CUNY GRADUATE CENTER

Advocate

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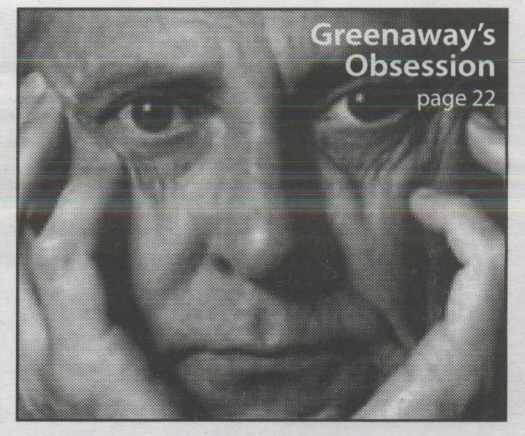

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CUNY's Terror School

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FROM THE **editor's desk**

Education Über Alles

"To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men." —*Abraham Lincoln*

The recent round of student protests and building takeovers at campuses across the University of California system this week have been both inspiring and heart-breaking. The devastating and unprecedented 32 percent increase in student "fees" (the UC system's way of getting around using the word "tuition") approved by the UC regents on November 19 reminds us of just how short-sighted, stupid, and callous most university administrations have been in their response to state budget cuts across the country. Instead of standing up to Sacramento and demanding restoration of cuts, UC President Mark Yudof told reporters after the vote: "Our hand has been forced. When you don't have any money, you don't have any money." This is, of course, easy for Mr. Yudof to say whose first year salary was $828,000 and whose $10,000 a month house in Oakland, the *New York Times* reports, is entirely paid for by the University.

Instead of throwing up his hands and saying there is nothing he can do, why did Yudof not threaten to resign? Why not encourage the regents, all of them who voted for this disastrous increase, to do the same and resign unless the state restores the cuts? Why not work *with* his students to oppose these cuts rather than kowtowing to the whims of the state? The answers to these questions are clear: because the governance of the UC system, like so many university systems across the nation, is such that administrators and regents and presidents and trustees see themselves as somehow at odds with the faculty and students whom they are supposed to serve. The trend of corporate-structured oversight of public universities has brought those institutions to their knees and until this is changed there is little hope that these kinds of cuts will not continue.

Equally heartbreaking was the relatively low turnout in response to these increases. Instead of thousands, even tens of thousands of students protesting at every campus across the UC, the biggest protests never reached more than 1,500 people and although some campus buildings were taken over and strikes called, they seem to be having little impact on the actual functioning of the schools, which continued with their business as usual, despite the noise of protest all around.

Nonetheless, these demonstrations were inspiring for several reasons. First of all, despite the relatively low numbers (considering the nature of the increases), the protests were aggressive and vocal and received an enormous amount of national and local press. At UCLA on the day of the vote, protestors attempted to block vans bringing the regents onto the campus, heckled regents as they crossed the university toward the meeting site, were maced and beaten by police, and then after the vote, surrounded the building linked arm in arm, refusing to let the regents leave for more than three hours before they were dispersed by police in riot gear. Simultaneously, students across the system, including Berkeley, Davis, and Santa Cruz began large protests and building takeovers. Until Saturday night, administrative buildings and classrooms were still being occupied on several campuses. More than seventy students at UC Santa Cruz were arrested Sunday morning after a three day takeover of a building there, where they were in close negotiations with the UCSC administration over demands. These responses show that students are ready and willing to put their bodies and their futures on the line against the police and the callous UC administration. In resisting these tuition hikes as they have, the UC students have managed to raise the bar yet again, setting a very different kind of precedent, which might well be the start of a much bigger, more organized and, more permanent form of campus resistance.

But what does all of this mean for us? What lessons can we at CUNY take from these protests and demonstrations? After all, we are also facing yet another round of tuition increases, cuts, layoffs, and service reductions. What can and should we be doing now to prepare to resist these cuts? The first thing to be learned from the UC protests is that there is strength in numbers and any successful student protest campaign must make sure that it has the support of a majority of the student body and that those students are fully educated as to the nature of the protests and why those protests are in their best interest. One of the most disheartening things about following these protests were the number of UC students who seemed unconcerned about the cuts or who were actively angry at the protestors for disrupting the campus. While this may not have been the majority of students, the fact is that many students, for whatever reason, still went to class, and still allowed the university to keep functioning. Why they were not with their fellow students on the lawns protesting or at least refusing to attend class is a mystery, but the fact is that without the support of these groups no protest will be truly successful.

In addition to recruiting students to the cause, it is imperative that any campus resistance also include a good share of professors and lecturers who are willing to call in sick, cancel classes, or hold classes off campus until demands are met. Although a handful of radical UC professors vowed to do this (three of them actually appearing live on *Democracy Now!* to announce their intentions to honor the strike) they seem to have had little impact so far, and as we go to press on there have been few reports of any significant continuing protest on any of the UC campuses.

The other big lesson to take away from these events is that university administrations clearly do not care about the interests or the welfare of the students they represent. Not only did President Yudof and the regents refuse to do anything to stop the cuts, they allowed campus presidents and UC police to brutally disband several of the protests and building takeovers. At Berkeley, police in riot gear shoved and dragged students out of Wheeler Hall, while students at UCLA were maced, beaten with billy clubs and otherwise harassed by police. Some students are even facing charges of felony burglary for refusing to leave Wheeler Hall. This kind of zero tolerance, life-destroying retribution sends a chilling signal to all of the other students who might be tempted to protest or disrupt campus activities as a form of political action.

Surely the situation is dire for students across the country and it is becoming increasingly clear that dealing with the attacks on public education one extraordinary case at a time may not be the best strategy. Perhaps it is time that students began to create and re-create national student resistance organizations in response to the budget cuts and tuition hikes that are afflicting campuses everywhere. These organizations should not only be ready to organize and help coordinate massive student strikes, walkouts, and building takeovers, but should encourage higher education unions to form solidarity coalitions in an effort to tackle these problems at the legislative level as well. These organizations must agitate not only for laws that limit tuition increases and guarantee funding, but must also push for new legislation to reform university governance at large state and city university systems like UC, CUNY, and SUNY. While legislative action is often slow and full of awful compromise, when backed up with a powerful movement willing to put bodies on the street, and willing to face arrest and police brutality, it can be a powerful tool for creating real change. "Students and workers united," as one recent protest chant put it, "will never be defeated."

Whatever the strategy, though, it is clear that something significant must be done soon to end the economic violence against the working and middle classes. The creeping decades-long trend of budget cuts, even during periods of so-called "economic growth," has seriously and perhaps irreversibly undermined the very foundations of public higher education. The students at UC are not only fighting for their own educations but are also fighting to insure that their children will someday have access to the excellent and affordable education they deserve. Ⓐ

New Schools, Old Hippies, and a Dead Domain

Hunter Cafeteria Workers Win Settlement with AVI!!!

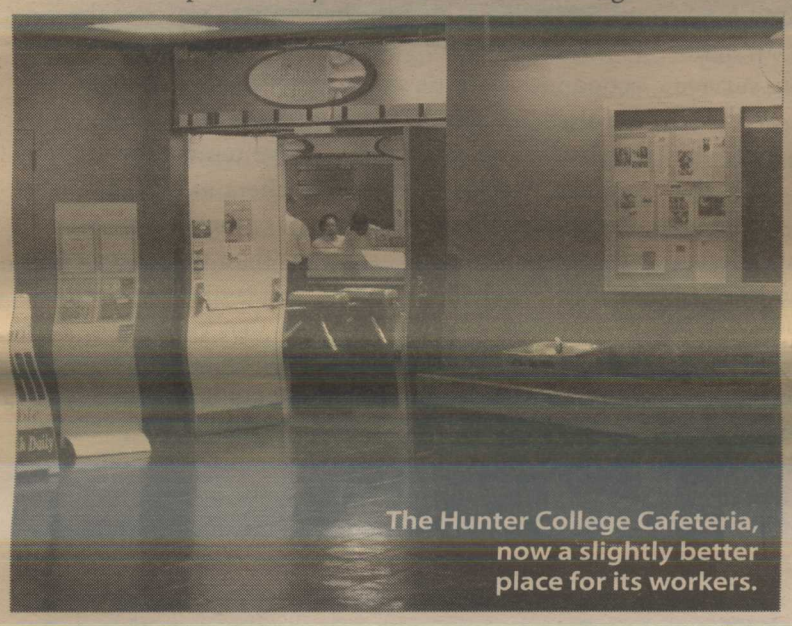
The strategic Affairs Department of UNITE HERE! has reported that the Hunter College Cafeteria workers have agreed to a settlement with their employer AVI Foodsystems Inc. The new settlement ends weeks of protest and a planned boycott by Hunter College students, both of which were used to put pressure on AVI to settle.

In an email sent to workers and the Hunter College community Ian Mikusko of UNITE HERE! said:

"The contract is signed and will take effect pending a ratification vote which will be held next Friday. It was approved unanimously by the leadership committee of the workers that represent their co-workers at the negotiations. In related news, the AVI workers at Sarah Lawrence College won a card-check neutrality agreement today as well!

"Now that the workers have won what they needed (again, pending ratification), there's no reason to boycott the AVI cafeteria at Hunter College on Thursday; so as far as the workers and the union are concerned the boycott is officially off. Please spread the word to people you communicate with about such things.

"The build-up to the boycott seemed to have a huge influence on the company's eagerness to settle. When we showed them the boycott pledge sheets (with over 1000 signatures — probably well over) several members of the AVI negotiating team got visibly rattled — it was the only point in the negotiation where the AVI people seemed to lose their cool. In my opinion, the threat of an impending boycott was a huge factor in winning a good contract today.



The Hunter College Cafeteria, now a slightly better place for its workers.

"To sum it up: the workers are happy with their hard-fought contract…It was awesome to see how much support the workers had from the Hunter College and CUNY community."

Highlights of the new contract include:

- The workers will continue to receive free family health benefits that will include employer contributions for this past June, July, August, September and October, months during which AVI previously expected workers to pick up the tab.
- AVI will contribute $35/week ('09-'10), $37/week ('10-'11), and $40 per week ('11-'12) for each employees UNITE HERE union 401k retirement plan (as opposed to the AVI company 401k plan which the workers rejected).
- The workers will receive a $500 lump sum payment this year, a $.43 per hour raise next year, and a $.43 per hour raise the following year.

CUNY Law Found Harboring a Bunch of Hippies

According to a new review of the nation's law and business schools, CUNY Law at Queens College boasts the most liberal students in the nation. This assessment, published by the fine folks at the Princeton Review, is based on student surveys collected from 172 law schools across the country. "We don't believe one law or b[usiness] school is best overall," said Robert Franek, publisher of the guidebook. "We report rankings in eleven categories and we tally them largely from our unique student surveys to help applicants decide which of these academically outstanding schools will be the best match for them."

And that's not all! Fortifying its reputation as a home for over-the-hill leftists still further, CUNY secured the number one ranking for the nation's oldest law school student body. It also captured top ten rankings in faculty diversity (seventh) and "best professors" (tenth). Unfortunately, it didn't do so hot in other key categories, such as "quality of life," "best career prospects," or admissions standards, but whatever. The important thing here is that CUNY showed those smug, latte-sipping future leaders of our country at NYU and Columbia who's got the most heart.

CUNY's Community Colleges Abandon Open Admissions Policy

For the first time in its history, the City University's family of community colleges has abandoned its open admissions policy. The decision comes down just as record numbers of applications are flooding the two year colleges—a phenomena many credit to Barack Obama's recent announcement that his administration considers community colleges the backbone of the American labor force—while Governor David Paterson is pushing for a massive budgetary spinal tap to the tune of $9.9 million. Talk about a bait and switch!

The funding cuts have paralyzed the ability of CUNY community colleges to provide a quality education while still accommodating the rapidly increasing number of new students, according to Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, leaving the system with a "moral dilemma" of choosing between maintaining academic excellence and shutting its doors to eager students. The president of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, Antonio Perez, agrees. Speaking with the *New York Times*, Perez noted that the current situation facing the two year school is "like trying to stop a large ship in the middle of the ocean. I expect we will be turning away students next semester as well."

CUNY Can't Fund its Community Colleges, but Opens New School in East Harlem

At the exact same moment that CUNY's community colleges are suffering the rollback of nearly $10 million in funding, the system is celebrating the grand opening of the Lois and Samuel Silberman School of Social Work in East Harlem. The school, which had been housed in midtown, will be relocated to its new digs thanks to a generous $30 million gift from the Silbermans, and a $100 million allocation from the State Legislature.

The ribbon-cutting ceremony attracted a high profile audience, including CUNY's Darth Goldstein, the city's recently-crowned mayoral kingpin Michael Bloomberg, and lame duck governor David Paterson, who took time out from his slash and burn campaign against state funding for public education to attend. Said Paterson, "We should all be proud that one of the country's top public social work schools is located right here in New York. Thanks to the generous gift of the Lois and Samuel Silberman Fund, we can be sure that the School of Social Work at Hunter College will remain strong for years to come. Moving the School of Social Work to East Harlem will give its students and faculty—as well as those at the new CUNY School for Public Health—the opportunity to engage with a vibrant, diverse and growing population in need of the vast array of services Hunter offers. Today's groundbreaking showcases a public-private partnership at its best."

What is this new School for Public Health, you ask? Well, according to the propaganda mill at 80th Street, the newest blossom on the CUNY family tree will "open with master's and doctoral programs in 2010-2011, and will be the only school of public health in the nation with an urban focus. This is especially important in a world where the population is increasingly urban, and predicted to be more than 75 percent urban by 2030. The school will focus on new ways to prevent and control health problems in urban populations while training practitioners to implement these solutions in New York City and other urban centers. It will offer community-based doctoral and master's degrees in disciplines including epidemiology, biostatistics, social and behavioral science, health care administration and policy, and environmental health, as well as selected undergraduate degrees. Attracting students who live and work in the communities it is designed to serve, the School of Public Health will produce graduates with the knowledge and skills to grapple with the serious health care disparities facing the poor, minorities and immigrants."

CUNY Lets Domain Name Drop

For an institution that prides its self on pinching pennies and making money, CUNY really dropped the ball this past month when they failed to renew one of their domain names—CUNY.com—which was promptly picked up and sold by NameJet.com to an eager bidder. The price tag attached? $30,000.

Industry analysts were left scratching their heads. "Why would a cash-strapped city and school system just let this domain drop instead of selling it?" asked *TheDomain.com*.

The *GC Advocate* was wondering the same thing. The paper attempted to reach our Dark Lord of the Chancellery, Matthew Goldstein, for some answers only to find out that his Highness is currently in San Diego, attending the 1132nd Annual Gathering of the Sith.

Leftover PSC Funds for the Taking

Listen up: PSC/CUNY Adjunct Professional Development Grant monies are waiting to be seized. Grants of up to $3,000 per academic year are available to adjunct faculty who are teaching six or more classroom contact hours in the semester and to continuing education teachers who are teaching a minimum of twenty hours per week. Complete eligibility criteria can be accessed through the PSC website at http://www.psc-cuny.org/PDF/AdjConEdProfDevGuidelines.pdf. The grants can be used toward research, courses, conferences, field studies and other activities that will enhance your professional development.

The PSC/CUNY Adjunct Professional Development Fund is one of the initiatives the Professional Staff Congress won in the last contact. It represents the first time in CUNY's history that a professional development grant program has been offered to adjuncts and is one of the first such programs in the country.

A grant application can be downloaded at http://www.psccuny.org/PDF/AdjConEdProfDevApplication.pdf. Read the enclosed guidelines carefully. Completed applications should be mailed to: Adjunct PDF, PSC/CUNY, 61 Broadway, 15th floor, NYC 10006. Grant awards will be made after review of your application by a panel that includes your peers and that meets once a month during the academic year. You will receive written notification of whether your project has been approved. Ⓐ

adjuncting

The Collapse of the Tenure Track

ALISON POWELL

Recently, a subcommittee of the Committee on Contingent Faculty and the Profession disseminated a report on the dire state of tenure-track positions in American universities. Considering that by 2007, almost 70 percent of faculty members were employed off the tenure track, it has become crystal clear that the original goal of tenure—established to ensure adequate compensation and encourage research and academic freedom—is applicable to fewer and fewer faculty. American universities must consider how they make use of contingent faculty and reassess not only the compensation and benefits of adjuncts, associate instructors, and the like, but also the status these faculty members are given within their departments. Some universities maintain a standard set of tenured faculty within their departments, only to rely increasingly on contingent employees in satellite campuses, online course offerings, and campuses overseas. The individuals staffing these positions work for low pay with few or no benefits, and they correspondingly have less say in how a department is run and what decisions are made regarding upcoming hires. Relied upon heavily for the majority of labor within these departments, yet with no job security or prestige, contingent faculty are the outcast step-child within their profession.

These issues are familiar to us at CUNY, and the Adjunct Project has consistently worked to bring the concerns of adjuncts to the forefront of conversations about how CUNY will face the 21st century. Yet the country-wide shift toward heavier reliance on contingent faculty goes beyond mere cost cutting. As the American Association of University Professors' *2009 Report on the Economic Status of the Profession* explains, the erosion of tenure-track positions is due in part to the "fundamentally flawed premise" that faculty "represent only a cost, rather than the institution's primary resource." The report continues, pointing out that the increasing reliance on contingent faculty who are underpaid and overworked "represents a disinvestment in the nation's intellectual capital precisely at the time when innovation and insight are most needed." Too true: that the general quality of American university education has been in sharp and consistent decline over the past few decades has become conventional wisdom. Grade inflation, and a decrease in challenging curricula are frequent topics during the happy hours of university faculty; they are problems we acknowledge with genuine dismay, yet really have no idea how to address.

Part of the issue may be that our attention is in the wrong place. Rather than being only the reflection of the state of ournation's public schools, or the current consumer-model many universities seem to follow, the problem is also a result of the heavy reliance on graduate students and adjunct employees who—rightfully so—have an ethical obligation to invest only as much in their classes as they are compensated. Of course, many, if not most, contingent faculty put in well over the amount of hours for which they are actually paid. Grading, conferences with students, pedagogical training (formal or informal) means additional hours which we "volunteer" in our departments. Nationwide, it is nearly impossible for contingent faculty to live on the low pay they receive, and many individuals must seek employment outside of their departments; depleting their resources and the time they can offer to students. The committee reports that "a broad and fast growing front of research shows that the system of permanently-temporary faculty appointments has negative consequences for student learning. In many cases this is not due to the quality and professional training of the faculty serving in temporary appointments—they may be highly qualified and superb teachers—but to the terms and conditions under which they are employed."

> "A broad and fast growing front of research shows that the system of permanently-temporary faculty appointments has negative consequences for student learning."

As many of you are aware, due to clerical and human error, many GC adjuncts failed to receive paychecks for two pay periods at the beginning of this year. The problem was widespread, and it is not an overstatement to say the economic ramifications for our graduate students—who live paycheck to paycheck as it is—were severe. Increases in credit card APRs because of missed payments, fees from landlords and other financial pressures highlight the tightrope many of us walk day-to-day as we try to survive on our paychecks.

There were many ideas about how to handle the problem, and the Adjunct Project, along with the Professional Staff Congress and Doctoral Students Council, worked around the clock to ensure that the Provost's Office and President Bill Kelly were taken to task for the inexcusable failure. One suggestion, aimed toward publicity and a desire to use the paycheck debacle as a "teaching moment," was to encourage adjuncts to make a statement to students about the event (the suggested statement was circulated over email). The idea was that our students benefit from understanding more fully how the university system works and that such knowledge helps them become more active and sophisticated participants in their university; in addition, it was argued that our students deserve to know how the education they pay for is being compromised by overworked and under-paid contingent faculty.

