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# clamor

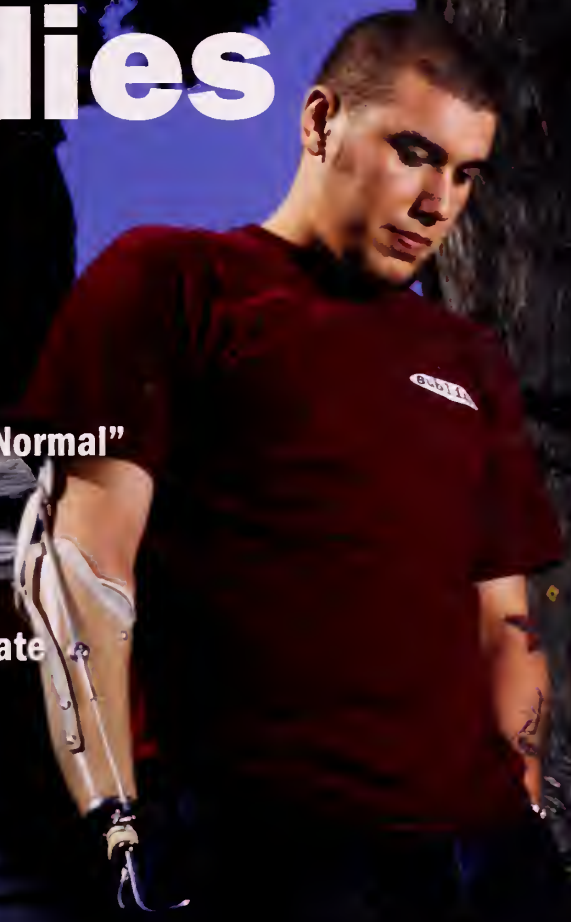
Your DIY Guide to Everyday Revolution

Bee Lavender • Black-Owned Bookstores  
Ursula Rucker • Leslie Feinberg  
Purple Heart Photos of Nina Berman  
Lt. Ehren Watada & Oh-So-Many Reviews!

Issue 38 • Fall 2006

## Our Bodies at War

- + Iraq Soldiers Return Home
- + Activists and Their Bodies
- + NO! The Rape Documentary
- + When Transgender Becomes "Normal"
- + The Body Worlds Controversy
- + Bodies on Billboards in NYC
- + Universal Healthcare, WHEN?
- + Rethinking the Stem Cell Debate

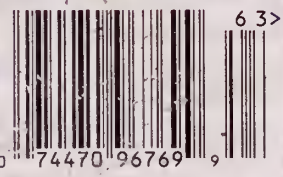


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(more so than usual)

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Spc Robert Acosta, 20, an ammunitions Specialist with the 1st Armored Division

"How lucky we are to have [the] writer . . . of this first-rate book."

—KURT VONNEGUT

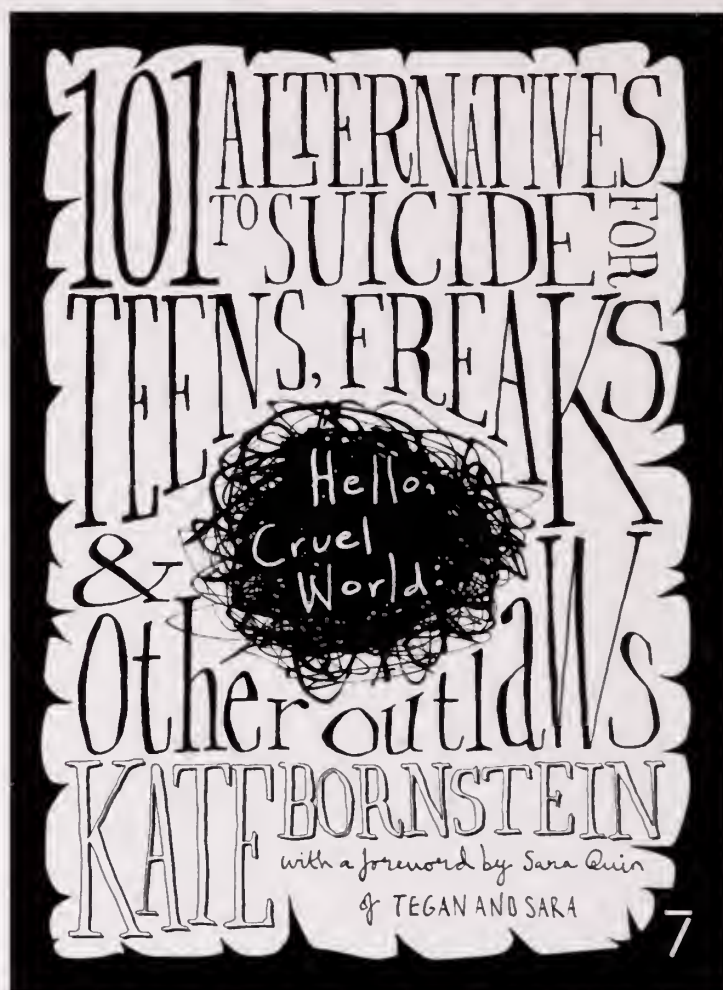
"[An] entirely new world-view for the living." —RACHEL KRAMER BUSSEL, Gothamist.com

"Bornstein . . . shares nearly 60 years of her own strategies and struggles to stay alive in order to make it a little less difficult for the rest of us."

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# Something's Missing

Can you guess what it is? How about those annoying cards that are glued, stapled, or wedged into the magazine to get you to subscribe? Annoying, yeah? We thought so, too. That's why we're simultaneously dropping the bind-in card AND announcing an all new online subscription rate. A year of Clamor delivered to your door used to cost an affordable \$18, but now it's an absurdly inexpensive \$15 if you subscribe online at [www.clamormagazine.org](http://www.clamormagazine.org). Using our secure online server to place your subscription saves trees, your time, and our volunteer resources. Like where this is headed? Head over to the library, push your roommate off the iMac, or flip open your laptop and sign up now for one year of "your DIY guide to everyday revolution."

# from your editors

You've got aches. You've got pains. But you deal. You do what you have to do to get by. Maybe you pop some ibuprofen to get through the work day. Maybe you take over-the-counter medicine to keep your chronic allergies at bay. And bizarre as it may sound, many of us know more about the mechanics of our car or computer than of our own body. We can't promise that this issue of Clamor will serve as the owner's manual to your body that you wish you had, but we CAN promise that you'll leave the issue thinking a little differently about that thing you lug around with you more places than you take your iPod.

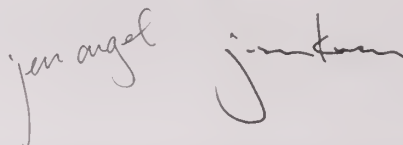
This "body" issue hits home for us in more ways than one. First, we'll come right out and note that Clamor has printed its shirt designs on American Apparel shirts for about as long as they've been in business. How could we resist the hippest company out there working their magic with half-naked models and a progressive "sweat-free" rallying cry? Well, we realize when the gig is up. And while Clamor isn't the first to call Dov Charney out on his shit, the articles by Dez Williams, Keeley Savoie, and Jim Straub in the special American Apparel section are some of the most incisive and concrete stories we've read about the slippery Charney Carnival. Big thanks to Grace Martinez and Kim Hoeckele for their help with the design and photography (respectively) in the special section.

And when we read Adrienne Maree Brown's essay (p. 16) on how activists treat their bodies - boy, could we relate. As we wrap up production on the issue, we've been hunched over keyboards, staying up all hours, depriving our bodies of the nutrition they need - maybe even self-medicating with caffeine and alcohol to keep the juggernaut moving (we'll leave you to guess which staffer that is). And for what? The big paycheck? We're all volunteers. The fabulous healthcare benefits? No such thing. The satisfaction of working on one of the leading social justice magazines on the newsstand

right now? Sure, that helps sometimes. As people who spend our lives dreaming of peace and health for everyone, we recognize that we're poor role models, but we're working on that, too.

Finally, we challenge you not to be moved by the photos and stories in this issue about soldiers returning from Iraq. Some of Nina Berman's photos ran in *Mother Jones* a few years ago, and they're unfortunately even more poignant now. After five years of listening to platitudes about "making the world safer," we're ready for the Commander-in-Chief to start talking about how his war is affecting the families of thousands of soldiers. Berman's photos and Socket's article about amputees returning home from war might just be the conversation starters we're looking for.

While we're being frank about our vices, let's air a little more of our not-so-secret side. Clamor, like most independent magazines these days, struggles financially. Yes, despite that glossy veneer, the credible and compelling content, the nationwide distribution, and the host of amazing advertisers, it still comes down to the basics. Clamor is still run by hard-working volunteers who are dependent on you, the reader, to help make sure their hard work can be printed in a magazine four times a year. The single most important thing you can do to support independent media is to vote with your dollars and encourage your friends to do the same. Magazines like Clamor need you to subscribe, to renew when we send you notices, and to buy subscriptions for every friend and family member you can think of. We won't survive without you. To show you we mean it, just flip this page over, and you'll see how we've made it even cheaper and easier to support Clamor with your subscription.



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Nina Berman

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*Clamor is a quarterly print magazine and online community of radical thought, art, and action. An iconoclast among its peers, Clamor is an unabashed celebration of self-determination, creativity, and shit-stirring. Clamor publishes content of, by, for, and with marginalized communities. From the kitchen table to shop floor, the barrio to the playground, the barbershop to the student center, it's old school meets new school in a battle for a better tomorrow. Clamor is a do-it-yourself guide to everyday revolution.*



# letters

Please address letters to [letters@clamormagazine.org](mailto:letters@clamormagazine.org) or write us at PO Box 20128 Toledo, OH 43610  
Letters may be edited for length.  
Not all letters will be printed.  
Bring it on!

## Who You Callin' Shirley?

Surely you jest.

Or perhaps Caitlin Corrigan is jesting when she suggests ("After the Storm: the gender of disaster and recovery in New Orleans," Spring 2006), that: "San Francisco is leading the way in preparatory thinking with a free program in disaster training skills that would have truly made a difference for many of the women in New Orleans."

Most people who live in the Bay Area know that San Francisco is spectacularly unprepared for a disaster, especially a major earthquake. We don't have to worry about an attack from angry mutants (see X-Men III), but we do have to worry about venal liberals and ineffectual Green Party members.

A scathing grand jury report in late May warned that San Francisco could not deal with even a few hundred severely injured victims. Those of us who work in local hospitals know that one good freeway pile-up would overwhelm the local trauma facilities.

As well, the major trauma center, San Francisco General Hospital, is "considered vulnerable to collapse in an earthquake." The report blasted the lack of coordination between hospitals and the city and the lack of realistic emergency drills.

The head of the city's emergency preparedness program has been revealed to be a political hack with the equivalent skills and background of the former head of FEMA. You remember him, "Great job, Brownie," right? Most of the money spent in the emergency preparedness program in the last year has been shown to have been used on administrative positions (read "jobs for Dems") and public relations (read "photo ops for politicians at the 100th anniversary of the big quake").

The fire hydrants in San Francisco can't even be used by fire trucks from other cities, a flaw

that has been known for some years, yet has not been corrected.

The only good thing to report is that there are no levees here.

Corrigan may be right that the free program might be reaching the people who actually need it, though I would be curious as to how many trainings in Spanish, Mandarin, Russian and Vietnamese have been held in this city where many, many women don't speak English. And how many people in Bayview or the Fillmore have the earthquake kit that I was given without charge recently - in my capacity as a hospital worker. Will those who have difficulty paying their rent set aside hundreds of dollars for the necessary emergency supplies?

I agree with Corrigan on her major point. When disaster strikes in the Bay Area, it will be gendered as it was in New Orleans. And the response will be just as racist. Until we change that.

M.Treloar  
San Francisco, CA

## Not Feelin' the Gender Analysis

First of all, I really really dig the new format. Congratulations. I love the pictures. All the aerial shots are hot and add a welcome and thankfully subtle (not too much order, now) thread of continuity throughout. I love that I continually ask this question when I read clamor: "Where do they find these people?!" Seriously, that's your edge - such unique, valuable perspectives.

Weakest articles were: "Rita & Katrina: After the Storm" and "14 Acres" (Spring 2006). I'll admit extra sensitivity re: the Rita and Katrina article because it's about gender, my field. This writer needed to be

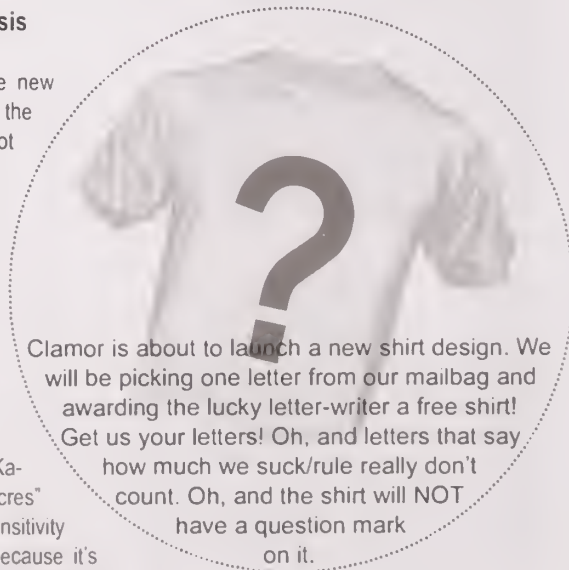
pushed to better explain the problem she identified. I was left wondering, why exactly is it necessary to gender the disaster response to Katrina and Rita. With this country's social services infrastructure, why wouldn't women's needs be taken care of under the "disaster victim" identity? Short of free sanitary napkins, what else would women victims need that men victims wouldn't? There's a solid argument for gendered responses to disasters but this writer doesn't quite get there. With "14 Acres" hardly any context and grounding is provided to guide the reader - what is South Central Farm and why am I reading about it?

Carla Murphy  
Brooklyn, NY

## We Didn't Pay This Writer ... but we should have!

Thanks a lot. Your magazine rocks, and all the hard work that goes into it is greatly appreciated.

Karen Michael  
Juneau, AK





# uproar

where Clamor readers have their say

Photo by Nina Berman. See more on page 7

I am sick of pretending that I feel perfectly fine and healthy when, in fact, I feel like crap most of the time.

Ever since I was diagnosed at the age of 23 I have been trying to put a brave face on having lupus. Unfortunately this has had a boomerang effect. I don't want to deal with people's reactions to my illness. So I pretend everything is normal. Therefore, everyone thinks that things are normal, and so, when I occasionally do mention being sick I get treated like a hypochondriac or like it's no big deal.

I have several friends who openly disbelieve that I have lupus "because you seem so healthy! You must have been misdiagnosed!" Another friend recently told me she didn't realize how serious lupus is. She thought it was "just one of those things you live with. Like psoriasis."

It ain't like psoriasis. It's a very unpredictable illness that easily could kill me. I just haven't told people all about it because, quite frankly, I can sense they are inwardly rolling their eyes. I think it just bores them.

But it doesn't bore me. It scares me shitless, every day of every week of every year of my life.

Sometimes I get reactions that are even worse than the eye rolling. Every once in awhile I meet someone who really is a hypochondriac. These people see me as a comrade in arms, and gleefully tell me about their terrible struggle with hangnails. Or there is what I think of as the "New Age ~ Louise Hay ~ You must subconsciously hate yourself and therefore your body is going wacko" reaction.

This one really galls me. It's a fact ~ sometimes people just get sick, and it has little to do with their mental state. Being unwell should not be looked upon as a fault of the sick person, the result of a mental disorder that they somehow could not correct. Sometimes bodies go kerflew. Sometimes they just fail altogether. Suggesting that this is something the patient brought upon themselves is just plain insensitive and insulting.

So I've decided I don't give a damn how bored people are or if they think I'm malingering or that

I hate myself. Here's where it stands for me. Here's how bad it gets.

Although I usually have what's considered a mild case of lupus, when it flares up, it's very serious. It hurts, and I am not much fun. This past summer, for example, I dealt with a 17 pound weight loss, vasculitis, continual fevers, various itchy scaly rashes, seizures, swollen glands, flu like symptoms, exhaustion, mental confusion, migraine headaches, hair loss, pleuritis, and difficulty getting out of bed because my joints hurt so badly.

So what do I want from people? Nothing. No big expressions of sympathy, but no eye rolling, either. No New Age theories, no disbelief. Maybe some respect and acceptance would be nice.

Thank you for listening. Tomorrow this station will return to its regularly scheduled programming.

Ruth Fledermaus  
Huntsville, AL

*the uproar continues on the next page*



I grew up in the early '90s in Detroit's lower middle-class west side. I was just starting elementary school, and I looked to my sixteen year old sister as the go-to for all things grown (you might call it "grown-up" but in my 'hood we called it "grown"). Together – help – sd and when I say together, I mean that we were in the same living space – we would watch the most reliable source for developing one's own grown-ness, The Box. The Box was the most innovative creation of its day, a channel where the audience could call in and request videos to watch for a small fee. Wealthy white kids might have watched videos on MTV, but inner city kids without cable watched The Box. It would be hard for me to try to explain the impact that this channel had on my life, so to put it into perspective I'll say that if the television was my dealer, then The Box was my crack. The Box presented me with a glamorous image that was a far cry from my own. I, a kindergartner at a not-so local Catholic school that my single mom could barely afford, thought that my recently-purchased bright pink Mickey Mouse sweater from TJ Maxx was the coolest thing since LeVar Burton. I was just a mere six year old, with a skinny lanky body and not a single trace of glamour in my entire being. In contrast to my pathetic young life, the big-booty video girls on The Box seemed amazing. Right about now you're probably thinking, now this is some heavy stuff for a six year old, but honestly this is exactly how I remember feeling at the time. Not only did I consider these women to be brilliant with their tight jumpsuits, bright lipstick, and cool dance movies, but their bodies were bangin' like no one else's. Bell Biv DeVoe warned me to be wary of these big-bootied girls, but never mind trusting them, I wanted to be them. My sister may have honed her skills copying their dance moves and fashion styles, but I didn't care about all of that, I just prayed that God would bless me with a bangin' body like theirs when I became grown. Fast forward fifteen years later and at 21, I'm at the age now that my six year old self would consider being grown. I live on my own, with my own apartment, and with digital cable for a discounted 6-month trial. I can finally afford to watch MTV and other cable video channels, and "big booties" are even trendy nationwide. Music videos, however, are not the crack they used to be, nor are they what they're cracked up to be. I can barely watch the filth that videos have become, and the big-booty girls that I once considered brilliant role models have been dumbed down to smutty video vixens. They have become nothing more than PG-rated pornographers that I don't want to watch, let alone, be equated with. The bangin' body of my childhood dreams has been replaced with an unprecedented real body. My booty is flabby at best, and as icing on the cake (that I apparently ate quite a bit of over the years), I still can't dance or dress glamorously. I guess the moral of this story is the same old clichéd crap that has been recycled for years – or at least the past few months: real girls have curves – some more

than others, video girls have gone from something seemingly positive to something distasteful, degrading, and disgusting. The Box was the shiz and cannot be replaced, and alas, you can always trust me, even when I'm smiling.

*Margarita Barry  
Farmington, MI*

Ass. For many years I have believed mine to be rather rough. Once I took a pumice to it, resulting in abrasion.

Breasts. My right asserted itself before my left, resulting in panic. I did some research and found that there was nothing to fear. I am working hard to accept this asymmetry, even if it means I am a stinkin' beta female for chrissakes.

Callus. Again with the roughness. I inherited thick soles from my mother. As a young girl I ran barefoot and wild. Later I used them on wooden and mylar flooring for modern dance. As one might imagine, these activities increased their toughness exponentially.

Dimples. I have dimples when I do a full-on smile.

Elbow. When tickled under my arms and/or on my sides, my elbows fly uncontrollably into the tickler.

Finger. An inward curve to the index finger supposedly indicates artistic leanings.

Groan. I have difficulty stifling a groan when frustrated. I do not know if there is a legitimate name for the other sounds I make; I am somewhat expressive.

Hostility. I am working on sublimating or otherwise constructively channeling my seemingly deepening feelings of hostility.

Ingrown. I am prone to ingrown hairs, and therefore prefer clippers when feeling hygienic.

Jiggle. Today my Other said he liked the way I jiggled from behind.

Kick. I may also kick if tickled.

Long. I am again growing my head hair long. It tends to be chestnut brown, but I have also dyed it black, blonde, hot pink and clown red.

Mute. When something bad happens, I may have difficulty speaking until much later.

Nerves. After several breakdowns, these can be fragile.

Ovulate. I thought that twinge was ovulation, but it could be a cyst or something.

Pretend. I have never pretended orgasm, nor do I plan to.

Quiet. I infinitely prefer golden silence to loud bombastic obnoxious chaotic mutinous sheets of noise, although there is a time and place for everything, children.

Rag. I have given up the rag, pads, and tampons for a latex cup.

Shiny. A long-lost friend used to call me this, and she did not mean I needed to powder my nose.

Tiger eyes. Mine are yellow brown like the semi-precious stone.

Ululate. I can do this with ease, but am a little self-conscious about it. I can also throat-sing, and am comfortable in the tenor range.

Vituperative. I used this word once in casual conversation, and relished the effect on my audience.

White. Some folk insist I am plain white, while others cannot believe that.

XXXI. I am thirty-one years old.

Yell. This is a rebel yell.

Zoomoozophone. I have seen and heard this instrument.

*Melissa Honeybee Mc Kee  
Asheville, NC*

## let's hear it!

Email your short piece, personal anecdote, or reflective story, up to 500 words, to uproar@clamormagazine.org with the topic in the subject line. Uproar selections should be non-fiction. Be sure to include your name and address so we can make sure you get a copy if your story appears. We encourage a wide interpretation of the theme.

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# Purple Hearts

Veterans Back From Iraq

TEXT & PHOTOS

Nina Berman



Spc Jose Martinez, 20



Sgt Joseph Mosner, 35

Since October 2003, I have been making portraits and recording interviews with American soldiers who were wounded in the Iraq War.

I seek them out in their hometowns, after they have been discharged from military hospitals. I photograph them alone, to emphasize feelings of alienation and isolation. I strip them of patriotic colors and heroic postures. As many of these soldiers joined the military to escape economic and social hardship, seeing them back in a domestic setting reinforces the notion that their dreams of escape through military service were painfully naïve.

I began the project out of desperation to find human truth amid the spectacle of "Shock and Awe," "Mission Accomplished" and the whole horrific marketing campaign used to sell death and destruction. I chose the wounded as my subjects because they stand as irrefutable witnesses to the human cost of war.



Pfc Tristan Wyatt, 21



Meeting so many severely disabled young men and women was profoundly disturbing to me. I felt complicit because they had fought in my name. And I felt the divide of privilege because I did not have to make a similar sacrifice.

When I exhibit my photos, many people, especially civilians, are shocked by the images, which surprises me as there are now tens of thousands of wounded soldiers. I think what disturbs viewers most is that the soldiers are photographed all alone, detached, present but unreachable, with no loved ones or network of support, the physical wounds used as metaphors into their psychological conditions.

Combat veterans, on the other hand, feel very familiar almost personally acquainted with my subjects. A Vietnam veteran, Tim Origer, who returned home an amputee at age 19, described the condition like this: " For the

soldiers today, even those who have returned physically unharmed, it may be years before they sleep less than fitfully through the night. They will awaken in cold sweats, striking out at nightmare enemies trapped within the terror of another time. They will find themselves becoming depressed as they gaze into the faces of small children (including their own). They will feel guilt and anger for having returned when others with whom they have served did not. Even the smallest of aggravations and disappointments in life will bring to the surface a seemingly inexplicable anger. They will attempt to describe to others what they have seen and experienced but for the vast majority of those among whom they must live, this will never be possible. There will never be adequate words."

*Nina Berman is the author/photographer of Purple Hearts: Back from Iraq (Trolley Books, 2004 - purpleheartsbook.com). View more of her work at ninaberman.com*







# the new WAR-TIME BODY

## Amputee Vets Return From Iraq

What happens when one's body becomes the war zone, the setting for patriotic pride, and the argument for technological advances that alter scientific and economic landscapes? It often means returning with a different sense of self and relationship to one's body for U.S. soldiers back from Iraq. Re-entry varies from the conceptual to the physical, and amputee veterans are returning from the Iraq war faced with transitioning back to civilian life without straightforward support to navigate the military health care system or job opportunities.

TEXT  
Socket

ILLUSTRATION  
Jonathan Allen

### The Homecoming

Jody Casey, formerly a 19 Delta Cavalry Scout sniper now organizing with Iraq Vets Against the War (IVAW), set the tone of our conversation, "I wasn't ready for re-entry. I wasn't briefed about anything regarding re-entry. So, on top of dealing with the anger and isolation of being back, I also had to be my own advocate." Casey advocated for work, securing mental and physical health care in a society that does not understand the realities of war. Counseling programs "were pushing all these pills my way without even hearing what I was going through, then they set me up with a counselor who has never known combat." He faced similar frustrations when looking for employment. "The job on the top of the list was to be a teller at Wal-Mart. No offense to anyone who works there it's just that I felt unseen, insulted, and under-valued . . . . They trained us only to re-enlist or work for Black Water Security or KBR." [Kellogg, Brown and Root is a former subsidiary of Halliburton] Both are mercenary war-profiteer subcontractor companies currently patrolling, fighting, and "providing security" at a much higher pay rate than U.S. soldiers

receive in Iraq. Casey stressed the enormous need for worker retraining programs and a modified GI bill that includes part-time and vocational students. "I only got trained to kill and be a soldier."

Casey matter-of-factly shared some ideas about how a worker retraining program could look. He suggested vocational training, something akin to "helmets to hardhats," utilizing an apprenticeship model, but provided by the Army. "Such a program could help you retrain from war on many levels because right now they are unleashing unstable people back into society."

## The Body

Sources from Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., estimate that since the onset of the Iraq invasion and occupation upwards of 400 U.S. soldiers have come back needing amputations and prosthetics (30 percent have multiple amputations). According to [icasualties.org](http://icasualties.org), since April 2003, between 18,000 and 20,000 U.S. soldiers' injuries include second- and third-degree burns, bone breaks, shrapnel wounds, brain injuries, paralysis, and eye damage. In addition, 9,744 U.S. soldiers wounded in action returned to duty between 2003 and 2004, while 8,239 soldiers did not return to war.

"The rocket went through my leg like a knife through butter. It was a terrible scene . . . there was just blood and muscle everywhere," Tristan Wyatt, 21, reported in a November 9, 2003, *LA Times* article entitled "Hospital Front." A rocket had cut off his leg and those of the two other soldiers with him four months earlier in Fallujah, a type of injury treated frequently at Walter Reed. Doctors Dennis Clarke and Jim Kaiser both reported (upper extremity) amputations from the elbow down, (lower extremity) above the knee or through the hip resulting from roadside bombs, bullets, and IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices). Kaiser concluded that "explosion injuries are vicious; they affect multiple body parts; for example, if one gets hit on the right side, part of the right leg, arm, and often-times their face gets exploded and pocked-up."

"We were always working with a base of 100 patients at any point in time," began Dennis Clarke, a visiting Orthoist-Prosthetist who specializes with lower extremity amputees. "On any given day, Walter Reed's orthopedic wing has about 50 inpatients and another 180 outpatients," says Jim Kaiser, who spent one week as a guest prosthetist at Walter Reed's Occupational Therapy Department in 2004. Working consistently, with hardly a break for lunch, they made fittings for new prosthetics and adjustments on old ones, and cleanings of amputation sites were constant. "There was always something to do and someone to see to. We were very, very busy," Kaiser continued. "Some prosthetics we made were arms;

most were leg/lower extremity from explosions and many of the same people had multiple amputations." Two factors – the war's urban setting and quick response time – have vastly increased the survival rate for the wounded compared to Vietnam. However, since Vietnam, the number of those wounded in action has risen from 3 percent to 6 percent, according to Wendy Y. Lawton in the *George Street Journal*, December 10, 2004. Dennis Clarke continues, "When one third of your patients have more than one limb missing, the work and stress and attention is different and accelerated."

## The Technology

"Vets are provided with a training leg with the most high-tech components (mechanical parts) and myoelectric hands and elbows. Civilians do not get offered such things. These vets motivate research for new technology . . . being tested on vets by such companies as Ossur and Otto Bock," remarked Chicago orthoist-prosthetist John Angelico of Scheck and Sirens.

In the field of orthotics and prosthetics (O and P), an orthoist specializes in planning, making, and fitting orthopedic braces, and a prosthetist makes artificial body parts (limbs and joints) called prosthetics, prosthetic devices, or singularly, a prosthesis. Hip disarticulation is an amputation through the hip joint removing the entire lower extremity. What was once a rare surgery has become more commonplace in the field since the Iraq war. Myoelectrics utilizes the electrical properties of muscle tissue from which impulses may be amplified, a technology that adapts and compensates for the wearer's natural gait and any irregular terrain, slopes, or steps. The most commonly used device on vets coming from Iraq is the C-Leg, a myoelectric leg developed by the companies Ossur and Otto Bock.

"I was surprised the veterans were receiving [myoelectric technology]. We had to struggle with the VA (Veterans Administration) to authorize knee technology. It took a year to get authorization. And then years later Walter Reed was giving that away to anyone." Jim Kaiser shared his insights on how the army has improved treatment of amputee vets. "Then, a vet could get one knee prosthesis, a carbon flex foot mechanism and a spare prosthesis. Their goal was to make sure a vet has a prosthesis to wear and one spare." While the standards apply today, the technology and care are so vastly different that it seems that the army is more willing to support vets from Iraq than their predecessors from Vietnam. Greater research and development of upper extremity technology has triggered a \$4 million grant from the federal government for Dr. Kuiken at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago. According to Kaiser, "It was the most money spent on prosthetics since Vietnam."

Dennis Clarke explained that the Department of Defense has created a "dream team" of experts brought in on a contractual basis since early on in the war. The volume and complexity of these injuries make it essential to bring in outside specialists. "Now there are three people permanently on staff at Walter Reed in the Prosthetics Department as well as the additional civilian folks brought in."

## the body counts

Injuries suffered by coalition troops are only a small percentage of the total human damage in this war to date. Civilians, journalists, and medical personnel from many nations are indeed also casualties and not usually highlighted in the data on the maimed, murdered and missing. Statistics on Iraqi soldiers and citizens are much less accurate and are no doubt more numerous than that of the U.S. Such complicated, devastating injuries suffered by Iraqi soldiers are most likely not getting as much medical attention and "technologically advanced" care as the coalition soldiers. Iraq Body Count, ([iraqbodycount.org](http://iraqbodycount.org)) estimates that, as of June 2006, between 38,000 and 43,000 Iraqis have been killed in the war. As of July 12, 2006, total U.S. military deaths are 2,546, according to Iraq Coalition Casualty Count ([icasualties.org/oif/](http://icasualties.org/oif/)).



**War is the single driver of technology in our profession. The net effect of these young and vibrant amputees is that they are pressing forward and doing well; that makes us look good. Technology does not lead change. Need leads change, and war is good for business because it necessitates need.**

When wounded on the battlefield, soldiers are flown to the Landstuhl airbase in Germany. Marines are sent to Bethesda while the Army is sent to Walter Reed, with all surgical procedures performed stateside. Innovations in sanitation, swelling control, and the use of digital cameras and scanners complement the plaster molds taken for every patient needing a prosthesis.

They send the records to Iowa for the Socket Interface, creating a personalized socket or suction system and joining it to the actual prosthetic device. The Socket Interface is done entirely on CAD-CAM – computer designed, computer manufactured technology – in approximately 48 hours with minor adjustments and alignments in person, but largely done on the computer. The success rate is high.

According to Clarke, the rehabilitative process is comprehensive, “Daily therapy of walking on parallel bars, transferring from one position to the next, and ultimately using crutches, to using one crutch, to using a cane. This process can take from 2 weeks to 2 months. Some patients were there eight weeks total, some were there 18 months.”

The future may hold a very different series of events, technologically speaking, for U.S. vets needing prosthetic devices. According to Lawton’s *George Street Journal* article, “\$7.2 million from the Department of Veterans Affairs was earmarked in 2005 for a team of researchers working to restore natural movement to amputees – particularly Iraq veterans. Within five years, scientists based at Brown [University] and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology hope to have created ‘bio-hybrid’ limbs that will use regenerated tissue, lengthened bone, titanium prosthetics and implantable sensors that allow an amputee to use nerves and brain signals to move an arm or leg. Work through the Providence VA Medical Center falls into six research programs.”

“The prosthetic industry is moving forward because of war,” Dennis Clarke observed. “War is the single driver of technology in our profession. The net effect of these young and vibrant amputees is that they are pressing forward and doing well; that makes us look good. Technology does not lead change. Need leads change, and war is good for business because it necessitates need. One could argue that as earnest an anti-war statement could be made regarding the same issues.” When people talk about war being good for business and good for technology, it’s important to recognize who ultimately benefits and who pays with their lives. Recruiters are enticing people into war with promises of making money, but soldiers are not coming back wealthy. Soldiers are coming back in body bags or with serious injuries. With their lives and bodies changed, vets come back owing more money in the face of increased medical expenses and often in worse situations than they were in upon leaving.

### The Figures

According to Corey Flintoff on the NPR program *Day to Day*, the cost of the invasion of Iraq could top \$2 trillion – much greater than any Bush administration estimate – when estimates include long-term costs such as replacing worn out or destroyed military equipment, debt incurred to finance the war, and providing lifetime care for disabled veterans.

The most commonly needed device by Iraq vets is the myoelectric arm that ranges in price from \$25,000 to \$35,000 (according to Dr. Kaiser). The C-Leg microprocessor knee costs \$50,000 with additional costs of components. Expensive technologies, yet these figures fail to consider vets’ other healthcare costs such as surgeries, medications, doctor’s appointments, and physical therapy.

Insurance programs sponsored by the Veterans Administration include the Service-members Group Life Insurance (SGLI), with the supplements of the Traumatic Service-members Group Life Insurance (TSGLI), Veterans Group Life Insurance (VGLI), Family Service-members Group Life Insurance (FSGLI), and Service Disabled Veterans Insurance (S-DVI). Each consists of its own rules and regulations, claims processes, fiscal calendars, and terms of eligibility. The TSGLI took effect on December 1, 2005, as a new program for service members who suffer from severe trauma: total or partial blindness, total or partial deafness, hand or foot amputation, thumb and index finger amputation, quadriplegia, paraplegia, hemiplegia, third degree or worse burns, traumatic brain injury, and coma. Yet, the myriad regulations dictate that beneficiaries had to file claims with the SGLI prior to December 1 in order to apply for TSGLI.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits booklet is a confusing description of programs, muddling the options available to vets. Examples of the poor wording include terms like “severely disabled” or “otherwise in good health” as requisites for coverage. This represents a bureaucratic nightmare considering that a soldier may need multiple insurances to meet their medical and life expenses. Yet, who judges good health and on what basis? Such are the obstacles encountering returning veterans who frequently are incapacitated, possibly not conscious, and focused elsewhere upon arrival from combat. The booklet makes no mention that vets can get a liaison or advocate to help mediate their medical needs. Taking initiative is vital to accessing any of these benefits.

The rate of injury is steady with no end in sight. Private individuals are pooling resources for research projects and individual vet support projects alike (with others listed at [www.fallenheroesfund.org](http://www.fallenheroesfund.org)). The Intrepid Project has contributed over \$14

*A number of organizations and campaigns offer support to veterans, military personnel, and their families.*

*Here are just a few:*

**Bring Them Home Now**

[www.bringthemhomenow.org](http://www.bringthemhomenow.org)

GI's, veterans, and military families against the war.

**Citizen Solider**

[www.citizen-soldier.org](http://www.citizen-soldier.org)

Books, videos, and more, prepared to challenge U.S. militarism in the new millennium.

**Conscientious Objector**

[www.objector.us](http://www.objector.us)

The Peace Roots Alliance  
Conscientious Objector registry.

**Courage to Resist**

[www.couragetoresist.org](http://www.couragetoresist.org)

A group that provides support to military objectors and their families.

**GI Rights Hotline**

[girisights.objector.org](http://girisights.objector.org)

A network of nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations who provide information to service members about military discharges, grievance and complaint procedures, and other civil rights issues.

**Gold Star Families for Peace**

[www.gsfp.org](http://www.gsfp.org)

Gold Star Families for Peace is an organization of families who are against the war and whose loved ones died as a result of the war in Iraq.

**Military Families Speak Out**

[www.mfso.org](http://www.mfso.org)

Organization for military families against the war.

