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A Rambling Introduction

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

"I was a young writer and I wanted to take off . . ." Jack Kerouac, *On The Road*

If you don't know where you are going, surmised Lewis Carroll, ravishingly logical as usual, any road will get you there.[1] Yet long and winding roads aren't always moseyed by rigid souls who imagine they know for sure where they will wind up or what will befall them between stale departure point A and hazy objective B. Plenty of nimble wanderers never needed to know so much, or so little, about their upcoming itineraries. For them, getting there was most of the kick, even if the sinuous route warps, as it sometimes does, into an epic aching series of ordeals.

Why? Because travel, as an affable Frenchman in a low-lit Lhasa café, and accompanied by a chic wife with papoose baby, remarked to me, "is a drug." I grinned back and nodded so hard I got a crick in my neck. Their sylph of a 7 year old daughter sat, or fidgeted, next to me—no trace of my own throbbing altitude sickness in her demeanor. These cheerful wanderers were on a year-long trek around the pre-9/11 globe. Not even fussy family strictures can keep you fastened if you yearn to go. That was slightly over a decade ago. Wonder how those kids are turning out.

Tibet, to be sure, is a mighty literal high road to take, motivated for many a Western traveler by childhood viewings of a flickering mutilated version of the 1937 movie *Lost Horizon*, fantasies of rescuing levitating local monks from swarming Chinese commie entrepreneurs, or a Herman Hesse-like notion of grabbing a handful of pure grace above the holy cloudscape.[2] Inside the butter lamp smog of the Potala Palace the next day, where pilgrims competed to perform extravagant sprawls of prayerful submission before each shrine, I was elbowed aside by two pugnacious supplicants jostling for favorable position. Near the exit I administered instant karma. For the sake of balance.

Alas and alack, the reality of most destinations is grimmer and weirder than sprightly written guidebooks imply, or else is tucked neatly behind glittery Potemkin village tourist facades. But that dismal fact won't deter the impetuous trekker from prying into exotic spaces, from Taos to Kathmandu (and, yes, too often to the detriment of the destination).[3] Being lured onto the road obviously is a lot different than being pushed onto it. Why you are on the road makes all the difference in how you experience it: trail of tears tragic trudgers, dust bowl refugees, hopeful hitchers, alienated beatniks, vagrants scooped into chain gangs, hobos riding freights, writers on a quest, tourist package holidaymakers, or rucksack revolutionaries devouring every stray experience in range.

America, since its stubbornly romanticized frontier era, *is* its roads—from dusty Daniel Boone trail to modern littered superhighway to ghastly Disneyland tinsel tour.[4] Pathfinder, after all,

is one of the nicknames by which James Fenimore Cooper labeled the first great white literary American protagonist Natty Bumppo—"a saint with a gun," as D. H. Lawrence described him.[5] You don't go to America to stand still, do you? When you are young, and gas is cheap, roaming seems irresistible; those memorable ventures into unknown nooks and crannies of America and then out of them again, for many, to traipse foreign lands, as "innocents abroad." (I first waded into the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Ecuador, as it happened, and only much later did so along the storied shores of California.) For many an avid adventurer, everything changed, and never quite in the way they expected. The road is a physical thing, but it also is a metaphor for personal and national transformation.

So Hollywood road movies are legion, perennially popular road songs proliferate, and iconic road images ambush us everywhere. Walt Whitman linked the 'open road' forever to an egalitarian state of being and, at very least, to ways of fleeing small town conformity and suburban close-mindedness. Whitman published *Leaves of Grass* – containing "Song of the Open Road" – in 1857. Woody Guthrie, taking his highly adrenalinized cue from the old poet, roamed a stricken nation in the 1930s strumming a host of classic tunes in accord with Whitman's radical democratic spirit.

Another Whitman disciple, Jack Kerouac, after years of demoralizing delays, published *On The Road* in 1957. Initially, the critical reception was mixed, with Harold Bloom decrying Kerouac's 'drab narrative" and *Time Magazine*, snappy and snotty as always toward powerless targets, ordaining Kerouac the 'latrine laureate of hobohemia." A lot of heedless readers nonetheless understood perfectly what Kerouac was getting at. In Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*, published the following year, Japhy Ryder, a stand-in for poet Gary Snyder, foretold a generation of

. . . Dharma bums refusing to subscribe to the general demand that they consume production and therefore have to work for the privilege of consuming, all that crap that they didn't want anyway . . . a great rucksack revolution, thousands or even millions of young Americans wandering around with rucksacks, going up to the mountains to pray, making children laugh and old men glad, making young girls happy and older girls happier, all of 'em Zen Lunatics who go about writing poems that happen to appear in their heads for no reason and also by being kind and also by strange unexpected acts keep giving visions of eternal freedom to everybody and to all living creatures . . . .[6]

It came and it went: it was called the 60s. While all that countercultural ferment was going on, 'straight' folks, who dutifully loathed the frivolous and risk-taking renegade 'freaks', were busy designing a legalized swindle of epic proportions over decades that threatens to reduce America permanently to a banana latte republic. They can't help it; it's what 'straight' people do.

Soon director Walter Salles of *Motorcycle Diaries* fame will release the long-awaited movie version of Kerouac's classic book, and Alex Gibney just released a documentary about Ken Kesey's merry pranksters bus trip, which seem good excuses as any for a lingering look at what the road means in our ever more confused and contorted American culture. This special section

of *Logos* therefore assembles lively essays from exceptionally savvy travelers, who record and revel and occasionally rue their high-spirited criss-crossings of the landscape and, because America is an empire that cannot call itself one, adjacent overseas terrains too. The classic heyday of the mythic road, the one to which young people flocked voluntarily, has to be the postwar era—roughly from the end of 1945 until the first oil crisis of the 1970s.

Our gleanings include:

Poet Paul Hoover enticingly wraps telling tidbits of tie-dyed history around a fable of his fleeting ownership of a cherished BSA motorcycle. New Mexico writer John Nichols (author of one of the truly great American novels *The Magic Journey*), shares sun-burnt reminiscences of transcendent joys and jarring moments traversing America's roads, especially out West. Nichols hiked and hitched and motored all continental America and, like other esteemed contributors, more than once. Author and expatriate John Long chimes in with vignettes of his own delirious days wheeling down celebrated Route 66 where terribly trite things become excitingly true and sometimes downright deadly. Writer and photographer Phaedra Greenwood as a roving young woman helped fulfill a rash promise by ten gallon-hatted Wavy Gravy (Hugh Romney) on stage in 1969 at Woodstock to whip up breakfast in bed for four hundred thousand, and etches her personal acid-enhanced odyssey during that enchanting cosmic moment on our sore, sorry planet.

Max Vanzi, former foreign correspondent (and later a friend of Kerouac's star-crossed pal Lucien Carr at UPI) skirts perilously along the razor-edged borders of embattled American interests across Asia – from Pakistan to Cambodia – and pays poignant tribute to a lost colleague.[7] Vanzi had to cross several Asian war zones to come back to the good old USA to get beat up by cops. Warren Leming, musician and filmmaker, recalls riding across the country in 1960 in a patched-up, rundown 1948 auto on a pilgrimage to the then-scorned Oklahoma shrine of the most legendary American itinerant of them all, Woody Guthrie. Poet and activist John Sinclair surely has been wherever 'there' is, done whatever 'that' is, but he keeps on trucking with defiant flair and artistic brio through a 21st century cross-Atlantic rendition of bohemia.

In a wide ranging and generous-spirited interview poet Anne Waldman with ample insight and humor probes the multiple meanings of the road for all those with a yen to break away. Who said a road must be paved, or, for that matter, be something you can touch, to be a source of change, to shake you up? Some roads are metaphysical; perhaps all roads we explore for the sake of exploring are. For our audio-visually inclined audience we include a hyperlink to a 4 minute preview of a new documentary exploring all the foregoing themes from an emphatically Whitmanesque point of view too.

The upshot? What all this willful wandering portended, as T. S. Eliot figured out, was that many of the scruffy Magi, the dharma bums, the valiant vagabonds, would return to their starting point "to know the place for the first time," and, unlike Elliot, even dare to try to

change it, after filing their reports to the rest of the unawakened tribe.[8]

Notes

[1] This oft-quoted line is actually a paraphrase of an exchange between Alice and the Cat in Chapter 6 of Alice in Wonderland.

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where–" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
"–so long as I get SOMEWHERE," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

[2] See Lee Feigon, *Demystifying Tibet: Unlocking the Secrets of the Land under the Snows* (Chicago 1996) and Pankaj Mishra, *Temptations of the West: How to be Modern in India, Pakistan, Tibet and Beyond* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2006)

[3] See Hal Rothman, *Devils' Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth Century American West* (Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 1998), Dennison Nash, "Tourism as a Form of Imperialism" in Valene L. Smith, ed. *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, Susan C Stonich, *The Other Side of Paradise* (Cognizant Communication Corp, 2000) and, even further afield but very relevant, Scott Laderman's *Tours of Vietnam: War, Travel Guides and Memory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

[4] See Robert C. Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian Hating and Empire Building* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); David H. Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2001); Richard White and Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Frontier in American Culture* (University of California Press, 1994); Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Unbroken Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York Norton, 1987) and Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[5] "Yet the Leatherstocking books are lovely. Lovely half-lies." D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (London: Penguin, 2003), Chapter 5.

[6] Jack Kerouac, *The Dharma Bums* (New York: Viking Press, 1958), chapter 12.

[7] Lucien Carr, a close friend and catalyst of the beats in New York, wound up stabbing an addled admirer David Kammerer to death in 1944. The circumstances were murky then, and more so now, and so worked in Carr's favor in court. After a brief spell in prison he embarked on a career as an editor for UPI. Max recalled Lou Carr's wit at work with reporters fiddling too long with copy: "Hey, They're not going to bind it in leather, you know." (In conversation with Vanzi.)

[8] T. S. Eliot, "Little Giddings", *Four Quartets* (London : Faber & Faber, 2001). The effects were predictably unpredictable. Speaking of Martinique, Fanon, for example, notes, 'The black man who lived in France for a length of time returns radically changed.' Those 'who return to their original environment convey the impression that they have completed a cycle, that they have added to themselves something that was lacking.' Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1952). p. 19. Many American blacks returning home from eye-opening experiences overseas during the Second World War became the backbone of the Civil Rights movement.

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The British Small Arms Company: A Motorcycle Memoir

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

In 1965, my sophomore year at Manchester College in Indiana, I bought my first car, a 1957 Chevy crème over rust four-door sedan in perfect condition. I paid $750 in cash, most of my savings, to a tall man with black hair whose used car lot was a green field on a sloping hill that was entered through a farm gate. There were no signs except on the car windows and no cute little sales shed, just four or five cars parked handsomely on the untrammeled grass. My father, pastor of the Pipe Creek Church of the Brethren, had discovered the spot while visiting his parishioners. It was an easy exchange. I drove away, the owner of a treasure. It wasn't the most desirable of '57s for a 19 year old. Those were the two-doors, mine was the family model. The dealer said it had been owned by a widow who drove it mostly to church and the grocery store. From the looks of the car and my experience of rural Indiana, it was probably true.

By the fall of my senior year in college, only two years later, I'd run my beautiful car into the ground. When I sold it to the friend of a friend, the windshield had a serous spider crack from a falling limb and I had to use the emergency brake to stop the car at his front door. The buyer didn't care. He was offering a blue and chrome BSA 650cc motorcycle in an even trade, and I leaped at it. Mostly I used the bike for fun rather than everyday transportation. A friend, Ted Studebaker, owned a Triumph, and we liked to go into the woods and skid around between the trees. These were big road bikes, but we were using them for motocross. We liked to leap out of ditches and over little hills on the fly. One of the best natural ramps was a ridge right next to a popular local restaurant. At the peak of flight, our bikes would appear to the diners seated at a picture window.

BSA stands for Birmingham Small Arms, which also manufactured the Triumph. The British company produced the famous Enfield rifle used in WWI, also the Sten machine gun, a range of air rifles, and motorcycles. There's a town in Indonesia that still uses BSA motorcycles, with sidecars, as taxis. But the company has been out of business since 1973. My BSA was probably produced in the 1950s.

I wasn't scared of the obvious dangers of riding; sometimes, in fact, I was reckless. But I had plenty of warning of those hazards when I was searching the want ads for a used Harley. One seller, a middle-aged man in a black leather vest, explained that he was getting rid of his because his best friend had been killed while they were riding together. "Nobody sees you when you're riding a bike, even one of these," he said, patting his soon-to-be-long-lost hog. "Cars pull out right in front of you." The same thing nearly happened to me. Thinking I was in the clear, I had just kicked it into third and had to swerve to miss a car backing out of parking space. Luckily no one was in the other lane. They live in another world, the sleepwalkers who

drive cars. They will open their doors without first checking out the street in their rearview.

Another seller, skinny and shirtless, showed me a bike with all the paint worn off and no electric starter. You had to kick start it by standing on a makeshift bicycle pedal he'd attached to the kick bar, then jump down on it with all your weight. This explained why he had his right arm in a cast. He'd been thrown over the handlebars when the high compression 1200 cc engine kicked back at him. Nevertheless, he took me for a high-speed ride on it down Indiana 31, between Peru and Kokomo. He kept turning his head around to talk, causing the Harley to drift this way and that. With a mouth full of 90 mph wind, it was hard to say much back to him. Neither of us wore helmets. They were controversial in those days, at least in Indiana. It had to do with government control over the individual. Those against the helmet law believed you had the right to be a dumbass and not wear one.

The BSA was attractive to a pretty girl from the college and I gave her a scarily fast ride for three blocks and back again. An hour later, I got a phone call at Miller House, the family home where I lived off-campus with six other students. It was her boyfriend, threatening to beat me up. Fresh out of the shower, I was wearing only a towel when I said, "OK, big shot, come over right now!" But I was glad that he didn't. I've never been in a fight in my life. I think maybe I'm too tall to have one. You never see tall people fighting, except on the basketball court.

When Bobby Kennedy was running for the Democratic nomination in the spring of 1968, I rode the BSA down route 13 to a railroad crossing in Wabash where a train was supposed to stop and Bobby Kennedy would wave from the back of the caboose. It was an old-fashioned whistle-stop campaign, with a bunting draped from the caboose railing. When he stepped from the caboose, he was shorter than I expected and very tanned. He also had a brilliant smile. He waved and said a few words without a microphone. Then the train passed on to the next stop. Just a couple of months later, on June 5, he was shot to death in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

The same week, I rode the bike back to Wabash to see Senator Eugene McCarthy, the only candidate running strictly on an antiwar platform. There was no train this time. The meeting was at a high school, indoors. I was surprised that, upon entering, the senator walked straight across the room to shake my hand first, even though I was in a far corner. My girlfriend Sharon had driven her car to the rally separately, so, on the way back, because the speedometer never worked, I asked her to keep up with me to see how fast it would go. We were at 95 mph when she decided to back off with the car. Although it was a single cylinder engine and idled bumpily, it ran very well on the road. One problem was that the housing bolts on the engine would shake loose and needed tightening. Also, the magneto would shake out of position and the bike wouldn't start. It became a regular practice to reset it before going on a ride.

The weather is an issue when your only transportation is a motorcycle. I had taken it with me to the college that fall. But I didn't think ahead about the coming of winter, and then Mr. Miller said the bike was taking up too much room in his garage. I wound up riding it to my

parents' home during Christmas break, on a freezing mid-December day. I had to ask my Dad to uncurl my fingers from the handlebars when I arrived at the house. Mr. Miller was a nice man, retired and working part-time for the college maintenance crew. When Martin Luther King was killed in Memphis, he came upstairs in the residence house to alert the rest of us. Students didn't have TVs in those days, so he invited us to watch the report in his living room. A lot of buildings burned at 63rd and Stony Island in Chicago, an area I later got to know as a rider of public transit.

When friends asked to take a spin on my bike, I would instruct them on the basics and hope they wouldn't kill themselves. Joel Eikenberry took a spill just a few feet after taking off and got a nasty scrape on the side of his hip. Thirty years later, having remained in the community of North Manchester as a doctor, he served as one of the pallbearers when we carried my father's casket from the nursing home to the hearse. A Nigerian exchange student took off too fast, and we could hear but not see him crash on the other side of a restaurant. He was OK but had broken a weld that held the muffler to the main frame, which cost me $5 to fix at a local welding shop. This was not a small amount of money in those days. My savings from summer work were around $750, and that got me through the entire school year including the $150 I spent on new clothes in the fall. For weekend spending, I would take $15 out of my account at the college bank. Gasoline was $.35 a gallon.

Just before graduation, I sold the motorcycle to a college classmate, Ed Carroll, who paid me $150, half of what he owed. He then took it with him to the Chicago neighborhood of Uptown, the inexpensive entry point for students, Native Americans, and especially Appalachians. After I moved there, too, I met him and his girlfriend at a party. He said his plan was to drive the motorcycle over the Canadian border, where he would live in resistance to the Vietnam War. I asked him to pay the balance he owed, and his girlfriend loaned him the money. I never saw him again after the money passed hands. Someone later reported that a couple days before he was scheduled to leave Chicago, the motorcycle was stolen from its parking space behind the apartment building. The Canadian draft exiles were offered amnesty by Gerald Ford following the resignation of Nixon. I assumed that Ed returned to the U.S. at that time, but I can't say for sure. My friend Terry Pettit and I worked during the war as Conscientious Objectors in Chicago hospitals. I worked nights and often took bodies to the morgue because that was job reserved for men. There was a fire at Terry's hospital and he carried some of the frightened psychiatric patients down the stairs. Someone two years younger, a recent arrival from our college, was assigned to work in a hospital laundry in Evanston. One night I heard on my car radio that someone with the same name had leaped from a tall building in the Chicago Loop, and I knew immediately it was Randy, an outspoken enthusiast of the dark philosophy of Schopenhauer. Those were the times of the Weatherman Underground and Patty Hearst kidnapping. A nursing assistant's husband kept piranha and tried to clean the tank without removing the fish. One of them bit a nasty hole in the palm of his hand that seemed never to heal. These things were all connected somehow. It was a dark time, but not as Jacobean as our own. Now it's a normal state of affairs if we fight two wars at a time. Michael Moore says it's actually seven.

Ted Studebaker, my motorcycle buddy from college, did some kind of social service in a Vietnam village. I believe the agency was BVS (Brethren Volunteer Service), and his role was similar to that of a Peace Corps volunteer. He married a girl of the village, and one day, learning that Viet Cong soldiers were entering the village aggressively, he helped his wife and others find hiding places underground, before poorly concealing himself beneath a bed. There he was shot to death, on suspicion of being a U.S. spy. The story made the national television news, because he was living there as a non-combatant and pacifist.

The most memorable time I rode with Ted was a late afternoon, toward what they call magic hour in the movies, on a narrow road north of town. It had nothing to do with riding fast or swerving around trees. We stopped to watch some deer grazing in a field, and it was just a beautiful and peaceful scene.

That's all I can report about my brief experience as a motorcyclist. The novelist John Gardner died on one. It's a romantic way to die, because we consider motorcyclists stronger and more heroic than we are. Resolute and straightforward, they thrust calmly into what buffets them. A woman riding a large motorcycle is a glory to behold, even when riding to her job at the bank. The angels in Wim Wenders' great film *Wings of Desire* would disdain to ride anything but a shining black motorcycle. No four-door sedan for the truly spiritual. It has to be the comforting growl of a Harley-Davidson. Nothing less than 650 cubic centimeters of engine displacement will do for those high fliers.

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Stranger at Home: Poetic Sensibility across Cultures and Languages

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Who gives the right to a foreign poet write in a non-native language? Knowledge of language is necessary, but not sufficient. This right is given by artist's destiny. "Do not compare, the living is incomparable!" (Osip Mandelstam). Arthur Schopenhauer formulated a double-aspect theory to the understanding of reality, that of the world existing simultaneously but separately as will and representation. Real poets exercise the will, cultural bystanders – representation. People know and understand the world and reality by naming it; thus through language.

Literature in Diaspora, in intercultural space is creative work in solitude. Not poetry of solitude, but poetry in solitude. The condition of a writer in intercultural space is the condition of an artist who is alone with himself or herself and the literary language process is going mainly inside the artist. Such an artist has tempting opportunity to be a voyeur. There is something mysteriously wonderful of watching new life through the prism of alienation.

It is important to mention some definitions. *Exile* and *immigration* imply some degree of hardship and involuntary leaving of native land. However, many writers who left their homeland in last several decades moved to *Diaspora* and that implies an attempt to create a normal life at a certain place of residence and creativity, in other words a natural life with difficulties of adjusting sensibility but not necessarily suffering.

Mutual influences of smaller and larger cultures of language and sensibilities serve as a source of energy as well as spiritual and mutual cultural enrichment. This also occurs in the process of the influx of foreign-born artists to a new cultural archipelago. This influence of the newcomers on the host culture occurs because a real artist carries this flickering light of reflected truth despite some possible opaqueness in his new, non-native language. This light shines through in the works of "great American poets with an accent," such as Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, Nina Cassian, Charles Simic, and others.

One of the major poets said, "A poet begins where a human being ends." One of the important interpretations is that poetry uses a special, almost "nonhuman" language. Therefore, the process of merging, overlapping, overshadowing, intermingling, and entwining is characteristic for poetry. Living one's life in a strange metaphorical sphere of poetry implies a certain degree of detachment, derangement, and alienation. A native or nonnative poet, who lives and therefore creates in a certain cultural space and time, is always, to a certain degree, an outsider, or at least, an extramural observer. "All poets are Yids!" (Jews, *Zhidy* in Russian) as Marina Tsvetaeva, a great Russian poet who was raised in the very center of the Russian intellectual elite, once said. What she meant is that poets, by definition, are more or less misfits

or, at times, even outcasts in the mainstream of cultural establishment, where they live and create.

Czeslaw Milosz once said about some contemporary American poets, “They wrote as if history had little to do with them.” A hermetic literary culture, he would say, is a cage in which one spends all of one’s time chasing one’s own tail. A foreign artist brings a new flow of artistic sensibility to a new culture and therefore becomes a *stranger at home*.

A foreign artist is not a poet of exile (as Joseph Brodsky was often called, I believe incorrectly), but rather a poet of alienation or, more exactly, of not belonging. The key question is whether the move to another culture was forced, or was it a voluntary transition to a different plane of the artist’s life? That difference may influence an artist’s ability to self-express in the new cultural and linguistic situation. Sometimes the ability to self-express is stifled by the inability to assimilate.

Alienation implies nostalgia for the past and for the future. And in poetry there is no “now.” By the time a poem is written, the moment is gone, but still lives in the poem in its own time (the “felt time” of a poem). “Oh, moment stop! You are not that magnificent, but inimitable!” (J. Brodsky, “Winter Evening inYalta”). Nostalgia, anyway, is the main topic of lyrical poetry.

A poem is a personal communication in the language that is available in the space where the author currently lives, written in the language that is germane to the circumstances, landscape, and to poet’s sensibilities.

Martin Heidegger wrote in 1954, “Man acts as if he were the shaper and master of language, while it is the language which remains the mistress of a man. When this relation of dominance is inverted, man succumbs to strange contrivances. Language then becomes a means of expression.” And poetry is precisely the art of strange contrivances. The word “strange” here is not incidental. It reflects the position of a poet, who is always a “stranger at home,” especially if he is a nonnative artist.

Andrei Codrescu, one of the most influential poetic voices “with an accent,” (in his case pretty thick) says, “I walk the walk and talk the talk and the talk came to me from living Americans, not books, so that their hands and mugs and hips put the English on it.” This is what justifies and gives the right to a nonnative poet of a “smaller” culture or a foreign culture to become a stranger, but still at home.

Another “stranger at home,” Filipino-American poet and writer Eric Gamalinda noted: “Therefore while poetry theoretically reaches more people than it previously could, it also creates a more severe division between the poet and the dominant society. It becomes more and more the condition of the poet to feel, as never before, a sense of alienation from the standards and the ideas of society and the relentless materialism society exalts in—of being alone in a spiritual vacuum, of being ‘out of key among the cosmic harmonies.” And poetry is an act of defiance against the incommunicability of being.

Tess Gallagher once noted: "…hard to tell whether or not the translator has gotten in touch with the cultural ideas and concepts of the country, its times and customs. If he hasn't, the translated poem may become a kind of awkward refugee in the new language, but only the culturally expert reader will know." That is precisely what genuine poets of foreign origin demonstrate: the poets who got in touch with their new land and acquired a new sensibility have become not "awkward refugees," but original American poets with their own voices and with their own accents.

Therefore, a foreign artist feels the new world and gives new names to it, to its landscape, in his/her new language, colored with his/her accent, which bears an indelible mark of destiny. It appears that the ability to view the landscape from the side, sensing every valley and every grove of the locale, is a key factor for the author who creates on the plane of foreign language and culture.

A poem is a composition on a free theme. First of all, it is not culture; that is, the language is secondary (forgive me this sacrilege). Art exists first of all in the artist and only secondarily in society, not vice versa. You do not speak the words of a poem with the lines of verse, no matter how professional they could be. You speak the words of a poem with your own direct speech, which is a monologue of artist's soul, infused with your own cadence and tone.

The language itself dictates the way a poem is to be created. This is why the number of words in poems in two different languages sometimes varies, which is only natural considering the vast differences between, let's say, Russian and English, or Italian. Consequently, there are differences in the lengths of the "same" translated poem, or written in a different language.

* * *

Joseph Brodsky once wrote, "Literature is in the first place a translation of a metaphysical truth into any given vernacular." One can continue that poetry is probably a translation of a metaphysical truth on almost a subconscious level, on the level of "universal grammar" (N. Chomsky). And that is why poetry is the city ofBabylon, where no one can repeat or translate someone else's words, but somehow everyone understands each other. Thus, " speaking in tongues, " a practice used for ages by "the proto-poets" : shamans, religious personalities and such.

As I mentioned before, Brodsky was rather a poet of alienation or, more exactly, of not belonging. To a certain degree, his artistic position was similar to that of Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan, but not entirely. They were two other great, "displaced persons" of the twentieth century, who wrote in the language different to the culture where they lived. Celan, who wrote in German inFranceand before that inRomania, obviously was another displaced person, a poet in the intercultural space. For Celan the magic crystal was his enigmatic, inner, frozen crystal, a primordial language—a breath unit, which is an idea by itself, or rather in itself, a soul diluted in the body and revealing itself by breathing. For Brodsky, the idea of soul is more Donnelike—a metaphorical contemplative soul-idea, soaring above the world and choosing "any

given vernacular" to express itself. In essence, any of such cases implie certain degree of detachment even from the native language (Celan) and creation by a poet his own idiosyncratic language in the boundaries of his native language. Brodsky was writing successful poetry in his non-native English, but in English closer to Oden in contemporaryAmerica.

Nina Berberova writes in her book, *The Italics Are Mine*, "Nabokov is the only Russian author (both in Russia and in emigration) that belongs to the whole Russian world (or to the world in general), and not only to Russia. For an artist of his nature, the fact of belonging to one certain nationality or to one certain language no longer plays a significant role. For Kafka, Joyce, Ionesco, Beckett, Jorge Borges, and Nabokov, language ceased to be as it was in the narrow national sense 80 or 100 years ago."

In his famous poem "An Evening of Russian Poetry" (first published in the New Yorker) Nabokov views American landscape from outside and in the light of the magic lantern of his beautiful and rich but still "alien" English language. Nabokov emphasized that poems written in a native language link the inner verbal association with old perplexities and constant worry of thought, bearing an imprint of ever-unresolved problems of the poet's childhood. These traits usually mark the poems written in one's mother tongue. Interestingly, Coleridge once gave a definition of a genius as an artist with ability to visit his childhood at any given moment.

Here we approach the issue of the influence of "plot," or the author's life circumstances, on the language form. The question arises: Was Nabokov an "American writer?" Or was he a gifted and skillful scout who was better oriented on the "island" than even the "aborigines?" It appears that the ability to view the landscape from the *side,* sensing every valley and every grove of the locale, is a key factor for the author who creates on the plane of foreign language and culture. This is equally important for a correct understanding of what such an author is doing and who he or she really is.

Thus, Joseph Brodsky, as I mentioned, was a major original English language poet, but *not an American poet*. For that matter, he was not at all interested in the local American landscape. His interest resided elsewhere, in the different areas of the artistic habitat. Brodsky's own statement delivered at one of his last public poetry readings was very characteristic of him. He noted that writing poetry in Russian and in English are two totally different processes, developing from two different perspectives. Writing poetry in English for him was similar to solving a crossword puzzle.

In contrast, Nabokov's interests in the interpretation of "American tragedy" (this is probably a genuine quality of a fiction writer) is obvious in his poems and in his prose and reaches its apogee in *Lolita.*

It seems that to write in other than a native tongue is similar to using the foreign culture realities in one's work, which is only natural for a person who actually lives in a non-native culture.

This is directly related to the issue of translation or self-translation of a poem. Tess Gallagher

once noted that in a translated poem, an English-language reader would like to see a good poem written in English. This particular philosophy was shared by a great Russian poet and famous Shakespeare translator into Russian, Boris Pasternak. He believed that the main goal in translation is to create a new solid poem in a different language into which the original poem is translated.

Language is a willful creature. It inevitably pulls one to its own side and does not allow placing a poetic structure of a foreign language into the procrustean bed of the prosody of the original. In this regard, it is interesting to recall Joel Carmichael's words from an article about the translation of Russian classical literature: "Poetry is almost untranslatable and the translation becomes more practically achievable as poetry vanishes." That is why those foreign authors, who not only have mastered operational literary English, but adjusted their sensibility to a new culture, are blessed. They have the great pleasure and significant advantage of translating the story of their poetic souls into new, "nonnative" vernacular.

An author is under the influence of language and still wants to remain free to control it. Therefore, further development takes form in the fight for a peaceful coexistence with this monster of language. One can imagine a certain thinking substance, almost palpable, around a spaceship, as in a science fiction movie. The editors of Webster's Dictionary not incidentally characterized language as a "maddening marvel."

Obviously, for an author who lives on the territory of a foreign language and writes in this language, the task is even more complicated (for understandable reasons) and at the same time simpler. Simpler because such an author by definition remains in condition of the conflict with the surroundings and his perception of a foreign language is somewhat "childish" or "barbaric, pagan." Of course, for the creative realization of such an "advantageous" situation, it is necessary to have an ability to penetrate in earnest this foreign territory and to be able to sense the breathing of the local landscape and not to remain in the cultural isolation of aliens, in cultural ghetto.

* * *

Poetry is a form of art that remains the most closed. A poet's sensibilities respond to a new milieu or culture, to a cultural idiom; a poetic tension remains tightly linked with a poet's native language. It seems to me that the most successful poems in two languages created on the same emotional wave (topic) are best written separately as two individual poems in two different languages. A poetic translation as creative process probably works best as the *re-creation* of the original poem, mainly in its spirit and sound, and the one that closely reflects an author's sensibility and is expressed by the most adequate words, but in a different language.

In our era of globalization and frequent movements of people, perhaps the only way of direct communication between the poets from different cultures and countries is coexistence in one of the major languages that have become *lingua franca* of culture: English, French, or Spanish, and in large parts of the world, Russian, Chinese, Arabic, etc. Poetry is a form of direct speech

reflecting real (and virtual) inner life of movement, displacement, and inhabitation of the new territory. A poem actually represents that direct speech, a personal communication, although in a metaphorical form. Penetration into other cultures, finding a common language of poetry, which by definition is an indirect, metaphorical language, allows achieving this mutual understanding between artists who come from different geographic, social, and linguistic backgrounds.

I have noticed that American poet is the same type of a mercurial creature as Russian, Italian, or Romanian poet. It depends on the special ability of a creative person to feel and hear the world, and this may not necessarily depend on that person's native language. Poetry is an autonomous process and uses an obligatory emotional conflict of the poet with the surrounding world as a nutrient to crystallize that special "overheard" sound. The stimulus for the creation of a poetic text is preexistent sound (i.e. condensed emotion-thought) that is overheard by the author. This is why the sounds of real life outside the window, on a train, or on a street corner are the most important ones for a poet who listens and transforms life metaphorically into his or her being and into live verse. This poetic stimulus is sensed by a poet because it coincides for some moment (this desirable fleeting moment!) with an inner emotional readiness and maturity of the author for a new creation. This sound may be incidental, such as the clattering of a train, the voice of a hot dog man, the pause-silence that unexpectedly occurs in street noise.

* * *

How does one end up writing in a foreign language? What is the first impetus? It is probably different for each author. I wrote my first poem in English almost by accident, as a result of a discussion with a native speaker. I instantaneously sensed that the more natural way to express my emotion was in English, that is, in the language of our discussion, and that "figure of speech" would be in English. In other words, it needed to be in the language of real life without any attempt to place real, actual emotion into now somewhat distant landscape of my Russian language sensibility. This inner landscape is already composed of the images and memories ofRussia's cavernous railroad stations, vast parkways, birch groves, and smoky kitchens at midnight – Russian discussion clubs.

For some "new settlers," this *new life becomes their own*. That involves a complex adjustment to the power field of new language of real life. In this case, the language becomes not simply a tool for survival, but also a second self (alter ego), amazingly different from the still existing first self of a native language.

This creates a problem of losing inner self-image and creating a new one, which, in essence, is the creation of the new sensibility. One can use a metaphor of the *broken mirror*, a broken mirror of someone's former reflection, in the native language and sensibility. This mirror was broken at the Customs while crossing the cultural border. And now one looks for a new mirror to find his (never the same) reflection in the strange windows of unfamiliar avenues and streets of new life.

This distant, powerful surf of the native-language poetry hums in a poet's head from childhood. At the same time, in an American "Everytown," one enters a dark house and picks a book from the shelf at random. It's quiet, only the foliage rustles in the backyard, and sometimes there is a remote sound of a police siren across the boundless parking lot at the town mall.

Outside his native culture, a poet creates a new type of "hybrid sensibility." Such authors are able to create their own cultural, spiritual, and even linguistic universe, which makes an imprint on the native and newly acquired culture alike. This pertains also to the fact that smaller "cultures" can make an imprint on a bigger culture when a major, great artist serves as a medium or a messenger of smaller culture. One can expand on the theme of a contemporary American culture being, if not a melting pot, a mosaic (in a metaphorical and biblical sense) of the variety of cultures. A "displaced person" from another culture begins to express his confused soul under the influence of the surrounding life in a different, newly acquired language, in this case, in English.

Sensibility travels in time and space following the body, after which a transition of the soul occurs with some delay. Displacement of soul and making it at home in the new habitat follows the displacement of a person. This movement goes more in the direction of *intercultural space* rather than to the confines of other cultural domain. It is in this space that we, as foreign artists, find ourselves connected. And in any language the main criterion of poetry is the live pulse of a poem that is felt even through the cover of a strong accent; the rest is secondary.

In our dynamic age of frequent movements of people, perhaps the only way of direct communication between poets from different cultures and countries is in English. Poetry is a form of direct speech about our real life of movement, displacement, inhabitation of new territory. There is an opportunity of intercultural poetical communication in English between authors both with and without accent.

For many foreign artists nowadays emigration *is not a temporary, forced situation***.** From the writings of the poets and writers of this formation, it is clear that the main longing, the nostalgic chord, is related to the nostalgia for childhood and for the bygone time, but not specifically for a life that could have gone the other way back home. Children grow up here and become assimilated into contemporary American culture. People inhabit the territory when they "plant" graves of their loved ones on a new land. That is the real "green card"—green hills and lawns of the orderly American memorial gardens. A certain cultural group achieves its critical mass in terms of population and creative activity. In about 25 years, it becomes not a marginal exile phenomenon, but a cultural group unique in its complex sensibilities with language derived from the land of origin, albeit reflecting a newly acquired "alien" sensibility.

Who can judge this most subjective form of the arts—poetry? The only measure is biblical. It happened in the Garden of Eden, and after this moment of sweet seduction, an artist, as a representative of humankind, intuitively knows the difference between a good poem, this sounding crystal, echo of the soul, and product of culture, which is only an imitation, as opposed to the unique pre-language phenomenon, a real poem.

In the situation of *Stranger at Home* (American poetry with an accent) we see two trends: a melting pot, a chorus of strong voices with many accents that gives new dimension to American culture and letters, and the process of the creation of a new home for every individual artist. Thus, we find for ourselves a new home in American poetry and, at the same time, open a new page of a wonderful book of poetry that is being continuously written.

Writing American poetry in a non-native language is a unique experiment, yet at the same time, it continues the tradition of melting pot and provides the influx of "new blood" into American culture.

POEMS

AREA B

Area B. Departures. Reunions. Revenants,

appearing from the stardust.

Sinful faces of Semitic beauties,

reflected on the screens of the past.

It's usually cloudy at this time of year.

The skies are full of myths,

which reappear

as we are born twice,

emerging from the lost cities,

from letters, from the heavenly mist,

condensed somewhere in a close proximity

to the East.

We are waiting here, in the Area B,

"Shadows in theParadise",

covered by a time's patina.

Where time becomes space,

and we grow extinct.

As memories break through the sound barrier

and then fade. Like, remember,

our invincible fighter planes

above the May Day parade,

disappearing like the dreams of youth,

fleeting, untouchable.

We are now "Eternal Jews",

gliding along the Long Island Expressway

like Flying Dutchmen.

Staring at the lights streaming

in every direction.

Closing the circle.

New Yorkat night is a forest fire,

fire of resurrections.

And we are closing our circle too.

Actors leaving the stage,

leaving a fallen foliage of letters,

that turns yellow page by page.

**Area B: international arrival area at John F. Kennedy Airport, New York.*

VA

My first job in the US

was at the VA Medical Center:

nights of the boxed breath

and the smell of stale piss,

chain-smokers, the collapsed lobes

overgrown by the relentless pink matter,

laryngless vets, talking in robot voices,

emaciated black guys in the men's room,

puffing through the tracheostomy tubes,

a burn unit survivor

hit by a Kamikaze

at the very end.

The young Jewish doctors

were rotating for a year or two,

running around with syringes,

dispensing chemotherapy, then

disappearing into the green sponge

of the suburban universe.

My way back to the new rented home

was graced by a sunset that touched

crosses on the descending lawn

by the Soldiers' Home, lit up

Rock Creek for a few minutes,

lingered pensively in the tree crowns

over the mansions atConnecticut Avenue,

then went underground somewhere

inPennsylvania.

