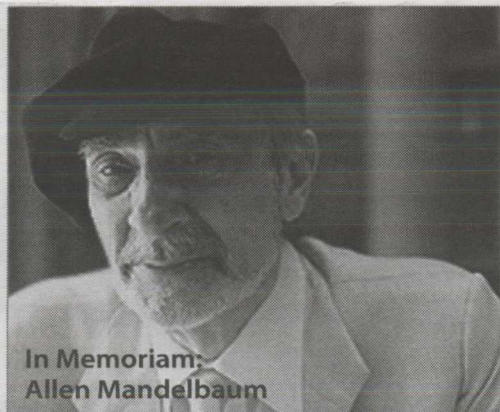


# CUNY GRADUATE CENTER **Advocate**

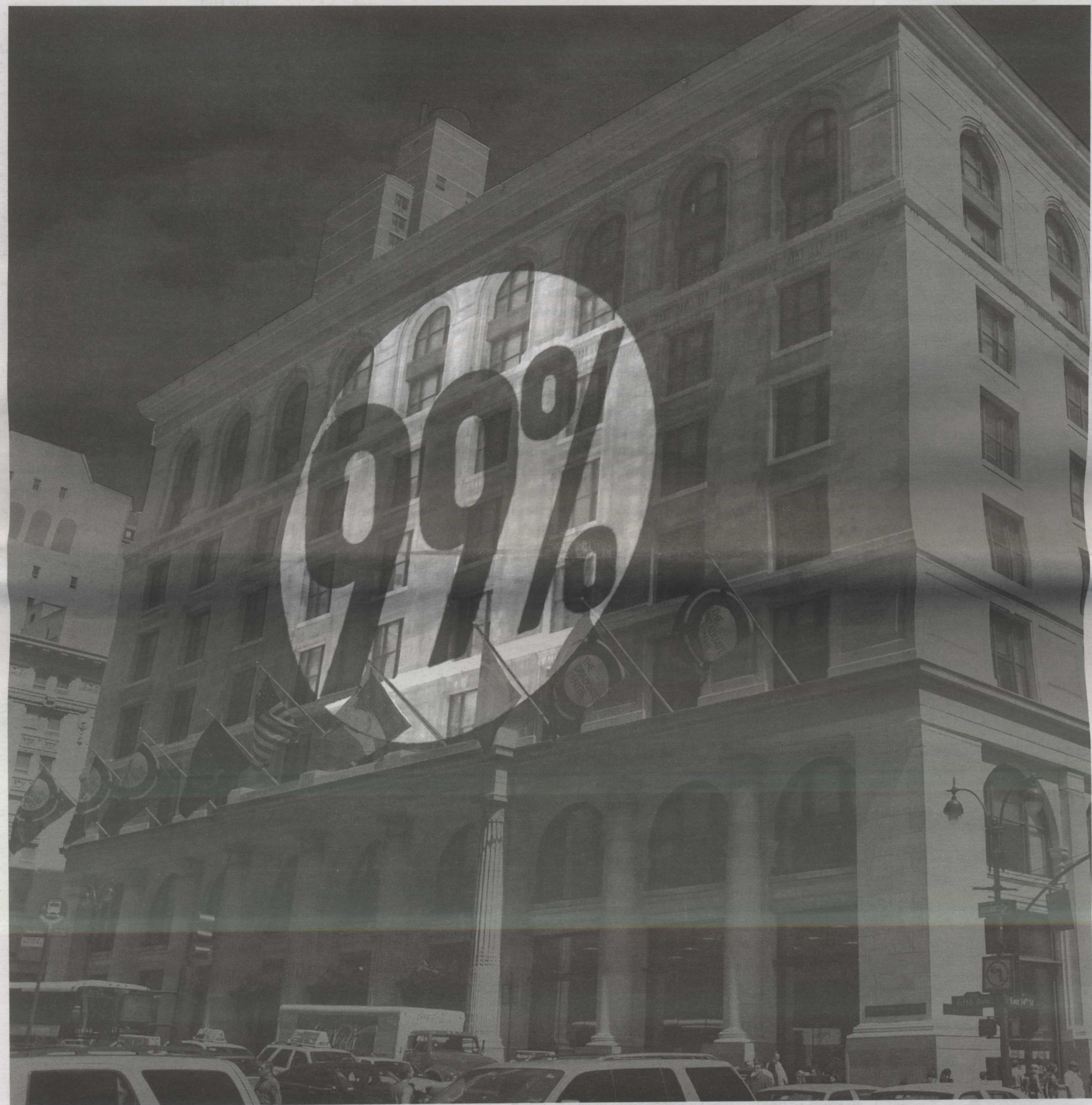
November 2011

<http://gcadvocate.org>

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In Memoriam:  
Allen Mandelbaum



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**FROM THE editor's desk**

# Is NY Ready for a General Strike?

If the workers took a notion they could stop all speeding trains;  
Every ship upon the ocean they can tie with mighty chains.  
Every wheel in the creation, every mine and every mill;  
Fleets and armies of the nation, will at their command stand still.

—Joe Hill

On November 17, I marched with hundreds of other CUNY Graduate Center students from Thirty-Fourth Street to Union Square as part of a day-long series of student walkouts and demonstrations across the nation. Armed with a large "Student Strike" banner and about a dozen "book shields"—depicting the covers of such radical classics as Emma Goldman's *My Life*, Ursula K. Leguin's *The Dispossessed*, and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, we filled the sidewalk and the streets with our bodies and our voices. Marchers chanted "Education is a Right/ Fight Fight Fight," and "All Day all Week/Occupy Wall Street." Around Eighteenth Street, as we approached Union Square, the crowd passed a group of several workers dismantling one of those ubiquitous sets of scaffolding that dot the city landscape. As we passed the workers stopped their lifting, smiled and waved, and as we waved back the chant went up through the crowd, "Students and Workers/ Shut the City Down." The workers seemed pleased with this chant as did the students. Indeed, this particular rallying cry has become surprisingly common among student protests at CUNY and within the Occupy Wall Street movement. I remember feeling a little embarrassed the first time I heard it shouted at a PSC rally years ago, as if such a statement were simply wishful thinking; but the more I've heard it repeated and the more I've seen young students and faculty members embracing the chant, vigorously shaking their fists in the air, the more it has come to seem like a real possibility.

Just about two weeks earlier, on November 2, protesters at Occupy Oakland had put that very idea into practice, calling a general strike among students and workers for the entire city of Oakland. This was a bold and controversial move and many in the Oakland OWS movement and the general assembly were resistant to issue a call for a city-wide strike that they knew had little chance of actually materializing. Although the vast majority of Oaklanders went to work that day, those who came out to rally and demonstrate managed to shut down a freeway and a port for the entire day, clashing violently with police throughout the night as they first occupied and then defended more spaces throughout the city. Now Oakland is calling for another (this one likely to be much more successful) massive day-long strike of all the west coast ports on December 12. This is not an unprecedented move. The west coast ports have been shut down by longshoremen strikes several times over economic and political issues that directly affect the working class. But the longshoremen are some of the most militant union workers in the country. It will be a lot harder to convince the average worker to take such action. Overall, the idea of a serious city-wide strike, where ordinary workers such as teachers, postal carriers, secretaries, professors, students, and bus and train drivers, all refuse to work, has not yet even begun to take shape. While workers in cities, states, and even entire nations across the globe often use the general strike as a means of achieving political ends, there has not been a city-wide general strike in the United States since a spontaneous strike erupted in Oakland in 1946 as part of an effort to unionize department store workers. So why are Americans now so afraid of the general strike?

The reasons for this hesitancy are legion. In New York and other states, laws like the Taylor Law offer stiff penalties to public sector unions that dare to take any kind of job action. But most working class people have never even heard of such laws. The plain fact is that working class people today lead extraordinarily insecure lives, where a day's work could be the difference between buying medicine and paying the rent or having to choose between the two. And even those workers

who can afford a day off have reason to be hesitant. Calling in sick on the day of a planned strike might be seen by some private employers as sufficient grounds for termination, and few workers are in a position to take that chance with their families' futures. So what has to change? What has to happen that would protect the economically vulnerable while still radically disrupting the normalcy of day to day alienation and exploitation that define our age?

To begin with, if we are going to talk the talk we need to start walking the walk. If students and workers are going to shut any city down, they must first come together to seriously talk about combining their power in a united front. In some places this is already happening, but not nearly at the pace needed to make sufficient gains among the rank and file of such unions as the TWU, DC37, PSC, and AFT. As I've argued in these pages before, it is essential that the rank and file of such unions begin to create spaces for organizing outside of the union leadership structures that have, just by virtue of their reliance upon the state for their existence, compromised the real power of their members—that is, their power to withhold their labor. Further, once these channels of communication are in place, it will probably require more than a strike call from an OWS general Assembly to get people out of their seats and into the streets. More than likely it will take a crisis of one kind or another.

In 1946, in Oakland, that crisis took the form of a police crackdown on protesting department store workers. In 2011 the options are seemingly wide-open, since crisis seems to have become the permanent state of affairs in occupied America. Some possible scenarios to watch out for include a further (potentially fatal) escalation of police brutality against students or Occupy protesters; massive austerity measures that further cut essential safety net programs like Medicare, Social Security, or veteran's health (all already in the works); or a protracted union contract battle capable of generating sentiments of working class solidarity like those expressed in Wisconsin last year. A particularly sympathetic union, if there is still such a thing, threatened by state cuts or, better, a private union being exploited for corporate profit, might also offer a potential battleground in which to again test the mettle of the general strike.

The Sotheby's lock-out is one example that actually seems to be gaining some steam. But the PSC is also on the verge of a potentially protracted and ugly contract battle. As the PSC moves forward there will be many opportunities to frame that battle as yet another example of the one percent's attack on the 99 percent of New Yorkers who attend or work at public schools and universities across the nation. As the negotiations over course load, class size, adjunct parity, healthcare, and job security come to a head, it is important that we seek out allies outside our own ranks by connecting these issues to the larger problems of our current economic system which favors the already grotesquely wealthy at the expense of nearly everyone else.

Without a doubt the OWS movement has reinvigorated the left, helping to make possible previously unimaginable acts of intelligent and creative resistance. But it has also managed to create important and vital public spaces in cities and towns across the country where electrical workers and professors, janitors and art handlers, the unionized and non-unionized, can come together across different industries and recognize their common struggle. Such solidarity across sector will continue make radical actions more possible and the idea of an eventual general strike a lot more plausible. **A**

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# CUNY Police Riot, Ban Students from Attending Public Hearing at Baruch

## ADVOCATE STAFF

A full day of action across CUNY campuses culminated in an ugly incident at Baruch College on Monday November 23. It began with a series of student walkouts from classrooms throughout the city between lunchtime and the late afternoon, at which point protesters converged on Madison Square Park where they met other contingents of students before heading as a group of Baruch's Murray Hill campus to protest the Board of Trustees meeting being held that evening to receive public feedback on, among other things, future tuition hikes for CUNY students.

College security ordered the protesters to clear the area when the meeting was convened at 5:00pm. When they refused, and attempted to move forward into the lobby, police pushed back using their billyclubs as battering rams, pushing students to the ground as protesters outside on the street pounded on the school's glass walls and chanted "Shame! Shame!" As *The Advocate* goes to press, it is still not clear if any students were hit with clubs. What is clear, however, is that police used excessive force against a crowd of nonviolent student protesters in a public space.

Conor Tomas Reed, one of five students arrested on Monday, offered

some details of what went down.

"During the billyclub melee, a guard unzipped my backpack and emptied its contents onto the floor, including a notebook with my students' grades and a CUNY library book. As I shielded myself and others, I was grabbed by several guards and thrown to the ground, pinned down with my shirt ripped and glasses broken, and had zip-ties placed around my wrists so tightly that I couldn't feel my hands.

Half an hour later, after I had been relocated to a room on the fourteenth floor (coincidentally, about a hundred feet from the Board hearing) with over a dozen other detainees, were my ties loosened. Many other detained CUNY students similarly experienced this tight cuffing and rough handling, and were otherwise in tremendous pain at the whim of a frighteningly disorganized and cocky security force."

"All five of us were CUNY students of color (four men and one woman), with me also in the peculiar position of being charged with trespassing on the campus where I teach. One CUNY security officer threatened the young woman in custody—after she told him not to touch her while we were being led outside Baruch, the officer said, 'I can do whatever I want to you...' Alleged charges...

switched around as we were brought to the NYPD's 7th Precinct. We were told at different times that we were being held for assaulting public safety officers, trespassing, resisting arrest, disorderly conduct, and for one of us, attempted grand larceny (trying to 'steal' a billy club that was twice pummeled into the student's ribs). I've now been personally charged with trespassing and resisting arrest, and would love any immediate advice on how to secure my teaching position at Baruch under these charges..."

Not surprisingly, CUNY's chief spin doctor, Michael Arena, was quick with the fingers in punching out an official statement that basically takes the truth, bends it over, and gives it a quick swift kick in the ass. "It is clearly evident that from beginning to end, the University's public safety officers acted with extraordinary professionalism and with great restraint to ensure the safety of the public... The protesters created a public safety hazard. CUNY public safety on three occasions warned the protesters they would be removed if they continued to block flow and access to the lobby." Of course, what Arena fails to mention—probably because he was too busy putting out the raging fire consuming his pants—the easiest way to prevent the blockage of "flow" would have been to *not* to erect barricades

and prevent people from moving into and out of the building. But Arena has never been one to allow things like details and facts get in his way while pumping out official bullshit.

The response to these events was swift and clear. Within hours, CUNY faculty released a powerful statement deploring the inappropriate use of coercion against peaceful protest on CUNY campuses and insisting that administrators "at both the CUNY-wide level and at individual campuses not call upon any outside police forces, including the New York City Police Department, or any other city, state, or federal law enforcement agencies, in order to disperse students who are engaged in nonviolent protests." A student-issued statement was also released echoing these concerns, while a petition began circulating shortly thereafter calling for the resignation of Chancellor Matthew Goldstein.

Follow-up actions are also being taken on Monday November 28, again at Baruch College, as the Board of Trustees meets to vote on further tuition increases and a host of other issues that adversely affect students. Organizers have announced that interested students meet at Madison Square Park (at 23<sup>rd</sup> Street) at 3:00 for a rally. From there, students will march to Baruch. Ⓐ



Police menace student protesters at Baruch. PHOTO: THE TICKER/FACEBOOK



# #OccupyGC

## St. Mark's Bookshop Saved!

The beginning of November witnessed a major victory for independent, small businesses in New York City. St. Mark's Bookshop, a Lower East Side institution for over thirty years, was threatened with eviction by its landlord, Cooper Union, as it struggled to scrape together monies to meet its monthly rent. The possibility of the store's ouster by Cooper Union sparked a massive backlash from community activists, book-lovers across the nation, and even celebrity personalities like Salman Rushdie.

On November 3, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer, who had arbitrated the dispute, announced that a deal between the bookstore and Cooper Union had been brokered which would allow the business to remain open for at least another year, and at a reduced rent. "I congratulate both sides for agreeing to new terms," Stringer said, "and I also want to salute the small businesses, independent bookstores, artists, and activists that have traditionally made the East Village so special."

Under the agreed upon terms, Cooper Union will slash the monthly rent charged to St. Mark's Bookshop by \$2,500, from \$20,000 per month to \$17,500, and has forgiven the entirety of a \$7,500 loan made to the store. The *Huffington Post* reports that the shop, in return, has agreed to work with Cooper Union students to devise a business plan that will allow for sustainable growth in the short, medium, and long terms, and has a year to begin turning larger profits or they're out.

Cooper Union, which is facing a budgetary crisis of its own, was forced to back down on its threats to evict St. Mark's Bookshop after a massive media campaign was launched to defend the local business. A petition that was sent to the school demanding the bookstore not be thrown out on the street was signed by nearly 45,000 people. But ultimately, the store will need more than signatures to survive. St. Mark's Bookshop has been experiencing sagging sales for years with increased competition from mega-sellers such as Barnes and Noble's and the move by many book buyers to purchase items from online distributors like Amazon.com.

In the meantime, the store is hosting a party to celebrate both its recent victory as well as its thirty-fourth year anniversary in the neighborhood. Those interested in swinging through to grab a glass of wine (and buy a book!) can do so on Thursday, December 1 from 5:30-7:30. The bookstore is located at 31 Third Avenue (one block north of St. Mark's Place).

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## DSC Issues Important Resolutions in Response to Recent Events

On October 28, the Doctoral Students' Council released three important resolutions in response to recent events and revelations that impact CUNY students directly. The first resolution condemns New York Police Department spying on CUNY campuses and the targeting of Muslim student organizations. It expresses, in no uncertain terms, solidarity with the Brooklyn College faculty and the CUNY School of Law faculty in opposing these surveillance activities that were clearly demonstrated to be independent of any criminal investigation. Furthermore, the DSC resolved that it calls "upon CUNY's central administration to condemn the violation of the NYPD-CUNY Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Response to Incidents and Events Occurring at the City University of New York," which prohibits the police from spying on CUNY campuses. Of course, it has never been made fully clear if the spying was going on with or without the approval or awareness of CUNY brass. Thus, the DSC also demanded that if the memorandum was not violated, that CUNY administrators "account publicly for its role in this surveillance." The resolution also calls upon the CUNY administration to "demand publicly that the NYPD inform these groups and individuals that they have been the subject of this surveillance and the nature of the evidence gathered," that police commissioner Ray Kelly account publicly for these actions, and that Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the City Council immediately end all spying operations targeting members of the CUNY community.

The second resolution passed that day was issued in response to proposed changes in the CUNY Board of Trustees Bylaws that would significantly reduce the power of student governance to regulate student organizations and extra-curricular activity. The proposed changes are in direct violation of Article Fifteen of those same bylaws which express commitment to "student participation, responsibility, academic freedom and due process," and were only presented to the student representatives ten days in advance before the BoT Committee on Student Affairs and Special Programs was scheduled to meet. The resolution demands that these proposals be rejected outright, and failing that, that the vote on changes be delayed "in order to allow for adequate university-wide discussion of these changes." Finally, in an act of defiance against the board's

power grab, the resolution reaffirms its sovereignty over student activity funds and its authority of student activities and organizations.

Finally, the DSC issued a resolution proclaiming solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement. Sighting its ability to bring national attention to income inequality, social injustice and corporate influence in politics—the very issues affecting the welfare of CUNY students and the communities of New York City more broadly—the DSC registered its support for the OWS movement and reasserted the rights of students, and all citizens, "to peaceably assemble, demonstrate, and petition businesses, the government, and CUNY for a redress of grievances." For more on recent DSC action, and the full text of resolutions discussed above, please visit <http://www.cunyds.org/resolutions>.

