLIKA DUTT, JOHN MOLLENKOPF

Monday, 7 pm, Martin E. Segal Theatre

Immigration laws have increasingly been used to disempower immigrants. How should the Obama administration use the power of the law to restore the civil rights standing of non citizens in the face of organized labor's sensitivity to the expansion of guest worker programs, conflicting local and national laws, and a generally repressive climate for the civil rights of non citizens? Join a select group of scholars and activists including Judy Rabinovitz, Deputy Director of the ACLU's Immigrants Rights Project, Mallika Dutt, Executive Director of Breakthrough, and others as they explore these and other questions. Moderated by John Mollenkopf, Professor of Political Science, the Graduate Center.


HENT DE VRIES

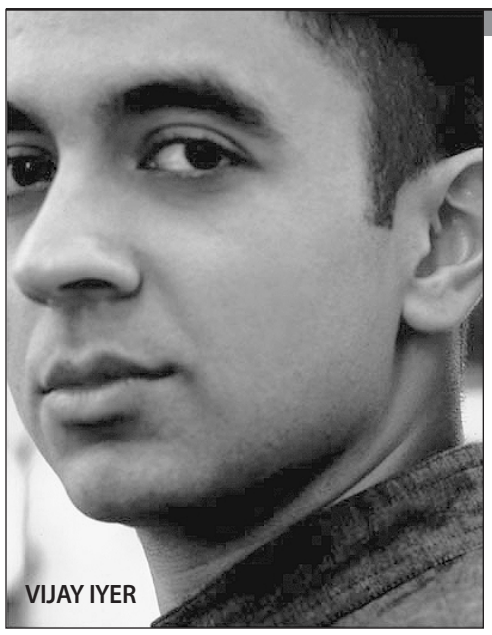
April 9

Is This a Secular Age?

BILL CONNOLLY, SIMON CRITCHLEY & HENT DE VRIES

in Conversation
Thursday, 6:30 pm,
Elebash Recital Hall

Do we live in a secular age? What does it mean to say that we do, and what are the benefits, and liabilities, to figuring public space as strictly secular? Bill Connolly, Krieger -Eisenhower Professor of Political Science at Johns Hopkins University, Simon Critchley, Professor of Philosophy at the New School University, and Hent de Vries, Professor of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, will discuss these and related themes. Moderated by Jill Stauffer, Resident Mellon Fellow at the Center for the Humanities.


VIJAY IYER

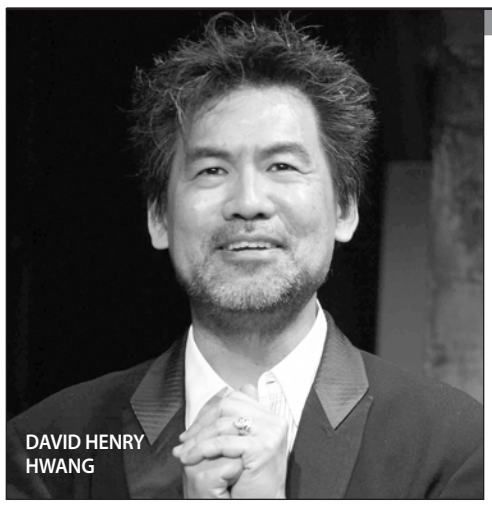
April 13

Cultural Power: Music

VIJAY IYER and DJ REKHA

Moderated by Greg Tate
Monday, 7:00 pm,
Elebash Recital Hall

Acclaimed jazz pianist and composer Vijay Iyer is joined by music sensation DJ Rekha for a discussion about music, power, and art in this third cultural power conversation. Vijay Iyer's music draws from a range of Western and non-Western traditions, and his recordings include Reimagining (2005), and Tragicomic (2008), among many others. DJ Rekha's debut album DJ Rekha Presents Basement Bhangra features the same blend of South Asia's traditional Bhangra music and Hip-Hop that made her monthly dance party Basement Bhangra famous. Introduced by critic Gary Giddins. Please visit www.greatissuesforum.org.


DAVID HENRY HWANG

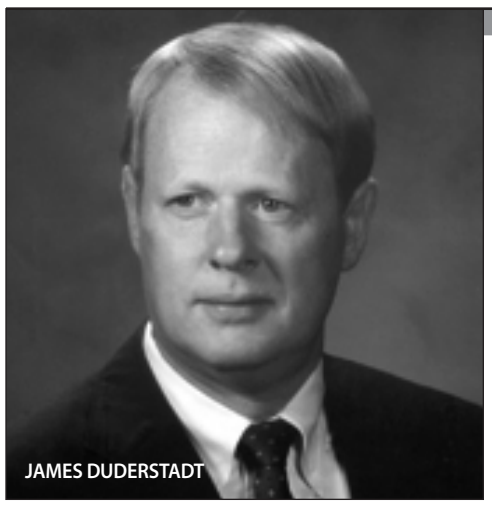
April 27

(Re)Writing History

DAVID HENRY HWANG, MICHAEL KORIE, DAVID NASAW, WILLIAM HOFFMAN

Monday, 6:30 pm, Martin E. Segal Theatre

What do artists and historians owe to history? Two playwright/librettists and a historian meet to dispute the nature of the debt the living owe the dead. Participants will include the playwright David Henry Hwang whose work includes M. Butterfly, Golden Child, and Golden Gate, and an adaptation of Flower Drum Song; librettist Michael Korie, author of Grey Gardens, The Grapes of Wrath, and Harvey Milk; and David Nasaw, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Professor of History, the Graduate Center, CUNY. Moderated by playwright William Hoffman, author of As Is and The Ghosts of Versailles, and Professor of Theatre at Lehman College.


JAMES DUDERSTADT

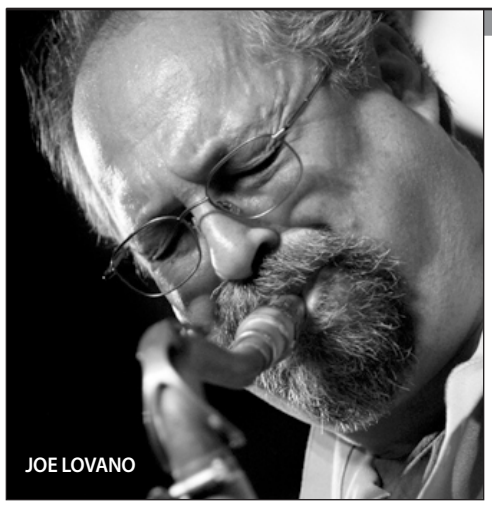
April 28

The Power of Education

JAMES DUDERSTADT, DEBORAH DAVIS, ENRIQUE DUSSEL PETERS, YU LIZHONG, WILLIAM KELLY

Tuesday, 7:00 pm, Proshansky Auditorium

Does the US system of public education provide a useful model for the rest of the world? What can American educators learn from higher education in countries such as China, South Africa, and Mexico? The final Great Issues Forum event of the year explores the power of education and the impact of public higher education on social mobilization and economic development in the 21st century. Featuring James J. Duderstadt, President Emeritus and University Professor of Science and Engineering at the University of Michigan; Deborah Davis, former director of the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization; Enrique Dussel Peters, Professor of Economics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico; and Yu Lizhong, President of East China Normal University. William Kelly, President of the Graduate Center, will moderate. Please visit www.greatissuesforum.org to register.


JOE LOVANO

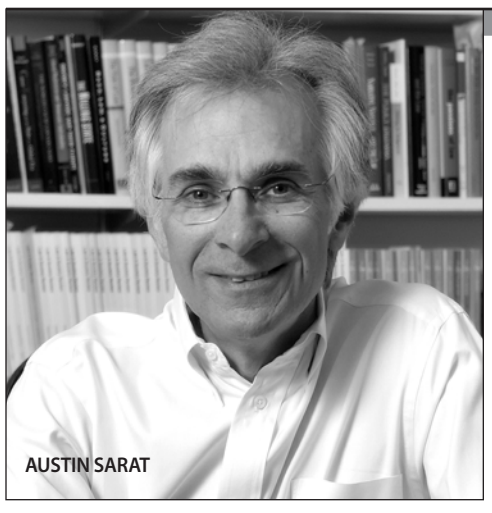
May 7

Blue Note Records at 70

JOE LOVANO, BRUCE LUNDVALL & GARY GIDDINS

in Conversation
Thursday, 7:00 pm, Elebash Recital Hall

Thelonious Monk, Jimmy Smith, Art Blakey, Horace Silver, Miles Davis, Sonny Rollins, John Coltrane, Betty Carter, Cecil Taylor, Cassandra Wilson, Jason Moran - the history of Blue Note Records is the history of jazz. Now, on the 70th anniversary of the label's first recording, Gary Giddins brings together Blue Note's current president, Bruce Lundvall, and one of its brightest talents, world-renowned saxophonist Joe Lovano, for a conversation about the history of jazz, the label's unparalleled success and legacy, and the state of the recording industry.


AUSTIN SARAT

May 11

Does the State Rely on Sacred Violence?

PAUL KAHN & AUSTIN SARAT

in Conversation
Monday, 7:00 pm, The
Skylight Room (9100)

Join two preeminent legal and political theorists as they examine religious threads running through modern secular philosophy, political theory, and the state itself. Paul Kahn is Director, Orville H. Schell, Jr. Center for International Human Rights, Yale University. Austin Sarat is William Nelson Cromwell Professor of Jurisprudence and Political Science, Amherst College. Moderated by Jill Stauffer, Resident Mellon Fellow at the Center for the Humanities.

Please visit http://centerforthehumanitiesgc.org or http://greatissuesforum.org for more information.

connecting what they learn to a world "strewn with ruin, waste and human suffering."[10]

Yet the commitments academics enact are distinctively political and civic, whether they deny or willingly embrace such roles. University educators cannot ignore politics, nor can they deny responsibility for acknowledging that the crisis of agency is at the center of the current crisis of democracy. At the very least, academics should be more responsible to and for a politics that raises serious questions about how students and educators negotiate the institutional, pedagogical, and social relations shaped by diverse ideologies and dynamics of power, especially as these relations mediate and inform competing visions regarding whose interests the university might serve, what role knowledge plays in furthering both excellence and equity, and how higher education defines and defends its own role in relation to its often stated, though hardly operational, allegiance to egalitarian and democratic impulses.

The view of higher education as a democratic public sphere committed to producing knowledge, skills, and social practices that enable young people to expand and deepen their sense of themselves, their moral imaginations, the public good, and the imperatives of a substantive democracy has been in a state of acute crisis for the last thirty years.[11] Harnessed to the needs and demands of corporate and military interests, higher education has increasingly abandoned even the pretense of promoting democratic ideals. The needs of corporations and the warfare state now define the nature of research, the role of faculty, the structure of university governance, and the type of education offered to students.[12] As federal and state funding for higher education is cut, universities are under more pressure to turn to corporate and military resources to keep them afloat. Such partnerships betray a more instrumental and mercenary assignment for higher education, a role that undermines the free flow of information, dialogue, and dissent. When faculty assume, in this context, their civic responsibility to educate students to think critically, act with conviction, learn how to make authority and power accountable, and connect what they learn in classrooms to important social issues in the larger society, they are often denounced for politicizing their classrooms and for violating professional codes of conduct, or, worse, labelled as unpatriotic.[13] In some cases, the risk of connecting what they teach to the imperative to expand the capacities of students to be both critical and socially engaged may cost academics their jobs, especially when they make visible the workings of power, injustice, human misery, and the alterable nature of the social order—all too evident in the recent firings of Norman Finkelstein and Ward Churchill.

Educators need to defend what they do as political, support the university as a place to think, and create programs that nurture a culture of questioning. But there is even more at stake here. It needs to be recognized on a broad scale that the very way in which knowledge is selected, pedagogies are defined, social relations are organized, and futures are imagined is always political, though these processes do not have to be politicized in a vulgar or authoritarian way. Again, the conditions that make the university possible as a democratic public sphere are inescapably political and should be defended as such. But such a defence should take seriously the distinctive role that academics play not merely in preparing students for the world in which they work and live but also in enabling them to function as individual and social agents capable of critically understanding their own capacities and responsibilities in working to expand the promise of a democracy that is increasingly under assault.

