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Academic Labor Under Siege

Henry A. Giroux on the Politically Engaged Academic

Hampshire College and the Politics of Divestment (page 8)
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“Experience demands that man is the only animal which devours his own kind, for I can assert the more generally true term to the general prey of the rich on the poor.” —Thomas Jefferson

“Hey baby, nobody suffers like the poor!” —Charles Bukowski

I know it's difficult, especially for the majority of students facing several years of fruitless job searches and adjunct lecturing in a pursuit that covered $55,000 a year tenure track gig, but take a minute and imagine what it would be like to make $200,000 a year. For most of us this number must seem outrageously large: four or five times our current yearly wages. Even a little more than that is the most well paid and distinguished professor makes at CUNY, but nonetheless, give it a shot.

How would your life be different? Would you finally be able to afford your own place? Would you actually give your money to a landlord or living with roommates? Would you finally feel secure enough to let your spouse take time off from work to have a child, and would you take comfort in the fact that your child would grow up in a safe and healthy environment? Would you be able to set aside a college fund and make sure that they received the best education and health care available? Would you take vacations in Europe or the Caribbean, eat at more of the great restaurants New York has to offer, or become a subscriber to the Metropolitan Opera? Of course you could do any or all of these things if you made $200,000 a year. In fact with a lifetime of that kind of income you could easily retire in your early sixties and spend a significant part of your adult life doing whatever you liked, volunteering your time in a meaningful way that helped make the world a better place. Indeed, let's face it, regardless of what you might think about the rich or how much you believe, like Roger Waters, that money "is a very necessary evil," anyone would have a hard time just to stay on top of their tuition bills, much less their course reading and homework. Add to this Paterson's proposal to slash the MTA budget, which will likely result in significant cuts in service as well as a potential fare increase, and it's not hard to see the economic war that is being waged on the working poor of New York. While the poor are being asked to pay more and to get by with less in almost every aspect of their daily lives, those making well above $250,000 a year are being asked to sacrifice absolutely nothing.

Currently the New York State tax on incomes over $400,000 is 6.85%. That rate applies not only to those making $40,000 a year but to everyone making much more than that marginally livable wage, regardless of how many millions of dollars they bring home each year. That means that those who have little or nothing to spare as it goes to show how little our state represents actual care about the living conditions of the majority of their constituency.

The Working Families Party in conjunction with several other organizations who are pushing for a more reasonable and moral solution to the current state budget crisis, one that seeks to distribute the burden of that crisis in a more equitable way. The Working Families Party in conjunction with several other organizations who have become increasingly poor, the small minority of New Yorkers who have become increasingly poor, the small minority of New Yorkers who have benefited from decades of government giveaways. Now's the time to take action. Contact your state senator and congressperson: send them a handwritten letter, send them a fax, or call them on the phone, and insist that they refuse to cut the services for those who have little or nothing to spare, and the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill package be modified to increase taxes on those New Yorkers making above $250,000. The bill, which is gaining momentum in the state legislature (Thanks in part to the determined efforts of ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations), would raise the state tax rate on those making more than $250,000 from 6.85 percent to 8.25 percent. Likewise those making more than a half a million a year would see their state tax rise to 8.97 percent, while those making more than a million dollars a year would be asked to pay 10.3 percent.

Even at the highest tax bracket proposed in the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill, this is a total increase of only 3.45 percent. That 3.45 percent, however, would, according to Fiscal Policy Institute of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance, generate as much as $6 billion a year for New York State. Furthermore, these increases would apply only to a small portion of New Yorkers, (only the wealthiest 3.25 percent), according to Fiscal Policy Institute of the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. Introduced in the New York State Senate by Senator Eric Schnie- derman, the Fair Share Tax Reform Bill proposes a modest increase in taxes on those New Yorkers making above $250,000. The bill, which is gaining momentum in the state legislature (Thanks in part to the determined efforts of ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations), would raise the state tax rate on those making more than $250,000 from 6.85 percent to 8.25 percent. Likewise those making more than a half a million a year would see their state tax rise to 8.97 percent, while those making more than a million dollars a year would be asked to pay 10.3 percent.

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The General’s Labyrinth Revealed

PATRICK INGLIS

Thomas Weiss, Presidential Professor of Political Science at the Graduate Center, and moderator of the recent panel discussion entitled “Military Power,” held in the Proshansky Auditorium, had asked General Barry McCaffrey (ret.) his thoughts on former military officers acting as analysts in the media. “I am a determinately non-partisan commentator,” McCaffrey responded. As if to prove his point, he then recounted a conversation with Donald Rumsfeld, in which he shared with the former secretary of defense some lessons from his days as a college boxer.

First, the general said, before you start a war you must treat your enemy with respect. After all, “when you pick up military tools, you don’t know the outcome.” Second, “When that gun goes off you step into the ring and try and kill your opponent with a first punch and dominate the fight from the outset.” His last piece of advice, incongruent with the first two, was to keep in mind that war “doesn’t mean just military power,” but also providing humanitarian aid in the aftermath. If only Rumsfeld had listened.

In the story, compelling and well told, McCaffrey neglected to say anything about the personal and financial motivations that drive him to pursue these sorts of conversations with top military brass. So, too, did President William Kelly, who introduced McCaffrey and the other two panelists, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative Fellow Alex de Waal.

Kelly listed McCaffrey’s many accomplishments: a retired four-star general with thirty-two years of service in the US military including four combat tours of duty, and the two-time recipient of the Distinguished Service Cross and winner of the Silver Star of Valor. In retirement, Kelly noted, the general had been named director of National Drug Control Policy in the Clinton administration, and now is “president of his own consulting firm based in Arlington, Virginia.”

That consulting firm, IR McCaffrey Associates, as revealed in reports in the New York Times Magazine in November 2008 and in The Nation in April 2003, works on behalf of military firms seeking the ear and pocketbook of the US military. These reports, in addition to another account from 2000 by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker that alleges McCaffrey committed war crimes in the first Iraq war, raise serious questions about the general’s claims to be a “determinately non-partisan” analyst of the present Iraq war. He is paid undisclosed sums of money by military contractors to advocate on their behalf in the media and in the offices of the Pentagon.

McCaffrey’s associations to the military industrial complex don’t so much reflect a conflict of interest, but an interest in conflict. His income depends on whether or not the war continues. In this light, President Kelly’s vague, and on the surface of it innocuous, mention of some “consulting firm in Arlington, Virginia,” is disingenuous and misleading. It was an act of bad faith amidst so many acts of bad faith perpetrated on the American public, notably in the media in the lead up to the Iraq war, but also more recently in the treatment of the financial crisis on Wall Street.

Some members of the Graduate Center community may have preferred that McCaffrey not even speak on the panel. That is not my position. I simply would’ve preferred open disclosure about the man’s ties to the military industrial complex.

Indeed, a group of students and activists, none of whom I know personally, did what President Kelly did not do. They circulated a flyer that presented the general’s “other” biography only to have it confiscated by security guards before even a few rows of people were presented with it. Fortuitously, the offending activists were permitted to remain in the audience. When one of them spoke up at the end of the event she was summarily removed from the auditorium, as one of the security guards, wearing a bullet proof vest, stood on stage, presumably on the lookout for other disturbances. Thus, the event “Military Power” came to a close.

A great deal may have been gained had McCaffrey’s associations been disclosed. Whether or not McCaffrey would’ve engaged in such a discussion is another matter. There is a good chance he may have declined the invitation. Such disclosure, or analysis of the relationship between the Iraq war and the people who sold it and the goods to fight it, even without McCaffrey in attendance, would’ve made for a more critical and ultimately more enlightening discussion than the one that occurred.

Instead, what we got was a rather banal rolling out of well known mishaps and blunders by the Bush administration, and, for Ricks and de Wall, but not McCaffrey, the argument that the war was wholly unnecessary. In other words, little, if anything, was said that has not been said a thousand times over by critics of the Iraq war, either from the left or right of the American political spectrum. (The crisis in Darfur and Sudan was also a topic of conversation.)

Nevertheless, one comment did stick out. Ricks, asked about the American public’s waning interest in the Iraq war, and disinterest in the broadening of the war in Afghanistan, had this to say, drawing on an apt analogy: “Just because you walk out of a movie halfway through doesn’t mean it ends.” As for the Iraq war, he said, the American people “have walked out on it,” despite unabated conflict, and talk of a lot more fighting in Afghanistan.

But not everyone has walked out on the war. Some, like the people who showed up to listen to the panel on military power, are still fixated on this war, arguably the biggest mistake in US foreign policy history, and have a vested interest, as citizens and taxpayers, in other wars the US may fight in the near future. They deserve to know exactly who the characters in this present theatre of war are. President Kelly, in not fully disclosing the nature of Gen. McCaffrey’s relationship to the military industrial complex, deprived them of that.

Elections

for Program Representative, Media Board, At-large Representative, the Disciplinary Panel, Student Academic Appeals Officer, and the Student Elections Review Committee

are being held online from 04/01/09 to 05/01/09.

To vote for Program Representative (matriculated students only), Media Board, At-large Representative, the Disciplinary Panel, Student Academic Appeals Officer (matriculated students only), and the Student Elections Review Committee, follow these three steps:

► STEP 1: Go to https://eballot3.votenet.com/dsc/.
► STEP 2: Login with your username and password:
   USERNAME: (Your 9 digit Banner ID #)
   PASSWORD: (Your first & last initial followed by your year of birth)
► STEP 3: ELECT! Once you have logged in, a personalized election ballot will be made available to you.

FOR FURTHER ASSISTANCE WITH THE ONLINE VOTING PROCESS, PLEASE VISIT: http://www.cunyisdcs.org/vote

NOTE: If you would like to receive email reminders with election-related news, please join our Google Group at: http://groups.google.com/group/cunyisdcs
They say when it hits the fan, people can’t even see the smoke. 
I wish this axiom could be applied to everything in the paper, because it would only mean good things for higher education. From a February 18 article on grade inflation in colleges to a March 6 article outlining the difficulties facing those of us searching for jobs, to Stanley Fish’s blog detailing what he called Neoliberalism 101, it’s not hard to see that Stanley Aronowitz was right when he stopped by the Adjunct Project table in the lobby to tell me that “this is a horrible time in higher education” and that it’s time for “adjuncts to take to the streets.”

I wish it was as easy as Professor Aronowitz made it sound.