## Occupy CUNY Graduate Center

On the afternoon of November 17, as New York City was in the midst of a day-long series of actions protesting the unacceptable conditions of our nation's—and indeed the world's—organization of power, over one hundred CUNY students gathered in the lobby of the Graduate Center in

and faced that sticking, that stinking accusation of apathy and we have spit in its fucking face. When we say today that 'we are the 99 percent' and that we are occupying our public spaces and our public schools, we are saying that we are individuals who think, who feel, and who know better about our societies. And that we are not too weak, that we are not too afraid, to say: This shit is wrong and it will not continue in our names. When I look at us now, at all of us—here, there, everywhere, I see an international community of engaged, aware, and conscious young people. And that is an incredible thing."

"I have a different story," said one woman, who described herself as having been "a member of the one percent." "I used to work for Goldman Sachs. I moved to India for them, and I relocated a lot of jobs there and I saw how racist the organization was, by making the assumption that we could re-colonize India, with our ideology, with our jobs, making [Indians] work hours we would never work.... Seeing you all here gives me hope." Faculty and staff also spoke. "You know the faculty is supporting you in large numbers here at the GC," said one GC staff member. But I also



midtown to join in solidarity, share their stories, and march as a group to a gathering in Union Square. [See the photo essay on pages 12-13.]

According to eyewitness accounts, the assembly was the most inspired and meaningful moment of collective action at the Graduate Center in recent memory. Students delivered impassioned, elegant statements of hope, outrage, and solidarity as their colleagues, GC faculty and staff, and NYPD and private security officers looked on in support and approval.

"Masses of Arab youth have turned to face that ugly stereotype of the backward Arab street, and they have spit poetry in its face," said Rayya El Zein, an Arab-American student at the Graduate Center and a faculty member at the City College of New York. "In the exact same way, in this country, you all, we all have turned

want you to know that staff are supporting you, too."

At 2:30, the group left the Graduate Center and marched down Fifth Avenue from 34th Street to Union Square.

As the nearly two hundred students entered the square from the north, it was met hundreds more students from New York University, the New School, and Hunter College marching from the south, joining together in the square center for a student general assembly at 3:00. Soon after, the human microphone resounded with the proclamation that "Now, as students, we march!" And march they did down to Foley Square for an extraordinary evening of music, speeches, and the seizure of the Brooklyn Bridge by some 20,000 protesters demonstrating their dissent from the status quo. A



# "Bored of Trustees": A Statement to the CUNY BoT

The following statement was collaboratively written by several members of the laterally-organized and loosely-affiliated #occupyCUNY, many of whom are also members of the nascent Graduate Center General Assembly. As "#occupy"-style organizing has become the mode of the day, several of us at the Graduate Center have found a political modus vivandi in organizations of this nature and draw energy from this broad, diverse movement that has taken the nation by storm. At the same time, we know that our struggles at CUNY are different from the broader issues Occupy Wall Street is concerned with, and we are inspired by a long history of vibrant student activism, occupations, and protest at the City University of New York.

This statement was written as part of a direct action organized by students and educators to protest the tuition hikes or what the Board of Trustees has deemed a "rational tuition schedule," which would raise our tuition \$300 annually for the next five years. On November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011, several students who were signed up to deliver testimony at the BoT's public hearing disrupted the meeting, staging "mic checks" or a "people's mic" and echoed each other as we read from this document. In the midst of all of this, we were alerted to the fact that our fellow students and educators were being beaten by police downstairs, and so several of us left the meeting to support our friends and colleagues. Later, we found out that fifteen of our colleagues had been detained. Some of the students who collaborated on this document continued to read from the document and disrupt the meeting with mic checks, even after those who had initiated the action had been escorted out forcibly, or as one protester put it-- "eliminated."

Below is a transcript of what we did that day...

(call) **Mic Check!**

(response) **Mic Check!**

Who here is CUNY?

**WE ARE CUNY!**

What do we think of these tuition hikes?

**No tuition hikes--make CUNY free again!**

Who supports public education?

**We are here fighting to keep CUNY public!**

The structure of this meeting is **not** democratic, and neither is the existence of this board nor the decisions that you make. The structure of this university is not democratic...so we are now *taking this space and this time and making it democratic!* We want to be clear--we're not stopping anyone from speaking or this hearing from continuing. We're **facilitating** the meeting, because this is not a hearing for the Board of Trustees, but for the public. We're creating a **PUBLIC HEARING**, one where the people's voices are heard through a process of listening. We repeat in order to amplify each other's voices. We repeat to have our voices heard. We repeat to make it clear that we are part of a larger collective.

We are here to state that public education should be accessible to all--**that means free tuition.**

**Tuition is privatization.** And privatization is **exclusion.** Look at what we had to get through to get into this space this afternoon!!! You call this hearing public? Education must be accessible to all, but with tuition hikes the Board of Trustees denies this access to the people of New York. We are here to tell you that this university is **OURS**. For far too long, you have not prioritized our education. **But today is a new day.**

Who is CUNY? Who is not here? Why aren't they here? In this meeting? In our buildings? In our classes Who's excluded? And who has been excluded historically?

...we'll tell you why they're not here. People are excluded from CUNY because of gradual privatization--tuition hikes--among other decisions that economically and socially force out marginalized and "non-traditional" students.

This meeting cannot contain the thousands of CUNY students and would-be CUNY students who don't fit in this tiny room. This exclusive room symbolizes the bottleneck of private power that strangles the public body.

This is what students of CUNY have to say, students who are can't attend this exclusive meeting:

One student writes, "I am a single parent who works part-time... I can barely buy text books and pay for my bills. If there is an increase, I can no longer afford to attend school. Please find it in your heart to stop the tuition increase."

Another student writes, "I worked as a real estate agent for 10 years, but after the problem in real estate, I finally gave up business to come and get an education. Currently, I do not have much income and I am a parent with two kids... No increase to school fees, please!"

A senior writes, "I am a single mother and trying to finish my degree and raising the price of education just doesn't make any sense... How do you expect us to further our education if we can't afford it?"

A student writes: "There are a lot of people who are not receiving financial aid and have jobs that are not enough for tuition, rent, fare for the train, bus, something to eat... I am a single mother with two kids trying to make it out of college."

CUNY is always the first victim of budget cuts. Now it is prey to privatization. We call for an end to the attacks on public higher education; we call for public reinvestment of our public university; we demand that our university stays in the hands of the people and no longer in those of private interest. We are students, not customers. We are teachers, not cheap labor. **WE ARE** a public institution, not a business!!!

What do tuition hikes mean? **Privatization. Exclusion. Division.** The rising cost of public education turns an institution that was meant to bring people together into an institution that divides our city.

You ask how CUNY can be tuition-free? You say "we are broke"? You ask "who would pay"? Why don't you ask Wall Street?!?!?! They have almost \$2 Trillion in cash in the bank and another \$1 Trillion in cash in overseas banks, which they refuse to pay taxes on and which they will not use to hire more employees or raise wages. We are **not** broke--the banks have all our wealth!

It is not okay that Presidents, or rather, "CEOs" of CUNY schools make six figure salaries, have housing allowances and chauffeurs, while students and workers are facing job instability, homelessness, and an inability to pay for transportation. Who is paying for your luxuries? Is it *our* DEPRESSED public funding? Is it *our* TUITION? As CUNY students and workers struggle to pay for lunch in their own cafeterias, it is insulting that our money goes to your obnoxious fringe benefits. Although your benefits are not on the line, adjunct health care is. There is something wrong with this picture.

We demand a better CUNY, of the people, for the people, by the people.

We demand that you repeal this tuition increase, NYSUNY 2020, and do not pass any other increase. Rather, we want a CUNY that is accessible to all. We want a free CUNY.

We demand that you fund adjuncts' health care, and all the wages, benefits, and working conditions

for our faculty and staff for them to live in dignity.

We demand that you fund a truly excellent CUNY--no more overcrowded classes and crumbling buildings, no more cafeterias with serious city health code violations, no more underfunding of the arts, humanities, and, especially, Gender Studies, Africana Studies, Puerto Rican and Latino Studies, Women's Studies and other departments that teach us about our histories and herstories.

We demand that CUNY resources such as libraries, health clinics, computer labs and other campus amenities be opened up to the communities of New York. We demand that you fully fund student services--free childcare, affordable housing, and nutritious, affordable food.

We demand that you pay for all of this by working hard to secure more public funding, and pivot spending within CUNY away from compensation of wealthy top administrators' and toward the education of students and compensation of faculty and staff instead. You are all public servants of a public administration--not CEOs of a private corporation!!!

Finally, we demand that you reform CUNY's governance. All major decisions at CUNY, especially curriculum changes like the proposed "Pathways Project," should be made by a "**People's Board of Trustees**," to be elected by students, faculty, staff, and community members. The current board represents the interests of the wealthy who comprise it and the politicians who appoint it, **not the people of CUNY!!!**

What is the value of education? Education does not and cannot have a monetary value. Once we say, "You, if you pay us this much, we'll give you this much education," we have turned education from a communal good into a commodity accessible only to those who can afford it or those willing to put themselves into thousands of dollars of debt. You cannot turn education into a business. In business, profit is key. Is that the value you place on education, Trustees? What's the profit here? And *who* profits? Do we define progress through profit???

There is and should be a difference between public and private education. Public education is for the public good. It is essential in order for our communities to thrive and for all people to be able to participate to the fullest extent of their abilities in the visioning and creation of their society. That is what we are doing -- envisioning and creating our own society. As Frances Degen Horowitz, a former president of the Graduate Center stated, "A democratic society is more dependent on an educated public than any other form of government. That's why public education is so critical to the future of our society." And that is why our society is becoming increasingly undemocratic as education is increasingly being rationed, as we are being forced to take on debt or remain uneducated - neither is an acceptable option. Rationing education constitutes moral exclusion and is an act of structural violence. Horowitz also said, "The only solution to our problems is education--money alone won't solve them." Money should also never stand in the way of education - or be seen as more important than education. Education should be the highest value in our society. For the people in this room. It is. Not only for ourselves, but for everyone. CUNY should "open the doors to all" and "let the children of the rich and poor take seats together and know no distinctions" as this university initially laid out to do, when it was opened as the Free Academy over a century ago.

**Teaching is sacred, learning is sacred! Public education is not a business! A**



# An Occupy Education

HELENA ROBEIRO

My initial involvement with Occupy Wall Street was, in a word, overdetermined.

I had received my American citizenship—after nearly thirty years of permanent residency in the United States—the week the occupation started at Zuccotti Park. After the PATRIOT ACT had declared that crimes like trespassing could be considered deportable offenses, and given the NYPD's zeal for arrests during peaceful protests, I had, for a decade, stayed away from any kind of politically-motivated crowd for fear that being in the wrong place at the wrong time would earn me a one-way ticket back to Brazil, a country I'd never really lived in.

Last spring, I wrote a syllabus for a class at the Gallatin School for Individualized Study—NYU's "school without walls"—which centered on the twinned, peripatetic tropes of writing and walking. Entertaining vague Aristotelean fantasies of traipsing around the city with students in tow, I had



prepared a course that would take advantage of the university's location, as well as the wealth of texts that have been written in, around, and about the spaces the incoming freshmen would be inhabiting for the next four years. In early September, the students and I began walking to Washington Square Park, finding an amenable place to sit, and then talking about, say, Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City," or flâneuring, or Henry James. During these walks, we would also talk about how the infrastructures we were walking through guided our movements, and about how park benches' wrought iron arms prevented people from laying down on them, and about how low park walls often have "decorative" features, like finials or rows of jagged concrete teeth to discourage sitting. The act of occupying public space became, in this class, not only a trope, but also a practice, which arose organically out of the interaction between the course's form and its content.

By the third week of September, emboldened by my new citizenship, and thinking about the ways in which the ideas my students and I were discussing seemed to dovetail with the reports coming out of Occupy Wall Street, I realized that there was no way I could teach this class without witnessing what was happening in Liberty Plaza; ignoring it felt irresponsible. The form of the occupation, as

well as what the people were saying there, interested me deeply. I saw this as an opportunity to not only put my mouth where the money is, helping to create this ruckus on Wall Street, but also to put my pedagogical money where my mouth is: I could not, in good conscience, encourage my students to understand and voice dissent without engaging in it myself. I came to see this synergetic convergence of circumstance, politics, research, and pedagogy as one of those chances, so rare these days, to align internal (and intellectual!) concerns with external practice. We can call that that alignment "integrity" in the holistic—not moral—sense. To me, and to others I would come to speak with at the park, this felt a lot like relief.

My first foray into the park was a tentative one; I tagged along with a group of friends for a Sunday stroll. I was intrigued, but wary: after so many years of disenfranchisement, not only from mainstream but also from radical politics, I looked askance as I looked around. I attended my first General Assembly, where a draft of what was to become the Official Declaration of the Occupation of New York was presented to the assembled body for revision. The Declaration had been written by the Call to Action working group over a series of meetings, and drafts were presented to the General Assembly for revision, amendments, and approval. Over the next several nights, it became clear that consensus would not be reached on the document as written; the proposal to adopt the docu-


ment was tabled for further discussion, and the document would be revised based on feedback received both at the General Assembly and online, where the group had posted the working draft as an editable Google document. By the time the Declaration reached consensus, it had passed through the hands of countless editors, over a period of many days; a transparent and collaborative writing process that was often as moving as it was exhilarating. It was peer workshoping writ large, and fascinating to me as a teacher of composition: here were the radical possibilities of revision. Though the declaration may lack poetry, perhaps as a result of the consensus process, the grievances it expresses synthesize the voices of hundreds, maybe thousands of people: it contains multitudes.

Despite the oft-repeated charge that occupiers are lazy or unwilling to work, a deep commitment to work—working on and working through—may be one of Occupy Wall Street's secret weapons. We are a nation of underemployed people with impeccable clerical skills! Liberty Plaza may have looked like a chaotic tent city, but the neighboring public atriums were packed with people meeting, working, and organizing. Visitors were invited to "plug in" and join a working group, many of which meet every day, sometimes a few times a day. The twenty-four-hour occupation was not limited to a banker's schedule

of nine to five, and therefore enabled spontaneous participation any time of day, and well into the night. The horizontal structures of the working groups, which mirror the horizontal structure of the movement, allow newcomers to jump right in. That first night, I casually accompanied my friends to an outreach working group meeting, and by the next week I was spending several hours a day at Liberty Plaza, despite teaching three classes this semester. I did everything from data entry to helping to write a FAQ for distribution, to brainstorming infrastructure within the working group, to distributing copies of the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*. The structure of OWS encourages the reassessment of our personal resources, and of what and how we may contribute to the movement. I have never been the kind of scholar who enjoys spending time cooped up in libraries or studies, and I found Liberty Plaza to be an excellent site not just for my OWS work, but also for my work as a teacher and student, integrating these tasks into my time at the plaza, happily grading outdoors for hours.

My work as a student, too, has benefitted from my time at the occupation. My dissertation concerns itself, in part, with discourses of American democracy, and the occupation has provided me with ample opportunities to rethink my arguments and revisit texts. Sometimes we forget that we live in a representative republic, as described in the *Federalist Papers*, rather than in a true democracy. It seems to me that the gap between these two structures, as well as the gap between the words we use to describe them and what they actually mean, are representative of the discursive breakdown we have experienced over the last couple of decades in this country: the federal government uses the word "democracy" as both a weapon and a shield against foreign (and local) dissent, and citizens are asked to fight, kill, and die for an empty signifier: we are a republic that fetishizes democracy, but does not necessarily practice it.

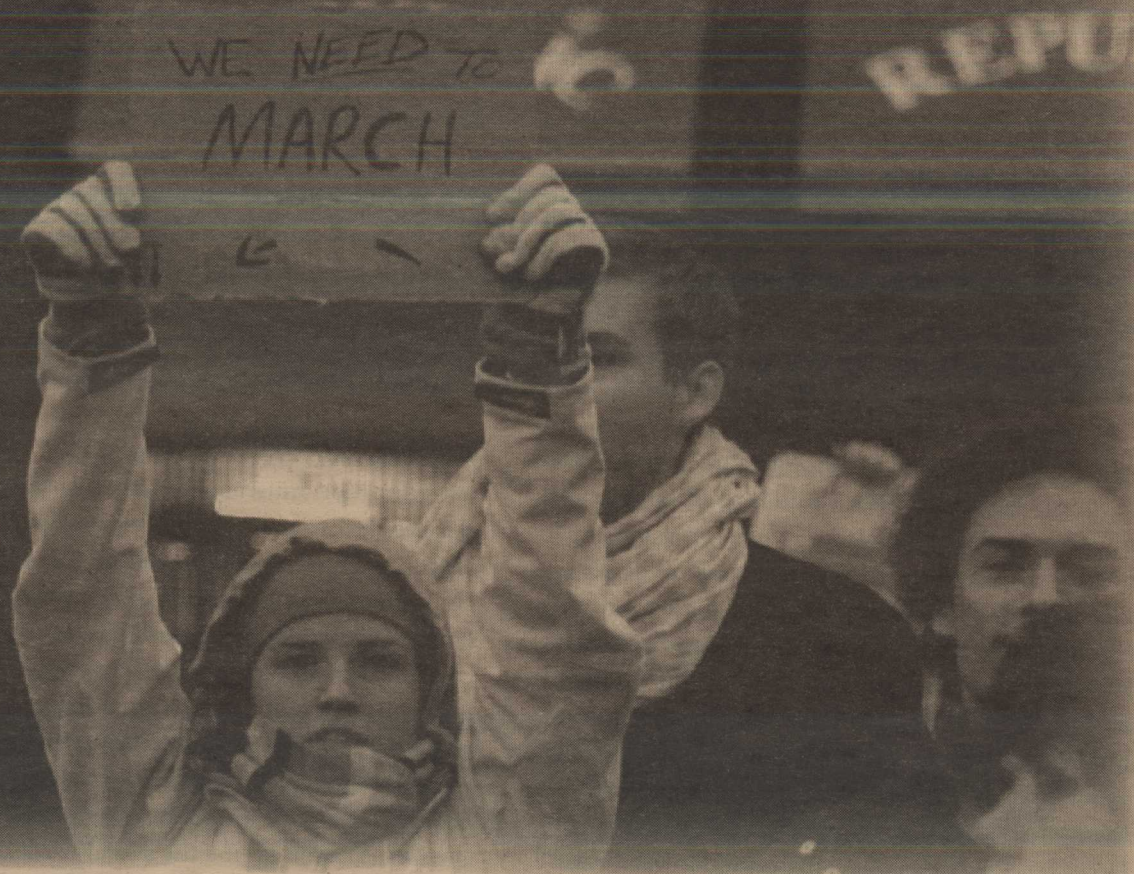
I believe that this discursive breakdown has been partly responsible for the Left's decades-long malaise: when what we say doesn't—or can't—match what we mean, we become alienated from language. Lacan attributed neurotic symptoms to this lack of correspondence between signifiers and signifieds. And when we become alienated from political discourse, we become alienated from our communities. Think of all the words whose signifieds have slipped away from us over the last few years: "security," "safety," "liberal," "hope," "change." This alienation is not only lonely, it also feels a lot like madness. So when protesters chant, triumphantly, that "this is what democracy looks like," it sounds to me like sanity: the hours-long, often tortuous General Assembly, where every participant is guaranteed a right to speak as well as to be heard is, in fact, what democracy looks like. This long-awaited reunion between words and meaning feels, today, like a breath of fresh air: it feels like relief.

