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May/June 2004 • Issue 26

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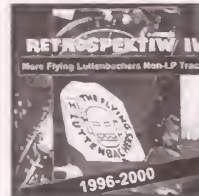
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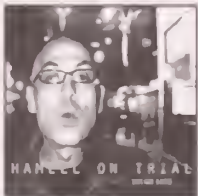
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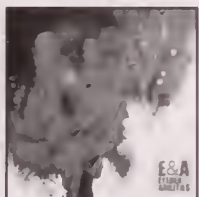
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from your editors

Who is working in America? And if you are working, maybe the questions should be - what kind of job are you working? Like the woman on the cover, slinging donuts for Krispy Kreme, are you working a service-industry job? Do you have medical benefits? Are you represented by a union? Do you even like your job? So you see, without getting too deep into economic analysis and speculation (hey, that's what we have *the Economist* and *Dollars & Sense* for), there's plenty to talk about on the subject of "work."

As soon as we sat down to write this letter, song lyrics we wanted to quote easily came to mind. We could have turned to the IWW labor songs for something like:

*Why do you work for 8 hours or more?
Two of us could have jobs if you'd only work 4.*

Or we could have gone with Aesop Rock's more contemporary "9-5ers Anthem":
We the American working population hate the fact that 8 hours a day are spent chasing the the dream of someone that isn't us. We may not hate our jobs, but we hate jobs in general that don't have to do with fighting our own causes.

Or maybe some of you are more familiar with the classic:

*Workin' 9 to 5
What a way to make a livin'
Barely gettin' by
It's all takin'
And no givin'
They just use your mind
And they never give you credit
It's enough to drive you
Crazy if you let it!*

Whichever of the countless songs out there dedicated to workin' for a living (Huey Lewis anyone?) you claim as your own anthem of disdain for the work-a-day grind, we all share one thing in common — we all gotta do it. Many of us love our work. Many of us hate nothing more than the thought of another day under the thumb of our boss. And thanks to the current administration, millions of us would take whatever we could get right now to put some food on our tables. We'll save that last point for discussion later in summer when we get closer to the election, but right now let's take a look at what people around the world are doing to find purpose or just get by.

Thanks for reading. Now get back to work.



Jen Angel and Jason Kucsma

PS: You've undoubtedly noticed the new look on the front cover. We redesigned the website, too. The old look served us well for four years, but it was time to make a change. We're always trying to improve the magazine, to get it into more people's hands, to fulfill our mission more completely. None of that is possible without your support, so thank you!

mission

CLAMOR's mission is to provide a media outlet that reflects the reality of alternative politics and culture in a format that is accessible to people from a variety of backgrounds. CLAMOR exists to fill the voids left by mainstream media. We recognize and celebrate the fact that each of us can and should participate in media, politics, and culture. We publish writing and art that exemplify the value we place on autonomy, creativity, exploration, and cooperation. CLAMOR is an advocate of progressive social change through active creation of political and cultural alternatives.

photo by David Bacon (story page 14)



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clam•or 'kla-mer 1 : a loud continuous uproar of many human voices 2 : insistent public expression

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A Mom Seeks Justice

I'm Sherman Austin's mom. I wanted to thank all of you for printing the story about his case. This case is extremely complex and difficult to navigate and I appreciate the fine job you all did in reporting the facts. I just wanted to let you know that pg. 2, paragraph 2 states: "In fact, Austin wasn't even charged with anything until six months after..." It's important to note that Sherman was never charged with any crime. The prosecutor threatened to indict Sherman if he did not sign the plea agreement. This tactic is typical of our so called justice system. Pressuring people to sign a plea for a crime they didn't commit by threatening a more serious charge if the case goes to trial, i.e., the 20 year terrorist enhancement. This is what we are dealing with. A justice system based on lies NOT truth. What can we do about this unjust system that try's to portray itself as a system based on truth and equal representation for all? I don't have all the answers, but I will continue to share the details of this case with whomever will listen. Exposing the inner workings of our system has become a full time job for me

Jennifer Martin Ruggiero
North Hollywood, CA

Right Topic, Wrong Writer

I would like to address the article "Contemplating Suicide" (March/April 2004). I find four main points in the two-page article — which I can summarize in one sentence: A human considering committing an act of suicide: a) must recognize that he/she has the freedom of thought and freedom of action, b) must realize that life is finite, c) must realize that "option" of suicide would end his/her life hence ending all subsequent options of thought and action, and — most importantly — d) must come to a rational decision based on an internal debate concerning the quality of his/her life.

[I would have preferred] the article to address how, as a society, we need to contemplate the topic of suicide: Why is the topic of suicide still often considered a social taboo? In what ways does an individual's suicide affect the survivors in his/her society? How should we as a society address suicide? What does suicide indicate about the social and physical environment we have created for ourselves?... No mention of Durkheim's famous book "Suicide" — which some sociologists feel spawned the field of sociology .

I applaud the author, Matthew Pianalto, very little. His article didn't even seem to address the issue in its title — what suicide, or the act of

contemplating suicide, "takes" and "gives." If he meant to say that considering a suicidal act takes a rational thought process but can yield an enriched sense of self-awareness, then he should have clearly announced that conclusion. While I question your experience with suicide, your long-winded verbiage left me with little doubt concerning your identity as a graduate student practicing up before his dissertation.

On the other hand, I do applaud Clamor magazine for publishing an article on the topic of suicide. Any article on a "hard" topic could evoke members of our society to initiate important discussion... but next time please select your article more carefully.

Debra Krause
Boulder, CO

Aesop Rock: Bringin' Clamor Down?

I've been holding my tongue regarding that Aesop Rock interview (Nov/Dec 2003) since I've read it. As someone who is really supportive of what Clamor has been doing, it made me question the integrity of what I feel like the readership expects on a consistent level. Yeah, Aesop Rock is hipster hotshit right now, in terms of contemporary Hip-Hop culture. After reading the article, I was really disappointed. Besides lacking any real content, it made me wonder if it was just a straight-up marketing ploy. I don't know, maybe the point of the interview was more subversive than that, and it was actually to show that this kid who gets a lot of attention and is on a popular "underground" label is really just a video game obsessed pothead who doesn't have much to say. In addition, from someone who is also very supportive of the conscious Hip-Hop scene (as you are also, if I'm not mistaken), it frustrates me to think that some readers who aren't as well-versed in the genre but have an interest might be instantly turned off and assume that the stereotypes are true; hiphoppers really are a bunch of complacent potheads who aren't activating for change.

Samuel Pixley,
Winona, MN

Setting the Record Straight

I'm the Director of the gallery that sponsored, funded and facilitated the Prisoner Art exhibit that Susan Phillips wrote about in your current issue ("Creativity in Confinement" Jan/Feb 2004)

I take issue with the characterization of the Klein Art Gallery, and her lack of any credit to a grass roots organization struggling to bring art to the public, beyond the usual elite art-going crowd.

The Creativity in Confinement exhibit was part of one of the Klein initiatives called the Art & Community Exhibition series. We feature organizations like Books Through Bars that use art to reach out and better the lives of their underserved constituency. Ms. Phillips failed to make any mention of the Klein Gallery other than to portray us only as a "polished lobby" that traffics the "comings and goings of suits and ties" — which is the furthest thing from what that space is and is about! The gallery sponsors public school creative art workshops regularly, and when 30 kids are in the space it is anything but polished and full of suits and ties. If anything, the gallery is a great example of where the two worlds mix and benefit from each other.

