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Advocate
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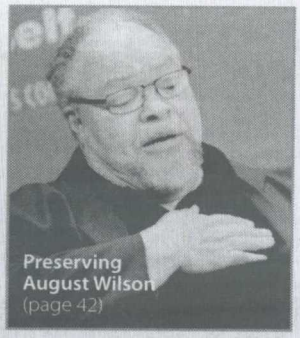
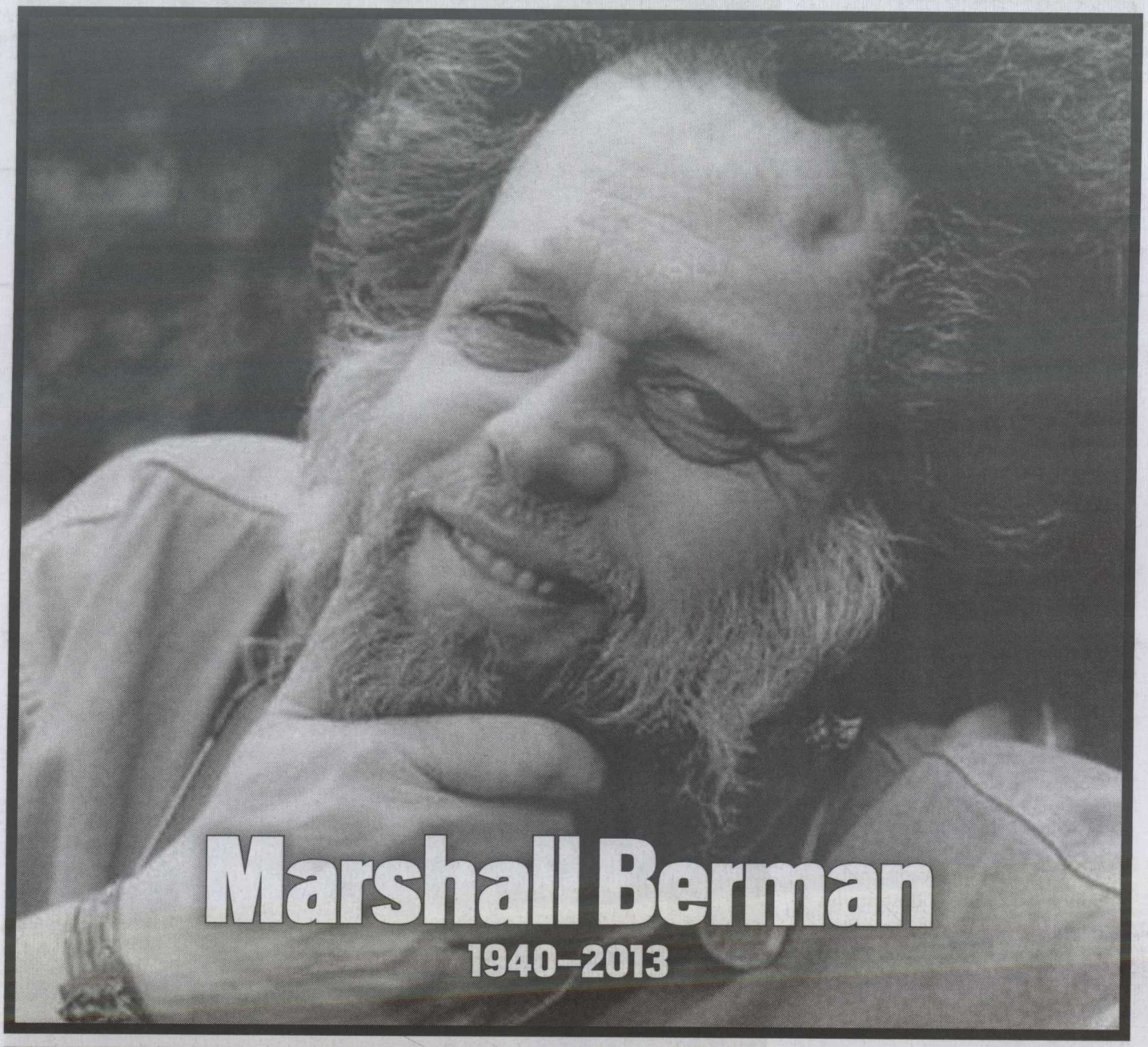

Preserving August Wilson (page 42)



Marshall Berman
1940–2013

ALSO INSIDE

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Advocate

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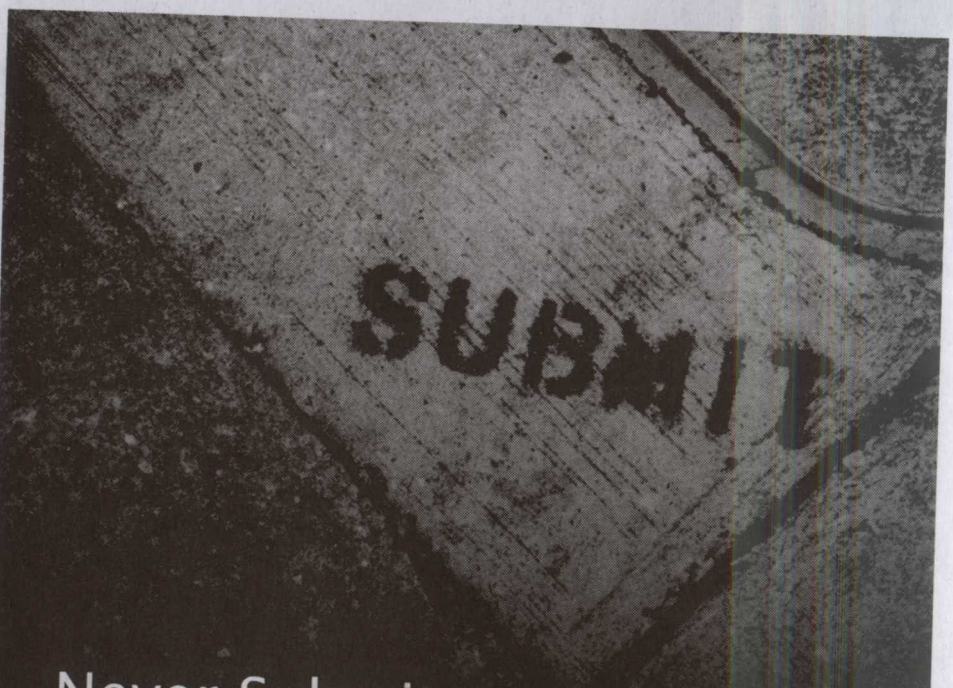

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The *GC Advocate* newspaper, the only newspaper dedicated to the needs and interests of the CUNY Graduate Center community, is looking for new writers for the upcoming academic year. We publish six issues per year and reach thousands of Graduate Center students, faculty, staff, and guests each month.

Currently we are seeking contributors for the following articles and columns:

- Investigative articles covering CUNY news and issues (assignments available on request)
- First Person essays on teaching at CUNY for our regular "Dispatches from the Front" column
- First person essays on life as a graduate student for our "Graduate Life" column
- Feature "magazine style" articles on the arts, politics, culture, NYC, etc.
- Provocative and insightful analyses of international, national, and local politics for our Political Analysis column
- Book reviews for our regular Book Review column and special Book Review issues
- Local Music Reviews and Art Reviews

To view recent articles and to get a sense of our style, please visit the *GC Advocate* website: www.gcadvocate.com.

Payments for articles range between $75 and $150 depending on the length and amount of research required. We also pay for photos and cartoons.

Interested writers should contact us at **advocate@gc.cuny.edu**.

FROM THE editor's desk

The General, the Sage, and the Principles of Academic Freedom

Eerie that this issue includes both remembrances of Marshall Berman and a report on protests surrounding David Petraeus. One of these figures is a long-time public intellectual who grew up on the streets destroyed by Robert Moses's Cross Bronx Expressway. This neighborhood destruction in the name of progress became the defining moment of his intellectual development, as outlined in his most influential work, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. The other figure is returning to the classroom after spending years in service in charge of US military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan and running the country's international espionage organization. His previous academic experience being mainly at West Point, but decorated for his military service in the intervening years, including the deployment of unmanned drones into the cities of Iraq and Afghanistan. Two very different versions of a public intellectual who builds their career on the destruction of the urban landscape: the philosopher and the military strategist.

The remembrances from Marshall Berman's students and colleagues paint a picture of a loving—if eccentric—genius who brought together political philosophy, literature, and pop culture in an engaging and personal style. Truly an embodiment of all this city and academy could be, Marshall nurtured a sense of wonder and creativity in his students, pushing them to be fearless without using fear as a tactic of politics. By contrast, the experiences of the Ad Hoc Committee against the Militarization of CUNY and the kidney punches thrown by plainclothes NYPD against non-violent protesters provide insight into the direction our fair University is headed. Away from the open and gracious pedagogy of Berman's ilk, and toward a policy of containment, regimentation, and violence that is more in line with the War Colleges of the U.S. military than the inheritor to the New York Free Academy.

The CUNY University Faculty Senate—the university-wide faculty governance body—took a strong stance against the student use of free speech. The UFS Executive Committee defended the former CIA director by officially stating that it "deplores all attacks on the academic freedom of faculty, regardless of their viewpoint." As evidence of this false equivalence, the UFS offered that "in the past, we have been strong advocates for the freedom of Kristofer J. Petersen-Overton to teach at Brooklyn College without harassment or retaliation." While technically both adjunct instructors, the graduate student and the former Commander of US Central Command were treated differently in the form of "harassment" they faced. Petersen-Overton was fired by CUNY because of the interference of a Brooklyn politician, whereas Petraeus merely had to face the chants of protesters on the sidewalk between the CUNY building and his car.

These protesters exercising their First Amendment rights—while probably very annoying to the retired four-star general—do not rise to the level of illegally firing a graduate student, and certainly do not violate the Distinguished Service Medal recipient's academic freedom. Paradoxically, the UFS statement ends by affirming that "members of the university community must have the opportunity to express alternate views, but in a manner that does not violate academic freedom." If the academic freedom of the Commander of US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan can be violated merely by protesters' speech, then I am not sure how the UFS envisions our university community should be allowed to express alternate views.

In the last issue of the *Advocate*, we noted that Chairman of the CUNY Board of Trustees Benno Schmidt's redefinition of Academic Freedom as faculty "responsibility"—a responsibility to fight the "speech codes" on campuses that he sees as freezing debate. Unsurprisingly, the UFS would seem to agree with the chairman's ideas on Academic Freedom. But surprisingly, Schmidt would seem to be in agreement with the protesters from the Ad Hoc Committee against the Militarization of CUNY in arguing that First Amendment rights should not be abrogated when they come into conflict with faculty indoctrination. Schmidt claims that "nor should faculty be allowed to engage in indoctrination and professional irresponsibility without being held to account." Academic Freedom issues make for some strange alliances.

While this issue was going to press, the Morales/Shakur Center at City College—a supposedly student controlled space for study and group organization—was shut down. City Council member and City College alum Ydanis Rodriguez reported that not only were the locks on the Center changed, but that the library was also locked. The City College Morris Raphael Cohen library website stated

that the library was to remain open twenty-four-hours-a-day during midterms, from "7 am October 16 through midnight November 8." Both the library and the Morales/Shakur Center are housed within the North Academic Building. After a few hours, the library reopened but according to accounts remained "under heavy security," while the Morales/Shakur Center remained locked. Before the move, no reason had been given for the closings.

Only after the backlash against the closing had started did the college issue a statement. This was not so much an explanation for the reasons, but a statement of fact that the Careers and Professional Development Institute was expanding. No reason was given for closing the student space of the Morales/Shakur Center. This exhibition of power without justification—or at least without providing a justification to those most affected by this action—falls into a troubling pattern on CUNY campuses. Administration's overreach of authority without explanation, whether against students or faculty, threatens to undermine the principles of academic freedom and civic engagement that were the founding principles of this university for the people.

The reviews in this issue also address questions of citizenship and freedom in this brave new world of violent regimentation. Whit Frazer examines the similarities between Thomas Pynchon's recent novel and one of his early works that both address the dissemination of information in a world that no longer makes any sense—a situation familiar to anyone who attempts to navigate the bureaucratic structures of our own university. One of the most famous writers on the effects of absurd bureaucratic violence—Kafka—is treated to a dance interpretation, reviewed by Meredith Benjamin, alongside the experience of feeling forced passivity while watching famous choreographers attempt to create new pieces in front of an audience. Clay Matlin looks at the provocative power inherent in the widely-dismissed abstract artworks by Robert Ryman. Even within the seemingly over-structured form that Ryman has chosen, there is room for our own philosophical ruminations on the never-ending process of eternally becoming. Michael Busch echoes Marshall Berman in describing the struggle between devastation and survival as components of modernism. The exhibit "Iran Modern" looks at the particularly Persian modernism that came out of the destruction of the Second World War in the thirty years between foreign occupation and the repressions of statist power. August Wilson's American Century Cycle (not to be confused with David Petraeus's upcoming North American decade) presented the experience of a century struggling for full citizenship and to be treated as human beings—a struggle that still continues even after the reported demise of the NYPD's stop-and-frisk policy. Daniel Venning draws some overall themes from the WNYC recording sessions that attempted to preserve audio versions of Wilson's plays.

Perhaps it shouldn't surprise me that these issues of freedom and citizenship must be periodically reasserted in the face of growing control from those in positions of power. After all, what large bureaucracy—whether a Congress or the premiere urban university—ever ruled by benevolent dictatorship? The struggles for our rights must be continually fought.

But will we go the way of a Marshall Berman or a David Petraeus? Will we seek to find what is beautiful in this city, despite its attempts to restrict our rights, abridge our freedoms, or even bulldoze our homes—all in the name of progress? Or will we attempt to restrict the First Amendment rights of our fellow citizens, establishing officially sanctioned free-speech zones (possibly patrolled and enforced by unmanned drones)? Ⓐ

Getting in Touch with the Doctoral Students' Council

The DSC's website, http://cunydsc.org, has information about upcoming meetings, governance documents, minutes, and information on services available to students. Reserve one of the DSC rooms (5414, 5409, or 5489) for an event or study session, enter the locker lottery, or sign up for a legal consultation with a lawyer via http://cunydsc.org.

Come visit the DSC's office during office hours, which you can find posted on the DSC website, in the Robert E. Gilleece Student Center, room 5495. Feel free to stop in to chat, ask a question, pass on information, buy discounted movie tickets ($6.50 for AMC/Loews and $7.50 for Angelika), and pick up some free safe sex materials, pens, and post-its.

The DSC has two listservs: DSC-L, to which any GC student can join and post, and DSCAnnouncement-L, to which only DSC Officers can post. Subscribe to DSC-L or DSCAnnouncement-L via gc.listserv.cuny.edu or by emailing ccc@cunydsc.org.

You can also interact with the DSC on Twitter (@cunydsc.org) and Facebook (www.facebook.com/cunydsc.org), or by email: dsc@cunydsc.org.

Students Decry CCNY Sneak Attack

Morales/Shakur Center at CCNY Shuttered in Police-Backed Takeover

Early in the morning on October 20, police and CUNY security closed the North Academic Center at The City College of New York to students and seized space in the building that housed the Guillermo Morales/Assata Shakur Community and Student Center, renaming it the Careers and Professional Development Institute. While details were still emerging and unknown at the time when the *Advocate* was going to press about who, precisely, ordered the move or what the response would be. What is clear is that security closed the entire NAC complex, including the twenty-four hour library right smack in the middle of midterms. It should be pointed out that the library's twenty-four hour access was the direct result of an advocacy campaign organized and based in the Morales/Shakur Center.

CCNY students assemble on Oct. 21 in response to the closure of the Morales/Shakur Center.

More recently, the center has been home to some of the efforts around protesting the appointment of General David Petraeus at the Macaulay Honors College, as well as the reinstatement of the ROTC on campuses throughout the CUNY system. Whether the space takeover is directly related to those campaigns, or is simply part of a broader move of power consolidation by the administration at the expense of students, remains unclear for the moment. For its part, CCNY's administration didn't help to clarify matters. Deidra Hill, the school's vice-president for communication and marketing, showed up to read from a prepared statement that repeated the obvious—that the Morales/Shakur Center had been cleared out to make way for the new "institute," and to assure students that "all contents in the third floor room prior to the expansion are in storage for safekeeping and documentation so they can be redistributed accordingly."

The CCNY Student Government responded quickly with a public statement slamming the school's actions, and highlighting the administration's lack of transparency. "According to the CCNY Vice President of Communications, Deidra Hill," the statement reads, "the new Career and Professional Development Institute will replace the MSCC. CCNY administration did not inform the student body, the Undergraduate Student Government or the students and student organizations who use the MSCC." Student body president Mel Niere further promised that she would be "reaching out to CUNY student governments, local politicians and CCNY administration officials regarding the situation."

On the evening of the center's closing, student activists at the college posted a statement on Facebook, reaffirming the center's importance as "an invaluable space for community groups to meet on campus, for students to connect with their political elders, and for movement histories to be retained and shared in Harlem," and calling for a campus-wide protest the following day. "The Center," the statement read, "has provided a space for students to organize around a number of issues recently, including the addition of gender identity into the school's anti-discrimination policy, and the combating of rape culture at City College. The closure of this space is a serious assault on our right as students to organize and cultivate community."

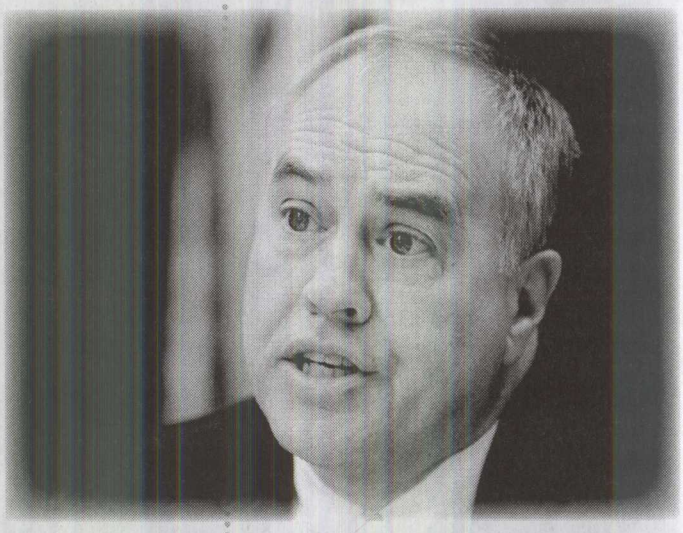
The next day, Monday October 21, students gathered in the plaza outside of the NAC building to protest, as promised. Around 12:30pm, just as afternoon classes were commencing, student leaders rallied a few hundred students with chants of "We're not leaving until they give it back!' About fifteen minutes into the protest, the NAC's fire alarm was pulled, forcing campus security to clear the entire building , pushing hundreds of more students into the plaza, and onto adjoining ramps and other available space immediately surrounding the building.

With the crowds swelling, the protest's leaders pushed onto a second level plaza where the nearest entrance to the Morales/Shakur Center is located, pounding on windows and demanding that the center be returned to student control. Behind the glass windows and doors of the entrance, police officers and CUNY security personnel filmed the students with cell phones and handheld video cameras and blocked them from entering the building.

One of the protest organizers, Taffador Sourovm, told the *New York Post* that "The Morales/Shakur Center has been under siege by the CUNY administration for twenty-five years, and they unexpectedly seized it Saturday night without consulting with anyone who participates in the center. We said that we would mobilize to defend our community space, and we did, and we brought out hundreds and hundreds of people." Noted Sourov, "The real question is: what's going to happen next?"

CUNY Gets Audited

New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli released his findings of an audit conducted into CUNY's administration of faculty fellowship leaves. The findings do not reflect well on the CUNY Brass. According to DiNapoli, "Although the majority of fellowship recipients complied with CUNY guidelines, improvements are needed to protect taxpayer dollars and the integrity of CUNY's fellowship program. CUNY officials did not have a comprehensive, accurate record of CUNY instructors who were granted fellowships during the review period. At least two fellowship leave recipients were not eligible and



State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli is investigating faculty fellowship leaves.

should not have been granted them."