If Fish’s blog made anything clear to me, it was the real reasons tenure-track faculty, adjuncts, graduate students, and undergraduates aren’t taking to the streets: many of us in the academy are in denial. I don’t think it’s a denial about how bad the problem is. Most of us will admit that we are overworked and underpaid, and those of us at the Graduate Center may see that as a stepping stone to getting a coveted tenure-track position. (In fact, many of us are fed that exact line by our programs. If I had a dime for every time someone told me that the most valuable piece of my CV isn’t my research or publications, but the lengthy section on undergraduate teaching, I wouldn’t need to scramble for fellowships to write my dissertation.) Most of our undergraduates know that their classrooms are overcrowded and they aren’t getting the attention they deserve. Most tenure-track faculty understand that hiring an army of adjuncts means fewer colleagues, a smaller academic community, less intense and engaging conversation about their scholarly work, fewer and fewer opportunities for collaboration, and an erosion of academic freedom.

It’s not that we can’t see the problem, or that we can’t see how bad the problem actually is. Many of us refuse to name it, and without a name we can just pretend that the problem doesn’t exist. Fish’s opening to his blog anecdotally reports exactly this: “I’ve been asking colleagues in several departments and disciplines whether they’ve ever come across the term “neoliberalism” and whether they know what it means. A small number acknowledged having heard the word; a very much smaller number ventured a tentative definition. Luckily in the first half of his post, Fish put together a brief, user-friendly, and relatively unbiased definition of neo-liberalism. He also cites many excellent sources that can teach us more.

When the Adjunct Project first started planning CUNY Equity Week (CEW), we had no idea that the national conversation might turn in a direction that would highlight the neoliberalization of the university, even if articles in the New York Times and the Chronicle of Higher Education don’t apply this label. But any time we read of the difficulties of new PhDs finding full-time and tenure-track positions or lowered expectations of undergraduate students or harried and over-worked instructors, the conversation is essentially about neoliberalism. Call it what you want: neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization. Our goals in CUNY Equity Week are to educate our students and each other enough so that we can, and do, call it something.

We are educators after all, and we can find power in using our skills. CUNY Equity Week does not aim simply to help us learn facts and figures and regurgitate them to our students. While it is meaningful that 57 percent of the faculty at CUNY are contingent employees, facts and figures themselves do not empower. Nor is Equity Week an outlet for our laundry list of complaints: I hate grading papers on the train, I work three jobs, it’s taking me nine years to complete my degree because I have to teach so much, I don’t have an office, they took away my mailbox. Complaint does not empower. Recognizing ourselves and our students as victims of a systemic attack that seeks to further oppress those already oppressed, racial, gender, ethnic, sexual, and economic minorities, by disenfranchising those who might help them the most will create a class of active social participants with real power to make changes. CEW serves to inspire faculty, tenure-track and contingent, and students, graduate and undergraduate, to act on a looming social issue that continues to devalue our education system from kindergarten through post-graduate education.

The Adjunct Project invites you to join us in naming the problem of neoliberalization and educating our students and colleagues about how it impacts us here at CUNY. During the week of March 30 through April 3 we ask that you participate in a collective effort to use these unspeakable words, neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization, as much as possible. Use them in your classrooms. Use them with your colleagues. Use them with support staff. Use them with your supervisors.

We also ask that you spend at least fifteen to twenty minutes of one class during CUNY Equity Week explaining your students in a conversation about the CUNY edu-factory and ask them (and maybe yourself) to question our current paradigm of education. Does the university need to be a credential factory? And how can we change the university to meet our needs and demands?

Stop by our table in the Graduate Center lobby during the week of March 23 to sign up to teach this in your classes or have a team of students come in and talk to your class about it. Join the Adjunct Project for two workshops that will discuss the specifics of how to teach this topic on Thursday, March 19 and Monday, March 23, both at 7pm in room 5409 of the Graduate Center. There you can sign up to teach this yourself, join a team of presenters at the campus of your choice, and join an ongoing conversation about classroom strategies for equity week. At both the table and these workshops we’ll have teaching tools and materials available, including a large color poster (like the one seen opposite) that we hope will serve as a conversation starter and an illustration of the current state of our CUNY edu-factory. For more information or to download these materials now, visit our website (adjunctproject.org).

Our fear of naming the neo-liberalization of CUNY and universities throughout the country allows the process to continue by sustaining its invisibility and furthering the myth of its inevitability. Stanley Fish might think CUNY Equity goes too far, removing us from our isolated cocoon of esoteric pursuits and bringing politics into the classroom. Stanley Aronowitz might think it doesn’t go far enough, that we should march down the streets and demand equity. These are important conversations to have and we have important decisions to make as a community. How do we demand we be treated fairly and that we are offered the same opportunities as those who grew up in Fish’s and Aronowitz’s generation? And how do we demand that our students are treated fairly and that they have the same opportunities we do?

Call it what you want: neoliberalization, adjunctification, Walmartization. Our goals in CUNY Equity Week are to educate our students and each other enough so that we can, and do, call it something.

Don’t Submit
Contribute

Turn the musings of your mind into manna for the masses. Write for the Advocate. advocate@gc.cuny.edu
The CUNY Edu-Factory:

1. Gather people together. Thinking and acting politically happens more effectively with others. Build, create, and criticize this poster. Create networks of support. All of these things tie us together and make it harder for the factory to divide us up and split us.

2. Never forget about who you are and your experiences at CUNY. These are our connections. Have you felt economic pressure getting in the way of your ability to be a student? Have class sizes been getting bigger? Is your education becoming less personalized? Have your adjunct instructors (and most of your instructors are adjuncts) been able to give you enough attention—or are they too busy finding other ways to make ends meet?

3. Fight back. We’ve made a visual allegory of the edufactory, but it’s our collective effort that will ultimately bring about the changes we need. Weeks, strikes, building occupations, self-organized student collectives—how do you think we can begin to dismantle the edufactory?

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The American Dream is Possible

Forget about all the clichés you’ve heard about college education—the American Dream, the benefits of hard work, upward mobility, equal access. These ideas are totally out of touch with our reality, yet we still continue to pretend that we’re insulated from all the way to our bones.

Like universities across the globe, CUNY is becoming a credential factory. These factories have little regard for the education of those enrolled, for the job prospects of those who’ve graduated, or for the needs of those not yet mainstreamed, or for the economic needs of those teaching. We are being converted into interchangeable parts, cops in a credential producing machine. So what should we do?

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The war looks eerily familiar: beheadings, assassinations of police and public officials, terrorized businesspeople, extorted schoolteachers, and in five years more than 230 American civilians dead in the crossfire. All this could easily describe the battle in Afghanistan or Iraq, but the reality is closer to home, where an increasingly gruesome war is threatening run, proven shortsighted.

More money and guns abroad will prove ineffective in increasing US influence over cartels and drug supply routes flowing into the country. Instead, American influence over the scourgé of international narco-trafficking will be best leveraged domestically: Quelling what is rapidly becoming an imposing foreign policy issue depends on increasing treatment at both retail and wholesale prices of cocaine subsequently dropped to about a third of what they were, where they have remained for the last two decades. Lastly, there is the "needle in a haystack" problem with regard to Mexico, the United States’ second largest trading partner. Recent statistics show that a million people and 300,000 cars cross the border each day, as do tens of millions of shipping containers each year. With the benefits of all this trade comes the impossible challenge of picking out the illicit from the licit.

At some point, one has to consider the demand side of the equation. First, no matter how much aid is delivered to Colombia or Mexico, stopping the flow at the source will prove impossible. And more importantly, if no one in America wanted to buy all these drugs, the cartels would have to take their business elsewhere. "The traditional approach to addressing demand has been to throw them in prison," Ethan Nadelmann, executive director of Drug Policy Alliance Network explained to me in a recent conversation. "Why not define treatment more broadly?"

Nadelmann said that many tend to think that tackling demand means instituting more D.A.R.E. programs to keep kids off drugs, but it is actually hardcore users who account for the bulk of consumption. However, serious addicts have few options to get themselves out of the downward spiral of addiction.

"It’s more and more difficult to get treatment unless you get arrested," Nadelmann said.

For instance, users now can only get methadone in a clinic. Making it available in pharmacies by prescription—as is done in many European countries—would make a popular treatment far more accessible. Accessibility to treatment would mean fewer users, reduced demand and less incentive for cartels to gain a foothold in the country’s border. Nadelmann offered two more options. The first is legalization. Across the country there is a widening discussion, and greater policy momentum, toward decriminalization and a new understanding of what is acceptable. Second, Nadelmann said, "The most effective form of treatment is actually not the threat of incarceration, but it is actually paying users for staying clean, like a reward." Nadelmann acknowledged the difficult politics involved, but pointed out, "It actually costs less than locking them up."

Both proposals, in fact, are politically flammable. But in the face of ineffectual policies and the threatening violence next door, all options have to be on the table.

Few foreign policy issues are so intimately tied to domestic policy as the War on Drugs. For the first time in decades, America is faced with the gruesome reality of a nearby war. A recent Pentagon study suggested that Mexico could soon be the world’s newest failed state, pushing refugees into the United States and creating havoc in a region that has been living at peace for more than a century. Yet, demand at home drives the conflict as much, if not more, than illicit abroad. Facing that fact will put users, and not cartels, at the heart of a new policy. —ANDREW BAST
Stop The Presses: Republicans Love CUNY

In an effort to provide short-term relief to a budget under duress, Republican lawmakers in the New York State Senate have proposed a plan designed to attract students to CUNY and SUNY while they’re still in the cradle.

The plan, open to all children under the age of fourteen, offers parents the opportunity to lock-in future tuition costs at current rates. For example, parents of newborns can begin planning for the future by purchasing their child’s future tuition at $98 per credit. Rates increase as the child gets older, but parents can continue to purchase credits on the cheap until the prospective student reaches the age of eighteen.

Interestingly, under the Republican proposal, revenue collected from prepaid tuition credits would be funneled back into the university system. Under similar plans instituted throughout the country, revenue monies have been invested in the stock market to maximize future gains. But with the market in flux, and increasingly unreliable, Republican lawmakers are arguing that available funds should be invested immediately into public campuses throughout the state.

Speaking as if the plan were a done deal, State Senator Kenneth LaValle announced that “We are letting them deal, State Senator Kenneth LaValle announced, ‘as they only create a hole down the road when the students arrive and the funds have been spent.’ Of course, the governor’s office failed to mention that much of this necessary ‘near-term’ relief is the consequence of Paterson’s rape-and-pillage campaign against the state education budget. But whatever.

According to its Republican sponsors, the plan offers a win-win solution to parents and public universities alike, each facing mounting constraints. On the one hand, the plan looks to generate roughly $8 billion in revenue over the course of the next decade.

On the other hand, says State Senator Dean Skelos, Republican Senator from Rockville Center, “This program will give parents and their children an opportunity for an affordable, first-rate education.”

Added LaValle, while the program does not ensure admission to any CUNY or SUNY colleges, it “will help parents secure a quality education for their children, while making a worthwhile investment in our public higher education system.”