Dan Schimmel
Director & Curator of Exhibitions
Esther M. Klein Art Gallery
Philadelphia, PA
www.kleinartgallery.org

For a Better World

I wanted to comment on the article, "Ni Una Mas! The Dead of Juarez Demand Justice" (Mar/Apr 2004). This article is an eye opener to those who have never heard about these happenings. Someone needs to get up and fight for a better Mexico! A better world! People cannot feel trapped. We all need to unite politically and let our voices be heard: we are not going to take it anymore! If we don't fight for the corruption in the government to end then incidents like the dead women of Juarez will continue to occur not only in Juarez, but will spread to other places.

Linda Rios
Cicero, IL

Corrections

In the Mar/Apr 2004 issue, writer Walidah Imansha's name was incorrectly listed on the contributor's page

The correct web address for Political Graphics, featured in the "Ni Una Mas" article (Mar/Apr 2004) is www.politicalgraphics.org — not .com.

In "The Village of the Bones" (Mar/Apr 2004), Tommy Joseph Jimmy's name was spelled incorrectly

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The revolution won't be televised, but you can read about it. **Books for a better world.** by Mike Palacek, former federal prisoner, congressional candidate, newspaper reporter. Please visit: iowapeace.com.

This is the Place: Queers from Mormon Families Stake Their Claim. You grew up queer and closeted in a Mormon family or household, but where are you now? We want to publish your story! We are compiling an anthology of such stories to arouse, to inspire, to entertain, to teach, and most of all, to claim our identities. This is the Place for queer writers with Mormon backgrounds to pioneer our own collection of groundbreaking memoirs, essays, and historical narratives. Send your stories by October 31 to: This is the Place, PO Box 1150, Bowling Green Station, New York, NY 10274. Submissions should be no more than 5000 words, typewritten in a 12-point font, double-spaced and single-sided. Please include a cover letter with brief bio and contact info, as well as a self-addressed stamped envelope of sufficient size for the return of your manuscript. Email thisistheplace@riseup.net for full guidelines.

WANTED: RARE. positive stories from people who have worked with Scott Beibin and/or Lost Film Festival. These stories will be compiled for an itty-bitty-mini-zine. PLEASE NOTE. these stories should NOT be about great films that you have seen or helped screen at a Lost Film Festival event, as Mr. Beibin most likely had little,

if anything, to do with creating these wonderful films. Please send your stories to boxcutterbeibin@graffiti.net by June 1, 2004. We will also welcome 250 word submissions detailing why you think the Beibin Brigade and the Lost Film Leech Machine are not welcome in your town anymore -- for a possible future Clamor article.

STICKERS: "If we're so free, why am I driving to work?" "Overpopulation - The ultimate child buse." "Civilization is a pyramid scheme." \$1 + SASE each. Send cash or MO to: The Wild Nuts Collective, PO Box 2301, Redway, CA 95560.

CALIFORNIA ZINESTERS: If you are interested in having your zine become a part of the San Diego State University "West Coast Zine Collection," please contact Annie Knight at digress@9250x.com.

PUNK PAPERS: Three punk/academics are currently co-editing a collection on the contemporary (post-1980) punk and hardcore scenes. We are writing to invite contributions to the volume by punks/activists, most likely (though this is not a requirement) those who also have one foot in academia. The book will consider issues such as resistance, commodification, social class, geography, identity (gender, race, sexual diversity, etc), and activism. While we welcome ideas for contributions, we are less interested in those which are simply descriptions of local scenes or aspects of the punk movement. Each contribution should address larger theoretical and political issues in an explicit manner. We are looking for chapters of 4,000 to 6,000 words written for academic readers as well as punks looking for serious discussion of their movement. The deadline is July 1, 2004. For more information, please write to bookofpunk@yahoo.com.

Clamor is looking for dedicated readers to take copies of Clamor around their cities or neighborhoods. If you would like to receive free copies to take to your local bookstores to encourage them to carry Clamor, or if you have friends who you think might be a likely subscriber, we'd love to work with you. This offer is available only to current subscribers and as long as magazine supplies last. Please write to info@clamormagazine.org and let us know you're interested.

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www.clamormagazine.org/communiques.html

Sarah Baeckler (p. 48) is a primatologist working to end the use of great apes in entertainment. She learned about Jane Goodall in the fourth grade and never looked back. Reach her at sarah@chimpcollaboratory.org.

Brandon Bauer (p. 12) is an artist living and working in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His work has been shown nationally and internationally. Brandon was an editor and contributed research for the book *Peace Signs: The Anti-War Movement Illustrated*, which is a collection of posters and graphics from around the world against the U.S. led invasion of Iraq. A DVD of Brandon's experimental video titled "Signal drift: a day under the city" was released by Lowave in May 2003. Brandon can be reached at random12@hotmail.com.

In between breaks from the drawing table, **Jerry Business** (p. 37) can be found riding bikes and drinking coffee. Most of the time though he's holed up in his apartment with his dog Muggs, drinking coffee, and sketching frantically. Mr. Business grew up in Boston and Attended Massachusetts College of Art. Currently he's scraping by freelancing design and illustration in San Francisco.

Shannon Carson (p. 14) has a passion for learning, and reads anything she can get her hands on, time permitting. She writes and researches diverse aspects of American culture and development. She is also very active politically, on both a national and local level. Email her at 20thstreetannex@excite.com.

Michelle Chen (p. 62) published five issues of her zine, *cain*, and ran the Alternative Library and Resource Center of New Haven before running off to China on a research fellowship in the fall of 2003. She is now in Shanghai researching the migrant worker population, and her travel-related rambblings can be found at Onefortytwo.com. Email her at cainzine@yahoo.com.

Leilani Clark (p. 64) currently lives in San Diego. She is a substitute teacher, writer, basement musician and graduate student. She recently completed the first in a series of zines titled *A Watcher of Birds* and is also working on a compilation entitled *Cultivating Monkness*. Contact her at lmclark27@yahoo.com.

Christina Cooke (p. 58) currently lives in Portland, Maine, where she works for a local magazine, writing articles about things like llama farms and whoopie pies. She produced the piece featured in *Clamor* as a student in the graduate-level writing program at the Salt Institute for Documentary Studies. Contact her at xtinacooke@yahoo.com.

Melita Curphy (p. 55) AKA Missmonster, spends her time making monsters, teaching at a college, and laughing at farts. See more at Missmonster.com.

Amy DeVoogd (p. 36) is an artist-for-hire with a Dutch last name. Learn more at Devoogd.com.

Joe Diffie (p. 37) resides in Fayetteville, Arkansas. After graduating from Hendrix College, he took up a lucrative career delivering pizza for the man. He works with the Arkansas Indymedia Center, the Northwest Arkansas Peace Coalition, and any other lost cause that strike his fancy. He can be reached at joediffie@hotmail.com by anyone interested in discussing Wal-Mart's plans for global domination, or to go out for a game of stick and a cheap draft

Rob Eshelman (p. 29) is an anti-capitalist dissident currently based in San Francisco. His articles have appeared in the *Brooklyn Rail*, *Counterpunch*, and *Electronic Iraq*. He can be emailed at robeshelman@riseup.net.