Between 2007 and 2011, CUNY granted over one thousand fellowships to faculty seeking part- and full-time leave. The comptroller's office surveyed six CUNY campuses, which were responsible for 665 fellowship leaves administered in that period. And while the majority of faculty members granted leave in the comptroller's sample adhered to the requirements attached to their fellowships, ninety-six of them did not. The total compensation paid out to the faculty members in question totaled some $6.7 million dollars. Noted DiNapoli, following the fellowship requirements—including submitting summaries of the activities engaged with during the period of leave—are "important to ensure that the benefits of this taxpayer investment are being realized." It seems someone, or rather a lot of people, were asleep at the switch.

The audit found that CUNY administrators were sloppy and generally irresponsible in their accounting. DiNapoli noted that, "For example, according to CUNY Central, Lehman College granted sixty-two fellowships during our review period. Yet, the listing we received from the college listed thirty-five grantees. Similarly, CUNY Central noted fifty-nine fellowship grantees for the Graduate Center while the Graduate Center's listing noted eighty-four grantees." If the problem were relegated to errors in counting, it would be bad enough. But the lack of oversight and accountability went further. In some cases, no fellowship applications for leave could be tracked down by state investigators, and in at least one case, a $77,000 fellowship was awarded to a non-tenured instructor who had been made a "professor" just before his fellowship application was granted.

At the Grad Center, the findings were even stranger. According to the comptroller's report, a higher education officer (HEO) at the GC, who had won a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship, was given a half-year fellowship leave by CUNY so that "the employee would not lose his CUNY income and health insurance coverage, or his PSC Welfare Fund benefits, while on the Guggenheim fellowship." According to PSC and CUNY officials interviewed by the comptroller's office, the agreement reached by the HEO and the Grad Center "were without precedent."

Oversight was most noticeably absent with respect to CUNY's requirement that faculty account for their activities while on paid leave. Less than one hundred of the more than six hundred faculty who took leave in the comptroller's sample group submitted their activity summaries on time to CUNY administrators (though many of these are laughably brief and vague); another hundred or so were submitted after the deadline, some arriving years late; nearly three hundred on file weren't dated at all (leaving the comptroller to wonder whether they had been written after the state demanded to see them); and about a hundred simply don't exist at all. The most common reasons given by faculty members interviewed by state investigators were "I forgot" and "No one ever asked me for it."

In fairness, CUNY administrators aren't the only ones guilty of slop. DiNapoli's audit findings, dated October 9, 2013, were sent along to the chancellor's office, addressed to "Chancellor Goldstein," at "535 East 80th Street." Someone might want to let the folks up in Albany know that Darth Vader has left the Death Star, and that the Death Star itself is currently parked at 42nd Street. Good thing Chancellor Kelly reads the *Advocate!*

He Did What?

CUNY administration may not have the first clue about what's going on with faculty fellowship leaves, but it was sharp enough to finally realize that since 2007, one of its employees was using a City University credit card to buy Uggs and other luxury crap. Early in October, Avi Gannon—the man in charge of the College of Staten Island's IT Department—pleaded guilty to grand larceny in the third degree after it was discovered that he had been scamming the university for tens of thousands of dollars in internet purchases paid for with CUNY funds.

According to the *Long Island Exchange*, Gannon "used his position in CSI's Information Technology Department—and thus as someone authorized to make purchases for the school on a school-issued credit card or school account—to steal thousands of dollars worth of items for himself over a five and a half year period. To carry out his theft, Gannon created and submitted false records to CSI, making it look as if the charges on his credit card statements were for items he bought for the school rather than ones he had bought for himself. CSI, relying on the records Gannon submitted, unknowingly paid the bills for the items Gannon was stealing."

It doesn't stop there. Gannon was also running a side business on eBay, selling CUNY property to online bidders, and in some cases turning around the very items he was using the CUNY credit card to purchase, and then pocketing the cash. In return for his guilty plea, Gannon will escape jail time, and instead will pay $25,000 in restitution for CUNY, and forgo his $21,000 annual leave pay (!!!). When you're pulling in money like that, do you really need to grab some more on the backs of a public institu....oh wait. Ⓐ

political analysis

Petraeus Protests Spur Harsh Response

MICHAEL STIVERS

By May of this year, just as the spring semester of classes were finishing up, the once loud and aggressive calls of protest to the appointment of former General David Petraeus to the Macaulay Honors College at CUNY had fallen quiet. After much public outcry by students and faculty (including formal condemnation by the PSC, the union of CUNY faculty), Petraeus's initial salary of $200,000 was reduced to just $1.

CUNY administration, namely then-chancellor Matthew Goldstein and Macaulay Honors College Dean Ann Kirschner, employed politically savvy damage control in response to a broad public outcry. Even progressive forces like City Councilmember Brad Lander and then mayoral candidate Bill DeBlasio were calling for his appointment to be renegotiated. This was not with its bumps and embarrassments though—as Corey Robin, Professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College, details in an article for *Salon*, the episode was chock-full of seemingly shady cover-ups and other suspect actions on the part of Goldstein and Kirschner.

Political hiccups aside, CUNY had seemed to successfully avert an institutional crisis by virtually eliminating Petraeus's publicly-funded salary. The overt and rage-inducing juxtaposition of CUNY administration offering Petraeus $200,000 to teach one three-hour course per week while students struggle with an increasing tuition burden and adjunct professors juggle multiple jobs just to make rent, had been stymied. From the viewpoint of Goldstein, Kirschner, and Petraeus, the rough waters of political controversy were behind them and all was clear on the horizon.

What the administration, and apparently much of the rest of CUNY, failed to realize was that for a significant portion of the original opposition, Petraeus's salary was not the primary cause of protest. Surely the money involved constituted a slap in the face to struggling students and faculty in he university system, but the finances of it all were secondary to Petraeus's role in the United States Military—namely as Director of U.S. Central Command operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and then later as director of the CIA.

This resurgent opposition formed as the Ad-Hoc Committee Against the Militarization of CUNY. Forged by a number of student groups spanning multiple CUNY campuses, the Committee treated the appointment of Petraeus not as an isolated issue, but situated it within a broader context of increasing military presence and influence on campuses across the university. They specifically targeted the Reserve Officer Training Corps and the presence of Military Recruiters on campus.

The Reserve Officer Training Corps, or ROTC, is a joint military-educational program in which students take courses on campus that put them on the fast-track to officer status. Military recruitment grants military branches privileged access to students on campus and their digital contact information. The Committee has also emphasized other militaristic developments on campus, such as the newly dedicated Colin Powell School at City College and support for CCNY's Advanced Science Research Center by weapons manufacturers like Raytheon and Northrop Grumman.

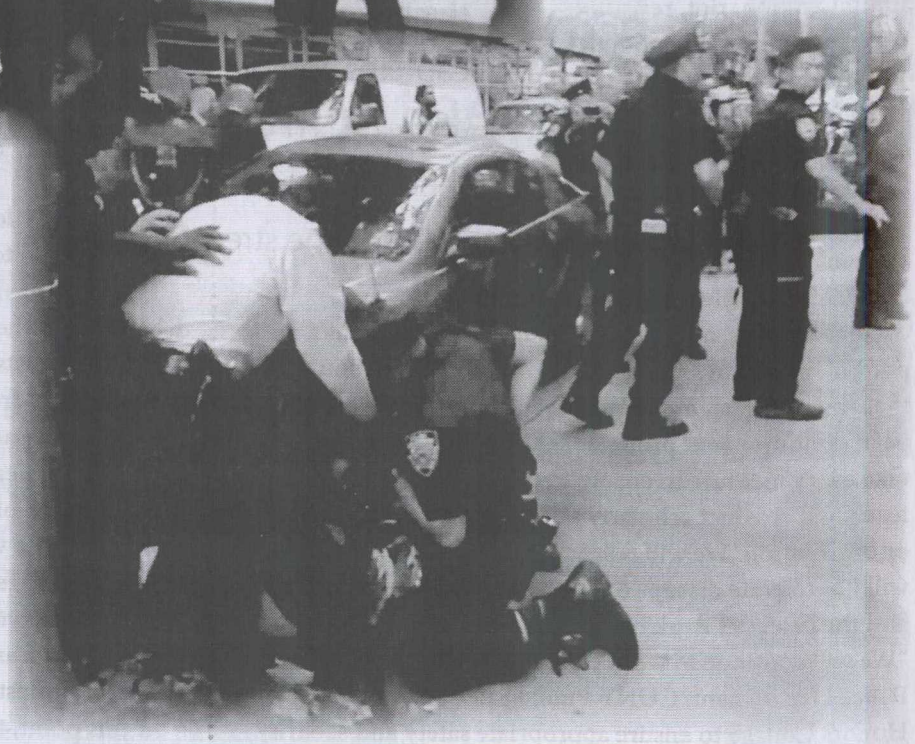
Opposition to these forces is not new at CUNY. ROTC was run out of CUNY in 1971 in response to overwhelming protest of the Vietnam War and the pipeline for officers that was being built on campuses throughout the city. Only this semester has the program been reestablished in Manhattan and Brooklyn (at City College and Medgar Evers College, as well as at the College of Staten Island and York College). The appointment of Petraeus proved to the be final straw in a growing opposition to the renewed and cozy relationship between the United States Military and the City University of New York.

After initial meetings and planning, the Committee called for a protest outside of the West 67th Street Honors College building on September 9, the first day of Petraeus's seminar (entitled "Are We on The Threshold of the (North) American Decade?"). Roughly one hundred protesters showed and joined in chants condemning US imperial policies abroad and their domestic correlates like ROTC and Petraeus. Protestors were met with a small, but not insignificant, police presence comprising CUNY "Campus Safety" and a few NYPD officers. There was little contention throughout the action.

Conflict did arise however when protestors unexpectedly caught Petraeus walking to his car after the class had ended. A small group surrounded him and followed him a couple blocks down Central Park West, yelling a host of questions and accusations, as well as reminding him, with chants of "Every class, David," that they did not intend this to be a one-off action, but a sustained campaign against the invasion of educational spaces by imperial military

forces and figureheads.

The video soon went viral and was quickly picked up by a host of major outlets—*New York Magazine*, the *New York Times*, and *The Guardian* to name a few. The response was in many cases negative, accusing protestors of harassment and aggression. Ann Kirschner responded with a call to civility. In a statement released shortly after the protests, she wrote, "We may disagree, but we must always do so in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. While the college supports the articulation of all points of view on critical issues, it is essential that dialogue within the academic setting always be conducted civilly."



Whatever criticisms of the video exist, there is no doubt that this garnered an enormous wave of attention for the Committee and to the policies within and without CUNY they were so ardently opposing. When 300,000 people see something, it is bound to rise to the forefront of popular consciousness. And that is exactly what happened.

As promised, the Committee returned with an even larger group of supporters on the following Monday for class. This time they were met, unsurprisingly, with a more overt police presence and a heavier truckload of steel barricades. The event ran similarly as it had the previous week, with a host of speakers deriding Petraeus for his actions in the illegal occupation of Iraq by the United States, which included establishing torture and detention centers to hold Sunni "insurgents," as revealed in a joint investigation by the BBC and *The Guardian*. Also referenced by the Committee was Petraeus's relationship with Colonel James Steele, a military official who reportedly organized "death squads" in Central America and was then brought to Iraq to replicate those acts. Refrains of "war criminal" and "David Death Squad Petraeus" were common.

Also discussed was his role in the US military foray into Afghanistan and his directorship of the CIA, under which the program of extra-judicial assassination by drone attacks increased sharply, operations that are also illegal under international law and have been denounced by human rights officials at the United Nations. Clearly there was no shortage of material for which to criticize Petraeus—and to criticize the CUNY administration who were honoring Petraeus' "accomplishments" with a visiting professorship and a $200,000 gift package. Still, the action went off without any major hitches or controversies.

Top: Students heckle Petraeus. Bottom: Still from a video showing police punching a protester.

That changed in a major way just the next day. The Committee had called for another protest in response to a fundraiser being held at the Macaulay building where Petraeus has been giving his class. The event featured. . . you guessed it. . . David Petraeus in conversation with foreign policy commentator Fareed Zakaria. It was rumored to be a "who's who" of the NYC elite, including an invitation to outgoing Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

It was on this afternoon that the building tension between CUNY students and faculty and the security forces reached a tipping point. As students were picketing, as they had been for multiple weeks, the police responded with overt violence. "Protesters were marching in a circle on the sidewalk and chanting, but the police forced them into the street and then charged," the Committee wrote in a press release the following morning. "Students were punched, slammed against vehicles and against the pavement by police captains and officers, after the NYPD forced them off the pavement and into the street." Six students were arrested and charged with obstruction of governmental administration, riot, resisting arrest, and disorderly conduct.

"Students were punched, slammed against vehicles and against the pavement by police captains and officers, after the NYPD forced them off the pavement and into the street."

While no response was given by Dean Kirschner or any other administrator within the Macaulay Honors College, CUNY Interim Chancellor William Kelly, who was inside the building while the arrests occurred, issued a statement in support of Petraeus's appointment and in support of the NYPD's protection of that appointment, apparently even if it meant brutally beating non-violent protests. "The University continues to take every measure to ensure that Dr. Petraeus is able to teach and conduct scholarly activities without harassment or obstruction. We will respect free speech; however, we will not tolerate disruption of the free exchange of ideas and the essential work of the University," Kelly wrote. "We will continue to work closely with the New York City Police Department, CUNY Public Safety, and Macaulay Honors College to ensure appropriate safety and security arrangements." Students were released roughly a day after the arrests. The court cases are ongoing.

Multiple videos of the brutality were circulated widely. One video included footage of a plainclothes police officer repeatedly slamming his fist into the kidneys of a student who was being held on the ground by other officers, clearly incapacitated. This video appeared to shore up more support and attention for those protesting. "People saw what the CUNY administration and Board is willing to unleash against students and faculty for the 'crime' of telling the truth and defending our university against this drive to make us march in lockstep with the Pentagon," remarked Sandor John, a professor of History at Hunter College and a member of the Ad-Hoc Committee. "The attempt at intimidation has not and will not succeed."

The action on the following Monday, which seemed to be becoming almost ritualized and more widely publicized, drew the biggest crowd. More students and faculty had been drawn to the now infamous Honors College, if not to protest the militarism of Petraeus and CUNY, then to condemn the arrest of non-violent individuals exercising their constitutional rights to free speech. This time though, there was no physical altercation.

Despite this growing opposition and the increasingly loud calls for the rescindment of the appointment, CUNY and Macaulay administrations have shown no signs of budging. That said, the protests are certainly having an effect. The class has been moved from the Honors College at 35 West 67 Street to a high-rise building on 555 West 57th Street. According to e-mails obtained by *Gawker*, CUNY staffer Jeffrey Weinstein told the university's facilities staff that "security will be increased."

On top of this, the protests have won a less concrete, albeit no less significant victory; they have brought the issue of militarization on campus to light and sparked a debate across the whole of CUNY and beyond. John noted that "the protests have succeeded in putting the militarization of CUNY front and center in its relation to the overall ruling-class assault on public education. They have helped to show very clearly and concretely what it means to say that the Board of Trustees and the administration do not represent those who work and study at the City University—in fact these anti-democratic bodies have explicitly or implicitly given their stamp of approval to brutal police violence and frame-up arrests of CUNY students for the 'crime' of protesting a war criminal."

At this point, there is nothing to indicate that protestors will scale back their efforts or lessen their demands. The committee is already planning another action on October 16, this time at John Jay College where Petraeus is being honored at an event entitled "Educating for Justice." According to the Committee, "members of NYC's financial elite will pay up to $50,000 for a 'visionary table.'" Until then, the conversation continues. Ⓐ

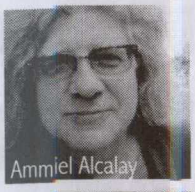
After Jews and Arabs

A 20th Anniversary Gathering

Oct 28, 2013, 6:00pm
The Skylight Room (GC room 9100)

Ammiel Alcalay's groundbreaking book, **After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture** (1993), carefully reconstructs a shared literary and historical tradition that has linked Arab and Arab Jewish and Middle Eastern thought for the better part of a millennium. Join a group of scholars and artists who been involved with this text over the last twenty years, to explore and celebrate the connections and inspirations this remarkable book has generated. Presentations will be followed by master 'oud player Najeeb Shaheen, along with readings.

Cosponsored by the Middle East & Middle Eastern American Center, The Graduate Center, CUNY.


Ammiel Alcalay


Sinan Antoon


Zvi Ben-Dor Benite


Sami Shalom Chetrit

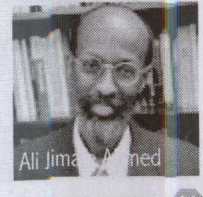

Dalia Kandiyoti


Archie Rand


Najeeb Shaheen


Ella Habiba Shohat


Joyce Zonana


Ali Jima[illegible]ned

guest columnist

Oil, Azerbaijan and the Strange Case of Rick Bourke

AMY GOODMAN

Oil is the source of so much pain in the world. Around the globe, wherever oil is extracted, people suffer a constellation of injuries, from coups and dictatorship to pollution, displacement and death. Pipelines leak, refineries explode, tankers break up and deep-sea drill rigs explode. The thirst for oil disrupts democracies and the climate. Not far from the burgeoning fracking fields of Colorado, Frederic "Rick" Bourke sits in a minimum-security federal prison. His crime: blowing the whistle on corruption and bribery in the oil-rich region of the Caspian Sea.

Rick Bourke is perhaps best known for founding the luxury handbag company Dooney and Bourke. He is a philanthropist, and has invested his wealth into ventures seeking novel cures for cancer. In the mid-1990s, he met a Czech national named Viktor Kožený, dubbed "The Pirate of Prague," who reaped tens of millions of dollars through controversial deals during the privatization of Czech national assets. Kožený sought greater fortunes by recruiting investors for the takeover of SOCAR, the state-owned oil company of Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic on the western shore of the Caspian Sea.

Kožený promised unprecedented returns on the investments. Serious investors vetted the opportunity and sank huge sums into the enterprise, including Columbia University's investment fund, the insurance giant AIG, legendary hedge-fund manager Lee Cooperman, a longtime executive at Goldman Sachs, and former Senate majority leader George Mitchell. Bourke's attorney, Michael Tigar, summed up the result on the *Democracy Now!* news hour: "Kožený was a crook. He stole every bit of Rick Bourke's money and all of the other investors' money. He bribed Azeri officials. He lives today happily unextradited in the Bahamas."

Kožený paid huge sums to the president of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev. Like Russia's President Vladimir Putin, Aliyev was a former top-level KGB official. He gained control of the country shortly after the Soviet breakup. His son, Ilham, during the period of Kožený's scheme, was the head of SOCAR. Kožený employed a Swiss lawyer named Hans Bodmer to coordinate the complex scam. An American named Thomas Farrell, who runs a bar in St. Petersburg, Russia, became the bagman, ferrying duffel bags of cash to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.

The investment tanked, and Kožený absconded with the remaining funds. Rick Bourke went to the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, which has a history of going after white-collar crime. He spoke with Assistant District Attorney Mariam Klipper, an expert on privatization in Eastern Europe. The DA's office indicted Kožený, who skirted the prosecution and is enjoying relative immunity in the Bahamas.

As the lone whistle-blower, Bourke also cooperated with federal prosecutors. Nevertheless, they decided to set their

Left: Rick Bourke. Right: Viktor Kožený.

sights on him. He eventually was found guilty under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, not for bribing anyone, but for alleged knowledge of the bribes, even though the entire case rested on testimony of the Swiss lawyer, Bodmer, and Farrell. At sentencing, former assistant district attorney Klipper wrote to federal Judge Shira Scheindlin, seeking a lenient sentence for Bourke: "He was extremely helpful," she wrote. He "came to my office voluntarily and spoke candidly and with conviction about the case. We did not offer anything in return. ... I never had reason to doubt him." While Bodmer and Farrell also were indicted, they received very favorable plea deals. They both quickly left the U.S.

Much of the court record is sealed, likely because of the involvement of intelligence agencies. In a remarkable twist in the case, the former head of Britain's intelligence service, MI-6, Sir Richard Dearlove, and the former deputy director of operations at the CIA, James Pavitt, both sought to testify on Bourke's behalf. They were reportedly denied the opportunity, perhaps to protect the intelligence value of both Bodmer and Farrell. In the murky world of petroleum geopolitics, it is very difficult to know.