**Peace-Out**

[www.peace-out.com](http://www.peace-out.com)

Info and explanation of how to pursue status as a Conscientious Objector

**Traveling Soldier**

[www.traveling-soldier.org](http://www.traveling-soldier.org)

An online newsletter by working-class people inside the armed services.

**Veterans Against the Iraq War**

[www.vaiw.org](http://www.vaiw.org)

A coalition of American veterans who support the troops but oppose war with Iraq or any other nation that does not pose a clear and present danger to the U.S.

**Veterans for Peace**

[www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org)

Veterans For Peace is a national organization founded in 1985.

**Vietnam Veterans Against the War**

[www.vvaw.org](http://www.vvaw.org)

Membership in VVAW is open to all people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of the members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but they welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends.

**United for Peace & Justice**

[www.unitedforpeace.org](http://www.unitedforpeace.org)

United for Peace and Justice is a coalition of more than 1300 local and national groups throughout the United States who have joined together to oppose our government's policy of permanent warfare and empire-building.

million to military families, yet many more families will need help so long as operations in Iraq and Afghanistan continue. Elizabeth Bernstein wrote in "The Gift Shift," a November 25, 2005, *Wall Street Journal* article, describing that "the president of the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund had collected well over half of the \$35 million the fund needed to realize its big goal to build a center in Texas where U.S. troops can recover from war wounds and be a research facility for prosthetic protocol technologies."

The high caliber technology provided to Iraq amputee vets has had a side effect on the access to care for non-vet amputees. Jim Kaiser states that "The climate in the sector of health insurance is that of [suppressing] technological costs." According to Kaiser, "Blue Cross considers a C-Leg experimental; the technology has been available in the U.S. for five years and in Europe for nine. The insurance companies use terms like 'situational, experimental and lack of medical necessity' in order to deny people access to technology that is becoming the norm in its field. Myoelectric arm technology is 30-years [old], which insurance companies continue to dismiss as experimental. If one does not have bills covered by the VA, how does one pay to keep up with the expanding field? One possibility is that non-vets just don't get to participate in this new technological landscape unless independently wealthy or have very committed and convincing doctors on their side. Perhaps non-vets may just have to wait for the insurance companies to catch up."

Dennis Clarke elaborated that one hope for The Fallen Heroes Fund facility is to collect enough data to lobby mainstream non-military insurance companies. "It's a fact that the industry has not proven its case yet. We need to prove to the insurance companies what the real benefit of these technologies are, how much better are these than the old ways. Our next step is to change the standard practice of insurance companies." How many more soldiers must demonstrate such necessity in order to raise the bar for all amputees?

**The Adjustment**

The IVAW website quotes Douglas Barber, later found dead by his own hand, "All is not okay or right for those of us who return home alive and supposedly well. What looks like normalcy and re-adjustment is only an illusion to be revealed by time and torment. Some sol-



diers come home missing limbs and other parts of their bodies. Still others will live with permanent scars from horrific events that no one other than those who served will ever understand."

Soldiers face a range of realities upon return. Some re-enter with a broad support network, adequate medical coverage, and stellar care. Others return feeling like absolutely nothing is intact and any possible resources are inaccessible and inadequate. Jim Kaiser stresses, "It is essential to provide constant quality follow-up care [to the veteran] once [he or she is] released from the VA system." However, he worries that what is offered post-release pales and is lacking compared to what is offered immediately post-injury. In his practice of 120 people, 16 percent are disabled. "It is important to hire disabled people in the business of improving prosthetic care and not to shut people out." These needs for support, recognition, and employment may seem obvious to some, but they do not go without saying.

Returning to active duty may seem like the lone option to some vets. Jody Casey had few prospects upon arrival home from Iraq. After being part of the U.S. military industrial complex, staying in can be easier than extricating oneself. "A significant percentage (10-20 percent) of amputee soldiers remains in active duty," Dennis Clarke explains. "With prosthetic technology, one can do more than ever after sustaining these types of injuries and recover faster . . . these soldiers are specialists in their field, and it is better to bring back experienced soldiers with good training and combat experience."

Throughout the VA literature and my conversation with Dennis Clarke, much emphasis was put on remaining in active duty. The push – after being injured, healing, receiving state of the art medical care – is to get back in the game. Those soldiers on active duty are rewarded with medical care coverage and accolades. Soldiers who choose not to return have far fewer options. The war practically creates a "super-soldier" archetype with bionic limbs and a taste for combat with vengeance running through them. The focus on active duty inhibits considering alternatives, divesting money and lives from this war. The creation of the invincible wounded warrior serves as propaganda for the war machine.

Jody Casey addressed the concept of support. "They don't want you to know what your rights are . . . I had no idea where my local VA was or what my medical coverage was." He discovered that his coverage was "two years of full medical and six months of dental." The IVAW and a veterans' support group are his community now and have become integral to his life. Having served in Iraq, working with IVAW and Vets for Vets has provided Casey with a different viewpoint of what the Iraq war is about – war profiteering happening at every level. "This is not about liberation" he concludes, "it's about a few people making a lot of money on the back of the poor and now people like me have to pay for it with their whole selves." ☒

*Izzy "Socket" Klatzker lives in the hills of TN, tends goats and chickens, enjoys loving, organizing, learning, writing, critiquing, imagining and creating.*

On June 22, Lt. Ehren Watada made history by becoming the first commissioned officer to publicly refuse deployment to Iraq. Lt. Watada had announced his intention on June 7, saying at a press conference that the war and occupation are illegal and immoral, and stating, "My participation would make me party to war crimes." Lt. Watada, stationed at Ft. Lewis, Washington, attempted to resign his position in protest but this request was denied.

In July, the U.S. Military charged Lt. Watada with missing a movement, contempt towards officials (for his statements about President Bush), and conduct unbecoming an officer. By issuing these charges, the U.S. Military has opened up discussion of the legality of the war and First Amendment rights. If convicted of all counts, Lt. Watada could serve up to eight years in jail. A hearing will be held in mid-August and a court martial will likely follow in the fall.

Lt. Watada should be commended for his courage and strength of character. By acting on his conscience in the face of dishonorable discharge, jail time, and being considered a traitor by some, Lt. Watada sets an example for others in the military and for all who are working to end the war. Supporting military objectors is one essential step in ending the war in Iraq, but not the only one. As Vietnam-Era Vet and activist Mike Ferner urged during the "Winter of Our Discontent" 33-day fast earlier this year, "We simply MUST do more than we've done. We simply MUST make every effort to halt business as usual, and that means going beyond activism as usual."



photo: Jeff Paterson

**Never in my life did I ever imagine I would have to disobey my president. But then again, never did I imagine my president would lie to go to war, condone torture, spy on Americans, or destroy the career of a CIA agent for political gain. I would rather resign in protest, but the army doesn't agree.**  
-U.S. Army Lt. Ehren Watada

For an update on Lt. Watada's case, visit [www.thankyoult.org](http://www.thankyoult.org).



## going from fat to phat with a little *resistance* training

### TEXT

Adrienne Maree Brown

### PHOTO

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A few years ago, a woman handed me a Phat Camp brochure. I remember being impressed and somewhat ashamed that someone clearly sensed I would be into this fat thing.

Was I fat?

The same thing happened when I was approached about writing a piece on fat activism, body image and body hatred. I considered the race/body conversation by asking myself, "where do non-judgment, love and acceptance, and faith enter the conversation?"

First I had to tackle my initial shame — was I fat?

No one I know has a self-image that syncs with what the world considers fat. Being fat is a temporary state, a baby thing, a stress moment. It's thick, big-boned, post-partum. It's metabolism.

The realization that after ten years I'm not actually the thin person in my head inspired me to re-evaluate my values. Can I be healthy if I don't accept who I actually am?

This question resounds deeply in the world of activists, a community that spends the majority of its time addressing disparities of power. We are a community who feels deeply that every person deserves a healthy and peaceful life. We have to fight in myriad ways to win peace and health for everyone. We sometimes treat ourselves like an enemy within.

"Activists internalize so much struggle and so much anger," says Shira Hasan, the woman who handed me that brochure. "Sometimes we allow the struggle to live in us. In our bellies, in our thighs, in our hearts. We work hard to take in the hate the world is



selling and churn out action and movement. The trauma that is left from that fight can make us feel like we aren't worthy, like we aren't enough, like we don't have a beauty of our own."

The activists I most respect mistreat themselves in many ways, as if they had a list of to-dos for their righteous days:

1. *Do eat whatever is easiest because it takes the least time from your work;*

2. *Do smoke like a chimney because it is so stressful to put your whole belief system on the line every day;*

3. *Do pack your schedule so full of travel, meetings, calls and work that a regular gym schedule becomes impossible;*

4. *Do drink like a proud fish or puff an L in order to stop the train of thoughts enough to sleep;*

5. *Do sleep, but never enough to feel well-rested.*

Add it all up, and there you have a large community of unhealthy activists. Some, like me, are thick. Meanwhile, others are wasting away, having lost all muscle tone. Some can't stop coughing. The world of the physical is so often ideologically disappointing; we are protesting those misplaced ideals with the small piece that we can control — our bodies.

"I don't know if you could get many social justice activists to admit that they 'hate their bodies,' but actions do speak louder than words," states Bryant Terry, co-author of GRUB, a new book of whole food recipes for the movement. "I have a lot of close friends and colleagues who are doing amazing work to save the world but failing to save themselves."

Now I'm just going say this: it is easier to dismiss skinny than fat. As people lose weight, even if it is stress related, folks often compliment the weight loss. I feel only slightly ashamed admitting that I have often wished that my stress led to a drop in the pounds. Instead, I get sedentary, ignore the calls from my gym, and start snacking and smoking. And my little fat cells expand.

"Some argue beauty doesn't even exist, except in relation to the notions set forth by a society, and therefore is less a 'real thing' than the prevailing conventions of a particular culture," says artist Ricardo Cortes, who excels at portraying people as they are

in size, shape, color. "My own particular definition of beauty is rarely one level that could ever be captured. It's a system of relationships . . . interactions . . . context."

On a good day, I can see beauty in my body and beyond that, myself. But on a bad day? On a bad day I can pontificate at great length on how I should feel about my body: it's a temple, etc. Part of being an activist is having this sort of 'all sizes and shapes are all good' attitude that, for many of us, rings false when we look in the mirror. Don't get me wrong, sometimes I get naked in front of the mirror, strike a pose and like what I see. And then strike more poses. But a lot of times I see a mirror and turn away, or see a picture of me somewhere that feels like a betrayal of who I am.

Society is very clear in the dominant idea of the size and shape we're supposed to be and makes sure you know when you are not that.

No matter how much you theorize and try to relearn ways of thinking of your body, the world can get you. Even when I'm not near a television or pop magazine, I am under constant verbal street assault: "Hey you got a BIG ass!" "You thick ma," "I like that meat on the bones."

Intended to be complimentary, or at least positively lewd, I instead hear the repeated message: "You are fat." It messes with my head, it throws off my concentration. Trying to live my life and do good things, I still get reduced to a piece of meat on a scale, often by my beloved community.

White folks don't really stress me on this point.

"I often feel my beauty or my self confidence affected by being surrounded by whiteness or by people who don't know how to read me. When you feel invisible, you can feel powerless. When you feel invisible, you forget that you have something to give," says Shira.

Like most things, there are two extremes. Being a large woman of color brings you a certain degree of respect in the white community — you can be seen as intimidating, as well as jovial and friendly. I have experienced dismissal as a physical entity. Beyond these stereotypes, I am also subtly cast into the 'big women of color' role — something between mama and housekeeper — that mainstream society is comfortable with.

The other extreme is the love that many in the black community have for "Thick Sis-

## **No matter how much you theorize and try to relearn ways of thinking of your body, the world can get you.**

tas." I will never forget how I felt moving from a mostly white community in Kansas to deep Georgia for middle school. Already tortured by things like boobs and a booty, when I walked into my new school and suddenly I was "stacked" and "thick," had "good hair." Skinny black Southern boys taught me a whole lexicon for how fine I was.

After a few years and lots of unwanted attention, I started to intentionally put on weight, thinking it would make people leave me alone. "We are taught that fat contradicts beauty," said Shira. My recent work has been to unlearn this, to accept the cover, the way the world sees me, as a precious version of me and something I am supposed to be happy with and treat well.

In the barrage of other people's ideas about how I should look, my activism provides no clear shield or outlet for the residual pain that leads to any behavior not in line with my personal health.

The only way I have been able to start to want health for myself is to connect it to resistance. There is a movement afoot of people who call themselves fat activists, among other things, and feel that underneath the politics is simply a healing person, struggling to be seen and heard. It is one thing to believe in healing communities, but the hard work begins when we start to live in our internal power and health, legitimizing the long-term work. The hard work begins when we start to see ourselves as valuable, virtuous, precious, special, beautiful, unique, and be healthy and perhaps even holy. I've been to that mountaintop y'all, and it's nice!

Shira said it better than I ever could: "To activists, I say that part of being engaged in resisting colonization is about learning how to let go of our self hatred and allow ourselves to be powerful and feel beautiful no matter what. My wish would be that activists take as much time for our internal battles, for loving and fighting for our right to be whole and gorgeous as we do to fight the battles going on outside our bodies." 📷

*Adrienne Maree Brown is the Executive Director of the Ruckus Society.*

# Black Bookstores

## Selling Blackness, Lattes, and Morrison

TEXT

Leslie Ann Murray

PHOTOS

Jahi Sabater - SabaterJ@newschool.edu

Almost every weekend in the spring and summer, I used to pop into the Indigo Café and Bookstore in downtown Brooklyn to browse their new arrivals, have some peppermint tea, and stir up conversation with book lovers and café loafers. Indigo Café's accessible location, pleasant staff, and good-looking patrons made it a weekend dating service as well as a bookstore. The bookstore had become an alternative gathering place for members of the Fort Greene community to socialize, network, and obtain a sense of community. Indigo Café was a bookstore without borders, capturing many cultures and ideas in one shop.

I felt connected to Indigo Café because of its progressive cultural melody, and when it closed due to the economic downturn in the wake of September 11, I was devastated. I was forced to venture around New York City to find a Black-oriented bookstore that resonated with the community atmosphere I enjoyed at the Indigo Café. All the Black bookstores I visited shared Indigo Café's premise of trying to refocus the myopic representation of Blackness, emphasize participative approaches to community development, and give Black customers an automatic connection to their bookstore.

By integrating their bookstores as an economic pillar for the Black community, Black bookstore owners create a significant bond between them and their customers. For some Black consumers, Black bookstores symbolize the subconscious ideas of "buying Black" in a non-dogmatic nationalist rhetoric, and as a way to empower and foster the community. Many consumers participate in the "Buy Black" motto (a nationalistic movement which was created in reaction to white capitalists profiting from Black consumers' wallets) because they want to foster an egalitarian merchant-consumer relationship of reciprocity in which the consumer will continue to "Buy Black" in exchange for the Black bookstore owners supporting broader economic development in the community.

Kori Willison, the manager of Sister's Uptown Bookstore based in Washington

Heights, supports the "Buy Black" philosophy in her bookstores, because "Blacks have a lot of buying power for independent businesses to flourish in [spite of] the dominant business market."

Bookstore owners are able to use their passion for books to benefit their entrepreneurial appetites since most such stores are independently owned & operated. Black independent bookstores avoid the impersonal nature of the corporate shops, which are rarely supportive of self-published writers. At Sister's Uptown Bookstore, the owners endorse self-published writers because they want black writers "to have a venue and a voice to shine," and periodically organizes book-signings to expose self-published writers' novels to the Washington Heights community.

Self-publishing is a viable option for many Black writers to share their voices with the public. Black writers who have been systematically excluded from the publishing world are breaking away from system-oriented publishing and are creating alternative avenues where their voices are not simply dismissed by publishing houses. The recognition of their writing by peers is vital to garnering new readers. Though some self-published works are mundane, like the various series of "street novels," self-publishing presents choices for Black writers and places market control back into consumer hands. In this fashion, agents, publishers, or affluent friends are no longer the prerequisite to publication.

Black bookstores and self-published Black writers create a consumer-driven market to increase the appreciation of Black literature, which is frequently overlooked. These two entities encourage literacy and build pathways for greater Black representation in the world of literature.

Independent bookstores take customers beyond the surface of pop-culture books that proliferate in big chain bookstores like Barnes & Noble, and provide their customers with a collage of both the independent and the mainstream. Articulated in "Read Between the Lines: Superstores Threaten





the American Literary Future,” David Kornhaber confirms the greater diversity of independent bookstores: “Chain bookstores that control 75 percent of the book market have a total of only five buyers deciding which books are being sold. So while the total number of bookstores may have increased, the diversity of books on the market has decreased.”

A lack of book diversity in chain stores is moving American literature into spiraling, parochial homogeneity. Chain bookstores preserve and promote ideologies of writers perpetuating sameness and reproduce dominant class principles.

Chain bookstores seize market control by flexing their corporate muscle, bullying independent bookstores for location, and inundating customers with other corporate sameness to lull them in. Chain bookstores, like many corporations, rarely contribute to the local economy. It comes down to the power and profit, according to Stacy Mitchell, a senior researcher with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance ([www.islr.org](http://www.islr.org)).

Local independent bookstores aren't only serving idealism with that literary slice of Toni Morrison, but also contribute a greater percentage of their profits to a neighborhood's economy. But small businesses receive fewer financial subsidies

from the government. Chain bookstores are supported with tax subsidies as well as other governmental tax initiatives. “[Government] mistakenly believes that retail development is economic development and they believe these stores will create jobs and tax revenues,” states Stacy Mitchell. “But what actually occurs is economic displacement, plus dollars no longer re-circulate (in the local community), leading to more economic losses.”

Kori Willison states that Sister's Uptown Bookstore provides the Washington Heights community with educational, cultural, and political resources. According to Kori, Sister's Uptown Bookstore “is an alternative to the streets and creates programs for children to blossom and have opportunities to learn about different things.” For example, Sister's Uptown organizes a yearly street fair in Washington Heights that brings together writers, musicians, and dancers. The street fair reflects the community development aspect of many Black bookstores. Such activities create alternative gathering places for community members to feel connected, counteracting the frequent alienation of urban living.



opposite: heading in to Sister's Uptown Bookstore.  
above: inside Sister's Uptown.

Black bookstores are profitable because they capture a fraction of African-American spending power. The Blackness they sell is of all forms, not just the latest fad pushed by corporate interests. Due to historical marginalization and displacement, these bookstores act as venues and vehicles that uplift the experience of being Black in America. By removing the imposed imagery of Blackness, this fledgling sector of independent bookstores offers a space where customers can stretch their legs, have some tea, and devour words. 📖

*Leslie-Ann Murray is a journalist from Trinidad, who lives in Brooklyn and is proudly South African, Zimbabwean and Tanzanian during the months of July-December.*

“It has been Zinn’s lifework to illuminate the subjectivities others have ignored.”

-Boston Phoenix

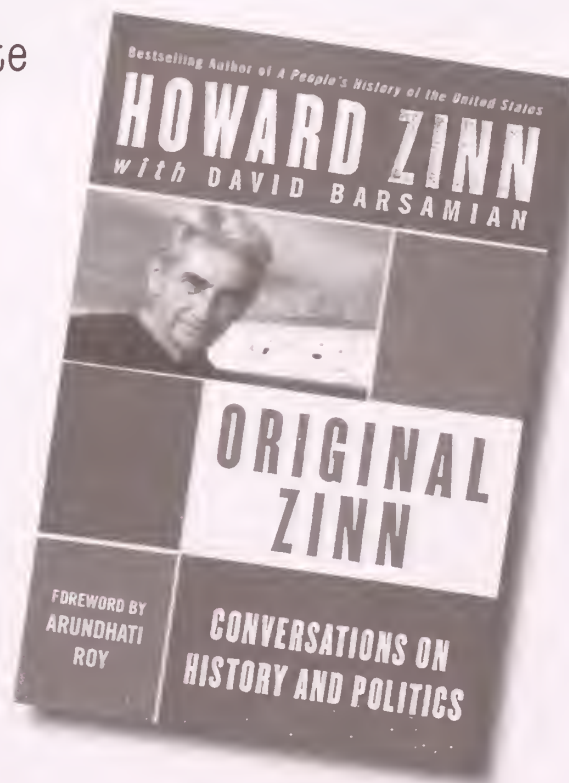
“Not to read Howard Zinn is to do a disservice to yourself.”

-Arundhati Roy

“A history maker to give us hope.”

-Alice Walker

Historian, activist, and bestselling author Howard Zinn has been interviewed by David Barsamian for public radio numerous times over the past decade. *Original Zinn* is a collection of their conversations, showcasing Zinn at his most engaging and provocative.



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CULTURE





# THE POWER OF NO!

## Talking with Black Lesbian Filmmaker Aishah Shahidah Simmons

INTERVIEW  
Tamara K. Nopper

It has taken rape and incest survivor, activist, and filmmaker Aishah Shahidah Simmons 11 years to complete her documentary *NO!*, which chronicles rape and healing within the African American community and relates this violence to white supremacy, slavery, sexism, and homophobia. Now that the film is finished, Simmons faces her next hurdle: getting *NO!* out to the public and navigating the politics of distribution. Although getting institutional support for a film is a normal challenge for any director, it is even more challenging for Simmons because *NO!* does what many films don't: centralizes Black women's experiences and analyses. *Clamor* talks to Simmons about this process.

*Your film NO! has been recently completed after an 11 year journey. How are you feeling about that?*

I'm very happy that *NO!* is finally finished and soon to be re-officially distributed, but that it's already being released into the world.

*What are some of the challenges you're facing in getting it out into the world?*

I finished *NO!* in August of 2005 and I submitted *NO!* to what's kind of considered the "A-list" film festivals . . . and all of them rejected me. I was kind of like – *whoa*, I wasn't expecting that and so it forced me to have to kind of just step back and think about who supported *NO!*, and

who's helped to make *NO!* a reality . . . I think it just kind of *re-grounded* me . . . And that's why I'm glad it didn't happen because fuck those people . . . as Toni Cade Bambara says, it's your *community* who you want to name you.

*I noticed with some of these film festivals, and especially with liberal Hollywood, all of a sudden this big interest in having images of Africa, especially war-torn Africa or corrupt Africa. And yet you can't get your film out about Black women in the U.S., even though there are a lot of things that Hollywood would like to see, which is devastation and the kind of trauma and violence towards Black people. People have such a weird appetite for that. Why do you think there's this kind of willingness to see Black bodies going through this experience in the context of Africa, but not with your film?*

I think that white people, not just Americans but Europeans as well, I think that there's this . . . to look at Black women in America is to hold white people accountable in a way in which, to talk about Africa, yeah, we all know about colonialism, but the way in which it's kind of . . . they're able to help the *other* as opposed to dealing with the situation at home. I've had prominent white feminists tell me that they couldn't support *NO!* because they were doing work in Africa – as if you can't do both. I never understood that. White American feminists tell me, "Oh, your project is very important, but you know, I'm helping Kenyan girls who are being raped." And so of course I don't want to be like, don't help them, but how can you not help me?

But I also think that a lot of African American women who are doing this work – and god knows *NO!* does it – it challenges racism in America. It challenges white feminists who've been racist, it challenges white men – they want to be the saviors. They want to . . . they see Africa as we've got to help these helpless people as opposed to, here *NO!*'s not, you know, women are definitely victimized but they're also agents of change. They're there as experts, and so even though we see them as the victims, we also see them as the survivors, as the activists, and in addition to the women who . . . the featured testimonies, we also have the scholars and activists and historians. I really think that *NO!* challenges white people, because . . . I think white people need, a lot of white people, unfortunately, want to be saviors and need to save.

*I'm sure you've seen a lot of films coming out about the exploitation of Black women in hip hop. What impact do you think that has on your film getting seen?*

Mmm. Well, hip hop is very sexy, you know? First of all, it's a very lucrative business. It's a predominantly *male* business. So, one of the things that I've learned from Toni Cade Bambara, as well as also from Julie Dash, who made *Daughters of the Dust*, is that what film does is it asks you for two hours, for ninety minutes, whatever, to experience what you're seeing through the lens of the filmmaker. So when I'm looking at a Woody Allen film, for instance – and I

hate to talk about the pedophile – but when I'm looking at a Woody Allen film . . .

*That's what he is, yeah.*

(laughs)

*Oh lord, thank you.*

You know, I'm asked to, you know, I'm asked to experience *everything*, so the Jewish culture, all of that, whatever . . . The challenge of the films done by people of color is that white people – much less people of color – we're not even trained to look at a film and see people who are not, people who are not white. We're just not trained to see that. So we're so used to seeing the white savior and all that kind of historically. What's come up as a result of Spike – first Melvin Van Peebles but Spike Lee and John Singleton, so many others – we've gotten these kind of *Boyz n the Hood* films. Not necessarily Spike, but John Singleton.

So because the way in which patriarchy works is that these white men could have their *fantasies* about being bad boys, gangsters, through Black men. So there definitely . . . there's still no interest in what Black women have to say . . . Hip hop has kind of really in some ways transcended race so . . . everybody's into hip hop. So I think that there's this kind of . . . it's *sexy*, so to speak. And then, what's even sexier is to have Black men talking about the problems with hip hop . . . Quite a few of the films that are out there are being done by Black men.

I mean I think it's good. They need to challenge these issues. But I wonder, you know, as opposed to the films that are being made by women of color, documentary films, they *aren't* as welcome . . . unfortunately, Black feminists don't get that kind of support or that space to talk about the issues.

*I see these clips on television and I notice that they often seem very gratuitous; the only way in which they can talk about Black women in hip hop is by talking about big asses and having these kind of slow-mo, slowed down scenes . . . And there's something about it that I think is supposed to be kind of tantalizing to the viewer even as they're supposed to be kind of repulsed by it, right? And so what would be tantalizing about Black women dealing with rape and sexual assault?*

I think because there is . . . the documentary does not objectify women's bodies. I mean, there is a segment where I do a brief critique of hip hop, but it's not in depth. So it's not *sexy*, if you will, in that way. And again . . . we're not trained to view Black women as experts. I've had people say, "Where did you get all of those smart Black women from?" You know, like, I've had folks say that. And then because I look at challenging the role of religion and how that's played a role and kind of looking at key prominent Black figures, Black male figures, I think that for white people, that this is their,

stills from *NO! The Rape Documentary*





a way in which they become paternalistic. So it's like, "Oh, I don't want to deal with that" because "I don't want to get involved with that."

For instance, I had a potential funder say to me that she was concerned about stereotypes of Black people. I named a list of shows that her organization that she runs produced, which are completely ultimate stereotypes of Black people. And then she paused and she just kind of said, "Well, you know, I don't want Jesse Jackson or Al Sharpton boycotting." Yet that's bullshit; they're not willing to go to the mat for Black women basically . . . . When I kept pushing and pushing, she said, "Let's face it. Most people don't care about the rape of Black women." At the same time I think if I were a white man, a white woman, or even a Black man, but definitely a white man or a white woman doing this documentary, it would be sexy. But somehow because I'm a Black woman who's a feminist, who's a lesbian, who's a survivor, I'm not objective.

*I got a chance to watch your film, and what really struck me is that it lacked, in a good way, it lacked kind of this condemnation of Black women for being sexual or for wanting to have desire or for dressing however they want to dress. And especially in the conversation about Desiree Washington as it related to Mike Tyson, and seeing a lot of the women in the film stand up for her and say, "Nothing gives the person the right to rape somebody regardless if they went to the room, this and that." And I sense sometimes that the hip hop conversation around Black women is still very condemning of Black women in a way where it's kind of like, "If you don't want to be violated or treated this way, then don't shake your ass," right?*

Mmm. Mmm. Definitely. I completely agree that that is definitely something . . . that I refused to give into about this right place, right time bullshit.

*And how do you think that's affected some of the reaction to your film, whether it's by funders, or whether it's by people who've seen clips?*

I do think it's played a role. So it's going to be very interesting. For instance there's, I'm sure you've heard about the woman who was raped in North Carolina by the Duke Lacrosse team – Black woman and now, because she was a stripper, North Carolina Central University, which is a Black school, historically Black school, and she's a student there, she's a stripper, a single mom, and they don't want to claim her. It's this kind of thing where she had no business being

Aishah Shahidah Simmons



at the bachelor party, anyway. And so . . . I'm actually going to go down there to have a screening of *NO!* I say that because many of the screenings that are happening – and not necessarily connected to that – it's going to be a different type of audience. Because in the past it's been like, "Aishah's raising money, we've got to help her finish this film." So I'm still kind of like on the edge of how *NO!* is going to be received in the world . . . . What I'm hoping that *NO!* does – and this I've learned from all the screenings and discussions – is to kind of address people.

So when a survivor in the film talks about going to her boyfriend's frat house at 1 a.m. in the morning and talks about the context of all that, then we got Sulaiman Nuriddin right after she tells her testimony to say that most men think that that's *not* rape. So just to really kind of – because people are already thinking that – address it and have a *man* saying it. So I do think it is going to push people's buttons and challenge them.

So now what they're saying is that the Mike Tyson–Desiree Washington case is outdated. And yeah, it *is* outdated in many ways in terms of that there are other cases that I could use now. But the context is that we already, if we've got some women who are raped by white men – *white men*, so you would think that would cause an uproar – white men and folks who still say they had no business being at the bachelor party, Mike Tyson isn't outdated. I mean, you know, I could look at other people, but it's still the same thing as blaming the victims. ■

*Note: This interview was conducted in March, 2006. In June, Simmons received a major Ford Foundation grant to support the educational marketing and distribution of *NO!**

For more info, visit: [www.notherapedocumentary.org](http://www.notherapedocumentary.org)

To order a copy of *NO!*, visit the California Newsreel website at [www.newsreel.org](http://www.newsreel.org)

*Tamara K. Nopper is an educator, writer and activist living in Philadelphia. She is a graduate student in the Department of Sociology at Temple University and a volunteer for the Central Committee of Conscientious Objectors (CCCO), a national anti-war and counter-military organization ([www.objector.org](http://www.objector.org)). She can be reached at [tnopper@yahoo.com](mailto:tnopper@yahoo.com).*

**I've had prominent white feminists tell me that they couldn't support *NO!* because they were doing work in Africa – as if you can't do both. I never understood that. White American feminists tell me, "Oh, your project is very important, but you know, I'm helping Kenyan girls who are being raped." And so of course I don't want to be like, don't help them, but how can you not help me?**

# when we be

## Transgender People in Pop Culture and the Politics of Normalcy

TEXT  
Shana Agid

I'm on a bus coasting along the Long Island Expressway. Because it's a weekday morning, the bus is mostly empty. Just past Queens, I find myself watching glimpses of boy-on-boy sex on the miniature screen of a video iPod between the seats one row up. Looking up from the screen, I see the iPod is attached to a 30-something man, taking in his weekly serving of "Queer as Folk," Showtime's fictional extravaganza of white gay drama and discord (and sex).

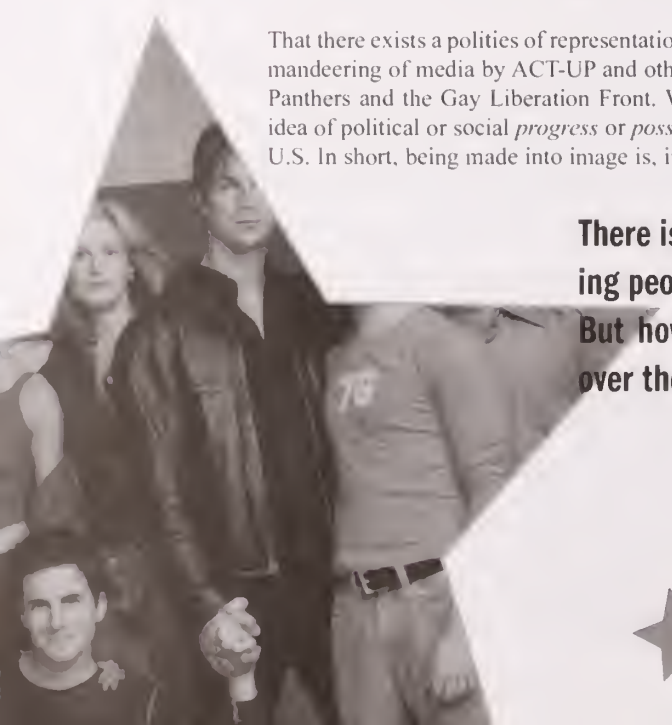
I stop reading and squint at the tiny figures, wondering how queer worlds like these are made, and then made to represent us to ourselves. And how, inevitably, they come to represent us to some larger "viewing public." These are, after all, the award-winning years of the queers – of *Brokeback Mountain*'s Oscar and *Transamerica*'s Golden Globe nods; of the celebrated finale of "Will & Grace" and the premiere of "Transgeneration," the flagship show of Viacom's new LGBT network, Logo; not to mention the ongoing success of "The L-Word" and, of course, "Queer as Folk."

White gay men like those in "Queer as Folk" are undoubtedly the central characters in the (relative) explosion of LGBT images. However the recent – and nearly simultaneous – release of major TV and film projects featuring transgender characters highlights the increasing media presence of trans people and underscores connections between trans "visibility" and the mainstreaming of images of lesbians and gay men. Over the past 10 to 15 years, efforts to image transgender bodies – and I use that term as an umbrella here, if a sometimes limited or faulty one, to include transsexual, trans, gender-queer, and intersex – have helped to shape ideas about what counts as trans, how trans bodies are pictured and quantified, and what social and political meanings are to be taken from those images.

The overwhelming tendency, it seems, for representations in the mainstream is to construct trans bodies as "normal" in an effort to render trans people understandable, tolerable, or deserving. This is done in large part through personal progress narratives, stories of origin and completion – from wrong bodies to right ones, tales of professional and personal success or terrifying, but symbolic, defeat. However, representing any body as "normal" comes with the traps of a visual and political culture in the United States that ultimately recognizes only certain bodies as such – the white, middle and upper class bodies of usually hetero- and gender-normative people. These patterns of seeing and being seen replicate many of the absences and amnesias of larger LGBT political movements, with issues of race, class, and gendered power taken mostly out of the picture in favor of highlighting an oversimplified "just-LGBT" story or political message.

That there exists a politics of representation is certainly not news. We recall the 1980s, identity politics, and the wily commandeering of media by ACT-UP and other activist organizations, and the earlier visual tactics of groups like the Black Panthers and the Gay Liberation Front. What remains worthy of consideration, however, is how representation, as an idea of political or social *progress* or *possibility*, has taken shape in the media-saturated and image-driven contemporary U.S. In short, being made into image is, in theory, tantamount to having "made it." There is a certain romance in seeing

**There is a certain romance in seeing ourselves on screen, or seeing people who, if we squint, we might pretend are close enough. But how does imagining that representation is liberation gloss over the rules by which those representations are chosen?**





# came normal

ourselves on screen, or seeing people who, if we squint, we might pretend are close enough. But how does imagining that representation is liberation gloss over the rules by which those representations are chosen? How does it mask problems with the social and political goals such representations are supposed to enable, or the very real structural power that not only keeps anti-queer sentiment alive and well, but organizes people's well-being, resources, and matters of life and death along lines of race, class, gender, and nation? What kind of liberation rests in the body of the acceptable, consumable queer?

In 2005, the release of "Transgeneration" and *Transamerica* marked the next installments in the burgeoning mainstream representation of trans people that arguably started with 1999's *Boys Don't Cry*. These three projects approach the telling of trans stories in very different ways: *Boys Don't Cry* is a fictionalized narrative of the rape and murder of Brandon Teena; "Transgeneration" follows four trans college students in the U.S. for a school year; *Transamerica* tells a fictional tale of a transwoman about to have sex reassignment surgery who first ends up on a life-changing road trip. Despite their different devices, each relies on the principle that difference is best made into sameness, and that trans people become familiar and, yes, normal, when we see them represented in terms broadly understood: right and wrong, illness and treatment, before and after, male and female.

For example, the four students whose trials and tribulations are featured in "Transgeneration" are predictably very different from one another (TV requires variety, no?) but are, according to the show's intro, sharing "one life-changing transition." This explanation at the outset of each episode telling viewers that there is one "transition" is elucidated by the consistent self-representation of each person as having "always been" the sex into which they are transitioning; "transition" becomes a move to the opposite and "correct" side of the gender coin. This leaves touchy subjects like challenging a binary gender system and imagining the

possibility of other "transitions" or a choice *not* to transition, for instance, out of the discussion.

I want to emphasize that there are certainly transgender and transsexual people for whom the transition from assigned sex at birth to another, often opposite, sex is of paramount importance. By identifying the use of a narrative of progress through transition, I am not dismissing or minimizing that experience. Rather, I am interested in the *use* of this story of clear origins and destinations, because it highlights the troubling relationship between representation and erasure, between creating a body of queer and trans images and constructing "ideal" or "real" LGBT bodies.