Rachel Gazda (p. 14) currently lives and works in Philadelphia. Her work with the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (part of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign) included organizing a 2002 Media Conference as well as coordinating press and media for the New Freedom Bus Tour. For more information visit: www.kwru.org or contact Rachel at rachel_kr_gazda@hotmail.com

Mike Gonzales (p. 9) is a full-time taxi driver and part-time activist living and working in Madison, Wisconsin, and can be reached at mikegonzales@riseup.net.

Jennifer Grant (p. 45) is a sex toy geek who runs her online erotic boutique, ilovexor.com, from the city of fallen angels. A.K.A. Dr. Red, she also gives advice to the sexually frustrated. She works to uphold and defend the basic human right to sexual pleasure, satisfaction and freedom. All this takes up most of her time, but she is rarely bored. Email her at doctorred@ilovexor.com

Despite being unemployed, **Shawn Granton** (p. 54) is always busy. Not as busy drawing comix like he should (you can peep the latest by sending a measly buck to P.O. Box 14185, Portland, OR 97293-0185), but just busy. Portland sorta does that to you. Does this blurb make any sense? Confused? Email him at trfindustries@scribble.com.

Jessica Hoffmann's work (p. 42) has appeared in numerous publications, including *Bitch*, *Kitchen Sink*, *Nervy Girl*, and *LOUDmouth*. She loves getting e-mail, so indulge her at chickenrothbaum@hotmail.com.

Willie Johnson (p. 23) is student minoring in art and majoring in journalism. Currently he is working with a collective of students to put together a progressive zine. To see his artwork, to contact him, or to see details about the zine, visit Killtheelite.com.

Anna Lappé (p. 20) lives in Brooklyn, New York. Her first book, *Hope's Edge*, co-written with her mother, is part-journey and part-thought piece exploring grounded alternatives to corporate globalization. See Hopesedge.com. She can be reached at: anna@smallplanetfund.org.

Victoria Law (p. 36) has been working with prisoners and around prison issues for over a decade. Since 2000, she has concentrated specifically on the issues and struggles of incarcerated women. She is a co-editor of the zine *Tenacious: Art and Writings from Women in Prison* and a volunteer for New York City Books Through Bars. Email her at: vikkiml@yahoo.com.

Susan Leem (p. 39) is thinking of applying for Canadian citizenship because she is fan of single-payer health care, but she likes Minneapolis and working at Ansel bookstore too much.

Tess. Lotta (p. 61) is a graduate student, writer, and musician living in Los Angeles. Currently, she's working on new zine, *Penny Dreadful*, as well as a poetry collection and solo recording project

Kari Lydersen (p. 32) is a journalist based in Chicago and an instructor in the Urban Youth International Journalism Program. Reach her at karlyde@aol.com.

Nick Mamatas (p. 12) is the author of the Lovecraftian Beat road novel *Move Under Ground* (Night Shade Books) and the recent collection *3000 MPH In Every Direction At Once: Stones And Essays* (Prime Books). He recently edited *The Urban Bizarre*, (Prime) an anthology of city stories by zinesters, fantasists, and pornographers. His reportage and fiction regularly appears in the *Village Voice*, *Razor*, *Fortean Bureau*, and other neat magazines. Nick was recently elected to the Board of Trustees of the Horror Writers Association, but the opinions expressed in his article are solely his own.

Anne Elizabeth Moore (p. 23) is standing by to take your questions now at anne@heykidz.org.

Isis Phillips (p. 20) works at Democracy Now! She is also a New York-based freelance photographer and can be reached at isisfoto@aol.com.

Samuel Pixley (p. 52) is a member of The Everland Collective in Winona, MN, which sponsors community all-ages art, music, and activist events. He'd like to have more time and energy for ongoing collaborations (filmmaking, sloganeering & stenciling, improv horn playing, DJ'ing), but habitually works too much. Encourage him to prioritize at sectoro@hotmail.com.

Emily Sloan (p. 55) rides her fixed gear bicycle to work, food, and fun in Houston. Starting in August, she will pursue her M.D./Ph.D degrees at the University of Virginia.

Charles Spano (p. 48) is a documentary filmmaker and rock journalist. Email him at: charlesspano@hotmail.com.

Joshua Stuewer (p. 9) is a cab driver and activist from Madison, WI, who is involved in publishing Madison's local and sporadically produced independent newspaper, *The Insurgent*. He can be reached at joshuastuewer@hotmail.com

Sunshine Mark (p. 62) is a multimedia artist operating out of SLH, NJ. He is currently engaged in prepping a series of curiosities, iconographic painted works on canvas and various objects, as well as revamping his website, Armoredbaby.com, in which all will be showcased. He can be contacted at: sunshine@armoredbaby.com.

Marie Trigona (p. 25) is an independent journalist based in Argentina and collaborates with Grupo Alavío. She can be reached at mtngona@riseup.net.

Danee Voorhees (p. 58) is a documentary photographer, writer, and global nomad. More of her photography can be seen at www.danneevoorhees.com

Stephen Voss (p. 32) is a photojournalist based in Portland, Oregon. He can be reached at sv@stephenvoss.com.

JT Yost (p. 16) is always up for drawing uncomplimentary illustrations of George W. Bush. See more unflattering portraits at JTYost.com.

union cab



COOPERative

work worth working

interview Mike Gonzales
introduction Josh Stuewer
photos Meagan Parish

People put themselves through all sorts of weird and uncomfortable experiences to make a living.

Five years ago, I was working in an iron foundry. As part of the training video, they included a portion on how to not evaporate yourself with molten iron. The fact that the risk of evaporating yourself on the job was considerable enough to warrant its own time in a training video is pretty fucked up. The fact that I could sit there, watch that video, and not immediately quit the job is even more fucked up. But my father worked in a factory and those were the terms of employment I was used to. So I did my job, made a living, and was generally pretty miserable.

When I moved to Madison, my self-deprecating employment tendencies led me into the food service industry. But my time at the iron foundry imbued me with a cynicism not conducive to waiting tables, and I was unable to earn a living. The irony was not lost on me. Luckily, I found Union Cab — a workplace that respects my autonomy as a human being. That shouldn't be an anomaly in the world of employment, but unfortunately, it is.

Based in Madison, Wisconsin, Union Cab Cooperative is a fully worker owned and operated taxi company. It was formed by a group of Madison cab drivers who in 1979, after nearly a decade of union-organizing drives, strikes, lockouts, and company closures, resolved to create a cab company run by the people who drive the cabs. In effect, what they did was create an organic democratic institution, putting the workers in control of the decisions that affect their livelihoods. The membership elects a Board of Directors composed of fellow workers, which acts as the central governing body within the co-op. It controls management, sets policy, and oversees a system of committees aimed at involving the membership in all aspects of the business.

The 25 years since Union Cab's inception have not been a Marxist's wet dream. But in a world filled with sweatshops and wage slavery, worker-owned businesses offer a revolutionary alternative to the exploitation that surrounds them. Union Cab is living proof of the feasibility of a more humane and equitable workplace.

On a ridiculously cold February evening, my friend, Mike, facilitated a discussion between myself and three of our co-workers: Scott, Nan, and John. We discussed our roles as individuals at Union Cab and how the co-op functions as a democratic workplace. All of us experienced cabbies; we also had between us a mechanic, a dispatcher, two directors, and the president of the co-op.

Why did you start working at Union Cab?

Scott: Because I was looking for a job, I thought it would be fun, and I was broke. I had a friend Terry [who] I met in the basement of a leather bar. He had a triple major in history, queer theory, and sociology. So he made the perfect cab driver, completely unemployable, but totally smart. He loved the place. And I thought if he loves it, then maybe I could actually enjoy it.

