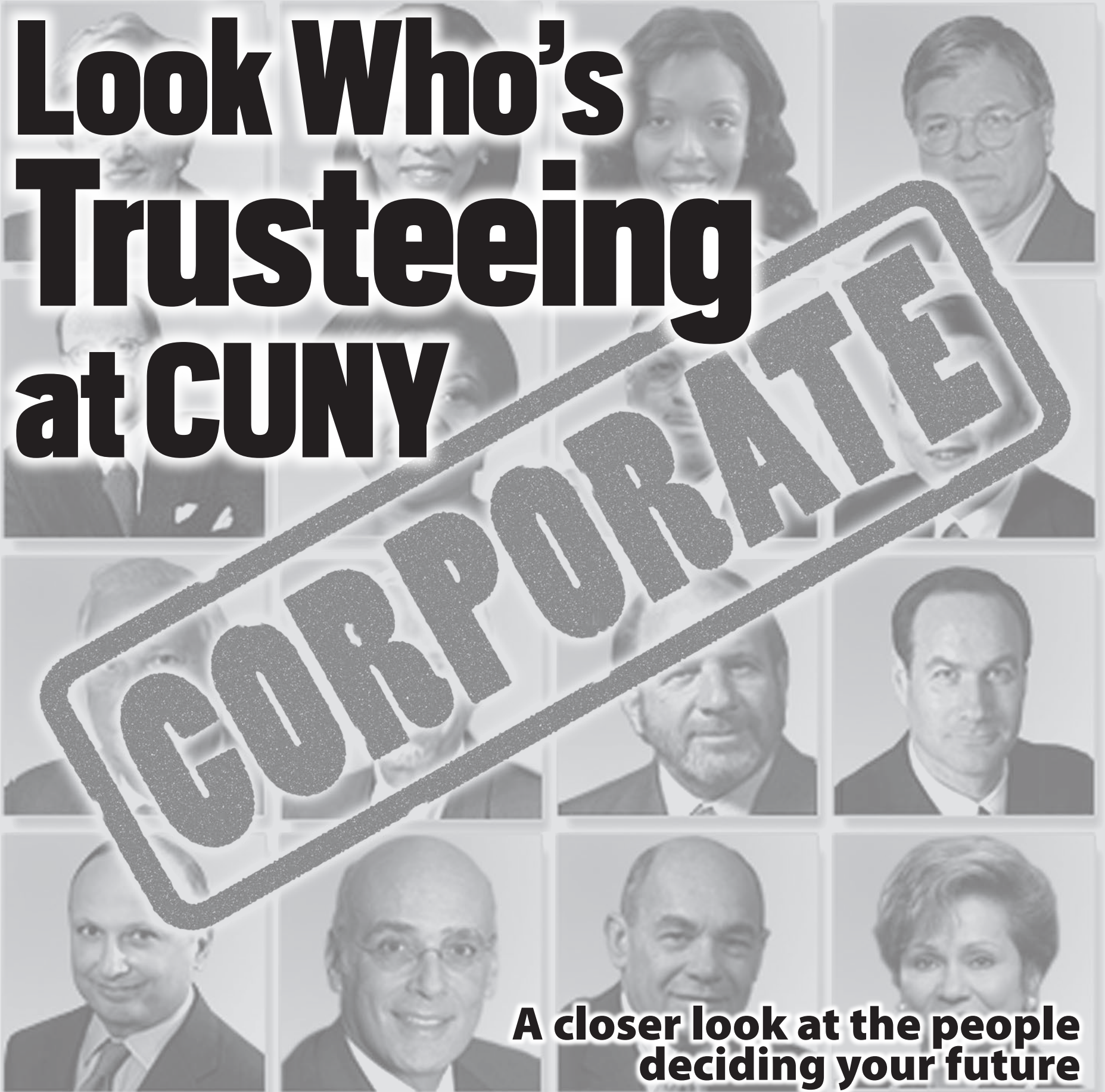




Profiteers, Union-Busters, Witch Hunters...

Look Who's Trusteeing at CUNY



**A closer look at the people
deciding your future**

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Shocking Wall Street

Disaster Capitalism and the Promise of Progressive Reform

"Buy the sky and sell the sky and lift your arms up/ to the sky/ and ask the sky and ask the sky/ don't fall on me."

— R.E.M.

"We must lay hold of the fact that economic laws are not made by nature. They are made by human beings."

— Franklin D. Roosevelt

In her prescient and controversial international bestseller *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), author Naomi Klein explains how the free market capitalism espoused by the likes of Milton Friedman and other Chicago School economists feeds and capitalizes upon political crisis and environmental disaster. According to Klein, national governments and international economic organizations like the WTO rely heavily upon the power of crisis, shock, and disaster to help wipe the economic slate clean and pave the way for radical free market reforms that in times of stability would face stiff resistance from the public. Klein compares these unholy and unscrupulous practices to the mind control and shock treatment research performed by Doctor Ewan Cameron and the CIA in the 1950s.

"Friedman's mission, like Cameron's" Klein says "rested on a dream of reaching back to a state of 'natural' health, when all was in balance, before human interferences created distorting patterns. Where Cameron dreamed of returning the human mind to that pristine state, Friedman dreamed of depatterning societies, of returning them to a state of pure capitalism, cleansed of all interruptions — government regulations, trade barriers and entrenched interests."

This disturbing and apt comparison between CIA mind control experiments and free market ideologies is at the heart of Klein's argument, and her book provides the theoretical framework for a salient critique of our response to the current economic meltdown on Wall Street. Like September 11th and Afghanistan, Iraq and Hurricane Katrina, this latest American disaster is being exploited by those in power with the implicit goal of furthering a right wing free market ideological agenda of private, deregulated, militarized globalization.

Although incredibly unpopular among ordinary common sense Americans (whose class consciousness seems to be growing exponentially the longer this crisis carries on) the proposed \$700 billion bailout package for US investment banks is just the beginning of a series of corpo-

rate giveaways and radical reforms that could be in the works. "The dumping of private debt into the public coffers" Klein wrote on her blog, naomiklein.org,

is only stage one of the current shock. The second comes when the debt crisis currently being created by this bailout becomes the excuse to privatize social security, lower corporate taxes and cut spending on the poor. A President McCain would embrace these policies willingly. A President Obama would come under huge pressure from the think tanks and the corporate media to abandon his campaign promises and embrace austerity and 'free-market stimulus'.

Despite the fact that Klein fails to mention here that McCain and Obama both support the October 1 version of the bailout package being sent to the senate, the seeming prescience of her argument is impressive. Indeed, as of October 1, what began as a straightforward bailout package that was supposed to help investment banks stay afloat, had already been manipulated by Democratic and Republican lawmakers to include a series of further tax cuts of \$100 billion totally unrelated to the economic crisis. It is clear that Klein is right and that we need to keep our eyes on the big picture here and be wary of what's in store, but her solution to this crisis is problematic. According to Klein the answer to this dilemma is pretty straightforward: we have to organize to resist this bailout and the subsequent reforms that it foretells. This is a good beginning, perhaps, but, like the proposed bailout package that sparked this debate, it begs the question: is this really our only option? Is the progressive left so weak, demoralized, and ineffectual that it has been reduced to little more than reactionary protest? Of course, we need to resist any government attempts to use this economic mess as an excuse for consolidating corporate and private wealth and power, but who says the left can't play the shock doctrine game just as well as the right?

Instead of merely resisting the right's attempt to exploit this crisis shouldn't the progressive left be exploring the opportunities inherent in this crisis? Isn't it precisely in moments of economic and political crisis that ordinary citizens become organized, energized, and engaged? Hasn't it been shown time and time again that the more precarious their economic conditions, the more sympathetic the US public is to ideas of government reform, reconstruction, and public assistance? Bleeding Kansas, the great depression, and the civil rights movement are all

instances where progressive reformers used the political and economic crises of their times (the bitter divisions over slavery, the economic collapse of the early thirties, and the racial conflicts of the fifties and sixties) to help push through a series of social and economic reforms that furthered and improved the freedom, equality, prosperity, and health of vast portions of its citizens. The abolition of slavery, banking reform, the introduction of social security, and the 1964 civil rights act, to name only a few of the most important changes, were all achieved through the creation and/or manipulation of crisis and social unrest.

Now is not the time to simply resist: the left must become proactive and demanding. Although it is important that we ask our representatives in the house and senate to unequivocally vote no on this bill, now is the time to go even further than that and push congress to take state control of these banks so that the public coffers will not be wasted on aid to the nation's wealthiest and most powerful citizens. Now is the time to ask congress for further regulation of investment markets so that investor exploitation of bubble markets does not negatively impact ordinary investors and pension funds. Now is the time to ask congress to do something about the hundreds of thousands of impending foreclosures by offering more legislation that protects homeowners from foreclosure and helps them readjust their mortgages. Rather than quibbling over a clearly flawed bill, now is the time to encourage congress and the next president to take visionary action along the lines of Roosevelt's unrelenting struggle for a New Deal for Americans.

Just as Klein described the proposed bailout as the first nefarious step in a series of free market reforms; increased regulation and public ownership of these investment banks could be the first step in a series of public takeovers, from the re-publicization of electric companies, prisons, and schools, to the public seizure of oil and gas fields, to the creation of a clean energy works program. This kind of necessary and radical readjustment, the kind of visionary change we need to save us from a future of even greater crisis and despair, will never happen so long as both our political and progressive leaders continue to play the game of reactionary politics. Quibbling over compromises in an already compromised bill, will get us nowhere. ☹



Three Days in the West Bank

NIRIT BEN-ARI

One Saturday morning in August, eight human rights activists were on their way to visit villagers attacked by paramilitaries. Earlier that morning armed paramilitaries attacked a young man while grazing his flocks outside of his village, and beat him up. The activists had decided to travel to the village to collect testimony. Upon driving toward the village, they were stopped by the military and were told that they would not be able to enter the entire area where the village is located, because it was declared a “closed military zone” for the entire day. The activists asked for the reason behind the closure of the area. The answer: “You are the reason, you are trouble makers.” But it was the paramilitary that beat up the villager, the activists think, so why are they allowed to travel freely and not us? No answer was given. While they waited by the check point, cars passed by; everyone was allowed into the “closed military zone” except the activists.

Did this happen in Tibet? Colombia? Or East Timor? Indeed, should it have happened in occupied Tibet, the entire world would have been on its feet calling to prohibit the Chinese from hosting the Olympic Games. But it happened in South Mount Hebron in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The activists — Israelis; the villagers — Palestinians; the military — the Israeli Defense Force, and the paramilitaries — armed settlers. No calls from the U.S. government were heard to protest the repression of political activists.

I was in that group of activists traveling from Jerusalem to Hirbat Susia in South Mount Hebron that day on August 16, 2008, when we were stopped on the way by reserve soldiers in the Israeli military. We were told that the entire area was a closed military zone. The soldiers had set up a check point on the road, and would not let us pass.

In the West Bank, there are two types of license plates: yellow license plates for citizens of Israel, and white license plates for Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories. White plate cars are stopped at every check point regularly and can wait sometimes hours for the green light to go. Cars with yellow plates are rarely stopped. Unless, that is, they belong to human rights activists.

The soldiers were probably waiting just for us. When we asked for the official reason for the “closed military zone” order, the reserve captain began explaining to us that “although a Jew can go everywhere in the land of Israel...” But before completing his explanation, the captain was interrupted, by our cynical laughter. This outburst offended the captain, and he refused to continue. We begged him to tell us why the area was a closed military zone. But the captain would no longer talk with us; he was deeply hurt.

So we set to call some members of Knesset (MKs) and ask them to try to rebuke the order so we can get through with our mission to visit the peasants in

south Mount Hebron who were beaten by Jewish settlers earlier that morning. The MK we called promised to try to help. We waited for about three hours, seeing many yellow license plates drive into the closed military zone. Finally, when the answer arrived that even the MK could do nothing that morning, we turned and went back.

South Mount Hebron is the home of thousands of peasants whose livelihood is based on farming and grazing. These peasants preserve an ancient lifestyle of residency in caves and shacks. After the 1948 and 1967 wars their access to the lands was severely restricted, and during the 1970s, large areas were declared closed military zones, although the military hardly used these areas. In the 1980s, the Israeli government declared these lands “state lands” and started constructing settlements on them. During these years, the military sporadically expelled residents of the area, and life for the remaining residents was complicated by occasional prohibitions on farming and grazing. Starting in November 1999, the military began destroying and sealing caves and shacks. Hundreds of residents were expelled. Following the petition of human rights organizations to the Israeli Supreme Court, the residents were allowed to return to their homes in the spring of 2000. However, after the killing of a settler by Palestinians in 2001, the Civil Administration decided, in cooperation with the military, to expel residents again (including residents that were returned after the Supreme Court decision), and to destroy homes in five villages in the area. In addition, the military and the Civil Administration poured sand and stones into water wells, and destroyed shacks, fences, and ovens. Today, the number of Jewish settlers has increased in the Carmel, Susiya, Shani, Livne, and other area settlements. Palestinian kids on their way to school are regularly harassed, and peasants who brave the settlers and go grazing and farming are occasionally beat up. The police and military often neglect calls from peasants, and occasionally arrest settlers for a few hours at a time. The settlements in south Mount Hebron are considered illegal according to international law, particularly outlined in Security Council resolution 446 and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

A month earlier, on July 18, I went to visit the city of Hebron in a tour organized by *Shalom Achshav* (Peace Now). The city of Hebron is the largest city in the West Bank, with approximately 166,000 inhabitants. Hebron is an exceptional case among Palestinian cities because Jewish settlers live inside the city itself. It is home to 400 of the most fundamental religious groups of Jewish settlers, who live in the center of the city under the protection of the army and the police, who regularly terrorize the Palestinian soldiers and police. The daily reality in downtown Hebron is that of settler rampages, checkpoints,

shop closings, no-go zones, long curfews during Jewish holidays, and house demolitions. According to *B’tselem*, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, settlers in the city have routinely abused the city’s Palestinian residents. Abuse often takes the form of physical assaults, including beatings with clubs, stones, and the throwing of refuse, sand, water, chlorine, and empty bottles. Settlers have destroyed shops and doors, committed thefts, and chopped down fruit trees. Settlers have also been involved in gunfire, attempts to run people over, poisoning of a water well, breaking into homes, spilling hot liquid on the face of a Palestinian, and the killing of a young Palestinian girl. Soldiers are generally positioned on every street corner in and near the settlement points, but in most cases they do nothing to protect Palestinians from the settlers’ attacks. The police also fail to enforce the law and rarely bring assailants to justice.

Regular Israelis know very little about the reality in Hebron; they hold dear to the illusion that the settlers are terrorized by Palestinians and that they should be protected by the army. That’s the reason why *Shalom Achshav*, the biggest peace movement in Israel advocating the dismantlement of settlements and the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, organizes tours to Hebron. Their goal is to show Israelis what’s happening.

On the morning of my tour, four buses departed from Tel Aviv, and one more bus joined the group when it reached Jerusalem. We were escorted by police. We traveled to Hebron, where we were stopped by the military before getting close to the city. Hebron is now a closed military zone, we were told. The reason? The settlers attacked another tour (by *Shovrim Shtika* — Breaking the Silence — an organization of former fighters in the Israeli military who served in the West Bank, who have decided to tell the Israeli public what they have seen and done during their military service) with eggs earlier that day, and a fight had developed. The army decided to deny our tour entry in order to avoid more clashes. The settlers’ aggression was well-rewarded — they managed to expel all witnesses to the violence in Hebron and none of them was arrested or expelled.

But I refused to be deterred by these many obstacles and I decided to join a group of young activists in their weekly protest against the separation fence partitioning the villages in Ramallah. On a hot Friday morning, August 15, I went with some veteran activists to the village of Bil’in, in the West Bank. Upon our arrival, we were greeted by friendly local Palestinians, who knew all the veteran activists by name, and were delighted to meet more Israelis who came to show solidarity with their struggle.

Bil’in is located four kilometers east of the Green Line. In January 2005, the Israeli military started constructing

the so-called Separation Fence around Bil’in, effectively separating the village from 60 percent of its farming land. A new neighborhood of Modi’in Il-lit, an Israeli settlement, is designated to be built on this land. In September 2007, the Israeli Supreme Court ordered the government to redraw the path of the wall because the current route was deemed “highly prejudicial” to the villagers of Bil’in. Chief Justice Dorit Beinisch wrote in the ruling “We were not convinced that it is necessary for security-military reasons to retain the current route that passes on Bil’in lands.” Despite the ruling, the fence was not removed, and construction of Mattityahu East, another settlement close by, has continued on Bil’in land. Attorney Michael Sfard, an unwavering human rights lawyer in Israel, has recently sued Canadian companies involved in the construction of these neighborhoods in international courts. Although the fence has been completed, weekly protests continue in Bil’in, with dozens of Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists participating.

At around one that afternoon, the protest left from the middle of the village and headed toward the fence. We held Palestinian flags and posters of Mahmud Darwish, the renowned Palestinian poet who died earlier that week. Palestinian activists yelled slogans in Arabic, and the Israeli and International activists repeated them. Some Spanish activists started calling “Viva viva viva, viva Palestina!” and the Palestinian hosts gladly joined in. A few other Israeli activists, including myself, stayed in the back and observed the protest.

When we reached the fence, some brave activists went close and repeated some of the slogans. Fully armed soldiers looked at them from the other side of the fence, mounting their weapons against the activists. No verbal communication occurred between the soldiers and the protesters. Then a big white truck showed up and started tossing a white chemical at the protesters. It was “Skunk,” a new deterrent devised by the Israeli police force for the purpose of protest dispersal. “Skunk” is a chemical that stick to clothes and skin and smells worse than a skunk. The chemical even reached us in the back of the protest, but happily, the wind was against us and the noxious chemical blew back at the soldiers. Some mayhem followed and more Skunk was dispersed. To this the soldiers added tear gas, and soon we were smelling awful and crying from the gas. Making matters worse, the sun was in the middle of the sky and there was no place to hide. This hell-like confrontation continued for another hour until both activists and soldiers got tired and retreated.

The fence was not dismantled that day, as the Supreme Court ordered. The villagers returned to their homes and we drove back to Tel Aviv. That afternoon, we had humus for lunch. 🍷

Teaching Writing Intensively (and Often)

JAMES HOFF

It happens at the beginning of every semester. Tucked into my tiny mailbox are a stack of about fifty blue and white student evaluations. The scantron sections of these evaluations, where students “rate” their professors in several categories on a scale of one to seven, never seem especially helpful to me. After all, it is inevitable that some classes will go better than others from semester to semester. And even when the students are responding to a specific prompt, such as “was the course material presented clearly” it is only natural that many of them are going to respond to their overall sense of the course, which is not limited to my instruction but includes their relationship to the course material — whether or not they “like” poetry, for instance — and the experiences, good and bad, that they have had with their fellow classmates. These evaluations, more cynically, as has been shown by many studies, are also often informed by the students’ own sense of whether or not they will receive the grade they wanted or feel they deserve. Because I am a demanding instructor and a moderately tough grader I often feel like I am actively sabotaging my student evaluation scores, which regularly tend to be on the cusp of the departmental average.

As most of us would agree, however, school is not about teaching, but about learning, and I have a feeling that many “good” teachers are not necessarily helping their students to be good learners. Often the students themselves are the last ones to realize this, especially in literature classes where quantitative measurements are impossible. How many times, after all, have we heard our students say to each other: “you should totally take a class with professor so and so, he’s a really cool guy”? For me, the point of teaching has always been

very simple: make sure that the students think and learn, and it is the open response sections of the student evaluations that I actually find most helpful when re-evaluating the methods I use to achieve this goal. Sadly, most students skip this part of the evaluation, but those who do respond often offer a constructive view of their own experiences and struggles in the class. Many students say nice things, some occasionally complain, and, less frequently, others express anger. I have come to realize that those expressing anger are usually unhappy about the fact that the course was too difficult, that the reading was too boring, and most often, that there was just too much writing. In fact, one of the most common laments I have heard from my literature students (who are generally required to write two 10 page essays over the semester and regular 1-2 page informal responses for each class) is that it is unfair for me to require so much writing in a class that is not “writing intensive.”