For instance, in movies and television, and even in some trans self-representations, the establishment of familiar, recognizable indicators of gender are often uncritically centered as "proof" of gender identities. Thus, more or less, tranny boys are *dudes*, transwomen are *ladies*. In addition, the majority of these representations feature white people, often young white transmen and older white transwomen. And though in some instances people of color are "included" in representations of trans bodies and lives – for example, "Transgeneration" offers Raci, a young Filipina transwoman living in East L.A. – the specificities of the experiences of trans people of color are rarely centered, thus re-inscribing whiteness as the unnoted, but ever-present, norm.

Several years ago, life-size posters appeared throughout New York City heralding the arrival of "Queer as Folk" with shining white boys (and two girls) splayed across the bus stops of lower Manhattan. It was, I believe, the first time I'd seen the word "queer" so big and glossy and . . . normalized. That the cast of this breakout all-gay-all-the-time show was also all white and nearly all male did not strike me as a coincidence, but functions now as a warning sign and reminder for the futures of trans and queer visual and political



culture. If we understand the resounding impact of images, then we know that what is missing and what is hidden also has political consequences.

So what, then, *is* missing? There are the disappeared bodies and lives of people of color, poor and working class people, and others who remain non-normative even under more expansive ideas of normal. There is also a resounding silence about the systems that determine the relative power different bodies and people are able to wield. These absences demonstrate clearly what *kinds* of politics are being engaged by and through the majority of mainstream LGBT representations. The limits of the acceptable, consumable queer are arguably made evident by the limits of LGBT politics in pursuit of the mythic American Dream – progress, assimilation, and the ever so mundane and dangerous "normal." 🗨

*Shana Agid is a visual artist, activist, teacher, cultural critic, and 30-something white tranny(boy). His visual and written work seeks to challenge ideas of race, gender, and sexuality in the post-Civil Rights Era United States, and addresses possibilities for undoing relationships of power in the 21st century. Shana can be reached at [rindpress@earthlink.net](mailto:rindpress@earthlink.net).*





# Holding the Mic and Power

I'm originally from New Orleans and displacement has been on my mind a lot recently. One year after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf coast – one year after the local police and National Guard moved in to shoot at, imprison, and bus out Black people from New Orleans – and one year after the multinationals, the NGOs, and the religious groups began buying out New Orleans real estate – I wonder what it is that keeps me in San Francisco when struggles against domination are so readily being fought in New Orleans.

I've been thinking about the two New Orleans – how the largely white and affluent neighborhoods like the Garden District have moved back to the city and are shopping in their boutiques and eating out in the French Quarter while the largely Black and working class 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Wards are still without electricity, natural gas, or potable water – if they've been able to return to the city at all. The 9<sup>th</sup> Ward, for instance, is currently under city- and state-mandated curfew that is enforced by U.S. Marshals, the New Orleans Police Department, the National Guard, and mercenary companies like Blackwater USA.

Residents of these Wards are effectively being scared into not returning, and those brave enough to come back literally live under the gun. There are grassroots campaigns going on right now to fight for the “right of return” for residents of these wards. The “right of return” is a phrase carefully chosen to draw a parallel between the struggles of displaced Palestinians from their cities and land to the struggles of the people of the Gulf Coast, also pushed out from their cities and land.

I've been thinking about displacement also because in August I moved to a rent-controlled, largely white, university educated, eight-person cooperative house in the North Mission in San Francisco. I went through the interview process with a lot of ease because I can speak their activist-y language, and we could relate on being part of similar social scenes. I know I depend on these circles wherever I go to help me get by, find relatively inexpensive rent and free food, but I also know that I'm tired of being part of largely white art-scenes, white anarchist scenes that destroy people's neighborhoods.

I also wonder if it's really about me, my own *body*, regardless of where I live and work and shop – or if it's about larger processes and institutions that displace people. Is it really about the way I'm racialized as East Asian, the way I'm gendered as male – and all of the different ways I perform that Asian-ness and masculinity? Is it the way I speak English, my immigration status, my sexuality, my education level, my endurance for largely white social scenes—my endurance for whiteness in general?

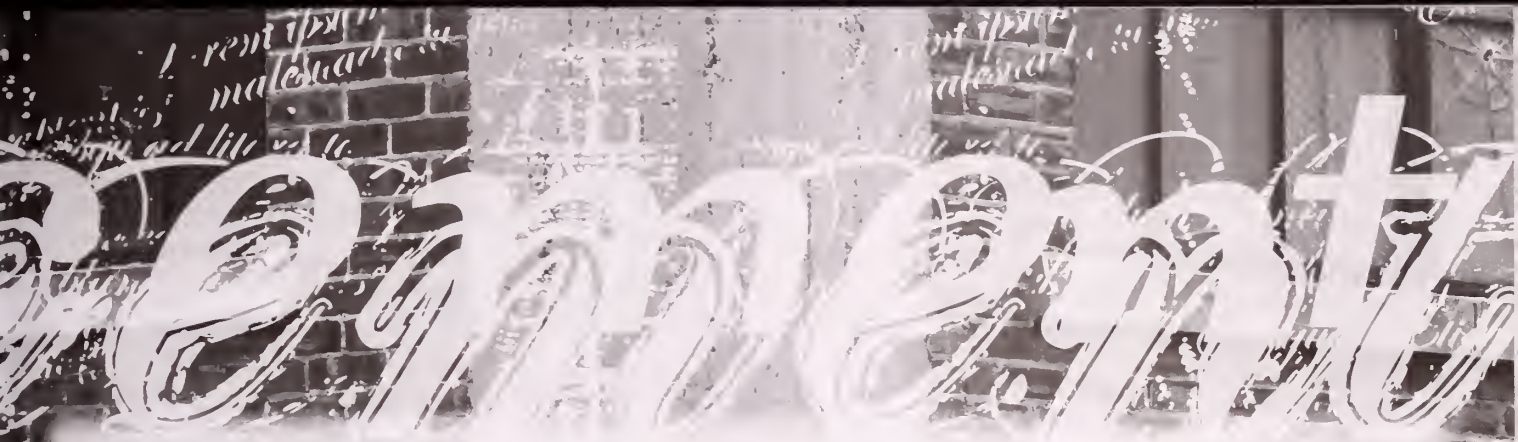
There's a great, capitalist myth that through our lifestyle choices as individual consumers we can control larger economic processes (or the larger processes of racism, gender, nationality, language) within and without our communities – the myth of consumer politics. Does where I find my housing matter in the larger thrust to displace communities of color? Aren't the forces that cause gentrification and displacement empowered by businesses (large and small), NGO's, the city government and its militarized police



TEXT  
Billy Bloodtruck

PHOTO  
alpraum





forces, its courts, and its prisons? How does my one body compare to that kind of institutional power? I suppose nothing stops it from being about both our lifestyles and institutional systems of domination.

How do we prioritize the effects of gentrification on those bodies that are actually displaced? How do I do this? Displacement has never been only about individual bodies forced to move or migrate, but about the dispersal of communities, the destruction of our social relationships. As people move further and further away from their work, the time and money they spend on getting to work grows. Meanwhile, the relationships they used to depend on for mutual support vanish. Due to hectic work schedules, imprisonment, and rising rents, the neighbors they once depended on to keep an eye on their kids, are gone. But displacement isn't just from the city to the suburb, displacement also crosses political borders.

When I was two years old my family flew to Louisiana with one-way tickets and a tourist visa from Taiwan. My aunt had married a Taiwanese-American who owned a motel outside of New Orleans. We worked for him and stayed for the next 11 years without citizenship or work papers. During those years we traveled around the South-east looking for work. One woman we met ran a farm in Alabama and was looking for temporary field hands. We had to pay the first few months of room and board before settling in to work for her, but in the end she pretended she had never received any payments from us. We didn't have a community to support us, and felt powerless.

So how do I repeat these dynamics in my life now? How do I push out people from their communities of support? Why do I have what's considered affordable rent and my own room? What is this kind of social capital that I've gained? What steps can I

take to support struggles against displacement? If I speak out, am I displacing others from telling their own stories? Is it important for me to have a microphone to tell my own stories? Those most affected by any system know most intimately how to overthrow that oppressive system – what needs to replace it. How do I justly tell others' stories? What does it mean to hold this mic? Part of it means I'm telling someone else's story. Part of it means I'm re-centering this story of displacement to make it about me, and part of that is an injustice.

Telling others' stories is either a part of racial and cultural genocide, or it is an act of solidarity. What is solidarity in the context of capitalist globalization and mass displacement? For instance, what is solidarity in the context of Katrina? Is it sending a bunch of white bodies to the Gulf when Black bodies have been so fully removed? Within the context of this country's continual dissolution of wealth that people of color accumulate and continual dispersal of communities that people of color build and inhabit, what does solidarity mean?

In New Orleans I helped start a project out of a friend's house called Books 2 Prisoners in 2004. Louisiana prisoners would write us asking for specific books, and we would try our best to match their requests and send them books free of charge. We tabled at a lot of events, and one night a friend of ours, who worked with a Palestinian solidarity group, asked us to table at a film showing. A young, white woman had just returned from Palestine after making a short documentary and was now touring around the country screening this film. During the screening, the filmmaker came up to our table. She looked through our stuff and we chatted. She was kind of hippie-ish with blonde dreads, smoking her American Spirit cigarettes. She said she had just finished her BA at the University of Wisconsin in Madison.

She felt moved by the injustices happening in Palestine and headed out there to make a film. She felt this was her solidarity in struggles against displacement and genocide in Palestine. She asked about our project, and I talked about it a little. She went on to remark that prisons are only a problem in the South.

I didn't reply at all. Later that night, it occurred to me that in order for her to fly all the way around the world to fight colonization and racism she had to make a choice. She had to decide what was more urgent for her, what was more important for her. And part of this choice was the denial of racism in her town – the kind of racism that funnels someone like her into college and funnels poor people of color into prison. What kind of work would she have to do in order to fight that kind of racism? Would that kind of work allow her to tour the U.S. with a film? Was the way that she told others' stories an act of solidarity – herself being the central player with the brutality of Israel as her backdrop and we, the audiences of her U.S. tour, the supporting cast – or an act of displacement? Was her denial of racism in the form of the prison industrial complex in the U.S. an act of solidarity with the state?

I wonder where that leaves me. I wonder how far I have to leave home to learn lessons that teach me to stay at home. I wonder how displacement has tangled up my life, and how I've used displacement to tangle up others' lives. I wonder what it means to say these words, to hold this space, to hold this mic. ■

*Billy works on projects in San Francisco. He draws pictures of mustachioed figures flexing tough against domination and plays in a band called Help Yourself. He still thinks petty vandalism is actually godly and that political violence will make the minimum wage go up. Reach Billy at: [billy@riseup.net](mailto:billy@riseup.net)*



# Science Spectacle

## The Body Worlds Controversy

TEXT: Ren Hsieh

PHOTO: BODY WORLDS and the Institute for Plastination

www.bodyworlds.com

Dr. Gunther von Hagens's human "plastination" exhibits are new only to U.S. audiences. His *Body Worlds* exhibitions of preserved and dissected human corpses have been touring the world since 1995, receiving over 18 million visitors. Now his three *Body Worlds* exhibits are touring the U.S., currently in St. Paul, Denver, and Houston.

While his human "plastinates" have generated mostly public and institutional support in the U.S., his exhibitions have not been as well received in other countries. *Body Worlds* has endured most of its critical backlash from European venues, but especially in Germany, von Hagens's country of origin. After a steady stream of legal interventions and public denunciations from media and groups both religious and secular, von Hagens discontinued his German tour last year and moved the exhibitions permanently to the U.S. Von Hagens's at times tongue-in-cheek renderings of the cadavers, including a man carrying his own skin and a man on horseback, only seem to provoke more criticism, even hostility, resulting in a range of accusations from racism and sexism to denigration of the deceased and sensationalism.

Russell Working of the Chicago Tribune, who has written perhaps the most detailed media coverage of the scandals surrounding *Body Worlds*, suggests that von Hagens's greatest controversy, however, may be the questionable process of obtaining cadavers from abroad. While von Hagens claims that all of the whole-body specimens used in his *Body Worlds* exhibits are those of donors, he also admits that he has bought anatomical collections from museums for partial body displays.

Despite two separate ethics committees in the U.S. — assembled by Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry and the California Science Center in Los Angeles — having cleared *Body Worlds* of using cadavers other than those donated specifically for the exhibit, von Hagens has been linked to illicit corpse trafficking scandals in China, Kyrgyzstan, and Siberia. Working adds that for years von Hagens has admitted to having accepted unclaimed bodies from certain countries according to their laws and restrictions, if provided proper documentation. However, he claims to have discontinued this practice due to rising controversy. Von Hagens has denied any wrongdoing in all of these cases and has yet to be charged for any illegal practices. He does, however, continue to generate rumors and allegations.

Nevertheless, von Hagens's *Body Worlds* exhibits have tallied an estimated 200 million dollars since their 1995 opening in Tokyo, Japan. The tremendous financial success of von Hagens's traveling exhibit has inspired imitators. His primary competition seems to be Atlanta-based Premier Exhibitions, Inc., which also holds RMS Titanic, Inc., a subsidiary that has produced great financial success salvaging and exhibiting artifacts from the Titanic wreckage while also seeing its share of controversy over salvaging rights. Premier Exhibitions currently finances *Bodies . . . The Exhibition* in New York City, London, and Atlanta, with exhibitions in Las Vegas and Tampa scheduled later this summer. Other exhibits have appeared across Asia, Europe, and North America, including Premier Exhibitions' first show *Bodies Revealed*

in England and South Korea, *Body Exploration* in Taiwan, *The Universe Within* in San Francisco, *Mysteries of the Human Body* in South Korea, and *Jintai Plastomic: Mysteries of the Human Body* in Japan.

None of these imitation exhibits have any official affiliation with *Body Worlds* nor are they endorsed or supported by von Hagens. Many of these exhibitions, however, are in various ways connected to his former staff and students.

Premier Exhibitions obtained all of its "plastinated" cadavers through China's Dalian Medical University of Plastination Laboratories where von Hagens once held a visiting professorship in the mid-1990s. In 2004, von Hagens' former manager, Dr. Sui Hongjin launched a copycat exhibition in Beijing, also called *Body Worlds*.

The increasing variety of uses for "plastinated" cadavers seems to indicate that von Hagens's technique has borne a growth industry. Currently, more than 400 institutions in 40 countries worldwide use "plastination" to preserve specimens for medical instruction and there are at least 11 current imitation exhibits of von Hagens's *Body Worlds* exhibiting throughout the world.

This burgeoning industry begs the question: Is it ethical to make a profit from the death of human beings? The public display of human corpses is hardly a new occurrence, even in America, where the deceased have been displayed in occasions ranging from executions and lynchings to mere identification. However, profiting from such public exhibitions is an altogether new phenomenon.

In 2003, Megan Stern suggested that *Body Worlds* represented "the redefinition of the human body within consumer culture." Because so many critics have fixated on the ethics and methods of obtaining human cadavers for "plastination," it seems implicit that there exists a rising unease toward the presumed placement of patients as consumers in the medical world. In her commentary for *Radical Philosophy*, Stern proposed that, "like the scandal of organ selling in the Third World, [*Body Worlds*] story suggests an uncomfortable awareness of the reduction of people to commodities."

The line between patient-as-consumer and patient-as-commodity appears to be very thin. The supposed informed consent of *Body Worlds*' donation program seems an explicit consumer choice. However, the questionable means of obtaining bodies by imitation exhibits and for medical instruction leans toward treating the patient as commodity. Until now an underground trade, the commodification of cadavers has put the deceased as product in the forefront, in the very public business of "plastination" exhibition. The resounding success of *Body Worlds* and its imitators has never gone without substantial critique as well as negative public and government reaction until reaching the United States. What does it say, then, about the U.S. as a consumer culture that the country is so noticeably lacking in this response? ■

Reach Ren Hsieh care of *Clamor* at [info@clamormagazine.org](mailto:info@clamormagazine.org)





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# Meet Kristina.

Kristina, born to an Italian mom and British dad, is a native Ohioan. She's seen here sporting an emerald 100% cotton racerback tank. Unfortunately, her brand devotion to AA could never land her a spot in their ads: Dov Charney thinks short hair on girls is "unnatural."

**aa**

**American Apparel Exposed**



# Who's Your Daddy?

Dov Charney serves up paternalism with a (creepy) smile at American Apparel HQ

**TEXT**  
Jim Straub

**PHOTOS**  
Kim Hoeckele

Even by the standards of today's sex-as-marketing culture, American Apparel's ads stand out. "Meet Melissa. She won an unofficial wet T-shirt contest held at the American Apparel apartment in Montreal." The words are draped over a soaked sexpot showering in a white shirt.

Another, a billboard, features a woman apparently preparing to fellate some lucky T-shirt wearer (with a caption hurrying her to open up wide). Intentionally resembling 1970s porn, with women appearing either incredibly young or perhaps caught in the sweaty throes of sex work, the ads seem to offer a subversive alternative to the usual plastic, airbrushed hot-babe ad – while still selling sex, sex, sex! . . . and clothes. But the strangest visual disorientation comes in the advertisement's upper left-hand corner, where normally a brand-name tag line would exhort buyers to live extreme or buy hard. But here, the sober type says simply, "American Apparel: Vertically Integrated Manufacturing." "Vertical integration" is an economic term referring to a business that encompasses all aspects of producing and selling a product; and in today's globalized and sub-contracted economy, companies that both manufacture and retail are increasingly rare. Presumably, to most hip consumers who are not economists or commodities exporters, these words on American Apparel's billboard

are just another anachronism in an already edgy ad. But American Apparel is persistent about peppering their ads with blurbs about their economic structure ("Made in Downtown LA") that the stodgy competitors at Hanes or Fruit of the Loom aren't moved to share. Indeed, some of the company's billboards in downtown Los Angeles do away with the soft-core hard bodies altogether and consist simply of large type reading "American Apparel supports the legalization of LA's workforce." A rare public statement by a company that benefits from the downward pressure on wages exerted by undocumented workers in the United States – that those workers deserve human rights – but what's the sales angle?

What other clothing company mixes trashy sex and manufacturing information in its ads? Like everything else about its business, American Apparel's marketing showcases the bizarre contradictions of postmodern consumer capitalism. The company possesses a downtown textile factory straight out of the '40s, a sexploitation ad campaign from the '70s, and a marketing strategy so sophisticated it almost seems to come from the future. Old-world manufacturing paternalism meets sexy transnational marketing: has American Apparel vertically integrated different eras of capitalism?



## Get the Hipsters Buying, and Start Counting the Cash

Today, Dov Charney is the glamorous "cool capitalist" who founded and runs American Apparel, the stylish clothing company whose explosive growth topped \$250 million in sales last year. But back in the '90s, Dov was just a kid attending prep school in Connecticut who bootlegged trash bags full of K-Mart T-shirts home to Canada for pocket money. His first real job as a youth began by crossing a picket line to serve as a replacement worker during a postal workers' strike in Quebec. But Dov had bigger dreams than simply being a scab or prep – he wanted to be a clothing manufacturer. He dropped out of college, borrowed \$10,000 from his father and moved to South Carolina to become a real textile magnate. But Charney arrived just as the clothing business was shifting en masse to low-wage Asian production. The earth's T-shirt forges moved from Danville to Dhaka, ruining scores of small industrial southern towns – and young Dov too.

Armed with an appreciation of the new global economics of textile production, Charney moved to Los Angeles and started a new garment company in 1998, training his sights on a specific target market. In an age when corporations obsess about marketing to "early adopters" (ad-speak for the young urban sophisticates whose tastes prefigure bigger consumer fads), Charney's strategy – get the hipsters first, and then start counting money – was not unique. But his success at cornering the market by selling undershirts has been. Last year, a *Business Week* article fawned over Charney, claiming he is "connecting with an emerging youth movement, an underground network of urban hipsters from Brooklyn to Berlin. These twenty-something consumers don't mind being marketed to as long as the images look real, unvarnished, and match their own casual attitudes toward sex." American Apparel, digging into the hipster niche of the retail clothing market, has been rewarded with a meteoric business success in the hundreds of millions of dollars and a potential future as a billion-dollar company.

American Apparel has cornered this most targeted of consumer markets with a slew of sophisticat-

ed, ironic public poses. From Charney's populist speeches to the ad campaign reminiscent of DIY porn, everything about American Apparel is geared to appeal to the ideal trend-starting shoppers Charney calls "young metropolitan adults" – including the company's sweatshop-free manufacturing ethic. The widespread misgivings by left-leaning young people that everyday commodities like coffee, clothing, and oil are inextricably linked with global exploitation has created a huge potential consumer market among the very "early adopters" all marketers love to pander to. Like Starbucks and Whole Foods, American Apparel has hit a niche market with a message about its business ethics – and carted off cash as fast as it can carry it.

### Postmodern Paternalism

Not only is the company's clothing "Made in Downtown L.A." as the billboard says, but the predominantly immigrant workforce of thousands earns \$12 an hour on average, according to American Apparel. In an industry that is shifting production to places where workers earn well under a dollar an hour, at a time when 97 percent of apparel sold in the U.S. is made in other countries, Charney's company stands the business model on its head. Indeed, with perks ranging from a health care plan to English classes to free massages, as well as its "one big family" élan and charismatic patron, American Apparel's factory (now the largest sewngarments facility remaining in the United States) hearkens back to a bygone, paternalistic era of textile manufacture in the United States.

Ever since a general strike of textile workers in 1934, employers in garment factories have been at such pains to keep their workers from forming unions that they would create a family-like, miniature welfare state, providing employees housing or Christmas dinners and, in more recent times, sports leagues or night classes. This old-school management emphasizes workers' status as the children in a family with the employer as a benevolent father figure who provides a good life but expects obedience. The idea was that spending money – on more-than-minimum wages and parties and classes for workers – in order to make

much more money, would be far cheaper than the costs that would accrue if the workers were to organize and make their own gains through collective bargaining. If workers in these paternalistic enterprises did attempt to organize, however, the carrot of good benefits could quickly be swapped with the stick of real employer power. Indeed, workers attempting to unionize in textile plants usually face harassment, intimidation, firings, threats to close the plant, and all manner of manipulation or creation of division among and between workers and their organization.

Paternalistic management techniques like these live on in updated "team" jargon in a thousand U.S. industries, from Wal-Mart to Amazon.com. However, the off-shoring of hundreds of thousands of textile jobs has made the issue a dead letter in garment-making: in the time that American Apparel has hired 2,000 workers, the industry at large has terminated some 500,000 jobs in the United States. American Apparel has bucked this trend, as its marketing campaign of getting socially conscious consumers to pay extra for more tailor-fitted clothing has forced the company to keep jobs in downtown Los Angeles, and pay workers more than the minimum. But being a "rebel company" doesn't translate to respect for workers' rights to organize. The plant's workers have no union, and in 2003 American Apparel fought a union-organizing drive with the same sophisticated savvy they bring to advertising.

### The Anti-Union Workers' Utopia

There is no denying that American Apparel's textile workers in Los Angeles are among the highest-paid workers remaining in U.S. basic-clothing production, and this has led some supporters of American Apparel's ethics to conclude that their workers would not benefit from unionization. On the other hand, high-wage skilled workers have frequently been at the forefront of the unionization of their industries. In, say, the 1920s, non-union Ford autoworkers were among the best-paid manufacturing workers in the world. But the cyclical nature of automobile employment meant a Ford worker's life was punctuated by periodic layoffs, re-hiring uncertainty, and a constantly accelerating pace of work. These concerns, relating to issues of job security and power in the workplace, led autoworkers to attempt to unionize in the face of a sophisticated and intransigent anti-union battle by their patron, Henry Ford – and many of these same issues brought a trickle

... the company's internal corporate culture seems to present Charney as the old-fashioned patron with some cool sideburns painted on. Indeed, besides his anti-union factory tactics, Charney presents another parallel to this persona: a recurring sexual-harassment theme.

## American Apparel Exposed



of American Apparel workers to the Union of Needletrades and Industrial Textile Employees (UNITE) in the summer of 2003.

"A couple [of] workers had contacted us about going union," says Isaura Lucero, an organizer with UNITE in Los Angeles. "People were worried about layoffs and job security and the speed of work." UNITE, which was later to merge with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union (HERE), is known as one of the most aggressive organizing unions in the country. The union takes pains to form political and community coalitions that pressure employers to limit the intensity of their fight against unionization, having concluded that the inevitable harassment, threats, intimidation, and firings with which employers resist unionization can be insurmountable obstacles unless muted by outside pressures. Following that model, UNITE assembled a coalition of support and hit the gates of the plant at shift changes with union cards.

"In our first two days of talking to the workers when they came on and off shifts, there was a lot of support and interest, and a lot of people signed up on union cards," says Lucero. "However, most people were interested and unsure, and they didn't ever get to talk about it. Pretty soon after we started talking to people, management started fighting, and everyone got real afraid." In the interest of making space for workers to talk freely with each other and union organizers, UNITE appealed to American Apparel's much-advertised ethics, asking for neutral access to the facility. But these overtures were rebuffed by Charney, whose enlightened personal philosophy (touted on the company's web site as a "hyper capitalist-socialist fusion") dwells more on liberating his sexuality than on union discussion as a civil right. Immediately after denying the union access or neutrality at the factory, American Apparel's stylish management executives began what the union calls a very traditional anti-union campaign of misinformation and fear. "People were intimidated and told things that weren't true by the bosses, and soon nobody would talk. We couldn't get to the parking lot, either; the boss said they'd arrest us."

According to signed affidavits in an unfair-labor-practices charge filed by the union and settled by American Apparel, the company's management campaign included surveillance of employees, captive-audience anti-union meetings, interroga-

tion of workers about their support for the union, and a campaign of misleading information and intimidation. But the true blow came when workers were made to attend, on paid time, an anti-union rally that management staged for reporters in the building's parking lot. Charney, however, saw the beauty of workers' self-organization in the scene: "Workers organized other workers to write letters to the union, sign a petition and demonstrate against the union in front of our building," Charney wrote in a letter to the *Nation* magazine in September 2004.

Although Lucero and other organizers remain in touch with a handful of union supporters at the plant, intense fear and pressure around the issue make a successful unionization campaign unlikely anytime soon. Charney, however, is quick to point out that he too has suffered from the whole incident, opining to the *San Francisco Chronicle* that his company's "sweat-free" tag has made it a target of activists and unions. "Is it a cooperative? Is it unionized? Are you objectifying women? Of course we're objectifying women. You want a smock? Go to the Middle East." In the wake of negative publicity around the union fight, Charney has decided to "de-emphasize" the sweatshop-free part of American Apparel's image. Backing away from his boasts about keeping production in the United States at high wages, Charney now makes more modest claims: "If we open a factory in China, we will sell our T-shirts in China, and we will pay at least the U.S.-dollar minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour. It is a new U.S. imperialism."

### Cool Capitalists Gone Wild

So, is the metro, forward-looking American Apparel really just a throwback to anti-union paternalism in its manufacturing practices? Without question, the company's internal corporate culture seems to present Charney as the old-fashioned patron with some cool sideburns painted on. Indeed, besides his anti-union factory tactics, Charney presents another parallel to this persona: a recurring sexual-harassment theme. One of the ugliest sides of employer paternalism has always been the likelihood of such unequal power relations giving rise to sexual abuse, and Charney has been sued by multiple former employees for sexual harassment. He maintains his innocence, and many in his white-collar workforce defend the environment at American Apparel as an updated, pro-sex take on feminism. But the fact remains: Charney has

had more people sue him for sexual harassment than, say, Joe Francis, the young entrepreneur behind the *Girls Gone Wild* video empire. Negative publicity around these recurring sex scandals at the company has caused Charney even more grief than have his anti-union tactics and has led him to make bizarre statements on gender equality like "women initiate most domestic violence."

Sexual-harassment scandals as liberated feminism? Workers spontaneously organizing other workers to carry out an anti-union management campaign? A wealthy prep-school kid who, in two decades, went from scabbing on striking workers to stopping his own workers' unionization today being lauded as having created a "hyper capitalist-socialist fusion"? The contradictions that underlie American Apparel certainly go deeper than the incongruous messages of their ubiquitous advertisements. But a certain consistent logic is evident, not only with Charney's business, but in all companies that have staked their brand image on socially conscious consumption and ethical trend-making. Companies like Starbucks and Whole Foods have also climbed their first few rungs up the ladder of corporate success by appealing to liberal professionals on the basis of a hip image and social responsibility – but both have fought unionization drives with the same grim gusto as American Apparel.

This is possible because, at least so far, the new niche market of liberal consumerism is primarily concerned with workers' rights if the workers in question live far away, in an exotic locale where adding a fair-trade sticker costs a corporation pennies. Deciding to not buy a product because the company that makes it is fighting its own workers' unionization efforts is not something Charney's "young metropolitan adults" really do. And as long as progressive consumer standards apply only to workers' rights in other countries, Dov Charney's factory is unlikely to supplement the free massages with job security or a voice at work. ☒

*Jim Straub is an organizer with SEIU Local 1107 in Las Vegas, NV — although a move to nicer, colder Minneapolis is in the works. He is researching a book about the rust belt, and so is eager to hear from anyone who grew up in de-industrializing Ohio, West Virginia or Pennsylvania. Email Jim at rustbeltjacobin@gmail.com.*



aa



# Meet Abby.

Abbie, born and bred in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, enjoys the \$28 Sheer Rib Shirred Front Cap Sleeve in Sangria (color). Rauced, double-stitched and combed for softness and comfort by L A workers fighting Dov Charney for paid holidays and affordable healthcare.

**American Apparel Exposed**





# This is Josh.

He dreams of the day when working at American Apparel is more politically progressive than working in a bike shop.

**aa**



**aa**

# Joel

When Joel thinks of American Apparel, he thinks first of dumb ads, followed by either comfortable tee shirts or labor problems.

**aa**



# **When the Sideshow Becomes the Main Attraction**

**American Apparel Exposed**



# Meet Colin.

Half-shark, half-alligator, all-exotic. Colin hails from a small town north of Tijuana, just this side of the hyper-militarized economic regulation zone. You can see his Baja roots proudly displayed in his Loop Quintuple-Blended Billy-O Polo.



## A town-hall meeting about American Apparel

### TEXT

Dez Williams

### PHOTOS

Kim Hoeckele

My once-fanatic opinion of American Apparel has turned disastrously bipolar. There is very little gray area, as my feelings are evenly split between love and hate.

**Love:** As a creative, I enjoyed the way the company initially targeted youth culture, facilitating numerous textile artists with a low-priced, quality medium with which to express their craft. No other T-shirt brand came close to American Apparel's quality or cut, and none proclaimed to purvey "sweatshop-free" products.

**Hate:** On the other hand, in light of his status as self-professed masturbatory exhibitionist and equal-opportunity employee fonder, I would have serious reservations about shaking American Apparel senior partner Dov Charney's hand. His seemingly strong sociopolitical message has taken a back seat to tales of union busting and sexual harassment.

Then there is my simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from the company's current advertising campaign. The images may titillate, but one cannot help but sense a sinister presence in each snapshot.

"How could any self-respecting woman work there?" a female friend asked me upon seeing one of the many salacious American Apparel ads.

### Wringing the Ringmaster

In 2005 three employees brought sexual-harassment charges against Dov Charney. Under Charney's employ, they charged, they were subjected to an environment that was "wholly intolerable" and "intimidating." Heather Pithie, who filed in conjunction with former trade-show coordinator Rebecca Brinegar, alleged that when she worked as an American Apparel recruiter, Charney told her to hire "young attractive women to engage in sex" with him, according to *Women's Wear Daily*. Not to mention that the women felt they were the subjects of "egregious" remarks delivered by Charney himself.

A third woman, former store manager Mary Nelson, alleged that she'd worked in a "hostile work environment" and that she was fired after she threatened to consult a lawyer regarding the alleged rape of one employee by another at a trade show. She further alleged that she was invited, during her employment at American Apparel, to masturbate with her boss.

By October 2005, the *LA Times* was reporting that Navigators Insurance Co. had filed a suit seeking to cancel American Apparel's employment-liability insurance policy on the grounds that Charney had lied in his application about the company's having a "zero-tolerance" policy for sexual harassment.

A month later, Nelson elected to permanently dismiss her case, with no settlement, and the judge agreed. Joyce Crucillo, lead counsel for American Apparel, claimed that the "swift dismissal vindicates American Apparel."

Brinegar and Pithie's case is still in litigation; a settlement is reportedly imminent. In a February 2006 interview, Pithie, now a pre-school teacher, told me that she and the other women cannot speak openly about American Apparel while their case is in litigation.

barbara findley, a feminist lawyer from Charney's native Quebec, expresses concern about the significance of the cases' outcomes. "The message that the failure of the sexual-harassment case carries to employers is that it is 'home free' for sexual behavior in the workplace. It is a very disturbing judgment."

findley continues: "Ninety-five percent of all civil cases settle, for a wide variety of reasons," including the very high legal fees required to take a case



all the way through a hearing; a complainant's immediate need for money, especially if she is unemployed; and the feeling that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" because a judicial outcome can never be predicted with absolute accuracy.

### Come Join the Circus

I am of the impression that Dov Charney believes his highfalutin ideas of the "Hyper-Capitalist-Socialist-Fusion-Model" and "Contrarian Vertically Integrated Paradigm," as he calls them, will bring a radical and much-needed change to the rag trade – and they just might. The management model boasts luxurious amenities for factory employees, and there is a central stateside industrial facility for manufacturing, marketing, and administration, allowing the company to boast that it is the largest domestic garment manufacturer in the United States.

Furthermore, the job offers at American Apparel are, at face value, alluring. Take this ad seeking a retail employee, found at [Americanapparel.net](http://Americanapparel.net) in May 2006:

"Innovation for the clothing industry. Challenging both the right and the left," the bullets point out. "Not dominated by logos or politically correct tribalism. Challenging the boomer dominance of the economy." Drawn in, I read more. "We are trying to make garments without having to resort to the use of exploitative labor."

It all sounded great and liberating. Then, on the last line, came this: "In order for us to keep track of applicants," it suggested, "a picture is helpful, but not necessary." The same was not requested in ads for production jobs.

Of course, neither Charney's corporate model nor the American Apparel job descriptions make mention of unfettered in-house sex relationships or a hostile work environment. And regardless of how Charney tries to conflate his pro-labor and pro-sex-in-the-workplace shticks as similarly liberating, in reality he's pushing a strange workplace combination: revolution *and* sexism.

### Strongwomen or Bally Broads?

Dov Charney claims his hyper-sexualized workplace reflects the liberated spirit of youth culture: "I don't think the young people can embrace the culture of the boomers," he said in an interview with *The McGill Daily*. "They're not going to put up with all the rules that the establishment has foisted upon them . . . The boomers are so into family values right now . . . Their sexual freedom isn't as important."

But is Charney's workplace really about promoting sexual freedom for anyone other than himself? He seems not to recognize that there is a difference between a sex-positive workplace and a sexist one, between sexual liberation and libidinous abuse of power.

Adult entertainer Susan Wayward suspects that she faces a lower chance of sexual exploitation in her work than she might as an American Apparel employee. "I've never considered myself at risk of sexual harassment by a club owner or manager, largely because I'm aware that it's unacceptable behavior even in the sex industry."

"I don't know about 'sex' in the workplace. Too much sex, and no work gets done," jokes Allena Gabosch, executive director of the Seattle Sex Positive Community Center, when asked about her opinion on the American Apparel work environment. But on a more serious note, she thinks that, if set up

correctly, a sex-positive workplace might be "totally empowering" – as long as it is based on the principle of "informed consent." When asked to suggest guidelines for a workplace that promotes sexual freedom for everyone, Gabosch says, "I feel that the 'right' way to do this is to have clear-cut boundaries and expectations of behavior. Things like 'no means no' and 'ask before touching' are important rules and should be religiously enforced."

### Cover-Up at the Carnival

In June 2005, *Women's Wear Daily* reported on Mary Nelson's allegation that she was fired from American Apparel after she told a coworker that she planned to consult an attorney about an alleged rape of one American Apparel employee by another at a Las Vegas trade show in January of that year.

The *WWD* article was not my first encounter with this story. On a chilly autumn evening, two American Apparel employees both made mention of the rape in conversation with me. They did not provide details or pretend to know any. The two simply wanted it disclosed that even if the claim was not true, people are sufficiently disgruntled by their fouled work environment to fabricate dangerous rumors.