The utterly privatized, if not reactionary, discourse through which academics with any sense of public commitment are now upbraided and told to save the world on their own time mimics both the logic of the market and the silencing forces of the corporate and warfare state.[14] Within this discourse, there is a needless severing of the connection between the private and the public, theory and practice, learning and social change, and the university and the broader social contract, with its implied ethical and political foundations. Such a crude dismissal of academic responsibility is not merely theoretically hermetic and politically naive; it is also part of an ongoing attack on the crucial civic and pedagogically responsible role that both the university and academics have in a society that—until the current global financial collapse—had aligned itself with the production of violence, greed, self-interest, cut-throat competitiveness, and a market-driven world bereft of ethical considerations. In a society that remains troublingly resistant to or incapable of questioning itself, one that celebrates the consumer over the citizen and willingly endorses the narrow values and interests of corporate power, the importance of the university as a place of critical learning, dialogue, and social justice advocacy becomes all the more imperative. Moreover, the distinctive role that faculty play in this ongoing pedagogical project of democratization and learning, along with support for the institutional conditions and relations of power that make it possible, must be defended as part of a broader discourse of excellence, equity, and democracy. As Wolin points out, "For its part, democracy is ultimately dependent on the quality and accessibility of public education, especially of public universities. Education per se is not a source of *democratic* legitimacy: it does not serve as a justification for political authority, yet it is essential to the practice of citizenship."[15]


Henry Giroux

For education to be civic, critical, and democratic rather than privatized, militarized, and commodified, the work that academics do cannot be defended exclusively within the discourse of specialization, technological mastery, or a market-driven rationality concerned about profit margins. On the contrary, academic labor is distinctive by virtue of its commitment to modes of education that take seriously John Dewey's notion that democracy is a "way of life" that must be constantly nurtured and defended, or as Richard Bernstein puts it:

> Democracy, according to Dewey, does not consist exclusively of a set of institutions, formal voting procedures, or even legal guarantee of rights. These are important, but they require a culture of everyday democratic cooperative *practices* to give them life and meaning. Otherwise institutions and procedures are in danger of becoming hollow and meaningless. Democracy is "a way of life," an ethical ideal that demands *active* and *constant* attention. And if we fail to work at creating and re-creating democracy, there is no guarantee that it will survive. Democracy involves a reflective faith in the capacity of all human beings for intelligent judgment, deliberation, and action if the proper social, educational, and economic conditions are furnished.[16]

Democracy is not cheap and neither are the political, economic, and social conditions that make it possible. If academics believe that the university is a space for and about democracy, they need to profess more, not less, about eliminating the racial, economic, and political conditions that fill their ranks with adjuncts,[17] remove faculty from exercising power in university governance, and work towards eliminating the economic conditions that prevent working-class and middle-class youth from getting a decent post-secondary education.

Both the responsibility that academics bear and the political nature of that responsibility are especially clear given the current unprecedented economic meltdown the country is now facing. As the financial crisis reaches historic proportions, free-market fundamentalism is losing both its claim to legitimacy and its pretense to democracy. Even a *Newsweek* cover declared recently that "We Are All Socialists Now."[18] Despite this apparent growing recognition that market fundamentalism has fostered a destructive alignment among the state, corporate capital, and transnational corporations, there is little understanding that such an alignment has been constructed and solidified through a neoliberal disciplinary apparatus and corporate pedagogy mostly produced in the halls of higher education and reinforced through the educational force of the larger media culture. The economic Darwinism of the last thirty years has done more

10) Edward Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 50.

11) See, especially, Christopher Newfield, *Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

12) I take up the issue of the emerging of the academic-military-industrial complex in Henry A. Giroux, *The University in Chains: Confronting the Military-Industrial-Academic Complex* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008).

13) See Henry A. Giroux, "Academic Unfreedom in America: Rethinking the University as a Democratic Public Sphere," in Edward J. Carvalho, ed. "Academic Freedom and Intellectual Activism in the Post-9/11 University," special issue of *Work and Days* 51–54 (2008–2009), 45–72. This may be the best collection yet published on intellectual activism and academic freedom.

14) For Stanley Fish's latest version of this position, see http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/neoliberalism-and-higher-education/

15) Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated*, 161.

16) Richard J. Bernstein, *The Abuse of Evil: The Corruption of Politics and Religion since 9/11* (Malden: Polity Press, 2005), 25–26.

17) On the crucial issue of the erosion of tenure track jobs and the growing casualization of academic labor, see Marc Bousquet, *How the University Works: Higher Education and the Low-Wage Nation* (New York: New York University Press, 2008). For a more pessimistic account, see Frank Donoghue, *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

18) See the February 7, 2009 issue of *Newsweek* and the accompanying story, Jon Meacham and Evan Thomas, "We Are All Socialists Now," *Newsweek*, 7 February 2009. Online at: http://www.newsweek.com/id/183663/output/print.

than throw the financial and credit system into crisis; it has also waged an attack on all those social institutions that support critical modes of agency, reason, and meaningful dissent. And yet, the financial Katrina we are now experiencing is rarely seen as part of an educational crisis in which the institutions of public and higher education have been conscripted into a war on democratic values through the endless reproduction of neoliberal beliefs, social relations, identities, and modes of understanding that legitimate the institutional arrangements of a cut-throat capitalism that has spawned rapacious greed, grotesque levels of inequality, the devaluation of any viable notion of the public good, and far-reaching levels of human suffering. There seems to be an enormous disconnect between the economic conditions that led to the current financial meltdown and the current call to action of a generation of young people and adults who have been educated for the last several decades in the knowledge, values, and identities of a market-driven society. Clearly, this generation of young people and adults will not solve this crisis if they do not connect it to the assault on an educational system that has been reduced to a lowly adjunct of corporate interests and the bidding of the warfare state.

This disconnect becomes clear in a recent article by Patricia Cohen in the *New York Times* in which she uncritically reports that in light of the current economic crisis the humanities are going to have a harder time defending themselves because they are often found inadequate to the task of educating students for future employment in the workforce.[19] According to Cohen, the humanities in these tough economic times has to "to justify its existence," by which she means it has to align itself more closely still with the needs of the economy—a view closer to training than educating.[20] Rather than view the humanities, if not higher education in general, as one of the few public spheres left that can educate students to do more than reproduce a now widely condemned set of market-driven values, she wants universities to adopt them even more aggressively, in spite of broad public recognition that this mode of corporate-driven education has both undermined the economy and sabotaged any viable notion of critical agency and democracy. Oddly, Cohen argues that the free-market rationality that has undermined, if not ruined, so many basic institutions in American society need not be jettisoned by higher education but applied more stringently. Couple this argument with the news that many prominent newspapers are now failing and it becomes clear that the responsibility of faculty who inhabit the university can no longer downplay or "abandon the idea that life's most important questions are an appropriate subject for the classroom."[21]Academics have a distinct and unique responsibility to make learning relevant not merely to the imperatives of a discipline, scholarly method, or research specialization but, more importantly, to the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope in the service of modes of agency that are crucial to sustaining a democracy in which higher education plays its rightful civic and critical pedagogical role. By renewing such a commitment, academics will more easily defend their role as public and engaged intellectuals, while also enabling higher education to live up to its promise as a valuable and valued democratic public sphere. Ⓐ

19) Patricia Cohen, "In Tough Times, the Humanities Must Justify Their Worth," *New York Times*, 25 February 2009.
20) Ibid.
21) Anthony Kronman, "Why Are We Here? Colleges Ignore Life's Biggest Questions, and We All Pay the Price," *Boston Globe* 16 September 2007. Online at: **http://www.boston.com/news/globe/ideas/articles/2007/09/16/why_are_we_here/.**

PROMINENT ECONOMISTS SAY:

Passage of the Employee Free Choice Act is critical to rebuilding our economy and strengthening our democracy.

Statement from **leading American economists**

Although its collapse has dominated recent media coverage, the financial sector is not the only segment of the U.S. economy running into serious trouble. The institutions that govern the labor market have also failed, producing the unusual and unhealthy situation in which hourly compensation for American workers has stagnated even as their productivity soared.

Indeed, from 2000 to 2007, the income of the median working-age household fell by $2,000 – an unprecedented decline. In that time, virtually all of the nation's economic growth went to a small number of wealthy Americans. An important reason for the shift from broadly-shared prosperity to growing inequality is the erosion of workers' ability to form unions and bargain collectively.

A natural response of workers unable to improve their economic situation is to form unions to negotiate a fair share of the economy, and that desire is borne out by recent surveys. Millions of American workers – more than half of non-managers – have said they want a union at their work place. Yet only 7.5% of private sector workers are now represented by a union. And in all of 2007, fewer than 60,000 workers won union status through government-sanctioned elections. What explains this disconnect?

The problem is that the election process overseen by the National Labor Relations Board has become drawn out and acrimonious, with management campaigning fiercely to deter unionization, sometimes to the extent of violating labor laws. Union sympathizers are routinely threatened or even fired, and they have little effective recourse under the law. Even when workers overcome this pressure and vote for a union, they are unable to obtain contracts one-third of the time due to management resistance.

To remedy this situation, the Congress is considering the Employee Free Choice Act. This act would accomplish three things: It would give workers the choice of using majority sign-up-- a simple, established procedure in which workers sign cards to indicate their support for a union – or staging an NLRB election; it triples damages for employers who fire union supporters or break other labor laws; and it creates a process to ensure that newly unionized employees have a fair shot at obtaining a first contract by calling for arbitration after 120 days of unsuccessful bargaining.

The Employee Free Choice Act will better reflect worker desires than the current "war over representation." The Act will also lower the level of acrimony and distrust that often accompanies union elections in our current system.

A rising tide lifts all boats only when labor and management bargain on relatively equal terms. In recent decades, most bargaining power has resided with management. The current recession will further weaken the ability of workers to bargain individually. More than ever, workers will need to act together.

The Employee Free Choice Act is not a panacea, but it would restore some balance to our labor markets. As economists, we believe this is a critically important step in rebuilding our economy and strengthening our democracy by enhancing the voice of working people in the workplace.

Henry J. Aaron
Brookings Institution

Katharine Abraham
University of Maryland

Philippe Aghion
Harvard University

Eileen Appelbaum
Rutgers University

Kenneth Arrow
Nobel Laureate in Economics
Stanford University

Dean Baker
Center for Economic Policy and Research

Jagdish Bhagwati
Columbia University

Rebecca Blank
Brookings Institution

Joseph Blasi
Rutgers University

Alan S. Blinder
Princeton University

William A. Darity
Duke University

Brad DeLong
University of Calif. - Berkeley

John DiNardo
University of Michigan

Robert H. Frank
Cornell University

Richard Freeman
Harvard University

James K. Galbraith
University of Texas

Robert J. Gordon
Northwestern University

Heidi Hartmann
Institute for Women's Policy Research

Lawrence Katz
Harvard University

Robert Lawrence
Harvard University

David S. Lee
Princeton University

Frank Levy
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Lisa Lynch
Brandeis University

Ray Marshall
University of Texas

Lawrence Mishel
Economic Policy Institute

Robert Pollin
University of Massachusetts-Amherst

William Rodgers
Rutgers University

Dani Rodrik
Harvard University

Jeffrey D. Sachs
Columbia University

Robert M. Solow
Nobel Laureate in Economics
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

William Spriggs
Howard University

Peter Temin
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Mark Thoma
University of Oregon

Lester C. Thurow
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Laura Tyson
University of Calif.- Berkeley

Paula B. Voos
Rutgers University

David Weil
Boston University

Edward Wolff
New York University

Two or Three Things I Know About Him

▶ *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*, By Richard Brody (Metropolitan Books, 2008, 720 pages)

MATT LAU

Two or Three Things I Know About Her, Godard's 1966 film inspired by newspaper accounts of bourgeois women taking up prostitution for the disposable income, contains one of my favorite scenes in all his movies. In it a young boy tells his mother Juliette (Marina Vlady) about a dream he's had. "I was walking all alone along the edge of a cliff. The path was only wide enough for one person. I saw two twins coming towards me. I wondered how they would get past. Suddenly, one of the twins went towards the other and they became one person. And then I realized that these two people were North and South Vietnam being united." In the counter shot, the camera returns to Juliette lying on the couch, smiling blankly. Her son then asks, "What is language?" She replies, "Language is the house that man dwells in."

juliette janson in Godard's 1966 *One or Two Things I know About Her*

Like so many of the scenes and sequences in Godard's best work, this little moment is full of significance. To begin, the scene is definitely "spontaneous," or, if you prefer, unrehearsed. But therein, paradoxically, lies its artifice, its appearance of design. When the young boy, who is hardly a child actor in the Hollywood mold, begins recounting his dream, he glances surreptitiously at the camera framing him in a close-up, says "Voila!" to himself, and then stumbles through his lines. There is humor and charm in this innocent playing at acting. The dream itself has the structure of a joke: at the beginning it seems to be a nice fable set in a fairy tale world, but by the end it has become so topical that it is doubtful the boy knows the meaning of what he's saying. This is humor, too, with a left-wing political charge, which makes it even more attractive to people who might share some of Godard's sympathies about the evils of modern empire and capitalism. Then, as is customary with Godard in moments of humor and gentle leftist propaganda, the conversation suddenly gets deeper. After her son asks a question worthy of either children or philosophers, Juliette replies by quoting one of Heidegger's great metaphors for man's relationship to language. As if her son will accept this answer with no further comment, the scene abruptly ends.