Around was the darkness

punctuated by a dialogue

between the towers on the flagships:

the Naval Hospital and theMormonTemple,

guiding the large cargo planes,

gliding through the black milk

of the night breath toward

Andrews Air Force Base.

MIAMI

The plastic of palm trees. Art Deco of the sky's plate.

Dentate coast scanned so many times by a periscope.

This is the subtropics, surf's muddy delirium.

The wise guys in white pants are only seldom seen,

mostly on boats. What's around is the belch of a beach crowd,

flocks of the orthodox lying by the chlorinated lagunas.

How many generations by now have wandered out ofEgypt?

The tribes nowadays nest in their cool and sterile boxes.

Radio Marti still plays its rusty trumpet,

everywhere is the aroma of Cohiba,Coronaand other smuggled goods.

Tattooed torsos, the lips are pierced, but at nightMiami

is as hollow as East Coast downtowns.

The metastases of the retail empires grow relentlessly around,

where old hippies and victims of Nazism persist as survivors.

HIV pigeons cooing, the Hasidim sweating,

Batista fighters asleep with their cold cigars on verandas.

It's all clear at theGuantanamo,

Havanais dancing, oozing its hungry desire,

at the Key's base the crew is chatting in Spanish and laughing.

There, on the sparkling surface

of the open ocean

the Coast Guard

opens fire

without a warning.

TIMELINE

When I came to the US

the postal stamp cost 20c,

Pabst Blue Ribbon 6-pack – $1.49

and one antiquated bar in ruralMaryland

was still hiding

the segregated areas sign

in the dark smoky corner.

The air of the era was hot,

or cold, depending on

perception of a recipient.

In general, in those times

I was looking for love,

not realizing that I already had it.

Nothing new, business as usual,

not so bad, actually:

the clouds are coming in

and out and morning dew

is vanishingly beautiful

on the windshield of my Jeep

in the morning.

And when the tree branches

touch the glass

they remind me of the multitude

of tentacles still connecting

neuropile of life

with the silence of

the underground roots

of dead winter grass.

Epistles from the Roadside

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

I don't think I had any conscious concept of Whitman's vision of the "Open Road." I had to read Whitman in school, but hardly any of it took. Later in life I've come to love Whitman but I never delved that deeply into him. I agreed with everything he said, but there were a thousand other writers, artists influencing me to his point of view. My grandfather, my Dad and Mom were on the road literally and figuratively, to go out West, up to Alaska, to sail around the Horn, you name it, long before Kerouac, Guthrie or any of those guys. My Grandfather, a well-known naturalist and ichthyologist for years at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York took several dramatic sailing voyages around South America to Hawaii at the end of the 19th century. He has the Wanderlust. Him and Charles Darwin.

My mother, who was French, from Brittany, but raised much in Barcelona, Spain (and made a refugee by Civil War and WW II from 1936), came to America for the first time in 1931 when she was 16. She was obsessed with visiting the American West. She took a train out West in 1932 to Santa Fe, worked at Jesse Nussbaum's Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe, befriended people in several Indian tribes. She traveled around the West, out to Los Angeles all over, went to movie studios, learned how to ride, throw a lariat. Loved everybody she met. I have a great picture of her out West, many images. A favorite is of [her] on horseback wearing a cowboy hat, and chaps in the bottom of the Grand Canyon, I have her wonderful journals of her wonderful times in a wonderful land

My father was removed from prep school by my Granddad during his junior year. Thereafter he traveled all over collecting small mammals for the AMNH in New York. In`935 or 36 he spent many months around Sutcliffe, Nevada near Pyramid Lake running traplines in the desert that he checked by horseback every day. He shot ground squirrels for his lunch. He kept great journals. I grew up on his stories of the West. He was gregarious, schmoozed everybody, got along with everyone. Great sense of humor. He spent much of 1937 up near Cantwell, Alaska all alone trapping lemmings and such near Denali. For the AMNH. I have copies of his journals, letters, his field notes, and drawings. Hw took trains and boats to get around. Also traveled on collecting expeditions to Maine, Florida, England.

In 1938 my Dad drove a Chevy Coupe he called the "greased Pig" from New York to Berkeley, California, shooting bats and trapping mice en route, camping out wherever. When he and my Mom got married in Dec. 1938 they took a boat from Paris to NY, then a train across country to Berkeley again. And for the nest 2 years they drove all over California, Nevada, Arizona, observing the land, birds, mammals, keeping in-depth field journals. They loved being on the road, self sufficient, camping. Their freedom was the marvelous wide land, its geography, its animal and vegetable life. My Mom died in Mimi Beach in 1942 at age 27. Her whole life had been wanderlust and travel. My Dad's also . . .

Naturally, [after watching a film about American journeys] I thought of my old road adventures, my travels back and forth across the country on trains and buses in the 1940s and 1950s; the bus trip I took to Guatemala from New York in 1964 that changed my life; a couple of car trips across country with my dad (in 1951 and 1978), with my wife and child and on my own in a VW bus maybe 7 times in the late 60s and early 70s, and wonderful excursions through New Mexico and Wyoming I made with a couple of girl friends (and to a girl friend in Montana) in the late 1970s and 1980s.

I remember blowing my VW Bus engine in Terra Haute, Indiana driving back West to Taos from New York in 1973, and, while I waited for my engine to be rebuilt, I discovered the Eugene Debs House and wound up for three days drinking bourbon with the curator while we went through the scrapbooks Debs' wife had kept of his career all her life. That was a wonderful experience, which led directly to me reading Ray Ginger's biography of Debs when I got home to Taos.

I used to drive. I used to be a contender. In 1980 or '81 my dad gave me his 1973 Chevy Impala with 100,000 miles on it (which replaced my VW bus), and my god how I learned to love that car, despite my environmental politics. The first time I drove that Impala from Colorado Springs to Columbia, Mississippi I knew what had made America GREAT. . . .

On The Road. I opened to page 110, the start of Chapter 6, and in the first few sentences got a microcosm. Bingo.

It was drizzling and mysterious at the beginning of our journey I could see that it was all going to be one big saga of the mist. 'Whoee!" yelled Dean 'Here we go!' And he hunched over the wheel and gunned her; he was back in his element, everybody could see that. We were all delighted, we all realized we were leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing our one and noble function of the time, move. And we moved!

In 1951 when I was 11, I drove with my Dad from Berkeley to New York in an epic journey. I remember vividly Reno and Elko (Winnemucca) Nevada., a blizzard crossing the Rockies into Denver, sliding on ice into a truck in Colorado and later almost turning over in a ditch (a tow truck pulled us out) , then hitting a pheasant in Kansas and putting it in the trunk to freeze (we ate it back East). And eating at a diner in Wheeling, West Virginia during a snowfall with hunters gathered around the truck with a very dead deer tied to it. I bought and saved newspapers from every town we went through. God I wish I had those newspapers now. America was wondrous.

Summer of 1957, 16 years old, I took a bus out West to New Mexico, and had extraordinary adventures that changed my life. Working for a scientist at AMNH research station in Arizona. Fighting forest fires with Chicanos and Mexican nationals in the Chiracahuas. Incredible time. I wrote my first novella about it, "The Journey." How could I be so lucky? Effectively, I was repeating my father's and mother's first journeys out West . . . And then at the end catching a bus in Lordsburg that got held up for s flash flood, then meeting a girl in Amarillo and making

out with her all the way to St. Louis. I loved the bus, talking to people on buses, looking at America out the window. It just seemed like I was on a quest, absorbing it all. I loved talking with strangers, and I would talk about anything. I was real friendly. People liked me. I absorbed and gobbled up whatever they told me. T felt wonderful and meant the world to me. I loved being on the road. Every landscape, every person I met was an adventure . . .

In May 1969 I drove out West from NY in our VW Bus to Colorado Springs then down to Taos, looking for a place to live. Taos was trippy and hippie. You wouldn't believe my first day in Taos where I saved a guy's life and wound up swimming nude with 30 freaks at a hot springs. My wife joined me, we found a house, then I drove nonstop back East [to retrieve furniture] with my wife and two new friends from the Taos Pueblo, everybody smoking dope and singing and eating while I plowed nonstop across America. . . . .It was still an extraordinary country . . . I never stopped at a motel on any of these trips. I could drive 36 hours straight, drinking coffee, eating Hershey bars and raisins. I sang songs all across America and back. I knew a thousand songs, Folk, campfire, Spanish and French, cowboy, rock and roll, blues, pop tunes, football college rants, you name it. I just loved to *move*. I remember stopping once, I think it was in Wilson, Kansas, and driving right into the middle of their "after Harvest Czech Festival." Quite a lively carnival. Everybody in the town was an immigrant from Czechoslovakia! Dancing in the streets. How can you not love America?

Once in the early 70s I drove from Taos to Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania nonstop in 32 hours or something. Once I got out [of] the West I started hating America in the East, especially the Pennsylvania turnpike, all those whizzing trucks and dead animals. Too cluttered, too many people. It was way more fun to go from Eat to West than vice-versa. The West was really made for traveling around in cars.

So: many memories provoked . . . Curiously I never tipped into guys like Kerouac, Ginsberg, Burroughs, Ferlinghetti, but certainly was immersed in blues and folk music and every other kind of music, playing the guitar, by the time I was 15. When I hung out at a place on Sullivan Street in the Village in New York in 1963, a place called the World Café, Gregory Corso used to come in, drunk out of his skull, and give me shit. Blabbing about how the Beats had made the New York scene, but now everybody since had fucked it all up. Since the World Café was an after-hours musician hangout filled with folkies, blues people, druggies all the time I gather he was shitting on my generation, people like Dylan and Phil Ochs, with whom (Phil) I used to play some sets, very briefly, on the MacDougal/Bleecker scene.

20, maybe 25 years later, in Taos I ran into Gregory Corso again, at a big party at the artist R. C. Gorman's house, where Corso was blotto out of his mind again and still bitchin' about it all. I also remember my first guitar gig in New York, 1963, was on the same bill with Tiny Tim, a blind poet named Moondog, and a standup comic named Hugh Romney. Romney was funny. He soon became Wavy Gravy and I ran into him also years later in Taos, toothless and probably on the arm of Lisa Law.

What goes around comes around.

I even married a woman, in 1994, who'd been born on the Penasco, New Mexico incarnation of the Hog Farm . . . But of course back in the 60s I was too busy being a 'Marxist-Leninist' to pay too much attention to the Beats or that Freak generation that followed.

Since 1969, my idea of the Open Road has been to stay in one small place for the last 40 years! But of course it's been infinity in a grain of sand. And I have to admit for a long time I made many forays into the outside world, working on films, doing book tours, whatever. Now I can barely drive a car. I hate travel except in my mind or through television documentaries or through books. Which means, I suppose, that the journey has never stopped. I read so voraciously . . . And tonight had a long conversation with a friend, who's a documentary filmmaker, about Jared Diamond and Guns, Germs and Steel, all about conquering (our conversation); Cortes and Pizarro and Coronado, etc. Diversions into the Werner Herzog film, "Aguirre, Wrath of God.' And my friend was recently shooting a documentary involving the history of black Buffalo Soldiers sent to Massacre Canyon in the Gila Wilderness of New Mexico to try and chase down the Apache chief Vittorio. They got slaughtered.

History. Love it or leave it.

Between 2000 and 2009 my main travels were into the high mountains near Taos. I mean high, like 13,000 feet. Alpine. Tundra. Bighorn sheep. I'm not sure what possessed me, but all my life here I've rambled Taos County's wild country, across the mesas, down in the Rio Grande gorge, up several watersheds and little rivers that go from 7,000 to 10,000 feet, and then, when I turned 60 I became a high mountain freak.

And I made the same hike every time, from 10,000 to almost 13,000 feet, I climbed one mountain, Lake Fork Peak, god knows how many times I was determined to learn alpine biology, botany, weather, fauna, you name it. Of course, every trip was different. And incredibly hard work for aging me. I came to love boulder fields, talus and scree fields, cliffs, exposed tundra, excessive wind, and other weather. I became a big fan of bighorn sheep, followed them with a spotting scope, learning a lot from observation and from reading books, talking to biologists. Same with ravens and other high altitude wild life. In winter I tromped up high relentlessly (though not quite as high for fear of avalanche danger when alone), and had many blizzardy adventures. I took voluminous field notes every trip, often making two trips a week. Those excursions became one of the great adventures of my life. Of course I shoulda done it when I was 30, not 60!

Recently I got diagnosed with CHF, and I also blew out my right knee, many meniscus and some ligament tears, and haven't had orthoscopic surgery yet, so this year my hiking has been limited to lower climes. But so far I have kept moving. It's all part of the Open Road, Que no? I remember my football coach in prep school telling us to always keep moving, even after a play was whistled dead. He said it's when you stop at the whistle that somebody clobbers you with a late hit and you're crippled for life.

Last year I read a bunch of stuff about the Pacific War. My Dad was on Bougainville in the

Solomons. God, the book I read on New Guinea was distressing; so too E B Sledge's book on the invasions of Peleliu and Okinawa. I still do not understand war. How can people be trained to do that? "This way for the gas, ladies and gentlemen" . . .

Well. That's a lot of rattling on.

Adelante, siempre; p'atra, nunca,

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Revisiting in the Heat of the Night

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

In the fifties and through most of the sixties few if any Hollywood films dealt in a serious and authentic manner with black life. The only one that readily comes to mind is Michael Roemer's (a white filmmaker) *Nothing But a Man* (1964), starring Ivan Dixon as an itinerant black laborer in the Deep South of the early 60s. *Nothing But a Man* was a low-budget, realist film that managed to capture the humiliation of being a second-class citizen in the 60s south, and, more distinctively, African-American society's class differences and the fragility of its family structure.

There were no working black directors in Hollywood, and also only one genuine black film star during that period, Sidney Poitier. His self-possessed, charismatic, heroic presence graced a number of films ranging from Stanley Kramer's work of liberal poster art, *The Defiant Ones* (1958) to the glossy, chaste interracial romance *Guess Who's Coming Home to Dinner* (1967).

Poitier was the black star who Hollywood had designated as their token African-American. In fact, he was the first African-American actor to achieve leading man status in Hollywood films. In film after film he played a, character whose humanity and dignity made him consistently successful with white audiences. Poitier never bowed or scraped to whites, but he was so reasonable and humane that white audience knew that his anger, no matter how much he would smolder, would always stay within acceptable bounds, and that there was nothing to fear from the characters he portrayed. His characters were the type of men who could only arouse the hatred or abuse of the most ignorant or racist of whites.

During the more militant, and race-conscious sixties, black activists often put down Poitier's persona as middle-class, masochistic, and liberal. Nevertheless, he was one black actor who no longer had to sing, dance, clown, and roll his eyes to have his image appear on the screen. And though Hollywood's handling of the race problem was neither bold nor imaginative, given the conformist and racist political tenor of the time, the emergence of a token black star could still be viewed as a minor triumph.

One of the strongest of Poitier's films was the Oscar-winning crime melodrama, Norman Jewison's *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). The film's script, written by Sterling Silliphant, was filled with contrivances, but the obvious strengths of the film lay in Haskell Wexler's cinematography and its performances. Wexler was working in color for the first time, and created a rich palette of shadows and dry scrub, menacing inky black corners, and glowing red lights of danger gleaming in the summer heat and darkness. And the film's acting was first rate. Poitier does a star turn, emanating grace, courage, keen intelligence, and a touch of arrogance and condescension as Philadelphia's number one homicide detective, Virgil Tibbs. And Steiger, always a powerful character actor when under control, gave one of his strongest

performances as the blustery, thickset, solitary, insomniac-suffering Mississippi small town (Sparta) sheriff, Bill Gillespie. The sheriff initially desires, without much of an investigation, to arbitrarily pin the murder on the most convenient suspects he can find. But he turns out to be much shrewder than is at first apparent. Though sharing the prevailing racist attitudes of the town (during their first encounter, Gillespie reflexively calls Tibbs "boy"), a pragmatic and strong-willed Gillespie is able to submerge his racism and resentment and get, the sharper, more experienced detective, Tibbs, whose expertise is needed to solve the crime, to work with him. As the narrative evolves, they predictably develop a mutual respect for each other—two lonely, unmarried, tough men who believe in justice (both are also outsiders), and can transcend at times their own wariness of each other. The film heavy-handedly underlines this point by concluding with Tibbs' hand clasping Gillespie's as he leaves Sparta on the train for the north.

Though *In the Heat of the Night* appeared during the era of inner city riots like Watts, the rise of the black power movement, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act, the film industry, still adhered to its sanguine belief that change could take place if blacks and whites would only learn to understand and accept each other (e.g., *Lost Boundaries*, 1949). And it's made easy in this film, because Tibbs is more astute, attractive, and professional than any of the film's white characters. If race weren't a factor, he would be a man embraced for his character and talent.

Consequently, *In the Heat of the Night* never attempted to convey that real social change is dependent on the transformation the country's social and economic institutions, feeling that good personal relationships were sufficient. But if the film is much too optimistic and sentimental about the social ramifications of sympathetic feelings between individuals, it is implicitly aware of the role economics and class play in the still segregated Deep South of the period. The man who is murdered is a Chicago factory owner who will bring jobs and integrate the work force in the area. (Though the film never implies that the factory was probably being opened in the South to avoid unionization, and pay lower wages to its workers.) Tibbs is middle class and well-dressed, while many of the whites are either working class like Gillespie or more marginal, slow-witted, murderous rednecks that seem to come out of central casting. Though at first they all resent Tibbs, not only because he's black, but also because he's of another class, and won't submit to being humiliated. He ultimately gains some of their respect for his astuteness and courage.

The film contains one arresting scene, where the racist, cotton-plantation owner, Endicott (Larry Gates) slaps Tibbs in the face after a question he perceives disrespectful, Tibbs instantly returns the slap with one of his own—he has too much pride to allow himself to be treated with contempt. It was a startling moment in the history of Hollywood film—a black man refusing to be treated with contempt and striking directly back at the oppressor. When the political climate changed and greater profit beckoned through reaching out to a black audience, blacks began to play more than a token role (if not an equitable one) in Hollywood. It was then no longer unique for black men played by intense, high decibel character actors like Samuel L. Jackson and Poitier-style leading men like Denzel Washington to strike back at whites and the

power structure itself. For these leading men, the white power structure would usually bend, and give in to their demands. But a larger overview of class and racial dynamics has rarely been articulated in these films.

However, from the vantage point of black-white relations in 2008, *In the Heat of the Night* seems anachronistic. While racism still exists in this country—it manifests itself in much more subtle, sinuous ways, even in the Deep South, than it did in 1967. So, one feels watching the film, of having traveled in a time capsule back to the South of bullnecked sheriffs, cattle prods, barking attack dogs, and howling racist mobs. Today, the media, the corporations, and American politics seek out articulate, skilled black men like Tibbs—men who project few or no overt signs of carrying a residue of inner city black culture. The Tibbs of today have become pundits, television anchors, CEO's, and even governors. Think of Barack Obama as a more emotionally expansive, and a less defensive and filled with repressed anger Tibbs. Obama, of course has had genuine advantages, being shaped by a much less racist, more open society than Tibbs, and attending a set of elite institutions like Columbia and Harvard that gave him a leg up.

But even Obama, biracial and raised in a mainly white world, has not been able to avoid the legacy of race and racism. It's his special eloquence, and nuanced intelligence that has garnered adulation (sometimes over-the top and possibly helped by being biracial) from younger whites and the upper middle class looking for a fresh voice At the same time, it has aroused both unstated and expressed antipathy especially from the white working class. The reasons that are given when race goes unmentioned—his "lack of experience," his being alien and anti-American, and his elitism ("uppity") are more often than not code words for their racism.

Still, in 2008 Obama has a very good chance of becoming President, because, for one reason, he can sufficiently transcend racial categories and stereotypes, and be acceptable to a good portion of the white electorate. Something no black candidate truly rooted in the black ethos could achieve. American society may still be racially divided, but for the exceptional black man or woman—the contemporary "Mr. Tibbs"— the odds for success have changed.

Even in South there are a number of black Congressmen, mayors, sheriffs, local officials and independent businessmen. But a muted form of racism still manifests itself in the Spartas of this country. In passing, the film suggests something of the economic plight and fear of ordinary Sparta blacks. And today if a town like Sparta's black middle class does fairly well, black poverty is Mississippi remains severe. In 2000, their per capita income was $10,042, with 34.9% of African Americans in Mississippi having incomes below the poverty line and 21% of Mississippi's African-American families earned less than $10,000 in 2001.

In the Heat of the Night was never intended to probe deeply into the nature of American social and political institutions. And though somewhat more penetrating about the personal relationships of blacks and whites, it remains a melodrama, bound to the turns of its plot and the solving of a crime. But the film does succeed in capturing something of the volatile racial

atmosphere of the times, especially in the South. And it provides the audience with an idealized, heroic black character, who, at least for the time they watched the film, could neutralize, even undermine, the racist feelings most of them held.

Got My Kicks on Route 66

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Much has been written about Route 66. That iconic shield with the double 6 marks the most famous of American highways. It had its origins in the twenties, and eventually extended from Chicago to LA, but the original road has been almost completely swallowed up by the Interstate System. It exists now only in patches, and is usually referred to as Historic Route 66. Yet, thousands of people continue to render homage to the old road in a pilgrimage along its path from the Midwest to the West Coast, from its beginning on Jackson Boulevard in Chicago, past the famous Dixie Truck Stop in Illinois (the world's first), the March Arch Rainbow Bridge in Kansas, Tee Pee Curios in Tucumcari, N.M. the series of ten half-buried Cadillacs in Texas, the Painted Desert in Arizona, and so on, finishing up at the Pacific Ocean on Santa Monica Pier near Los Angeles. Thus, Route 66 began in the City of Big Shoulders, turned its back to the snooty East with its early history and megalopolises, and with a nod to that famous phrase, went West and took us young men with it. And now, with over 14 million Google links, its place in American history is assured.

I first began dreaming about Route 66 in Chicago in the late forties when I was about 6 and my family had a visit from Uncle George and Aunt Edna. They were living in LA and had driven out to see us in their brand-new '47 Ford. I still have a photo of them taken with the family in front of our bungalow near 80th and Damen, our pasty-white Chicago faces in sharp contrast to the tanned and slick look of our California visitors. What's more, Uncle George worked in the movies, and even though I think he was only a prop man, that didn't matter. All I knew was that we were at one end of Route 66, so close to the Stockyards that you could smell them when the wind was right, and George and Edna lived in some sunny paradise that smelled of orange blossoms, on the opposite end of that road, in a place where movies were made and dreams came true.

The year following their visit we moved out of Chicago to a western suburb, and now I was even closer to that fabled road. It actually formed the southern border of our village, though there was an unincorporated area in between. But, now adventures were at our grasp, and because our tightassed town was officially "dry," the first time I bought beer was with a fake ID in the Welcome Inn out on Route 66. I was only fifteen, and the card said I was 23, but the nice lady did not give a damn, and I walked out with a big, brown bag containing six cold, sweating quarts of Drewerys—enough to get me and my buddy shitfaced. The first whorehouse I ever visited was out that way, too, on a branch road off 66, in an ungodly town called Godley. If you Google it you'll see that it's still famous for having harbored that glorious institution for many decades. We knew about it because my friend's grandfather went there when HE was a kid. I was only 15 on that first time as well; things happened fast on Route 66, you see. I'll never forget that warm, lovely young woman's welcoming words to me as she stretched out naked on her comfy little bed: "Come to Mama." Of course, I'm opposed to the exploitation of women

through prostitution, but . . ..

Yet, horrible things also happened on Route 66, such diabolical things that some felt that the famous shield lacked a third 6. Underage girls were violated on side roads by drunken, horny, underage boys, and two friends ran away and were never heard from again. Other friends died out there in horrific car crashes—I lost three in one wreck, gobbled up from behind one night by a roaring semi while they were passed out drunk at a stoplight that had turned green. Apparently, they'd pulled out of a tavern and had been driving without lights. I, myself, came very close to being killed on 66. It was a rainy day in October 1957, and I was driving around with my friend Falke after high school, drinking a few quarts of Bullfrog. I'd only known him a week as he entered the school year late, having just been released from the St. Charles home for delinquents. It was a very unusual step for our upper-middle class public school to take in someone like that, and he arrived with the reputation of being a real tough guy. In his first few days he spun many stories about the daily fist fights he'd survived while "inside," and those who didn't scorn him ate it up in awe.

He lived out near the Woodbine restaurant on 66 and as we approached a wide curve near his turnoff in my '53 Ford V-8, dual carbs roaring, twin pipes popping, and flat out at 110 mph as was usually the case on Route 66, I stupidly said "I like to spin," and gave the wheel a jerk. It was an eight-lane highway at that point, and the car immediately did a 180° on the wet pavement and headed out into the four oncoming lanes. Glancing back, all I could see was the horrified expression on the face of the trucker who was driving the 18-wheeler bearing down on us, I swear to the Void we were THAT close. He missed my rear fender by only inches as we continued on backwards until we hit the berm on the opposite side of the road, facing in the wrong direction. I almost shit my pants and, in fact, Falke pissed his. His embarrassment finally overcame his shock when, as I dropped him off at home, he looked down at the dark stain on his pants, then at me, and said: "Johnny Boy, let's never mention this." And I hadn't, until this day. By the way, my '53 Ford, which my dad had bought for me that year for my sixteenth birthday—the day I passed my driver's test— lasted only a few weeks after the Falke incident. I totaled it one day in town when, as I was cornering and trying to keep the beer can in my lap from spilling, I ran it into a telephone pole. Dad wouldn't buy me another one. And, he died a few months later.

Of the millions who roamed up and down Route 66, some were good and some were bad. From Steinbeck's fictional Tom Joad, representing thousands of real-life, beaten-down Dust Bowlers escaping to the greenery of California to try to feed their families, to the infamous Richard Speck, incarcerated in another famous stop on the Road–Stateville Prison near Joliet. Speck murdered eight student nurses on one horrific night in Chicago back in 1966. Some years ago I saw an interview with him in prison, surreptitiously filmed by another inmate. He was dressed in women's panties and his bare torso sported an enormous pair of breasts. Apparently, he was able to get hold of female hormones. At one point he was being sodomized by a fellow inmate. He laughed and joked and said "If they only knew how much fun I'm havin' they'd turn me loose." He died of natural causes in 1991 after living behind bars for 25 years just off Route 66. Of course, I'm opposed to the death penalty,

but . . .

In any case, the reader will divine that my acquaintances in those teenage years, though not at the level of Speck, were not altar boy material either. But I did have one dear friend from fourth grade on, Fitch, who was not just my best buddy but my intellectual mentor as well, and I can clearly recall the day in 1957 when he told me I absolutely had to get a copy of this great, new book called On the Road, which was available in a bookshop in a neighboring town.

I borrowed my older brother's car and rushed off and bought the book, and this man Kerouac became our Hero of Heroes. He knew the Road; he WAS the Road. Kerouac's travelling buddy was Neal Cassady (Dean Moriarty in the novel), so Fitch became my Dean Moriarty and I became his, and Route 66 took on a whole new meaning as it was traced out in Kerouac's novel. In the new "beat" mode we changed from drinking beer to wine, not the sophisticated Bordeaux variety, but the sweetened, alcohol enhanced piss they sold mainly to bums—Thunderbird, Ripple, and Twister. The names tell it all.

The following year I hitchhiked the length of Route 66 for the first of three times. Just 17 years old, I said farewell to my worried, widowed mother, and Fitch gave me a ride out to a spot near Joliet. He couldn't make this trip, so we said an emotional goodbye, he turned around, and I started walking backwards with my thumb out. Then, IT came over me like a wave: for the first time in my life I felt Freedom, I mean really FREE, and if the metaphor "Life is a Road" is trite, it's also true. I had a vague Idea of a destination that day, just as we all realize vaguely that someday we'll die, but I had no clear idea how or when I was going to get there, which car or truck would stop, who'd be behind the wheel, or how far I would go. These are only things I learned as I went along, and knew in retrospect, like life.

I had many memorable moments on that first trip, but one image that remains as vivid as the day I saw it—though I don't remember if it was in Oklahoma, Texas or Arizona—was a chain gang of prisoners repairing the highway. What stayed with me was the look on their faces as the car crept through the work zone, expressions that went from curiosity, to jealousy, to hate, to despair. Chained to a spot, they were insuring others the freedom of the open road.

That open road brought another tragedy into my life, this time involving Fitch. My "Moriarty" made his last trip out to the coast on Route 66 about 4 years after my first excursion. Fitch had fallen in with some very wealthy friends, one of whom was the scion of a family who had founded a scurrilous right-wing publishing house. This guy talked my friend into accompanying him in a brand-new Corvette to LA where he was to catch a cruise liner to Hong Kong. During the three months he was to be gone, he offered Fitch the use of the Corvette. How could he refuse? But, knowing how we abused alcohol in those days, this was tantamount to handing a loaded revolver to a toddler. Fitch dropped him off and proceeded up to Washington State to visit his uncle. A month or so later he drove the Corvette off a mountain. They didn't find his body for two weeks. I organized the pall bearers. Fitch had gone off the road both figuratively and literally. He might have recovered in time from the metaphorical sense, but there was no coming back from that crushed Corvette. Though almost fifty years have gone by since then, I

still dream about him from time to time. Of course, I've never been gay, but . . . .

Well, you can't talk about Route 66 without mentioning its raison d'être—the cars and trucks that plied the highway in an almost continuous caravan. Kerouac, and especially Cassady were obsessed with cars, and this comes through in their writings. The trucks were mobile jobs, and in a mobile society like America, they were kings of the highway. It was fairly rare to get picked up by a trucker—insurance issues—but when it did happen it was a real treat. These were the true denizens of the Road, and I never met one who didn't have an inexhaustible repertoire of stories—probably mostly untrue or at least highly exaggerated—with which to entertain his guest in the passenger seat. Seated high above the streaming cars, with the roar of the motor, the whine of the wheels, and the gnashing of interminable gear changes, you had to shout to communicate in those old trucks, but that was half the fun.

Cars were another thing. It's amazing how these devices have appropriated our money, time and territory like some famished monster, and almost without our realizing it. As a child, I remember looking down the length of 80th street of a morning, and not spotting one single car as far as I could see. Today, try to find a parking space in the same area. And, if you are lucky enough to find one, you're going to have to hold up a whole bunch of traffic to squeeze into it. The realization of how we've been submerged in the car culture came to me some years ago when I was visiting family near San Francisco. First was the fact that in this upper middle class Bay Area town there were no sidewalks. No one was ever expected to walk anywhere. I pushed my mother to Mass in her wheelchair down a main street with a solid line of cars parked along the curb and NO SIDEWALK.

Then there was the fact that the main highway linking the southern bay towns to the city was bumper-to-bumper all the time. I don't mean just rush hour. Be it three p.m., three a.m., or any other time, the traffic was jammed up for miles. And, finally, I had a surreal moment one day when walking to the library I stopped to cross El Camino Real at a red light. There were eight lanes of traffic at that point, four in each direction. As far as the eye could see both left and right, maybe for a mile or more, the cars were backed up. Add to this colorful river of glass and metal the fact that this area was popular with car dealerships. On both sides of the road, in both directions, vast inventories of cars, new and used, were displayed, maybe fifteen or twenty deep. And so the river became a sea. To quote Ginsberg: "Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?" Indeed, where will it end, this obsession with the "machine"? (That was my mother's generation's word for "car," and I guess that dates me more than the grey hair—or what's left of it.)

To sum it up I guess you could say that for me it was a coming of age on that Road, and on another westward passage some years after that initial expedition I eventually ended up in San Francisco just when the Beat Generation was giving birth to the Hippies. Being introduced to LSD in those years, and other, related adventures, I believe, opened me up to different possibilities and liberated me once and for all from the small-minded Republicanism of my family and the shackles of a Catholic grammar school education. Of course, drugs can be dangerous, but . . . .

In 1972 my hippie wife and I moved permanently to France to escape Nixon's America. But Kerouac and the Road stayed with me and along with Burroughs and Ginsberg became part of my doctoral thesis and an important element in my teaching curriculum in several French universities. I'm retired now, living in an old farmhouse, raising sheep in the southwest near Roquefort. Our nearest neighbor is a mile away, back in the hills. When he told me one day that the narrow road that passes in front of our property, originally built by the Romans, was rebuilt by German prisoners, my thoughts immediately went back to the chain gang on that first hitchhiking trip to California, swinging their sledgehammers on the same road where I had found freedom. Now I'm quite distant in time and place from that concrete ribbon that stretched across the US, but there, indeed, was where the dreaming began, long ago, far away, on the Road, on hallowed Route 66.

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Traipsing after Sawada: An American Foreign Correspondent's Memoir

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Until the road I took became the road I knew, the journey I envisioned wound through the world just as any Western traveler might map his way across the seas to see all the popular sights. Upon escaping a circumscribed, middle-class California existence, I would set off to destinations mostly familiar to me in all but the details. I would look across the bend in the horizon and anticipate fulfilling the usual expectations: taking in the picture-book vistas, the rich human tapestry, a symphony of strange tongues. I would come back one day with a fine stock of tales to tell from visits to many lands.

Thank God I missed that tour bus. My road, as it consumed the years and the miles, turned inward upon the traveler in ways I couldn't have imagined, and became the longest journey of all covering the shortest spatial distance of all. Somewhere inside the brain where incoming signals are processed, the chemistry shifted and everything changed. A new awareness took root and grew, but slowly.

Hal Wood was a sports writer in the news agency bureau in San Francisco where I worked as a sometime reporter and rewrite man, but I was mostly a flunky known as a wire filer. My job was to take long rolls of Teletype paper on which news stories were written and reshuffle the content for transfer to other long roles of Teletype paper. Drinking helped.

Finally, one day my request for an overseas assignment came through, and Hal had advice for me. He'd shuttled between the golf courses and the traveling press hotels in countless countries, so he knew the world. He said I was making a mistake. I should never have asked for a foreign assignment because where I was going was Asia and Asia was poor, filthy, and diseased. People were shifty. Your wallet was never safe.

Before I left town, Thackrey, Nolan, Sakamoto and I drank at the Fourth Estate on company time and laughed at Hal's verdict on treacherous Asians. But I knew otherwise only in the abstract. The real journey, soon begun, led me to new surroundings and a million new visions from new encounters, some risky, but somehow the wallet stayed inviolate. In a few short decades, I moved across terrain driven either by the story before my eyes or the one lying just past the next border checkpoint. Or just change for its own sake, "one place made bearable by the prospect of departure for another," in V.S. Naipaul's description of the traveler's restlessness.

The reach toward new places tested the boundaries of the known world. When a labor action on my part and that of a co-conspirator to wring better pay in Tokyo for United Press International reporters, teletype operators and pourers of tea failed with a dull thud, I relished

the punishment. My bosses sent me to distant Pakistan, notorious for its lack of either creature comforts or events worth reporting. The company kept a foreign correspondent in Karachi on some thin business ruse.

However, news broke out there and elsewhere on the Subcontinent and for me creature comforts aplenty eventually came to pass. After I left Pakistan, I married and started a family and for the first time after a long time I was eating at home. By then I had spent two and a half years based in Karachi and from there had struck out to all of West Pakistan, to East Pakistan (now Bangladesh), to India, and to Afghanistan. I had seen and reported on riots, a dictator's rigged election, and America's loss of face and prestige in the Subcontinent, compounded often by sheer goofiness.

As vice president, Lyndon Johnson on a visit to Karachi in 1962 promised to show what America was all about by sending the randomly selected camel driver Bashir Ahmed a new American-made pickup truck. After it arrived the prop stunt promptly backfired. Ahmed was resented among the camel-driving brethren and Karachi had a good laugh, all at U.S.A. expense.

Reporting on 1965's edition of the wars between India and Pakistan, I managed to take cover in a roadside ditch when an Indian jet fighter (American made) strafed the Jeep I was in (American made) as I came from the scene of a recent tank battle (American made weapons, both sides). Another time I was nearly mobbed by angry anti-American demonstrators on a station platform in Karachi only to get rescued by Pakistan's most prominent anti-American of all at the time, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, an intelligent man who served one military dictator as foreign minister, only to be hanged years later by another.

Bhutto calmed the crowd that day with the announcement that this American was a friend. Actually, I was his friend in the limited sense we had shared a cognac at his seaside home. Reporters who believe their high-flown sources can become real friends delude themselves. The connection is not one of friendship; it's a mutually self-serving condition lubricated by second-rate liquor. As asked by the wife of the Singapore foreign minister upon catching him pouring his best scotch for a pair of visiting journalists, "Why from that bottle, for them?"

To the war in Indochina came journalists and pretenders in the thousands. "The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested often," wrote Chris Hedges, a war correspondent for the New York Times. Most who came to see the war never got within hearing distance. But for others, as Hedges cautioned, the attraction is only fulfilled where the danger is greatest. My friend the photographer Koichi Sawada went to Vietnam on his own dime to shoot war pictures for his cheap UPI bosses, and came out bearing every prominent world and national photo prize possible. Home safe in Hong Kong, he became restless and headed south again. The risks outweigh the rewards every time, as they must if you are "in thrall to chaos," as Joyce Carol Oates said of perilous attractions.

Sawada died in 1970 presenting his press credentials to his Khmer Rouge executioner on a night time run he surely knew he shouldn't have made. You never traveled war zone roads at

night. He and I had talked about it just weeks before as we went about Cambodia looking for the CIA's fingerprints on the coup that had just toppled Prince Norodom Sihanook's war-neutral government.

I looked into the maw of a similar fate one afternoon shadows fell on a Mekong River bank several miles from Phnom Penh. Correspondents had gone there to check out reports of guerrilla activity. The evidence was everywhere. Villagers were taking down from their walls photos of the once highly revered Prince Sihanook. A local police post stood deserted. After my hired driver disappeared and left me on the riverbank, the AP man wanted to leave me there. Wire service competition rarely reached the point where death was too good for the bastard chasing the same story, but it could come close.

The correspondent from the Chicago Daily News, Keyes Beach, shared the vehicle and its hire cost with the AP man. Conservative patriot that he was, Keyes declared he would not leave a fellow American alone and exposed in Communist guerilla country, and into the vehicle I clambered.