For me, participation in OWS has meant an opportunity to re-integrate the structural compartments that I had become so accustomed to living with, as a citizen-subject, as a student, and as a teacher. Working within the movement, I feel nothing less than relieved to blur the lines between research and lived experience, between what I say in the classroom and what I do outside of it, and between the world I'm in and the one I'd rather live in. And this relief, ultimately, arises out of the difference between self-actualized and alienated labor. 



political analysis

# Step 1: Occupy Schools. Step 2: Transform Them.



CONOR TOMÁS REED

We've reached two miraculous months into Occupy Wall Street—a movement catalyzing millions into decisive action around the world. For many of us, 'occupy' has become a verb to be sung. This rowdy crowd word, at once descriptive and prescriptive, aims to body-flip the logic of imperialism on its head. A radical people's occupation of public space doesn't erect checkpoints, it tears them down. Instead of usurping others' resources, we heartily pool our own for free distribution. The call to occupy now reverberates from Oakland ports to NYC k-college education hearings, from garish Sotheby's art auctions to rush-hour subway ciphers. The wealthy are now hounded at public appearances, while banks begin to dance the frantic backpedal. The results are in: a poor people's movement is once again changing the course of history.

So how can we apply this electric tenacity to occupy our schools? Initially, education activists

did well to look beyond the immediate horizon of campus grounds and help transform public squares—the movement's major first act. The recent "People's University" and "#occupyCUNY" teach-ins at Washington Square Park demonstrated, along with each OWS assembly and Open Forum, how to re-shape public places as free venues for collective education where all can actively make meaning in a range of critical discussions. With the goal to shake prevailing school priorities inside out, these wide-open counter-classrooms have been essential. But for our second act (and just in time for winter!), we need to boomerang the "occupy" movement back to where our power was latent all along—the highly contestable institutional sites of education.

For teachers and students to differently occupy our schools means to jettison many failed tenets of how higher education operates today. Competitive individualized learning, rigid demarcation of disciplines, shallow celebration of difference, grading

systems that all-too-viciously distort self-worth—these are the pedagogical tools of the 1 percent. Instead, many campuses now host OWS-style general assemblies that welcome the surrounding community, and put educationally marginalized people's voices to the front of the speakers' list and the top of resulting activities. Student writers at the CUNY Graduate Center have begun to collaborate on multiple-author documents about the Occupy movement's significance, with public writing times and involvement across disciplines. Our goal is to work up to creating "People's Dissertations" to be shared with committees of peers. After each dissertation is created, we can hand out P(eople)h(ave) D(dreams) certificates en masse to rupture these emblems of intellectual prestige.

The point here is to re-occupy our schools with clear political purpose. It's not enough for a tiny band of adventurous students and teachers to take a school building and hoist a flag. We need to gather

## The GC Advocate is pleased to announce the Second Annual GC Advocate Poetry Competition.

The winning entry chosen by our judge, the poet Wayne Koestenbaum, will receive a \$250 cash award plus publication in the May, 2012 issue of the GC Advocate. Second and third place winners will receive \$75 and \$50 respectively plus publication.

The contest is free and open to any poet, previously published or unpublished.

Submissions must be received no later than March 1, 2012. Winners will be notified by April 30. All poems submitted to the contest will also be considered for possible future publication in the GC Advocate.

To enter, submit up to five poems of no more than 6 pages total as a Word attachment to [advocate@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:advocate@gc.cuny.edu) no later than March 1, 2012. Please be sure to include "Advocate Poetry Competition" in the subject line.



vast networks of resonant support if school occupations and strikes are to succeed, and line up a syllabus of radical educational acts for the exact moment when business as usual is disrupted. In Chile, Puerto Rico, California, and around Europe, educational activities *proliferated*, rather than halted, when people effectively shut down campuses. Labor historian Paul Johnston also suggests that “we start seeing the strike not as an ‘off button’—put down your tools, walk out, stand in front of the worksite, keep people from crossing the lines—and instead see it as an ‘on button,’” in order to galvanize a huge influx of participants into concrete action.

Now to dig even deeper—what does it mean for us to “occupy theory”? Although some cozily ensconced radical scholars would bray otherwise, we must be clear that liberatory education is a means, not an end. So too, radical books that are disconnected from social action may be like that lone flag rippling atop an otherwise unchallenged edifice. As Paulo Freire, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, and others persist, we have been inculcated in an imperialist banking model of education. The more intellectual value-ground we gain by climbing education echelons, the more precarious then becomes our resistance. However, the late people’s historian Howard Zinn understood the exigencies of radical scholarship—while at Spelman College, he would discuss U.S. history with his students, and then after class they would proceed to shape history by marching down together to desegregate lunch counters. In such moments, the high walls of theory become marvelously porous; we test the learning process by leaping off the page and into lived social experience.

The relationship between ideas and currency is another target for occupation. Pierre Bourdieu calls attention to the French word *louer*, which can mean both “to praise” and “to rent.” I’m reminded

of the time-worn practice of the first day of seminars, in which each student goes around to share their “interests”: “I’m interested in this field/author, that methodology is so interesting,” etc., etc. The word “interest” connotes somewhat of a detached, dispassionate gaze, but also contains clear economic ramifications. We borrow ideas throughout school, duly paying interest to those who own them, which thus accrues value for certain kinds of knowledge. With this inaugurating tradition of sharing one’s interests (like a banker-in-training, or otherwise like a collector of possessions), we practice the cool ownership of ideas. We don’t discuss our scholarship in the world in such productive ways as, “I WORK with this, I am INVOLVED with that.” To liberate our education must include, then, expropriating our ideas from these hierarchical mis-evaluations.

Moreover, we would do well to incorporate Occupy Wall Street’s methods of discussion in revitalizing our learning communities. How often do we carefully strive to create consent about complex positions and concepts? We’ve been taught to theorize like starving hyenas—tearing the throat out of each other’s ideas. Instead, an educational circle that listens to one another, repeating word for word if needed, can inscribe the social work of scholarship with a shared sense of critical *construction*. In doing so, we can attempt to break out of the last few traumatic decades’ fixation on the dis- abyss: our school movement’s trajectory now requires re-empowerment, re-orientation, re-combination! We will expand the global Occupy struggle if clear alternatives to this utter failure of a system are presented, debated, attempted, assessed, re-worked, and attempted again, with each stage in the process promoting wider variations for action. Everyone can perform in these revolutionary rehearsals—from classroom announcements to book-shield art-

istry to street marches to nonviolent direct action upon our universities’ own 1 percent.

Ultimately, such an expansive project will entail changing our conceptions of school altogether. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney urgently reveal the present underside of education: “the university contains incarceration as the product of its negligence.” Paradoxically, then, our role in transforming schools must include striving to abolish their function as the official sites of knowledge production, just as we must in connection strive to abolish prison systems that maintain colonialism by other means. To liberate schools is to liberate a society in which education codifies and contrasts people’s needs and dreams to each other’s. To this effect, the people’s class is now in session, with guaranteed free tuition and open admissions. We’re making up the syllabus as we go.

Here in New York City, the November 17 student strike mobilized several thousand students and teachers to transform Union Square, the streets of lower Manhattan, as well as a New School building at 90 Fifth Ave under current vibrant occupation. On November 21, hundreds of CUNY students and teachers amassed inside and outside a Board of Trustees meeting to protest massive tuition increases, student loan debt, department bureaucratization, and adjunct healthcare still under attack. We will dramatically escalate pressure on the Board’s business meeting one week later, November 28, to indicate a message of no confidence in their legitimacy. Graduate Center General Assemblies are now (growing!) each Friday, 6pm, in the 8th floor cafeteria. And the most thrilling part? We’re just getting started. **A**

Conor Tomás Reed is an activist in the City University of New York with the Adjunct Project and the Graduate Center General Assembly, and a member of the Occupy Wall Street student and labor outreach committees.

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guest editorial

# Standing Up for Our Students

AMMIEL ALCALAY

Intermittent crises have been an integral part of CUNY ever since my first association with it (as a City College student and dropout in the mid-1970s, a PhD student in the 1980s, and now a tenured full professor). But there is something especially troubling happening at CUNY now. From the very top, what I have come to call the “proctological” business management model has taken increasing hold on more and more aspects of CUNY life. From the creation of new administrative layers, insanely disproportionate security measures (as evidenced not only by the recent arrests at Baruch but by the general atmosphere on many campuses), to the imposition of Pathways, a modular general education curriculum that will further devalue undergraduate education and send students into even further debt, CUNY is losing touch with its values as a public institution. Once upon a time a high school diploma or trade school might have led to gainful employment; then it was a college degree. Now a college degree promises little, while an MA or even a PhD offers no guarantee of a future in which accrued student debt might reasonably be paid back. This devaluation and extension of existing educational structures has played a key role in the larger

economic restructuring policies that have led this country to deindustrialization and outsourcing. The current corporate direction of CUNY is falling right into this pattern.

Throughout CUNY, institutional memory has been replaced by administrative procedure, sometimes competent, sometimes not at all. Contracts for computer systems, software programs, and security services have taken precedence over education. Accounting for results and outcome assessments have taken precedence over exploration and experimentation. The loss of institutional memory, like the imposition of a centralized curriculum, makes individual and locally collective initiatives expendable, replaceable, disposable. CUNY has come to look more and more like Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg’s New York, in which poor and working people have been hidden, cordoned off by the trappings of gentrification, relegated to zones of exclusion, only able to peek in at the windows of the little boutiques of excellence that dot the map of what was once the Free Academy.

With the increase of adjunct labor, our graduate students face complex political issues every day in what is our common workplace, albeit with very different levels of privilege. They are often in

competition with others who are neither graduate students nor full-time faculty, but under-employed academics struggling to make ends meet through intellectual piecework.

As someone with a deep allegiance to this great institution, I have watched with true admiration and pride as I see our students—graduates and undergraduates—awaken from the miasma that has been choking off the oxygen of our public space for decades. This is an important moment and, as tenured faculty who enjoy certain obvious privileges, we owe it to our students—all of them—to use those privileges to their advantage. While our students are perfectly able to take care of themselves (as has been proven so many times), we need to use our place in the hierarchy to create safer spaces between the forces being marshaled against them and their much greater vulnerability.

However each of us decides to do this remains to be seen but I urge everyone, in the strongest terms possible, to think through these issues and find new ways to return some of what has been invested in us. After all, without students, none of us would have jobs in the academy, and it is an essential part of our job not only to listen to our students but to hear them. **A**

guest editorial

# The Brave New World of Occupy Wall Street

AMY GOODMAN

We got word just after 1:00 a.m. Tuesday that New York City police were raiding the Occupy Wall Street encampment. I raced down with the *Democracy Now!* news team to Zuccotti Park, renamed Liberty Square. Hundreds of riot police had already surrounded the area. As they ripped down the tents, city sanitation workers were throwing the protesters’ belongings into dump trucks. Beyond the barricades, back in the heart of the park, 200 to 300 people locked arms, refusing to cede the space they had occupied for almost two months. They were being handcuffed and arrested, one by one.

The few of us members of the press who managed to get through all the police lines were sent to a designated area across the street from Zuccotti Park. As our cameras started rolling, they placed two police buses in front of us, blocking our view. My colleagues and I managed to slip between them and into the park, climbing over the trashed mounds of tents, tarps and sleeping bags. The police had almost succeeded in enforcing a complete media blackout of the destruction.

We saw a broken bookcase in one pile. Deeper in the park, I spotted a single book on the ground. It was marked “OWSL,” for Occupy Wall Street Library, also known as the People’s Library, one of the key institutions that had sprung up in the organic democracy of the movement. By the latest count, it had accumulated 5,000 donated books. The one I found, amidst the debris of democracy that was being hauled off to the dump, was *Brave New World Revisited*, by Aldous Huxley.

As the night progressed, the irony of finding Huxley’s book grew. He wrote it in 1958, almost thirty years after his famous dystopian novel, *Brave New World*. The original work described society in the future where people had been stratified into haves and have-nots. The *Brave New World* denizens were plied with pleasure, distraction, advertisement and

intoxicating drugs to lull them into complacency, a world of perfect consumerism, with lower classes doing all the work for an elite.

*Brave New World Revisited* was Huxley’s non-fiction response to the speed with which he saw modern society careening to that bleak future. It seemed relevant, as the encampment, motivated in large part by the opposition to the supremacy of commerce and globalization, was being destroyed.

Huxley wrote in the book: “Big Business, made possible by advancing technology and the consequent ruin of Little Business, is controlled by the State—that is to say, by a small group of party leaders and the soldiers, policemen and civil servants who carry out their orders. In a capitalist democracy, such as the United States, it is controlled by what Professor C. Wright Mills has called the Power Elite.” Huxley goes on to write, “This Power Elite directly employs several millions of the country’s working force in its factories, offices and stores, controls many millions more by lending them the money to buy its products, and, through its ownership of the media of mass communication, influences the thoughts, the feelings and the actions of virtually everybody.”

One of the People’s Library volunteers, Stephen Boyer, was there as the park was raided. After avoiding arrest and helping others with first aid, he wrote: “Everything we brought to the park is gone. The beautiful library is gone. Our collection of 5,000 books is gone. Our tent that was donated is gone. All the work we’ve put into making it is gone.”

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s office later released a photo of a table with some books

stacked on it, claiming the books had been preserved. As the People’s Library tweeted: “We’re glad to see some books are OK. Now, where are the rest of the books and our shelter and our boxes?” The shelter, by the way, was donated to the library by National Book Award winner Patti Smith, the rock ‘n’ roll legend.

Many other Occupy protest sites have been raided recently. Oakland Mayor Jean Quan admitted to the



BBC that she had been on a conference call with eighteen cities, discussing the situation. Another report noted that the FBI and Homeland Security have been advising the cities.

A New York state judge ruled late Tuesday that the eviction will stand, and that protesters cannot return to Zuccotti Park with sleeping bags or tents. After the ruling, a constitutional attorney sent me a text message: “Just remember: the movement is in the streets. Courts are always last resorts.” Or, as Patti Smith famously sings, “People Have the Power.” **A**

Amy Goodman is the host of *Democracy Now!*, a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 900 stations in North America.

Above: A photo of the people’s library, taken before it was destroyed by NYPD and sanitation workers.



# CUNY Faculty Statement of Support for the Nov. 17 Student Strike in Solidarity with Occupy Wall Street

We faculty members of The City University of New York (CUNY) would like to express our solidarity with Occupy Wall Street (OWS) and the nascent student movement it has helped galvanize at CUNY. We support the movement's stand against the structural inequalities that lead to the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the few and against austerity measures taken during the recent economic downturn. The costs of this crisis and current social order constitute a harsh reality for many New Yorkers and especially CUNY students because our student body has always been the 99 percent: working-class people of all colors with a strong commitment to education and democracy. The increasing tuition costs and growing debt burden foisted upon students undermines not only CUNY's institutional goals, but also our students' very futures. This is why we support the student strike organized by our students on Thursday November 17, along with the protests on November 21 against the prospect of tuition hikes to be decided on by the Board of Trustees.

To sign the statement, write to: [NSmith@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:NSmith@gc.cuny.edu)