The son of Heydar Aliyev, Ilham Aliyev, succeeded his father as president of Azerbaijan, ruling the country with dictatorial control. He just won his third term as president last week, with the initial election results being reported the day BEFORE voting began. Human Rights Watch issued a report in September, "Tightening the Screws: Azerbaijan's Crackdown in Civil Society and Dissent."

Rick Bourke sits in the federal prison in Englewood, Colo., sentenced to a year and a day. Former Washington Post reporter Scott Armstrong, who founded the National Security Archive and chaired the Government Accountability Project, spent years investigating the case. As a senior investigator on the Senate Watergate Committee, Armstrong uncovered the existence of President Richard Nixon's secret taping system. He knows corruption when he sees it, and considers Bourke a genuine whistle-blower. He summed up the case: "This elaborate set of frauds that Kožený was involved in were in essence covered up by the United States government, who chose instead to bring the full weight of their investigative enthusiasm against the whistle-blower. And that just shocks the conscience." Ⓐ

Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column. Amy Goodman is the host of "Democracy Now!," a daily international TV/radio news hour airing on more than 1,000 stations in North America. She is the co-author of "The Silenced Majority," a *New York Times* best-seller.

IN MEMORIAM

Marshall Berman: Angel on the Streets

Michael Walzer

Marshall was a good friend over many years—almost half a century; he was a political comrade for all those years; and he was a lovely human being. Judy and I knew him first as a very vulnerable young man, a graduate student, miserable in Harvard's Government Department (as I had been not many years before). When he was especially unhappy, he would visit us and hang out in our house, with our kids. I think that we raised his spirits, and he certainly raised ours. I remember vividly how he dragged us to the first Earth Day celebration in Cambridge, on the banks of the Charles River. Judy and I were skeptical, probably wrongly, but Marshall and our two daughters, eight years old and three years old, had a wonderful time.

Born in 1940, Marshall was in important ways a child of the '60s. Though he hated the way that decade ended, in ultra-left posturing and experiments in violence, he never turned his back on all that had gone before. He relished every liberating and every participatory moment—one of his early articles in *Dissent* was a retrospective appreciation of those feverish years. And his lovely essay, from the year 2000, "Jaytalking," is an attempt to figure out how the critical culture of the '60s might be reconstituted in these latter days.

But his love of the '60s, and of the New Left, produced in some of the *Dissent* elders a certain wariness, so it was some years before he was fully admitted to our little circle. I was never wary, in part because Marshall and I had another connection, in addition to our shared sense that the Harvard Government Department was not a utopian society. He was, as I am, a man of the left and a lover of Zion. Those haven't always been commitments easy to combine, but he combined them with grace, and it helped me a great deal over the years to talk and walk with him.

He was also a Marxist, of sorts, though the images of Marx that he put on his book covers and his T-shirts were not the ones we are accustomed to. I have read many Marxist writers in my time, and I can say with confidence that Marshall was not a Marxist Marxist, but one of his own kind. He focused on the writings of the young Marx, especially the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, and I have always thought that in reading those texts he also improved them.

Eventually, the other editors of *Dissent* recognized in Marshall the high intellect that they required and admired—and they recognized something else too, which doesn't always go along with high intellect: a buoyancy of spirit that could lift us all and make *Dissent* a better magazine, which it did, which he did. He became our urbanist and our in-house critic of the anti-urbanists, all the desecrators of cities. He described again and again, in vivid detail, for all our readers and for many others too, the connections of modernism, urban life, and human emancipation. He resurrected the old medieval maxim "Stadtluft macht frei": the air of the city makes us free. He found that freedom everywhere, in the busy streets of Manhattan; in the clubs and cafes of Greenwich Village, in the gaudy lights of Times Square; in the Bronx where he grew up, which died and was reborn; in the graffiti scrawled on New York's subway cars; and in the music of the city, from jazz to Broadway to rap.

Avram Barlowe, a colleague of my daughter's at the Urban Academy, an alternative high school in the New York

City system, was a student of Marshall's and has written a brief account of one of Marshall's visits to Urban. He has given me permission to quote it here.

> Marshall was the lone white participant on a panel that debated rap music and censorship. He opened by quoting violent lines from Shakespeare and then seamlessly transitioned to the words of Public Enemy. Just about everyone in the room was amazed by his fluency with late '80s rap lyrics and his ability to locate them within a tradition that the students (and some of the panelists) were barely familiar with. His appearance, as usual, was rather disheveled and his knapsack was mended with grey duct tape. One of the students, fourteen years old, leaned over to me and whispered "This guy is amazing, but is he one of those homeless geniuses?"

Only the adjective was wrong. Marshall and his family were at home here in the Upper West Side stetl, and this city was also his home. It made him angry sometimes, and sad sometimes, but with his mind and heart he encompassed and embraced it. And that was his genius.

What may have been his last lecture was delivered only a few months ago in the Great Hall of The City College of New York. The Hall was packed with people of all ages who admired Marshall and who loved him. He climbed the steps to the podium like an old man, but he spoke of this city with the ardor of a young man. When he finished, we all stood, everyone stood, and applauded. And I thought, this is the way it should be.

The evening that I learned of his death, I sat reading some of his old *Dissent* articles. We will post them; take the time to look at them; they are buoyant still; they will lift you up.

Zichrono l'vracha—May his memory be a blessing.

Jamie Aroosi

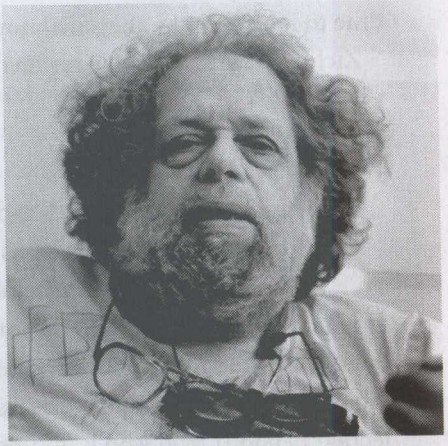
As an undergraduate, I know I wasn't alone in being angry with academic life. Bookish for as long as I can remember, university seemed to offer me the promise of a place where the kind of intellectual life to which I aspired was valued. However, as is often the case, the promise outstripped the reality. For me, the wake-up call came when I began studying with a brilliant political theorist (a subject which became my own intellectual passion), one who both upended my world, while also helping me put it back together again, but who was himself a lone and increasingly marginal figure in the department. At the tail end of a career devoted to teaching, at a school that was evermore caught up in the desire to climb the rankings, my school affected this climb by diminishing the importance of teaching and increasing that of publishing. And so, I watched as one of the few people in the department who had truth to speak (and who did it in the classroom) was marginalized. Those like him weren't to be a part of the twenty-first-century university—and perhaps, if not for a brief moment of the New Left's ascendency, they wouldn't have been part of the twentieth-century one either.

As I later realized, my own experience was hardly unique, however important it was to me. The university was changing, driven more and more by rankings and the statistical measures that go into them, and less and less by the type of open-ended, creative inquiry that is impossible to quantify. So, when I looked out at the wide world of academic departments, in search of a place that I could call my graduate home, I found myself at a loss. I could pick a department based solely on reputation, keeping my fingers crossed that I would find the intellectual and spiritual nourishment that I sought; however, choosing that way worried me. If my decision was based solely on perceived ranking, it seemed to me like a compromise—both in my aspirations and my sense of self—as I would be choosing based on the very rubric that had led my own mentor to marginalization. So, I continued to look for a place that I thought would embody the type of intellectual life that had sustained me for many years. As it turned out, that *place* was wherever Marshall Berman happened to be.

I first encountered Marshall in the way that many do, through his masterpiece, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*. I read it as an undergraduate in a class called "Enlightenment and Modernity," a class that I took with my undergraduate mentor. A survey of works that runs from Rousseau's *Second Discourse* and Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, to Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, Marshall's book was the only one written by an author then still alive. This is not the easiest company to keep (but surrounded by

such company, a political philosopher seems destined to lament the lost minds of days past); yet, Marshall's book was every bit their match. In some ways, its pages held more. In Marshall's work we not only found a mind capable of synthesizing everything from Dostoevsky to Robert Moses, from Karl Marx to Times Square, we also found someone whose warmth and humanity shone through on every page. If there was a book that embodied how I wanted to write, a book that demonstrated that the true promise of thinking remained alive rather than being a relic of the past, it was Marshall's book. I can't say that I understood it all, and I still don't; but I understood it well enough to know that here was a man who could help me become the person I wanted to be.

Over the course of many years, Marshall and I became quite close, and he proved to be exactly the type of mentor that I had always wanted. Aside from the insights he brought to bear on my work—insights that often took me by surprise for their ability to reveal things in wholly unpredictable ways—Marshall gave me exactly what I think each of us needs in order to produce our best work: he gave me his love. Welcoming me into his life and his home, as he did with many of his students, Marshall was uninterested in shaping me into the type of marketable commodity that fits some specialized academic niche. Instead, he was interested in my very intellectual and spiritual development, in the broadest terms possible. This isn't to say that he didn't want me to get a job, or that he didn't realize all that goes into getting one, especially these days; instead, Marshall had faith that through intellectual and spiritual development, through my own growth and understanding, I might one day produce the type of work that has a truly *human* insight into the world. And if I was ever successful, Marshall believed (and I do too, perhaps foolishly), that people would want to read it. Regardless, even if academic life wasn't in my future, I could nonetheless be happy with whom I had become. What Marshall really offered me was the simple promise of what an education can and should be.



This reminded me of my first interaction with him: it occurred over email, prior to my arrival in New York. Writing to him that I had an interest in Søren Kierkegaard, he responded very kindly, but with a perplexing story about a piece of graffiti found on the restroom wall at one of his favorite haunts: the Hungarian Bakery, up by Columbia University. Juxtaposing Kierkegaard with a few other authors, the punch line was that Kierkegaard may never have had sex himself, yet, he wrote the greatest seduction story ever told. I wasn't sure what to make of it at the time, but I was satisfied and relieved that he had responded so kindly. However, like many of the things Marshall brought to my attention, its real insight—and Marshall's own insight—would only be revealed over time.

As years went by, and I settled into my own study of Kierkegaard, I pored over his texts in libraries spanning from Minnesota to Copenhagen. However, Marshall was always quick to bring my attention to what might otherwise be mistaken for the random ephemera of modern life—much like graffiti on a restroom wall. However, similar to one of his favorites, Walter Benjamin, these random bits of modern life could be woven into a tapestry of our otherwise disjointed lives, revealing great depth where before only lay superficial appearance. Like Benjamin, Marshall proved himself one of those rare minds capable not only of thinking *ideas*, but of thinking *life* itself. If I wanted to find Kierkegaard I wouldn't find him in a graveyard in Copenhagen, nor in any archive of his works; I'd find him in myself and those around me, and in whatever led someone to scrawl a few words on a restroom wall. I always knew this, and I came to study with Marshall because I knew he did too, but knowing this, and being able to read the writing on the wall are hardly the same thing; it's the difference between reading Benjamin, and being him.

With all this said, for a long time I couldn't see the connection between my own work and Marshall's. The very intimacy and warmth he conveyed in his writing was something that I seemed to be losing, as my own work become increasingly technical. I plugged away, enjoying myself as I worked through complex philosophical arguments, but I wasn't sure I had much of Marshall's poetic touch—I could think ideas well enough, but somehow I halted at the world. As I watched myself write what seemed to become more of an abstract work of philosophy, and less the kind of poetic intellectual adventure that Marshall himself wrote, I wondered over the reason. I had come to study with Marshall, after all, to develop as a writer. I wanted to develop a writing style that was more

accessible and less academic, more poetic and less philosophical, and I had come to judge truth itself in its very resonance with both our hearts and our minds. A truth that didn't resonate with others, a truth that wasn't both felt and thought, was no truth for me.

Yet, to my surprise, I was happy with my work despite all of this, and my satisfaction only increased as my work progressed. It was only then, almost upon completion, that I realized its connection with Marshall's work: in my own modest way, we were both writing about the same thing. While I worked through the intricacies of nineteenth-century philosophy, in what oftentimes seemed an esoteric if personally enjoyable adventure, whereas Marshall seemed to capture just about everything that has ever existed in a wonderful time-and-space spanning tapestry, what drove me was a simple question: how might we live *modern* life? Just as Marshall explored what it meant to be a modern self alive in the modern world, just as he explored the complexities, contradictions, ironies, tragedies, and joys of modern life, in my own much more modest way, I was doing the same thing.

My work wasn't so different from his at all. I was simply laying my own intellectual foundations, finding a little bit of much needed clarity in an otherwise chaotic world, so that, now, I was better able to understand his work. And realizing this—realizing that the culmination of my own life's work was a mere prerequisite for understanding the complexity of his own—was a humbling experience. But what else might I have expected from a man whose canvas was the entirety of modern life? However, this realization also made me feel closer to him, and I'm doubly happy because I think he liked my conclusion too: for all the many things that being a self might mean, one of the most important things it means is that we need to learn to give, and to receive, *love*. It is love, after all, that truly draws us into the world, and I can't think of a man more in love with the world than was Marshall.

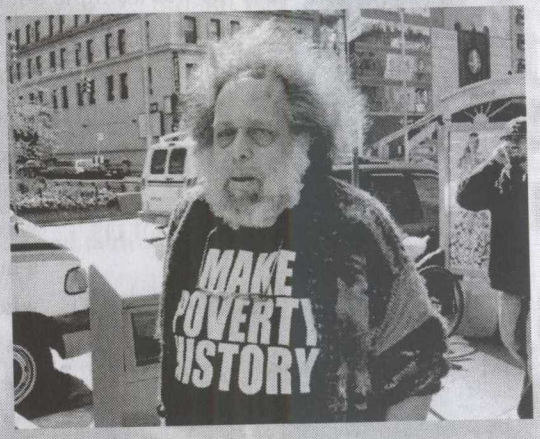
And this is why so many of us flocked to study with Marshall; just as the academy's promise of spiritual and intellectual transformation seems evermore forgotten, with Marshall, the truly magical nature of intellectual life remained wonderfully alive.

As Marshall knew, and as he helped me better understand, our ideas help us live life, transforming ourselves and the world as we go. And so, ultimately, there's something more truthful about the way in which Kierkegaard is *lived* in a Morningside Heights coffee shop, than the way he's sometimes studied in dispassionate academic tomes—and incidentally, it's a way that Kierkegaard himself would have preferred. It is all too easy to forget the luxurious safety that we each possess, by virtue of our lucky location within the academy (and the tenuous life of an adjunct, sadly, only intensifies the need for safety); however, it is an awareness whose loss threatens to become our very own conservatism—a conservatism that might strike us just as we appear to ourselves most radical. If our ideas fail to move us to live life differently (or *dangerously*—Marshall was fond of quoting Nietzsche's riff on this), if they fail to draw us into a deeper, loving relationship with the world, what value lies in their truth? Delving into the muddied waters of *lived* life—and finding a sense of meaning there—is the real challenge of intellectual life; in fact, it's the real challenge of life itself. And this is why so many of us flocked to study with Marshall; just as the academy seems poised on the precipice of an entrenched institutionalization, just as the pressures to conform into a *pro forma* academic mold seem greater than ever, and just as the academy's promise of spiritual and intellectual transformation seems evermore forgotten, with Marshall, the truly magical nature of intellectual life remained wonderfully alive.

Marshall was always easy to recognize: invariably wearing a t-shirt—one whose image was usually a vibrant celebration of modern life—his attire was always a welcome burst of exuberant vitality. It's in this way that I'm reminded that being truly radical isn't found in the doctrines we expound, or the ideas which we keep, all of which are all too easily feigned. True radicalism runs much deeper. Ultimately, it's found in the person that we choose to become, and in the commitments we choose to keep—and for those of us who knew him, in Marshall, we found a man whose love of the world endured through whatever darkness it also might bring. And while I see fewer and fewer t-shirts in the Academy, I'd like to remember Marshall's example, and to remind my peers of it too. *True* thinking, the type of thought that not only defies boundaries, but that refuses to accept them as real in the first place, isn't found in the books that we publish, or the notoriety we might achieve. Rather, it emerges from a kind

of intellectual and spiritual courage that is willing to *truly* think about the world, but it is a courage which itself can only emerge after we accept that we are a part of the world too. Unfortunately, this courage is punished all too often; as Jean-Jacques Rousseau knew, himself another of Marshall's favorites, *we* moderns need not execute our own Socrates, we simply laugh at him. However, if only we can summon this courage ourselves, then we might also come to see that true radicalism, a democratic radicalism that we find not only in the best intellectual works but also in the streets, might just be found in the light we bring to the world when wearing a t-shirt to work.

Jennifer Corby



Marshall Berman was a man who was, in every way, hard to miss. At first glance, his unruly mane, fantastic t-shirts, and kaleidoscopic sweaters made it immediately apparent that he was an intellectual who trafficked well outside the norms of academia. His work took us on a ride as wild as his aesthetic. Traversing disciplinary and cultural boundaries, he artfully captured and beautifully rendered the dynamism of modernity. In crossing these boundaries, he helped us overcome our own limitations, and allowed us to see our world, one another, and ourselves through new, awestruck eyes, if only for a moment. Like the world he sought to disclose, his work was transformative, leading many to experiences of personal revelation. In a world that so often compels us to be narrow, Marshall showed us the possibilities revealed by radical openness.

He offers one description of this openness in his most-loved book, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*. In it, he explains that to be modern is "to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction." In this, we have little choice; the condition of our experience is modern, and as such so are we. How we relate to our condition, however, is what separates the modernist from the malcontent. He continued, "To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows." It would be difficult to find a more fitting epitaph for Marshall, who was more at home in this world than any other person I've met. His love for, appreciation of, and delight in the harnessed creativity of our species was so great and so unwavering that it could at times be hard to understand. How could a man so acutely aware and intimately affected by the cruelty of modernity remain so open to it? I think that for Marshall, finding and fighting for beauty, freedom, and justice required an unwavering faith that they *could* be found. I think it was this faith that allowed him to look for, and find it in the darkest of places.

Like many others, I've found myself returning to Marshall's work in the few weeks since his passing. His life and work offer endless examples of the beautiful things that come from the dark, but one that has particularly struck with me is a scene from Ric Burns's iconic *New York* documentary. There's comfort in seeing and hearing him talk about himself and our city. The image that persists in my memory, however, isn't one of him onscreen, but one that he paints of himself as a child. Standing on the Grand Concourse overlooking the construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, he describes an engineering feat that "was quite beautiful and sublime," but one that arose from the demolition of his own neighborhood at the hands of "that bastard," Robert Moses. He depicts himself on a precipice, surveying his environment being shaped and re-shaped by the twin forces of creation and destruction, and the urgent, paradoxical feelings of agony and ecstasy these forces evinced in him. In classic Marshall Berman style, he captures with a handful of casual sentences the essence of the modern experience—an experience as terrifying as it is exhilarating, and one that constantly threatens to overtake those who are not open to it.

These examples highlight the kernel of Marshall's thought that has had the most transformative effect of my own. Namely, that in order to find meaning in the modern world, we must believe that it *can* be found, and be open to finding it. Otherwise, we risk falling into the trap of nihilism and pessimism that have become all too

prevalent. There's a way of seeing the world, he once said to me, that "reduces everything to shit," and that wasn't the world he wanted to live in. But more to the dialectical point, it *wasn't* the world he lived in. This has been an important lesson for me. And though I suspect I'll always be more inclined to levy criticism than Marshall was, I have him to thank for helping me find a more sensitive, strong, creative voice.

All of this is to say, Marshall Berman made an impact that was hard to miss, which is precisely what makes missing him so hard.

Monxo Lopez

Marshall Berman, el gran intelectual nuyorquino que nos regaló el clásico *Todo lo sólido se desvanece en el aire*, me enseñó a amar la ciudad de Nueva York antes de mi gran primer encuentro con ella. Yo había venido varias veces por estas calles, pero ese primer gran encuentro solo fue posible tras haberlo leído.

Marshall Berman fue profesor en el sistema universitario público de la ciudad de Nueva York (CUNY) por más de tres décadas, crítico cultural y de arte, colaborador frecuente de revistas y periódicos como el New York Times, Dissent, The Nation, entre otros. Fue profesor de urbanismo en diferentes escuelas de arquitectura y autor del más alto calibre; escritor de prosa vívida y poética, una mente incisiva, un marxista feliz, lento e incansable caminante de ciudades, optimista irredento, irreverente mal pensado y bromista, amante del graffiti y las bien caminadas calles de cualquier ciudad; fue también mi amigo.