As near as I can place it, my knowing and coming to understand Sawada sometime in the 1960s began opening the door to insights I hadn't known possible into the lives of strangers around me in this foreign setting I'd chosen. Did not true understanding of one another flower only among members of the tribe?

Sawada had such insights but seldom mentioned them because they didn't seem credible but which could serve him well in his work. There were reporters based in Saigon, as then called, who spent the war looking for battles never found. They always guessed wrong about which helicopter-borne missions to tag along on. Sawada never missed a battle because he wasn't guessing. He said the war moved across the country in detectable waves like the Mekong winds rippling the jungle's upper canopy, and that one could anticipate where they would go next.

Where Sawada got such notions I sometimes asked but the answers took the form of Zen aphorisms that he assumed gave me sufficient explanations. So I pretended I understood. Sawada connected with people instantly. I watched him talk his way past security guards refusing to allow arriving journalists to head into town after arriving at the at Phnom Penh airport in 1970, the year of his death, even though the guard knew who he was. They let me through only because I lied and said, without any basis in possibility, that I was a bookkeeper. While he was in Vietnam, Sawada's photography won the World Press Photo of the Year award in 1965 and the Pulitzer Prize in 1966. He gave away all his prize money to the Vietnamese mother he photographed with her four children, all neck deep in rising flood waters, as they fled the fighting.

My aim upon learning of his death—it happened weeks after I left Cambodia—was to try to see people as Sawada saw them, strictly on an even footing, whether he had something to gain or not. That was not a common trait among journalists from rich countries writing about the fates of nameless Asians in the grip of war and famine. Death in a bad war made the best copy, and

it was often told in no more human terms than in body counts.

So it was that I began trying to escape the cynicism, to explore the possibilities of connecting as a fellow human being with the less fortunate among those who made news and those I encountered who did not. Where would it start? How about Phnom Penh, 1970? The coup brought to power a stupid general who began his leadership by inexplicably launching a pogrom against persons of Vietnamese ancestry. Poor residents, Vietnamese-related or not, huddled in their hovels, among them parents without resources who whored out their daughters to customers invited inside. The word went around poolside at the Hotel Phnom: "She may have been 15, but she had the body of a 9-year-old." Everybody laughed.

I too smiled, thinking maybe it was just a joke. Later I hoped it was just a joke. And the girls' destitute families, what to make of them, what must they think of all of us? All I could do was hope they would put these times out of mind while cowering from new horrors brought about by Pol Pot's country-wide killing spree a few short years later.

Or what of the petit hookers with heart-shaped faces along Pat Pong Road in Bangkok, a street of whore bars and massage parlors amidst which some genius had opened a UPI bureau. Many a time I sat before a typewriter and over the blaring stripper music wrote of war, Asian politics and American foreign policy—and thought nothing of the lives of our flesh-hustling neighbors.

But I think of them now, in the spring of 2010. As I write this, Thailand's rural poor are rising against the corrupt military elites who have long ruled the country for their own enrichment. The business decision to maximize the take has always included the white slaving of the impoverished female rural population. I like to think that among the rioters braving the army guns in 2010 are this generation's defenders of the long lost girls on Pat Pong Road.

I admired two people in politics, both assassinated. Harvey Milk actually practiced true compassion for San Franciscans of every sexual persuasion during his short career serving as the country's first openly gay elected official. He was shot to death, as was the Mayor, by a deeply disturbed former colleague on the city's Board of Supervisors. I lived and worked as a journalist in the city before and after Milk's demise. Later, as I tried to report street disturbances occasioned by the short prison sentence given to Milk's killer, San Francisco police officers clubbed me to the sidewalk and broke three ribs. I never had a scratch during all those years in Asia.

The only other figure in public life that I never held in suspicion of the inevitable sellout was Benigno Aquino, the prominent Philippine opposition leader shot and killed by Ferdinand Marcos's soldiers as he tried to reenter his country from the United States in August, 1984. I was on the plane returning Aquino to his homeland and, all but watching the bullets fly, witnessed his assassination. Marcos's men followed me through Manila's streets and threatened a Filipino colleague with criminal libel for helping me report later events. While I was in the Philippines, phone calls were made to my wife in San Francisco threatening me with death for the book that my friend Fred Poole and I were writing to expose the Marcos regime

and Aquino’s assassination.

So it’s not as if I find in all God’s children the milk of human kindness. Any journalist so naïve should turn in his Rolex. We like it when the academics refer to our bearing witness to violent upheavals as the first draft of history. But travels through Asia as a foreign correspondent did mean also that a phenomenon more profound than the headlines became uppermost as the journey progressed. I learned, as it never occurred to me before I left the United States, that you can look into the eyes of practically anyone swept up in war, natural disasters or political victimhood and see yourself looking back at you.

There are no hierarchies built on wealth, power or the right connections that matter. The Bangladeshi peasant washed out of his home, his village leveled by a cyclone, gets the same status in my eyes as myself, whether I am face to face with him to cover the news or imagine him in my absence as the next storm surges out of the Bay of Bengal. Sawada lived in the belief that all were the same even if artificially separated by rank. So people no one else listened to told him secrets that only pass between friends, and the secrets pushed him forward to some measure of fame.

I am no Sawada and have no such secrets. Compassion is the wrong label for my story of consciousness raised in the heat of the turmoil that I witnessed in Asia. I, a mere observer, seldom lifted a finger for anyone being ground under by their own private holocaust. But something did happen inside that part of the orb where the brain processes experience that I could never have foreseen. Call it understanding.

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Two for the Road

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

The Dallas show was over; the crowd had dispersed and the campgrounds were deserted except for the Prankster's four buses and a couple of rented Hertz trucks for the Querry, the band that had played on the free stage at Woodstock and followed us here.

I overheard one of the Pranksters say, "There's a faint smell in the air—cops."

Time to head out.

But Furthur was stuck in the mud in the middle of a field and wouldn't start. Fort Home was running okay, but Babbs said he didn't dare risk driving in there and getting stuck, too. I was squatting beside Mighty Bus with my spirits lying at the bottom of the black pot I was scrubbing.

Windy took one look at me with those clear blue eyes dancing. "Hey, what's happening? Aren't you riding in the Hertz with Stoney? Think how nice it will be—just the two of you."

"He hasn't asked me."

She fell back on her heel. "Asked you? It isn't the prom. Just go get in the truck with him."

I looked at her with hot eyes. "I can't. I've been following him around for days. I have to know if he wants me or not."

She sighed.

I looked up in time to see Stoney twirling the Hertz through the mud, between and around trees, pulling out of a skid with only an inch to spare on either side, braking nose-to-nose with Further to offer a battery charge.

The engine of the bus roared to life; the whole crew turned out to push, sloshing ankle-deep through mud, heaving at Furthur's flowery behind or straining on the chain attached to her front bumper, tossing branches under her wheels as she inched to higher ground.

Babbs, our spiritual leader, stood tall in his red and blue striped shirt, looking on. "He's driven through the worst of it," he laughed, "and now here he comes back without getting stuck." Babbs called to Stoney, "You shouldn't do things like that."

"Why not?"

"Because you make it look like anyone could do it."

Glowing, Stoney pulled alongside Mighty Bus and called, “Hey, freak. Want to ride with me?”

I dropped the burned pot, darted around the truck and hopped in beside him. Three miles down the road we were busted. They got Stoney for driving without a license and took him away in the squad car. They nailed the rest of the caravan for everything they could think of: no mud flaps, no green signals, no muffler, and no registration. The fines came to forty dollars.

“Why?” I said to Babbs. “After all we did to help.”

“We took too long getting out. There was a period of grace when they wouldn’t interfere, but we overstayed our welcome.”

“What about Stoney? Are we just going to leave him to rot in jail?”

“Bucko went after him to pay the fines,” Babbs said.

They were back in about half an hour, but someone else had taken the driver’s seat in the Hertz. Glowering, Stoney said, “Never mind. I’ll hitch.”

He grabbed a few things and took off down the road.

“There goes your man,” Windy said.

I grabbed my boots, crocheted bag and my Travelers Checks and took off after him.

* * *

Stoney and I lay in the long grass beside the highway. We still had about an hour until sunset. We were dressed like Walt Disney bums in faded denim shirts and blue jeans. Stoney wore a battered straw hat he had found somewhere. I had stuck a big yellow sunflower in it to make him look innocuous, and one behind my ear to accent my hair.

Stoney was lazily scratching his belly. He lifted his shirt to look. “Hmm, I wondered why I kept scratching my belly. It wasn’t my belly I was scratching.” He grinned at me. “What are you doing over there in the grass?”

I ran my tongue over my top lip. “Nuthin’.

He chuckled and lit up a cigarette. I picked up a handful of pebbles and tossed them across the road, one at a time. “Did you really want to do this trip alone?”

“Yes, at first.”

“But you don’t mind me being here?”

“I guess not. I’ll probably get more rides with you along. But if we don’t, we should hop a

train.”

“Have you ever done it?”

“Nope. Thirty years old and I’ve never hopped a train. Never had a beard either.”

I sat up. “You said you were born in 1928.”

“I wasn’t.”

“Then why did you tell me that?”

“Because I thought you were looking for a father figure.”

“You sure got that wrong.” I stared at him, seeing a younger man. He no longer seemed so wise. “Is Stoney your real name?”

“Is Laughing Lily yours?”

“No.”

“My real name is Gabe Gouch.”

“Really?”

He shook his head. “Come on, let’s go. Nothing is going to happen if we just sit here.”

A ten minute walk brought us into Vernon, Texas. We stopped by a small cafe. He used the restroom while I ordered coffee and sandwiches. I still had two bucks in my pocket, and fifty dollars worth of Traveler’s checks.

The place was empty except for the waitress and the manager. Stoney leaned on the counter and said to the manager, “I’ll flip you to see who plays the jukebox.”

“Okay . . .” The manager was a heavyset man with a red face and a big belly. Stoney won and the manager handed him a quarter. In a moment the cafe resounded to the voice of Dean Martin singing, “Just a’Bummin’ Around.” Stoney and I sang a duet for the waitress who watched from behind the counter with her finger in her mouth.

We drank our coffee, ate our BLTs and left a quarter tip, trudging off with our arms around each other singing in a raucous tone, “Oh we ain’t got a barrel of money/Maybe we’re ragged and funny/But we’ll travel along/Singing a song/siiide by siiide.”

***

Hours passed, but only three or four cars. The long straight road was flooded with moonlight.

Neither of us felt sleepy so we hiked along, holding hands and talking.

“My mother was French,” Stoney said. “She was slender when I was young, but later she became grossly overweight. She weighs about three hundred pounds. I’ll never let myself get like that. She left my dad when I was six and ran off with a Puerto Rican. A Puerto Rican! I never got over it. He didn’t like me and I didn’t like him. He had four boys, all older than me. He drank and beat me. Once he stripped me naked, tied me to a willow tree and beat me to amuse my mother. So I ran away from home.”

He looked up at the stars and said in a sing-song voice, “When I was a kid I never saw the door of the gods. I’d still like to go. I’d even like to find the door.”

“What door?”

“When I was little I’d get a daydream—I was going to be in the army and be a hero for my country. The ants were friends of mine, marching across the driveway. I could depend on them. Every day I went out and they were there. And the whole sky full of daystars and at night, nightstars.”

“You must be stoned.”

He pointed to the star-studded vault of Texas sky. “See the Big Dipper? The end of the Dipper points to the North Star. North is where I don’t want to go, so I keep an eye on it in case it starts creeping up on me. I got as far as Montana once. That’s when I learned the rules of hitch hiking: never hitch north in the winter. Can you imagine? A ten-year-old kid from Los Angeles? There I was in the wastes of Montana walking around in the snow wearing a thin jacket and tennis shoes. No hat. No gloves. My ass nearly froze. I came to this farmhouse. Nobody was around, so I went in. I had just taken the shotgun down from over the fireplace to see if there were any shells in it when the farmer came in. I told him my story and he said I could stay if I’d water the cows twice a day. I can still feel my fingers frozen around the handle of the bucket and the ice cold water sloshing into my tennis shoes. I did that for two days and then I split for warmer climes. I guess I never quite thawed out because now when I see the tiniest snowflake in the air, I flee.”

* * *

Dawn unveiled a wide cobalt blue sky painted with baby pink clouds. So corny. Long grasses dreamed beside the road and yellow sunflowers nodded at us over the fence. Down the road I saw wide-open freedom, adventure and fulfillment. That was my fourth moment of total happiness. . . but I still wasn’t counting. I thought they were infinite.

Stoney and I lay face down at the edge of the road to watch the ants march single file across the Tarmac. A car came rumbling over the horizon. Neither of us moved. Startled faces gawked at us out the window as they passed. We laughed.

* * *

Clayton, New Mexico. A pink plastic restaurant. The waitress stood over us, arms akimbo. “You two will have to go somewhere and get yourselves cleaned up if you want to eat here. Just look at you—both of you. You’re a disgrace to God.”

“Who, me?” I said. “Christ went barefoot all over while he was doing God’s work. And I’ll bet he wasn’t that clean, either, sleeping every night on the ground.”

“He most certainly was. You’d better leave.”

“There’s no use arguing about it,” Stoney said, getting up. He flashed the waitress a toothless grin. “Hey, you got a cigarette?”

“Just go!”

Back on the street, he disappeared into a bank and came out with a cigarette behind each ear. “We’re down to this,” he said.

“I guess so.”

“Did you forget to bring your Traveler’s checks?”

“Uhh . . . ”

“Not that I expect you to pay for everything. I pay when I can.”

“How did you know?”

“Keith told me you paid for the engine of Mighty Bus. So you had your little secret and I had mine.”

“Sorry.”

“Whatsamatter? Don’t you trust me?”

I shoved my hands in my pockets and thought of Frank’s parting song, “Oh baby, baby, it’s a wild world . . .”

“Take my advice, kid. Stash it in the bank and don’t let anybody get it away from you.”

We strolled to the edge of town and waited. And waited. A freight train emerged from behind a distant row of buildings and chugged slowly toward us. “Just what I ordered,” Stoney laughed. “This is our train.”

We made a dash for the crossing. Two brick-red boxcars rolled toward us, doors open. We

glanced around. Stoney said, “Here’s our car.”

Just for a second, right before us, the train paused. I scrambled in. Stoney tossed in the bedrolls and jumped up beside me. I gave him a hug. “Too fucking perfect!”

We hid down behind some cardboard cartons. “It’s fun for now,” Stoney said, “but I’ll bet it gets cold at night.” Two minutes later we could still hear the wheels clicking, but our car didn’t seem to be moving. He peeked out the door. “Guess what. There goes our train.”

We watched it chugging away to the east. The two boxcars with the open doors had been sidetracked.

“Remember how sweetly it stopped in the middle of the crossing? The engineer will probably be laughing all the way to Oklahoma.”

“What the hell. Who wants to go to Oklahoma? Let’s get ourselves a clean motel with lots of hot water.”

* * *

At dusk our ride left us off in Cimmaron, a drive-through, New Mexican town about forty miles northeast of Taos. It was chilly at seven thousand feet; the air smelled of pine and steep mountains thrust up into the clean, evening sky. We stood around for a while with our thumbs out, but nothing happened. Stoney gathered sticks, I wadded up some paper and we started a fire with nibbles of wood, warming our hands over the cheerful blaze.

A black car pulled up. The driver sat looking out the open window, not saying anything. I smiled. “White man build big fire, sit way back. Indian build little fire, sit way up close.”

The Man in a black uniform gave us a restrained smile, got out of the car and came over. “May I see your ID?”

I got out mine, but Stoney didn’t have any. “I lost it.”

“Will you get in the car please?”

“Oh, God,” Stoney groaned. “Here we go.”

“But we haven’t done anything wrong.”

The police station was a five-room adobe house. We followed the officer up the walk and waited while he unlocked the door. He turned on the lights and motioned for us to come in and sit down.

I took the battered leather armchair and glanced around the room. A couple of half-burned logs stood in the adobe fireplace in the corner. To the right were two smaller rooms; one was a

bathroom and the other had been converted into a cell equipped with a bunk and an oversized mattress that looked comically comfortable.

The officer was about twenty-eight, black hair, crew cut, discerning black eyes and a square jaw. Handsome, I decided.

“I’m John Graham,” he said.

“I’m Tom Neece. You can call my answering service in L.A. They’ll identify me.”

“At one in the morning?”

“Somebody usually sleeps in the office. It’s been broken into a couple of times. Big city crime.”

Graham put in the call. After awhile someone answered. “They refuse to accept the charges,” he said with his hand over the receiver.

“Shit! Who have you got on the line? Stella? Tell her this is no time to be cheap.”

“Look,” said Graham into the phone, “I’ve got this man in custody and he’s really in trouble unless you can identify him.” Tom and I leaned forward in our chairs. “About five foot eight?” He looked at Tom and shook his head. Tom pulled up his sleeve and showed his tattoo. “Ask her about this.”

“Any distinguishing marks you can think of? Uh-huh . . . uh-huh. Okay, thanks very much.” He hung up.

“I think you’re a little shorter than five eight, aren’t you?”

“No, that’s about right.”

“She couldn’t think of any distinguishing marks, and she didn’t mention that you wore glasses. She did say you never carry any ID.”

“Okay, I lied about that. I don’t see any point to it. I never have. You are who you are. If you’re doing what you should be, you don’t need any ID.”

Graham held his eyes for a moment. “It’s cases like this where it’s handy to be able to prove who you are. It so happens that we’re looking for a man who beat his wife to death in Colorado. And you match the description.”

A long stupefied silence. Graham turned to me. “What about you?”

“Tom and I have been together since the Woodstock festival in New York,” I said. “It couldn’t have been him.”

“No, it wasn’t me,” Tom said with a sheepish grin. “I can dig what you’re saying about ID. I was just never much for conforming to other people’s rules.”

“Have you ever been arrested before?”

Tom didn’t answer. The phone rang. Graham swiveled around in his chair, carried on a muffled conversation for about a minute and a half and hung up. Leaning back in is chair, he gave me a faint smile. “When you said that back there–about the little fire and the Indian sitting way up close—that kind of got to me. Did you know I was Indian?”

I shook my head.

“Well,” he said, I believe you really are who you say you are. But there’s another matter. It’s against the law to hitchhike in this state. Unless you have some money, you’re open to a vagrancy charge.”

I had spent my last dollar on a pack of Camels for Tom. We cast each other a helpless look.

Graham stood up. “Maybe I’m crazy, and maybe I’ll wake up dead tomorrow, but I guess I’ll take you both home with me.”

Tom broke into a broad grin. “Really? Thanks a lot.”

“You won’t regret it,” I promised. “How do you like your eggs?”

* * *

In the morning Graham drove us about a mile out of town. We shook hands, said thanks, and set off down the road. It was understood that as soon as we were out of sight we’d stick out our thumbs.

What a great day to be out in the warm sun and sparkling air, with masses of purple asters in the fields and tall yellow sunflowers nodding by the wayside. In ten minutes we were picked up by some freaks who took us to Taos. We stood on the plaza looking around. Every store was mud-brown adobe with sky blue window frames. Most of the folks on the street had dark hair and brown faces. The mellifluous sound of Spanish wafted through the air. I knew by the warm sunlight on curved adobe walls and the blue mountain that towered above the town that after my long cross-country search, I had come home.

It wasn’t hard to score a ride from here. We didn’t have to lift a thumb. A VW van pulled over, slapped with smiley flowers and a bumper sticker that said, “Question Reality.” By early afternoon we caught up to the Pranksters at the Hog Farm in Peñasco.

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Looking for Woody

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

If I now put myself in Dave Huehner's 1948 Studebaker heading for San Francisco, from Champaign, Illinois, in 1961 I remember studying its single blue front fender which pointed us West while Whitman whispered:" The only home of the soul, is the open Road."

The world is open to you when you've a hundred bucks to cover the gas, and just room enough to sleep in the car. This assault on Chance was soon over; but the memory stays with you like the taste and smell of days driving the desert in one hundred degree heat.

Dave and I were to stop over in Okemah, Oklahoma, birthplace to Woody Guthrie whose book, Bound for Glory, with Kerouac's On The Road, had been our Bible.

That same year Woody's sidekick Jack Elliot had been stranded in Champaign where Dave worked to repair the transmission that had left Elliot and a French girlfriend homeless and broke. Elliott had traveled Europe with Derroll Adams, a banjo picker, and the two were still legends there. He'd survived with just a guitar. What else could have washed him up in this bleak backwater but a combination of wanderlust and the simple mad random crapshoot of existence? Whom, of all we knew, would have considered wandering the Continent in a Beater, without money, avid to show a French lover the "real America?" Life was meant to be lived by people like this.

Jack was expert at an esoteric Americana which included the Peterbilt Truck; sailing, and the pleasures of a Chinese Junk he had waiting in Long Island harbor. We'd first heard him flat-picking on a ten inch LP, which included his impeccable version of The Ballad of Jesse James. Elliott was a superb mimic, and did Guthrie so well his vocals were indistinguishable from the Masters.

The glue in all of this was the fledgling American Folk scene that had Woody Guthrie epicenter and the two red Stinson LP's he had done with Cisco Houston had made me a convert in moments. It wasn't just the singing, the guitars, the songs: there was something deep within those grooves inexplicable, enchanted, and freeing.

Poor with no prospects and a drop out : Guthrie offered me a lifeline and a guide to survival. I had majored in five-string banjo to the exclusion of anything academic and I'd traded the stilted, bleak University existence for something joyous and heartfelt.

Dave and I plotted survival tactics as we angled the Studebaker on to the Two Lane. We left behind one Archie Green, fledgling folklorist and authority on mining songs. He had been mentor/advisor to us and had founded the University of Illinois folksong club.

It was Archie who had introduced me to Aunt Molly Jackson, a Kentucky radical, forced from her home and exiled by the mining interests during the Union strife in Harlan and Hazard counties in the early 30's. Aunt Molly had known Woody, and was part of a New York Left colony whose history has yet to be written. Alan Lomax described her as "deeply radical.". Jackson laid out her own history in the lyrics to a song, which became a Union anthem.

"I am a Union woman, as brave as I can be
And I don't like the bosses and
The bosses don't like me.
Join the CIO boys, Join the CIO

The boss he rides a big white horse
While we walk in the mud
Their flags the old red, white and blue
And ours is dipped in blood.

The boss he come to my husband
And this is what he said: Bill Jackson
I can't hire you, sir. Your wife's a
Russian Red.
Which side are you on boys?"

They say in Harlan County
There are no neutrals there
You either be a Union man
Or a scab for J.H. Blair
Which side are you on boys?"

Jackson had toured America singing and agitating for the United Mine Workers, and the Communist Party. Her activities ended with the Red-baiting 40's, and she moved to California where she died in obscurity.

Guthrie and Jackson's songs provided the unwritten, unsung history of the American working Class; a story which has since disappeared midst the mercantilist frenzy of our time.

My great great grandfather had been a dirt farmer in Ducks Pond, Tennessee. Decades later my uncles (his grandsons) took me to the Colonial graveyard where their father had taken them years before; in order to lay the tombstone he had saved for all of his life. It bore his parents names: Frank and Missouri Pearson Leming.

Frank Leming had been a stern father to his two sons; one of them my grandfather. My grandfather and his brother, beaten so badly for a minor infraction that the switch their father used was said to have laid one boys leg almost bare to the bone, had abandoned the farm and rode the rails looking for work.

My grandfather never returned to Tennessee.

His father a Tennessee dirt farmer with too many children, too proud to tell his sons he could no longer feed them.

My grandfather got to Pittsburg, where he learned a trade, and later to Chicago, where he worked as a Tool and Die maker for the American Can Company.

He stayed a Union man all his life. American Can broke the Union in 1927 and undermined his final years. My uncle Oscar, his brother in law, was Can Company Management. Following the strike my Grandfather and my Uncle never again spoke.

Poverty provided the goad, and the resistance to it that Guthrie made his life's work. Asked once to avoid anything "political" for a radio program, Guthrie sang the single sentence ' I Hate Your Capitalist System" for the entirety of the fifteen minutes he had been allotted.

If Guthrie has since been reworked and spun to harmless poet, wanderer, and partial Pop icon, none who knew him ever doubted his deeply Revolutionary belief. His life honed by the desperate poverty of his circumstances, he sometimes frightened the polite Left he encountered in New York.

We landed in Okemah on a hot summer's morning, and with nowhere else to go, slept in the car. As we settled into an uncomfortable sleep two cops arrived, checked the out of state plates, and asked us what we were doing there.

We hesitantly explained our mission, unsure of our reception in small town Oklahoma. We weren't going to jail; instead we toured the town with our cop benefactors as they related its history. There was no mention of the lynching of a mother and child photographed in 1916, the bodies strung from a bridge. But we did see the corner where an infamous Black Cowboy was gunned down by a rival, a postcard revealed his coffined body on display in front of the store where he died.

Guthrie's father was an oil speculator, politician, street fighter and Klansman, whose hands had been broken so often he could not close them. At some point he abandoned the family leaving Guthrie and a brother to fend for themselves in a boomtown bustling with hustlers, roustabouts, oil riggers, cowboys, and ladies, all come to cash in on a boom soon gone bust. Guthrie shined shoes, sang songs, drew pictures, painted signs and hustled.

As the Dustbowl disaster spread he migrated west ….

"Folks back East hers what they say
Going west most every day
Heading for that California line
Cross those desert sands they roll
Think they're getting out

Of that old Dust Bowl, but they get
To California and here's what they find:
Oh the police at the Port of Entry say
You're number fourteen thousand for today
But if you ain't got that Do Re Mi boys
If you ain't got that Do Re Mi
You better get back to beautiful Texas
Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee
California is a Garden of Eden
It's a Paradise to live or see
But believe it or not, you won't think it's so hot
If you ain't got that Do Re Mi"

Up at the graveyard where Woodie's mother and sister were buried we ran into a Caretaker. I asked him what folks locally thought of Woody and he didn't mince words:"People around here didn't like him, always hanging around with Niggers, Indians and Hobos."

We made our way to the now abandoned Guthrie homestead, its windows and doors long since rotted; its floors littered with debris, and its walls covered with a collection of graffiti, slogans, lyrics and tributes to Guthrie's memory. It remains the single completely spontaneous memorial to a human being I was ever to see.

There were tributes in German, Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish, French, and languages I could not decipher: all of them scrawled on the walls of that decaying building.

Decades later I met someone from Okemah and asked about the house and Guthrie's legacy. There had been a plan sometime in the 60's to either build a statue to Guthrie or honor his memory in some other way. His politics were discussed and the plan dropped. As for the house, it was long since torn down, a final insult to the man who could inspire a People's monument to his memory and yet remain a pariah in his hometown.

Dave and I pushed on for San Francisco; none of it worked out. I never landed a job; returned to Chicago, and within a year… I'd moved my Draft date up and was immediately taken. A calculated act which saved my life. I did my two years and was out of the Army by 1964, as the call-ups for Viet Nam intensified, dooming thousands of my generation.

The lessons of Woody, Aunt Molly, and the Road were not been forgotten.

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Still on the Road

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Although I faithfully followed the bardic path for more than 40 years, I waited a long time to hit the road as a poet. There were so many other things to do along the way, and I did them all. I had directed the Detroit Artists Workshop, the Allied Artists Association, Jazz Research Institute and Detroit Jazz Center. I managed the MC-5, Mitch Ryder & Detroit and other bands. I produced dance concerts at the Grande Ballroom, free concerts in the parks, the Ann Arbor Blues & Jazz Festivals, and countless left-wing benefits, community cultural events, jazz concerts and poetry readings. I've booked bands, done publicity for nightclubs, bars and concert halls, developed programs, written grants and raised funds for jazz artists and community arts organizations, and produced records by artists from the MC-5, Little Sonny and Deacon John to Sun Ra, Victoria Spivey and Roosevelt Sykes.

I wrote about jazz and blues, rock & roll and poetry for publications ranging from obscure local papers to *downbeat* and *Playboy* magazine. I published poetry books and journals, edited underground newspapers, arts quarterlies and blues magazines, and written liner notes for albums by Louis Armstrong, the Art Ensemble of Chicago and Harold Melvin & the Blue Notes, Johnny Adams, the Wild Magnolias and the Re-Birth Brass Band. As a political activist I fought the marijuana laws through Detroit LEMAR, the Amorphia organization and a five-year struggle in the courts of Michigan cost me two and a half years in prison before I won my case. I was chairman of the White Panther Party and its successor, the Rainbow Peoples Party, battling Richard M. Nixon and his goons. It was my court case challenging Nixon's "national security" wiretap program that produced the Supreme Court decision that warrantless wiretaps would no longer be allowed.

Suffice to say that I've enjoyed a productive life in the arts and community affairs for more than four decades – and helped raise four terrific daughters in the process. But as a poet, setting my verses to music and performing them with jazz musicians and blues guitarists, it was always my intention to take my show on the road. What performing I did until then was done mostly for fun, and I was well beyond my 50th year when my first album, *Full Moon Night*, was released in the mid-1990s. I finally realized my lifelong dream of hearing my verses and musical arrangements realized to perfection by a sympathetic team of serious players, cleanly recorded in the heat and clarity of public performance.

Since 1995 I've criss-crossed the United States and western Europe, working through a vast network of old friends and new comrades to assemble bands and book myself into funky nightclubs, blues bars, art galleries, coffeehouses, churches, cultural centers, college auditoriums and music and poetry festivals coast to coast to coast. Living in New Orleans I collaborated with great musicians: Earl Turbinton, Johnny Vidacovich, Willie Metcalf and Walter "Wolfman" Washington; guesting with the groups of Michael Ray, the Radiators,

Rockin' Jake, Stavin' Chain, New Orleans Juice, Brotherhood of Groove and the Jazz Vipers. And doing special projects with Mark Bingham, James Andrews, Tuba Fats, the Forgotten Souls Brass Band and others. I formed my own band of Blues Scholars and we played all over town, from Margaritaville and the Mermaid Lounge to JazzFest and the House of Blues.

There's not much money in the poetry racket so I generally travel by myself, hooking up with musicians wherever I go. The cast is always changing and the music changes with them, so my texts stay fresh because they sound different every night. Plus I play with a thrilling array of great musical friends and make new connections, and that adds a level of excitement that's hard to beat. The particular kaleidoscope of music encountered from night to night is the high point of every tour, and the changing sound of my poems helps keep things interesting. When one proposes "An Evening of Music & Verse," few people have any idea of what they're going to hear anyway. On top of the music, the other great thing about the bardic path is the community of people who light up the way and see to the poet's modest needs. These are the people who pick me up at the train station and take me to the airport, bring me into their homes, put me up in their spare bedroom or let me sleep on their couch, feed me and get me high. They help set up gigs, drive me there, introduce me to all the cool people, take me to dinner afterwards and see to my recreational needs.

They're the amazingly sweetest of friends. They're also fellow artists and journalists and educators and broadcasters and producers, and their lives pulsate within the nexus of creative activity and social consciousness in the places they live. They're always making things happen, and they know what's going on around them as well. I bring news from mutual friends and other scenes around the country and take their stories and concerns along with me to the next stop on the trail. All this activity takes place well beneath the radar of the entertainment industry, in locations only people like ourselves know about, involving music the likes of which is rarely heard on the radio today, never seen on TV or even noticed by the daily press. It's produced in profusion and joyously shared by people who live and work in obscure neighborhoods and deconstructed urban communities which are shunned by mainstream America and the mass media—important outposts of the vast teeming world that throbs with heat and turmoil underneath the surface of American society and remains unseen and unrecognized by the world of the squares.

We used to call it the underground because we were so far down out of sight that they couldn't even see us. And as mainstream culture narrows and tightens the boundaries of what kind of life is acceptable in this country, the underground world grows in size and scope. There's the underworld of the endless African-American ghetto that extends from city to city across the country. There's the underworld of deviant sexual behavior, the underworld of social protest against the multinational corporations and the complicit government, and the underworld of drug users. There's also the underworld of outlaw music—punk rockers and garage bands, blues quintets and jazz wailers and wild improvisors, jam bands and funk groups, reggae outfits and folk singers and hammered dulcimer players who are making music in their communities or roaming the country, playing for little pockets of people who are aware they exist from seeing their names in the one little weekly paper there that chronicles their passages. They put

out their own records and CDs and T-shirts at their gigs, get out their own publications and manage to survive and spread their message, as I do, by virtue of the kindness and generosity of comrades and friends.

And then there's the intellectual underground, that ever-shrinking populace of intelligent Americans who pay attention to what's going on and devise their own ways of registering their responses to it in music, painting, poetry, dancing, writing, photography, plays, films, videotapes. CDs, DVDs, hand crafted objects, whatever forms of expression happen to enter into their minds and issue forth from their hands and fingers and mouths and eyes to reach the rest of us. Creative individuals, people who are grounded in the great social and artistic achievements of the past and steeped in the idioms of the present and future, alert to the tightening of the political and economic noose around the neck of the public and full of ideas about how to slip out of it and maybe even how to tie it around the throat of the oppressor and thus hoist him up on his own petard.

These are the people I look for when I travel, and the good part is that I almost always find them. But you've got to go where they are, and seek them out, and cherish them when you find them, and keep coming back to seek them out again, and keep on exchanging energy and ideas as freely as you can. That's what sustains our creativity and our intellectual life and makes the whole thing worthwhile. The downside to underground life in America, of course, is the relentless economic terrorism that grips our existence and rarely lets up. Nothing ever pays enough to cover the costs of everyday life: we're behind on the rent, out of groceries, always trying to keep them from turning off the electricity or the phone. Our cars break down, we don't have insurance and god help us if we get sick. Or else we take precious time away from our intellectual and creative endeavors to exchange for a miserable paycheck and minimal benefits, postponing artistic production in order to bring up our children or tend to our afflicted.

If we get high we worry about the police, pay too much for our supplies, and go through a maze of changes to secure the substances we require. If we make music we've got to find people who will let us play and give us enough money for what it cost us to get there. If we're poets or writers or painters or dancers or fine artists of any sort, we are never allowed to forget that our work is not valued and will not be properly compensated no matter how good it may become. If we publish our magazines or produce our recordings and books we will never solve the incessant problem of effective distribution and thus will always fail to reach all our intended audience.

But as an artist in America, once a person takes the vow of poverty, one may be as creative and productive as one is capable, and it is possible to do great things despite the shortage of sufficient funds to provide for the necessities. We find a way somehow to make a life for ourselves within the economic netherworld to which our work has consigned us, and we keep in mind the promise once delivered nightly by the Rev. Robert Grant in the opening segment of his "Spiritual Sunbeams" program on WGPR Radio in Detroit: *If you can take it—you can make it*.

At this moment I'm ensconced in the well-worn flat of my friend, guitarist and fellow journalist Mark Ritsema in the city of Rotterdam, engaged in an expedition to determine whether I can make a living here and support a permanent move to the Netherlands. Simply put, I've reached the point at my advanced age where I feel that if I have to struggle so hard to make a living doing the work I love to do, I owe it to myself to find a less hostile environment than in the United States. If it's got to be so hard to get paid what one needs to live, let me carry on my struggle for survival as an artist and intellectual in a society where the citizenry isn't armed, regular people still achieve a certain level of basic intelligence, the arts are cherished and the police don't care if I want to get high.

I love Holland and hope that I can stay. But I also come back to the U.S.A. and pick up my travels there. Starting out on the train from Detroit to Chicago, I catch the Amtrak train called the City of New Orleans and travel down to join the Mardi Gras festivities in the Crescent City. Then it's back on the train from New Orleans to Memphis and on via Grayhound to Little Rock, looking forward to reuniting with my new friend, fearless publisher of the *Little Rock Free Press* whom I hooked up with at the big table in the 420 Café last December.

The month before I had determined to move to Amsterdam, but I was operating without a safety net and without any housing budget, living on the largesse of my handful of friends here and trying to find a way to remain in this incredible place where I wanted to live out my life. On this particular night I just returned from a week in Florence as a guest of the film festival where Steve Gebhardt's film *20 To Life: The Life & Times of John Sinclair* played. I planned to find somewhere to stay for the night when I got to Amsterdam at my scheduled arrival, but my train had been held up in Italy while we slept, and when it made Central Station the train was seven hours late. When I got to the 420 Café to smoke a big joint and get myself together it was already 11:30 pm. I was getting nervous with my time to arrange for lodgings shrinking with every minute. Now my potential resources in Amsterdam were unreachable and I might even have to spend half of my meager €100 bankroll on a hotel room.

To top it off, I smoked too far into my joint of pure Dutch weed after a week of near abstinence in Italy and I was too high for my own good. The top of my head felt like it was about to lift off. My mind started racing and I was overcome with worry about where I would spend the night. I worried and worried at the problem with no solution in sight. Then I came down just far enough to enter the mental zone where I generally reside, and with a great sigh of relief I realized—as usual—that worry gets one nowhere and has absolutely no effect on the outcome of one's problems. Now my mind & body began to relax into the positive, expectant state I try to stay at. Everything would be all right, or it wouldn't, but in any case I could deal with it.

My attention was drawn to the cannabis counter where two Americans were talking with Greg behind the bar while scanning the room for a place to sit. I was by myself at the big table and motioned for them to join me. The woman sat next to me and said she was from the *Little Rock Free Press* and was looking for John Sinclair. I allowed that I was him. Her companion sat down and introduced himself as president of Skinny Dipping in America Inc. While they toked up I started bemoaning my situation without a room for the night. They said they were staying

around the corner in a funky little hotel. Their room had three beds and I was welcome to claim one. That settled everything, and we were free to have as much fun as we wanted.

John Sinclair *is a poet, activist, radio broadcaster and much else. His website is https://johnsinclair.us.*

Interview with Anne Waldman: On All Kinds of Roads

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Anne Waldman is a poet, performance artist, and author of dozens of literary works as well as the editor of important volumes on the beats and other subjects. Waldman's latest book is The Iovis Trilogy: Colors in the Mechanism of Concealment *(Coffee House Press, 2011) She is a cofounder, with Allen Ginsberg, of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. The interview took place in the spring of 2011 in Greenwich Village.*

JACOBSEN: What does Whitman's open road mean to you?