## Signatures

- \* Neil Smith (Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography, Graduate Center)
- \* Susan Buck-Morss (Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Graduate Center)
- \* David Harvey (Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Geography, Graduate Center)
- \* Setha Low (Professor of Environmental Psychology and Geography, Graduate Center)
- \* Cindi Katz (Professor of Environmental Psychology, Graduate Center)
- \* Patricia Ticineto Clough (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center and Queens College)
- \* Kandice Chuh (Professor of English and American Studies, Graduate Center)
- \* Peter Ranis (Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Graduate Center)
- \* Rebecca Mlynarczyk (Professor of English Emerita, Graduate Center)
- \* Carol Smith (Associate Professor, SEEK program (retired), City College)
- \* Renate Bridenthal (Professor of History (retired), Brooklyn College)
- \* Ruth O'Brien (Professor of Political Science, Graduate Center)
- \* John Gerassi (Professor of Political Science, Graduate Center and Queens College)
- \* Alyson M. Cole (Professor of Political Science and Women Studies, Queens College and Graduate Center)
- \* Linda Martin Alcoff (Professor of Philosophy, Hunter College and Graduate Center)
- \* Sibyl A. Schwarzenbach (Professor of Philosophy and Women's Studies, Graduate Center)
- \* Stanley Aronowitz (Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Urban Education, Graduate Center)
- \* Ira Shor (Professor of English, College of Staten Island and Graduate Center)
- \* David Chapin (Professor of Environmental Psychology, Graduate Center)
- \* Marvin Carlson (Sidney E. Cohn Distinguished Professor of Theatre, Comparative Literature and Middle Eastern Studies, Graduate Center)
- \* Frank Kirkland (Associate Professor of Philosophy (Graduate Center and Hunter College))
- \* Alex S. Vitale (Associate Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College)
- \* Ashley Dawson (Associate Professor of English, Graduate Center, College of Staten Island)
- \* Caitlin Cahill (Assistant Professor of Urban Studies, Graduate Center, New Community College, and Kingsborough Community College)
- \* Michael Friedman (Visiting Scientist, Sackler Laboratory for Comparative Genomics, American Museum of Natural History; Adjunct Assistant Professor of Biology, Medgar Evers College)
- \* Kelly Anderson (Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies, Hunter College)
- \* Anthony Alessandrini (Associate Professor of English, Kingsborough Community College)
- \* Eben Wood (Associate Professor of English, Kingsborough Community College)
- \* Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Graduate Center)
- \* Rosalind Petchesky (Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Hunter College and Graduate Center)
- \* Sarah Schulman (Distinguished Professor of English, College of Staten Island)
- \* Michelle Fine (Distinguished Professor of Psychology, Graduate Center)
- \* Sarah Benesch (Professor of English, College of Staten Island)
- \* Siona Wilson (Assistant Professor, the Graduate Center and the College of Staten Island)
- \* Hester Eisenstein (Professor of Sociology, Queens College and the Graduate Center)
- \* Vinay Gidwani (Associate Professor of Geography and Global Studies, University of Minnesota; Adjunct Associate Professor of Geography, CUNY Graduate Center)
- \* Barbara Katz Rothman (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center and Baruch College)
- \* Kenneth Gold (Professor of Education, College of Staten Island and Graduate Center)
- \* Cynthia Chris (Associate Professor of Media Culture, College of Staten Island)
- \* David A. Gerstner (Professor of Cinema Studies and Media Culture, Graduate Center and College of Staten Island)
- \* Maxime Blanchard (Associate Professor of French, City College and Graduate Center)
- \* Dr. Maurya Wickstrom (Associate Professor of Theatre, Graduate Center, City University of New York and College of Staten Island)
- \* Marianna Pavlovskaya (Associate Professor of Geography, Hunter College)
- \* Sujatha Fernandes (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Queens College and the Graduate Center)
- \* Meena Alexander (Distinguished Professor of English at Hunter College and Graduate Center)
- \* Ellen Belton (Professor of English, Brooklyn College)
- \* Clarence Taylor (Professor of Modern African American, Religion and Civil Rights, Baruch College)
- \* Corey Robin (Associate Professor of Political Science, Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center)
- \* Roderick Watts (Professor of Psychology at Hunter School of Social Work and Graduate Center)
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- \* Lisa Freedman (Lecturer, Kingsborough Community College)
- \* Vincent Crapanzano (Distinguished Professor of Comparative Literature and Anthropology, Graduate Center)
- \* Wythe Marshall (Adjunct Lecturer, Brooklyn College Department of English)
- \* Kristofer Petersen-Overton (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Lehman College)
- \* Rachel Faulkner-Gurstein (Lecturer, Hunter College)
- \* Jennifer Corby (Lecturer, City College of New York)
- \* Kathleen Haley (Assistant Professor of English, Brooklyn College)
- \* Katherine Verdery (Julien J. Studley Faculty Scholar and Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, Graduate Center)
- \* Angelica Nuzzo (Professor of Philosophy, Graduate Center and Brooklyn College)
- \* Mary M. Reda (Associate Professor of English & Director of Writing, College of Staten Island)
- \* Susan Opatow (Professor of Criminal Justice, John Jay College and Graduate Center)
- \* Carly Smith (Adjunct Lecturer, Baruch College)
- \* Robert Reid-Pharr (Professor of English, Graduate Center)
- \* Conor Tomás Reed (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Baruch College)
- \* Duncan Faherty (Associate Professor of English & American Studies, Queens College and Graduate Center)
- \* Hope Parisi (Associate Professor of English, Kingsborough Community College)
- \* Ricardo Miranda (Associate Professor of Film & Media Studies, Hunter College)
- \* James Blair (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Brooklyn College)
- \* Charles Post (Professor of Sociology, Borough of Manhattan Community College)
- \* Jim Fleming (Adjunct Lecturer, Hunter College)
- \* Bernard L. Stein (Professor of Journalism, Hunter College and Graduate School of Journalism)
- \* Megan Paslawski (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Queens College)
- \* Yuri Cantor (Lecturer, Queens College)
- \* Martyna Starosta (Lecturer in the Film and Media Department, Hunter College)
- \* Lyn Di Iorio (Associate Professor of English, City College of New York & Graduate Center)
- \* Mike Owen Benediktsson (Assistant Professor of Sociology, Hunter College and City University of New York)
- \* John MacMahon (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of Political Science, Hunter College)
- \* Rayya El Zein (Lecturer, Department of Theater, City College)
- \* Conor Tomás Reed (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Baruch College)
- \* Malav Kanunga (Teaching Fellow at Baruch College, Dept of Anthropology and Sociology; Assistant with the Mellon Committee on Globalization and Social Change)
- \* David Nasaw (Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Professor of History, Graduate Center)
- \* Isabel Pinedo (Associate Professor of Film and Media Studies, Hunter College)
- \* Jackie DiSalvo (Associate Professor of Political Science, Brooklyn College)
- \* Steven Alvarez (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Queens College)
- \* Julia Sneringer (Associate Professor of History, Queens College & the Graduate Center)
- \* Velina Manolova (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Department of English, City College)
- \* Martin Lucas (Lecturer, Department of Film and Media Studies, Hunter College)
- \* Susan O'Malley (Professor of English, KCC, Professor of Liberal Studies, GC, retired)
- \* Rainer J. Hanshe (writer/editor, Contra Mundum Press/Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics)
- \* Gary Wilder (Associate Professor in Anthropology, Graduate Center)
- \* Penny Lewis (Assistant Professor, Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies, SPS)
- \* Noe Dinnerstein (Adjunct, Art and Music, John Jay)
- \* Cynthia Tobar (Assistant Professor/Metadata Librarian, Graduate Center)
- \* Wayne Koestenbaum (Distinguished Professor of English, Graduate Center)
- \* Blanche Wiesen Cook (Professor of History, John Jay and Graduate Center)
- \* Alison Powell (Graduate Teaching Fellow and Adjunct Lecturer, Hunter College)
- \* Jean Graham-Jones (Professor of Theatre and Hispanic and Lusobrazilian Literatures and Languages, The Graduate Center)
- \* Paisley Currah (Professor of Political Science, Brooklyn College)
- \* Rupal Oza (Associate Professor of Geography and Chair of Women's Studies, Hunter College, Graduate Center)
- \* Shifra Sharlin (Distinguished Lecturer, MALS, Graduate Center)
- \* Valerie Tevere (Associate Professor of Media Culture, College of Staten Island)
- \* Elizabeth Bidwell Goetz (Adjunct Instructor, English, Graduate Center, Hunter College, Borough of Manhattan Community College)
- \* Lily M Hoffman (Director, Rosenberg/Humphrey Program in Public Policy Sociology, CCNY & Grad Center)
- \* Tom Buechele (Adjunct Lecturer at Brooklyn College Dept of Sociology; Fellow at the Center for the Study of Culture, Technology and Work, CUNY Graduate Center Brooklyn College)
- \* Jean Maude Anyon (Professor of Urban Education, Graduate Center)
- \* Alison Powell (Adjunct Lecturer / Graduate Teaching Fellow English Department, Hunter College)
- \* Peter Hitchcock (Professor of English, Baruch College and the Graduate Center)
- \* Jennifer Sloan (Adjunct Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Queens College)
- \* Katherine Hazzard (Adjunct Assistant Professor, English Medgar Evers College)
- \* Bilal Khan (Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science, John Jay College)
- \* Cynthia Fuchs Epstein (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center, CUNY)
- \* Celina Su (Associate Professor of Political Science, Brooklyn College)
- \* Kenneth Gould (Professor of Sociology, Brooklyn College)
- \* David E. Lavin (Professor Emeritus of Sociology, Graduate Center and Lehman College)
- \* A. Martini (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Political Science, Lehman College)
- \* Carolina Bank Munoz (Associate Professor of Sociology Brooklyn College and The Graduate Center)
- \* Vilna Bashi Treitler (Associate Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center; Department of Black & Hispanic Studies, Baruch College, CUNY)
- \* Stephen Boatright (Adjunct Lecturer of Geography, Hunter College)
- \* John L. Hammond (Professor of Sociology, Hunter College and Graduate Center)
- \* Maritsa Poros (Associate Professor of Sociology, City College of New York)
- \* Richard Alba (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, The Graduate Center)
- \* Katie Gentile (Associate Professor of Counseling, John Jay College)
- \* Peter Kwong (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, The Graduate Center)
- \* Andrew Alan Beveridge (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center and Queens College, CUNY)
- \* Pyong Gap Min (Distinguished Professor of Sociology, Queens College and the Graduate Center)
- \* Victoria Pitts-Taylor (Professor of Sociology, Queens College and Graduate Center)
- \* Rafael de la Dehesa (Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, CUNY Graduate Center; Department of Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work, College of Staten Island, CUNY)
- \* William Kornblum (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center, CUNY)
- \* Sophia Catsambis (Professor of Sociology, Queens College Sociology and Educational Psychology, Graduate Center, CUNY)
- \* Ruth Milkman (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center, CUNY)
- \* Barbara Katz Rothman (Professor of Sociology, Public Health, Disability Studies; Baruch, GC and SPS)
- \* John Torpey (Professor of Sociology, Graduate Center, CUNY)
- \* Roger Hart (Professor of Psychology and Geography, Graduate Center of CUNY)
- \* Patrick Sweeney (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Psychology, Hunter College)
- \* Carla Betancourt (Architect, Urban Design, City College)
- \* Einat Manoff (Adjunct Lecturer, Hunter College)
- \* Christine Caruso (Adjunct Instructor, Social Science and Humanities at LaGuardia Community College; School of Continuing Ed at The New School)
- \* Jennifer Tang (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Psychology Department, Hunter College)
- \* Sruthi Atmakur (Adjunct Lecturer, Children and Youth Studies)
- \* Tommy Wu (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Queens College)
- \* Melissa Phruksachart (Graduate Teaching Fellow, Brooklyn College)
- \* David Sorkin (Distinguished Professor of History, Jack H. Skirball Director, Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Center)



# The Police War against the Occupy Crowds

JUSTIN ROGERS COOPER

The subject of the Constitution is not a single individual: it's a plural subject. *We the people*. The first amendment says that Congress "shall make no law" abridging the "right of the people peaceably to assemble." Individuals vote in elections. The "people" that peacefully assemble by definition assemble their bodies together to form crowds in public space. In that space their assembled bodies have free speech. In a strict constitutional sense, "the people" do not appear except when they actually exercise their rights: therefore the Occupy Wall Street crowds are *the* people of the Constitution. All crowds assembled for political reasons are the people. All police actions against peaceful crowds are assaults against the Constitution.

The Occupy crowds have done more than create a globally disseminated message about the corruption of US democracy by a wealthy class dominated by corporate and financial elites. They have created public spaces as stages for the right to form crowds under the protection of the US constitution. They are the largest national protest movement that hasn't been organized against a war since the Civil Rights Movement, and for the first time in decades, institutions of financial accumulation and their supporters are on the defensive.

Without a doubt, the police tactics used against the Occupy crowds have extremely profound consequences for constitutional advocates, American political reform, and the wealthy elite dominating the offices of US political representatives. By representing themselves in public spaces instead of ceding political representation to corporate-financed politicians, the Occupy crowds have implicitly taken on the burden of true self-representation. They are vulnerable and at risk. Their bodies are there to create messages or to be beaten. They are under incredible verbal assault from a vocal minority of elite investors, middle-class xenophobes, and a pro-capitalist news media. They have been described by this media as disgusting, violent, dirty, vile, criminal, pathetic, leeching losers. These terms of hatred in fact project what their accusers can't admit about their own values and lives—like the group of complaining neighbors near Zuccotti Park, who portray themselves as the true victims.

In reality, Occupy has revealed a national crowd control strategy for current and future civil insurrections. This strategy suggests a level of city coordination between law enforcement agencies that the mainstream media has curiously ignored. Based on the violent evacuations of protesters from public spaces in Denver, Oakland, Portland, Nashville, Richmond, Austin, Atlanta, and now New York, we can conclude that the Constitution is not protecting the right to assembly in the United States. The specific evictions of crowds in Oakland, Nashville, and Denver were key strategic experiments. They succeeded, and therefore they spread. Each local action has revealed a consistent national strategy. States and municipalities have used local codes about camping, vagrancy, sanitation, curfew, public safety, drugs, and similar scapegoat issues. Local politicians, mainstream media, and 1 percent sympathizers have attached negative social emotions to the Occupy crowds in order to put the stink on them: they're sick, they're contagious, they're wasted,

they're addicts. They can only escalate these strategies in the future, which is another reason why it's imperative that the crowds remain non-violent.

The clear campaign to turn the Occupy crowds into criminals was a cover to latently criminalize their demands and to distract willfully ignorant persons from actually confronting the slogans. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo had to offer rhetorical statements that both alluded to the constitutional "right to demonstrate" and yet also warned "we will enforce the law." His use of the word "we" here is informative. It's unclear here how Governor Cuomo understood the difference between the Constitution as law and *the* law he might support to disperse the crowd. *Congress shall make no law*: the concept that federal law trumps state law—and local law—is called the supremacy clause.

This clause should supposedly apply to the constitutional rights of black and Hispanic citizens, for example, who are arrested hundreds of thousands of times every year by "stop and frisk" searches. These assaults are unconstitutional, but also are seemingly tolerated as local practices that take priority over constitutional rights. Essentially, stop and frisk says that a state of emergency exists in all black and Hispanic neighborhoods in New York. Significantly, on October 21 the NYPD arrested over one hundred people outside a police precinct in Harlem, including former Princeton professor Cornel West, who had gathered to protest stop and frisk. The ultimate consequences of removing such protesters from public visibility cannot

violence in a black neighborhood.

The eviction from Zuccotti Park has highlighted the possibility of a constitutional showdown over the First Amendment right to speech and assembly. The outcome of this showdown is hard to predict, since the courts and the police have strategically criminalized several types of crowd forms in the name of national security, especially since 9/11. But the real object of these assaults is the message of the Occupy crowds: anti-capitalist speech is not consistent with national narratives of US identity before or after the Cold War. Unsurprisingly, recent directions in US law and legislation have been explicitly against all forms of social association except the corporate kind—consider the recent attacks on unions. All bodily combinations besides legally body-less corporations are in danger in part because of their perilous relationship to the public imagination. This is mostly because of a concerted effort to erase all forms of identity except glorified individualism. The Occupy crowds have acted as a collective subject, as a variation of the "people." In the United States there can only be one form of collective subject: the corporation. Everyone else is reduced to a consumer—or a voter. On that score, shills for the financial elite have recently fallen in love with telling the Occupy crowds to vote, as if voting were in fact a reasonable solution to the problems that the movement has publicized.

The only agent the elite class of the United States has for interacting with the crowds, then, are *local* police enforcing *local* laws in the name of defend-



be overlooked.

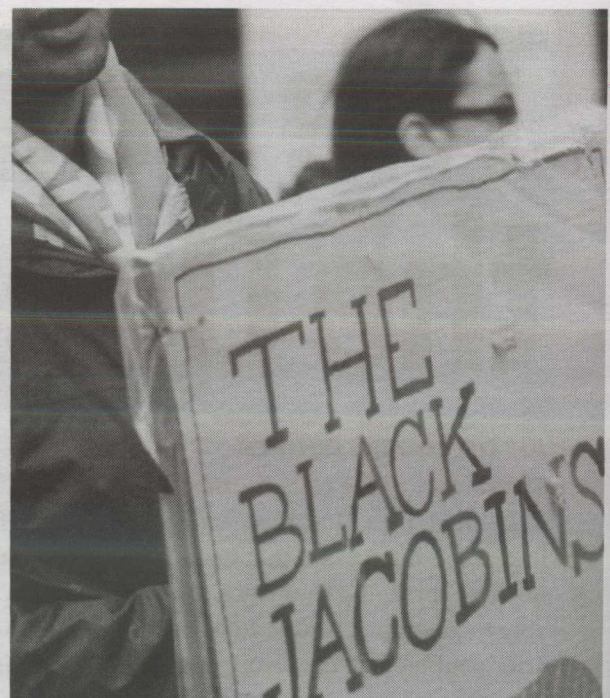
Similarly, the dispersal of the Occupy crowds was preceded by the widely disseminated and yet dubious sequence of news cycles about drugs, sex, noise, sanitation and safety. This was an organized smear campaign that the movement had no answer for in the short term. It was instrumental in securing juridical support for the eviction because it created a growing sense within public opinion that the Occupy crowds were actually disgusting bodies that needed to be cleaned by the police. There is a history to this production of disgust to mobilize white middle-class support against the working class and against people of color. That history is rehearsed every time a local news outlet covers late-breaking

ing against public chaos: this is the exact same logic applied on a national scale to push through legislative assaults on civil liberties like the Patriot Act and to justify blatant violations of international law, such as the US drone strikes in Pakistan. The police are there to disperse bodies, period. This method draws upon a legal foundation rooted in martial law, whereby military troops cannot legally appear unless a local executive declares a civil emergency. In emergency conditions and when emergencies are threatened, local authorities can void the Constitution with the certainty of the President. In these cases, national troops are unnecessary because local police act as agents of US federal law. In short, the

*Continued on page 14*

Above: A protester throws up her hands in self-defense as the NYPD clears out Zuccotti Park.





On November 17, students, staff, and faculty massed at the CUNY Graduate Center for a speak-out in solidarity with the Occupy Wall Street movement, after which they proceeded down Fifth Avenue to a rally at Union Square (see news, page 3). Among the many lending their support were Barbara Katz Rothman, sociology professor at the GC (top left, with one of the book shields), Tristan Husby (top center), Naomi Adiv (above left), Natascia Boeri (above right), Zoltán Glück (opposite, center right), and John Boy (opposite, bottom center).