Al mudarme a Nueva York, Berman era esta figura mítico-titánica que quizás todavía caminaba y observaba lo que era ahora también mi ciudad, sin sospechar que yo -su gran fanático- andaba loco enamorado de sus calles e historia, y todo gracias a él.

Fue desde ese amor sin perspectiva, ya sintiéndome cómodo en ese asunto de no tener raíces y sabiéndome absolutamente moderno (*full New Yorker* que le dicen), que me aventuré, una vez más gracias a *Todo lo sólido*, a leer a la gran Jane Jacobs, a rockear y explotar las bocinas de mi estereo con el grupo checoslovaco The Plastic People of the Universe, Television y Patti Smith; fue por él que leí múltiples traducciones de Eugene Onegin de Pushkin, que investigué teorías bizantinas y bizarras sobre los problemas de la traducción en la poesía, y que descubrí el viaje prodigioso de *St-Petersburg* de Andrei Bely. Pero no conocía a Berman personalmente. Incluso a veces pensaba, no sé por qué razón, que estaba muerto.

En ese primer año en Nueva York decidí que la meta era no solo dejar que la ciudad me poseyera, sino -¡oh pequeño saltamontes!- de yo poseer a mi ciudad. Así que me embarqué en la búsqueda de hacer dinero para poder comprar nuestro propio espacio, y así reclamar sólidamente posesión de un micro-espacio en la gran urbe. Pero como siempre sucede, y así dicen que lo dijo Freud, a los meses de haber logrado la gran hazaña, de tener nuestro jaragual, la vida comenzó a sentirse hueca, la modernidad ya era asunto de todos los días, encontrarme downtown a Quentin Tarantino alquilando amores a las tres de la mañana era casi normal. Así que decidí hacer contacto.

Siempre recordaba esa penetrante y dolorosa introducción de *Todo lo sólido*, donde Berman habla de la muerte de su hijo de cinco años, Marc, en un accidente. Me imaginaba a Berman amargado, lejano, misántropo, solitario, el clásico *loner*, pero también imaginaba que ese dolor le daba dotes de observación y visión tipo superhéroe. Llamé a la universidad y pregunté por él. Un estudiante me dijo 'Marshall no está ahora mismo, pero llámalo a la casa, su número está en la guía telefónica'. Hablemos de intelectual público. Lo llamé y dejé mensaje. Salí de la casa.

Al regresar, Marshall había dejado mensaje en mi máquina. Again, Marshall *fokin* Berman había dejado un mensaje con su propia voz en la máquina de Monxo López, de Cupey. Escuché el mensaje unas diez veces, y lo grabé. Y luego perdí esa grabación. Pero cool, porque todo lo sólido se desvanece en el aire. Eventualmente me invitó de oyente a su curso de marxismo. Nos llevamos bien. Me preguntó si yo, Monxo López de Cupey, quería ser su estudiante. Y le dije que sí, que claro, que cómo no.

De lejos Marshall parecía batear a un promedio de .500 como profesor. A veces se nos dormía en la clase, o parecía que dormía, y luego de dejarnos ladrar por media hora abría los ojos y decía, Fulano no sabe lo que dice, Mengana dijo lo único que me pareció interesante y nadie le hizo caso, Foucault is full of shit, y otras cosillas así. O sea, que Marshall no dormía, sino que meditaba en un estado superior de análisis, con un lado del cerebro obser-

vando a Marx en pingües aventuras y otro pedacito de su cráneo atento a nuestras babas y sinsentidos. Ese era el Marshall vago, lento y bajo promedio. Y eso es mejor que la mayoría.

El Marshall Berman a todo vapor eran tres horas discutiendo línea por línea el *Manifiesto Futurista* de Marinetti; haciéndonos sentir que volábamos en aviones metálicos a miles de millas por hora y a miles de millas sobre la tierra. Haciéndonos sentir el horror y el éxtasis de la velocidad de un auto de carreras. Dejándonos ver que esa apología del metal y la velocidad degeneró en horrores y Holocausto.

El Marshall Berman peligroso era esa lectura poética y rigurosa del *Manifiesto del Partido Comunista*, donde de repente las máquinas devoraban a la gente, las gentes y sistemas se devoraban entre sí, todo era violento y rápido, pero las posibilidades de libertad, de agenciamiento, de justicia, eran innegables; así que a dejarse de llorar y que viva la revolución.

El Marshall Berman en turbo nos transportaba al París de *Las Cartas Persas* de Montesquieu, y nos hacía ver por los ojos de esos dos príncipes turcos a la vez sorprendidos y espantados de los altos edificios de la ciudad y del libertinaje rampante de sus mujeres. El Marshall Berman humanista lloraba al hablar de *Catch 22* o de *The Great War in Modern Memory*; porque en su mundo no había guerra absolutamente justa, y menos aún, humana.

Pero también había un Berman-Yoda, infinitamente viejo y sabio, que guardaba un minuto de silencio por las víctimas de tortura de Abu Ghraib, o los bombazos en Madrid. Ese Marshall me preparó para cuando mamá murió de cáncer en mis brazos, en el abrazo de mi vida, porque nos llegó a hablar de cómo se supone que nuestros padres mueran antes que nosotros, ya que ver a un hijo o hija morir no es la cronología justa de la existencia. Así que en Marshall pensaba yo, mientras mami se apagaba. Pensaba que ella estuvo ahí para recibirme, así que aquí estoy yo para despedirla. El dolor es secundario. Todo esto en seminario doctoral. De esas clases fue las que más aprendí.

Nueva York; nunca la quise ver como lugar, sino, como proceso. Como centro de operaciones y trampolín real (y discursivo) hacia otras tierras y posibles -aunque temporeras- existencias. Así que cuando comenzamos -mi esposa Libertad y yo- a viajar fanáticamente, auto-declarados embajadores de la modernidad tercermundista nuyorquina, descubrí al Marshall super estrella underground internacional. Sabía que era respetado en círculos académicos, eso era obvio. ¡Pero cuántos artistas, activistas y perros satos conocían, amaban y se inspiraban en su trabajo! En Estambul, en Perú, en Berlín, en Buenos Aires, en París, en Vigo, en el D.F., en San Juan. Marshall, mi director de tesis, era mucho caché. Llegué a ver una traducción polaca de *Todo lo sólido* en el Mercado de las Flores de Estambul.

El tema siempre era el mismo, tanto así, que yo me creo el cuento totalmente: no hay modernidad, sino modernidades. La modernidad no es siempre o necesariamente americanización e imperialismo. Hay deseos nativos y autóctonos de modernidad en casi todos los sitios donde la densidad alcanza niveles citadinos. Marshall entendió eso, los estudiantes en Pekín -por ejemplo- entendían que él sabía, y lo invitaban a hablar. Y yo le dije, pues háblales de revolución y derechos humanos, y el me dió el tapaboca amoroso de que sí, con la boca es un mamey, y después me regreso en avión para Nueva York y los dejo a ellos en un lío, what the fuck is wrong with you?

Marshall presentó su último libro, *On the Town*, en la sala de mi casa. Viajamos juntos con mi familia y otros amigos a Berlín. Allí comimos y bebimos en un restaurante ex-comunista hermoso, gris, triste, mustio y monumental. Nos dio un tour personal de Berlín. Caminamos juntos por la mítica y ahora odiada Potsdamer Platz. Se le durmió en la cara al odiado arquitecto de la Potsdamer Platz-shopping-mall en un panel. Una foto de Marshall dormido en la cara del mentado arquitecto, bajo el título 'El arquitecto de Potsdamer Platz aburre hasta el sueño a nuestro ilustre invitado Marshall Berman' (o algo así, porque yo no leo alemán), salió en primera plana en un periódico en Berlín.

Hablábamos dos veces por semana en algunos meses, y una vez cada tres meses otras ocasiones. Hablábamos mucho del Sur del Bronx.

Marshall Berman nació y se crió en el Sur del Bronx. El Sur del Bronx es felizmente mi casa, por voluntad y elección familiar. Nuestro vecindario fue destruido por Robert Moses y su Cross Bronx Expressway. Marshall vivió y sufrió esa destrucción, el urbicidio, como él le llamaba. Yo he vivido el renacimiento tras las ruinas. Marshall me hablaba de la vida antes y durante el urbicidio.

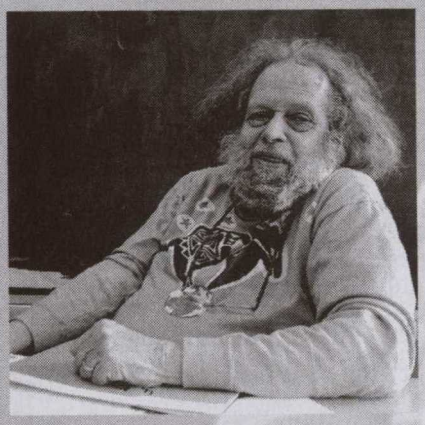
Marshall era un marxista alivianado y tenía un sentido del humor extraordinario; una bestia rara. Su visión de

la revolución era vibrante, colorida, divertida y sensual. Marshall no argumentaba contra casi nada; él hablaba a favor de. Su cerebro no bregaba por oposiciones. Si se quiere entender quién era Marshall a nivel cerebral, hay que atreverse a dar los brincos vertiginosos a los que nos invita en *Adventures in Marxism*; ese libro presenta la raíz de su pensamiento. Si se quiere escuchar el corazón de Marshall, hay que entregarse a *Todo lo Sólido*, el libro que enamoró a Shellie, su hoy viuda.

Pensador audaz, Berman nunca cedió a la tentación de bautizar las cosas que le agradaban como modernas, y lo que no le agradaba como anti-moderno o post-moderno. Su visión de lo moderno era compleja y espumosa. Lo moderno nos puede liberar, pero nos puede destruir. Lo moderno puede ser humano, pero puede ser exclusivamente automóvil. Lo moderno es puentes y velocidad, pero es también desplazamientos de comunidades. Él vivía cómodo con esas "contradicciones".

Marshall decía que a él se le prendió el bombillo cuando leyó los *Manuscritos de 1844 de Marx*. Decía que se volvió marxista y moderno cuando se encontró con ese Marx. Yo, sin embargo, creo que él nació moderno irremediable y que Marx fue casi una excusa para tirarnos un cable a tierra, para que lo encontráramos -a Marshall- entre todo el ruido de lo moderno. Yo creo que Marx tuvo suerte de encontrarse con Marshall en el Bronx.

Sabía de su fragilidad física. Y observaba la elegancia y el dandismo con los que la sobrellevaba. Caminando lenta y sabiamente, con su bolsito tejido del altiplano, con sus t-shirts de colección, con su super-cool-look de que me parezco a Carlos Marx y me llamo Marshall Berman. Amaba cuando nos sentábamos a almorzar en la cafetería polaca en tercera y la doce, supuestamente a hablar de mi tesis, pero en realidad a ver la gente pasar y hablar de todo. Me encantaba invitarlo a comer. Me encantaba más aún cuando me invitaba. Que me hablara de sus hijos. Que confiara en mí. Que me considerara su amigo. Que le regalara libros a mi beba hermosa. Que me entregara un sobre con comentarios de mi disertación doctoral sobre Albert Camus, con notas hasta en el sobre.



La última vez que lo vi en público habló de imágenes de destrucción de ciudades desde Sodoma y Gomorra en tiempos bíblicos hasta el Sur del Bronx en tiempos de Reagan. Hubo par de inteligentes que trataron de pillarlo por su optimismo con preguntas enredadas y sin sentido, y él los dejó atrás, aún con su paso lento, viejo y cuidadoso. Corrió y bailó alrededor de ellos sin dar un paso.

La última vez que lo vi en persona fue en la puerta de su casa, hace dos semanas, cuando fui a recoger sus últimos comentarios sobre mi disertación. Se acababa de levantar, pero me dió un abrazo junto con mi tesis. Sentí su amor y amistad.

Me recordé de cómo, entrados los años de faena doctoral, y mientras trabajaba como asistente en nuestro departamento de ciencias políticas, me topé con mi propio expediente de solicitud de ingreso a la universidad. Y había una notita amarilla en el puño y letra de Marshall pegada a mi expediente: "I want him in!".

La última vez que hablé con él fue dos días antes de que muriera. Hablamos de mi defensa de tesis, de Camus en general, de las elecciones de Nueva York, de cosas personales, de que iba a hablar con los otros miembros del comité para ver qué les parecía mi trabajo (llegó a hablar con todos y me dicen que estaba bien feliz con mi trabajo, ¡ajem!), me felicitó una vez más por tener una bebé tan bella y una esposa tan espectacularmente hermosa e inteligente (siempre lo hacía), así que te llamo al final de la semana…

Anoche soñé con él. En el sueño yo sabía que Marshall había muerto; yo estaba en su casa junto con su familia. Su viuda, Shellie, me llevó a un lugar que nunca había visto en la casa: un espacio de reuniones semi-público. Ella me habló de que había una pared que Marshall siempre quiso reservar para que cuando muriera hicieran un mural en honor suyo, pero no sobre él, que les recordara a todos de él siendo feliz. Marshall de repente entra a nuestra conversación, sabemos que está muerto, pero no importa. Y yo les digo que yo siempre amé que Marshall citaba constantemente a Emma Goldman cuando decía que si no podía bailar en la revolución, que no quería la revolución. Y le dije que pintáramos la portada de su libro *Adventures in Marxism*, a ese pequeño Marx en caricatura, que corre y baila a la misma vez, y que, además, se parecía físicamente a Marshall. Les encantó la idea. Y me fui. Su última imagen en el sueño es Marshall poniéndole el brazo en el hombro a Shellie, ambos de espalda.

Cuando abrí la puerta al salir, estaba en la ruinas del Sur del Bronx.

Asaf Shamis

I remember the first time I read Marshall. It was the second chapter of his magna opus, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*. I was twenty-eight then and knew little about who Marshall Berman was. I was writing my master's thesis on the poetics of Marxism and looking for stuff that would speak to the dramatic and literary aspects of Marx's writings. After I read the following lines I realized, "I've struck gold!"

> The central drama for which the Manifesto is famous is the development of the modern bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the struggle between them. But we can find a play going on within this play . . . Marx is not only describing but evoking and enacting the desperate pace and frantic rhythm that capitalism imparts to every facet of modern life.

Two years later, my wife and I packed our lives into two big backpacks and headed across the Atlantic to New York City, to Marshall.

I remember the first time I saw him. Although I found it hard to imagine what the man who wrote about "dialectical nakedness," "creative self-destruction," and "unchained melodies" would look like, when he entered the classroom it all made sense. His muddled beard; the cool red frames of his glasses; his piercing blue eyes; and, of course, a white-blue-pink T-shirt that read "BAZOOKA!"

The class was nothing like what I had ever experienced before. The room was filled with twenty or so eager students, many like me coming from distant places across the globe to hear Marshall. All through the semester Marshall kept us on the edge of our seats. He opened for us a whole new and strange world which brought together a lot of things that back then I did not think belonged at all together: factories and sex; Lenin and Gene Kelly; Hard Times and Duane Reade; cosmic jokes and self-destruction—all of it came together into a scrumptious cocktail of ideas. Looking over my notes, I can hear Marshall's voice saying about Marx: "He tried to create a vocabulary that will make people happy," and "For him, the two most important things were: industry and sex." On himself he said: "I am a 'Marxist' who goes around in a T-shirt and believes in having fun. Others put on black suits and condemn everything."

Once I began writing my dissertation, I saw Marshall much more. I learned that he loved the Metro Dinner on 100th Street and Broadway (where he had his last meal). I learned that basking in the sun made him happy. I learned that he could not resist a fresh bagel with lox. I learned that he loved to sit on a bench in the middle of Broadway and strike up casual conversations with passers-by. After a while, I can't remember exactly when, it dawned on me that in the time I spent with Marshall, I did not only get to know him, but I got to know the city as well. Marshall had an organic, mystic connection with New York. He roamed its streets endlessly. In his thoughts you can hear the rumbling sound of the subway; you could feel the glittering lights of Times Squares; the destruction of the South Bronx of his childhood.

A day before Marshall passed away he called me on my cell phone. It was a Tuesday. He called to invite me to dinner on Saturday. Less than twenty four hours later, he was gone. I slept very little over the next few nights. I spent most of them looking through Marshall's works. It is as if the personal tone of his writing allowed me to hear his voice one last time.

In the days that followed I struggled to figure out what Marshall meant to me. Trying to do so led me to contemplate how to define his body of work. Is there something we can call Bermanism? (Marshall would probable hate this term). Certainly, Marshall's prose wasn't like anything else. Try to hand to any of his students an anonymous text and we would know right on the spot whether Marshall is indeed its author. Yet, was there a vision of some sort behind Marshall's spectacular personality and singular writing style? Marshall was often referred to as a Marxist humanist, yet what about his works on Rousseau, Baudelaire, and Times Square? Besides, labeling him as "Marxist" always seemed to me to simplify the complicated relationship he had with capital.

I do believe that Marshall offered a comprehensive world view. There were two points that define the spectrum characterizing Marshall's works: A nostalgic pole, centering on a lost past, and a utopian restorative pole, that offered idealized redemption. Marshall pulled those two poles together into a dialectical relationship, and by doing so, he conjured up a vision of modernity as a self-contradictory yet, coherent whole. Life in modern times was for him a total experience comprising an ever-lasting struggle between a lost past and the hope for redemption.

Marshall hated what capitalism did to modernity. Yet, like Marx, he understood the immense spiritual and material benefits it brought to mankind, and he appreciated its revolutionary nature. Marshall's treatment of capitalist

society was especially directed against those on the Right who saw capitalist society as heaven on earth, and the post-modern pessimists that he thought robbed human beings of their basic liberties: ". . . there is no freedom in Foucault's world" he wrote. Appreciating the dialectical relationship between the corrupting and destructive sides of modern capitalist society, and its liberating and creative aspects, Marshall put forward a third way.

In modernity's darkest hours when it came under attack by hordes of blind conservatives and even blinder post-modernists, Marshall insisted that "We can learn a great deal from the first modernists, not so much about their age as about our own . . . these first modernists may turn out to understand us—the modernization and modernism that constitute our lives—better than we understand ourselves." He called us to make the visions of Goethe, Marx, and Benjamin our own. He urged us to use them to realize that there is more depth to our lives than we often think. For Marshall, going back to the first modernists was a way forward.

In the Cabbala, the notion of Tikun ("repairing," or "putting back together") is used to describe the re-establishment of the great harmony that was disturbed by the Breaking of the Vessels. For Marshall, capitalism was the moment of Tikun. It was a catastrophic eruption that carried the promise to restore a nostalgic utopia. Marshall suggested that if we see life under the free-market as an end in itself, or just us a colossal catastrophe—we will miss the point. Instead of clinging to the material wealth produced by capitalism, or rejecting it all together, he called us to use it to elevate ourselves morally and spiritually. For him, capitalism was a path to the end of all things, but also to a fresh beginning. It opened up the possibility for a future social utopia that will allow us to return to a pure and authentic beginning. Failing to do, he thought, will leave us only with degenerate utopias, broken vessels.

Marshall thought that there are two main venues where the restorative power of capitalist society could fulfill its full potential: popular culture, and the city. In Marshall's immediate surroundings they came in the shape of pop culture and New York City. Marshall thought that if we will think of T-shirts not as mobile billboards but extensions of our unique personalities, if we use the streets not to build cross express highways but for dancing, if we will go to Times Square not to shop but bask in the neon lights—if we do all that, then we just might stake our claim to the modern world.

Marshall's work will continue to remind us of his overflowing personality. By passing on his grand vision of modernity we will continue to celebrate his life. In the closing lines of his beautiful piece on Walter Benjamin, Marshall asks his readers to file Benjamin under Eros, not Thanatos: "Enjoy his largeness of vision, his imaginative fertility, his openness to the future, his grasp of the comedy that was part of the tragedy of modern times. Be glad. The Angel of History is back on the streets again." It seems to me that there is no better way but Marshall's own words to bid goodbye to Marshall Berman—a rich human being, a mentor, a friend.