Adam Neiman of garment manufacturer No Sweat Apparel hypothesizes that Charney's narrow-sightedness plays a large role in how he views the opposite sex in general and women workers specifically. The reason American Apparel's model fails its female employees, according to Neiman, is that Charney retains all the power for himself while the women he employs have a faux sense of liberation that exists strictly within the rules, or lack thereof, that the mastermind has created.

Despite its pro-labor marketing, American Apparel has no union, no legal body to advocate for the workers. But "the worker-voiced union model is critical," offers Neiman. "It's not enough to have a groovy guy at the top touting, 'We don't need union contracts, 'cause we're all groovy guys. Can't you tell? We've got ponytails!'"

### Sideshow Acts

Neiman's is one of a few companies doing what American Apparel promised, sans over-hyped sexuality. There are also companies that take a more satirical approach. Sweatshop Labor Productions, a small operation that produces limited-edition screen-printed T-shirts, promoted their collective with sidewalk stencils that read "I [heart] Sweatshop Labor."

In a farcical world of its own design exists the collaborative group at Sweatshop Labor Productions. These young entrepreneurial artists aren't merely tuned in to youth culture; they *are* youth culture.

SLP's Lucas feels strongly about the message American Apparel, and America more generally, is circulating about youth culture. It's the old sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll adage – and it's blatantly sexist, casting exploitation as masculine and strong and justice-oriented ethics as feminine and weak. "Being against sweatshop labor is a strong position to take, especially for a young company [such as Sweatshop Labor Productions] that must rely on controversy and gossip to get anywhere," says Lucas, who believes American Apparel is really a good company behaving badly. "One of the ways that American Apparel tries to cover up for its 'good ethics,'" Lucas says, "is with the hot girls in sexy positions. They think that by exploiting women they won't look like a bunch of bleeding-heart pussies."

# American Apparel Exposed



## Burning the Lot

Rules like the informed-consent policies suggested by Gabosch for creating a sex-positive workplace are the ones Charney and his ilk have put up a concerted and very public effort to resist. To Charney, conforming to any kind of etiquette would mean surrendering to the very system he has sworn to battle. Surrendering would also dilute the sensationalism that is an integral component in the American Apparel marketing model. Dov Charney will no doubt stay true to his mission of "liberating" his employees while pleasing himself sexually.

"Without women in my company, we'd be fucked," Charney told *New York Magazine* in 2004, and I am certain everyone I talked to for this story would agree with him in more ways than one. 📷

*Dez Williams is a Brooklyn-based freelance writer and new dad. He has recently completed editing his irreverent guide to male pregnancy, Men Are from Mars, Babies Are from Uterus.*

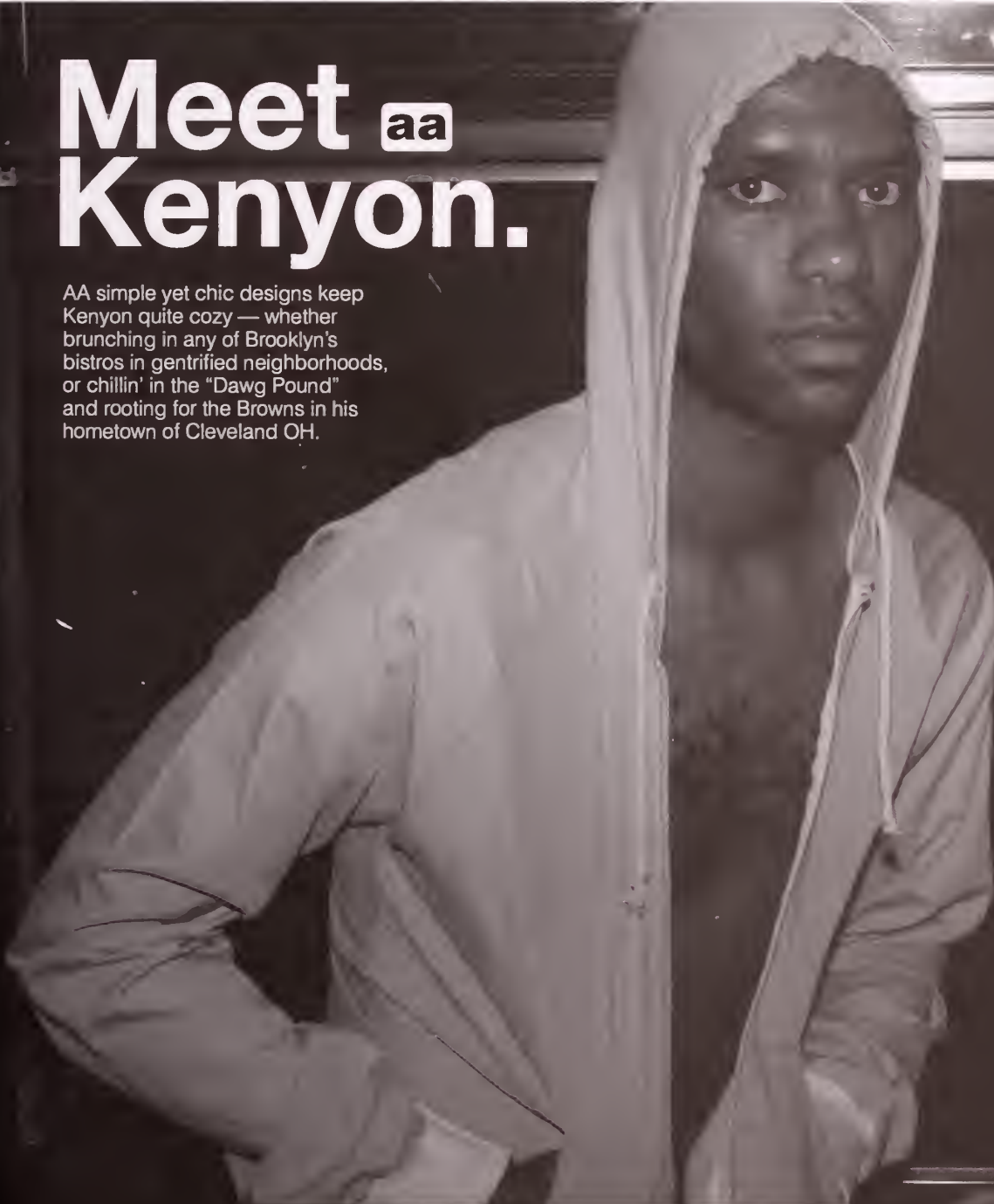
### NOTES:

*The writer attempted subsequent in-person interviews with current American Apparel employees, but was advised by a New York store manager that the media-relations department had set a gag order in place.*

*Cynthia Semon of the media-relations desk at American Apparel was contacted for this article and initially replied, but was unresponsive to questions posed.*

# Meet **aa** Kenyon.

AA simple yet chic designs keep Kenyon quite cozy — whether brunching in any of Brooklyn's bistros in gentrified neighborhoods, or chillin' in the "Dawg Pound" and rooting for the Browns in his hometown of Cleveland OH.



# F\*cking Progressives

American Apparel wants you to bend over for its anti-sweatshop schtick

TEXT  
Keeley Savoie

With the arrival of American Apparel in Park Slope, Brooklyn's stalwartly anti-chain-store neighborhood, the trip up gritty, traffic-clogged Flatbush Avenue now culminates in the lusciously moist, open mouth of a Lauren W. Her tongue flirts with her fingers through parted lips, and it looks as though she's inviting us to taste the same quintessential flavor of American Apparel she appears to be savoring: CEO Dov Charney.

American Apparel ads have become their own pop-culture entity. At first sight, they excited something in ad-watchers and media-thinkers. The ads seemed new, edgy, smart, and real. They feature very young women (and some girls under 15, if rumors are true) who are unpolished, un-retouched, and hyper-sexualized. The camera-eye leers at crotch level, focusing where flesh disappears under thin cotton fabric, lingering on bruised thighs, scratched buttocks, stubbly armpits. It lurks above the tawny-skinned, thin models who are lolling about on tousled sheets, propped against door jambs, bent over plastic crates, or sprawled on cheap couches. The camera's lens becomes a proto-phallus, as if you are seeing a photographic rendition of a horny boy's favorite sexual fantasy. It's not a far stretch; Dov Charney is listed as the "artist" in many of the photo montages on the American Apparel website. In Lauren W's slide-show, she is shot from the shoulders up against the backdrop of a pillow. In excruciatingly close views, we are taken through a series of her facial expressions of lust, sexual excitement, orgasmic ecstasy, and coy satiation. In one of the final shots, a male hand reaches down from behind the camera, and touches her chin.

"Dov's whole thing [is about] humiliating women . . . not letting them be strong and in control – always [appearing] vulnerable," says Adam Neiman, CEO of No Sweat Apparel, AA's main anti-sweatshop (and pro-union) T-shirt-and-tank-top competitor.

These are the ads that took American Apparel from being unknown to becoming almost as much of an urban fixture as Starbucks – that's what

we've been told. At first the ads were a welcome departure from the air-brushed anorexic tyranny of most Madison Avenue "sex sells" fare, but under the surface of the too-close, Polaroid-candid, spots-and-all realism was the same ol' same ol': "Sexual expression co-opted by capitalism," as Jean Kilbourne, author of *Can't Buy My Love* and ad-critic extraordinaire, puts it.

The images of super-young models prostrated in positions of hyper-sexual vulnerability are reminiscent of a Calvin Klein advertising controversy of a decade ago, in which pubescent teens were deliberately posed to evoke that bastion of '60s sleaze, rec-room pornography. Unsurprisingly, the CK ads generated immense controversy, which of course translated to immense profits.

By the same token, American Apparel ads recall the "classic" '70s images from *Hustler* magazine, which also adorn the walls of their retail stores. Predictably, the smarmy AA ads have generated considerable buzz that has facilitated American Apparel's ascendancy. But American Apparel did CK one better. The edginess of the ads garnered the headlines, but the topper – the *piece de resistance* for Charney's target demographic – appeared further down in almost every single article ever written about American Apparel: the parenthetical appeal of AA's anti-sweatshop schtick.

It was the seemingly incompatible combination that *really* launched AA from obscurity to ubiquity within a couple of years of opening their first retail store. Therein lies the genius of the marketing strategy of American Apparel. They know sex sells, but free press with a progressive twist sells a whole lot more.

The real story of American Apparel's ads is how the company has used the bodies of its barely legal employees to shore up its appeal to the progressive left by implanting anti-sweatshop schtick into every article generated by its low-budget, sexist ads. And the AA demographic – low-wage-worker-defending (but high-wage-earning), guilt-

ridden lefties who want nothing more than to assuage their own angst-ridden middle-class anxiety about having succeeded in the capitalist world by consuming with conscience (and the more conscience, the better: sweat-free, fair-trade, organic, vegan, and sustainable) – ate it up.

"He [is] basically telling the left on one hand, 'Yeah, you're making me work,'" says Neiman. "On the other, [he's saying], 'Kiss my hairy bare butt.'"

American Apparel's fame as an anti-sweatshop hero company is rooted not in ideology, but in the cut-throat clothing industry. Charney had just opened American Apparel's first retail store in downtown L.A. when he learned that another T-shirt-and-tank-top outfitter, the late SweatX, aimed to open a retail outlet right next door. "He saw a threat from SweatX, so all of a sudden he realized that there was press – lots of it – so he played that angle," says Neiman.

"Dov had never shown any interest up to this time in the sweatshop issue whatsoever," Neiman says. "It was all about sex – sexy tees, sexy tees, sexy tees – was it." Sex is still the central concern for Charney. Wherever Charney goes, rumors and insinuations follow. Stories about workplace nudity, inappropriate come-ons, and outright sexual harassment seem to sprout out of Charney.

But it's also a whole lot more than just sex. It is the cynical positioning of those female bodies over a backdrop of progressive causes, an incomplete and cognitively dissonant seduction that seems, nonetheless, to have worked well enough that almost every shirt I'm tempted to buy has that tell-tale three-circle logo of American Apparel. And no wonder: American Apparel is, ironically, the brand of choice for any number of progressive organizations who decide to do a little T-shirt marketing.

"It always astonishes me when people who consider themselves progressive fall for this," says Kilbourne. ☹

## American Apparel Exposed





TEXT & PHOTOS  
Irina Contreras



aa



## It's a Front

How does one address the impossibilities of representing what is already portrayed in American Apparel ads without simply falling victim to one of Charney's own tropes? What I have become more interested in doing is gathering the unheard voices of the fragmented bodies through still imagery, informal dialogues and interviews, and the inclusion of the idea of how we might like to be shot. Whichever way we decide to look at American Apparel ads, policies, and practices, we can also look at the fact that these are clothes that simply do not fit and do not represent our views the way we had intended them--and the fact that Charney's hand is always present, even when we do not see his knuckles grazing a model's shoulder or lips. 📷

*Irina is a visual artist/writer/shitstarter living in Elysian Park. Come start some shit with her: poopstarr@yahoo.com.*

Looking for a Change? **Alternative:** [www.alternativeapparel.com](http://www.alternativeapparel.com)  
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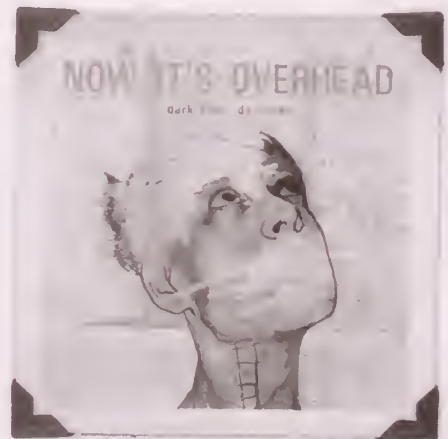
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## INTERVIEW

Irina Contreras

## ILLUSTRATION

Dustin Amery Hostetler · upso.org

Spoken-word artist Ursula Rucker, a premier social commentator of our time, has spent the last decade waxing philosophical about everything from slavery and politics to sexuality and womanhood. Writing since she was an adolescent, Rucker started recording her thoughts as a social documenter would and became one of the leading forces behind Philadelphia's "poetic revival." But Rucker's work stands out for its fluid integration of music – hip-hop, jazz, soul and world – mixed under her often understated, but commanding delivery. *Ma'at Mama*, Rucker's third album, was released this year and continues with her powerful blend of poetry, hip-hop, and social criticism, with creations that draw from her own experiences as a mother, daughter, and woman of her time. Rucker truly beckons the spirits of Zora Neale Hurston and Frida Kahlo – two of her influences – with the echoes of Boogie Down Productions and Public Enemy to create a sound and vibrancy that is all her own.

*Clamor* had the opportunity to speak with the Ma'at Mama this past spring, in a spirited and inspiring conversation about creative energy, social justice, and the practice of elevating an art form.

*Ursula, can you talk a little bit about you came down this path as a writer, performer, and social commentator?*

The way that I started writing is not really clear. I knew that I was going to do something in the arts. When I was in college, I realized that the things I was writing in my journal could be considered poetry. King Britt was a friend of mine and I've told this story a million times but it's the only one to tell. He invited me to do a recording and I was like, "oh, cool." It was nothing I ever really dreamed about, but that's how it happened.

*So, he was a mentor of sorts? Or did you have other mentors?*

He is more of a peer. More like an angel that presented something to me and I went with it. If he had never invited me to do it, I don't know if I would of. But, as far as mentors go, Sonia Sanchez is my favorite poet. I had her as a teacher. She will always be a mentor for me.

*The title of your new work, Ma'at Mama comes from the ancient Kemetic concept of universal order. Could you talk about what this means to you?*

I call it *Ma'at Mama* because I really want to focus on truth as the center of what I do, who I love, and who I tell off. In 2006, I take a cab that used to cost me \$20 and now costs me \$40. Something is not balanced. The cabbie has to raise their prices and everyone is struggling. That's just one example of how unbalanced things are now. It boggles my mind. I don't know how it affects other people but it really bothers me...hearing everyday about how many people were killed in a suicide bomb, some exchange of gunfire in Iraq. It's insane.

*Could you talk about how you see hip hop as a guide or vehicle for social change?*

Art is a vehicle for social change, so hip hop as art— of course. It's something that can be used to change the world, but what a lot of people deem as hip hop in this age is not art. It's not even hip hop. Hip hop was for us. It was really a movement. Even if we weren't talking about anything political or socially charged, it was a way for us to be heard. And then with PE [Public Enemy], KRS-1, it became something that really could be used for change. I was watching a video of an interview with Harry Belafonte. He made a statement that if you are an artist, and you get to a certain position with your art, you have a certain power, especially as a Black artist or actor...to not say anything, to not use that place is unacceptable. Quite frankly, I find it difficult to accept and understand. So when you look at people like Jay-Z who no doubt is quite intelligent, but doesn't use his place to say or do anything else.

*So, you definitely feel the other sense of it being stagnating as well?*

Everything has just become complacent. [They] say, "Oh well, that's not what I would have chosen, but that's okay." And it's not! People don't wanna say it's not okay. I think if you look at things from the grand scheme, there are only a handful of people that are willing to say this is not okay.

*It's a fear of stepping up?*

I recognize that fear. I know what it is. I have felt it. But, I am not the kind of person to sit there and just let people do what they want to, to me.

*As women involved in the movement, how are we responsible for what we listen and dance to? Do you believe we bring that onto our person in a psychological or spiritual way regardless of whether or not we just think it has a good beat?*

Absolutely. I remember Sonia Sanchez and I were doing a reading once at Penn. State University and she was talking about just that. About how women will be up in the club and there will be some song that comes on about "bitches and hoes" or "slap-pin' that ass." And, they're like "Yeah, this is my song!" I have some friends that when the whole thing with R. Kelly was going on, I remember them saying to me, "But I really like R. Kelly's album." And I was like, uh uh. No. As a woman, I can stand firm and say you should not be listening to this and you should not be supporting this. Women definitely need to stop supporting and stop think-

**Art is a vehicle for social change, so hip hop as art— of course. It's something that can be used to change the world, but what a lot of people deem as hip hop in this age is not art. It's not even hip hop. Hip hop was for us. It was really a movement. Even if we weren't talking about anything political or socially charged, it was a way for us to be heard.**





ing that the stereotypical images played in these videos are for them. If a woman can just sit around and watch one of these videos then that's not someone I want to be friends with. But, I would like to talk to them and try to change their minds.

*When you first became involved in performing, were these some of the aspects that you considered? If so, how have they changed?*

I think when I first started I wasn't really thinking about any of that. It was just all so fresh and new. In my writings, I was in college when I started to move into that area where there was a different level of consciousness. And I always use that movie *Unbreakable* by M. Night Shyamalan as an example. Even though it was a bit of a Hollywood flick, I think that the main theme of it wasn't Hollywood. It was that you tap into your highest level of existence. Not to wax all philosophical and spiritual, but I mean it is possible to use a larger percentage of your brain than what you normally use. Know what I mean? And, if you can tap into that and use a larger percentage of your spirit and soul. It's not that you have to sign up for any religion but it's that you keep progressing.

*Did you or do you want to lend this philosophical or spiritual progression to the art form that you are not hearing?*

This is just stuff that I need to get out of my gut and in order to feel like I'm being creative, in order to do my art. It's not like I always have to— what's the word? I don't like to call it conscious just to describe it. It's just a label to me. I've heard it being used many times to describe what artists do, "Oh, they are one of those conscious artists," as if that is a bad thing. Some people might think, Frida Kahlo is my favorite artist; they might see her paintings or read her journal entries and think, gee could you be a little happier? But, that was her art. And I thank god for it. Because I have been so inspired by her art and who she was.

*I listened to "Black Erotica" and "Humbled" recently and took in your descriptions of the female form and the acts being performed. What do you seek to accomplish when you write and perform these pieces?*

The whole existence and genre of writing that is Black Erotica is something I have been interested in for a while. And I just think it's such a beautiful thing 'cuz historically black people's sexuality has been warped and marred by the wonderful history of slavery. It's much easier to me to cuss someone out to the bone then to talk about oral sex, which is what I do on Black Erotica. I would like to possibly write a collection of Black Erotica. If I want to do that, I'll always have to do it by approaching it with truth and honesty. Whether it is super raw or visually stimulating, which I am sure it will be 'cuz I always work in images when I write.

*Your poems seem to treat women as an entity or a spiritual force. Could you talk a little bit as well about the treatment of women and women's stories in your work?*

One of my many campaigns is that women and black people not be afraid to stand up and tell their stories. We shouldn't feel guilty, ashamed, or make excuses for our experiences. I got an email this week from what I am assuming was a man. He was like, In response to 'What a Woman Must Do,' can you complain a little more? Complain, complain, complain. Let me tell you! My first instinct was to tear him a new asshole in an email. But, then I said everyone is entitled to their opinion. That's who I am not afraid to talk to and get into their ear. Oh, you feel like that? Guess what? I don't care. That's exactly why I wrote that damn poem: for macho freaks like you.

*He should be confronted with your music. You should feel like you were very effective.*

It bothered him so much that he had to send me an email. Yeah, right. Thank you!

*Many people became familiar with your work through your powerful piece, "The Unlocking" on the Roots album, Do You Want More?!?!?! Could you talk more about the inspiration for "The Unlocking" and message that you intended?*

That was a very pivotal point in my writing life. Amir from The Roots really challenged me with that one. He asked me and gave me a guideline for what he was thinking about. He wanted it to be about a woman that was gangbanged. I was like,

"Whoa, most of the time I write about something I am familiar with, something I have experienced." So, recently just before that I had been in a— I wouldn't even call it a relationship. He was not cool in that I found out that he would get in rooms with his friends and tell them details about what we did together. And, we were grown! I was shocked. I didn't think he would go off and [say] "Oh homie, guess what we did...." So, I called in that experience. In a way, I was gangbanged in that room or that evening in that room. Who knows how many times it happened.

*Looking back now, what do you think of how it and you were perceived?*

I went into all that not knowing. Just going with the flow. And, it really changed the way that I wrote. But, I guess I got some feedback from women who would ask me or tell me things like, "I wasn't cool with it 'cuz it seemed like you were glorifying a rape scene." And I would say, "Well no that's not what it was." And then when I talked to people and they understood where I was coming from. I loved that; that it created this forum, which is what my art often does. That poem is about victory. It's not about a woman being raped, but about her coming up the victor in the end. Amir told me, "When you do this, people are gonna ask you questions." And I was like "Yeah, yeah, whatever, let's just do it." I was afraid that if I thought about it, I wouldn't have been able to do it. But, he was right. 'Till now, it will always be that thing that I did that everybody connects me with. ☺

*For audio, lyrics and more go to [www.irina-sula-rucker.com](http://www.irina-sula-rucker.com).*

*Irina is a visual artist/writer/shitstarter living in Elysian Park. Come start some shit with her: [poopstarr@yahoo.com](mailto:poopstarr@yahoo.com).*



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*behind-the-scenes of*

# Made in Secret:

## The Story of the East Van Porn Collective

How do you make smart, savvy, anarcho-erotica? Take queer theory, feminism, bicycles, and porn. Add one consensus-based collective and a fictional documentary filmmaker named Godfrey and you get *Made in Secret: The Story of the East Van Porn Collective*.

Collectively created between January 2002 and October 2004, *Made in Secret* uses the conventions of the documentary genre to explore the work of the quasi-fictional East Van Porn Collective from their beginnings as a theory-based group, through to their decision to make porn films of their own.

**TEXT**  
Kyle Harris

**PHOTOS**  
courtesy East Van Porn Collective

Unlike the strict hierarchical production process of most films, everybody in the collective participated in both the cast and the crew. This muddy structure creates fascinating contradictions within the story and production of the film. In order to immerse themselves in the process, collective members replaced their real names with what they referred to as their "noms de porn." When they presented the film to public audiences, they maintained their alternative identities and abandoned their real world names.

One collective member, Monster, an STD and HIV outreach nurse and playwright, said that Professor University, the genius behind the film, was a dedicated and enthusiastic "natural leader."

"There was the fictional collective," said Monster, "which is pretty much us, but slightly idealized in terms of spreading the workload around. And then there was the real-world collective, who really were us, working on making a movie with varying degrees of enthusiasm, free time, money and skills."



The lack of formal education or professional experience in film was not a barrier for the collective. Professor University, a freelance editor and obsessive compulsive who lived for 10 years in an anarchist community in West Philadelphia, told *Clamor* that none of the collective members, with the exception of the fictional Godfrey, had any film background.

"Godfrey had taken a ten-month training program on documentary filmmaking," said Professor University. "The rest of us, though, have been involved in all sorts of arty, DIY projects over the years, from street theatre to punk bands to silk-screening. You name it."

The collective experience brilliantly informs the documentary. From bike culture, anarchism, and punk rock, to gender studies, parenthood, and sex toy sales, the members brought their own unique knowledge to shape the structure and story of the film.

"A lot of these skills are pretty transferable. Or if not the skills, at least the attitude – that basic punk rock attitude of 'we don't know how to do this the 'right' way, but let's dive in and figure out our own way.'" Professor University said.

Most impressively, the real-world collective used their D.I.Y. experience to make a film that produces feminist, anarchist, queer theory, and community life debates in an irresistibly appealing Aristotelian narrative. *Made in Secret* focuses on the fictional collective's production of *Bike Sexual* and the group's conflict over whether they should submit their film to an alternative pornography festival in violation of their rule never to show their films outside of the collective.

The film concludes with a dramatic day-long, consensus-based meeting in which Nerd Girl, a collective member, blocks consensus until the group can come to an agreed solution. These scenes are as dramatic as any Hollywood cliffhanger, and work to explore and celebrate the possibilities of consensus.

The real-world collective also encountered serious issues in production that threatened the progress of the film. According to Professor University there were at least two times the project seemed doomed unless the group could reach consensus. "In both cases though, we managed to find solutions in the same way we did in the movie," he said. "We talked and talked and talked and listened and listened and listened . . . until we eventually found a better solution."

Monster agreed there were times the collective felt really discouraged after watching the final edit of the film because they could not agree on a version that everyone could support. "We met for hours, and actually found ourselves quoting the long difficult meeting in the film," said Monster, adding that she was inspired by how they solved the conflict in the movie.

"I thought, 'We have it in us to work this out, we have practice. We know how to be smart and kind and calm. I've seen us do it.' It became a joke that kept us well-behaved during contentious moments: 'What would the East Van Porn Collective Do?' And it worked," she said. Eventually the collective did come up with a final edit by consensus, which Monster said was "better than either of the options we were wrestling over."

"I guess that's what we're hoping audiences will get out of this film: that sense that consensus will take a long time, but it can work out unexpectedly well if you just keep trying," Monster told *Clamor*.

By practicing consensus within a fictional space, the real-world collective used the artistic experience as a laboratory for group decision making that empowered their process and ultimately influenced their final production. This pragmatic experimentation exemplifies the transformative power of cinema when its process is freed from the confines of hierarchy, professionalism, and the myth of the genius director.

According to Professor University, after opposite: Monster in the bathtub. right: JD Superstar (left) and nerdgirl (right). below: the East Van Porn Collective.

their June 2006 release of the *Made In Secret* DVD, the group will team up for their next production.

"The next movie is also about group process, but on a much larger scale. *Made in Secret* lays the groundwork, introducing the ideas of consensus and collective process in a really small, homogenous group of friends," said Professor University. "The next movie looks at how those ideas would work in a context of an entire community, particularly a community made up of lots of groups with their own priorities and agendas." ■

The next project is slated to be called *Curve of the Earth*. More information is available at [www.onetinywhale.com](http://www.onetinywhale.com).

Denver based media artist, activist, writer, and curator, Kyle Harris programs documentaries at Free Speech TV, Dish Channel 9415 ([www.freespeech.org](http://www.freespeech.org)). Currently, he is in postproduction on his feature-length eco-anarcho-queer epic "The Patriarchs" and is editing a book called *Advertising Anarchism: The Pitfalls and Possibilities of Propaganda*.



# the BUSINESS of BODIES

We see them peering down at us, piercing through our souls with radiant eyes. Their bright white smiles and glistening skin shine ceremoniously. They are big and bold. Each curve and contour is magnified, each hair meticulously placed, each limb perfectly spaced. These are the bodies that greet us on the streets. These are the bodies that define what we *desire* in this world.

## The Image and the Emulation

Corporations use the body to create self-consciousness in the individual. Through photographic expertise they infuse the bodies of the beautiful and the famous with the values most cherished in our society – beauty, rebelliousness, success, confidence – creating images of envy. Then, in a deft sleight of hand, businesses imply that if we simply buy their products, we too can approach the values these bodies in their ads exhibit. And as bonus, we can achieve this goal without having to improve ourselves internally. Just spend a few bucks.

*This 1921 advertisement for Palmolive soap in McCall's magazine may seem quaint by today's standards, but the ideas were already beginning to form. The woman in the picture, beautiful and apparently rich, obviously achieved all of these values through the diligent use of Palmolive soap!*

**AS YOU DESIRE ME**

Take a lesson in confidence from "those dear but younger friends"

**PALMOLIVE**

Keep that Schoolgirl Complexion

## Pimpology: the Science of the Sale

Ad agencies use the body of the same way a pimp does. The body images – all perfumed and dolled up – are nothing more than teasers: one has to provide money for the act of consumption to be consummated. Still, before the actual cash is brandished, there is considerable gawking on our sidewalks and interstates, in busses and subway cars. Ad agencies have turned the outdoor parading of bodies for profit into a science. They are the ultimate pimps.

And they are not ashamed of it. In 1999, Dr. James Maskulka, an associate professor of marketing at Lehigh University, who also does consultation for advertising agencies and corporations, wrote a paper for the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA), stressing the importance of outdoor advertising: "Today's consumers are yesterday's Generation X'ers – complete with short attention spans and the ubiquitous 'been-there-donc-that' attitude." Maskulka, who has also done consulting work for Bell Labs and General Motors, continued, "Outdoor is one of the few remaining media formats available to deliver a mass audience."<sup>1</sup>

In 2001, the media and marketing research firm Arbitron completed and published a study of outdoor advertising, putting solid data behind Maskulka's speculations.<sup>2</sup> The study, in customary corporate fashion, measured several categories of consumers primed for exploitation: "Power Pedestrians," "Mega Milers," and "Super Commuters." These three categories of people are those most likely to see outdoor ads. Consequently, Arbitron has created a profile of the people who belong in each category. Arbitron seems to know more about us than we know about ourselves. Indeed, if you are designated a "Mega Miler," you have "an attractive socioeconomic profile." Read: you have fat pockets. Also, if you are a Mega Miler, you are more likely a man between ages 25 and 54, married with kids.

*This ad for a storage company in New York is perfectly placed in a main thoroughfare of downtown NYC in Chelsea. It is no coincidence that the ad, which shows a cowboy holding a teddy bear saying, a la Brokeback Mountain, "I Wish I Could Quit You," was placed in this area of the city known for its gay culture.*



## A Body of Work: Billboards around New York City

The Arbitron study, plus a little common sense, suggests that the most visually interesting ads would be strategically placed in high-traffic areas. To investigate this tactic, I went around New York City looking at how images of bodies were presented, snapping pictures along the way. I found remarkable consistencies in how bodies were presented – some obvious, others not so.

*The close-up demands eye contact and compliance. Like your primary school teacher who stared at you coldly, forcing you to admit you were the one who threw the spitball, these bodies have a similar effect, forcing you to admit you do not own the latest Tag Heuer watch or Lane Bryant blouse. These cold stares also connote honesty. They are honestly telling you that you really need that new pair of Aldo shoes.*

**TAG Heuer**  
WHAT ARE YOU MADE OF?

Moonlite Int. Inc.  
73-15 Broadway  
Jackson Heights, NY



# The Embodiment of Consumerism

TEXT & PHOTOS

Roderick Graham



*Avril Lavigne, a strict vegetarian, may "hear no evil" if you mention meat, but she will gladly listen if you mention Aldo.*



The insistence on individuality is an obvious aspect of body image. It is simply good business to have a product that each individual wants instead of a product bought and shared amongst the community or family. Thus, individual bodies model

the hoped-for individual behavior. Even when the idea is to sell "diversity," there is rarely any contact between people. Both Walgreens and Chase Manhattan promote their companies as ones that are fully amenable to New York's diverse population – yet, there is never any social interaction between groups of people. The individual people are presented as individual atoms, ensconced in their own personal worlds of consumption. Another factor leading to this style of ad is the necessity to avoid creating any uneasy feelings among the viewers. The trick is to show their diversity in theory, without showing this diversity in reality.

*This Walgreens ad is similar to the Chase Manhattan ad. In the Walgreens ad, the black man and the Asian woman have found individual satisfaction in Walgreens. They have so much in common: healthy food, laptops, nice clothes, and an implied predilection for Walgreens products; why can't they hang out together?*

*Black bodies are cool. Their swagger and posture can be used to signify rebelliousness and individualism, always a popular theme. These ads speak to our desire to individuate ourselves, to be different, to be unique. The inherent irony is the condition of trying to mass market uniqueness.*



*I live in Harlem, and I can promise you that these guys don't live in my neighborhood. The ENYCE and OMAVI ads are posted on Harlem's 125<sup>th</sup> Street. The idea here is to capitalize on the perception of young black men as rebels and iconoclasts.*

continued next page

## The Ultimate Derivations: Human Billboards and the Homeless

As Maskulka pointed out, the advertising universe is getting crowded. The main reason outdoor billboards have grown is because people have become desensitized to the more traditional magazine ads and television commercials. But advertising is a race to the bottom. If outdoor ads are effective, everyone will run to plaster their products on the sides of buildings, and these too will lose their effectiveness over time. So, what next?

One ad company has come up with the ultimate advertising innovation. In December 2004, TatAd, a Toronto-based marketing company, became the first company to use humans as ads.<sup>3</sup> Over 1450 individuals have since agreed to have their bodies tattooed with corporate ads. TatAd CEO Darren Little said in a May 2005 press release, "Essentially, a TatAd is your brand permanently tattooed on an enthusiastic member of your target audience."<sup>4</sup> At the time of the press release, Suzuki and Shocker Clothing were two brands using TatAd members.

How do you become a member? Well, if you have an inclination to be pimped, you can log on to the TatAd website (TatAd.com) and complete a registration form which asks about your physical characteristics (of course) and your preferences. As the president of TatAd says, "All you have to do is fill out a lifestyle survey . . . identify the area of the body you would like to have branded, how much you are willing to get paid, and we will do the rest!"

So, we have moved from using bodies to sell products on billboards, to using cool and beautiful bodies as billboards themselves to add value to products. Now we move to the most powerful of advertisements – the final derivation – the body itself as a product. But these bodies work in the negative; they are the embodiments of everything we *should not be*.

I am talking about the city's homeless. As they lean on abandoned buildings and sit on sidewalks they unintentionally compete with all the billboards and advertisements for the public's eye. A native New Yorker may be blind to this fact, but a tourist will be startled by the sight of a homeless man asking for money in front of Tiffany's on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Homeless people present a point of reference in a society in which we have forgotten the truism "because you exist I exist," and instead have imbibed the drug of individual improvement through superficial consumption.



*These men and women coping with the problems of gaining shelter and sustenance act as negative reinforcements to those who do not consume adequately.*

### The Positive Use of Bodies

Bodies are used to sell goods through the ideas and values they represent. Sure, corporations use the image of a beautiful body to sell beauty products, use the skin and posture of young African-American males to sell cool, and use celebrities to infuse value in an otherwise valueless product. But, we can also use bodies to represent other things. I am thinking of the use of bodies to sell health, community, and social responsibility. Some health organizations, non-profit organizations, and social groups use bodies in a positive way.



*At a bus stop in upper Manhattan, a social organization attempts to address the growing health care problem by advertising free health checkups. The ad uses all the conventions used by profit seekers, including the beauty of this woman, her piercing gaze, and the strategic placement at a bus stop.*

If the ultimate derivation is the body as billboard, then social organizations can use this tactic as well. Rather than sell consumer goods, bodies can be used to promote social cohesion and public well-being through cultural expression. There are many organizations in New York City and other areas of the country that have as their express purpose free public performances. Below are a few such organizations:

### Dancing in the Streets

[www.dancinginthestreets.org](http://www.dancinginthestreets.org)

This organization stages free public dance performances in urban spaces in New York City. In operation since 1983, Dancing in the Streets has garnered national acclaim for its performances.

### Tada! Youth Theater

[www.tadatheater.org](http://www.tadatheater.org)

While their performances are not free, this non-profit organization directs its proceeds toward the continuing recruitment of youth from different social and economic backgrounds into the joys of theater.

### Lower Manhattan Cultural Council

[www.lmcc.net](http://www.lmcc.net)

This organization provides free space for visual and performing artists to exhibit their work, and free exhibitions and shows for those interested in visual and performing arts.