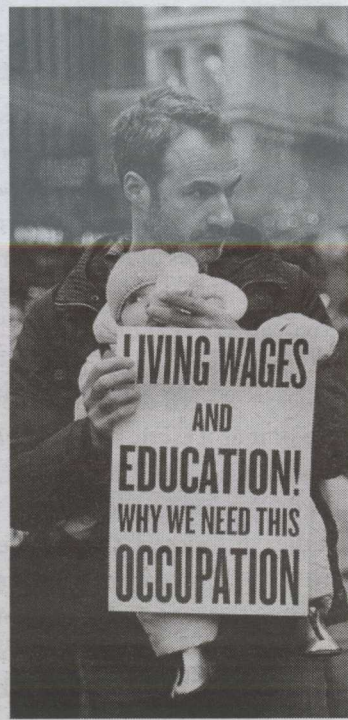
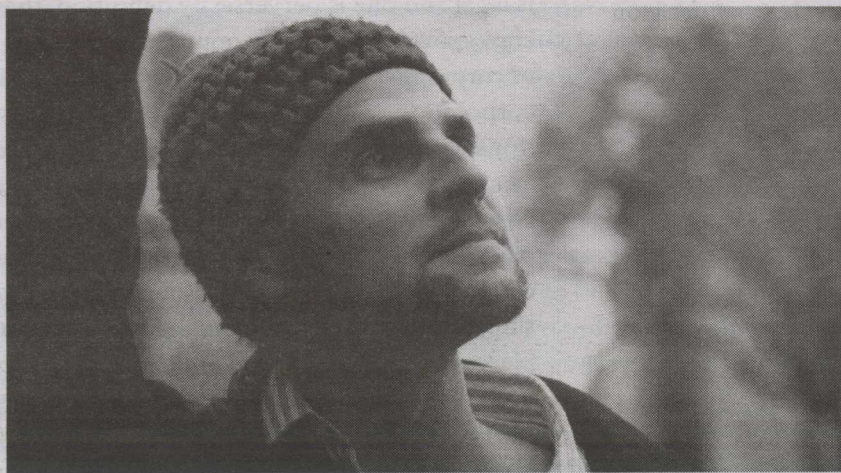
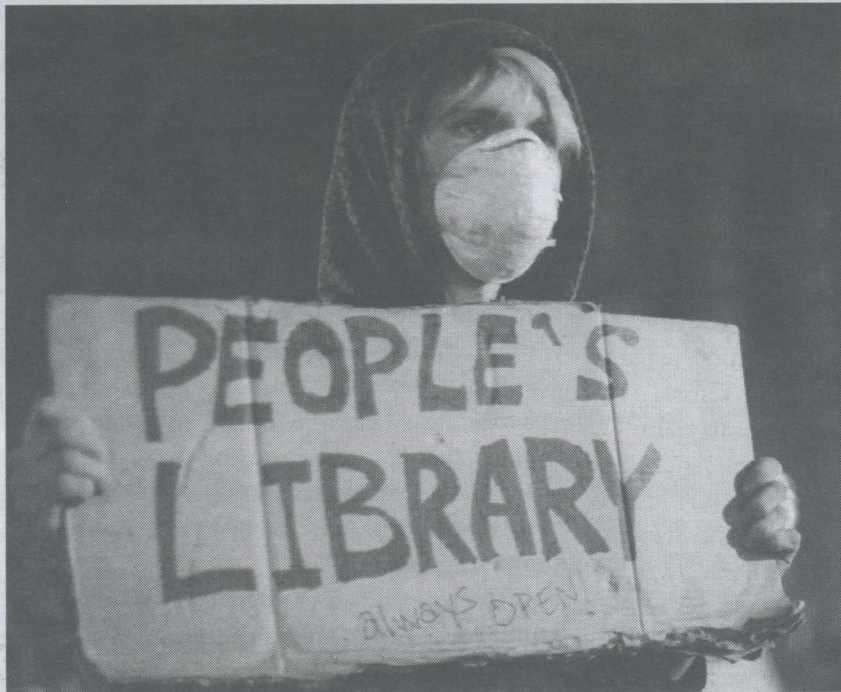
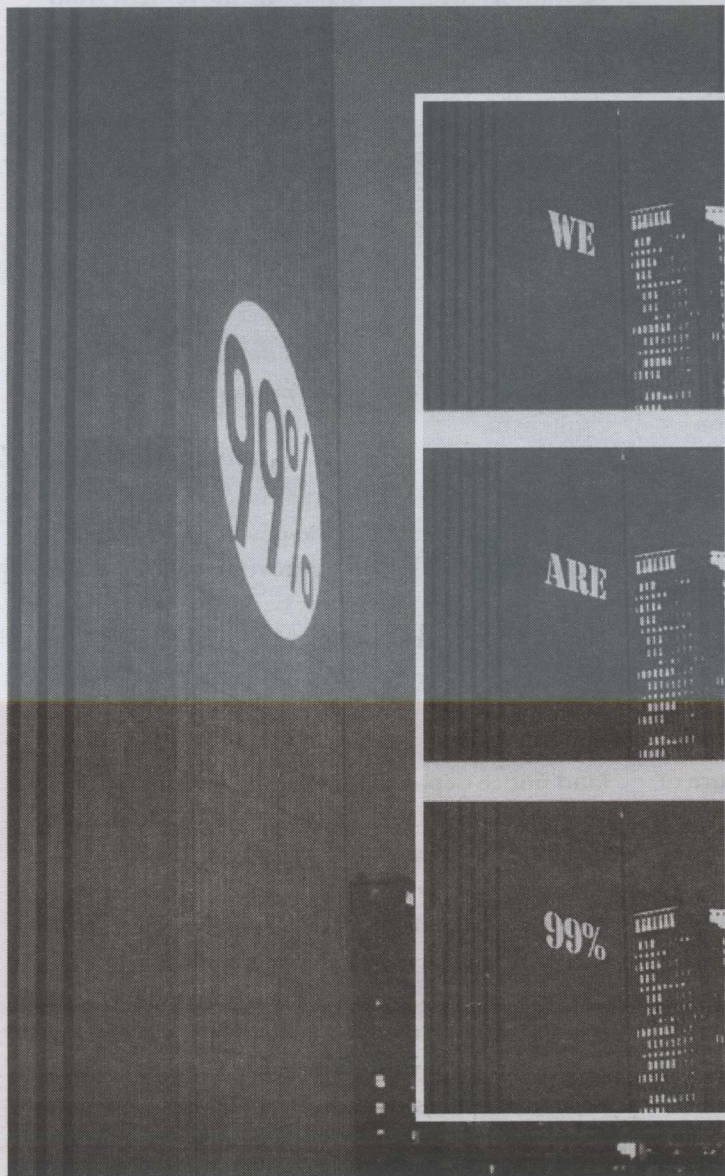
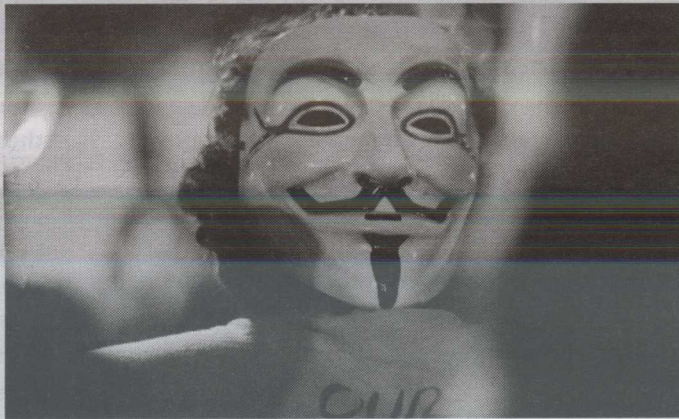






# Scenes from a Demonstration

A PHOTO ESSAY BY ANTONIA LEVY





## Police War

Continued from page 11

eviction is an echo of the US martial law political culture—this is why Mayor Michael Bloomberg had to justify the necessity of the emergency by literally shouting fire. The United States is a de-centralized police state.

When we turn to the decentralized police and military response to the nationwide Occupy crowds, we must remember that the Constitution prohibits legislation that prevents assembly of bodies into crowds if those crowds are organized for political purposes. Every police confrontation with Occupy Wall Street, then, is really a constitutional crisis. These crises between local police and crowds signal conflicts with implications for the entire United States. This is because there is no federal police force to specifically combat crowds, and no force designed to enforce the Constitution, either. The 1878 Posse Comitatus Act limits the use of certain federal military branches to enforce the law, though this does not include the National Guard. The 1807 Insurrection Act allows for other state militias, such as the National Guard, to act as police only after state legislatures or governors request their presence. In effect, regional police forces acting under the inconsistent direction of city mayors, police commissioners, and state governors have become the primary mediators between crowds of “the people,” the Constitution, and the political and economic leaders opposed to the messages and demands of the movement.

The United States is a nation at war with itself, and the police actions on the Occupy crowds represent this war. Absurd sounding local ordinances are the discursive terrain of the battle. Police arrested more than one hundred people in Boston on October 11 for failing to “vacate their encampment.” In Portland, Oregon on October 30 police arrested thirty for violating a curfew. On the same night, riot police in Denver violently cleared a park because occupants had erected tents. Similarly, on November 5 the NYPD arrested parts of an Occupy Wall Street march because they were obstructing the sidewalk, even though they were apparently the only ones on the sidewalk. This strategy seems to be the only way for the police to justify their attack on crowds and crowd formation. Their relentless focus on removing those bodies should clarify how threatening such organizations of bodies must be to wealthy elites in US cities, and not that they are in fact dirty, perverse criminals.

It's confusing how different judges will interpret these political actions in light of the constitutional issues involved. In Nashville on October 29, a magistrate judge immediately released all the arrested protesters from a charge of trespassing on the plaza near the State Capitol. In response, the Tennessee Highway Patrol currently continues to claim the curfew in the plaza remains in effect. After the Zuccotti eviction, New York Supreme Court Justice Michael Stallman ominously wrote that “protected speech is not equally permissible in all places at all times.” The only resolution of these issues will ultimately be the Supreme Court. It should be the mission of the Occupy movement to force this issue to more judges at ever higher levels. That decision would clarify the next strategic steps to take for advocates of real democracy.

One possible step might be to return to Thoreau's concept of civil disobedience and the successful use of it as a tactic in the Civil Rights Movement—though we should remember, too, that the Civil Rights Movement took years and many beaten bodies to succeed. One staple example from the era is the segregation protests where young black demonstrators sat at lunch counters and marched through streets in violation of local Jim Crow statutes. Anyone who fetishizes the law for its own sake

does not have a valid position in a conversation about democracy, period. Since the Occupy crowds are in fact exercising their constitutional right to assembly, it's actually unclear whether or not they're breaking any of the local laws that police use to disperse them. The Occupy crowds have inconsistent legal recognition because local jurisdictions are allowed to subvert constitutional rights by declaring minor infractions of public order as emergencies or emergent threats.

The real threat thus far has been the recession of democratic rights under President Barack Obama. His extension of Bush-era implementations of Homeland Security, CIA black sites, the Patriot Act, and Guantanamo Bay have all undermined civil liberties in America. Instead of going to war against the real criminals, Obama sought to negotiate with them—a criminal class holding the United States hostage. At every instance the administration bends toward them through mediation instead of declaring war on them as the Occupy crowds have done. Within this political context, it should interest us what speech is criminal. It's not criminal to say ‘government is the problem.’ This is because the anti-state attitudes of the American right-wing aren't threatening to the class in power. This is why the policies of the Tea Party can appear in the mainstream media and be supported by the wealthiest corporations, while the Occupy crowds are met with police violence. Individuals don't threaten anyone in power. The US can now figure its national identity as a pluralism of races, genders, and, in some states, sexualities—but twenty years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, any speech that could be defined as communist remains implicitly criminal. This is what the right-wing means when they call Occupy crowds un-American and anti-American.

Crowds threaten those in power but are not undemocratic. It is the anti-state attitudes of, say, the *New York Post* that are in fact anti-democratic. The absurdity is obvious: *how could a democratic system that speaks for the people be the enemy of the people?* The Occupy movement is criminal because they speak against the class in power. When we contemplate the methods of direct violence used by the police against the crowds, it should be obvious that the United States is unprepared to define itself by groups that merge slogans of national identity with slogans of anti-capitalism. Occupy crowds face a long shadow of the federal and state assaults on anti-capitalist speech during the last century: the Justice Department's war on Wobblies, McCarthyist witch hunts, and the FBI's brutal suppression of anti-capitalist groups.

The real war now is between two collective US subjects, crowds and corporations. Each believes in a different narrative of the past and future. But one is legal and one is perverse: by definition, the Occupy crowds are directly opposed to the legal rights of corporate personhood and the political culture of corporations. Corporations are tyrannical institutions where power works in a pyramid, where money and speech are equivalent, where voting rights correspond to wealth, where contracts take the place of real rights, where real and online space are constantly monitored, where all personal relationships are mediated by unequal power relations, and places where one's life and ability to reproduce him or herself everyday depends on corporate wages. These same qualities describe autocratic and fascist states, of course. It's radically illogical for libertar-

ians and self-described patriots to defend private tyrannical institutions while American democracy becomes crushed by those very institutions.

The illegal foundation for corporate personhood comes from the Fourteenth Amendment, which was written into the 1886 Supreme Court decision *Santa Clara County v. Union Pacific Railroad* by a court reporter and former railroad president named J.C. Bancroft Davis. This decision provided the constitutional support for the Supreme Court's decision in last year's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which allows corporations to spend unlimited amounts of money in political campaigns. Like local ordinances that allow police departments to harass and evict Occupy protesters form public spaces such as Zuccotti Park, the legal

argument for corporate personhood rests upon very flimsy intellectual foundations. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney accidentally demonstrated how stupid the idea of “corporate personhood” sounds to average Americans during a campaign question and answer session in Iowa this past August, when he defended rapacious corporate accumulation by saying “corporations are people, too.”

The longer Occupy crowds keep corporations in the media for their culpability in the failures of American democracy and as the unfair beneficiaries of federal bailouts, the harder it will be for the class they've

called the 1 percent to move ahead with future wars, cuts to social programs, and the privatization of more public commons—no one should doubt public education itself is up for grabs after the teacher's unions are destroyed. This cannot be tolerated by a democratic system that legally articulates an equivalence between corporate money and political speech, as in the *Citizens United* decision. The Occupy crowds are being dispersed for political reasons, not legal violations.

The crowds of Occupy have had remarkable and unprecedented success so far, although intelligence operations meant to divide the movement from within no doubt are underway. After 9/11, unconstitutional “free speech zones” and mass detentions during the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City appeared to suggest that the Homeland Security apparatus and the threat of terrorism might permanently occlude constitutional rights to assemble crowds freely. Free speech zones were used to control the G20 protests as recently as 2009 in Pittsburgh. It is therefore of paramount importance that the crowds defend their right to use public space and speak about alternatives to capitalism.

Each time the police attack OWS protesters or any group speaking out against corporate greed, they demonstrate both the power and the increasing desperation of the 1 percent, which has now been forced to employ physical violence to defend the legal, economic, and ideological violence from which it derives its wealth and influence. NYPD officer Anthony Bolonga's attack on two female Occupy protesters on September 24 and the Oakland police department's vicious assault on US Iraq veteran Scott Olsen on October 26 have brought negative global attention to US police tactics and shamed them as agents of the elite. The world is now watching like never before. The movement is ready for a martyr to trigger new masses to take to the streets, as in Tunisia and Egypt—part of the caution now shown by police departments must be to deliberately avoid such a shock. And let there be no mistake: those deaths are coming, and crowds more radical and more violent will soon clarify the fierce urgency of now. **A**

The Constitution prohibits legislation that prevents assembly of bodies into crowds if those crowds are organized for political purposes. Every police confrontation with Occupy Wall Street, then, is really a constitutional crisis.





## IN MEMORIAM: Allen Mandelbaum (1926-2011)

Beloved teacher, translator, poet, scholar, and mentor, Allen Mandelbaum died on October 27, 2011 at the age of 85. Mandelbaum is perhaps best known for his award winning translations of *The Divine Comedy* and the *Aeneid*, which won him the National Book Award in 1973, but he also published several volumes of his own poetry. He was a professor of English and Comparative literature at the Graduate Center from its founding in the 1960s until his move to Wake Forest University in 1989. During his time at the GC he deeply inspired his students, many of whom now hold academic positions at the Graduate Center and other prestigious institutions. Below are short remembrances of Professor Mandelbaum from several of his former students.

### AMMIEL ALCALAY GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

It was 1980—I'd returned to New York from two years in Jerusalem where I managed to cobble together a BA from Empire State College after dropping out of City College in 1978. I'd moved from Ancient Greek and Latin to Hebrew, Arabic, and Spanish, and wondered how I might pursue these interests in some more formal way. As a classic academic underachiever (my high school years were 1969 to 1973 and there were far more interesting things to do than go to school), I wasn't cut out for most graduate programs. I got the Columbia application and, after looking it over quickly, tore it to shreds in a combination of relief and despair. I simply didn't know where to turn. It was then I decided to go find Allen Mandelbaum at the old Graduate Center on 42nd Street. I knew some of his poetry (*Leaves of Absence*, *Chelmaxioms*), and his early translations of *Quasimodo*, *Ungaretti*, and the *Aeneid*. I intuited that he might be a person to whom one could utter names like William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, Lorine Niedecker, Luis Zukofsky or Pier Paolo Pasolini without getting a blank stare. This was not a simple proposition in the academy of 1980. What I didn't yet know but soon found out was that I could also utter names such as Ibn Arabi, Ibn Ezra or Mouloud Mammeri, and he would know what I was talking about. I never encountered anyone who knew so much but yet read like a poet, who knew that even Dante was struggling to figure out how to use words, and learned as he went along, not really understanding how to use the word "when" ("cuando") until Canto XXVI. Through Allen I was able to pinpoint the journey of a vowel or a sound cluster across millenia in ways I could only intuit before. We spent several hours together in what would be the first of countless sessions in Allen's office or apartment, in his characteristically conspiratorial hush that made you feel like you were in on some cosmic poetic operation, and actually an essential part of it. At a certain point, he marched me down to the Comparative Literature office and asked that they attend to the formalities of getting me into the program. It was, undoubtedly, a very different world.

Under Allen's guidance, I feel like I was one of the last students in this country (generationally speaking), to get a certain kind of philological training. This meant working through at least three or four generations of scholarship (Hebrew, Spanish, Italian, French and English, in my case), as well as Allen's legendary bibliographies, made not for a semester or an exam but for at least a lifetime. He made sure I had access to Saintsbury's *History of English Prosody*, not in the abridged one volume version but the complete three volumes, by loaning it to me for several years. Allen's generosity was, at times, overwhelming. He had grown up with Hebrew and when I began to further my studies in medieval Hebrew poetry I got wind of an old Jewish bookstore under the Manhattan Bridge that was going out of business. I wandered, with great longing, through stacks of coveted volumes that were extremely hard to find anywhere. When I

reported this back to Allen, who was very aware of my limited financial situation, he simply gave me a signed blank check and told me to get whatever was necessary. When I was living in Jerusalem and very ready to give up on finishing my dissertation (what would become *After Jews and Arabs*), Allen gave me and my wife Klara an offer we couldn't refuse: he invited us to Venice and paid for lodging at a *pensione* close enough to meet for coffee every morning in order to convince me I needed to finish my doctorate. I told this story to some of my students after class one night, just two days before hearing of Allen's death, and one of them, Mariana Soto, a CUNY/BA student I've been working with, wrote me after seeing my posting about Allen's death: "I was just thinking about how I was glad you finished your PhD. I keep feeling like the class you're teaching and the space/intersections it creates have been/are really significant for all of us. There's so much bullshit in big buildings of education. It really matters to have not just professors but teachers. What I meant to say is when I read this message I feel moved by the death of this person I never knew. Teachers matter." I will be forever grateful that I had the good fortune to have Allen as my teacher.

### HENRY WEINFELD UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

"You taught me how man makes himself eternal"—thus Dante to his old teacher, Brunetto Latini, in Allen's translation of the *Inferno*. That's more or less what I learned from my old teacher, and it sums up how I feel about him as well. He was without question the largest, most generous, most magnanimous human being I have ever known. Wonderfully funny and completely without pomposity, he was a poet and teacher of the utmost seriousness, and when one became his student one learned, first of all, that the things of the intellect were to be taken with the utmost seriousness.

More than anyone I have ever known, Allen lived in that Republic of Letters—or (to use the metaphor he borrowed from Ungaretti) *terra promessa*—in which the great poets and thinkers are continually in conversation with one another. There Dante conversed with Virgil and Ovid, but also with Goethe and Mallarmé. Having once entered through the Mandelbaum Gate, they held discourse with one another in perfect freedom and without any concern for anachronism. Such was his erudition—and generosity—that everyone of any significance was included. When one entered through the Mandelbaum Gate, anything could happen. The lion could lie down with the lamb. Aquinas could find himself in dialogue with Ezra Pound or with the great Yiddish poet, Yankev Glatshteyn.

Those of us who were privileged to be his students were immediately included in the ongoing conversation he was perpetually having with himself. His range of reference was so vast and he spoke so elliptically that until one learned how to connect the dots, one was completely at sea. The first class I ever took with



him (it must have been in 1974) I remember raising my hand and saying, "Professor Mandelbaum, could you please repeat the last half hour!" It was sink or swim, and if we stayed the course it was not only because of Allen's brilliance but because we knew that in him we had found a true model of what the intellectual life could be.

In those years when there was much talk of the "anxiety of influence" and so forth, learning from Allen meant inhabiting a very different sort of intellectual universe, one in which the relations among poets and thinkers were "fraternal" rather than antagonistic. Allen was attuned to the tragic ironies of history, but he was a genuinely utopian thinker, at least as far as his understanding of the human potential afforded by the traditions of poetry, art, and thought was concerned. In the Limbo canto of the *Inferno*, Dante and Virgil reach "a meadow of green flowering plants" (basically the Elysian Fields that Dante has taken over from the *Aeneid*), and we are told: "The people here had eyes both grave and slow; / their features carried great authority; / they spoke infrequently, with gentle voices." As the nobility of his rendering of those lines indicates, in a very real sense Allen lived there too.