This argument is perplexing. Although there is a part of me that sympathizes with this complaint — after all, CUNY students have incredibly busy lives outside of school — I cannot help but ask: if these students really feel this way, what does that say about their expectations about college and college level writing? And what do those expectations mean for the future of higher education more broadly? Should we, after all, require less work when our students complain, or should we hold our ground? Is less work going to help them learn more and is the amount of work required for a class really up for negotiation? Where do we draw the line? And how much writing is the right amount of writing?

But these student complaints also raise a question that is specific to the work that so many of us do as writing and communication fellows at CUNY,

and that is: has the creation and promotion of writing and communication intensive classes actually done as much harm as it has good? After all, aren’t writing and communication the very means of learning, and aren’t good writing and communications skills the hallmarks of a liberal education? Shouldn’t every class then be writing and communication intensive?

Despite the labors of countless writing program directors overseeing vast armies of Composition and Rhetoric PhDs, there are always those students who seem to have a hostile relationship to writing: they don’t like it and they want to do as little of it as possible. Perhaps this resistance is natural for some people; as Frank O’Hara says of poetry: “if they don’t need poetry bully for them, I like the movies too. And Only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the Americans are better than the movies.” To this I would add Stevens, but I digress. No one said students have to like writing, and bully for them if they would prefer to become filmmakers or beauticians, stock brokers or Broadway dancers, but in a liberal university that values expression, eloquence, and clarity of thought, they should at least be asked to think, write, and communicate. And they should be asked to do it often. How well they choose to write and with how much love and enthusiasm is up to them. Writing and communication should not be a requirement, but a method and an expectation, like doing the assigned reading, or preparing for an exam. We should ask students to write not so we can evaluate them, but so that they can put their ideas into words, helping to improve their writing skills while simultaneously reinforcing the course material and making it their own. To expect students to fulfill a writing requirement or to fulfill a communication requirement just two or three during their college career, only underscores the idea that the classes emphasizing these skills are another hoop to jump through, like the general arts and science requirements: “Rocks for Jocks” geology classes or “Music Appreciation.”

I have always thought that writing intensive curricula were a good idea in principle, and still do. However, it is becoming increasingly clear to me that the way we have used writing and communication intensive classes are maybe not the best way to get students to learn. Instead of spending our time developing specific writing and communication intensive courses, which, in my experience are all-too-often not very intensive at all (some in-class writing and a few extra pages a semester tend to qualify as writing intensive for some courses), administrations should also be working with students and faculty to devise college-wide expectations for the kinds of writing, speaking, and interpersonal communication that should be practiced in all courses as often as possible. Courses in the humanities and social sciences, for instance, should automatically be designated as writing intensive, and professors should be encouraged to assign a minimum amount of regular written work for each. Likewise, instructors in professional programs and the sciences should be encouraged to integrate more speaking and interpersonal communication activities into their classrooms.

It seems clear to me that it has become all too easy for students to regard writing and communication as something distinct from the learning process, as a requirement to be fulfilled rather than a method of learning. Writing and communication intensive curricula, by compartmentalizing these activities, only reinforce the false dichotomy between writing and learning. If students are to learn to write, they must be required to write to learn. The question we should really be asking ourselves is how we can get students to recognize and embrace the idea that writing is not something you do for a grade at the end of the semester or during a written exam, but rather that it is an essential part of the learning process itself. Requiring students to write only in designated “writing” classes undermines this important fact and reinforces the often problematic relationship that many students have with writing. Ⓐ

The CUNY Graduate Center
Postcolonial Studies Group Colloquium Series 2008-2009

The Postcolonial Studies Group presents:

Ashley Dawson

The Graduate Center & Staten Island College, CUNY

**Another Country: The Postcolonial State,
Environmentality, and Landless People's Movements**

Oct 10th AT 2 P.M.
CUNY Graduate Center, Room 5409
All are welcome.

Ashley Dawson is an Associate Professor of English at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY) and at the College of Staten Island, where he specializes in postcolonial studies. He is the author of *Mongrel Nation: Diasporic Culture and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (University of Michigan Press, 2007) and co-editor of *Exceptional State: Contemporary U.S. Culture and the New Imperialism* (Duke University Press, 2007), *Dangerous Professors: Academic Freedom, Corporate Culture, and the Future of U.S. Higher Education* (University of Michigan Press, forthcoming), and *Altered States: Prospects for Radical Democracy* (Routledge, forthcoming). At present, he is completing a study of colonial and postcolonial urban culture and form entitled *City Culture and Imperialism*, as well as a collective biography of the generation of anti-colonial intellectuals who gathered in Britain during the 1930s, to be titled *The Rise of the Black Internationale*.

The CUNY Graduate Center is located at 365 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016. The Postcolonial Studies Group is a chartered organization of the Doctoral Students’ Council.

Questions? Email Kate Moss at katenoelmoss@gmail.com.

Graduate Student Health Insurance Is on Its Way — But Not For All

RENEE MCGARRY AND JESSIE GOLDSTEIN

Beginning in January 2009, many students at the Graduate Center will have access to health insurance through the NY State Health Insurance Program (NYSHIP). Many of us have fought hard for this basic right, and it would seem that our efforts have been rewarded. The Adjunct Project is appreciative of all the hard work that has been put into this by the administration and by the Professional Staff Congress.

While we are pleased that many students at the GC will finally have access to this basic human right, it is important for us to maintain a critical perspective on these new benefits, and to realize that the fight for health insurance at the Graduate Center is far from over.

First the good news: the NYSHIP plan will cost individual students about \$10 a month, and family coverage will cost about \$92 monthly. The coverage is relatively comprehensive, and even includes dental and vision coverage. For many student-workers at the Graduate Center, NYSHIP will provide rather adequate health coverage.

There are, however, a few important limitations to this new health coverage that must be noted. The plan's drug benefit caps at \$2,500 per year, which means that any students who require expensive medications for chronic illness may find the coverage to be insufficient. The plan also does not cover routine health exams, except to offer a \$60 reimbursement once every two years. Lastly, this plan is, like all health insurance in the U.S., still part of an overly corporatized health system where patient-doctor interactions are minimal, and each of us is one illness away from a Kafka-esque trail of paper

work, automated messages and bureaucratic procedures that may very well bring you to the brink of sanity... Fortunately mental health services are covered, up to 15 visits per year.

The Graduate Center will be joining a group health plan that is already in existence, and has been created specifically for graduate and teaching assistant employees of SUNY. These employees are represented by the Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU) whose contract sets out the terms of their healthcare coverage. Since CUNY will be piggybacking on their plan, as of now we will have no power to negotiate the terms of our health coverage, and will be relying on the work of GSEU in their negotiations with their employer.

This however may be able to change as we move forward, and the Adjunct Project will continue to monitor the situation closely.

The most glaring problem with the coverage that we are being given is the limited pool of Graduate Center students that it will cover. Only doctoral students employed as a Graduate Assistant or as an adjunct will be eligible. This means that all MA students are ineligible, as are all students who do not work for CUNY in one of these eligible job titles.

Throughout this past year, the Adjunct Project has fought for health insurance for *all* members of the GC community. Both the PSC and the CUNY administration have responded to these calls by subtly modifying this demand, telling us, and the GC community, how they are committed to the same goals as us, to providing health insurance to all *working* graduate students; in other words, to limit this benefit to only a portion of graduate students at the GC. The PSC

claims that its hands were tied — that legally it was only able to bargain on behalf of its members, and therefore could only work on a deal to provide health insurance to graduate students covered by their collective agreement.

This however, does not explain why MA students, who are just as much members of the PSC as doctoral students, have been excluded. The administration, on the other hand, has none of these limitations at all, and has never once justified its decision to work only with the PSC in developing a health care plan for graduate students, well aware of the limitations that such an approach would entail. The end result is a partial victory — health insurance for some graduate students, but not all.

The Adjunct Project continues to hold the position that all members of the Graduate Center community should have affordable access to health insurance, and as this new coverage is unrolled for many but not all of us, we will not stop pushing for this goal. Our position can be summarized by three goals.

1. To expand existing coverage by eliminating the drug benefit cap or by augmenting the NYSHIP insurance with a secondary policy that kicks in once the drug cap is reached.
2. To expand access to this coverage to all graduate students at the GC.
3. To establish a process whereby ALL graduate students and/or their representatives can have a substantive roll in the ongoing administration of health care benefits at the GC. This means that representation by the PSC will not be sufficient, as they are only able to represent GC students who are also covered by their collective agreement. ☹

cuny news IN BRIEF

CUNY Hits the Streets to Protest Budget Cuts

In answer to Governor David Paterson's slash and burn tactics against CUNY and its 450,000 students, members of the CUNY community took to the streets in protest.

On Monday, September 23 protesters marched from the Graduate Center campus to Paterson's Madison

Avenue New York City Offices in a public demonstration of dissatisfaction with Paterson's \$51 million in cuts to the CUNY budget.

Paterson proposed the spending rollback in August to help alleviate the stresses of New York States \$6.4 billion deficit. State legislators rubberstamped the proposal shortly thereafter, signaling their intention to protect private interests at the expense of public education. While some within the Democratic-led majority have called on Paterson to impose a "millionaires tax" on the state's wealthiest citizens, the governor has steadfastly rejected this possibility in favor of deeper cuts to social service spending.

Fiterman Demolition Delayed

Not to be outdone by the abuse suffered under the Paterson administration, CUNY has engaged in acts of political hostage-taking against the city according to municipal authorities.

Fiterman Hall, a downtown campus site of BMCC located directly across from the World Trade Center, was severely damaged on September 11, 2001 but has remained standing in the seven years since, despite being unfit for occupation.

Although the city has demonstrated willingness to contribute funds for demolition, CUNY purportedly has been sitting on its hands in the

matter in order to extract an additional \$80 million from city coffers before it tears the site down.

"It's ridiculous," says Deputy Mayor Robert Lieber. "There's no reason that the building is not coming down."

Unsurprisingly, CUNY disagrees, arguing that the seven year wait has been in the name of public safety. In mid-September, CUNY issued a press release claiming that the demolition has yet to occur because administrators had yet to receive permission from the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Our focus continues to be on moving the Fiterman Hall project forward as safely and quickly as possible," a CUNY spokesman told *Downtown Express* newspaper. "We are working closely with city and state officials to expedite this stage of the project and beyond."

Peter Pantaleo Appointed to CUNY Board of Trustees

Ever mindful of CUNY's best welfare, Governor David Paterson appointed Peter Pantaleo to the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York for a term that ends in June 2015. According to the CUNY press office, Pantaleo — a partner at the international law firm DLA PIPER — principally focuses his practice on "advising employers in complex, politically sensitive labor and employment matters."

If this piece of information fails to raise the eyebrows, it should also be noted that Pantaleo received the modest title of "New York Super Lawyer" from state authorities in 2007.

For more on this rising star in the CUNY universe, see "Look Who's Trusteeing at CUNY," in this issue (page 9). ☹



Adjunct activist Abe Walker demonstrates outside the Grad Center on Sept. 23.

PHOTO: CARL LINDSKOOG

grad life

The Battle of St. Paul



PHOTO CREDIT: THE NYC INDEPENDENT MEDIA CENTER

ABE WALKER

“If the Hanoi Hilton could not break John McCain’s resolve to do what is best for his country, you can be sure the angry Left never will.” — *President George Bush, addressing the RNC via satellite feed, September 1, 2008*

“I Am The Angry Left.” — *T-Shirt seen at demonstration outside RNC, September 2, 2008*

For casual observers on the east coast, the most enduring memory of the 2008 Republican National Convention is probably the chorus of Republicans who interrupted McCain’s acceptance speech chanting “Drill, Baby, Drill” while pumping their fists up and down, like a sea of oil rigs on the Alaskan tundra. For 19-year-old Elliot Hughes, one of 800 protesters arrested during the four days of street protests outside the convention hall, the memories are likely to be somewhat different. Speaking at a press conference immediately following his release from jail, he told reporters, “six or seven officers came into my cell, and they took — one officer punched me in the face.... And the officer grabbed me by the head, slammed my head on the ground [points to a visible gash on his forehead]. And I was bleeding everywhere. They put a bag over my head that had a gag on it. And they used pain compliance tactics on me for about an hour and a half.” When asked about the incident, Ramsey County Sherriff Bob Fletcher neither confirmed nor denied the allegations, but noted Hughes was “extremely disruptive in jail,” and “it took some force to control him.”

Elliot’s experience was but one of the more dramatic examples of an exceedingly brutal police reaction to militant protests that turned downtown St. Paul into a virtual war zone for four days and nights. While in recent years most police departments have become increasingly reliant on de-escalation tactics and so-called “soft” repression, the RNC seemed to signal the reversal of this trend. The RNC certainly marked the most aggressive policing of a US demonstration since

the 1999 WTO Riots in Seattle, and probably the most fiercely contested political party meeting since the infamous 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago. Police unleashed their full arsenal of “less-lethal” weaponry, deploying tear gas cartridges, pepper spray canisters, smoke bombs, concussion grenades, and rubber bullets with little restraint, not to mention the liberal use of nightsticks. In one of the most widely reported incidents, police used snowplows and dumptrucks to trap a group of 300 protesters on a bridge, ordering them to lie on the pavement with their hands over their heads as they awaited arrest. Most disturbing, police seemed to deliberately target the alternative media, shutting down the offices of the Twin Cities Independent Media Center and raiding I-Witness Video — a NYC-based video journalist collective with a record of documenting police brutality at mass demonstrations — three times. Democracy Now radio broadcaster Amy Goodman was also arrested in the course of the demonstrations, along with two producers, one of whom was bloodied in the process.

A bit of context is necessary here: All major party conventions are now deemed National Special Security Events, which means they are allocated special funds and overseen by the Joint Terrorism Task Force — a partnership between the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security components (Coast Guard, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Secret Service) and state and local law enforcement. In preparation for the festivities, the city temporarily deputized 3,000 officers from across the state to supplement its 600 regular officers. Meanwhile, 1,200 members of the Minnesota National Guard — many fresh from a tour of Iraq — waited in the wings in case things got testy. To fund these expenditures, St. Paul asked for and received \$50 million from Congress. On top of that, the Republican National Committee had bought a \$10 million insurance policy from the St. Paul police, pledging to spend its own money to stop any civil rights lawsuits.

This insurance policy seemingly gave the police free license to engage in activities that were likely to get them sued. If past practice is any guide, the host city may eat some hefty fines, but not before harassing the crap out of the rabble with the aim of incarcerating them and/or intimidating and impoverishing them through legal fees and court appearances.

I attended the convention as a member of a political marching band known as the Rude Mechanical Orchestra. Our role was mainly ancillary: we would stand on the sidewalk and pump out tunes to diffuse tense situations while our friends in the street did the dirty work. Our repertoire ranges from a cover of 80’s glam-metal band Twisted Sister’s “We’re Not Gonna Take It” to a reimagining of Beyonce’s “Crazy In Love” (with anti-war lyrics). Oh, and we have some originals too. We rolled up to St. Paul in a veggie-oil-powered school bus, after having logged 1500 miles en route from New York. Upon our arrival in the Minnesota capitol, we were swiftly greeted by St. Paul’s finest, who interrogated our driver as part of a “routine traffic stop.” On day two of the convention, our bus was surrounded and barricaded by riot police for a four hour stretch, until they realized they had no justification to detain us. Both times, we got off scot free. Others were not so lucky.

The ironically named RNC Welcoming Committee was formed as “an information and logistical framework for radical resistance to the RNC.” The WC did not actually organize the demonstration, but instead provided a support structure for protesters coming to the Twin Cities. But because the WC was the public face of the demonstrations, police quickly labeled it an “organized criminal enterprise” with plans “to utilize criminal activities to disrupt and stop the RNC.” Even before the festivities began, the local police were already conducting preemptive strikes against known organizers. In mid-August the WC opened a “convergence center” — a space for protesters to gather, eat, share resources, and build networks of solidarity. On Friday, August 29th, 2008, as folks were finishing dinner and sitting down to a movie, the Ramsey County

Sheriff's Department stormed in, guns drawn, ordering everyone to the ground. This night-time raid resulted in seized property (mostly literature), and after being cuffed, searched, and ID'd, more than sixty individuals inside were released. The next morning, on Saturday, August 30th, the Sheriff's Department executed search warrants on three houses, seizing personal and common household items and arresting five suspected leaders. An affidavit released several days later revealed that police operatives had successfully infiltrated the WC as early as one year before the convention, gathering information that led to the preemptive raids and arrests. (Many of the allegations in the affidavit are patently false and strain the imagination, such as the claim that anarchists planned to kidnap delegates and blow up tunnels leading to the convention center). A spokesperson for the National Lawyers Guild, which defended some of the protesters, told the press, "This is a political prosecution in its purest form, because no one is actually accused of physically doing anything that would be violent... They're being prosecuted specifically for their political activities and what they advocated."

Although some of the more prominent organizers had been taken out, the WC's decentralized structure made it invulnerable to decapitation. The WC had divided Saint Paul into 7 sectors, so that organizing bodies throughout the country could coordinate their actions and blockade as many access points as possible. Operating in small, autonomous cells known as affinity groups, protesters with the stated goal of disrupting the convention blockaded highway on-ramps and busy intersections and destroyed corporate property. Others improvised barricades out of street signs and newspaper bins. At one intersection, protesters dragged a dumpster into the street and overturned it, filling the street with trash and debris. Peace Officers from the nearby permitted rally removed the dumpster from the street and set it upright on the curb, only to watch it get dragged into the street again minutes later. This sequence was repeated at least three times. Elsewhere, a car was driven into the center of

a busy intersection, diagonally blocking traffic from both directions under a banner reading: NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR. EAT THE RICH. FEED THE POOR. A video circulated on YouTube shows a protester jumping an officer from behind as he attempts to make an arrest. (The officer subsequently retreats empty-handed). On the afternoon of September 4, thousands of Twin Cities youth walked out of their high schools and colleges in a citywide student strike against the Republican Convention, organized by Youth Against War and Racism.

Despite threats and public recriminations from the mayor and the superintendent, many high schools across the metropolitan region were reportedly shuttered. Although the heavily defended security perimeter immediately surrounding the convention hall was never breached, delegate busses from Connecticut and Alabama were delayed and Democratic pundit Donna Brazile was accidentally hit with pepper spray.

The award for "most creative protest tactic" goes to "Bash Back!," a Chicago-based collective of trans-folk, queer youth, and anarcha-feminists clad in pink and blue, many brandishing magic wands and some with fairy wings. When confronted by the members of the incendiary anti-homosexual Westboro Baptist Church, the queer bloc chanted "We're here, we're queer. We're anarchists, we'll fuck you up!" while pantomiming gay sex acts, much to the consternation of the churchgoers. The reward for "most idiotic slogan" goes to the neo-Trotskyite Spartacist League, who raised placards advocating "Unconditional Defense of the Deformed Chinese Workers State against Imperialist Counterrevolution."

Of course, all this was lost to readers of the *New York Times*, who had to turn to page 18 to find any protest coverage at all. The media, for its part, was mainly bewildered. The local FOX News affiliate reported: "At every turn, the peaceful protesters were overshadowed by the anarchists, who left a trail of vandalism in their wake, without cause or ideology, leaving police to wonder, 'what's still to come?'" (Ap-

parently, those who identify ideologically with the anarchist tradition are "without ideology"). Another naïve television reporter asked a member of my band whether we were Obama supporters. To be sure, the convention attracted the usual mix of liberals, NGOs, and social democrats, many of whom still have illusions in Obama or the Greens, but their endless speechifying and permitted marches were overshadowed by more disruptive groups. The mainstream American left, in its pitiful state, cannot see beyond the bounds of party politics. History shows we can't vote our way out of a war by backing the least offensive candidate.