The idea was met with some criticism. Adjuncts were hesitant to subject their students to the discomfort of listening to their teacher "complain" about not being paid. There is obviously room for debate about the strategy; the desire not to discuss with our students the disheartening working conditions we labor under demonstrates our genuine commitment to our classes. Eager to create a professional and top-notch classroom environment, we're reasonably hesitant to broach the subject. But their ignorance, much like the ignorance of the rest of the country, doesn't serve them well. Rather than being fully equipped to articulate the kind of education they expect or to participate in the ongoing conversation about the state of the nation's universities, our students passively run through the system. Their disengagement reflects, in fact, the disengagement of many contingent faculty from their own departments. No one can deny that the system we work under requires, in part, the ignorance of our students to the problem. "Mindful that their working conditions are their students' learning conditions," explains the Committee, "many faculty holding contingent appointments struggle to shield students from the consequences of an increasingly unprofessional workplace.... Institutions that serve the economically marginalized and the largest proportion of minority students, such as community colleges, typically employ the largest numbers of nontenurable faculty. We are at a tipping point. In addition to the injuries to students, campuses that overuse contingent [faculty] show higher levels of disengagement and disaffection among [all faculty members], even those with more secure positions."

It's difficult to know how to proceed, how to begin to address such a wide-spread and systemic problem in American colleges across the country. The Committee "believes that the best way to stabilize the faculty infrastructure is to bundle the employment and economic securities that activist contingent faculty are already winning for themselves with the rigorous professional peer scrutiny of the tenure system. The ways in which contingent teachers are hired, evaluated and promoted often bypass the faculty entirely and are generally less rigorous than the intense peer scrutiny applied to faculty in tenurable positions." This makes sense, if the idea that increasing scrutiny for contingent faculty will be accompanied by reward—that is, an increase in compensation, especially those who have worked within the department for some time, the potential for more benefits, and a shift in the marginalized position these individuals feel when it comes to the development of their respective departments.

The Committee concludes its report with a summary of those institutions which have "adopted provisions that fall well short of tenure but that offer contingent faculty some protection and the institution some stability. Often, these take the form of improved job security, protections for academic freedom, or provisions for inclusion of contingent faculty in academic citizenship and governance." One of the universities they consider is CUNY, and they point out the improvements in job security for contingent employees recently won through collective bargaining by the PSC. It must not escape our attention that these hard-fought victories fall short in one key way: none will result in the increase of tenure-track positions within departments. This is a question we must all consider, a concern we must all have, as graduate students and as contingent faculty. How do we both advocate for improved working conditions, job security, and compensation, and also stop the increasing decline of tenure-track positions available? We *can* do both—but it's just one more thing to add to our plate. Ⓐ

Rapid HIV Testing Returns to GC on Dec. 3

COLLETTE SOSNOWY

The Graduate Center is an HIV-saavy community, which is evidenced by the significant turnout to the recent confidential Rapid-HIV testing event sponsored by the Wellness Center-Student Health Services on November 11. In fact, there proved to be such a need for the service, the Outreach Team from Ryan-NENA Community Health Center will be returning on Thursday, December 3, from 10:00-12:00 and 2:00-4:00 on the concourse level! In addition, the Wellness Center-Student Health Services will be tabling information on HIV/AIDS and World AIDS Day in the lobby.

The fact that there is so much activity and education around HIV speaks to the need for continued efforts to stem transmission of the disease. According to the CDC, many persons with HIV do not get tested until late in their infection. In the United States, approximately 40 percent to 50 percent of patients with HIV infection are diagnosed with AIDS within one year of testing.

Another challenge to prevention efforts is that many persons who are tested do not return to learn their test results. Using the traditional test, it may take several weeks to get results back, warranting a second appointment. The CDC estimated that in 2000, 31 percent of patients who tested positive at public-sector testing sites did not return to receive their results

Rapid-HIV testing both reduces wait time to one visit and expands the testing sites to non-clinical settings. A rapid test uses a quick finger stick test that produces results in about twenty minutes. Allowing time for confidential paperwork and education, the appointment takes less than an hour. The Ryan-NENA staff provides comprehensive, confidential counseling and will connect you quickly to medical services if needed.

One test counts the number of T-cells in the immune system. T-cells are white blood cells that help the body fight infections. HIV destroys these cells. A person with HIV usually has a high number of T-cells early on. Over time, that number begins to drop. Another test checks how much HIV is in the blood. This is called "viral load testing." The number of T-cells and the HIV viral load determine what kind of treatment a person should have, and show whether or not the treatment is working once it is started.

There are other testing options. State and local health departments, HIV/AIDS organizations or private doctors can give the test. The nurse practitioner at the Wellness Center-Student Health Services can give the test. It has to be sent out for results and requires a follow-up visit, but may be a more convenient option for Graduate Center students. There is a lab fee of about $12 that will be billed to the student by the lab.

No matter the method, all HIV tests are confidential. Your result is told only to you, but it is also put in your medical file, which your health care provider has access to. Some areas offer anonymous testing. This means you don't give your name and the result will only be reported to you. Home testing kits are available from pharmacies. You mail a blood sample along with a code name or number and receive results over the phone.

Knowing your HIV-status is critical to getting early treatment if your status is positive. While there is no cure for HIV, treatments can be started when the person is healthy. The most common treatments limit the ability of the virus to reproduce. They help protect the immune system and improve chances of staying healthy. Other treatments may slow the spread of HIV, make the immune system stronger and treat opportunistic infections. Certain medicines can be taken by HIV-positive pregnant women to significantly reduce the risk of passing it on to their baby. Since it takes time for HIV to show up in the blood system after it has been contracted, it's best to get tested regularly.

Important Information

The Ryan-NENA Outreach team will return to the Graduate Center for confidential Rapid-HIV testing on Thursday, December 3 from 10:00-12:00 and 2:00-4:00 in the concourse level (C204-C205).

The last patients from the 10-12 slot will be seen at 12 and the last patients from the 2:00-4:00 slot will be seen at 4:00. Please allow time for a short wait, paperwork, testing and questions and answers, about forty minutes to an hour. If you have any questions, call the Wellness Center at 212-817-7020.

If you are not able to make the on-site testing at the Graduate Center on December 3, the Ryan-NENA Community Health Center offers full HIV services, including rapid testing at their site, located in the Lower East Side.

For information, or appointment call:

- Ryan/Chelsea Clinton: (212) 265-4500
- Ryan-NENA: *Assistant Coordinator of Prevention, Education Outreach* (212) 477-8500
- Ryan Center: Coord. of Counseling & Testing (212) 749-1820

political analysis

The Militarization of Crowd Control

JUSTIN ROGERS-COOPER

The Group of 20 (G-20) Summit protests in Pittsburgh this past September were a threshold event. Not only were protestors detained and beaten by the police, but they were also subjected to new military-grade technologies that have pushed the boundaries of what kinds of actions are permissible for controlling large crowds of protestors, unruly or not. This fact, however, has been largely ignored by the mainstream media for several reasons. First of all, the commercial media ignores stories it can't spin into easy and familiar narratives of good and bad, right and wrong. The story of the G-20 protests and the subsequent police brutality that took place during those protests does not match the facile optimism of political campaign speeches, upbeat advertising, and entertainment spectacles. Instead, these corporate media outlets spin simplistic stories that redefine disorders as isolated disruptions or exceptional "tragedies." Another alternative interpretation of these national "tragedies" and disruptions is possible by connecting together what they have in common. The actions of security forces in Pittsburgh in 2009, New Orleans in 2005, and the Republican National Convention in New York in 2004 all reveal the increasingly militant policies of the homeland security state since September 11. By tracing police actions back to those policies it's possible to more substantively interpret the meaning of the Pittsburgh protests and what they mean for the future of crowd control.

The policies of the new homeland security state reflect a consensus between law enforcement officials and the military about the use of new technological weapons against citizens and non-citizens. The Pittsburgh security forces used non-lethal weapons to disperse crowds, including the Long Range Acoustic Device, or the LRAD. This large sonic gun radiates short bursts of sound waves that are audible over very long distances. Firing it up-close creates a very loud and powerful noise that is capable of causing hearing loss and great levels of pain. These LRAD devices have previously been used in Iraq for similar purposes. It was also used as a defensive weapon on the cruise ship *Seabourn Spirit* in 2005 off the coast of Somalia to fend off a group of pirates. The pirates were repelled despite having rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns. And now the use of the weapon domestically against non-violent crowds of American citizens is taking place, arguably not only a violation of their civil liberties but also a violation of basic human rights.

The device is meant to inflict "non-lethal injury." In this sense it echoes the "enhanced interrogation" techniques that the military uses to torture enemy combatants in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and the US prison at Guantanamo Bay. Like the Taser gun, which has become popular with local police departments, the LRAD is yet another law enforcement weapon that's supposedly non-lethal but also relatively unstable in live trials. Like Predator spy planes that shoot Hellfire missiles at suspected targets in Pakistan, the Taser and the LRAD are weapons that fundamentally change the new laws of security powers. These weapons modulate wide ranges of before unheard of force in order to subdue individuals and crowds.

Equally problematic is the increase in the use of the 1968 Riot Act to criminalize the use of social networking technologies such as Facebook and Twitter. Local authorities in New York took major steps to circumscribing the effects of public protests in 2004 through mass arrests, but they went a step further in Pittsburgh by targeting the use of communications devices by protesters. Elliot Madison's arrest by the Pennsylvania State Police in Pittsburgh for Tweeting the location of police to protesters is symptomatic of a campaign to prevent crowds from intelligently organizing. The subsequent search of Madison's apartment by an FBI counter-terrorism unit confiscated pictures of Marx and Lenin as evidence. A grand jury trial is still open. The police are using the Riot Act as legal precedent. This is an orchestrated attack on legitimate forms of political dissent.

> Political dissent in the United States has essentially been effectively criminalized, becoming in the eyes of the law just one more form of emergency that must be met with controlling force.

These actions send a chilling message to potential political activists and everyday citizen protesters, that public authority will use any means necessary to control individuals and crowds. This includes authorizing the use of violent new instruments of control. Each new tool reflects a unique technological breakthrough in the science of controlling human bodies efficiently. These on-going assaults are tolerated because of little compromises that individuals make about the social contract and the ethical responsibilities one has toward the suffering of others. Each little compromise has required a denial that returns as a form of fear and anxiety in much of the American public. Not coincidently, the American public has reacted passively against these new technologies of immobilizing bodies. Anxiety paralyzes one's ability to think clearly about the real movements in American politics.

These movements reflect essential changes in the technology of crowd control. Companies that provide emergency training for local authorities use computer simulations that construct scenarios of natural disasters, fires, terrorism, and civil disturbances. A simulation video advertised on YouTube boasts that every block in New York has been digitally reproduced for that training. The expression of these policies in physical confrontations reveals an organized, methodical, and potentially dehumanizing approach toward all bodies present in declared "emergency" and "disaster" zones. In much of the military literature, for instance, protests are also classified as civil disturbances. Civil disturbances are, in turn, defined as man-made disasters. As a result, strategic responses to natural disasters and protest disasters are very similar. They involve suspending civil liberties for the purposes of protecting public order and private property. Crowds are "managed," whether they have gathered to loot, commit violence, or just to protest.

They are also managed if they become displaced by climate catastrophes or economic incentives. In 2006, the Halliburton subsidiary KBR received a $385 million contract for temporary detention and processing centers. At the time, this contract reminded some independent journalists of the REX-84 "readiness exercise" that Oliver North spearheaded during the Reagan administration. The exercise imagined that 400,000 migrants from Mexico entered the US and became an uncontrollable population. The plan called for all 400,000 to be detained. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) would be responsible for storing them. As immigrants, they would not be subject to constitutional protection.

Like the KBR centers contracted in 2006, the camps would detain, house, and process bodies. The United States has powers to create domestic internment camps just as all other state governments do. The World War II Japanese internment camps provide evidence that the United States can detain tens of thousands of bodies after declaring an emergency.

In 1982, former FEMA head Louis Giuffrida drafted an executive order for continuity of government planning in the event of nationwide insurgency of African-American militants. The order called for "martial law" and "suspension of the Constitution." The REX-84 camps and the Japanese interment camps are large-scale precedents for Guantanamo Bay. State authority rests on emergency powers in all three cases. They are large-scale precedents for the 2,000 protesters detained at Pier 57 during the 2004 New York Republican Convention.

Populations often express themselves through specific, collective identities. One such form of identity is crowds. Crowds are inherently unstable and very powerful. They

A protester at the Group of 20 meeting on Pittsburgh on Sep. 24, 2009. The police vehicle is equipped with a Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD).

thus make the state vulnerable. Protests and protesters acquire disproportionate power when they form crowds. Crowds can make demands that elections cannot. Crowds can use force that cannot be undone. Crowds can shift political sentiment for authority by exposing the erosion of power, by embarrassing authorities, or by being subjected to police brutality. Crowds can visually demonstrate the violence of the state against certain ideas. As crowds, they have the power to draw emotions and media to ideas and bodies possibly subject to censorship or derision.

The collective power of assembled bodies can overwhelm repellent police technologies, including lethal weapons. Crowds can overwhelm state forces through the sheer power of numbers. A group as organized and energized as an Ohio State Buckeye football crowd could easily occupy the state capitol building in Columbus. This is why crowd control was essential for the protection of President Barack Obama in Pittsburgh. This is also why movements that encourage various kinds of crowds have successful records against state forces. An example might be the Montgomery Bus Boycott in 1955-56 and the Berlin Wall crowds in 1989.

Riot police at the ready at the Group of 20 meeting on Pittsburgh on Sep. 24, 2009.

In response to the power of these crowds, states can declare and enforce martial law. During martial law, executive authority resides under the direction of local civil authorities. This is the single most important aspect of understanding martial law. Elements of the military maintain "liaisons" with federal, state, and municipal authorities. The 2005 Department of Defense "Strategy for Homeland Defense and Civil Support" explicitly refers to the military support the Pentagon may lend local police authorities. Since the executive who declares emergency powers is local, to understand martial law one must not focus on Presidential executive powers. The Homeland Security press release by the Secret Service during the Pittsburgh G-20 Summit described the participating security bodies as a combination of "local, state, and federal security," along with "public safety and military partners."

In the context of American constitutional law and Department of Defense policy, martial law emergency powers *always reside with local civil authorities*. Martial law is not about negotiating checks and balances of federal powers, however. Martial law emergency powers are part of a capillary, distributive system of emergency powers in the United States and can be *called into being wherever crowds form*. Senator David Vitter acted as a liaison between Karl Rove and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco following Hurricane Katrina, for instance, and told Blanco the George W. Bush administration wanted her to declare martial law or "as close as we can get." This exchange lays bare where the powers reside.

This is the case because presidential authority is legally limited. The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act withdrew northern troops from the south by limiting the powers of the executive to command military troops within US borders. The president could nonetheless still declare a state of national emergency and declare nationwide martial law. Doing so, however, would draw a great deal of negative attention and media. Martial law powers are much more flexible—and thus more tactically useful—because they rely on local authorities. Department of Defense military forces, when used domestically, would be renamed Defense Support of Civilian Authorities (DSCA). These forces are also referred to as Civil Support, which would engage "riots, acts of violence, insurrections, unlawful obstructions or assemblages, or other disorders prejudicial to public law and order." These unlawful assemblages—crowds—might be dispersed through the simple act of a local authority. Crowds trigger these authorities to invoke emergency powers that are inseparable from the powers of martial law.

In the last two decades many of the laws surrounding crowd control came to define the actual apparatuses of federal emergency powers. Crowd control laws are important because they address how security forces can interact with real bodies. This then clarifies the real expressions and fears that motivate state power. The REX-84 exercise is an example of state policies that envisage large-scale responses to massive population control problems. It is no accident that new crowd control methods were included in the new civil liberties policies following September 11. Airport security grew. Bridge security grew. Vast detention centers opened in Afghanistan and Iraq. A special torture camp opened in Cuba. The CIA "black sites" prison system continued to expand.

These are all human rights crimes. In the United States, human rights and civil rights are two separate discourses. It may be effective to wind them together more. Since 9/11 civil liberties have come under intense assault. Political dissent in the United States has essentially been effectively criminalized, becoming in the eyes of the law just one more form of emergency that must be met with controlling force. Civil disturbance manuals used by the army claim that disturbances arise from "highly emotional social and economic issues," where "economically deprived" residents are ready to release frustrations. This link between civil disturbance, economic conditions, and emergency powers received some surprising attention last October, when California representative Brad Sherman claimed some legislators were threatened with the specter of martial law unless the bailout bill passed.

It is here that crowds, the forces of crowd control, and our Constitution clash. The civil liberties that have come under the most assault are freedom of speech and assembly. These liberties conflict with policies about crowds and civil disturbance. Since crowds threaten public order because of their power, the response of security forces reverts back to policies and laws that govern civil disturbances. Civil disturbances are emergencies, and, as such, emergency powers are in effect. Defining protests as emergencies allows police conduct that should be understood as unacceptable violations of the constitutional rights of free speech and public assembly. When all protests and spontaneous mass gatherings are seen as emergencies, then the ability to actually practice any reasonably effective form of mass political action becomes nearly impossible, limited only to police and city authorized marches and rallies.

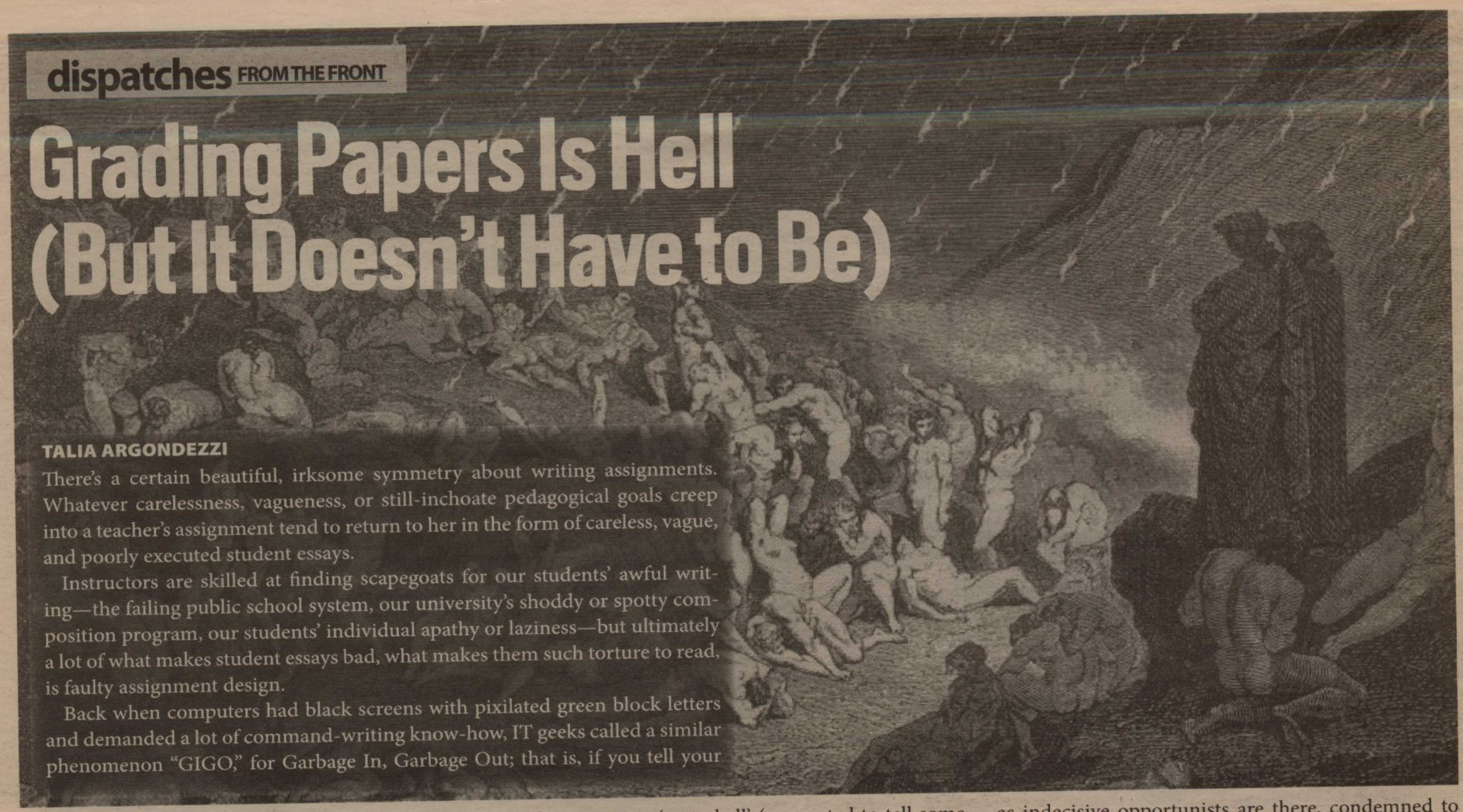
The permanent state of emergency, like the permanent war on terror that the Bush administration envisioned, is here, stretching from Kabul to Pittsburgh. It is meant to test the boundaries of what kinds of abuse a population will tolerate against its fellow humans and fellow citizens. This represents a new fashion of policing undisciplined and unpopular ideologies. It seems to make no difference whether one is a Muslim, a terrorist, an anarchist, a communist or just a protester—one's body is inevitably subject to all kinds of forms of temporary state control. For radical Muslims this state control can last for years of indefinite detention; it can also include torture. For illegal immigrants it might last months and sometimes years. Judging by Pittsburgh and the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York, it can last for a few days against American citizens.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to direct public attention to these policies. The police commit routine violations of the law without punishment because they have acquired a patriotic armor. The same is true for American soldiers. The police and the military elicit intense forms of devotion from wide intersections of classes and ethnicities. Focusing on the individual actions of police officers is not important anyway. One need not fear criticizing any individual police officer or soldier. This only mystifies the problem. The problem is one of policy.