Or at least this is how I would have analyzed this precious minute of absurdity before I read Richard Brody's exhaustive new analytic biography of Godard, *Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard*. Now, I know better. You see, Godard, as Brody's main thesis runs, was almost always making a movie that was, in one way or another, an allegory for his messy personal and professional life. In this case, the case of the *Two or Three Things* and Marina Vlady, even the case of this little scene, Godard's desire for love and marriage with Vlady (who rejected his proposal during filming) is everywhere on display. Vlady had children from a previous marriage and this moment shows what they might have become, the very dreams they would have had, with Godard for a stepdad. And as surely as the child's dream is Godard's, so too is Vlady's quotation from Heidegger, who Godard would have read either in the unfiltered original or distilled through any number of sources in the great French intellectual milieu at mid-century, most probably Sartre. An adorable, politically conscious son and a beautiful, philosophically literate wife, these were the things the renowned director wanted in the wake of his crushing break-up with his first wife, Anna Karina.

Allegory is probably the simplest and therefore the most complex of all literary concepts. When we ask what the moral of the story is we are asking a question every child learns to ask and the question that for Plato was the only one worth asking. Traditionally, aside from the moral reading, allegorical interpretation serves two other tasks. It is called on to reconcile explicitly disparate texts. Ever notice, for example, how Jesus' name doesn't come up a lot in The Old Testament? That's really not a good way to plan for a sequel. To obviate this problem that has bothered a lot intelligent Christians, allegory became crucial. Sure he's not there in the letter of The Hebrew Bible, St. Paul might say, but he's there in a more important dimension, in its spirit, which is the source of the life of the book anyway, the community of believers who believe in it and in him. St. Augustine had a more interdependent formulation for the problem. "In The Old Testament, The New Testament is concealed. In The New Testament, The Old Testament is revealed."

The other task of allegorical interpretation since biblical times has been the black art of the bookmaker, prophecy. Maybe Daniel was just playing it safe when he told Nebuchadnezzar that the dream he'd been having meant that from his Kingdom would come a line of civilizations that would hold sway until the end of time. After all, the guy had threatened to liquidate all the intellectuals in Iraq if they couldn't figure it out. Maybe it's because things worked out so well for Daniel, or because people just love speculating and dreaming, but at least since then, reading the present and the past as signs of the future has been a good job, if you can get it.

Brody's allegorical thesis does a lot of work in his book, which is hardly surprising, since it is a work of biographical criticism. There's really no disputing the idea that Godard's movies are intensely personal. But the irony of Brody's reliance on allegory is that he arguably doesn't use it enough. The forms of traditional allegory that I've mentioned are all at stake in Godard's work. You want prophecy? As Brody explains, *Le Chinoise* is "widely understood" to be just that: "1967 was a year of political confrontation, and 1968 a year of legendary upheaval, especially in France. The film expressed the latent proclivity for violence among the highly politicized youth of France and suggested that their opposition went far beyond the local concerns of the university, extending to revolution in the literal sense." Furthermore, "the coming transformation that Godard foresaw and helped to foster was one of art as well as politics. In *Le Chinoise,* Godard was doing more than exploding the conventions of the cinema: he was expressing despair that the radical politics of the time had surpassed the radicalism of his cinema."

What about morality? Godard was, in Brody's view, a deeply conservative revolutionary. This is Brody's explanation, for instance, as to why Godard changed the ending of *Vivre Sa Vie* from a sardonic Brechtian one, in which Nana (Anna Karina) is thriving as a high class call girl and concubine, to the actual ending in which she is shot and left for dead in the street, after the deal to trade her from one pimp to another goes wrong. The lesson here is that Nana should have stayed with her husband whom she abandoned at the beginning of the film. And the lesson in Godard's life is for Anna (note the "Annagram"), who hated the change to the brutal ending: she could not go unpunished for her infidelity the previous year, even if she had already attempted suicide out of guilt.

Godard's Marxism, too, was tinged with refined and not-so refined male-chauvinist biases. American style consumer capitalism seems to be corrupting women above all in many of his films. As Brody details, there is, along these lines, an often overlooked

ambiguity in reading one of Godard's most legendary phrases. In *Masculine Feminine*, Godard summed up the post-war generation in the title cards. "'This Film Could Be Called/ The Children of Marx Coca-Cola/ Understand Who Will.'" The question is "whether these children are the product of Marx and Coca-Cola both, or whether these are two different groups—that is, the children of Marx and the children of Coca-Cola." To add to the difficulty, "Godard himself glossed it both ways." On the one hand, all the characters in his hymn to '60s youth culture could have come from families where the mom was "Mrs. Marx" and dad was "Mr. Coca-Cola." On the other hand, in the next breath Godard says, "Jean-Pierre Leaud (the boy) and Chantal Goya (the little ye-ye [pop] singer) represent the left and the right, respectively." While the Left was becoming the "New Left" at the cinema and in the lecture hall instead of in the factory and on the barricades, the Right seemed to have had the insight that if it could monopolize enjoyment no one would recognize it as a politics anymore. At the end of the movie, Leaud's character falls off his apartment building. Today, Chantal Goya is a popular entertainer for French children.

Which brings us to allegorical interpretations that unite disparate texts: it seems to me, this has always been one Godard's defining turns of thought. It has assumed many guises in his work. In his film criticism and later in his films he set out to reconcile high art and popular culture. This took the form of arguing for the artistic merit of commercial cinema through the now canonical theory of the film director as an author not of stories, but of a certain mise-en-scene. In his films he unites art and pop by letting them be alone together, by quoting from philosophy and literature and quartets and sonatas in ways that underscore their distance from consumer society. When he went to work as a professor, starting in the '70s in Montreal, he began to consider his own work in relation to "classical Hollywood" in a way that reminds me of biblical typology. The New Testament is to The New Wave as The Old Testament is to Hollywood. The analogy is apt if only because taste in film, for one, seems to have been born again because of The New Wave. Film critic Andrew Sarris' conversion in the early '60s is emblematic: "'I began seeing a lot of American movies through French eyes... To show you the dividing line in my thinking, when I did a Top Ten list for the [*Village*] *Voice* in 1958, I had a Stanley Kramer film on the list and I left off both *Vertigo* and *Touch of Evil*.'"

But there is also another, more disquieting way in which the analogy between the Bible's two halves and the diptych of Hollywood and The New Wave holds: through what Brody sees as Godard's troubling flirtations with anti-Semitism. There is plenty of circumstantial evidence to support this claim. Godard's family pedigree predisposes him to this regressive ideology. They were collaborators with the Nazis; his mother's father, one of the most powerful bankers in all of Europe, was openly ant-Semitic. In an infamous argument with the producer Pierre Braunberger, Godard called him a "dirty Jew" (Truffaut never forgave Godard for this incident. He even cited it in a vituperative response to a request by Godard for money in the mid-'70s. The exchange ended what remained of their personal and professional relations). And, of course, Godard is a critic of Israel and a supporter of the Palestinian struggle.

But because of how this books ends, by drumming up charges of anti-Semitism against Godard for *Notre Musique*, his most recent feature film, I think Brody unintentionally emphasizes this supposed anti-Semitism too much. Of course, Godard is wrong to equate the plight of the Palestinians with the Holocaust (for the record, Godard denies ever claiming this). To Brody, it seems like a regression to some of the most tendentious and unappealing political moments from his early films, when in the midst of a lecture to film students in Sarajevo about shot and counter-shot, Godard's examples stray from a textbook juxtaposition of Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday* to two shots of inmates in a concentration camp. The first he labels "Jew," the second "Muslim." Godard's commentary takes it from there: "In 1948, the Israelites walked in the water toward the Promised Land. The Palestinians walked in the water toward drowning. Shot and counter-shot. The Jewish people rejoined fiction. The Palestinian people, documentary. One says that the facts speak for themselves, but Celine said, 'Alas, not for long.'"

What if the facts did really speak for themselves? Then justice would probably flow like a mighty stream and a whole lot of artists would be looking for work. But until that day poet-prophets (i.e. crazy people) like Godard will keep confronting us with their allegories, their reflections of the facts, personal and political, into art and demanding that we further allegorize them, i.e. transform them with our interpretations and in our actions. If there was ever a salient criticism of Godard's achievements, it is that they are ultimately not allegorical enough, not transformative enough. As Stanley Cavell put it long ago, Godard criticized slogans and advertising with more slogans and advertising. "If you believe that people speak in slogans to one another, or that women are turned by bourgeois society into marketable objects, or that human pleasures are now figments and products of advertising accounts and that these are directions of dehumanization – then what is the value of pouring further slogans into that world (e.g. 'People speak in slogans' or 'Women have become objects' or 'Bourgeois society is dehumanizing' or 'Love is impossible')? And how do you distinguish the world's dehumanizing of its inhabitants from your depersonalizing of them? How do you know whether your asserted impossibility of love is anything more than an expression of your distaste for its tasks? Without such knowledge, your disapproval of the world's pleasures, such as they are, is not criticism (the negation of advertising) but censoriousness (negative advertising)."

Godard once said the horror of the bourgeoisie could only be countered with more horror. I think the atrocities committed in the name of Communism in the last century show us what this claim amounts to. An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind and then we won't be able to go to the cinema. So for now, we'll have to find solace in the fact that the revolution will be available on DVD. Ⓐ

book REVIEW

The Story Behind the Surge

▶ *The Gamble* by Thomas Ricks
(Penguin, 2009, 400 pages)

MICHAEL BUSCH

Before we use Thomas Ricks' *The Gamble* to revisit the now largely forgotten American escalation in Iraq, a few words on the US occupation there between 2003 and 2006 might be helpful, and Ricks himself provides them. Distilling three years of failure through the lens of a single day's massacre—which left over twenty Iraqis, many of them children, dead—we learn right at the start that:

> What happened that day in Haditha was the disturbing but logical culmination of the shortsighted and misguided approach the US military took in invading and occupying Iraq from 2003 through 2006: protect yourself at all costs, focus on attacking the enemy, and treat the Iraqi civilians as the playing field on which the contest occurs...Marines were 'chasing the insurgents around the Euphrates Valley while leaving the population unguarded and exposed to insurgent terrorism and coercion.' This bankrupt approach was rooted in the dominant American military tradition that tends to view war only as battles between conventional forces of different states. The American tradition also tends to neglect the lesson, learned repeatedly in dozens of twentieth-century wars, that the way to defeat an insurgency campaign is not to attack the enemy but to protect and win over the people.

OK, now suppose that around this same time, a retired four star general decides one evening—while watching television in his suburban basement den—to single-handedly seize control of the war, and force the floundering Bush administration to accept a change of course in Iraq. Not attempt to seize control, mind you, but to take it without delay. By drawing on decades of military experience, impressive contacts in Washington, and a special relationship with the military's rising star *par excellence*, "big" Jack Keane effectively redesigns the entire approach to occupying Iraq and manages to bypass completely the hierarchy of military power, ultimately securing himself an audience in the Oval Office. Once there, needless to say, the president is putty in his hands.