WALDMAN: First I'd like to invoke the Native American Navajo because their word for road is used as a verb. Their whole relationship to road has to do with how you travel it, who you are traveling it with, what the environment might be, where you're headed, in what direction, the weather and so on. So there are many different forms of that word, and to give one example of how it is used as a verb form, they say: "it roads me away," So I invoke that sense of the particulars of that kind of literal travel and what that has meant historically in terms of diasporas, in terms of the migrations of immigrants coming to this country with a real vision of finding the promised land. So there's a little bit of background: think of the road as a kind of zone and a site of incredible diversity.

I think for me in terms of this kind of dichotomy you have to hold the sense of negative capability in your mind–which is Keats line about being able to hold two different ideas 'without any irritable reach after fact or reason.' So you have on the one hand this extraordinary vision and ethos of the open road, and the stripping away of status and class and even race – although that comes later – and we have to keep that in mind in terms of the very recent rulings of the 1960s for African American people, the situation with Native American people. So there's romanticism for the generalized American, I think there there's been a lot of projection onto that. Just keep these kinds of tangibles in mind, and historical facts. I think it's great to see the richness of the possibility and the ethos [of the road].

JACOBSEN: Where did you grow up and why would you want to leave?

WALDMAN: I grew up in New York City in Greenwich Village and had parents who were somewhat bohemian so I was always on the nonconformist side of the equation. I was raised with a sense of democratic vistas and egalitarianism. Both my parents came from working class backgrounds and had been dropouts, in a way. My father shared the ethos of many of the beat writers and was a friend of Allen Ginsberg. Probably for 25 years of my father's life, He had been an itinerant piano player and so traveled the road with bands and that sort of thing. My

mother actually left American in 1929 to be part of an alternative community of bohemians around her then father-in-law who was a well-known Greek poet. This group of people were living in this semi-Luddite reality and weaving their own clothes — proto-hippies in a way- -but around an artistic vision.

JACOBSEN: A pretty unusual background.

WALDMAN: For me there is a poesis, a poetics, around the trope of the road that is embedded within many life experiences of the people I've been close to. Certainly the beat writers I've known who carried forward the original, you know, I'd say that came together in the 1940s and 50s. So I was inheriting in a way some of that ethos. In my teen years and early twenties I was really interested in this fellaheen worlds that, of course, Kerouac invokes and wanting to go below the border and wanting to get to these other places or interstices of the culture where you were encountering the realities of these other kinds of cultures, experiences, language, I think of jazz culture of course. The culture of a certain kind psychic exploration, if you will, I think of Burroughs' interests, and others.

JACOBSEN: It's the question that needs to keep on being asked.

WALDMAN It's so rich as a trope–the whole idea of the road and it being in terms of language, being an active experience. I think my life very early became dedicated to that ethos, to creating further zones. For me the road became a zone, in places like Saint Marks poetry Project where I worked for 12 years. Then when Ginsberg and I founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics – that was 1974 – we referred to it by a term used by Sufi thinker Hakim Bey, as "temporary autonomous zones." That for me sums up some of Whitman's sense of a community of likeminded people with a certain kind of adhesiveness and connection and sharing of this ethos.

So I felt we were inheriting this open road ethos and what were we going to do with it. What were we going to make of it? Yes there were the travels and hitchhiking. I first went out to California not till 1965 to this huge New America Poetry conference, convention and figures whom I admired such as Charles Olson, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Duncan, many others were at this event. I went out to see them. Then that led to hitchhiking to Mexico, getting to Mexico, my first LSD experiences and so on. Then coming back and working at Saint Marks and then the founding of magazines and communities. So a lot of my life has involved with helping create cultures that have as their basis this vision of the sharing, the partaking of a certain ethos together.

JACOBSEN: How is **On The Road** part of that ethos?

WALDMAN: Remember *On the Road* is a work of art. It's a piece of writing. So, yes it's the road trip and, yes, it's the literal thousands of Americans taking to the road and getting into that green automobile and just going. At the same time there is real incredible work [of art] that comes out of it. Never forget that. There are many versions of On the Road, many visions of how that book would come together. Then it was heavily edited. Now we have the original

scroll version. It's a work of art and because of that ethos it carries and is a real cultural intervention and continues to be in our world as younger people pick it up and read it.

JACOBSEN: Do the passing decades make a big difference in how the work is seen?

WALDMAN: Things are a little different now. Where do you go on the road? Do you go on the Internet? Do you leave America? What is the contemporary vision or version? A lot of people pick up on the Beats and then come out to the Jack Kerouac School in Boulder. They might be interested in Buddhism or, if they're scholarly, they become scholars of this extraordinary range and collection of amazing poetry and philosophy and thinking. I think of the letters between Ginsberg and Kerouac or Ginsberg and Burroughs–he thinking and the complicated making that was going on**.** I just think of the amazing things that were going on. So it's so rich. The doors keep opening.

JACOBSEN: In ***On The Road*** two young white guys bounce back and forth between the coasts a lot. Is it just a macho white boys' trip?

WALDMAN: I bristle at some of the macho references or how women are referred to. But I also take this as a symptom of the times, the kinds of vocabulary used because it's a book, a work of art. It's beyond whatever the white boy trip is that might be were they frat boys or something. It's just a very different reality for me. I think it's an instance in contemporary literature of male bonding. It's not an Army story. It's not a buddy story in that sense, It's a different kind of picaresque book, it can only happen in this particular time frame. So the soulfulness, the tender connection, the heart connection between the characters. The sense of the writerly Kerouac, the observer projecting onto the protagonist who is Neal. Remember these are composite characters. They're not literal either. Kerouac was making this up. It was based on a combination of trips and so on.

I think of these amazing scenes where they are suddenly leaping out of the car and playing ball. The scene in Denver, this vision of seeing Native Americans and black kids and white kids and soldiers. It's a very Whitmanic moment. There's traveling to Mexico. You're really going to places that had not been covered in quite the same way**.** And all the direct speech. I think of William Carlos Williams and the notion of 'no ideas but in things', and the attention to the details of ordinary speech. It's not a highfaluting, constructed or artificial kind of world. So as a window on the time and on this very soulful heart connection, filled with epiphany, of insights, spiritual connection, seeing things for the first time, feeling the excitement of the writer's gaze. It's much more than a boy's trip for me. I knew some young women who tried to imitate that trip just in the last 5 or 6 years, a pair of women who had this art project and took it on the road. Those guys had done it and we can do it too. Its led to so many interesting projects. And just the effect of the writing itself has been profound; I still see it in my things that come my way.

JACOBSEN: What about your own times on road right after leaving college?

WALDMAN: It was very political time going out to Berkeley with all the drama there. This was

before the radical revolution at Columbia in New York which I was caught up in to some extent when I was back in New York. But going to this convocation of poets and artists and alternative folk in the environment of Berkeley with all its free speech movement, Being in a room with some of my heroes, I did notice there weren't enough women poets at this event. It was somewhat lacking in diversity. But the nature of the conversation, the nature of the discourse, the range of the individual work, the experimentation of this writing. This was not left-hand margin poems about dead animals, and flowers and your dying grandmother. It was a much more extensive poetics. And more out of the influence of the Whitman and Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and others. You really felt a radical shift in the advance of a poetics that had really been engendered by Whitman. This was very exciting. I wanted to work in this environment. I wanted to help recreate it in places. There was a lot of small press magazines activity. We had no Internet at that point, but there were correspondences that started happening. Then when I got back to NY had the opportunity to work with the beginning years of the poetry project which was founded with money from the OEO under Lyndon Johnson to work with alienated youth on the lower East side. This was extraordinary, to be able to help then to create a culture that would capture the energy that I felt at Berkley.

I talk about taking my vow. I took my vow to poetry; this is where I'm going to be. These are my people; this is my tribe. This is where I'm going to put my energy. So that led later to the founding of the Kerouac School when the opportunity arose to create something at Naropa University which was the first Buddhist inspired University in the West with Allen Ginsberg. And to lure William Burroughs out there– and Gregory Corso and Diane diPrima and many, many writers, and younger writers as well, associated with the Beat Movement. Gary Snyder, Ken Kesey, Joanne Kyger, many people I felt were helping co-found this vision of a temporary autonomous zone that could happen on the spine of the North American continent going clear down to South America, that had the closeness of Denver, which was Neal Cassady's stamping ground. And you could go there and get the beat tour, and Kerouac had actually passed through there.

JACOBSEN: How did you settle on the name?

WALDMAN: When Allen and I were talking about naming our school, he came to mind as this quintessential American mongrel, Quebecois working class, Lowell, came to high school and then Columbia on a sports scholarship, was soulful, tender-hearted, throbbing inside for the fragility of the world, seeing everything in this energized way, and having a vision, a spiritual vision of its impermanence. So it continued that moment in Berkley. And seeing Allen out there. We already had had some phone calls but that was where I really officially had met him. The confluence of these initial inspirations just came together. So I see in my own life this stream that comes out of this ethos that you are talking about. And also a ground where people can come if they're curious, and think of themselves as artist and writers. And come and really play with that and develop relationships with one another.

The beat literary movement is strong because of those very challenging and individual relationships and styles and contention and so on. So I just feel blessed by this kind of

opportunity that came from it. It was a kind of seed.

JACOBSEN: Did going 'on the road' necessarily connect with radicalism, with political as well as a cultural radicalism?

WALDMAN: I would say so. I certainly saw it. I think of my father growing up in South Jersey, the son of second-generation German immigrant glassblowers. The opportunities for him of feeling that aspiration, that yearning, get out of the small town, connect to a larger world, get yourself to New York, wanting to play the piano at every opportunity, bonding with people who were on a similar path, ending up in Provincetown, which was kind of nexus for nonconformity, and artistic dropout reality. A lot of my father's generation were thinking about communism and had deep liberal and progressive connections. He never admitted whether he was a card-carrying communist party member but I think its possible.

Then World War II comes along, and World War II synchronizes things for a lot of people. There's a kind of wakeup call. I think he had been drinking a lot and had a chaotic life. You have to sober up and you're fighting the Nazis. Then you come out and what do you do? You go to college on the GI Bill and gets a doctorate in English literature, in education and he ends up a teacher at Pace University down the block. He was a frustrated writer. I think he wanted to write the great American novel. He certainly loved fiction. He was a serious reader, I would say. I think of him born in this very small, limited situation and then coming out of that. Many people have this story.

JACOBSEN: What about the contemporaries now?

We get students at Naropa who are often from very conservative backgrounds. I had a student some years ago whose father had worked on the Manhattan Project. I had a student who had to escape this very intense, born-again fundamentalist Christian background that was very much like a cult and of course they struggle to get to Naropa. And they have cut themselves off. They don't look back. But they then have to survive. Survive on many cases as artists. We hope people get the training to be teachers and editors and translators. Free spirits as well. So that's always been interesting to me the kinds of people who show up. I have students whose fathers are voting for Sarah Palin. It's wild. And the whole red state/blue state thing is very interesting. Watching that shift over the years.

Who would have thought this would have happen. Seeing these different transient tendencies and tactics now that were so active with many of us during The Vietnam war period. That's another key milestone in terms of what you are talking about You know the dichotomies, The brokenness of the culture around things like the Vietnam war, and then a lot of it has to do with war and where we put our energy and money and attention. And the military industrial complex, which dominates our whole economy. Even with the vision of democracy in other places we know the dark side.

JACOBSEN: Was the Vietnam War responsible for what we call the 60s?

I think it plays a large part in that I felt that very specifically. People I knew were going to serve, couldn't get out of the draft. Other people I knew getting out of the draft and moving to Canada. The people who were behind were involved in protest and getting arrested. I did go to Vietnam in 2000 as a kind of pilgrimage and to feel my generation was very much a part of this. I felt responsible but also connected and empathetic. It was a very complicated relationship we had, whichever side you were on. The shock of being there was very few people my own age – I was primarily in the North in the streets of Hanoi. A whole generation was essentially decimated. I was with much younger people who were born after the war. Then I was with elderly people, often crippled and maimed because of incident s created by the war. It was a very moving to see that, the palpability of t the loss. It was such a stretch at the time. We had much more imagery from that war. The media was not controlled. The storyline, the master narrative was not controlled. I thin it was some those images really radicalized people and shifted things to some extent. And the Viet Cong also, their tenacity.

JACOBSEN: Tell us about growing up in the 1950s.

Growing up in the fifties, having to wear a dog tag, having to take shelter in a bomb shelter. That turned me toward the road, I did not want to live in fear of that, I was gong to work somehow against what that vision was, and what that horror was. It was poetry, art, music. The antithesis for me was the artistic path. That was very strong as well. Whitman's vision was before a lot of the atrocity of the 20th century. I was going to public school in the post-World War II, the grey doldrum years. But I was in this extraordinary environment of Manhattan, of Greenwich Village, of bohemian parents. Pete Seeger was down the block. My older brother was involved in the folk movement. We would gather every weekend in Washington Park. The folk songs were so important to my reality I had parents who were attentive to what was going on politically. They also had these interesting histories. There was the Greek connection, a sense of a larger world. People coming in from abroad. There was a sense of community around ideas: a discourse and an adhesiveness–which is my favorite word from Whitman. My teachers were often very eccentric in this neighborhood. There was a kind of formality and strictness. This also was a heavily Italian and Roman Catholic area. We were atheists. My mother started taking us to church when I was in seventh or eight grade. That was always a question, Do you believe in God? I remember having a vision in the girls' room with some other girls at PSA which was around the corner from here. We convinced ourselves we were seeing the devil, it wasn't God we were seeing but the Devil. I think we were punished for that. It was a civic education, being taught American history, the importance of voting. It was a diverse community, I had Portuguese kids in my class, Hispanic, a couple of African-American students. So there was the melting pot that you find in America.

JACOBSEN: The commies were always coming.

WALDMAN This business of taking shelter because of the threat of the commies coming across the water or whatever. I started to question that. What is this fear? As we see through our whole lives here the way fear is propagated. Whether there are some killer bees on the way. One of the classic examples. So there clearly was a point where you were going to live in the

fear or live in the horror or try to do something about it or put your energy somewhere else.

It was really hard coming to terms with the Nazi history. Then in my twenties I was traveling to Germany. There was a lot of poetry activity and some of my first readings abroad and trying to relate with people my own age there and what they were discovering and learning had to examine in terms of their backgrounds. Then so many of my friends had family who had either perished in the holocaust or survived in the holocaust. It was very palpable. This was another reality to consider. You had a relationship too. Was it the Adorno idea? Can you have beauty, art, after atrocity? I felt this resounding, "Yes, You have to." I mean, You have to.

You had a lot of the Beat writers – there had been some military service there. But not what my father had been through for the most part. There were friends of Kerouac who were in WW II certainly. Ted Berrigan, a close poet friend. had been in Korea but did not really see action. I felt certainly with Allen there was a real pacifist stand there. Then I knew people like Dave Dellinger and working with people in the peace movement and that later led to a lot of work, which continues for me. With the Rocky Flats plutonium plant where I was arrested with Allen Ginsberg and Daniel Ellsberg in the 70s. We helped with many others to close that place down. There was so much extraordinary criminal, I would say, lack of accountability. We're talking about plutonium actually leaking into the soil. So this site is still toxic and still the Fish and Wildlife department want to have a park on the site of rocky flats where you can take your children and your dog. So I'm involved in thirty years with the rocky flats guardianship project where were trying to alert citizens of the area and the world. With this situation in Japan if this is not our last chance to wake up I don't now what will be. When l look at my life there are these streams, these things that have continuity from the fifties to now in 2011.

JACOBSEN: Is there anything about Kerouac that you find especially misrepresented or misunderstood?

WALDMAN: I think the idea of the lone tormented artist – which we can apply to others – I think that it needs to be revisited. He needs to be seen in the context of a lot of other artistic activity. He is like a Jackson Pollock of words. There is a pretty interesting document called 'action writing.' Which is not all about spontaneity and first thought, best thought,' but a certain kind of attention to the smallest increments of the phonemes of language, The kind of power of connection, what he is able to do with language. Or John Cage or other radical artists of the time, and put him in this context rather than extracting him and being more obsessed with the life story, whether it's the relationship with the mother. All these are factors in who he is and what he created.

Go to the work if you have real curiosity. Go to the work and you take on something like Visions of Cody. When you think of the move from Maggie Cassady or Tristessa to Visions of Cody. I think Visions of Cody is his most radical book in terms of poetic stretch and the way he is able to incorporate documentation and incorporate the live tape recording of Neal and so on. It's a collage, its more like montage, its more like film in some ways. I think of the work of Burroughs and his work with cutup and superimposition and so on. And his writing being more like film,

the way he talks about montage. I think you can apply some of that to what Kerouac was doing. So to see the experimentation of this kind of artist and to make him less of a pathetic figure, I guess. And also we don't want to go too heroic either. Form some point of view we're not allowed to have heroes anymore really unless they are movie stars who are not really doing what they are portraying.

JACOBSEN: What can women take away from this writing, this experience?

WALDMAN: As a woman I have felt encouraged and fed by and nurtured by the work of Kerouac and others. Certainly Allen and Burroughs. I knew Allen and Burroughs, and Gregory to some extent. Certainly Gary Snyder's work. Then the connection to Buddhism, because that is another strand in my life. There's this combination of this subtlety of mind, thinking about the big things, chewing on who we are, why we're here and what are we doing, seeing the joy and the heartbreak as well, being able to hold the two disparate things in the mind "without any irritable reach after fact and reason." This negative capability. And being able soar with it and inspire people to try to just not imitate that but to feel that, feel some human possibility and potential. That we still have our larynx, we still have our minds and we still have our consciousness. We still have this gift to make things with words and images and get outside these preordained tropes and ways of thinking and the master narratives–what's handed to us. That we can think for ourselves and we can awaken the world to a greater consciousness. They were doing that. And here's Kerouac looking at the fellaheen worlds. Looking at these other cultures. Welcoming it, curious, Really stepping outside his own limited, whatever that narrow world was. It's amazing to think we can do it. We can have that same kind of trajectory of mind.

JACOBSEN: What's the best of the Beat legacy?

AW: Adhesiveness, candor, curiosity, travel. The sense of traveling this continent, also other continents. The friendship. That is so amazing to me; I would say a non-competitive friendship. Yes, they had their squabbles and love affairs and emotional differences and certainly political differences as Allen did with Jack during the Vietnam War. This idea that all the beats are wildly liberal and progressive is ridiculous. You have people thinking for themselves and having certain affinities because of their upbringing and who their family are, their own people who were close to them who fought in these wars and so on. It's complicated. But they had that ability to continue the conversation.

Allen's loyalty to his friends was extraordinary. And as he was dying he was calling people: "What can I do for you before I die? Do you need money? What can I do?" My last bedside conversation in the hospital just a few weeks before he died was 'please take care of so and so. And the legacy of the Kerouac school. We've got thousands of hours of Allen's teaching and William and panels and colloquia. We have the archive and some of these cultural icons are still with us. Lawrence Ferlinghetti is still with us. Diane DiPrima is still with us. Gary Snyder is still with us. For me the richness of that vision, all these things I mentioned but also the diversity in the discourse of the actual writing, the interest in Buddhism, the interests in jazz, Black culture, other cultures, whether Morocco or Mexico. Its expansive, it's an expansive poetics;

it’s an expansive gift. I mean as a younger person you can come in through many, many gateways. It’s like some huge Mandela. You can enter into this and get refreshed. And It’s an antithesis to this war culture, this death culture, this suicide of, you know, Oh, don’t get me started.

JACOBSEN: What stands out among your own road trips?

WALDMAN: I remember being caught in this earthquake in Mexico City and having a sense of people coming before me., of being part of this lineage. I felt similarly when I went to India and South America. Allen had been there in the 60s and I was able to meet with people he had known. I think there also was a sense of serendipity. What’s coming up? You know it’s very different if you’re in your own car. If you are hitchhiking then you never know want you might encounter. But I remember a very kindly fellow. I was traveling with a friend. We were at the Alamo in Texas and we’re exhausted and hadn’t really eaten. He had an extra room; I don’t know that I’d do that today. At the time it seemed safe and interesting.

JACOBSEN: As a woman on the road did you feel in peril?

I was not ever hitchhiking alone. I’ve done solo train trips but I’ve never driven myself alone. So it’s always been with others. It was a little harder when I first went to Egypt when I was 18 years old and being a white woman with a knapsack and in blue jeans. But again I was part of the rucksack revolution there was some grace there. You could put it that way. And confidence as well because I thought of myself as a poet. That was part of it. I was going for that, to have experiences to make the work.

JACOBSEN: How does the rucksack revolution look to you now?

WALDMAN: These rucksacks are very expensive and there’s so much gear involved. I think anything that gets people outside–I’m a big supporter of public parks and public spaces. I get very upset when money is being cut and people can’t visit the Grand Canyon. Also I’m concerned about the overuse of these spectacular places. And there’s no real wilderness left and so there’s a heartbreak there. You can go anywhere and be rescued through your cell phone and have some helicopter drop down. It’s very different. We’re really connected up here. Some people chose not to do that. There’s a lot of potential for disaster. Again the radical intervention of the web. It just shifts the mind, shifts the frequency but also you can make links. Any technology is just a skillful means and it’s how you use it. How are you using it? You can push a button and bring down a whole rain forest in South America; you can push another button and do something more creative. So it’s not the technology itself. So I don’t demonize the downside. As we’ve seen in Egypt and Tahrir square and other recent event, the adhesiveness through these kinds of communication is extraordinary. Interesting times we live in.

JACOBSEN: Burroughs warned Kerouac against California Buddhists – a certain kind of Buddhist. “There are no sidelines, like it or not you are part of the human endeavor.“ Your response?

WALDMAN: That was a statement probably from the mid-50s. I think William's view grew and changed. He was certainly around Allen enough and Allen was a serious Buddhist**.** William was in residence at the Jack Kerouac School at Naropa, which has this Buddhist backdrop, and many people in that community are activists, are cultural activists, political activists. And I've never myself been on the sidelines. So he saw that in me and others. That's another misconception also, that you are going up and staring at your bellybutton on a mountaintop somewhere. I wish we could. I would love to do that. The view is that you need to take it with you. (Laughs).

It's interesting. When William finally did a Buddhist retreat under Buddhist auspices. You're not supposed to take along all the paraphernalia of your work, your typewriter, your novels you want to read, other texts or research books. He protested that. He said, 'What if a great idea comes to me during the retreat and I let it go?' So he took his notebook and writing utensils and wrote something called the Retreat Diaries that was published. I find that tension sometimes with younger students who are inspired by the vision of the beats and show up and are also are curious about Buddhism. There seems to be a disjunct there. How can you work on letting your thoughts go and getting synchronized into the moment and questioning your wild imagination. But I say just think of all the great Japanese and Chinese poets and scholars who were also meditators.

I mean, yes. There's a kind of training, when you are sitting in a session in the Japanese tradition or any of the Buddhist traditions, taking your lotus posture or whatever it is. That's what you're doing. You're sitting there following your thoughts, considering the nature of your mind, and how things arise. Where do they come from and where do they go. And you let go and you try to just get synchronized into the present. You're not sitting there with your computer necessarily. There's a time and place for it all. I think people get it, start to get it. Also it helps, I think, with the problem of identity and ambition. If you can integrate your life to have a kind of meditative practice that is considering others. We pride ourselves at Natrona – I mean, pride {ironically] – on developing a noncompetitive community. That's very important. The values that can come from that kind of meditative work combined with the creative work you do, combined with your activism, can come together.

JACOBSEN: The women were slighted., at least in the beginning, weren't they?

WALDMAN: They were not given the transmission. So when the guys are talking about what they read last night, what excited them in Spengler or Count Korzybski's notebook on semantics. You know sharing their insights and soon. The women were not getting those transmissions. They were kept out of that conversation. And you had a fight to get in it. Certainly Diane did and Joanne Kyger who was married to Gary Snyder. Finally I think both Allen and Gary in later years were able to finally see Joanne's work.

I think I was very lucky with Allen because there was some affinity that seemed quite organic and I had his ear, and he saw that we were on a similar path with our Buddhist studies and with Naropa and so on. He was almost a generation above. He could be a kind of mentor and a

guide. And certainly traveling with him and performing with him and that sort of thing and then creating this school with him. I was watching him up close and there was complete egalitarian give and take. So I have no complaints there.

I think again it's that period of the 50s and the 60s. I felt it even as a 20 year old at Saint Marks. I had to hold my ground. The first night I met William. In the early 70s. He had come from England. I was sitting next to him at a cocktail party. I think "The Job" had just come out and the interview where he talks about children being born out of men's assholes and we don't need women. I remember that sort of conversation. There was some part of me feeling very intimidated but also I felt I could hold my ground and I was curious. So it took this added chutzpah in some of these early encounters. But then especially at Boulder which was kind of spacious environment, and a project that we were creating for ourselves. We weren't working for the man. It wasn't some institution with a heavy infrastructure that was controlling our imagination. Things could relax . Then more and more women were coming in. I was bringing more women writers into the arena. There were more women students. The fact that I was teaching there. Diane Di Prima, Joanne Kyger and Barbara Guest were part of the vision**.** And so these things can change. I think it was a relief for Allen to let go a little bit of that. I think I still had to correct him at times when he called women girls. I'd say. Allen please, it's not politically correct. (laughing).

JACOBSEN Is the road over?

WALDMAN: I don't think it is as a trope or as something in our psyches. There's very little wilderness out there but there is wild mind, and the Wild mind that actually, as Gary Snyder says, wants to take care of things. There's an elegant quality to the wild mind. It might be that everything is in museums, that everything is in books that we have to read on kindles or online. The sacred stuff will be there but it 's more codified and it will not be so easy. Maybe we'll have to go to outer space. That was crazy Leary's view at the end, and William's view to some extent. We're here to disappear. We're also here to get off the planet. This is a sinking ship. I'm curious about other universes, and nonhuman elementals. For me it's still a very lively ethos. It's a kind of practice. It's an ethos that is very sustaining.

Modernism Revisited: Artistic Works, Academic Disciplines, Divided Minds

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"If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in darkness, cold, and silence… Life knows us not and we do not know life—we don't know even our own thoughts. Half the words we use have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore; thoughts vanish; words, once pronounced, die; and the memory of yesterday is as shadowy as the hope of tomorrow."

– Joseph Conrad, 1897

Dada aimed to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order… Dada is senseless like nature.

– Jean Arp, 1948

Of all the modernist schools and movements, Dada most deserves the coveted encomium, "most radical." How typically provocative to proclaim an intention to "recover the natural." It was modernist heresy to challenge the self-sufficiency of art, its independence from nature. But the first impression is immediately undermined and a modernist article of faith restored; for what Dada was out to "recover" was a nature that was senseless and disordered, a modernist nature, seething with aimless forces and quantum uncertainties.

John Locke and Adam Smith had God's design of nature to guide them, to restrain them, when they imagined constituting governments and political economies. Hegel, Spencer and Comte could no longer rely on a Deistic or orthodox Creator, but history for them was still going in *some* direction, however painfully. They felt supported by a *natural* process of *social* evolution—an essential continuity retained. Nietzsche's announcement of God's death stood apart from the chorus of 19th century atheistic proclamations because he wasn't just talking about religious faith. Nietzsche was saying that there was nothing for humanity to turn to for guidance—not natural law, not historical progress, *nothing.*

Coming to terms with that message distinguishes the modernist moment from modernity in general. Whatever designs might give significant form to human life had now to be conceived by human beings. Nature and history supplied the matter (instincts, bodies, resources, environments) and that matter imposed limits on what forms were feasible—true, adaptive, functional, even beautiful. But all meaning and value would derive from modern subjects, now alone once again, with no external support, as they had been originally in the *cogito* moment. Think of the tone in Weber and Freud, the stoic willingness to face up to irredeemable loss and

make the best of it. Recall the ferocious absolutism of 20th century totalitarian regimes. These represent opposing but characteristic moods and both were responses to a condition of abandonment and a consequent responsibility for all forms of human practice—including academic disciplines, to be secured now by rigorous definition of their objects of study and methods of approach.

In *After Babel* (1975), George Steiner builds his landmark account of modernism around the concept of "the lacking word." It marks the "principle division in the history of Western literature," he declares, and its irruption "occurs between the early 1870s and the turn of the century. It divides a literature essentially housed in language from one for which language has become a prison." He adds in a footnote, by way of caveat, that "the whole question of the etiology and the timing of the language crisis in Western culture remains extremely involved and only partly understood" (176 – 177).

But modern subjectivity itself was also, and more fundamentally, at issue during that period. The "lacking word" was a symptom of a larger crisis for all forms of representation and depiction—which ultimately means for modern consciousness in a world that could no longer be comprehended by a self that no longer knew its own mind. Can it be a coincidence that literature and art turned to experimental reflexivity at the moment when the modern unconscious was admitted to existence? A commitment to interpreting subjectivity phenomenologically, as being-in-the-world, invites this question: what in the world of the late 19th century corresponded to this crisis of representation and to apprehensions of an unconscious at the core of the *cogito?*

It is important to recall just how *prima facie* radical an idea "the unconscious" was. If Descartes or Locke or Thomas Jefferson had been told that they were possessed of thoughts they weren't thinking and feelings they weren't feeling, they would have rejected the idea as self-contradictory, like "round square." They took for granted Derrida's "transparency of self-presence." That is why the idea of an unconscious, especially as deployed by Nietzsche and Freud, seemed to mark the beginning of the end of the Cartesian/bourgeois subject—even as it spurred that subject to heroic labors in its own defense.

So what in the world corresponds to an unconscious mind within? Could the beginning of an answer be this simple: sheer complexity, sheer volume, sheer speed—a crossing of some quantitative threshold in the conditions of life in refashioned cities transformed by technologies and teeming with crowds of strangers? Was "the unconscious" a name for being in a world that had lost its worldhood?[1] Did the modern mind lose its unity and transparency because the impossibility of comprehending the world became obvious?[2] Is the modernist retreat to "the work"—and to the psyche—an escape from that incomprehensibility? Did the sheer presence of so many engines, grunting and pumping and shoving, so many vehicles passing, departing, arriving, so many transmitting wires crossing and re-crossing between so many mouths and ears, so many agencies, offices, and bureaus forming and collapsing and meeting and merging and ordering and reordering and urging so many people to do and wear and say this or that or the other thing, so many roads and bridges and tunnels and lights and signs and

memoranda and directives announcing and showing and cautioning and directing and enticing and reporting on unimaginably many other such circumstances—did this vast and aimless jumble of embodied intentions constitute the decadent heir to Barzun's argument of the device?[3] Had the modern project of progress apparently been realized as a mass Dada exhibit that *showed* us we could not be God—not in the real world, anyway?[4]

For what would God amount to, in a modernist register, if not the worldhood of the world—the *sense* of the world, as Wittgenstein put it in "The Lecture on Ethics"? And what was lost in the vast pile-up that history had become, if not just that sense?

If we look beyond the arts and think of "modernism" as a crisis for the mode of existence of modern subjectivity more generally, certain features emerge as characteristic of cultural developments on many fronts:

1) Most fundamentally, the absence of meaning in nature and direction in history become manifest, as just outlined. Responsibility for authorship of meaning and direction falls to humanity. A particular kind of toughness and/or vulnerability emerges among those who take up that task—and an unprecedented elitism.

2) Diachrony lapses accordingly, and synchrony rises. Depths of origin in evolutionist history are replaced by present, often elusive, psychological origins and depths (hence, "depth psychology") and by various functionalisms. The ancient and exotic become a storehouse of resources for contemporary intellectual and artistic projects.

3) Abstraction in various forms becomes a principle strategy for gaining authority—with "abstraction" understood most generally as a gesture that separates the work from the historical world. For example: "abstract art" *per se,* of course; but also the distinction between function and origin in the social sciences; *langue* and *parole* in linguistics.

5) The *cogito* divides—with the emergence of the unconscious, first of all, but in a range of other ways, improvised in various contexts, to suit various temperaments and undertakings. The "abstraction" from the world that is the modernist work corresponds to an "abstracted" subjectivity, the modernist creator. In the words of Marcel Proust, "A book is the product of a different self from the one we manifest in our habits, in society…" (1998: viii (original 1913)).

6) Universals of some sort—however elusive, however defined—remain vital to the projects of these creators.

7) The distinction between fact and value is drawn, complement to the collapse of evolutionist narratives.

Artistic Self-Definition

…. if a writer were a free man and not a slave, if he could write what he chose, not what he must, if he could base his work upon his own feeling and not upon convention, there would be

no plot, no comedy, no tragedy, no love interest or catastrophe in the accepted style… Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semitransparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit?

– Virginia Woolf, 1925

An immense pride was buoying us up, because we felt ourselves standing quite alone at that hour, like proud beacons or sentinels facing an army of enemy stars encamped in their celestial bivouacs… We are on the last promontory of the centuries! Why should we look back when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? …Museums, cemeteries! Truly identical, a sinister juxtaposition…

– Filippo Marinetti, 1909

It would be difficult to find more sharply contrasting exemplars of the modernist creator than Woolf and Marinetti. Yet both saw themselves standing against a world, a universe, that was meaningless, even hostile. Marinetti's "enemy stars" are delicately complemented by Woolf's description of an empty summer house, as spring arrives, and on the patio "…the garden urns, casually filled with wind-blown plants, were gay as ever. Violets came and daffodils. But the stillness and the brightness of the day were as strange as the chaos and tumult of the night, with the trees standing there, and the flowers standing there, looking before them, looking up, yet beholding nothing, eyeless, and so terrible." [5]

Both Marinetti and Woolf felt oppressed by conventions of a dead past that wouldn't let go, so deeply embedded had they become in mass culture. Alienated from that culture, and essentially alone—especially Woolf in her Cartesian envelope—each was nevertheless sustained by a small group of the like-minded, an elite few who were profound enough to understand their senseless situation and brave enough to produce the works that provided what redemption could be had. Boundless achievement seemed possible to Marinetti's gang of proto-fascist visionaries in the years before the Great War. More ephemeral epiphanies were all that Bloomsbury's extraordinary souls could expect, and the fact that they could settle for that testified to their exalted standing in their own minds. As with Marinetti and Woolf personally, so the contrast between the ethos of Bohemian refinement at Bloomsbury and the hothouse atmosphere of the Futurist school could hardly be more striking. And yet we recognize, at the deepest level, a common form of life. Modern subjectivity, in *extremis*, determined to create.

Abandoned by God, adrift in an aimless natural history, the modernists found various consolations in art. There—on the canvas, on the page, in concrete and steel—there could be a world with meaning and value. For this work, at least, was entirely authored. And the authors were not merely producing the works; they were defining the *kinds* of works that were worth producing in the first place. Hence, the torrent of manifestoes, the multiplication of secessions

and movements, founded one day, falling apart the next—and then founded once more, always in pursuit of that ineffable something that lingered just over the horizon of what had already been done. Hence, the obsession with the purity of the work, its self-sufficiency, its place apart. The true artist, the modernist artist, was bold enough to reject a world that no longer made sense, to decline to represent it, first of all—but to repudiate all traditional themes and methods and attitudes as well. While philistines wallowed in the kitsch of history, the modernist artist refused to look back, except in search of images and allusions appropriate to present purposes. The rubble of time, like the chaos of city life, was grist for the mill. Hence, above all, the cult of originality—the mad desire to be a genius, to *prove* oneself a genius through an authored work that transcended the given.

That is why modernist art was such an elitist undertaking. What else could be expected of an enterprise obliged to supply a lack bequeathed by a departed God?

An assembly of reminders follows. Staples of the voluminous literature on modernism, they point to a manifestation of the modernist way of being in the world, a common "form of life" in Wittgenstein's sense of the term.

We have already heard from Proust: "A book is the product of a different self from the one we manifest in our habits, in society…"

Then, these reflections:

"Madame Bovary is based on no actual occurrence… it contains none of my feelings and no details from my own life. The illusion of truth (if there is one) comes, on the contrary from the book's impersonality.... An artist must be in his work like God in creation, invisible and all-powerful…"

– Gustave Flaubert, letter to Mlle Leroyer de Chantepie (1857)

"The personality of the artist passes into the narration itself, flowing round and round the persons and the action like a vital sea…. The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails…

– James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1914)

"The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality… It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting… the business of the poet is not to find new emotions, but to use the ordinary ones and, in working them up into poetry, to express feelings which are not in actual emotions at all."

– T.S. Eliot "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1922)

Then this, from a painter:

"Shapeless emotions such as fear, joy, grief, etc… will no longer greatly attract the artist. He will endeavor to awake subtler emotions, as yet unnamed… his work will give to those observers capable of feeling them lofty emotions beyond the reach of words."

– Wassily Kandinsky Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1914)

Examples could be multiplied indefinitely. This particular experience of what Nietzsche described more strenuously as "self-splitting" was common to most, if not all, the modernist creators. It shaped their self-understanding, even though they lived and worked in different times and places, across all the arts and, as we shall see, the academic disciplines as well. Whence this experience of a division between the everyday person and the mysterious, almost anonymous, agent of creation within? What in the world of artistic production specifically—given the overall context just described—can account for this?

Consider the question in light of the founding principle of the New Criticism formulated by Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy." They distinguished between "internal evidence"—which meant the words on the page—and "external evidence," which meant anything outside the work itself, including especially the author's personal feelings and intentions. The upshot was that "the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art" (1954: 3; original 1946)

Spontaneous reports of internal division from modernist creators found doctrinal expression in this central tenet of the New Criticism. An explanation suggests itself: these artistic enterprises had the effect of splitting a creator's sense of self because that division of subjectivity corresponded to the "abstraction" of the work from the world, from the uncontainable flow of lived experience in the historical flux. That correspondence is phenomenologically predictable; it follows from the nature of intentionality.[6] The more separated, the more unprecedented, the more exalted and purified—in many cases, the more literally abstract—the art object, the more the creator felt as if the everyday person who ate and drank and chatted, the person "fallen" into Heidegger's "average everydayness"—*that* person couldn't possibly be the source of an entity so radically distinct from the plane of ordinary existence? [7]

It is worth recalling what "sur-realism" literally means. Breton and his cohort, tapping into the depths of what they took to be the Freudian unconscious, the other-self from whence their works surged forth, fully intended the imputation of superiority.[8] A sense of privileged access founded the elitism, the contempt for mass society and sensibility that was so typical of the great modernists.[9] *In Search of Lost Time* was sur-real in this enlarged sense, not dogmatically, of course—but just as improbably, and even more strikingly when one considers the characteristic Proustian effect, the "heightened" experience of experience, the transcendence of experience by itself, as it were—thanks to a rendering more faithful than the

original.