There is a way to use your body to make a difference. You can use your body to protest, to physically partake in a mass movement of minds and hearts. Take to the streets and march with like-minded folks. Sell your body to a cause for change. Let your body represent the value of social uplift and community. Your body can be a human billboard that can produce a profit for all. 📺

*A doctoral student in sociology at the Graduate Center at the City University of New York, Roderick Graham lives and works in New York City.*



# MADCAT

# 10



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# Activism Embodied

**A Roundtable with Leslie Feinberg,  
Geleni Fontaine, & Shira Hassan**

FACILITATED, WRITTEN,  
& ILLUSTRATED by  
Nomy Lamm

As a fat, disabled, genderqueer person, I have spent most of my life feeling isolated in my body and trying to connect with others through art and activism. I live for those rare moments when I can witness the wisdom of “my people” – an uncategorizable group consisting of those who are willing to locate the self in the struggle, in the moment. We meet in the space where imagination and reality combine, gathered around the metaphorical table for a conversation about our bodies, our activism, what connects us all, and what gets in the way.

I, your host, at this moment of imagination, am an antlered creature, wearing a smoking jacket and ascot, with a little pen and paper in my hooves, ready to absorb.

#### **My people:**

Leslie Feinberg is a grassroots, revolutionary political organizer and author of several books, including *Stone Butch Blues*, *Transgender Warriors*, and *Drag King Dreams*. Ze is a managing editor of the *Workers World* newspaper and longtime member of the Revolutionary Communist Party. When home in New York, Leslie reads, walks, thinks, talks, and slows down with life partner Minnie Bruce Pratt. In this moment, Leslie is barefoot, wearing jeans and a black t-shirt.

Geleni Fontaine recently left his job at the Center for Anti-Violence Education in Brooklyn to become a full-time student in acupuncture and Oriental medicine. Geleni leads workshops on violence prevention, self-defense, and empowerment, mainly with youth and survivors of violence. A poet and martial artist, Geleni also plays the shakuhachi and enjoys walks in the park, smelling greenness, and listening to birds. Picture him wearing a ripped-up t-shirt, boxer briefs, and a top hat.

Shira Hassan is the wellness coordinator for a needle-exchange youth-drop-in program, and works part-time for the Young Women’s Empowerment Project, a harm-reduction project for girls in the sex trade. Shira is the program director of Phat Camp, a body-empowerment project for youth, and a band manager. She likes to sleep, travel, knit, craft, sew, cook, hang out, and start new projects. For visuals, imagine long hair, tattoos, fuzzy slippers, and a six-pound floppy dog on her lap.

This conversation, which took place over the course of a month, through numerous emails and a phone conversation, is now presented to you, the reader, as a unified experience.

*Nomy Lamm: Thanks for making time for this. You all do so much, how do you decide what to take on?*

Shira Hassan: I am really bad at setting limits. I hear about an interesting project and I jump on it. My priorities are projects that unite and organize queer people of color, or youth of color. I almost always make room for a new project related to youth and the sex trade, or drug use.

Leslie Feinberg: I'm always up against the limits of what I can humanly do. I want to follow the struggle wherever it's building up or breaking out. So the only limit is my physical strength. I sure get more emotional energy and strength out of my work and travels than I put into it, but it takes a lot out of my body.

Geleni Fontaine: I spent years working beyond overtime for an organization that I made my life, and that's an old pattern for me. Now I'm focusing on balancing work (paid and political), school, and my arts. Some things get less attention than they used to, and others flourish. The constant challenge is keeping my own healing in that picture.

*NL: Do any of you have health coverage?*

SH: I am really affected right now by not being covered by insurance. I need to get on an opiate substitution therapy that is supposed to regulate my chronic pain and anxiety. I can't afford it, so I'm waiting to go on it until I figure out healthcare—otherwise I will likely be turned down because I have fibromyalgia.

GF: I have coverage on my partner's plan for another month or so. After that she has to find other work, so it'll be up in the air. I've been through the bureaucracy of trying to get meds and treatment without healthcare, and (as a former

nurse) I've been part of [the system]. I've seen people treated as if they were objects.

LF: I have not had health insurance for my entire adult life until the recent few years. During a life-and-death illness, I was able to get coverage through my union—National Writers' Union/UAW Local 1980—that saved my life. As a transgender person, I need to be able to choose my own doctor and facility, because the treatment I receive can mean my life is in the balance.

*NL: So what's on your mind these days? What feels hard?*

GF: Immigrants' rights, and the idea of borders; these invisible lines forced on all of us. Lines that are supposed to define us, but only represent us in pieces. Our bodies themselves become colonized territory.

I've internalized a lot of fatphobia and racism by not allowing myself to be visible and take space. I've internalized transphobia by not expressing myself in many ways and holding back my needs and identity. In the past this has manifested as dependency on alcohol and drugs. I have to remind myself that self-hatred is part of the oppression, part of what I'm struggling through.

LF: My hand is still sore from an injury I acquired from three days of scrubbing due to city-ordered tenement repairs, and then touring to promote my new book, *Drag King Dreams*. [The book] is about a circle of (for lack of a better umbrella term) "genderqueer" coworkers and friends trying to survive on a job in a third-shift drag bar on the East Side. It's set at the beginning of the Iraqi invasion by the U.S., with the disappearing of Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern people. I wrote it two years ago, and today we're still in the middle of the U.S. war in Iraq, still the deepening of racist profilings, still the mass disappearings. Why is it that you can find these truths in this fiction, when so little of it is being talked about in the newspapers and television?

SH: I feel overwhelmed by colonization right now. Just the other day I looked at one of the city-rag papers and saw a belly-

dancing competition on the front page and I thought, shit. That's how you know the U.S. is waging a war in the Middle East—the Lefties have started to make Middle Eastern culture into cool, hipster U.S. counter-culture. Lately I have been particularly obsessed with how the Left colonizes bodies. I am trying to learn about Middle Eastern forms of herbal medicinal healing, trying to reclaim stuff from the hippies who take yoga and turn it into something you need special clothes and mats for.

*NL: What are your strategies for connecting struggles of race, class, gender, disability, queerness, etc., to each other and to global political movements?*

GF: I first try to integrate an overall consciousness in my life and my work—the idea of being and living the changes you want to make. It's important to start with myself and all the identities I embody, but if I stop there I don't challenge my own privilege and grow. In so many social justice-movements, people are burnt out, exhausted; this can make people dis-embodied. I think we need more healing spaces because we move around and work with big, open wounds. I think that survivorship is a place of connection to return to and grow from.

Being an anti-violence activist connects me to issues of global war and peace, as well as individual and community safety: domestic violence and institutional violence against people of color; sexual abuse and bias attacks against queer and trans people, etc. Those of us who relate to any of these oppressions have a lot to teach each other and a lot more power together than apart.

SH: My work is really about the micro. I work with youth who are experiencing the micro affects of the drug war ... The white youth are identified as drug buyers and harassed and arrested by cops just for living and being in communities of color. They perceive people of color as having more power than them because most of their dealers are people of color. Their perceptions of race and power are completely skewed. Oftentimes, my work is unpacking this for them. Sitting down and saying, "Okay, now,

**I've internalized a lot of fatphobia and racism by not allowing myself to be visible and take space. I've internalized transphobia by not expressing myself in many ways and holding back my needs and identity.**







## Some people like to argue for unity on the basis that we all have the same experience—for me that just plants landmines that are going to blow up later.

how did the circumstances develop? How did the drug war shape so much of our reality?" When I am working with youth of color, who are harassed constantly by police and by other youth, the conversation is often about empowerment and mobilization. We start with, "Okay, the situation is fucked ... How many people do we know who think it's fucked? What could we do to make it better?" I work to make the connections by providing a space where youth of color and white youth and drug users and queer youth and youth with disabilities can sit and eat a meal together.

LF: The way I view the struggle is that our oppressions are not identical, but we're up against a common enemy. I feel that collectively we're trying to figure out on what basis to build coalition to fight that enemy, and that's a process. If anybody's left out, the strategy's not right yet. There may be oppressions that aren't even named yet. That happens, and the struggle opens up more opportunities for people to come forward.

NL: *Do you believe that locating struggles in the body is an effective way of uniting people into a larger movement?*

SH: Yes. Unfortunately, what I most often witness is people's trauma around their bodies getting in the way of uniting. As queers, as fat people, as people with disabilities, as people of color, we have often located so much of our pain in our bodies. We internalize so much anger, we get sick from it and throw up walls and make divisions. I get inspired when I see the connections made on an individual level. But on a larger scale I don't really see it happening yet.

I think there are two main obstacles: 1) Most of us spend a lot of time outside of our bodies. I'm not sure how many people are willing to get into their bodies in the way it would require in order for this kind of movement to build. Phat Camp was an amazing place to witness people going through this. They come in with their brains in a tizzy, wondering "What is empowerment? What is self-acceptance?" and then they realize we don't want their brains to do the work—we want to go to a deeper place. A place where all of our bodies are unified in the struggle to be whole and real.

2) People who don't have to think about their power usually don't. Sometimes I

wonder if we can really build anything effectively without figuring out how to cross over and get people to examine their privilege. There is so much mythology about health and wellness, that it's hard for me to picture having a deep moment with someone who more than anything believes I just need to lose weight. Even if we agree that the prison system needs to end and Bush is a motherfucker.

I see the goal of all work like this to be community building, healing, and revolution. In that order.

LF: Part of what I appreciate so much about this roundtable is being able to listen to and learn from activists who have taken this approach. Some people like to argue for unity on the basis that we all have the same experience—for me that just plants landmines that are going to blow up later. In my activism and my travels, I've been able to work with so many different types of people, which teaches me to appreciate our differences and recognize the burdens that people are forced to carry. This helps me learn about what it is to be a human being and break out of the isolation that's been imposed on me as a transperson.

GF: I taught a group of young girls of color last weekend, ages 9 to 12. They're African-American and Latina. At least one of them had starved herself from the age of nine. We talked about how they wanted to create new magazines and images of beauty. I asked them how this conversation related to self-defense and violence-prevention. One girl said, "You have to know your life is worth something before you can fight to save it." Others talked about their belief that one can't work for justice in any community without starting from a place of self-love, or at least working toward that.

Shira talked about the challenge of people being wounded and in pain. Open acknowledgment of those wounds and the survivorship skills associated with them can help individuals to heal, and can be something that brings communities and movements together. We have to be aware, though, of the danger of only identifying through our pain—it can easily be diverted into an investment in a hierarchy of oppression.

NL: *What kind of support do you need? Who supports you? Who is your community?*

GF: I need support that pushes me to new places of learning. I need reminders to forgive myself. I need support to talk about class issues because they're old and thorny for me, a sensitive place. I'm supported by an amazing partner who grows with me and a family of dozens of people who love even the parts of me that they don't understand—and then work toward understanding.

LF: Whatever support I need, I must be getting it, because I don't know what it would be. I overlap a lot of communities so I get a lot of support from different places—lesbian communities, trans communities, gay and bi communities, as well as many currents of the women's liberation movement. Union movement, for sure, and my own Revolutionary Communist Party.

SH: I need communism already. Where the fuck is that shit? I'm tired of scrapping around for money and begging for this and that. Our drop-in is overrun with rats 'cause we are broke. I need an exterminator. I need a healthcare system that works. I need to be able to give as much as I know I can without cracking.

My community is huge. I used to think it was small 'cause I would only think locally. Recently I realized that I am part of a national community of queers and activists that are willing to give you the shirt off their backs. Thinking this way has made me feel better about the world.

NL: *What is missing from this conversation?*

GF: Well, we're not conversing in person, and that reflects the disembodiment that I'm talking about, but in a way that makes this a very poignant experience, because it is so important to reach from self to community. 📧

*Nomy Lamm is a writer, musician, and activist whose work focuses on queerness, body image, disability, and connections between the Self and the systems of oppression we live within. She is an Associate Publisher of Clamor and a regular columnist for Punk Planet.*



# No Hierarchy of Suffering

INTERVIEW  
Laura Fokkena

*an interview with Bee Lavender*

Bee Lavender, perhaps best known as publisher of Hip Mama's website and coeditor of *Breeder: Real-Life Stories from the New Generation of Mothers* (Seal Press, 2001), has deviated from the politics of parenthood and written an eerie memoir of her childhood – a childhood punctuated by loud family brawls, drunken uncles, an aunt who drove over her husband with the family station wagon (“It didn’t kill him; we believed he was too wicked to die”), and, at the center of everything, hospital visits and cancer treatments.

Lavender underwent her first surgery on her 12th birthday. She had a parade of illnesses growing up, all of them labeled genetic yet unrelated, all of them branded weird flukes of nature. Although the medical establishment was never able to uncover a root cause for her incredible medical history, Lavender suspects the damage to her DNA has something to do with the nuclear waste from Bikini Atoll dumped in the bay near her hometown on Washington’s Kitsap Peninsula: “My parents and their sisters and brothers and cousins swam in those waters.”

When Lavender became pregnant at 18, she once again found herself defying the orders and dire expectations of her doctors. She delivered a healthy daughter and in the process became politicized on issues of class, teen motherhood, education, and the medicalization of childbirth. Having – just barely – reached the legal age of majority, she found in motherhood her first opportunity to act as her own advocate in a hospital. “I specifically decline consent for this procedure,” she told one doctor. “Take your hands out of my body.”

*Lessons in Taxidermy* (Akashic Books, 2005) is Lavender’s tale of what it means to grow up poor and sick. Recently, *Clamor*’s Laura Fokkena spoke with Lavender about her childhood, her memoir, and how surviving cancer has impacted her work as a writer and activist.

*Despite the success of your other projects, you had a hard time finding a publisher for Lessons in Taxidermy. As a culture we seem to be prepared to deal with cancer narratives as long as they are uplifting and packaged as self-help, but a raw look at illness and the fear of death is something we shy away from. Were you ever tempted to rewrite your story as a happy, triumphant tale of conquering adversity?*

There were a couple of agents and publishers interested in the book, but they all wanted me to change the focus of the narrative. They wanted a different title, different conclusions, and one even asked if

I could write the book as a novel. It would have been easier and probably more lucrative to follow their advice, but I couldn’t fictionalize my life.

I’ve never found cancer to be inspiring. It is demeaning to live with long-term chronic illness. I haven’t had a day completely free of pain in my entire life, and since 1983 I have had certain knowledge of my own mortality. I’m interested in helping other people who have similar problems, but my own experience has led me to a political understanding of disease. I don’t need therapy; I need full civil-rights protection and a national commitment to policies that protect the most vulnerable citizens.

*Your surgeries started when you were 12 and continued through high school, and by sixteen you were somewhat divorced from your body. These years are difficult for any girl, but you had the added complication of having your body handled and “managed” by strangers. Were the medical professionals you dealt with sensitive about this? How about your parents?*

There were a couple of truly amazing doctors and nurses who tried to talk to



me and be advocates; the earliest career counseling I received all happened on hospital gurneys, as people coaxed me to talk and told me that I should go to college. I appreciate the fact that many medical professionals worked to save not only my life but also my future. But the truth is that being a "good patient" is something that is valued within a medical system, and I was complimented and rewarded when I didn't complain. The fact that I could sit in pre-op chatting about literature with the anesthesiologist demonstrates more about my survival instinct than any burgeoning intellectual skills. I wanted to impress people because that would make them more interested in treating me decently. I was vulnerable and often too sick to protect myself with anything more than a precocious vocabulary. I was lucky that I had that much; less articulate working-class kids would not have fared so well.

Of course, there were countless encounters with people who were distracted, bored, and even cruel. I learned everything I needed to know about the extremes of human nature before I was 13 years old.

My mother was extremely sensitive to my situation, and she very correctly advised me not to cry. It was important to everyone that I learn to be stalwart, stoic, and, in the end, silent.

*You and your mother spent several years arguing with dismissive medical professionals and dealing with teachers who called you a hypochondriac and refused to let you make up your homework. One of the more memorable scenes in the book is the junior-*

**I don't need therapy;  
I need full civil-rights  
protection and a national  
commitment to policies  
that protect the most  
vulnerable citizens.**

*high-school teacher who challenged you to "prove it" when you told her you had cancer; so you lifted your shirt up and showed her your torso covered with bruises and scars. I'm wondering how this experience of being invalidated as a child affected your community-organizing efforts once you were an adult.*

I have always struggled to balance the necessity of disclosure with an instinct to preserve my privacy. Telling the truth is difficult because I do not want to be judged, I do not want sympathy, and I categorically refuse to be a role model. I don't believe in the bootstrap myth and I'm not going to let my story contribute to that sort of false dialogue. Yes, I had cancer as a child, I was a teen parent, I was born in poverty and worked my way out. But most of the challenges I faced were ridiculous and unnecessary, and I will not pretend otherwise. This is more complicated than any book could ever describe, and more painful. It would be easier to pass, to pretend that I have had a great life. It would be more fun to do almost anything except what I have chosen, which is to self-identify as a person with a disability who most inconveniently has a political conscience. In daily reality this does not mean that I talk about the illness; I still fall into the trap of being the exemplary good patient who never complains. But I do talk about public policy, and I am vigilant about keeping political reform first on my agenda.

I've only been eligible for full civil-rights protection since the ADA was signed into law in 1990, and it is still legal for insurance companies in most of the country to discriminate against people with pre-existing conditions. From a strictly utilitarian perspective, there are many reasons not to admit to having a genetic disorder if you live in the United States. Beyond that, I never wanted to talk about the disease; I didn't want to remember.

*The book opens with your memories of growing up "in the lowest dregs of working poverty: too poor to feed your family but not poor enough to receive government benefits." Since then, you've jokingly described yourself as a class traitor, and said that becoming middle class is an attitude that must be learned. When did you feel that shift, and how did it come about?*

I didn't feel middle-class until the day I had full medical and dental benefits, enough money on hand to pay for my own funeral, and cash left over to buy a burrito at the taquería on the corner. By then I was 32 years old.

But having said that, I lost my working-class credentials the day I left home for college. I wasn't healthy enough for the kind of jobs that my cousins took on; I didn't even have use of my arms most of the time. Going to school was the only conceivable way to find a job, particularly after I became a parent. What I didn't know at the time was that I was effectively denying myself a place in my own community. I did not reject my upbringing; I was not smarter than anyone else, but I was quantifiably different. When I was 22 years old I had a secretary older than my mother. It was extremely difficult to adjust to the idea that I was entitled to exercise the authority of the professional classes. I'm glad that my life up to that point ensured that I would not be seduced and ruined by the experience.

*Are there other ways that your childhood experiences in the medical system have informed your political outlook and activist work?*

I started to work in nonprofits and activist organizations when I was sixteen, organizing other teenagers to do community-service projects. I have always assumed that anyone who has ever encountered discrimination has equal standing and should work to build coalitions. This understanding was a product of growing up in a rural, working-class, military community. Having cancer as a poor kid opened my eyes to the demeaning and unnecessary institutional barriers that kept some people down while others were promoted.

From the earliest possible age we are sold this lie that working harder will inevitably lead to every possible fantasy being fulfilled. Well, I did it. I worked hard and I have a fantastic life filled with travel, friendship, and adventure. But I still have hundreds of scars to remind me that I could lose everything over one catastrophic hospitalization.

Lots of people in the States are living on maxed-out credit cards, teetering on the edge of bankruptcy over medical costs; employees are losing pensions in corporate scandals; veterans are denied appropriate medical services; equal-employment rights and reproductive rights are being dismantled; and the only people who ever truly achieve the dream are the selfish and entitled.

There is no hierarchy of suffering. We're all in trouble if we can't take care of each other. ☐

*Laura Fokkena's work has appeared in several publications and periodicals, including *Waking Up American: Coming of Age Biculturally* (Seal Press, 2005). She lives in Boston.*

# Hottentot Hotties, & History

TEXT  
Stacey Tolbert

Bare brown skin has been a recurring symbol in narratives of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, well-mannered human vs. savage beast, beautiful vs. ugly – White vs. Black.

Where do I, an African American woman born 1972, fit into the discourse? I've never been classified as a "brick house." I don't wear miniskirts, but I do wear jeans that show my shape. Within the same hour, I may dance naked and go to church. But when I walk into suburban coffee shops donning tight jeans, a tattoo-revealing tank top, and a bald head, I become a walking stereotype. You guess which: Aunt Jemima or the Hottentot Venus?

Women of all races have suffered sexism, chauvinistic abuse, and sexual oppression. In addition to these injustices, women of African descent have been hyper-sexualized or desexualized in the United States and Europe from the inception of slavery to the present day. Saartjie (Sara) Baartman (aka the Hottentot Venus) and the Aunt Jemima icon are two branches of the same lynching tree.

Who was Baartman? A skeleton in European closets.

Historians are still arguing over Baartman's herstory. Some believe she agreed to leave South Africa for "riches untold"; others say she was taken by force. Either way, her subsequent treatment is an historical scar.

Baartman was a South African Khoisan woman whose body type – pear-shaped, medium-sized breasts, wide hips, and a prodigious behind – struck nineteenth-century Europeans as so unusual that they placed her in public exhibitions in England and France between 1810 and 1815.

Her first stop was the Egyptian Hall of Piccadilly Circus. From there, she was animal-caged and circus-pimped across London and France. She was allowed to wear only a small piece of fabric that covered her genitalia. Newspaper cartoonists drew caricatures of her featuring a pronounced behind and blown-up lips.

"She appeared on a platform raised two feet off the ground. A keeper ordered her to walk, sit, and stand and show her private parts. When she sometimes refused to obey him, he threatened her," Kimberly Wallace-Sanders writes in *Skin Deep, Spirit Strong: The Black Female Body in American Culture* (2002). Not much is written about the ways in which Baartman resisted her scientist-assailants, but historians all seem to agree that she did not want to be paraded around, poked at, or visually prostituted. She became a heavy user of alcohol.

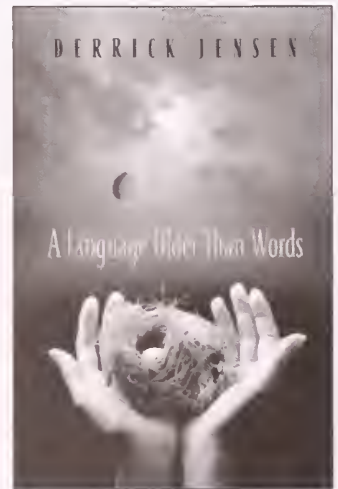
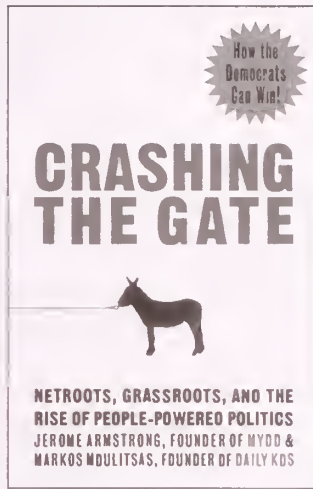
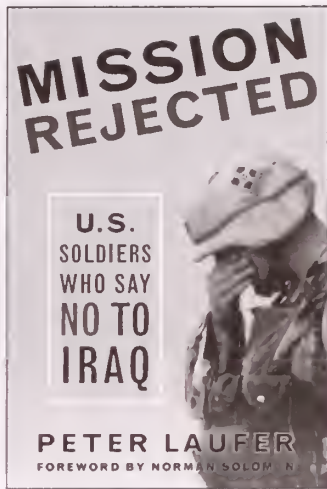
In winter 1815, Baartman died. Her remains were given to the Musee de l'Homme in Paris by scientist George Cuvier, who, along with many other anatomy-comparison scientists, examined her entire body, including dissecting her vagina. Their aim was to prove that she was a rare breed of animal, not a human.

In May 1999, Janell Hobson, author of *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (2005), traveled to the Musee de l'Homme to see Baartman's remains. What she saw instead was a cold metal rack marked "1603" that housed a life-sized body cast of Baartman. The rest of her remains, including her brain, liver, and dissected vagina, were in a formaldehyde box marked "number 33."

In 2002, Sara Baartman was finally laid to rest in South Africa. And while her story remains submerged, the legacy of exploitation it represents persists. Every day in the West, where women still struggle for control of their own bodies, video hos proudly "drop it like it's hot" for money while shaking their God-given ste•ato•py•gia – and if you ask your niece, nephew, or next-door neighbor who Sara Baartman was ... silence. 🗑️

Stacey Tolbert is a writer and teacher with an affinity for sunflowers. In her spare time, she is a feminist superhero.





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# Challenge Corporate Power



photo by Eric Slomanson/ZUMA Press

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CSG



# So, this guy walks into the emergency room, and ...

## Universal Healthcare Coverage in the U.S. and other Timeless Jokes

### TEXT

Tara Bracco

### SIDEBARS

Elizabeth Webb

### ILLUSTRATION

Candace Sepulis - ballyhoomeia.com

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 45 million Americans went without health insurance coverage in 2004. Uninsured and underinsured people are often faced with difficult decisions: putting costly doctor visits on credit cards, which escalates personal debt; staying at an unwanted job in fear of leaving and becoming uninsured; delaying the purchase of expensive prescriptions because they don't fit within the monthly budget. Put simply, America's health care system is failing its citizens.

What will it take to ensure that all U.S. residents have equal access to health care? Some health care advocates say that the power of drug companies and big insurers can best be countered with by mobilizing the power of the nation's employers—corporate behemoths and small businesses alike. It won't be an easy task. To pull off this coup, grassroots organizers may first have to raise the profile of the health care issue, fight off conservative anti-government ideology, and ultimately prevent employers from shifting increasing health care costs onto workers.

### Half-Measures from Massachusetts

In an effort to address the health care crisis in one state, Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney signed a law last April that requires all residents to obtain health insurance by July 2007. The law expands eligibility for Medicaid and provides subsidies to low-income families so that they can purchase insurance. Gerald Friedman, a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, believes the law "may end up covering more people, at least for a while."

Nonetheless, the Massachusetts plan is drawing criticism from some health care advocates. Criticism centers on the law's requirement that those individuals who make at least three

times the poverty level (about \$29,000 for an individual) purchase their own health insurance, if they do not already receive coverage through an employer or some other source. If they don't buy their own coverage, they will be charged a fine.

The plan does nothing to prevent employers from shifting insurance premium increases onto their employees, and actually aids big insurers by bringing them new business. In a state like Massachusetts, with a high cost of living, even those who make \$29,000 a year can face difficulty affording health insurance. Richard Kirsch, who works on health care issues as the executive director of Citizen Action of New York, is opposed to this individual mandate. He says the Massachusetts law doesn't adequately address the lack of affordability of health care for large segments of the population, and calls it a "false promise that's likely to never be enacted."

Steffie Woolhandler, co-founder of Physicians for a National Health Program, is even more blunt. "The Massachusetts bill is a hoax," she says. "There is no universal health care in the bill... Insurance companies were ecstatic about this bill."

While Kirsch acknowledges the positive provisions the law contains for low-income people, he contends it simply doesn't provide affordable care for moderate- and middle-income families. The law also doesn't regulate insurance companies. "The law treats health care as a commodity as opposed to a public good. It doesn't stand up to the insurance companies and drug companies to make health care affordable," says Kirsch.

Health care advocates like Friedman, Kirsch, and Woolhandler suspect the law will unravel. The state will only provide subsidies for low income people if it has the funding to do so. If the state runs out of money, it will cut back the number of people covered. In this way, the state is protected, but the people aren't. Under these circumstances, there would still be Massachusetts residents who would remain without health coverage. "When the system fails, as it probably will," Friedman says, "we'll be at a turning point."

## Not Everyone Suffers from the Current Health System

"There are lots of people making money off of people's misery and illness," says Mark Rukavina, executive director of The Access Project, a campaign created to expand access to health care throughout the country. America's health care spending is estimated at a staggering \$2 trillion a year. "We have a whole system of health care organized around profit," says Kirsch. "Those forces have a lot to lose if we control health care costs."

One of the fundamental problems with America's current profit-driven health system is that it is not advantageous for insurance companies to cover sick people and pay out on their claims. As such, insurers logically resist covering individuals with pre-existing conditions. "The way to make profits in the insurance companies is to find the people who are going to be expensive and get rid of them before they run up bills," explains Friedman. "Everyone wants to insure healthy people. No one wants to insure the sick."

Most health care advocates believe the United States should adopt a single-payer health care system. A single-payer plan is one in which the government finances health care through taxes, covering all citizens regardless of age, employment, or pre-existing medical conditions. Under a single-payer system, the government is the one entity that is billed for all medical costs. Supporters of single-payer argue it would reduce waste in the current system and provide more effective coverage; comparisons between the U.S. system and single-payer plans in other developed nations add credence to this claim.

A 2005 report from the Virginia-based Lewin Group projected that a single-payer plan would reduce California's health care spending by nearly \$8 billion. A similar report the group published in 2003 found that Georgia would save \$716 million in its first year if it implemented a single-payer system.

Nonetheless, insurance companies and pharmaceutical companies are adamantly against it. A single-payer system that insures all people to be covered would likely cut into their profits. From the van-

**The way to make profits in the insurance companies is to find the people who are going to be expensive and get rid of them before they run up bills. Everyone wants to insure healthy people. No one wants to insure the sick.**

Linda Davis was diagnosed with type-2 diabetes almost ten years ago. In order to keep the disease in check, she has to take regular insulin injections and other medication, and has twice had to receive cataract surgery so as not to lose her vision. After several years of coverage, her family's health plan unexpectedly dropped them. She has been unable to find a new HMO and has had to pay hundreds of dollars out of pocket each month for her medication. She worries about the impact on her family should she require additional surgeries or new medications in the future – a likely scenario for someone with her condition.





**They [pharmaceutical companies] don't want national insurance because they have market power. If the federal government is the single buyer of insurance and the single buyer of pharmaceuticals, then prices would plummet.**

tage point of insurers, being pressured to provide coverage for unprofitable sick populations is bad enough. Worse still a single-payer system would likely force insurers and drug companies to lower their prices. "They don't want national insurance because they have market power," says Friedman. "If the federal government is the single buyer of insurance and the single buyer of pharmaceuticals, then prices would plummet."

With these threats to their profits in mind, insurance and pharmaceutical companies have successfully lobbied to prevent a national single-payer health plan, helping to keep profits high. The Public Citizen report *The Other Drug War II* identifies the special interest group Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America as a leader in spending on lobbying, spending a whopping \$11.3 million in 2001 to support its agenda. And their efforts paid off. During that year, when the average profits of Fortune 500 companies declined by over 50%, drug companies experienced an increase in profits from \$28 billion in 2000 to \$37.2 billion in 2001, making drug companies the country's most profitable industry.

#### **Pitting Big Money against Big Money**

Advocates in agreement that radical health care reform is needed face a much-more daunting question than what ideal health care policy should look like. Given the political and economic might of the health care industry, the much more difficult question is how we can ever create meaningful change.

Some health care advocates feel that the way to combat the power of the health care industry is with the power of the nation's major employers, companies that typically pick up a substantial portion of their employee's health care costs. An irony of America's profit-driven health system is that other profit-making businesses are being slammed by ever-rising insurance premiums. Employer-sponsored health insurance premiums rose by 9.2% in 2005, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation's report *Employer Health Benefits*. This is on top of increases of 11.2% in 2004 and 13.9% in 2003.

Cynthia Toussaint has lived with a chronic pain disease known as Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy (RSD) for the past 23 years. When symptoms first appeared in 1982, the HMO that



covered her viewed her condition with skepticism. As such, the disease went misdiagnosed and mistreated and her health deteriorated. Now, on a good day, she is able to walk 100 feet; on a bad day, she is completely bedridden. Her severe disability now qualifies her for Medicare and she is able to get basic treatment, such as acupuncture, acupressure, and medication, to relieve some of the pain. If properly treated from the start, it's possible she would have been cured of the disease. Toussaint believes that a health care plan less concerned with denying claims would have made it easier for her to get that treatment.

If businesses recognize the benefits of a single-payer system, their support for a national plan could provide the power needed for change. "Businesses are likely to be one of the forces pushing for change in the health care system," says Woolhandler.

According to Friedman, a barrier in getting employers to advocate for change is that employer-sponsored health insurance serves as a way of controlling workers and locking them into their jobs. "Companies use health insurance as a way of manipulating the labor force. A national health system would reduce the leverage companies have over workers," he says. Businesses have traditionally used benefits and wages to recruit and retain workers.

Health care advocates are also quick to point out, however, that national health care could serve to reduce many companies' staff turnover, as workers would not have to leave their jobs in search of better health benefits elsewhere. Money currently spent on health coverage could be spent on other desired benefits that could increase staff loyalty. Decreasing turnover alone could save businesses money.

Another impediment to recruiting employers as allies has been one of perspective: many businesses adopt an adversarial stance towards government involvement. "The problem has been ideological," says Woolhandler. "Business-oriented people don't like the idea of government stepping in." So even as costs to businesses rise, many are hesitant to give up the control of making decisions about employee benefits.

Still another significant reason businesses haven't been more vocal in support of a national health plan is that they have thus far been able to shift the increased costs of health insurance onto their workers. This has been done in recent years by reducing benefits and increasing employee contributions into health plans. The Kaiser Family Foundation's findings stated that the number of firms offering health benefits declined in recent years from 69% in 2000 to 60% in 2005. A Hewitt survey from 2006 reported that employee contributions continue to increase for individuals, with employees now

Stephanie Wynot, a 23-year-old living in Massachusetts, has a long history of severe depression and personality disorder. She was hospitalized in 2003 for threatening suicide, and her doctors recommended drug treatment to effectively manage her illness. Wynot lost the health coverage previously provided under her mother's insurance plan when her family became aware of her homosexuality and she was kicked out of home. She is currently working as a temp and hopes to be hired on full-time so that she can receive medical benefits. Right now, her untreated mental illness poses a significant danger.



Sandra Walker died on November 12, 2004, at the age of 55 due to complications from high blood pressure and her inability to afford medication. Despite having already been hospitalized for blood pressure-related strokes on two separate occasions, Walker lost her government-provided health coverage when her son turned 18. Unable to get full-time employment due to her poor health, she struggled to make ends meet and continually attempted to re-enroll for public health assistance. After a year of trying, she was finally able to get back on Medicaid – but the time spent off of high-blood predication medication had already taken its toll and she died a few months later.



paying an average 22% of the total premium. Of course, if health care costs continue to rise faster than average wage increases, it is unlikely that these expenses can continue being shifted onto working people forever.

Despite one's views of the current Massachusetts health plan, it can be viewed as a sign that politicians are beginning to wake up about the need to expand health coverage to more people. The Massachusetts law and those proposed in other states, despite all their flaws, could help jumpstart a national single-payer system. Friedman believes that if more states had laws, it could push large businesses to advocate for a national plan because they would not want to deal with 50 different state systems. "If we did get a bunch of state systems, then we would get a federal system because employers would jump on board for convenience," he argues.

Dan Hodges, chair of the California-based organization Health Care for All, agrees that state action is the right approach. "The only way I think is viable right now, is for a state by state achievement of different kinds of health care reforms," he says.

### Time to Start Organizing

A movement for a single-payer health system that relies on employers as key advocates may seem paradoxical to some grassroots organizers. The benefits of corporate allies, however, in no way reduce the crucial need for individuals to get down to the traditional work of holding meetings, sending emails, staging protests, visiting politicians and contacting the media.

A significant push will be required to force businesses to become involved in this issue. Only if workers resist employers' efforts to shift rising health care costs onto them will businesses truly open up to a national health plan. "I don't think employers will join the campaign unless they are convinced they can't get rid of the costs of insurance on their own, by pushing it onto their workers," says Friedman.

Hodges believes in order to have a single-payer system it will take a massive public demand, "that is strong enough, loud enough that some businesses break ranks and move in opposition to long-standing US business practices of control over determining benefits for one's own employees."

While some labor unions, health advocates and community groups have already made health care a priority, Kirsch believes a system change will only come when there is an overall shift in political focus. "In order to get to the point where we can actually have the kind of changes to make health care affordable, we need to have a whole change in the politics of the country, where we are looking at politics that understand that we have a common responsibility for each other."

The political organization MoveOn.org recently conducted an online poll of its members to determine what issues they considered most important. Over 100,000 people voted. When confronted with choices that included the environment, energy prices, the Iraq war and voting rights, they selected health care for all as MoveOn's number one issue to be addressed in future campaigns.

"People are being more vocal. They are realizing that their difficulties are not an issue of their own personal failure, but the system failing," says Renae Reese of the Connecticut Center for a New Economy.