The fact is that under both the American Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights citizens have the right to assembly. Any new security policy must reflect these rights. Crowd formation is inevitable. No government can ultimately control collected human bodies and organized crowds. Policies must reflect this reality. Crowds too control the terms of "consent" inherent in all representative government. Recognizing this will make it easier to evolve the political systems in new ecological and economic eras. Decaying political forms will erode in power. The corporate-funded two-party system relies on an infinite-growth economy that relies on fossil fuels for food and labor production. The post-petroleum era will require much more local forms of production. The groups that will dominate this era will form new kinds of crowds. They must to be allowed to emerge. Ⓐ

dispatches FROM THE FRONT

Grading Papers Is Hell (But It Doesn't Have to Be)



TALIA ARGONDEZZI

There's a certain beautiful, irksome symmetry about writing assignments. Whatever carelessness, vagueness, or still-inchoate pedagogical goals creep into a teacher's assignment tend to return to her in the form of careless, vague, and poorly executed student essays.

Instructors are skilled at finding scapegoats for our students' awful writing—the failing public school system, our university's shoddy or spotty composition program, our students' individual apathy or laziness—but ultimately a lot of what makes student essays bad, what makes them such torture to read, is faulty assignment design.

Back when computers had black screens with pixilated green block letters and demanded a lot of command-writing know-how, IT geeks called a similar phenomenon "GIGO," for Garbage In, Garbage Out; that is, if you tell your computer to do dumb stuff, the computer acts dumb. An imprecise understanding of Eastern religious traditions nudges me to liken this to karma. For our purposes, let's call this trend the assignment boomerang.

Dante Alighieri would call it divine retribution for professorial sins. I got smacked hard with the assignment boomerang a few years ago, the first time I taught Dante's *Inferno*, a department-mandated text in City College's World Humanities General Education requirement. For those not familiar with the epic, the protagonist—also named Dante—travels through the Catholic hell and describes, in Italian terza rima, the pain and anguish experienced by the many sinners he sees there. The sins grow progressively more serious, and the punishments correspondingly more gruesome, as Dante descends circle by circle down the cone-shaped hole of hell, until he reaches Satan in the ninth and final circle, the nadir of the cone. If you share my agnostic humanism, this plot may sound a bit repulsive, but the poem is full of suspense, drama, empathy, and what I can only describe as a sort of voyeuristic glee at encountering characters in such fantastic and spectacular misery.

After a series of lively discussions in class, my anticlimactic writing assignment dully asked students to analyze how the punishments suffered in Dante's hell match the sins the damned had committed in life. Grading their responses was unspeakably tedious. Instead of resenting my job or the student authors, however, I had to face the fact that there was a real justice to my boredom. Since I'd required my students to lumber through my ill-conceived assignment, I in turn was condemned to wade through their inanities. Boiled down to a cliché (as, I assure you, all my insights can be): You do the crime, you pay the time.

My most frequent "sin" in designing writing assignments is failing to consider how dreary students find the writing process. Fixated on the advanced techniques of assignment design (clarifying goals and expectations, telegraphing grading criteria, extracting an appropriate learning outcome, etc.), I tend to skip over what should be the first questions of assignment design: Would I want to write this paper? Do I actually want to read the best possible answer to this essay prompt? It's appropriate that, failing to account for my students' possible boredom, I would suffer extreme boredom while grading their often competent essays. For sucking the joy out of the poem-reading and essay-writing processes, I was punished with a joyless grading session. Dante couldn't have devised a more just hell.

So the following semester I made the writing assignment a bit more transgressive: "Have you ever told someone to 'go to hell' (or wanted to tell someone that)? Describe the scenario. What did the person do wrong? Use quotes and interpretations of Dante's *Inferno* to describe what their punishment would be, and explain why." The assignment still met my pedagogical goals—to have the students think critically about the text and articulate connections between its parts—but the students' answers were so much more engaged, and reading their essays was much less a chore for me. Plus, as an accidental bonus, I think the assignment allowed the students to experience the cathartic, semi-therapeutic effects of imaginatively punishing people who'd wronged them—an effect that Dante himself certainly relished in imagining his hell, which is littered with personal enemies.

Of course, many students claimed to be too peaceful to participate: they'd never wished anyone eternal damnation at the hands of an angry god, and didn't want to start ambling down such a vengeful path. But after a little prodding and brainstorming and encouraging of James Frey-style truth-stretching (also a common feature of first-person teacher narratives, ahem), everyone produced a victim.

As it turns out, the class included a number of scorned lovers. In *The Inferno*, excessively lusty sinners, including adulterers, end up in Circle Two, where their spirits whirl around in violent winds, in sight of, but never able to touch, the objects of their desire. I hadn't predicted, though, that several of the cheated-on would call for Dante to reconsider the lenient positioning of the condemned cheaters; apparently the second circle, nestled between the "virtuous pagans" of Circle One and the gluttons of Circle Three, is far too cushy for such trash as these students' unfaithful exes.

To my surprise, one essay boldly pointed out that, by making the students angry at people who've hurt them, I was forcing them all to join the ranks of "the wrathful," who are condemned to attack each other without rest while covered in sludge in Circle Five. Sadly, as a consequence, I will spend eternity in one of the deepest parts of hell, the eighth pocket of the eighth circle, where I, with all the other "evil counselors," will rove about zombie-like while completely engulfed in flames. Ouch.

The best outcome of the assignment came from students who had real-life sinners in mind, but couldn't find a place for them in Dante's seemingly exhaustive hell. There's no spot in the medieval Catholic hell for, say, parents who don't understand your long-term goals, or for bratty offspring. It's not that Dante decided only to punish the very bad transgressors and let everyone else off the hook: even sinners as benign as indecisive opportunists are there, condemned to be stung constantly by swarms of insects and trudge through puddles of their own maggot-infested pus and blood. Since Dante's *Inferno* didn't speak to my students' conceptions of right and wrong in many cases, the assignment forced them to notice the singularity of Dante's hell, constructed for his very specific personal, theological, and political purposes.

I want to add a caveat here. I don't believe that writing assignments are automatically interesting and pedagogically sound just because they require students to reflect on their personal experience. "Talk about yourself" is not, unfortunately, the magic answer for improving all my writing assignments. I know this because I've assigned some real clunkers. (Don't ask your students, for example, to compare and contrast their own experience of New York City to that of Ralph Ellison's invisible man; I can tell you, sometimes they feel invisible too and they also live in Harlem. It's a commonly accepted but nevertheless wrong notion in composition studies that personal writing is easy, a sort of warm-up for analytical writing; in reality, to write a good personal, descriptive, and/or narrative essay is just as difficult, if not *more* difficult, than a good analytical one. My *Inferno* assignment worked as a personal/analytical hybrid because it asked students to do something very specific, both in their personal narrative and in their analysis.

In a later semester, I sheepishly admit that I was inspired by a *New York Daily News* headline on the day of Saddam Hussein's execution. It read "Next Stop: Hell." It made me realize that people still enjoy the schadenfreude of high-profile eternal damnation. So I expanded the *Inferno* assignment to ask students to consign various historical and contemporary figures to the appropriate circles of Dante's hell. This added a component that I hadn't originally considered, because it turned into an impromptu mini-lesson on both current events and notorious "sinners" from history. And, since students were again reluctant to condemn others, especially their favorite celebrities (one student on Paris Hilton: "Give her a break; she's just living her life"), we had a provocative discussion about the waning cultural relevance of the concepts of sin and retribution.

Reading student responses to both of these improved prompts was actually enjoyable, so I'm going to go ahead and deduce that writing them wasn't as boring as usual either. That's the nice thing about Dante's worldview: it is not just about sinning and going to hell; you can also do good and be rewarded. Now I know that thoughtful assignment design can lead us to divine essay-grading Paradise. Ⓐ

Autonomy!

▶ *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics* Edited by Sylvère Lotringer and Christian Marazzi

ASHLEY DAWSON

Before the book, a place and time: Berlin, summer, 1990. Or actually, the road to Berlin. I'd spent the last two days on the move, hitchhiking without sleep to get from Amsterdam to Berlin. I was delirious, having spent hours talking to a Dutch businessman who spewed a stream of racist bile about Muslims taking over his country and an even longer time with an Italian truck driver who insisted that he was carrying a large consignment of weapons for the Sicilian mafia. Beggars can't be choosers. Night blurred into day and back again. Now I was on the final leg of the journey, crammed into a dilapidated Opel with a dishevelled elevator salesman and his advertising gear. The highway ran like an artery of light through what I knew was the pitch-black East German countryside.

A street party on Meinzer Strasse, 1990.

Groggy with sleep, I struggled to keep up a conversation with the driver. The surreal sense of being deep under water I felt coming over me was brought up short when we pulled into a grimy gas station glued to the dark margin of the highway. As I got out to stretch I saw the East German soldiers, their machine guns pointing at the ground, standing around smoking cigarettes.

The next day, after crashing on the floor of friends of friends in West Berlin, I made my way across the city to Checkpoint Charlie. As I approached the crossing on the elevated metro line, I saw the graffiti-covered remnants of the wall and, equally oppressive, the huge gash running through the center of the city, an ominous blank space carved out for hundreds of feet on either side of the wall to ensure maximum visibility of escapees. At Checkpoint Charlie, the wall was no longer intact, but the guard tower from which East German security once watched over and at times killed their compatriots, was still there. I walked through the crossing, feeling as if history was turning upside down on my way to Mainzer Strasse.

During the Cold War, Berlin was the only city in which young West German men could escape mandatory military service. Supported by the Allies as a symbol of resistance to communism, the city ironically became a haven for West German dissidents and a forcing house for the diverse social movements that came to be known as the *autonomen*: anti-war, anti-racist, feminist, environmentalist and many other strands of the German extra-parliamentary Left who retained strong links with the traditions of direct, participatory democracy pioneered by the New Left during the late 1960s and by subsequent radical tendencies such as the Greens. The *autonomen* were concentrated in the relatively poor, heavily Turkish neighborhood of Kreuzberg, which, during the Cold War, was located in the far eastern section of West Berlin. After the wall was torn down in November, 1989, the *autonomen* moved east into neighborhoods where huge numbers of late nineteenth century apartment buildings had been left vacant by the East German government whose plans to demolish them and build hideous tower blocks in their place had been scuttled by the collapse of communism. Now, West Germans and East Germans, as well as radicals from Italy, Japan, Peru, and other points around the world, joined to occupy over a hundred buildings in the neighborhood just across the River Spree from Kreuzberg.

Mainzer Strasse was special, though. Most squats were isolated, or existed in clumps of two or three houses. On Mainzer Strasse, an entire block of twelve abandoned tenement buildings had been occupied. There was an *autonomen* movie theater; several infoshops distributing radical zines, books, and films; separate gay and lesbian houses; and *autonomen* cafés and bars, each with decoration more imaginative than the next—my favorite was the wedding themed bar in the lesbian house, with a gigantic white wedding bed that seated at least twenty people. The reputation of Mainzer Strasse had travelled all the way to the United States; friends told me that I had to go to on a pilgrimage to the place while I was in Germany to polish my language skills before taking the mandatory exams in grad school.

After walking through seemingly endless streets filled with once elegant but now ramshackle five-story apartment buildings, I finally turned into Mainzer Strasse. After walking past several houses that seemed completely uninhabited, I stopped in front of one with a bright purple façade where two young guys were sitting in the sun playing chess. Biting the bullet, I blurted out an awkward hello in German and then explained in English that I was in Berlin for the summer and wondered if they had a place for me to stay. Neither seemed particularly nonplussed by what seemed to me a ridiculously bold and invasive request. Oliver turned with an amused look on his face to Mischa and said that he thought they probably had room. Mischa replied that yes they probably did, but they'd have to ask the house council if I could stay. I sat around watching them play chess and smoke hand-rolled cigarettes with exotic Dutch tobacco. They seemed quite personable and we talked about where I was from and what I wanted to do during the summer.

This information came in handy a couple of hours later when they put my case to the house council. Even though I was in Berlin to polish my German, I didn't understand much of the business conducted at the council, which took place in a volatile mix of West German, East German, and international *autonomen* argot. The mixture of people from both parts of the country—so soon after the dismantling of the wall—was impressive, as was the pretty even mix of men and women in the squat. I felt distinctly uneasy, though, when discussion turned to my application to be a member of the house and I felt people's eyes on me. Oliver whispered to me that things were going relatively well, although there was quite a lot of suspicion of an unknown outsider like me since the "Osi's" had grown up subjected to the pervasive spy network of the hated Stasi, the East German secret police, and the "Wesi's" had been battling the authorities' anti-squatter moves for much of the last decade. Perhaps equally worrying, I was an "Ami," a citizen of the universally hated imperialist power across the Atlantic. But though I felt nervous, I also felt elated: this was my first experience of radical participatory democracy in a commune.

My application for membership approved by consensus by the house council, it was time for me to learn the ropes in the commune. Mischa took me to see my room, which faced onto the backyard of the building, beyond which lay a cemetery studded with beautiful cypress trees. My room was on the first floor of the building, and consequently abutted onto an imposing steel security door that clamped down with a huge wheel across the stairway leading up from the ground floor café to the rest of the house. The whole affair seemed rather like something one might encounter on a submarine or in a space station. There was a buzzer system that allowed people to get in after curfew each night. Mischa explained to me that just recently a group of neo-Nazis had broken into a nearby house and savagely beaten some *autonomen* living there. Neo-Nazis who'd squatted a house in a nearby neighborhood also apparently liked to blast down our street in their jeep, firing flare guns into the houses. Mischa told me that sentries were posted with walkie-talkies at either end of Mainzer Strasse, and that the autonomen were worried that they'd be attacked by a mob of either neo-Nazis or police sometime soon.

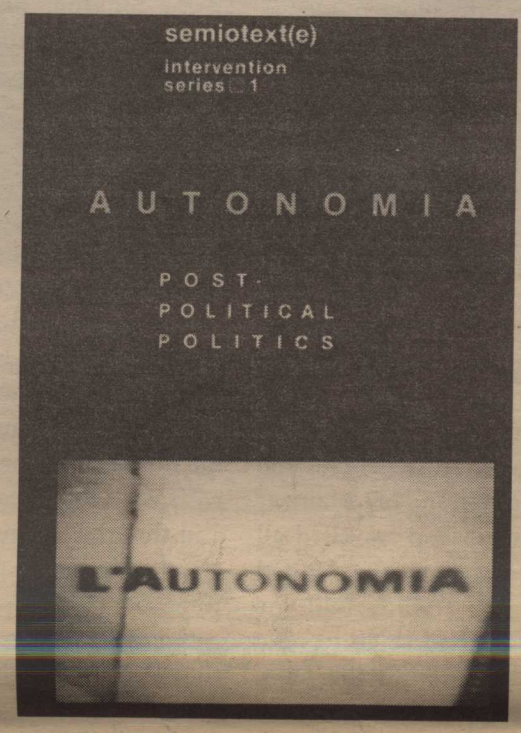
Needless to say, I had trouble going to sleep. Although I eventually dropped off, I woke in horror in the middle of the night to a deafening clanging on the steel security door. After nearly pissing myself with fear, I eventually realized that the clanging wasn't the noise of someone trying to dismantle the door but rather of someone patiently trying to wake the evening sentry up and get into the house. But this was cold comfort—perhaps it was a neo-Nazi trap! Eventually someone else woke up and came down the stairs cursing in colorful German. It turned out that the person whose turn it was to keep the buzzer in their room had closed it out on the landing and gone to sleep, leaving a partygoer to wake half the house in order to get in.

The next morning, while I was eating breakfast, Oliver asked me if I'd like to come to a protest against the neo-Nazis. This seemed like a good idea after the terrible night I'd had! When I agreed, Oliver asked me if I had a motorcycle helmet with me. Sure, didn't he see the motorcycle in my backpack yesterday? Okay, no problem, but bring your passport with you in case you're arrested, he said—you don't want to get stuck in an East German jail with no identification.

As *autonomen* gathered for the march, I saw that Oliver hadn't just been trying to wind up the new Ami housemate. Dressed almost exclusively in black, the *autonomen* around me really were gearing themselves up with helmets and other homemade riot gear. The march nevertheless set off towards the neo-Nazi squats with a remarkably carnivalesque air. When we got to the street occupied by the fascists, though, we found that a convoy of East German police trucks was blocking the way. This, Oliver told me, was typical. Since the wall came down, neo-Nazi movements had sprung up across Germany. Judges sentenced perpetrators of increasingly-frequent attacks on immigrants to short jail terms or light fines, while the Social Democrats had joined with conservatives to deport tens of thousands of Roma and help rewrite the country's constitution to seal the borders to political refugees. The *autonomen*, growing out of an anti-imperialist movement and very much aware of their links with the German Left in the 1930s, sought

to protect Roma and other immigrants from the marauding neo-Nazis, but, unlike the neo-Nazis, they were violently repressed by the police on both sides of the old border. For the *autonomen*, the East German *volkspolizei* or people's police lined up in front of them were supporting the fascists by defending their squat.

While most of the *autonomen* marched past hurling only jeers, a group clad in helmets and leather jackets waded into the cops with the pipes and trash can lids they'd brought along for the occasion. This most militant segment of the black bloc seemed a pretty even match for the relatively lightly armed East German police. Soon, though, the melee heated up as Molotov cocktails went flying and police trucks caught on fire. In the United States, of course, the police would have just shot the "terrorists." But instead, the thin green line of East German police held fire and held firm, the neo-Nazi squats remained safe, and the march moved on. I was shocked by the violence, but appreciated the willingness of the *autonomen* to put their bodies on the line to challenge the Nazis. After being attacked a number of times by skinheads during the course of the summer, I came to understand the *autonomen*'s militant attitude a bit more.



We marched on towards a complex of housing blocks where Vietnamese immigrant workers had been living in terror for months, unable to get back to their country and repeatedly attacked by the neo-Nazis. Along the way to these tower blocks, the marchers stopped briefly to torch a truck filled with cigarettes from a recently arrived Western corporate cigarette company. After a buoyant march through the dreary concrete jungle of outer East Berlin, an *autonomen* delegation peeled off to meet with representatives of the Vietnamese workers and to express solidarity with their struggle against racism in the new Germany. As the balmy summer afternoon wore down, the *autonomen* dispersed, with clumps of black-clad men and women waving flags of the former German Democratic Republic, the bottom golden stripe ripped out to leave only black and red stripes over the embossed hammer, compass, and grain insignia of worker, farmer, and intellectual unity.