At press time, eight individuals face charges of Conspiracy to Commit Riot in Furtherance of Terrorism, a 2nd degree felony that carries the possibility of 7½ years in prison under a "terrorism enhancement" clause normally reserved for prisoners of war. The last use of such charges in Minnesota was in 1918, when organizers with the Industrial Workers of the World on the Iron Range were charged with 'criminal syndicalism' for organizing unions. This comparison is surprisingly apt. Then, like now, we were reeling from an increasingly unpopular war in an era when dissent was equated with terrorism. In an open letter to allies, the defendants group writes, "These [conspiracy charges] create a convenient method for incapacitating activists, with the potential for diverting limited resources towards protracted legal battles and terrorizing entire communities into silence and inaction."

Finally, it seems, the American Left has shaken off the post-9/11 *malaise* that tamed street protests in the half decade immediately following the WTC attacks. Despite Bush's posturing, the Angry Left is back. In an email message circulated widely just after the convention, a collective associated with the demonstrations wrote, "the upsurge associated with the anti-globalization era was not a flash in the pan: if anything, we are stronger today than ten years ago." Who knows what the next years may bring...

To support RNC arrestees — monetarily or otherwise — visit www.RNC8.org. ☸

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OCTOBER 17-19 2008



The Nurse Practitioner Will See You Now

ROISIN O'CONNOR-MCGINN

More than a year after the departure of the previous nurse practitioner, the Graduate Center welcomes Adraenne Bowe to its ranks. She joined the GC earlier this semester.

A New York native who earned her nurse practitioner credentials on the west coast, Bowe became the second person to fill the role since the Student Health Services center was created in 1994.

Bowe's arrival will doubtless be welcomed with sighs of relief from many students. For the past academic year a list of off-site clinics has bridged the gap between nurses. But these clinics were no substitute for a friendly face and sympathetic ear. Nor did they do anything to quell the anxiety felt by many GC students, (according to Sharon Lerner 40% of GC students are uninsured) who perched nervously in an unfamiliar doctor's office petrified to ask, "How much is this going to cost?"

The omnipresent fear of the unin-

uate Center ID card hangs around her neck, showing the miniscule portrait of its owner, discernible by shoulder-length brown hair and blunt bangs.

Bowe hadn't always wanted to be a nurse. She studied English Literature at Vassar College and had aspirations of becoming a writer — dreams that she would still like to fulfill. "My interests were originally in writing and literature. It's not over yet," she said, smiling. Her penchant for writing, she believes, is in her genes. Her father is author Harry Bernstein, who published alongside William Carlos Williams and Gertrude Stein in the early thirties. More recently, at age 98, he became the oldest person to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship grant for his third book, "The Golden Willow." Bowe is currently reading an advance copy. "It won't take me long," she said. "His books are very easy to read. You just kind of slide through it."

By the time she decided to swap coasts Bowe had already elected nursing as her career. She attained her Mas-

patients on disease prevention as well as diagnosis of acute and chronic disorders.

In addition to her experience in urban primary care, Bowe also worked as part of a mobile health unit in rural northern California, providing care and physical exams to people who would not otherwise have had it. "That was a very interesting position, but it was state funded," she says. "Like all state funded programs it had its limits."

"Everybody wants to live in San Francisco. I've been trying to figure out why I came back!" she joked. "Nurse practitioner positions on the west coast were not plentiful," she said, identifying the reason for her return to New York. "The medical community was not as open to nurse practitioners simply because there was a lot of competition between doctors." When she speaks, Bowe does so deliberately, and when she laughs, it is self-conscious. Like an experienced listener she doesn't rush to fill the silence when conversation lulls.

fidant in her ability to provide the correct support and assistance needed at the GC. "I don't think anything is too small or too large to deal with," says Bowe. "There are specific things that people are concerned with. Immunizations are very big, as are screenings for certain conditions such as HIV or sexually transmitted diseases."

"I think staying well is the most important thing for students. If a student wants to come in because they want to discuss what they're eating or the fact that they're not sleeping well, that's something of importance and I can see them. They don't have to be sick."

Sharon Lerner, Director of Student Affairs, said wellness events would be organized over the coming months to help publicize the return of health services to the Graduate Center. She also emphasized that students should make their health a priority, particularly now that the service was back in place. "Despite repeated notices posted, sent to departments, people still don't necessarily add certain things to their schedules," said Lerner. Quoting Fall 2006 figures, Lerner estimated that 293 students had availed of student health services during that period. There are 4250 students enrolled for postgraduate study at the Graduate Center.

When asked why it took so long to appoint a new nurse practitioner, Ms. Lerner said the process had been exasperating. "I never surmised this could take as long as it did. I had it in my mind every day." Lerner, who was assisted in the recruitment process by a Mount Sinai Hospital, also felt that the Graduate Center was at a disadvantage since it does not have a hospital integrated with the university. "We're not a medical facility. We're a university," she notes, adding: "We're within a state bureaucracy. You can't go out and just make a contract with anyone when you're a state entity."

Despite the long and arduous process, Lerner feels that the appointment of Bowe, who was identified by Mount Sinai Hospital, was the best possible decision and one that could not have been arrived at in any other way. "It was always about finding the right person for the Graduate Center."

While both Lerner and Bowe are inclined to agree that the Student Health Services Center is no substitute for a good health insurance plan, both understand the implications in terms of cost and affordability. Lerner advocated speaking with Associate Director of Student Affairs, Elise M. Perram when evaluating health insurance options. "Sometimes you can have student policies that are hardly worth the money that you pay for them," said Lerner.

"It seems like there are a lot of choices but if you don't have the money, or you're going to get insurance that has such a high deductible that you will not use it, then I can't in good conscience encourage that," says Bowe. "I would urge students to come here and utilize this particular service and we'll do the best we can." Ⓐ



Nurse practitioner Adraenne Bowe assisting a GC student at the Health Services Center.

sured or underinsured is a problem of which Bowe is well aware. "I think one of the major challenges, here and everywhere, is the health care system," she said. "It's my goal to make this particular system and service as good as possible."

The issue of health insurance has been a consistent challenge in Bowe's career, which spans almost four decades. "Patients are basically put in the position of being commodities and the provider is put into the position of a corporate profit making system," she said. "That can be very frustrating."

In her new office on the sixth floor of the Graduate Center, Bowe's desk is cluttered with items that had yet to find a permanent home. She sits straight-backed and attentive, in a chair positioned at the end of the desk rather than behind it. Her fingers link together loosely on her lap and her CUNY Grad-

ters in generic nursing at the New York Medical College and spent two years practicing on the Lower East Side. "I think I became more socially and politically aware," she said of her decision to become a nurse. "At the time I saw that people really could not function and achieve what they wanted to achieve if they were not well. That's what inspired me."

Bowe is no stranger to institutes of higher education, either as a student or a health care provider. She speaks highly of her experiences at public colleges and universities. At the City College of San Francisco, she took courses in such disparate disciplines as aviation and classical piano, before finally enrolling for nurse practitioner training at the University of California. Nurse practitioners are registered nurses who have completed advanced education in nursing, and are qualified to advise

In the interim, between returning to New York and taking up the position at the Graduate Center, Bowe worked at the Columbia Presbyterian outpatient clinic in Washington Heights. Prior to that she attended to City College students on the Upper West Side, as well as the Fashion Institute of Technology community in Chelsea. Before that, Bowe worked for twelve years at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, seeing survivors of childhood cancer, and evaluating the late effects of cancer treatment. Bowe was attracted to the job of nurse practitioner at the Graduate Center because here she could provide primary care with added emphasis on health education. "This is a population that is interested in learning," she says. "It's an age group that I find particularly stimulating to work with."

Experienced in dealing with the needs of student populations, Bowe feels con-

Profiteers, Union-Busters, Witch Hunters... Look Who's Trusteeing at CUNY

CUNY INTERNATIONALIST CLUBS

We've all seen those "Look Who's Teaching at CUNY" ads on the subway. You know, the ones with distinguished professors grinning like all get-out straight into the camera.

The PR campaign puts your teeth on edge if you're part of the "invisible" 57% of CUNY teaching staff with no job security, getting poverty pay for the same work. Adjuncts, teaching grad students, Continuing Ed and other "contingent" faculty are treated like disposable non-persons by the top CUNY chiefs.

For CUNY's 450,000 students, there's not much to grin about either: against the background of war and economic crisis, budget cuts, tuition hikes, fee boosts and obscene textbook prices education has become increasingly precarious. Now big banks like JPMorgan Chase and Citibank say community college students will be denied loans — while the feds bail out the private Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac companies to the tune of \$200 billion.

Who is it that's pushing to turn CUNY into "Walmart U"? Who keeps hiking tuition and fees? Who says most faculty just "can't" be allowed a living wage, job security or, in many cases, health care? Who keeps shoving more and more working-class and minority students out of school? Who launched an "anti-immigrant war purge" against "undocumented students" in fall 2001 (which was pushed back by protest and exposure)?

To begin answering this, let's take a good look at who's trusteeing at CUNY. Though school administrators (like the ruling-class politicians who appoint them) talk a lot about democracy, the people who work and study here don't run the place. Nor do New York's millions of working people have a say in the city's public university. Instead, CUNY's ruling body is a veritable rogue's gallery of hand-picked business elite.

Union-Busters R Us

Exactly who and what is the Board of Trustees? Our attention was drawn to this question last summer, after newly sworn-in Democratic Governor David Paterson appointed Peter S. Pantaleo, a top professional in the lucrative field of anti-unionism. The Board of Trustees (BoT) website identifies Pantaleo as a "Partner at DLA PIPER," adding: "Mr. Pantaleo represents both domestic and international employers in labor, employment, and civil rights matters. While he has substantial experience litigating cases before courts, administrative agencies, and arbitration panels, the principal focus of Mr. Pantaleo's practice is advising employers in complex, politically sensitive labor and employment matters."

DLA PIPER is the largest law firm in the United States by attorney headcount, reportedly representing half the Fortune 500. Its website includes a "Labor and Employment Alert" giving employers step-by-step instructions on how to use a recent decision of the anti-labor NLRB to "prohibit use of email for union organizing purposes." This is remarkably similar to what happened at CUNY's LaGuardia Community College, which banned faculty from using email to discuss union business until this gag rule was defeated through a campaign sparked by campus union activists.

One of Pantaleo's favorite tunes must be "Viva Las Vegas," given his cushy relationship with the casino bosses. Google "Peter S. Pantaleo" and "anti-union" and you'll find a March 10, 1997 *New York Times* article on Pantaleo lawyering for the Las Vegas MGM Grand hotel during its campaign to stop a unionization drive. All the way up to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), his old firm — Pantaleo, Lipkin & Moss — represented Las Vegas bosses who banned three workers from handing out pro-union leaflets at the entrance to a casino/hotel complex.

And who knew there was such a thing as the *Gaming Law Review*? Turns out there is: its May 1998 edition features Peter S. Pantaleo as co-author of an article on "lessening the power" of the hotel employees and restaurant employees in the city where slot machines never sleep. Another Pantaleo piece, from 2004, tells employers in non-union workplaces how to use an NLRB ruling to prevent employees from having a coworker present during "investigatory interviews." The Democratic governor's appointment of Pantaleo may be related to the fact that Dick Gephardt, for years the Democrats' leader in the House of Representatives, is Senior Counsel at DLA Piper. The firm was among the top business contributors to the Hillary Clinton campaign. Add it all up and a key point comes through: the Democrats, like the Republicans, represent big business against the working class.

Education as a "Profit Platform"

Last spring, a scandal erupted at Hunter College over a "Special Public Relations" course offered the previous year, bought and paid for by a \$10,000 grant from the Coach handbag company. Run by a public relations firm hired by the apparel industry, the class made up a bogus story about a student named Heidi Cee (who did not exist) being ripped off for \$500 in reward money she put up for the return of a Coach handbag. According to the fake story (which included a phony YouTube video, blog, MySpace and Facebook profiles), someone had given her a counterfeit Coach bag instead. The Coach company turned Hunter into a cog in its corporate campaign against the allegedly dire menace of handbag counterfeiting. A few months later, Coach's CEO donated a million dollars to Hunter.

The Hunter/Coach escapade is just a small example of the push to corporatize education. Ironically, CUNY's Board of Trustees includes the CEO of a different handbag company: Sam A. Dutton, head of Accessories Exchange. Dutton is Vice President of TEACH NYS, which the *New York Sun* describes as "a coalition of faith-based groups" pushing for tax deductions for families who send children to private and religious schools, an endeavor backed by ex-governor Spitzer. In a March 2008 article in Jewish Week, Michael Tobman, a former aide to Democratic Senator Charles Schumer who now heads TEACH NYS, called Spitzer's replacement, Governor David Paterson, "a friend to efforts to secure help for tuition-paying families."

TEACH NYS is also boosted by the State Policy Network, a self-described "network of free-market think tanks" including the notorious Manhattan Institute, which came up with many of the attacks on CUNY launched under former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. In 1998, the Manhattan Institute published an "agenda" for Giuliani, featuring a diatribe against "remediation and race politics" at CUNY, ending with the call: "CUNY can cut its size by half." Giuliani proclaimed of CUNY: "That's a system we would blow up," moving promptly to destroy the remains of open admissions and eliminate remediation at senior colleges. He set up a task force on CUNY headed by Benno Schmidt, infamous for his high-handed arrogance and threats to dissolve entire departments during his six-year reign as president of Yale University.

Schmidt left Yale to head up the Edison Project, which aimed to establish a national network of hundreds of private schools. For him, education was to become a new "profit platform." After pushing through the "agenda" of racist, anti-working-class attacks on CUNY, Benno Schmidt got his reward when then-governor Pataki made him Chairman of the Board of Trustees in 1999. He was reappointed in 2006. Yes, an outright enemy of public education is top dog at the country's largest urban public university!

This symbolizes much of what's wrong with CUNY today. More precisely, the career of Benno Schmidt tells us plenty about the whole system of capitalism and how it's gutting public education. When Schmidt and his friends at City Hall tried to foist Edison Schools on the city, the privatization project blew up in their face. From 1997 until last year Benno was chairman of Edison, now he's vice-chairman. Meanwhile, as *New York* magazine reported in July, he and his partner Chris Whittle have launched Nations Academy, "an international chain of for-profit elite private schools." Enterprising researchers would do well to look closely at this latest venture.

Under Schmidt, a special Honors College has been set up at seven four-year campuses, named after investment manager William E. Macaulay, who gave \$30 million for the project. The Honors College is "a flagship program...designed to raise educational standards" and "showcase the University's return to excellence," burbled CUNY Newswire, adding in tones of hushed reverence that benefactor Macaulay is CEO of First Reserve Corporation, "one of the ten largest private equity firms in the world with \$12.5 billion under management." Schmidt chimed in that Macaulay's "pioneering gift

sends a signal of support all across America that CUNY is the place for the best and brightest."

And get this: students in the Honors College get free tuition, plus "\$7,500 each year to study abroad or to defray living expenses during an unpaid internship," plus a free Apple laptop computer (well, actually, they have to pay \$1 for it on graduation), plus a free pass to "dozens" of top cultural locales like the Metropolitan Opera and the Museum of Modern Art. There are no doubt some more pluses we don't know about. Not bad, if you can get it, but students

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and faculty should demand the same for all CUNY students, not just the hand-picked elite.

You couldn't ask for a clearer signal that the idea is to embed the elitist agenda of Schmidt & Co. into the very structure of campuses around the CUNY system, the better to lop off those deemed not "the best." In the past this has meant attempts to close down "ghetto and barrio campuses" like Hostos and Medgar Evers entirely.

Robber Barons and the "Business" of Education

What name pops into your head when you hear "robber baron"? J.P. Morgan is a good bet. Old J.P. got his start selling antiquated rifles to the Army during the Civil War, then built an empire from WWI bonds, U.S. Steel stocks and multifarious financial shenanigans. In 2000, J.P. Morgan & Co. merged with Chase Manhattan to form JPMorgan Chase, which now has \$1.8 trillion in assets.

JPMorgan Chase was one of the megabanks that recently decided to "phase out" loans to students at community colleges.

With strong backing from Giuliani, then-governor Pataki tried to appoint former JPMorgan Vice President Kathleen M. Pesile to the CUNY Board in 1998 to replace a trustee who opposed the abolition of remedial classes at CUNY's four-year colleges. Her appointment eventually went through, and she helped Pataki win the vote against remediation the following year. Lynne Cheney's hard-right American Council of Trustees and Alumni made Pesile a member, and, according to the October, 2002 *Clarion*, Pesile was also part of "the short-lived 'decency panel' that Mayor Giuliani appointed in the wake of his attempt to censor the Brooklyn Museum."

With eight years at the infamous House of Morgan, and five at Capital Cities/ABC, she has run her own Pesile Financial Group since 1995. Getting the picture? Giuliani says "blow up" public education, appoints Schmidt to figure out how, then brings in bankers like Pesile to ram it through. Benno gets to be chairman of the board, speculators laugh all the way to the bank, and everyone goes home happy. Everyone, that is, except CUNY's 450,000 students, tens of thousands of faculty and campus workers, and the millions of New York City working people getting ripped off every day.

Continuing the roll call of trustees from the corporate heights, we have Bloomberg appointee Rita DiMartino. A former lobbyist for Ma Bell may not know much about education, but can be expected to know the ways and means of government in the service of business: she is a former AT&T Vice President for Congressional Relations. Being a long-time Republican operative definitely has its perks: Presidents Reagan and Bush Sr. appointed DiMartino to various prestige positions. Today, the BoT website proclaims, "Ms. DiMartino is Vice Chair of the Board's Standing Committee on Faculty, Staff, and Administration, and holds membership on the Standing Committee on Academic Policy, Program, and Research, the Standing Committee on Facilities, Planning, and Management, and the Standing Committee on Student Affairs and Special Programs."

Next up: appointed to the Board by Pataki, Valerie Lancaster Beal is Senior Vice President of M.R. Beal & Company, "one of the top investment banks trading in...municipal bonds," according to its website. Profiting from city finance deals is evidently just the ticket for the business of running CUNY. Last year,

according to Bloomberg News "M.R. Beal & Co. agreed to settle allegations that it conspired to bribe an official with a California water agency in exchange for helping a New York dealer land a lucrative derivative contract."

Philip Alfonso Berry was a VP at Colgate-Palmolive, which the CUNY Board's website breathlessly describes as "a \$12 billion global consumer products company" as if that were just the dandiest recommendation ever. Mr. Berry is now Managing Principal of the global management consulting firm Berry Block & Bernstein. Another Pataki appointment, Berry is now Vice Chairman of CUNY's BoT.

Musical Chairs: City Hall, Big Business and the Board

Trustee Marc V. Shaw was appointed to CUNY's BoT by Mayor Bloomberg, after becoming City Hall's highest-paid official (almost \$200,000 a year) as Billionaire Mike's Deputy Mayor (2002-06). When Bloomberg moved to close firehouses around the city, Shaw enraged the Fire Fighters' union when he told the *New York Times* that its members were "hanging around doing nothing ... 95 percent of the time" Prior to that, Shaw was Rudolph Giuliani's budget chief. In October of 1995 the *New York Times* wrote that "under Mr. Shaw's watch, the city continued to withhold subsidies to the [Metropolitan] Transit Authority for free student passes, a cut that helped place the M.T.A. in its current financial predicament."

Yet in late 1995 Governor George Pataki appointed Shaw to the MTA, where as Executive Director he helped push through refinancing of the agency's \$12 billion debt under the auspices of Wall Street investment firm Bear Stearns, which, *The New York Times* noted, received "a large share of the underwriting duties worth tens of millions of dollars," adding: "critics said the plan was unsound, and unduly influenced by Bear Stearns." (By the bye, JPMorgan Chase acquired Bear Stearns last May for \$236 million.)

The golden rule of city finance was applied — those with the gold make the rules — so financial speculators had their debt-service mega-profits guaranteed. The city's working people were expected to foot the bill. In 2003, not long after Shaw moved into the deputy mayor slot, the MTA raised fares by 33 percent, from \$1.50 to \$2. As top deputy to the billionaire mayor, Shaw was neck-deep in attempts to break the 2005 strike of the Transit Workers Union, when Republican Bloomberg called strikers "thugs" while Democrat Eliot Spitzer, then the state's attorney general, used the infamous Taylor Law to jail the TWU Local 100 president.