John Forte to Teach at City College

Just months after being released from prison on a cocaine possession charge, rapper John Forte has been hired to teach at City College. Forte, who was busted by authorities in New Jersey in 2001 carrying over a million dollars worth of liquid cocaine, was released in January after serving seven years of a fourteen year sentence. He received a pardon for his troubles from George W. Bush.

Starting in early April, Forte will begin teaching a music therapy course as part of City College’s “In Arms Reach” program for at-risk youth, specifically those with incarcerated parents. The three month program will teach students between the ages of twelve and fifteen how to cope with the feelings of fear, anger and frustration common among those with parents in prison.

According to a Forte representative who spoke with ALLHipHop.com, “John hopes that the catharsis of song composition will help children deal with the stigma of having a family member who is incarcerated and rebuild the spirit of those who have been traumatized or abandoned.” Former president Bush could not be reached for comment.

Hunter Students Stand in Solidarity against Budget Cuts to Universities

On March 5, thousands of students from across New York’s public and private university systems, marched on City Hall to protest Governor David Paterson’s proposed cuts to the state’s higher education budget. The CUNY contingent was represented most heavily by the hundreds of Hunter students that walked out of classes that afternoon to protest proposed tuition hikes.

In a show of their frustration, Hunter students abandoned their classrooms at 2:00 PM, and headed south to Borough of Manhattan Community College where they joined with other protestors headed to City Hall.

“CUNY is made up of working-class students and students of color who really can’t afford to go anywhere else,” Hunter sophomore Jackelyn Mariano told Washington Square News. “It was supposed to be free when it opened up, and tuition has been increasing ever since.”

The rally was the latest in a string of actions taken by a nascent alliance developing between students at public and private institutions throughout the city. In January, students closed the New School in protest, followed the next month by the occupation of NYU’s Kimmel Center in the name of university accountability. According to the Graduate Center’s own Doug Singsen,

“Our next goal is: now we build something bigger than this. Our strategy is that students and faculty are the people who make CUNY run, and we have the capacity to shut it down. By doing that we can force them to meet our demands.”

“Adamic is a writer who demands our attention....”—The LA Times

Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America

The essential history of class conflict in the U.S.

By Louis Adamic, with an introduction by Jon Bekken

The history of labor in the United States is a story of almost continuous violence. As its title suggests, Dynamite refuses to sugarcoat this explosive and bloody legacy, investigating in detail the events that shaped the face of U.S. labor, from immigrant riots to the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).

*Adamic’s Dynamite is a classic, written with the verve and perspective of an author who was a first-hand observer and participant in many of the struggles he chronicles.*—Mark Leier

Coming this April: A hotly anticipated new work by journalist & scholar Barry Sanders

The Green Zone:
The Environmental Costs of Militarism

By Barry Sanders (author of A is for Ox and Sudden Glory) with an introduction by Mike Davis

Environmentalism—it’s the word on everyone’s tongue. Reusable shopping bags, hybrid cars, and green home energy solutions allow us to reduce our carbon footprint, but it’s only the tip of the quickly melting iceberg.

In the midst of the movement to save the earth, The Green Zone presents a sobering revelation: until we address the attack that the US military is waging on the global environment, the things we do at home won’t change a thing.

Get 20% off your entire online order!

Mention “GCA4”
Hampshire College and the Politics of Divestment

In 1977, Hampshire College became the first US institution of higher learning to divest from companies that did business with and helped to support apartheid South Africa. Shortly after this divestment, the college president and administration took steps to distance themselves from that landmark decision. Now, thirty-two years later, history is repeating itself. Students for Justice in Palestine, a Hampshire-based social justice group, is claiming that the college has become the first academic institution to effectively divest its holdings in several companies that do business with the Israeli military. And, once again, the president and the board of trustees—responding to pressure from outside interest groups—have sought to play down and effectively deny this claim. Despite a significant change in its investment policy, which supports SJP’s claims of Israeli divestment, the administration asserts that there has not been any kind of selective divestment and that the changes are simply consistent with their policy of socially responsible investing. So who’s right? Has Hampshire become the first college to tackle the ethical dilemmas of investing in occupation or is this all just a case of overly enthusiastic undergraduates with good PR skills? The answers to those questions depend on who you ask and how exactly you choose to define divestment.

On February 7, the Hampshire College Board of Trustees, after reviewing its investment portfolio (the State Street global Advisor’s index fund), agreed to temporarily suspend its current investment policy and authorized the creation of an ad hoc committee to investigate alternatives for future investment to be completed by November 2009. The decision to investigate the fund was made immediately following a formal petition for divestment that was brought to the Finance Committee by members of the group Students for Justice in Palestine. The college’s investment policy was then suspended after a commissioned investigation by KLD research group, which screens companies and portfolios for socially responsible investing, found that several of the companies in the State Street index were in violation of the college’s current investment policy. According to an official statement dated February 24 from the college president, Ralph Hexter:

KLD found that of the fund’s 455 holdings, well over 200 raised significant concerns relative to Hampshire College’s socially responsible investment policy and were in violation of values of socially responsible investing. It was on this basis that the investment committee voted as it did to exit from the fund when an alternative fund has been identified.

President Hexter then went out of his way to sternly deny that the board’s decision had anything to do with divestment from Israel, claiming that the decision was based solely on the college’s policy of responsible investing.

Despite his attempts to distance the college’s actions from the divestment, the president nonetheless admitted that “it was the good work of SJP that brought this issue to the attention of the committee.” This statement, as well as the series of press releases that were issued by SJP following the February 7 decision claiming victory for their efforts to achieve divestment, set off a firestorm of criticism led by none other than Harvard University Law School professor and staunch pro-Israel advocate Alan Dershowitz, who condemned the college’s actions as anti-Semitic and out of proportion, claiming that divestment was “motivated purely by hatred for the Jewish state.”

It was only after this response from Dershowitz and the media blitz that followed the SJP’s publicity campaign that Hexter responded with his February 24 statement. Indeed, although President Hexter and the board have done everything they can to deny that there has been any kind of divestment from Israel, both critics and supporters of the idea seem to agree that the college’s actions are potentially ground-breaking and could potentially mark a serious milestone in the ongoing efforts to form a mass divestment movement.

Since at least 2007, the SJP organized to force Hampshire to divest all funds from six companies that the group claims are complicit in the occupation and destruction of the Palestinian territories. These six companies include United Technologies, which manufactures Blackhawk helicopters used by the Israeli military, General Electric, which supplies the propulsion systems for Apache helicopter gunships, also used by the Israeli Defense Forces, ITT Corporation, which provides night vision goggles to the Israeli military, Motorola, which is engaged in a $400 million project to provide radar systems for enhancing security at illegal West Bank settlements Terex, which provides trucks for logistical support to the Israeli military, and Caterpillar, which provides many of the bulldozers and construction equipment used to build new settlements and to destroy Palestinian homes in the West Bank and Gaza.

The Hampshire student group, which has been calling for divestment from Israel for several years, and which had stepped up their calls for divestment in response to the recent Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza in January, has claimed responsibility for the Board of Trustees decision. In an official statement issued the day of the decision, SJP stated:

“This landmark move is a direct result of a two-year intensive campaign by the campus group, Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP). The group pressured Hampshire College’s Board of Trustees to divest from six specific companies due to human rights concerns in occupied Palestine. Over 800 students, professors, and alumni have signed SJP’s “institutional statement” calling for the divestment.

SJP believes that the board’s decision, regardless of the several other companies involved, represents a divestment from the six companies associated with the Israeli occupation, which is precisely what they were calling for. While the administration may deny that the changes, which actually only affect four of the six companies on SJP’s list, have anything to do with criticizing or punishing Israel, the effect is the same. Beyond the semantic argument at the heart of this debate SJP argues that regardless of the administration’s position, the movement belongs to the students, and that the more than 800 signatures (on a campus with little more than 1,200 students) represent their “collective desire to see the end of the Occupation and the
restoration of justice to the Palestinian people.” Shortly after the board’s meeting, several left wing newspapers, blogs, and news programs around the nation began to run stories, based on SJP press releases, that claimed Hampshire had become the first US college to officially divest from Israel. *Grit TV* and *Democracy Now!*, for instance, both ran brief stories suggesting that Hampshire had divested from Israel. In response to these stories, Dershowitz published an article in the *Jerusalem Post* on February 15 claiming, among other things, that the SJP’s goal was to “end the existence of Israel.” In that same editorial, he called on “all decent people—supporters and critics of Israel alike—to make no further contributions to a school that now promotes discrimination and is complicit in evil.”

In other words, Dershowitz issued his own call for divestment, essentially seeking to force the Hampshire administration to repudiate and denounce its own students. Sadly, Dershowitz’s gambit succeeded. Rather than defend the rights of their students to speak freely and to interpret the political situation as they saw it, Hexter and the Hampshire administration caved in to the powerful fear of being labeled anti-Semitic.

As the author Howard Friel reported in ZNet, Hexter and the Hampshire administration essentially threw their own students under the bus in their response to Dershowitz. In a conciliatory letter to Dershowitz and the *Jerusalem Post*, Hexter wrote “[we] urge you to understand us clearly, when we say that students do not speak for the college and may not willfully misrepresent the school. It will be, and must be, the college’s task to undertake any disciplinary action, according to its established rules and procedures. Discipline is an internal process that is not shared with the public.”

As Friel explained, this talk of disciplinary punishment only furthers Dershowitz’s false claims that the Hampshire divestment movement—a peaceful, nonviolent attempt to end a hostile and racist occupation—is, in effect, driven by bigotry and hatred instead of a desire for peace and justice.

As of the publication of this article, there seems to have been no disciplinary action taken against any of the students involved in the divestment movement, and for their part, the students seem genuinely unperturbed by the series of events. As Adam Horowitz put it in one SJP blog post: “The bottom line is that before February 7, Hampshire College was invested in companies that directly profited from the occupation. Today, we are not. This is a direct result of pressure and efforts by SJP.”

Leaving aside the contentious issue of who divested from what and why, the movement that began at Hampshire, has, as Dershowitz feared, exploded. Divestment from Israel has become an increasingly debated topic on campuses across the country, an issue that previously enjoyed little or no activism on its behalf. Students and student governments at UMass Amherst, Columbia, and NYU have all begun to talk about divestment, while closer to home, the Campus Antiwar Network will be hosting a Student Divestment Strategy Day at Hunter College on Sunday March 29. Whether or not these movements can attain the same level of success as Hampshire College remains to be seen, but clearly Hampshire has once again set the standard for successful, if controversial, student social activism.

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I do not believe that a student of human reality may be ethically neutral. The sole choice we face is one between loyalty to the humiliated and to beauty, and indifference to both. It is like any other choice a moral being confronts: between taking and refusing to take responsibility for one’s responsibility.