Corey Robin

When I heard the news about Marshall, my first thought was the date: 9/11. There's no good day to die, but to die on a day so associated with death—whether the murder of nearly 3000 people on 9/11/2001, most of them in his beloved New York, or the 9/11/1973 coup in Chile that brought down Allende and installed Pinochet—seems, in Marshall's case, like an especially cruel offense against the universe.

For as anyone who knew or read him knows, Marshall was a man of irrepressible and teeming life. The life of the street, which he immortalized in his classic *All That's Solid Melts Into Air*; the life of sex and liberation, which he talked about in *The Politics of Authenticity* (read the section on Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*; you'll never read that book the same way again); the life of high art and popular culture, whether it was the Sex Pistols or hip hop.

Marshall took in everything; his portion was the world. The only thing he couldn't abide, couldn't take in, was ugliness and cruelty. If he had to die, it should have been on May Day—not just the May Day of internationalist radical politics (though that too is a commemoration of death) but the May Day of pagan spring, of dance and

song, of maypoles and fertility rituals.

And yet there is something about that date—9/11—that seems appropriate. For Marshall's vision of life bursting was inextricably linked to his awareness of death and destruction. *All That's Solid Melts Into Air*, which takes its name from that famous line in *The Communist Manifesto*, is a paean to the divided experience that is modernity: the loss of the old world paired with the creation of the new, decay as the condition of construction. Whenever I think of Marshall, I think of that line from Osip Mandelstam's poem *Notre Dame*: "I too one day shall create/ Beauty from cruel weight." (Oddly, though Marshall wrote about Mandelstam at length in *All That's Solid*, he never mentioned this poem.)

All That's Solid is one of those rare texts of theory that is really a memoir, a deeply personal revelation of its author's being. Like Rousseau's *Second Discourse* or Said's *Orientalism*, it is intensely, almost unbearably, intimate. Formally a discussion of Marx and modernism, it is the biography of a man who saw his world come to an end as a teenager, during the fateful year of 1953, when Robert Moses came blasting through his neighborhood in the East Tremont section of the South Bronx. The cause was the Cross Bronx Expressway, but in that cause and its demonic villain, Berman found his muse, his Faust, his Fleurs du Mal.

Growing up in suburban Westchester in the 1970s, I remember driving above the South Bronx on those long arterial stretches and looking down and out on the devastation. But it was not till I read Marshall that I understood its source or at least one of its sources: the wrecking ball of a mad urban genius, who set out to reconstruct an entire city as if it were nothing more than a system of highways, an expressway to get people and goods from one end to the other.

> Robert Moses is the man who made all this possible. When I heard Allen Ginsberg ask [in *Howl*] at the end of the 1950s, "Who was that sphinx of cement and aluminum," I felt sure at once that, even if the poet didn't know it, Moses was his man. Like Ginsberg's "Moloch, who entered my soul early," Robert Moses and his public works had come into my life just before my Bar Mitzvah, and helped bring my childhood to an end....
>
> For ten years, through the late 1950s and early 1960s, the center of the Bronx was pounded and blasted and smashed. My friends and I would stand on the parapet of the Grand Concourse, where 174th Street had been, and survey the work's progress—the intense steam shovels and bulldozers and timber and steel beams, the hundreds of workers in their variously colored hats, the giant cranes reaching far above the Bronx's tallest roofs, the dynamite blasts and tremors, the wild, jagged crags of rock newly torn, the vistas of devastation stretching for miles to the east and west as far as the eye could see—and marvel to see our ordinary nice neighborhood transformed into sublime, spectacular ruins.
>
> In college, when I discovered Piranesi, I felt instantly at home. Or I would return from the Columbia library to the construction site and feel myself in the midst of the last act of Goethe's *Faust*. (You had to hand it to Moses: his works gave you ideas.)

Right there, in that last line, is the man. Standing amid ruins, he reaches for the flowers of high culture, then cracks wise. That was Marshall. That was modernity. Marshall's modernity. "We come from ruins," he said in Ric Burns's documentary on New York, "but we're not ruined."

Marshall liked to sign off his e-mails with "Shalom." I used to think he meant simply "Peace." But shalom, of course, also means "hello" and "goodbye." That too was Marshall: every hello was a goodbye, every arrival a departure.

Though I first met Marshall in 1999 and was his colleague for nearly a decade, I didn't know him well. We served on committees together, we shared students and an office (the first copy of Treitschke's *Politics* that I read was his, though he never knew it), and he treated me to stories about his son, his ambivalence about Israel, and more.

And yet I feel like I knew him: not only from his work but from the legions of students who loved him, who came to the Graduate Center just to work with him, and regaled me with stories of his kibitzing genius. He was one of those rare advisers (Michael Denning at Yale was like this too) who tossed off a sentence from which an entire dissertation grew.

Marshall was our Manhattan Socrates: not the arch dialectician but the philosopher in and of the street, not the aggressive asker of questions but the ambler in the boulevard, the man who seeks wisdom in the agora, in the conversation of Times Square, the walker in the city, the man who died among friends. Ⓐ

book REVIEW

Bleeding Past the Margin

- *Bleeding Edge*, By Thomas Pynchon (Penguin Press, 496 Pages)
- *The Crying of Lot 49*, By Thomas Pynchon (Harper Perennial, 192 Pages)

WHIT FRAZIER

Early in Thomas Pynchon's new novel, *Bleeding Edge*, the reluctant heroine, small-time fraud investigator Maxine Tarnow, is rescued from reviewing the file of the "dim and overextended" Uncle Dizzy, a "Crazy Eddie" Antar-like fraudster, by the arrival of an old friend, Reg Despard. She considers herself, for the moment, "Saved. She puts aside the folder, which like a good koan will have failed to make sense anyway." Of course, this being a novel by Thomas Pynchon, who is known for his labyrinthine plots that obfuscate meaning rather than illuminate it, Maxine is just putting aside one koan for another.

The koan, a brief Buddhist story or parable meant to provoke doubt and uncertainty in the listener, will make various appearances throughout the novel, whether delivered by her friend March Kelleher, a left wing activist blogger, or by Maxine's personal guru, Shawn, a flaky mystic with occasional moments of lucidity, who takes the place of a psychotherapist. Although the novel is already peppered with these little parables, the unmentioned koan at the center of this aggressively post-modern novel is Thomas Pynchon's own early novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, which *Bleeding Edge* unmistakably echoes.

The similarities between the two novels are striking: where *Crying* concerns the postal service and delivery of information through companies both mainstream and underground, fictional and historical, *Bleeding Edge* concerns itself with the Internet, and more specifically, the Deep Web, those underground networks unreachable by search engines; and where *Crying* follows the story of a woman who, one by one, loses the men around her to the mystery confounding her, *Bleeding Edge* follows the story of a woman who ultimately has to decide between losing her familial attachments or losing herself down the unsolvable maze of mystery, which is the pseudo-plot of this information-novel.

This mystery involves an Internet company hashslingrz.com, which is run by Internet mogul, Gabriel Ice. Reg is an amateur film bootlegger who has stumbled into respectability and has been hired by Gabriel Ice to make a film about the dot-com firm, although apparently his access to some necessary data has been restricted, data which is impossible to find except via the Deep Web. Figuring he's encountered a problem he needs to take to someone he can trust, he approaches Maxine about investigating the company to see what she can uncover. She doesn't uncover much. Instead she finds herself burrowing down rabbit holes that lead to more rabbit holes that eventually lead to a possible conspiracy behind the September 11 terrorist attacks. The plot, much like that of *Crying*, involves not so much solving the case, as it does a series of introductions to a varied cast of eccentric and unlikely characters. If Pynchon is rewriting *Crying* for the Internet age, the question is why.

The obvious answer is that this is perfect Pynchon territory. Where the mail system allowed Pynchon to delve into the fundamentally fraudulent and corruptible network of information we receive from the media via newspapers, the radio, and even personal communication, the Internet allows Pynchon to investigate this deep paranoia in a globalized setting, where the information really is, as Pynchon puts it in *Crying*, "Ones and zeroes. . . there either was some Tristero beyond the appearance of the legacy America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia." The second, and perhaps more interesting answer, has to do with Pynchon's approach to language in *Crying*, and his approach to language in *Bleeding Edge*. In the introduction to his book of short stories, *Slow Learner*, Pynchon writes,

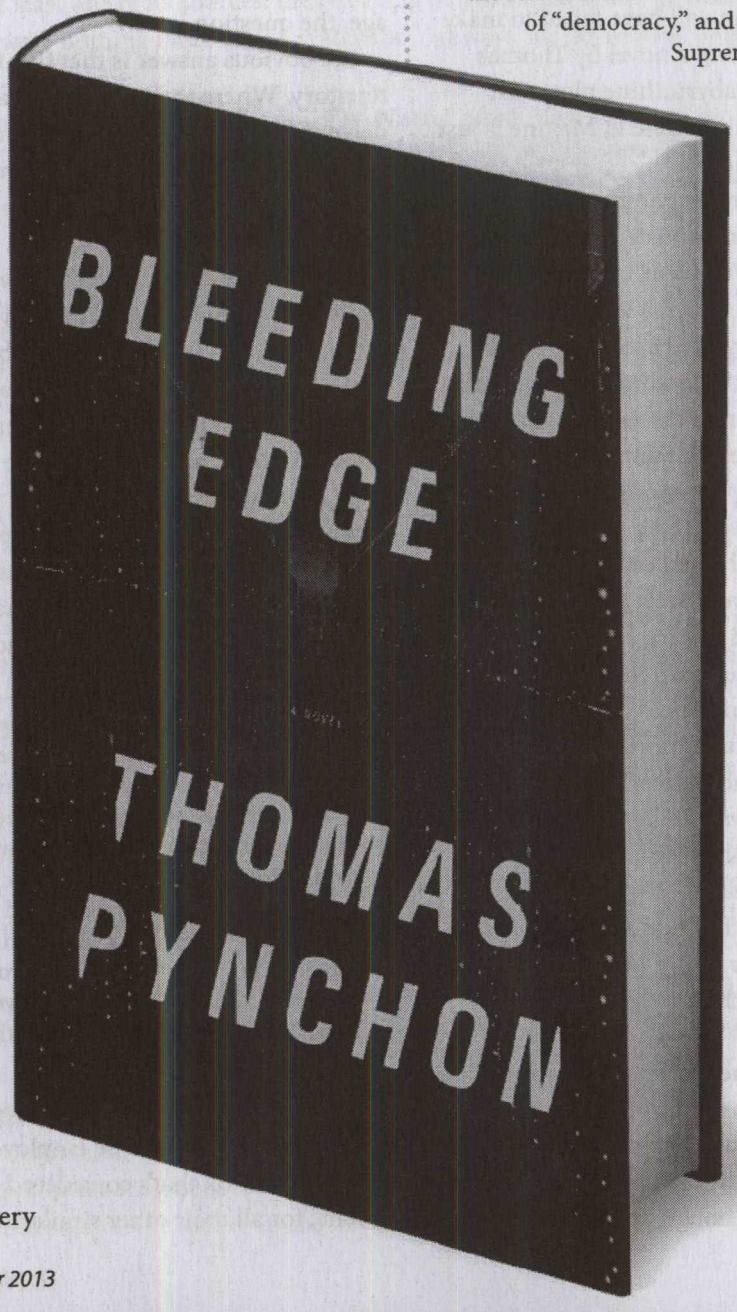
> I had published a novel and thought I knew a thing or two, but for the first time I believe I was also beginning to shut up and listen to the American voices around me, even to shift my eyes away from printed sources and take a look at American nonverbal reality. I was out on the road at last, getting to visit the places Kerouac had written about. These towns and Greyhound voices and fleabag hotels have found their way into this story, and I am pretty content with how it holds up. . . The next story I wrote was *The Crying of Lot 49*, which was marketed as a "novel," and in which I seem to have forgotten most of what I thought I'd learned up till then.

If we're to take Pynchon at his word, it seems he feels the high literary prose style he employed in *Crying* did a disservice to a book that's considered so central to his vision. In tone, for all their other similarities, *Bleeding Edge* could

not be more different than *Crying*. Where *Crying* is hyper-literary, *Bleeding Edge* is saturated with "American voices," in particular those of New York City circa 2001. There are references to Britney Spears, Ally McBeal, the Jay-Z and Nas beef, DC's old punk rock hangout, the 9:30 Club, first person shooter video games, Ben Stiller, Ben & Jerry's, Edward Norton, and so on. The language throughout is chatty, sarcastic, and smart, even when it conveys dread in Pynchon's peculiar poetry:

> They gaze at each other for a while, down here on the barroom floor of history, feeling sucker-punched, no clear way to get up and on with a day which is suddenly full of holes—family, friends, friends of friends, phone numbers on the Rolodex, just not there anymore. . . the bleak feeling, some mornings, that the country itself may not be there anymore, but being silently replaced screen by screen with something else, some surprise package, by those who've kept their wits about them and their clicking thumbs ready.

This is, naturally, the feeling at the bottom of many of Pynchon's novels, especially *Crying of Lot 49*. The language here, however, is Pynchon at his most colloquial and contemporary. The colloquial, chatty American voice is one he has employed before, most notably in *Mason & Dixon*, which is written as oral history; but now, because the novel is set so close to the present moment, it's startling. Pynchon's novels generally deal with crucial times in American history. What makes *Bleeding Edge* different is that Pynchon not only tackles a time that's very near to us, but also one that, because of its proportions, undertakes a very ambitious task, especially when attempting to do so with such a relaxed vernacular.



This event, of course, is September 11, 2001. In Pynchon's universe, conspiracy must lie at the heart of the attacks, even if only in the public imagination. The event doesn't occur until the last third of the novel, and it seems somehow tied to the video Reg Despard is shooting, the enormous financial empire of hashslingrz.com, and the people involved in the conspiracy Maxine is investigating. Nevertheless, we are all guilty. Maxine's friend, March Kelleher, who increasingly finds herself at the margins of society after the attacks, posts the following on her blog:

> But there's still always the other thing. Our yearning. Our deep need for it to be true. Somewhere, down deep at some shameful dark recess of the national soul, we need to feel betrayed, even guilty. As if it was us who created Bush and his gang, Cheney and Rove and Rumsfeld and Feith and the rest of them—we who called down the sacred lightning of "democracy," and then the fascist majority on the Supreme Court threw the switches, and Bush rose from the slab and began his rampage. And whatever happened then is on our ticket.

In the meantime, every conspiracy theory from the early days after September 11 makes an appearance: Bush and company conspiracies, Mossad conspiracies, Corporate Capitalism conspiracies. The mystery basically remains, like all mysteries in a Pynchon novel, unsolvable. Perhaps the only thing that can be said is not to believe everything you read in "the Newspaper of Record. . . Out in the vast undefined anarchism of cyberspace, among the billions of self-resonant fantasies, dark possibilities are beginning to emerge." But to remain entangled in the conspiracies, without any direction or idea of where to look, or how to go about investigating the events that occur to us, leaves us at an impasse. Either we can find ourselves

increasingly distanced from our lives and our society, like March Kelleher, or we can stay suspended in a state of semi-consciousness, like Maxine Tarnow appears to be at the end of *Bleeding Edge*:

> Maxine has a quick cup of coffee and leaves March and Tallis with a tableful of breakfast to revisit their food issues. Heading back to the apartment to pick up the boys and see them to school, she notices a reflection in a top-floor window of the gray dawn sky, clouds moving across a blear of light, unnaturally bright, maybe the sun, maybe something else. She looks east to see what it might be, but whatever it is shining there is still, from this angle, behind the buildings, causing them to inhabit their own shadows. She turns the corner onto her block and leaves the question behind. It isn't till she's in the elevator of her building that she begins to wonder, actually, whose turn it is to take the kids to school. She's lost track.

It may turn out to be impossible to write an entirely satisfying novel about the Internet, and especially about September 11. Both the Internet and 9/11 involve looping webs of information and misinformation that become confused in the very visceral way they continue to impact our day-to-day lives. Pynchon has taken the shrewd tactic of writing his book as an historical novel, thus allowing himself to document the fear, paranoia, hysteria, and confusion of the time, as well as the more superficial and lazy ways we've learned to interact with each other. In doing so he manages to write a book that at the very least won't become dated as the technology changes more rapidly than any novelist can keep pace with, and as the theories about September 11 fall more and more into the realm of inaccurate memories and political and historical rewriting. But he has also failed to write a satisfying novel about these events, either on a personal or political level. He may not have been interested in such a novel. This is a novel full of chatter; memories, along with personal and political narratives, get lost in the thick of it.

How are we supposed to read this novel then, other than as a bizarre, fraudulent, fictional documentary that employs hundreds of pop-culture references and genre nods, from the Chandleresque to the Gibsonian? In the face of a historical narrative we are increasingly more distanced from, the question of personal remembrance and narrative become especially important, and Pynchon likes to leave us feeling the same impasse his characters feel. *The Crying of Lot 49* achieves this end more successfully and poignantly than *Bleeding Edge*, which leaves us mostly with a feeling of spiritual exhaustion through an excess of chatter and a shortage of self-determination. The characters are here one day and gone the next, only to reappear again in different form. They die, only to reappear again as avatars; they shape-shift without warning, and apparently without even the realization that they are doing so. Self-determination is impossible.

> Every schoolday morning on the way the Kugelblitz, she's been noticing the same three kids waiting on the corner for a school bus, Horace Mann or one of them, and maybe the other morning there was some fog, maybe the fog was inside her, some incompletely dissipated dream, but what she saw this time, standing in exactly the same spot, was three middle-aged men, gray-haired, less youthfully tuned out, and yet she knew, shivering a little, that these were the *same kids*, the same faces, only forty, fifty years older. Worse, they were looking at her with a queer knowledgeable intensity, focusing personally on her, sinister in the dimmed morning air. She checked the street. Cars were no more advanced in design, nothing beyond the usual police and military traffic was passing or hovering overhead, the low-rise holdouts hadn't been replaced with anything taller, so it still had to be "the present," didn't it? Something then, must've happened to these kids. But next morning all was back to "normal." The kids as usual were paying no attention to her.

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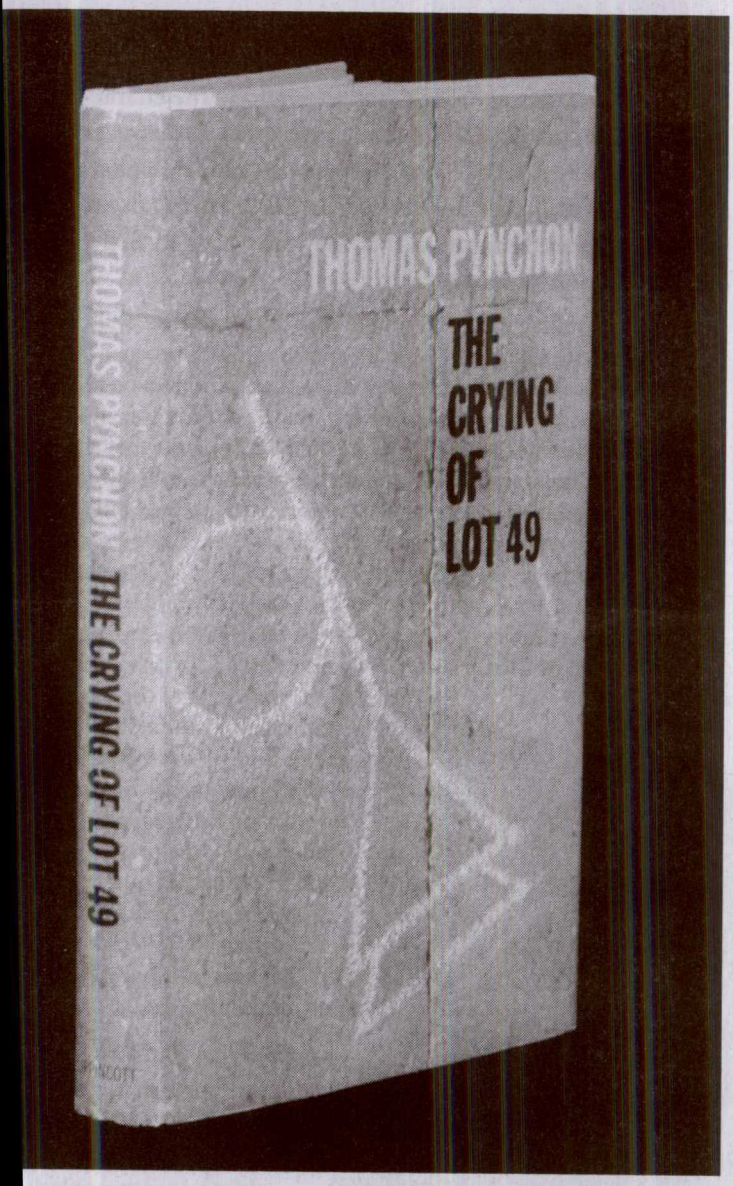
Essentially, all of Pynchon's novels, have at their heart, the necessary human task of self-determination, a process that is inherently political—whether that be through a renunciation of political affiliations and activism, as is the case with Maxine Tarnow, or an alienating embrace of activism, which can only lead to circles of paranoia and doubt, as in the case of March Kelleher—and also inherently spiritual, as any process of self-determination requires the individual to take responsibility for her own personal narrative, despite living in an historical age when any form of communication is potentially a form of miscommunication. "Spiritual exercise," as Maxine calls her preparation for work on Uncle Dizzy's case near the beginning of the novel. And while Maxine is admittedly, as she herself recognizes, not the most spiritually empowered individual, she does develop a sense of self by slow degrees. At the end of the novel her attitude toward the political and the spiritual is contrasted with March Kelle-



her's in the aftermath of having Gabriel Ice at gunpoint. Maxine decides to let him go.