Those who think Marx and Lenin are old hat should take a look at Mr. Shaw in the light of Lenin's *Imperialism* (1917), where the Russian revolutionary noted that in this "highest stage of capitalism," government agencies typically have a "personal link-up" with high finance, with "seats on Supervisory Boards" handed back and forth between them. Shaw's case is classic, as he jumped straight from the union-busting, fare-hiking world of city and state politics to the rent-gouging, gentrifying world of high-end real estate speculation.

In 2006, Shaw joined the Extell Development Company as Executive VP for strategic planning. Extell is a high-end real estate firm which foresees \$1 billion in sales this year, largely at luxury buildings like The Rushmore. A recent ad offers a penthouse at another Extell building for a trifling \$45.5 million. The new Extell Towers at 100th Street and Broadway is often

cited as a prime example of Harlem's gentrification, while Extell's *The Lucida* inspired an article titled "Gentrification Arrives at a Crossroads in Yorkville" (*New York Times*, 2 January 2006). Shaw's Extell was also featured in a November, 2007 *Independent* article titled "NYC: Out with the Poor, In with the Rich."

Charles A. Shorter, another Bloomberg-appointed trustee, also comes from the realm of real estate, having held high positions with Ernst & Young LLP's Real Estate Transaction Advisory Services Group as well as Arthur Andersen LLP, the accounting firm infamous for its involvement in the Enron scandal.

Deputy mayorship is clearly a great way to land a seat on the CUNY Board of Trustees. Bloomberg's pattern of "administrative nepotism," in the words of the September, 2006 *GC Advocate*, continued when he named Carol A. Robles-Román as a trustee only six months after she became Deputy Mayor for legal affairs in early 2002. Counseling the mayor on legal affairs, as well as collective bargaining issues, her office shared responsibility for strike-breaking measures during the historic 2005 transit strike. Then there is Joseph J. Lhota, Executive VP of Cablevision, a former PaineWebber investment banker who served as Deputy Mayor (1998-2001) in the depths of "Giuliani Time," was appointed to the CUNY Board by the notorious Rudy G., then reappointed by Bloomberg. Lhota's wife was a fund-raiser for Giuliani, and was part of a group in the mayor's office that raised money for projects like the Giuliani-appointed commission on "the future of CUNY" that was headed by Benno Schmidt.

The remaining trustees are Wellington Z. Chen (Pataki appointee), Executive Director of the Chinatown Partnership Development Corporation; Frieda Foster-Tolbert, a former Pataki Community Affairs director appointed to the Board by the ex-governor; Dr. Hugo M. Morales, a mental health specialist appointed by Pataki and reappointed by Spitzer; and one ex officio member each from the University Faculty Senate and University Student Senate.

Witch-Hunting at CUNY

But wait — there's one more. Last but most definitely not least in the rogue's gallery of trustees: the outlandish, sinister and bizarre Jeffrey Wiesenfeld, who seems to channel the spirit of the Cold War redbaiter, Senator Joseph McCarthy. After four years in the FBI's foreign counterintelligence division, Wiesenfeld became the head of the First New York Conservative Democratic Club in Queens, working for Ed Koch before going Republican and serving the notorious Senator Al D'Amato, then Governor Pataki. Today he is a principal with Bernstein Global Wealth Management.

When City College faculty members participated in an antiwar teach-in shortly after September 11, 2001, the *New York Post* launched a smear campaign. According to the American Association of University Professor's *Academe*, "several faculty members named in the article subsequently received hate mail, including death threats." The event was sponsored by the campus chapter of the CUNY Professional Staff Congress (PSC), whose CCNY chair told *Academe*: "We felt strong pressure not to continue to hold teach-ins.... The atmosphere can only be described as chilling to academic freedom and free speech." Chancellor Goldstein hastened to denounce the participants, and Wiesenfeld said "I would consider [their] behavior seditious at this time," raving that the event "enticed radicals to come and spew their venom to-



ward the United States.” The following month, after a right-wing Queens politician said “illegal aliens” at CUNY were a “security” threat, the university launched its anti-immigrant war purge, more than doubling tuition for “undocumented” students. The CUNY Internationalist Clubs initiated the campaign of protest that eventually pushed this back.

Wiesenfeld has made the faculty and staff union a key target of his McCarthyite diatribes. A newsletter published by the rightist “CUNY Alliance” in 2004 said “we commend Trustee Wiesenfeld” for “express[ing] concern that PSC management may be abusing its discretion by spending union dues on superfluous political activities. The Chair of the Board indicated that he would ask the University’s General Counsel and Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone to investigate the Board’s responsibility in this matter.” In June 2005, Wiesenfeld told a Board of Trustees meeting that the PSC “acts to defend the academic freedom of those who engage in terrorist and criminal acts.”

Wiesenfeld is a Zionist (pro-Israel, anti-Arab) witch-hunter in particular. He was New York chair of the “Stop the Madrassa Coalition,” a major player in the vicious crusade against Debbie Almontaser, the former principal of the Khalil Gibran Academy in Brooklyn who was forced out when the *Post* whipped up a frenzy because she was part of a group that shared office space with an organization that sold t-shirts reading “Intifada NYC” (a reference to the Palestinian revolt that began in 1987 against the brutal Israeli occupation). “Virtually all terrorists today are Muslim,” ranted Wiesenfeld in *The Daily News*. He joined attempts to silence Columbia professor Joseph

Massad for the “crime” of speaking out in defense of Palestinians. Wiesenfeld Told *The New York Sun*: “Every public and private campus has its share of ‘revolutionaries’ who think proselytization is synonymous with education. I’ve made it my business not to be silent when this phenomenon raises its ugly head at a CUNY campus.”

Wiesenfeld was a featured speaker at a January 2008 Queens Village Republican Club dinner in honor of the publisher of the red-baiting *Patriot Returns* newsletter. His announced topic: “The poisoning of our next generation by our academics throughout our nation.” The keynote speaker was George J. Marlin, former mayoral candidate of the ultra-rightist anti-abortion Conservative Party and member of Pataki’s 1994 transition team.

The ultra-right *FrontPage Magazine* a mouthpiece for David Horowitz’s McCarthyite campaign to identify and purge the universities of perceived leftists, fulsomely defends Wiesenfeld’s red-baiting attacks on PSC members while lauding him as “a hero to many New Yorkers for his efforts in bringing higher academic standards to CUNY,” which it claims is now “experiencing a wonderful renaissance” as a “result of abolishing the failed policies of open admissions and remedial education.”

What needs to be abolished is the Board of Trustees itself! It is no accident that the Board is made up of patronage appointees, profiteers, union-busters and witch-hunters. But the BoT is more than just a patronage mill. Its composition corresponds to its function: to run CUNY in the interests, not of the people who work and study here, but of the parasitic elite of money-men, speculators, real-estate moguls and rul-

ing-class politicians. Thus, the burning questions of CUNY’s fate are in the clearest sense class questions, bound up with the broader issues of who rules society, by what means, and for which purposes.

Who is in charge of the nation’s largest public urban university is not just a local matter. A few years ago, the Rand Corporation, the premier think tank on strategic issues for the Pentagon, did a study on “The Governance of the City University of New York: A System at Odds with Itself” (2000), paid for by the Mayor’s Advisory Task Force on CUNY set up by Rudolph Giuliani. The problem, it seems, was that there was resistance even at top levels to the wholesale elimination of every last vestige of open admissions:

“In particular, some members of the Board of Trustees and some of the political leaders responsible for CUNY believe that, at the senior colleges, open admissions has failed and requirements must be raised. Many of CUNY’s stakeholders, however, remain strongly committed to open access at the senior colleges as well as the community colleges.”

This problem was resolved by the removal by one means or another of all those who resisted the corporatization and elitist “reform” of City University.

Instead of the Board of Trustees and CUNY administration, the university should be democratically controlled by students, teachers and workers. But no university can be an island of emancipation if society at large is enslaved to capital. In the 1960s, New Leftists dreamed of “red universities,” an impossibility under the rule of capital. The task of freeing CUNY from the profiteers’ dictatorship is part of the fight to sweep away that rule, making education genuinely a right for all. ☺

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What's Happening to America?

Is America in the midst of a moral and political crisis — one that goes deeper than George W. Bush? || The *Advocate* asks America's brightest minds what's going on — and what we can do about it

IN THIS ISSUE:

- E. L. Doctorow
- Ashley Dawson

Last month marked the *Advocate's* inaugural forum seeking to understand “What’s Happening to America?” Since then, the question has been injected with increased urgency as American politics have soared to the heights of a chilling cynicism, while our economy has suffered a descent into chaos. Following the parade of madmen and women that marched across the stage of the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, the GOP celebrated the nomination of Sarah Palin as running mate to John McCain. That the convention’s pageantry showcased the ugliness of our nation’s bigotry, intolerance and uninspired insipidness was perhaps to be expected. But the coronation of Palin as standard bearer of the Christian right’s return was unprecedented.

The Alaskan governor — by all accounts the most unqualified candidate ever to compete for the White House — embodies the very “indifference to truth,” and “disdain for knowledge” that E.L. Doctorow identifies as the hallmarks of George W. Bush’s disastrous rule. Indeed, by compounding the ghastly hollowness of the McCain campaign with the addition of Palin, the Republicans effectively affirmed Bill Clinton’s observation that “they actually want us to reward them for the last eight years by giving them four more.”

A particularly odious legacy of the eight years will likely be the environmental degradation produced by Bush administration policies. Best summed up by the chants of “drill, baby, drill” at the Republican convention in St. Paul, the United States has demonstrated an absolute lack of imagination or interest in forging a politics based on environmental respect and conservation. In stark contrast to this utter disregard, Ashley Dawson adroitly argues that the current moment of financial meltdown offers the opportunity for meaningful economic and environmental change in a progressive direction.

Taken together, these authors outline the daunting challenges threatening our national security and democratic wellbeing. At the same time, Doctorow and Dawson elegantly demonstrate that possibilities for hope, redemption, and change are to be found in acts of imaginative expression and creative thought.

E.L. DOCTOROW

The White Whale

The domestic political fantasy life of these past seven years finds us in an unnerving time loop of our own making — in this country, quite on its own, history seems to be running in reverse and knowledge is not seen as a public good but as something suspect, dubious or even ungodly, as it was, for example, in Italy in 1633, when the church put Galileo on trial for his heretical view that the earth is in orbit around the sun.

I am not a scientist and don’t deal in formulas, but as a writer I would, in the words of Henry James, take to myself “the faintest hints of life” and convert “the very pulses of the air into revelations.” That surely provides me with a line to unreason. And so when I read that the President of Iran denies the historical truth of the Holocaust, and when I hear the President of the United States doubting the scientific truth of global warming, I recognize that no matter what the distance they would keep between them, and whatever their confrontational stance, they are fellow travelers in the netherworld.

Two things must be said about knowledge deniers. Their rationale is always political. And more often than not, they hold in their hand a sacred text for certification.

But, you may say, am I not narrowing this issue, politicizing it by speaking of our President? In this discussion of knowledge as a foundation for a democratic society, am I not misusing this forum to broadcast a partisan point of view? Albert Einstein once said that even the most perfectly planned democratic institutions are no better than the people whose instruments they are. I would translate his remark this way: the President we get is the country we get. With each elected President the nation is conformed spiritually. He is the artificer of our malleable national soul. He proposes not only the laws but the kinds of lawlessness that govern our lives and invoke our responses. The people he appoints are cast in his image. The trouble they get into, and get us into, is his characteristic trouble. Finally, the media amplify his character into our moral weather report. He becomes the face of our sky, the conditions that prevail.

From those fundamentalist leaders who proclaimed 9/11 as just deserts for our secular humanism, our

civil libertarianism, our feminists, our gay and lesbian citizens, our abortion providers, and in so doing honored the foreign killers of nearly 3,000 Americans as agents of God’s justice... to the creationists, the biblical literalists, the anti-Darwinian school boards, the right-to-lifer antiabortion activists, the shrill media ideologues whose jingoistic patriotism and ad hominem ranting serves for public discourse — all of it in degradation of the thinking mind, all of it in fear of what it knows — these phenomena are summoned up and enshrined by the policies of this President. At the same time he has set the national legislative program to run in reverse as he rescinds, deregulates, dismantles or otherwise degrades enlightened legislation in the public interest, so that in sum we find ourselves living in a social and psychic structure of the ghostly past, with our great national needs — healthcare, education, disaster relief — going unmet. The President may speak of the nation in idealistic terms, but his actions demonstrate that he has no real concept of national community. His America, like that of his sponsors, is a population to be manipulated for the power to be had, for the money to be made. He is the subject of jokes and he jokes himself about his clumsiness with words, but his mispronunciations and malapropisms suggest a mind of half — learned language that is eerily compatible with his indifference to truth, his disdain for knowledge as a foundation of a democratic society.

It will take more than revelations of an inveterately corrupt administration to dissolve the miasma of otherworldly weirdness hanging over this land, to recover us from our spiritual disarray, to regain our once — clear national sense of ourselves, however illusory, as the last best hope of mankind. What are we become in the hands of this president, with his relentless subversion of our right to know; his unfounded phantasmal justifications for going to war; his signing away of laws passed by a congress that he doesn’t like; his unlawful secret surveillance of citizens’ phone records and e-mail; his dicta time and time again in presumption of total executive supremacy over the other two branches of government; his insensitivity to the principle of separation of church and state; his obsessive secrecy; his covert policies of torture and extraordinary rendition, where the courtroom testimony of the tortured on the torture they’ve endured at our hands is disallowed on the grounds that our

torture techniques are classified; his embargoing of past presidential papers, and impeding access to documents of investigatory bodies; his use of the Justice Department to bring indictments or quash them as his party’s electoral interests demand.... Knowledge sealed, skewed, sequestered, shouted down, the bearers of knowledge fired or smeared, knowledge edited, sneered at, shredded and, as in the case of the coffins of our dead military brought home at night, no photography allowed, knowledge spirited away in the dark.

I realize, in the tenor of these times, that anyone who speaks of the broad front of failure and mendacity and carelessness of human life in so much of our public policy, in terms any louder than muted regret, is usually marginalized as some sort of radical — that is, as someone so “out of the mainstream” as not to be taken seriously. But I believe what I have described so far is an accurate and informed account of the present state of the union.

We must ask if this rage to deconstruct the Constitution and the Bill of Rights has any connection with the prevalence of God in the mind of this worshipful president. We must ask to what extent, and at however unconscious a level, a conflict arises in the pious political mind when it is sworn to uphold the civil religion of the Constitution.

The idea of the United States may have had its sources in the European enlightenment, but it was the actions taken by self-declared Americans that brought it into focus and established it as an entity. America is a society evolved from words written down on paper by ordinary mortals, however extraordinary they happened to be as human beings. When constitutional scholars speak of the American civil religion, they recognize that along with its separation of church and state our constitution and its amendments establish as civil law ethical presumptions common to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

But if you have extracted the basic ethics of religious invention and found the mechanism for installing them in the statutes of the secular civic order, but have consigned all the doctrine and rite and ritual, all the symbols and traditional practices, to the precincts of private life, you are saying there is no one proven path to salvation, there are only traditions. If you relegate the old stories to the personal choices of private worship, you admit the ineffable is ineffable,

and in terms of a possible theological triumphalism, everything is up for grabs.

Our pluralism cannot be entirely comfortable to someone of evangelical faith. But to the extreme fundamentalist — that member of the evangelical community militant in his belief, an absolutist intolerant of all forms of belief but his own, all stories but his own — our pluralism has to be a profound offense. I speak of the so-called “political base” with which our President has bonded. In our raucous democracy, fundamentalist religious belief has organized itself with political acumen to promulgate law that would undermine just those secular humanist principles that encourage it to flourish in freedom. Of course, there has rarely been a period in our history when God has not been called upon to march. Northern abolitionists and Southern slave owners both claimed biblical endorsement. Martin Luther King Jr.’s civil rights movement drew its strength from prayer and examples of Christian fortitude, while the Ku Klux Klan invoked Jesus as a sponsor of its racism. But there is a crucial difference between these traditional invocations and the politically astute and well-funded activists of today’s Christian right, who do not call upon their faith to certify their politics as much as they call for a country that certifies their faith.

Fundamentalism really cannot help itself — it is absolutist and can compromise with nothing, not even democracy.

But all contrarian movements, like revolutions, devolve to their extremist expression, do they not? The theorists of creation science and intelligent design have marching on their right flank, with or without their approval, if not pre-critical hordes of religion, a militantly censorious, well-funded political movement that a president of the United States has tapped into for his and their benefit. I am not aware that American history as invoked by Professor Noll has a precedent for this. Nor am I aware that the hypercritical avatars of the secular scientific method have an equivalent hard-nosed political organization behind them.

The President has said the war with terrorists will last for decades and is a confrontation between “good and evil.” Whether he means the evil of specific terrorist organizations or the culture from which they spring, his vision is necessarily Manichaeian. There is immense political power in such religiously inspired reductionism. Thus, no matter how he lies about the reason for his invasion of Iraq, or how badly it has gone, bumblingly and tragically ruinous, with so many lives destroyed, and no matter how many thousands of terrorists it has brought into being, to criticize his policy or the architects of it is said to aid the enemy. The President’s inner circle of advisers, who conspire in this Manichaeian worldview, have the unnatural vividness of personality of Shakespearean plotters. While the original think — tank theorists and proponents of the war have quietly and understandably withdrawn from public view, the Vice President and the President’s chief policy adviser have stood tall — the first contemptuous of his critics, his denials of reality and obfuscations delivered in the dour tones of unquestionable authority, the second too clever by half, and because he spent his years developing a theocratic constituency and wearing such blinders as an exclusive concern with party power has attached to him, most clearly has a future in the culture of antidemocracy he has so deviously and unwisely nurtured.

A Manichaeian politics reduces the relevance of knowledge and degrades the truth that knowledge discovers. The past seven years of American political life are an uncanny cycle we’ve slipped into, or slid into, that foresees the democratic traditions of this country as too much of a luxury to be maintained. We have seen, since the 2006 election, the struggle for the legislative branches to regain some of their constitutional prerogatives. They struggle not only with a recalcitrant president and vice president who impugn

their motives but against the precedents of the imperial presidencies of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, each of whom added another conservative shock to the principle of separation of powers. Many of the executive practices today — the blatant cronyism, the political uses of the Justice Department, the evisceration of regulatory agencies and so on — are empowered by these precedents. And so we have marched along from the imperial presidency to the borders of authoritarianism.

To take the long view, American politics may be seen as the struggle between the idealistic secular democracy of a fearlessly self-renewing America and our great resident capacity to be in denial of what is intellectually and morally incumbent upon us to pursue.

Melville in *Moby-Dick* speaks of reality outracing apprehension. Apprehension in the sense not of fear

or disquiet but of understanding... reality as too much for us to take in, as, for example, the white whale is too much for the Pequod and its captain. It may be that our new century is an awesomely complex white whale — scientifically in our quantumized wave particles and the manipulable stem cells of our biology, ecologically in our planetary crises of nature, technologically in

our humanoid molecular computers, sexually in the rising number of our genders, intellectually in the paradoxes of our texts, and so on.

What is more natural than to rely on the saving powers of simplism? Perhaps with our dismal public conduct, so shot through with piety, we are actually engaged in a genetic engineering venture that will make a slower, dumber, more sluggish whale, one that can be harpooned and flensed, tried and boiled to light our candles. A kind of water wonderworld whale made of racism, nativism, cultural illiteracy, fundamentalist fantasy and the righteous priorities of wealth.

I summon up the year 1787, when the Constitutional Convention had done its work, and the drafted constitution was sent out to the states for ratification. The public’s excitement was palpable. Extended and vigorous statehouse debates echoed through the towns and villages, and as, one by one, the states voted to ratify, church bells rang, cheers went up from the public houses, and in the major cities the people turned out to parade with a fresh new sense of themselves as a nation. Everyone marched — tradespeople, workingmen, soldiers, women and clergy. They had floats in those days, too — most often a wagon — sized ship of state called the Union, rolling through the streets with children waving from the scuppers. Philadelphia came up with a float called the New Roof, a dome supported by thirteen pillars and ornamented with stars. It was drawn by ten white horses, and at the top was a handsome cupola surmounted by a figure of Plenty bearing her cornucopia. The ratification parades were sacramental — symbolic veneration, acts of faith. From the beginning, people saw the Constitution as a kind of sacred text for a civil society.