— Zygmunt Bauman

In his sobering analysis of recent democratic decline, Sheldon Wolin has rightly argued that in a "genuinely democratic system, as opposed to a pseudo democratic one in which a 'representative sample' of the population is asked whether it 'approves' or 'disapproves', citizens would be viewed as agents actively involved in the exercise of power and in contributing to the direction of policy."1 There is a long tradition of critical intellectuals in American higher education extending from Thomas Jefferson to John Dewey, Edward Said, and Howard Zinn, who have all insisted that the university is one of the few spaces where the task of educating students to become critical agents and socially engaged citizens is not only crucial to the meaning of education but also an essential condition of academic labour and democracy itself. As a vast array of public spheres, including some of the nation's major newspapers, either fall prey to corporate control or simply disappear, higher education becomes one of the few remaining sites where a society might question itself, where it might reflectively consider how lived realities measure against democratic practices and ideals. Universities thus provide the pedagogical conditions for existing and future generations both to defend democratic principles and to incorporate them into their own understanding of what it means to define themselves as engaged citizens and critically responsible adults.

Understanding higher education as a democratic public sphere means fully recognizing the purpose and meaning of education and the role of academic labor, which assumes among its basic goals promoting the well-being of students, a goal that far exceeds labor, which assumes among its basic goals promoting the well-being of students, a goal that far exceeds the oft-stated mandate of either preparing students for the workplace or providing them with the skills and the formal competencies of textual analysis. And it is precisely this democratic project that affirms the critical function of education and academic labor, while refusing to narrow its goals and aspirations to instrumental or methodological considerations. This is what makes intellectual labor different from other provincial notions of teaching, largely restricted to teaching the canon or the conflicts, and other narrowly defined pedagogical commitments. And it is precisely the failure to connect learning to its democratic functions and possibilities that creates the conditions for those pedagogical approaches that ignore what it means to receive a critical education.2

The goals of higher education and the demands of academic labor must also include teaching students to be responsive to the conflicts of our times, learning how to identify anti-democratic forces in the wider society, and connecting knowledge, power, and critical modes of agency to the task of imagining a more just world and demonstrating a willingness to struggle for it. Academics have a moral and pedagogical responsibility to unsettle and oppose all orthodoxies, to make problematic the commonsense assumptions that often shape students’ lives and their understandings of the world, but also to energize them to come to terms with their own power as individual and social agents. Higher education, in this instance, as Pierre Bourdieu, Paulo Freire, Stanley Aronowitz, and others have reminded us, cannot be removed from the hard realities of political struggles. Educators enact social forces that both support it and consistently, though in diverse ways, attempt to shape its sense of mission and purpose.3 Politics are not alien to higher education but central to comprehending the institutional, economic, ideological, and social forces that give it meaning and direction. Politics also references the outgrowth of historical conflicts that mark higher education as an important site of struggle. As Pierre Bourdieu has argued, politics illuminates the complex ideological and institutional conditions that enable universities to function as democratic public spheres. At the same time, it makes visible the fact that such conditions are the outcome of "fragile social achievements that open up the possibility of more equality and justice, and to sacrifice them is to step backwards, whether this step is masked by a deterministic analysis of the 'market' or a naked assertion of self-interest by the wealthy and powerful."4 Politics is thus not the bane of either social science or academic research but rather a primary register of their complex relation to matters of power, ideology, freedom, justice, and democracy. The real enemies of education are those modes of politicking education in which matters of critical dialogue, judgment, debate, and engagement are disabled through allegiance to domains of ideological purity, certainty, dogma, and assured knowledge—a species of fundamentalist thinking and practice that is not limited to any one ideological position or disciplinary terrain.

Nurturing critical agency is part of a pedagogical process that must be self-reflective, empowering, and directive, but not propagandistic. When the distinction between a political and politicking education is collapsed or lost, the role of academics is reduced to that of either corporate clerks, heretic specialists, or jargon-ridden, clever apologists for established power who justify their unthreatening combative ness by gleefully claiming to "profess nothing." The smug call for neutrality is nothing or to "save the world on their own time" is not an educational virtue but a form of surrender, a corrosive cynicism parading as a form of professionalism, an ethical refusal to educate students to question official dogma, to create the pedagogical conditions for them to become moral agents and critical citizens, and to provide them with the knowledge and skills to engage the tension between existing reality and the promise of democracy. The "save the world on your own time" creed aligns too closely with the neoliberal inclination that "there is no alternative" and in the end means complicity with the established order. In this discourse, education as a fundamental basis for engaged citizenship, like politics itself, becomes a temporary irritant to be quickly removed from the hallowed halls of academia. In this stillborn conception of academic labor, faculty and students are scrubbed clean of any illusions about

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6) This position is brilliantly articulated in Edward Said, Hummus and Democratic Criticism (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
7) See also Henry A. Giroux and Sean Saelig Giroux, Take Back Higher Education (New York: Palgrave, 2004).
9) Shuleik Fu, Save the World on Your Own Time (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
Please visit http://centerforhumanitiesgc.org or http://greatissuesforum.org for more information.
The view of higher education as a democratic public sphere committed to producing knowledge, skills, and social practices that enable young people to expand and deepen the sense of themselves, their moral imaginations, the public good, and the imperatives of a substantive democracy has been in a state of acute crisis for the last thirty years. \(^{10}\) Harried to the needs and demands of corporate and military interests, higher education has increasingly abandoned even the semblance of promoting democratic ideals. The needs of corporations and the warfare state now define the nature of research, the role of faculty, the structure of university governance, and the type of education offered to students. \(^{11}\) As federal and state funding for higher education is cut, universities are under more pressure to turn to corporate and military resources to keep them afloat. Such partnerships betray a more instrumental and mercenary assignment for higher education, a role that undermines the free flow of information, dialogue, and dissent. When faculty assume, in this context, their civic responsibility to educate students to think critically, act with conviction, learn how to make authority and power accountable, and connect what they learn in classrooms to important social issues in the larger society, they are often denounced for politicizing their classrooms and for violating professional codes of conduct, or, worse, labelled as unpatriotic. \(^{12}\) In some cases, this is justified. When they teach to the imperative to expand the capacities of students to be both critical and socially engaged may cost academics their jobs, especially when they make visible the workings of power, injustice, human misery, and the alterable nature of the social order—all too evident in the recent firing of Norman Finkelstein and Ward Churchill. 

Academics need to defend what they do as political, support the university as a place to think, and create programs that nurture a culture of questioning. But there is even more at stake here. It needs to be recognized on a broad scale that the very way in which knowledge is selected, pedagogies are defined, social relations are organized, and futures are imagined is always political, through these processes do not have to be politicized in a vulgar or authoritarian way. Again, the conditions that make the university possible as a democratic public sphere are inescapably political. What has been lacking is a commitment to modes of education that take seriously John Dewey’s notion that democracy is a “way of life” that must be constantly nurtured and defended, or as Richard Bernstein puts it: 

> Democracy, according to Dewey, does not consist exclusively of a set of institutions, formal voting procedures, or even legal guarantees of rights. These are important, but they require a culture of everyday democratic co-operative practice to give them life and meaning. Otherwise institutions and procedures are in danger of being co-opted or hollering hollow. The American Republic is a republic because Democracy “is a way of life,” an ethical ideal that demands active and constant attention. And if we fail to work at creating and maintaining democracy, there is no guarantee that it will survive. Democracy involves a reflexive faith in the capacity of all human beings for intelligent judgment, deliberation, and action in the political, educational, and economic conditions that are furnished. \(^{13}\) 

Democracy is not cheap and neither are the political, economic, and social conditions that make it possible. If academics believe that the university is a space for and about democracy, they need to profess more, not less, about eliminating the racial, economic, and political conditions that fill their ranks with adjuncts, \(^{14}\) remove faculty from exercising power in university governance, and work towards eliminating the economic conditions that prevent working-class and middle-class youth from getting a decent postsecondary education. 

Both the responsibility that academics bear and the political nature of that responsibility are especially clear given the current unprecedented economic meltdown the country is now facing. As the financial crisis reaches historic proportions, free-market fundamentalism is losing both its claim to legitimacy and its pretense to democracy. Even a New York Times cover declared recently that “We Are All Socialists Now.” \(^{15}\) Despite this apparent growing recognition that market fundamentalism has fostered a destructive alignment among the state, corporate capital, and transnational corporations, there is little understanding that such an alignment has been constructed and solidified through a neoliberal disciplinary apparatus and corporate pedagogy mostly produced in the halls of higher education and reinforced through the educational force of the larger media culture. The economic Darwinism of the last thirty years has done more

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12 Take up the issue of the emerging of the academic-military-industrial complex, see Henry Giroux, *Academic Unffiend in America: Rethinking the University as a Democratic Public Sphere*, in Edward J. Carvalho, ed. *Academic Freedom and Intellectual Activism in the Post-WWII University* special issue of *Work and Days* 51–54 (2008–2009), 45–72. This may be the best collected published on intellectual activism and academic freedom.
14 *Wolin, Democracy Incorporated*, 161.
than throw the financial and credit system into crisis; it has also waged an attack on all those social institutions that support critical modes of agency, reason, and meaningful dissent. And yet, the financial Katrina we are now experiencing is rarely seen as part of an educational crisis in which the institutions of public and higher education have been conscripted into a war on democratic values through the endless reproduction of neoliberal beliefs, social relations, identities, and modes of understanding that legitimate the institutional arrangements of a cut-throat capitalism that has spawned rapacious greed, grotesque levels of inequality, the devaluation of any viable notion of the public good, and far-reaching levels of human suffering.

There seems to be an enormous disconnect between the economic conditions that led to the current financial meltdown and the current call to action of a generation of young people and adults who have been educated for the last several decades in the knowledge, values, and identities of a market-driven society. Clearly, this generation of young people and adults will not solve this crisis if they do not connect it to the assault on an educational system that has been reduced to a lowly adjunct of corporate interests and the bidding of the warfare state.

This disconnect becomes clear in a recent article by Patricia Cohen in the New York Times in which she dimly reports that in light of the current financial economic crisis the humanities are going to have a harder time defending themselves because they are often found inadequate to the task of educating students for future employment in the workforce. According to Cohen, the humanities in these tough economic times has to “to justify its existence,” by which she means it has to align itself more closely still with the needs of the economy—a view closer to training than to educating. Rather than view the humanities, if not higher education in general, as one of the few public spheres left that can educate students to do more than reproduce a now widely condemned set of market-driven values, she wants universities to adopt them even more aggressively, in spite of broad public recognition that this mode of corporate-driven education has both undermined the economy and sabotaged any viable notion of critical agency and democracy. Oddly, Cohen argues that the free-market rationality that has undermined, if not ruined, so many basic institutions in American society need not be jettisoned by higher education but applied more stringently. Couple this argument with the news that many prominent newspapers are now failing and it becomes clear that the responsibility of faculty who inhabit the university can no longer downplay or “abandon the idea that life’s most important questions are an appropriate subject for the classroom.” Academics have a distinct and unique responsibility to make learning relevant not merely to the imperatives of a discipline, scholarly method, or research specialization but, more importantly, to the activation of knowledge, passion, values, and hope in the service of modes of agency that are crucial to sustaining a democracy in which higher education plays its rightful civic and critical pedagogical role. By renewing such a commitment, academics will be more easily defend their role as public and engaged intellectuals, while also enabling higher education to live up to its promise as a valuable and valued democratic public sphere.