Now we go to Tacheles, Oliver told me. Located in the once predominantly Jewish neighborhood of Berlin Mitte, and subsequently used by the Nazis to house French prisoners of war, Tacheles was a hulking derelict former department store that had been occupied by *autonomen* a scant three months after the wall came down. Tacheles had blossomed into a community arts center, and now boasted scores of artists' workshops, exhibition spaces, a bar, and a movie theater. The building itself was a labyrinthine gaping wound. Once the entrance to the Friedrichstadt-Passage, a shopping complex akin to the covered shops written about by Walter Benjamin, Tacheles featured historically important early steel architecture, but had been partially demolished by penniless communist functionaries after World War II and was slated for final demolition in spring of 1990. The *autonomen* blocked this demolition and created a vibrant space for experiments in communal living and aesthetics.

When we arrived at Tacheles, the sun was just beginning to set. The entire back wall of the building had been removed, leaving its rooms exposed like a giant honeycomb. This particular evening an Irish performance artist had spread canvas from floor to ceiling in each room. Inside each room she had stationed a slide projector; each projector was in turn wired to a central computer control. She had created a gigantic version of one of Nam June Paik's video installations. The net effect was a mesmerizing collage of coruscating images, sometimes flashing in completely disconnected rhythms, sometimes composing themselves into a single six-story canvas, all in time to music played by a jazz band in the massive courtyard behind Tacheles. Oliver gestured to me, and we began climbing up the scaffolding attached to the outside of the building, the giant images flashing in front of our faces as we climbed. When we got half way up, we turned around, twined our legs round the scaffolding, and sat watching the sun go down over a free Berlin.

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When I returned to grad school at the end of that summer, I found myself studying with quite a few colorful professors, but Sylvère Lotringer was one of the more memorable. He was teaching a class on mutant French theory: Bataille, Artaud, Deleuze and Guattari during their polymorphous perversity phase. At the time he was helping a member of the Black Panthers who'd just been released from jail put together a collection justifying the party line. When Lotringer heard that I had been living with the *autonomen* in Berlin and that I spoke Italian, he immediately gave me a dog-eared copy of his journal *Semiotext(e)* from the late 1970s. The theme of the journal: *autonomia*.

Autonomia, which has recently been reissued in the Semiotext(e) foreign AGENTS series, contains the collective efforts of intellectuals active in radical Italian organizations such as *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operiao* to gain a theoretical grip on events during the country's *anni di piombo* or "years of lead," when the nation was convulsed by a startling variety of extra-Parliamentary radical movements. In the mid-1970s, the Italian Communist Party (PCI), repudiating Soviet dogmatism, had forged a "historic compromise" with the country's long-serving, endemically corrupt Christian Democrats. It thus fell to the PCI to discipline increasingly restive workers during the first major economic downturn of the post-war period. Workers began organizing autonomously of the Communist-controlled labor unions, engaging in spontaneous actions to shorten the work week, to overturn management control in workplaces, and to demand higher wages, all by organizing in workplace councils.

Even more alarmingly for authorities, social struggles began to move out of the factory, with *autoriduzione* (auto-reduction) movements coping with the rising cost of living by collectively determining a reduced price to pay for public services, transportation, housing, electricity, and groceries. In addition, sectors of the population invisible to traditional Marxist theory began to assert themselves. Groups like *Rivolta Femminile* challenged the patriarchal values that pervaded Italian society in general, but also the workers' movement and the PCI. Feminists introduced new styles of organizing in small groups with horizontal links rather than the top-down vanguard style of many traditional vanguard groups, and pioneered fresh discursive and decision-making strategies based on open general assemblies and consensus. In tandem, youth movements began to assert their right to the autonomous self-governance of education. A vibrant, playful counter-culture quickly developed in Italy's major cities that struggled to build *centri sociali* (autonomous social centers) where young people could escape the oppressive confines of the patriarchal family and carve out a vision of community outside the alienating confines of the mass consumerist society of the spectacle.

The articles collected in *Autonomia* track and attempt to theorize these polymorphous Italian social struggles. Writers such as Mario Tronti, Sergio Bologna, and, of course, Toni Negri articulate the tenets of *operaismo* (workerism), the theoretical approach to conceptualizing autonomous worker activism developed in Italy during the struggles of the late 1960s and 1970s. The *operaismo* analysts drew in their work on a long tradition of radical theory, the most prominent branch of which led back to France's Socialism or Barbarism Group, where Cornelius Castoriadis had first articulated notions of workers' autonomy. In turn, Socialism or Barbarism had been influenced by the investigations of wildcat strikes in American auto plants carried out by the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a dissident Trotskyist group founded by Trinidadian polymath C.L.R. James and Russian exile Raya Dunayevskaya. Writing in journals such as *Quaderni Rossi*, Negri and his colleagues challenged the hierarchical tenets of Marxist-Leninist theory, focusing instead on the "spontaneous" forms of shop floor organizing evolving in sites such as FIAT's giant car factory on the outskirts of Turin. *Operaismo* theorists also revamped classical Marxist theories of value by arguing that in modern societies wealth was produced increasingly through "immaterial" or "social" labor—the collective work of social reproduction carried on outside the wage relation by women, students, the unemployed, etc. Although it remained grounded in theories of class struggle, *operaismo* expanded the definition of the working class to include many of the social movements that were transforming the political landscape of Italy during the 1970s. Italian *autonomia* had a dramatic impact in Germany, helping to catalyze the movement in which I participated in Mainzer Strasse.

Looking back at *Autonomia* from my current vantage point—which coincides with the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall and the tenth anniversary of the Battle of Seattle—I'm struck by the germinative character of these theoretical labors. Not that they lack flaws: as its name suggests, *operaismo* retained an emphasis on production that ineluctably marginalized many of the issues around which social movements such as feminism and the youth counter-culture mobilized. In addition, the theorists of *autonomia* remained relatively silent on the unfolding new international division of labor. This perhaps helps to explain the blindness in Toni Negri's subsequent attempt to theorize Empire as a decentered, all-pervasive force that leaves accounts of nation-state-centered imperialism in the dustbin of history. The Iraq War put an end to such modish pomo accounts of power. Nevertheless, in their attempts to theorize new forms of grassroots organizing and to develop fresh theories of the production of value in contemporary capitalism, the work of the *autonomia* theorists was prescient and remains valuable.

For all its faults, *autonomia* has provided one of the most expansive theoretical frameworks for understanding the spontaneous, horizontal politico-social forms that I experienced among Berlin's *autonomen* and that have since become a crucial feature of the global justice movement. While other theorists such as Manuel Castells also tracked the development of grassroots struggles in urban locations around the world, few have reinvigorated historical materialism and provided the framework for conceptualizing fresh efforts at organizing from below to the extent of *autonomia*. Indeed, we might think of *autonomia* as one of the most useful articulations of historical struggles that bind together such disparate phenomena as the *autonomen* in Germany and other parts of northern Europe, the efforts of the Brazilian Workers' Party to establish participatory budgeting, the independent township groups of the Mass Democratic Movement that brought down apartheid in South Africa, and the struggle of the Zapatistas against neo-liberalism and for autonomous indigenous governance in the Lacandon jungle in southern Mexico.

The Mainzer Strasse commune I lived in no longer exists. Three months after my return to the United States, the Social Democratic government of Berlin sent in more than three thousand police, including SWAT teams, and smashed the *autonomen* resistance. But while the Battle of Mainzer Strasse was lost, the struggle against the forms of dispossession and alienation imposed by neo-liberal capitalism lives on. All power to the communes! Ⓐ

Lessons in Terror at John Jay

ABE WALKER

In the normally-restrained world of academic discourse, the 2007 annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association stands out as a break with the dominant culture of self-abrogation and humility. During the course of this meeting, a fierce and impassioned debate broke out over a proposed revision to the association's Code of Ethics that would prohibit secret research. The disputed language read, in part, "no reports should be provided to sponsors that are not also available to the general public and, where practicable, to the population studied." In practice, this would bar American anthropologists from doing research for the US Department of Defense and its affiliates.

The proposed clause actually wasn't new. It was added to the Code in 1971 as sentiment against the Vietnam War peaked, but was later excised, mirroring the ascendency of the right-wing on the national stage and in the academy. By 2007, as George W. Bush readied American forces for the now-infamous "surge," many anthropologists felt it was again time to take a stand. Anthropologists were attracting media attention for their involvement in an initiative called the Human Terrain System—a program in which anthropologists worked directly for the US military in war zones for the purpose of collecting cultural and social data. The AAA leadership had already issued an official statement condemning Human Terrain System, but some rank-and-file members felt it hadn't gone far enough. The proposed change to the code of ethics would go much further, chastising not only those anthropologists who work directly in the theater of war, but also those who conduct military research from the comfort of their ivory tower offices.

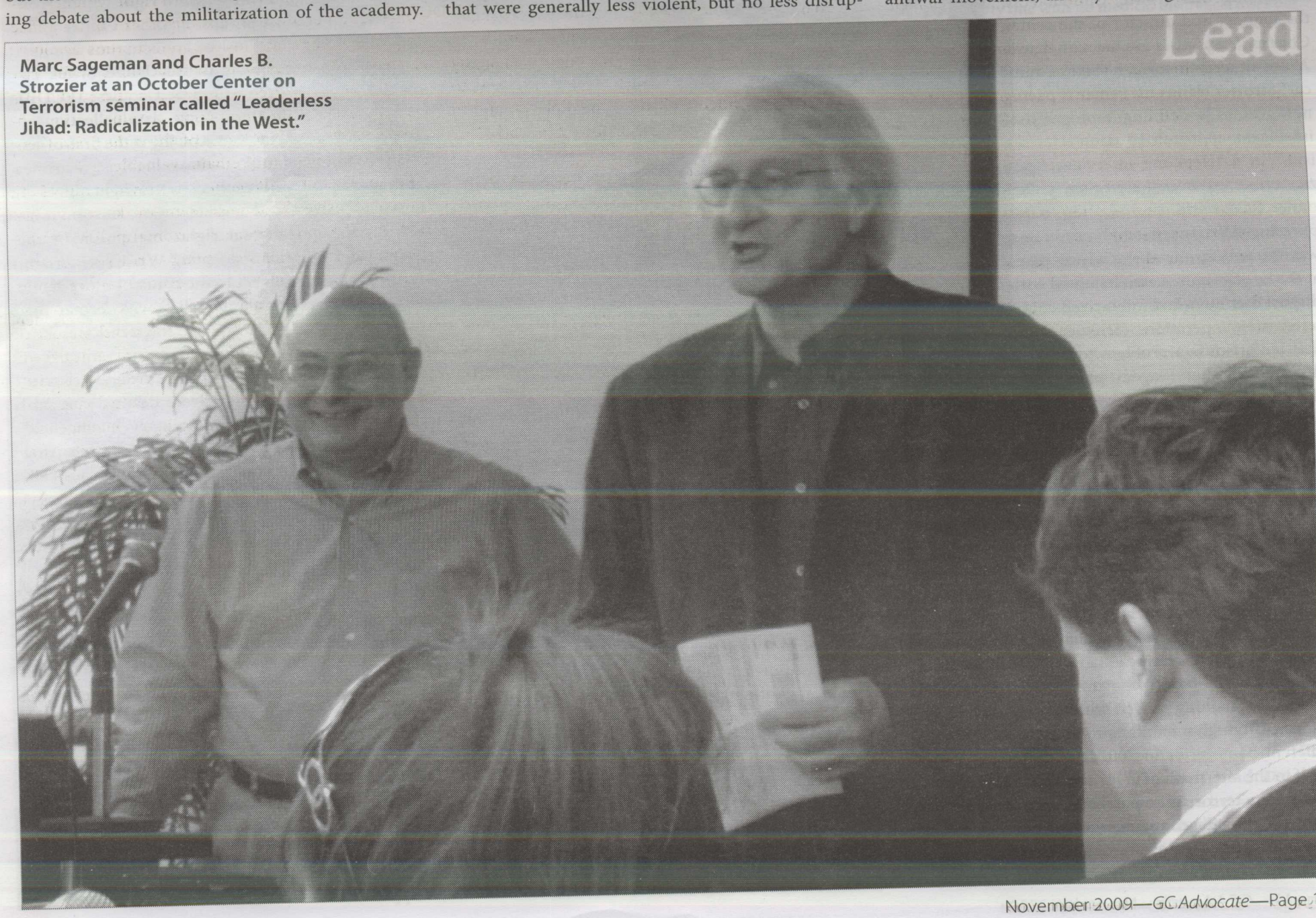
The AAA leadership eventually managed to defeat the proposal by means of a deft procedural maneuver, but the events of the meeting reignited a longstanding debate about the militarization of the academy. To what extent should academics collaborate with the military? Are research projects that further a military campaign inherently unethical? Is warmaking compatible with the social mission of the university? Clearly, opinions on these questions are sharply divided along ideological lines. But like the AAA's code of ethics, this debate has its roots in the 1970s.

At 4:00 AM on August 24, 1970, a bomb ripped through the University of Wisconsin–Madison campus resulting in over $2 million worth of damage. The incendiary device was a stolen Ford Econoline van filled with 2,000 pounds of explosives. The target: the Army Mathematics Research Center (ARMC), which had become a magnet for student protests because of its perceived involvement with counterinsurgency operations in Vietnam. A lone scientist, working on an unrelated research project through the night in his physics lab, was killed. Four UW students were eventually charged with the bombing; two later served jail time and one remains at large.

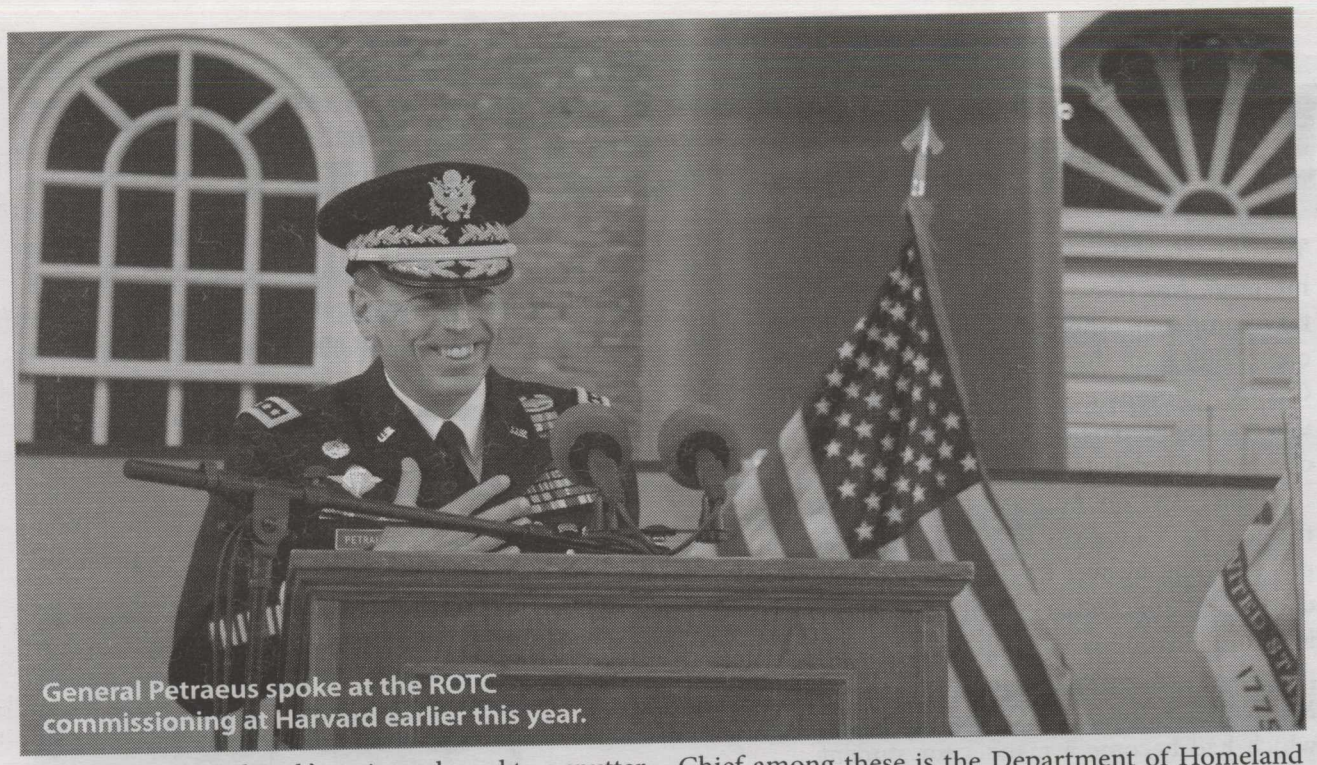
For some, this event definitively marked the shift from a decade of peace, love and understanding to a decade of anger, violence, and cynicism. For others, it marked a strategic shift in the antiwar movement: rather than march on Washington, students would now fight the military presence in their own backyards. Chants of "US out of Vietnam!" turned to "ROTC Off Campus!" The military-industrial complex was recast as the Military-Industrial-University Complex. While all but the most fringe elements condemned the bombers at UW and lamented the tragic loss of life, most antiwar activists agreed that the strategy of targeting campus-military connections was essentially correct. What followed was a rash of student protests that were generally less violent, but no less disruptive. Research facilities receiving military funding were picketed, professors conducting research for the military were singled out and harassed. These events culminated in the largest student strike and occupation wave of American history in the spring of 1972, prompting Nixon to establish the Commission on Campus Unrest.

Forty years later, the Global War on Terror—now rebranded the "Overseas Contingency Operation" by the Barack Obama administration—has benefited from a dramatically different political climate. The *New York Times* recently ran a feature exploring the possibility of lifting many elite colleges' longstanding bans on ROTC programs. The *Times* reported that at Harvard, 62 percent of respondents to an informal survey of undergraduates favored bringing the ROTC back on campus, and virtually no protesters showed up to challenge US Central Command General David Petraeus when he delivered an address in Harvard Yard at a ROTC commissioning ceremony. The antiwar movement, already running out of steam in

The John Jay Center on Terrorism shares its space with the Center on Media, Crime and Justice and the Corporate Security Programs.



Marc Sageman and Charles B. Strozier at an October Center on Terrorism seminar called "Leaderless Jihad: Radicalization in the West."



General Petraeus spoke at the ROTC commissioning at Harvard earlier this year.

the closing years of Bush's regime, slowed to a sputter when a friendlier face took over the highest office. The country's largest antiwar organization gave Obama a free ride through the early months of his presidency, and is only now beginning to regroup. What remains of the Left has mainly concerned itself with protesting the excesses of the bailouts, and protesting cuts to education and social services.

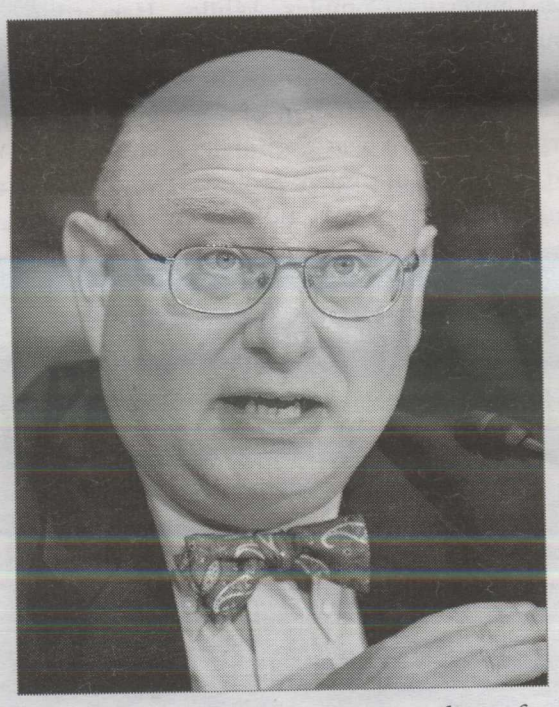
On today's college campuses, the still-open-ended war on terror never managed to spawn much of an antiwar movement. Instead, the war has manifest itself mainly through the emergence of terrorism research centers. There are already at least half a dozen campus-based centers dedicated exclusively to the study of terror, and many more that count terrorism among their foci. Campuses as varied as Duke and the University of Maryland now house specialized anti-terrorism programs. As a rule, most of these centers are not particularly critical of US foreign policy. Some are run by known right-wing ideologues, and a few are scarcely-concealed neoconservative think tanks.