And with good reason: the ordaining voice of the Constitution is scriptural, but in resolutely keeping the authority for its dominion in the public consent, it presents itself as the sacred text of secular humanism.

When the ancient Hebrews broke their covenant, they suffered a loss of identity and brought disaster on themselves. Our burden, too, is covenantal. We may point to our 200 — some years of national survival as an open society; we may regard ourselves as an exceptionalist, historically self — correcting nation, whose democratic values locate us just as surely as our geography — and yet we know at the same time that all through our history we have brutally excluded vast numbers of us from the shelter of the New

Roof, we have broken our covenant again and again with a virtuosity verging on damnation and have been saved only by the sacrificial efforts of constitution — reverencing patriots in and out of government — presidents, senators, justices, self — impoverishing lawyers, abolitionists, muckrakers, third — party candidates, suffragists, union organizers, striking workers, civil rights martyrs.

Because this President’s subversion of the Constitution outdoes anything that has gone before, and as it has created large social constituencies ready to support the flag — waving ideals of an incremental fascism, we’re called upon to step forward to reaffirm our covenant like these exemplars from the past.

Philosopher Richard Rorty has suggested in his book *Achieving Our Country* that the metaphysic of America’s civil religion is pragmatism and its prophets are Walt Whitman and John Dewey. “The most striking feature of their redescription of our country is its thoroughgoing secularism,” says Rorty. “The moral we should draw from the European past, and in particular from Christianity, is not instruction about the authority under which we should live but suggestions about how to make ourselves wonderfully different from anything that has been.”

To temporize human affairs, to look not up for some applied celestial accreditation but forward, at ground level, in the endless journey to resist any authoritarian restrictions on thought or suppression of knowledge that is the public good — that is the essence of our civil religion.

It is Whitman, our great poet and pragmatic philosopher, who advises us not to be curious about God but to affix our curiosity to our own lives and the earth we live on, and then perhaps as far as we can see into the universe with our telescopes. This was the charge he gave himself, and it is the source of all the attentive love in his poetry. If we accept it as our own and decide something is right after all in a democracy that is given to a degree of free imaginative expression that few cultures in the world can tolerate, we can hope for the aroused witness, the manifold reportage, the flourishing of knowledge that will restore us to ourselves, awaken the dulled sense of our people to the public interest that is their interest, and vindicate the genius of the humanist sacred text that embraces us all.

E.L. Doctorow is an internationally acclaimed novelist and essayist. His books include *Ragtime* (1976) *Billy Bathgate* (1989) *The March* (2005) and *The Creationists: Selected Essays 1993 — 2006* (2006)

ASHLEY DAWSON

A New Green Deal

The United States, and with it the rest of the world, is experiencing the initial stages of an unprecedented emergency brought on by three intertwined factors: a credit-fueled financial crisis, soaring energy prices linked to the peaking of oil supplies, and an accelerating climate crisis. If the developing climate crisis means that we *should* make a transition to a zero-carbon economy with the greatest possible dispatch, the peak energy crisis will constrain us to transform our behavior over the next decade as fuel supplies become tighter and hence more expensive. Overlapping with these crises, the unfolding economic meltdown constitutes a significant unraveling of dominant neo — liberal ideology, offering us an important opportunity to transform our economy in a progressive direction. We must seize on this triple crisis to build a Green New Deal.

Unfortunately, the shift in behavior that will be imposed on us will not necessarily move us down a path to sustainability. The United States could, for example, decide to respond to the triple crisis by intensifying its current strategy of gaining military control over energy reserves in the Middle East in an attempt to sustain current habits of hyper-consumption. Such an aggressive, unilateralist policy is likely to provoke increasing opposition from current and developing

regional powers such as the EU, Russia, and China. This would not, however, be the first time in history that elites have elected to pursue such an apparently perilous path. The embrace of aggressive nationalism and imperialism by nineteenth century European powers such as Britain and France resulted from the unwillingness of the bourgeoisie to give up any of their class privileges and engage in a project of social reform and economic redistribution domestically. Such a project might have offered a solution to the crisis of over-accumulation that characterized the period. Refusing such forms of redistribution, however, Victorian-era elites were constrained to turn outwards to find a spatio-temporal fix. The imperial project they elected to pursue pried open noncapitalist zones of the planet and thereby made available cheap labor power, abundant raw materials, low-cost land, and new opportunities for trade. It also triggered Great Power rivalries that led eventually to the conflagrations of World War I and II. We have progressed a fair distance down a similar road today. As the worldwide opposition generated by the occupation of Iraq has made clear, this strategy is likely to intensify already apparent trends towards the kind of inter-imperialist rivalry that produced the global imperial conflicts of the previous century.

An alternative resolution to the triple crisis we confront would involve rejecting the racially coded “clash of civilizations” ideology that underlies the current war on terror in order to forge a new geopolitics for an era of peak oil and climate change. The crisis of financialization we are currently weathering offers us a perfect opportunity for such a move. At bottom, this crisis stems from the stagnation of the real economy caused by failure to reinvest capital, stagnation which the volatile boom-and-bust cycles of the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) economy has only deepened. In addition, the turn to neo-liberal doctrine over the last several decades has been accompanied by strategies of privatization and debt-fueled “structural adjustment” imposed on poor nations. Such strategies are being met with increasingly radical resistance around the globe, from grassroots movements such as the Global Justice Movement to developing nations such as China and India, who recently torpedoed the World Trade Organization’s Doha Round in response to the organization’s skewed policies of agricultural liberalization.

A recent scientific study commissioned by Britain’s New Economics Foundation reports that we have less than 100 months left before energy depletion and climate change rob us of the capacity for systemic change. We therefore need to take maximum advantage of the current crisis conditions in order to articulate and act on a coordinated and substantial transitional program. While regulation of the economy designed to reign in the speculative power of capital is important in order to address the economic crisis, it must be yoked to a sweeping program of environmental regulation and state-led domestic reinvestment aimed at the swiftest possible transition to a zero-carbon economy. This Keynesian environmentalism would deal with the crisis of financialization by re-directing overaccumulated capital into the creation of green domestic infrastructure and social programs. In order to coordinate such a program, we need to draft a national action plan that evaluates the risks created by the triple crisis and sketches out the best responses to this crisis. How best to clamp down on carbon emissions could be debated as this document is drafted, although we need to be careful to avoid half-measures and politically expedient compromises. In his recently released energy and environment plans, for example, Barack Obama sends mixed messages by advocating a cap-and-trade system to limit carbon emissions but also endorsing the search for increased oil supplies.

In Britain, by contrast, environmentalists have for

some time been discussing the need for carbon rationing. When and if the international community agrees on a cap for atmospheric carbon concentrations, rationing would allow emissions to be doled out in an equitable basis between and within countries based on their populations. The advantage to such a rationing system lies in its fairness and in its invocation of the collective good. Unlike energy taxes, which will disproportionately affect the poor since they spend a greater percentage of their income on fuel, rationing would constrain everyone to cut their consumption. Rationing could also allow frugal consumers of carbon to sell their excess credits on the open market during an initial phase-in period, and would, therefore, constitute a significant means of redistribution. Similarly, if the government retains sixty percent of the carbon allocation as George Monbiot has suggested, it could auction off carbon emission rights to companies. The proceeds would be used to fund many of the other necessary programs in the Green New Deal.

In addition to such regulatory measures, the government could offer Green Bonds, similar to the “defense bonds” promoted by the US Treasury during World War II. As well as helping prevent the kind of inflation of assets that has characterized the FIRE economy by providing a sink for excess capital, these Green Bonds could be used to fund the sweeping program of reinvestment that must lie at the core of an environmental Keynesianism. These bonds would not only help curb inflationary speculation but, just as they did during World War II, could offer a vehicle for investments by pension funds and ordinary people, and would thereby help stoke a sense of patriotism in the face of this unprecedented challenge to the nation and the world.


One of the major benefits of carbon rationing would, of course, be the curbing of energy-intensive activities. The more consumption is curbed, the easier it will be to use a greater percentage of renewable energy sources. I do not include nuclear power and “clean” coal among these renewable resources because of concerns about security and disposal in the case of the former and because of the unproven character of the latter. More than any other nation, the US is built on the assumption of endless horizons for energy consumption. The national highway system, product of the symbiotic relation of the Cold War national security state and the automobile industry, is a perfect example of the infrastructure of a fast — receding fossil fuel era. The highway — automobile complex of course helped facilitate the suburban sprawl that has come to characterize most US cities. In addition, these assumptions about endless energy horizons also help explain the global commodity chains that US corporations such as Wal — Mart pioneered during the neoliberal era. As the nation moves towards a zero-carbon state, production and consumption will have to become far more localized and efficient in order to conserve energy and resources. Cities will need to be reengineered through careful and coordinated planning in order to emphasize the kind of compact living that makes public transportation viable and that facilitates combined heat and power generation arrangements. Our automobile and bus fleet will have to be switched from gasoline to electricity.

In the post-carbon age, it simply will be impossible to move our food, clothes, and other commodities across continents. The doctrine of subsidiarity, which dictates local production for local consumption whenever possible, is therefore likely to be a fundamental aspect of a new ecologically stable and democratic society. Achieving subsidiarity will, however, mean transforming or even dismantling inter-

national financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which use the debt burden carried by developing countries since the 1970s to coerce those nations into producing for export markets in order to accumulate capital with which to pay interest on their borrowings. Challenging the unjust aspects of globalization will involve increasing local democratic control over economic and environmental resources, so that developing nations are no longer forced to turn over their land to massive agricultural corporations growing homogeneous crop varieties largely for export to the global North. A Green New Deal for the global South will therefore mean supporting the many peasant groups calling for policies of land redistribution in order to promote reruralization and cope with the socially and environmentally unsustainable growth of mega-cities in which the majority of people eke out a living in the highly unstable informal economy.

None of our domestic environmental achievements will mean much unless the US also takes the lead in negotiating a meaningful successor to the Kyoto Protocol in Copenhagen in 2009. As the nation most responsible for global carbon emissions, we have the responsibility to forge a just and effective agreement that charts paths to alternative, low-carbon development. The models for such a pact already exist. For example, Oliver Tickell offers one such alternative in his book, *Kyoto2: How to Manage the Global Greenhouse*. Tickell’s proposal hinges on reaching agreement on a global cap on emissions that would be applied “upstream” (e.g. at oil refineries or cement factories), with permits to pollute auctioned off. The proceeds would be used to finance transition measures. The problem lies, then, not in the lack of feasible plans for transition to a low-carbon economy, but in the unwillingness of the leaders of the world’s most advanced countries to adopt such programs. The G8 meeting in June, 2008 for example, represented a significant setback for efforts to craft an effective post-Kyoto climate strategy, despite the confusing declarations of good intent that emanated from the gathering. Sustained political pressure similar to the kind of critique and direct action with which the Global Justice Movement has bombarded institutions such as the World Bank and the WTO needs to be brought to bear on the elite summits where climate treaties are negotiated.

As educators we have a vital role to play in the Green New Deal. In addition to training members of the millions-strong Green Corps that will be needed to implement environmental Keynesianism, educators and other public intellectuals must play an important role in countering the climate change denial industry. The triple crisis promises to worsen all the major problems currently confronting global society, from the food crisis to state failure, from terrorism to mass migration. As educators, we must find ways not simply to situate isolated instances of peak energy and climate change within a broader narrative, but to communicate in a holistic manner the gravity of the emergency we face. Moreover, we need to play a role in proposing and debating solutions to the triple crisis; the aim should be to counter the toxic cynicism that has infected public life during the neoliberal era.

Like the original New Deal, an environmental Keynesianism will become a reality only if a broad variety of social movements make connections between the different aspects of the triple crisis and force through changes on local, national, and global levels. The political odds are truly daunting in this regard. But so was the battle against economic collapse, social dislocation, and fascism during the 1930s. And what alternative do we have but to engage in this greatest of all struggles? We face, after all, a fairly simple choice: a New Green Deal or an intensification of the present barbarism, leading to the inexorable collapse of life as we know it. 

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The New Left Looks East

MICHAEL BUSCH

► *Revolution! South America and the Rise of the New Left* by Nikolas Kozloff (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). 256 pp.

Rapidly deteriorating relations between the United States and Venezuela opened new avenues for confrontation this past month, as the two countries broke off official diplomatic channels and exchanged ambassadorial expulsions. The trouble began when Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez marked the anniversary of September 11th by expelling US Ambassador Patrick Duddy from Caracas, accusing the diplomat of plotting a coup against him. Washington answered in turn the following day, closing communications with Caracas, and demanding that Venezuelan ambassador Bernardo Herrera leave the country immediately. The US Treasury Department salted the wounds still further later that day, freezing the assets of Venezuelan intelligence officers it accuses of aiding FARC guerrillas in Colombia.

This recent round of diplomatic brinksmanship is the latest episode in the drama of US relations with Latin America since the region's tectonic shift to the left nearly a decade ago. Beginning with Chavez's 1998 election in Venezuela, a cascade of similarly minded leftists has swept into power across Central and South America. In Brazil, Luiz Ignacio da Silva — a labor union organizer known popularly as "Lula" — captured the presidency with a landslide victory in 2002. The following year Nestor Kirchner, an obscure, provincial governor, rose to power in Argentina. The changing of the guard in Buenos Aires spread next to neighboring Chile, where voters ushered into office their first female president, Michele Bachelet in 2005. The region's shift away from the right continued a year later with the elections of Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and the return to power of Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua.

That the past decade has witnessed a dramatic turn to the left in Latin American politics is abundantly clear; the question remains whether the region's recent flirtation with socialism signals a departure from its tortured modern history, or merely represents an updated rerun of similar episodes from the past. Firmly stationing itself at the intersection between these competing possibilities, Nikolas Kozloff's *Revolution! South America and the Rise of the New Left* looks to provide some preliminary answers.

Kozloff charts a course across the leftist landscape of South America, travelling from the more radical countries in the Andean north to the less revolutionary states of the Southern Cone. While there, he interviews an extensive roster of academics, activists, and government representatives, and collects his own impressions of the region's progress in escaping the shadow of its authoritarian past. What emerges is a loosely organized assortment of portraits and meditations that captures fairly well the disparate nature of Latin America's emerging political posture.

Kozloff is no romantic. While clearly sympathetic to the political agendas propagated by the various leftist governments currently in power, he is less enthusiastic about what he witnesses on the ground. Kozloff sees the Lula regime in Brazil as unrivaled in its corruption and willingness to abandon poor constituents. He correctly takes the Kirchner administration to task for its abysmal labor record and penchant for patronage politics. In Chile, Kozloff documents Bachelet's use of water cannons and tear gas to subdue student protesters demanding affordable education. The situation in Bolivia is possibly more distressing still, where Kozloff reports that issues of indigenous rights and constitutional reform have threatened the state with disintegration.

But Kozloff is no Jeremiah either. In Ecuador, he

finds the recently elected Correa deftly steering his country away from historically entrenched racism and practices of environmental degradation. In all the countries Kozloff visits, he sees invigorated social movements taking shape. And if the majority of leftist governments have failed to fully meet the expectations of their citizens, Kozloff demonstrates that, for the most part, the sensitivity of national governments to civil society organizations has improved remarkably throughout the continent.

As in every current discussion of Latin America's left turn, however, all roads eventually lead to Hugo Chavez. Accordingly, Kozloff devotes the majority of his attention in *Revolution!* to Venezuela. If the region is indeed experiencing some sort of revolution as Kozloff's title suggests, then Venezuela surely inhabits the vanguard. Since recovering from an attempted coup in 2002, Chavez has ramped up the revolutionary rhetoric, and grown increasingly aggressive in his practical politics. Yet while he fires the imaginations of supporters at home, and sparks hope in the international Left, significant questions linger concerning the nature of Chavez's Bolivarian project.

Of greatest concern, as Kozloff rightly argues, is its sustainability. He writes, "Venezuela is awash in oil money, and people's expectations are high. However, public discontent over inefficiency is mounting, not just among the opposition but among sectors of the population that support the Bolivarian Revolution. People are calling for the right to health care, the right to housing, and the right to work."

And they are acquiring those rights, albeit unevenly, through the government's "Bolivarian Missions," a series of state-subsidized associations tasked with alleviating inequities in education, health, and housing suffered by Venezuela's poor. Perhaps not surprisingly, however, these alternative systems of social welfare delivery lend themselves to political hostage-taking in the ongoing battle between Chavez and his opposition.

Kozloff notes that "Public hospitals are confronting even more daunting problems than the primary care system. Public health care pits two systems, divided largely by politics, against each other. Though Chavez has spent millions on the Barrio Adentro [mission], he has largely ignored the traditional public hospitals... Chavez has underfunded the traditional hospitals because the physicians' associations supported the 2002 coup and oil lock-out of 2002-03. Doctors complain that Chavez wants to 'trample' the old system by not supplying adequate maintenance or resources."

Another, paradoxical, problem faced by Chávez's oil-financed Bolivarian missions is the perpetuating cycle of "catch-up" they face in meeting the needs of marginalized populations. While mission workers welcome and depend on increased petroleum revenue, the influx of oil wealth into the Venezuelan economy produces greater rates of inflation, which in turn exacerbates disadvantages faced by the im-

poverished majority. The first steps to escaping this rock-and-a-hard-place trap could lie in radically altering the country's tax code with the view to equitable wealth distribution. Such a move, though, would further threaten Chávez's already shaky relationship with the Venezuelan elite, and is therefore highly unlikely.

Nevertheless, as *Revolution!* makes clear, the more disturbing and problematical aspects of Chavez's rule notwithstanding, life in Venezuela — and the continent more broadly — is undeniably better for the majority of its people. The advent of Latin America's New Left has sparked a renaissance of social justice movements, and articulated new possibilities for the region's economic arrangements after decades of disastrous neoliberal reform. Moreover, fears of a return to military dictatorship have been safely dispatched by the return of a vibrant civil society, while many previously marginalized sectors of the population have been brought back into the political fold.

So what does the future have in store for Latin America? Implicitly embedded within Kozloff's observations is the assumption that South America is on an inexorable march toward regional integration. To be sure, *Revolution!* concludes by examining the region's prospects at deepening union. "Many have long proposed closer South American political and economic integration, but the time to move forward has never seemed more propitious." Maybe, but recent evidence suggests that Kozloff's optimism may be premature. If periodic bouts of macho chest-thumping between Chavez and Colombian president Alvaro Uribe, or the fact that Bolivia teeters on the verge of civil war are anything to go by, hopes for integration are tempered for the time being by lingering antagonisms and continued U.S. influence.

It comes as no surprise, then, to find Kozloff arguing that integration offers the best hope for saving the region from the chokehold of American power. His observation that the possibility of "South

America speak[ing] as one voice on the world stage" would "deal a severe blow to U.S. power," rings true. But Kozloff remains disappointingly silent on another critical ingredient to the future of Latin American prosperity, whether integrated or not: China. When Fidel Castro pointed out in 1953 that the region "export[s] sugar to import candy" he was making reference to the debilitating dependency of Latin America on United States markets. Countries in South America find themselves in much the same spot fifty-five years later, though the terms of agreement have been slightly altered. As the balance of power in international relation shifts east, South America has increasingly become the focus for Chinese foreign direct investment and trade.

Today, Latin America exports its natural resources, not just to the United States, but increasingly to China in return for inexpensively manufactured goods.

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Nikolas Kozloff

Existential Affairs

HOWARD PFLANZER

► *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre* by Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook (Continuum, 2008). 269 pp.

Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre were an iconoclastic couple. They were lovers, friends, intellectual companions and mutual advocates of an open sexual relationship. It was not Sartre — as is commonly thought — but de Beauvoir, who demanded this kind of arrangement. They didn't live together or marry. They developed a family of acolytes whom they shared as friends and lovers. But they met virtually every day to write together in cafes or their rooms and discuss the development of their ideas. Their existentialist philosophy was a joint venture with principles that they both explored in their extensive writings. They were together for fifty years and yet intellectually independent, though their ideas shared a large common ground. Sartre has been hailed as the father of existentialism, but the Fullbrooks have made a compelling revisionist case in *Sex and Philosophy: Rethinking de Beauvoir and Sartre* that de Beauvoir

with Sartre put her in a subservient position, but I see it as a situation which served her intellectual and emotional purposes and linked her to a cultural community in which Sartre was a central figure.