Meanwhile, as our intrepid general is busy subverting the entire military chain-of-command in an elaborate end run around the Department of Defense, imagine his protégé David Petraeus, recently returned from combat duty in Iraq, cruising cross-country in a BMW 325i. He's on his way to fill a cushy command post at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The decision to move Petraeus, the military's most promising young general, to Middle America in the midst of two disastrous wars instead of the Middle East is roundly criticized by Washington insiders. Needless to say, though, while Petraeus may have left Iraq, Iraq has not left Petraeus. He quickly converts Fort Leavenworth into an in-house think tank of the United States Army, staffed by a rotating ensemble of the country's most eminently formidable military intellectuals. Their task: locate "a starting point for a new approach in the war."

Suppose further that somewhere in New York City, a 6-foot-7, chain-smoking, Brazilian-born Palestinian raised by Mennonites in Jordan, is at this moment resolving to abandon his job as a taxicab driver to pursue a more ambitious path in life. What does he choose to do? Head to Baghdad of course! with the intention of aiding the badly-bruised American occupation. Following a freak bathroom encounter with the top American commander in Iraq, Sadi Othman catches his big break, and becomes a civilian translator with the American military. Soon thereafter, the man whose previous public accomplishments extended only as far as being the first Jordanian to dunk a basketball finds himself on the path to becoming one of the most influential foreigners in Baghdad.

Now picture a career officer on the ground in Baghdad, a soldier with famous appetites for baseball and breaking heads. Up until recently, this veteran of numerous wars has come to represent all that's wrong with the American approach in Iraq. Again and again, Raymond Odierno's name has been connected with jaw-dropping incidents of civilian abuse, intimidation, and most troublingly, a murder conspiracy. But then, in a sudden, almost Aristotelian character reversal, Odierno experiences an epiphany that radically alters his approach to war. The battle is being lost, he decides; it's time to change course. But how?

Finally, imagine a pacifistic British human rights crusader, fluent in Arabic and Hebrew, with a taste third world economics and a penchant for moonlighting as a spy. Emma Sky had been to Iraq, and was present during the invasion in 2003, but had vowed never to return as long as the country was under the yoke of American influence. But then one evening, she received a telephone call from Ray Odierno, asking her to become his special adviser on Iraqi affairs. Against her own better judgment, she agrees, on one condition: that should she ever witness him or his men commit a war crime, she would report Odierno to The Hague.

If I've set the stage for what looks to be a hokey Hollywood war flick, that's because *The Gamble* crackles with the sort of proliferating improbabilities, colorful characters, and high-stakes risk-taking usually reserved for the movies. Ricks recounts the history behind a radical reorientation in the American military—the new posture that gave life, in turn, to "the surge" which many credit with recently quelling violence in Iraq—with a sure hand and flare for dramatic detail. At the same time, *The Gamble* is far from fluff; while the majority of literature on Iraq produced during this period will undoubtedly tumble into obscurity before long, *The Gamble* will likely prove an enduring artifact of the war for years to come.

The book builds on Ricks' 2006 masterpiece, *Fiasco*, a scathing, smart indictment of a stupid, stupidly prosecuted war. Ricks took no prisoners in laying blame for the Baghdadi boondoggle squarely at the feet of the goonish manly-men populating the military's highest ranks. Donald Rumsfeld's Defense Department, Ricks passionately argued, allowed the US armed forces to illegally storm Iraq, with little protection and even less strategic guidance. Worse still, the Bush team dismissed credible warnings against the war from established experts with all the arrogance of high school jocks slamming the geeks against their lockers.

In *The Gamble*, however, we get revenge of the nerds, as a brigade of bow-tie wearing academics and PhD-holding army officers wrest control of the war from the knuckleheads at the Pentagon by outsmarting them intellectually, and outmaneuvering them on the ground. The first half of the book recounts this revolt, effectively arguing that the story is one of a double insurgency: the first raging in Iraq against the American occupation, the second quietly dismantling failed policies in Washington. The latter rebellion was hardly an organized, concentrated effort at its genesis, however. As we come quickly to find out, the surge was instead spawned by an orgy of entrepreneurial, do-it-yourself action taken by a host of different players, the various strands of which only later came together in united purpose. Ricks deftly navigates a slippery slope in his historical account by offering a meticulously clinical treatment of the ideas that ultimately shaped the American escalation in Iraq while at the same time crafting a captivating thriller packed with intrigue, double-dealing, and sedition in the name of saving what's left of America's honor.

This is not to suggest that *The Gamble* is without its shortcomings. You will have probably noticed, even from this thumbnail overview, that Ricks' Iraq is unusually devoid of Iraqis, a problem frequently noted by the reporter's critics. According to Marc Lynch's perceptive review on *ForeginPolicy.com*, "In 325 pages of text…*only ten pages*…quote an Iraqi of any description, and *only two* [quotes are] unmediated by an American military official," thus rendering Iraqis passive recipients of grotesque violence during the American occupation. The point is a good one, though I'm not clear that Ricks should be held responsible for producing an all-encompassing account of the past two-and-a-half years. The value of *The Gamble*, as well as *Fiasco* before it, rests in its unwaveringly sober critique of the US military—warts and all—and the dynamics that influence its action. Books that beautifully chronicle the Iraqi experience of terror, anger, humiliation and fleeting moments of joy in the war have already appeared—in English, Anthony Shadid's *As Night Draws Near* and Dexter Filkins' *The Forever War* stand out most immediately—and will certainly be joined by other quality contributions in future.

But another concern I have about Ricks' account, not so easily palliated, is *The Gamble*'s celebration of that which was condemned in *Fiasco*. The protagonists in *TheGamble,* while surely deserving of praise for attempting to make a sickening situation in Iraq a little less horrendous, did so by flagrantly disregarding democratic transparency, the institutional structures according to which our government and its military operate, and in some cases, the law. The only difference between the revolt described in *The Gamble* and the one chronicled in *Fiasco* seems to be that the former boasts more sympathetic characters. In many ways, the real story that emerges from both books taken together is the willful insubordination and indiscipline that apparently became *pro forma* in the US military during the Bush years.

These considerations aside, and despite the best intentions of the architects behind the surge, the military's about-face in Iraq would likely not have taken place if not for the 2006 midterm elections, a clear wake-up call to the Bush administration that its approach to policy could no longer be tolerated. The Democrats seized victory in grand fashion, capturing majorities in both the House and the Senate, as well as governorships and state legislatures, effectively sounding the death knell for the Bush administration. And while Bush himself described the Democratic victory in typical yokel fashion as a good ol' fashion "thumpin,'" Ricks notes that the midterms triggered a profound change in Bush's thinking. "Until the election, Bush seemed satisfied with blather," he writes. "After it, he began to speak about the war seriously."

Leading the charge in the Democrat's congressional comeback campaign was Jim Webb—former Republican, Vietnam vet, erstwhile novelist, and father of a marine serving in Iraq—who contested George Allen for a senatorial slot in Virginia. Webb stomped Allen into the ground wearing a pair of combat boots from his son's first tour in Iraq. Says Ricks, "Those boots that had trod the bloody streets of Ramadi gave Webb's opinions on the war an added gravitas: not only had he served in Vietnam, his son was in the fight now." And the newly minted senator was furious.

Webb provided a cathartic funnel for opponents of the war, aggressively pounding the White House with his clear contempt for its Vietnam-dodging inhabitants who sent other people's children to die in Iraq. Things came to a head at a White House gathering following the elections, where Webb was sought out by the president after ducking an earlier opportunity to meet:

> "How's your boy?" Bush asked.
> "'I'd like to get them out of Iraq, Mr. President."

"That's not what I asked you," Bush persisted. "How's your boy?"

"That's between me and my boy," Webb responded, before walking away.

This exchange, while controversial among those who believed Webb to have publicly disrespected the president, put the administration on notice that the status quo was no longer acceptable. The president received the message loud and clear. Immediately following the elections, Bush booted the cancerous Rumsfeld from Defense, replacing him with the more reserved Robert Gates; ordered Petraeus back to Baghdad as the top US commander in the country; and opened the floodgates allowing Jack Keane to become a *de facto* one-man Joint Chiefs of Staff, with Patraeus, Odierno, and their respective sidekicks, Othman included, implementing his will on the battlefield. Thus was set into motion a facelift for the American occupation in Iraq.

The bulk of the book's second half chronicles the painful implementation of the surge. On the surface, the new strategy comprised a handful of principle elements. The first, and politically most challenging, was a troop-level boost in the neighborhood of 30,000 additional soldiers. Second, American commanders were ordered to cut deals, where appropriate, with local insurgents in order to scale back the violence. Third, Petraeus and the US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, sought to engage with Muqtada al-Sadr, the young firebrand cleric who controlled the loyalty of millions of Iraqis, including armed groups, even at the risk of alienating the central government.

Immediate effects were disheartening, if expected. The first months were smeared with blood, as violence intensified throughout the country. American troops increasingly left their bases, set up outposts in cities and towns, patrolled streets with 24/7 regularity, and became, in the process, attractive targets for insurgent attacks. Attacks on US and Iraqi troops increased 70 percent, an acceleration that produced mounting casualties with shocking frequency throughout the spring and into the summer.

"The bad news seemed relentless. On April 14, a car bombing at the main bus station in the Shiite holy city of Karbala killed thirty-two. Four days later, bombings in mainly Shiite areas of Baghdad killed more than 150." But May was the worst. According to the military's own data, that month witnessed over 6,000 "significant acts of violence," by far the highest tally since the war's start, and the culmination of the bleakest period of the war. "United States' combat deaths climbed inexorably: 70 in February, 71 in March, 96 in April, and 120 in May, which became the deadliest month for US troops in two years."

While American casualties mounted with shocking frequency, violence perpetrated against Iraqi civilians accelerated to grotesque heights. In February, a Baghdad market bombing left over a hundred dead, and hundreds more wounded. That same month, chemical warfare was introduced by insurgents, as was the use of children for suicide bombing missions. These attacks were soon followed by the concentrated killings of ordinary workers, attacks against the country's industrial infrastructure, and assassination campaigns against tribal leaders and religious officials.

June promised more of the same, as the unyielding violence showed no signs of dissipating. Wave after wave of suicide bombings and other assaults whittled away the American presence—even as it mushroomed past 150,000 troops—leading to demands for immediate withdrawal in Washington, and leaving soldiers on the ground broken and demoralized. "In the hard-hit 1st Battalion of the 26th Infantry Regiment…life got even worse in July. The first sergeant of Alpha Company, while on patrol, said "I can't take it anymore," put a weapon under his chin, and shot himself in front of his men."

But then as the summer began to close, the gamble began to pay off, at least in security terms. Attacks declined sharply by over 60 percent as the insurgency seemed to dissolve, and Iraqis took back control of their streets. The capital, for one, "felt distinctly better. Kebab stands and coffee shops had reopened across the city…ordinary Iraqis felt safe enough to venture out of their homes at night…women discarded the head scarves that Islamic extremists had insisted they wear…Ramadan didn't bring a major spike in violence, as it had in the previous five years. Some 39,000 displaced families safely returned to Baghdad."

Ricks does not spend much time scrutinizing alternative explanations for the reduction in violence, nor does he ask uncomfortable questions of his own analysis, chief among them: What would have happened had there been no surge? Hints of an answer that the bloodbath would have abated on its own do crop up briefly in *The Gamble*, but are quickly dismissed. Ricks notes that by the time the surge hit its stride in the Iraqi capital, "the ethnic cleansing of Baghdad had been largely completed, with some neighborhoods that were once heavily Sunni becoming overwhelmingly Shia." According to one soldier patrolling the increasingly peaceful city, "Now that the Sunnis are all gone, murders have dropped off... One way to put it is they ran out of people to kill." In other words, as Stephen Walt recently pointed out, the surge's success may have been all in the timing.