The trick will be channeling this increased awareness into action. "People need to get off their sofas and go and participate in the political process," says Woolhandler. ☐

*Tara Bracco is the founder of Poetic People Power, an ongoing project that combines poetry and activism. She is also an alum of the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership. You can contact her at poeticpower@gmail.com.*





# War in the Store

**The Center for Science in the Public Interest is taking on the Big Boys so your kids don't have to.**

INTERVIEW

Edward Burch

PHOTO

Jyn Mayer

When I saw a recent ad for 7UP claiming that the high fructose corn syrup-laden beverage is now "all natural," I did a double take before laughing myself silly. The folks at the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) may have had the same reaction, but when the laughing ceased, the legal action began. CSPI is in the process of suing Cadbury-Schweppes, alleging that its claim that 7UP is "all natural" is misleading.

CSPI is a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C., working on a range of health issues, especially those issues related to nutrition and food safety. CSPI also publishes *Nutrition Action*, a monthly newsletter that strives to supply readers with accurate information about nutritional choices – and which takes no funding from the food industry. Margot Wootan, the nutritional policy director with CSPI, took a few moments to speak with *Clamor*.

*Can you tell me a little bit about the sort of work that the Center for Science in the Public Interest does to promote better health and nutrition?*

We try to provide the public with good information about what good nutrition is and how to make healthy choices. At the same time, we also try to make those healthy choices easier. So instead of just saying, "Eat more vegetables," we'll try to get more fruits and vegetables into the school lunch programs

and try to make more fruits and vegetables available to children as snacks in schools.

It's not enough to just say to people, "Eat your vegetables," if they're not there where people are eating, if they're not attractively packaged, if they are not prepared in ways that taste good, and if they're not affordably priced. Part of our concern is policy changes and environmental changes to make it easier to eat better.

*CSPI was involved in the recent case of getting sugary drinks out of schools?*

Yes. The number-one source of calories in the American diet is now soda pop, and people are consuming a lot more calories from sugary drinks than they realize. One place where that habit starts is in schools. Soft drink companies market their products to children in schools in a number of ways, including by having exclusive beverage contracts so that a school will only sell Coke or only sell Pepsi in the hope that kids will become only Pepsi drinkers or only Coke drinkers for life.

*They want to build the brand loyalties very young.*

That's right. Companies want to be in schools to build brand loyalty. And it happens throughout the education system. Not as much in the elementary schools as the beverage companies would have once liked,

but in middle schools and high schools, and a lot of universities have soft-drink contracts as well.

*So was this process of removing the sugary drinks happening at the university level as well, or just with middle school and high school?*

We have been focused on soft drinks in elementary and secondary schools. With limited time and resources, that's where we've been focused.

There's been a lot of momentum to get soda and junk food out of schools. Many school districts have been implementing nutrition/physical activity/wellness policies – including New York City, L.A. Unified, Chicago, Philadelphia, and a number of big school systems. In 2005 alone, 200 bills were introduced in 40 states to get soda and junk food out of schools. Just last month, Congress introduced a bipartisan bill in both the House and the Senate to require the U.S. Department of Agriculture to put into place stronger nutrition standards for foods that are sold out of vending machines and a la carte lines in school stores.

So there's been a lot of momentum in communities and states, and even in Congress. Coupled with that, a number of lawyers and public-health advocates have been working together on a lawsuit against the soft drink companies to sue them to get soda out of schools.

We were very close to settlement. We'd been negotiating with the soft drink companies for about six months, and the soft drink industry, instead of having it come out as part of a litigation settlement, announced a new policy for getting soft drinks out of schools.

*Which is not an uncommon practice for corporations, especially in dealing with matters of public health and welfare, since they would rather engage in voluntary self-regulation than to have to comply with some sort of regulation from without that was not of their choosing.*

Absolutely. The soft-drink industry would rather voluntarily pull soft drinks out of schools on their own terms than have to comply with a decision by a judge or a law from the Congress.

As for the settlement, the agreement – well, I guess it's not an agreement – the announcement that the soft-drink industry made to get sodas out of schools is a good step forward. It will get all sugary drinks out of elementary and middle schools, and it will remove sugary sodas from high schools. It will still allow for the sale of sports drinks and juice drinks in high schools, but there will be some portion-size limits.

So we're going to be building the momentum from what's already been happening at the local and state levels, and the industry's own announcement, and try to lock in that beverage agreement, as well as try to improve upon it by trying to get those sugary sports and juice drinks out of high schools.

We also want to get standards for snacks, because the beverage announcement doesn't address the Flamin' Cheetos or the Snickers bars or Ho-Hos or other junk food that's sold in schools. So we think this is actually a good step forward toward helping pass federal legislation that would set standards for items sold in vending machines or a la carte in all the nation's schools for the whole school day.

*As you were talking about sports drinks, it certainly calls to mind product-labeling practices. Think of things like Power Bars and other "nutritional" bars that are really not much more than glorified candy bars.*

[Laughs] Nothing like slapping a healthy label on a junk food to help a company market it. You know, people complain about how nutrition can be so confusing, and part of the reason is you see these claims on unhealthy foods.

This past weekend I was at Hershey Park in Pennsylvania, and I saw all these Hershey candies with "Zero Trans Fat" claims on them. Sure, a lot of these cookies and candy bars didn't have trans fats, but they're loaded with saturated fats, which will do just as much damage to children's arteries and to their health.

*So, do you find that product-labeling practices, as currently structured, are adequate enough to provide people with accurate and helpful information on health and nutrition? Do they provide a complete picture?*

Well, nutrition labeling has improved a lot over the last ten years. Congress passed the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act in 1990, which went into effect in 1994, and so we now have Nutrition Facts labels on virtually all packaged foods. I think that can help those people who are really interested in nutrition to find out what's in their food.

We still don't have nutrition labeling at restaurants, and people eat about a third of their calories at restaurants and other food-service establishments. So when people go out to restaurants, they can only guess what they're eating, and what studies have shown is that they usually guess wrong, that people think they're getting a lot fewer calories than they think.

It's not always that easy to tell the difference between items. For instance, at McDonald's, a chocolate shake has more calories than a Big Mac, or a tuna salad sandwich at a deli has 50 percent more calories than a roast beef sandwich. It's just not always obvious. One of the things that we're pushing for [is] legislation for fast-food and other chain restaurants to list calories and other important nutrition information right on menus so that people can make informed choices and know what they're getting.

*So when we're dealing with labeling issues, it is still a situation where you have to be fairly pro-active in seeking out the information. How do consumers traditionally get most of their information on diet and nutrition?*

Well, for restaurants, you can't even seek it out because it's not available at the place where you're making a decision. Even though most of the large chain restaurants have nutrition information, most of them do not have it in the store. They have it on a Web site, which means people have to log on to the Internet before leaving home, which isn't practical.

In the grocery store, people can get information from packaged foods, but there isn't as much information available for fruits and vegetables – which are healthy options – and I think if people saw big calorie labels on fruits and vegetables, they would see what a nutritional bargain they are. You know, often times you could have a really terrific snack for a low cost and very few calories. That could make fruits and vegetables more appealing to a lot of people.

*Do you know how much the food industry has spent on influence at the FDA or on political campaigns?*

I haven't seen those numbers, but they would be interesting figures to pull together. I have seen figures on what is spent promoting healthy eating. For example, the Centers for Disease Control have about \$1.5 million to promote fruit and vegetable consumption.

*As opposed to \$25 billion.*

Right, compared to \$25 billion to market food, much of which is junk food or unhealthy food.

*As with most regulatory agencies, there seems to be a revolving door between people who work for the FDA and the agribusiness interests they are responsible for regulating. To what extent do those types of relationships influence the extent to which the FDA holds the food industry accountable – accuracy of product information, food safety, and so on?*

The food industry is very powerful politically. They have the ear of Congress and federal agencies, and they influence food policy in a number of ways. By having their former executives serve in government, by making donations to political campaigns and to politicians, by funding studies meant to influence the way the government and the public think about certain food issues, through PR campaigns – there is a tremendous amount of influence by the food industry.

I think the average person probably thinks about their food choices as being their own. They don't realize how much agriculture and food policy influences their food choices – how it affects the price, the availability, the way it's marketed, the overall appeal of the product. ■

*Edward Burch is a freelance writer living in Urbana, Illinois. One of the founding editors of the online magazine Pamphlet ([www.pamphletpress.org](http://www.pamphletpress.org)), his summer obsessions have been swimming and cooking. Email him at [EdwardBurch@pamphletpress.org](mailto:EdwardBurch@pamphletpress.org)*



# A Progressive Position on Stem Cell Research

TEXT  
Jesse Reynolds  
& Parita Shah

Most Americans' positions on stem cell research are determined by one highly charged political question: their take on the moral status of the embryo. The polarized debate over stem cells has come to pit anti-abortion conservatives who want to ban all research on human embryos against scientists who reject quasi-religious restrictions on their research. Unfortunately, this artificially narrow dialogue has left out equally-important concerns regarding health care accessibility and the exploitation of women.

While many progressives are admirably calling for an overturn of President Bush's restrictions on federal funding for stem cell research, they have failed to call for mechanisms to ensure that this innovative and complicated research goes forward in a way that benefits all people. While trying to combat the anti-abortion crowd, many on the left have unwittingly run into the arms of the biotechnology industry – strange bedfellows indeed.

Without responsible oversight of the emerging science, which is often publicly funded, we could wind up enriching the biotech firms while exacerbating an already shameful health disparity and the commoditization of women's bodies.

## Overlooked Embryonic Politics

The religious right's extension of embryo defense from abortion to medicine must be countered. But liberals' knee-jerk reaction to this – albeit an understandable one – has left many blinded to other legitimate progressive concerns.

Most embryonic stem cell research currently underway uses cell lines derived from embryos that were initially created, but not used, for fertility purposes – essentially, left over embryos from attempts to create what was once referred to as a "test tube baby."

In the future, however, human stem cell lines may also be derived from embryos created using the cloning technique known as somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT). Many scientists are moving forward with SCNT. Researchers at Harvard and the University of California recently made headlines around the world when they announced their plan to begin SCNT.

SCNT, or "research cloning," raises a number of issues not present with traditional embryonic stem cell research. First and foremost, this technique requires a supply of fresh human eggs, the only source of which is women. Egg extraction is an invasive procedure that carries significant risk.

The practice of egg extraction is fairly common today when egg donors donate – or more-commonly sell – eggs to infertile women to assist with in vitro reproduction. Under assisted reproduction, the highest-paid egg donors are typically young women with highly-sought after physical and intellectual traits who attend the nation's best universities.

In contrast, because the genes will be removed from the eggs, all eggs are equal in the eyes of stem cell researchers. There is no incentive for companies to pay college-educated American women a premium for their eggs. Without strong regulations in place, eggs needed for SCNT-based stem cell research could cheaply be collect-

ed from economically-vulnerable women in poor nations throughout the world. The various extraction procedures that would be used could easily result in the women who provide eggs becoming the first test subjects of embryonic stem cell research. To prevent this type of exploitation, women who volunteer eggs for research should not be paid beyond reimbursement of direct expenses, should be afforded all of the safeguards available to research subjects and should receive medial attention for any consequences of the egg extraction procedure.

A second issue is that treatments based on stem cells are likely to be extremely expensive. Many hours of highly technical labor would be required for each individual patient's treatment, and the "personal biological repair kit" touted by research advocates would require a new stem cell line for each sick person. The eggs for research cloning will only add to the costs. A report in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences estimated the figure at \$100,000 to \$200,000 per patient for the human eggs alone. Who will be able to afford such "designer medicine?" And, how will lavishly-funded government programs that pay for this research ensure that these therapies will be available to the uninsured and the underinsured?

While this is no reason to oppose the research, it certainly grounds to examine the priorities of potential uses of our public monies. For example, in 2004 research advocates, venture capitalists, and others spent \$35 million to convince California voters to approve an initiative which allocated \$3 billion for stem cell research, paid via bonds. After interest, this will cost Californians \$6 to 7 billion. In a state with millions of people unable to access basic health care, there is certainly a more effective way to allocate billions of taxpayer dollars to improve people's health.

Like California, several other states are publicly funding stem cell research. These states and the federal government lack the type of effective oversight and plans for accessibility of treatments that are needed. Progressives should be demanding policies to ensure that publicly-funded stem cell research moves forward in a much more fair and equitable manner.

## Looking ahead

Political debates about the desire to prioritize medical research are very much linked to questions of healthcare accessibility and women's health. The desire to combat the agenda of the religious right is no reason to forgo a cautious approach to stem cell research that advocates the responsible use of the new human biotechnologies developed with public dollars.

Unless the left's support for stem cell research is coupled with demands for real oversight and a clear affirmation of core progressive principles, we risk letting the right "own" many of the issues that make Americans uneasy about stem cell science – including exacerbation of health inequities and the financial inducement of women who provide eggs for research. ■

*Jesse Reynolds is the Director of the Project on Biotechnology Accountability, and Parita Shah is the Communications Director, at the Center for Genetics and Society.*



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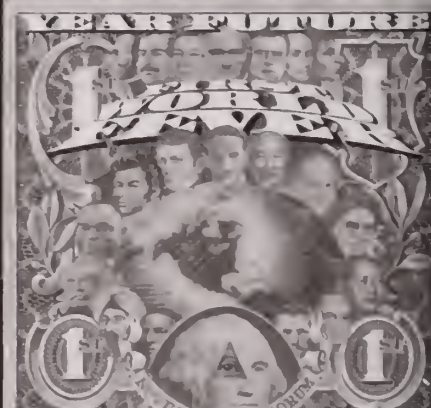
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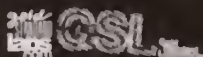
**SABERTOOTH TIGER**  
"Extinction is Inevitable" CD  
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This L.A. trio's debut album is roaring blast of political punk. Comparisons to DRIVE LIKE JEHU, TRAGEDY, and BULLET UNION aside, STT wield powerful sonic dynamics to equally forceful ideas on topics such as autonomy, economics, patriotism, consumerism, and the like. Recorded in 2005 by the venerable Alex Newport, *Extinction is Inevitable* features the considerable drum talents of both Jon Theodore (THE MARS VOLTA) and Erin Garcia (BROTHER READE). Song lyrics range from the cynical to the hopeful, and, at times, the radical. For further info on the band please check out [www.sabertoothtiger.net](http://www.sabertoothtiger.net).



**YEAR FUTURE**  
"First World Fever" CD/LP  
GSL110

YEAR FUTURE are an L.A. quartet comprised of members of DEAD AND GONE, THE VSS, ANGEL HAIR, MOVING UNITS and more. The band's 11-song debut full-length has been compared to the likes of BLACK FLAG, YES, BAUHAUS, and DEAD KENNEDYS. Political without being cliché, hardcore without being dogmatic (the album includes a DEAD AND DANCE cover), YEAR FUTURE breathe new life into the idea that a punk band can aspire to more than MTV rotation and corporate sponsorship. Also available: 2004 "The Hidden Hand" 7"/CDEP. For more info check out [www.yearfuture.net](http://www.yearfuture.net).



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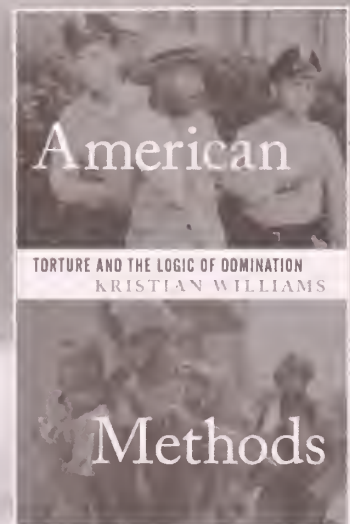
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# American Methods

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# I WILL ALWAYS BE YOUR DAUGHTER.

# I WILL ALWAYS BE YOUR SON.

**an overdue conversation  
with writer, filmmaker, and  
auto mechanic Juma Blythe Essie**

#### INTERVIEW

Ellen Marie Hinchcliffe

#### BOY/GIRL PHOTOS

Lou Oates

The issues around transgendered identities continue to gain more awareness in our society, but often the experience of transforming the body and the complexity of gender is being expressed through the eyes of white folks. Like most unexamined experiences by white people, these encounters are usually presented without acknowledging race. Juma Blythe Essie is a 30-year-old black man, writer, filmmaker and auto mechanic living in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His take on being transgendered, black, and male pushes the conversation in a much-needed direction.

*How do you describe yourself in relation to your gender?*

I am a transsexual person. I would describe myself as a 30-year-old man who lived the first 29 years of his life as a black woman and now lives his life as a black man.

*I have heard you describe your experience transitioning from female to male as going from being invisible to hyper visible. Can you explain what you mean?*

I think black women in this society face a double bind. They are either hyper visible as in the caricature of the big, black, loud woman, or often they are just invisible, and I felt like I was mostly invisible. Now, as a black man in this society, I am hyper visible as a threat, as a predator, as a source of desire. I am seen a lot more now than I was as a black woman. In neither case was I seen for who I am, that is not what I mean by being seen, what I mean is being gazed upon in a different way.



I think black people are viewed through the lens of white supremacy as either “your nigger” or “that nigger.” If the black person is “your nigger” they are there to entertain you, the black person white people can trust, the different one, the exception to the rule. If the person is “that nigger” it means they don’t care what white people think of them and that makes a lot of white people nervous. You might start as “your nigger” and end up as “that nigger.” Unfortunately some white people when I first meet them assume because I am open to being friends with them or because I have white people in my life that I am some how not connected to black people. They will often show their true colors to me by using the word nigger or talking about other black people or people of color in a way where they think I am going to agree with it. I have to face that, and it’s very disappointing.

*How is your experience transitioning as a black FTM (female to male transsexual) different from a white FTM’s experience?*

There’s a good book out by a white FTM called *Becoming a Visible Man*, and I guess I feel like I am becoming the hyper-visible yet still invisible man. For me it hasn’t simply been about the physical changes. The social part of it has been huge. White FTMs (with a few exceptions) never talk in terms of being white men, just men. I can’t separate the experience. For me every aspect of my transition is informed by being a black man in a white supremacist society on this planet. For white FTMs their whiteness informs their transition as well, but in white supremacy that is rarely acknowledged. The whiteness gets erased, and it’s just about gender, but it’s never just about anything because oppressions and -isms are interconnected.

*That ties into my next question. What has it meant for you to become a man in a sexist society?*

For me it’s been about added responsibility. Since I began my transition the question I have been asking myself is, what kind of man am I going to be – not simply what kind of man am I going to look like? It’s a big question. A lot of what we live out is roles. We act this stuff out over and over, but I think being an outsider, being a third gender person I can use 29 years living as a black woman to inform how I create my maleness. It’s a very unique opportunity. Part of that is being honest about where I come from and what it was like for me to live as a black woman and then act accordingly as a black man.

*So what would you say some of those things are that you are trying to act about gender, and piggybacking on that, what’s hard about that?*

I try not to ask myself “Am I being male enough?” and I think that makes me come off as effeminate to some people. I don’t want to shape my masculinity on other men or something we all saw on television. I’m sure it’s going to change as I continue to transition, but right now I am working on not thinking I have to walk like a man, or thinking “Oh, that’s not what a man would say.” I never want to think to myself what would a man do in this situation and for me that is the first step in deconstructing maleness. Now I want to mention that folks may be wondering if I am trying to deconstruct maleness why am I transitioning. Because I have a medical issue that needs to be resolved by bringing my physical body in line with my gender, this medical issue has deep social ramifications.

*Do you have any role models as an FTM?*

I can’t say I have found many models for being an FTM, but for being a man, I have found many models I like. James Baldwin



comes to mind – just artistic, weirdo black men, and there are a lot of them! (Laughs) And they inspire me to just be myself.

*Talk about black weirdos.*

There is this perception that the eccentric, creative, complex artist is not a black person. There is still the idea of this single black reality or this little space of identity that black people can occupy. There are so many of us black weirdos out there doing our thing, and I think we do seek each other out.

*What is your experience dealing with other black men?*

Yeah, I went to a Dignable Planets show, and this white guy tries to pick a fight with me, which was bizarre at a Dignable Planets show. So this brother comes over and says to me, “Just walk away man, he’s not worth it.” And for me that is something I have been experiencing through out my transition, a kind of camaraderie with men of color, especially black men. It has been really beautiful for me but really heartbreaking at the same time because where was that camaraderie when I was being seen as a black woman? And it’s not to say that with every black man I come across there is this brotherly love, but I have definitely felt a simple acknowledgement from other black men that I didn’t get as much as a woman.

**We live in a sexist, homophobic society, and some people are homophobic and some aren’t. But whenever two black people get together and say something it becomes the black community – I don’t know how. Why is it never the white community when some white idiot says something?**





*Lets talk about sexism, homophobia and transphobia.*

I'll start with this: sexism is real, it exists, and we don't even need to go into that. Now homophobia and transphobia exist as well, but they are not oppressions. They are punishments where sexism is the oppression. Susan Pharr wrote in her book *Homophobia as a Weapon of Oppression* that sexism is about gender; it's about gender roles, and when you break those by being gay, lesbian, or transgendered you are breaking sexist rules and so you are punished. I think a lot of times people don't acknowledge that sexism is the root of transphobia and homophobia. And a lot of people have this idea that dealing with sexism or talking about feminism isn't "sexy" anymore with expressions like "this is not your mother's feminism."

*I hate that saying. Like it was all square before, and now we are so cool.*

Yeah, and it's bullshit because we need feminism, and we need what came before us more than ever. I think people are basically good but also a little selfish, and I think when you really see the interconnectedness of struggles and people you begin to see yourself in others, and it can bring out that goodness in yourself. I know that sounds hokey, but I think to see yourself in everything is where it's at. On a political level that means seeing past your issue that affects just you as a white gay man or transman or what have you.

*When people start talking in boxes like race is a black person's issue. Well race is so much a white person's issue just as sexism is not just what the girls should worry about. The boys should worry about it too! This really ties into the idea of solidarity.*

Yeah, you go to the HRC (Human Rights Campaign) website, and one of their corporate sponsors is Shell, so you should go buy your gas from Shell because they give domestic partner benefits – they're great! Have you people never heard of Nigeria? How can you call yourselves the Human Rights Campaign and support Shell when they are tied to political murders and environmental devastation and the continued theft of a people's natural resources? I mean whose human rights? I went to a Le Tigre show and they had this slide show for a song about visibility or something and they had a slide of a Shell station with a rainbow over it. Just lost me right there.

*Okay, so what about the perception that the black community is somehow more homophobic than the rest of the country?*

Well that's white supremacy talking. (Laughs) We live in a sexist, homophobic society, and some people are homophobic and some aren't. But whenever two black people get together and say

**A lot of what we live out is roles. We act this stuff out over and over, but I think being an outsider – being a third gender person – I can use 29 years living as a black woman to inform how I create my maleness.**

something it becomes the black community – I don't know how. Why is it never the white community when some white idiot says something? Now I have heard black people say that too about black people being more homophobic, but I find often really what they are talking about is their moms or their brothers and so on. Or people say the black church is so homophobic. Again, what about the white church? I grew up in the black church; I was there at least two times a week and let me tell you there were gay people there. I just don't buy it. When the senate votes to decide if they should ban gay marriage, how many of those people voting are black? My union will not cover my healthcare needs as a transman. Well the union board of trustees is white by the way. It's not run by the black Pentecostal church! (Laughs) Let's talk about power and perspective and who sets these agendas.

*What about racism in transgendered spaces?*

Like other spaces in white supremacy, white people don't have to acknowledge being white and can assume their experience is the norm. It's not like there is less white supremacy in transgendered spaces. In fact often when groups of people that feel or are oppressed include white people they don't feel they have to deal with being white or they are exempt somehow from white supremacy, and that is not the case.

*What has been the hardest thing for you to deal with as an FTM transitioning?*

Funny, the hardest thing for me hasn't been about being black. It's been about being a union member. My union refuses to cover my health care needs that include chest surgery and a hysterectomy. That's been the most painful thing for me, and that is about class. As a working class person I cannot afford these surgeries otherwise. The ironic thing is if I had a non-union job I would have more recourse to fight to get my health care needs as a transsexual covered, especially in Minnesota where the law against discrimination includes transgendered people. But as a privately held plan the union makes the decisions.

*What has brought you the most joy?*

Just being present in my body. You know I could never see myself as an aunt, and I never thought about having close relationships with children, and now that I am an uncle I feel so open and involved. I never saw myself as a mother, but now I'm so excited about being a father. I feel like my world has opened up to possibilities in a way that I wasn't open to before because I don't think I fully inhabited my world before.

*I'm curious how transitioning and living as male has affected your creative life?*

Art has always been a way of understanding for me, a processing tool. For the last year things have been changing so much in me that I haven't even been able to wrap my head around it. So my creative life has been kind of underground. I also feel my medium has changed, before my transition I mostly did spoken word/poetry and now I find myself doing a lot of video because I am absolutely obsessed with looking at myself! (Laughs)

*I'm sure many trans folks can relate to that.*

Oh yeah. And so video has really inspired me. Before it was always coming out of my head in terms of poetry and flow, and obviously the words are still there but the visual impact has become so important to me.

*Talk about the video you are working on right now called, "A Seed in You, Inside Your Mother's Womb."*

## resource: **\$pread Magazine**

Most industries offer trade magazines for their workers and artisans. Four New York women decided that there should be one for the world's oldest profession.

Audacia Ray, executive editor of *\$pread*, founded in early 2005, views her subject with ambivalence. "It's good and bad," Ray, 26, says of sex work, "for the same person at different times."

For Ray, a Jill-of-all-media trades in the New York porn scene, addressing the needs of sex workers is part of the labor movement. And because sex work affects the rights of women and LGBT people acutely, advocating for them is a part of the feminist and queer rights movement, she believes. *\$pread* deals with the direct needs of dancers, escorts, et al. It offers interviews with figures in the adult movie industry and debates over things such as the use of condoms in adult films. A recent issue reviewed sex work laws around the globe and addressed the rising costs today's strippers face. For example, more dancers these days are independent contactors who pay a club to work. *\$pread* has a reformer vision for the industry. "Sex work should be fun," Ray says.

*\$pread* has critics who disapprove of its effort to legitimize sex work by advocating for better working conditions. Some even challenge the editors' devotion to feminism. "There is the idea that women selling their bodies can never be a feminist act," Ray says. "It is something to think about."

*\$pread* is open to all perspectives, including those of feminists with anti-sex work views. "If they have good arguments I love it," she says. The magazine has no official editorial stance, and encourages debate. In order for the editors to avoid potential legal entanglements,

however, each issue contains a disclaimer that says *\$pread* does not condone prostitution. The editors are concerned for sex workers who are the victims of trafficking and abuse while others have chosen the trade and take pride in their profession. *\$pread* accepts both realities, Ray says.

The magazine is non-profit, and everyone involved has been working on a volunteer basis. Writers and artists, many of whom are sex workers, contribute work pro bono. The magazine's wild launch parties create positive media buzz and *\$pread* received recognition from the *Utne* Reader. Ray recently curated a small exhibit featuring art by sex workers in New York. It featured art with a mix of both the sensuality and sorrow involved in sex work, such as a photograph of a nude woman washing herself with the words "No matter how much you wash you'll never get clean" across the frame. Some other

photos featured female models with faces that could easily be expressing ecstatic fervor or genuine angst. The show received mixed reviews.

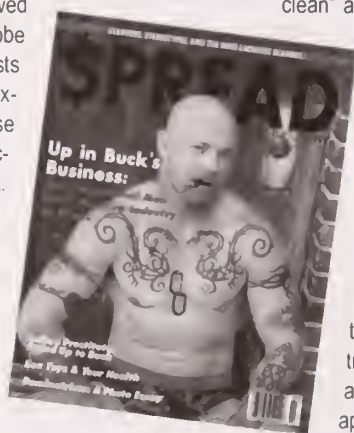
There are challenges: It has a low budget and the editors would like more diversity in their staff and stock of contributors. But *\$pread* is getting advertising, the editors are applying for grants and they remain optimistic about the maga-

zine and the industry. "Our response," Ray says, "is that doing sex work is taking control of one's erotic output."

-Ari Paul

For more information, visit [www.spreadmagazine.org](http://www.spreadmagazine.org)

To profile sex and gender resources, libraries, or museums in your area, email [sexandgender@clamormagazine.org](mailto:sexandgender@clamormagazine.org)



I'm trying to reconcile my relationship with my mother, which actually isn't about my transitioning, which she has been accepting of, but we have some things between us that go a lot deeper than that. I think every single person is here for a reason, and I think about when baby girls are born they have all the eggs they are ever going to have for their whole life. So at her birth your mother had this seed that is one day going to be you inside her. That is heavy; it's so beautiful and I love it. I think there is something very deep about these connections, but we can't always reconcile them with the people we share them with. I don't feel I can reconcile this with my mother so I'm trying to work it out with video.

*I like in the film that you are touching on this transformation of your body but also genetic memory and things this transformation will not change.*

I still have the same chromosomes, and I will always have these chromosomes. Within me is history and my grandmother and her grandmother and her grandmother and on and on. Within each of us we carry so much joy, so much pain, and so much promise. ☺

*Ellen Marie Hinchcliffe is a white woman, writer, childcare worker, filmmaker, and above all a loving auntie. She received a Jerome Foundation commission to create a performance piece called, "Dirty the Bones—On Being White and Other Lies," which will premiere this November at Intermedia Arts in Minneapolis, MN. She has written most recently for Z Magazine. You can email Ellen at [hinchcliffe@yahoo.com](mailto:hinchcliffe@yahoo.com).*



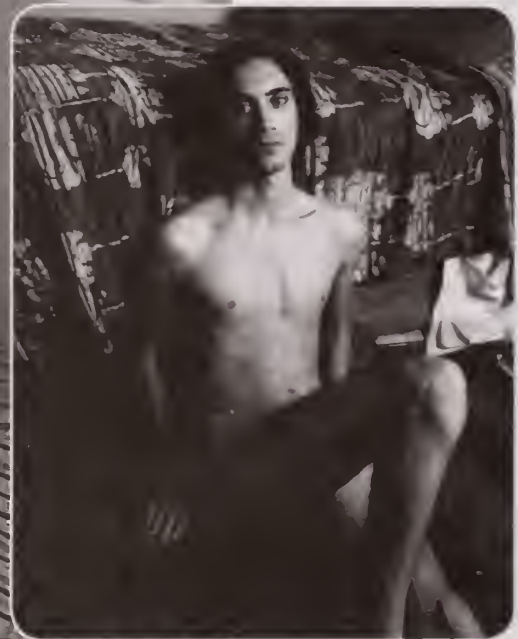


# New Men About Town

a photo essay in four parts

photo this page by Ryan Pfluger

clamor magazine.org fall 2006 clamor 77



## Meeting the Men of Ryan Pfluger

Ryan Pfluger is a 21-year-old gay photographer out of New York who has been shooting for about three years now. He focuses on a highly stylized autobiographic mixture of the sentimental, the emotionally honest, and the mysterious that challenges viewers to look at lifestyles and bodies they are unaccustomed to seeing fully exposed. In his latest series, "The Men I've Met" (2005-Present), Pfluger documents his relationships with male friends, acquaintances, and strangers in a light of uneasy photographic intimacy.

Taboo for nearly five centuries, and still scarce in comparison to the female nude, the naked or semi-naked male body continues to evoke fear and anxiety in a culture unwilling to own up to its biases and vulnerability. Pfluger's men are at home, still, and often in repose. Most of these bodies are not those typically seen in male nudes: athletes, action heroes, or noble savages. When they are, their normal roles are displaced by their nudity, their bodies at rest, and their gazes back at or just past the camera. This work confronts prejudice against the male nude in photography

by recontextualizing the male body within the forces that react to it and seek to control its challenge.

Inspired by photographers ranging from Nan Goldin and Mark Morrisroe to David LaChapelle, Pfluger transgresses the cultural and historical boundaries imposed on the naked male body by presenting it as something more and something less than what is accepted. We are continuing to learn to look at men, and Pfluger's lens is helping us along the way.

-Brian Bergen-Aurand



## Michele Crowe on Michele Crowe

Photography has always been for me like a diary I write in my sleep and never remember writing. Many times instead of the imagery being a representation of a pre-existing story or concept, I find myself needing to create a body of work without even knowing why. There is no planning or brainstorming, only images and execution. Then, only in retrospect can I analyze the images and piece together what my subconscious is trying to say. Photography has always taught me as much about myself as about others.

So what has this series taught me about my feelings on the male form? The man is a very powerful and beautiful force. He can be strong and masculine, yet humble and vulnerable. As the roles between men and women become less defined, men gain sensitivity yet keep their strength. Danny, alone in his chair, is a man in the purest form. You see his lines, muscles, contours and also a sense of vulnerability and kindness. When juxtaposed with the women he looks capable and dominant. But as the women get stronger and start to take on some of those dominant qualities, you see one striking back and reducing his masculine role in the relationship. This is not a study on feminism or strength of women, but a testament to the ever-changing role of man. Men play all parts now, the victor and the victim, and I hope this shows how much more versatile the male subject has become.

*Michele lives in Brooklyn and continues to study all aspects of life through her imagery and ever changing thought process. Please visit more of her work at: [www.michelecrowe.com](http://www.michelecrowe.com).*





### Manorexia Through the Lens of Tod Seelie

Tod and I have been talking about bodies and photography for almost ten years.

Now that you're seeing them in black and white, you should look at the seventeen websites he maintains (among them, [ofquiet.com](http://ofquiet.com) and [everydayilive.com](http://everydayilive.com)) to find his lonely, vulnerable, wistful, affecting travel photos and portraits. I look at these photos, and I ask myself about what U.S. culture says about thinness and masculinity. Fat bodies are co-inscribed with femme and disgust (no accident there), but what is the expectation of thin male bodies? These pictures feel like an inspection to me. I wonder about the cultural value of male bodies, what a male body norm is, and if an erotic ideal exists of thin men (and I think it does), and what it says about us when we subscribe to it, or don't.

-Laura Mintz





## And/Or

This piece is a work in progress and normally displayed in color. This project is an exploration of how social and cultural ideas may influence one man's apprehension of a male nude from another culture. This apprehension may be more clinical than sexual. Each part of the subject's body is photographed separately to give the viewer a more in-depth look at the other's body.