From the outset, CUNY's Center on Terrorism (COT) has been an anomaly among this crowd. Undoubtedly, the founder and director of the center, Charles Strozier, is no neocon hawk. A self-described former "Sixties radical", Strozier claims his center is paving new ground by defining "a progressive, intelligent approach to counterterrorism." In a telephone interview, Strozier criticized counterterrorism policy under Bush without prompting, paraphrasing Obama's catchphrase: "Iraq was the wrong war at the wrong place at the wrong time." Later, he noted with disgust that Bush had militarized counterterrorism operations. (Strozier argues with caveats that terrorism is a problem to be dealt with by police. But this is no longer a particularly controversial thing to say. In contrast, Strozier still expresses admiration for Obama, describing him as "moving in the right direction." When pressed, Strozier described the president as having the "right ideas and right goals" but being "slow in implementing them." (At press time, Obama had not yet made a decision on General William McChyrstal's request for as many as 45,000 additional troops in Afghanistan).

The Center on Terrorism is located on the 6th floor of an unassuming office building on the far west side of Manhattan with a BMW dealership on the ground floor. The center's research staff consists of a combination of locally-based scholars with CUNY appointments and far-flung experts without other local affiliations. Although a similar program existed under a different name prior to 2001, the center reinvented itself in the aftermath of 9/11, and dedicated itself exclusively to terrorism research.

CUNY provides the center with office space and essential support, but the program reports that the "vast majority" of its funding comes from outside sources. Chief among these is the Department of Homeland Security, which sponsors the center both through one-off grants and through the ongoing Graduate Assistantship in Homeland Security. The assistantships offer a $2300 monthly stipend in addition to tuition reimbursement, student fees and health insurance. While the program reports that its DHS-funded graduate assistants go on to pursue varied careers, the application for the program includes a 1,000 word essay on "how this assistantship will help advance your career objectives in the field of homeland security." In addition, the center offers a certificate in Terrorism Studies—one of the only of its kind, and works closely with John Jay's Criminal Justice PhD students who choose to specialize in counterterrorism. Last year, John Jay reported that its faculty had received over $580,000 in DHS grant money.

The COT is not the only CUNY-based research center that accepts military funding. "The Center for Advanced Technology in Photonics Applications," with offices at CCNY and Queens reports on its website having received more than $6 million over the last five years from the US military sources, including $600,000 from the Navy for "underwater target imaging."



"The choice is not between counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency, but between counter-terrorism and counter-terrorism plus counter-insurgency. ... Counter-terrorism works and is doing well against the global neo-jihadi terrorist threat."

—MARC SAGEMAN

Aside from passing mentions in a few online publications, the Center on Terrorism and other CUNY-based research initiatves with connections to the military have largely escaped the notice of the anti-war movement. To be sure, the Center on Terrorism's politics defy simple categorization. Unlike many of its companion institutions, CUNY's center takes pains to include a range of viewpoints and perspectives on its roster, including a handful of unabashed liberals. The center's director is quick to point out that it sponsored a conference on torture *before* Abu Ghraib. At its conferences, the center has hosted a number of outspoken leftists, from critical geographer Cindi Katz to feminist thinker Marnia Lazreg, anti-nuclear activist Jonathan Schell, and the director of Human Rights Watch, among others. The center's most recent conference was called "Surveillance Society: At What Price Security" and listed "reconsiderations of Foucault and Orwell" among topics to be covered.

Social science figures prominently in the center's research. While many of its affiliated faculty are trained as criminologists, the center claims psychologists, historians, sociologists, and humanities scholars within its ranks. To the extent that the war on terror is a socio-psychological war, the social sciences have found their modeling methods are suddenly in huge demand. The watchwords of the day are 'cultural knowledge,' 'ethnographic intelligence,' and 'social networks'—all concepts derived from the social sciences, especially sociology and anthropology. Modern military tactics depend on determining the likelihood that residents of a particular Afghan village might become radicalized. Sean O'Brien, a senior employee at the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (the Pentagon's research and development wing) charged with running the agency's "computation social science" program, recently spoke glowingly of the social sciences. In a series of public remarks he claimed that "increasing sophistication of agent based social simulations" would make it possible for researchers to effectively predict future human behavior—for example, who might join a terrorist cell. More ominously, O'Brien argued "we may revolutionize the social sciences along the way."

Some center faculty members have direct connections to US intelligence. The center counts among its affiliated faculty former-CIA operative Marc Sagemen, whose resume includes three years running "US unilateral programs with the Afghan Mujahedin." Sageman's most recent book, *Unmasking Terror* features a glowing review from former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge on the bookjacket. In his October 7, 2009 testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Sageman read a series of prepared remarks entitiled "Confronting Al-Qeda: Understanding the Terrorist Threat in Afghanistan and Beyond," which reads in part, "counter-terrorism works and is doing well against the global neo-jihadi terrorist threat."

But the COT doesn't only concern itself with right-wing terrorist groups. Another Center affiliate, Joshua Freilich, runs a project known as the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB), a "large-scale data-collection effort that is building the first-of-its-kind relational database of crimes committed by far-right, Jihadist, and animal rights and environmental rights extremists in the United States." While some might object to the conflation of Islamic fundamentalists with "ecoterrrorist" arsonists, the term "terrorist" is increasingly being applied to domestic radicals.

Strozier is keen to point out that "progressive critical thinkers tend to shy away from dealing with subjects that involve police and military intelligence." Nowhere has this been clearer than at the AAA. After the Code of Ethics revision was defeated, a group calling itself the Network of Concerned Anthropologists drafted a petition which offered an even stronger version of the anti-military language. The petition reads in part, "We believe that anthropologists should not engage in research and other activities that contribute to counter-insurgency operations in Iraq or in related theaters in the 'war on terror.' ... [This work] contributes instead to a brutal war of occupation which has entailed massive casualties." For these radical anthropologists, to conduct research for the military is to further the neoimperialist project. But for Strozier, this separation between the academic Left and military/intelligence communities is "artificial and dangerous." Strozier openly acknowledges that the field of terrorism studies is "dominated by right wing fanatics and mainstream cheerleaders," but describes his center as "a beacon of hope in defining an alternative approach." Ⓐ

book REVIEW

Singing the Body Politic

▶ Peter Swirski, Ed. *I Sing the Body Politic: History as Prophecy in Contemporary American Literature.* McGill University Press, 2009

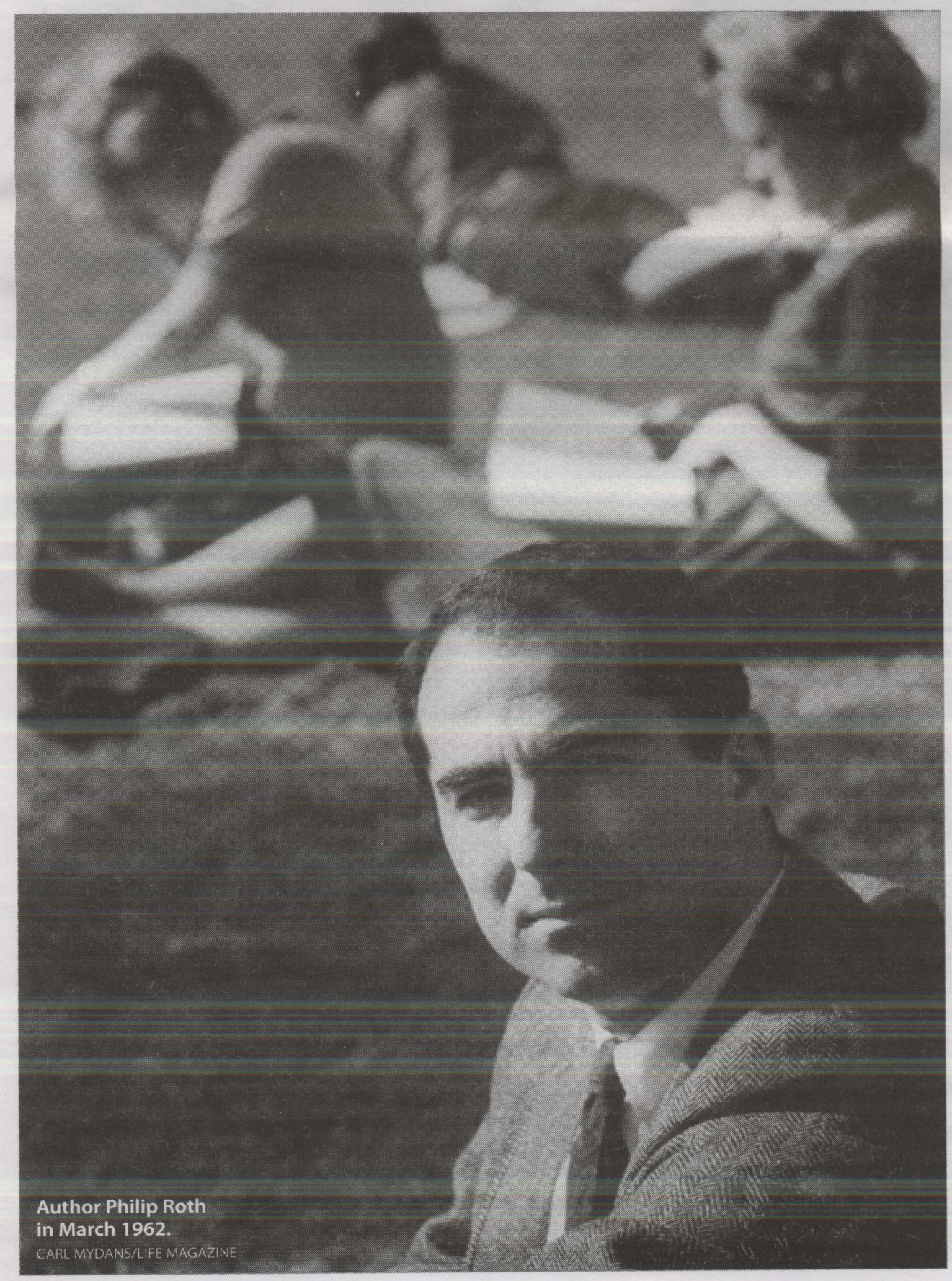
ALISON POWELL

One December day in 1817, John Keats wrote to his brother the following: "I had not a dispute but a disquisition… on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my mind, & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in literature… I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason." He had, of course, no idea what impact "negative capability" would have on future generations of writers and readers. John Dewey said this letter "contains more of the psychology of productive thought than many treatises." And indeed, negative capability—when contrasted with the various ideologies of his time and since—holds up impressively well.

It is true that negative capability is a quality we find in all great works of literature: consider John Milton's sheer awe at the universe in *Paradise Lost;* the sinners' inability to comprehend the present in *The Inferno*; and the brilliant, cyclical *Hamlet*. That strong authors must be comfortable with "uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts" holds no less true for contemporary literature (or art in general): Sylvia Plath's *Ariel,* for example, rests on the wavering dock of her sanity.

Keats' concept of negative capability can help us understand the relative dearth of extraordinary fiction with a more-or-less explicit political aim. First, there is the certainty and conviction required for an author to sustain a "message" or political perspective over the course of a novel or book of poems. In addition, it must be a Sisyphean task to achieve this with characters who are three dimensional and negatively capable (if you will). Poetry or fiction which is rooted in the politics of identity risks becoming at best irrelevant, at worst curious or quaint, when our understanding of such identities inevitably shifts—more appropriate for the study of culture, than the study of literature, for example (inasmuch as they can be separated). Whether or not an author is justified in fearing his or her work will cease to be relevant in future generations, or—more important—whether such a fear is productive, is a conundrum that political authors arguably circumvent, in their investment in documenting what is happening *right now.*

The exceptions are brilliant, outstanding, and integral to American culture and history—Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*; but the vast majority of literature which takes on political thought as its main topic falters and dissipates into the ether. *I Sing the Body Politic: History as Prophecy in Contemporary American Literature* offers a keyhole view into recent literature and art that grapples with some of the most painful events in recent American history, including the war in Iraq, George W. Bush's presidency, and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X. The book is less interested in the literary style, or artistic success, of the works it considers than it is in revealing the political valences of their content. Instead, the authors present a boook where "in essays by five senior scholars, major works of American literature and film are analyzed in the context of a larger set of arguments about American injustice at home and across the empire." The book focuses on some predictable artists and authors: Philip Roth, Joseph Heller, Spike Lee, and Michael Moore. It also includes an essay (its strongest) by Michael Zeitlen which compares the memoirs of veterans of the Vietnam and Iraq wars. The tone of the book is no-nonsense, and if you don't know the authors' and editors' politics by the end of the introduction, you're reading it upside-down. Highly critical and full of moral outrage, the authors attempt to demonstrate how political resistance manifests in the work of some of the nation's most important writers and film makers.



Author Philip Roth in March 1962.
CARL MYDANS/LIFE MAGAZINE

The first chapter, "Stupidity's Progress: Philip Roth and Twentieth-Century American History," considers Roth's famous trilogy of *I Married a Communist* (1998), *American Pastoral* (1997), and *The Human Stain* (2000). David Rampton details Roth's own, diluted version of negative capability:

> Where there is an American pastoral, there is the American demonic. Where there are blithe assumptions about upward mobility, there are the workers chained to their stations in the factories. Where there is prosperity for the upper half, the other half, down-sized and staring at the poverty line with no medical insurance, loses out to the forces of globalization. The comforts of the suburbs are simultaneously a cover for seething discontent. The ideals of the founding fathers are used to justify the most blatant kind of imperialism.

(Interestingly, Rampton doesn't address the most oft-cited criticism of Roth's work, which is his overt and detailed misogyny.)

The ambivalance or uncertainty in Roth's political maneuvering—for example, equal helpings of disgust for patriotism and the domestic terrorists of the Sixties—is widely undercut by the consistency of his rant: Americans are stupid, and we're getting worse. His critique of America's anti-intellectualism, willful naïveté, gluttonous consumerism, and isolationist ideology comes from the gut. It is as though Roth himself, nudged and cajoled by the international fallout from American ignorance, is at the edge of the cliff that is this country—and he's decided to make the leap a little bit gleeful, for his trouble. What makes his novels so intensely pleasurable to the reader is this glee—the pure, unapologetic hedonism, the adolescent playing hooky—that characterizes his novels. But of course, as an older white American male, Roth is in a position to elide gracefully the sense of indignation which characterizes much of American far-left politics. The pleasurable sense of irony and freedom in futility woven through his novels, in fact, are largely possible because of Roth's sensibility—observing, as he does, from outside of the fray.

"Spike Lee, Martin Luther King, Malcolm X: The Politics of Domination and Difference," by Gordon Slethaug, considers and celebrates Lee's work. His films (focusing mainly on *Malcolm X* and *Do the Right Thing*) document the negotiation between militant and nonviolent resistance in the black community over the past fifty years. Unfortunately, much of

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book REVIEW

Who Cares About Wal-Mart?

- Nelson Lichtenstein, *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business*. Metropolitan Books, 2009
- Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise*. Harvard University Press, 2009

CARL LINDSKOOG

Many New Yorkers might wonder what use it is to understand a company like Wal-Mart. After all, with no Wal-Marts in the city most of us aren't Wal-Mart shoppers, and the social and political culture of New York is far different from the one we regularly associate with Wal-Mart. Isn't Wal-Mart simply a red state thing? Why should anyone not in "Wal-Mart Country" bother trying to understand this phenomenon?

In two important new works, historians Nelson Lichtenstein and Bethany Moreton each seek to answer those questions. To understand the important changes in the United States (and even the world) in the last thirty years we must understand Wal-Mart, they argue. Whether you are interested in political, economic, or cultural history, Lichtenstein and Moreton each make a powerful case for the decisive influence of Wal-Mart.

In *The Retail Revolution: How Wal-Mart Created a Brave New World of Business*, Nelson Lichtenstein offers a comprehensive view of the company, detailing where it came from and how it became the largest retailer and private sector employer in the world. A distinguished labor historian who has also made major contributions to the history of politics and political economy, Lichtenstein goes beyond Wal-Mart's impact on American labor, politics and the economy. As the title suggests, *The Retail Revolution* seeks to explain how Wal-Mart, as the "vanguard of the retail revolution," has overthrown the previously dominant form of global political economy and has ushered in "a new stage in the history of corporate capitalism."

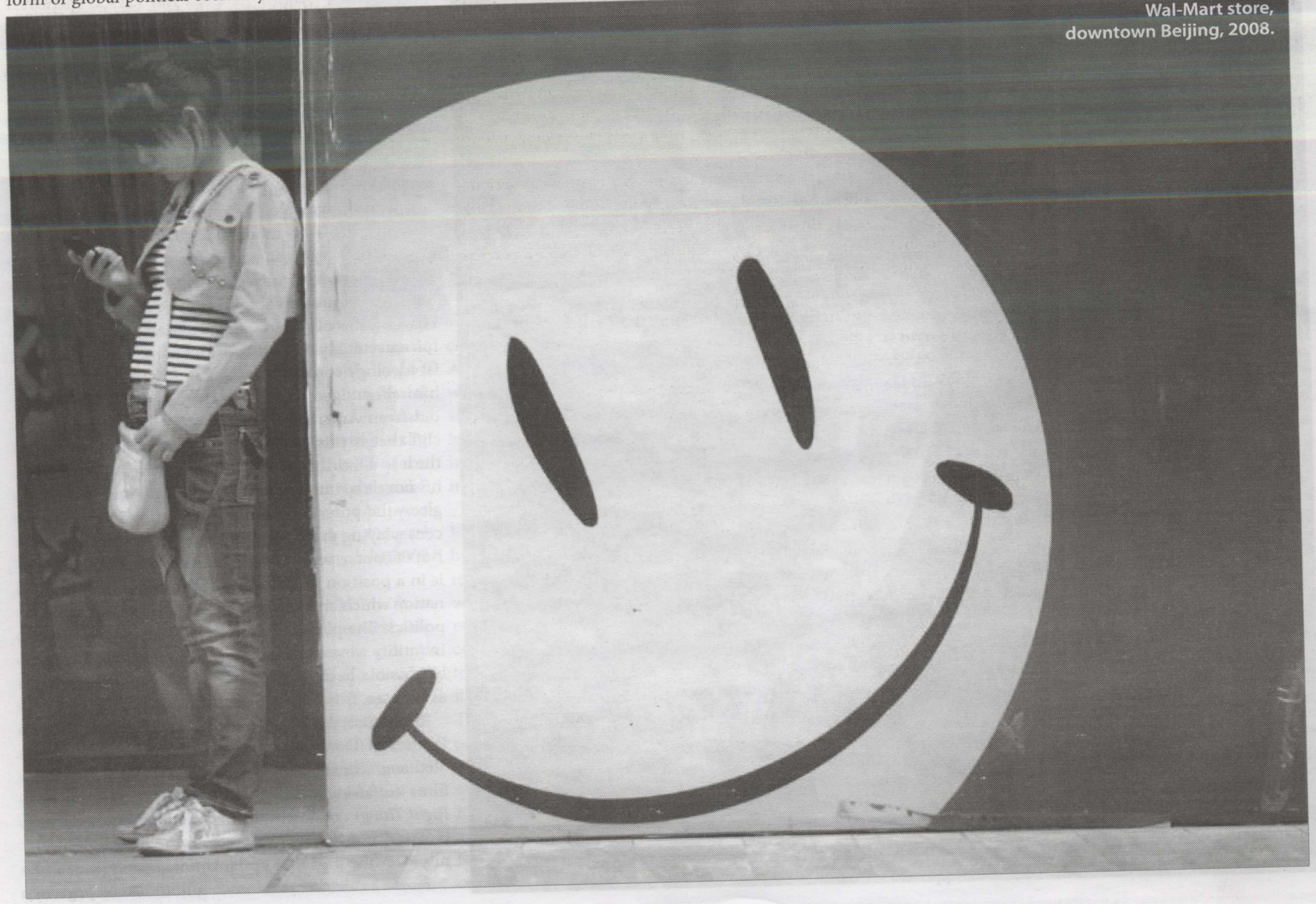
In each chapter Lichtenstein focuses on a different aspect of Wal-Mart's history and contemporary story. Telling the story of Wal-Mart's origins, Lichtenstein places the company's ascendance at the end of a one-hundred year period in which manufacturers dominated the American economy. Sam Walton, Wal-Mart's founder and patriarch, grew up in a world where retailers played second fiddle to manufacturers. But by the 1970s—Wal-Mart's "miracle decade," in which the company cracked the $1 billion sales mark—manufacturers' dominance was coming to an end.