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**Statement from leading American economists**

Although its collapse has dominated recent media coverage, the financial sector is not the only segment of the U.S. economy running into serious trouble. The institutions that govern the labor market have also failed, producing the unusual and unhealthy situation in which hourly compensation for American workers has stagnated even as their productivity soared.

Indeed, from 2000 to 2007, the income of the median working-age household fell by $2,000—an unprecedented decline, in that time, virtually all of the nation’s economic growth went to a small number of wealthy Americans. An important reason for the shift from broadly-shared prosperity to growing inequality is the erosion of workers’ ability to form unions and bargain collectively.

A natural response of workers unable to improve their economic situation is to form unions to negotiate a fair share of the economy, and that desire is borne out by recent surveys. Millions of American workers—more than half of non-managers—have said they want a union at their workplace. Yet only 7.5% of private sector workers are now represented by a union. And in all of 2007, fewer than 60,000 workers won union status through government-sanctioned elections. What explains this disconnect?

The problem is that the election process overseen by the National Labor Relations Board has become drawn out and avaricious, with management campaigning fiercely to deter unionization, sometimes to the extent of violating labor laws. Union sympathizers are routinely threatened or even fired, and they have little effective recourse under the law. Even when workers overcome this pressure and vote for a union, they are unable to obtain contracts one-third of the time due to management resistance.

To remedy this situation, the Congress is considering the Employee Free Choice Act. This act would accomplish three things: It would give workers the choice of using majority sign-up—a simple, established procedure in which workers sign cards to indicate their support for a union—or staging an NLRA election. It triples damages for employers who fire union supporters or break other labor laws; and it creates a process to ensure that newly organized unions have a fair shot at obtaining a first contract by calling for arbitration after 120 days of unsuccessful bargaining.

The Employee Free Choice Act will better reflect worker desires than the current “war over representation.” The Act will also lower the level of acrimony and distrust that often accompanies union elections in our current system. A rising tide lifts all boats only when labor and management bargain on an equal and respectful footing. And in recent decades, most bargaining power has resisted with management. The current recession will further weaken the ability of workers to bargain individually. More than ever, workers will need to act together.

The Employee Free Choice Act is not a panacea, but it would restore some balance to our labor markets. As economists, we believe this is a critically important step in rebuilding our economy and strengthening our democracy by enhancing the voice of working people in the workplace.
Towards me. I wondered how they would get past. Suddenly, one of the twins went towards the other towards me. I wondered how they would get past. Suddenly, one of the twins went towards the other towards me. I wondered how they would get past.

Like so many of the scenes and sequences in Godard's best work, this little moment is full of significance. To begin, the scene is definitely "spontaneous," or, if you prefer, unrehearsed. But therein, paradoxically, lies its artifice, its appearance of design. When the young boy, who is hardly a child actor in the Hollywood mold, begins recounting his dream, he glances surreptitiously at the camera framing him in a close-up, says "Vuilla!" to himself, and then stumbles through his lines. There is humor and charm in this innocent playing at acting. The dream itself has the structure of a joke: at the beginning it seems to be a nice fable set in a fairy tale world, but by the end it has become so topical that it is doubtful the boy knows the meaning of what he's saying. This is humor, too, with a left-wing political charge, which makes it even more attractive to people who might share some of Godard's sympathies about the evils of modern empire and capitalism. Then, as is customary

with Godard in moments of humor and gentle leftist propaganda, the conversation suddenly gets deeper. After her son asks a question worthy of either children or philosophers, Juliette replies by quoting one of Heidegger's great metaphors for man's relationship to language. As if her son will accept this answer with no further comment, the scene abruptly ends.

Or at least this is how I would have analyzed this precious minute of absurdity before I read Richard Brody's exhaustive new analytic biography of Godard, Everything Is Cinema: The Working Life of Jean-Luc Godard. Now, I know better. You see, Godard, as Brody's main thesis runs, was almost always making a

how Jesus' name doesn't come up a lot in The Old Testament? That's really not a good way to plan for a sequel. To observe this problem that has bothered a lot of intelligent Christians, allegory became crucial. Sure he's not there in the letter of The Hebrew Bible, St. Paul might say, but he's there in a more important dimension, in its spirit, which is the source of the life of the book anyway, the community of believers who believe in it and live it. St. Augustine's has an ininterdependent formulation for the problem. "In The Old Testament, The New Testament is concealed. In The New Testament, The Old Testament is revealed." The other task of allegorical interpretation since biblical times has been the black art of the bookmaker, prophecy. Maybe Daniel was just playing it safe when he told Nebuchadnezzar that the dream he'd been having meant that from his Kingdom would come a line of civilizations that would hold sway until the end of time. After all, the guy had threatened to liquidate all the intellectuals in Iraq if they couldn't figure it out. Maybe it's because things worked out so well for Daniel, or because people just love speculating and dreaming, but at least since then, reading the present and the past as signs of the future has been a good job, if you can get it.

Brody's allegorical thesis does a lot of work in his book, which is hardly surprising, since it is a work of biographical criticism. There's really no disputing the idea that Godard's movies are intensely personal. But the irony of Brody's reliance on allegory is that he arguably doesn't use it enough. The forms of traditional allegory that I've mentioned are all at stake in Godard's work. You want prophecy? As Brody explains, Le Chinoise is "widely understood" to be just that: "1967 was a year of political confrontation, and 1968 a year of legendary upheaval, especially in France. The film expressed the latent provocation for violence among the highly politicized youth of France and suggested that their opposition went far beyond the local concerns of the university, extending to revolution in the literal sense." Furthermore, "the coming transformation that Godard foresaw and helped to foster was one of art as well as politics. In Le Chinoise, Godard was doing more than exploding the conventions of the cinema: he was expressing despair that the radical politics of the time had surpassed the radicalism of his cinema.

What about morality? Godard was, in Brody's view, a deeply conservative revolutionary. This is Brody's explanation, for instance, as to why Godard changed the ending of Vivre Sa Vie from a sardonic Brechtian one, in which Nana (Anna Karina) is thriving for Daniel, or because people just love reading the present and the past as signs of the future has been a good job, if you can get it.

"Vivre Sa Vie" is "widely understood" to be just that: after all, the guy had threatened to liquidate all the intellectuals in Iraq if they couldn't figure it out. Maybe Daniel was just playing it safe when he told Nebuchadnezzar that the dream he'd been having meant that from his Kingdom would come a line of civilizations that would hold sway until the end of time. After all, the guy had threatened to liquidate all the intellectuals in Iraq if they couldn't figure it out. Maybe it's because things worked out so well for Daniel, or because people just love speculating and dreaming, but at least since then, reading the present and the past as signs of the future has been a good job, if you can get it.

Godard's Marxism, too, was intertwined with refined and not-so-refined male-chauvinist biases. American style consumer capitalism seems to be corrupting women above all in many of his films. As Brody details, there is, along these lines, an often overlooked
ambiguity in reading one of Godard's most legendary phrases. In *Masculine Feminine*, Godard summed up the post-war generation in the title cards. “This Film Could Be Called/The Children of Marx Coca-Cola/Our End Their/Who? Who? The question is "whether these children are the product of Marx and Coca-Cola both, or whether these are two different groups—that is, the children of Marx and the children of Coca-Cola.” To add to the difficulty, "Godard himself glossed it both ways." On the one hand, all the children in his films to whom youth culture could have come from families where the mom was "Mrs. Marx" and dad was "Mr. Coca-Cola." On the other hand, in the next breath Godard says, "Jean-Pierre Leaud (the boy) and Chantal Goya (the little ye-ye [pop] singer) represent the left and the right, respectively." While the Left was becoming the "New Left" at the cinéma du look in the lecture hall instead of in the factory and on the barricades, the Right seemed to have had the insight that if it could monopolize enjoyment no one would recognize it as a politics anymore. At the end of the movie, Leaud's character falls off his apartment building. Today, Chantal Goya is a popular entertainer for French children.

Which brings us to allegorical interpretations that unite disparate texts: it seems to me, this has always been one Godard's defining turns of thought. It has assumed many guises in his work. In his film criticism and later in his films he set out to reconcile high art and popular culture. This took the form of arguing for the artistic merit of commercial cinema through the now canonical theory of the film director as an author not of stories, but of a certain mise-en-scene. In his films he unites art and pop by letting them be alone together, by quoting from philosophy and literature and quartets and sonatas in ways that underscore their distance from consumer society. When he went to work as a professor, starting in the '70s in Montreal, he began to consider his own work in relation to "classical Hollywood" in a way that reminds me of biblical typology. The New Testament is to *The New Wave* as The Old Testament is to Hollywood. The analogy is apt if only because taste in film, for one, seems to have been born again because of *The New Wave*. Film critic Andrew Sarris' conversion in the early '60s is emblematic: "I began seeing a lot of American movies through French eyes... To show you the dividing line in my thinking, when I did a Top Ten list for the *Village* Voice in 1958, I had a Stanley Kramer film on the list and I left off both *Vertigo* and *Touch of Evil*.

But there is also another, more disquieting way in which the analogy between the Bible's two halves and the diptych of Hollywood and *The New Wave* holds: through what Brody sees as Godard's troubling fictions with anti-Semitism. There is plenty of circumstantial evidence to support this claim. Godard's family pedigree predisposes him to this regressive ideology. They were collaborators with the Nazis; his mother's father, one of the most powerful bankers in all of Europe, was openly anti-Semitic. In an infamous argument with the producer Pierre Braunberger, Godard called him a "dirty Jew" (Truffaut never forgave Godard for this incident). He even cited it in a vituperative response to a request by Godard for money in the mid-'70s. The exchange ended what remained of their personal and professional relationships. And, of course, Godard is a critic of Israel and a supporter of the Palestinian struggle.