*-Justin Carter*



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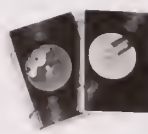
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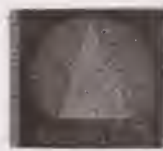
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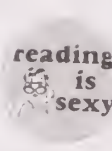
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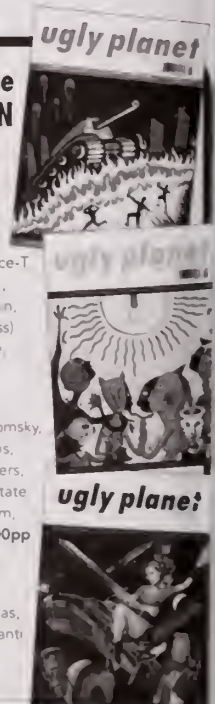
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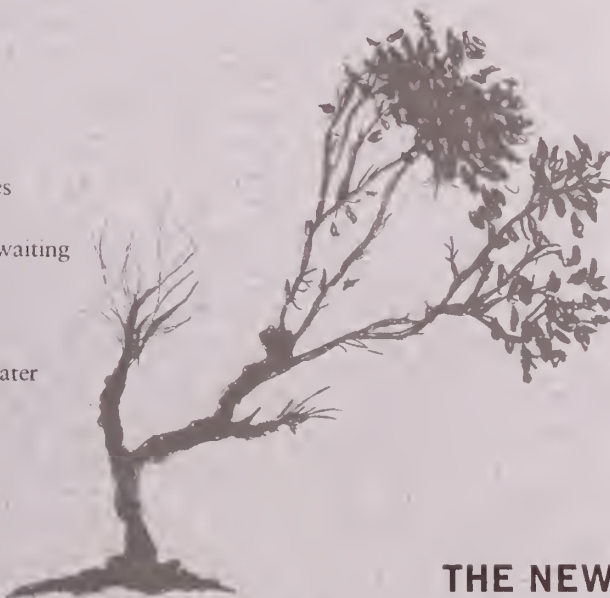
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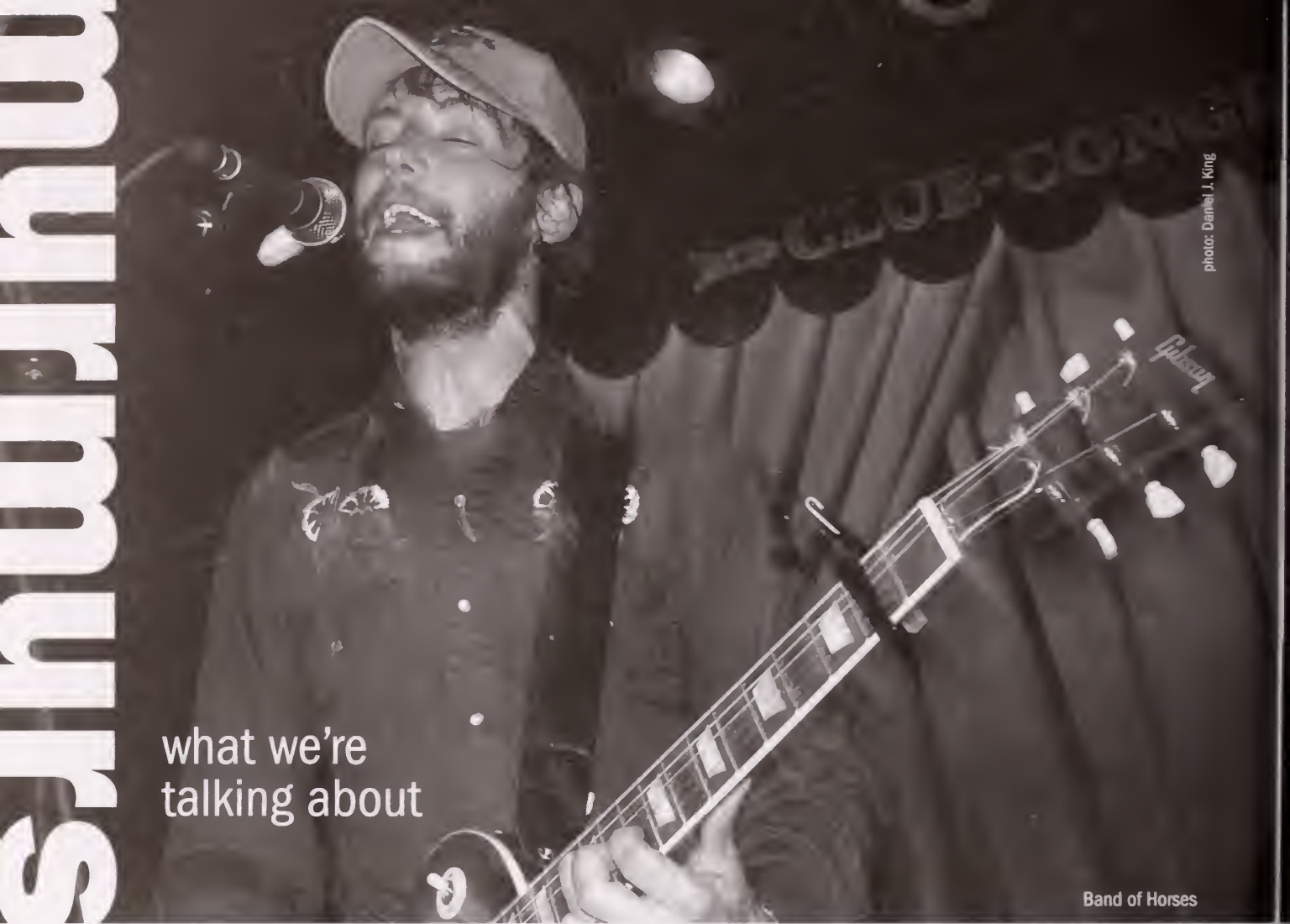


photo: Daniel J. King

CLAMOR

## what we're talking about

Band of Horses

**Barr**  
*Beyond Reinforced Jewel Case*  
5RC, 2005  
[www.5rc.com](http://www.5rc.com)

*What is this?* Every once in a while a recording comes along that is so befuddlement-inducing it can't even really be defined, much less evaluated. It's been a long time since I've heard a recording like that, but this is a good example of one. It's almost pointless to try to describe the Barr sound in print. "Obsessive-compulsive hip-hop" only begins to hint at what this music actually is.

The album begins with these words: "How do you start something? You start it. . . How do you introduce something? You start it. Little hands reading at the store, it has started already. It has really, really begun already, for sure." This intro suggests the kind of irritating self-consciousness that taints the worst of indie music, but that isn't really what this is.

At his best, Barr manages to infuse his whacked out, staccato monologues, delivered deadpan over spare drum and keyboard accompaniment, with something genuinely affirming and cool. The lyrical content ranges from willfully absurd

to painfully personal: "Did you get the memo? I have been in therapy for my OCD since January and I've gone off my meds and I don't hug as much and as hard."

In the end, Barr just *is*. The album is full of words: densely packed, tightly flowing, intense clusters of words. But somehow words can't describe it. Listen.  
-Mike Day

**Band of Horses**  
Live at the Congress in Tucson – June 28, 2006  
Sub Pop Records  
[www.subpop.com](http://www.subpop.com)

Seeing Band of Horses lead singer at the bar at the Historic Hotel Congress, I thought I'd do something I rarely do when I'm at a show I plan to write about — introduce myself. For my money, there's nothing more awkward than rolling up to someone in a band to let them know that you love their music and you're there to write about them for a magazine. Embracing that awkwardness, I walked up to Ben Bridwell and told him just that. His polite thanks would later be revealed to be more-than-polite considering they had just arrived for the show after a 6+ hour in a tow truck after their van broke down in El Paso.

What would be described by Bridwell the next day to a Phoenix audience as a shitty show, was anything but from where I stood. BoH powered through a short set of songs primarily from their recently released full-length *Everything All The Time*, earning and exceeding all comparisons to Built To Spill, Flaming Lips, and labelmates The Shins. Give BoH a minute of your time. You'll find yourself asking them to stay a lot longer.  
-Jason Kucsma

**The Ex**  
*Singles. Period. The Vinyl Years 1980-1990*  
Touch & Go Records, 2005  
[www.touchandgo.com](http://www.touchandgo.com)

The Ex is a band that every *Clamor* reader should dig. In their twenty-plus years, they've changed from Gang of Four-influenced propagandists to being practitioners of a detailed post-punk art rock to a gifted group of improvisers constantly reexamining their boundaries. They remain open to the moment and fearlessly committed to an idea of politics that inspires both action and admiration.

Since forming in 1979, the Ex has cut a wide swath. Inspired by the open palette of Crass and Chumbawamba, the Ex created rhythmically



complex pieces with noisy guitar and sometimes shouted vocals from GW Sok and Katherina, their percussionist. Along with Terrie on guitar and, until 2003, Luc on bass, they formed the core of the Ex. Using the openness of the form, they recorded with artists as dissimilar as Sonic Youth chief Thurston Moore, Euro-free perc pioneer Han Bennink, and veteran art rock cellist Tom Cora, whose two full-length collaborations with the Ex (*Scrabbling at the Lock* and *And the Weathermen Shrugged Their Shoulders*) are a high point in the catalog. They've worked with dance troupes, done countless benefits, and recently toured Ethiopia and Eritrea, where they collaborated with local musicians. Sok and Katherina never preach (okay, rarely preach) and clearly realize that political art always ends up with a certain ambivalence. Hard questions – about the culture of the political and the politics of culture – are the Ex's stock-in-trade and they don't let themselves off any easier than they do anyone else.

So what do the records sound like? This one, a compilation of their '80s 7"s, starts at the beginning with their first release, *All Corpses Smell the Same*, a four-song from 1980. This and several subsequent records show the influence of leftist punks like Gang of Four and more than make up for in sincerity what they sometimes lack in subtlety. By the fifth record, 1983's *Gonna Rob the Sperm Bank*, you begin to recognize the growth that the Ex is showing and by the end of this 23-song cd, you clearly understand how the Ex began using punk structures less and punk ideology more in building their sound. Their collaboration with Iraqi Kurdish band Awara, "Enough is Enough" makes clear how they collaborate and find space for non-punk noises. Taken together, this compilation serves as a valuable roadmap to how the Ex developed into what they now are while being entertaining and engrossing at the same time.

If all of this sounds really *worthy* and Sting-like, don't let that scare you. There is a reason NPR hasn't profiled the Ex – the music is loud, smart, and keeps a sense of humor. Go to their website and buy some of these records. Buy this compi-

lation, buy *Scrabbling....*, buy *Aural Guerilla*, and buy 2004's brilliant double CD *Turn*, on which Rozemarie Keener's bowed upright bass often echoes Cora's cello. You'll wonder where you've been for the last twenty years.

-Keith McCrea

### Hairshirt

*Lover Politician*  
Contraphonic Music, 2006  
www.contraphonic.com

Hairshirt is approximately what the future of music sounded like in 1989. The Detroit three-piece wanders from atmospheric ambience to fairly straightforward guitar rock on this five song EP, going in a few directions from their home base of synthy new wave. On one song, "Snake Bite," singer Amir Husak sounds a bit like a Bosnian Dickie Barrett, and at times his voice gets a little Lou Reed-y, but for the most part this guy sounds like himself – gravelly and earnest, a man who purportedly learned English from Iggy Pop records. The effects-heavy guitar and aforementioned earnest singing are at the heart of these minimalist tracks, which convey the effort with which they were built. There's also a discrepancy between the dark moodiness of his voice and the buoyant major key instrumentation. According to the liner notes, this was recorded, mixed and produced in "countless bedroom studios" and the corresponding thinness of most of the tracks reflects that plural placelessness. I just wish this *Lover Politician* had something more to sink my teeth into, something to carry with me once its half-hour was up.

-Christine Femia

### Haram

s/t  
Lovitt Records, 2006  
www.lovitt.com

Sweltering summer night in the pits of suburban Connecticut and I'm doing what I can to stay hydrated and conscious. They're pumping air-conditioned cool through the VFW hall so the kids are uncharacteristically stay inside and watch

every band. One of those bands is Virginia's Haram. This, their debut album, packages the energy and raw power evinced that night into a handy, portable disc (or record).

Thanks to impeccable production (kudos to Jim Siegel), the album sounds like the band is right there in front of you kicking ass and sweating and spitting all over you. Haram roll out a potent brew of rock not too far removed from classically indie-bred guitar-rocking acts like Drive Like Jehu or Hoover. Indeed, the DC sound seeped down I-95 to infect these Richmond and outlying area boys. You have your discordant and pulsing twin guitar attack, the raspy, shouting (though not over-the-top, kick your grandmother in the teeth scream-o blabbering assault), the 4/4 rhythms that blend into off-time episodes at the drop of a Stetson hat.

"Fade Away" sums up this approach well, a more sedate, though nevertheless gripping slab of musical majesty. You can feel more than a passing nod to Sonic Youth here and elsewhere, particularly in the middle of "Out of Tune." "Plastic Hearts" reveals their roots a bit (*City of Caterpillar*, p.g. 99), with a more drawn-out, spaced-out guitar riff a la Godspeed You! Black Emperor. All of it reveals the band's latent penchant for a diversity of sound soon to come.

-Casey Boland

### Heartless Bastards

*All This Time*  
Fat Possum Records, 2006  
www.fatpossumrecords.com

On their second full length, the Heartless Bastards, apart from having a catchy name, write good songs. That's what it comes down to. If a band can write a tune and sound strong and urgent performing it, live or recorded, they will succeed. Front-person, Erika Wennerstrom, is frequently compared to Janis Joplin. Although Wennerstrom and her band are attempting something completely different, the comparison seems valid. They do have obvious similarities, but overall the tie between the two is overplayed. As a three piece combo, the band explores a number of different rock landscapes. "Brazen" has amid tempo drum shuffle that stands out from the rest. But with the good is the bad and the following track sports some questionable vocal gymnastics. Again Wennerstrom does have an interesting voice, but the songs still fall flat lyrically. The final track leaves off on a dragged out downer. The band has a lot to say, so at least it's genuine. Competent and almost compelling.

-Dave Cantor

### Honor Role

"1982" 7"  
No Way Records, 2006  
www.nowayrecords.com

I love it when records like this come out of nowhere. Honor Role was a three-piece first wave

photo: Brian Niesz



hardcore band from Richmond, Virginia. No Way Records has done fans of this genre a great service by committing the band's side of their '82 split cassette with Graven Image to wax. Nine songs in 7 minutes will clue you in, but I'll add early Gang Green and Necros as reference points. Snotty vocals that could've come from a 12 year-old and totally bare bones production add to the authentic '82 vibe – fast as fuck and furious. Lyrics are simple yet appropriate – change one line of this: "Fighting for the Land of The Free/Would President Reagan Die For ME?" and it would be relevant right now. A raging release.

-Chad Kelsey

#### Khanate

*Capture & Release*

Hydra Head Records, 2005

www.hydrahead.com

While it seems fair to apply the term "metal" loosely to Khanate's dark, crushing, negative, and cold sound, this isn't like the stuff you listened to in high school. While other metal bands *sing* about or present an *image* of evil, Khanate seems a bit closer to an actual *incarnation* of evil: a lumbering, slaving, depraved beast bent on your destruction.

This is a prime example of the genre known as "doom metal," which sounds kind of like the Melvins, only 800 times slower. The beat comes about once a minute. The riffs, if you can even call them that, are so stretched out you'll never

of others but self-hatred, acknowledging that attempts to love only result in more and stronger hate: "I release, and everything you are is on the ground. You are blood, that's all."

My favorite of the two tracks here (yes, there are only two tracks, but together they consume all of 43 minutes) is the second, "Release." It seems to breathe a bit more than the first. It has some quiet and almost reflective portions. It inhales and exhales and slobbers all over itself and you.

This band includes members of Burning Witch, Atomsmasher, Sun O))) , Blind Idiot God, and more. If you like any of those bands, or if for whatever reason you're looking for a blast of intense negativity to darken your day, this is your album.

-Mike Day

#### Lair of the Minotaur

*The Ultimate Destroyer*

Southern Lord, 2006

www.southernlord.com

Three guys see the need for a Greek mythology-based metal band and decide that they themselves are up to the challenge. This is pure metal with all the standard trappings, coming off like a mixture of Celtic Frost and Black Sabbath but with more "modern" metal vocals. It's slow to mid tempo and punishing, with relentless riffing and a HUGE guitar sound that is loud as all get out without being transparent or slick sounding. Think midrange, man, assloads of Midrange. It

also has a groovy 4/4 swagger to many of the parts, giving it a harsh 70's rock vibe much like Entombed's almighty "Wolverine Blues" LP had, making it very suitable for headbanging, beer drinking, etc. Add to all this the totally over the top lyrics (uh, how about "Athena swore revenge on Medusa/ With repugnant tusks of a swine" sung without irony? Okay, a tiny bit of irony . . .) and we have the greatest straight up metal album in ages. It rocks, and it rocks fuckin' hard. Oh, and if I ever decide to get another Doberman (*ed.note RIP Nikkki*), I'm gonna christen him/her the "Grisly Hound of the Pit." For real.

-Chad Kelsey

#### Jamie Lidell

*Multiply Additions*

Warp, 2006

www.warprecords.com

Jamie Lidell's debut, *Muddlin' Gears*, was dull. Sure, it was a quality recording that was accomplished in its own right, but it offered little to set itself apart from the crowd. It was only when Lidell began infusing northern soul into his brand of IDM on his sophomore release, *Multiply*, that others began to take notice. For this reason, it seems silly that Warp would want to further promote the record with somewhat tra-

ditional IDM remixes of his music. Of course, the formula is fairly standard: allow the brightest stars of the genre's galaxy to remix an up-and-coming artist's work to lend him their light; however, Lidell possesses such an acute understanding of each song's shape and intent that his reinventions of his own work outshine those of super giants such as Four Tet and Luke Vibert. The mixes by other artists all feel too cluttered; they take the focus off of Lidell's incredible voice and shift it to a mess of unnecessary whirs and bangs. Lidell's contributions, on the other hand, keep the focus on his vocals while highlighting a feature that the original didn't illuminate. Sadly, Lidell only provides three reinventions on this EP (one remix and two live tracks), which may not provide reason for fans of Lidell's to purchase this EP; however, if you've never heard *Multiply*, *Multiply Additions* could be a great starting point, one that will leave you delightfully surprised when you backtrack and pick up *Multiply*.

-Ross Reilly

#### Love Equals Death

*Nightmerica*

Fat Wreck Chords, 2006

Fatwreck.com, Loveequalsdeath.com

Sounding at times like a mid-to-late-90s melodic skate-punk band, a la Pennywise, to AFI-meets-Alkaline Trio-esque haunting "horror punk" darkness, Love Equals Death maybe trying too hard. While they've more than proven themselves as skilled musicians, cutting time in Tsunami Bomb and Loose Change, among others, Love Equals Death can't seem to find its stride. With some semi-politically charged songs about dropping bombs to I-wear-black-eyeliner-because-I'm-so-emo-and-my-heart-aches, to fist-pumping youth anthems, the band is just too far off the map to be taken seriously. The genre changes are a little too abrasive.

Once you get through the clichéd use of dark imagery and overly ambitious swagger, there are some solid things working here, namely, the ability to write good songs, even if they abandon innovation for imitation. With all that said, *Nightmerica* will no doubt be the soundtrack to 13-year-old life this summer.

-Matt Kiser

#### Ethan Miller & Kate Boverman

*If All the Land Would Rise*

Riot Folk, 2005

www.riotfolk.com

Now is a fertile time to release a protest record, and Ethan Miller and Kate Boverman have gone ahead and done just that with their first team effort, *If All the Land Would Rise*. With songs about everything from Christian hypocrisy to Pennsylvania Mining, racism to the WTO, this duo – partners in love and folk music – wants to make the world a better place. They don't even believe in copyrights, if that sheds any light. A

photo: Kill Rock Stars

Mecca Normal



recognize them unless you hold your finger on the fast-forward button. The bass is a pool of oily sludge in which you'd be hard-pressed to distinguish any specific notes.

Oh, and the lyrics. Here is another attribute that distinguishes this music from the metal of by-gone days. The lyrics are full of not just hatred



number of these tracks are catchy enough, but their arrangements are often a little too simple and the lyrics fairly general. The pair is most successful at evoking an emotional response in the lovely, and tragic, "Simple Dirt," where the old idiom "the personal is political" bears out as Miller sings from the specific perspective of a lifelong farmer whose family industry, along with its history, is getting swallowed and destroyed by corporate and mechanical McAmerica. It's here and seldom elsewhere that he seems to be singing from a different part of his body than on the rest of the songs, where his singing seems to almost be smiling in its lilt, sounding like a concerted effort to sound like a cheerful peacenik even when the lyrics are rightfully angry. "Riot Folk" suggests revolution, and these folks making this album are certainly on board for the fight, but saying something more clever or something new might do more to mobilize rather than simply join the chorus.

-Christine Femia

### Mecca Normal

*The Observer*

Kill Rock Stars, 2006

[www.killrockstars.com](http://www.killrockstars.com)

Dating is learning by immersion. You learn more about someone faster than in any other day-to-day experience. The stimulus can be overwhelming – watching them, watching them watch you, watching yourself – all while sharing some of your most intimate moments. Combine the intensity of a first date with the accelerated intimacy of the internet and dating vertigo increases. You can feel like you know someone, *really* know someone, without ever having seen them walk, heard their voice, or followed their gestures.

The new record from Mecca Normal, the long-running duo made up of vocalist Jean Smith and guitarist David Lester, is about Smith's experiences with online dating. One of my favorite qualities Mecca Normal, from a story about their "Black Wedge" tour in an early Maximum Rock 'n' Roll through today, is the degree of democracy they share and the way they use it to fill space with sparse instrumentation. On this record that is less in evidence, but the experiment in conceptual writing makes up for it. Smith's observations about online dating are funny, fascinating, and sometimes cringe-worthy.

Smith, as she comes across here, is a pretty fearless dater and puts up with dating's vagaries with an even temper. Even when reporting tedious or self-absorbed behavior amongst her suitors, she never seems pissed. Bored, irritable, and world-weary, sure, but not pissed and it's that generosity that makes her dispatches from the dating front so entertaining. She doesn't seem like she's putting up walls with her wariness in "Attraction is Ephemeral." When she's calling out the callous behavior behind internet personas on "I'll Call You," she's making her

point without victimology. And when, on the album's 13-minute centerpiece "Fallen Skier," she sketches a perpetual student and ski bum who's not exactly a fine prospect, she does so without malice – even if you end up hating the guy around minute six.

Smith's voice is a distinctive instrument. It's powerful without belting and sounds unstudied and DIY. I've always found it beautiful, but not sexy. That lack of sexiness is used to great effect here as it lends a conversational quality to even the most involved melodies and reminds you that you're hearing a story being told, not watching one unfold. David Lester's guitar playing is always fascinating – Cocteau Twins, Television, punk power chords – even when the songs seem like background music for the lyrics, as they sometimes do here.

With Jean Smith's skills as a writer, she could easily dash off a dating book a la *He's Just Not That Into You* and few people could bring off a line like "he stretched the condom like he was making a balloon animal." *The Observer* reminds us that while dating is a fascinating experience, it isn't all interesting conversations with interesting people. But it can make for great (and sometimes embarrassing) stories born of patience, perseverance, and faith in other people.

-Keith McCreia

### Southern Culture on the Skids

*Doublewide and Live*

Yep Roc Record 2006

[www.yeproc.com](http://www.yeproc.com)

Break open the sour mash and beer, fire up that there BBQ, throw them catfish on the skillet. It's Southern Culture on the Skids (SCOTS).

This N.C. based trio have been plugging away at their swamp trash garage blues surf rockabilly thing for 20 years so far. But anyone that sounds this enthusiastic a couple of decades later is okay by me. In fact anyone who writes a song paying tribute to big hair and the '69 El Camino is also fairly high up there.

Their music is almost beyond criticism because it isn't there for people to mull over. I could call it kitsch and retro and say that it's somewhere between the B52's and The Cramps but that'd miss the point, which is to dance instead of ponder. SCOTS's sound is possessed by the spirit of somewhere around 1960: the soundtrack to one of those parties where the details are a little hazy and you didn't catch the name of the person you woke up with. In fact, this live recording smells of spilt beer, wheezy air conditioning and dingy juke joints and the only way I can really describe it is by making up words. Swamp-zuberant! Riff-eriffic! Reverb-erendous! The band whips up a hurricane of sound that would have Michael Brown hiding under his desk and there are more hooks in most songs than in a yel-

low mouth fisherman's tackle box. If this music doesn't raise a smile and a tapping foot then you are probably dead and if Jack Rabbit Slim's was holding a crawfish boil then SCOTS would be the house band.

The album probably works best as a souvenir of one of the shows and an advert for the next one. In fact I suggest you look them up and go see them immediately. Better still, throw a party and book them. Twang-tastic!

-Saltydog

### Spit for Athena

*Piss is Perfect*

Friction Records, 2005

[www.frictionrecords.net](http://www.frictionrecords.net)

Once I hopped off the Greyhound in Iowa City and wandered around until I found a place called the "Hall Mall." It was an office building that had been co-opted by people who envisioned a punky, non-conformist shopping mall; the Hall Mall featured a tattoo and piercing parlor, a head shop and a zine store.

I frequently thought of the Hall Mall while listening to Spit for Athena's lively and screamy indie rock defined by introspective angst. The sound can only be described as Midwest DIY grunge, like landlocked kids renting out office spaces in an on-going attempt to create an identity and community that is not white middle-class and politically "in the center." Spit for Athena is a musically-gifted trio from Michigan, pouring out boy-pain – singer Levi Bailey croons "Sometimes I think about ending it all but mostly I just think about fucking/ dairy products are hard on your digestive system" in "Rubble Yell." Even if Spit for Athena's moody grunge sound is nothing particularly new, it brought back good memories of surprise meetings with non-conforming kids scattered across the belly of this country.

-Jessica Whatcott

### The Sea, Like Lead/Belegost

*Split CD*

Electric Human Project &

Hard Travelin' Records, 2006

[www.electrichumanproject.com](http://www.electrichumanproject.com)

Somewhere in the aftermath of Mogwai's colossal, crushing introduction *Young Team*, scores of indie-minded musicians decided that ambient, guitar-soaked soundscapes vacillating between loud and quiet passages were worthwhile stock in rock trades. Godspeed You! Black Emperor upped the ante, and with the 21<sup>st</sup> century came the flood of bands wielding Telecaster guitars blasted through Fender Twins and Vox amps to deafening degrees (see: Explosions in the Sky, Pelican, Mono). Singing? Who needs that? This genre thrives on mood, and nothing ruins mood more than words. This is epic music. Think Odysseus or Beowulf come to life as rock bands.

The Sea, Like Lead and Belegost share a CD to explore these tumbling, shifting waters, to slow, hair-swinging effect. It may be three songs, but that's 41 minutes and 21 seconds of music. Both bands sound a bit too similar to be sharing such quarters together. Still, they lavish upon us captivating (if somewhat daunting and attention-testing) music.

While listening to this album, I imagined myself crouched down, sweating and petrified, on a small boat sailing up that river in Apocalypse Now. The locals throw their arrows through the white, cotton-ball fog. And then we're out in the vast black night, the sky aglow with the fireworks of soldiers and rebels battling over a bridge. That bridge will be won and lost and destroyed every night. It will be rebuilt every day, only to fall once again. This album, friends, is this torrid saga's soundtrack.

-Casey Boland

### The Streets

*The Hardest Way to Make an Easy Living*

Vice Recordings 2006

[www.vice-recordings.com](http://www.vice-recordings.com)

After two albums Mike Skinner became England's first proper bedroom producer superstar. "Original Pirate Material" and "A Grand Don't Come for Free" were a revelation. Skinner gleefully threw urban styles together and rapped in an unfashionable Birmingham accent, turning the experience of young British males, with its beer drinking, prosaic drug taking, and shambling mating rituals, into a set of witty and catchy tunes.

This succinct third album is a good listen but a curate's egg. One the one hand he extends the simple but poignantly effective emotion of "Dry Your Eyes" into songs such as "Never Went to Church," a tribute to his late father. On the other hand . . .

It took Pink Floyd 15 years to hit "The Wall." It took Skinner about 15 months to come up with his own take on the paranoid star, for whom fame is a lonely and hollow treadmill. In "When You Wasn't Famous" he retreads "Fit but You Know It," reminiscing about crack-fuelled sex with a bimette pop starlet, whilst complaining that trying to shag other pop stars is harder than shagging groupies. In the title song and "Prangin' Out" he complains about his manager and fears being seen as an average hung-over bloke as another conquest sleeps in the other room. This fear extends to the "toilet papers" – the tabloid press, and the fact that they might discover his sex, drug, alcohol and gambling habits.

I applaud him on his often brutal honesty, and he retains the storytelling skills and ability to drop pearls of eloquence into the chatter. But Skinner has encountered the classic problem that afflicts so many stars. They find that their previously

"real" subject matter is now the "unreal" world of five star hotel rooms and free drugs. The world behind the velvet rope of the VIP area.

-Saltydog

### The Stills

*Without Feathers*

Vice/Atlantic, 2006

[www.vice-recordings.com](http://www.vice-recordings.com)

The Stills' sophomore record sees them moving away from the '80s influence that made their debut such a hit with the tight pants crowd. Instead, they are channeling the spirit of the super sounds of the seventies. *Without Feathers* contains 12 tracks of mellow, melancholy rock. It opens with "In the Beginning," which combines chugging guitars, an organ, and lyrics like "It's just never what it was in the beginning." They retain their British mope-rock influence, but it is tempered with a generous dose of sunshine and bellbottoms.

This album reminded me a little of the Arcade Fire, with its epic, ambitious songs, and intricate orchestration. However, *Without Feathers* is less theatrical than the Arcade Fire, less David Bowie and more Big Star. The disc is equal parts Kinks, early electric Dylan, Pink Floyd, and '90s Brit rock. The lyrics are solid throughout, capturing a sense of regret, sadness, and nostalgia, and even when they drop dubious lines like "helicopters are chasing our spirits into the sea," it's sung with such passion and sincerity that it works.

If you feel like being cheered up and bummed out at the same time, or you want indulge in some '70s worship without having to dig into your mom's Carpenters albums, give *Without Feathers* a spin. So does this mean Interpol's next album is going to have a lot of sitars?

-Patrick Sean Taylor

### Volumen

*Science Faction*

Wantage USA, 2006

[www.volumen.net](http://www.volumen.net)

Volumen hail from Missoula, Montana, and are doing their best to put their hometown on the map. *Science Faction* was recorded over a period of several years, and it shows in the radically varying styles on the album. The disc is all over the place, from the Blues Explosiony "Side of a Box" to the Britpop "Lush & Co." to the punk of "Orson Welles Was Right" to the heavy metal instrumentals of "Descolada" and "Dune."

With most bands, this schizophrenic lack of focus might render them listenable. Fortunately, Volumen are good enough to overcome their stylistic expenmentations. The only real missteps were the instrumentals – I'm sure they were tons of fun when they were all rocking out in the studio, but for the listeners at home, not so much. Musically and lyrically the band members add a touch

of humor and weirdness, but are serious enough that they don't come off as frivolous. They drop some brilliant lines like "I woke up today in my clothes/ Rips in my shoes exposing toes/ In an empty room," and, "I dunno what kind of guys you like, but maybe tonight I can be what you like?"

*Science Faction* is a very good album by a band doing their best to keep indie rock interesting. With a little more editing and self-control, these guys could be brilliant. Go Montana!

-Patrick Sean Taylor

### Year Future

*First World Fever*

GSL Records, 2006

[www.goldstandardlabs.com](http://www.goldstandardlabs.com)

Who suffers from first world fever? Can modern medicine sell us palliatives? Punk rock doesn't seek to answer such questions, just pose them. Year Future pushes a medley of issues, most exploring the meddling of the market in our personal lives. We are "buried alive for most of lives," shouts mouthpiece Sonny Kay. He quotes forefathers Fugazi, "we're not what we own." And he sums up macho-American militaristic attitude when he opines, "You'd still rather be cowboy than injun." Consider this band the injun.

Year Future whips up a potent punk roar on their debut full-length. With a few selections revamped from preceding EPs, the band explodes with a tightly wound detonation of punk fury. Yet Year Future demonstrates more than adequate musical skill and finesse. The delayed-guitar licks recall Dead Kennedys, and perhaps those progenitors of the form are a fair comparison. Both bands exhibit surgical-precision instrumentation propelled by a high-pitched singer bemoaning the fall of modern man in America. Yet Year Future embarks on its own path.

The careening and blistering "Hidden Hand" nicely introduces us to the caustic world of industrialized sickness. As with the other previously heard cuts, the song sounds fresh and reinvigorated thanks to the brand new rhythm section. "Monday" seethes with the dread and bile of facing the birth of yet another workweek.

Guitarist Rocky Crane deserves adulation for his resuscitating the tired, six-stringed form. Consult the strange effected-noises in "Rather Be Cowboy" or the arpeggio riffs of "Lord of the Rungs." The rhythm section of Chris Hathwell and Pete Lyman backs it all up with rumbling, tribal-like power. Listen to the ventable musical tempest of the disco-fied "Born into a Bruise" for evidence. This is a call to arms for our generation.

-Casey Boland

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## Against the Wall: Israel's Barrier to Peace

Michael Sorkin, Editor  
The New Press, 2005  
www.thenewpress.com

The seemingly intractable set of problems created by the Israeli/Palestinian situation is, in so many ways, central to our modern world. It encompasses splits in religion, social ideology, geography, and politics. It also has a widely resonant symbolic power and often reflects all our national and personal insecurities and conflicts.

I am no scholar of the almost impossible complexities of the situation, but I know that when I see corpses in an Israeli restaurant or dead children on the dusty streets of The West Bank I feel despair and anger. *Against the Wall* is an excellent reference book, one that will help any sympathetic observer face and understand the issues and arguments.

As a detailed and wide-ranging critique of the Security Wall this book is, of course, pretty sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. But beneath the sometimes obvious and one-eyed politics it is also manages to reflect what most sympathetic people feel – nothing is black and white. The Jewish people deserve their own state, but so do the Palestinians. Both deserve freedom and neither deserve to be blown up whilst shopping or on the way to work. Because many of the viewpoints expressed in this book are based in architectural and urbanist theory, the whole provides a general survey that goes beyond the blinkered shouting that often counts for argument when the Middle East is the topic. Ultimately *Against the Wall* is on the side of fairness and tolerance. Its impulse is towards a solution.

Sorkin has gathered a number of essays from many different contributors that dissect aspects of the Wall in both practical terms and as an idea. As such, the thoughtful opinions presented have meaning beyond the Middle East. For example, those who think a bloody great big wall along the Rio Grande is a good idea will find much in here to consider.

The choice of topics is wide-ranging, from post-modern philosophy through to architectural

description and on-the-ground reportage. The overall effect is profound. Sorkin builds an effective argument against the wall by looking at it from all sides, exposing the historical and philosophical complexities behind its conception, as well as the current effects and future implications of the policy. Taken individually and together, the essays in this collection build a compelling case against this wall specifically, and politically motivated walls in general. The Wall is not just the simplistic bomb-stopping solution that I thought it was. It is in fact the physical manifestation of a backward looking and bankrupt set of ideologies. The wall literally sets in stone a position that is declared temporary, but appears permanent. As the subtitle implies, it blocks the psychological and physical paths to peace.

As a polemic, *Against the Wall* is impassioned and very well formulated. But this book, for me, also acted as a uniquely detailed and fascinating source of information and context about a situation that has import far beyond those remote sun-bleached images of random violence we see on TV.

-Saltydog

## Crunchy Cons

Rod Dreher  
Crown Forum, 2006  
www.crownforum.com

This book is a manifestation of an emerging ideological tendency in America. Many conservatives are beginning to realize that the Republican Party no longer cares about their priorities, if it ever did. Conservatives who care about the local values of discreet communities, who want to defend their lifestyles against increased pornification, who believe that small farmers should have a chance against agribusiness, have finally started waking up to the fact that the GOP doesn't share their concerns. Rod Dreher, a former staffer at the *National Review*, has sketched an insightful critique of the GOP's bankruptcy, but goes horribly off the rails about what is to be done.

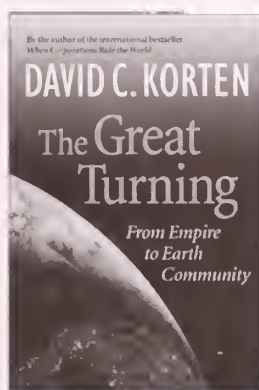
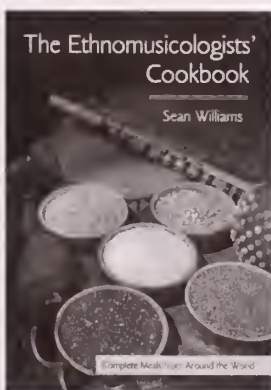
*Crunchy Cons* stands as a companion of sorts to *What's the Matter with Kansas?* by Thomas Frank. This book examines a different sort of conservative from those left behind by the capi-

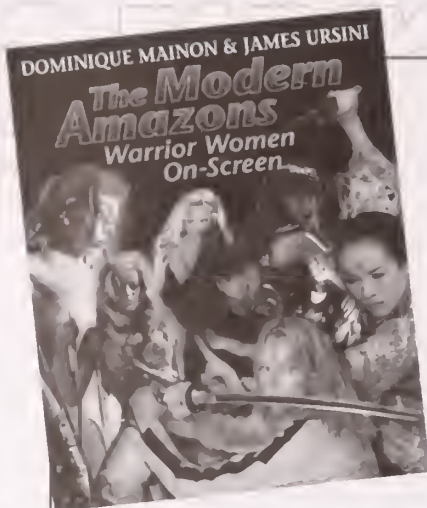
talist rapture in Frank's book (one of Dreher's protagonists, Presbyterian lawyer Caleb Stegall, even shares an area code with Frank's parents in affluent Northeast Kansas), but the alienation is the same: Today's Republican Party has no desire to conserve anything. It is in the consumption business. But where the conservatives in Frank's book remained steadfastly loyal to the GOP, the people we meet in *Crunchy Cons* are starting to realize that maybe Bush and Co. take them for granted while ignoring their concerns.

The cast of characters here is no less colorful. We meet people that I wouldn't mind living next to if they routinely forgot to vote: organic farmers, religious foodies, some genuine eccentrics, and conservatives who share the *haute bourgeois* pretensions of their blue-state counterparts among them. They genuinely care about the environmental depredations that sprawl, factory farming, and pollution cause. They are profoundly aware of the loss to families that shrinking incomes and the need for two wage earners causes. And they mourn the atomization that a rootless society – a society without organizations, cohesive communities, and adult friendships – causes. These people illustrate Dreher's view that conservatives should buy non genetically-modified foods and support organic farmers. They should skip the sprawl of McMansions and live in reasonably sized houses and build cohesive communities. They should ride bikes and walk instead of driving everywhere. They should care about the future of our environment. All these are laudable positions and, no doubt, ones common to most *Clamor* readers, if not all.