Nan: I had always wanted to be a cab driver, because you get your own office, and the only thing that's missing in your cab is a refrigerator and a bathroom. You have a great view. You go all over the city. You meet lots of people. You never really know what's going to happen one minute to the next. That's why I came here. Fourteen years later, I'm still here.

Do you feel like most people have a voice or have the opportunity to have a voice at Union Cab?

Nan: I do. And it comes back to the individual using that voice and being a proactive, productive member. It's your choice to participate or not. It's the same thing as voting for an alderperson or mayor or governor or president. If you don't want to vote, that's your choice, but you still have that right as a citizen. As a member, we all have the right to participate.

Josh: It's important to stress the organic nature of the democracy at Union Cab. It's not like our government, where voters feel alienated and unrepresented. Here, if you don't like the decisions that are being made, you can talk to the person that made them. You see them everyday at work. The democracy is built through conversations with individuals.

Nan: Yet I think some people still do feel that their voices aren't heard. Even if they feel they've worked through the system to have their voice heard, it still comes down to accepting what the majority says. And that's a fundamental basis of democracy.

Scott: I think Union Cab is a republic. I don't think it's a democracy. It's a republic with a threat of a democracy. Every year when the membership meets it's a democracy. The Board of Directors acts for the membership in-



between, but the Board always has to know that the membership has the authority, at any time, to call a meeting and overrule the Board.

John: Which is a very important distinction, because of the trust that we, as a membership, put into our Board. We basically say, "We put our faith in you that you are going to make good decisions. But the second you step out of line and do something that I as a member think is incorrect or harmful to the co-op, I can address that to you, and I can address that to the membership, and I can act on my belief to remove you. And I can talk to anybody and make my voice heard."

Nan: And I don't think that we have a trickle-down system here with trust. As U.S. citizens, we are supposed to trust the government, who will protect us and take care of us. That's how we're bred. We know that's all a bunch of lies. But here, not only do we trust our elected people, we're also trusting our comrades to vote responsibly. We trust our supervisors, which in a cab driver's case is the dispatcher. We don't have a lot of cab driver-dispatcher squabbles that other places have. We trust the mechanics are doing their job. We trust the management and the directors are doing their job. And we have safeguards in place so that when that trust is broken there is an avenue to say, "Hey, wait a minute. I really think you guys screwed up here. I really feel like you screwed me on my trust and that my trust in the system has been violated."

Do you think Union Cab functions better as a business because it operates as a cooperative?

Scott: Yes, because cab driving doesn't make an awful lot of money. A lot of cab companies went under after 9-11. We were hurt a little bit, but we've been way deeper in shit before and we all hung together. We did what we needed to make it better. "We," meaning the co-op, in its history, did what it had to do to keep its doors open. And that's why we're stronger.

Nan: I think sometimes the cooperative can actually hamstring the business and put the business in jeopardy, because often in the business world you have to make a decision now. You don't get to make the decision in three months once we get consensus and we can all hug. You know there are some real fundamental problems with that. Sometimes our democracy travels at such a painfully slow pace that we can't necessarily make good business decisions in a timely manner. Now, would I want it to be from the top-down in a traditional business model, where workers don't have a say, and we don't have a worker-run Board of Directors?

I wouldn't want to be a part of that. But I think in the past we have failed to make decisions because of our democracy. It has not been able to keep up with the pace.

John: What you are saying is true, but I also think that because we are a cooperative, and everyone who chooses to speak can be heard, we have a vast resource of ideas. Our ability to adapt is much greater than the standard corporate model because the standard corporate model depends on a much smaller group of ideas.

Can you talk about the growth of the cooperative a little bit?

Nan: When I was hired, I was one of about 115 members. And then we escalated to 265 or 280. It happened in less than 10 years. Probably in like six years we took on 150 more people.

John: It was just nice, steady growth?

Nan: No, it wasn't steady growth. It was poorly planned. It was a spike.

Scott: Now we're trying to have a nice, steady growth.

Nan: Well, now we're trying to have a regular heartbeat. When I first started here we were borrowed to the teeth and still borrowing. We were a mirror image of our federal government. "I'll spend \$66 million a day and take on \$100 million more in debt." And I think that we've learned over the years that, first of all, we are going to be around. I honestly believe 25 years ago, nobody thought of that. And that's reflected in our policies. We do have some issues



with an aging workforce and how you deal with that. That's really one of our next, greatest hurdles, because you don't expect to retire from a cab company.

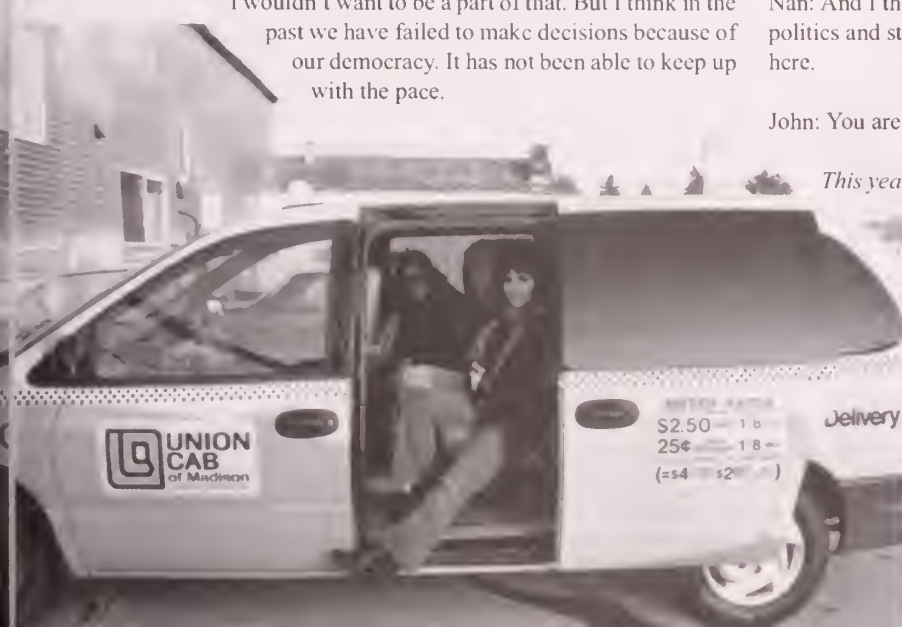
Scott: Now we're starting to think ahead. And that's cool. I mean getting 180 people to consciously participate and plan a few years into the future is a really big deal.

Nan: And I think the most unique thing about Union Cab, besides our politics and structure, is you are allowed to care here. It's okay to care here.

John: You are encouraged to care here.

This year is Union Cab's 25th year of operations. Why are we still here, despite so many challenges?

Josh: I think it has survived so long because it requires a committed core of individuals, and for 25 years, people with interests consistent with the cooperative spirit have been coming to Union Cab. People who aren't happy with working jobs in factories or restaurants, or wherever they don't have control of their work environment, end up coming here, realizing it's a pretty fucking cool job and sticking around. ☆



FREELANCERS UNITE!