Still, even if we accept that the final months of 2008 proved the surge to be tactically successful, the first months of 2009 have revealed it as a strategic failure. Iraq may be physically safer, but the country's political situation remains a morass, and it looks to get worse. The Maliki government hobbles along—dysfunctionally corrupt at best, pathologically sectarian at worst—which harbors bleak assessments of what to expect on the horizon. Steve Simon, a Middle East expert, and Council on Foreign Relations analyst, argues that the surge likely averted utter collapse of the Iraqi nation-state, but predicts that it will also leave behind a legacy that will leave the country suffering "the same instability and violence as Yemen and Pakistan."

Heavy stuff, no doubt. But as the economic crisis continues to swallow up the world's attention by melting all that was solid into thin air, will Americans even notice, or care? Ricks arrives at the deflated conclusion that:

> "Many Americans seem to think the Iraq war is close to wrapped up, or at least our part in it. When I hear that, I worry. A phrase associated with this war that particularly haunts me is one that Paul Wolfowitz, then the deputy secretary of Defense, used often in the winter before the invasion. 'Hard to imagine,' he would say. It was hard to imagine…that the war would last as long as they feared, or that it would cost as much as all that, or might require so many troops… I worry that we are now failing to imagine sufficiently what we have gotten ourselves into and how much more we have to pay in blood, treasure, prestige and credibility."

In other words, we have to stay, whether we, or Iraqis, want us to. For Ricks, there are "no good answers, just less bad ones," in Iraq, and that no matter how immoral staying may be, immediate withdrawal would be more so.

In somber conclusion, Ricks predicts that "the events for which the Iraq war will be remembered probably have not yet happened," a chilling confirmation, if he is correct, of John Grady Cole's realization at the end of *All the Pretty Horses*: "He thought that the world's heart beat at some terrible cost and that…in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower." A single flower, no matter how wilted, or imaginary. Ⓐ

Nothing to Say – Hirschhorn's *Universal Gym*

▶ Thomas Hirschhorn – *Universal Gym*.
Gladstone Gallery, on view till April 11, 2009

CLAY MATLIN

I have always been suspicious of Swiss-born installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn's art; it always strikes me as a little too easy. The blatant in-your-face qualities of his installations recall a petulant teenager who really wants to shake things up but can't get out of his own way. Hirschhorn's 2006 show *Superficial Engagement*, at Barbara Gladstone, was at its core an assault on the viewer, one which seemed more intent on being upsetting than saying anything of real value. Made up of four large platforms that the viewer had to navigate through, the jerry-built work combined ghastly images of violence and war in the Middle East, mannequins studded with nails and screws—made to look like African fetish objects—textiles, references to the Swiss mystic Emma Kunz, video monitors, and newspaper articles with headlines stuck to the walls. The space became so cramped from the mass of objects that it was impossible for the viewer not to be confronted with some image of horror: a headless body, a dismembered corpse, the disfigured body of a small child.

Hirschhorn's argument for the piece is that by never letting the viewer relax the engagement with the images becomes superficial, which is to say that the experience is kept on the surface; we remain confronted by the things we see, unable to argue or pontificate our way out of the encounter. The things we see remain unfilterable and through this experience art might allow us to be healed in the face of the world's terrors. A nice idea, but it ultimately fell short. The chaos of the installation made it impossible to be truly horrified or indignant. Those that did feel that way are always looking to be offended in some way or another. Pictures of terror are just the things they saw at that moment. Yet with all these images leering at the viewer, one ultimately became inured to the experience. *Superficial Engagement* turned out to be less terrifying and merely interesting, perhaps even comic in its absurd aggression. The use of Emma Kunz, as the *New York Times* critic Ken Johnson pointed out, seemed out of place in Hirschhorn's narrative. As Johnson aptly put it, "For all its brutal obviousness and faux-populism, there is something deeply confused and confusing about Mr. Hirschhorn's project…He bullies the viewer and induces a vague, free-floating guilt." Is a work really so powerful when we have to be deliberately hit over the head with our own helplessness and impotence so that we can't help but succumb to an agenda, in this case one that is both political and artistic? One never gets the sense when viewing a Hirschhorn that the art is dangerous, that it has menace and can wound us. Not like Edward Kienholz (and later Nancy Reddin Kienholz), whose installations really are terrifying and unsettling. Duchamp was right when he declared that Ed Keinholz was "a marvelously vulgar artist." The same can't be said for Hirschhorn.

And now Hirschhorn is back, pointing out the problems of the world and still carrying the torch for art as social critique. But what if that social critique is empty? What if its meaning really is meaningless (and not in the way Camus believed in the freeing power inherent in lack of meaning) and it all comes down to trying too hard? There is no denying that Hirschhorn is smart and thoughtful, but that isn't enough. There are plenty of smart and thoughtful people in the world, though most are probably not as ambitious as Hirschhorn, and this is where his work falls apart. It coasts along on its own painfully evident intent. *Universal Gym* is his first New York solo show since *Superficial Engagement* and once again he is forcibly making his point known. There is something to be said for subtly, for not providing all the answers to the viewer at once. Thomas Hirschhorn doesn't believe this. He lays it all out and explains it away, negating any chance for real involvement with the work. I had heard that *Universal Gym* was really just that, a gym for anyone in the heart of Chelsea. It seemed like an inspired idea. It is not. Instead Hirschhorn is still bound up in his old ways, still slapping things together with tape and cardboard, going for that D.I.Y approach, and as heavy-handed as ever.

Taking up all of Barbara Gladstone's West 21 Street gallery space, *Universal Gym* is a simulacrum of an upscale health club, replete with workout equipment, mirrors, fans, free weights, exercise balls and mats, stationary bikes, treadmills, and TVs. Hirschhorn has put motivational imagery of steroid-ripped muscle men on the wall next to a wallpaper image of an exotic beach at sunset. The word "Sculpt" is emblazoned on the back wall. There is a map of the world on the other. Plastic water bottles and aluminum cans of Coke are taped to the floor. And then, as is his tradition, he goes over the top. Never content simply to let things alone, Hirschhorn can't help but fill things to the brim as if he has some sort of obsessive-compulsive disorder that doesn't allow him restraint. There is an enormous black medicine ball that sits in the middle of the room; to the right of it is a make shift room filled with TVs and a treadmill, the televisions displaying what look to be readings of heart and lung function, like some sort of sports-science training facility. Behind the medicine ball are four mannequins in Plexiglas cages. They stand with their right arms extended: one holds a weight, one a heart, one an enormous pill made out of a globe of the earth, and one a tub of protein supplement. All are missing their hearts, a hole in each chest signifying where they once were. One of the mannequins has no flesh but is wearing expensive trainers, one is nude, two are clothed.

The installation view of Thomas Hirschhorn's *Universal Gym*

All of the workout equipment is unusable, taped up to itself or down to the floor. Hirschhorn's familiar cardboard and brown tape is everywhere. Apparently this is some sort of commentary, the gym as metaphor for all of us. The press release states that, "the *Universal Gym* becomes somewhat comic, a ship of perfected fools sailing blindly through the storm." Hirschhorn himself has written that the piece "is a space for exhaustion, for hanging on, for staying upright, and staying in shape while the world falls apart." Is this what passes for social critique, poking fun at those who go to the gym, analogizing that concern with one's physical appearance is akin to removing one's heart? How trite and easy. There is no bravery to this art. Even as misguided as *Superficial Engagement* was, there was some heart to it, some attempt to say something. With *Universal Gym*, Hirschhorn is merely making empty value judgments and providing the viewer with no legitimate questions to ask herself.

Edmund Burke wrote that "a clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea," Hirschhorn tries so hard to be clear and is so desperate to say something that his ideas become little. But one gets the sense that his thought itself is not little, and this is what makes him all the more maddening. That he is so deliberate, so committed to his ideas, ultimately serves to undo him. The point is made the minute one enters the gallery and forgotten as soon as the doors close on the other side. I had hoped that *Universal Gym* would really be just that, a gym open to the public in blue-chip Chelsea. Now that would have been daring. Were Hirschhorn to have provided a free gym for two months, a place where all walks of life could congregate, the work would have been legitimately interesting. Perhaps that little slice of life would allow us to see if we really are trying to "stay in shape while the world falls apart." Instead we are presented with an unusable space filled with empty metaphors on the human condition, a condition that needs no sugarcoating, for the very act of living allows us to know the problems of being human.

By playing at social critique and engaging with the most obvious ideas Hirschhorn succeeds in being just as ineffective as if he had remained silent and made nothing at all. He has written of his work: "What I want is to stay disobedient! I want to try to resist, protesting and I want to refuse myself the tendency of making things 'arty', nice and clean. I want to work without cynicism, without negativity and without self-satisfying criticism—I do not want to be critical—I want to do work, which resists the moralist and nihilist tradition!" This, however, is not the work of protest. He succeeds in not making things "nice and clean," but fails not to make things "arty." This is not cynical art, but it is nonetheless deeply self-satisfied and moralist. Hirschhorn is nothing if not a moralist. His critiques are couched in making us disappointed in ourselves, in trying to make us better, the better becoming that which we are not. I am unsure if this is actually us becoming better or becoming little Thomas Hirschhorns. Hirschhorn should embrace his moral high ground and tell us how to remake our disastrous selves. Perhaps his work would be more powerful if he was overtly cynical and a little surlier. As it stands now he tries to terrorize us from afar, pushing us around but pretending he has no agenda. He's slick, but he's also transparent and clumsy. The only people that find his work upsetting are those longing to be upset. Let them have him and leave the exploration of really terrible things to those artists who not only know them when they see them but are unafraid to let those things run amok and be truly terrifying. Ⓐ

Four Plays Are Better than Some

- Mabou Mines' *DollHouse* at St. Ann's Warehouse
- *Billy Elliot* at the Imperial Theater
- *Chautauqua!* by the NTUSA
- *Soul Samurai* by Vampire Cowboys Company

"Solidarity" from *Billy Elliot*

FRANK EPISALE

"I don't know how you do it, Frank. Every time I look out at the theatre scene in this city, all I see is a lot of crap." This statement was part of an email I received last summer while trying to decide what I would write about for an upcoming article. When I was an undergraduate, one of my professors confessed to the class that he had long ago stopped seeing theatre because it was so often a disappointment and he found it personally painful to see bad theatre. I myself have gone through long stretches when I've questioned my chosen field of study, not so much because of the terrible shows, but because of the mediocre shows. These most deadly of productions showcase bland competence and workmanlike professionalism that garner respectful applause from an audience that won't remember the details of what they saw even a week later.

But then there are seasons like this one. Show after show, week after week, I'm reminded why I study theatre and why I live in New York. The past month has taken me from DUMBO to Broadway, SoHo to the East Village, with ticket prices ranging from $15 to $125. I generally avoid describing anything as "exuberantly theatrical," a phrase frequently employed by critics who want to make sure they're quoted in a theatre's publicity material. That's precisely what most of the performances I've seen recently have exhibited, though: an exuberant theatricality that rewards fans and students of the theatre but doesn't punish novices, that celebrates the medium of the theatre without denigrating other media, that challenges the audience while also being sure to reward them. Following then, are brief responses to the four shows I've seen most recently, in the order in which I saw them.

Mabou Mines' *DollHouse*, a radical adaptation (directed by Lee Breuer, adapted by Breuer and Maude Mitchell) of Henrik Ibsen's most famous play, debuted at St. Ann's Warehouse in 2003 and has spent the last several years touring the world to near-unanimous acclaim. Last month, the show returned to St. Ann's to complete the final leg of its tour. Famously, all of the men in the production are less than five feet tall, while all of the women are over six feet tall. The set (designed by Narelle Sissons), a foldable, doll house-like structure that renders the play's title literal, is scaled to be a comfortable fit for the men and the children while the women in the play are forced to crouch and contort themselves to pass through doors or sit on furniture.

While the little people are the hook that most press releases and reviews focus on, this high-concept visual gimmick is only the beginning of director Lee Breuer's inspired theatrical madness. Red velvet curtains descend to envelop the space, enclosing the audience in a 19th-century melodrama, or perhaps a faded opera house. Nightmare sequences featuring stilt walkers, giant puppets (designed by Jane Catherine Shaw), and lascivious musicians interrupt the narrative from time to time. Ibsen's experiments in naturalism are gleefully tossed aside and replaced with Breuer's experiment in melodramatic excess. A portrait of Ibsen's rival, playwright August Strindberg, hangs on the wall of the doll house. The final scene exchanges melodrama for opera, as Nora (brilliantly played by Mitchell) is transformed into a Wagnerian valkyrie cum Rapunzel who towers over the entire set, singing a triumphant farewell aria while a chorus of puppets bicker and wail, trapped in their stifling, emotionally violent marriages. What saves the show from collapsing under the weight of its pretensions is a mischievous, relentless sense of humor that invites the audience to be in on the joke even as they gape in disbelief at the sheer spectacle of it all.