In one of the most interesting chapters of this fascinating book, Lichtenstein explains just how Walton was able to raise Wal-Mart to such heights. Through an innovative use of technology to track and distribute products Walton transformed the relationship between merchant and vendor. He created his own distribution centers and network and he pioneered a barcode system to keep track of every piece of merchandise. After 1987 Wal-Mart's communication was further aided by the world's largest private, integrated satellite communication network. This was nothing less than a "logistics revolution" Lichtenstein tells us, and it allowed Wal-Mart to put the squeeze on its manufacturers and suppliers, employing this wealth of new data to "leverage their enormous buying power." This ability to pressure manufacturers and suppliers was one of the major reasons the company could offer such low prices and it remains Wal-Mart's major advantage in the global marketplace.

Having clearly established the logistical innovations that aided Wal-Mart's growth, Lichtenstein's chapter focusing on the role of China comes across brilliantly. Initially attractive to Wal-Mart because of its "stable currency, developed infrastructure, political reliability, and compliant workforce," China is now crucial to Wal-Mart's continued success. But Wal-Mart's innovative methods to pinch producers and suppliers have created a nightmare for workers and labor standards in China. As the author explains, "an excruciating squeeze on all of its [Chinese] suppliers" has produced "a cascade of social pathologies that corrupt and distort every supply chain relationship: between the prime Wal-Mart vendor and its subcontractors, between factory inspectors and factory management, and between the production supervisors and the young female workers who compose the overwhelming bulk of the factory workforce." So, during high-production season in China's Guangdong Province, subcontractors producing Wal-Mart goods regularly require "seven-day workweeks and eighteen-hour workdays." Lichtenstein makes crystal clear the horrifying image of a "vast new universe of sweatshops that fill the production end of the Wal-Mart supply chain."

Although highly original information is packed into every chapter of *The Retail Revolution*, more familiar to observers of Wal-Mart will be Lichtenstein's chapters on the company's conservative and male-dominated corporate culture, its ties to right-wing political and religious movements, and its unabashed and unwavering attempts to keep out labor unions. Those keeping track of Wal-Mart in the news will also be familiar with the stories Lichtenstein tells of the union and community groups' challenges to its expansion into Southern California, Chicago, and Maryland.

However, Lichtenstein captivates the reader by placing these well-told stories alongside Wal-Mart's attempts to expand internationally. According to Lichtenstein, while the company has been enthusiastically embraced in many parts of Latin America and East Asia, Wal-Mart has run into roadblocks "in nations where either politics or a tough regulatory environment robs the company of the capacity to slash



Wal-Mart store, downtown Beijing, 2008.

labor costs or build a new generation of suburban stores." In the United Kingdom, for example, Wal-Mart has had considerable trouble while in Germany, where the company failed to grasp the significant differences in political culture, it has experienced "outright failure."

Lichtenstein concludes *The Retail Revolution* by asking the reader to consider the future for Wal-Mart and what an opposition movement might be able to yield. Lichtenstein suggests that the decline of the labor movement and Wal-Mart's hostility to unionism "has reawakened interest in what progressives and New Dealers used to call 'the labor question.'" "On the agenda" for progressives and labor activists today "is not so much a struggle specifically against Wal-Mart, although that is well under way. In the end, it is Sam's World, the one in which people are compelled to live under economic and psychological duress, that needs to change." Lichtenstein predicts "a day of reckoning" for Wal-Mart, at home and abroad.

Bethany Moreton adopts a different approach to Wal-Mart that focuses instead on the region and the people that produced the company. Although *To Serve God and Wal-Mart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the company, Moreton aims to do even more. She seeks to reclaim the people of Wal-Mart country from historical and political irrelevancy. Moreton makes a case for placing these people, especially Wal-Mart Moms (the white, rural women who worked and shopped in the early Wal-Mart stores) at the center of the political and economic changes in the last three decades of American history.

In a surprising and interesting argument, Moreton claims that the people of Arkansas, the original Wal-Mart country, held tightly to their 19th century populism, and that this political and cultural legacy actually helped facilitate the rise of Wal-Mart from the populist heartland. This shouldn't be so surprising, Moreton argues, if we recognize that populists "were not purely hostile to business or bigness." They proposed farmers' cooperatives and producer's monopolies over the farming sector, improved infrastructure, and they favored the idea of "federal resources for a favored segment of the polity, the virtuous farmers." Thus, Moreton argues, the "fragmented legacy of Populism" facilitated the rise of "the mega-corporations of the Sun Belt." Demands for the state to underwrite regional development and concern about keeping resources local all "contributed to Wal-Mart's subsequent success" and "helped the world's largest company win hearts and minds to the cause of corporate capitalism in the old heartland of anti-corporate agitation."

Other values that workers and customers from Wal-Mart country brought into the stores were even more decisive. As the author puts it, these people, especially middle-aged mothers, "brought rural, Protestant family ideals into the workplace, changing the face of postindustrial America." Although authority in Wal-Mart stores was clearly vested in men "as men, not as management," and all women were therefore subordinate, Moreton maintains that Wal-Mart women still had a good deal of power. They "made their priorities known, and management responded accordingly," thereby being the source of "the original momentum" for "a new service ethos" which would "grow to an economic gospel." Through the "relationship between customers and clerks, the people in early Wal-Mart stores taught management how to function in the new economic niche it was creating." This was the "ethos of service . . . a new ideological basis for valuing work and for explaining the radical inequalities it produced."

Moreton intends this argument to be a response to journalists and scholars like Thomas Frank who fail to fully understand what happened in Wal-Mart country. The women and men of Wal-Mart were not duped into placing social and religious concerns before economic needs, nor were they simply exploited workers who were too stupid to realize it. According to Moreton, Wal-Mart shoppers and workers helped shape a company and a workplace that met their needs as well as those of Wal-Mart owners and management. Women workers at Wal-Mart "did not automatically claim the identity of 'worker' or, indeed, of 'woman.' Their own preference was for a different cultural tradition, that of Christian service," Moreton claims. So, even though the servant model that Wal-Mart moms helped promote offered management a new claim to authority and even though it solidified patriarchy in the workplace as well as the home, it also offered female service workers a new source of respect and it ensured greater participation by husbands at home. This was, according to Moreton, an acceptable compromise for Wal-Mart women.

> Wal-Mart has run into roadblocks "in nations where either politics or a tough regulatory environment robs the company of the capacity to slash labor costs or build a new generation of suburban stores."

Wal-Mart store, Rogers, Arkansas, 2009.

In addition, *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* tells the story of the simultaneous rise of the New Christian Right, ascendancy of free-market ideas, and growth of Wal-Mart as an international corporation. Finding many points of intersection between these three stories, Moreton argues that Wal-Mart country became, through the direct support of Wal-Mart, Inc., the home of Christian free enterprise, a movement that fused religious and economic ideas to evangelize for free market capitalism.

In the early-1970s, the United States was experiencing the political and economic tremors that would cause the New Deal state and New Deal liberalism to collapse. Wal-Mart and the people of Wal-Mart country played an important part in this process, Moreton observes. Contributing to the growing "prestige of the market," Wal-Mart and the Walton family provided "a highly productive laboratory of free-market faith during the 1970s and 1980s." By introducing a free market educational campaign among its management as well is in regional Christian colleges, Wal-Mart helped plant the seeds that would grow into the neoliberal "Washington consensus." Wal-Mart became the main benefactor of conservative Christian colleges like University of the Ozarks, John Brown University and Harding University, giving them key financial support when other sources of funding were hard to come by. In return, regional Christian colleges moved economics courses and business departments to the center of the curriculum, promoting a widespread regional embrace of free market ideas and creating ready avenues for future company management. Housed at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Missouri, Students in Free Enterprise, an extracurricular organization that promoted free enterprise ideas among college students, represented an exceptionally "outstanding laboratory for the elaboration and dissemination" of these ideas. In all these ways, Moreton shows, Wal-Mart country was especially fertile ground for the seeds of Christian free enterprise to take root.

The ideology of Christian free enterprise that grew out the careful collaboration between Wal-Mart and conservative Christian colleges had an important impact on the course of economic globalization, particularly as it would affect Latin America. Moreton demonstrates how this movement tapped into an evangelizing spirit that extended south of the border to Mexico and Central America. Offered Walton Scholarships, Latin American students came to Sun Belt Christian colleges to receive training in the virtues of free market capitalism as well as evangelical Christianity. When they returned to their home countries, these Walton Scholars could be depended upon to help establish international branches or at least spread the gospel of free enterprise.

To Serve God and Wal-Mart is a fascinating and useful work of US cultural and economic history. Moreton adds much to our understanding of the people of Wal-Mart country leaving the reader with a better idea of the complexity of this group. Even as it answers certain questions, however, Moreton's work raises others. In her attempt to understand the agency of Wal-Mart employees, Moreton eclipses workplace concerns these laborers must have had, and she fails to fully engage with them as workers, an identity that likely persisted even if in a subordinate position alongside the identity of Christian servant and woman. Nelson Lichtenstein acknowledges the widespread devotion to Wal-Mart that many of its workers had, but he also details the many complaints that these same workers put forth. Where is the anger over being forced to do unpaid work or the anxiety that unusual work hours and limited benefits produced in the workforce? Are we to assume that this was completely erased by workers' devotion to Christian servanthood? Even in the earliest Wal-Mart workers this seems unlikely.

Another set of questions arises around the ideology of Christian free enterprise that occupies such an important part of Moreton's story. As Moreton explained the formation and influence of Christian free enterprise I frequently found myself wondering what differentiated this sort of ideology from mainstream market fundamentalism. What made it "Christian" free enterprise? Moreton does show how Southwest Baptist University, the home of Students in Free Enterprise, fused Christian and business education and she clearly demonstrates that free market fundamentalists partnered with Christian fundamentalists to build a powerful movement. Still, what is missing is a careful discussion of the exchange between economic ideology and evangelical theology, without which Christian free enterprise is left looking virtually identical to other forms of free market fundamentalism.

These concerns aside, Bethany Moreton has written an extremely interesting book. Alongside Nelson Lichtenstein's *The Retail Revolution, To Serve God and Wal-Mart* adds a great deal to our understanding of US history and the contemporary world. These books should put to rest any question about the relevance of Wal-Mart and the significance of political and cultural movements produced in Wal-Mart country. Ⓐ

From "The Unofficial Record"

BY DOUG SPARKS

1.
Black stars.
White water.
Beef and baby food:
Under the ice, sea monsters:
In your mouth
I hear them bolt
and gnash their prey.
The mouth and the sea.

2.
Weary, almond-fed,
and I can hardly care if the flitting wings
are bats or sparrows.

If I opened my palms
I wonder:
would the winged creatures
unfold into the air?

3.
A land and law of spectacular limits.
And for the myths of the wanderers and
for the few who plunder on
against all will and impulse,
for those who harbor no ambitions
but the most clean and eruptive:
my back is bent in mere half belief
as occult little black fish
needle each other in the silver starlight.

We would have grown old,
Soothed by the creek's movements
as the sand made its long crawl underneath from
the
mountains to the forest and back, perhaps.
A widening groove.

We would have held hands here.
We would have read the bones of the forest:
the chattering skull of the fisher cat
who terrorized the children
now perilously fragile among the leaves.

The eyes of the fisher cat
alive would turn you to stone.

The creek can brook no return course
in the smaller sense.
Only the world knows the way back.

4.
And where is the lost fire of the constellations?

August and simple sounds:
uncompounded:
trains and wind.
Passing sounds.

5.
We dreamed of going to Paris
we dreamed of having a daughter,
of getting out of debt:
we dreamed your son would one day
be an artist.
We dreamed we'd own a houseboat
and live among the feeding pelicans at dusk.

You hoped someday to travel.

Another match for another kindling word.

The moon will not burst into
lightning and the sun
will not rise up
in miniature
out from the morning glories.

Nots and dreaming nots.

Some cradled aspirations
now bawl like waylaid babies
like sidewalk stoves
kicked into the riverbed.

11.
On the waxy field
of the skin of a grape
worms push through the drum;
soundlessly, they beat the skin.

Mallet headed worms,
and words countless,
magnifying not sound but sorrow,
dimming sorrow,
spreading sorrow
they consume sorrow and
they spread sorrow.

The way the strings of her voice
vibrate, drunk or flushed
with love:
this is the way the rains fall.

17.
The night crawlers
struggling against storms
surrender and become bitter men.

Under the soil,
they slurp against the glacial remains
of granite and mica.

The night crawlers carve out pockets
of precious stones.
The stones are passed through
dim-heard tunnels until
they drop ever distant into the blue snow
at the earth's core.

Snow flecked by dragonflies,
their wings agitate the air
and the storms fall and the storms rise.

18.
Against jokes and hand holding
old signs
these bits that spin
as they float on the surface,
downstream,
and only noted in reflection—
in the small spaces underneath the fallen leaves.

Pan has dashed his bottle on the rock.

The human history of drunken wisdom
is over—
we bow our heads.
We smile.

No words take.
She is gone.
And even willows snap
and even willows take root
in waves upon the grey fields.

To see the entire poem, visit
http://platosghost.blogspot.com/

Book Review–Powell

Continued from page 13

the essay is an attempt to determine whether the politics of Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr. are most championed in *Do the Right Thing*—when the success of the film itself is created by the complexity of the community represented toward each other, toward the other, and toward America. The author concludes that "arguably… this film is not about the possibility of integrating black and white or of sitting down at a table together but about creating black manhood… 'liberating the black man in American society rather than integrating the black man into that society.'"

By far the most moving essay in the collection, "The American Wars: History and Prophecy in Vietnam, the Gulf, and Iraq" by Michael Zeitlin compares the memoirs of veterans from these wars, attempting to discern what differences, if any, the soldiers from these wars have experienced upon returning home. Zeitlin is remarkably deft at corralling the many issues at hand, and comes to a conclusion that, impressively, doesn't awkwardly squash the men's experience to create some kind of synthesis. Zeitlin offers a chilling perspective on the role that war films have had on generations of American men: *Apocalypse Now, Platoon, Full Metal Jacket.* He quotes one young man: "Vietnam war films are all pro-war, no matter what the supposed message, what Kubrick or Coppola or Stone intended.…We watch the same films and are excited by them, because the magic brutality of the films celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills." One soldier told him "The psyops bastards continue playing the loud rock-and-roll music. I like rock music, but I don't think it belongs in my war. It was fine in the movies, on the boat with Martin Sheen going up the fake Vietnamese Congon or with the grunts patrolling Ho Chi Minh as they take a hill and heavy casualties, but I don't need The Who and The Doors in my war, as I prepare to fight for or lose my life. Teenage wasteland, my ass. This is the other side." Culling through the interviews, memoirs, films and music of America's most recent wars, Zeitlin reminds us that America may not be ready for this new generation of soldiers with post-traumatic stress disorder, with amputated limbs, with broken families. Zeitlin concludes that one difficulty the Iraq veterans face is the cognitive dissonance of coming home to a cheering America. He compares this dynamic to that of the Vietnam vets, who came back to an America that was deeply divided; he concludes that the celebration of the homecoming of our newest generation of veterans is entirely for the media, far from cathartic to those men and women who return exhausted, traumatized, and just glad to be alive.

These three essays—on Roth, Lee, and America's recent wars—do much to articulate the radically different perspectives on what form liberal criticism might take in the arts (unfortunately, the book ends with an essay on Michael Moore—who could single-handedly destroy Keats' ideal of negative capability. Admittedly, this is his purpose: "Moore's oeuvre stands or falls on its ability to tell the truth as he sees it.… Moore's vision of the American political scene is clear, consistent, and plausible and when he puts his thoughts on paper or edits film as a documentarian must, this vision is not betrayed"). The collection reminds us of the difficulty of writing about politics, but also the importance; we should be grateful to those admirable artists who are able to pull it off. Ⓐ

art REVIEW

A Dutch Treasure Comes to the Met

▶ *Vermeer's Masterpiece.* Metropolitan Museum of Art.

MICHAEL BUSCH

There's quite a lot riding on *Vermeer's Masterpiece*, the headlining act in the Metropolitan Museum's fall exhibition calendar. At a moment when the slumping economy has drained the Met's endowment, forced major layoffs within the institution, and threatened to shrink the number of annual visitors, the museum desperately needed a shot in the arm to boost morale and draw big crowds. And it got it, in the form of a temporary gift generously proffered by Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum. Ostensibly celebrating the 400th anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage from the Netherlands to New York, the Dutch shipped Johannes Vermeer's astonishing *Milkmaid* to the Met where it was quickly made the centerpiece of the museum's autumn program.

The mini-marquee exhibit, which runs through the end of November, offers a blueprint of what to expect from the Met as it moves forward with a new model of recession-special installations—small shows anchored in a prominent work or two, and bolstered by a supporting cast drawn from the museum's expansive permanent collection. The logic of the move is clear: with a contracting endowment and significantly reduced operating budget, the Met's recently-appointed director Thomas Campbell decided that looking inward and relying on the occasional munificence of partner institutions was the museum's most promising tactic to cut costs without sacrificing quality. But concerns challenging the utility of this approach persist, making *Vermeer's Masterpiece* the most important trial of Campbell's young career.

Unfortunately, the budget blockbuster falls flat. To be sure, the exhibit betrays hints of limited resources. Including period reproductions of ceramic bowls and tile work, for example, is charming but suggests a quiet desperation to fill space without clear purpose in the absence of relevant content, while the comic book-length catalogue (stapled at the spine) indicates that the Met has abandoned its tradition of producing gorgeously hefty companion pieces to its major exhibits. But this is hardly the problem.

If the curatorial cocktail animating *Vermeer's Masterpiece* comprises one part inadequate funding, it is most certainly met with three parts conceptual incoherence. Not content to let *The Milkmaid*'s reputation as one of the finest paintings in the Western tradition serve as reason enough to scramble uptown for a viewing, the show's designer, Walter Liedtke, insists on spicing it up for the oversexed masses with promises of a radical rereading of Vermeer's masterwork. All of which would be fascinating if it could be sustained throughout the entire exhibition. But it can't, and the show deteriorates with impressive velocity into a slapdash arrangement of pictures bound together more by proximity than through the rhythm of an internal logic.

The exhibit's central argument advances the proposition that Vermeer endows *The Milkmaid* with a heretofore unappreciated degree of eroticism. In order to mount this attack against traditionally staid interpretations of old masters, Liedtke, curator of the Met's Dutch collection, convenes a small parade of the museum's holdings in the first gallery to demonstrate that the stereotypical "milkmaid" colonized the landscape of European sexual imagination, exciting noblemen with the prospect of a little pinch n' giggle when their ladies of the manor weren't looking. According to the accompanying brochure, milkmaids were summed up by an early modern poem in which "a woman in the act of milking a cow ('A sinewy thing she has seized with joy,' and so on) is compared with grabbing a man's…attention." And certainly, the images gathered here—populated as they are by buxom women and admiring men with their bulging codpieces and cocked crossbows set "to shoot…bolts"—support the curator's contention that milkmaids had acquired a reputation for being "sexually available" by the time Vermeer came along. Says Liedtke, "It was the old joke of the farmer's daughter and the travelling salesman."