Can Writers Get It Together?

words Nick Mamas

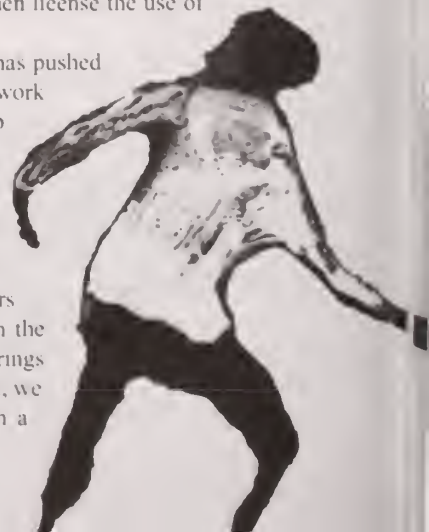
illustration Brandon Bauer

When Time Warner and AOL merged in 2000, they created a massive multimedia company that controlled a significant slice of the ideosphere: television, cable, magazines, Internet, high-speed access, and content — everything from CNN to DC Comics was under its purview. The Federal Trade Commission, the government agency charged with keeping corporate trusts from forming, let the merger go ahead. After George W. Bush gained the Presidency, he had the Department of Justice step back from breaking up the monopolistic software firm Microsoft — the case has ended for now with a slap-on-the-wrist settlement. The image of a trust-busting government protecting the little folks from monopoly capital is no longer on the screens of Big Media. And why should it be? They wouldn't want the little folks getting any ideas.

However, there is one pernicious group of would-be monopolists that the government remains committed to stopping. I'm part of this group, as are most of the other writers and artists listed on the table of contents of this issue of *Clamor*. Anti-trust legislation keeps us from joining together to demand more money for our work, because we are freelancers. Huge companies can merge together like Voltron to create an even greater menace, but freelancers, an ever-growing segment of the working population, are cowering in the rubble of Voltron's path of destruction.

Legally, freelancers do not have the right to organize. The Wagner Act of 1935 makes union organizing and collective bargaining an explicit exemption from antitrust laws, but only for certain classes of employees. Naturally, independent contractors of all sorts — physicians, writers, consultants, small business people, temps, etc. — are not legally employees. We use our own labor to generate property, then license the use of that property to the big boys.

It's not a surprise that capital has pushed many more people into freelance work through firing and rehiring via temp agencies, outsourcing, hiring consultants, and homework and telecommuting. No unions, no collective endeavor, no extra taxes, and no worker's compensation. There were 8.6 million independent contractors and 1.2 million temporary workers in the US in 2002, and trying to organize brings the FTC down on our heads. After all, we might demand health care or even a minimum wage.



The average member of the Authors Guild earns less than \$25,000 and one has to sell work pretty regularly to top markets to even qualify for Guild membership. In the world of fiction, the Science Fiction Writers of America and the Horror Writers Association recently pegged five cents a word as the minimum rate for "professional" publication — half a million words of short stories per year would bring in that \$25,000. And this was a raise from the old pro rate of three cents a word.

Mostly members of the working poor, freelance writers and artists are increasingly at the mercy of the new media conglomerates. Time Warner's magazine division demands that writers sign a work-for-hire contract; that means that the article belongs to them in exchange for a flat fee. Time Warner doesn't negotiate their contracts and doesn't need to. There are plenty of freelancers looking for too little work. After the Supreme Court ruled that they just cannot reprint old articles in electronic databases, other publications have also demanded that freelancers sign all-rights contracts. Smaller publishers have learned the trick and are introducing language into their contracts that literally break the laws of physics. Here's a clause of a contract I signed in late 2002 for a feature article sold to a men's magazine:

Independent Contractor hereby grants to Publisher all rights of every kind in and to the Works, all translations of the Works and all existing and future derivative works of the Works of every kind (collectively "Derivative Works"), including, without limitation, copyrights, publication rights, distribution rights, reproduction rights, rights to create derivative works, the rights to publish and publicly display the works everywhere in the Universe by any and all means now known or hereinafter invented, and all future created rights.

"Throughout the universe," even though time is not a constant, which means that there is some area in the universe where I have yet to sign this contract. "All future rights," so after the sun goes supernova and our planet is a floating cinder in space, the alien descendants of the magazine's publisher will own the pheromone-chain excretion rights to my story. It's ridiculous, but try explaining the curvature of the space-time continuum to a small claims court judge. And the assignment was for \$3,000, or one-sixth of my entire annual income, so of course I signed the contract.

Baronets in the Kingdom of Ownership

A number of professional author and artist associations have thrown their weight behind a

piece of legislation called the Freelance Writers And Artists Protection Act, which would allow freelancers the right to form traditional labor unions. Predictably, the bill has gone nowhere. But even if it were passed and even if unions could successfully organize and face down Time Warner, Condé Nast, and all the rest, the fact is that freelance writers really are in a peculiar class position — they're middle class socially even when they have incomes lower than members of the organized working class.

Writers are still baronets in the kingdom of ownership. Work-for-hire contracts are a form of exploitation, but depending on intellectual property for one's livelihood can mean sympathy and solidarity with capitalism against the working class, even when a fighting, organized working class can offer better protection and more freedom. Too often, the fool's hope of writing the next *Harry Potter* is enough to turn a writer into a multimogul preoccupied with property, copyrights, and money.

Karl Marx is said to have joked that it would be easy to eliminate private property under socialism because capitalism itself eliminated private property for almost everybody already. Big Media's all-rights contracts serve to proletarianize freelancers while simultaneously keeping them competitive with one another, aloof from other workers, and unable to legally organize. For every J. K. Rowling who goes up from the middle class to capitalist class, there are tens of thousands of writers being pushed into the working class and yet too many freelancers identify with Big Media; they think stronger intellectual property laws will protect them from their bosses. On the contrary, laws protecting property only protect those with lots of it.

Copyright and intellectual property laws are becoming ever stricter, spoiling the commons of the public domain. Properties ranging from Sherlock Holmes to Mickey Mouse should be ours by now, but copyright extensions and expansive interpretations of trademark rights have kept them in the hands of the big corporations — though of course corporations like Disney made their billions plundering the public domain for Grimm's fairy tales, historical figures, and classic legends. My own novel, *Move Under Ground*, combines the work of Jack Kerouac and H. P. Lovecraft; writing and selling such a book is much riskier now that it would have been 20 years ago. In the same way the agricultural commons were shut down and people herded into the cities to work in the factories created the industrial working class, the enclosure of the commons of ideas is creating an informational working class, one that had better pick up some working class politics very soon.

Freelance writers are now where waged workers were a century ago. The craftsmen

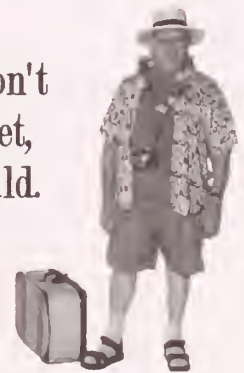
and artisans looked down on the unskilled and kept the labor movement divided for too long. We are in the same boat with temp workers; hell, most of the freelancers I know temp more frequently than they write just to keep themselves in ramen noodles and toner cartridges. Freelance writers and artists may face both legal and socio-economic obstacles to organizing, but we're going to have to organize anyway, because Big Media is going for the jugular.

Freelance writers need to get past the big-money thrill of writing commodified nonsense for Time Warner or Bertelsmann and choose a side. Let it be the side of the rest of the world's workers. Let the kingdom of ownership fall into ruin, because we'll be better off living in a better universe — one that our bosses haven't already staked a claim to. ☆

An extended version of this story is online at www.clamormagazine.org/issue26.html.

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- *Wanderlust Week*

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START YOUR SUBSCRIPTION TODAY!

