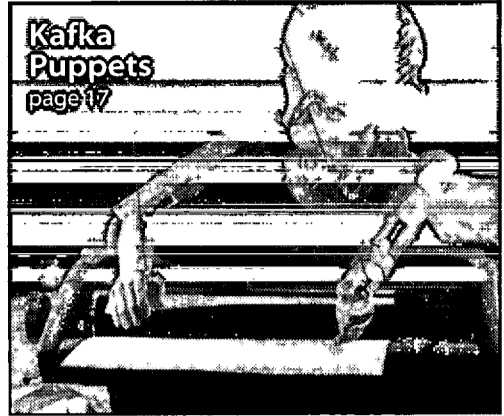


CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

Advocate



May 2009

<http://gcadvocate.org>

advocate@gc.cuny.edu



The End of an Icon?

Future of the "Peace Pentagon" Uncertain

ALSO INSIDE

Did Bard College Purge Joel Kovel? (page 8)

Reevaluating John Giorno (page 12)

In Memoriam: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (page 5)

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

James Hoff

MANAGING EDITOR

Michael Busch

LAYOUT EDITOR

Mark Wilson

MEDIA BOARD CHAIR

Rob Faunce

CONTRIBUTORS

Meena Alexander

John Boy

Frank Episale

Rob Faunce

Tim Krause

Steve Kruger

Matt Lau

Clay Mailin

Renee McGarry

John Otrompke

Robert P. ...
Jason Schneiderman

Mark Schiebe

Nicole Wallenbrock

Abe Walker

PUBLICATION INFO

The *GC Advocate* is the student newspaper of the CUNY Graduate Center and is published seven times a year. Publication is subsidized by Student Activities Fees and the Doctoral Students' Council.

SUBMISSIONS

The *GC Advocate* accepts contributions of articles, illustrations, photos and letters to the editor. Please send queries to the email address above.

Articles selected for publication will be subjected to editorial revision. Writers who contribute articles of 1,000 words will be paid \$50 and those who submit longer articles requiring research will receive \$75. We also pay for photographs and artwork.

The *GC Advocate* is published seven times a year, in September, October, November, December, February, March, and April. Submissions should be sent in by the middle of the month. Print copies will normally be on the stacks around the end of the month.

FROM THE editor's desk

Writer's Block

"You don't know what it is to stay a whole day with your head in your hands trying to squeeze your unfortunate brain so as to find a word."

—Gustave Flaubert

"The imagination is man's power over nature."

—Wallace Stevens

It happens to all of us at one time or another. The blank page, the blinking cursor, the creeping and debilitating panic, the constant distractions, the getting up and walking around and sitting back down and getting up and walking around again. Usually it can be overcome by a force of will, an exertion of ego—as Mailer thought—the suspension of critical judgment, and a lot of furious freewriting. Sometimes, however, like an unwelcome obsession, it can take hold of you and whole hours, evenings, entire days simply disappear.

For the last two days, I have done nothing but bang my head against the wall of my windowless office trying to come up with something to say for this, the last *GC Advocate* of the year. Swine Flu, Bird Flu, Fox News, Arlen Specter's defecation, Air Force One, Obama's first 100 days... nothing seemed to click. I had heard somewhere that former *Harper's* editor Lewis Lapham used to spend the afternoon at the bar knocking back martinis before coming up with "Notebook" articles for the magazine, so I figured, what the hell. A few pints at O'Reilly's couldn't hurt, and at least I'd be blocked and drunk instead of just blocked, which is no fun sober.

Sitting in O'Reilly's talking to a friend, I realized, like an epiphany, that one of the reasons I was having so much trouble is that I had spent the last couple of weeks working daily and diligently on my dissertation, and that I was so happily wrapped up in the otherworldly esoteric intricacies of that work that the thought of writing about something as pedestrian as politics was not only uninspiring but on a certain level repugnant. My head was in academia, and for once so was my heart, and I realized I was blocked precisely because I did not want to write or even have to think about CUNY politics and Chancellor Goldstein, the pathetic job market ahead of me, or the beat down the NYPD delivered to those poor New School students last month. I wanted to be left alone to write my dissertation in peace, and to hell with the rest of it. But how, I thought, was I supposed to write about poetry and the value of modernist aesthetics when the world of torture memos and suicide bombings kept knocking at my open door? This dilemma, of course, is nothing new, and one that many graduate students are intimately acquainted with. In a world full of so many problems it is not always easy to see how one's own work connects to the bigger picture.

As I enter that magical ninth year at the Graduate Center (Louis Menand told the *New York Times* "it often takes about nine years to complete a dissertation in English") I am quickly beginning to feel like one of those sorry saps I swore I would never become: ABD and out of funding, roaming the stacks of the GC library year in and year out, utterly demoralized and obsessed with their own insignificance. Of course, it is easy to become distracted and disheartened by the daily indignities and seeming immateriality of graduate life and work, and I cannot begin to count the number of times I have had this discussion with friends of mine. And of course, any conversation of more than two or three humanities students inevitably leads to the fateful: "why did I become a graduate student?" "I could have been a doctor or a lawyer." "I could be out there, really doing something, making a difference, or at least making a living, but instead I'm sitting here trying to figure out the difference between ontological and epistemological."

In no profession, except perhaps politics itself, is one more keenly aware that one's ambitions and one's current condition are so far apart, or more desperately afraid to consider what one has given up. In no profession, either, is one more aware of the distance between what one studies and the "actual world" that, at least on the surface of things, seems to do just fine without you and all of your "intellectual labor."

The world of our imagination (that is, the world of our ideals and our ambitions, our visions of what is noble, right, and good), as poet Wallace Stevens knew, is periodically under assault from the pressure of a reality that cares nothing about our happiness or sense of value. Stevens also knew that the imagination was itself a weapon, "a violence from within that protects us from a violence without," and that the surest resistance to a hostile reality was not always the most direct. We may rally and we may fight, we may (and probably should) take over our administrative buildings and college campuses and tell our governor where he can put his new budget; but we must also do the work of the imagination. We must write the dissertations and the books, and the boring, overly annotated journal articles, not only because they will eventually, with luck and plenty of patience, get us a steady and decent position, but because they provide us with the ammunition to defend ourselves from the daily onslaught of bad news and injustices that typify our times.

Faced with nothing but a blank page and a world of often overwhelming violence, it is our obligation not only to recount the hard facts of that world in all of their immediacy, but to draft the possibilities, the subversions, and the alternatives necessary for continually transforming and structuring those facts in more satisfying and meaningful ways. ☺



**DON'T SUBMIT
CONTRIBUTE**

Turn the musings of
your mind into manna
for the masses. Write
for the *Advocate*.
advocate@gc.cuny.edu