But because of how this books ends, by drumming up charges of anti-Semitism against Godard for *Notre Musique*, his most recent feature film, I think Brody unintentionally emphasizes this supposed anti-Semitism too much. Of course, Godard is wrong to equate the plight of the Palestinians with the Holocaust (for the record, Godard denies ever claiming this). To Brody, it seems like a regression to some of the most tendentious and unappealing political moments from his early films, when in the midst of a lecture to film students in Sarajevo about shot and counter-shot, Godard's examples stray from a textbook juxtaposition of Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell in *His Girl Friday* to two shots of inmates in a concentration camp. The first he labels "Jew," the second "Muslim." Godard's commentary takes it from there: "In 1948, the Israelis walked in the water toward the Promised Land. The Palestinians walked in the water toward drowning. Shot and counter-shot. The Jewish people rejoined fiction. The Palestinian people, document further allegorize them, i.e. transform them with our interpretations and in our actions. If there was ever a salient criticism of Godard's achievements, it is that they are ultimately not allegorical enough, not transformative enough. As Stanley Cavell put it long ago, Godard criticized slogans and advertising with more slogans and advertising. "If you believe that people speak in slogans to one another, or that women are turned by bourgeois society into marketable objects, or that human pleasures are now figments and products of advertising accounts and that these are directions of dehumanization — then what is the value of pouring further slogans into that world (e.g. 'People speak in slogans' or 'Women have become objects') or 'Bourgeois society is dehumanizing' or 'Love is impossible'? And how do you distinguish the world's dehumanizing of its inhabitants from your depersonalizing of them? How do you know whether your asserted impossibility of love is anything more than an expression of your distaste for its tasks? Without such knowledge, your disapproval of the world's pleasures, such as they are, is not criticism (the negation of ad-
Now picture a career officer on the ground in Baghdad, a soldier with famous appetites for baseball and fast food. War brings the latter, this is a fact. War finally, this is a certainty. The cloud of numerous wars has come to represent all that’s wrong with the American approach in Iraq. Again and again, Raymond Odierno’s name has been connected with jaw-dropping incidents of civilian abuse, intimidation, and, most troublingly, a murder conspiracy. But then, in a sudden, almost Aristotelian character reversal, Odierno experiences an epiphany that radically alters his approach to war. The battle is being lost, he decides; it’s time to change course.

Finally, imagine a pacificist British human rights crusader, fluent in Arabic and Hebrew, with a taste third world economies and a penchant for moonlighting as a spy. Emma Sky had been to Iraq, and was present during the invasion in 2003, but had vowed never to return as long as the country was under the yoke of American influence. But then one evening, she arrived at Fort Leavenworth, where Ray Odierno, ask- ing her to become his special adviser on Iraqi affairs. Against her own better judgment, she agrees, on one condition: that she should ever witness him or his men commit a war crime, she would report Odierno to The Hague.

If I’ve set the stage for what looks to be a hokey Hollywood war flick, that’s because The Gamble crackles with the sort of proliferating improbabilities, colorful characters, and high-stakes risk-taking usually reserved for the movies. Ricks recounts the history behind a radical reorientation in the American mili- tary—the new posture that gave life, in turn, to the ‘surge’ which many credit with recently quelling violence in Iraq—with a sure hand and flair for dramatic detail. At the same time, The Gamble is far from fluff; while the majority of literature on Iraq produced around the Euphrates Valley while leaving the popu- lation unprotected and exposed to insurgent terrorism and civil war.

In Baghdad, a soldier with famous appetites for baseball and fast food. War brings the latter, this is a fact. War finally, this is a certainty. The cloud of numerous wars has come to represent all that’s wrong with the American approach in Iraq. Again and again, Raymond Odierno’s name has been connected with jaw-dropping incidents of civilian abuse, intimidation, and, most troublingly, a murder conspiracy. But then, in a sudden, almost Aristotelian character reversal, Odierno experiences an epiphany that radically alters his approach to war. The battle is being lost, he decides; it’s time to change course.

Book reviews...
“That’s between me and my boy,” Webb responded, before walking away.

This exchange, while controversial among those who believed Webb to have publicly disrespected the president, put the administration on notice that the status quo was no longer acceptable. The president received the message loud and clear. Immediately following the elections, Bush booted the cancer-tainted Robert Gates; ordered Petraeus back to Baghdad as the top US commander in the country; and opened the floodgates allowing Jack Keane to become a de facto one-man Joint Chiefs of Staff, with Petraeus, Odierno, and their respective sidekicks, Othman included, implementing his will on the battlefield. Thus was set into motion a facelift for the American occupation in Iraq.

The bulk of the book’s second half chronicles the painful implementation of the surge. On the surface, the new strategy comprised a handful of principle elements. The first, and politically most challenging, was a troop-level boost in the neighborhood of 30,000 additional soldiers. Second, American commanders were ordered to cut deals, where appropriate, with local insurgents in order to scale back the violence. Third, Petraeus and the US Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Crocker, sought to engage with Muqtada al-Sadr, the young firebrand cleric who controlled the holy city of Karbala killed thirty-two. Four days later, a car bombing at the main bus station in the Shiite neighborhood of Baghdad had been largely completed, with some 3,000 “significant acts of violence,” by far the highest percentage, an acceleration that produced mounting casualties with shocking frequency throughout the country. American troops patrolling the increasingly peaceful city, “Now that the Sunnis are all gone, murders have dropped off.”

One way to put it is they ran out of people to kill.” In other words, as Stephen Walt recently pointed out, the surge’s success may have been all in the timing.

Still, even if we accept that the final months of 2008 proved the surge to be tactically successful, the first months of 2009 have revealed it as a strategic failure. Iraq may be physically safer, but the country’s political situation remains a morass, and it looks to get worse. The Maliki government hobbles along—dysfunctionally corrupt at best, pathologically sectarian at worst—which hampers bleak assessments of what to expect on the horizon. Steve Simon, a Middle East expert, and Council on Foreign Relations analyst, argues that the surge likely averted utter collapse of the Iraqi nation-state, but predicts that it will also leave behind a legacy that will leave the country suffering “the same instability and violence as Yemen and Pakistan.”

Heavy stuff, no doubt. But as the economic crisis continues to swallow up the world’s attention by melting all that was solid into thin air, will Americans ever notice, or care? Ricks arrives at the deflated conclusion that: “Many Americans seem to think the Iraq war is close to wrapped up, or at least our part in it. When I hear that, I worry. A phrase associated with the war that particularly haunts me is one that Paul Wolfowitz, then the deputy secretary of Defense, used often in the winter before the invasion. ‘Hard to imagine,’ he would say. It was hard to imagine...that the war would last as long as they feared, or that it would cost as much as all that, or might require so many troops...I worry that we are now failing to imagine sufficiently what we have gotten ourselves into and how much more we have to pay in blood, treasure, prestige and credibility.”

In other words, we have to stay, whether we, or Iraqis, want us to. For Ricks, there are “no good answers, just less bad ones,” in Iraq, and that no matter how immoral staying may be, immediate withdrawal would be worse so.

In somber conclusion, Ricks predicts that “the events for which the Iraq war will be remembered probably have not yet happened,” a chilling confirmation, if he is correct, of John Grady Cole’s realization at the end of All the Pretty Horses. “He thought that the world’s heart beat at some terrible cost and that...in this headlong deficit the blood of multitudes might ultimately be exacted for the vision of a single flower.” A single flower, no matter how wilted, or imaginary.
Nothing to Say—Hirschhorn's Universal Gym

Thomas Hirschhorn—Universal Gym.

Gladdstone Gallery, on view till April 11, 2009

CLAY MATLIN

I have always been suspicious of Swiss-born installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn's art; it always strikes me as a little too easy. The blatant in-your-face quality of his installations recall a petulant teenager who really wants to shock things up but can't get out of his own way. Hirschhorn's 2006 show Superficial Engagement, at Barbara Gladstone, was at its core an assault on the viewer, one which seemed more intent on being upsetting than saying anything of real value. Made up of four large platforms that the viewer had to navigate through, the jerry-built work combined ghastly images of violence and war in the Middle East, mannequins studded with nails and screws—made to look like African fetish objects—textiles, references to the Swiss mystic Emma Kunz, video monitors, and newspaper articles with headlines stuck to the walls. The space, which became a improvised mass operation that it was impossible for the viewer not to be confronted with some image of horror: a headless body, a dismembered corpse, the disfigured body of a small child.

Hirschhorn's argument for the piece is that by never letting the viewer relax the engagement with the images becomes superficial, which is to say that the experience is kept on the surface; we remain confronted by the things we see, unable to argue or pontificate our way out of the encounter. The things we see remain unfiltered and through this experience art might allow us to be healed in the face of the world's terrors. A nice idea, but it ultimately fell short. The chaos of the installation made it impossible to be truly horrified or indignant. Those that did feel that way are always looking to be offended in some way or another. Pictures of terror are just the things they saw at that moment. Yet with all these images leering at the viewer, one ultimately became inured to the experience. Superficial Engagement turned out to be less terrifying and merely interesting, perhaps even come in its absurd aggression. The use of Emma Kunz, as the New York Times critic Ken Johnson pointed out, seemed out of place in Hirschhorn's narrative. As Johnson aptly put it, "For all its brutal obviousness and faux-populism, there is something deeply confused and confusing about Mr. Hirschhorn's project... he is the view, and induces vague, free-floating guilt." It is a work so rich powerful when we have to be deliberately hit over the head with our own helplessness and impotence so that we can't help but succumb to an agenda, in this case one that is both political and artistic. One never gets the sense when viewing a Hirschhorn that the art is dangerous, that it has menace and can wound us. Not like Edward Kienholz (and later Nancy Reddin Kienholz), whose installations really are terrifying and unsettling. Duchamp was right when he declared that Ed Kienholz was "a marvelously vulgar artist." The same can't be said for Hirschhorn.