And—once again, and at a further degree of removal—modernist creators were not only producing sur-worldly works from sur-selfly sources, but were also *defining* art, defining what sort of thing a poem or a painting or a building *ought* to be—creating values, in accordance with Nietzsche's challenge to the "midnightly men" of the future for whom he had written.[10] Parameters of the kind that traditions took decades or centuries to establish were being determined by a few friends sitting around a café table, organizing the Vienna secession or the publication of *BLAST.*

From this perspective, it becomes apparent why there was so intense a focus on the elements of art, on the actual media, as opposed to whatever art might be "about," if anything, besides itself. Steiner's "lacking word" belongs here. The sense that conventional means were inadequate was indeed most pronounced in writers. But that must be understood as part of a larger conversation about the exhaustion of traditional means and techniques across the board—and about all the bold attempts to start again, from scratch, from the level of the most elemental materials. When Arnold Schoenberg was "loosening the shackles of obsolete aesthetics" he was, at the same time, asking himself "for the theoretical foundation of the freedom of my style" which he would identify musically with mathematical rigor ("My Evolution," original 1949). [11] This gesture of self-definition, of complete construction in explicit defiance of the chaos of history, is modernist "foundationalism." It will be the principle target of the counter-gesture of deconstruction when it comes.

The fact that language is so promiscuous a medium, so constantly and irretrievably woven into the fabric of mass society, made it that much harder to reconceive and renew. There was a near limit to what one could get out of arranging words in new ways on the page, after the manner of Mallarme's *Un Coup de Dés*. The same goes for experiments with automatic writing and neologisms and all the rest. At the end of the day, there were just those 20 odd letters to work with, and just so many words—all of them shamelessly available to journalists and bureaucrats as well as the literary vanguard. So it was inevitable that writers, reaching for glimpses of Baudelaire's eternal in the transitory flux of ordinary life, would feel more frustrated with their depreciated medium then creators in the plastic arts. Here are two representative expressions of that frustration:

"…once again words desert me… something entirely unnamed, even barely nameable, at such moments, reveals itself to me… A pitcher, a harrow abandoned in a field, a dog in the sun, a neglected cemetery, a cripple, a peasant's hut—all these can become the vessel of my revelation… can suddenly, at any moment (which I am utterly powerless to evoke), assume for me a character so exalted and moving that words seem too poor to describe it."

– Hugo von Hoffmannstahl, The Chandos Letter, 1902

"More and more my language appears to me like a veil which one has to tear apart in order to get to those things (or the nothingness) lying behind it. Grammar and style! To me they seem to

have become as irrelevant as a Biedermeier bathing suit or the imperturbability of a gentleman. A mask. It is to be hoped the time will come, thank God, in some circles it already has, when language is best used where it is most efficiently abused."

– Samuel Beckett, letter to Axel Kaun, 1937

As the depictive imperative lost its grip, the possibilities for innovation in painting, sculpture, the performing arts, even architecture would seem to be almost unlimited by comparison. And those innovations were evident at first glance. The "shock of the new" depended upon immediacy—as does any genuine shock—and that was provided by Picasso's *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon,* Duchamp's *Fountain* and Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring.* So modernist painters did not typically complain about the "lacking color," nor did sculptors feel betrayed by their material just because, say, bronze was also used in hackneyed statues of Great Men on Horseback in the public square. The sheer appearance of Brancusi's *Princess X* overcame the happenstance of "bronze" at a stroke, and with strikingly immediate effect that no amount of wordplay in *Finnegan's Wake* could match.

So the difference in attitude between writers and artists was essentially an accident, a byproduct of the intrinsic characteristics of the media and their customary social deployments. The common ground shows itself with the realization that all these modernist creators were intensely and self-consciously concerned with artistic means *per se.* And, whatever the medium, that concern tended to intensify as a function of artistic aspiration—the more ambitious the project, the more exalted and transcendent the aim, the more concerned with the how-of-it creators became.

Beyond that, it seems impossible to generalize much further. The sheer experimental variety is astonishing and the accompanying accounts—the treatises and tracts—almost as various. But whether, like Le Corbusier, Malevich or Mondrian, you had identified (often on grounds of psycho-physics) a list of axiomatic aesthetic elements (the cone, the pyramid, the cube…) or, like Kandinsky and de Chirico you were intent on ineffables (or both), the characteristic rhetorical gesture—the tone, the style—is unmistakable: ultimate matters had been consigned to your care and an aspect of your being—a part of you—had risen to the occasion. It is indeed, as so many have remarked, next to impossible to define "modernism" if the procedure is to generalize about the contents of works. It was a form of subjectivity in a form of life that constituted the phenomenon.

Academic Self-Definition

… To take a practical political stand is one thing, and to analyze political structures and party positions is another. When speaking in a political meeting about democracy, one does not hide one's personal standpoint; indeed to come out clearly and take a stand is one's damned duty. The words one uses in such a meeting are not means of scientific analysis but means of canvassing votes and winning over others…. It would be an outrage, however, to use words in this fashion in a lecture or in the lecture-room.

– Max Weber, "Science as a Vocation" (1918)

In this famous lecture, Weber was concerned with one of the most significant of modernist abstractions—the one separating the realm of "value judgments" from "judgments of fact." The social scientist, like anyone else, must live on the level of incorrigibly messy everyday experience. At that level, all the determining factors are simultaneously at play, including the personal interests and political commitments of the scientist. But the disciplined study of a well-defined object depends upon its abstraction from that messy actuality—and when the object is society/politics, the most urgent of all the disciplinary tasks must be to neutralize the "values" that the man the scientist happens to be cannot help but have. The establishment of the fact/value distinction enacted a split in the consciousness of founders of the modernist human sciences that parallels the division between the artist as creator and the artist's personal biography. The correlations of Husserlian intentionality were operating here as well.

The announced aim, of course, was to cleanse these sciences of bias and—finally!—to study human beings objectively as preceding generations of moderns had somehow failed to do, in spite of all their efforts.[12] That long record of failure to live up to the example of natural science accounts for the tone of Weber's lecture—alternately steely (towards those committed to objectivity) and contemptuous (of those who lacked the right stuff). It was as if he were rehearsing the extremes of personal discipline that the purity of his academic discipline had required of him. As indeed he was.

Emil Durkheim had established essentially the same distinction some 20 years earlier when he built his *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) around the scrupulously defined entity *his* science required—the "social fact." Weber—the German, heir to Hegel and to Protestantism—stressed subjective self-discipline. Durkheim—the Frenchman, heir to Comte and to Catholicism—stressed the object pole. In his formulation, the key to objectivity lay in treating the social fact as a "thing," with the implications for value neutrality and personal disengagement understood.

Meanwhile, as if in telepathic conference with Durkheim and Weber, G.E. Moore was standing by, ready to build *his* science out of what *their* science had banished. The "science of ethics" outlined in *Principia Ethica* (1903),would depend upon a uniquely non-natural and indefinable predicate, "good," the name of a simple quality that Moore's uniquely refined intuition had enabled him to abstract from the welter of natural causes and historical events that make up daily life. As a linguistic philosopher, Moore was even able to identify a "naturalistic fallacy" in the faulty logic of his 19th century predecessors and assign it to patrol, as it were, the boundaries of his well-defined domain—his work—to protect it from contamination.

No surprise, then, to discover that de Saussure, founding *his* science of linguistics in *Course in General Linguistics* (1915), decided upon the abstraction of "grammar"—of *langue,* as opposed to *parole* (actual speech)—from the myriad overlapping domains that determined linguistic phenomena in their entirety.

But consider also what might be called the rhetorical structure of these foundational works.

The first chapter of *Rules of the Sociological Method* is called "What is a Social Fact?" The first chapter of *Principia Ethica* is called "The Subject Matter of Ethics." The *third* chapter of *Course in General Linguistics* is called "The Object of Linguistics," but the titles of the first and second chapter make that a difference without a distinction.[13] The first chapter (5 pages) is called "A Glance at the History of Linguistics" (no more than a glance was called for) and the second chapter (2 pages) is called "Subject Matter and Scope of Linguistics; its Relations with the Other Sciences." That second chapter amounts to a very brisk house-cleaning operation in which old-fashioned diachronic studies of language evolution are allowed to retain a place under the broad umbrella of "linguistics" understood as the study of "all manifestations of human speech." The relevance of other sciences—such as sociology and physiology—is admitted under that broad definition as well. But it is only when we get to "The Object of Linguistics" that a real *science* of language is at issue; *langue,* the grammar of linguistic signs, makes that possible thanks to the abstraction of this "well-defined object" from "the heterogeneous mass of speech facts" (Saussure 1966: 14 (original 1915)).

All three books were short. They were not manifestoes exactly, but they had some of the same didactic qualities. They presented parameters within which research was supposed to unfold over the years to come. They did no more than sample empirical work, by way of illustration, for these treatises were quite consciously intended as founding documents—intended as "origins" of a new kind, of a synchronic and logical kind. While they might sample the work of benighted predecessors, there was little sense of obligation, no real legacy to build on.[14] The most salient feature is the overall sense of authorial entitlement conveyed. [15] In that form of life, the modernist form of life, one had a right to say things like: "What, then, is good? How is good to be defined?" or "In setting up the science of language within the overall study of speech, I have outlined the whole of linguistics."

Imagine someone making such pronouncements today.

A sample, then, of well-defended compartments in the modernist academy, of disciplines as analogues of artworks. For all these academic instances of abstraction—framing, defining, founding—"well-defended" is not too strong a term. In fact, the rhetoric these creators deployed around their creations often relied on tropes of purity and contamination and that accounts for the ferocious debates that broke out over ensuing decades over whether or not some issue at hand qualified as "philosophy" or "anthropology" or whatever. And, of course, the stakes would be that much higher when the whole idea of—the very institutions of—the modernist disciplines came under attack.[16]

An Archetype of Modernism in Context

Hegel once defined philosophy as an age grasped in thought. If the modernist moment can indeed be characterized in terms of a divided *cogito's* relation to its abstracted work, Hegel

could not ask for more striking confirmation than Husserl's phenomenological reduction, the *epoche:*

Therefore, if we think of a phenomenology developed as an intuitively apriori science purely according to eidetic method, all its eidetic researches are nothing else but uncoverings of the all-embracing eidos [essence], transcendental ego as such, which comprises all the possibility-variants of the de facto ego and this ego itself qua possibility.

– Husserl, Cartesian Meditations (1929): 71

This was the ultimate abstraction. The entire life experience of the philosopher, as personal-historical (*de facto*) ego, was to be "detached" from itself, as it were, and treated as the "object" of philosophical inquiry. An anonymous creator-self necessarily emerged in tandem with that abstraction in the form of Husserl's transcendental ego in whose essence-grasping eyes the *de facto* ego of the philosopher would now appear as one (actualized) possibility among an indefinite number of possible ego/worlds accessed through "eidetic variation" in philosophic fantasy.

Notice that the transcendental ego did not merely grasp essences philosophically it *constituted* those essences in the world through intentionality. Could there be a more ambitious expression of the modernist aspiration to author meaning? In the context of this account, Husserl looks like the modern mind's last desperate lunge toward comprehension of an incomprehensible world. He feels inevitable.

But Husserl was representative of the modernist moment as it has been described here in other ways as well. They now appear as necessary adjuncts of the primordial founding act:

He was obsessed with identifying the foundational elements of his enterprise, the essences that would distinguish "regions" of conscious experience and guarantee their stability and universality.

He was as obsessed with method and definition, perpetually tinkering with purifying boundaries that would distinguish philosophy from other enterprises, especially that dreaded interloper—psychology.

Husserl also called the bracketing gesture that abstracts the transcendental ego from the personal-historical ego "abstention" (as in abstaining from judgment and belief about what presents itself phenomenally). Under that rubric, it shows itself as a more comprehensive version of the fact/value distinction in the social sciences.

Notes

[1] "Worldhood" is the term Heidegger used to evoke the ultimate "there" of *Da-sein*, the

environing horizon of all actualities and possibilities that constitutes *Dasein* as being-in-the-world.

[2] This passage focuses on everyday lived experience but, for the modernist elite, the impact of developments in the sciences—especially in relativity theory and quantum mechanics—reinforced the basic message. The intuitively accessible Newtonian cosmos, a monument to modern rationality, was no more.

[3] Jacques Barzun, speaking of modernity in general, once remarked that the fact that "the appliance works" was "the great argument that has redirected the western mind" (1964:19).

[4] Marx and Comte are only the best known of the many 19th century thinkers who interpreted humanity's remaking of the natural and social worlds as a displacement of the deity.

[5] From "Time Passes" in *To The Lighthouse* (1927)

[6] In Husserl's terms, they are *noetic* and *noematic* counterparts.

[7] Flaubert famously quipped, "Madame Bovary, c'est moi."—which might seem inconsistent with the claims to indifferent objectivity made to Mlle de Chantepie. But Flaubert was speaking of himself as a person with a biography in this case, of himself as creator of a work in the other. Joyce was making the same distinction. Personal biography provided *material* for the creator's work, resources like any other.

[8] Contemporary usage—"it was surreal!"—carries no such connotation. High Culture brought low under the regime of postmodernity.

[9] Said Ezra Pound, writing from Stone Cottage, where he was at work with Yeats: "…to explain a symbol is to destroy its ability to embody the divine or permanent world; knowledge that could be understood by the uninitiated masses would not be knowledge at all" (in Longenbach 1988: 91)

[10] Says Rudolf Safranski: "All of the significant currents in the early 20th century, from symbolism to art nouveau and expressionism, were inspired by Nietzsche. Every self-respecting member of these circles had a 'Nietzsche experience.' " (2002: 323)

[11] Compare Constantin Stanislavski, creator of what came to be known as "The Method" for

actors: "..the founding of our new Moscow Art and Popular Theater was in the nature of a revolution. We protested against the customary manner of acting, against theatricality…" And that meant that "we needed a new beginning. We needed new bases and foundations…" (1924: 330, 483). Those bases and foundations were psycho-physiological and would eventually be laid out—literally, in a chart—as The Stanislavski System.

[12] And when the time came to deconstruct the modernist social sciences in the 60s and 70s it was this boundary that would be most enthusiastically transgressed.

[13] The fact that this "book" was actually assembled by students from Saussure's lectures may account for this divergence.

[14] The undisciplined Herbert Spencer, for example, was a reference point for both Durkheim and Moore, as he was also for Freud; the world that had seemed comprehensible to Spencer was being divided up into manageable parts, suitable for *really* rigorous study.

[15] And would be much on Derrida's mind when he came eventually to describe the "end of the book."

[16] Margaret Mead was my advisor at Columbia in the '70s. She had been a student of Franz Boas, a disciplinary founder of American Anthropology at the beginning of the 20th century. Only a few decades from founding to crisis, then—but in the heat of battle it felt to all concerned as if ancient testaments were threatened, for good or ill.

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Plato’s Gospel

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“I become holy by initiation. The Lord [Jesus] reveals the Mysteries. He marks the worshipper with His seal …” Clement of Alexandria, from The Protreptikos (Exhortation to the Greeks), ca 190 AD.

Here in America, Darwin is on the ropes again. After winning round after round since the Scopes “Monkey” Trial in 1925, he’s facing thoroughly revived opponents—adversaries who are taking fewer standing eight-counts and getting in a few licks of their own. In 2005, for example, 11 parents in Dover, PA who resented having their children taught Creationism (repackaged as “intelligent design”), brought suit against the school board in what has been touted as a second Monkey Trial. Dr. Ken Miller, a professor at Brown University and the author of the biology book that agreed with evolution—the book that the suing parents *wanted* their children to use—stated on the witness stand that he believes God created the universe. Considering that Dr. Miller was a witness for the *plaintiffs,* it’s a small miracle they won.

A survey conducted in 2006 by political scientist Jon D. Miller of Michigan State University showed that only 14 percent of American adults consider evolution “definitely true” while roughly a third believe it to be “absolutely false.” Out of a sampler of 34 countries, only Turkey was less accepting of Darwin’s theories, while in nations such as Denmark, Sweden, and France, better than 80 percent of the adults questioned sided with Darwin. Perhaps more disquieting is the fact that 20 years ago about seven percent of U.S. adults were uncertain about evolution; that number has since tripled.

The uniquely American aspect to this resurgence of religious fundamentalism is reiterated by a chart showing the relationship of wealth to religious belief republished in the June 2, 2010 opinion section of by the *New York Times* (“Why Is America Religious?”), which demonstrates that the “the wealthier a country is, the less important religion is to that country. The one exception: The United States.” As *USA Today* pointed out (June 3, 2004), the “religion gap” is the “leading edge of the ‘culture war’ that has polarized American politics, reshaped the coalitions that make up the Democratic and Republican parties and influenced the appeals their presidential candidates are making.”

A somewhat medieval mentality, it seems, still holds significant sway in the world’s most powerful nation. If ‘medieval’ seems too close to hyperbole, recall Pat Robertson’s remark about Haiti and its “pact with the Devil” in the wake of the earthquake that hit the island. If you’re inclined to dismiss Robertson as a marginal political player, consider Ronald Reagan, who openly wondered whether Armageddon—in the form of a nuclear showdown with the Soviet Union—was going to occur on his watch. Or take the Bush White House, which in 2003 had to deny claims trumpeted by a BBC television program that Bush bragged to Palestine’s

President Abbas, “God told me to strike at al-Qaeda and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did …” When it comes to credibility, Abbas and the BBC are probably safer bets. We are dealing after all with a man who, in his nationally televised debate with John Kerry, said, “I pray over my decisions,” including the one to invade Iraq.

Reagan and Bush (a millennialist more by implication than admission) are not alone. According to the 2008 documentary *Waiting for Armageddon*, 20 million Americans believe we are now living in the End Times. Among these End-Timers is Sarah Palin, one-time Republican darling, as well as Michele Bachmann and Republican frontrunner, Rick Perry, both of whom, according to Matt Taibbi of *Rolling Stone*, “have dabbled seriously in Left Behind belief systems, under which the righteous will be whisked away to heaven just before God comes down to Earth to kick ass and dispense justice to unbelievers via End-of-World troubles like wars and natural disasters.”[i]

The *Left Behind* series, for those unfamiliar, consists of16 volumes of pulp fiction about the Rapture authored by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. The books have sold some 70 million copies; at one time roughly one in eight Americans was reading them. “Scholars reconstructing the popular history of the first years of the 21st century … will have to grapple with the phenomenon of *Left Behind*,” writes David Gates in the May 24, 2004 issue of *Newsweek*. It should come as no surprise that, as Gates reports, “many critics of the series see a resonance between its apocalyptic scenario and the born-again President Bush’s apocalyptic rhetoric and confrontational Mideast policies.”

It was in this atmosphere of religious recidivism that I began writing *The Christ Mosaic*, a novel based on the suspicion among a number of religion scholars that the Christ of the Gospels is not a historical figure. I don’t remotely propose to prove *that* in the space of this essay; rather, I’d like to present what I hope is persuasive evidence that the Gospels are quite clearly a species of fiction—which *isn’t* necessarily a bad thing. Moreover, the author of *Mark*, at least, *never* intended his work to be understood by educated readers as literally true.

There are plenty of enigmatic passages in the Bible, but three in particular lend themselves to unraveling ulterior motives written into the Scriptures: Why is a blind man healed outside of Jericho named after one of Plato’s most famous dialogues? Why does Jesus send a multitude of demons into a herd of 2,000 pigs? And why are the first words of another blind man healed by Jesus, “I see men like trees, walking”? If these questions are answered objectively and plausibly, it becomes clear that *Mark* is both more and less than a faithful recording of events as they happened.

Any attempt to answer these questions, however, brings us to our first obstacle, and it’s nearly insurmountable: We in the 21st century really can’t imagine the Mediterranean—particularly the eastern region known as the Levant—of the first century AD. The vast majority of us today don’t speak Aramaic (the supposed language of Jesus) or ancient Hebrew; we haven’t read the Gospels in the Koine Greek in which they were written. Moreover, most of us have no concept whatsoever of the religious milieu in which the Gospel writers lived, and even scholars can

reconstruct it only vaguely for us. In short we've lost the calibrations on our compass.

So before getting to our questions, we need an impression of the ancient Mediterranean's spiritual mindset … a brief biography of the Greco-Egyptian God Serapis is a good place to start. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, Alexander's generals divided up his empire; Ptolemy got Egypt and took Alexandria as his capital. Faced with ruling an Egyptian population and a large number of transplanted Greeks, Ptolemy needed a way to unite his subjects. Settling on worship as the most effective way to get everyone pulling in the same direction, Ptolemy created a composite god: Serapis. Serapis was the husband of the Egyptian goddess Isis, just as the Egyptian god Osiris had been. And Serapis's animal was the divine bull, Apis—as was Osiris's. (The name Serapis is a fusion of Osiris-Apis.) Whenever Serapis was depicted, however, the likeness was of a bearded, curly-haired Greek. Like Zeus, Serapis was the ruler of the gods, and like Dionysos, he was a fertility god.

Ptolemy's god was created purely out of political expediency (although as we will see, the religion Serapis presided over was not). Today, except in the case of a very small, fringe cult, this would be unthinkable—you just don't go around mixing and matching gods. In the first-century Mediterranean and in centuries previous, however, it was not only acceptable, it was *routine*. The Mystery religions, of which the cult of Serapis was one, were classic examples of this sort of syncretism. In Asia Minor the Greek goddess Artemis was grafted onto the cult of the Anatolian mother goddess Cybele and stood at the center of the Ephesian Mysteries. The Pythagorean Mysteries took the Mysteries of Osiris and replaced the Egyptian god with a Greek one—Dionysos, who evolved into Dionysos Zagreus, the divine figure worshipped in numerous Mystery cults. His dual name reflected that fact he was also a composite of two gods, but the minor figure of Zagreus (who is slain and resurrected) was almost completely assimilated by the more prominent god.

This syncretism worked on a local level as well; a city-state often chose a god who already had a strong following to head up their Mysteries. The Eleusian Mysteries near Athens, for example, venerated Demeter and her daughter Kore (also known as Persephone, who was the mother of Zagreus). Using a familiar god as the front man—or woman—was a simple but effective way of gaining converts to an alien religion or to a newly created one. (We can see a vestige of this practice in car interiors: the plastic Jesus sometimes glued to the dash often has blond hair, fair skin, and blue eyes, which, had Jesus lived, is hardly likely.)

Ptolemy's strategy worked brilliantly. Serapis became enormously popular, and the cult spread well beyond Egypt; the Serapeum in Alexandria, destroyed by fanatical Christians in 385 AD, is thought to have been one of the finest edifices of the ancient world.

It's interesting to note that when Christianity first took hold in Egypt, early church members venerated Serapis and Jesus equally.[ii] Once again, we need to bear in mind that syncretism was the way of the ancient world, and practices unimaginable today were common enough when Christianity was in its infancy.

So far the Mysteries have merely been mentioned, but we really can't begin to understand the ancient Mediterranean without at least a basic understanding of these Cults. Sir James Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*, dug up the oldest of Christianity's roots—the worship of a god who dies only to be resurrected—and followed it to its elemental source: the cyclical death and rebirth of plant life. It is as simple as it is ingenious: the turning of the seasons. Drawing upon examples from hundreds of cultures and peoples as divergent as African huntsmen and German peasants, Native Americans and Welsh farmers, Frazer proved fairly conclusively that a broad range of religions all reflected the death of the Earth in fall and winter and its rebirth in spring.

The Mysteries are the clearest embodiment of this truth. The high priest was the hierophant ("one who reveals sacred things"). "Secrecy," according to Walter Burkert in *Greek Religion*, "was radical" and an essential element.[iii] An initiate into the cults was called a *mystes*. The root, tied to the Greek verb *myein,* means *to close* or *to shut*. It's often conjectured this is because initiates had to keep their mouths closed about the ceremonies, but they hadn't participated in the central ceremonies yet. Perhaps a more likely explanation for "shut" to be at the root of *mystes* is that before a *mystes* become an *epopt* (a witness), their eyes were closed—spiritually speaking. Because of the secrecy clause, a great deal of information about the exact nature and practices of the Mysteries has been lost, but Burkert identifies an agrarian aspect as among the most important. Not surprisingly, Demeter (goddess of grain) and Dionysus (god of wine and fertility) were two of the most important Mystery deities.

Another key element, Burkert notes, "is the aspect of myth: mysteries are accompanied by tales—some of which may be secret *hieroi logoi*—mostly telling of suffering gods." Joseph Campbell agrees: "[T]he principle of divine life is symbolized as a divine individual (Dumuzi-Adonis-Attis-Dionysos-Christ) …"[iv] Life, in the form of the god, will suffer, die, and be reborn.

We also know that the initiation rites, purification ceremonies, and processions culminated in a final drama, the purpose of which was to bring the initiate face to face with God. Aristotle, drily detached as ever, puts it this way, "It is not necessary for the initiated to learn anything, but to receive impressions and to be put in a certain frame of mind." Plato was well acquainted with the Mysteries but, respecting their vow of silence, made comparisons to them rather than writing about them directly: "[W]e philosophers followed in the train of Zeus, others in company with other gods; and then we beheld the beatific vision and were initiated into a mystery which may be truly called most blessed …"[v] Here, raising philosophy to the status of a divine experience, he likens it to initiation into the Mysteries.

Christianity's connection to the Mysteries is no longer obscured by the centuries. Campbell, for example, citing the work of Jane Harrison, doesn't even bother to argue the issue—it's too obvious. He points out that "numerous elements" included in the heritage of "the mysteries of Demeter and the Orphics … were passed on to Christianity—most obviously in the myths and rites of the Virgin and the Mass."[vi] (Notice Campbell includes Christ in his list of Mysteries deities cited above).

The great Roman orator Cicero, who died in 43 BC, actually criticized Mystery celebrants for

taking their rites too literally: “Is anybody so mad,” he wrote, “as to believe that the food he eats is actually a god?”[vii] I mention Cicero not to detract from belief in the Eucharist, but to point out that well before Christ was born, a nearly identical rite had already been firmly established. The fact is, Cicero was no enemy of the Mysteries; far from it. But he believed in a *symbolic* interpretation of the rites, not a literal one. In *De Legibus*, (II, xiv, 36), he has nothing but praise for the Greek Mysteries, saying that through them “We have gained the understanding not only to live happily but also to die with better hope.”

Campbell believed that “whether accurate or not as to biographical detail, the moving legend of the Crucified and Risen Christ was fit to bring a new warmth, immediacy, and humanity, to the old motifs of the beloved Tammuz, Adonis, and Osiris cycles. Indeed, it was those early myths filling the atmosphere of the whole eastern Mediterranean that had furnished the ambient readiness within which the Christian legend so rapidly grew and spread.”[viii]

Campbell’s argument can be varied slightly: it wasn’t warmth and humanity Mark was after so much as a *Jewish* god at the center of a new Mysteries religion that, for all intents and purposes, Paul had set in motion. Paul’s letters are, by scholarly consent, the earliest Christian documents, which, as Campbell indicates, “were written to his converts in the busy Hellenistic market towns to which he had introduced the new faith, and in these the fundamental mythic image of the Fall by the Tree and Redemption by the Cross was already firmly defined.”

It shouldn’t come as such a surprise that Paul promulgated a Mystery religion with a Jewish dying-and-rising God at its center. He was after all a Hellenized Greek from Tarsus (a center for the Mysteries of Mithras) and preached in Antioch (famous for the Mysteries of Adonis), Ephesus (for those of Attis, the consort of Cybele/Artemis), and Corinth (Dionysos). Making Christ into a god at the center of another Mystery cult fit in perfectly with Paul’s task of converting Greeks—who was more familiar with the Mystery cults?

It is Paul who says, “Now we see in a glass dimly, but then face to face,” echoing the Mysteries’ emphasis on direct experience and virtually plagiarizing Plato, who, discussing the recollections of the soul when “she” (the soul) was in the presence of God, writes that those memories “are seen through a glass dimly.” And don’t think for a minute Paul hadn’t read Plato; he was an educated Greek who wrote in Greek, and Plato was required reading in any school of the time.

Intimate knowledge of Plato’s work applies to Mark as well, and we are now in a position to address the question of why a blind man in Mark’s gospel is named after one of Plato’s most famous dialogues. Here is *Mark* 10:46-52: “Then they came to Jericho. And as [Jesus] went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging.” First of all, note that “son of Timaeus” in the original manuscript is a translation of Bartimaeus into Greek. Mark does not do this for *any* other Jewish name; he wants to make sure his Greek readers don’t miss the point.

“And when [Bartimaeus] heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out …”

Jesus asks him what he wants, but instead of asking to be cured, he asks to "receive" his sight.

"Then Jesus said, to him, 'Go your way, your faith has made you well.' And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road."

Despite the fact that there is no Aramaic root for Timaeus, some scholars, such as those cited by Michael Patella in *Lord of the Cosmos: Mithras, Paul, And the Gospel of Mark*, still argue that a connection with Plato "seems unlikely." This is a good example of how even academicians are not accustomed to thinking of Mark as a writer who had undoubtedly read and been influenced, not just by Plato, but by any number of Greek authors.

In the Platonic dialogue, a character named Timaeus expounds the whole of Plato's cosmology, including the creation of man and the universe, and in so doing details some of the core beliefs Plato has left as his legacy—prominent among them an "eternally unchanging" realm of perfection, which Timaeus insists is the pattern for the visible universe. The cosmology outlined in *Timaeus*, Patella argues, is the reigning model of the universe in the first century Mediterranean. He doesn't have to argue too hard; it's *still* the reigning model of the universe. In spite of the findings of astronomy and physics, most people are religious and most of the religious still believe that our transitory, flawed, earthly realm is somehow situated below a perfect, wispy place called heaven. In another key part of this dialogue, particularly germane to Mark's gospel, Timaeus not only explains the mechanics of sight, but also, in section 14:47, he makes a case for sight as the foundation of philosophy, which he calls "the greatest gift the gods have ever given or will give to mortals."

For centuries the healing of Bartimaeus was read as a simple miracle story—and so it would appear to the uneducated Christian convert of the first century. To an initiated Greek, however, it would be clear that Jesus is playing the part of the hierophant and opening the eyes of an initiate to the truth. Bartimaeus is taken from *mystes* (closed off) to *epopt—one who has seen*. No longer blind, his eyes have been opened to the eternal, and he throws off his cloak (the only material wealth he has) to follow Jesus.

While the connection with Plato is difficult to refute, the one with the Mysteries may seem less so. This brings us to the second question and *Mark* 5:2 in which Jesus is accosted by a man "with an unclean spirit, who had his dwelling among the tombs." The man as it turns out is possessed by a legion of demons, who—with exorcism imminent—beg Jesus to send them into a nearby herd of swine. Jesus agrees, and the 2000 swine "ran violently down the steep place into the sea, and drowned …"

To readers in the 21st century who aren't acquainted with the ancient Levant (which is pretty much all of us), this seems simply a bizarre miracle, but … 2,000 pigs? In a country where pork is outlawed? The text doesn't say so, but we can assume the swineherds in the text are Greek. While it's hard enough to imagine how two or three or even a half dozen swineherds handled that many animals, it's more difficult still to explain why they don't demand reparation. Even today 2,000 pigs would fetch a hefty price. All the swineherds do is ask Jesus to take his magic

show on the road.

Mark dispenses with realism because, of course, the incident is allegorical. And fortunately for us, Frazer has written at length on the pig[ix], pointing out that swine often embodied the "corn-spirit"—the invisible life of grain crops. The pig was also, as it happens, sacred to Demeter, who we should recall was goddess of grain and chief deity of the Eleusian Mysteries, the most famous of the Greek Mysteries. We should also recall her daughter Persephone was worshiped (as Kore) at the same Mysteries. The myth relating Persephone's kidnapping by Hades provides one of the keys to understanding this pericope in *Mark*. "At the moment that Pluto carried off Proserpine [Frazer uses the Roman names] a swineherd called Euboleus was herding his swine on the spot, and his herd was engulfed in the chasm down which Pluto vanished with Proserpine. Accordingly at the Thesmophoria [a women-only religious festival held in autumn] pigs were annually thrown into caverns in order to commemorate the disappearance of the swine of Euboleus."

The demon-infested man in the Gospel *lived* in the tombs; what better way of suggesting the Underworld where Persephone, according to the myth, presided over the dead for seven months out of the year?

The connection, however, is incomplete. In *The Jesus Mysteries*, Timothy Freke and Peter Gandy (citing Walter Burkert and Jane Harrison) point out that "As part of the purification ceremony before initiation [to the Eleusian Mysteries], some 2,000 initiates all bathed in the sea with young pigs. …[T]he pigs … were then sacrificed … by being chased over a chasm."[x] Part of the endnote to Burkert and Harrison reads: "When Eleusis was permitted to issue her own … coinage it was the pig that she chose as the … symbol of her Mysteries, an animal that since Neolithic times has been associated with the Underworld."

To the credulous and the uneducated in the first century AD, this was simply a demonstration of Jesus' power to cast out evil. To the Greek *epoptae*, the allusion to the Eleusian Mysteries couldn't be missed.

The two questions answered so far involved the Mysteries, the latter fairly irrefutably. The third question is perhaps the most puzzling. *Mark* 8:22-26 recounts the healing of another blind man. Jesus leads him out of town (Bethsaida), "And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, 'I see men like trees, walking.' Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly." "Everyone" in this case is Jesus and a throng of followers.

Let us make no mistake here: When the blind man first opens his eyes what he sees *is not there*. Jesus has to try a second time to restore his sight. So what is the point of his strange vision of tree-like men?

To answer this question, we have to keep in mind that Jesus was far from the only miracle-worker and healer known to the ancient Mediterranean. Among those who were famous during Jesus' lifetime were Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana, and Asclepius. While miracles are

attributed to all three, only Apollonius and Pythagoras seem to have been historical figures. Said to be the son of Apollo, Asclepius was raised by the famous centaur Chiron, who taught him the art of medicine. He was reputedly killed by Zeus after bringing back one man too many from the dead (the stories vary), but the point here is that is that Asclepius was a renowned healer. In fact, the original Hippocratic Oath invoked his name: "I swear by Apollo the Physician and by Asclepius and by Hygieia and Panacea and by all the gods …" Hygieia (hygiene) and Panacea (cure-all) were two of his daughters.

By 300 BC, Asclepius's cult, which was not one of the Mysteries, had reached the height of its popularity, and numerous supplicants were drawn to his temples and sanctuaries, where they hoped to be healed. In the second century AD, Asclepius was still so well known that Justin Martyr, one of the earliest of the Church Fathers had to answer claims that the stories of Jesus' healing abilities had been based on the Asclepius's. Indeed, as Freke and Gandy point out, after Emperor Theodosius lifted imperial protection and allowed Christians to attack pagan temples in the Roman Empire without fear of reprisal, "Many of the inscriptions to Asclepius were taken over by early Christians by simply replacing his name with that of Jesus."[xi]

Fortunately, some monuments still bearing his name have survived, and one in particular relates to *Mark*. According to *Miracles in Greco-Roman Antiquity: a Sourcebook* by Wendy Cotter, the following inscription was found on an ancient stele: "Alcetas of Halieis. The blind man saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god [Asclepius] came up to him and with his fingers opened his eyes, and that he first saw the trees in the sanctuary." And there we have half of the mystery.

Cotter lists a number of healings of the blind and at least two of them require the application of a salve or a drug; and this, I believe, is the reason Jesus spits on the blind man in *Mark* (the application of a little divine saliva was unnecessary in the case of Bartimaeus). Be that as it may, it seems clear that Mark is alluding to Asclepius and Alcetas; why else would Jesus' beneficiary claim to see something that is not there?

Now for the tree-men. Recall that Asclepius was a god of healing and medicine but was not associated with the Mysteries; Jesus, however, was—as were many of the other dying-and-rising gods. Adonis is a good example. According to Frazer, Adonis was worshiped by the "the Semitic peoples of Syria" from whom the Greeks borrowed the cult "as early at least as the fifth century before Christ."[xii] Adonis "was said to have been born from a myrrh-tree, the bark of which bursting, after a ten months' gestation, allowed the lovely infant to come forth."[xiii] Dioynsos was the god of the vine and was often depicted with branches and/or leaves growing out of his head; Attis died under a pine tree and after his death was believed to have been turned into a pine tree. As Frazer points out: "The original character of Attis as a tree-spirit is brought out plainly by the part which the pine tree plays in his legend and ritual."[xiv] Frazer goes on to say "His tree origin is further attested by the story that he was born of a virgin, who conceived by putting in her bosom a ripe almond or pomegranate."[xv] Body parts of the murdered and dismembered Osiris were discovered by his wife, Isis, inside a living tree. More importantly, Jesus is associated with the tree, which of course is what the cross was. In

fact the word used in the Gospels is actually *stavros—stake*, not *cross,* for which Plato uses the word *chi*, denoting the Greek letter *X*. And a stake is little more than a tree stripped of its branches.

Acts of the Apostles makes the connection overt. In *Acts* 5:30 an accusatory Peter says, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you murdered by hanging on a tree." (Quite different from the Crucifixion scenario to which we've all grown accustomed.) Peter reasserts his claim in *Acts* 10:39, saying Jesus was "killed by hanging from a tree." In *Acts* 13:29 Paul states that after his death Jesus was taken down "from the tree" (not from the cross). In *Galatians* 3:13 Paul again insists on a tree rather than a cross, saying Christ has "become a curse for us (for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.')"

The blind man Jesus heals with spit and a laying-on-of-hands seems to have been presented primarily as a reference to Asclepius, in whose tradition Jesus is following, and secondarily to reinforce Jesus' status as a god of the Mysteries. At this point the reader may ask why speak in riddles? Jesus himself answers this question in all three Gospels although the following is from *Mark* (4:10-12): "When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. He told them, "To you it has been given to know the secret of the kingdom of God; but to those on the outside, everything is said in parables so that, 'They may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding; otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!'"