For some inexplicable reason, however, Dreher wants to make the GOP the place where he and his fellow "crunchy cons" can live and proselytize. Unfortunately, however, today's GOP is – first, last, and always – a party committed to nothing other than unbridled capitalism. No slow food, no organic gardening, no anti-sprawl ideas. Like Marxist-Leninists, there is no point in arguing with the GOP; their ideology explains everything with no other priorities entertained. Dreher's enthusiasm for the GOP invokes the same deluded pathos that people exhibit by pining for a mythic past when the Mafia was a principled organization. It is not for no reason that, in order to support his ideas, Dreher must extensively quote from Howard Kunstler, E.F. Schumacher, early socialist William Morris, and Jimmy Carter even – all men of the left.

It's almost charming how credulous Dreher seems about the party that he loves. Continually turning to abortion as a reason why "crunchy cons" couldn't possibly vote Democratic, he ignores an inconvenient fact or two. For example, in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, – a US territory that enables "Made in the USA" to be stamped on garments made in sweatshop conditions – multinational corporations force women to have abortions to keep





**The Modern Amazons:  
Warrior Women On-Screen**

Dominique Mainon and James Ursini  
Limelight Editions, 2006  
www.amadeuspress.com

At first, I was skeptical. As much as I criticize television and film, I've had a consistent weakness for on-screen women who could feasibly break through the TV set and kick my ass. Growing up, I wanted to be Wonder Woman, Cat Woman, and later, Sarah from *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*. Fairytales in which the princess waited ever-so-patiently in a tower for rescue never did much for me. Despite my penchant for violent, angry, and wicked women in film, I had low expectations for a book on the subject.

If there were ever a case for not judging a book by its cover, this is it. The cover to this 400-page text is splashed with images of female characters that are either gasping for breath after raging against the enemy, or in mid-orgasm. Hard to tell. But once inside, the authors make it known that they are not out to just titillate adolescent boys with pix of sweaty, sword-wielding women.

In the introduction, Mainon writes that their, "main goal in writing this book is to document and explore some of the many interesting action roles played by women actors over the years and note some of the trends and patterns, including the folkloric origins of many characters" (xxi). This book doesn't exist to simply celebrate female actors. It sets out to analyze the characters, films, and even genres.

Mainon and Ursini provide a set of guidelines for characters to be classified as warrior women. To be included in the book, the character must have several of the following traits: "fights in an aggressive and physical manner when required," "not merely a sidekick to a man," "part of a female-run organization or culture," "displays some level of kinship and sisterhood with her own gender," "uses classic warrior woman weapons and tools," "dressed and adorns herself in warrior garments," "independent and doesn't need a man to save her," "lives or comes from a 'lost civilization,'" and "may be homosexual, bisexual, or simply not desire men" (11-16). Using this classification, the authors cover characters appearing in films from 1914 to 2005.

Mainon and Ursini analyze, just to name a few, Lara Croft, Tank Girl, Xena, and Foxy Brown. They devote about twenty pages to *Kill Bill* alone, comparing The Bride to Elle Driver, her doppelganger. A whole chapter is dedicated to giant female characters that appear in mostly B-movies.

In a section about *The Fifth Element*, the authors write, "It is not accidental that in the early part of the movie the priests, who are involved in the ritual of salvation, and the scientists, who seek to reconstitute this being, all speak of the entity using masculine pronouns. They are unable to break out of the cultural box, which assumes that any thing with that power must be male" (179). The authors maintain this feminist perspective throughout this massive text. Following the chapter on superheroes, they discuss the "occupational hazards of superheroines" by bringing up a debate over whether or not female characters in comics suffer more than male characters. They note that, "Male heroes may suffer, but they generally come back stronger, their tragedy improving them in some other way. Women in comics don't get over their own rapes the way men get over watching their rapes take place" (165).

I was amazed by the breadth and depth that the authors covered in *The Modern Amazons*—cartoons, superheroes, vampires, blaxploitation films, you name it—writing about everyone from the well-known (Buffy) to the obscure (Ilsa) to the old standby (Pippi). This book provokes thought, which leads the reader to look at the films and shows discussed within in an entirely new way

-Kerri Provost

them at their sewing machines. The CNMI, overseen by the Bush Administration's Department of the Interior and lauded by evangelical former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay as a place that "represent(s) everything that is good about what we're trying to do in America," is practically a wholly-owned subsidiary of the GOP. And when the GOP had to choose between capitalism and stopping abortions in the CNMI, it unambiguously chose capitalism.

I also can't shake the feeling that Dreher is tired of being ridiculed as a philistine. His desire to be liked by his fellow bourgeoisie is palpable and his efforts to eccentric-up his conservative lifestyle are relentless. He and his wife are Catholic, but they attend an Orthodox church rather than a Roman one. He votes for right-wingers, but shops at co-ops. He shares the enthusiasm of lefty boomers for *A Prairie Home Companion* and he suggests that his Craftsman Bungalow would be inviting to a hobbit. There is a home for people who think like this — it's called the Democratic Party.

The chapter on the environment offers both the most interesting ideological arguments and proves the most frustrating. Here Dreher makes most clear that he understands the ideology of the GOP. He asks why the voters of Ellis County, TX continue to send anti-environment reactionary Joe Barton (League of Conservation Voters Rating for 2004 = Zero) to Congress when pollution is so thick that his "asthma-suffering relatives — all of us conservative Republicans — (are) sucking on inhalers and struggling to breathe." He even quotes Wendell Berry bemoaning the "the corporate totalitarianism which is rapidly consolidating as 'the global economy,'" but fails to follow up on it. Why, one wonders, would Dreher have any desire to be a member of any party that can be accurately called "totalitarian?"

To Rod Dreher, I offer this: The Republican Party hates you, dude, and please stop wearing Birkenstocks. Today's GOP is only interested in serving the needs of the owners of transnational capital, whether they're Russian oligarchs, conflict diamond traders, the Chinese government, or Saudi plutocrats who import "guest workers" to do jobs beneath them. This is the party whose leadership, represented by Giuliani and Bush — urged followers to *shop* in response to the attacks in the days after 9/11. All other priorities are irrelevant.

*Crunchy Cons* does a great job of diagnosing how destructive modern Republicanism is of the very things that conservatives should protect. But, of the cons that Dreher shows us, the most durable con is the one that keeps people like Dreher's *Crunchy Cons* voting Republican.

-Keith McCrea



**Earth Democracy:  
Justice, Sustainability, and Peace**

Vandana Shiva  
South End Press, 2005  
www.southendpress.org

In *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace*, award-winning author Vandana Shiva writes for a specific audience, assuming that her readership has a political science background and does not need the complicated concepts of economics broken down. There is nothing inherently wrong with writing what is not a beginner's guide type of book. However, as a composition instructor, one of the most difficult ideas I try to teach my students is the value of clear, interesting, and logically ordered writing. If one does not have a political science background, she has two challenges to deal with when reading this book – understanding complex jargon without the benefit of a glossary, and untangling what unfortunately amounts to bad writing.

With that said, I feel like the struggle to decipher this text is worthwhile. Shiva presents "Earth Democracy" as the polar opposite to the current brand of globalization. The ten principle of Earth Democracy are:

*All species, peoples, and cultures have intrinsic worth; the earth community is democracy of all life; diversity in nature and culture must be defended; all beings have a natural right to sustenance; Earth Democracy is based on living economies and economic democracy; living economies are built on local economies; Earth Democracy is a living democracy; Earth Democracy is based on living cultures; living cultures are life nourishing; and, Earth Democracy globalizes peace, care, and compassion. (9-11)*

She explains these ideas throughout the scrambled text, but in a subsection describing the desired move "from cultures of death to cultures of life," she writes, "Ahimsa, or nonviolence, is the basis of many faiths that have emerged on Indian soil. Translated into economics, nonviolence implies that our systems of production, trade, and consumption do not use up the ecological space of other species and other people" (116). She describes nonviolence as active, rather than passive. She shows nonviolence in action when she tells the stories of people who have fought against the corporations and walked away with small victories.

Before showing a handful of successes, Shiva spends most of the book detailing what globalization really looks like, especially for people of India. In what could be called a quest for food sovereignty, the author writes about how seeds and water are increasingly privatized. It is illegal for farmers to save their own seeds, yet the ones

available to them are modified and often fail to produce crops. As for water, Shiva explains the assault on the water supply by major soda manufacturers – Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola. She peppers the text with other alarming symptoms of globalization. In the chapter on living democracies, Shiva writes, "another example is the Indian government's recent decision to raise the permissible level of MSG (Monosodium Glutamate), which has been found to cause severe health problems such as asthma, in order to prioritize the expansion of fast food chains like KFC over people's health." (87) Though she does not mention this, it isn't difficult for the American reader to connect this bit of information with the USDA food pyramid here in the United States.

*Earth Democracy* inspires the reader to walk away from an earth-harming system and embrace local, sustainable economies, but it also forces the reader to examine the "capitalist and religious patriarchal" structures that make unrestrained globalization possible. Despite its messy writing style and organization, and Shiva's apparent belief in gender essentialism (i.e. women as natural nurturers), *Earth Democracy* is a meaningful and challenging book that should not be overlooked.

-Kerri Provost

**The Ethnomusicologists' Cookbook**

Sean Williams  
Routledge/Taylor & F, 2006  
www.taylorandfrancis.com

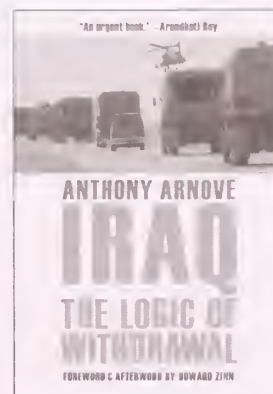
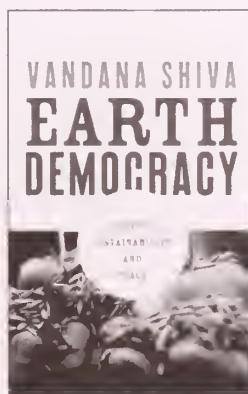
"This is a cookbook; not your average cookbook" is the profound understatement that opens the introduction by Williams, a professor of ethnomusicology at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. In stark contrast to the recent spate of "foodie" cookbooks full of glossy photographs and trendy ingredients, this is a very down-home book full of black-and-white photographs – many of which are so blurry and vague as to be actually unappetizing – and ingredients like powdered plantain fufu (Northern Ghana) and Spicy King brand Szechuan Salad Sauce (Sichuan, China). Where another cookbook might try to replicate the experience of getting cooking lessons from Mario Batali or Julia Child, this one does its best to replicate the experience of getting cooking les-

sons from a series of kindly grandmothers, complete with instructions for feeding tidbits to "little children helping in the kitchen" (Sweden). It's a delightful introduction to the culinary styles and history of 45 cultures from around the world.

The musical aspect arrives via anecdotes following each set of recipes. Each of the contributors to the collection traveled to a place to learn about its music and found that music and food were inextricably entwined, especially when one is entertaining guests.

Whether discussing the ancient tradition of marriage ceremonies in Sephardic Morocco or investigating the popularity of veganism among punk and hardcore bands in Brazil, each piece returns again and again to the idea that culture is best claimed, studied, and shared by creating music and meals together. Whether playing or cooking, improvisation is key, as is the idea of a familiar theme that is then embellished to provide variety. While there's no implication that all cultures are the same – quite the opposite – one does get a sense here of common goals and priorities around the world. Making music with others creates a harmonious mood. Feeding people is a way of saying, "Welcome," and, "I love you," and, "Share my bounty," no matter where you are. It's nearly impossible to come away from reading through these stories and recipes without a feeling of warmth for the ordinary people who created them, wherever they may be.

The cook must be willing to match this extensive preparation with a willingness to improvise, experiment, and adapt to the unfamiliar; even the most adventurous novice might want to have someone more experienced around to offer suggestions. Many instructions simply say things like "cook until done," or, "add flour until dough is the proper consistency." When preparing the Southern Appalachia-style cornbread, I thought, "Isn't that an awful lot of salt?" I stuck with the recipe and found out that to my taste it was indeed a lot of salt. (Someone from North Carolina might disagree with me.) Later, when baking the honey cake from the Romanian Jewish New York section, I halved the recipe, tossed in candied orange rind and currants instead of walnuts and raisins, and baked it in a loaf pan. It came



out perfectly. With this cookbook, I learned it's particularly important to pay attention to your instincts (or your own cultural training) and make whatever changes seem appropriate. And each set of recipes makes a complete meal for six people. Williams notes that few of us usually have frequent opportunities to cook for six, so most of the recipes are easily halved and all make good leftovers. To further assist the cook, the book's website will have downloadable shopping lists for each recipe, and the back of the book has a list of which recipes are (or can be easily modified to be) Kosher, vegetarian, and vegan.

It's not an unfamiliar lesson: many of my music teachers have taught me just the same thing. "Authentic" is a slippery term, as Williams notes, and can too easily become prescriptive rather than descriptive. I'll take Duke Ellington's advice instead: "If it sounds good, it is good."

-Rose Fox

### **The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community**

David Korten

Berrett-Koehler, 2006

<http://www.bkconnection.com/>

*The Great Turning* is a book that I probably would have loved ten years ago – big on non-specific macro-theories about how we need a cultural shift to avoid an impending ecological crisis. But author David Korten is apparently so convinced that his audience will agree with him that he sees no need to provide any details about how these changes will take place.

Korten claims that the alternative to "empire" and its culture of domination is a thing called "earth community," yet supplies very few examples of what "earth community" is. Maybe I'm just growing cynical but it seems like I have read one too many books that painstakingly detail the symptoms of an environmental crisis and then list "solutions" that the average reader has no power to enact.

Its disappointing then that in the entire book Korten only provides two examples of how cooperative structures might promote a "great turning" towards community in the face of ecological challenges (a ranch in Costa Rica where a manager gave employees more autonomy and saw improved performance as a result and the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), a sustainable business network Korten works with). One of the problems with Korten's "earth community" argument is that communities are complex, nuanced undertakings which rely heavily on details. Ask anyone who has lived at an intentional community whether details like decision-making, ownership, communication, and economic structures matter. Even the less all encompassing community structures and organizations that we may belong to can succeed or fail based on small details.

The lack of clarity and detail is all the more disappointing given Korten's background and credentials. Korten has a long history in the field of economic development and has been involved in environmental and global justice movements since as early as 1992 when he was a delegate at the Earth summit in Brazil and also played in key role in organizations like the International Forum on Globalization (IFFG), BALLE and YES magazine. With so much experience over the last 15 years one would expect more analysis of the potential for community both in social change movements as well as his own community in Washington State.

The material that Korten does provide can best be described as interesting but inconsistent. He includes his own mini-version of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, recounting historical incidents from the founders to the current administration but he never explores any one historical incident very long. He also explores the issue of the culture of empires starting in ancient times. But many of the arguments he makes about culture have already been thoroughly explored in Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* series nearly 15 years ago, or more recently Thom Hartman's *Last Hours of Ancient Sunlight*.

I really can't argue with the central thesis of Korten's book that successfully meeting the political and environmental challenges of the future will require a more cooperative era with different values and culture. But the book never really helps us to understand how such a scenario might take place. Community or the lack thereof is rooted in the places where we live. It's fascinating therefore that Korten never once mentions the community where he lives.

David Korten is a respected writer and organizer who has made many contributions to our understanding of globalization and corporate power in his previous writing. I'm sure fans of his will want to read this latest work. People who have never read him may want to start out with his earlier books on economics: *When Corporations Rule* and *The Post-Corporate World*

-Brad Johnson

### **Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal**

Anthony Arnove

The New Press, 2006

[www.thenewpress.com](http://www.thenewpress.com)

"I stress immediate withdrawal, as opposed to various proposals for a timetable for withdrawal, gradual withdrawal, or withdrawal when the situation in Iraq has 'stabilized' at some undefined point in the future." With this single sentence Anthony Arnove clearly states the premise of his book. Arnove steps into the raging political debate about when and how this war will end – A bold undertaking especially for a book that is a mere 105 pages of text.

Arnove, an activist and freelance writer, begins by arguing that assertions made by the Bush administration and the media at-large led to a false sense of urgency and incited within the American public the unchallenged belief that war with Iraq was justified. He then contrasts these early feelings of public support with a brutal picture of daily life in Iraq since the U.S. occupation began. "Physical insecurity for Iraqis has greatly increased . . . At any moment, Iraqis know their doors may be battered down by U.S. or British troops, with family members humiliated, arrested and taken off to be detained, tortured or murdered." Arnove then relates stories from articles taken from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* describing how U.S. soldiers treat the Iraqi people with unbridled cruelty. The impact of U.S. and British occupation, according to Arnove, places the Iraqi people in a more precarious situation than they were in prior to the start of the war.

Throughout this book Arnove stresses that this war is a "war of choice," one fought for economic and political reasons, despite the assertions of the Bush administration to the contrary. While Arnove paints a compelling picture that is emotionally and viscerally wrenching, he fails to provide an opposing viewpoint until the final chapters of this book. Arnove's myriad qualifications – he is an activist with a Ph.D and M.A. from Brown University – imply that this book will be a well-balanced argument for immediate withdrawal that provides an in-depth analysis of the opposing viewpoint. Arnove is an antiwar speaker and, as a result, this book reads like an extended speech.

It is not until the final chapters of this book that Arnove presents the reader with "eight reasons why the United States should leave Iraq immediately, addressing common arguments why the United States needs to 'stay'." The primary reason Arnove asserts for immediate withdrawal is that the Bush administration invaded Iraq based on a "series of deceptions." In contrast to the argument that Iraq housed weapons of mass destruction and was a training ground for terrorists, Arnove points out that no cache of weapons has ever been found. He then asserts that Iraq posed no real threat to the United States. This section provides valid arguments against occupation and could have been used as the book's underlying outline. Instead, it is relegated to a few pages at the end.

Overall, Arnove does provide compelling reasons to withdraw but those reasons need more support. Further examination of the opposing viewpoint, the one in favor of continued occupation, needs to be expanded. *Iraq: The Logic of Withdrawal* is a relevant work and adds substantially to the raging argument about whether the United States should withdraw or continue to occupy a foreign country with seemingly negative results.

-Karon Powell



## Ms. Films DIY Guide to Film and Video

Niku Arbabi, Editor  
www.msfilms.org

Check out any film list these days – the American Film Institute's 100 Best American Movies, or an Oscar history of Best Picture nominees – and what you may already suspect will be quickly confirmed: Films by women are conspicuously absent. Beeban Kidron, director of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) once said that film is the telling of our stories – and given that women make up less than ten percent of all directors, it's alarming how few of our stories are shaping the cultural psyche.

The essayists of the *Ms. Films DIY Guide* more than recognize the need to motivate women to express themselves as the creators of cinematic narrative. While the guide will be useful for any burgeoning filmmaker (regardless of gender), the number of essays authored by women is particularly inspiring for the female auteur – as is the story of Ms. Films, a non-profit organization that gives women the tools to break into filmmaking. They've grown from a small event to a buzzed-about annual festival and overall resource center for women creating media.

*The tone to this zine-styled guide is uncommon to the more conventional "introduction to film" books. It's insiderly, almost conspiratorial, initiating conversations that digress from formal film subjects as story rights and storyboards, timecode and lighting, marketing and post-production (though some of these traditional topics are touched upon too). Pat Doyen's article on camera-less filmmaking explores the process of scratching and painting on film directly – a win-win medium for filmmakers operating on a low budget who are especially interested in the experimental. Later, Doyen presents a thoroughly readable and rousing overview of Super-8 film, from its perks (cheap, accessible, and distinctive) to how to shoot with it (lots of light!) to how to edit it, à la DIY (project the film onto a white surface while taping it with a video camera). These essays are a highly creative and fun supplement to standard textbook fare, and offer adventuresome, road-less-traveled approaches for the filmmaking novice, from organizing your own DIY Drive-In to practical strategies for fundraising.*

If these pages have a weakness (aside from the occasional typo and weirdly out-of-date filmography of women directors), it's that the edition is too brief. Specifically, I was expecting more first-person articles like Lenn Keller's production diary of her film *Sightings* (1995) in which she explores the epic multitasking and roller-coaster reality of making a film. (There's also the pure, vicarious buzz for the reader when our struggling filmmaker shoots the killer scene or casts the perfect lead.) Yet however slim this volume may be, it's crammed with ideas, springboards,

reference books, a list of film festivals and film festival tips.

-Michelle Humphrey

## Pretend We're Dead: Capitalist Monsters in American Pop Culture

Annalee Newitz  
Duke University Press, August 2006  
www.dukeupress.edu

As a teenager I was plagued by dreams about friends and family members who had turned into zombies and were trying to get me. My mother always said it was because I watched too many scary movies. But to hear Annalee Newitz tell it in *Pretend We're Dead*, maybe I was reading too much Marx.

Newitz skillfully guides the reader through over a hundred years worth of pop culture monsters that reflect the horrors of capitalism in the United States. *Pretend We're Dead* discusses monsters as they appear in novels, short stories, and films in the form of serial killers, mad doctors, the undead, robots, and monsters of the culture industry. In each chapter, Newitz highlights narratives depicting "humans turned into monsters by capitalism. Mutated by backbreaking labor, driven insane by corporate conformity, or gorged on too many products of a money-hungry media industry." The "capitalist culture industry," Newitz explains, generates "gore-soaked narratives of social destruction" right alongside "happy fantasies of self-made men." The gore-soaked narratives, she argues, represent our cultural fears and anxieties about capitalism and physical horrors that manifest as we trudge through life "pretending we're dead."

A good example of how Newitz works it out is found in chapter 3, "The Undead: A Haunted Whiteness." She describes the Wes Craven movie *The People Under the Stairs*, about a Black teenage boy named Fool who gets trapped in the home of crazy, incestuous rich white people who own the run-down apartment building Fool's family lives in. Newitz interprets the movie as representing resistance to socially constructed monsters (insane rich white landlords) on the part of the inner-city Black folks (Fool and other tenants) and disenfranchised whites (the zombies living in the basement). *People* is just one of many narratives that Newitz believes stands as "a warning, and a hope" that the monsters capitalism creates can be resisted and destroyed.

Newitz's argument is stimulating, but her knowledge of horror films is what really drew me in. Let this stand as a warning to people who hate knowing the ending of a movie, this book reveals many plot lines. Rather than ruining the movie, Newitz inspired me to rent a few flicks I had missed, like *The People Under the Stairs*. Occasionally as I was roaming through the author's extensive descriptions of monster movies, I forgot where she was going with her argument. The

introduction is a good template of her argument to refer back to, but the book was sorely missing an epilogue.

Like a carnival haunted house, I enjoyed the ride even as I groaned at the occasional cheesy display. Finally, a book to link all my nightmares with my politics.

-Jessica Whatcott

## Rough Music

Tariq Ali  
Verso, 2006  
www.versobooks.com

In *Rough Music*, Tariq Ali explains and explores what most of us knew all along: Those in positions of power ignore the real wants and needs of the masses. They always have and they always will, unless of course the masses force the elected aristocracy to hear them. This concept rests unsoundly at the heart of the book. Its focus is upon Blair-era Britain in the dawn (or dusk) of the U.S. crusade against any and all labeled "terrorist," particularly after the ignominious events of September 11, 2001. Through careful analysis and cogent introspection, Ali lends his great talents as a writer and thinker to the task of sifting through the issues facing Britain and the world. His conclusion is certain: the government wages war ostensibly to stop it, yet perpetuates and increases the bloodshed.

Anyone using terms like "power" and "masses" treads a slippery slope. Who really holds power? Is there one, unilateral, linear "mass"? And does this power or this mass share the same view, vertically, horizontally and otherwise? Ali clearly avoids generalization. His aim is to examine Blair's response to "terrorism," specifically in the wake of the bombings of July 7, 2005.

He draws parallels between British official response to IRA bombings and current responses to terror acts. In both cases, the government rushed through laws regulating the rights of citizens, in effect curtailing many of these sacrosanct rights. In both cases, Ali contends that terror is not outlawed or in any way hindered. If anything, it grows through the nurturing of bitterness and hatred. It's clear Ali alludes to the U.S.'s habit of obliterating once-impervious bodies of fiercely-guarded civil liberties in the face of fearless (though cowardly, as the President is wont to say) foes. In no instance do we feel any safer. Ali argues we feel more terrified thanks to the government's ceaseless war against (for?) terror. He writes, "When the state uses terror in this fashion it unleashes a parallel response. The cycle of violence continues until a political solution is found."

Ali spends much time looking at media coverage and media's role in the terror-related issues in Britain. As in the U.S., he shows that most journalists and major media outlets rest comfortably

in the pockets of politicians. The media of Britain and the U.S., Ali believes, go out of their way to downplay any possible links between terrorist activity and either nation's respective foreign policy. He cuts deep to the chase when he contends, "To explain the cause is not to justify the consequence, but Blair and his toadies should be forced to confront what is now a widely held view across the political divide: the central British role in the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan and, more broadly, Britain's unquestioning support for the U.S.-Israeli war drive in the Middle East and across central Eurasia, has blown back in the shape of the London terrorist attacks."

Obscuring connections between such violence and policy has long been the government and the media's forte; see for instance the issue of Palestine. Iraq is no different. The media and the government it works for would rather we believe terrorists and any who oppose "us" do so out of blind hatred and psychopathic rage. The lines are drawn – "us" versus "them." Ali demonstrates that the media of Britain are just as guilty as its U.S. counterpart in perpetuating this myth.

-Casey Boland

#### Refused

Refused Are Fucking Dead DVD  
Epitaph  
www.epitaph.com

Posthumous band videos can truly be a tricky beast. Do you create a film that embraces what the band truly was? Do you try and create a new legacy? Or do you just give the fans what they want?

Refused is a band whose reputation has far, far outlived their celebrity at the time of their demise. They are a band whose average fan was under the age of 18 when they called it a day; a band whose primary fanbase (which is HUGE) never saw them perform live.

*Refused Are Fucking Dead* comes off as vilification of Refused more than praise. Though compiled by the band, you learn the truly self destructive and incredibly pretentious nature of the band at its demise. Refused is a band that imploded under its own weight and scenes such as the "New Noise" video overdubbed with opera, and artistic scenes of the band walking down deserted streets amplify that notion tenfold. Luckily, it is exactly what I wanted from a video retrospective.

-tv's seth anderson

#### Street Fight

Marshall Curry, director  
Marshall Curry Productions, 2005  
www.marshallcurry.com

I've been involved for 12 years in urban politics in a city where our mayor pled guilty in a real estate deal and a quarter of the city council for which I work and that mayor is currently under investigation. Our governor copped a plea on an ethics charge, our attorney general is under federal investigation, and the entire state and local Republican hierarchy, including two local GOP county chairmen and Toledo's highest Republican office holder (a county commissioner, the detestable Maggie Thurber) are targets of federal and state probes into laundering money for Bush/Cheney '04. I've worked on campaigns in Windsor and Toronto in Ontario, and Toledo and Lorain in Ohio, where I also managed a state-wide campaign and worked for senate and presidential campaigns. I've seen the sometimes ugly ways in which politics operates.

But the campaign activities of Newark, New Jersey Mayor Sharpe James that Marshall



Curry exposes in his excellent film *Street Fight* genuinely shock the conscience. Curry's film documents the 2001 mayoral campaign of Newark councilman Corey Booker, a 30ish Yale law grad, Rhodes scholar, and Stanford football star against longtime incumbent James, a former schoolteacher and activist. James, a product of the black urban machine politics that produced figures like former Detroit mayor Coleman Young and New York congressman Charlie Rangel, looks like a figure from another time, the generation that heeded Young's famous dictum "only radicals and capitalists can change the world" and balanced a black power ideology with corroborations with big-developers, often lily-white building trades unions, and reactionary police and fire unions to keep power in majority black cities.

Corey Booker, especially as Curry sees him, is an entirely different creature. Booker, whose civil-rights generation parents earned for him a comfortable suburban lifestyle, comes off as an honest if ambitious, bright, and gifted campaigner with a genuine interest in Newark's future and poor citizens. Coming back to NJ after school, Booker set up a non-profit, moved into the projects, and ran for council. While Booker's (and Curry's) assertion that running for office grew out of the work he was doing as opposed to the other way around is difficult to take seriously, Councilman Booker makes both a compelling case for change and presents an appealing package as the agent of that change. His campaign team is also obviously committed and seemingly sincere and we will soon be able to judge his abilities as mayor – Booker was elected to full term this year against a James protégé.

Sharpe James comes off significantly worse. As the mayor of a city with serious problems, James does little to inspire confidence. Making nearly \$200,000 as mayor of a city with only 200,000 souls and serving, after wrangling for himself an appointment, as Newark's member of the NJ Senate for another paycheck of \$50,000, James comes off as jaded, vain, and arrogant. And *Street Fight* diligently documents the appalling abuses that James uses to stay in power. A thoroughly-politicized police force intimidates people, city inspectors threaten to close busi-



photo: The Star Ledger photograph used with permission



nesses of Booker supporters and follow through, and Curry himself is pushed around a couple of times by cops as he films.

James also, at various times, accuses Corey Booker of being a Jew, a Republican, a tool of rich whites, a white guy himself, a carpetbagger, a chicken little, and gay. In a blackly amusing instance of overkill, James excoriates one Booker's aides of being a patron of underage prostitutes due to a visit to a strip club that proved, uh, less than scrupulous in documenting their workers. Later in the campaign, however, the club's owner, aggrieved at the implications of Sharpe James's increasingly heated accusations, points out that lots of people have visited his club, including the Snapple-sipping mayor of Newark, Sharpe James.

This film makes abundantly clear that Sharpe James is a venal and vicious politician and deserves to be tossed out on his ass. Curry's black-and-white take on a brutal black-on-black campaign between two Democrats, however, carefully elides one fact: When it comes to white reactionaries supporting his opponent, Sharpe James has a point. Corey Booker's campaign was feted by such GOP-types as columnists George Will and Arianna Huffington and former upstate NY congressman and Bush I cabinet secretary Jack Kemp. Bob Dole's 1996 running mate and one of the most aggressive and consistent supporters of failed supply-side economics, Kemp championed the ideological and punitive urban policy that the Reagan/Bush administrations used to put cities like Newark (and Toledo, for that matter) into crisis conditions. As Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Kemp encouraged a half-baked experiment in urban free-marketteering to rebuild central L.A. after the Rodney King riots – it didn't work and the Clinton administration subsequently funded real help – and is currently pedaling this same snake-oil to rebuild New Orleans. Kemp no doubt believes that the solution to Newark's capitalism-caused problems is . . . well, more capitalism. The support of someone like fellow gridiron hero Kemp legitimately raises valid questions about Corey Booker's plans for Newark, but Curry buries them under Sharpe James's indefensible attacks on Booker's blackness and faith and the incumbent mayor's despicable anti-Semitic and homophobic slurs. The support of the Reverends Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton for Sharpe James is, while shown, never explored, it is instead merely countered by showing the support that Booker has from prominent African-Americans like Spike Lee and Princeton's Cornell West and, in a move to burnish Booker's Democratic bona fides, former NJ Senator Bill Bradley.

In *Street Fight*, Curry brilliantly captures the often-claustrophobic atmosphere of campaign life and gives us an insightful glimpse into urban politics at its worst. If Curry's sense of balance is sometimes skewed a little, being pushed around

by cops would tend to make anyone less objective. As both a veteran of politics and the study of politics, I think Curry's work stands with some of the best work done documenting campaigns. If Curry isn't always entirely dependable as a reporter, he more than makes up for with his storytelling and filmmaking abilities. And, ultimately, aren't political campaigns *about* picking sides? -Keith McCrea

#### Water

Deepa Mehta, Director  
Mongrel Media, 2005  
<http://water.mahiram.com/>

According to the Laws of Manu in Dharamshastras (Sacred Hindu texts), "a virtuous wife, who remains chaste when her husband has died, goes to heaven. A woman who is unfaithful to her husband is reborn in the womb of a jackal."

If that is not oppressive enough for India's females, factor in the fact that for many (if not most) Indian girls, their parents arrange her marriage. She cannot earn money like her male counterparts. Mind and body she is handed over to her husband from marriage until her death.

Sold into marriage and held there until her death is a long time to be devoted to someone, especially if you did not marry for love. Now imagine that the girl has been married and widowed by the age of eight and you have the tragic story chronicled in Deepa Mehta's *Water*, a compelling film about India's "widow houses," where women of all ages are taken to live apart from society following the deaths of their husbands.

*Water* follows the story of Chuyi (Sarala), a girl — a widow at eight — who cannot count higher than 10. Hiding economics behind religious custom, Chuyia is required by ancient Hindu laws to leave society. She is brought to a dilapidated widow house where, according to custom, her hair will be short, her clothes exchanged for white robes and the rest of her life will be spent in renunciation. A girl who has not even entered her menstrual years is to deny sex for her life. (Nonetheless, the child is raped later in the film.)

Chuyia begins to have an effect on the other women who live there. There is the devout Shakuntala (Seema Biswas) and the rebellious Kalyani (Lisa Ray), who has been forced into prostitution by the head widow, Madhumati (Manorma).

As Chuyia's presence instills a rebellious attitude on a microcosmic level, Gandhi (Mohan

Jhangiani) is taking India by storm, reaching out to everyone, including these social outcasts. In particular, Gandhi influences Narayan (John Abraham), a younger man whose liberalism differs from the patriarchal order, individually and collectively. For him, Kalyani's body is not a prop or property for consumption. It is the structure that exposes and protects her beauty and soul.

But Narayan and the other men in the film are supporting characters. *Water* is about women and how these ostracized women who must beg in the streets and live quiet lives of desperation and isolation accept their oppression on some level. They accept their oppression and, indeed, some take advantage of it. For example, Madhumati is a pimp who sells Kalyani and Chuyia.

Their married female counterparts offer no compassion either. In one telling scene a widow bumps into a "respectable" woman (Dolly Ahluwalia Tewari) while running. The woman scolds the widow because she must now cleanse her-



self again after touching a widow who dares to run. With woman like this, who needs men to keep you down?

Yet the skills of Mehta cannot be denied. She constantly sets up India as some idyllic place if you stand back from it. The camera gazes on gardens and statues with loving care only to move in closer on a way of life that is brutally ugly. Things may look nice from afar, including nostalgia for the gold old days, but up close they are not pretty.

*Water* has been years in the making, and Mehta ultimately had to shoot this flawed but very important film in Sri Lanka after receiving death threats by Hindu fundamentalists during her shoot in India. Alas, in one form or another, extremely religious men (and women) never stop trying to control what women do with their lives or their bodies.

-John Esther

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## Rubble Division

above and below: Rubble Division on the Interstate at Rhyolite featuring the Meat Bees

Rubble Division was a float that crossed this country late this spring. It was built by the sculptor Katie Grinnan, and we paraded it unpermitted through sights of ruins — Death Valley, the ghost town Rhyolite, Las Vegas, The Wapatki Ruins, Crawford Texas, New Orleans, Washington DC. Going slowly through towns, a band called the Meat Bees improvised a form of free-jazz, which the US Secret Service interpreted as “Middle Eastern Music.” The Crawford town police, to whom the Secret Service reported us, agreed that we were the weirdest “protest” float to ever visit.

As art playing itself out in the expanded field, Katie said, “This trip is a phenomenological sounding of the country.” Me, I was genuinely interested in our ability to cross the country and do unreadable stuff like dragging a catacomb like structure of rubble and caution tape to folks on the streets of DC or broadcasting angular and angry music to cows roaming around the beautiful countryside of Crawford.

Though I persist in my belief that these types of things can have profound effects writ large on the social landscape (imagine caravans of youth journeying from town to town dragging 15 foot abstract and representational parade floats with them), I will readily acknowledge that this art touched us the most. Otherwise creeping behind the float in our chase car looking at the pedestrians on the Vegas Strip was like staring back from behind the screen at the audience watching a disaster flick. Alternately people were discomforted, upset, angry, giddy and confused by our uneasy presence. Faced with an aesthetics summoning of industrial collapse no one instantaneously divested themselves of the illusions of empire — though we did outdraw the fountain spectacle at the Bellagio Casino for a few moments.



“Look! We have brought a different spirit in, and the spirit we brought in was not destroyed. We took what the city could offer and now at the end we have transformed an aspect of the city.”

—Anna Halprin in *CityDance* 1977 (Sabot Press, 1977)

**TEXT**  
Robby Herbst

**PHOTOS**  
Dawn Kasper





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