When I was a young man, I came under his influence, and that changed me irrevocably. His example helped me form the image of myself that I wanted to pursue. He was a teacher in the highest sense, and I cannot separate anything I have done or tried to do from what I learned from him. I carry his image in my mind, and will until I die.

Farewell, beloved teacher and friend!

### BURT KIMMELMAN NEW JERSEY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Allen was Allen.

I speak of Allen Mandelbaum tautologically to avoid the ineffability inherent in describing the supernal. I also mean to impart some sense, though, of how completely *sui generis* Allen was.

I studied with some brilliant people at the Graduate Center in the 1980s. Allen was not brilliant. He was a genius. Yet he was not at all distant (he once wept in class over a poem).

To be around Allen was to live with depth and intensity of language, which was absolutely exhilarating—so thrilling I was addicted to it. And Allen spoke his own language. When he spoke, his subtlety and quickness of association beckoning, one had to scramble to think both critically and poetically at once. Jack Hall, who taught at the Graduate Center then, once said of him (quite enjoying the cleverness of his baseball metaphor, and in obvious admiration): "With Allen, you have to take the first pitch."

Allen did not seek me out to work with him (though his canny insistence that I write the particular paper I did in the course I took with him set me up for a wealth of future scholarly publications, and soon thereafter he wrote the foreword for my first book of poems). After some protestation he gave in to me when I came to his office to confess my need to work with him. What ensued was one of the most cherished relationships of my life. And in time the roles of our friendship, while he remained my mentor, reversed.

Love took my hand and smiling did reply,

"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord, but I have marr'd them; let my shame

Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"

"My dear, then I will serve."

Once my dissertation proposal passed the English program's committee I took the summer off to write a first draft. Trying to flesh out the plan in the proposal, I decided to begin with some background commentary (typical avoidance behavior), sort of an introduction to the introduction I was supposed to be writing. Two weeks later I said to my wife, Diane Simmons (we met at the Graduate Center), "you know, when this dissertation is done, I think I have another book here." A week after that I realized that I was going to write that book then and there. I plunged in, saying nothing to Allen or anyone else. By the end of August I had a rough first draft (which years later became a book Allen blurbed).

I brought the draft over to Allen's apartment. Diane was teaching so I had our baby daughter with me, who constantly smiled at Allen's attentions. In his typical way he explained, "It's the glasses, dear, the glint of light."

She and I occupied his couch while Allen sat at a desk with his back to us, turning pages slowly, smoking one cigarette after another. After an hour he broke the silence: "Uh, I think we have an idea here." He told me to clean up the draft and get it to my readers.

Allen sensed my need to go my own way and he was a hands-off adviser (though he knew that my readers, Bob Payne and Fred Goldin, would write extensive marginalia—a great team). After my dissertation defense Allen joined us for drinks. Eventually I found a job and the years passed. At odd times the phone would ring and, picking it up, I would hear that voice speaking in *medeas res*; it was an indescribable joy. He would call to see what I was up to and I would tell him and ask him what he was up to and he would tell me ("I the unkind, ungrateful").

I think we all desired admittance into Allen's *bella scuola* (thinking here of his great translation of the *Commedia*), Allen Dante's Homer. His intellect was be-

yond my ken. He was a mensch, in any case. He had me play by his rules (but he let me figure out how to maneuver within them), not the rules we should have followed. I was so very lucky for that.

### JOAN RICHARDSON GRADUATE CENTER, CUNY

Early afternoon, Saturday, October 29<sup>th</sup>—howling storm, rain mixed with snow, and wild wind darkening, chilling all: "Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains," the words kept coming up, punctuating and distracting my attention as I attempted to address the task at hand, meeting a deadline, finding source indications of lines and phrases I had quoted in an essay about William James and pragmatism. Lightning, then whistling thunder sounding like a jet passing low, whooshing branches of the huge, old sycamore lashing roof and windows: "Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains"—and then, in counterpoint, the ping of an email arriving: from Ammiel Alcalay with the news that Allen had died. Tears came up and I more than shuddered: it was from Allen that I had learned how to read and hear that line from Stevens that had, like so much else I began to learn from Allen, become part of my being, "Washed into rinds by rotting winter rains." The reality of spirit.

On Thursday night I had dreamed I was on a stage talking about Allen—I only learned a day after Ammiel's Saturday email that Allen had died on Thursday—about how he used to sing, or, rather, quietly intone, the Psalms in Hebrew as we worked on the page proofs for his *Inferno*—I was his research assistant that year, his marks in the margin in the Peacock Green ink he used for his fountain pen. Shades, shades. This dream, of course, returned as I felt what I felt on hearing he had died, and I cried and thought of how I should honor his spirit and realized, naturally, that I could do no better than continuing to do my work, and so went on paging through my heavily marked copy of James's *Pragmatism* to locate page numbers for phrases, that, like all that has come to matter, I know by heart. Tears uppoured again as I came to: "To anyone who has ever looked on the face of a dead child or parent the mere fact that matter *could* have taken for a time that precious form, ought to make matter sacred ever after.... That beloved incarnation was among matter's possibilities."

"Spirit is matter reduced to an extreme thinness: O so thin!"—Emerson. Had I not learned to read Stevens and the other Modernist poets with Allen, and then back through the Romantics to Milton, Shakespeare, Chaucer, I don't think I would have begun to hear Emerson or James in Stevens or Donne in Eliot or the *Vita Nuova* in Pound. Allen Mandelbaum lived, and still lives, in the shapes and sound of words he taught us, his most fortunate students, to hear, and to see through them worlds within worlds and angels falling, where in *Paradise Lost* there are two—otherwise thought impossible—stress maximums on the fifth syllable: Exhilarating!—"There is no wing like meaning." He revealed to us language's elegant mysteries. He would be thrilled, in response, by a question about the place of a comma.

On finding myself during my first semester as a graduate student in the Program of Comparative Literature in Allen's seminar on Modern Poetry offered by the Program in English, I took notes furiously, transcribing what seemed a foreign language. I would spend days following in the dictionary and in the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, translating my notes. Three or four weeks went by before I gathered courage enough to describe my quandary to one of my classmates—none of whom had said anything more than I did in seminar. But some occasionally nodded, and so did not seem uncomprehending. I had thought to myself that I was the index pointing the difference between those who had been English majors in college—those weighted down by Norton anthologies—and lesser beings. In response, then, to my voicing my ignorance to one of my classmates at the end of the meeting when I had been asked to give a "précis" on Eliot's use of the quatrain in comparison to Theophile Gautier's *Emaux et Camees* during our next session: "I don't understand what he's saying...!" he replied, "Oh, don't worry, nobody does...." I was grateful, if still perplexed. We all had a lot to learn, and we did. Allen was my first dissertation director, when my topic was "The Difference between the Operation of Metaphor in Poetic and Ordinary Language." Following his guidance, I began gathering all the references to metaphor from the pre-Socratics on. After many months in the library of Union Theological Seminary, when I was only up to the Church Fathers, I realized that I would never get to write *that* dissertation, but Allen knew I had to learn that for myself.

For some years during my graduate career, Allen was Executive Officer of the Program in English and I was one of the student representatives to the Graduate Council. Allen was passionate in arguing at meetings for giving official designation/documentation to/for candidates who had completed all requirements and who were deepening their research and writing the dissertation. Dressed in one of his exquisitely-cut Italian tweed jackets, dark shirt, thin suede or horizontally-striped raw silk tie, removing the cigarette holder with the nicotine-removing filter from his teeth—it was his habit to chew on it as he was thinking, and we all smoked then—he stood one afternoon and described how the ABD—"All But Dissertation" designation—would give candidates a "serenity platform"—a residence in time permitting the kind of learning he exemplified and valued. It was pure Allen, one of my beloved teachers.

"They will come no more/ The old men with beautiful manners." A



# Reconsidering Revolution

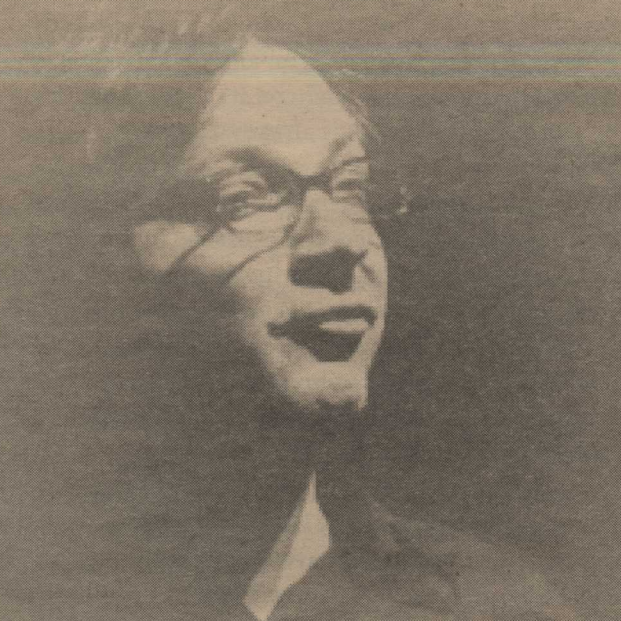
Not one to shy away from controversy, the outspoken and acerbic political cartoonist Ted Rall (best known for his take down of 9/11 widows and football-playing war heroes) has recently published a new book, *Anti-American Manifesto* with Seven stories Press, in which he urges the reader to throw off the chains of pacifism and once again take up the difficult discussion of violence as a political tool. Intrigued by the boldness and chutzpah of this gesture, the *GC Advocate* sat down with Rall to talk a little bit about the complications and possibilities implicit in this argument.

[This interview originally appeared in the December, 2010 issue of *The Advocate*.]

**Advocate:** So, Ted, let's jump right into it. In your new book you explicitly advocate the use of revolutionary violence. It's hard to get any more radical than that and I can't imagine the decision to write such a book was an easy one to make. Indeed, in conversations with friends about the book I've found that even the mention of revolutionary violence is almost universally greeted with disdain, shock, or disbelief. I am really interested in how you came to this decision to write the book, the events or ideas that led you to this argument, and why you felt compelled to write this book now?

**Ted Rall:** Well, it was a very difficult decision, from a career standpoint as well as from the standpoint of being a simple American citizen. As a student of history I am well aware of the fact that revolution is dangerous and violent and brutal and can make things worse before they make things better, so it's not a decision to be taken lightly. I want to be very clear that even though the book is a call to arms and a call to get rid of the current government, and it does definitely defend the use of violence (I would say that there is no such thing as non-violent revolution; no radical change has ever taken place without violence or the credible threat of violence), but I think there is a tendency to sensationalize the violent aspect of the book. Most revolutionary activity is inherently non-violent actually. It's just that violence is part of the revolutionist's toolbox; it has to be, otherwise there is no way to credibly remove the state. The rich and the powerful don't give up wealth and power voluntarily so you can't fight it nonviolently without effectively tying one hand behind your back.

In terms of the decision to write the book I kind of followed a simple, logical process, which is to ask myself and many other people whether there was any possibility that this system, the Democrats and the Republicans and the corporatist capitalist system that they support, could or would address any of the really serious pressing problems that are faced by the United States today—whether those are income inequality or the environment and climate change, or skyrocketing deficits, or war and militarism, or healthcare—and I don't think so. We are talking about a government that can't even get it together enough to improve the efficiency of automobiles. I mean we're talking about a government that passes a health care reform plan that actually makes health care more expensive and harder to obtain for most Americans, so how are they going to provide socialized health care. We are talking about a democratic president who issues an executive order granting himself the right to assassinate American citizens, so how is that president going to increase personal freedoms and civil rights and so on. I am forty-seven years old, I have seen a constant downward trajectory and I came to the conclusion more in sorrow than in anger that the system had become unreformable. It was one particular event however that proved it perfectly for me: the bank bailouts. When Obama decided to continue them in November of 2008, the process that Bush had begun in September and October of 2008, I knew that the system was unreformable, because we are talking about using an economic crisis that called for jobs creation as an excuse for lining the pockets of major corporations; in other words, business as usual. Yet



the situation was anything but usual, it was the full blown collapse of the of the global economic system and the only solution to keep political stability going was massive job creation stimulated by the government. But they did not and could not and would not do that. When Obama refused to be the new FDR I knew that, Obama being about the best most progressive, smartest president we were gonna get out of this system, I knew that the time had arrived to call for revolution. Now I wish that other people were doing it, I wish that I could join someone else's movement, I don't want to stick my neck out; it's not fun to attract all of this heat, but no one else is doing it. There's no Left whatsoever in the United States. All there is is wimpy liberals. So, I wrote this book in order to start a conversation. This is not revolution for dummies, this is not a how-to guide, this is not the anarchists' cookbook. If you are picking this up looking for how to overthrow the US government buy another book; this is not that book. This is a book that creates the space to have a discussion that is just not even part of American politics. American politics occurs strictly between the Ds and the Rs. We don't even talk about the Greens and the Libertarians, much less the possibility of getting rid of the system entirely.

**Advocate:** Along those same lines, how has your life changed since the publication of the book? What's the last month been like for Ted Rall? What have you learned about America, particularly concerning the subject of this book?

**TR:** I guess many things did not come as a surprise. The fact that the media and the political system are so deeply entrenched and unwilling to consider actual change came as no surprise. The fact that there are many very reactionary, hateful people who defend the status quo no matter what came as no surprise either. But what did come as a surprise were the huge crowds that came out to my book signings, which indicated to me that there is a thirst for talking about these sorts of options. Many, many people have been over the system for a long time, but that conversation doesn't take place, so I provided a forum for that kind of dialogue to happen. What I've learned, and it's kind of what I suspected, is that there are a lot of people out there like me. I wouldn't have written the book if I thought I was alone. I don't think I'm such a unique thinker. A lot of people can look at the same set of circumstances and draw similar conclusions, and they have. So in terms of how my life has changed,

I mean, it hasn't really, except for being very, very busy doing interviews, but that's about it.

**Advocate:** One of the claims that you make in your book, and one that I think many Leftists would agree with, is that the Left in America has become pacified to the point of complete ineffectiveness. Why do you think this is? What has changed and how can the Left get its "groove" back as it were?

I wish I knew the answer to the first question. This process started when I was a kid, so in a sense I've been living with it my whole life. I've never seen what a real Left looks like, but I've read about it in books, and I've seen it in movies. I don't know what happened to the Black Panthers and the New Left and SDS and all that. But from what I've read, the baby-boomers who fought these battles were exhausted by the end of the late sixties and the early seventies. The drugs and the violence and the failure to get anywhere against the war in Vietnam just wore them out. The assassination squads led by COINTELPRO, and all the strikes of '68 having no real result just brought them to the point of being tired. And there was no Left at all, even a lame Left in the 1970s, and when opposition started to coalesce it was a whole new generation, it was my generation, generation X, in the eighties against Reagan, and I remember from that time we didn't know what to do. The country had turned so far to the right we didn't have the confidence of our convictions. We didn't feel like if we led the charge there would be anyone there to follow us. So without role models and without any sense of a forward momentum people just got lost.

In terms of the militant pacifism, that is something that really mystifies me because a lot of people will talk about Nelson Mandela, for instance, and say "oh his peaceful example..." Well, he might have a calm tone, but he shot a cop! That's how he ended up in prison in the first place. If I remember right, he shot a cop while the guy was directing traffic, so it's not like he was a pacifist by any means. The ANC was very violent and they were considered a very radical communist organization at the time, so I don't know. In terms of how the Left can get its groove back, well, my book doesn't explain that either. It's a call for people to be strong. But how to organize people to do that, I don't know. There's going to need to be revolutionary programs, there is going to need to be charismatic leaders, there is going to need to be propaganda films and political parties to start this process of radicalizing not just people's politics, but their tone. It's very frustrating for me to see the self-confidence that the Right has and not understand why the Left doesn't get that this is how we need to be too. I mean, we are right. They've been proven wrong about everything, so why are we so wimpy? We are trying to save the world here and yet we're worried about hurting people's feelings. I don't get it at all.

**Advocate:** It seems to me like one way of getting that groove back is precisely the threat of violence. How exactly would the use of violence by groups on the Left change the political landscape in America? Wouldn't the use of violence, as several people have suggested to me, merely delegitimize any group that used it and alienate potential allies?

That is an argument, you know. I think what would really happen if there were a real Left is, of



course, that there would be numerous stripes of the Left, some more radical than others. When violence has been used it can be very inspiring. For instance when ELF burned down those houses in Washington State on a development, or when they burned down a ski lodge in Aspen, or when they burned SUVs at a car dealership, I remember thinking: that's funny. I hate those SUVs, I hate suburban sprawl. There are twenty million vacant homes in the United States, why are we still building anything? And you see the ineffectiveness of non-violent approaches. You go to city council meetings, you argue against a development, but the fix is in, everyone's been paid off. And of course it happens anyway. Did these guys stop the process of sprawl? No. But they got a piece of these guys. They bugged them. They caused them problems. It just seems to me that all of the power is going from corporations and from the Right and coming down like a fist on the Left and on ordinary people. And every now and then when you get to bite these guys back it makes you feel better.

In terms of the danger of turning off the moderates, well, that's true; that is always a danger, and in fact, if the Left is violent and the government and the Right do not respond with violence then that would not work. What the Left would have to count on is the extremely violent and hostile nature of the system itself; that they would overreact and expose themselves as the monsters that they are. That's the purpose of any kind of violent act. Like 9/11. If the United States had not responded violently and had used that as an opportunity to open up dialogue with the Islamic world, it would have been counterproductive to al Qaeda, but it was a huge victory for al Qaeda precisely because the United States responded with extreme violence, and that radicalized moderates. I think violence only works if it provokes bigger violence from the state, and I think it's pretty safe to say that it probably would.

**Advocate:** *This leads me to my next question, actually, which is about the idea of complete revolution. Your book, as far as I can tell, argues for complete and total overthrow of the United States government. Aren't there other less drastic tactics that might produce revolutionary change, or is this the only option?*

Look, I can't predict the future. It would be great if it were possible to reform the system and get some substantial change out of the existing system simply because it would be cheaper and easier in terms of blood and money—that would be preferable. Revolution should always be the last resort. But it's hard for me to imagine right now, as things stand, because the system has been so incredibly resistant to any kind of reform in recent years. It's all about give backs, it's all about push backs. "We're going to fire you, were' going to take away your rights. After we make you poor we will make it impossible for you to declare bankruptcy." It's just relentless, and that attitude of "we will not compromise, we will not be reasonable" just leads me to believe that you can't negotiate with these people. But you never know.