This is a very interesting passage because the first two-thirds were written by Mark, but the last third, in single quotes, is Isaiah 6:9-10. And it illustrates the double-sidedness of the Gospels precisely. In the two-thirds written by Mark, Jesus follows in the tradition of the Mysteries: before you go from *mystes* (those on the outside) to *epopt*, you need to be initiated. In other words, before you can be trusted with the secrets of the cult and its members, the members need to know they can trust you. But the verse from Isaiah was for his Jewish listeners: Jesus appears to be fulfilling scripture.

What we have in Mark's Gospel is not merely a matter of reconciling two cultures, as was the case with the creation of Serapis; rather, Mark consciously imitated the Mysteries because they were wildly popular (Judaism was not). And this meant imitating their tradition of secrecy as well as their allegorical approach. As should be clear by now, Mark is essentially talking in code, and deciphering his message calls for a thorough grounding in the thought and important events of the time. Martin Luther, it seems, was not entirely correct when he insisted every man can read the Bible for himself. In fact even he was somewhat underqualified.

The idea that Mark modeled Christianity on the Mysteries is not at all far-fetched. Philo of Alexandria, also writing in the first century AD, believed that Moses (as well as Jeremiah) was a hierophant and that Judaism was *already* a Mystery religion. Philo, whose work Mark almost certainly read, was an incredibly well-known commentator on Judaism. If Philo believed Judaism was a Mystery religion, why wouldn't Mark graft Paul's Christ Jesus/Jesus Christ onto a new Mystery cult? (Remember: Paul was writing decades before Mark and had won over

large numbers of *Greeks* whereas Jews did not readily take to Christianity.)

Interesting also that the name Jesus Christ contains one Greek element (*Christos* is the Greek translation of *messiah*), and one Hebrew (Y'shua), which might be coincidental or might fall in with the idea that Christianity was attempting to join Greek worshipers with Jewish ones. (This of course would be Paul's innovation as he is the one who coined the name, or at least was the first to write it down. He is also the one who, in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, said in so many words, "I am a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks"). Is it purely coincidence that Mark is meticulous about demonstrating how Jesus is the Messiah, often writing, "And this was done to fulfill the prophecies"—except for the one stating that the messiah "shall be called Immanuel" (*Isaiah* 7:14)? It's much more likely that Mark wanted to hang onto Paul's Greek recruits. The healing of Bartimaeus, the exorcising of the numerous demons known as "Legion," and the healing of the blind man in *Mark 8*, along with a number of other incidents in the New Testament, are not "plagiarisms" of the Mysteries (as Freke and Gandy would have it) but allusions to them. What better way to attract pagan—mostly Greek—converts?

Once we stop thinking of the Gospels as historical accounts or as being strictly Jewish and uninfluenced by the milieu in which they were written, the Gospels show themselves to be richly layered allegories. The wise men, who appear only in the Gospel of Matthew, furnish a final example of dual-edged eloquence. They are referred to in the original Greek as *magoi apo anatolon*—literally, *magi from the risings of the Sun* or more simply *magi from the east*. Matthew never mentions how many there are; this is a later interpretation based on the fact that they bring three gifts, two of which were no doubt inspired by *Isaiah* 60:3-60:6: *Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look around; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense.*
But the Greek word *magoi* cannot mean kings; priests came, not kings—specifically, as most scholars now agree, priests of Mithraism, one of Christianity's competing Mystery Cults. Nor did anyone come from Sheba (Ethiopia). The question that immediately arises is why would Mithraic priests from Persia pay homage to either a *Jewish* king or a Jewish messiah? If they were divinely inspired, as the gospel suggests, why didn't they return to Persia and convert the population? Or at least post a few bills to alert the public to God's will? Nothing of the sort can be found in any chronicle. (Nor is there the faintest trace of any "slaughter of innocents"—not even in the other Gospels.) After their handful of paragraphs in Matthew, the wise men disappear forever.

Paralleling Matthew's birth narrative—sort of—Luke has the divine newborn attended by shepherds. This is fascinating because, at his birth, Mithra was adored by gift-bearing shepherds.[xvi] Notice the conflation: Matthew's wise men are not shepherds, nor are they present at Jesus' birth[xvii], but they do bring gifts; Luke's shepherds attend Jesus' birth, but they do not bring gifts. The constant in the "nativity" scenes in the only two Gospels that depict them seems to be the evocation of Mithra.

Rather than imagining that either of these accounts actually happened, it makes much more sense to see this incident—and many scholars do—as allegorical.[xviii] Patella points out that

Mithraism was “the most popular astrological system at that time.” Clearly, a force to be reckoned with, Mithraism followed a westerly trajectory “from the eastern regions of the Roman Empire into the heart of Rome itself.”[xix] Matthew is signaling to worshipers of Mithra that Jesus supersedes their god-man; this is why the priests of Mithra worship the child. Similarly, the shepherds in Luke venerate not Mithra but Jesus; Jesus has replaced the Persian god-man. Even Tertullian, a Church apologist writing around the turn of the third century, understood this incident allegorically. The fact that the wise men took an alternate route when they returned home meant, in his view, “that they should no longer walk in their old way.”[xx] This, of course, is precisely the case I’ve been making.

Notice also that the wise men bring myrrh, a gift that isn’t mentioned by Isaiah. Myrrh is of course incense, but it was also the name of Adonis’s mother (Myrrha), who was turned into the tree from which he was said to have been born. Myrrha was also said to be name of the mother of Bacchus, another name for Dionysos. Once again Jews reading Matthew would see the prophecy of Zechariah more or less fulfilled while Greeks and other pagans would recognize allusions to their own god-men.

What we’ve uncovered in this handful of biblical passages is the time-tested method of superimposing one religion on various aspects of others in order to assimilate them. This is why churches were built over pagan temples. This is why the Celtic cross still incorporates a circle—a symbol the Celts refused to give up. This is why Christians chiseled in Jesus’ name on monuments where Asclepius’s had been. This is why the Church created Halloween, All Saints’ Day, and All Souls’ Day and laid them over the Celtic New Year, which consisted of three days overlapping the end of October and the beginning of November.

In “What Did Jesus Do?”, published in *The New Yorker* (May 24, 2010), Adam Gopnik moons over the prophet he thinks he’s found in the Gospels: “there is also something neither quite Greek nor quite Jewish about Jesus’ morality that makes it fresh and strange even now. Is there a more miraculous scene in ancient literature than the one in John where Jesus absent-mindedly writes on the ground while his fellow-Jews try to entrap him into approving the stoning of an adulteress, only to ask, wide-eyed, if it wouldn’t be a good idea for the honor of throwing the first stone to be given to the man in the mob who hasn’t sinned himself.” This is a perfect example of the pitfalls involved in interpreting the Gospels.

As Helmut Koester points out in *Ancient Christian Gospels* (p. 248), “the pericope about Jesus and the adulteress … is missing in the older papyri (p66 and p75) and in the oldest uncial codices … as well as in the oldest translations … and appears for the first time in the 5th century.” In other words, some scribe snuck it in about 400 years after Jesus had already met his much-discussed end. And it caught on (it *is* good). Thanks to this anonymous copyist, we see with crystalline clarity how even certain things we have come to think of as “pure Jesus” (quotation marks mine) are pure fiction.

It doesn’t seem likely that a few deconstructed biblical passages (though there are plenty more where they came from) will persuade anyone of faith that the Gospels are not the unerring

word of God. But they do suggest that layman and scholar alike revise his or her attitude toward the New Testament. It seems nothing short of irresponsible for scholars to dismiss as "unlikely" a connection between Bartimaeus and Plato when Plato's cosmology is *still* the dominant world view. (Both Augustine and Nietzsche recognized there was very little difference between the Christian and the Platonic worldviews—Nietzsche going so far as to say, "Christianity is Platonism for the people.") But it is also irresponsible because we have a potential 2012 presidential hopeful who, for 28 years, attended a church that believes Alaska will be a refuge during the End Times. We also have a pair of Republican frontrunners, Michele Bachmann and Rick Perry, who have demonstrated clear sympathies for Rapture theology. Moreover, there are 20 million End-Timers in this country who welcome war in the Middle East as a heavenly signal that the joys of Apocalypse are not far off. Nor did the tarry geyser in the Gulf of Mexico much upset them because it was another hopeful hint that the angelic trumpets are about to sound and that this world isn't going to last much longer anyway.

If, however, we made more of the New Testament transparent, if we wrote in abundant detail about the complex milieu in which the Gospels took root, if we approached the Bible with greater open-mindedness, and we answered the biblical techno-thrillers of Jenkins and LaHaye with more substantial volumes, it's possible that, two or three decades from now (assuming we avoid a nuclear conflagration in the meantime), future presidents will realize it's best not to consult a millennia-old book—which has baffled *scholars* for centuries—as though it were a window onto the future.

Notes

[i] https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/blogs/taibblog/gop-hearts-end-times-insanity-20110830

[ii] Otto Friedrich Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity,* American University in Cairo Press, 2002, p. 143

[iii] p. 276

[iv] *Occidental Mythology*, p.138

[v] *Phaedrus*

[vi] Ibid, p. 28

[vii] On the Nature of Gods

[viii] Ibid, p. 362

[ix] *Golden Bough*, vol. II, 42-59

[x] p. 41

[xi] p. 38

[xii] Ibid, vol. I, p. 279

[xiii] Ibid, vol. I, p 281

[xiv] Ibid, vol. I, p. 298

[xv] Ibid, vol. I, p. 298

[xvi] *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 11th ed., vol. xvii, p. 623

[xvii] A close reading of Matthew shows that Jesus was a "young child" not a new-born infant. This is why Herod decrees that children *two* years old and under be put to death.

[xviii] In an article in *The Guardian* (December 22, 2005), Karen Armstrong, author of numerous books on religion, writes, "The gospels are not accurate biographies of Jesus …. Throughout his gospel, Matthew argues that Jesus came not only for the Jewish people but also for the Gentiles. He therefore makes the three wise men from the east the first people to recognise [British spelling] and pay homage to him." As I have argued, Matthew is looking to win over adherents of Mithra.

[xix] *Lord of the Cosmos: Mithras, Paul, and the Gospel of Mark*, p. 1

[xx] *De Idolatria*

Looking Forward to the History of the Tea Party

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

The Right's dream of demolishing the modern welfare state is as old as the New Deal itself. [1] A "Conservative Manifesto," drafted in 1937 by a coalition of conservative Republicans and Southern Democrats in the Senate called for a balanced budget, tax reductions, the curtailing of union power, and an end to "unnecessary" government competition with private enterprise. Although FDR bowed that year to budget-balance pressures from the right, conservative assaults on progressive taxation, public works, and unions in the name of austerity still lacked broad, popular support. Indeed, when a draft of the Manifesto was leaked to the press, Senate Minority Leader Charles McNary from Oregon declared that "anyone who signs that thing is going to have a Liberty League tag put on him," referring to a far right organization discredited by even Republicans for its extreme positions, such as an adamant commitment to a minimal state and its charge that FDR was a socialist. Indeed, because of the negative attention the Manifesto received, even conservative senators who had a hand in drafting the document denied any association with it.[2]

Today, of course, such discourse is conventional in both major parties, but it took many decades for this to come about. The challenge conservatives faced in achieving ideological hegemony was how to fashion a political identity through which they could equate unfettered private accumulation with a greater national good. The Right was ultimately able to generate a populist conservatism by claiming to stand for honest, hardworking whites who were beset by an alliance of liberal establishment elites above and disruptive, parasitic blacks below. With the election of a black Democratic president, conservative populist anger has moved beyond the demonization of people of color to the demonization of the public realm as such. To be sure, this is precisely the direction FreedomWorks, Americans for Prosperity, and other wealthy, corporate entities associated with the Tea Party movement have attempted to steer it. Their vision is neither populist, national, nor racial, but rather directed toward seizing ever greater state resources while radically reducing what remains of democratic rule. Yet while these economic libertarians want to avoid cultural questions in their quest to dismantle the welfare state in its entirety, they still require a language of nation or community to advance their political aims. As they seek to defend the very rich and demand austerity measures for an increasingly vulnerable populace, this becomes increasingly difficult to do.

The Tea Party and the Racial Legacy of Antistatist Populism

The alliance between southern segregationists and economic conservatives signaled by the Conservative Manifesto continued to develop over the 1940s and 1950s, given voice in the Dixiecrat Revolt 1948, in southern organizing drives of the Eisenhower campaigns, and in the

pages of National Review Magazine, among other places.[3] With unified southern support, conservatives finally took control of the national GOP in 1964 and built the party afterward by framing conservative imperatives in the language of racial nationalism. Opposition to redistributive and egalitarian state imperatives gained popularity in the white electorate as it was linked to school desegregation and busing, welfare, crime, fair employment, open housing, affirmative action, and antidiscrimination law and policy. This period from the 1960s through the 1980s (Goldwater to Atwater),which we might call Republican era of high racism, cemented conservatism's centrality in American political culture. Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign marked the first national attempt to wed racism to fiscal conservatism, when the Arizona senator's opposition to civil rights gave him enough southern delegate votes for a conservative capture of the Republican nomination that year. Nationally though he won only his home state and five more in the Deep South. Conservatives had thus extended their base by embracing racial politics, but were still associated with wealthy interests.

The emergent relationship between race and conservatism, however, opened opportunities for popular embrace, however. Alabama Governor George Wallace, running in the 1964 Democratic primaries, and then in an independent presidential run in 1968, forged a politics that framed both racism and antistatist conservatism within an older producerist rhetoric, defining his battle as one of productive members of society against parasitic elites and subversive protesters. He counterposed "pointy-headed intellectuals," "bearded bureaucrats," "rioters," and "law-breakers" to "this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, the beautician, the policeman on the beat." Such themes proved popular not just in the white south, but among white working and middle-class voters in cities like Gary, Detroit, Milwaukee, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.[4]

In the 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon drew on Wallaceite populism and began using the terms "silent majority," "forgotten Americans" and "middle America" to describe an aggrieved white majority squeezed by both the unruly poor below and government elites above. After the election Kevin Phillips, then a Nixon advisor, wrote a book called the Emerging Republican Majority, describing a budding political demographic that "spoke clearly…for a shift away from the sociological jurisprudence, moral permissiveness, experimental residential, welfare and educational programming and massive federal spending by which the Liberal establishment sought to propagate liberal institutions and ideology." Nixon worked to expand this identity over the course of his presidency, even forming a "Middle American Working Group" in the White House and asking the Budget Bureau to find ways to better serve "forgotten Americans," (a group that the Bureau eventually claimed was more of a concept than an empirical demographic). This political identity was revived in Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign through his simultaneous demonization of government and "welfare queens."[5] State was increasingly split from nation in this politics, allowing Reagan himself to be iconographic of (white) America even as he continually disparaged the state.

The Tea Party movement is the latest reincarnation of antigovernment populist rage, triggered by Obama's election and given shape and content by Seattle blogger Keli Carender's "porkulus package" demonstration, NBC business news editor Rick Santelli's rant on the floor of the

Chicago Mercantile Exchange, and other protests against anti-recessionary spending, most of which were organized by FreedomWorks and given ample coverage on Fox News. The nascent movement solidified over the summer of 2009 through the public spectacle of protests at town hall meetings across the country where elected officials at public fora discussed federal health care reform legislation. The movement soon took on the Gadsden "Don't Tread on Me" flag, an icon that at, like the Boston Tea Party itself, evokes both patriotism and antigovernment dissent.[6] The contemporary Tea Party movement has evinced the thundering antistatist fury of its forebears in its attacks on the stimulus package, Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP), the auto industry bailout, healthcare reform, public sector workers, and deficit spending.

Part of the antistatism of the Tea Party reflects a growing libertarian movement that has had an important impact on it. This pro-market, individualist antipathy to government has grown since 2008, and has thus been well placed to have an influence. The libertarian Students For Liberty now has over 400 groups on college campuses. The cable channel Fox Business News has two libertarian shows: Freedom Watch and the Stossel Show. Ron Paul was a visible presence in the 2008 GOP primaries and continues to be a more prominent public figure. The fervent devotion of Ron Paul supporters gave the initial spark and organizational basis for Rand Paul's successful run for the Kentucky senate as a Tea Party candidate. Most important, perhaps, libertarian zeal for privatization and antipathy toward regulation dovetails with the political and economic desires of the Koch Brothers' American s for Prosperity, FreedomWorks, and other ultra-wealthy individuals, corporations, and foundations.

Race and the Tea Party Movement

While Tea Party spokespeople claim that the movement is purely fiscal, it is inconceivable that such antistatist rage is unconnected to the racism that fueled it in prior decades. Indeed, the unprecedented electoral division between racial conservatives and racial liberals in the 2008 presidential race were prologue to the Tea Party's appearance.[7] Obama has been portrayed as both a figure of racial abjection and a symbol of totalitarian control on Tea Party placards and in supporters' rhetoric. Evidence of racial rage was on national display in March, 2010 when Representatives André Carson of Indiana, Emanuel Cleaver II of Missouri and John Lewis of Georgia, all black, were subjected to racial epithets and spitting as they walked to the Capitol by Tea Partiers who were there to protest the passage of federal health care reform.[8] Veteran hate group monitors Devon Burghart and Leonard Zeskin issued a report soon after that provided ample evidence of participation of racists in the Tea Party at both the national and local level. [9]

Yet although there is much to suggest that there are powerful racial motivations in the movement, race does not signify for modern conservatism as it did during its ascent in the 1960s and '70s. Indeed conservatives today claim not only colorblindness but often an emphatic embrace or appropriation of the civil rights movement. More complicated still is the fact that conservatives today must disavow any racial intent. This is a defining paradox of the political moment: even as the conservative movement has lurched rightward, racial appeal – indeed even racial coding – has become discredited as a form of political address. While Tea

Party leaders loudly denounced the NAACP after that organization called on Tea Party groups to expunge racists from their ranks, more openly bigoted figures such as Tea Party Express leader Mark Williams were promptly ousted from the movement, and racially-charged signs quickly disappeared from Tea Party rallies.[10]

Indeed Tea Party organizations and spokespeople have adamantly refuted claims of racism in a manner distinct from the era of the rise of the Right, when conservatives would code language but the issues themselves had transparent racial referents, such as crime, busing, welfare and affirmative action. Tea Party leader Michael Patrick Leahy, responding to a University of Washington survey demonstrating higher levels of racial resentment among Tea Partiers, wrote: "The Tea Party movement has rejected the discussion of social issues as an unwanted distraction that will hurt the movement's ability to accomplish its constitutional and fiscal objectives. I know this because I helped start the movement, and I have participated in hundreds of conferences calls where this position has been deliberated and confirmed – both publicly and privately – innumerable times." The quote is revealing for the emphasis Tea Party leaders have placed on avoiding racial issues, but also for the essential admission that racial identification run so deep that the effort required deliberation over "hundreds of conference calls."[11] In his campaign memoir, Tea Party-backed Kentucky senator Rand Paul spends pages defending himself from charges of racism. Referring to the Tea Party's focus on issues of spending and debt, he writes, "The Tea Party doesn't see politics in black and white, but black and red." Such refutations of racial intent are common staples of "colorblind" rhetoric of contemporary conservatives, requiring a denial of the myriad forms of race-based inequality built into US political, economic, and social institutions. And yet the repeated, vehement repudiation of racism speaks to the changed landscape of US politics, where race-baiting cannot be openly achieved. Tea Partiers are perhaps particularly sensitive to the charge of racism. FreedomWorks campaign director Brendan Steinhauser, who counts civil rights leader Bayard Rustin as one of his inspirations, starkly put the matter, "Being a racist is one of the worst things you can be in this society. No one wants to be labeled this."[12]

To dismiss Tea Party disavowals of racism as merely colorblind window-dressing would be to underestimate complex changes afoot. How does one account for the high-profile Tea Party-associated black, Latino and Asian-American politicians, such as Rep. Allen West and governor Marco Rubio from Florida; and Nikki Haley and Tim Scott from South Carolina – the latter who defeated one of Strom Thurmond's (white) children for the Republican nomination? They are not evidence of an embrace of Tea Party politics by significant numbers of voters of color, as the Republican base of each of these candidates is largely white. But their successful candidacies do perhaps speak to a strong desire for racial innocence, a notion that Lawrie Balfour, following James Baldwin, explains as an expressed affirmation of racial equality that nevertheless disavows the very historical conditions and contemporary practices that continue to reproduce racial stratification.[13]

More than just disavowal, Tea Partiers often affirm innocence through appropriation. "We want to put a young, edgier face on this movement," said FreedomWorks' Steinhauser about a decision to feature a rapper named Hi-Caliber at 9/12 events. "This isn't a bunch of boring

people who just listen to one kind of music. Don't get me wrong. I love country music, but we have an edge, too." Steinhauser's affection for country music is meant to affirm the Tea Party's conservative cultural basis even as he explains his desire to breathe new life into this identity in a black idiom – which, as Toni Morrison has argued, has been used to signal what is modern, hip and urbane in the white American imagination.[14] Glenn Beck, taking it a step further, described himself and his allies as "the inheritors and the protectors of the civil rights movement." He said he "wouldn't be surprised if in our lifetime dogs and fire hoses are released or opened on us. I wouldn't be surprised," he went on, "if a few of us get a billy club to the head. I wouldn't be surprised if some of us go to jail — just like Martin Luther King did — on trumped-up charges. Tough times are coming."[15] Where colorblind conservatives de-racialize King to make him into one of them, here Beck almost racializes conservatives to make them more like King.

The current US right is not being built directly in opposition to a developing black freedom movement as it was in the era from the late 1950s through the 1970s. In the post-civil rights era however, such appeals have far less affective power, and people of color have become celebrated national figures not just in sports and entertainment, but in politics. Yet the same period has seen the further isolation and targeting of the black poor through the simultaneous processes of neoliberal deindustrialization, dismantling of the welfare state, and the massive expansion of the prison system. The combination of symbolic victories and political defeats of the civil rights movement has produced a context that constrains the right from deploying racial affect, robs it of the political resistance against which it was constructed, and yet offers new possibilities for racial appropriation.

Socialist Obama and the Demonized State

It remains to be seen whether the Tea Party movement will endure, but for now racial affect has made the movement successful even in the absence of an active civil rights movement to stoke it. This returns us to Obama, whose office-taking coincided with the emergence of the Tea Party movement. Obama was inaugurated in the midst of the mortgage crisis and subsequent great recession, sharply increased nativist anxieties about immigration from Mexico, and within the long shadow of 9/11. For his racial opponents he represents a notion of blackness linked to irresponsible welfare spending; foreignness linked to nativist anxieties; and Islam, depicted as violent fanaticism. Racism has remained still a key element in the populist affect of the Tea Party movement that has pushed national politics rightward through its incessant pressure on the Republican party.

While Obama represents a violation of white national identity for those who could not bear the election of a black president, for libertarian conservatives he represents a violation of an unencumbered marketplace. These two representations, though sometimes in tension, come together and indeed magnify each other in the Tea Party imaginary. As animus toward Obama built in the battle over health care reform, the president increasingly became labeled by Tea Partiers not as a liberal, but as a socialist. This extraordinary claim, which would in no way have been credible even for conservatives prior to Obama's election, has far greater purchase

now. TARP, the Stimulus Package, and Health Care Reform, all of which were restrained state responses to a historic economic crisis, (TARP being actually the product of the Bush administration), were rendered dangerous, threatening expressions of socialism when associated with a black president. For an antistatist populism that contrasts a virtuous white middle against black dependents below and controlling elites above, Obama represents both poles.

The most widely circulated symbol associating Obama with socialism among Tea Partiers was a poster that began circulating in early 2009 depicting Obama as the Joker from the film *Batman: The Dark Knight* above the caption: "Socialism." By summer, tens of thousands of reproductions of the image with the caption *Socialism* were wheat-pasted across the Los Angeles area. As the Tea Party opposition to health care reform developed over the summer of 2009, the Obama/Joker poster was omnipresent. Defenders of the image claimed that there was nothing identifiably racial in the otherwise demonic image, and that the message, *Socialism* is a clear political statement unconnected to race.

Those who assert that the image is racist, however, have rightly pointed to the minstrelsy connotations of his painted face and the symbolism of the Joker as a figure of uncontrolled urban violence and nihilism. But it is not merely that a racially demonized image of Obama got juxtaposed to the political charge of socialism in the text below it. Indeed, the Socialism caption points not away from race, as its defenders would have it, but towards it. The modern conservative movement in the United States from the late 1940s onward linked the advance of black civil rights with the threat of a totalitarian state, and of socialism specifically. The modern Right, as argued earlier, continually depicted an unholy alliance of invasive state elites above and criminal, parasitic blacks below against a virtuous middle of hardworking white Americans. As a form of political address, there is nothing muddled about the Socialism poster. Image and text refer to each other along an already well-developed chain of associations.

But the Obama/Joker image also demonstrates how the symbolic relationship between race and the state has changed in the current political context. The last significant instance of the right's deployment of a menacing black face for political purposes was Lee Atwater's use of convicted rapist William Horton ("Willie" was Atwater's invented nickname) in the 1988 Bush campaign.[16] There as here, blackness was linked to criminality to discredit a Democratic opponent. The difference is that in the 1988 Bush campaign "liberalism" was meant to evoke fears of a white president, unleashing black criminals on a vulnerable nation. For contemporary Tea Partiers, "socialism" is meant to evoke fears of a black president unleashing a criminal state on a vulnerable nation. In the former, the state enabled unchecked black aggression, whereas in the latter blackness enables unchecked state aggression. Without black social unrest as a political issue (or even recent memory), assaults on the modern right's virtuous middle come from above, not below.

What does it mean politically that the Tea Party expresses a conservative politics directed less at people of color than at the redistributive state more generally? The successes of the modern

Right were achieved through the refashioning of political identities of working and middle-class whites away from the Democratic liberalism and toward conservative Republicanism. This meant splitting off and racializing the poor as welfare dependents and criminals. But welfare has been largely dismantled, and the prison industrial complex fully realized. Indeed, as noted above, the issue of crime is mostly absent for Tea Partiers even as the disproportionally black and latino poor continue to be subject to violence, coercion and incarceration.

Racial affect for the Tea Party circulates most powerfully in attacks on Obama, but as such these lack substantive policy targets around which to rally. The birther issue, for instance, has fired the countersubversive imagination, but does not translate directly into more punitive crime legislation, or further attacks on affirmative action. Thus hatred of Obama is translated into assaults on taxation, social programs, public sector unions, and deficit spending. Unspoken racial rage against Obama as signifier for the state may continue to sustain this trend for those who would continue to transfer wealth ever upward.

What now?

The challenges we now face in reversing contemporary political tides are formidable. Looking back, the widely discredited Liberty League of the New Deal era looks nearly identical to the very influential Tea Party today.[17] And the Tea Party is merely the most visible manifestation of the assault on equality, freedom, and democratic rule. The Democratic Party has also shifted dramatically rightward in the last 30 years, echoing the turn away from commitments to democracy and economic equality. The Supreme Court's 2010 elimination of campaign finance reform in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* exacerbates this trend, as both parties now will require even more staggering amounts of money to run campaigns. Indeed, Obama campaign suggests that the 2012 reelection effort will exceed a billion dollars. Such sums, of course, are most easily attainable on Wall Street, which is one indicator of the direction in which the Obama administration is likely to continue to lean.

As devastating in some ways as the historic dismantling of the New Deal is, it is a mistake to seek merely to defend the welfare state. Such rearguard actions cannot alter the contemporary terms of debate, challenge the extraordinary power asymmetries we now face, nor, most importantly inspire broad-based political action. Record unemployment, crumbling schools, bankrupt municipalities and counties, collapsing infrastructure, widespread poverty and homelessness—in this context, assaults on redistributive aspects of the state (slashed social programs and entitlements, weakened wage and benefit security for large sectors of the workforce, and preserved tax breaks for the very rich) strain populist credulity. How long can a such a movement sustain itself without an idea of *res publica* that it seeks to defend? If we are all Black Americans now, as Melissa Lacewell-Perry recently suggested, than populist political cleavages can be reconfigured.[18] For all of its funding by wealthy patrons and exposure on Fox News, the social movement success of the Tea Party movement nevertheless has been made possible in part because participants saw themselves as civic actors advancing autonomous political ends – much as the New Left once did. Those who wish to reverse this political tide must come to inhabit political identities that are oppositional, and framed within

in our own populist language of liberty.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Kevin Bruyneel and Jacob Slichter for their insights and suggestions on this essay.

[2] See John Robert Moore, "Senator Josiah W. Bailey and the 'Conservative Manifesto' of 1937," Journal of Southern His- tory, 31, no. 1 (February 1965), pp. 21–39; 75th Congress, 2nd sess., Congressional Record (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, December 20, 1937), 1934–40. The Liberty League was a proto-fascist conspiratorial organization set up to overthrow Roosevelt in the early 1930s.

[3] Lowndes, Joseph. From the New Deal to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism. New Haven, Yale University Press, 2008.

[4] Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 12; Robert Alan Goldberg, *Barry Goldwater* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995) Lowndes, pp 45-76; Perlstein, Rick. *Before the Storm: Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus*. New York, Hill and Wang, 2001.

[5] Lowndes, pp 106-139; Kevin Phillips in *The Emerging Republican Majority* New Rochelle, N.Y.: Ar-lington House, 1968)

[6] Zerneke, Kate. *Boiling Mad: Inside the Tea Party Movement,* New York Times Books, Henry Holt. 2010.

[7] Tesler, Michael and David O. Sears. Obama's Race: *The 2008 Election and the Dream of a Post-Racial America*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2010.

[8] Pear, Robert. "Spitting and Slurs Directed at Lawmakers." March 20, 2010. *New York Times*. https://prescriptions.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/03/20/spitting-and-slurs-directed-at-lawmakers/ (Last accessed May 24, 2011).

[9] Burghart and Zeskind, *Tea Party Nationalism*.

[10] Delong, Matt. "Tea Party Leader Expelled Over Slavery Letter." *Washington Post*, July 18, 2010. https://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2010/07/mcconnell-on-tea-party-racism.html (Last accessed May 24, 2011)

[11] Leahy, Michael Patrick. "Bruce Bartlett's Intellectually Dishonest Smear of the Tea Party Movement." *American Thinker*, May 23, 2011 https://www.americanthinker.com/2010/06/bruce_bartletts_intellectually.html (last accessed may 24, 2011)

[12] Gardner, Amy and Thompson, Issah. "Tea Party Groups Battle Perception of Racism." *Washington Post*, May 5, 2010. https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/04/AR2010050405168.html (Last accessed May 24, 2011)

[13] Balfour, Lawrie. The Evidence of Things Not Said: James Baldwin and the Promise of American Democracy. Ithica. Cornell University Press, 2001.

[14] Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness in the American Literary Imagination*. New

York. Vintage. 1993.
[15] Herbert, Bob. “America is Better Than This.” *New York Times*, August 27, 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/28/opinion/28herbert.html (last accessed May 24, 2011)
[16] Mendelberg, Tali. *The Race Card: Campaign Messages, Implicit Strategies, and the Norm of Equality.* Princeton, Prienceton University Press, 2001.
[17] See David Woolner, “The Tea Party Movement: Successor to the Liberty League?” https://www.newdeal20.org/2010/07/01/the-tea-party-movement-successor-to-the-american-liberty-league-13880/ (Last accessed August 4, 2011)
[18] Lacewell-Perry, Melissa. “Are We All Black Americans Now?” *The Nation*, April 18, 2011.

On Judging American Foreign Policy: Human Rights, Political Realism, and the Arrogance of Power

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Human rights and political realism offer two very different ways of approaching international affairs.[1] Here is not the place for an extended philosophical disquisition on the relationship between them, let alone their connection with the history of American foreign policy. Human rights and political realism have their unique traditions that are usually seen as starkly opposed to one another. But the interplay between them has become ever more apparent in an increasingly global society. This new blending of human rights with political realism penetrates the basic questions that citizens should be asking in judging American foreign policy in a meaningful way — now and in the future.

Human rights gripped the popular imagination in the aftermath of World War II. It seemed to offer a response to the cynical political realism of totalitarian leaders as well as the barbarism associated with what Daniel Rousset termed "the concentration camp universe" exemplified by Auschwitz and the Gulag. With the liberation of the formerly colonized world, and the passing of socialism as a mobilizing ideology, the idea of human rights provides new hope for a more civilized world. Human rights have their roots in the Bible, natural law, and classical humanist notions concerning the "dignity of man." But the modern idea of humanity derives from the Enlightenment and the republican revolutions that extended roughly from 1688-1789. This was the era of the rising bourgeoisie whose vision of national self-determination was tied to the liberal republic and a universal understanding of rights. Each nation, in principle, was seen as having the right to determine its own destiny and the exercise of that right was seen as requiring a liberal state in which individuals enjoyed the benefit of civil liberties.[2] As for political realism, its beginnings can be found in the "Melian Dialogues" from Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (410 BC) and, even further back, in *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu (610 BC). Works such as these anticipated Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1532) – what might be termed the Bible of political realism — and Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651). Reflecting the rise of the modern absolutist state, these classics evince a fear of democracy, chaos, privilege, authority and stability. They introduce the ideas of *raison d'etat* and balance of power, sovereignty and leadership, national interest and geopolitical advantage, as well as a modern understanding of the claim that "might makes right." The perspective now associated with human rights, by contrast, were always employed to mitigate the exercise of arbitrary power on the part of states guided by little more than political realism. Thus, human rights and political realism have traditionally been seen as political opposites.

Human rights are predicated on universal assumptions like the liberal rule of law and political realism on national interests. Ethical ends associated with law and liberty fuel human rights while the short-term means for securing power animates political realism. Human rights always privilege the freedom of the individual against the state while political realism champions the exigencies of *raison d'etat.* Leaving things at that, however, works to the detriment of both human rights and the prudent exercise of political power. If the pursuit of human rights is undertaken without reference to political interests then the policy will prove blind to existing realities. Political realists have noted how often the road to hell has been paved with good intentions. Leading representatives of the realist tradition like George Kennan and Hans Morgenthau always insisted that recognizing the crass reality of power is the necessary condition for both defending and furthering freedom. But it is not sufficient. Simply trumpeting interest and power is just as dangerous. It breeds distrust (especially for a superpower like the United States in a multi-polar world) as well as a moral climate in which all means are legitimate for all participants in the struggle for power. These implications are worth considering with regard to the use of terrorist tactics including those that brought about the tragedy of 9/11. Bluster about the dangers of "moral equivalency," indeed, it is relevant only for those who have already been convinced. Using human rights cynically in order to further narrow forms of national interest is ultimately self-defeating. Noam Chomsky has been relentless in chastising those policymakers interested in nothing more than the short-term calculus. Any politics predicated purely on immediate and instrumental interest generates precisely the kind of instability – and potential for "blowback"[3] –that genuine realism should supposedly inhibit. Making judgments with regard to its effectiveness, however, involves asking certain basic questions – that are still too rarely asked.

*What is the strategic goa*l? The United States has a defense budget of more than $700 billion, a military of 1 million members, and 750 bases throughout the world. It is already present everywhere and political realists seek to strengthen that presence especially in "hot spots." What this means, however, is not self-evident. "Mission creep" is becoming a defining characteristic of American foreign policy in the Middle East. It can apply to both a supposedly unconscious expansion of practical aims by decision-makers in the pursuit of a policy but also to the shifting justifications required to garner support from the citizenry for that policy. American intervention in Afghanistan in the aftermath of 9/11 was initially predicated on capturing Osama bin Laden. But that undertaking soon turned into a bombing assault on the Taliban, regime change, and nation-building with the support of the corrupt Karzai government that lacked both competence and legitimacy. As for Iraq, though conservative policymakers had been planning to unseat Saddam Hussein since 1991, the regime change they planned was more difficult than they anticipated. There was the anger directed against American "liberators," the subterranean ethnic and religious conflicts always ready to explode into outright civil war, and the new state without legitimacy or a monopoly over the means of coercion. Mission creep has permeated many contemporary conflicts. It has fostered an image of the United States as self-interested, imperialist, and completely arbitrary in its goals and tactics – and that impression is not always erroneous.

Is there an ethical purpose? Ethical confusion in terms of justifying American policy in the

Middle East has mirrored the practical confusion in carrying it out. Human rights fell by the wayside as the Bush Administration began substituting and then mixing one faulty ideological justification for another in Iraq. Identified with the "axis of evil," which called forth a "war on terror," Iraq was then castigated as a threat to Israel and, with its control of oil, the American national interest. But this argument stood at odds with the weakness of the Iraq military and the fact that Iraq's secular Baathist regime was never a major supporter of terrorism in general or Islamic fundamentalist movements like al Qaeda in particular. False accusations concerning the existence of "weapons of mass destruction" were then introduced along with wild claims that Saddam Hussein was intent upon launching them against Israel and the United States. Once it became apparent that this, too, was not the case, hyper-realists began talking about human rights and spreading democracy to the Middle East.[4] All of this was reinforced by the belief that the Iraqi citizenry enthusiastically supported American intervention and that there existed a groundswell of unified national support for a new democratic order. The same jumbled set off justifications became apparent in Afghanistan. American self-righteousness has only been exacerbated by such miscalculations and misperceptions. Plagued by a confused ethical purpose, compromised by suspect allies and without an exit strategy, the United States has consistently found itself entangled in a murderous – and, occasionally, even genocidal – set of foreign policy actions that serve neither human rights nor the American national interests.

Where is the support? Support for a policy (especially a dangerous policy) rests on a number of contingent factors. Yet, increasingly, basic conflicts of interest over foreign policy have appeared between the political establishment and the citizenry. Political realists have always considered foreign policy the prerogative of the sovereign – or, better, the state that incarnates sovereignty. It is the state (or better its officials and their advisors) that supposedly determines the national interest and, by extension, whether intervention in the name of human rights is warranted in any particular instance. Since the time of Machiavelli, political realists have justified the insular formation of foreign policy on a number of grounds: superior expertise (that apparently was lacking in Afghanistan and Iraq); the importance of decisive action (that has, too often, been indecisive and misguided) and the need to preserve national security (whose self-righteous invocation has produced the last refuge of the modern political scoundrel). Traditional political realists leave little room for democratic input in official decision-making. Demands for democratic input surfaced during the 1960s with the rise of "new social movements." Calls for expanding democracy and social welfare at home generated demands for ethical accountability and transparency for policies undertaken abroad. Political realism thus encountered human rights. What is known as the "Vietnam syndrome," indeed, involves less the loss of a war than the lingering distrust of interventionist undertakings by much of the citizenry. Such skepticism proved warranted given the fabrication of evidence, the collusion, the sloganeering and the outright lying to justify the invasion of Iraq by so many in the Bush administration. Memories of Vietnam, fear of dissent, and fear of full disclosure contributed to the rise of a national security state along with the constriction of civil liberties beginning with the "patriot act." Attempts to artificially fabricate consent over the long haul for any policy – let alone one that justifies itself in terms of moral claims or human rights – can only prove self-defeating in the world of Wiki-leaks and an age of global media.