When they met, both de Beauvoir and Sartre were graduate students in philosophy in Paris. Both of them had equal access to training at the university. But men were welcomed as students in the philosophical/intellectual arena while women were not. Though she was a voracious reader of philosophical texts and an avid explorer of philosophical ideas, de Beauvoir chose not to write philosophical treatises or attempt to create philosophical systems. After lengthy discussions of philosophical concepts with Sartre, she chose instead to express her ideas through a fictional form, the novel.

The Fullbrooks make the provocative revisionist case, based on extensive documentation, that de Beauvoir wrote most or all of her first novel, *She Came to Stay*, before Sartre had even begun to write his famous existential philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*. Many of the major philosophical ideas credited as originating with Sartre did not appear in

philosophical ideas growing from the experiences of life. In an interview about her theory of the Other in 1979, de Beauvoir said: "No, these ideas are my own ... indeed when I wrote my novels I was never influenced by Sartre because I was writing my lived and felt experience."

Another major topic in her writings involves the presence of absence. For Sartre and de Beauvoir, the Fullbrooks tell us, "Human action balances on the interface of being and non being between what is, and what is not, but might be." Absence is not a void but a palpable essence. The continuum of past, present and future is central to their philosophical thought. "Thus past, present and future all stand in the relation of co-implementation. Conversely, the present is not conceivable without the past and the future." For de Beauvoir consciousness is an emptiness or nothingness which constantly requires replenishing. To catalyze your consciousness you need to be in intimate contact with the world in all its aspects, both intellectually and sensually. Only when you're asleep or dead are you unable to project yourself into the concrete experience of reality.

De Beauvoir did not want to create a masculine philosophical edifice. She posited an anti-universalist argument in relation to philosophy. She says that most philosophical systems originate from the purview of the thinker who shapes their world view and ideas in their own image. She considers this universalism which propels most philosophical systems arrogant. De Beauvoir wrote contemptuously in 1944 in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*: "The universal mind is without voice and every man who claims to speak in its name only gives in to his own voice." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, de Beauvoir's and Sartre's friend, made this point: "All intellectual work is concerned with establishing a certain attitude towards the world of which literature and philosophy are different expressions. The task of literature and philosophy can no longer be separated. The world of the concrete is the field of major philosophical inquiry." For de Beauvoir, the novel is a result of concrete philosophical research and experience, not a representation of an *a priori* philosophical idea. De Beauvoir's approach pointed the way to the current use of philosophy as an instrument of social change.

Extending her ideas further, de Beauvoir argues that reciprocity between individuals and civil society is needed. The degree of reciprocity in a given society is the measure of personal freedom. Individuals need to be free to interact with whomever they choose. If one's state of freedom is properly developed then you want freedom, not oppression for others, so they can join in the creation of the being which consciousness desires. Each individual needs to value their freedom. "Everyone's fundamental project is the justification of their existence. Freedom is the only source of justification. Therefore everyone should choose freedom as their ultimate value." Most importantly de Beauvoir extends freedom to a broader social context-situational freedom. She notes in *Pyrrhus and Cineas*: "the freedom of others can do nothing for me unless my own goals can serve as point of departure." There is a great timidity in our society about actually allowing the freedom for others that we desire for ourselves. Things could get out of control and result in anarchy, but I'd risk anarchy any day over the overt and covert forms of repression that are endemic in our society.

De Beauvoir also put her philosophical ideas about freedom to radical use. While Sartre advocated violent responses to violently oppressive and imperialist regimes, she used her concept of the Other to redefine the master-slave relationship which she found in



Jean-Paul Sartre with Simone de Beauvoir in 1946

was the mother of the basic ideas of this philosophy which each of them developed in their own unique way.

"Sartre and de Beauvoir chose writing, mind and friendship as the most important indigents of their association and they chose these factors over promises of sexual fidelity for which they substituted a code of honesty in and reportage of sexual relations with others." Their sexual adventures energized their philosophical investigations. For de Beauvoir and Sartre sex in tandem with philosophy certainly had a positive synergy. The more varied their sexual relationships were, the more their ideas flowed. This was totally unlike Freud or Gandhi who sought to channel their sexual energy into their work, and from their middle years forward were celibate.

When she was looking for an equal partner de Beauvoir "...had two types of equality in mind; equality in terms of achievement and equality in terms of innate potential for achievement ... equality from within and equality from without....Her ideal companion is her equal from within and must be nearly her equal from without or else they would not be able to discuss anything." In a seeming contradiction, she felt a man who was her equal must have superior achievements given the greater opportunities open to men. Some feminists have said that de Beauvoir's arrangement

Sartre's journals and other writings till after he had read the second draft of *She Came to Stay* in 1940 when he was on a ten day military leave. Analyzing *She Came to Stay*, the Fullbrooks make the case that de Beauvoir's first novel develops the important existentialist ideas of individual consciousness, reality and the consciousness of others in the fictional rendering of scenes where the three main characters — Francoise, Pierre and Xaviere — interact in various ways. Before even beginning his large philosophical work, Sartre wrote in his *War Diaries*: "Love is the effort of human reality to be a foundation of itself in the other." de Beauvoir makes the same point in *She Came to Stay*, antedating Sartre. These ideas in a more traditionally developed philosophical format with greater verbosity were articulated by Sartre in his massive philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness*.

De Beauvoir's idea of the Other appears in the novel centered on the concept of the look. To perceive someone looking at you is to perceive yourself as the Other's object "hence the Other as a conscious being." The idea is central to de Beauvoir's magnum opus, *The Second Sex*, where all women are looked upon as the Other in a male defined and dominated world. De Beauvoir and Sartre manifested the same ideas, but Sartre did it in the philosophical realm while de Beauvoir achieved it in the field of literature, with

Hegel. The Fullbrooks provide a précis of her ideas on this topic. Groups which have been subservient have turned the tables on their oppressors including the proletariat in Russia; black people in Haiti; the Indo-Chinese against French colonialism by substituting the collective “we” for the singular “I”. De Beauvoir derived this shift of pronoun and consequent shift in outlook from her analysis of women’s condition in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir argued that these reversals have only been possible when each groups’ respective members have transformed apprehension of themselves as subjects, of their communal refusal to be relegated to permanent subservience and non-reciprocal Otherness. It is necessary for these subservient groups to transform their oppressors into Others who can successfully be challenged. Before effective action can be taken against them, there has to be a major transformation of communal consciousness in the formerly oppressed group. In *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir says: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.”

In the fundamental ethics of *The Second Sex*, the public good is defined in terms of the creation of institutions which promote concrete opportunities for individuals in the larger society. This definition is situational and materialist in orientation, eschewing idealistic formulations of the concept. People can endlessly debate the nature of the ideal society and the relationship of individuals collectively in this society without even trying to answer the question: “What is to be done?” If you act strategically with a well-defined purpose change is possible. Your oppressors will try to keep you down, and rationalize their oppression by saying what they do is for your own good and the good of society. They will defame you, but if you take aim at them carefully, you can turn their specious rhetoric against them.

Because she is unclassifiable as a philosopher in the traditional sense of a system builder, the Fullbrooks note that de Beauvoir is not recognized alongside Sartre and others as an important philosophical voice of the twentieth century. Camus’ work, interestingly, has suffered the same fate; his books, philosophical and otherwise, have been relegated to the literature section of most bookstores. De Beauvoir’s books likewise appear in the literature and feminist studies sections of bookstores, but never in the philosophy section. And yet her books are multifaceted and should be categorized across a range of genres. *The Second Sex*

is an overview of the historical concept of women, but in its form and substance it is a considered refusal of definitions, categories and genres. Where do you place works that don’t fit? This is an important issue that the Fullbrooks grapple with and posit that in the coming years de Beauvoir’s works that deal with justice, freedom, responsibility, material conditions and the ethics of reciprocity will find an important place in the philosophical canon. De Beauvoir brought philosophy from the rarified ideal realm of heaven down to the sensual and raw environment of earth.

Amazingly we find in the student diaries of de Beauvoir, written when she was nineteen, her developing her method of mingling the personal and the philosophical.

The three main categories of philosophical thought of Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* are present in rudimentary form in these diaries. What we can see from the outset is that de Beauvoir was problem-oriented in her philosophical explorations and not a system builder.

A significant omission in this book is a full discussion of de Beauvoir’s and Sartre’s existentialist philosophy in relation to Camus’ articulation of the idea of the absurd and the negative existential consequences of the structure of consciousness. Camus is after all, only cited once, and de Beauvoir’s refutation of his ideas is given only a brief mention. From 1943 to the end of the decade, the three of them — Camus, Sartre and de Beauvoir — were closely associated and met often to discuss their ideas. More about their interactions and their differences would have been illuminating and helpful for evaluating the ideas presented in this book by the Fullbrooks.

Camus, Sartre and de Beauvoir met during the war, when Sartre asked Camus to perform in his play, *No Exit*. Sartre wanted to turn Camus into an acolyte, but de Beauvoir wanted him as a lover. Camus rejected them both. Indeed, Camus stood independent from Sartre and de Beauvoir’s existential philosophy where each individual has the potential to create his life and relationships. In Camus the question of the absurd and the pursuit of human happiness are two sides of the same coin. For Camus philosophy was an endless struggle to affirm human values and fight against nihilism, terror and violence as solutions to the problems of the world. Sartre and Camus attacked one other with vehemence after Sartre embraced communism and the Soviet Union, in spite of the revelations

about the Gulag and the Stalinist use of terror against Soviet citizens. Sartre justified his choice as selecting the lesser of two evils: communism over western capitalism. Camus was brutally and unswervingly honest in his rejection of nihilism and terrorism which lead to dehumanization in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. As a French Algerian, he recognized the great injustices against the Muslim population, but could not accept that French colonial rule could only be terminated through revolutionary violence. His views on the Soviet Union were shaped in part by Arthur Koestler. Once a communist, he attacked the Soviet Union with all his rhetorical might and drew Camus into his political orbit.

De Beauvoir publicly supported Sartre’s political stance. But it seems likely Camus’ discussion of the consciousness of the absurd, suicide and the possibility of human happiness as well as his advocacy of the philosophical novel resonated with de Beauvoir. For several years, de Beauvoir was his confidant and they were close friends. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus discusses the longing for connection of alienated individuals to God or others in this hostile universe. De Beauvoir looks to human reciprocity based on individual freedom as a way to collectively overcome alienation. Intellectually her ideas were shaped by her discussions with Camus as well as Sartre.

Progenitors of ideas are hard to pinpoint with accuracy. The Fullbrooks do an admirable job of making a strong case for de Beauvoir as the unheralded avatar of existentialism. But the development of important existentialist ideas and their political ramifications were as much part of the intellectual clash among Sartre, Camus and de Beauvoir as the relational give and take between de Beauvoir and Sartre. This important aspect of the intellectual development of existentialism is possibly avoided because it would muddy the Fullbrooks’ argument of the genesis of existentialism solely as the interplay of the ideas of de Beauvoir and Sartre. Bringing in Camus’ contribution in an important way would skew the focus of their thesis. Each one of them contributed significantly to the development of existentialist ideas and in their engagement with each other, directly and indirectly, sexually and intellectually, to the existentialist world view. Ⓐ

Howard Pflanzner is a playwright whose most recent work is *Living With History: Camus, Sartre and Beauvoir*.

Book Review
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As a result, local industries are undercut, and the region’s economic development has gradually been cast in doubt. Has the New Left’s rush to China’s embrace set the stage for a return to classically colonial trade practices, with Latin America on the losing end? Kozloff doesn’t say, leaving readers with as many questions at the end of *Revolution!* as at its start.

Recently, however, Kozloff has elegantly engaged with the issue of China in Latin America. Writing in the *Brooklyn Rail*, Kozloff examined the changing nature of South America’s relationship with the rising powers in the east. “What are the likely economic effects of South American nations’ trade with China?... The Asian nation is willing to help construct ports and railroads, and such infrastructure projects will be linked to the transport of raw materials. In this sense China is little different from the United States, which historically sought to promote the type of ‘development’ which would merely facilitate the extraction of South America’s resources. Nevertheless, there is some reason to be optimistic about South America’s long-term political prospects. Today, in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Brazil, and even Chile, a whole host of social movements have emerged and across the continent indigenous peoples, environmentalists, workers, and landless peasants are at the vanguard of political struggle. As China moves more forcefully into South America, the Asian nation can ignore such forces only at its own peril.

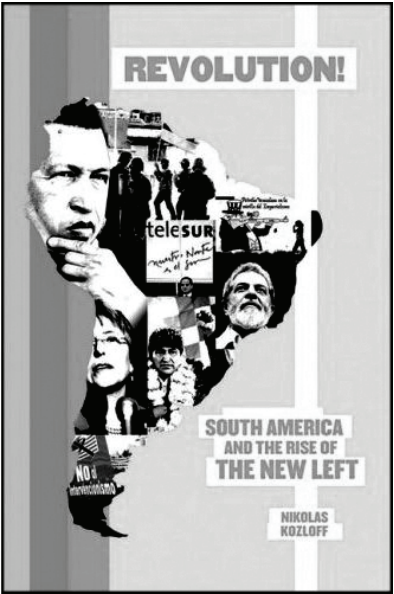
“Having fought a long and protracted battle with local globalizing elites backed by Washington, these social movements are now pressing their respective governments to adhere to progressive principles. In Africa, where China has been busily extracting raw resources such as oil, the Asian nation has propped up brutal regimes that fail to observe any semblance of human rights. In the absence of any real organized left in Africa, China has been able to achieve its economic goals without too much resistance. In South America, however, the story could unfold quite differently.”

In the meantime, the continent and its northern neighbor will be forced to contend with another rising power intent on asserting influence over regional politics. Russia has returned to the scene, drastically changing the political calculus of power politics in Latin America. As international alarm at Russia’s incursions into Georgia this past month reached fever pitch, Moscow quietly negotiated a joint military maneuvers agreement with Chávez regime. In addition to future naval exercises and increased information sharing, Caracas invited the Kremlin to send a pair of nuclear-capable bombers to dock on Venezuelan soil. While the planes are not equipped with nuclear weapons, the significance of these de-

velopments is clear. “It is a warning. Russia is with us,” Chávez announced. “We are strategic allies. It is a message to the empire. Venezuela is no longer poor and alone.”

This may be true, but Russia’s return raises a host of uncomfortable questions that regional leaders, current and future, will necessarily confront. Will Latin America’s New Left find ways to stimulate self-sustainable growth without falling under the sway of foreign domination? Can it do so without retreating from the global political economy and the emerging norms of good behavior that underpin it? Most importantly, will South America’s new crop of socialist-inspired leaders be able to strike the balance between meeting the hopes and demands of their poor constituents without bursting the constraints of their very real economic limitations?

In this context, one is reminded of Rosa Luxemburg, who, writing 40 years before Castro’s Macondo defense, could have been commenting on Latin America in 2008. “It is often difficult to discover,” Luxemburg cautioned, “within the tangle of violence and contests for power, the stern laws of the economic process.” Such determinations are especially important to the future prosperity of Latin America, whose political tangles are especially thorny. Ⓐ



Women Artists Across the Board

NATASHA KURCHANOVA

- Louise Bourgeois and Catherine Opie at the Guggenheim Museum
- Olga Chernysheva at Foxy Production

Even in a city as exciting and diverse as New York, it is a rare occasion that interesting exhibitions of women artists spring up simultaneously from various corners of the city. It is happening now, with the Guggenheim arranging two impressive shows in a row: Louise Bourgeois' retrospective followed by a mid-career survey of the photographer Catherine Opie, while galleries in Chelsea and elsewhere in the city are displaying works of such notable artists as Mary Heilmann, Judy Glantzman, and Martha Rosler. There are also shows with less-well-known names: for example, a tiny exhibition of a Russian photographer and video artist Olga Chernysheva at Foxy Production, tucked away on West 27th Street next to the West Side Highway. With Bourgeois — given her history and name recognition — at the head of the pack and Chernysheva at the tail, there is very little that connects the two women apart from their belonging to one profession and one gender. In looking at their exhibitions, however, I am tempted to suggest some comparisons and propose some tentative links.

The Bourgeois retrospective is self-contained in terms of its subject matter, restrained in its installation design, and anxious in the dominant mode of expression. Its spirit is that of perseverance. The artist herself summarized it best in the work "Where My Motivation Comes From?" completed last year, at the age of 96: "It is not so much where my motivation comes from but rather how it managed to survive," she wrote on a canvas. Indeed, one is stunned by the drive, intensity, and unrelenting vitality of her art which she sustained unfettered throughout her career. Equally dazzling is the variety of her formal inventiveness, made all the more impressive because it moves around a few constantly repeating themes. Arranged chronologically her works — mostly sculptures, but also paintings and small-scale installations — spring from one and the same source: the childhood trauma of a terrorizing father. Bourgeois returns time and again to the same subjects — domesticity, the woman's body in a patriarchal family, enclosed spaces, agoraphobia, safety, oneness and multiplicity. The exhibition announces the artist's particular attachment to symbolic representations of reality at the entrance. Visitors are faced with two recurring motifs in Bourgeois' iconic vocabulary: the spider and its two cocoons. The spider is a free-standing sculpture which towers above the visitors and forces them to look at the knots and claws of its enormous legs at a close range. This spider stands for the artist's mother, a woman who ran the family's tapestry business and knew much about weaving. Overprotective and home-bound, Bourgeois' mother endured continuous degradation from her husband in order to preserve her family. Hence the cocoons, hanging from the ceiling, wrapping and preserving what's inside it against all ills.

Having escaped her family, her city, and her country as early as she could by marrying the American art historian Robert Goldwater, Bourgeois came to United States in 1938, at the age of 27. Her first paintings, *Femme-Maisons* or women-houses, depict hideous monsters — half-houses, half-women — standing, walking, flailing their arms and otherwise struggling

to assert their organic state, all the while hovering in an ethereal space without ground or gravity. Bourgeois made these paintings while still a young mother, in an effort to cure herself of demons as well as to engage herself in a meaningful activity. She returned to this motif over the years — in 1983 and 1994 — sustaining herself by these memories. The later woman-houses were carved in marble. Bourgeois found that she could express herself most effectively in sculpture rather than painting: it is a more visceral medium, relating to the scale, form, and physicality of the human body in a more direct way. Her first sculptured works, such as *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1947-49) were geometric and angular, in the style of Post-Cubist abstraction. And, like many of Bourgeois' sculptures, were inspired by a narrative myth. As the artist avowed, it represented "old men who can drive you over the edge of the precipice." From the beginning, the sculptures were scaled to the human body..

By 1949, Bourgeois abandoned geometry and began making anthropomorphic figures, which she exhibited at Peridot Gallery in New York. Her *Femme-Volage*

1982, eight years after the unveiling of the sculpture, the artist was given a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, an unprecedented honor for a woman in this country. Bourgeois was seventy-one at the time.