While Broadway musicals are often thought of as lavish and spectacular, *Billy Elliot* is subdued and visually conservative in comparison to Breuer's *DollHouse*. Written by Lee Hall, directed by Stephen Daldry, and featuring music by Elton John, the new musical was adapted from the 2000 film of the same name (which was also written by Hall and directed by Daldry). Set against the backdrop of Britain's devastating 1984 mineworkers' strike, *Billy Elliot* is the story of a boy who discovers, much to his surprise, that he has a talent for, and a love of, dancing. Like blue-collar dance tales from *Footloose* to *Flashdance*, this one is a feel-good tale at heart, the poverty and oppressive moral code of the community serving primarily as a foil for the hopes and ambitions of the protagonist. Unlike those others, though, this show succeeds in keeping its class issues relatively front-and-center, and even in maintaining some political bite. "Solidarity," a major production number halfway through the first act, takes pains to dramatize (and choreograph) the strike, while the second act opens with "Merry Christmas, Maggie Thatcher," a song in which the miners cheerfully wish for their prime minister's death.


Nora and Torvalt face off in Mabou Mine's *DollHouse*

It is tempting for many to claim that its politics are what sets *Billy Elliot* apart from other shows, but this is hardly the first high-profile musical to tackle such issues. Canonical musical theatre fare—from *Showboat*, to *South Pacific*, to *Oklahoma!*, to *West Side Story*, to *Hair* among others—has confronted class, race, and other such topical matters again and again, with varying degrees of success. Each time, the show in question is heralded as a surprise, an exception to what we imagine to be the vapid musical norm.

What really sets *Billy Elliot* apart from so much other Broadway fare is the palpable commitment of its cast, the infectious joy that they exude while performing. Also unusual for a musical is that the music itself is mostly forgettable; I don't imagine that a great many cast recordings are going to be sold in the theatre lobby. This is in part because the young actors performing in the title role (Kiril Kulish, who starred when I attended the show, is one of three boys who play Billy in rotation) were cast more for their dancing than for their singing. Kulish can carry a tune, but he doesn't own the stage until he starts to dance. The entire team seems aware of where the show's strengths lie, though, and they play those strengths for all they're

Continued on page 21

Next Steps: New EPs from TMS and Beirut

- Throw Me the Statue, *Purpleface* (Secretly Canadian)
- Beirut, *March of the Zapotec / Holland* (Ba Da Bing!)

DAOUD TYLER-AMEEN

The careers of Throw Me the Statue and Beirut are still young, and for the moment it seems both bands are doing exactly what they should. The stories of their success almost make this music business stuff sound easy: TMTS frontman Scott Reitherman created the debut LP *Moonbeams* largely on his own, released it on his own Baskerville Hill label in 2007 (to luxuriant blog press), and was picked up by Secretly Canadian, who re-released the album in 2008. Beirut mastermind Zach Condon, having fallen in love with Balkan folk and French pop in his teens, self-recorded an album steeped in the former (2006's *Gulag Orkestar*) that got him signed to Ba Da Bing!, and followed it up with an effort heavily influenced by the latter (2007's *The Flying Club Cup*)—all of this by the age of twenty-one.

After a one-man bedroom band explodes into relevance, the usual Step Two is to get a proper backing band together and tour like hell, which both artists have done impressively—Reitherman filling out his onstage sound with a tight four-piece, and Condon surrounding himself with a veritable army of brass and strings. It's when it comes time to record again that question marks begin to pop up. Do you incorporate the backing band, or stick to your old format? What effect does the experience of performing for an audience, instead of just your four-track or computer, have on your arrangements? Does being a professional musician, instead of just a kid with a dream, change the way you write songs? The buzz machine is buzzing, expectations are high, and sometimes the best way to make everyone shut up for a minute is to release an EP. Not a huge commitment, not a definitive statement on the band's direction, just a little something to whet the public's collective appetite. That's the route these two intriguing acts have decided to take; this past month saw the release of Throw Me the Statue's *Purpleface* and Beirut's *March of the Zapotec / Holland*.

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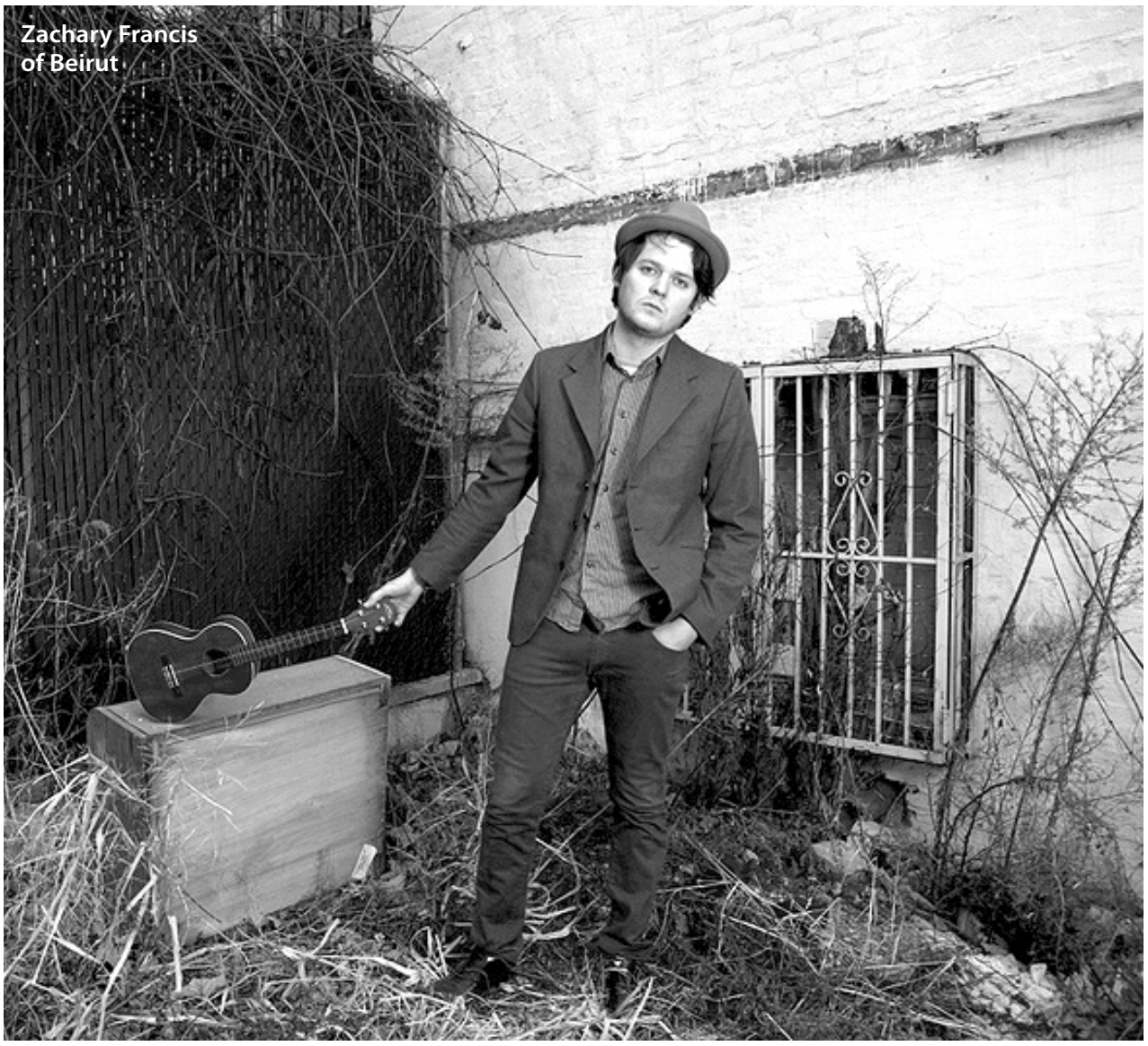
Purpleface begins with a disorienting jumble of sounds that, ever so slowly, converges into something resembling a coherent whole. A Casio-type beat, typical of TMTS's repertoire, takes center stage for a precious few seconds before giving way to the heavy pounding of live drums, signaling a patent break from form (the way Elliott Smith did when the drums kicked in on "King's Crossing"). An acoustic piano, another anomaly in the band's formerly synth-centric world, adds some moody, resonant tones to the mix, its sustain pedal evidently floored. The heir apparent to *Moonbeams* opener "Young Sensualists" is "That's How You Win," a far more complex and cryptic beast. Where its predecessor related frankly the story of a friendship ruined by selfishness and lust, there's no clear narrative in the lyrics of "That's How You Win"; all that comes through in its string of free-associative phrases is a sense of world-weary chagrin, couched in ironic affirmation: "Unblinking eyes make for tired days," goes the refrain, "But don't let it get you down."

A melancholic tone now set, *Purpleface* proceeds with a reworking of *Moonbeams* track "Written in Heart Signs, Faintly" that suggests Reitherman spent a lot of the time between releases listening to Mogwai and Explosions in the Sky. The album version was a rare moment of acoustic sparseness—just Reitherman and his guitar, accompanied by tambourine and the faint plinking of bells. The EP version does away with the campfire instrumentation and gives the song the post-rock treatment, adorning it with blippy guitars, warm waves of malleted cymbals, and thick clouds of reverb fog. The flood of new and diverse sounds gives the song a dynamic malleability it couldn't have in its previous incarnation, conjuring drama and passion in what once seemed little more than an idle daydream. We are tossed headlong into the fantasy landscape the lyrics describe, the place in the clouds "where the kissing never, ever stops."

Reitherman's lyrics deal prominently in wanton sexuality, and even more prominently in the shame that such abandon often brings about. His lotus-eating protagonists generally know they've crossed the line, and yet never seem all that sorry for their

Throw Me the Statue


Zachary Francis of Beirut

misdeeds (see the bridge of "Heart Signs": "Another girl's eyes got wet / I was a total fool / But what can I do?"). It's nice, then, to see him take a break and indulge in some genuine sentimentality, as he does on "Honeybee." The narrator still has one foot in slumberland, and through soft blankets of woodwinds and heartbeat-like tom-tom thumps, he speaks to his lover in sleepy half-phrases of the dream from which he has just emerged. With some snappier, less shoegazey production, this could easily be an early-period Belle and Sebastian song, and Reitherman's delivery matches the mood, trading his usual deadpan for a gentle coo. His mumbled sentence fragments don't make much sense, but they are sung so sweetly that it hardly matters.

"Ship" rounds out the disc. It begins with a march beat, then adds instruments and vocals one by one, ramping up tension on the verse, exploding into a Sunny Day Real Estate-style jam on the chorus, then gradually falling into tight, regimented order again. This is the closest thing we've heard so far to the Throw Me the Statue we know and love; the vocals are clear and present, the drums no longer sound like they're underwater, and the structure is alternately catchy and chaotic. It's a good sign that while TMTS is clearly evolving, they haven't abandoned the sound their fans first fell in love with. *Purpleface* doesn't have a "Lolita" or an "About to Walk" or anything else on par with the ecstatic power-pop that made *Moonbeams* stand out from the pack, but it is certainly not without its compelling moments. This EP may only be a detour on the path to the band's sure-to-be-buzzworthy sophomore LP, but it is a thoroughly memorable detour at that.

—

Beirut's case is a bit different. Their latest release is eleven songs long, more than enough for a full-length album, but it is divided in purpose. *March of the Zapotec / Holland* is actually a pair of EPs, one of them inspired by (and partially recorded on) a Mexican soujourn in the spring of 2008, and the other one a throwback to Zach Condon's pre-Beirut days, as the electronic solo act Realpeople.