Who benefits? Calculating *costs* is a normal and necessary element in determining whether to engage in any particular foreign policy. Costs are an ineradicable element in determining what is possible in any given situation and their underestimation will surely erode whatever original consensus existed for the policy in question: the Iraq conflict at its height cost the United States over $380 million per day, the American policy in Afghanistan stands at $300 million per day, and that the costs for involvement in the Libyan conflict are $55 million per day and rising. But the issue is not merely the costs undertaken by the United States. Too often, political realists fail to take into account the costs paid by the nations supposedly reaping the benefit of American policy. Lenin liked to say that you cannot make an omelette without breaking eggs: but sometimes breaking eggs results only in a mess. Costs always amount to more than dollars and cents. The United States has suffered a loss of moral capital through use of rendition, torture, and cynical talk about collateral damage. Its officials and its citizens, however, are amazed when the supposed beneficiaries of such policies appear ungrateful. They forget that others pay the often much steeper price for their decisions. Even should a democratic state emerge in Iraq, it will have come at virtually genocidal cost: A study conducted by Johns Hopkins University in 2006 estimated 600-800,000 dead in a country of 27 million; between five and ten times that number wounded; thousands in exile; ecological damage, and more –a cost paid by Iraqis not Americans. Calculating the gains and losses of a political policy is not merely a mathematical but a normative endeavor. Both at home and abroad there is a growing and quite legitimate belief that the justifications for American foreign policy in terms of human rights are merely a cover for "oil" and other powerful lobbies (Bechtel, Halliburton, XE) or various geo-political interests. Costs and benefits cannot simply be calculated from the perspective of the United States or in relation to its policy aims. Little wonder that American expressions of concern over human rights abuses are greeted with such skepticism especially by those who should benefit.

Is there a double standard? American foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 has increasingly been associated with the use of a double standard by much of the world. The United States employed the doctrine of the "pre-emptive strike," which would allow an assault upon any nation deemed a threat to national security by the American government, to justify the invasion of Iraq in 2003. It has also been bandied about in order to legitimate bombing Iran's nuclear facility at Nantanz and elsewhere. But the right to engage in pre-emptive strikes and support violent regimes and movements is denied to others. American political realists consider self-evident that their country should sponsor authoritarian regimes in Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, brand others like Iran as "rogue" states, and appear to the world as the unblemished beacon of democracy. Given this attitude, once again, their often exaggerated moral outrage to attacks and criticisms can only seem hypocritical and self-serving to disinterested or non-committed parties. Finally, in a particularly perverse example of the double standard, the United States – the only nation ever to employ the atomic bomb (not just once, but twice) – finds it can provide nuclear arms for India and other countries of its liking and simultaneously threaten Iran with military action for building a nuclear facility that might produce a nuclear device in about ten years. There are policymakers who never encountered a crisis for which American intervention wasn't a remedy: Richard Barnett called them "white collar militarists." But, then, hundreds of wars, thousands of human rights abuses are taking place as these words are being read. It is

always legitimate to ask how egregious is *this* particular breach of human rights? Why is *this* particular nation the target? How does *this* crisis affect the national interest and the world community? One size does not fit all when it comes to foreign policy and the pursuit of human rights. This only makes the justification for any particular action in any particular instance more important. Indeed, what matters is less the inability to intervene everywhere than the ability to fashion a particular foreign policy intervention that is prudent and works to the benefit of the peoples involved.

The Arrogance of Power: Arguments that the end justifies the means have always been tautological — since it is only the means that produce the end. It always remains to be asked: what justifies the end other than the means used to bring it about. Liberal hawks like the journalist Paul Berman or the scholar and policy analyst,[5] Samantha Power,[6] or Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice have consistently endorsed interventionist policies on moral grounds. Emphasizing universal standards of behavior, (though not quite so vociferously when it the culprit is the United States), they stand for human rights wherever they are abused: and, usually, they come up with the same list of proscriptions on a sliding scale whether for Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Pakistan, Libya, Somalia – or Iran. Sensationalist publicity campaigns begin the process that usually leads to demands for sanctions, "strategic" bombings and — ultimately — regime change brought about my military intervention. These idealists simply assume that because the end is pure, even if the policy itself is somewhat vague, support can be mobilized. The costs are secondary because "the people" – the beneficiaries of their largesse – are always awaiting American intervention with baited breath. A dose of political realism wouldn't hurt these idealists seeking to carry the banner of democracy on their bayonets. Effective foreign policy today rests on recognizing the interplay between human rights and political realism. Principles are not neatly divorced from interests[7] — and advocates of political realism should take heed. The United States has paid dearly for its contraventions of human rights its support for President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and (without even mentioning Israel) other questionable allies in the region like Saudi Arabia. Traditional cynicism about human rights and long-standing support dictatorial regimes clearly created blindness in anticipating and hesitancy in embracing the new movements associated with the Arab Spring.[8] There is an old saying that bears repeating: "Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are." It doesn't help for political realists to insist (with frustration) that the world is a "dangerous place:" not only the victims, but the more disinterested parties, will challenge what the late Senator J.W. Fulbright termed "the arrogance of power."

Credibility is, today, a fundamental tenet of any successful foreign policy endeavor – and this presupposes recognition of the need for transparency and respect for the basic traditions of a democratic polity. Corrupt tactics and the cynical choice of allies have undermined the credibility of America's ethical commitments, the legitimacy of its national interests, and the ability to garner genuine support for American policy in the Middle East. Any intelligent person could see that the successful destruction of the Iraqi state would leave two other powers in the region, Syria and Iran, and that logic dictated a future assault on them in the name of spreading democracy. Circumstances intervened, however, and this kind of policy has (both pragmatically and ideologically) become a bit more difficult to pursue. Rousseau was surely

correct in *The Social Contract* (1762) when he noted that "the strongest is never strong enough to be always the master, unless he transforms strength into right, and obedience into duty." Perhaps the connection between human rights and political realism (or between ends and means) can never prove absolute: such a demand is probably utopian. But it is legitimate to ask of policymakers that they offer a *plausible* – if not absolute—connection between principles and interests in the policies they propose. That requires vigorous debate and questioning of the usually phony insistence upon national security in the deliberation process. When it comes to human rights and American foreign policy, indeed, there is no finessing the implications of political realism: democracy is what democracy does.

Notes

[1] This text is based on a speech originally given at a conference, "The Changing Middle East: Implications for US-Iran Relations," that was sponsored by the American-Iranian Council and Georgetown University on June 7, 2011.

[2]Note the extended discussion in Stephen Eric Bronner, *Reclaiming the Enlightenment: Toward a Politics of Radical Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

[3] Note the extended discussion of the unintended future consequences of short term instrumental decisions – a simple example is the support originally extended by the United States to the Muhjadeen in Afghanistan against the Russians — in Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York: Holt, 2004).

[4] Note the chronology in *The Iraq Papers* edited by John Ehrenberg, Patrice McSherry, Jose R. Sanchez, and Caroleen Sayej (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[5] See the essay on liberal supporters of the Iraqi war that I co-authored with John Kurt Jacobsen, "Dubya's Fellow Travellers: Left Intellectuals and Mr. Bush's War" in Stephen Eric Bronner, *Blood in the Sand: Imperial Fantasies, Right-Wing Ambitions, and the Erosion of American Democracy* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), pgs. 102ff.

[6] Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Harper, 2007).

[8]Note the hapless discussions over "What Just Happened?" and "Why No One Saw It Coming?" with respect to "The New Arab Revolt" in *Foreign Affairs* (May/June 2011) and F. Gregory Gause III, "Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring" in *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2011). For an alternative approach, see Stephen Eric Bronner, "Rosa in Cairo" in

Reader Supported New (February 8, 2011); www.rsnorg.org

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Bad I.O.U.: Badiou's Fidelity to the Event

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

1. Immortality

For Badiou, our mystical participation in the heroic Event is our triumph over mortality.

Badiou's *Ethics* includes a sustained polemic against a contemporary ideology of human rights that juxtaposes the "passive, pathetic or reflexive subject," the mere *suffering victim*, to the "active, determining subject of judgment" that fights on behalf of the hapless victim. This ideology, Badiou asserts, subordinates politics to ethics, has no positive conception of the good, seeing it only as an absence of "Evil," and defines human rights as nothing more than "rights to non-Evil."

Badiou never reveals exactly which theorists or theories hold such depressing and idiotic tenets. He includes no citations and analyzes no texts. No doubt, some hold such views, but many, including most of the leading theorists of human rights today, do not. His method of attack, the attribution of vague and often preposterous generalities and the deduction of disastrous consequences from them, is strikingly similar to that of some of his favorite opponents, such as Luc Ferry. However, let's put aside the details of Badiou's sloppy and abusive attack on his poor opponent. (Should we call them his poor pathetic victims who are never allowed to speak for themselves?) Instead, let us focus on the way in which this attack is symptomatic of something to which Badiou has himself fallen victim.

Badiou's polemic is certainly correct in attacking victimology, one of the banes of the contemporary world. However, there is a danger both in reducing the person to a mere victim and also in negating absolutely the phenomenon of victimhood. Badiou's attack goes suspiciously too far in latter direction. This philosopher of the heroic event seems deathly afraid of the very category of victimhood. For example, he states that "the status of victim, of suffering beast, of emaciated, dying body, equates man with his animal substructure, it reduces him to the level of a living organism pure and simple." But why this excessive reaction to any attribution of victimhood, this deafness to much of what human rights advocates often say and do? This statement makes sense only if it is seen as an aspect of the affirmation of a heroic, masculinist, Promethean conception of selfhood. An expression of masculinist anxiety in the face of threat of castration or feminization. A Promethean panic reaction.

We should remember that in the phallocratic French language "la victime" is one of the few generic words that is feminine. For Badiou it is not sufficient that one combat the process of reduction of humans to *mere* victims. Rather one must always see humans as other than victims. For Badiou, l'Homme, "Man," must never fall to level of "la victime." "He" must seek to prove himself to be "un Immortel." As Badiou states it, "An immortal: this is what the worst situations that can be inflicted upon Man show him to be, in so far as he distinguishes himself

within the varied and rapacious flux of life…"

Note the typical Promethean view of nature or life as a hostile consuming power that threatens and limits heroic "Man" and challenges him to raise himself up above it, to "distinguish" himself. He cannot bear to be "la nature," "la vie." He cannot escape from dependence on his "lower nature,: but he must do his best to transcend it. "So," Badiou continues, "if 'rights of man' exist . . . [t]hey are the rights of the Immortal, affirmed in their own right, or the rights of the Infinite, exercised over the contingency of suffering and death. The fact that in the end we all die, that only dust remains, in no way alters Man's identity as immortal at the instant in which he affirms himself as someone who runs counter to the temptation of wanting-to-be-an-animal to which circumstances may expose him."

So for Badiou the disgrace of ordinary humanity is that it exists in a sinful, fallen, animalistic condition from which it must be saved through accepting its higher calling to attain immortality.

"In each case," he says, "subjectivation is immortal, and makes Man. Beyond this there is only a biological species, a 'biped without feathers', whose charms are not obvious." Here we have it. Bipeds without feathers are not charming. Thus spoke Badiou.

Perhaps he has a point. This why in New Orleans we so often dress up in utterly charming feathers. But I fear that even this would not satisfy Badiou. To be honest, I'm not sure if life could ever be charming in Badiou's fantasized evental world, which at best can only tolerate the richness of human cultural creativity as occasionally useful baggage. I'm not sure if life can ever be charming without the emergence of the carnivalesque, the magical, the marvelous in the midst of the ordinary. Admittedly, a cultural revolution at its most ecstatically nihilistic can rise to the level of cannibalism, but Carnival is the true festival of carnality, of immanence, of celebration of our glorious materiality and embodiedness, of animality with imagination. It shows that the outside is always inside and vice versa. Structure may walk the streets occasionally but the dialectic marches through them on many important occasions. A multitude of small non-Badouian events show that excess, supplementarity, the rambunctious remainder are at the heart of everyday life.

There runs through Badiou's thought a certain Gnostic contempt for human nature; a positing of a need to prove oneself truly human by transcending our embodied condition and our ordinary humanity, the dangerousness of our cultural and communal being. I can imagine the militants of Badiou's groupuscule arriving at a gathering of foreign workers. They begin, "greetings animals, we are here to help you make yourselves into human beings."

2. Death

For Badiou, our mystical participation in the heroic Event is our victory over death.

In his *Ethics*, Badiou states that "I shall call 'truth' (*a* truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation. For example, the politics of the French

Maoists between 1966 and 1976, which tried to think and practice a fidelity to two entangled events: the Cultural Revolution in China, and May ’68 in France.” (42)

But fidelity to May ‘68 is also an illusion. Let’s be grateful to Philippe Garrel for his excruciatingly magnificent film “Regular Lovers,” the greatest of all May 68 films. In some ways I would like to say that the greatest was Tanner’s “Jonas Qui Aura 25 Ans en l’An 2000,” which is really about a kind of fragile and more human form of fidelity to May 68. But the masterpiece is Garell’s work of honest and profound infidelity to May ‘68. As I viewed it, wholly entranced, I thought, how can Garrell inflict so much pain on us, so much truth? He tells us, with great insight, that the price of fidelity to May ‘68 is death.

In the very long first episode of the film, we see the non-heroic hero, François, at the barricades. There he is, in legendary May ’68 itself, but he is not there. He cannot fully be in May ’68 because he is at the same time living in his fantasy of 1792. If Garrell had taken us to the barricades of 1792 we would perhaps have found a young non-hero living in his fantasy of 1776, a 1776 that those who were living there in 1776 could have even vaguely recognized.

Garrel inserts in the midst of the film the Kinks’ haunting tune “This Time Tomorrow,” in a scene which was used as a trailer for the film. As we hear this great Kinks song we see young Parisian radical youth, dancing, looking supercool and knowing it, living their fundamental fantasy. Living it and not living it, as the Kinks’ lyrics ominously and tragically hint to us. It was already tomorrow. Their fidelity to the event was their death sentence. As the story plays out, François remains true to his political event and to his subsequent amorous one. The events are over. The void of uneventful ordinary life remains. His truth procedure leads to a dead end—in this case quite literalyl. How can Garrell do this to us? How can he tell the truth so cruelly? It is perhaps an even crueler truth if we do not take the death literally. The symbolic message is that fidelity to the event means surrender to the death drive. It means the kind of death to which Badiou, technically alive, so often surrenders.

This time tomorrow

where will we be

On a spaceship somewhere sailing across an empty sea
This time tomorrow what will we know
Will we still be here watching an in-flight movie show

Will we, like Badiou, still be lost in our fundamental eventa fantasy?

3. Life

For Badiou, our mystical participation in the heroic Event is our triumph over nature.

In December of 2007 Badiou did an interview in which he discussed his view of nature and ecology. His comments are quite revealing. They show the degree to which he is blind to

whatever does not fit into the narrow bounds of his abstract eventism.

Ecology he says, 'is a contemporary form of the opium of the people . . . an only slightly camouflaged religion." He does not, however, present any coherent and informed analysis of the religious dimensions of contemporary ecology movement to perhaps help us a little in assessing the merits of his claim. Instead, he offers a stream of consciousness listing of things he imagines about ecology and does not like: "the millenarian terror, concern for everything save the properly political destiny of peoples, new instruments for the control of everyday life, the obsession with hygiene, the fear of death and of catastrophes." Thus, we are to conclude, ecology is "a gigantic operation in the depoliticization of subjects." An operation *by whom* we are not told. By ecofeminists, eco-Marxists, eco-anarchists, bioregionalists, neo-primitivists, liberal environmentalists, FBI and CIA infiltrators of these movements? Who knows and who really cares?

Obviously, not Badiou. "It's the whole vibe of the thing." One must simply view this ecology thing as a vague amorphous conspiracy. He assures us that "behind it there is the idea that with strict ecological obligations one can prevent the emerging countries from competing too rapidly with the established imperial powers." Is there any particular someone who actually *has* this idea or does the idea somehow do this on its own. Do Chico Mendes's rubber tappers have it? Do the Amungme tribe in Papua fighting against transnational corporations have it? Did the women of the Chipko Movement in India who fought against the destruction of their forests have it? Don't ask Badiou. He obviously opts for the safer Platonoid theory that the idea does it all on its own. Next he tells us that "the fact that ecology is practically consensual in our 'developed' countries is a bad sign. This is a rule: everything which is consensual is without a doubt bad for human emancipation." Needless to say Badiou looked at no mere empirical evidence to determine the possible existence and nature of such a consensus. New York Times polls of voters consistently show ecological concerns at the bottom of these voters list of priorities. After decades of presentation of scientific evidence barely half of the US populace believes in anthropogenic climate change, and the percentage has been dropping quickly. This is even more the case in England. So much for the consensus.

Badiou finally delivers his punch line. "I am Cartesian: man is the master and possessor of nature. That has never been as true as today." He does not have the slightest suspicion that this ludicrous article of his own arid religious faith is at all problematical, and actually proposes a proof of it. "The proof," he says, "is that in order to save a particular species of beetle or tulip, one does not make use of nature, but of State regulations! Nature is therefore in no way a norm situated above humanity." Notice that in the course of this brief proof this trained mathematician has substituted a quite different conclusion for the original thesis he proposed for proof. There is no possible interpretation of his argument in which the conclusion follows. There is in fact no inconsistency between grounding norms in nature and humanity being the master of nature. Norms have no way of automatically enforcing compliance by human beings. In any case, the two propositions can certainly not be equated. Furthermore, nature could generate norms that are consistent with human mastery, so natural norms and mastery are not contradictory as Badiou implies.

But putting aside this incoherence in his argument, what can we say about his key point that the existence of state regulations demonstrates human mastery of nature, which is his central point in the argument. This argument fails miserably. State regulation only demonstrates the existence of an attempt to control some aspect of nature, and in no ways proves that “mastery” exists. In fact, despite various laws and regulations perhaps as many as 50,000 species are now going extinct each year, and the Sixth Great Mass Extinction in the history of life on earth continues unabated. Thus Badiou is left with the bizarre contention that state regulation aimed at preventing extinction, which is a monumental failure globally, is evidence of human “mastery of nature,” rather than of humanity’s obvious failure in its attempts to shape nature according to its will. What mass extinction does in fact demonstrate is that humanity is much more capable of destruction of the natural world than of “mastery” of it. As Hegel showed long ago, destruction or annihilation is not only not a form of mastery, it in fact makes mastery impossible.

But in the absence of real mastery, those who aspire to it have another recourse. It is called fantasy.

Pollen and Diamonds

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Elizy, dear. I can't carry you any longer. You've gotten too heavy. Come, be a good girl and take a few steps on your own.

Maria-Maria heard this one day as she stared at the screen of her lap top, regained control of the cursor and clicked on the earth and steered her way to a big city.

Where am I? She asked herself. This is so strange!

Maria-Maria approached this city with great speed. Fist she saw the silhouettes of the houses. Then everything grew foggy. She couldn't recognize anything. Where am I? A subtle feeling of discomfort came over her. No, I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid? Maria-Maria had already done the sight-seeing tour. Visited theGrand Canyon,Niagara Fallsand the Colorado River. The Imperial Palace inTokyo. She had already been to Bucharest, in the largest building in the world after the Pentagon. She'd been on the roof of Dracula's castle. She had visited the castle in the Carpathians, that Jules Verne had described. And she had already looked at the Cafes in Paris, in which Hemingway had written some of his stories. She's climbed the Eiffel Tower and admired the glass pyramid at the Louvre. She still wanted to see the Berlin *Reichstag* from above and New Delhi as well. And much more. Where have I landed? Am I even on earth? And why doesn't Google show me the name of this city?

Elizy, dear, pull up your socks. Don't be a slob…and pick up your feet when you walk. Good Lord, child, don't be that way, and stop crying. We'll be there in no time! –she heard again.

She wanted to come up again with the help of her cursor. But something unusual happened as she navigated. It was as if someone was steering against her. All of a sudden, the view became clearer. She saw a pair of mud-splattered children's shoes. The laces of the left shoe drooped into the plaster and soaked up the water in a small puddle. Large drops dripped into the puddle and poured dirt onto the child's snow-white socks.

The shoes belonged to a chubby little girl, still unable to get a balanced stance on her feet. Oh, that must be Elizy, Maria-Maria surmised.

Elizy pointing to her socks, cries heartrendingly. And the woman who stood next to her loses her patience.

A newspaper page flies by and lands on the ground. The little girl steps on it and won't budge from it. As though she were drawn to the piece of paper. As though she felt safer on this piece of paper. Come, Elizy, dear. Come, move away from there. Let's go, quickly. Otherwise, we'll get soaking wet. I want to read what's on there, Mama. Come on, my little one, don't talk any

nonsense. You don't even know how to read yet! Tell me, Mama, what does it say on there? Katalyn tears the kid away and distances herself from the paper. The rain beats down on the page with great force. The paper was soaked and the it was torn by a gush of water. Katlyn can still make out a few words on it. The Wiener Allgemeine. The page is stuck to the sewer manhole (Was she looking for a headline?)

Katalyn carries the suitcases hurrying and dragging Elizy with her. Elizy's holding on to Katalyn's skirt.

The storm has scared the people away. There is no one to be seen on the streets. Elizy and Katalyn have suddenly disappeared. Maria-Maria hears a crack, as if thunder had struck somewhere near her. And in the distance she hears the knell of a bell. Ding-dong. Ding-dong!

Maria-Maria hears the bells and looks toward the church.

At once she realized, that someone was ringing the doorbell to her apartment.

I'm coming Roswitha! Just be patient, yelled Maria-Maria somewhat agitated. I'll be right there!

Roswitha lives in the same house as Maria-Maria and is unemployed. Whenever she goes grocery shopping, she shops for Maria-Maria as well. Today she'd planned on having fish with vegetables. She's planning on sharing some of the fish with her tomcat. What about fruit? Yes fruit too. A large wedge of watermelon and a couple of bananas. Maria-Maria stood up somewhat hastily, switched her computer on stand-by and looked for her crutch. Carefully, she hopped toward the door. Appalled, she wanted to slam it. I'm not buying anything, she yelled. I have enough insurance policies. I don't need a vacuum cleaner. And I donate elsewhere! The man would not give up: But Maria-Maria, we have plans! I have important news for you. Didn't you get my letter?

The fog broke up slowly and the view cleared up. It wasn't fog. It was smoke that was ascending from a table in the corner. Elizy was nowhere to be seen. Instead there was a group of men engaging in a boisterous discussion. One man banged his fist on the table and shouted: that's how art gets driven into its grave. That's the way to demolish literature, my dear gentlemen! He was agitated and his gestures did not fit his appearance, which was somewhat severe. And his colorless face. We have to respond, Peter. I will found a journal. A fervid reaction against this nonsense. The man called Peter seemed to listen with divided attention. He seemed to be thinking about something much more important, looking over the shoulder of his conversation partner into the distance. The buzz of voices in the café was mixed with sounds, the sounded like rain. The rain that prattled against the window panes. Damn it Peter, you are incorrigible. Could you listen to me for 5 minutes!

Sh…sh…shhhh. Don't shout. Do you see the little girl over there? The one with her mother. She

has the Beethoven- look.

I have to photograph her. She belongs in my collection. Good Evening, Herr Loos, was heard in the background. Do you still miss Griensteidl? Or have you begun to like it here in our parts. This too is a good place for literati. There was mail for you today. The man called Loos joined the other two men that were seated there. Will it be the usual? Asked the waiter. White coffee, as always. The newspaper. And please don't forget my mail. Karl, are you still hoping to change Peter? That's no longer possible in this lifetime. Gentlemen, have you heard the latest joke about.…

Loos took his handkerchief and wiped the dampness off of his face.

It's raining buckets and I couldn't get a cab. Sometimes Vienna can really get to one.

The waiter came with the tray. Next to the coffee and a glass of water lay two missives. Addressed to Herr Loos – Café Central –Herrengasse. On the table awaited him also the Freie Wiener newspaper. This is yesterday's paper, waiter. Today is the 25th. The 25th of March, 1905. On this special day, gentlemen…as he clasped his white coffee.

(There was an inspection of the letters about details of how they talked to one another and how they behaved. A description of the three, Peter Altenberg, Karl Kraus and Adolf Loos. Next to Peter and the wan, tempermental young man with the spectacles appeared a tall…)

A small child was rocking on unsteady legs at the table in the corner. Elizy! Elizy, my darling, come back here immediately. The rain has stopped. We can keep going. The waiter brought her the two large suitcases and an umbrella. Madame, I can call you a cab.

The lady disappeared. At once, the screen turned into a drippy window pane.

During dinner, the computer had been left on stand-by. After dinner Maria-Maria had wanted to finish going through her mail. Now she stood there without knowing how she would put everything in order. She had been to Vienna—at least if she were to believe everything she'd heard, that is to say, what she was allowed to witness, since she was in Vienna on the 25th of March, 1905. At the same time while being in Leipziger Strasse. In her kitchen. In her apartment on the 13th floor on March 25th, 2005. I've only broken my leg, she thought to herself. My head should be in good shape.

The day was very eventful. She did not leave her apartment, but the world had come home to her. The last remains of the fish that Roswitha had brought her still lay in the cat's dish. The business card that Herr Siementhal-Grotwski had left behind lay on the table. Does this bank even exist, Maria-Maria asked herself. Or am I dreaming in a dream that one has in a dream?

Maria-Maria noticed the cigarette smoke in the kitchen. The lap top lay on the kitchen table.

She dared not go near it. She sensed the tobacco smoke in the kitchen. Her guest had had a cigar. But he hadn't smoked it. The smoke seemed to become more intense. As though it were wafting out of the computer screen. A shudder moved up her spine. She did not want to admit to herself that it smelled like mocha as well. Like fresh brewed mocha. Coffee. Café Central?

Central. Of course she still remembers! That's the café' in Vienna, where you can see a paper-mâché figure sitting up on a chair. What was it called again? This peculiar writer, who lived in the hotel. And had upholstered his room with photos of women and girls. He wrote short sentences. Telegraphic sentences, as they were referred to at the time. He was a friend of Karl Kraus and Feliz Salten. And Adolf Loos.

She asked herself whether living alone could have such consequences. Whether she was hallucinating. Whether it was time to call for her friends? To ask Roswitha to come upstairs? Or to consign herself to her doctor? Where are my crutches?

They stood in the same place. The tomcat slithered by her healthy leg. Just don't trip! She stood up and went to the bathroom.

When she came back, she heard the child crying. Mama, asked the child. When are we finally going to arrive. Mama. I'm hungry! Maria-Maria hurried as fast as she could to the computer and pulled the plug out of the socket. Her heart was thumping and she went to bed without brushing her teeth. She didn't even undress. Tensed up, she lay herself down. She began to shake. Then pulled the covers over her head and tried to fall asleep.

A few days went by until Maria-Maria mustered up enough courage to turn on her computer. It was in the afternoon. After her visit to the physical therapist. She was burning with curiosity and at the same time she was fearful too. I have to finish sifting through the mail. Then I'll decide. Katalyn is there again. This thought swirled around in her head. And she asked herself, whether she would also be able to later find out, where Katalyn would be. And as she turned on the computer, and clicked on Google (Time), a woman, whom she did not yet know, appeared on the screen.

The woman stood in the kitchen in front of a long, smooth wooden table and was cutting something into small pieces on a wooden cutting board. She spoke, upon being clearly summoned, to someone that was not visible. Maria-Maria could have sworn that she had already seen a kitchen similar to that.

Must you only bring disgrace to our family! Why do you want to work in Vienna? Among strangers. And if it's only about work for you, then you've got plenty of that here. In your own house. With your own children. Or in father's shop. And why in God's name do you want to leave here to go to Vienna. To study! Your head is full of nonsense!

Even father doesn't know which end is up with you! Yesterday I had to really pity him. I gave

her everything, he said to me in despair. I tolerated everything. And I gave her everything. Because you had no mother.

Everything you wanted, you got. Even Franzerl. Now it’s time for you to be reasonable and marry a bright and decent man. One who can provide for you and your daughters. Be reasonable for once and marry the university lecturer, Goldmann. You have three children, you’re no longer a young girl and it’s your duty to take care of them.

The woman at the table did not get a reply and became more agitated. Now it’s no longer about you. Father is not strict enough with you. You wrap him around your finger and he allows you to do whatever you want with him. I always had to obey. But you, he loves you above all else. And you make a fool of him. Now you want to stick him with two children. Has father not provided for us long enough? Your mother. Yes, my mother too, she deserted you. And left him with the entire burden.

And the woman that was spoken to, and had not yet shown herself on the screen, appeared now next to the woman on the screen and asked: Anna, would you have said the same about father, if he had died? Must you always be different? Damn it Katalyn, you really think you’re better than everyone else. I won’t be able to leave father alone with the children. You know that. You leave me no choice. Now I have to also take care of your children. Have I not done enough for you? I’ve been like a mother to you. I had no time to be young. And in love. Like you. I married the first best suitor, who wanted to marry me. So that I would not be a burden to father.

You decided that for yourself, Katalyn told her. Father never complained that it was too much for him. He was happy with us and didn’t want you to leave. You imagined that all yourself.

Anna was chopping onions. With the knife in her hand. And in her rage, she threw the knife on the kitchen table. The knife was high up and fell into a plate. The plate broke. Terrified, Katalyn went to grab it. She grasped the shards.

Wait, I didn’t mean it like that. Please, Katalyn! I’m sorry. Katalyn’s eyes were filled with tears. Give me your hand. Anna quickly looked for a clean kitchen towel and wrapped it around her hand. The cotton fibers were gorged with red.

I love you my little sister. My child. Then she became filled with anger again. Somehow you always manage to do that. To always give me a bad conscious.

Again and again, Anna said. Again and again I have a bad conscious, when I finally say, what I’m thinking. When I refuse to do, what one expects of me. And in the end, I do it anyway. You, on the other hand, you only do what you want. You never do what one expects of you. You are like mother. You never sacrifice yourself for anyone. Not even for your daughters. That’s why Franzerl left you. You can’t make a fool out of me. He left you. He’s not dead. Father knows it too. Everyone knows it. Except no one will say it. Father doesn’t say anything either. Because he knows, it has no purpose. You only do, what goes through your head. Father says nothing to

you. That worries me. It causes me to worry about your daughters. What will come of them, with such a mother!

Katalyn's face hardened for an instant, then she said: Anna, my dear. You don't understand me. And I don't understand you either. It's as if we weren't sisters. How can you speak of mother so. I love you Anna, but don't speak about mother like that again. You didn't understand her either.

Then everything disappeared from the screen and nothing but a black surface could be seen. Maria-Maria was left a feeling of discontentment. But Katalyn was gone. And that remained so for the rest of the day.

It had already been a few days since Katalyn had been in Vienna with Elizy and she still could not believe it. She had some money and happiness too. The small apartment on the top floor in the Herrengasse, not far from Café Central, had just been vacated and she moved in immediately. Elizy was healthy and Katalyn was able to look around and plan her next steps. She wanted to study with Professor Schauta. You want to become a gynecologist, he'd told her on the same day. We'll have to see if you have what it takes. It's a hard profession. Until now, I've only met men who have the endurance for it. Why is it not enough for you to become a midwife? Why don't you want to become a pediatrician? Or a throat, nose and ear specialist? Why don't you simply marry a doctor?

Should I answer all of your questions at once. Or only the most important one?, Katalyn replied. Only the most important one. And it will be the one on which I shall soon test you .

My good God, I'm inVienna, Katalyn said to herself. And I'm determined to realize my dream. But today, she'd had a long day. And besides, her heart was heavy today. She noticed how a dark cloud had spread out over her and threatened to swallow her. She could barely breathe. With every deep breath, she grew ever more sad and a feeling of loss crept over her.

Elizy played with her horse in the room next door. She'd seen the horse the day before in a showcase and had yearned to have it. A horse, my dear goodness, no doll, but a horse. It was ornamented, like a Hungarian Hussar horse and Katalyn thought about Franzerl. She remembered the first day she'd met him. On the day, that he appeared on a white horse, in his embroidered Hussar uniform. And she lay in the grass and opened her eyes. And bent over her head was the one she'd later call, Franzerl-my heart. Franz-Ferdinand Fikar, a Hussar in the volunteer Husar regiment Number 13.The man that she'd chosen for the rest of her life.

I could have been grateful to Franzerl. Perhaps he wouldn't have left and I wouldn't have been in Vienna now. And what would I have done if I had never known Franzerl? Then there would have been no Marischka, no Aurora-Amalia. She looked at Elizy. And I probably would have had it a bit easier in Vienna now without Elizy, she thought.

Without Elizy? A life without Elizy. I can't even imagine that. Dear God, please don't punish me for my thoughts. Then my thoughts have no end: What would have become of me if my mother had not died at the time of my birth? If Anna had not married? If father had remarried? If I had been born in another family? In another country? Would I have ever met Franzerl?

Katalyn looked at Elizy. She felt something. A feeling. As though her heart were creating more room. As though this room were becoming filled with waves of warmth. With flutters and trembling. And swinging. With infinity. With hurt and nostalgia. And happiness. Something that was so vast, manifold and luminous, that she couldn't capture in words. Except for those of others.

A life without Franzerl.

Perhaps she would have been better off if she'd stayed with father? Or if she'd married Aurel after all? So many questions spun around in her head.

Would she have been able to stay with Franzerl her whole life through? Happily? Or unhappily? Would she have been able to follow him to the place where he wanted to start a new life? Would she have gone with him to New York, if he'd asked her from the onset? Would she have really gone? Would she have trusted Franzerl enough, in order to put her life in his hands? To rely on him completely? And would Franzerl had even left her, if she'd trusted him that much?

Katalyn was not the type of woman that wanted to depend on anyone. Today she was sure of that. Perhaps it was for the best. Otherwise I would be like my sister, who waits for others to decide her due. She waits to see what's left for her. I don't want mere crumbs. I want the whole cake. I want the Sachertorte. And I want to get it myself.

Elizy was tired and cranky. She wanted to sleep with the horse. That won't be, Katalyn told her. Let it sleep in the corner with the dolls. And I'll tell you a fairy tale. A real story. All of a sudden, Elizy's eyes shone bright. Katalyn pointed to the book on her night table. Would you like me to tell you about how an Englishman went around the world with his servants in 80 days? And the man who wrote it just died. The Englishman's name was Phileas Fogg. A strange man with neither wishes nor dreams. And one day, out of the blue, he wanted to travel around the world and prove that the earth has gotten smaller. Because one can travel around it faster nowadays. Katalyn doesn't get very far with the story. Phileas Fogg had barely boarded the train toDoverto start his trip, when Elizy fell asleep. Her little fist loosened her grip around Katalyns hand and she started to suck on her thumb.

Katalyn extinguished the light. She would have preferred to remain in bed next to her. To hold her tight and to fall asleep with her. But she still had a great deal to do. For her the day is just beginning. For reading and above all for studying. In order to give Professor H the right answers. And to be admitted at university. She wants to be like Dora Teleki. There aren't many women that dare to enter the world of men. There aren't that many women who believe that it is not only their right, but that they also have the strength and the abilities to be in that world. She wants to establish herself as a gynecologist in her hometown. She wants to open a clinic.

She wants to specialize in women with difficult deliveries. She wants to cure them of their illnesses. So that no child will be motherless. And no woman will die at childbirth.

Is that too much to ask? Is that even attainable for her? To become a midwife would be enough. Don’t exaggerate, Katalyn, Aurel had said to her, as he came back from Berlin for semester break. It isn’t necessary for you to be like a man. You could become my assistant one day. That way we could always be together.

But Katalyn doesn’t always want to be with someone. Sometimes she just wants to be. For herself. And since Aurel said that, she’d never regretted not marrying him.

This is an excerpt from Carmen Francesca Banciu’s forthcoming novel, Pollen and Diamonds and is translated from the German by Elena Mancini.

Twilight Saga of the American Empire?

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Reviews of Andrew J. Bacevich, Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War (Metropolitan Books, 2010); Philip S. Golub, Power, Profit & Prestige: A History of American Imperial Expansion (Pluto Press, 2010); Chalmers Johnson, Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope, (Metropolitan Books, 2010).

America's supreme position in the world is coming ever more into question everywhere. The Pax Americana in place since the aftermath of World War Two no longer seems viable. Things are in transition. The future looms more ominously than we would like. The center, as Yeats wrote, cannot hold – and perhaps, neither can the Right, which has presided over this growing mess for most of our lives. Three recent noteworthy volumes by Andrew Bacevich, the late Chalmers Johnson and Philip Golub, offer interesting snapshots of the precarious present moment and sharp overlapping histories of how we stumbled into our plight.

Chalmers Johnson, who died last November, was a scholar best known for his book Blowback, which introduced the wider American public to the hitherto peculiar idea that the unpleasant things the United States does around the world can and do have grave repercussions for the United States itself. The notion of 'blowback', which is an insider intelligence agency term, arose especially out of the 1980s Afghan insurgency that the U.S. fed in order to oust the Soviets, only to have these same extremists afterward turn their gun sights on U.S. infidels. Andrew Bacevich is a retired U.S. Army Colonel, former instructor at West Point, and history professor at Boston University. Bacevich, formerly a self-confessed unquestioning functionary, hit a personal and anguished crossroads as the second Iraq War got under way, finding himself opposed to the extremely ill-advised U.S. course of action. He also, tragically, lost a son in that war. Philip Golub is a professor of International Relations at the American University in Paris and a long-time contributing editor at the monthly Le Monde Diplomatique.