**Advocate:** *In the book you also argue that revolution is necessary in large part because the United States is already on its way to collapse. Can you talk more about that? How do you see that happening and when do you think it will happen?*

There are so many possible ways that collapse could ensue that it is impossible for me to tell you how it will go down. I don't know if it's going to be environmental collapse that sparks food shortages and food riots. I couldn't tell you if it will be simple economic collapse because the government can no longer issue debt. I can't tell you whether it will be the complete collapse of the consumer economy because of high unemployment and the inability of people to spend money. I don't know if it will be blowback from one of America's countless wars of aggression. All I can say is it just feels incredibly un-

sustainable and since the collapse probably is coming sooner rather than later, the question is what we should do about it. Should we just let it happen, go the way of the Soviet Union in the early nineties and let the country tank the way Russia did in the nineties? Or do we act and step in and replace the system with something that works better now?

**Advocate:** *In your book you are extremely, how can I put it, reticent about proposing any kind of replacement system...*

Yeah, that's the major criticism of the book. People don't like that. They want to be told exactly where I'm going to take them, and the answer is: I'm not taking them anywhere! It's up to them. It's up to others. This book is already 280 pages; it's too long really for a manifesto as it is, and it's actually kind of ridiculous to be in a situation where you have to write a book like this, because in any other country it's a given that if the government doesn't work you can overthrow it. And it's only in the United States that we have such childish politics that the idea of bringing up revolution as an option is somehow shocking or radical. In a way it's almost embarrassing to have to write this thing.

But the next question is, obviously, what does the new government look like, what does the new regime look like? And I have my ideas about that and I hint at them and I am working on a book now that's a sequel to this that will lay out what I think should happen next: a transition to Socialism. But like I wrote in the book, what I think really doesn't matter. I am one of three hundred million people; I am not special. I am not smarter or dumber than anyone else. I am just a guy, and I have my opinions and I will put them forward. But what needs to happen is for us to start thinking outside of this box, get rid of this system, and have a national conversation that involves a struggle over what comes next. Are we going to have a left wing government, a right wing government, something else, who knows? But we need to have that talk. I felt that if I laid this out as a purely left wing book that it would, first of all, needlessly eliminate potential allies on the right, and secondly, it was kind of beside the point. I viewed it as becoming a giant distraction. As it is people on the right would love that because they look at my politics and they say that Ted Rall's book calls for left wing revolution, but it doesn't. It just calls for revolution. I didn't put it in the book, because I wanted to make the case for revolution outside of the construct of ideology, because it is impossible to predict what's going to come next.

**Advocate:** *Speaking of the left; in your book you are pretty harsh on some very well liked and admired figures on the Left. Michael Moore, for instance, and the Yes Men, whom I think are really hilarious...*

**TR:** They are hilarious..

**Advocate:** *So, what's up with that? What's the problem with what they do? Aren't they allies in your cause?*

I would say the reason I picked them is because they are so good. They are the best that the official American Left has to offer, in the same way that Obama is the best, in terms of the mainstream political system, that the system has to offer. Michael Moore has got this immense audience of tens of millions of people, his movies can open up in hundreds of theatres, he can talk about things that no one else can talk about, he's got this great Midwestern folksy sensibility, he has a gentle delivery; he's really kind of a genius. And his TV show was even better than his movies I think. And the Yes Men are great too. And I am sure you're asking yourself, ok what are you talking about, why are you down on these guys so much, and it's because they don't go there. Like John Stewart and Colbert, this kind of dissent validates the official system by saying "look at the American political system; it's so big and open minded that it even allows a guy like Michael Moore or the Yes Men or John Stewart to

operate." And the implication is, it's not that bad. But you notice that they marginalize people who actually call for radical change, like Howard Zinn or Ralph Nader. Those people are not allowed to get their message out. So you're allowed to go up to the edge of ridiculing, but you can't call for real change; all you can do is poke gentle fun, or not so gentle fun, but it's got to be all in fun. You can't call for the actual system to be replaced, and that was really the argument I was trying to make there.

**Advocate:** *Do you feel like you have been marginalized in that way?*


Absolutely; sure. And that was before I wrote this book even. The country lurched to the right significantly in 2001 and has not come back at all, and everybody I know who is, like me, a Lefty cartoonist, has been savaged by the decline in print and the changing political climate. But I don't view it as a personal thing; I take it for granted. I guess I could be a milquetoast liberal and have a few more client newspapers, but what would be the fun of that? The story that I'm trying to write about my own life is about taking chances and doing what I think is right, not just trying to put a few extra bucks into my 401K.

**Advocate:** *World events seem to be catching up with the book. Witness just this week's London student protests, or the news that Obama's planned spending and entitlement cuts have angered both the liberal left and the radical right. Do you see events like these as somehow echoing or speaking to what you talk about in the book? Is the revolution already underway, and if so, how do we get these movements to coalesce.*

**TR:** The revolution is not underway, but certainly the revolutionary climate is upon us. And the Europeans seem to be, as usual, setting the standard for what needs to be done. They are used to this, they know about this and they are probably going to go first, but Americans are incredibly docile and they're going to have to stop shooting each other at the mall and start aiming their rage at the rich and the powerful who deserve it.

**Advocate:** *Lastly, I wanted to give you the opportunity to respond in print, if you like, to a commentary by Fox News' anchor Greg Gutfeld, who called you a "Bitter cartoonist" and said that "advocating phony revolution is where idiots like Ted start and end." He also argued that you would come after him swinging your NPR tote bag.*

I think that is funny. I've read a lot of those right wing blogs where they just sort of assume that all Lefties are effeminate and unable to stand up and fight, and they make it real personal, like "I would beat you down; you'd be carrying your yoga mat" or whatever. It's so funny that they think that is how politics are going to play out, but I am paying the price, in a way, for forty years of wussie Lefties. They are not afraid of us; they think that we are a bunch of wimps, that at the first sign of a fight we are going to run away like little girls. I don't blame them for thinking that because that is what the American Left is. I think everyone can strive to be braver but I doubt too many of them would do as well as me and two other Leftie cartoonists: Matt Bors and Steven Cloud who just came back from Afghanistan in August. We were there for a month and we lived with locals, unembedded, no contacts with the military, no guards, just us, low key, and we traveled all over the country, we went to Taliban areas and we stayed at Taliban hotels...I'd like to see those guys, those armchair warriors do what we did and see how they come out of it.

In terms of Mr. Gutfeld calling me a "bitter cartoonist," well, guilty as charged. All good political cartoonists are bitter about injustice and stupidity and I am guilty and I plead guilty. In terms of whether it's a phony revolution or not, well, there is no revolution at all, so it can't really be phony, but I certainly would like to see a real one. 



# It Seems Like the Devil Don't Ever Let Up

► *The Devil All the Time* by Donald Ray Pollock. Doubleday, 272 pages.

**AARON BOSTWICK**

It is nearly impossible to separate Donald Ray Pollock from his biography. After dropping out of high school, Pollock got a job at a meatpacking plant and then went on to work at a paper mill for nearly thirty years. He flirted with fiction during this time, retyping out his favorite short stories on his typewriter, and this intimate relationship with these texts seems to have served as his literary education. He finally decided to quit his job and his debut book, the short story cycle *Knockemstiff*, was published before he even completed his MFA at Ohio State University.

I met Pollock a couple of years ago when he visited an undergraduate course I was taking on

This deadpan approach to the seedy cavities of the American Midwest is typical of his work: "Holler" concludes with the protagonist swallowing the skull of a tiny bird, while "Honolulu" features a john who squeezes milk out of a "whore's big tits." And yet in person, Pollock was flat, impenetrable.

*Knockemstiff* features a series of characters that try and fail to leave the eponymous town; standing before us, without a trace of his knowing wit, it seemed as if Pollock was one of them. When he read a passage from *The Devil All the Time*, still a work in progress at that point, he admitted that he didn't think it was very good. Then he answered our questions politely, signed copies of *Knockemstiff*, and left after noting that he made more money in the paper mill than he does now as a writer.

My inscription reads: "BACTINE: BETTER LIVING THRU CHEMISTRY!" His face did not betray whether or not he was pleased with his own joke, but it did connect the man with his fiction. Despite the quiet, humble exterior, the stench of the mill—"belching forth another dirty brown cloud"—still seemed to burn in his nostrils.

*The Devil All the Time* is set at the height of the 'sixties, though the hippie movement has yet to reach Ohio. Sandy is a waitress and a part-time whore who saves up money for summer serial killing trips with her husband, Carl, a man who fancies himself a photographer and enjoys taking nude pictures of his wife and their murdered "models." Carl imagines that one day people are going to look at his pictures and think they're just as good as anything Michelangelo and Leonardo ("them guys") ever made, while Sandy just hopes that he doesn't get rid of her and move on to a younger, less abused woman before she decides to kill him. Arvin Eugene Russell, orphaned by a cancer-

countered before, and Pollock does an effective job of creating a space in which nothing but dirtiness and misery abounds. This is a place where people do not make love but "fuck-eyes" at one another, where a preacher asks seduced, underage congregants to recite the bible to him while he nails them with his "staff," and where a successful, cuckolded lawyer returns home each day at lunchtime to quietly watch his wife and his Black gardener go at it on his couch; later, he can't help but notice that the pastry she is eating is "covered with chocolate icing." Even more depressing are those who consider themselves superior to their neighbors: Arvin's uncle, Earskell, remembers that his now-dead lover "always had big dreams" because she had enrolled in secretarial school. And Hank, the proprietor of a local convenience store, fantasizes about the day he'll go see a baseball game and then sleep with a whore: "He was going to buy a new shirt for the occasion, stop in at Bainbridge on his way down and get a decent haircut." Though we know that even this pathetic aspiration will never be realized, Hank sometimes "wished he weren't so ambitious."

Pollock's depiction of Christianity, too, is fascinating. The title comes from the opening page, in which Arvin notes, "It seemed that his father had fought the Devil all the time." Indeed, this is culture dictated by violence and religion, the two of which are inextricably linked. Take the aforementioned preacher, Preston Teagardin. He loses interest in his wife once she becomes indifferent to sin, since having sex with her no longer carries any risk of damnation in her mind: "Nowadays, fucking her was like sticking his staff in a greasy, soulless doughnut." Instead, he seeks out local ingénues, the kind of girl who "believed that she was going wrong when she lay with him ... How could he get turned on by someone who didn't understand the desperate battle raging between good and evil, purity and lust?" Then there is Roy, who kills his wife after mistakenly believing that Christ had told him he could resurrect the dead. After three hours of staring at her corpse, Theodore says, "It ain't gonna happen, Roy."

Arvin, on the other hand, abandons God once his father, Willard, kills himself; the two spend months erecting a prayer log for his dying mother, sacrificing animals (and one human) and pouring their blood over a series of crosses. After discovering dad's body on the day of his mom's funeral, a police officer asks Arvin, "Goddamn it, boy, what the hell is this?" He replies matter-of-factly, "It's a prayer log ... But it don't work." Nonetheless, Arvin grows up to be a man with an acute sense of right and wrong, while Teagardin, reflecting upon all the virgins he's deflowered, thinks, "Thank God, thank God, his mother had decided all those years ago that he was going to be a preacher."

Which isn't to say Pollock is anti-Christian; his narrative is not suited to those kinds of labels. The only conclusion he can reach is simple enough: "Too much religion could be as bad as too little." *Knockemstiff*, Ohio seems to be a place where violent prayer is at least better than violent action; Willard, consistently condescended to by his landlord, thanks God "for giving me the strength to keep my hands off Henry Dunlap's fat fucking neck. And let the sonofabitch have everything he wants in this life, though I got to confess, Lord, I sure wouldn't mind seeing him choke on it someday." Needless to say, he eventually loses that strength.

Perhaps a more accurate description of Pollock's worldview would be that he values experience over



contemporary American fiction. He was shy, unassuming, and terse in describing his process: "I go up to my attic with a cup of coffee and a pack of cigarettes—unfortunately—and I write." Not quite what I expected from an author whose work packs in more violence and depraved sexuality than a shelf full of Greek tragedies. His story "Dynamite Hole," for example, begins frankly: "I was coming down off the Mitchell Flats with three arrowheads in my pocket and a dead copperhead hung around my neck like an old woman's scarf when I caught a boy named Truman Mackey fucking his own little sister in"—yep, you guessed it—"the Dynamite Hole."

His landscape is one few readers will have encountered before, and Pollock does an effective job of creating a space in which nothing but dirtiness and misery abounds. This is a place where people do not make love but "fuck-eyes" at one another, where a preacher asks seduced, underage congregants to recite the bible to him while he nails them with his "staff," and where a successful, cuckolded lawyer returns home each day at lunchtime to quietly watch his wife and his Black gardener go at it on his couch; later, he can't help but notice that the pastry she is eating is "covered with chocolate icing." Even more depressing are those who consider themselves superior to their neighbors: Arvin's uncle, Earskell, remembers that his now-dead lover "always had big dreams" because she had enrolled in secretarial school. And Hank, the proprietor of a local convenience store, fantasizes about the day he'll go see a baseball game and then sleep with a whore: "He was going to buy a new shirt for the occasion, stop in at Bainbridge on his way down and get a decent haircut." Though we know that even this pathetic aspiration will never be realized, Hank sometimes "wished he weren't so ambitious."

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# Prisons of Egypt

ANNE WALDMAN

a song for for the occupiers at Liberty Plaza (with back strains of "Let My People Go")

The prisons of Egypt go back far  
To Joseph in the house of Potiphar  
Check the papyrus check the astrology  
Down the stair of time in a theocratic dynasty  
Death is before me today like the odor of myrrh  
Like sitting under a sail on a windy day  
Death is before me today like a hangman's noose  
In the torture chambers of Egypt you rarely get loose  
Al Qaeda bred in the prisons of Egypt  
Nurturing hatred in the prisons of Egypt  
CIA operatives in the prisons of Egypt  
Complicit waterboarding body and soul in the prisons of Egypt  
We're connected we're wired in this global economy  
We're victimized and thwarted in the bigger reality  
We're going to keep pushing until the frequency changes  
Meditating and ranting and singing and raging  
Shackled in a pyramid waiting for the death barge  
Shackled in a pyramid waiting for the death charge  
Bound and gagged and blindfolded for twelve long days  
As outside your prison the revolutions rage  
Shackled and outraged in Capitalism's jail  
Gagged and bound by the Federal Exchange alpha male  
What will it take (revolution?) to get the mind stable  
What will it take get food on every table  
We saw it: *into the streets into the streets of Tahrir Square*  
Into the streets where the people won't be scared  
Into the streets into the streets of old Cairo  
Down with the tyrant down with the cop-pharaoh  
Secret police riding camels wielding clubs and guns  
Communication going dark but people kept coming  
Prisons of Egypt didn't keep them down  
Prisons of Egypt turned us all around  
This verse is like luminous beads on a string  
Verse like the shifting sands with a scorpion's sting  
Verses are the cries of people in the bowels of corruption  
Verses ululate souls of those crying out in insurrection  
Everywhere the call and everywhere the response  
The examples of our companeros and companeras leave us no choice  
Here on U.S.A. continent soil  
We're in it together in rhizomic interconnected coil  
Rebellion, rebellion, a line is drawn  
No more privilege no more degrading scorn  
Of the people who struggle and inhabit this world  
This is the season to reverse the bankers' pact-with-devil course....  
Rise up Cairo rise up Port Said  
Rise up Alexandria rise up your need  
Rise up El Karga rise up your voice  
Prisons of Egypt gave you no choice  
Rise up U. S. of A., rise up your voice  
Capital's prisons everywhere leave us no choice  
It's the universal paradigm it's the only game in town  
Support the occupiers of Wall Street, don't let them down  
Out of darkness out of tyranny  
Prisoners everywhere could be set free  
We won't be sleeping on the shifting desert sands  
Til freedom of all denizens come to all lands....  
We'll occupy Zuccotti Plaza beamed around the world  
Sleep on the concrete, wake up on consecrated soil  
Where bones of slaves and workers and victims of war  
Will haunt the USA 1% spooked psyche right down to the core....

In memory: Allen Ginsberg

Courtesy of the Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology,

available as a free PDF from [peopleslibrary.wordpress.com](http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com).

transcendence, ethics over morals. This is best illustrated towards the end of the novel, when Arvin closes his eyes before an image of Jesus on the cross at his prayer log: "He tried his best to picture God, but his thoughts kept wandering. He finally gave up, found it easier to imagine his parents looking down on him instead ... 'Tell me what to do,' he whispered several times. After a couple of minutes, a sudden gust of wind came down off the hill behind him, and some of the bones still hanging in the trees began to knock together like wind chimes." In other words, heaven and the dead will never answer—the only place to seek guidance is on earth.

Carl, meanwhile, is religiously placed between Arvin and Teagardin, dismissing traditional theism in favor of art. The juxtaposition of beauty and violence in his pictures provides him with what he calls "the one true religion ... [and] only in the presence of death could he feel the presence of something like God." Anticipating the murder of his next model, Carl is ecstatic: "It was electric, the sensation that went through him just then, the awareness he had of his own short time on this earth and what he had done with it... *The mystery*, that's all Carl could say." Though we may snicker at his self-aggrandizement—he will never be considered an equal of Michelangelo or Leonardo—there is the presence of a truly aesthetic mind in Carl. Before shooting an English student, he reads aloud from *The Poems of John Keats*, his "voice getting louder and louder to drown out the other's pleading until he came to the last line, which he has forgotten now, some bullshit about love and fame that he had to admit made the hair stand up on his arms at the time." Whichever poem it was, Keats is an appropriate choice: Carl has something of a Romantic sensibility, it being the movement that nearly required from its artists premature death.

Chuck Palahniuk has claimed that Pollock's book is "more engaging than any new fiction in years." It is obvious why Palahniuk would be attracted to the grimness of Pollock's writing, and at first glance it may read like the same naïve garbage as that of his champion. But in fact Pollock writes with an unfashioned bluntness that screams authenticity. On the second page of *Knockemstiff*, a middle-aged drunk expresses his disgust for movies: "Screw a bunch of make believe... What the hell's wrong with real life?" Similarly, early in *The Devil All the Time*, Willard, walks out of John Wayne's *Back to Bataan*, "disgusted with the phoniness of it all."

Pollock is at his best when he is echoing this sentiment. *The Devil All the Time*, though certainly not a perfect novel by any means, does not have a trace of artificiality. Its author may not be the best read, the most skilled or the most thoughtful writer in America today, but these are not necessarily flaws. He hasn't written a dissertation on Woolf and Faulkner like Toni Morrison and he hasn't taught at Princeton like E.L. Doctorow. His book lives and dies on pure talent alone—he never tries to prove how intelligent he is, and his prose isn't littered with allusions to Flaubert. There is a roughness here that is truly exciting.