And now Hirschhorn is back, pointing out the problems of the world and still carrying the torch for art as social critique. But what if that social critique is empty? What if its meaning really is meaningless? Edmundo Burke wrote that "a clear idea is therefore another name for a little idea," Hirschhorn tries so hard to be the chosen artist, making things "nice and clean," but fails not to make something that his ideas become little. But one gets the sense that his thought itself is not little, and this is what makes him all the more maddening. That he is so deliberate, so committed to his ideas, ultimately serves to undo him. The point is made the minute one enters the gallery and forgotten as soon as the doors close on the other side. I had hoped that Universal Gym would really just be that, a gym open to the public in blue-chip Chelsea. Now that would have been daring. Were Hirschhorn to have provided a free gym for two months, a place where all walks of life could congregate, the work would have been legitimately interesting. Perhaps that little slice of life would allow us to see if we really are trying to "stay in shape while the world falls apart." Instead we are presented with an unusable space filled with empty metaphors on the human condition, a condition that needs no sugarcoating, for the very act of living allows us to know the problems of being human. By playing at social critique and engaging with the most obvious ideas Hirschhorn succeds in being just as ineffective as if he had remained silent and made nothing at all. He has written of his work: "What I want is to stay disobedient! I want to try to resist, protesting and I want to refuse myself the tendency of making things 'arty', nice and clean. I want to work without cynicism, without negativity and without self-satisfying criticism—I do not want to be critical—I want to do work, which resists the moralist and nihilist tradition!" This, however, is not the work of protest. He succeeds in not making things "nice and clean," but fails not to make things "arty." This is not cyncial art, but it is nonetheless deeply self-satisfied and moralistic. Hirschhorn is nothing if not a moralist. His critiques are couched in making us disappointed in ourselves, in trying to make us better, the better becoming that which we are not. I am unsure if this is actually us becoming better or becoming little Thomas Hirschhorns. Hirschhorn should embrace his moral high ground and tell us how to remake our disastrous selves. Perhaps his work would be more powerful if he was overtly cynical and a little surlier. As it stands now he tries to terrorize us from afar, pushing us around but pretending he has no agenda. He's slick, but he's also transparent and clumsy. The only people that find his work upsetting are the longhairs who have him and leave the exploration of really terrible things to those artists who not only know them when they see them but are unafraid to let those things run amok and be truly terrifying.
Four Plays Are Better than Some

Mabou Mines’ DollHouse at St. Ann’s Warehouse
Billy Elliot at the Imperial Theater
Chautauqua! by the NTUSA
Soul Samurai by Vampire Cowboys Company

FRANK EPISTALE

“I don’t know how you do it, Frank. Every time I look out at the theatre scene in this city, all I see is a lot of crap.” This statement was part of an email I received last summer while trying to decide what I would write about for an upcoming article. When I was an undergraduate, one of my professors confessed to the class that he had long ago stopped seeing theatre because it was so often a disappointment and he found it personally painful to see bad theatre. I myself have gone through long stretches when I’ve questioned my chosen field of study, not so much because of the terrible shows, but because of the mediocre shows. These most deadly of productions showcase bland competence and workmanlike professionalism that garner respectful applause from an audience that won’t remember the details of what they saw even a week later.

But then there are seasons like this one. Show after show, week after week, I’m reminded why I study theatre and why I live in New York. The past month has taken me from DUMBO to Broadway, SoHo to the East Village, with ticket prices ranging from $15 to $125. I generally avoid describing anything as “exuberantly theatrical,” a phrase frequently employed by critics who want to make sure they’re quoted in a theatre’s publicity material. That’s precisely what most of the performances I’ve seen recently have exhibited, though: an exuberant theatricality that rewards fans and students of the theatre but doesn’t punish novices, that celebrates the medium of the theatre without denigrating other media, that challenges the audience and students of the theatre but doesn’t punish novices, that celebrates the medium of the theatre without denigrating other media, that challenges the audience while also being sure to reward them. Following then, are brief responses to the four shows I’ve seen most recently, in the order in which I saw them.

Mabou Mines’ DollHouse, a radical adaptation (directed by Lee Breuer, adapted by Breuer and Maude Mitchell) of Henrik Ibsen’s most famous play, debuted at St. Ann’s Warehouse in 2003 and has spent the last several years touring the world to near-unanimous acclaim. Last month, the show returned to St. Ann’s to complete the final leg of its tour. Famously, all of the men in the production are less than five feet tall, while all of the women are over six feet tall. The set (designed by Narelle Sissons), a foldable, doll-house-like structure that renders the play’s title literal, is played by Mitchell) is transformed into a Wagnerian Valkyrie cum Rapunzel who towers over the entire set, singing a triumphant farewell aria while a chorus of puppets bicker and wail, trapped in their stifling, emotionally violent marriages. What saves the show from collapsing under the weight of its pretensions is a mischievous, relentless sense of humor that invites the audience to be in on the joke even as they gape in disbelief at the sheer spectacle of it all.

While Broadway musicals are often thought of as lavish and spectacular, Billy Elliot is subdued and virtually conservative in comparison to Breuer’s DollHouse. Written by Lee Hall, directed by Stephen Daldry, and featuring music by Elton John, the new musical was adapted from the 2000 film of the same name (which was also written by Hall and directed by Daldry). Set against the backdrop of Britain’s devastating 1984 minersworkers’ strike, Billy Elliot is the story of a boy who discovers, much to his surprise, that he has a talent for, and a love of, dancing. Like blue-collar dance tales from Footloose to Flashdance, this one is a feel-good tale at heart, the poverty and oppressive moral code of the community serving primarily as a foil for the hopes and ambitions of the protagonist. Unlike those others, though, this show succeeds in keeping its class issues relatively front-and-center, and even in maintaining some political bite. “Solidarity,” a major production number halfway through the first act, takes pains to dramatize (and choreograph) the strike, while the second act opens with “Merry Christmas, Maggie Thatcher,” a song in which the miners cheerfully wish for their prime minister’s death.

It is tempting for many to claim that its politics are what sets Billy Elliot apart from other shows, but this is hardly the first high-profile musical to tackle such issues. Canonical musical theatre fare—from Showboat, to South Pacific, to Oklahoma!, to West Side Story, to Hair among others—has confronted class, race, and other such topical matters again and again, with varying degrees of success. Each time, the show in question is heralded as a surprise, an exception to what we imagine to be the vapid musical norm.

What really sets Billy Elliot apart from so much other Broadway fare is the palpable commitment of its cast, the infectious joy that they exude while performing. Also unusual for a musical is that the music itself is mostly forgettable; I don’t imagine that a great many cast recordings are going to be sold in the theatre lobby. This is in part because the young actors performing in the title role (Kiril Kulish, who starred when I attended the show, is one of three boys who play Billy in rotation) were cast more for their dancing than for their singing. Kulish can carry a tune, but he doesn’t own the stage until he starts to dance. The entire team seems aware of where the show’s strengths lie, though, and they play those strengths for all they’re worth.

Continued on page 21
Throw Me the Statue, *Purpleface*  
(Secretly Canadian)  
Beirut, *March of the Zapotec / Holland* (Ba Da Bing!)

DAOUD TYLER-AMEEN

The careers of Throw Me the Statue and Beirut are still young, and for the moment it seems both bands are doing exactly what they should. The stories of their success almost make this music business stuff sound easy: TMTS frontman Scott Reitherman created the debut LP *Moonbeams* largely on his own, released it on his own Baskerville Hill label in 2007 (to luxuriant blog press), and was picked up by Secretly Canadian, who re-released the album in 2008. Beirut mastermind Zach Condon, having fallen in love with Balkan folk and French pop in his teens, self-recorded an album steeped in the former (2006's *Gulag Orkestar*) that got him signed to Ba Da Bing!, and followed it up with an effort heavily influenced by the latter (2007’s *The Flying Club Cup*)—all of this by the age of twenty-one.

After a one-man bedroom band explodes into relevance, the usual Step Two is to get a proper backing band together and tour like hell, which both artists have done impressively—Reitherman filling out his onstage sound with a tight four-piece, and Condon surrounding himself with a veritable army of brass and strings. It’s when it comes time to record again that question marks begin to pop up. Do you incorporate the backing band, or stick to your old format? What effect does the experience of performing for an audience, instead of just your four-track or computer, have on your arrangements? Does being a professional musician, instead of just a kid with a dream, change the way you write songs? The buzz machine is buzzing, expectations are high, and sometimes the best way to make everyone shut up for a minute is to release an EP. Not a huge commitment, not a definitive statement on the band’s direction, just a little something to whet the public’s collective appetite.

That’s the route these two intriguing acts have decided to take; this past month saw the release of Throw Me the Statue’s *Purpleface* and Beirut’s *March of the Zapotec / Holland*.

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*Purpleface* begins with a disorienting jumble of sounds that, ever so slowly, converges into something resembling a coherent whole. A Casio-type beat, typical of TMTS’s repertoire, takes center stage for a precious few seconds before giving way to the heavy pounding of live drums, signaling a patent break from form (the way Elliott Smith did when the drums kicked in on “King’s Crossing”). An acoustic piano, another anomaly in the band’s formerly synth-centric world, adds some moody, resonant tones to the mix, its sustain pedal evidently floored. The heir apparent to *Moonbeams* opener “Young Sensualists” is “That’s How You Win,” a far more complex and cryptic beast. Where its predecessor related frankly the story of a friendship ruined by selfishness and lust, there’s no clear narrative in the lyrics of “That’s How You Win”; all that comes through in its string of free-associative phrases is a sense of world-weary chagrin, couched in ironic affirmation: “Unblinking eyes make for tired days,” goes the refrain, “But don’t let it get you down.”

A melancholic tone now set, *Purpleface* proceeds with a reworking of *Moonbeams* track “Written in Heart Signs, Faintly” that suggests Reitherman spent a lot of the time between releases listening to Mogwai and Explosions in the Sky. The album version was a rare moment of acoustic sparseness—just Reitherman and his guitar, accompanied by tambourine and the faint plinking of bells. The EP version does away with the campfire instrumentation and gives the song the post-rock treatment, adorning it with bleepy guitars, warm waves of malleted cymbals, and thick clouds of reverb fog. The flood of new and diverse sounds gives the song a dynamic malleability it couldn’t have in its previous incarnation, conjuring drama and passion in what once seemed little more than an idle daydream.

We are tossed headlong into the fantasy landscape the lyrics describe, the place in the clouds “where the kissing never, ever stops.”

Reitherman’s lyrics deal prominently in wanton sexuality, and even more prominently in the shame that such abandon often brings about. His lotus-eating protagonists generally know they’ve crossed the line, and yet never seem all that sorry for their...
misdeeds (see the bridge of “Heart Signs”: “Another girl's eyes got wet / I was a total fool / But what can I do?”). It's nice, then, to see him take a break and indulge in some genuine sentimentality, as he does on “Honeysbee.” The narrator still has one foot in slumberland, and through soft blankets of windwhistles and heartbeat-like tom-tom thumps, he speaks to his lover in sleepy half-phrases of the dream from which he has just emerged. With some snapper, less shoegaze production, this could easily be an early-period Belle and Sebastian song, and Reitherman's delivery matches the mood, trading his usual deadpan for a genteel coo. His mumbled sentence fragments don't make much sense, but they are sung so sweetly that it hardly matters.

“Ship” rounds out the disc. It begins with a march beat, then adds instruments and vocals one by one, ramping up tension on the verse, exploding into a Sunny Day Real Estate-style jam on the chorus, then gradually falling into tight, regimented order again. This is the closest thing we've heard so far to the old-world grandeur and turns to techno, perhaps the most surprising thing about Made in Condon's other material, the soundscapes on these five tracks, but there's nothing technically wrong with the arpeggiated synths and ditty-bop beats on these five songs, too well; there's nothing technically wrong with the incidental. His vocal contributions lack their usual passion and come off as an afterthought; the arrangements, though sonically as grand as ever, feel strangely arbitrary.