> March lights a joint and after a while, paraphrasing Cheech & Chong, drawls, "I woulda shot him, man."
>
> You heard what he said. I think this is in his contract with the Death Lords he works for. He's protected. He walked away from a loaded handgun, that's all. He'll be back. Nothing's over.

No, nothing's over. It's worth remembering that only forty-five days after September 11, the United States passed the Patriot Act. This Constitutionally questionable (at best) Act allows the United States Government unprecedented authorization to track phone, Internet, and wire communications, as well as unparalleled authorization to freeze and seize assets of suspected terrorists, and detain terrorist suspects, potentially indefinitely, without trial. If we look at the history of presidential doctrines since the second World War that have preceded this act, from the Truman Doctrine of 1947, in which Truman promised to help stop the spread of Communism worldwide, with military force if need be, to the Carter Doctrine of 1980, in which Carter proclaimed, "An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force," a pattern seems to emerge, in which all these Doctrines appear to be in service of expanding the United States' power and influence in the Middle East, with Communism as the scapegoat. In a post-Cold-War world, there is no one left to fight for control of the Middle East other than the inhabitants themselves.

The passing of the Patriot Act not only effectively makes any Arab a potential terror suspect, with or without trial, thus rendering them an enemy of the state, it also gives the United States the benefit of being able to actively monitor and regulate the newest bleeding edge technology, Internet communication, giving the government primary control of the way the world disseminates and receives narrative information.

That of course reads as a conspiracy theory so thick it seems to lack probability. The slimy character Windust puts it this way: "You people want to believe this was all a false-flag caper, some invisible superteam, forging the intel, faking the Arabic chatter, controlling air traffic, military communications, civilian news media—everything coordinating without a hitch or a malfunction, the whole tragedy set up to look like a terror attack. Please. My wised-up civilian heartbreaker. Guess what. Nobody in the business is that good."

It's the response we expect from Windust's character, but maybe he has a point. It's the same question Oedipa Mass, after all is confronted with at the end of *Crying of Lot 49*, and which she at first dismisses as ridiculous. "Has it ever occurred to you, Oedipa, that somebody's putting you on? That this is all a hoax, maybe something Invariarty set up before he died?" But how can that be? Then again, how else to explain the inexplicable?

In the absence of any larger narrative that makes sense, where all channels of power, money, government, and communication are intertwined, and the media's attempts to untangle them seem, at best, as naïve and groping as our own, and at worst, blithely complicit in the twisted web, the need for a narrative that makes sense to us, either personally or politically, becomes crucial, life or death. In Pynchon's vision, this only leads us back full circle to our two examples: the political Kelleher on the one hand, and the spiritual Tarnow on the other. And neither one of these women seems comfortable with where they land. Ⓐ

art REVIEW

Modern Majesties

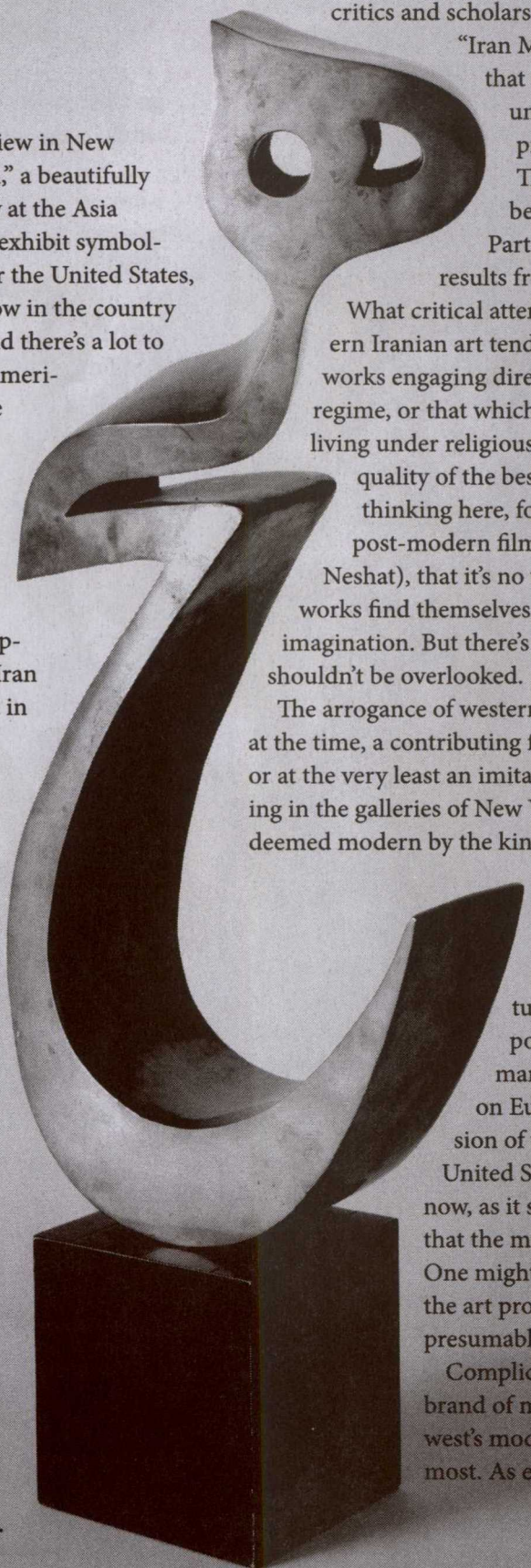
▶ *Iran Modern.* At the Asia Society on the Upper East Side.

MICHAEL BUSCH

The most significant art exhibit on view in New York at the moment is "Iran Modern," a beautifully curated show which opened recently at the Asia Society on the Upper East Side. The exhibit symbolizes something of a breakthrough for the United States, marking the first major museum show in the country dedicated to modern Iranian art. And there's a lot to like. In contrast to the uninspired "American Modern" retrospective down the road at MoMA, which fails to register a pulse despite its abundance of top-shelf art, "Iran Modern" is focused, exciting, and, by turns, revelatory.

The exhibition showcases roughly one hundred works of painting, sculpture, and photography produced in Iran between 1945 and 1979. Taking root in the years immediately following the Allied withdrawal from the country at the close of World War Two, Iranian modernism flowered for thirty years until Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini swept into power on the crest of revolution. They were, themselves, years of revolution. Iranian artists struggled with and celebrated the intensity of the socioeconomic and cultural modernization experienced by the country in the postwar era, establishing radical new modes of expression in response to these changes and managing to carve out an aesthetic space for themselves that was at once fully modernist and entirely Persian.

And yet, the three decades of Iranian modernism following the Second World War have received curiously short shrift from critics and scholars alike.



Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech (Nothing)*, 1972.

"Iran Modern" covers a period that ranks as one of the most understudied and poorly appreciated eras in art history. This is as true in Iran as it is beyond the country's borders. Part of the problem naturally results from the Islamic Revolution. What critical attention has been paid to modern Iranian art tends to be directed at those works engaging directly with the revolutionary regime, or that which treats the experience of living under religious authoritarianism. And the quality of the best of it is so remarkable (I'm thinking here, for example, of the wondrous, post-modern films and photography of Shirin Neshat), that it's no wonder older, less accessible works find themselves marginalized in the popular imagination. But there's another reason, too, that shouldn't be overlooked.

The arrogance of western self-regard was, at least at the time, a contributing factor. If it wasn't western, or at the very least an imitation of what was showing in the galleries of New York and Paris, it wasn't deemed modern by the kingmakers of *haute couture*.

The "American Modern" exhibit currently at MoMA suggests as much, offering a strange twenty-first century defense of the museum's position sixty years ago when many attacked it for focusing on European art to the exclusion of work being produced in the United States. MoMA's argument now, as it supposedly was then, holds that the museum's focus was on both. One might conclude, then, that it was the art produced everywhere else that presumably got the curatorial shaft.

Complicating matters further, Iran's brand of modernism challenged the west's modernist orthodoxy more than most. As evidenced in the exhibit,

many Iranian artists were uncompromising in their refusal to abandon the currents of local culture and tradition which had been under siege for most of the previous century and a half. There had been the Great Game, foreign occupation during the World War II, then the CIA-sponsored overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in 1953. Western influence was not relegated to political domination alone, however. Iranians were hardly immune to the forces of western culture which were spreading across the globe, and which were being brought back home by nationals who had lived, studied, and traveled abroad.

In his introductory essay for the exhibition's accompanying catalogue, Hamid Keshmirshekan notes the impact of western modernism on Iranian sociocultural development in the immediate postwar period. Iranian art academies during the 1940s "encouraged the adoption of modern western art through teaching and exhibition strategies. At the same time, the growing intellectual atmosphere in Iran had strengthened the desire of its young artists to experience new western artistic approaches. Moreover, in the postwar years, a large number of famous European works—including novels, poems, and philosophical works—were being translated into Persian, and analytical discussions on these materials increased among the Iranian intelligentsia."

The impact of what was transpiring in artistic circles in the United States and Western Europe can be felt in some of what's on display in "Iran Modern." The pleasing compositions of Leyla Matine-Dadftary, Mossadegh's granddaughter and an artist who spent considerable time in London and Paris, bring to mind Matisse and even, in her lovely portrait "Lydia," Alex Katz. The restless, rough abstractions of Manoucher Yektai, with their densely caked canvases smeared and exploding with paint, would be perfectly at home in the galleries of Alfred Barr's MoMA even at the height of the museum's worship of western art. So, too, would the pulsating pieces by Bhjat Sadr, whose pallet-knifed lines cut through blocks of color to create a thrilling interplay between the mysteries of positive and negative space.

It wasn't long, however, before Iranian avant-gardists grew weary of the western embrace. Much of this can be understood through the lens of the shifting political terrain during this period. The mild support some had felt towards the weak Shah—the chief sponsor and cheerleader of Iranian modernization—during the 1940s and 1950s developed into outright hostility as his reign became progressively autocratic and antagonistic to the merchant and clerical classes, and Iran's sociopolitical space grew increasingly suppressed. The coup that jettisoned Mossadegh from power effectively suffocated any hope that the Shah would allow for the rule of constitutional law. It also opened the door to foreign control over of Iran's vast oil deposits, as western companies struck deals with the Shah that allowed them to capitalize handsomely from the sale of Persian energy. Iranians rightly felt humiliated, and outraged.

By the early 1960s, the country's political stability was in serious doubt. Prime Minister Ali Amini, seen by some as a progressive political force in Iranian politics, resigned his office after running afoul of the Shah; Khomeini established himself as the country's chief religious authority following the death of Ayatollah Hossein Borujerdi; and Jalal Al-Ahmad published *Westoxification*, a leftist political work bemoaning the corrosive effects of western influence in Iran. Al-Ahmad's tract struck like a thunderbolt, fundamentally altering the course of political opposition to the Pahlavi dynasty. Ervand Abrahamian observes in *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* that though *Westoxification* "contained a strong Marxist flavor and analyzed society through a class perspective," it also "advocate[ed] a return to Islam," an exhortation which ultimately helped set the stage for a coming together of revolutionary forces. That front would ultimately topple the old regime in 1979. Notes Abrahamian, "al-Ahmad was the only contemporary writer ever to obtain favorable comments from Khomeini."

The changing political landscape can be traced through the art on show at the Asia Society. In the same year that *Westoxification* appeared in print, Faramarz Pilaram would produce three gorgeously geometric pieces—"Laminations," "Mosques of Isfahan," and an untitled watercolor, all on view in the exhibit—that place Shi'ite iconography at the center of each painting. These works make for a stunning trio, shining in their golds and silvers, insistent on the flattening of spatial depth, and beautifully arranged. While Pilaram's own work would later flower into a focus on calligraphic meditations that are astoundingly powerful and almost hypnotic in force, other artists began mining Persian mythology and the motifs of Islamic faith in their own paintings and sculpture.

Some will suggest that the increasingly overt religious symbolism in the work of this period undercuts the modernist sensibility supposedly at work. I'm not so sure. For one thing, Iranian artists were hardly the only ones meditating on the significance of religious iconography in their work at the time. As Jed Perl reminds us in an essay on spiritualism in modern art, "In the 1930s, Picasso, a Spaniard infinitely more pagan than Catholic in outlook, did many studies of the Crucifixion; and in the late 1940s, Matisse was absorbed in the design of the Chapel

Nicky Nodjoumi, *Untitled*, 1976.

at Vence, which includes the Stations of the Cross. In the United States, Barnett Newman titled paintings *Abraham* and *Chartes*, produced a series of paintings called the *Stations of the Cross*, and worked on the design for a synagogue. All around the world, there were major religious projects by the greatest architects, by Le Corbusier, Frank Lloyd Wright, Alvar Aalto, and many others." Yet even if Iranians were unique in this respect, the focus on Shi'ite religious belief here is modernist in both form and function.

Just as abstraction was the portal through which Western artists escaped the confines of realist representation, the focus on religion and classical mythology allowed Iranian modernists to turn away from the West itself. The most profound expression of the need to break from outside influence and return to the reservoirs of Iranian tradition and experience took shape in the work of the *Saqqakhaneh* movement. Less a properly organized school of production than a tendency of like-minded artists, *Saqqakhaneh*, in the words of Fereshteh Daftari, incorporated "motifs drawn from artisanal objects, mostly religious in nature, of a very popular kind found in bazaars, saqqakhanehs [religiously inspired water fountains memorializing Shi'ite martyrs denied water during the battle of Karbala], shrines, and religious processions."

The results, though not always successful, were undoubtedly revolutionary and, in some cases, extraordinary. The in-your-face sculptures and mixed-media compositions of Parviz Tanavoli—the most brazen of *Saqqakheneh*-spirited artists—are highlights of "Iran Modern." Tanavoli's early efforts, such as the colorfully whimsical "The Poet and the Beloved King," or the more austere but no less kooky "Bronze Prophet," don't quite find their footing, aesthetically, but signal the artist's preoccupation with tradition, iconography, and ordinary objects—subject matter which anchors the astonishing works that would follow. Breaking with the playful character defining his previous works, Tanavoli went on to produce severe, monochromatic sculptures, such as "Confrontation" and "Heech Tablet," that suggest an increasing interest in the significance of myth, written language and the existential struggles inherent to faith, as well as its rejection.

The focus on script deepens with "The Poet," and Tanavoli's exquisite "Oh Persepolis," with its golden cuneiform plates that recall the glories of ancient Persia as much as they do the growing sense of political crisis during the mid-1970s when it was produced. As Daftari suggests, "The 'Oh' in the title may be more than just an expression of awe or nostalgia for an ancient civilization. It also betrays sarcasm, perhaps hinting at recent events in Persepolis, which in 1971 had been the site of controversial celebrations. Tanavoli appears to converse in the dialects of power with the subversive intention of denunciating and not glorifying the ideologies sustaining those powers." The sense of subversive intent, and a commitment to plumbing the significance of symbols, can also be detected in Tanavoli's "Heech (Nothing)," maybe the most commanding piece on display at the Asia Society. It is a figurative work of sculpted script teetering on the knife's point between the cheap and the sublime, but which Tanavoli successfully engineers to achieve an internal coherence that is as disarming and powerful as the best of Brancusi.

Preoccupation with the written word was not Tanavoli's alone. The classically trained calligrapher Reza Mafi explored the possibilities of layered letters and words in a series of beautiful ink drawings and oil paintings, including a majestic, untitled work from 1973 where the blood-red scripted letters set against a dark background become flames of raging fire consuming a fading, ghostly fist raised in defiance. In another untitled work produced five years later, Mafi's aqua green and blue lettering billows exuberantly from the depths of a darkened void, literally spilling over the frontiers of the painting's top right corner where it overtakes the dead white spaces of the work's inner frame. The effect is trippy, darkly thrilling, totally '70s.

If Mafi was intent on drawing out the dynamic rhythms of calligraphic script, Mohammad Ehsai was concerned with exploring its architectural possibilities. Ehsai's interlocking constructions on the canvas, rendered most intricately in "EREHAYE KHAYAM," a work from 1968, are striking and bold, clearly influenced by New York School modernists and, interestingly, anticipating the glorious era of wild style graffiti that would unfold shortly thereafter in the United States. Indeed, an untitled painting of Ehsai's from 1974—with its tightly pressed, overlapping, text in blues and greys over a solid yellow background—would have made a fine burner on the IRT that same year in New York City. These are joyful works, celebrating style and color, completely divorced from the political turbulence which was then coursing through the markets and mosques of Iranian society.

As the revolution drew closer, some Iranian art began assuming an explicitly political character. A number of examples are on view at the Asia Society. The effects of repression and state terror, for example, are all consuming in a pair of frightening works by Nicky Nodjoumi. The first depicts a gang of secret police running through the night-darkened streets dragging behind them a limp, hooded body. In a nearby painting, "Standing Tall," we get a sense of the fate awaiting that kidnapped victim. A handcuffed prisoner stares defiantly at the viewer, his

discomfiting gaze no less penetrating for the red sheet that has been wrapped around his head, tied at the neck. Hints of torture play across his ash blue torso in sweeps of wispy reds and pinks. The man in the painting, the Marxist poet and revolutionary Khosrow Golsorkhi, would, in fact, be executed, but refused a blindfold when facing the firing squad. Golsorkhi wished to stare his killers in the eye.

When the revolution arrived, it was captured most arrestingly not through painting or sculpture, but by the camera. The overwhelming forces that dispatched the Shah and ushered in an era of theocratic governance couldn't be more movingly represented than they are in a series of gelatin silver prints by Bahman Jalali, Rana Javadi, and Magnum's Abbas. Taken together or individually, the photographs here are magnificent, startling. We get the snapshots of inexorable crowds looting government offices and toppling the old regime just as we do the uncertain faces of those welcoming in the new, and the violence of street justice playing out on the periphery. And we get Abbas's "Women Welcome the Ayatollah Home," one of the truly remarkable photos taken in the twentieth century which defies the eye to focus, and which blurs into and out of abstraction and realist representation.

It is here that "Iran Modern" closes, and does so on an ambiguous note. If there was an immediate response to the revolution in the modern art of Iran, the curators aren't saying. Did the fall of the Shah effectively bring the era of Iranian modernism to a close? We aren't told. Nor is judgment passed on the regime that would take power in 1979, and continue to hold it to the present day. Perhaps this is just as well. The final images that continue stinging the mind's eye long after leaving the museum—the giant portraits of Khomeini buoyed by the waves of revolutionaries pouring through Tehran, the sea of women welcoming the exiled Ayatollah home, the horrors of a woman being lynch-mobbed by a gang of furious men—offer stark reminders about the often uneasy relationship between politics and art, and the risk that the former can sometimes threaten the very existence of the latter.