Bacevich and Johnson, as former true believers in establishment shibboleths, retain an abiding respect for what they see as the allure of the ideals of America, however great the shortfalls from reality, but both men argue ruefully that at this current moment those ideals are being cast aaway altogether. Their books have different focal points; Bacevich's being the Washington power structure since World War II while Johnson writes on the parlous state of the U.S. empire. Regardless, there is a pronounced and unavoidable overlap. They both denounce and dissect the rash global war that Bush, Rumsfeld, Cheney and their neocon comrades launched in the fall of 2001. Bacevich notes, "By the time Barack Obama succeeded George W. Bush as president in January 2009, the phrase global war on terror had become an epithet, redolent with deception, stupidity, and monumental waste. Soon thereafter it faded

from the lexicon of American politics."(166) As no small consequence, he argues, there is an ebbing in real U.S. power. The authors argue that for the United States to advance safely into the future, it urgently needs to undo the imperial character that openly has come to constitute it. They are not especially optimistic about remedies.

The Past 60 Years

Bacevich opens his book with a personally candid chapter called "Slow Learner" where he describes his eye-opening tour of East Berlin near the end of the Cold War. He tells how he realized that the Soviet powerhouse the West was living in mortal terror of was in reality a fragile shell afflicted by archaic rules, disintegrating infrastructure, and economic stagnation. Similarly, Johnson notes, "To the dying days of the Cold War, every estimate of Soviet strategic nuclear forces overstated [emphasis in the original] the rate at which Moscow was modernizing its weaponry."(77) These realizations, and the post-collapse revelations of the abysmal shape of the Soviet economy, were staggering ones for his world-view. Given that the magnitude of the Soviet threat was hyped and hyper-hyped — though the brinksmanship was quite real — one becomes haunted by the question: all this fear and trembling (and endless spending) for what?

Bacevich takes us on a brisk tour of U.S. foreign policy from the end of World War II down to today. Along the way we meet the likes of the Strategic Air Command's, Curtis LeMay, the CIA's, Allen Dulles, the Defense Department's, Robert McNamara, Donald Rumsfeld and David Petraeus. All these eminent gentlemen come in for well-warranted and penetrating ridicule. When Bacevich, a veteran, writes about the U.S. in Vietnam one is struck by how this experience still casts a large cautioning shadow for him but not for the Bush White House. Vietnam was a major defeat for the U.S. and yet its hotly disputed legacy continues to (mis)inform and shape policy. Thomas Ricks' book, The Gamble, on the surge in Iraq has some stunning quotes from the military and diplomatic leaders showing how frightened they were of a catastrophic defeat in 2006. One gets a keen sense of how Vietnam is both a reference point and a negative catalyst amplifying the U.S.'s constraints. One can only imagine the impact within U.S. society if American casualty figures from Iraq or Afghanistan were in the tens of thousands, as they had been during the Vietnam war. This alone underscores the limits the U.S. has in projecting its power as it moves into the new millennium. To be an empire means fielding an imperial army. The U.S. right now is experiencing some dangerously unacknowledged constraints in its ability to do that.

Iraq

It is worth remembering this fact when Johnson writes that George W. Bush and his administration "drove the country as close to the precipice as was humanely possible."(3) It is shocking to consider the launching of two major wars in the span of two years along with the threats against Syria and beyond at the triumphalist conclusion of the initial U.S. invasion of Iraq — to say nothing of emboldening of Israel to drive into Lebanon in 2006 and then the saber rattling at Iran. The U.S. made quick work of invading, toppling regimes and killing thousands of people, but found itself incapable of constructing the kind of pliant pro-Western

regimes they hankered after. It brings to mind Eric Hobsbawn's observation, "Arms have often established empires, but it take more than arms to maintain them, as witness the old saw dating back to Napoleon: 'You can do anything with bayonets except sit on them.'" (53). The U.S. is only now beginning to extract itself from Iraq, and to a lesser degree, Afghanistan. All this will have lasting repercussions, hitherto denied, for the projection of power.

Events of 9/11, Bacevich writes, constituted "a moment that created an opening to pose first-order questions."(73) Though he does not elaborate what those question might be the framework of his book suggests: Why did this attack happen? Who are these enemies that despise the U.S. to such a degree that they would do something so atrocious? Why is the twenty-first century still affected by a religion based on the seventh-century? And so on.

Of course these sobering kinds of questions were never asked. Rather we got the Rumsfeld defense department touting the impact new technology would have in fighting easy wars. The book quotes Lt. Gen. Robert Wagner on the Rumsfeld war-fighting doctrine, "Our operations in Afghanistan and Iraq [have demonstrated] operational attributes that an adaptive joint force must possess in the modern Battlespace." (176) Bacevich correctly calls such utterances as, "jargon tricked out as profundities."

Bacevich is not in the thrall to General David Petraeus either. He points out that what happened in Iraq under Petraeus and the surge was a matter of good timing in which an important section of the Sunni population broke with Al Queda, at the same time as the Shia drew closer to Iran. It was in that context that the security work of the population undertaken in the surge was able to get some purchase — it hardly qualifies as victory. He offers a revealing quotation from Chairman Petraeus, "Perceptions of reality more so than objective reality, are crucial to the decisions of statesmen."(194)

This is nothing more than a restating of the crudest concept of American pragmatism, i.e., if it seems true, it is. This concept, however, requires some exploration. A good example of 'generating perception' can be seen in Obama's August 2010 statement declaring an end to the combat mission in Iraq, "[U.S. forces] defeated a regime that had terrorized its people. Together with Iraqis and coalition partners who made huge sacrifices of their own, our troops fought block by block to help Iraq seize the chance for a better future. They shifted tactics to protect the Iraqi people, trained Iraqi Security Forces, and took out terrorist leaders. Because of our troops and civilians — and because of the resilience of the Iraqi people — Iraq has the opportunity to embrace a new destiny." Of course the actual situation is quite different. It is the story of a brazen imperial adventure that unsuccessfully attempted to redraw the map of the Middle East that has left in its wake an underlying instability in that country, lead to major geopolitical shifts in the region (a more powerful Iran for one), and the real loss of American power and legitimacy. All efforts by Petraeus, Obama, and other like to cast success as failure, cannot dispel that underlying reality.

Washington Rules

The central thesis in Bacevich's book is that there are in place "Washington Rules," consisting of a credo, that U.S. alone must lead in the world, and a trinity: "global military presence, global power projection, and global interventionism."(12-14). These haughty rules are at the heart of the problem that needs to change if the U.S. is to advance into the future in tune with what Bacevich feels are the country's founding principles. What he does not explore much is the underlying need of the U.S. elites to dominate the world economically.

At one point Bacevich offers a revealing quote from Obama from December 2009, "The United States of America has underwritten global security for over six decades — a time that, for all its problems, has seen walls come down, and markets open, and billions lifted from poverty, unparalleled scientific progress and advancing frontiers of human liberty." Obama's key point is the opening of markets, i.e., the U.S. is not projecting power for the sake of it or because it is on some type of self-perpetuating dynamic (though there are elements of that), but in order to reap rewards in wealth. It is from this that the larger policy springs. That is not to say it only resides in the drive for profit, or to say that politics does not play an independent role at times, but it is the case that something is driving this, and it is the drive for accumulation.

For his part Johnson addresses the underlying economic interests. He writes, "The fact that we did not modernize or replace our capital assets is one of the main reason why, by the turn of the twenty-first century, our manufacturing base had all but evaporated." (145) This is a strikingly simplistic assertion. The drive to extract surplus value — which can only be got from labor power in its myriad forms — is what drove manufacture to places like Indonesia and China. This underscores how the decline of U.S. hegemony is part of a larger transformation going on. In that regard Frederic Jameson in his *Valences of Dialectics* is worth pondering. Jameson points out that Marx — in contrast to some of the more "triumphalist" passages in Capital, "tirelessly insisted on the significance of the world market as the ultimate horizon of capitalism." (370) It is beyond the scope of this essay to delve fully into this, but the strength of American power cannot be understood outside the overall process of capital accumulation, a process that continues in its increasingly globalized character at the same time it is crashing against it own limits. In that regard the banking crisis of 2008 seems more a bellwether of things to come.

Dismantling the Empire?

Here we address Chalmers Johnson's central thesis. He writes, "The real reason for constructing [a] new ring of American bases along the equator is to expand our empire and reinforce our military domination of the world. (119)" So far so good, but then he tells us, "If the U.S. nuclear stockpile consisted of several hundred weapons rather than several thousand, would the United States find itself appreciably more vulnerable to nuclear blackmail or attack? Were the United States, sixty-plus years after the end of World War II, finally to withdraw its forces from Germany, Italy, and the rest of Europe, would Americans sleep less easily in their beds at night?" Here we see Johnson at once reject the situation, but accept the rationale. The U.S. can still have a preeminent place in the world, but with a much smaller imperial footprint. In that respect Johnson (among others) offers England at the point it began to shed its empire

as a positive model.

This is an artful reimagining. England did not just give up its empire. Through the course of two horrific world wars it militarily lost it. That it was not quite as catastrophic as the fall of some empires is historically specific. Had it not been for the peculiar mix of the United States — driven by its own national interests — coming to its rescue during World War II and the need to contain the Soviet Union, the fate of England would likely have been messier. That did not happen so there is not much use speculating what that would have looked like. However it underscores this process of 'shedding' an empire tends to be a wrenching and potentially calamitous process.

The bigger point though is that the suggestion that one can peacefully shed an empire and convert into something idealized suggests wanting to look at the monstrousness of all this and walk away saying this doesn't have to be a monster, that this isn't of a piece.

The "American Century" has been a parade of horrors: Korea, the invasion of the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Vietnam, Grenada, Panama, the Iraq I, Afghanistan, Iraq II, along with coups, assassination and other dirty work. Yet neither Bacevich or Johnson want to entertain the idea that the problem — rather than Washington Rules or the military industrial complex — is the American ideal itself. The idea of America as a 'shining city on the hill' that exists as humanity's highest achievement — stands against the actuality that that achievement has always been driven by rapacity. It led to the expropriation and near elimination of the native population, the enslavement of multiple generations of slaves, the grabbing of country-sized swaths of land from Mexico, taking the Philippines and Hawaii, down to the 'empire of bases' today from Germany to Okinawa, to Colombia to Guam. A frank look at this would suggest we aim to achieve something higher. What that is exactly is not at all clear, but such are the questions that people of good will like Chalmers Johnson and Andrew Bacevich ought to be asking.

Golub

Golub is not burdened with such illusions. His book fills in a lot of the spaces that Bacevich & Johnson step or gloss over. Golub is not approaching things from the point of the rarefied "American Experience." He levels a harsher and more honest critique. He writes, "Even a cursory glance shows that from the 1950s until today, the United States has either been at war, supporting war-making or sustaining predatory states almost constantly in one part of the world or another of the 'Far Empire.'" (78) He outlines the countries, from the Philippines to the Congo, to Laos to Panama, where the U.S. has stuck its predatory nose.

Yet there is an underlying idealism (both philosophically and popularly understood) in his analysis. Golub favorably quotes Hannah Arendt, speaking about the US. in the Vietnam that it, "sought to demonstrate the will and ability…to have its way in world affairs,'…"to behave like the greatest power in the world for no other reason than to convince the world of this simple fact.'"(130) In many ways Golub flattens out the concepts of Power, Profit and Prestige, rather

than constructing a dialectical array. The Arendt quote suggests that prestige is an end in itself. Rather than an augmenting factor in service of larger aims, i.e, the drive for profit for the overall ability to accumulate. One is reminded of the quote in the Autobiography of Malcolm X, "To the hustler, reputation is everything." True, but that reputation is in service of something, the business of hustling. In the end Golub comes to a conclusion close to Johnson's that the U.S. can somehow decide to stop being imperialist, "An ordered pluralism cannot emerge if the U.S. does not disengage from empire." Given the history of the last century, and the U.S.'s history in particular one is left scratching their head as to the basis, even remotely, of such a sunny prospect.

The Moment

Recently Slavoj Zizek writing in, Living in the End Times, noted "The American Century is over and we are entering a period characterized by the formation of multiple centers of global capitalism: the U.S., Europe, China possibly Latin America, each of them representing capitalism with a specific local twist" (168)… This is why the present situation is potentially more dangerous than it may appear." Bacevich understands this on a basic level when he writes, "Promising prosperity and peace, the Washington rules are propelling the United States toward insolvency and perpetual war. Over the horizon a shipwreck of epic proportions awaits." (250). For his part Johnson tells us that, "If we do not learn from their examples, our decline and fall is foreordained."

This is a dire assessment. We need to envision a world different from the one we currently occupy. Whether that is ultimately a better one rests on many things, not the least of which is how we understand the world we actually inhabit. These books offer keen insights and analysis towards that. The need to ask first order questions remains.

Review of Basem Ra’ad, Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Our understanding of reality is paradigmatic. That is, it comes from a learned picture drawn by culture and ideology. There can be various aspects to a paradigm: political, scientific, religious, etc. and sometimes they can overlap and even be contradictory. Also, they all are capable of changing over time. Individuals who live through such changes can suffer “culture shock.”

Normally, individuals adapt to the paradigms dominant among their socio-economic peers and, more generally their national states. This adaptation to the dominant paradigm is part of the education and acculturation process group members go through. Having done so the initiate gets locked into his or her belief system with a conviction that it actually represents the world as it truly is. Unfortunately, there is nothing necessary about this conviction. To the extent that one’s paradigmatic worldview approximates things as they actually are, life can go along relatively smoothly. The best chance of this happening is at a very local level of life. However, where there are significant or growing discrepancies, tensions and conflict arise. Yet, even at their most discordant, imbibed paradigms can be utterly convincing for those raised within them. Even when proven objectively false, they still can have the power to shape people’s perceptions and direct their behaviors.

Basem Ra’ad’s truly fascinating and well written book, Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean is an excellent examination of the paradigms at work complicating and fueling the on-going competition in Palestine. Its lesson is a sobering one–our belief systems can falsify history and make a hell of our present world.

The paradigms now operating in Palestine are mostly religious, and among them the dominant one is that of the Israeli Zionists. This is the one that teaches its adherents that Palestine is the ancient and divinely promised homeland of the Jewish people. It also teaches that today’s Jews are the heirs the ancient Hebrews. The claims of ownership rest mostly on Old Testament stories rather than any objective historical evidence. For the Zionists, this worldview is sufficient to give contemporary Jews priority to the land and its resources. In the process they and their supporters have sought to dismiss the notions that the original population base of Palestine stems from ancient Cana’anite stock and that there is probably an interrelationship of Hebrews and Cana’anites. Both of these hypotheses would strengthen the modern counter claims of the Palestinians.

The counterclaims of the Palestinians, both Muslim and Christian, are based on age-old occupancy. Ra’ad makes the argument that, as suggested above, this occupancy is old enough

to suggest that at least some of the native Palestinians may well be the heirs to the ancient Cana'anites. The Zionists, for their part, appear to secretly take this challenge seriously, for they have invested a lot of time and effort in trying to falsify it. A contributing problem that enters the field at this point is that many Palestinians are themselves reluctant to press the point of ancient lineage. They are caught up in their own religious paradigms, which teach them to take seriously the same bible stories the Zionists use to justify their claims to the land.

Ra'ad sees it as his mission to clarify the resulting confusion. As he tells us, "the past is distant and therefore exploitable by those who have the tools to wield for the purposes of power" (p.111) and as a result "historical facts and religious narratives" have been purposefully confused in a self-serving fashion (p. xi). This has been happening for a long time. "After the Byzantine period, which succeeded in eradicating evidence of pagan precursors…Western ideas about Palestine developed from the 7th to the 9th centuries almost entirely in the imagination and in religious doctrine" (pp. 77-78). The Zionists are just the latest in this line of paradigm manufacturers.

In this role, the Zionists have inordinately powerful weapons. Those weapons are not only the propaganda engines of the modern media, government and education. They also have captured history itself. The modern concept of objective, academic history is little more than 150 years old, but in the case of Palestine its practice has made little difference. As Ra'ad shows, in the cases of both the Western masses and academic specialists, the Zionist "construction of identity" has prevailed, and in the process "the imaginary often has [had] a stronger effect than real connections" (p. 111).

Here are some examples Ra'ad gives of the imagination trumping reality in the competition for Palestine:

1. The notion that today's Jews are the same people as the ancient Israelites. This is simply not true. "At the same time it is purported that the 'first temple' was built (tenth century BCE) the people living in Palestine were pagan in their religious practices. 'Judaism' did not develop until at least 500 years later . . . Palestine remained largely pagan until the fourth or fifth century CE, and it was then, and has been ever since characterized by a multiplicity of religious practices and ethnicities . . . the most likely scenario is that a percentage of the people who stayed on the land (now Palestinians) merely changed their religious affiliation over time" (p. 114). In other words, as the socio-political environment changed, significant elements of the peasantry evolved from pagan to Jewish to Christian to Muslim. This historical picture, increasingly suggested by archeological evidence and other scholarship, has no place in the Zionist paradigm. In that counter view most of the Palestinians come into the "land of Israel" with the Muslim invasion of the 7th century CE.

2. The biblically based denigration of the Cana'anite people and culture. This too paints a historically untrue picture of the past. The Old Testament, which so many religious Israelis (among others) take as literally true, "degrades the Cana'anites as pagans destined to become slaves or be exterminated" (p. 101). Yet the reality is that we owe to Cana'anite culture much

that is foundational to our own way of life. For instance, our modern writing system originated with the Cana'anites, who supplied the "crucial creative force in the development of the phonetic alphabet" (p. 98).

3. Ra'ad notes that while the Zionist version of ancient history is demonstrably false, some Palestinians, as suggested above, have been seduced their own confirmed Muslim and Christian faith. Thus, "Palestinians often only aid Zionist rationalizations by falling into the trap of religious sequencing and associating themselves historically with the Muslim conquest in the seventh century (if they are Muslims) or the Christianization of Palestine in the fourth century (if they are Christians)" (p.145). The fact is that none of these groups were truly separate. They were part of a continually evolving montage of populations underpinned by a relatively stable peasantry.

In other ways as well, Israel constitutes a unique challenge for the Palestinians. As Ra'ad tells us, the Zionists are different that past colonial masters. Those sought to "impose their language, religion, values, clothing or lifestyle on the colonized." But Israel "attempts to take everything from the native population and to systematically degrade their environment" (p. 157). A good example of this is given in chapter 10 of the book, entitled "Politics of Place Names." Here Ra'ad describes the Israeli extermination of Arab Palestinian place names and their replacement with Hebrew ones. In other words, as colonial masters the Zionists have no interest in converting the natives. Rather they wish them to disappear and toward that end they will not only make their lives economically insufferable. They will also subject them to a process of cultural genocide. Thus, as a people, the Palestinians are going through the worst possible form of culture shock.

How does one successfully fight against this? For Ra'ad one prerequisite to success must be "de-colonizing the mind" (p. 156ff) of the Palestinians themselves. They must come to both know and to value their actual ancient past in its historically objective form. For, even if the Palestinians get something approaching their own state (which presently does not look likely) they will still be without a clear understanding of their own history. Ra'ad himself knows of no better way of contributing to this process than documenting that hidden history and making clear the obstacles to its revelation. Hidden Histories is his first effort to do so. One suspects there will be others.

Tristram Hunt, Marx's General: The Revolutionary Life of Friedrich Engels

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Engels has always deserved more consideration than he's gotten from his English-speaking biographers. The two best treatments of his life and work have been around for quite a while but their sophistication, length and density make them a bit unsuitable for introductory readers. That's our loss of course, but Sam Cooke was probably speaking for many Americans who also "don't know much about history." Gustav Meyer's magisterial biography is very long, dates from 1936 and is hard to find while Franz Mehring's treatment is part of his classic 1918 biography of Marx. That's our loss, for it leaves Engels vulnerable to lazy, glib misinterpretation. Indeed, he is often treated as Marx's silent financial supporter, the mechanical defender of ideological orthodoxy and source of theoretical constipation, the father of twentieth-century totalitarianism, the intellectual lightweight who reduced Marxism to a series of empty formulas, or the unimaginative disciple whose drive to organize a science of society distorted his friend's humanistic impulses and made it difficult to develop Marx's insights in a politically productive way. There's something to these criticisms, but introductory readers really don't have a nuanced and informed biography that would provide some theoretical, political and historical context within which to weigh them. After all, it was Engels whose theoretical and organizational work helped make Marxism the revolutionary and democratic theory of the labor movement. A superb political analyst, journalist, tactician, and – yes – popularizer, Engels played a vital role in the theoretical origin and practical development of the dominant trend of the modern Left. He deserves a good, accessible biography that would appeal to first-time visitors.

Tristram Hunt has written useful and thoughtful account of Marx's "second fiddle" who, despite a lifetime of self-sacrifice, made important theoretical and empirical contributions to his friend's grand project. Beginning with his turn away from German Romanticism and the heady theorizing of the "left" Hegelians and toward practical social criticism, Hunt chronicles Engels's first-hand knowledge of capitalist industry, describes his long and fruitful collaboration with Marx, and ends with a description of his capable and principled stewardship of his comrade's great work. Anarchism, utopian socialism and communism – along with the tactics associated with mounting the barricades and directly attacking the state – had reached their limits with the defeat of the Paris Commune and the headlong industrialization of Europe. Marx and Engels were the only ones who had the theoretical understanding of what was happening, and it was Engels whose devastating critiques, tactical flexibility and tireless organizing set the conditions for the labor movement's embrace of Marxism. The development of a unified theory and practice of socialism was anticipated by *The Communist Manifesto* and

Das Kapital, but Engels's great contribution was the articulation of an all-embracing revolutionary theory and popular philosophy that reflected a new stage in the labor movement.

Like many other talented young men of their generation, Engels and Marx moved on parallel tracks toward philosophic materialism and the working class, both attracted to the French Revolution, political democracy and religious skepticism. Born into a typically philistine bourgeois family, Engels was aware at a young age that the poverty, exploitation, and demoralization of workers and artisans provided the foundation of his family's wealth and social position. His breakthrough came when he was twenty-four and wrote *The Condition of the Working Class in England* while in unhappy exile in the family's Manchester branch. Hunt spends a great deal of time on this remarkable book, which still stands as one of the seminal texts of both modern communism and nineteenth-century social analysis. Its description of the bourgeoisie's relentless search for profit and consequent immiseration of the workers, its understanding of the crucial role of the proletariat and of the need for the careful analysis of real life, its recognition of the limits imposed by the requirements of private property and of the consequent need for a fundamental change in the entire social order, its tireless educational work building the class consciousness of the workers and preparing them for independent political activity – all of this made Engels's book unique, set its young author apart from his peers, and provided the grounding for his friendship with Marx.

Engels provided concrete and theoretical material to Marx throughout their collaboration, even as he always recognized the primacy of his friend's genius. His *Principles of Communism* was really the first draft of the *Communist Manifesto*, his political-military analysis of the 1848 revolutions provided essential material to Marx's brilliant political journalism about France, and *Capital*'s use of the Blue Books supplemented the many letters that Engels wrote in response to Marx's requests for information and editorial help. Throughout their 35-year collaboration, Engels provided practical reinforcement of the positions toward which he and Marx had been independently moving before they met; if the theory of surplus value was his friend's other original discovery, then Hunt is not wrong in his repeated insistence that scientific socialism was the joint work of both men.

Engels's exceptionally broad range of interests and expertise extended to military matters, the impact of European imperialism and colonialism on the English workers' movement, broad questions of political strategy and tactics, the historical development of modern socialism, the origins of male supremacy, the complexities of the national question, the critical importance of sustained agitation and propaganda, the refinement of historical materialism and the struggles against theoretical vulgarity. From his early work with Marx through the later *Anti-Duhring*, Engels was indispensable to the creation of the mass democratic labor movement that would find a home in Germany and Austria and move the center of European radicalism away from insurrectionary "red Paris." If *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* established the foundations of Marxist anthropology and marks Engels as the source of socialist feminism, his reevaluations of the Irish and other "people without history" sparked leftists' interest in the national-colonial question that would carry over into the twentieth century. His historical writings, journalism, independent military analyses of the Franco-

Prussian and Crimean Wars and efforts to create a unified Marxist science testified to a body of work that went far beyond sending Marx money or helping him write *Capital*. That he was able to make such important contributions while accepting his responsibility for keeping his comrade out of penury and the communist movement afloat is a testament to his extraordinary range of interests, his fidelity to the cause, and his enormous commitment to Marx's work. We should all have one such friend.

And what a friend he was. When Marx died in 1883, modern social democratic parties were beginning to take an organized form. After all his earlier contributions, it was Engels who spent the rest of his life editing the last two volumes of *Capital*, providing for what remained of the Marx brood, assisting visiting socialists and their emerging political organizations, keeping track of current events, providing guidance to all who asked, and – most importantly – continuing his fight for ideological clarity, organizational coherence and political direction. As corresponding secretary of the First International, chief organizer of the Paris Conference of 1889 which launched the Second and, always, as the Grand Old Man of the European left, Engels "embraced his role as Marx's bulldog driven at all costs to guard his friend's political bequest." His prodigious output and tremendous range during the twelve years that separated Marx's death from his own would be enough to mark him as one of the great organizers of the modern left.

Hunt makes a welcome contribution to our understanding of Engels's role by focusing on his accomplishments during this last period of his life. Engels was always on the side of the most militant, organized and proletarian elements of the emerging socialist movement – even as he began to consider the possibility of different transitions in particular circumstances. As heavy industry, great cities and the rapid development of the productive forces continued to concentrate the proletariat, Engels revealed himself as a supple tactician who was always ready to rethink received wisdom. It was he who made Marxism the dominant trend in a broad swath of socialist parties from Austria to Germany, Russia to America. And where the lingering influence of Proudhon, Bakunin and Lassalle still affected the progress of a proper communist movement, it was Engels who carried on the fight and taught the labor movement how to fight for a bourgeois republic as an indispensable step toward socialism. It was his understanding that republicanism would be the foundation for socialism that guided the struggle for the vote and moved social democracy toward becoming a mass proletarian political party instead of a romantic insurrectionary conspiracy. And the proof was in the proverbial pudding. When he travelled through Europe toward the end to take stock of the movement's progress, socialism had become a powerful, militant, successful tendency with disciplined parties, newspapers, parliamentary representation, networks of educational and cooperative societies, and thousands of dedicated agitators and militants.

This useful introduction to Engels is called *Marx's General* – an echo of his affectionate nickname – in the slightly longer American edition that's available in this country. It's a better title than the English version under review. Hunt knows better than to pay too much attention to Engels's frock coat. Indeed, he doesn't engage in the cheap trick of denigrating Engels's politics because he happened to be born into a bourgeois family – or even because he was a

bon vivant who liked women, champagne, fox hunts and good pilsner. The important thing about Engels is what he *did* with his money, not where it came from. Politics is not a lifestyle. It's a set of ethical positions, theoretical projections, and practical activities about public affairs. On that score, Friedrich Engels needn't apologize to anyone. It's we who are in his debt.

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Steven Shapin, Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if it were Produced by People

By | 2011: vol. 10, issue 3

Never Pure, the title of Steven Shapin's new collection of essays, refers to the fact that science always has been tainted inescapably by politics, morality, cultural subjectivity and the influence of elites. The subtitle, meandering and humorous, is a declarative underscoring of the author's intent: to disabuse his audience of the idealized notion that pure adherence to scientific objectives yields ingenious discoveries of scientific fact.

The reprint of a 17th century painting of an alchemical laboratory on the cover suggests the point of departure for his work – a unified science revealing universal truths. It may well allude to Robert Boyle, father of modern chemistry, supplanting the name alchemy with chemistry but reportedly clinging to alchemy's principles in practice and doctrine. The humor and grammatical impreci subtitle expresses Shapin's overarching attitude about the aim of the science historian – to lower the tone of writing about the history of science. Shapin's primary form of tone-lowering is to disassemble "genius", display its parts, lecture on the function of each, then reassemble them as rapidly as a deft mechanic might.

Shapin, an historian of science, participates in a long, steady trend away from philosophy of science and toward the sociology of scientific knowledge. Earlier historians and philosophers of science, such as Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn, were on a quest to find one universal scientific method that would clarify and sanctify the distinction between science and non-science, and then apply this distinction to the science of the past. Shapin departs from both predecessors, taking an almost aerial perspective of the philosophy and history of science. Probing well beyond Popper's epistemological examination of science and Kuhn's suggestive but unsystematic considerations of how scientists function as a social group, Shapin opens absolutely all aspects of the production of scientific knowledge to sociological analysis.

While skirting the anarchist deconstructionist approach that Paul Feyerabend's *Against Method* took, *Never Pure* does demote scientific knowledge to a status no better other forms of knowledge by critiquing the key premise upon which the search for a universal scientific method is based – observation. Shapin argues that credibility depends not only upon the method by which observation is conducted, but also on who is doing the observing, with whom they are in league, and how the results of observation are presented. In pushing the boundaries of the sociology of scientific knowledge, Shapin exceeds Robert Merton whose inquiries in sociology of science left scientific knowledge *per se* untouched, but stops short of David Bloor who radically posits that scientific knowledge is socially constructed. Whereas Bloor asserts

that the theories upon which scientific experimentation is based are themselves shaped by social class, ideology and laboratory politics, Shapin begins from the position that nature and natural phenomenon do in fact exist, but that the facts generated about them are, or become, believable depending on a complex set of social factors.

Never Pure is Shapin's venture to explain this perspective to those outside of the inner sanctums of the scientific community. Throughout the book chapter titles and introductions characterize the content, a technique aimed at inviting in the layman. His densely packed prose, brimming with arcane references, belies this effort. Nevertheless, such chapters as "Pump and Circumstance" will appeal to readers across many academic disciplines. This essay attempts to unlock the mystery of fact-making by shedding subversive light on the connection between the production of knowledge and the communication of knowledge.

Shapin argues "speech about natural reality is a means of generating knowledge about reality, of securing assent to that knowledge and of bounding domains of certain knowledge from areas of less certain knowledge." The chapter reveals that Robert Boyle's air pump experiments were by turns thwarted or supported by the process of displaying experimental 'facts' in such a way that multiple witnesses might legitimize his findings. University researchers especially will be intrigued by the history of the origins of the many checks and balances (such as dissertation committees and peer-review boards) that govern publication of research findings today – particularly since Shapin delivers this history with colorful details of the often peculiar characters who initiated the processes.

Never Pure takes the reader from the gentleman's laboratory in his private home to the even more private laboratories housed in public spaces, such as universities, then ushers him into the present with a peek at the evolution of the tensions between research and industry in corporate megaliths such as Du Pont, RCA and Bell Labs. We learn why it is a compliment to be called a gentleman and a scholar and how more abstract criteria for measuring credibility emerge. Alongside the historical, cultural and moral situatedness of scientific research, Shapin delves into personal preferences and habits of scientists themselves.

Shapin treats Robert Hooke, assistant to Robert Boyle and curator at the Royal Society, an atypical example of the 'late 17th Century `experimental philosopher' – a uniquely creative individual unaffected by convention even in his most mundane activities. Shapin uses the device of a foray into a day in Hooke's life to illustrate that Hooke's tendency toward privacy rendered him out of sync with the historical movement toward a gentleman's society of research scientists who, unlike alchemists, opened their laboratories to the public.

Other chapters scour dietetics and morality, health, philosophical purity and intelligence. Shapin devotes two chapters to situating science in the *bodies* of men puzzling over the great questions – understandably, given his portrait of the scientist as lost in thought. There are memorable anecdotes sprinkled throughout, such as Newton's dinner companion who sat waiting a considerable time in Sir Isaac's dining room and, growing impatient, helped himself to the chicken which he ate in its entirety, replacing the bones under the cover. When Newton

entered the room, sat down at the table and saw nothing but bones under the cover he remarked, “How absent we philosophers are. I really thought that I had not dined.”

Shapin has a magnificent eye for detail, an admirable facility with anecdotes and his informative text is seasoned with humor. At a time when scientific integrity has become even more important in public culture – given recent reports on commercially and politically induced bias and violations of research independence, and rampant pharmaceutical industry backing of medical research – Shapin’s book is a welcome aid in developing the skill of appraising scientific discoveries that define our world. An enjoyable read if one has the dedication to cut through the thicket of prose.

Megan Boler, Digital Media and Democracy: Tactics in Hard Times

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Do digital media technologies present the potential for the shaping of political discourse that differs from traditional forms of media, like newsprint? Digital media is examined in Boler's volume as a political force that shapes our perceptions. *Digital Media and Democracy* contextualizes the force of digital media and offers a relevant survey of the topic for both the novice and the expert. Sources of political discourses are copious, from bourgeois philosophy to civil society to state-centered information dispensers. Institutionalized mass media, however, stands out as the most salient source. Technologies like newsprint, radio, and television have long been forces that transmit discourses between those in power and the general public (Anderson 1984: Hall 1977). The book contextualizes the political dynamics, structures, and modalities of digital media.

Covering a vast range of topics, like The Daily Show, white supremacy, and the militarization of cyberspace, Digital Media and Democracy applies expert scholarly analysis to understancd "the rapidly changing face of media use, production, and practices" (31). Oscillating between pessimism and optimism this volume is concerned foremost with the intersection of media and democracy. Editor Megan Boler, professor at the University of Toronto, demonstrates that media cannot be described simply with adjectives like "honest¸ "; "exploitative"; "public"; or "commercial". New forms of media operate in a very murky area between liberation and subjugation. This book provides a valuable critique of modern media institutions and their effects on political realities.

Alessandra Renzi's opening chapter analyzes "Tactical Media"(TM) as an alternative form. TM "are expressions of dissent that rely on artistic practices and 'do it yourself' (DIY) media created from readily available, relatively cheap technology"(71). Renzi's focus is how new media can get produced outside of the conventional axis of institutionalized power. One example is a Sao Paulo group of activists, called Mídia Táctica, who demonstrate the "centerless" nature of TM. They developed their own form of TM described as "Digitofagia". based on the Brazilian artistic tradition of anthropophagy, where software and media technology are recuperated, consumed, and repurposed for local uses. What resulted are media forms freely accessible to marginalized communities (82). Mídia Táctica, like other TM projects, uses language and mediums in order to subvert the legitimacy of established mainstream media sources. Renzi, thinking in terms of Arjun Appaduri (1996), constructs a theoretical "mediascape" where everyday political relationships can be studied in terms of a constantly and sometimes confusingly redefined semiotic space of alternative political action.

Digital Media and Democracy does not focus only on the beneficial and agentive possibilities of new media. A discussion of capitalism, politics and the media by Jodi Dean provides examples of this book's extensive analytic reach. Utilizing Žižek's concept of "post-politics"(1999), Dean examines a "fantasy of participation" (109) that arises with Web 2.0 technologies. Dean notes that media is fetishized as inherently democratic, inclusionary, and participatory. Yet the plethora of media content being produced actually creates something more akin to a riot of information and opinion than a productive and accessible stream of news. Introducing "communicative capitalism", Dean states "the use value of a message is less important than its exchange value, its contribution to a larger pool, flow, or circulation of content. A contribution need not be understood; it needs only be repeated, reproduced, forwarded" (108). In the age of digital media the relentless flow of content and reiteration of ideas creates a semblance of participation that, in reality, causes the individual user and consumer to disengage with real world political practices. Digital media pacifies the public with an abundance of information, denying any practical and agentive political action.

As Dean's and Renzi's chapters suggest, this book offers both pessimistic and optimistic takes on digital media. Hassan Ibrahim, a journalist for Al Jazeera English, highlights how some journalists and media institutions are attempting to negotiate an obstructive and politicized media climate so as to maintain ethical relevancy. Ibrahim admits upfront that Al Jazeera "is not free of agendas and free of special interests" (304). Ibrahim and his colleagues use their privileged positions within it to fend off innuendo, rumor, and political interference. Ibrahim finds most institutions are structured like "news machines"(304) more than centers of journalism. Mainstream outlets like CNN, BBC, and Fox News cater to political interests and lowest common denominator rather than to the production of ethical and valuable media. In contrast, you have what Ibrahim considers "multi-cultural platforms" like Al Jazeera. These media sources examine issues and opinions that are often subordinated or ignored by other media sources. Although Al Jazeera's institutional framework, one out of reach of Western corporate influence, is neither ideal nor unique, it nonetheless provides a good counter-example.

Sophie Statzel examination of white-supremacist websites provides an excellent example of ethnography online. Statzel describes online hate communities discussing race, nationalism, and subjectivity. Anthropology usually has a paradigmatic focus oriented towards smaller communities, marginalized individuals, and non-western contexts. There is a decisively Western, or "northern", tone throughout Digital Media and Democracy. Only three chapters of nineteen deal with non-Northern sites. The contributors to this collection might argue, and rightly so, that many of the issues outlined in this book are global issues and remain relevant because of their wide-reaching nature. However, as the Renzi article concerning TM points out, examining how forms of media are articulated on the ground and away from powerful media institutions offers a productive insight into the agentive and "alternative" processes of clever marginalized producers.

Moreover, while examining The Daily Show and Democracy Now! afford a compelling perspective on how people seek alternative commentary on burning issues, these cases are

limited to English-language, US-oriented audiences. I am aware of formats similar to The Daily Show in countries like Argentina and Iran. The analytical value of these programs is the challenging re-contextualization of their media and political environments. This is not to say that I find limited value in studies concerning a global “Northern” context. Rather, future media studies would be well served by a greater consideration for the global South.

Tom Boellstorff’s discussion of gay and lesbian subjectivities does show us how to address issues of ethnographic perspective, western bias, and the situated consumption of media. Boellstorff demonstrates that the consumption of globalized media takes on new meanings for gay and lesbian communities in Indonesia. Globalized media have helped to create a politicized and alternative subjectivity through an agentive consumption and not through production. À la a derridian “signature even context” (1977), these communities have given new meaning to discourse through rearticulation and reinterpretation, and not through repurposing or blind consumption.

Digital Media and Democracy analyzes the institutional locations where knowledge is created, circulated, and embedded. Before anyone can describe the creation of individual subjectivity, they must contextualize the individual within a broader field of practice. This volume provides a fantastic introduction for those beginning to examine digital media. As Digital Media and Democracy reminds us, no one ought to feel immune to the authority that intersects and transcends institutional technologies. We must always examine how our own biases and political positions are molded by digital media.