Zapotec had its genesis in the town of Teotitlan del Valle, Oaxaca, where Condon discovered his newest world-music crush: the Mexican funeral march. Aiding him is Band Jimenez, a nineteen-member brass ensemble whose performances were captured on field recordings in Teotitlan and are woven through the fabric of Condon's usual multitrack alchemy with some cunning studio cut-and-paste. It's a rather engaging bit of mythology, but sadly it doesn't translate to an engaging album. The songs on *Zapotec* blend together for the most part; the mind wanders, forgetting for minutes at a time that it's listening to Beirut and not just a rummage-sale mariachi record. The success of *Gulag Orkestar* and *The Flying Club Cup* was based in Condon's ability to wed his international influences with the Western ones he grew up with; it's that instinct that created "Postcards from Italy," a sublime bit of genre-mashing that ought to be as appreciable to the old folkies of Eastern Europe as it is to the Williamsburg / Park Slope set. But on *Zapotec*, Condon's presence within the music feels almost incidental. His vocal contributions lack their usual passion and come off as an afterthought; the arrangements, though sonically as grand as ever, feel strangely arbitrary.

Holland suffers from a distinct but related dilemma. On it, Condon-as-Realpeople shies away from Beirut's old-world grandeur and turns to techno, perhaps the only kind of music that's meant to sound like it was made in a bedroom. The plan, however, works a little too well; there's nothing technically wrong with the arpeggiated synths and ditty-bop beats on these five songs, but there's nothing terribly interesting about them either. Really, the most surprising thing about the Realpeople recordings is how spare they are—for all the trumpet calls, conga rhythms, accordion strains, and clarinet flourishes that assault the senses in Condon's other material, the soundscapes on *Holland* are unadorned and conspicuously tame. And that's a shame, because the core material here sounds far more earnest and ardent than that on *Zapotec*, and the Postal Service-grade accompaniment is far too often a distraction. Opener "My Night with the Prostitute from Marseille" has a particularly affecting melody, and makes one wish Condon would turn off the drum machine, pick up a guitar, and just belt it.

March of the Zapotec and *Holland* are a fitting pair, but more for their complementary flaws than for any kind of thematic connection: the first is all style and no substance, the second all substance and no style. Here's hoping that on his next outing, Condon finds a middle ground, a way to stay true to the best of his creative instincts while continuing, as he has on past releases, to transcend indie-rock insularity and help make the cultural landscape in his own backyard more interesting and exciting. Ⓐ

Theater Review

Continued from page 19

worth. Daldry's direction, Ian MacNeil's elegantly effective set, and even John's music are all designed to take a back seat to Billy and his friends when they begin to pirouette. (My mother, who was my guest at the performance, would be greatly disappointed if I did not at least mention show-stopper David Bologna, who plays Billy's flaming best friend Michael with charisma, confidence, and showmanship that are as effective as they are calculated, and who presides over the production's single most memorable song, a celebration of cross-dressing and individuality called "Expressing Yourself").

Show-stopping dance numbers were ostensibly anathema to the Chautauqua lecture circuit that flourished in the rural United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A pro-science, pro-temperance alternative to religious revivals and vaudeville acts, the lectures were education-as-entertainment, and were extremely popular while they lasted. The ironically named National Theater of the United States of America (NTUSA) has put together their own *Chautauqua!* event, an evening of lectures and entertainments that features guest speakers, slideshows, historical reenactments, and the kind of song-and-dance diversions that eventually crept into the popular lecture circuit as it became more and more of a codified business model. In some ways a meditation on the tension between art and commerce, entertainment and enlightenment, *Chautauqua!* is primarily an extension of NTUSA's ongoing project to make theatre inspired by paratheatrical events, and to demonstrate that the avant garde need be neither self-serious nor inaccessible.

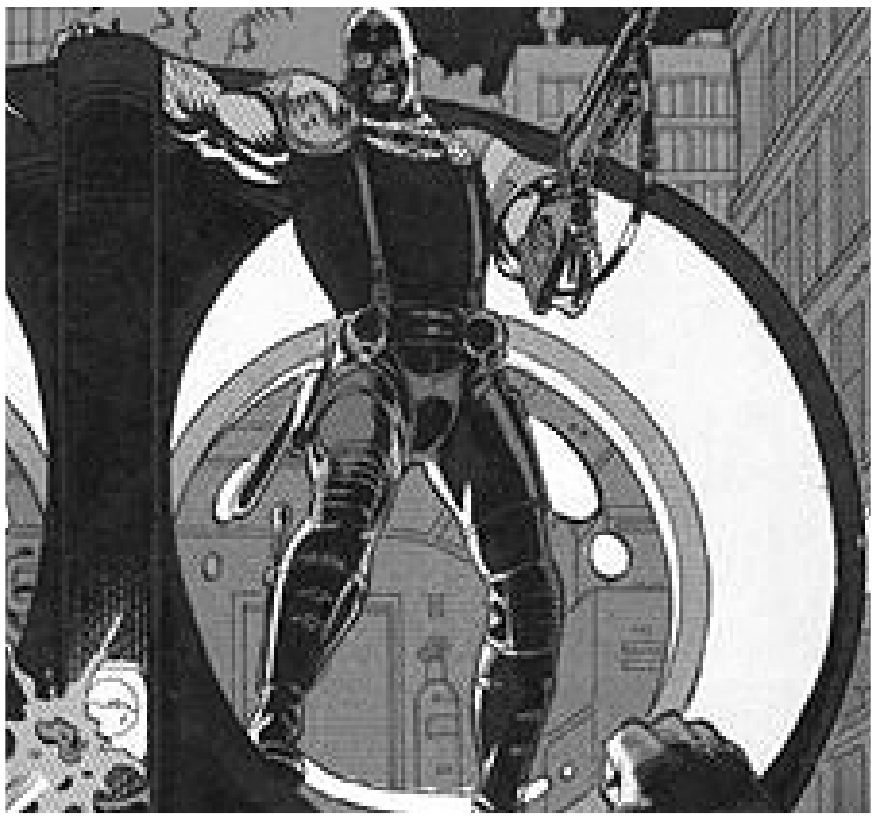
While theatre is often seen as opposed to, and marginalized by, newer media, a generation of video-game playing, comic-book reading genre geeks has emerged in the downtown theatre scene and exploded the highbrow-lowbrow binary that ostensibly separates the performing arts from mass culture. At the epicenter of this scene-within-a-scene are Vampire Cowboys, a young company devoted to stage combat and genre mash-ups. VC's most recent concoction, *Soul Samurai*, is *Kill Bill* meets *The Warriors*, a collision of martial arts and blaxploitation tropes that features post-apocalyptic kung-fu vampires, homeless puppets, and boundless energy. Full of winking references to countless movies, TV shows, and collectible action figures, and featuring one extended action sequence after another, *Soul Samurai* nevertheless manages to showcase some really good acting at almost every turn. (Paco Tolson, as samurai sidekick Cert, is particularly winning). The 5 members of the cast play 19 roles over the course of 100 breathless minutes, managing to win the hearts of the audience even as they juggle whirlwind costume changes, funny voices, and an array of movement styles ranging from Tae Kwon Do to Capoeira. Playwright / fight director Qui Nguyen and director Robert Ross Parker have produced a smart, unapologetically funny show that lays claim to story material from movies and comic books even as it celebrates theatricality and the inimitable thrill of live acting.

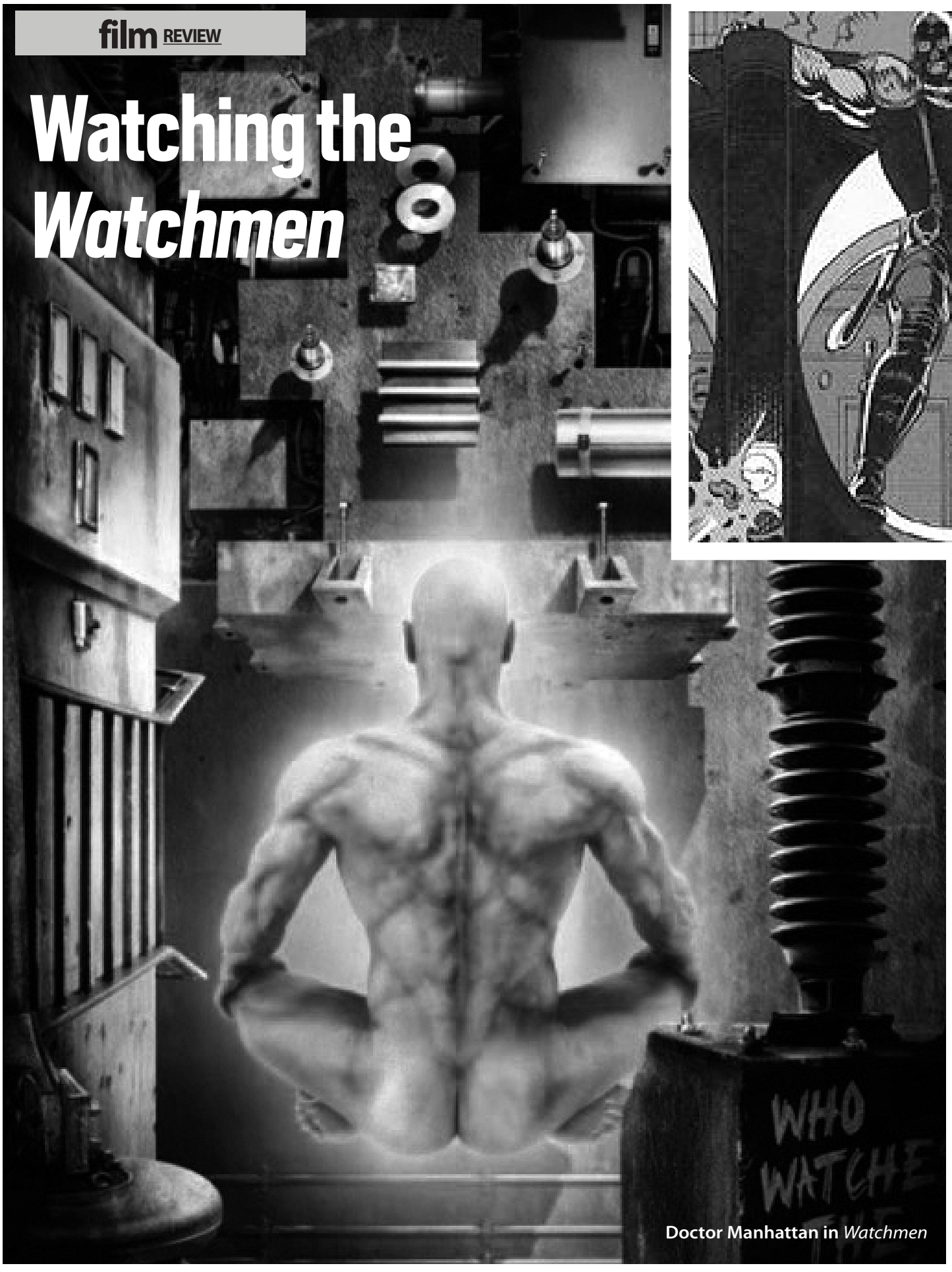
None of these shows is perfect. *DollHouse* sometimes shows signs of Breuer's hubristic self-satisfaction; *Billy Elliot*, an exorbitantly expensive show about poverty, occasionally sacrifices narrative coherency for aggressive pacing, *Chautauqua!* drags in places and is often rough around the edges; and *Soul Samurai* doesn't always maintain its high-wire balance of parody, tribute, and post-identity politics to which it aspires. Each of them, though, is a part of a season that has made me excited to go to the theatre again. I've got tickets coming up to *La Didone*, the Wooster Group's new sci-fi deconstruction of a baroque opera, and *Rambo Solo*, a popcorn-fueled show about a guy who sets out to re-enact *First Blood* in his studio apartment.