Yet if there's a lesson from the exhibit, it is one of redemption. The show ends as it began—with great uncertainty. Iranian artists at the doorstep of modernism were forced to pick up the pieces of a society changed by war and foreign occupation and from this, forge new modes of expression, a new aesthetics. They succeeded, as "Iran Modern" clearly demonstrates. One assumes Iranian artists were faced with similar challenges in the wake of the revolution, as well, but that they got on with business however difficult it has been. And that's the thing about art: like people, it's resilient. Politics may destroy, refashion, or rebuild society. Art adapts and survives. Ⓐ

Faramarz Pilaram, *Untitled*, 1972.

An Approach Towards Infinity

▶ Robert Ryman. ***No Title Required.*** Pace Gallery.

CLAY MATLIN

Robert Ryman has a new show at Pace. The paintings are white. Six of them are on colored cotton canvas, the edges of the canvas visible, the white paint applied with impasto flourishes that lead one to think that the canvases are asymmetrical. They are not, but range in size from 18" × 18" × 2½" to 24" × 24" × 2½". Additionally, there are eight paintings on birch plywood and two on board panel; each of these is painted with enamel and acrylic. They are as smooth as glass, with some panels having their vertical sides painted in dark blue. These ten panels (ranging in size from 43" × 43" to 47⅞" × 47⅞") comprise one work, *No Title Required.*

None of this should be surprising: neither the size nor color. In fact, one could argue that if you have seen one Ryman painting you have seen them all. Among younger artists, Ryman, the old master, is often dismissed as never changing, a maker of boring, formulaic paintings. It's true that while the contemporary art world celebrates an artist's capacity to handle (or try to handle) myriad artistic hats, or to put it in less generous terms, celebrates a prevalent dilettantish aesthetic, it might appear that Ryman has been painting the same white paintings forever. Oddly, though, we seem to applaud Ellsworth Kelly for the very same thing we fault Ryman. It is as if Ryman's choice of color is less valid than Kelly's only slightly broader palette. Oscar Wilde was right when he declared that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative. But Ryman's work is in no way unimaginative. Nor is it particularly consistent. They are, in fact, documents of struggle; each painting is a new creation building on the successes and failures of the previous one.

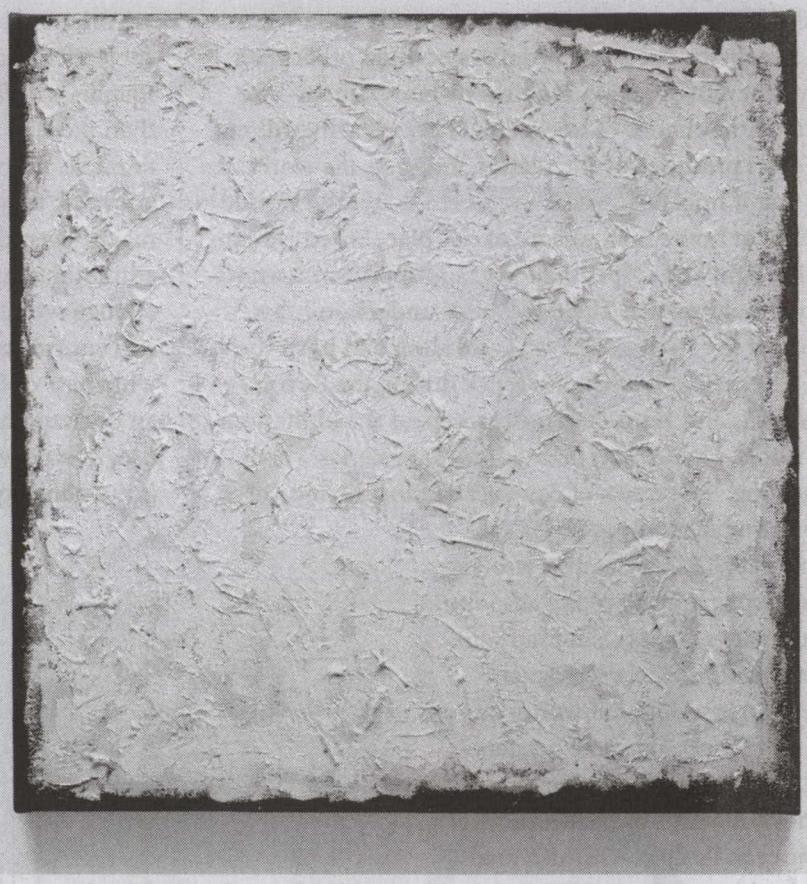
It was John Dewey who wrote that we find no fulfillment in completion; we dream of nirvana and heavenly bliss only because they are "projected upon the background of our present world of stress and conflict." I believe that we are well served to think of Ryman in these very terms. The project is not yet complete. Each of these white paintings tells a different story, hunts after something new, and, if he is lucky, fails to get there. Yet, this is not to say the paintings are failures. More precisely, each is an act of expression and experimentation. We tend to think of failure in negative terms, but with an artist like Ryman, the failure lies not in the painting itself, but in our desire, the viewers', for narrative resolution. That he keeps painting white paintings is not a limitation of his language or ideas. Rather it is the means he has chosen to communicate with the world. Ryman's paintings move out into life, they have a presence that forces itself upon us. Meyer Schapiro believed that the artist, whether roughly or not, places himself directly in the "focus of our space." We should let him; there is much to gain from those experiences that speak to us and not at us; that force us to consider seriously difficult, unclear ideas. When we let others into *our* space, we enlarge our involvement with the task of living. The very whiteness of Ryman's paintings coupled with the whiteness of the gallery space gives each painting a physicality that projects it off of the wall into space. They are as much objects as they are paintings, perhaps as evinced by the inclusion of the paintings' depth.

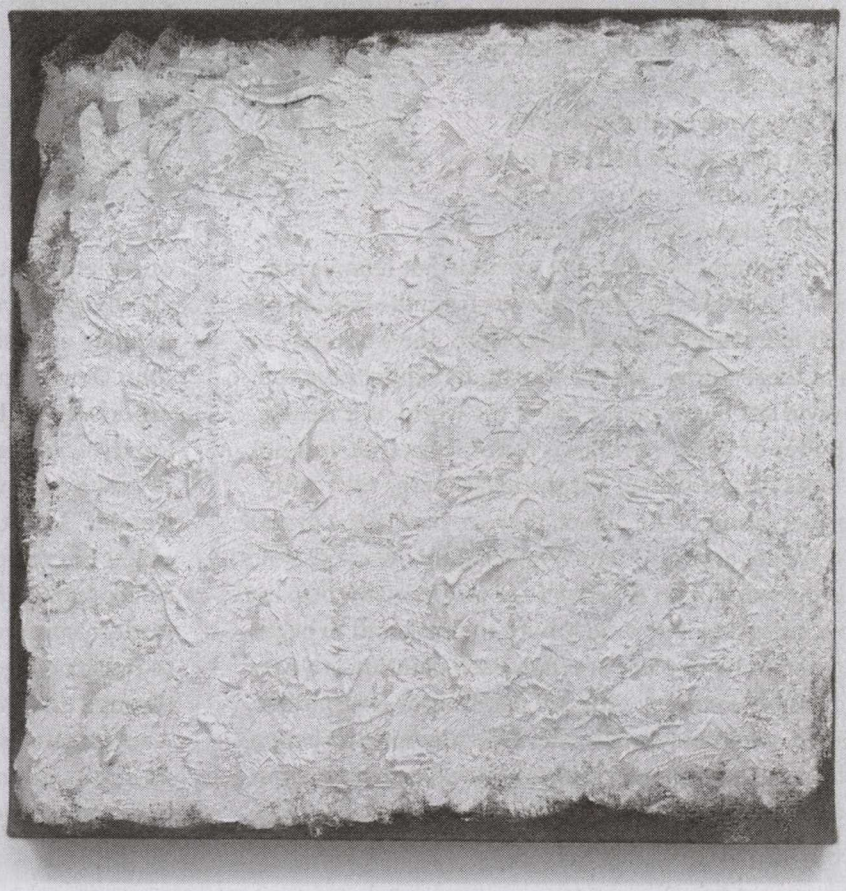
As such, it is fruitful to think of Ryman in relation to a different type of painter, but one who nevertheless had a profound impact on Ryman as an artist and thinker: Mark Rothko. In direct contrast to Ryman, Rothko endeavored to make paintings that became part of the wall. They had real presence, but that presence was directed inward, through the painting and into another space. Rothko strove to draw the viewer in, to seduce us. Not that Ryman pushes us away, but we live in tension with his work. With Rothko, any tension melts away in his work. Rothko painted doorways to another world, one where this self-proclaimed painter of his "not-self" could be freed from the stress and conflict that someone like Dewey knew to be haunting, but not worth running from. Rothko, though, wanted to run, to dive through one of those lushly painted doorways that only got grimmer the longer he lived and the more desperate he became. Yet he never did paint his way to freedom. His repeated failure showed him that we are trapped by life to this world. Eventually it became too much for him. For Ryman, however, the specter of failure does not curse him. He seems to have accepted that the paintings are not perfect, but will build on each other. Often the complaint about Ryman is that he does not change, the whiteness of the paintings keeps coming. But if we were to think more deeply about this we would understand that Ryman has not in fact failed to change; he continues to move forward. The act of painting, the use of white as both color and object, is the possibility through which Ryman changes. The white painting is not the terminus, but the means by which we *might* discover

some indefinable end.

Urs Rausmüller observed that Ryman has no starting and ending point with his paintings, the middle filled in like a crossword puzzle. Instead, Rausmüller noted, each painting Ryman makes is "the one ultimate painting. You rely on everything you have painted before and on everything you know and have experienced about painting." Yet we so frequently fail to see this with our artists, especially our abstract ones. Perhaps we struggle with someone like Ryman because we still struggle so much with abstract painting. We go easier on representational painters. They perform a kind of art making that is less threatening because we assume we understand what it is about, that there are those among us who can "read" the painting into comprehension. The images of representational painting avail themselves to an easier interpretation or appreciation than what can be the abstruse language of abstraction. Though it is not simply abstract painting that flummoxes us, but abstraction in general. We cling to clarity as if clarity itself is the mark of God on the faces of all his children. We want clear writing and clear ideas. We desire to hear clearly, to see without any obstacles. The assumption is that if things are presented to us in a clear way then they are valuable.

Except, maybe Edmund Burke was right in 1757 when he dismissed clarity: "But let it be considered that hardly any thing can strike the mind with its greatness which does not make some sort of approach towards infinity; which nothing can do whilst we are able to perceive its bounds; but to see an object distinctly, and to perceive its bounds, is one and the same thing. A clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea." Clarity, though, is not the same thing as precision. A precise idea need not be clear in order to be important or





useful. Precise things can be difficult or worth struggling with. Clarity is the promise of instant gratification—it is a call to simplicity. Precision promises nothing other than that the thought or action requires real investment—we are offered the chance of intellectual rigor. Clarity will not, for all of its promises of elucidation, bring us the world. It seems that it might, instead, cause us to doubt the world, to feel less at home in it, unsure of our place when we cannot shine light and dispel shadows. The approach *towards* infinity should matter. The Romantics understood that this hunger for clarity is the desire to slash and burn the world. They saw it happen in France during the Revolution. Novalis and Hans Hölderlin accepted the limitations of the world, understood that there are mysteries worth not knowing. "We must, of course, abandon all hope of ever wresting from things their ultimate mystery," Ernst Cassirer wrote, "or of ever penetrating to the absolute being of matter or of the human soul." Our fetishization of clarity wants the creation of a different world, one where there is no "ultimate mystery." Abstract painting is a confrontation with the limitations of *this* world. Not all things can be clear. Our desire for such a world is neither realistic nor humane; it is a dream of control that is not viable.

What abstract painting teaches us, and perhaps Ryman in particular is one of the prime examples of this, is that, to quote Clive Bell, there are "things in life the worth of which cannot be related to the physical universe—things of which the worth is not relative but absolute." Abstract painting frees us from the burden of explicit moral and political judgments. The work may be both of those things, but the weight, its explicitness and the way it sits heavy on the life of the world, is lessened. The power of Bell's "significant form" rings true. It is not that ideas do not matter, but the ideas merge fully with the presentation of the object, they are part of the overall unity. We are aware, to return to Schapiro, "at every point, of its [the work of art's] becoming." For Ryman, the painting becomes the opportunity both to finish and to begin—the opportunity to paint another. Each painting is a new one, possibly even one ultimate painting, as Rausmüller observed, wherein Ryman relies on everything he painted before and everything he knows and "experienced about painting" to guide him forward.

Ryman is Schapiro's abstract painter who reminds us of the very act of painting, of the vitality and mood that are inherent to the making of an abstract painting. "The subjective," Schapiro understood, "becomes tangible." Ryman is difficult because we assume there is less to him than there is. His choices seem minimal, the work easy to make. But we need to remember that his concerns are valid, they speak to our time. Abstract painting, and maybe even the idea of abstraction itself, is the chance to admit that past forms of art making and thought are not enough—that there is a multiplicity of presentations of and confrontations with the world. Rather than query the whiteness of Ryman's paintings or what we believe to be an unchanging quality in his work, we ought to see it as a legitimate way of communicating with *this* moment. "It is not about symbolism or stories or references to parts of society, politics or whatever," Ryman has said. "Those are things that are just incidental. It is about the very immediate need that everyone has to delight and wonder." John Dewey knew that in order really to have an aesthetic experience, to be sufficiently receptive, we must surrender ourselves to it and in the very act of submission we begin to create our own experience, one available to delight *and* wonder. An artist like Ryman asks more of us than we might be comfortable giving. But we should let ourselves be confronted *by* the very whiteness that seems so difficult to comprehend. The locus of our cognition ought to radiate outward from ourselves. Thought is work, and through this work it connects us to the world at large. We would be well served to embrace painters like Ryman, to let him stand in our focus. Perhaps then we might learn that in surrendering just a bit of our focus we *gain* a life in the world. Ⓐ

Transformation & Process

- ***The Metamorphosis,*** The Joyce Theatre.
- Sally Silvers, ***Surprise Every Time: A mini-festival of "live choreography***. September 29.

MEREDITH BENJAMIN

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." This is the striking, if straightforward, revelation that begins Franz Kafka's novella, *The Metamorphosis*. In the pages that follow, Kafka chronicles Gregor's turmoil and challenges as he struggles to adapt to life in his new condition and the estrangement it produces in those around him. The novella is not one that seems easily adaptable to dance, but choreographer Arthur Pita has taken on the challenge in a production that came to New York's Joyce Theatre after premiering at the Royal Opera House's Linbury Studio in London.

Adapting this story for the stage necessarily requires a shift in focus from the interior to the exterior: our perspective shifts from inside Gregor's head, amidst his feel-

Edward Watson and Nina Goldman in *The Metamorphosis*. PHOTO: TRISTRAM KENTON

ings and reactions, to his exterior and the physical aspects of his transformations. Whereas in the novella, we learn of his family and their reactions only through his eyes, onstage it is the family—his parents and sister Grete—who serve as our onstage stand-ins, registering the shock his changes elicit. When the audience entered the theatre, these three were already onstage, going about their daily business. The set (designed by Simon Daw), was split in two, emphasizing the duality that will come to characterize the dynamic in the flat: the family's anxieties confined to the kitchen half, and Gregor in an austere bedroom on the other. In addition to these striking visuals, the tense and claustrophobic atmosphere of the piece is sustained by the eerie accompaniment of musician Frank Moon, which ranged from classical violin to guttural vocals.

The production begins with three squarely and methodically performed repetitions of a daily routine: Gregor goes through the motions of the day, getting dressed, buying a coffee, boarding the train, and returning home. Throughout his ordeal, family life continues around the kitchen table, often to the point of absurdity, as when his constantly worried mother distractedly works out to an exercise program on the tiny TV.

Edward Watson, a principal at the Royal Ballet more often seen in more traditionally balletic roles, was a marvel as Gregor Samsa. His transformation is evoked not through costuming, but instead through movement: the stiff, square man who went about his daily business in an almost mechanical manner becomes a creepy, tangled insect: limbs grotesquely askew, fingers and toes that keep moving like antenna, independent of the rest of the body. When he first wakes up on his back, limbs in the air, there is a dark brown substance oozing from his mouth: the first external sign of the change he has undergone. The sticky, slippery substance will eventually envelop his entire body as well as his bedroom, the eerily-streaked set beginning to resemble a scene from a horror film and illustrating the sense of confined chaos.

While the novella lets us inside Gregor's thoughts, logical throughout, to remind us of the person inside the insect's body, here it is the human body, still visible through the layer of slime and contorted positions that foregrounds the duality. At moments, we catch glimpses of Watson's human eyes, conveying the increasing agony of his isolation from his family. The most remarkable element of Watson's physical transformation was the way in which the relationship between his torso and his limbs changed in movements that suggested his legs no longer originated from his hips. Even when he paused, a creeping echo of motion always remained, as his fingers or toes undulated, echoing the near-constant motion of insects.

Gregor's sister Grete (played by the splendidly vivid Corey Annand) is the figure who most clearly marks the passage of time for us: the first time her still-human brother returns home, she awkwardly demonstrates her beginning forays into ballet. By the end of the production, she is a full-fledged dancer in pointe shoes, expressing her frustration through dance, her movements emphasizing the more bug-like and angular qualities of ballet and tying her to her brother, despite the fact that she is now vehemently trying to separate herself from him. When the gooey substance spills over into the kitchen, a clear divide has been breached: as the family is forced to confront the effects of his transformation, we see their own movements begin to change as well.

Ultimately, after scaring off a trio of boarders who would have been a much-needed source of income for his family, Gregor's sense of being a burden becomes too great, and he escapes out the window to what we assume is his death. As an audience, we see his experience only from the outside; in his metamorphosis, Gregor is rendered mute, unable to communicate. His thought process, so carefully detailed in Kafka's telling, remains a mystery to us, and in the end, we are left only with the highly theatrical spectacle of his absence.

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Where do we draw the line differentiating performance from rehearsal? Between prompts for a class or workshop and choreography? These were some of the questions that came to mind at *Surprise Every Time*, a mini-festival of "live choreography" conceived and programmed by Sally Silvers and held at Roulette, an arts space in Brooklyn, over two days in the last weekend of September. In contrast to the highly theatrical and stylized production of *The Metamorphosis, Surprise Every Time* thrived on the tentative and the provisional. The festival consisted of

four different performances, each featuring three different choreographers or pairs of choreographers. The choreographers had not selected their dancers, and they had no opportunity for advance collaboration. Each choreographer had thirty minutes in which to create and then have their dancers "perform"—complete with reminders when time was running out. The program read like a veritable "who's who" of the contemporary dance scene, featuring choreographers including Bill T. Jones, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Alexandra Beller, and a number of well-known dancers, many of them choreographers in their own right.

When I attended on Sunday afternoon, the first choreographer, Jérôme Bêl, was Skyping in from Paris. His face was projected on a large screen at the back of the stage: a fact which made him decidedly uncomfortable. His initial requests to the dancers centered around getting them to hide his image or drown out his voice, to challenge the physical manifestations of his power that put him so ill at ease. While the dancers were occasionally successful in hiding his presence, the challenges of choreography-by-Skype proved overwhelming: the looming image of the choreographer seemed to inhibit development on either end.

Different approaches to the task at hand took shape over the course of the afternoon: Bêl was tentative, asking the dancers to try things out, becoming a part of the process himself, and changing direction according to his own unscripted reactions. Paul Langland and Mary Overlie gave the dancers a series of conceptual tasks (e.g. "doing the unnecessary"), asked them to combine them with a one-line script ("Darling, I feel like I'm falling in love for the very first time"), and then sat back to see what happened. The final two choreographers, Aynsley Vandenbrouck and Abigail Levine came in with the most pre-determined idea, explaining to the dancers the multi-step process they would go through (Vandenbrouck noted that she felt uncomfortable with this one-sided dynamic in which they dictated to the dancers; Levine, on the other hand, said "I'm fine with it.").

While only Overlie explicitly mentioned it, the ethos of the 1960's Judson Dance Theatre—in which the practice is the product, and ordinary movement is privileged over spectacle—echoed throughout the afternoon. No one seemed particularly anxious about finding something that worked, or developing a polished piece to present. None of the choreographers gave any particular "steps" or even any suggestions on the type of movement. Their directions were each of the sort that one would hear in an improvisation class: abstract suggestions about the quality of the movement or the intention behind it.