Far from marking the end of her career, the retrospective fueled Bourgeois' creative energy. Since then, she has made more works than during all of the years prior to this momentous event. In the late 1980s and 1990s she kept expanding the range of materials and styles — making figures sewn out of fabric and medium-scale installations. But the most important change in her life since the retrospective has been her skyrocketing fame and her instantly acquired status as a star of the art world. Bourgeois faced the change in the reception of her work in stride, hosting a salon and becoming a spiritual leader of sorts for the post-1970s generation of artists. Her personal aura became so strong that it allowed her to possess not only people's souls, but also their bodies. In 1993 she made a life-size bronze figure of a headless male torso arching backward at a hundred-and-eighty degree angle. She called the work *Arch of Hysteria*. To make

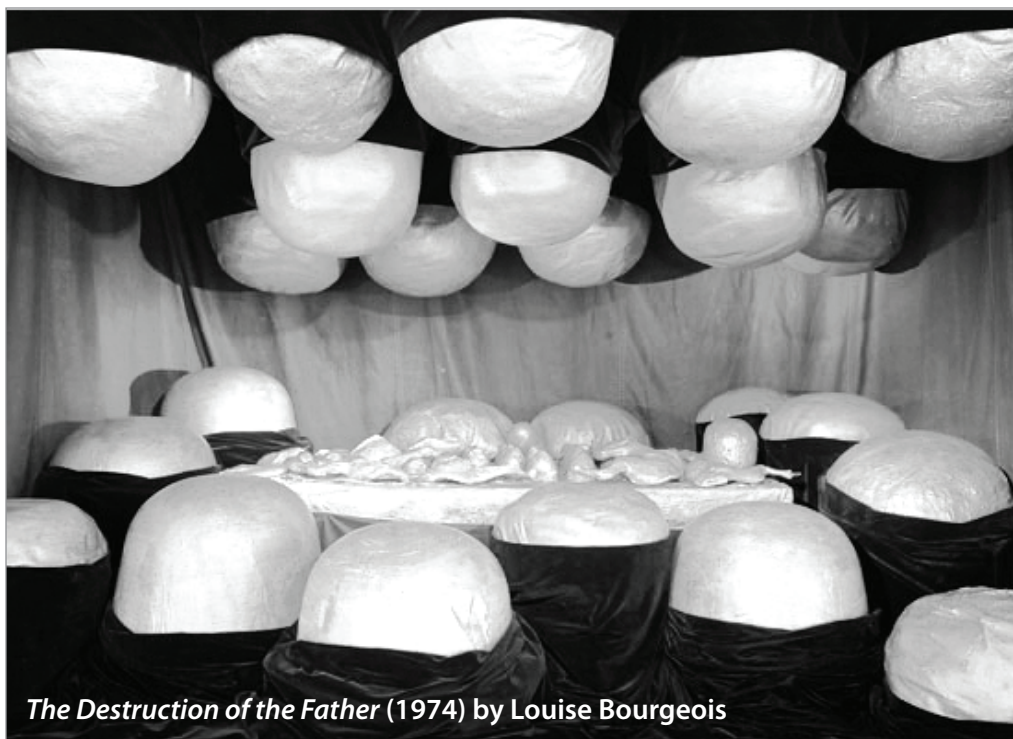
it, she used her assistant, Jerry Goro-voy, as a live model. His body had to be completely shaved and submerged in plaster for long enough to make a cast. Even this "gentlest and most patient of men" in the words of Bourgeois' friend Robert Storr, had to admit, reluctantly, that it was not the most comfortable experience in his life.

Olga Chernysheva's work appears to be very different than Bourgeois's. A photographer and a video artist, Chernysheva does not operate on the level of the body, but rather engages in a more conceptual and markedly more cerebral form of art making. Her exhibition at Foxy Production consists of a handful of photographs of today's Moscow and a video of a woman standing on a Moscow street. The photographs are divided into three thematic groups:

"Moscow Area," depicting public and private spaces of the post-Soviet city; "Alley of Cosmonauts," documenting the debris of the Soviet-era monumental construction; and "From the Deputy," five large durable prints that depict one and the same building wall photographed over a period of time, recording drastic changes in its appearance. The video brings together these groupings by showing a young woman drawing a triangle, a square, and circle on an etch-a-sketch. As soon as the drawing is complete, she erases it, repeating the process over and over again. Amidst the hustle and bustle of a crowded Moscow street she looks happy, almost ethereal.

There may be many ways of looking at Chernysheva's work, but it is difficult to miss the themes of change, the flow of time, and the affirmation of the fleeting status of reality. Paths that go nowhere and people that go about their daily chores may repeat in endless succession — just like an etch-a-sketch drawing — but what remains everlasting is the self-containment that the woman finds in her simple activity. Extremely open to the world and withdrawn simultaneously, she seems to stand apart from her busy surroundings, because she receives her sustenance from an activity that disconnects her from the world of things.

This is very different than Bourgeois's work. But the two artists get their sustenance from the notion of memory and of shock — memory as an individual trauma for Bourgeois and memory as a collective trauma for Chernysheva. Bourgeois and Chernysheva seem to hold to the same pole, but from opposite ends. 



The Destruction of the Father (1974) by Louise Bourgeois

(Fickle Woman) from this period is groundbreaking in its use of multiple stacked forms, as opposed to a single solid structure. After producing a series of these in the 1960s, she turned to the *Lairs* — self-enclosed structures made of plaster, latex, and other easily molded materials, whose function it is — similar to the spider cocoons — to shield and enclose, guard and preserve. During this period, she made a stunning work, *Fée Couturier*, looking like an enormous bird's nest hanging from the ceiling, hermetic and threatening like her childhood house, with a few gaping holes for the "doors" and "windows."

From the late 1960s until the early 1980s, metaphors for childhood abandonment, desire for safety and protection proliferate. After *Cumuls* — amalgamations of multiple bulbous shapes brought together and draped by what looks like a soft, pliable cloth, but in fact are carved from marble — Bourgeois made the formidable *Destruction of the Father*, a large cavernous sculpture the inside of which is filled with protuberances covering its top and bottom and glowing in the reddish darkness. This piece tells a very specific story of a primal fantasy of cannibalizing the father, a communal meal. The savagery of this myth finds its counterpart in the threatening, claustrophobic, and unsettling associations evoked by the sculpture. The space of the primordial cave, inhabited by no one and by everyone simultaneously, is a site strangely familiar, even if seen for the first time. In *The Destruction of the Father*, Bourgeois manages to achieve what is rarely possible: a combination of an immediate, visceral response from a viewer and an explicit subtext, obvious to anyone familiar with the word "psychoanalysis." In

Masters of New Music

NAOMI PERLEY

► John Zorn and Signal at (Le) Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker St. at Thompson St., (212) 228-4854.

Things other than school start in September. The new Greenwich Village club, (Le) Poisson Rouge, is a fine example. Described on its website as a “multimedia art cabaret,” (Le) Poisson Rouge presents a dizzying array of concerts, art exhibitions, films, and dance productions, with the goal of reviving “the symbiotic relationship between art and revelry; to establish a creative asylum for both artists and audiences.” Its mission bears much in common with that of its predecessor, the iconic Village Gate, which from 1958 to 1993 presented top performers ranging from folk and jazz musicians to improv comedy.

I ventured down to (Le) Poisson Rouge just as school was getting under way to see two very different concerts. The first featured record producer, composer, and jazz saxophonist John Zorn, performing with a free jazz ensemble. The second featured the contemporary music group Signal performing two works by American composer Steve Reich.

One of the strengths of (Le) Poisson Rouge is the flexibility of the performance space. When I descended into its cavernous depths for the John Zorn concert, the vibe was very much that of a downtown jazz club. Black walls, small black tables with sleek black chairs filling the room, a small black stage in the middle. At the far end of the space there is a bar; the other corners of the room feature raised seating areas. When I returned ten days later for the Signal concert, I found myself in a completely different space. Gone were the raised stage and little black tables and chairs. The ensemble of over twenty musicians was arranged in quasi-orchestral fashion in the middle of the room. Some members of the audience sat down on the concrete floor wherever they could find a spot — remember those assemblies in your elementary school gym? — and some stood by the bar.

John Zorn has got to be one of the most eclectic musicians around, probably because he listens to pretty much everything. When an interviewer once asked him if it was true that he had the biggest record collection in the East Village, he replied, “Well, see, it’s not really true. There are only about 13, 000 pieces.” In his more formal work, he is known for rapid-fire compositions which cross genres in a matter of seconds — from Brahms to noise to jazz to Mozart in under a minute. At (Le) Poisson Rouge he performed two sets of free jazz with drummer Milford Graves and guitarist Marc Ribot, who came in at the last minute to replace an ailing Bill Laswell.

Many people deride free jazz as being merely noise. If three musicians improvise simultaneously, instead of successively, without seeming to follow any grand harmonic plan (as they would in more traditional forms of jazz), what else could it be? Well, when you take three musicians of John Zorn and company’s stature, it can be a lot more than that. Throughout the show they were listening closely to each other — after one musician would start to play with a new idea, the others would develop it as well. At times, they were playing off of each other to such a degree that it didn’t sound very different from the more traditional technique of “trading fours” — where two musicians trade solos back and forth, each one improvising for only four measures at a time.

Since the early 1990s, Zorn has sought to incorporate his Jewish heritage into his various musical activities. Under his record label he established a series entitled “Radical Jewish Culture,” in which different artists propose their answer to the question of what constitutes Jewish music, and where it is headed in the future. He performed throughout the 1990s with a klezmer-jazz ensemble called Masada (named after

a famous mountain in Israel) that explored this question as well. In his September 4 concert the topic of Judaism and Jewish music lurked just below the surface. There were occasional bits of melody that sounded like little bits of Jewish prayer music or klezmer sprinkled throughout the show.

After the start of the second set, Zorn introduced the “secret guest” of the evening — legendary musician Lou Reed! Earlier in the week, Zorn and Reed had played another concert together, and Zorn called him in for the September 4 show to make up for Bill Laswell’s absence. The group’s sound, with Reed’s addition, was sultrier than it had been in the first half — channelling the Ornette Coleman-Lonely Woman vibe.

Drummer Milford Graves stole the show. A veteran of the original free jazz groups in the 1960s, more recently he has been investigating the spiritual, healing power of music. His solos throughout the show were remarkable. But he did much more than just play drums. At one or two points during the concert, everyone else stopped what they were doing and Graves got up from his drum kit, went to center stage, and did some crazy little bits of performance art. You know, a bit of dancing, and a lot of non-verbal vocalisations. He worked these into his drum solos in other parts of the show as well, giving off an incredible energy all the while.

Although Steve Reich and John Zorn have similar backgrounds (both New Yorkers, both Jewish), their musical styles are completely different. Reich’s style is much more cohesive than Zorn’s; while it has developed considerably along the way, it really has grown out of his early works of the 1960s and 1970s.

Reich exploded onto the scene forty years ago with his work with tape loops. If you take a bit of speech and play it over and over again on two different tape machines at the same time, they will start off being in sync but will gradually fall out of sync with each other. As the tapes get more and more out of sync, the sound keeps changing. Reich called this device “phasing,” because the samples go in and out of phase with each other. Reich applied the technique of phasing to instruments as well, asking his performers to try to get out of sync with each other while playing the same melody.

After the first few phase pieces, Reich felt that he had to move on: “When you discover a new idea, it may be very important to present that idea in a very forceful and pared-down way. . . . But once you’ve done that for a while — you can’t write the same piece over and over again.” This is where *Music for 18 Musicians*, one of the pieces performed at Poisson Rouge, comes in. It was composed in 1976, about ten years after Reich first began his tape loop experiments. The rhythmic process Reich uses in it is more subtle than that of his phase pieces, but still somewhat related: while the pianos and mallet instruments maintain a constant rhythmic pulse, the rhythm in all of the other instruments plus the voices is determined by how long the musicians can hold their breath. The melodic and harmonic material in *Music for 18 Musicians* is also more complicated than in his earlier works. As in jazz, Reich establishes a series of chords, and each instrumentalist plays only notes from the specific harmony used in each section. Unlike jazz, however, Reich will stay with one chord for about five minutes, rather than just a few seconds, before moving on to

the next one.

The other piece performed at (Le) Poisson Rouge, *You Are (Variations)*, is much more recent; Reich composed it in 2004. While it is orchestrated in a similar fashion — lots of pianos and mallet instruments, some strings and woodwinds, and a few voices — and thus sounds quite similar in some ways to *Music for 18 Musicians*, Reich is even more flexible with his processes. Although he still is using an underlying harmonic pattern, he frequently goes against it, adding in extra harmonies that contradict his pattern. Also, he now uses some more traditional, harder-to-hear processes to develop the music over time.


Another important facet of *You Are (Variations)* is Reich’s choice of texts. Reich sets a different Jewish philosophical quote in each of the four movements. In the outer movements, he uses quotes from rabbis; the quotes of the inner movements are from a Psalm and the Talmud. Reich too felt the need to reconnect with his Jewish heritage later in life, when he was 37. Because he was not raised in the Jewish musical



tradition, he does not feel, like Zorn, that he can incorporate Jewish melodies or scales into his music. Instead, he frequently incorporates extra-musical Jewish topics into his compositions, as he does in *You Are (Variations)*.

Both of Reich’s works were performed by Signal, a contemporary-music group that only came into being last spring. All of the musicians seemed to be fully engaged in what they were doing. And when the musicians are excited about what they’re performing, it makes the concert that much more enjoyable for the audience. My only complaint would be that sometimes the keyboard and mallet instruments threatened to drown out the woodwinds and strings — a problem that could probably be fixed with better amplification.

Music for 18 Musicians was a lot of fun to watch. All of the instrumentalists were arranged perpendicularly to the typical orchestral arrangement. The strings, woodwinds, and singers were at the front, seated double-file, all facing toward the centre. The keyboards and mallet instruments were arranged behind them in such a way that pairs of instruments faced each other. The mallet instruments were visually stunning in this arrangement, as the two musicians in each pair would play on alternate beats for long stretches. Picture a seesaw going up and down — that’s how their arms looked the whole time.

(Le) Poisson Rouge appears to be off to a great start. The management has created a cool, flexible space that will hopefully provide an audience for many different kinds of artists in the years to come. One might worry if their mission isn’t too widespread; how could they retain a core clientele? Judging from the high turnout at shows featuring such disparate musicians as Zorn and Reich, that isn’t going to be a problem. 

it Awards Celebrate 50 Years Off-Off Broadway

FRANK EPISALE

The notion of representing the entirety of Off-Off Broadway in a single awards ceremony is quixotic at best, but the Innovative Theatre (it) Awards, which held its fourth annual evening of festivities on September 22nd, attempts to do just that. To get a sense of the scope of the awards, consider that the nominees this year included 127 individual artists and forty-seven productions representing forty theatre companies. These nominees were selected from a pool of over 3,000 artists who were submitted for adjudication. Compare this to the Broadway's TONY Awards, which last year made its nominations from a pool of only 36 eligible productions, and the argument can be made that winning an it Award is, in some ways, rather more daunting (if considerably less expensive) a challenge.

Theatre productions in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens with a budget of \$40,000 or less, who charge \$30 or less for tickets, can register themselves to be considered for awards. Most of the productions that submit themselves for nomination have considerably smaller budgets and lower ticket prices than required to meet these standards. A production which enters into the pool for consideration must also send a representative to judge several other productions, resulting in a kind of peer review process. Each production is seen by three judges, each of whom counts for 25 percent of the show's total score. Audience ballots count for the remaining 25 percent. This process results in eighteen categories of nominees and several special awards.

Intriguingly, despite the number of productions in competition, a few companies dominated the nominations. Blessed Unrest received nine nominations for *Burn, Crave, Hold: The James Wilde Project*; Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company received eight nominations for their *Fight Girl Battle World*; Rabbit Hole Productions received six nominations for *The Night of Nosferatu*, and Company SoGoNo received five nominations for *Art of Memory*.

This year's it Awards — which producers are careful to pronounce “it awards” in order to avoid being confused with Information Technology — marked not only the fourth year of this event but the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of Caffè Cino, widely considered to be the first Off-Off Broadway venues (though, as with most origin-myths, this one has spawned some counter-narratives). As such, the theme of the evening was “Celebrating 50 years of Off-Off Broadway.”

In keeping with the relatively grandiose theme, the evening's presenters included people like Olympia Dukakis, Bill Camp, and Edward Albee. Many of the presenting luminaries have had considerable mainstream success, but nearly all of them referred to small theatre as their “home.” Presenters in the past have occasionally caused unwelcome stirs and mini-controversies by implying, or seeming to imply, that working in small theatres is always the result of compromise and obstruction, and thus a lesser achievement than working in the commercial theatre. To be fair, such statements have generally been made in the spirit of criticizing mainstream theatre's blindness to some formidable talents. Nevertheless, the idea that Off-Off Broadway talent “should be” working in more commercial theatres on a regular basis doesn't play particularly well in a room full of “alternative” theatre artists.

Not only did this year's presenters avoid such moments, some of them went a bit too far in the other

direction. This was particularly true of Edward Albee, who declared that there are “two kinds of theatre: the commercial theatre, and the theatre that matters.” Those who consider their own work and tastes to be “highbrow” have long used such statements to claim cultural capital for artists who receive little capital of the other kind, but these proclamations also serve to reinforce the idea that alternative theatre is neither intended for, nor accessible to, a wider audience. Rest assured, though, most of those hoping for an Innovative Theatre Award do so in no small part because they hope to attract a wider audience — and, in some cases, more funding — for their work.

There was nothing pompous or off-putting about host Lisa Kron, the playwright and performer probably best known as a cofounder of the performance troupe The Five Lesbian Brothers. Kron recently had a brush with commercial success herself, when her newest play, *Well*, was transferred to Broadway in 2006. The production, which had begun its life at the Public Theater in 2004 (hardly an obscure storefront theatre itself), received positive reviews but struggled to find an audience, and closed quickly. Talking about that experience during

her opening remarks, Kron seemed genuinely grateful to have downtown theatre as a home to which she could return.

Throughout the events, Kron was consistently funny and charming, in a distinctly offbeat East Village kind of way. Her humor and occasional self-deprecation helped diffuse any moments of self-importance that popped up from time to time, and her apparently heartfelt enthusiasm for theatre and its practitioners was infectious. The evening also featured a couple of brief performances from Blue Man Group, who were once, not so long ago, considered innovative themselves. Kron and the Blue Men went a long way towards making the too-long ceremony feel a lot less ponderous.

The winners of the various production awards were as follows (a complete list of the nominees is available on the it Awards web site, www.nyitawards.com):

- **Outstanding Ensemble:** Elena Chang, Noshir Dalal, Jon Hoche, Kelley Rae O'Donnell, Melissa Paladino, Maureen Sebastian, Andrea Marie Smith, Paco Tolson, Tamar Underwood, *Fight Girl Battle World* (Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Solo Performance:** Andrea Caban, *You Got Questions? I Got Answers!* (Coyote REP Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Actor in a Featured Role:** Rob Sheridan, *The Two Lives of Napoleon Beazley* (Incumbo Theater Company)
- **Outstanding Actress in a Featured Role:** Megan Byrne, *No End of Blame* (Potomac Theatre Project)
- **Outstanding Actor in a Lead Role:** Cameron J. Oro, *The Accidental Patriot: The Lamentable Tragedy of the Pirate Desmond Connelly, Irish by Birth, English by Blood, and American by Inclination* (The Stolen Chair Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Actress in a Lead Role:** Stephanie Barton-Farcas, *Elizabeth Rex* (Nicu's Spoon)
- **Outstanding Choreography/Movement:** Qui Nguyen, *Fight Girl Battle World* (Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Director:** Edward Elefterion, *The*

Night of Nosferatu (Rabbit Hole Theatre Ensemble)

- **Outstanding Lighting Design:** Kevin Hardy, *The Night of Nosferatu* (Rabbit Hole Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Costume Design:** Jessica Wegener, *Fight Girl Battle World* (Vampire Cowboys Theatre Company)
- **Outstanding Set Design:** Sean Breault, *Art of Memory* (Company SoGoNo)
- **Outstanding Sound Design:** Dan Bianchi, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (Radiotheatre)
- **Outstanding Original Music:** Dan Bianchi, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (Radiotheatre)
- **Outstanding Full-Length Script:** Bekah Brunstetter, *You May Go Now* (Babel Theatre Project)
- **Outstanding Short Script:** Aliza Shane, *The Three Sillies* (The Looking Glass Theatre)
- **Outstanding Performance Art Production:** *Removable Parts* (HERE Arts Center)
- **Outstanding Production of a Musical:** *Yank! A New Musical* (The Gallery Players)
- **Outstanding Production of a Play:** *Burn, Crave, Hold: The James Wilde Project* (Blessed Unrest)

In addition to the production awards, three special achievement awards were given this year. The 2008 Artistic Achievement Award, intended to celebrate “significant artistic contribution to the Off-Off Broadway community,” was awarded to Judith Malina, cofounder and artistic director of leftist, pacifist legends The Living Theatre. The 2008 Stewardship Award “for significant contribution to the Off-Off Broadway community through service, support, and leadership” went to Martin and Rochelle Denton of The New York Theatre Experience, the organization that runs nytheatre.com and publishes an annual anthology of plays produced in independent theatres.