If one considers, moreover, the overt sexuality of Vermeer's early work—a topic strangely not broached by the curators in this show—the bridge between the naughty milkmaids of Dutch lore and Vermeer's masterpiece might be easily crossed. As a young man, Vermeer saturated his work with salaciousness, painting scenes of seduction that range from the sexually subdued—as in *Girl with the Wineglass*, where a man eagerly plies his uncertain female companion with drink and lecherous looks while a third friend dozes in the corner—to more direct depictions of debauchery, perhaps best represented in *The Procuress*, where a john feels up a drunken prostitute while her madam and some random lout look on.

Still, even theoretically, Liedtke's attempt to eroticize Vermeer's *Milkmaid* wears thin quickly. Beyond his claim of potent sexuality inherent in all period representations of the milkmaid, the curator's most straightforward charge holds that the maid's milk jug—out of which she measuredly pours milk into a pudding bowl—represents what Liedtke prudishly refers to as "a portion of the female anatomy." Fair enough, for the moment, but what more? The curator directs our attention to the painting's lower right hand corner, where a small painted tile decorated with a naked Cupid poised to strike abuts an ochre foot warmer. One might question just how a dull-col-

Young Woman with a Water Pitcher

The Milkmaid

ored foot warmer would provoke lip-biting arousal from Vermeer's contemporary audiences. Yet they would surely scratch their head even more vigorously at Liedtke's giddy answer: "The mistress of the house would put her feet up. It heats everything under the skirt." And with that, the case is closed.

But when confronted with the sheer weight of *The Milkmaid*—finely wrought exquisiteness packed into each pore of canvas, tender attentions that produce the painting's photographic effects—it becomes clear that Liedtke's theory cannot withstand the magnitude of Vermeer's creative ambition. The piece hangs together in perfect balance, allowing its painter to showcase his dazzling command of perspective and light, in turn establishing *The Milkmaid*'s moving sense of serene contemplation. Far from injecting it with signposts of an ulterior motive, Vermeer strips the work of possible distractions that might interfere with an appreciation of his technical brilliance.

Study of a Young Woman.

Digital imaging studies of the painting (also not mentioned in the exhibit) bear out the point. An infrared reflectogram of the painting demonstrates that the sexy foot warmer was not even included in the original composition. Instead, Vermeer had first painted a hulking basket piled high with clothing in the right corner, which, had it not been replaced with the smaller heating device, would have cluttered the canvas, ruining any sense of depth that the stark, bare wall behind affords. As it is, the floodlit void in the upper-right hand corner directs the eye's attention to the lower-left hand sector where it is held captive witness to Vermeer's serial acts of virtuosity.

How exactly he achieves such a degree of precise pointillism in the spread of bread and pottery laid out on the maid's worktable defies easy understanding, but the effect is spellbinding. From the torn chunks of bread collected at table's edge and the surviving loaf safely within its wicker basket, to the smooth shell of a blue beer jug and worn brittleness of the milk pitcher and pudding bowl, Vermeer uses pinpricks of paint to establish an illusionistic play of light, endowing otherwise mundane subjects with a jaw-dropping, three-dimensional voluptuousness. Indeed, there may exist no other work that so successfully ascends the heights of hyper-realism—save that found in the liquid eyes, moist lips and teardrop jewelry of Vermeer's *Girl with the Pearl Earring*—and certainly not in such concentrated fashion.

Once museum-goers, however, successfully negotiate the traffic jam of camera-flashing tourists and scolding guards gridlocked around *The Milkmaid*—roughly halfway through the exhibit—they quickly enter a labyrinth of curatorial disorder and poor judgment. Apparently having shot his wad on the milkmaids theme at the start of the show, Liedtke doesn't seem overly concerned about what comes next. As a result, the exhibit becomes a string of pretty pictures that takes on the feel of the museum's permanently installed Dutch gallery in the Met's European wing, minus the majesty of its considerable collection of Rembrandts.

Haunting the vicinity to *The Milkmaid*'s left hangs *Study of a Young Woman*, perhaps signaling the most bewildering missed opportunity of the show. The painting offers another example of Vermeer's masterful deployment of light and shadow, and the gentle brush strokes that mysteriously breathe life into his subjects. The angelic moonishness of the girl's face, her porcelain-perfect skin surrounding a simple smile and invitation to eye contact, make for arresting portraiture. But the picture possesses no other characteristics that directly connect it to *The Milkmaid*, nor for that matter any other paintings in Vermeer's *oeuvre* with the exception again of *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. What's it doing here?

In its place should have been *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher*, a painting executed towards the end of Vermeer's life, and also on view in a separate gallery. Of the paintings in the artist's small body of work, *Young Woman with a Water Pitcher* offers the greatest opportunity to compare and contrast the middle and late periods of a career in full blossom. Like *The Milkmaid*, *Study of a Young Woman* offers no narrative intrigue, privileging instead mood and composition in its intimate contemplation of domestic tranquility. Here again, a young woman is depicted in placid repose, her attention apparently captured by something off-stage as she prepares her morning bath. Vermeer employs the same pointillist technique to highlight the glistening pitcher, the soft touch of velvet covering the table, and the reflections caught by the water basin's rim. Yet these perfectly rendered details are overwhelmed by the oppressively rigid geometry that structures the space. In startling contrast to the supple curves organizing *The Milkmaid*, here Vermeer traps his young woman's serenity within the stern constraints of unyieldingly straight lines, achieving a dynamic balance that frees the image to jump off the canvas. No two works in Vermeer's catalogue are more similar in structure and different in execution.

Another painting curiously tucked away in an adjoining gallery, Hendrick Sorgh's *A Kitchen*, should have been granted pride of place in the same room as the show's star. Sorgh's dark, domestic interior scene, painted when Vermeer was still a child, clearly proved influential in *The Milkmaid*'s development. Aside from Domenico Fiasella's *Queen Artemisia*, perhaps no painting made more of an impression on Vermeer in this period. Liedtke acknowledges this, of course, but understates the case. "This thinly painted and somewhat worn panel dates from about 1643 and anticipates some aspects of Vermeer's domestic interiors, such as the abrupt recession from the left. The Delft artist [Vermeer] achieves a more naturalistic effect by bringing the viewer in much closer to the scene, and through his more sophisticated study of daylight." True enough. But were one to crop the painting down to nothing but the maidservant in the corner, the extent to which Vermeer copied Sorgh's composition for his own purposes becomes abundantly clear. The Met makes this point itself in the show, all the more reason to question why the two paintings have been sequestered in different rooms.

While most shows are designed to end with a bang—if for no other reason than to get museum goers excited about purchasing items from the little gift shop barnacles affixed to every exhibit these days—*Vermeer's Masterpiece* peters out with a trickling whimper. Having assembled a pageant of images depicting people—their appetites, labors, and loves—the show closes with an isolated pair of paintings wildly out of place. *Interior of the Oude Kerk*, the shared title of these nearly identical works by Hendrick van Vliet and Emanuel de Witte, respectively, are almost completely devoid of human presence, emphasizing as they do the beauty of Delft's iconic church. According to the Met, each work "evoked a spiritual environment and anticipated the optical approach of Vermeer," which is fine, but why consign them to the end of the line? Had they come earlier to set the stage for understanding Vermeer's milieu, influences and development, the church interiors would have nicely complemented the other works, building momentum toward a climactic viewing of *The Milkmaid*. As it is, guests leave the exhibit with the feeling of seeing double. Ⓐ

music REVIEW

The East Village Scene

- The First Annual *Nublu Jazz Festival*
- Al Foster Quartet at *Nublu*
- Andrew D'Angelo's Gay Disco Trio at *Drom*

MARK SCHIEBE

Once home to some of the great venues for "downtown" music, the closing of spots like *Tonic* and *The Internet Café* have crippled the east village jazz and experimental scene. Avant-garde icon John Zorn moved *Tonic* further east into Alphabet city and called the new spot *The Stone*. The club (just a single room with folding chairs and an art space vibe) has been open for about three years. It's strictly for diehards, however, and does not have a liquor license, meaning it will likely perish even before Avenue C starts sprouting the luxury condominiums that priced *Tonic* out a few blocks west. Instead, downtown music has begun to attach itself to lounge spaces that are able to attract a hybrid crowd: fans of electronica, weekend warriors looking for a house party with artistic edge, and finally, fans of jazz and some of its more experimental offshoots. Two such clubs are *Drom* (Ave. A / 5th St.) and *Nublu* (Ave. C / 4th St.). The latter has just finished hosting its first annual jazz festival, which ran from Nov. 5-22.

Nublu is owned by Turkish saxophonist, record producer, and promoter Ilhan Ersahin. By my count at least three of his own groups work regularly at the club. Wax Poetic is a heady fusion of electronica, world music, and dub funk, with Middle Eastern melodies. Norah Jones sang for the band for two years before becoming a pop star. The Wonderland Quartet features the Danish guitarist/loops/samples man Thor Madsen and two of the great "straight-ahead" players on the New York scene: Matt Penman (bass) and Jochen Rueckert (drums). Wonderland, whom I had an opportunity to see at the festival, seems to be evolving more in the direction of the American postbop idiom (surely because of the presence of Penman and Rueckert) while still retaining much of the Turkish rhythmic and melodic flavors from earlier European incarnations of the group, and the digital loops and samples background provided by Madsen.

My problem was not with the music but rather with the fact that most of the crowd that particular night (and it was *very* crowded) were there to see DJ Logic, who was performing next. Without sounding like an old curmudgeon (okay...maybe I am) or some kind of jazz purist (I'm not), the uncomfortable feeling I had (a close listener who had come for the jazz) amongst hordes of folks who wanted a house party is symptomatic of my problem with *Nublu's* pretensions toward hosting a jazz festival in the first place. The club is really an ambient lounge specializing in electronica and an eclectic variety of live performance, basically the range of its owner's interests. The house party crowds probably weren't happy standing through an hour and half of jazz, and I wasn't happy feeling like a rave was going to break out every time someone stepped near a turntable.

The venue itself was not going to stop me from seeing Al Foster, one of my all-time favorite drummers and musicians in general. Foster was the headline act on that particular night and I arrived late, figuring to miss "DJ Hardedge," who was performing just before. I should have remembered that these festivals usually run about an hour behind schedule, so after forty-five minutes of deafness-inducing beats (that did not inspire dancing but more of a head-drooping stupor from the crowd), Foster appeared with his quartet. Al Foster is most commonly known for his lengthy stint as Miles Davis's drummer beginning in the early seventies, and then continuing with Miles after his comeback in the eighties. According to some, he is one of the only people the "Dark Prince" would talk to during his six years of reclusion.

My personal connection with Foster's music began when I heard his work with the Joe Henderson Trio in the eighties and nineties, a collaboration that produced albums such as *State of the Tenor* (Blue Note, 1985) with Ron Carter on bass, and the stunning but underappreciated *An Evening with Joe Henderson* (Red Records, 1987). Foster's versatility (moving from the heavy funk of Miles's seventies period to a more straight-ahead context with Henderson and Herbie Hancock) is impressive, but as a drummer in the postbop jazz idiom he far surpasses the thundering fusion drummers of the seventies, such as Billy Cobham and Lenny White. Perhaps only Jack DeJohnette is Foster's rival in having created absolutely original conceptions in both genres.

All of the characteristics that make Foster instantly identifiable were on display at *Nublu*, where he offered a relaxed set of jazz standards and originals, joined by his current quartet featuring Kevin Hays (Fender Rhodes), Doug Weiss (bass), and Rich Perry on saxophone. The band opened with "Take the Coltrane," a blues in F by Duke Ellington. I was thrilled to be standing five feet from Foster. There were the waves of rolling tom runs behind the soloist, the distinctive patterns on the ride cymbal bell, and the unmistakable click hiss, click hiss of the "sock" drum (high-hat). Foster brings an intensity, focus and charisma to his approach that is characteristic of the greats. And the telepathic dialogues he engages in with the soloist were evident throughout the show. Like predecessors such as Roy Haynes and Elvin Jones, Foster doesn't just "kick" the soloist, providing "fills" in the spaces between the horn players' lines. Rather, he sets up his own rhythmic patterns "underneath" the soloist. He is the Matisse of the drums, painting in bold shapes and colors, rather than the dense polyrhythms of Jones. Overall, the show was an example of beautiful, non-pretentious music with a focus on craft, openness, and freedom within tradition.

Similar to *Nublu*, *Drom* has a dark, lounge vibe with a mix of bar area, scattered couches and seating. Unlike Nublu, the club was underground and it was huge. After walking through a narrow, intimate room, the space opens up into warehouse-like proportions, which certainly affect the acoustics. Sound tended to echo off of the walls a bit more than I would have wanted. I was there to see Andrew D'Angelo, one of my favorite alto saxophonists, playing with his Gay Disco Trio, featuring Trevor Dunn on bass and Jim Black on drums.

Andrew D'Angelo's Gay Disco Trio

Before the performance D'Angelo, a brain cancer survivor, gave a rambling talk about his experience over the past year and a half: seizure, diagnosis, two surgeries, miraculous recovery, and a trip to "The East" to find out if the monks had "the answer." It turns out they didn't. Instead of opting for more traditional radiation treatment, he worked with Peter Roth, founder of the Heart River Center for Intuitive Healing, and has made a full recovery that has astonished doctors. While on the one hand, I am sympathetic to D'Angelo's critique of hospitals, the answer, as he has it: that we are all solely responsible for everything that happens in our lives (including cancer, which he argues is the result of built up resentment) is a little ridiculous. In a way, however, I was glad I heard D'Angelo speak, because

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theater REVIEW

McCraney's Mythologies

▶ *The Brother/Sister Plays* by Tarell Alvin McCraney, through Dec. 13th at the Public Theater.

FRANK EPISALE

At 29 years old, playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney has been crowned "a major new voice" by enough critics, directors, dramaturgs, and producers that there is already something of a backlash in the works. The *New York Post*'s Elisabeth Vincentelli recently dismissed McCraney's success as that of "a lucky guy," calling his work "precious," "naïve," and "affect[ed]," while Erik Haagensen, in *Backstage*, acknowledged that there is "much to admire" in McCraney's work but continued to assert that the wunderkind's dramaturgy is too often "ham-fisted," "trite," "emotionally distancing."

As much as it would be fun to play iconoclast, however, I'm afraid that in this case I have to side with the kingmakers: Tarell Alvin McCraney is the real deal.

His plays are neither flawless nor universal (though I suspect this latter adjective will be employed far too often in discussions of his work); they are too ambitious to be perfect, or to please everyone in every audience. These are challenging texts, in need of strong directors and skilled actors, and I have little doubt that some disappointing productions of McCraney's plays will make their way around the regional and university theatre circuits in the coming years. Despite what some may say, however, needing a strong director does not lessen the value of a work. The text alone is not theatre. And, for all their carefully crafted use of language, these plays are not intended to be read; the poetry they strive for is poetry in four dimensions, embodied and in motion.

The Brother/Sister Plays, now playing in repertory at the Public Theater, is a series of three plays all set in the fictional town of San Pere, Louisiana. Each play is meant to stand on its own, but the three together amplify one another, revisiting characters and families and viewing them from different angles, at different times, in different combinations. The first play in the trilogy, *In the Red and Brown Water*, is presented as Part I, while plays two and three, *The Brothers Size* and *Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet* are presented together as Part II. Each evening lasts about two hours on its own, or you can see all three plays (i.e., both "parts") together in a "marathon" performance.

The aesthetic and narrative strategy of the plays is to marry the stories of a rural, lower and working class African-American community with the storytelling traditions that the playwright clearly believes to be at the root of the theatrical impulse. More specifically in this case, McCraney has woven into his plays a number of references to Yoruba mythology; many of the characters in the play are named for deities (Oya, Ogun, Oshoosi, Elegba, Egungen, etc.), their character traits and actions resonating with the myths referenced by their names.

In the Red and Brown Water introduces us to the people of San Pere and to the "Distant Present" in which McCraney has set the plays. Oya (Kianné Mischett), a promising high school track star, is torn between accepting a college scholarship or staying home to be with her ailing mother. She is courted by the cocky, sometimes cruel Shango (Sterling K. Brown) and by the sweet and stuttering Ogun (Marc Damon Johnson), and eventually finds herself pregnant, orphaned, and struggling to hold her world together. Along the way, we meet the mischievous, dangerously charming Elegba (André Holland), a trickster whose dreams may hold deeper meanings, as well as Ogun's Aunt Elegua (Kimberly Hébert Gregory) and a number of tertiary characters who help flesh out the shape and feel of the community.

Water is directed by Tina Landau, who co-wrote *The Viewpoints Book* with SITI Company founder Anne Bogart. Viewpoints is a method of teaching movement and improvisation for actors and dancers, and has famously reinvigorated physical approaches to theatre in the West. Some of the techniques employed in Viewpoints training have become so commonplace as to result in clichéd sequences of gestures and poses that any educated actor recognizes as the products of a classroom exercise. At its best, though, Viewpoints provides actors with a common vocabulary that allows them to carve space with their bodies and shape the rhythm of a performance with their breath.

Water is among the best uses of Viewpoints-derived staging I've seen; it's also the most successful work I've seen from Landau, whose productions have

Tarell Alvin McCraney

sometimes disappointed. The actors, most of whom are visible throughout the performance, become a (usually nonverbal) chorus when their respective characters are not the focus of the action. They breathe and pose and dance together, punctuating and underscoring the poetry and prose of the text and providing a supportive, communal backdrop for the work of their castmates.

All of this ties in nicely to McCraney's vision of theatre as a part of a longer oral tradition, a sharing of stories true and false, of histories and myths, memoirs and allegories, of mourning and celebration.

Assured by the Public's Web site that the plays need not be seen in order, I saw Part II before Part I. While this meant I failed to catch a reference to previous events from time to time, it is probably the order I would recommend seeing the parts in, if only because Tina Landau's gorgeous staging of *In the Red and Brown Water* is a hard act to follow. This is not to say, though, that *The Brothers Size* and *Marcus* are not successful stagings.

A scene from *The Brothers Size*

Director Robert O'Hara, an accomplished playwright in his own right (and one who was also once saddled with labels like "prodigy") elicits athletic, disciplined performances from the actors, foregrounding the rhythmic muscularity of McCraney's text. This is especially true of *The Brothers Size*, the most compact, and perhaps the best written, of the three plays. *Brothers* focuses on Ogun, older now, who has taken in his recently paroled younger brother Oshoosi (Brian Tyree Henry) and is trying to keep him out of trouble. Trouble is inevitable, though, with trickster/messenger Elegba also out of prison.

Marcus jumps ahead a generation to introduce us to its title character (Holland), who bears a striking resemblance to his father Elegba. In addition to the physical similarities, Marcus shares his father's prescient dreams and some of his sexual appetites.

The acting, for the most part, admirably balances precision and passion. The performers are faced with no small task, as McCraney's text demands that they step into, out of, and around their characters from moment to moment and the two directors have envisioned the three plays with a number of different acting styles. McCraney often has his characters speak their own stage directions as if they were asides, not so much to distance us from the action as to reinforce the idea that the actor is always also a storyteller, and that narrative is at the heart of what theatre is. These actor-storytellers are more than up to the task, and it seems almost unfair to the top-notch ensemble to single out Henry's furious, infectious energy, Holland's dangerously vulnerable charm, or Gregory's masterful timing and tone.

The deceptively minimal design work is first-rate as well, particularly Lindsay Jones's sound and Peter Kaczorowski's lights. Both of these elements pull focus when they are required to do so, but more often subtly support the work of the actors, gently and generously amplifying the directors' visions of performer-driven productions.