Iraq's Labor Resistance

by Shannon Carson photo: David Bacon

Try to get a union started here in the land of the free, and you'll find a working class that appears to be less than brave. The fact that only 13.2 percent of Americans belong to a union is a more accurate reflection of our society's perception of its freedom than any document or romantic prose.

In Iraq, every factory has an active union. Every last one. This, despite the fact that unions are unrecognized and illegal there. As such, U.S. occupying forces have decided to enforce Saddam Hussein's decades-old ban on labor unions, going so far as to arrest outspoken labor leaders. It's a situation that Iraqis have met with resistance.

Though most Iraqis are pleased that Saddam no longer rules their country, they have also experienced wage reductions and price inflation since his deposition. These changes have been dictated by the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), the governing body in Iraq led by the United States and Britain. In order to achieve a living wage from the occupation government, the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) has supported a number of work stoppages.

Some IFTU members believe that the lower wages the CPA has ordered are designed as a first step towards making Iraq more attractive for those seeking to invest in the country. They are very concerned with massive rounds of privatization planned by the CPA.

Until now, most large businesses in Iraq have been state-owned. This has meant that the profits from textile factories, oil refineries, and other industries have remained within the country's borders, thus sustaining the economy. When the CPA allows for private, foreign ownership of Iraqi companies, new owners will be able to take the profits from Iraqi businesses out of the country. That very thought is what has emboldened workers in Iraq to organize, despite fear of imprisonment and investigation.

In response, the CPA has gone as far as to issue a public notice stating that anyone who advocates "evil disorder" (like a strike) will be arrested and treated as a prisoner of war according to the Geneva Convention.

But so far, Iraqi unions have stood strong in the face of this repression. In mid-December, the CPA tried to lower wages for workers at the Southern Oil Company to just \$40/month. Upon threat of a strike, the CPA upped the amount to \$60/month. The oil workers still refused, demanding a \$130/month standard. In February, the CPA agreed to the union's bid — a monumental achievement for any labor movement, let alone one that is wholly illegal.



Fighting to Stop the

Cheri Honkala is the national spokesperson for the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, and founder of the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (KWRU). A former history teacher and social worker with over 20 years of experience organizing poor people, Cheri Honkala also knows poverty on a first-hand basis. As a single mother, she raised her two sons on welfare, moving in and out of homelessness. In 1991, Honkala organized KWRU with a group of mothers on welfare and began leading poor Philadelphia families in the struggle for living wage jobs, health care, housing, and daily survival.

Honkala now spends much of her time coordinating the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, a network comprised of over 50 organizations of poor people from around the nation. This broad coalition unites public housing activists in Chicago and farm workers in Florida, temporary laborers in Atlanta, and unemployed miners in West Virginia to work together to end economic injustice.

Rachel Gazda, a former KWRU organizer, had the chance to speak with Cheri Honkala in February 2004.

Can you describe and dispel the "myth of the welfare queen"?

Cheri: An average welfare recipient in our country is a white woman who has two children and stays on assistance for only a couple of years. Instead, the history of racism in our country has been used to paint a welfare recipient as being an African-American who has nine children and drives a Cadillac — something that is just not the case.

This stereotype has become so prevalent in our society, that even some people that really do live on the dole have come to believe it. You have white people living on welfare convinced that the social welfare system needs to be dismantled.

From what I'm watching right now around the country, all of us that have been welfare recipients are currently struggling to figure out how to get through an extremely difficult period. Welfare recipients are being sent to work two or three jobs without union representation, bad hours, not seeing our children, and not having access to adequate child-care.

At the same time, many are trying to figure out how to become part of this larger social movement calling for economic human rights. We are starting to figure that out. People are making difficult choices to live under a much lower standard of living than being on welfare to be a part of this movement because the situation in this country requires it right now.

Of course, myths about "welfare queens" impact this work as well. The reality is that people in our country have been conditioned to think that there are only certain people that can lead in various struggles. There is little acknowledgement that a welfare recipient is a person

above: Cheri is wrongfully arrested on July 4th at a demonstration in front of the Constitution Center in Philadelphia. Charges were later dropped (photo by Harvey Finkle)



Other War

Rachel Gazda
talks with organizer Cheri Honkala
about the war on the poor

that has the strength to deal with all the negative things society says about you in order to receive public assistance. This has been one of our hardest battles, and it is not usually taken care of by an “undoing classism” workshop.

What are the effects of the 1996 welfare reform legislation and programs such as Welfare-to-Work?

There has been a great public relations effort by the powers that be to make it seem that welfare recipients are responsible for the majority of problems in society — even though public assistance is such a small percentage of the budget.

The reality is that welfare recipients have been placed in Welfare-to-Work programs that focus almost exclusively on service jobs that are very temporary. Women have had to struggle horribly in order to secure childcare so that they can attend these temporary jobs. There is a direct correlation between the number of children left at home alone, or who get watched by siblings, because their mothers are having to work two or three make-shift jobs — jobs which don't give healthcare or a living wage for them to be able to provide for their children.

So what we are seeing is false reporting in newspapers that things are getting better. I have been doing this work for 12 years and I've never seen things this bad in terms of the amount of people that are having to shack-up in one house, the amount of people that are going without health coverage for themselves and their children. I've never seen the waiting list for state health care programs so long. I've never seen so many children not having access to immunizations and instead having to wait months at health care clinics.

Especially if the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) agreement passes and if Bush remains in office, I fear not only for our country but also for the rest of the world. The motion will continue to go in the direction of

who will do work for the lowest wages, under the worst conditions, as opposed to figuring out a world and a country that values human beings and pays them living wages so that they can fully participate in society.

What exactly do you expect if the Free Trade Area of the Americas agreement passes? What have been the effects of NAFTA?

The FTAA is aptly referred to as “NAFTA on steroids.” Well, over three million people have lost their jobs as a result of NAFTA. We expect the FTAA to be even worse.

As part of the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign's march in August 2003, I got to travel to North Carolina, where I met former employees of the Pillowtex company. Some had worked there for 25 years. Forty-five hundred people went to work one day, and their factory closed down and is never coming back. When that happens, it's not just those 4,500 workers who are impacted. We will see in the months to come that the closing of factories will literally shut down that entire town.

People in this country are going to continue to see their labor being replaced. If we don't take back basic values about caring for human beings — if the only way that a person can have a house and eat is if they sell their labor — then we are really in trouble.

Clearly, a healthcare system that is dependent on permanent full-time employment is problematic. What do you see as a viable alternative to this system?

I see single payer universal healthcare as the answer. I think that those who are very wealthy should contribute to helping the rest of the folks in this country, who have participated in bringing billionaires and millionaires their wealth. Collectively, we have a responsibility to ensure that we have a system in place in this country that values all human beings. With the

kind of healthcare services that we have available in this country there isn't any reason why every human being shouldn't have full coverage so that we can have a healthy society.

You mentioned that the Bush administration has been devastating for our country. Do you put any faith in the Democratic candidates for the upcoming elections?

We don't have any faith in a Democratic candidate, but right now we don't really have any other choice but to try and figure out how to get rid of this administration. Literally, the invasion into other parts of the world, the passage of the FTAA, and having a world race to the bottom are the things that we have before us if Bush is reelected.

What are some of the future opportunities that you will take advantage of to get your message out?