A performance of this kind is inherently difficulty to write about—what is fair game for evaluation? For interpretation? I was at times frustrated by my own passivity, unable to try out on my own body the choreographers' evocative instructions. My friend suggested that perhaps we as the audience were nonetheless participating—doing the mental work that the dancers were doing, as we thought about how we would interpret a certain cue or directive, despite the fact that we ourselves were not moving. Less about witnessing a spectacle and more about witnessing the creative process—failures and non-starters included—the festival was a reminder of the value of practice and investigation. Perhaps as audience members, we were meant to feel frustrated by our role as spectators—the better to push us to go forth and experiment on our own. Ⓐ

Sally Silvers's *Surprise Every Time* at Roulette.

August Wilson, Recorded for Posterity

- *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. By August Wilson. Directed by Phylicia Rashād. 4 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *The Piano Lesson*. By August Wilson. Directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson. 9 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *Two Trains Running*. By August Wilson. Directed by Michele Shay. 11 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *Seven Guitars*. By August Wilson. Directed by Stephen McKinley Henderson. 13 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *Jitney*. By August Wilson. Directed by Ruben Santiago-Hudson. 16 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *Gem of the Ocean*. Directed by Kenny Leon. 24 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).
- *Radio Golf*. Directed by Marion McClinton. 28 September 2013. At The Greene Space (viewed via live video webcast).

DAN VENNING

August Wilson, who died in 2005, was one of America's greatest playwrights, creating works that represent and serve as reminders of crucial aspects of the African American experience. Wilson's signature achievement is his "American Century Cycle": ten plays, each depicting characters living in a different decade in twentieth-century Pittsburgh. Wilson did not write the plays in chronological order; his first play in the cycle, *Jitney* (1982) is set in the 1970s, while his last two plays depict the earliest and most recent events (*Gem of the Ocean*, written 2003, set in the 1900s, and *Radio Golf*, written 2005, set in the 1990s). Taken together, the ten plays show the advances won by the struggles of Black Americans. But the plays simultaneously demonstrate how, both immediately and nearly half a century after the enactment of the Civil Rights Act, African Americans often remain marginalized, victimized by discrimination and the long shadow of our country's shameful past.

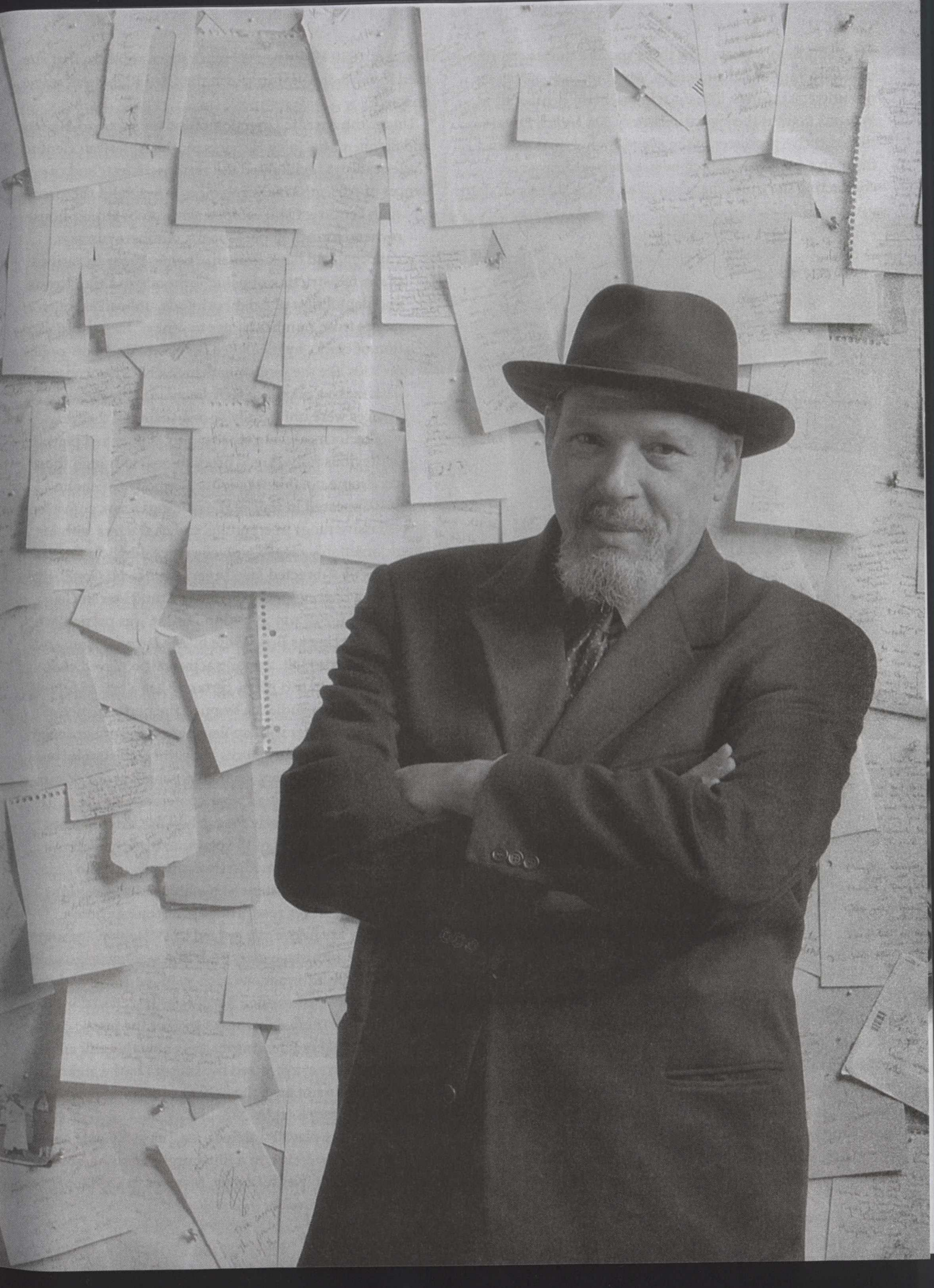
All of the plays except *Jitney* have appeared on Broadway, and the full cycle has been presented by several theatres, most notably the Huntington Theatre Company in Boston (over twenty-six years, from 1986 to 2012) and the Pittsburgh Playwrights Theatre, which produced the cycle over the last decade. But never before have all of the plays been given readings so close together. This landmark event, produced by WNYC Public Radio and recorded at The Greene Space from August 26 to September 28, presented a unique opportunity to experience the entirety of Wilson's cycle. The readings were presented to sold-out live audiences and shown on live-streamed video online; I was unable to see *Fences*, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, or *King Hedley II*, but watched the remaining seven online. The archived recordings are not yet available, but will be presented on public radio across the country in 2014, and the audio will also be available next year on demand. This set of readings reconfirms Wilson's place as a master of American playwriting.

Wilson's plays are absolutely in the tradition of Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams, plays that can be seen as "theatricalized realism," mixing candid sociopolitical views of the American experience with imagery that highlights the theatricalized fiction of the event. Wilson's plays frequently allow characters to describe their vivid dreams or nightmares. But Wilson resisted being placed in this trajectory of white American playwrights. In fact, Wilson's entire oeuvre was designed to forge a space for an African American identity in the theatre. He abhorred "color-blind" or "nontraditional" casting, arguing that casting plays without considering the race of the actors served to efface racial identity in America, to reaffirm the place of white culture as "universal." In an address entitled "The Ground on which I Stand," delivered to the Theatre Communications Group in 1997, Wilson said:

> Color-blind Casting is an aberrant idea that has never had any validity other than as a tool of the Cultural Imperialist who views their American Culture, rooted in the icons of European Culture, as beyond reproach in its perfection. . . . For a black actor to stand on the stage as part of a social milieu that has denied him his gods, his culture, his humanity, his mores, his ideas of himself, and the world he lives in is to be in league with a thousand nay-sayers who wish to corrupt the vigor and spirit of his heart. To cast us in the role of mimics is to deny us our own competence. . . . We will not deny our history, and we will not allow it to be made of little consequence, to be ignored or misinterpreted.

Whether or not one agrees with Wilson's condemnation of nontraditional casting (the practice is supported by the actors' union, Actor's Equity Association, which notes that nontraditional casting greatly increases diversity in productions and opportunities for actors of all races), his

Right: August Wilson. PHOTO: YALE REPERTORY THEATRE.



plays ably demonstrate how these specific stories can resonate with very broad audiences. And these are particular, not universal stories. The unifying element behind all Wilson's plays is the legacy of slavery. Dr. Indira Etwaroo, the executive producer of the event, highlighted this fact through a pre-show speech before each performance, connecting the time when "shackled feet first stepped onto

foreign soil" to when slaves "secretly learned to read" to the Civil Rights movement, a "visceral resistance to terror in one's own country," to Wilson's writing. Indeed, the character whose presence spans the plays is Aunt Ester, a former slave. We first hear of Aunt Ester in *Two Trains Running*, set in the 1960s, where she is described as a 349-year-old spiritual healer. She appears onstage in *Gem of the Ocean*, a 285-year-old former slave in the 1900s, a cleanser of souls. Her age is no coincidence—she was born the same year slaves were first brought to the colonies that would become the United States. And in *Radio Golf*, Wilson's final play, which concerns the demolition of her house at 1839 Wylie in the Hill District, we learn that she died in 1968, the year in which the Civil Rights Act was enacted.

Under the Artistic Direction of Ruben Santiago-Hudson and Stephen McKinley Henderson, the American Century Cycle readings highlighted the various dialects and cadences of African American voices throughout the twentieth century: from escaped slaves to boarding-house owners, former sharecroppers, numbers runners, children, and businessmen. Themes recur in various plays: redistricting of neighborhoods and the closing and demolition of neighborhoods, unlicensed businesses from number games to jitneys, the criminalization of blacks by the police (he dramatizes how police policies like the forerunners to the NYPD's stop-and-frisk make a populace feel alienated). The performances were universally strong (many of the forty-two performers were reprising roles they had played in previous fully-staged productions) although there were some notable standouts: Anthony Chisholm, who appeared in four of the readings I saw, conveyed a massive range of emotions and characters with his unforgettably ragged, gravelly voice. Phylicia Rashād, who directed *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, gave a riveting performance as Aunt Ester in *Gem of the Ocean*. Brandon Dirden was particularly stirring as Boy Willie in *The Piano Lesson*, and Alexis Holt, a young actress who played children in two plays, certainly has a bright future: the live audience stopped the performance of *Joe Turner* with applause after one of her scenes.

The performances were directed simply: occasionally, actors would have small props or mime activities, but all wore contemporary dress. The directors clearly focused on the language and aural aspects of the plays, so that characters would be immediately distinguishable to radio or podcast listeners. Notably, stage directions were never read. This was a strange choice, because they are frequently crucial in Wilson's plays, some of which end with stage directions that resonate poetically or crucially affect the action (such as in *Joe Turner*, where Harold Loomis slashes open his chest). The crucial visual directions were mimed by the actors, but the poetic ones were left unspoken; I am unsure as to how this will affect the way the plays are received by listeners to the audio archives who do not have the benefit of seeing the actors or knowing Wilson's texts.

The first of the plays I watched, *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, is set in the 1910s, in a Pittsburgh boarding house run by Seth Holly (Keith David). Many of the residents,

Top: Ruben Santiago-Hudson as Canewell in *Seven Guitars*. PHOTO: STEPHANIE BLACK
Bottom: S. Epatha Merkerson as Bertha in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. PHOTO: MATTHEW SEPTIMUS

who pay week-to-week, are former slaves, or the children of former slaves. Most notably, Harold Loomis (John Douglas Thompson) arrives with his daughter Zonia (Alexis Holt) looking for his wife. Seth knows who she is, but doesn't want to get involved. In the moving central scene, Loomis tells and of how he was taken by "Joe Turner" and forced to work on a chain gang, and of a nightmare he has where he is on a slave ship, unable to stand. The boundary between metaphor and reality is a little unclear, since Harold Loomis claims he was taken for no reason, while the strangely prophetic Bynum (Roger Robinson, in a role for which he won a Tony) insists he was kidnapped because of "his song." Loomis finally finds his wife, and gives up his daughter, and then slices himself open, bleeding and, as Bynum says, seeing himself finally standing tall, having found his song.

The Piano Lesson, directed by the cycle's Artistic Director, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, is one of Wilson's most famous plays. Set in the 1930s, it deals with the conflict between Boy Willie (Brandon Dirden) and his sister Berniece (Roslyn Ruff) over whether to sell a treasured family heirloom, a piano carved with the history of their formerly enslaved family. Boy Willie has been working as a sharecropper and comes to Pittsburgh to convince his sister to sell the piano. With the money from the sale of the piano, he could buy his own land; for him, the piano represents his future. Berniece, who refuses to play the piano but also refuses to sell it, sees it as a priceless memento of their past. In the climactic scene, the ghost of their family's former owner, Sutter, attacks the house: he is only quelled when Berniece plays the piano, confronting head-on the family's wounds. Upon witnessing this, Boy Willie, realizes that he cannot move forward by effacing his past.

Two Trains Running, set in 1969, centers around Memphis (Anthony Chisholm), the owner of a diner in a block in the Hill District set to be demolished. Memphis refuses to sell his diner to the rich undertaker, West (Harvey Blanks) across the street, who is offering less than it is worth, but more than Memphis is likely to get through eminent domain. Memphis reveals that in the South he was unfairly deprived of his land and barely escaped with his life—he refuses to be taken advantage of again. Much of the play consists of everyday conversations of the customers. Particularly noteworthy are the intrusions of Hambone (Keith Randolph Smith), a slow-witted man driven insane by being cheated of a ham he was owed by a local grocer. A striking parallel appears between Memphis and Hambone: both struggle to get a fair shake. When Memphis, unlike Hambone, receives more than he asked for his diner from the city council, he decides that it may be time to return south to once again try to recover his land: there are two trains running daily to take him home.

Two Trains Running, with its narrative that shows how the struggle of African Americans must continue full force, even after the enactment of civil rights, was, of all the readings, my favorite. It was followed by the one that moved me least, *Seven Guitars*. Set in 1948 and directed by Associate Artistic Director Stephen McKinley Henderson, the play focuses on hustlers and musicians. The blues singer Floyd Barton (Jerome Preston Bates), recently released from jail, is considering a trip to Chicago to jump start a music career after, by chance, one of his recordings has turned into a smash hit. Although he almost succeeds, recruiting his friends Canewell (Ruben Santiago-Hudson) and Red Carter (Stephen McKinley Henderson)

Top: Aunjanue Ellis as Vera in *Seven Guitars*. PHOTO: STEPHANIE BLACK
Bottom: Amari Cheatom as Youngblood in *Jitney*. PHOTO: MATTHEW SEPTIMUS

to play with him and rekindling his love affair with Vera (Aunjanue Ellis), he is pulled once again into the world of crime and violence. Notably, the website for The Greene Space, until after the performance, listed Harry Lennix as the actor who would play Floyd; I wonder if perhaps part of the reason I found this production less compelling was that Bates took over reading the central role at the last minute.

Jitney, set in 1977, and here directed by Santiago-Hudson, is the oldest play in Wilson's cycle and the only one never to have been staged on Broadway. It deserves to be seen there. It focuses on a group of unlicensed cab, or jitney, operators, working out of a building that is soon to be boarded up due to redistricting. The manager, Becker (Roscoe Orman) has constant conflicts with his crew. But Becker's most significant conflict is with his son Booster (J. Bernard Calloway), a convict who served twenty years for murdering a white girl who falsely accused him of rape. Becker had raised his son to move beyond his station in life and is furious that the boy threw that away. Calloway is extraordinarily emotional in this role, and his long scene with Orman before intermission was one of the most moving in the entire cycle. Becker's final conflict is with the offstage city council: he is determined to fight the redistricting and keep his business open. He dies suddenly before the play's penultimate scene, and Booster is left to fill his father's shoes before the battle can be completed.

The final two plays, *Gem of the Ocean* (directed by Kenny Leon and set in 1904) and *Radio Golf* (directed by Marion McClinton and set in 1997), although the furthest apart chronologically, are the closest together in spirit. *Gem of the Ocean* consists of a lot of long meditative monologues, showing various reactions to slavery at the beginning of the twentieth century. Aunt Ester (Phylicia Rashād) uses her wisdom and long experience of slavery to cleanse the soul of Citizen Barlow (Chadwick Boseman), a young man whose careless crime led to another man's death. Barlow is cleansed by taking a dream journey to the City of Bones on the Gem of the Ocean, the same ship that had brought Ester to America. Also present in Ester's house are Solly Two Kings (Chisholm), a former slave who worked for the underground railroad, and Caesar (Smith), a lackey of the police and local mill who uses his power to abuse his neighbors in the name of bettering them; he parrots the idea that some people were better off in slavery. Solly is killed by Caesar but passes his mantle of heroism to Citizen.

Caesar's grandson, Harmond Wilks (Rocky Carroll) is the protagonist of *Radio Golf*. Harmond seems poised to win his campaign for Mayor of Pittsburgh. He has partnered with Roosevelt Hicks (James A. Williams) to redevelop part of the Hill District, including the site that was once Aunt Ester's house. But, it is revealed, Harmond bought the house illegally when its owner, Elder Joseph Barlow (Chisholm) returns. Although at the beginning of the play Harmond seems willing to compromise his ethics (highlighted by the fact that he delivers a line identical to one spoken by his grandfather in *Gem of the Ocean*), he is eventually moved to do the right thing, even at great personal cost. Harmond sacrifices his political ambitions over the house, which is destroyed anyway: the golf-playing Roosevelt Hicks, working with a consortium of white businessmen, buys him out. But Harmond retains his dignity by striving to preserve the legacy of his past.

Seeing these seven performances live streamed online was a moving and thoroughly enjoyable experience. It brought me closer to Wilson's works, some of which I have taught many times but never felt so viscerally. (I have taught *Fences* most frequently, and was sad to miss that recording). By watching these plays as a cycle, I was able to follow the historic and thematic connections between the plays. Wilson's plays are ultimately about human dignity and citizenship. They show how difficult it is to maintain these when a people have been subjugated and relegated to the margins of the society of which they are a part. Wilson dramatizes the constant negotiation involved in maintaining dignity and subjectivity in the face of objectification and discrimination. To do so requires, against all odds, maintaining a moral compass, a vibrant community, and finding a way to own the ground on which one stands. Ⓐ

August Wilson's "American Century Cycle" (*Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, *The Piano Lesson*, *Two Trains Running*, *Seven Guitars*, *Jitney*, *Gem of the Ocean*, and *Radio Golf*). By August Wilson. Executive Produced by Indira Etwaroo, Ph.D. Executor of August Wilson Estate: Constanza Romero. Artistic Director: Ruben Santiago-Hudson. Associate Artistic Director: Stephen McKinley Henderson. Directors: Phylicia Rashād, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Michele Shay, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Kenny Leon, and Marion McClinton. Audio Theater Producer: Arthur Yorinks. Composers: Dwight Andrews, Kathryn Bostic, Branford Marsalis, and Bill Sims, Jr. Set Design by Hollis King. Lighting Design by Jeanette Yew. Project Manager: Nikki Johnson. Dramaturgy by Jade King Carroll and Nicole A. Watson. Featuring: Joniece Abbott-Pratt, Eric Lenox Abrams, Jerome Preston Bates, Harvey Blanks, Chadwick Boseman, Nile Bullock, J. Bernard Calloway, Rocky Carroll, Amari Cheatom, Anthony Chisholm, Rosalyn Coleman, Chuck Cooper, Keith David, Elisa Davis, Brandon Dirden, Jason Dirden, Aunjanue Ellis, Lou Ferguson, Cassandra Freeman, Barry Shabaka Henley, Taraji P. Henson, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Alexis Holt, Ron Cephas Jones, Joaquina Kulukango, January LaVoy, Eugene Lee, Mandi Masden, S. Epatha Merkerson, Owiso Odera, Roscoe Orman, Brenda Pressley, Phylicia Rashād, Roger Robinson, Roslyn Ruff, Ruben Santiago-Hudson, Raynor Scheine, Keith Randolph Smith, Ray Anthony Thomas, John Douglas Thompson, Tracie Thoms, and James A. Williams. At The Greene Space (streamed live over the web at www.thegreenespace.org at time of performance). 26 August – 28 September.

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