As I've already hinted, these shows are not without their flaws. *Water*'s second act does not quite live up to the promise of its first, while *Marcus* fails to shed enough new light on the stock coming-of-age tropes upon which it relies too heavily. Despite these and other shortcomings, though, it seems clear that *The Brother/Sister Plays* will be remembered as a highlight of the 2009–2010 theatre season. McCraney's efforts to marry the quotidian with the mythic and the gritty with the cosmic will be criticized by some as pretentious, but I never felt he was trying to inflate the importance of these very personal stories so much as he was reminding us that mythology is personal too, that the telling of stories, whatever their scope or provenance, is always less about connecting us to our invented gods than it is about connecting us to one another. Ⓐ

The Brother/Sister Plays by Tarell Alvin McCraney. Part I: *In the Red and Brown Water*, directed by Tina Landau. Part II: *The Brothers Size* and *Marcus; or the Secret of Sweet*, directed by Robert O'Hara. Sets by James Schuette; costumes by Karen Perry; lights by Peter Jaczorowski; sound by Lindsay Jones; vocal arrangements by Zane Mark. With Sterling K. Brown, Kimberly Hébert Gregory, Brian Tyree Henry, André Holland, Marc Damn Johnson, Royce Johnson, Vanessa A. Jones, Kevin Kelly, Sean Allan Krill, Angela Lewis, Nikkiya Mathis, Kianné Muschett, Hubert Point-Dejour, and Heather Alicia Simms. Running in repertory through Dec. 13th at the Public Theater, 425 Lafayette Avenue. Tickets $60 ($25 student tickets available in person at the box office). www.publictheater.org

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Music Review

Continued from page 19

it helped shore up one of my critical axioms when evaluating art and artists, probably best summed up by D.H. Lawrence's "Trust the tale, not the teller." The way I look at it, anything helpful I get from the artist is just gravy. If the artist starts saying some weird stuff about his own life, or his work, or about life in general, I don't hold it against him. If the artist is an asshole, I don't hold it against him. It's not what matters.

Well, there is nothing especially gay or disco about The Gay Disco Trio. The music is a volatile, exuberant fusion of free jazz, funk, and rock that perfectly suits the unique talents of Dunn (formerly the bass player of the experimental rock group Mr. Bungle) and Black (one of the most ubiquitous drummers on the downtown scene). But even in a band comprised of three "stars," D'Angelo's playing is so intense as to exert a gravitational pull. The trio's songs are mere sketches: maybe a mood set up by a bass riff, or one of the saxophonist's repeated hammering, spiraling lines. At this point, I'm willing to risk the paradoxical statement that D'Angelo is both entirely original but at the same time sounds more like the early Ornette Coleman than anyone I've ever heard. "Ornette doesn't think I sound like him," he once joked in an interview. "So that's all that matters." But there is that plastic blues cry deep in the sound that comes in part from blowing "through" the horn, exerting more air pressure than normal, which renders more audible the rich overtone set that accompanies each note played. To the casual listener, his playing might seem random or imprecise, but the opposite is true: D'Angelo has incredible control of his horn and produces some amazing multi-phonics, creating effects evoking a range of sounds from the thick richness of an overdriven guitar to the airiness of a flute. On sustained notes, his pitch will often waver, hanging beautifully between pitches, creating a natural "chorus" effect, before being bent sharp or flat as they disappear. Like Ornette, and like Albert Ayler and Dewey Redman, this musician really thinks less in terms of notes and more in terms of sound. To appreciate D'Angelo, understanding this is essential. Listening to avant-garde improvisers is no different than listening to those who are more anchored in tradition. The difference is simply that the initial effort is greater. The listener must learn the private language of the artist—judgment must be reserved until one feels sufficiently familiar with the language. We must grant each artist his own terms.

The appearance of Al Foster and Andrew D'Angelo at *Nublu* and *Drom* is a sad reminder that jazz music is still suffering from its inability to support itself. It's unfortunate that those of us who want to see this great music (and are willing to pay a reasonable price to see it) are forced to be part of a scene that really has little to do with acoustic jazz, and in some ways is damaging to it. On the other hand, I suppose it is reason to cherish those places like *The Village Vanguard* that are bravely uncompromising. Ⓐ

Murder at the Rijksmuseum

Peter Greenaway tackles the mysteries of Rembrandt's *Night Watch*

▶ *Rembrandt's J'Accuse* (2009) and *Nightwatching* (2007), directed by Peter Greenaway

JAMES D HOFF

Peter Greenaway has always been a visually-oriented director. Originally trained as a painter, Greenaway meticulously structures the images in his films, revealing a care and attention to the meaning of visual composition that is almost unheard of in popular cinema. Indeed the compositions of many of his frames look more like seventeenth century paintings than twentieth century film stills. This attention to the details of the visual image, often at the expense of any illusion of narrative reality, has, not surprisingly, been met with very mixed reviews. For those used to the strong narrative focus and action-driven aesthetics of directors like Martin Scorsese, Francis Ford Coppola, and Quentin Tarantino, Greenaway's work may feel overly intellectual, emotionally cold, or just plain boring. Those more interested in the potential visual and structural experiments that are still possible in film, however, will be much more likely to appreciate Greenaway's attention to the power of the image. His emphasis on the visual and rejection of the illusion of cinema is more in line with the aesthetics of the avant-garde works of directors like Ingmar Bergman, Jean-Luc Godard, and Bunuel. Like these directors Greenaway is unafraid of calling attention to the artificiality of his own work as art. For Greenaway, film is no more real than a painting or a sculpture and its aesthetic roots lay not in the theatre, but in the visual arts.

In this sense Greenaway's career has been an ongoing battle against the prevailing decline of visual literacy. And in his latest film, the documentary *Rembrandt's J'accuse*, Greenaway makes explicit this belief in the value of thinking in visual terms and in learning how to see and better represent the world through a close attention to the images provided us by the great masters of painting. "Most people," Greenaway argues, "are visually illiterate. Why should it be otherwise? We have a text based culture. Our educational systems teach us to value text over image, which is one of the reasons why we have such an impoverished cinema." This intentionally provocative statement is nothing new however since Greenaway has been obsessed with the contrast, the conflict, and the occasional intersections between the visual and the textual, between words and images, since at least *Prospero's Books*, released in 1991. Coming just seven minutes into the film, this argument operates like a thesis statement, setting the tone and providing a much needed context for the rest of this remarkable film.

The focus of Greenaway's documentary is the story behind Rembrandt's well known and controversial painting *Night Watch*. Finished in 1642, *Night Watch* was one of Rembrandt's last paintings before his disastrous decline as a painter. Although art historians argue there is little evidence that *Night Watch* had anything to do with Rembrandt's withering popularity, Greenaway makes a different argument, positing a conspiracy of astonishing complexity. Without giving away too much, Greenaway's essential argument is that Rembrandt's highly evocative and visually rich portrait is "a painted piece of theatre," full of hidden condemnations, ridicules, and most importantly, an indictment and an accusation of murder or, as Greenaway puts it, "assassination disguised as military accident."

According to Greenaway, Rembrandt's famous painting of the Dutch militia company offers a symbolic depiction of the murder of Captain Piers Hasselberg, the commander, as Greenaway tells us, of the Thirteenth Company of the Amsterdam militia.

Greenaway, perhaps playfully or perhaps in earnest (it's hard to tell), claims that his argument offers an answer and solution to many of the core mysteries that have surrounded the painting since it was unveiled in 1642. Like so many of Greenaway's works the film is highly formally structured, based upon a set of thirty-three mysteries, which are explained in sequence. From an explanation of the culture of Dutch militia companies, to a discussion of the curiously phallic and homo-erotic placement of William Van Ruytenberg's partisan, to the incredibly curious and unconventional golden girl who seems to be running through the center of the crowd, Greenaway examines these mysteries one at a time, building his case like a public prosecutor.

Clearly Rembrandt's painting is a satirical criticism of the pretentious and arrogant Dutch militias, who by 1642 had largely given up fighting and patrolling and spent the majority of their time drinking, eating, and devising ever new ways of increasing their wealth. The ridiculous dress, the clumsy way they hold their weapons (many of them would never have had opportunity to use such weapons against an enemy) and the diminutive proportions of several of the figures seem to reveal what must have been Rembrandt's thinly disguised contempt for the Bourgeois militiamen. But Greenaway's argument takes these insults to a level beyond the plausible.

Playing upon many of these oft-noted visual insults, Greenaway constructs a series of convoluted and complex propositions to prove his point, sounding at times more like a patrician conspiracy theorist than an art critic. But perhaps this is the point.

Open Meetings and Chartered Orgs

There is a law in New York that basically says that public business should be conducted publicly with enough notice to the public that any member of the public can attend to witness this public business conducted on behalf of the public if he or she so desires. I realize that in that sentence I overuse a certain word, but I believe that I'm overusing it to make a point. This law is known as New York State Open Meetings Law—or just OML, and the premise behind it seems obvious and right. Since CUNY is a public university, all of our business is public business.

We haven't, however, always been so compliant with OML. Recently, a student was barred from attending a College Association meeting at Hostos Community College and was arrested. This student sued the university, and the university lost. The case is known as *Perez* v. *CUNY* (2005). The opinion in *Perez* was a bit wider than just the purview of OML; it included questions of quorum, which is the definition of the minimum number of voting members who must be present in order for business to be conducted. The number now works out to 50 percent of all seats plus one member. "All seats" happens to include vacant seats as well.

These issues of quorum do matter. For instance, last May, many degrees were in jeopardy of not being granted because a meeting of Graduate Council, the meeting in which all degrees are voted on to be accepted, didn't make quorum. A special meeting was called in that moment of crisis so that those who had earned their degrees could actually have them awarded that month.

At the DSC this year, we've had a strong focus on our own governance, partly because two of the co-chairs are members of the Graduate Council's Committee on Structure and partly for other reasons. There has been a flurry of activity from the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, and a new version of the constitution—which has been reorganized, streamlined, and brought up to compliance with OML, in light of *Perez*—was passed at the November 20 Plenary meeting of the DSC.

So, go vote on the proposed constitution. You can find the copies of the old as well as the new and a link to vote at http://www.cunydsc.org/constitution.

A few other announcements

Don't forget about the free legal services provided by the Campus Legal Resource Network. Sign up for an appointment on the DSC webpage.

There are chartered organizations that still need members to be charted: L'Atelier, Turkish Students Association, Mise en Scène, Japan Study Group, Luso-Brazilian Studies Group, Eastern European Studies Group, PART (Art History Journal), Free CUNY, Middle Eastern Studies Organization, and the Africa Research Group. If you have any interest in joining these organizations or helping them get their charter, then please go and sign-up for them. A link can be found on the DSC website; otherwise, point your browser to https://eballot.votenet.com/dsc/. Please go make friends: join a chartered organization.

Did you know that you don't need to pay Medicare or Social Security Tax on wages paid by an institution at which you go to school? What's nicer is that you can get all those taxes that you paid back from previous years; just think of it as a nice check to pay for that debt you'll incur on Black Friday. Here's the process: get a letter from the Registrar's Office (7201) certifying that you were a student for each semester that you have taught in the CUNY system (adjuncting at other schools counts as well). Then go to HR at the school you're employed at, present them the letters, and ask for a refund. It'll help greatly if you have copies of your previous W–2's so that you can provide them with the dollar amount that they owe you. If they don't comply, then contact the IRS. There is a form on our website (www.cunydsc.org/forms) that you can send to the IRS. With any luck, you'll get a fat refund.

Perhaps most importantly as you feel the need to unwind at the end of the semester: free booze! We'll throw our annual holiday party on December 11, starting around 8 PM. The last one was too much of a success, and so we're planning on redoubling our efforts and finding ways to fit even more people into our space in a more comfortable way.

Here is a last plea that starts in the form of a question: what do you want us to do? As representatives, we need to represent you, and so, please send us issues that you find are pressing or just ones that should be addressed. You can filter them through me: dsc@shawnrice.org, and I'll make sure that they are heard in the appropriate committees.

Upcoming Meetings

(starting at 6pm in room 5414):

- Plenary meetings — Dec. 11, 2009, Feb. 5, 2009
- Steering Committee meetings — Dec. 4, 2009, Jan. 29, 2010
- Party: Dec. 11, 2009, starting at 8pm in rooms 5414 and 5409. Ⓐ

Although these arguments are not always convincing—indeed some of the claims are wildly speculative and there seems to be very little actual historical evidence to support them—historical accuracy is not what this director is after. Greenaway seems to take such pleasure in the story he is spinning and his insights are so dazzling and satisfying that their veracity hardly seems to matter. Greenaway's real purpose, however, is not to prove his point, but to test how well Rembrandt's *Night Watch* is able to evoke and support a story of such complexity and suspense—and indeed, the painting seems more than capable of this. Greenaway's act of exegetic storytelling bring us full circle back to one of the central aesthetic arguments of his entire oeuvre, which is that the visual is itself a form of communication, and that images, even still images, may also contain meaningful narratives. It is the loss of this sense of visual narrative, Greenaway would argue, that has reduced so much of our current cinema to mere emotional amalgams of dialogue and action, with little, if any concern for the composition of the several thousand still images that make up a film. This, I would add, has also led to a fair share of very bad film criticism, so much of which is obsessed with discussions of narrative and action, often at the expense of any possible discussions of the image.

A scene from *Rembrandt's J'Accuse.*

Rembrandt's J'accuse is borrowed footage from *Nightwatching*, adding an oddly self-conscious but effective dramatic element into the documentary. Greenaway's obsession with Rembrandt is no surprise, however, seeing as how so many of Greenaway's films are filled with similarly structured, intensely symbolic and portentous visual narratives, full of their own sometimes nagging mysteries. Consider, for instance the several odd time-lapsed scientific experiments in *A Zed and Two Naughts* or the highly elaborate games played throughout *Drowning by Numbers*.

Greenaway is, however, above all else a sensualist, a painter of the world and the human body in light and shadow, and although *Rembrandt's J'accuse* is at times visually lush, it is precisely this sensuousness that Greenaway fans will find lacking in the film. This is in part because of the documentary nature of the film, but is also the result of Greenaway's changing style. Ever since *Prospero's Books*, which evoked an enormous amount of digitally composed techniques of text and image overlaid onto the screen, Greenaway has been obsessed with, and has explored in increasingly enervating excess, the possibilities of this technology. In films like *Prospero's Books* and *The Pillow Book*, this technique has the effect of giving greater depth and detail to the shot or sequene in which it is employed, but here its use is increasingly distracting and often feels unnecessary. Indeed, the technological busyness of this film, as if looking at several monitor screens all at once, makes one miss and long for the slower, less frenzied, but still intricate compositions of his earlier work like *A Zed and Two Naughts, The Belly of an Architect,* or the always delightful *Drowning by Numbers.* Ⓐ

New Grad Center Provost Has Amazing Hair

MATT LAU

Is it a perfect Southern California wave frozen in time, its crest forever feathered by the late autumn offshore breeze; or, the living form of a jagged alpine peak, hiding sublime mysteries and wonders both natural and supernatural; or a cornice, that historic building's last ineluctable detail of anointed perfection; or a rare bird in full plumage sighted deep in the dark heart of the Amazon jungle, with only Herzog and Kinski there to help document; or, closer to home, the happy love-child of Susan Sontag and Conan O'Brien's signature hairstyles? Whatever your metaphor may be to describe it—there's no denying the undeniable. The Graduate Center's new Provost, Chase Robinson, has amazing hair.

"It was really the hair that distinguished him from the other candidates" said Grad Center human resources spokesperson Mark Schiebe, who was speaking on condition of anonymity. "We knew we wanted an Islamic Studies person because we needed to fill that need in the History department, but we didn't want to go with someone too controversial or who would appear too ethnic to our Jewish donors."

He continued, "On the other hand, we didn't want someone who was too vanilla. You know, like one of Spivak's white students, who can't say a complete sentence without some variation of the word spectral in it. Which is why Robinson is so perfect, he is an expert in a nonthreatening subsection of a topic Americans find threatening, and his outward appearance perfectly embodies this. He is a handsome, professorial type, but that wisp of grey in his pompadour says, "I'm a little bit of a bad boy."

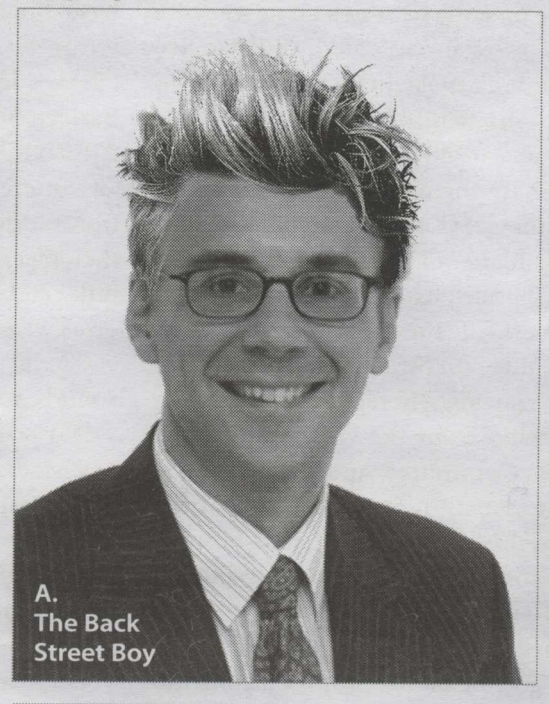
"We had a saying around here when Chase was a PhD student," said Harvard Professor of History Roy Mottahedeh. "If Helen of Troy had the face that launched a thousand ships, then Chase has the hair that launched a thousand scholarships! I came up with that one myself during a committee meeting when we awarded him our heftiest graduate student stipend. The drinks were on him if you know what I mean! But fair warning about having him over for dinner, his hair might stain your couch cushions."

The Provost's office had no comment on the possible favoritism that has been shown the Provost throughout his career because of his fabulous hair. They did, however, reveal that the Provost recently switched from Herbal Essences hair products to Aveda, perhaps in part thanks to his new pay raise as a Provost and Distinguished Professor of History. In addition to daily shampooing, the Provost conditions almost every day during the drier months but as little as once a week during humid months. In something of a surprise, the Provost abjures the current fashion for pomades in favor of big hair mainstays like mousses and gels.

If this detailed information weren't telling enough of how crucial his hair has been to his success, consider that Provost Robinson was recently named the first recipient of Islamic Society of North America's lifetime achievement award in the category of personal grooming.

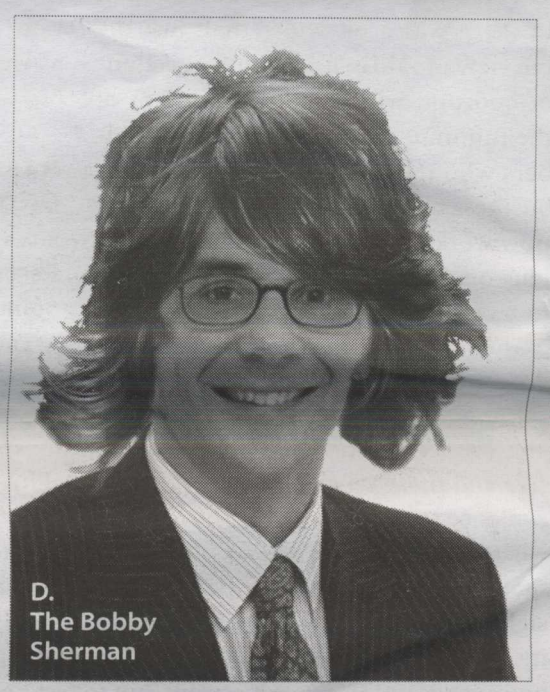
"One thing is for sure," reads the conclusion of the citation, "when he walks into a lecture hall with his perfectly coiffed hair slightly tousled by the wind, the terror alert level is elevated in every pretty girl's heart. If any Islamic Studies scholar deserves to be monitored by the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Broken-Hearted Undergraduates it is Professor Robinson. Here's to you Dr. Robinson. Ⓐ

Pop quiz: Which one is Provost Robinson's real hairstyle?


A.
The Back Street Boy


B.
The Rachel


C.
The Skunk


D.
The Bobby Sherman

ph.d. comics BY JORGE CHAM