Right now we are working around the clock for a huge poor people's march planned for August 30, 2004 in New York City, marching from the front of the United Nations to the doors of the Republican National Convention. We intend to raise the consciousness in this country. Not only do we need to stand in opposition to the war taking place in Iraq, but we need to address the war taking place here at home. With 519 casualties in Iraq and another 9,000 who have been evacuated because of a major trauma we must speak out against the war. But there are an even larger number of people in this country that die every year because they don't have a basic right to housing; or because they are a victim of domestic violence and they don't have a place to go for safety; or they die in our country because they don't have access to health care. These are things we can change. ☆

To contact Kensington Welfare Rights Union call (215) 203-1945, email kwru@kwru.org, visit www.kwru.org or write to KWRU, P.O. Box 50678, Philadelphia, PA 19132.

above: The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign at the Lincoln memorial upon arrival in DC. In August 2003 the group traveled from Marks, MS through the south and set-up a tent city to call attention to the lack of economic human rights in the United States. (photo by Hans Bennett)



Bracero 2004

How Bush Plans to Legalize American Sweatshops

words Artemio Guerra
illustration JT Yost

When Bush came out with his guest workers proposal in January of this year, I was organizing Mexican immigrants working for cleaning contractors in New York City. That night, Guadalupe and Ramon, undocumented immigrants from Mexico, approached me and began to talk about their experiences working for a contractor cleaning supermarkets in the neighborhood.

Many city supermarkets become hellish sweatshops at night after they close their doors. When the gates come down, janitors like Guadalupe and Ramon are locked inside the stores and are left to toil all night to make those floors shine. Ramon has seen managers disconnect phones and Guadalupe recalls seeing padlocked fire exits in many of the supermarkets he worked. Supermarket managers are afraid the workers will steal or walk out on the job and not finish their shift, so locking workers up is a way to control them. If there is an emergency, there is no way out, no way to call for help.

On a regular night, a janitor can work for as long as 12 hours. One janitor can clean as many as seven different supermarkets in one week. Guadalupe recalls working for 20 hours straight and then being sent by the contractor to clean another supermarket in a different part of town. The pay is \$60 a night or \$55 if you are learning the trade. Many of the workers work seven days and over 60 hours a week and will never see overtime pay. Others will never get paid at all.

Guadalupe was fired last October when he refused to work on his first day off in weeks. His boss kept the last two weeks of work as a deposit. Ramon was fired a week later and the boss also refused to pay him.

Undermining a Workers' Movement

Under Bush's guest worker proposal, sweatshop bosses will determine the fate of workers like Ramon and Guadalupe. Bush's program proposes a temporary status of three years and a maximum of six (if an extension is granted) to the millions of undocumented workers already in the country — but only if they get an employer to apply for them. If they are abroad, they can enter the United States legally if they are offered a job by an American employer who can prove no American worker will fill the position. Bush's immigration program creates a partnership between government and business interests to control the supply of workers and feed the demand of America's low wage industries. Such a guest worker program will impose severe limitations to the rights of immigrant workers and their ability to fight for justice in the workplace.

American unions have experienced a rapid membership decline in the manufacturing sector as corporations continue to move their operations abroad to maximize their

profits. In the last decade, new immigrants have revitalized organized labor as the service sector grew during the economic boom of the 1990s. NAFTA opened Mexico's borders to American and foreign companies seeking cheap labor. Bush's guest worker program will bring cheap labor to the doors of the service industry here at home. This new government and business partnership will have absolute power over the workers' right to exist in this country. Workers will be discouraged to join unions or fight for their rights by the fear of losing their legal status and becoming, to use the term of academic and author Peter Kwong, "forbidden workers" again.

Bush proposes to "match willing workers with willing employers." Guadalupe's reaction to the program is that "whether or not it works depends on what kind of boss you have." If you quit or get fired under the guest worker program, you will have until your current permit's expiration date to find another boss willing to apply for you — another "willing employer." If you don't find a new job and fall off status, you will be subject to deportation—that is what you will get for not being a "willing worker."

Furthermore, the guest worker program doesn't guarantee the more than 8 million undocumented workers in this country the right to obtain permanent residency. With a cap of 140,000 green cards per year, there is a severe gap between the government's current immigration policy and the reality of millions of immigrant workers.

From Operation Wetback to the Patriot Act

Recent history offers a clear example of a guest worker program and its consequences. When the United States entered WWII in the 1940s, millions of American workers went off to fight the war, creating severe labor shortages. In 1942, the American government created the *Bracero* program (*bracero* from the Spanish word *brazo*, meaning arm), a guest worker program that admitted as many as 500,000 Mexican workers per year to work the land and harvest the crops. Under the *Bracero* program, more than 5 million Mexican work-

ers immigrated and grew roots in communities throughout the nation. The war ended and, since guest workers were not so desperately needed anymore, the government orchestrated Operation Wetback (yes, the government called it that) and deported nearly 2 million Mexicans between 1954 and 1956. Many of the deported were here legally under the *Bracero* program.

Most criticism from immigrant advocates surrounding Bush's guest worker program has been framed around its lack of an avenue to citizenship. However, we ought to take a deep look at the notion that equates citizenship with full protection and recognition of a person's rights in this country. For instance, Mexican immigrants, the largest group of undocumented immigrants, are not compelled to emigrate by the prospects of American citizenship. A long history of troublesome relations with their neighbors to the north and a complex sense of working class nationalism prevent Mexican immigrants from readily embracing American citizenship, but once you arrive here, American citizenship turns out to be the only legal means to be fully recognized as a person.

Any project of immigration reform needs to provide an avenue for permanent residency and rights and protections for immigrants who are not citizens. Bill Clinton denied non-permanent residents the right to access public assistance and a myriad of federally funded relief programs. His 1996 Immigration Reform Act, a precursor to the despised Patriot Act, even made them vulnerable to indefinite detention in the name of national security if the government ever held any secret evidence against them. Immigration advocates who believe that the Democratic Party's presidential hopefuls are the answer to the plight of undocumented immigrants ought to remember Bill Clinton's appalling record.

Today, permanent residency in this country is simply a dangerous, unstable, and frightening state. A guest workers program with no avenue for workers to stay and grow roots where they choose is an attempt to sever any possibility of a new workers' movement ever emerging in this country. If the immigrants

who began the struggle for the eight-hour workday had been guest workers, the Haymarket Square riots would never have happened and President Wilson would never have enacted the eight-hour workday mandate. There wouldn't have been a United Farm Workers union and no Cesar Chavez if the Filipino and Mexican farmers had gone back after their visas expired. No Justice for Janitors and no Adrien Brody staring in Ken Loach's retelling of the LA strike in the film *Bread and Roses*.

Fighting for the Future

Guadalupe and Ramon, regardless of what Bush plans to do, don't have plans to go anywhere any time soon. They have decided to stay here, fight back, and demand their back wages. Recently a group of community residents joined the workers and picketed a Met Foods Supermarket in the neighborhood of Carroll Gardens in Brooklyn. They wanted the supermarket's owner to show his face. Supermarket owners should be accountable for the atrocities of the contractors they hire. Met Foods didn't want any more community demonstrations in front of the store so they fired the cleaning contractor who abused the workers.

A week after the protest, the contractor paid Guadalupe. He hasn't yet paid Ramon. We are currently organizing other janitors working for the same contractor. The labor division of the New York State Attorney General is conducting an investigation of the wage and hour violations.