I can hardly wait. Ⓐ

film REVIEW

Watching the *Watchmen*





Doctor Manhattan in *Watchmen*

TIM KRAUSE

Zack Snyder's *Watchmen* is a curious film: a painstaking translation, from comics to cinema, of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons's twelve-issue limited series (and later graphic novel) of 1986–87; the latest entry in the overcrowded genre of superhero films; and a monument to geek culture, embodying the obsessive love of detail and trivia, the fanboyish curatorial energy and drive, and the passionate partisanship of nerds, collectors, and devotees (and the marketers who prey upon us) the world over. Sadly, like many monuments, Snyder's film is a cenotaph and mausoleum, an overdone, topheavy tribute that buries (rather than praises) the grandeur of the original under the weight of its own ambition. The story—an intricately detailed alternative-universe satire in which superheroes are real, the United States has won the Vietnam War yet careens toward a nuclear confrontation with Soviet Russia, and an unknown assailant is murdering the retired members of a band of crimefighters known as the Watchmen—fails to take life: embalmed by Snyder's directorial ministrations, the film is an exquisite corpse rather than a living, breathing work in its own right.

Much of the film's problems can be attributed to the now-legendary impossibility of the task of filming *Watchmen*: directors of no less a caliber than Terry Gilliam have proclaimed the feat impossible, and the property languished for nearly twenty years in various states of preproduction. Filming *Watchmen* is the equivalent of redoing any medium-specific masterpiece in another, quite different medium: if the original *Watchmen* is, say, the *Citizen Kane* of comics, then imagine redoing Welles's *Citizen Kane* as a comic book; or, if you like, if the original *Watchmen* is the *Ulysses* of comics, then watch Joseph Strick's 1967 film *Ulysses*, a plodding, meandering, overliteral mistranslation of Joyce's great original. As with literary translation, a slavish fidelity to the original enforces a mistaken focus in the copy. The most basic disconnect between the media of comics and film would be that of time: comics time is theoretically endless, with the succession of panels enforcing a general forward motion through the narrative, but one that can be interrupted whenever for backtracking, slowing down, and rereading. Indeed, illustrator Dave Gibbons filled each panel of the original with such detail that he maximized the static visual impact of the medium: each image was a tiny tableau into which the reader's attention was invited to disappear, thus investing Gibbons's magnificent drawings with the reader's own imaginative energies. Cinema—especially the unsubtle neo-visceral style of cinema favored by Snyder—allows for no such pause or reflection: the images unroll as if in real time, at twenty-four frames a second, and we are bound, watching them, to the filmmaker's version of events, with comparatively little (or none) of our minds enlisted, to paraphrase Shakespeare, to eke out the performance.

If these yawning aesthetic and narratological gulfs weren't enough, Snyder's numerous cinematic infelicities—many used to fill in the necessary gaps between comic and film—further doom his quixotic project. The unmoving two-dimensional drawings of Dave Gibbons must now be made to move, have voices, exist in a credible simulacrum of three-dimensional space, and so on: but almost every cinematic strategy Snyder brings to bear deadens, rather than enlivens, the film. The constant use of pop music hits on the soundtrack as markers of emotion, which drowns the action in waves of readymade nostalgic bathos; Snyder's now-infamous overuse of stop-motion photography and rapid-fire edits for his numerous action sequences, which renders much of the would-be-balletic fight sequences an incomprehensible flurry of bodies; Snyder's near-total tone-deafness for acting, and the resulting loss of nuance and verisimilitude, so necessary to a dystopian, gritty tale like *Watchmen*: all of these render the film a hodgepodge of competing effects, nothing like the delicate balance of word, image, and color that is the comic. Much of the film, unmoored from the particularities of the comic form that made the Moore-Gibbons *Watchmen* such a joy, becomes a sticky sci-fi rehash, a dull grey paste that refuses to cohere into a compelling visual narrative. And despite the film's lauded—and largely earned—fidelity to the original, there are added moments that don't work at all, as with Snyder's filming of President Nixon and the Joint Chiefs discussing nuclear war with Soviet Russia in the style of Kubrick's famous war room from *Dr. Strangelove*, or the disastrous appropriation of Wagner's "ride of Valkyries" for a short scene from America's Vietnam victory. And an epic fail goes to Snyder for the opening shot of the film's final scene, a view of the hole left in midtown Manhattan by energy bombs released by supervillain Ozymandias. The hole is unmistakably a huge version of the footprints left by the destruction of the World Trade Center; to ram home the point, the camera shows the digitally-added Towers to the south, standing once again like sentinels of an unharmed New York, symbolic watchmen of its prosperity and fortune. Snyder shows the Towers throughout the film, and most of the times it feels exactly right—this is 1985 in a parallel universe, after all—but this final juxtaposition is nakedly exploitative, a nasty, unnecessary grab at the heartstrings that

Two Comedians: *Watchmen* the movie (right, and far left) emulates imagery from *Watchmen* the graphic novel (left)

feels more like a sucker punch in the gut. Internet commentary has been spot-on (geeks again!) about Snyder's multiple sins in reworking the end of the graphic novel: the opening pages of the last chapter, for example, of the Moore-Gibbons *Watchmen* detail extensively a corpse-strewn Manhattan destroyed by Ozymandias's masterplot (that giant telepathic squid you've undoubtedly heard about), thus humanizing the spectacular violence, showing the terrible cost of the machinations of grown-up boys in tights. Snyder denies the viewer even this glimmer of humanity, opting instead for Bang! Pow! CGI pyrotechnics and a crass display of bankrupt sentimentality.

Snyder's film is also, paradoxically, a victim of its own conditions for existing, namely the two-decades-long exploration—in comics, movies, and other popular media—of the antiheroic, the morally ambiguous, the criminally pathological, and the psychotically insane. Moore has expressed repeatedly that none of this was his intention, that his *Watchmen* was intended to provide a critical break with an aesthetic tradition—the pulp glamour of superpowered heroes—not forge an entire countertradition. Yet that is exactly what *Watchmen* did, aided by Frank Miller's 1986 *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*: both detonated in the late-nineteen-eighties comics scene with the force of nuclear explosions, spawning a horde of imitators, and both mirrored other turns toward the dark in American culture and history, trends like cyberpunk and steampunk, the mainstreaming of goth and the resurgence of vampires and zombies, films like *Blade Runner* and *Terminator*—the list is long. We've been working through these obsessions for some time now, and Snyder's entry in this vast public work of cultural mediation and negotiation of these archetypes—the demonic avenger, the crusading hero—is a bit late: even Jackie Earle Hayley's terrific Rorschach can't compete with last year's revelation of Heath Ledger's Joker, surely a benchmark among cinematic psychopaths. This is not to say that *Watchmen*, either the Moore-Gibbons original or Snyder's bloated retread, lacks relevance, *pace* public scolds like A. O. Scott and Armond White: there's more to either than simple Nietzschean-inspired rantings about the *übermensch* or the great responsibility that is attendant upon great power—all of that adolescent angst that Moore's *Watchmen* deftly punctured and parodied. One thing that's been lost in all the talk about Snyder's film is the period-specificity of the original in pre-Giuliani New York City: facing massive budget cuts and reductions in services, with the entire nation teetering on the brink of economic collapse, *Watchmen*'s nightmare New York seems more topical, more possible, than anytime since its creation. (This must not be taken as an endorsement of Giuliani's own vigilante-style justice, or of the massive waves of development and gentrification undertaken during his reign as mayor.) The turgid fight scenes, so unconvincing as cinema, have something to say about the objectification and reification of violence, if we're willing to push past the glossy surfaces and bone-crunching sound effects. And even the film's *deus ex machina* ending—in which Ozymandias destroys the largest cities of the world to terrorize humanity into not destroying itself—could be used to illuminate contemporary politics. Ozymandias's argument is essentially that of the Chicago School writ large: that mankind needs to believe in some large, distracting (preferably frightening) myth, a lie that will bring peace and stability to a naturally fractious populace by organizing them against a common enemy, convincing them to fight and die in the name of an abstract political cause.

This plays as a bit dated during the first months of the Obama presidency—although Obama's Justice Department's recent adoption of Bush administration positions relating to state secrets and the rights of prisoners bears more than a disturbing whiff of Ozymandian ingenuity—but we're close enough in time to the Machiavellian neoconservative ideologies of George W. Bush not to feel some frisson of discomfort when listening to the supervillain's rationalized barbarity. Snyder's *Watchmen* is by almost all standards a failure, but it's certainly not a boring or irrelevant one. Ⓐ

NEWS FROM THE **doctoral students' council**

Nothing to do on Fridays?

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 pm on March 20, and will feature Vice President for Student Affairs Matthew Schoengood.

We will continue to keep abreast of developments and post to our website, www.cunydsc.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.cunydsc.org for updated 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!

Elections begin April 1: keep checking www.cunydsc.org/vote for regular updates on the election, and for complete instructions on how to participate (the same ones you hopefully received in print in *The 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 20th, from 8:00-11:00 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 20, 6p.m.
- April 24, 6p.m.
- May 8, 5p.m. (2008-09 reps)
- May 8, 6p.m. (2009-10 reps)

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

- April 3, 6p.m.
- May 15, 5p.m., room 5409 (2008-9 and 2009-10 Steering Committee members)

Media Board Meeting

- March 27, 5p.m., room 5489

Spring DSC Party

- March 20, 8p.m., room 5414

Other Committees of the DSC

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

DSC

SPRING PARTY!

THE DSC SPRING PARTY WILL BE HELD ON THE EVENING OF

MARCH 20TH

FROM 8:00-11:00 P.M.
IN ROOMS 5414 AND 5409.

BEVERAGES AND SNACKS WILL BE SERVED

PLEASE JOIN YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS, YOUR HARD-WORKING PEERS, AND ENJOY SOME MID-SEMESTER

MERRIMENT AND MIRTH!

Stanley Fish Has No Chili Peppers on Ratemyprofessors.com

MATT LAU

With the Humanities facing existential budget cuts and the industrialized world melting down in the greatest credit crisis since the last scene of *Fight Club*, Stanley Fish may be "the last professor," but the Florida International University Law Professor is certainly not the hottest. Or at least that's the verdict of his students on ratemyprofessors.com, regarding the sexiness of the somewhat famous, 170 year-old Milton scholar whose *New York Times* blog probably annoys you.

Ratemyprofessors.com is a website on the "internet" that allows students to rant or, conversely, rave about their college and university teachers in brief commentaries. They can also rate them, on a point scale, on their easiness, clarity, helpfulness, rater interest in the subject, and, of course, most importantly, their hotness.

Hotness, or as it is more traditionally known, fuck-ability is a nearly universally desirable attribute in human cultures and societies. And although it is to a great extent determined by the norms of a given period and culture, "it is difficult to imagine any possible context in which Stanley Fish would be considered hot," writes one student on the site.

Or as another student extremely factual and objective student put it, "Old, white, and beady-eyed, with a whiny voice that sounds like he's mockingly imitating himself, the last time Professor Fish got laid was the day before the concept of sexual harassment was invented, which was too late for the donkey."

Critics might argue that he has that one author photo on the cover of *The Trouble with Principle* where he looks kind of okay, not "like you wanna throw up in your mouth, IMAO," as another modest student contribution to ratemyprofessor.com has it. The photographer did a reasonable job of hiding his less-than-flattering Cindy Crawford mole, and his jowls appear to have been taped to the back of his neck. Meanwhile, his hair looks surprisingly tousled and full. As one comment on Ratemyprofessors.com reads, "Where did he get that wig?"

But if my sources, Mark and Kram Schiebe, are correct, then Professor Fish, who is an English Civil War veteran, stole it from his mother's trunk on the slave ship his family gainfully operated to arrive in the New World. Or, as one of the reviews online reads: "When Prof. Fish went to school, they didn't have History!"

But most of his law students, as polled by the statistical firm of Dewey, Cheetem, and Howe, think either his wife painted that photo or that it is someone else entirely. Indeed, my confidential sources for such matters, gigolos Mark and Kram Schiebe, told me she confessed to it to them. "We told her we wouldn't make her life worth living anymore if she didn't come clean about how she'd enhanced that photo," said the Schiebes, who looked like they'd been violated, when they stepped off the plan from Miami.

When asked why they'd hired a blogger who's almost as ugly as Maureen Dowd, the senior public spokesperson for *The Times*, Ramk Beschie, said he couldn't talk right now because Dowd had been sitting on his face for the last several hours.

Beschie finally emailed a response later in the day. "Look, compared to Dowd, he's completely beautiful. I mean, she makes Medusa look like Helen of Troy. Besides at least Fish is a bottom. My jaw hurts." Ⓐ