In one of the more puzzling moments of the evening, the Caffè Cino Fellowship “for consistent production of outstanding work” went to the Boomerang Theatre Company. Boomerang have been around for ten years now, and have mounted an impressive number of plays, displaying tenacity and competence. But innovation? Not so much. Most awkwardly, members of the company performed a selection of scenes before receiving their check that reminded me of nothing more than an agent showcase by a graduating class from a mediocre BFA Acting program.

Indeed, while most of the winners of this year's awards might be considered “innovative” in one way or another, many of the nominees were in fact rather conventional. A couple of them might even be considered conservative. That is not to say that none of them is deserving of an award for Off-Off Broadway excellence, just that the Innovative Theatre Awards may very well be misnamed. Certainly producing work in small, independent theatres requires ingenuity, fortitude, and creative thinking, but such work is not necessarily “innovative.”

Qualms and quibbles aside, the it Awards bring press attention to artists and producers who often feel as if they are the invisible engine of New York City theatre. They also encourage many of these artists to see, or at least be aware of, each other's work; far too many downtown theatre artists find that they have little or no time to see theatre because they spend all of their time (understandably) in rehearsal and (unfortunately) scraping together money for their next show. The Off-Off Broadway theatre scene is far too fragmented and unruly to be thought of as a cohesive community, but it is a community nonetheless, and the it Awards, for all their imperfections, provide an opportunity, once a year, for at least some of that community to come together, applaud one another, and share a drink or two. ☺



Lisa Kron
in *Well*.

Putting the ‘Bad’ in the Battle in Seattle

NICOLE WALLENBROCK

► *Battle in Seattle*, directed by Stuart Townsend.

Battle in Seattle has gained more press exposure than the average independent film due to its controversial setting: the riots and demonstrations attended by over 50,000 at the WTO conference in Seattle, Washington in 1999. And then there is the film’s talk show-hopping Hollywood star, Charlize Theron. The talented actress, who surpassed expectations by playing an overweight killer in *Monster* (2003), has a lot less star making material to work with in this disappointing directorial debut of her Irish fiancé Stuart Townsend. In truth, *Battle in Seattle* follows so many narratives, it is difficult to say that Theron is the star, even if her name is its publicized feature. By following the trials and tribulations of four racially diverse young activists, a television reporter, a cop, his pregnant wife, and the mayor of Seattle, the narrative strives to be Altmanesque, but ultimately provides little more than a collage of under-developed stereo-types. In truth, though the film’s production company, Insight is independent, *Battle in Seattle* does not appear to sub-

realism of *Medium Cool*, the montage looks as if he badly cut and pasted videos. Furthermore, the artificial dialogue and the flat characters contrast greatly with the actual footage of the riot. Thus the film’s Hollywood tendencies are enhanced and the realism of *Medium Cool* or *The Battle of Algiers*, for instance, is never even approximated.

Though no reference is made to the political circumstances of 2008, the film premieres roughly a month after the RNC where police again used teargas on peaceful protestors. Similarities between the need for action in 1999 and 2008 abound and one might assume that Townsend hopes to inspire current activism with the stories of fictional heroes clad in t-shirts and scruffy jeans. Jay (Martin Henderson), appropriately outfitted with beard and scarf, serves as the predictably white male protagonist, mastermind behind all of the protest organization. His blossoming romance with Lou (Michèle Rodriguez) struggles to keep our attention, and almost wins through the sheer humor of trite sexist dialogue. Rodriguez, who started her career as almost butch in *Girlfight* (2000), continues to play feisty and tough, though now with a sweet lov-

ing feminine touch. She relaxes her fist throwing anarchist tendencies when sobbing in her jail cell, and then holds hands through the bars with Jay as he tells her to “stop crying like a girl.” (How serendipitous that within all the chaos of the 1999 Seattle WTO shut down, our lovers’ would land next to each other in the jailhouse!) Unfortunately, if Jay and Lou do inspire you to activism, it will not be in hopes of romance. The romance plot does not even seem to interest the actors, and adds nothing to their

“Let’s go out and get those motherfuckers!” (direct quote) ideology.

The other activist to note is the only African-American one, Django (Outkast’s André 3000). Django, like most black supporting roles, and most *are* supporting, offers comic relief and optimism for the white characters and audience. Django can be facing the teargas, at the end of a police baton, or with others bleeding in jail, but will always, as a good performer, wear a big smile. Although Jay’s back story is the death of his activist brother who was chained to a tree and then cut down, Django’s past is only referred to when he recounts a bedtime story his grandpa told him about turtles. One must suppose that this sweet story is what inspired Django’s love of turtles and subsequent fierce opposition against the turtle-killing fishing industry. Although Outkast deemed 2002’s live action *Scooby-Doo* flick worthy of a soundtrack song, the only hint of André 3000’s musicality in *Battle in Seattle* is an a capella rendition of Bobby McFerrin’s “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.”

If the actors appear as cardboard cutouts of radicals and anarchists, one should note that Townsend’s search for accuracy did include consultation with David Solnit, a real Direct Action Network organizer who was part of the WTO protests in 1999. Solnit tried to correct the script, and evidently did alter large sections despite the director’s resistance. He explains in *Yes Magazine* that along with other activists, he succeeded with a pressure campaign, “applying tactics (they) often used in anti-corporate campaigns,” but were consulted “too late to change the film’s basic narrative.” Alas, one may hope that perhaps with

more time, Solnit and friends could have corrected not only the stereotypes of activists but also the consistently banal dialogue, and what becomes an obstacle course of characters. Other veteran WTO-protest participants who do not agree with the film’s portrayal of Seattle in 1999 have bonded together on a website, therealbattleinseattle.org, which follows Solnit’s conclusion to settle for the mediocre. Their website statement: “It’s a huge improvement over corporate media lies, but won’t tell the motives or thinking of the people who shutdown the WTO.” Although one can easily agree that the Direct Action Network characters are superficial constructions, the film primarily affronts the activist community with its weak script piped full of lofty meaningless inspirational statements and a badly directed cast that was then later, badly edited.

Although the film inserts footage of the violence committed to protesters by cops, police are in no way demonized. In fact Dale (Woody Harrelson), a low level mob-control cop might be the most fully developed character. Dale’s pregnant wife, Ella (Charlize Theron), is beaten and miscarries when she passes through an unavoidable riot on her way home. Dale’s sadness turns to rage when he is forced to return to work after learning the unfortunate news, and this fuels his violent attack on our peaceful protagonist, Jay. Dale alone chases Jay through Seattle’s side streets and beats him to a pulp at a church before he handcuffs his narrow wrists. But because this climatic confrontation between antagonist (cop=bad guy) and protagonist (Jay=organizer=good-guy) must be resolved, the film allows for major character development in a jail make-up chat where Dale visits Jay and says that he is sorry several times. Jay then tells him that it is okay, “You were just doing your job.” This is a surprising turn around for the audience who has only twenty minutes before watched the two characters clash violently in the street. Theoretically, the miscarriage of Dale’s wife and his apology would allow the audience to sympathize with his character despite his crime. Yet the opacity of Dale’s attack and the apology leave the viewer apathetic. This is part of larger general disinterest, for the audience cannot relate to any of the stereotypes presented in *Battle at Seattle*, whether it be cop or radical.

Townsend (whose career highlights include a guest role as a pastry chef on *Will & Grace*) seems to have filmed *Battle in Seattle* with the narrowly didactic purpose of educating those who might have forgotten the historic clash between activists and police, vandalism and media that took place in 1999. He thus begins and ends the film as a very expensive power-point presentation, with charts dissolving into more charts, arrows pointing to dates, and photos cut into smaller photos. Despite Townsend’s aim to win a place in classrooms, his over-wrought style becomes less educational than clunky and confusing, and though the film aims to be objective in capturing both the activist and the cop perspective, the bookends of data wash the film in a liberal preachy-ness. If you do consider yourself to be politically liberal, *Battle in Seattle* is another film that will shame you, by painting leftist politics as the simplistic wet dreams of the Hollywood industry. Indeed, in an act of self-respect one is tempted to deny affiliation with the fatigue-jacket backpack crew already described. If this situation befalls you, I recommend returning to earlier times of American activism by rediscovering *Medium Cool*, a film that is ground-breaking and relevant forty years after its release. The riots of *Medium Cool* are frightening in their violence, and compelling in their place within a fictional narrative; *Battle in Seattle* is at its best a watered-down tribute to this film of ‘69 that still exposes the reality of protest and media in the United States. Ⓐ



Charlize Theron in *Battle in Seattle*.

scribe to the rules of such categorization. The film takes no risks in casting unknowns (and instead casts many minor players of the major world) and its plot follows the classical Hollywood paradigm complete with an emotional score and a happy ending.

Townsend makes a number of nods to Altman, but his primary inspiration is another political film of a protest turned riot, Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool* (1969). *Medium Cool* follows the story of a television journalist obsessed with capturing the real story of change in Chicago despite being dismissed by his station. Only weeks before the DNC he develops a relationship with a West Virginian mother and her 12-year-old son. The narrative thus comments on the state of media and the interdependent web of the personal and political, while its editing and cinematography further blur documentary and fiction. This attempt at transgressing fiction and non-fiction is Townsend’s most overt reference to *Medium Cool*; actors are placed within the riots by splicing documentary news footage when an establishing shot is needed. This is seemingly infantile when compared with Wexler’s approach, for rather than researching footage of police brutality at the DNC in 1968, Wexler anticipated the protests and wrote his script to include it. By physically placing his fictional characters within the unrest, Wexler questioned the nature of cinema. Townsend rather questions the nature of originality, or lack there of, while celebrating predictability. While Wexler captures the beat of 1968 in the year itself, Townsend reconstructs what he only witnessed via the web, almost a decade later. Hence, though Townsend is emulating the immediacy and

Friday, October 24 from 8pm-11pm
(following the DSC Plenary), Room
5414.

Come join us for free food, alcoholic and nonalcoholic drinks, and great music. Take a break from all your pointless graduate studies and silly teaching responsibilities and revel in the glory that is a DSC party, the primary reason we all attend graduate school!

Along with the usual fun and merriment at the October 24 Plenary, please come and welcome President Bill Kelly, who will regale us with important news and natural charm. All are welcome at a DSC Plenary: September 12, 6pm, room 5414 of the Graduate Center.

We are a group of student representatives from all academic programs chosen by elections that are held each spring. There are also at-large reps elected by the student body as a whole. The DSC exists to serve student needs and represent student interests before the GC administration.

For more information about the DSC, the benefits and services it offers to students, and how you can become more

Chartered Organizations

It's your money — Spend it! Even if your group does not have a conference or other major event planned for the semester, there are plenty of ways you can use your organization's stipend. Here are some ideas:

- 1) Have a wine-and-pizza-and-welcome reception for new members who signed up during orientation — or use such an event to solicit new members!
- 2) Use the funds to host a team-building outing to a cultural event in NYC.
- 3) Spend your stipend on the latest books, photographic slides, journal subscriptions, or web materials that benefit your organization.
- 4) Hold an informal seminar on career placement where you can invite professionals and alumni from your field to talk about how they found a job and how students can improve their CV. Use the stipend to pay for food and meeting materials.
- 5) Hold a movie screening and use the stipend to pay for film rentals, food and drink.

Speaking of the website, www.cuny-dsc.org has been undergoing some changes. The site now features a more streamlined look, easier-to-find content of your favorite DSC forums, information on chartered organizations, and pictures and profiles of your DSC Steering Committee members.

Ways to Get Money from The DSC

As part of your yearly tuition at the GC, you pay a student activities fee. The DSC, along with relevant offices of the GC administration, oversees the disbursement of these and other funds available for various kinds of student activities. Here are some of the ways you can get a piece of the action:

- 1) Hosting a conference, performance, or film series? Apply for a Cultural Affairs grant.
- 2) Organizing a workshop or professional development seminar? Ap-

3) Need funds for your department to have a party, subscribe to a journal, or purchase items for your lounge? Ask your department's DSC representative to apply for your program's allocation each semester. Keep in mind: departmental allocations increased from \$2 to \$3 per student, which may mean your department has more money to spend!

- 4) If you are interested in having ongoing discussions and events around an interdisciplinary topic, consider starting a chartered organization. Chartered organizations receive DSC stipends to hold events at the GC. Some also receive office space. Interested in starting a chartered organization? Contact the co-chair for student affairs, Greg Donovan, on dsc@gregorydonovan.org.

DSC Plenary Meetings:

- ▶ October 24 (Fall party to follow)
- ▶ November 21
- ▶ December 12 (Holiday party to follow)

DSC Steering Committee Meetings:


- ▶ November 7
- ▶ December 5

DSO Media Board Meeting:

- November 14


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CUNY Center for Place, Culture, and Politics Attempts to Recruit Geography Expert Sarah Palin

MATT LAU

Everyone knows that when she was asked about her foreign policy credentials, Governor Sarah Palin cited her state's proximity to Alaska. Charlie Gibson asked her, "What insights into Russian actions, particularly in the last couple of weeks, does the proximity of your state give you?" Without blinking the Governor responded, "They're our next door neighbors. And you can actually see Russia from land here in Alaska!"

What is less well known, however, is that in the next portion of the interview, which was censored by the McCain campaign, Palin went on to cite the Marxian critical theory of some of the Grad Center's most reputable thinkers, including David Harvey and Neil Smith. "You know Charlie, I can tell you haven't read David Harvey's vital new essay, 'Space as a Keyword.' Place is a central topic in cutting edge critical theory, as is culture. And you know, I couldn't agree more, mostly because those are two of the only words I understand."

The *GC Advocate*, however, was fortunate enough to obtain a copy of the unedited interview, which is included in the bonus features of the Bristol Palin sex-tape.

In it the camera returns briefly to Charlie Gibson's face, which is clearly dumbfounded. He is unable to respond, so Palin continues, "You know Charlie, I applied to the Professor Harvey's seminar at *The Center for Place, Culture, and Politics* last year because I share his opinion that [she reads from her notes] 'most of the pressing political and economic issues of today occur at the nexus of place and culture.' My research project was going to center on the

contradiction between the fact that Alaska is so close to Russia and the fact that the two places are nevertheless so different.

"You know, I've been trying to figure out why this is since I was a little girl and was told they spoke a different language right over there in that place I can see from here. Alaska's "proximal distance" to/from Russia, as I like to call it, would seem to suggest that place and culture aren't so much a single nexus as they are a vertiginous spiral of interlocking nodal clusters, to put it topologically."

At this point, Gibson had finally recovered enough of his wits to ask, "Were you awarded the fellowship?"

"Well Charlie, they offered me that fellowship, but you know what I told those obscure, Marxist elitists? I told 'em, 'Thanks, but no thanks!'"

A little investigation by this intrepid reporter revealed otherwise. It was not that she was simply rejected from the Center's seminar. She was admitted contingent on her securing some big time donation money for PCP.

"It's not cheap running this Center," said Mark Schiebe, who was walking down 5th avenue in front of the Graduate Center.



CPCP scholars Neil Smith, Heather Gautney, and David Harvey meet at the Fifth Avenue Starbucks with GC president William Kelly and GOP VP nominee Sarah Palin to discuss her affiliation with the Center.

"Do you know how much there tab is at O'Reilly's? They're going to need their own federal bailout just to square up over there. I mean, John the Bartender put a down payment on a loft in Gramercy with just his tips from the Center's bills!"

In a scrapped press release, dated September 21, the PCP stated, "We're honored to have found an unlikely intellectual ally in Sarah Palin. We think her research project will yield some striking and unexpected conclusions about the differences between Russian and Alaskan culture that persist despite their geographical contiguity. We hope her presence and the money she's earmarked for us in the Federal Bailout package will help shine a bright light on the work we're doing here." Ⓐ

ask harriet
BY HARRIET ZANZIBAR

Dealing with Señora Estúpida Loca

Dear Harriet,

I hired this woman to work as my assistant because she's a real spitfire and I thought she'd be a kick to have around. You know how boring things are when it's just the boys. But now I find out she's crazy and stupid, and it's too late to replace her. How do I fix this without coming off like a sexist numbskull?

— Overlook the Dumb Broad

Thanks for coming clean, ODB. You wouldn't be the first to hire a striking-looking woman just to dress up the place, and even despite all the miraculous advances of modern society — advances that have brought us from those laughable old days when Joan Crawford was typecast as a cold-hearted, conniving bitch in *The Women*, maligning the good intentions of the female sex everywhere, all the way up to these enlightened times when Eva Mendes can choose to play a cold-hearted, conniving bitch in *The Women*, opening up the world to the rich complexities of dark and light of which the modern woman is capable — nonetheless, despite these advances, I predict with some confidence that you will not be the last.

In fact decorative hiring strikes even in places you might not expect. My mother, who's a regular Harriet Nelson (though she earned plenty of brownie

points with me for agreeing to guest host my column last year), always suspected that she was first originally hired by my father's dry-wall manufacturing and contracting firm, Garden State New-Walz, not because she was an exceptionally gifted Kelly girl with a really clean steno style but because she had a nice set of grapefruit. But Mom, at least, was qualified for the job she thought she was being hired for, as well as for the job Dad was hiring her for, which is to say, designated nooner. After my three brothers were born in rapid succession she settled on the career for which Dad had pegged her, leaving stenography — and nonhorizontal lunch hours — far behind.

But unlike my Dad, ODB, you didn't do your due diligence, and now you're stuck with a Gal Friday who's all Gal and no Friday. What you do next really depends on how crazy and stupid she is. Oftentimes crazy and stupid is in the eye of the beholder, especially when the eye doing the beholding is connected to a body containing a penis and the beheld is not. I say this not to malign men in general: men are a kick to have around, as you put it.

Anyway, the point is, can she be trained? Maybe she's crazy like a fox, and stupid like a ... um. Like an Emperor Claudius? I dunno, there isn't a cliché that leaps right to hand, but the point is

some women act dumb to attract attention from — well, from people like you. Maybe she's smarter than she seems. Remember Marilyn Monroe's comment about how she can be smart when it's important, but most guys don't like it? My girlfriend Emily hasn't had a date in three years. Partly it's because she's as flat as Nebraska, a Nebraska that's been given a really good ironing, but mostly it's because she's a bigger poindexter than Screech from *Saved by the Bell*.

Hopefully the job for which you've hired her doesn't involve talking to people, or making decisions. At least in that case, hiring a skirt-*qua*-skirt would at least make some sense, and you now have some time away from inquiring eyes to groom her or broom her. If, on the other hand, Ms. Crazy/Stupid — or perhaps it would be more polite to say it in another language. If, on the other hand, Señora Estúpida Loca is in a high-visibility position, and she can't be trained post-haste, then you might just be S.O.L.

Your only chance to convince everyone that intelligence and perspicacity are positive disqualifications for the job, and you're actually looking forward to the freshness and delightful originality of the stray ideas that escape, like deadly gamma rays, from the dangerous nuclear pile encased deep within the protec-

tive shielding of her thick, thick skull. If you can sell *that*, and god bless you if you can, then you'll have managed to turn her idiocy into an asset, and people will come from all over just to hear what curious and bizarre things she has to say today. If you scrupulously limit access to her, as if she were a circus sideshow, you can maximize the enthusiasm and spread the legend while minimizing the damage.

This tactic worked for this devious magnate I once knew who hired an unlettered but pleasant-looking idiot boy because of his family connections and trotted him out at regular intervals so that folks could laugh at the peculiar things he said, never suspecting they were being diverted from the stuff the old magnate was doing. This double act worked for years, almost a decade, until they both retired, with everyone entirely without a shred of suspicion that they'd been had. So this situation might even turn out to be a plus for you, ODB, if you can turn the tables your way — and if you have any Machiavelli in you. Dress her up in tight skirt suits, give her a microphone and a blog, and while everyone's mesmerized by her idiocy slip out the back and do your own thing. Niccolò would be proud. Ⓐ