Still, Pollock has yet to become the writer he should be someday. When he visited my class, he said he had not read many novels, and was doing so now in order to get the hang of the way they work. This inexperience begins to show about halfway through *The Devil All the Time*, where the prose sags, the rawness wears out its appeal, and the characters cease to become interesting. Pollock, who seems bored himself, continues to rely on the refrain of sex, violence, and religion without adding anything new. There is some beautiful writing in the closing pages—death is the door to a sad, empty room that closes with a faint click—but it is hampered by the repetitiveness that precedes it. What could have been a stellar, crisp novella is instead an interesting but flawed full-length novel. A



# Absurdism as a Learning Experience



► *The Bald Soprano*. Written by Eugène Ionesco. Translated by Donald M. Allen. Directed by Hal Brooks.

## DAN VENNING

The Pearl Theatre, whose production of *The Bald Soprano* opened September 25, is devoted to educating their audience. Their mission statement is to “connect audiences to great plays.” They follow this mission by presenting their plays with minimal directorial concept; their plays are attempts to stage works by canonical authors as “faithfully” and clearly as possible. One of the problems with this sort of theatre is that it can easily fall into the trap of becoming what the director Peter Brook called “deadly theatre”: “plays done by good actors in what seems like the proper way ... just as [it is] supposed to be in the best of classical theatres...yet secretly we find it excruciatingly boring.”

The last time I attended The Pearl Theatre, for a production of Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts* in 2008, what I saw was probably a perfect example of Deadly Theatre: mediocrity masking as elevated culture. Thus I approached the Pearl’s production of *The Bald Soprano* with some trepidation. However, since then the Pearl has undergone significant changes. Most notably, J. R. Sullivan took over as Artistic Director in 2009. He has presided over the company’s move from the East Village to City Center’s Stage II as well as over an expansion of repertoire to include plays which, while still central to Western theatrical tradition, may be less familiar to audiences, and more challenging in terms of form and structure. I was pleasantly surprised by the Pearl’s production of *The Bald Soprano*: although I was not completely satisfied with director Hal Brooks’s thoroughly adequate staging, the play itself is a rarely-seen gem and its very inclusion in the company’s repertoire certainly challenged the Pearl’s core audience.

*The Bald Soprano* falls into the genre that critic and scholar Martin Esslin termed “Theatre of the Absurd” in a 1960 essay by that title. Esslin adopted the term of absurdity from Albert Camus’ 1942 essay “The Myth of Sisyphus,” where he argues that:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a world that is suddenly deprived of illusions and light, man feels like a stranger. He is in irredeemable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity.

Esslin coined the term in order to classify and try to define the structure of seemingly structureless plays written after World War II by Eugène Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter. These plays often lack any clear plot (in many cases the plays end in a situation nearly identical to that in which they begin), have undefined characters who often lack any apparent motivation, and in some cases are filled with illogical or incomprehensible language.

Esslin was trying to make sense of what seemed to be nonsensical plays (famously, at the 1953 premiere of Beckett’s Absurdist *Waiting for Godot*, a critic had stormed out of the theatre after announcing “I will not wait for Godot!”). Esslin went on to argue that these plays came from a particular historical moment: World War II had revealed the existentialist hopelessness of the human condition. Technology had shown itself to be ultimately nefarious, whether allowing Nazis to perfect death camps or the Allies to develop the atomic bomb. Esslin argued that the absurdist playwrights felt that in such a world, traditional dramatic structure seemed meaningless and silly—and the same could be applied to basic human connection.

Just as Esslin developed his theory of the Theatre of the Absurd through detailed attention to historical specificity, Ionesco himself wrote *The Bald Soprano* with close attention to the mechanics of culture. Like Beckett, Ionesco was an expatriate who lived in France; while Beckett was Irish, Ionesco was Romanian. He wrote *The Bald Soprano* while learning English and the play focuses keenly both on the mechanics of the English language and on postwar English middle-class culture.

The short one-act play, set in “A middle class English interior, with English armchairs” on “an English evening” in the home of Mr. and Mrs.

Smith, consists of a series of vignettes. The first bit, after “The English clock strikes seventeen English strokes” consists mainly of an extended exposition by Mrs. Smith on the evening’s dinner. Following this, Mr. and Mrs. Smith discuss the recent death of Bobby Watson, but discover they have no idea who they are talking about because every member of Watson’s family is named Bobby. The next sequence occurs after Mr. and Mrs. Martin arrive for a dinner party: Mr. and Mrs. Martin seem extremely familiar to one another and deduce, through an examination of what at first appears to them to be a series of astonishing coincidences, that they are husband and wife. Eventually, a fire chief arrives and tells an extended story about a family member who had caught a cold, the Smith’s maid Mary performs a dramatic poem about a fire, and the evening degenerates into linguistic chaos. After a blackout, the play returns to the opening, with the Smiths replaced by the Martins. These vignettes seem as if they could come from a variety of genres—a middle-class drama, a detective story, a romance, a melodrama, a cabaret act—except that they are all rendered meaningless through their illogical use of language. The play demonstrates how language can render human interaction meaningless, but it does this with a childlike glee in linguistic play.

For the most part, the Pearl succeeded ably in its goals for its production of *The Bald Soprano* through the meticulous direction of Brooks and the excellent acting on the parts of all the cast members. Brooks deftly handled the play’s frequent genre shifts in a production that runs only a little over an hour. To his credit, the nonsensical play made a certain kind of sense because, through this production, he effectively communicated the central tenets of Absurdism to his audience. Furthermore, the staging was quite funny: I was laughing throughout.

Brooks’s one extratextual conceptual choice was to cast Mrs. Martin as a British Indian. While all the other characters were played by white actors and used more standard English accents, Mrs. Martin, played by Jolly Abraham, spoke with a slightly Indian English dialect (Dialect Designer Amy

Above: Brad Heberlee (Mr. Martin) and Jolly Abraham (Mrs. Martin) in *The Bald Soprano*.





Stoller deserves praise for her sensitivity to differences in the ways British English can be inflected). The multicultural casting of Mrs. Martin was the one device that suggested that The Pearl's *The Bald Soprano* could just as easily take place today as in immediately postwar England: issues of ethnicity have been at the forefront of British politics for the last few decades.

All of the actors deserve high praise. Bradford Cover's Mr. Smith was an effective parody of the professorial and patriarchal "stiff upper lip" English husband and was ably matched by Rachel Botchan as his chatty wife. The Martins, played by Abraham and Brad Heberlee, were younger, and their introductory scene, staged like the denouement of a mystery, was one of the highlights of the show: the two are extremely charismatic actors (although Heberlee dropped his accent occasionally). Robin Leslie Brown as the Mary elicited some of the best laughs of the night, especially during her virtuosic and over-the-top cabaret-style performance of the poem "The Fire." However, the highest praise must go to Dan Daily as the Fire Chief. Daily projected a candid optimism and his childlike face contributed to the sense that the play could almost be seen as a children's game with language. All the actors were particularly noteworthy in the final scene, in which a chaotic geyser of babbling was matched

with intensely physical and highly choreographed movements. The actors were supported throughout by Barbara A. Bell's well-chosen costumes and Stephen Petrilli's lighting design. Bell's costumes and carefully chosen accessories projected an extremely middle-class sensibility. Petrilli's soft lighting thoroughly illuminated the stage but also projected the warmth and comfort of a middle-class home.

One questionable element of the play was Harry Feiner's scenic design. Many elements were excellent: like Bell's costumes, the chairs, desks, doors, wallpaper, and doors on Feiner's set radiated humdrum bourgeois taste. However, Feiner's set included several fanciful elements that alerted the audience to the fact that this English home was not "normal." The upstage wall was decorated with a set of china and a small clock—but these knick-knacks were all upside down. Similarly, candlesticks near each of the two upstage doors projected their candles downwards instead of up. Feiner's carpet for the Smith's home was sky-blue, decorated with white clouds, as if out of a painting by René Magritte. This creative design suggested the absurd nature of the home in which the action would take place—but it's unclear how necessary this all was. Part of why the play is so interesting is that its bizarre nonsensical acts take place in such a nondescript location. The topsy-turvy set gave the game

away the moment the audience walked into the performance space. Another problem with the set was its symmetrical regularity. This led to many scenes being blocked in a rather uninteresting manner; symmetrical pairings and semicircular formations ruled the stage until the final scene. Additionally, because the small City Center Stage II was arranged in a thrust formation, the set may have led to very limited sightlines for audience members seated at the far sides of the seating areas.

Apart from problematic aspects of the set, there was much to praise in the Pearl Theatre's *The Bald Soprano* and the production was an effective staging of the play. The Pearl's mission of educating the audience, providing them with Culture with a capital C, was apparent everywhere. Yet I nevertheless left the production somewhat unsatisfied. I didn't feel that I had gotten anything at all out of the staging that I couldn't have found through sitting down and reading the play. This was furthered by the production's total lack of sexuality. Ionesco's play includes several scenes that could be staged with some sensuality: a kiss between Mr. and Mrs. Smith following an argument, or the moment when "Mary throws herself on the neck of the Fire Chief" leading to

cries of "it's not proper!" from the other characters. Moments such as these were staged with such complete chasteness that they lost all vigor. Although the play is about the failure of human connection and one could argue that such moments thereby illustrate how even limited moments of tenderness can be precious, the issue seemed to me to be one of extreme squeamishness. It appeared as if Brooks was afraid that because much of his audience was over fifty years old, anything more might give them heart attacks. Additionally and ironically, the bourgeois establishment satirized in Ionesco's play was precisely the demographic to which Brooks was catering. The biggest problem with this is that it seems impossible to genuinely educate an audience without challenging the audience members, and Brooks's *production*—although a meticulous, funny, and well-acted staging of a difficult and strange text—was never itself the least bit challenging.

While the Pearl's *The Bald Soprano* was not particularly deep and lacked anything like a "high concept" (the closest it came was through the casting of Mrs. Martin and thus an oblique reference to issues of ethnicity in England), Brooks still succeeded in making Ionesco's play, written over sixty years ago, speak to today's society. Absurdism, especially Ionesco's Absurdism based in nonsensical language, seems like a particularly apt metaphor for the partisan political situation in America today. For much of the last decade, despite a rhetoric of bipartisanship and "compassionate conservatism," the Democratic and Republican parties have been starkly oppositional and essentially unable to work together or even communicate with one another. *The Bald Soprano* illustrates how society itself is predicated on the simple fact of logical sense: when speech ceases to mean anything or allow for genuine communication, the simplest activities come to seem strange, foreign, ridiculous, and even impossible. **A**

*The Bald Soprano*. Written by Eugène Ionesco. Translated by Donald M. Allen. Directed by Hal Brooks. Scenic Design by Harry Feiner. Costumes by Barbara A. Bell. Lighting by Stephen Petrilli. Sound by M. L. Dogg. Dramaturgy by Kate Farrington. Stage Management by Erin Albrecht. Featuring: Jolly Abraham, Rachel Botchan, Robin Leslie Brown, Bradford Cover, Dan Daily, Brad Heberlee. Produced by The Pearl Theatre Company. At New York City Center Stage II. September 13–October 23. Tuesdays and Thursdays—Saturdays at 7:30pm. Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays at 2:30pm. Tickets: \$39–\$64; \$15 student rush on day of performance. See <http://www.pearltheatre.org/1112/soprano.php> for further details.

## In Utopia

CHARLES BERNSTEIN

In utopia they don't got no rules and Prime Minister Cameron's "criminality pure and simple" is reserved for politicians just like him. In utopia the monkey lies down with the rhinoceros and the ghosts haunt the ghosts leaving everyone else to fend for themselves. In utopia, you lose the battles and you lose the war too but it bothers you less. In utopia no one tells nobody nothin', but I gotta tell you this. In utopia the plans are ornament and expectations dissolve into whim. In utopia, here is a pivot. In utopia, love goes for the ride but eros's at the wheel. In utopia, the words sing the songs while the singers listen. In utopia, 1 plus 2 does not equal 2 plus 1. In utopia, I and you is not the same as you and me. In utopia, we don't occupy Wall Street, we are Wall Street. In utopia, all that is solid congeals, all that melts liquefies, all that is air vanishes into the late afternoon fog.

Courtesy of the Occupy Wall Street Poetry Anthology,  
available as a free PDF from [peopleslibrary.wordpress.com](http://peopleslibrary.wordpress.com).



# An Open Letter to President Kelly

November 22, 2011

Dear President Kelly,

Over the past week we have heard from students expressing their concerns and questions related to the increased presence of uniformed security guards at the CUNY Graduate Center. What has been especially disconcerting is the disproportionate increase in security forces in areas of the building devoted to student study, governance, and socialization. The large number of security personnel patrolling our hallways and outside our classrooms signals to many that you believe there is a threat to the Graduate Center. Indeed, the presence of these security forces in student spaces, not at the established building entrance checkpoints, suggests that you believe the threat is internal.

We have chosen to address this issue with you in a public letter because this is a public issue and requires a public response.

In light of recent security and police actions toward peaceful student protests on CUNY campuses and at other public universities, it has become especially difficult to believe that deploying additional security personnel without notice does anything but intimidate students and faculty and create an environment of fear. The Graduate Center community must be informed should some imminent danger require you to make the decision to mobilize security forces.

You have assured the Doctoral Students' Council that peaceful protest and assembly will be allowed on our campus. Indeed, a number of events related to student and faculty protests have gone exceedingly well and without incident from security forces for those peacefully assembled. We thank you in advance for your continued support on this matter and hope you will join the students, faculty, and staff in participating at future events.

On behalf of the students of the CUNY Graduate Center, but for the benefit of the entire community, the faculty and staff included, we request the following information:

- (1) a community notice explaining the choice to increase security presence on campus, with reference to specific safety concerns;
- (2) an outline of the policies and protocols for responding to student protests, including details on the levels of force that Graduate Center and CUNY security is currently authorized to use, and an overview of how security officers have been trained in responding to these issues;
- (3) a report on security actions taken, observations made, and any other pertinent information on public safety officer activity, including an open disclosure of the Graduate Center budget for additional security; and
- (4) a clear timeline of when the Graduate Center will draw down the increased security presence.

We thank you for your attention to these matters and anticipate your response.

Sincerely,

Officers of the Doctoral Students' Council

Colin P. Ashley, Officer for Funding

Annie Dell'Aria, Co-Chair for Business

Anne Donlon, University Faculty Senate Liaison

Nicole N. Hanson, Officer for Outreach


Sarah Jordan, Officer for Student Services

Eero Laine, Co-Chair for Student Affairs

Christina Nadler, University Student Senate Delegate

Jared Simard, Co-Chair for Communication

Patricia Stapleton, Officer for Technology and Library

Monique Whitaker, Officer for Health and Wellness 

**NEW!**

## The DSC Fundraising and Alumni Commission (FAC)

### WHAT'S FAC?

The Fundraising and Alumni Commission (FAC) is a new DSC affiliate that works to generate fundraising opportunities for student-led initiatives and increase outreach to recent GC alumni.

### WHAT CAN IT DO FOR ME?

FAC seeks to help raise funds for the DSC, student programming, and other student-led initiatives. By working with the GC Office of Development, FAC also serves to connect students with recent alumni to increase networking, outreach, and a greater sense of community.

### HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

EMAIL: [fac.cunyds@gmail.com](mailto:fac.cunyds@gmail.com) for more information or to get involved!



## THE back page



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

HULK NO UNDERSTAND  
OCCUPY MOVEMENT!! WHY  
NOT JUST SMASH THINGS???



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

GREAT THING ABOUT ALL CAPS  
IS THEY TURN TIRED  
WHIMPERS OF BROKEN  
ADJUNCT INTO ANGRY SHOUTS  
OF BIG GREEN MONSTER!!!



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

PROFESSOR XAVIER TELL  
HULK HE WONT WRITE NEW  
LETTER OF  
RECOMMENDATION!! SAYS TO  
USE LAST YEARS INTERFOLIO  
LETTER!!!



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

GRADING MAKE HULK MAD!!!  
HULK SMASH STUDENT PAPERS  
BUT THEY ONLY GET FLATTER  
NOT BETTER!!!



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

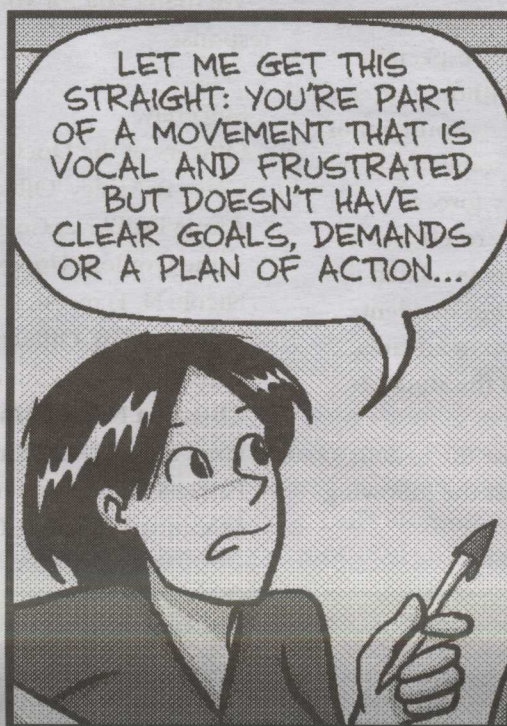
HULK WRITE TEACHING  
PHILOSOPHY STATEMENT FOR  
JOB APPS. HULK NOT KNOW  
WHAT "PHILOSOPHY" MEAN,  
BUT HULK DO KNOW NOT TO  
SAY ANYTHING NEW.



@AdjunctHulk  
ADJUNCT HULK

HULK INVINCIBLE 'CEPT FER  
ONE THING: GERMS FROM  
STUDENTS!!! SICK PUNY  
STUDENTS: STAY HOME!!!  
DON'T YA KNOW HULK NO  
HAVE INSURANCE???

## ph.d. comics BY JORGE CHAM

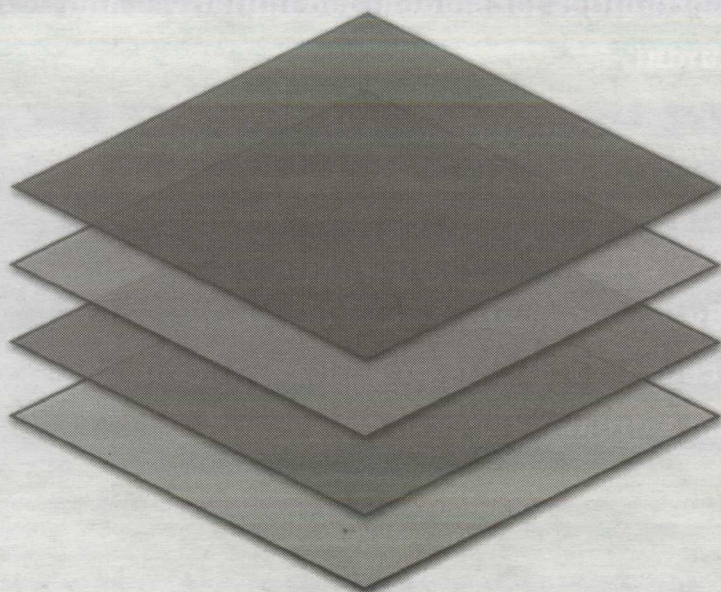


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