Holland suffers from a distinct but related dilemma. On it, Condon-as-Realpeople shies away from Beiruti's old-world grandeur and turns to techno, perhaps the only kind of music that's meant to sound like it was made in a bedroom. The plan, however, works a little too well; there's nothing technically wrong with the arpeggiated synths and ditty-bop beats on these five songs, but there's nothing terribly interesting about them either. Really, the most surprising thing about the Realpeople recordings is how spare they are—all the trumpet calls, conga rhythms, accordion strains, and clarinet flourishes that assault the senses in Condon's other material, the soundscapes on Holland are unadorned and consequently tame. And that's a shame, because the core material here sounds far more earnest and ardent than that on Zapotec, and the Postal Service-grade accompaniment is far too often a distraction. Opener “My Night with the Prostitutes from Marseille” has a particularly affecting melody, and makes one wish Condon would turn off the drum machine, pick up a guitar, and just belt it.

March of the Zapotec and Holland are a fitting pair, but more for their complementary flaws than for any kind of thematic connection: the first is all style and no substance, the second all substance and no style. Here's hoping that on his next outing, Condon finds a middle ground, a way to stay true to the best of his creative instincts while continuing, as he has on past releases, to transcend indie-rock insularity and help make the cultural landscape in his own backyard more interesting and exciting.
Watching the Watchmen

Zack Snyder's _Watchmen_ is a curious film: a painstaking translation, from comics to cinema, of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons’s twelve-issue limited series (and later graphic novel) of 1986–87; the latest entry in the over-crowded genre of superhero films; and a monument to geek culture, embodying the obsessive love of detail and trivia, the fanboyish curatorial energy and drive, and the passionate partisanship of nerds, collectors, and devotees (and the marketers who prey upon us) the world over. Sadly, like many monuments, Snyder’s film is a cenotaph and mausoleum, an overdone, top-heavy tribute that buries (rather than praises) the grandeur of the original under the weight of its own ambition. The story—an intricately detailed alternative-universe satire in which superheroes are real, the United States has won the Vietnam War yet careens toward a nuclear confrontation with Soviet Russia in the style of Kubrick’s _Dr. Strangelove_, or the disastrous appropriation of Wagner’s “ride of Valkyries” for a short scene from America’s Vietnam victory. And an epic fail goes to Snyder for the opening shot of the film’s final scene, a view of the hole left in midtown Manhatten by energy bombs released by supervillain Ozymandias. The hole is unmistakably a huge version of the footprints left by the destruction of the World Trade Center; to ram home the point, the camera shows the digitally added Towers to the south, standing once again like sentinels of an unharmed New York, symbolic watchmen of its prosperity and fortune. Snyder shows the Towers throughout the film, and most of the times it feels exactly right—this is 1985 in a parallel universe, after all—but this final juxtaposition is nakedly exploitative, a nasty, unnecessary grab at the heartstrings that have voices, exist in a credible simulacrum of three-dimensional space, and so on: but almost every cinematic strategy Snyder brings to bear deadens, rather than enlivens, the film. The constant use of pop music hits on the soundtrack as markers of emotion, which drowns the action in waves of readymade nostalgic bathos; Snyder’s now-infamous overuse of stop-motion photography and rapid-fire edits for his numerous action sequences, which renders much of the would-be-balletic fight sequences an incomprehensible flurry of bodies; Snyder’s near-total tone-deafness for acting, and the resulting loss of nuance and verisimilitude, so necessary to a dystopian, gritty tale like _Watchmen_; all of these render the film a hodgepodge of competing effects, nothing like the delicate balance of word, image, and color that is the comic. Much of the film, unmoored from the particularities of the comic form that made the Moore-Gibbons _Watchmen_ such a joy, becomes a sticky sci-fi rehash, a dull grey paste that refuses to cohere into a compelling visual narrative. And despite the film’s lavished—and largely earned—fidelity to the original, there are added moments that don’t work at all, as with Snyder’s filming of President Nixon and the Joint Chiefs discussing nuclear war with Soviet Russia in the style of Kubrick’s famous war room from _Dr. Strange-love_, or the disatrous appropriation of Wagner’s “ride of Valkyries” for a short scene from America’s Vietnam victory. An epic fail goes to Snyder for the opening shot of the film’s final scene, a view of the hole left in midtown Manhattan by energy bombs released by supervillain Ozymandias. The hole is unmistakably a huge version of the footprints left by the destruction of the World Trade Center; to ram home the point, the camera shows the digitally added Towers to the south, standing once again like sentinels of an unharmed New York, symbolic watchmen of its prosperity and fortune. Snyder shows the Towers throughout the film, and most of the times it feels exactly right—this is 1985 in a parallel universe, after all—but this final juxtaposition is nakedly exploitative, a nasty, unnecessary grab at the heartstrings that
feels more like a sucker punch in the gut. Internet commentary has been spot-on (geeks again?) about Snyder's multiple sins in reworking the end of the graphic novel: the opening pages of the last chapter, for example, of the Moore-Gibbons Watchmen detail extensively a corpse-strewn Manhattan destroyed by Ozymandias's masterplot (that giant telepathic squid you've undoubtedly heard about), thus humanizing the spectacular violence, showing the terrible cost of the machinations of grown-up boys in tights. Snyder denies the viewer even this glimmer of humanity, opting instead for Bang! Pow! CGI pyrotechnics and a crass display of bankrupt sentimentality.

Snyder's film is also, paradoxically, a celebration of the supervillain's rationalized barbarity—although Obama's Justice Department positions relating to the current economy could be used to illuminate contemporary politics. Ozymandias's argument is essentially that of the Chicago School writ large: that mankind needs to believe in some kind of comfort and stability to a naturally fractious political system, and that of the Chicago School writ large: that mankind needs to believe in some kind of comfort and stability to a naturally fractious political system, and

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movies are open to the public—one our next one is at 6 p.m on March 20, and will feature Vice President for Student Affairs Matthew Schroening. We will continue to keep abreast of developments and post to our website, www.cunydscc.org, and continue to invite speakers to our plenaries who can speak directly to student needs and concerns.

For a mere $6 per pass, you, too, can go to the movies using our AMC Silver movie passes.

Drop by the office (GC 5495) during office hours (check www.cunydscc.org for updated office hours), and remember to bring your current GC ID and a checkbook to buy movie passes. For more information, drop by the DSC office!

To-do List: Nominations, Check! Elections, Upcoming!

Nominations are due! Thank you so much for nominating yourself, your friend, your peers, and everyone else who has been nominated for various DSC positions. Now, the Steering Committee is tabulating, formulating, and creating the ballot for Elections! Elections begin April 1: keep checking www.cunydscc.org/vote for regular updates on the election, and for complete instructions on how to participate (the same ones you hopefully received in print in The Advocate, or in an email forwarded from your APO or EO or DSC rep or someone else….)

Remember: no paper ballots this year! Go green, and participate. It's your vote, your voice, your DSC!

DSC Spring Party

The DSC Spring Party will be held on the evening of March 20th, from 8:00-11:00 p.m., in rooms 5414 and 5409.

Beverages and snacks will be served. We're still working on a theme, but St. Paddy's wares are never out of fashion in mid-March, right?

Please join your fellow students, your hard-working peers, and enjoy some mid-semester merriment and mirth!

DSC Calendar

The DSC has the following meetings scheduled.

Plenary Meetings (all plenary meetings are held in room GC 5414)

- March 20, 6p.m.
- April 24, 6p.m.
- May 8, 5p.m. (2008-09 reps)
- May 8, 6p.m. (2009-10 reps)

Steering Committee Meetings (all SC meetings are held in room GC 5489 except as noted)

- April 3, 6p.m.
- May 15, 5p.m., room 5409 (2008-9 and 2009-10 Steering Committee members)

Media Board Meeting

- March 27, 5p.m., room 5489

Spring DSC Party

- March 20, 8p.m., room 5414

Other Committees of the DSC

Please check our website, www.cunydscc.org, for listings of other meetings of the DSC as they are scheduled and published to our website.
Matt Lau

With the Humanities facing existential budget cuts and the industrialized world melting down in the greatest credit crisis since the last scene of Fight Club, Stanley Fish may be “the last professor,” but the Florida International University Law Professor is certainly not the hottest. Or at least that’s the verdict of his students on ratemyprofessors.com, regarding the sexiness of the somewhat famous, 170 year-old Milton scholar whose New York Times blog probably annoys you.

Ratemyprofessors.com is a website on the “internet” that allows students to rant or, conversely, rave about their college and university teachers in brief commentaries. They can also rate them, on a point scale, on their easiness, clarity, helpfulness, rater interest in the subject, and, of course, most importantly, their hotness.

Hotness, or as it is more traditionally known, fuck-ability is a nearly universally desirable attribute in human cultures and societies. And although it is to a great extent determined by the norms of a given period and culture, “it is difficult to imagine any possible context in which Stanley Fish would be considered hot,” writes one student on the site.

Or as another student extremely factual and objective student put it, “Old, white, and beady-eyed, with a whiny voice that sounds like he’s mockingly imitating himself, the last time Professor Fish got laid was the day before the concept of sexual harassment was invented, which was too late for the donkey.”

Critics might argue that he has that one author photo on the cover of The Trouble with Principle where he looks kind of okay, not “like you wanna throw up in your mouth, IMAO, “ as another modest student contribution to ratemyprofessor.com has it. The photographer did a reasonable job of hiding his less-than-flattering Cindy Crawford mole, and his jowls appear to have been taped to the back of his neck. Meanwhile, his hair looks surprisingly tousled and full. As one comment on Ratemyprofessors.com reads, “Where did he get that wig?”

But if my sources, Mark and Kram Schiebe, are correct, then Professor Fish, who is an English Civil War veteran, stole it from his mother’s trunk on the slave ship his family gainfully operated to arrive in the New World. Or, as one of the reviews online reads: “When Prof. Fish went to school, they didn’t have History!”

But most of his law students, as polled by the statistical firm of Dewey, Cheetem, and Howe, think either his wife painted that photo or that it is someone else entirely. Indeed, my confidential sources for such matters, gigolos Mark and Kram Schiebe, told me she confessed to it to them. “We told her we wouldn’t make her life worth living anymore if she didn’t come clean about how she’d enhanced that photo,” said the Schiebes, who looked like they’d been violated, when they stepped off the plan from Miami.

When asked why they’d hired a blogger who’s almost as ugly as Maureen Dowd, the senior public spokesperson for The Times, Ramk Beschie, said he couldn’t talk right now because Dowd had been sitting on his face for the last several hours. Beschie finally emailed a response later in the day. “Look, compared to Dowd, he’s completely beautiful. I mean, she makes Medusa look like Helen of Troy. Besides at least Fish is a bottom. My jaw hurts.”

Stanley Fish Has No Chili Peppers on Ratemyprofessors.com