A new labor movement of millions of workers like Ramon and Guadalupe is growing in the United States. Globalization has destroyed the economic infrastructures of developing countries, leaving many immigrants little to go back home to. There is an emerging web of local struggles of poor people organizing for economic justice that exists outside of traditional political institutions. Just like the peace movement emerged and took to the streets to protest the war on Iraq, a new workers movement will emerge as well. Bush's new *Bracero* program must not be allowed to derail this incredible progress. ☆



Greg MacPherson
Maintenance CDEP
G-7 Welcoming Committee Records
www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Greg MacPherson is probably one of the most under-sung singer/songwriters in N. America today. Americans have yet to realize that we have a continental equivalent to Billy Bragg, but hopefully this short review takes a couple steps toward changing that sad state of affairs. For those of you who are confused, I'm talking about the artist who writes songs about life, liberty, and the pursuit of the aforementioned life without corporations meddling in the minutiae of our work-a-day worlds. On this CDEP, Greg MacPherson covers The Clash's "Bankrobber" with a deftness that debunks detractors (myself included) who think most folks should just leave The Clash alone. The standout of this short collection, however, is the track "Company Store," which recounts a family tale told by his grandfather who worked the mines in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. GMac brings working class sensibility to your doorstep with a guitar and a sincere smile. Let him in, and ask him what's on his mind.

~Jason Kucsma

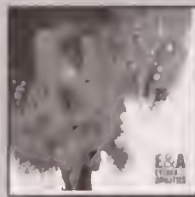
REVIEW WORKING CLASS HERO

Eyede & Abilities

E&A

Epitaph

www.epitaph.com



Finally, a new album from MC Eyede and DJ Abilities! It's self-titled and released by Epitaph, but I don't hear any rock'n'roll crossover, so maybe somebody's trying to cash in on "popular Hip-Hop culture"? Whatever, I'm not convinced that E&A are going commercial just yet. Though they definitely have mass appeal. My girlfriend listened to this while I was out the other day, before I even had a chance to hear it myself. She tells me later, "What's E&A mean? I listened to it earlier and it's goood!" So nice work fellas; you sold her on the new record before I even heard it, and she didn't know who the hell you were from the get-go, since she's more on that Born Against, Catharsis, and Against Me! tip. Hey, maybe *that's* the rock'n'roll crossover? Anyway, check it out everybody, this is the second release by Eyede & Abilities, and it's dope. Personally, I'm not a big fan of the battle style, which is where the roots of E&A originate. I don't understand how that trial-by-fire scene does much for the unification of the Hip-Hop community. However, this record is solid. After hearing the "Reintroduction," you'll be like, "Damn, nice to meet y'all again!" The cuts "Now," "Kept," "One Twenty," and "E&A Day" all got an x-large "I" from me, by delivering the goods with tight production and lyricism intact. The way E&A work together, jumping off of one another's sound is interesting; you can really hear the camaraderie. "Exhausted Love" and "Paradise," are the cool-out cuts on the album. "Star Destroyer" on the other hand, is an insane battle anthem from outerspace. "Get Along" is a nice, jazz-laden interlude while "Act Right" features a message to the misbehaving nightlife and "Glass" has an excellent build-up that doesn't end with the finale you'd quite expect. All in all, a quality record here with righteous production that just doesn't quit from Abilities and confidence on the microphone that you can appreciate from Eyede.

Micranots

The Emperor & the Assassin
Rhymesayers Entertainment
www.rhymesayers.net



If you are unfamiliar with the genius that is MNPLS-based Micranots, and you consider yourself a true fan of conscious Hip-Hop, do yourself a favor by picking up their 2000 Subverse release, *Obelisk Movements*. This album is a proper introduction; one that will take many listens due to its mega-dense content. It's a serious journey and a very important one, otherwise you're missing a big piece of the Micranots puzzle. The conceptual companion piece to *Obelisk Movements* is their recent February 2004 follow-up, *The Emperor & the Assassin*, which fills in the historical blanks to paint a complete picture of where this unstoppable duo are coming from. The production is held down exclusively by DJ Kool Akiem, a master in the art of sonic storytelling by layering narrative soundscapes and meditative beats throughout all Micranots releases. In addition to what Kool Akiem is saying musically, MC I Self Devine demands your attention and respect as a true leader in the realm of conscious lyricism. He's an MC for the people, no doubt, and carries mad weight with his verbal spray, which is always a tight and focused grouping on the target subject. This album is complex in that there are stories within stories happening throughout, as each transitioning track speaks volumes. It's a dark record but it's honest, as it

breaks down the early histories of the artists coming up in violent times. All the cuts are solid, but stand-outs are Glorious" ("Death is the climax, everything is balance in the cycle"), "The Origin (feat. Mujahed)", "Steel Toe vs. The Rookie" (feat. Slug), "Eight Days" ("Keep yr head up, regardless of the set-up, and don't let evil fuck yr head up, don't let up"), "Amerikalogy" (proper dissent theme), "Neutralize," "Violence" (audio-visceral!), and "Off Beats" (feat. Malcolm). Plus DJ Kool Akiem's "Intro" & "Outro" on this record are classic to his style. In his own words, Kool Akiem describes the production; "There is a lot I'm saying on this album, but it's up to those people perceptive enough to discern the meaning of what I'm saying. It's like contemplating on the meaning of a symbol. You have to use your intuition, link things together, uncover clues." Micranots are a legendary force, which serve to champion the cause of truth and originality in all aspects of Hip-Hop. As decorated soldiers in this game, they deserve respect and infinite props.

Rjd2

Since We Last Spoke
Definitive Jux
www.definitivejux.net



It's been a couple years now since Rjd2 premiered his critically acclaimed debut solo album, *Deadringer* (Def Jux, '02). The lag time between that and this recent follow-up is definitely not due to a lack of work on his part. This kid's a real-deal hustler for sure and one has to wonder, does he ever sleep? And if he does, does he dream of electric sheep? On *Since We Last Spoke*, which just dropped May 2004, there are no recognizable guest MC's like on *Deadringer* (which some like and some don't). But there are no disappointments either. Per his usual style, there's a little somethin' somethin' on here for everybody, from rock steady Hip-Hop beats to Latin rhythms to mellow esoteric ambience to insane rock guitar riffs. Rjd2 has created yet another full-length masterpiece of ridiculously dope instrumental music that comes through as even more "soundtrack-ish" than his previous, which is just fine by me. If you aren't well versed with his production style, he builds soundscapes using several machines as extensions of himself. Specifically, with an Akai MPC 2000, up to four Technics 1200 turntables, and a Vestax mixer. Though I'm sure these days and for his recording, he's using even more toys and updated ricks. But Rj's soundscapes are really something special because you can find yourself getting completely lost in them. With so many layers of sound complemented and textured, all created by just one hustling DJ, you gotta wonder if the kid isn't a machine. Seriously, if you think about it and give his records a thorough listen, he's already on that next shit as a robot in disguise. Go check out his live set for an impressive show of turntablism, but be careful not to break your neck!

Various Artists

Embedded Joints
Embedded Music
www.embeddedmusic.net



The trick with samplers/comps is that often they're a big gamble for both the featured artists, whose songs they hope you like, and for the working class folks who fork out their cash for a listen. If a specific compilation song is subjectively bunk, what are the odds that the public will buy that artists' full-length release? I personally don't mind sifting through to find the real cuts that I'm feeling but considering the hit-or-miss nature of comps, it can

be ruthless work. Luckily, Embedded production duo, Ese and Hipsta, have put together a tight grip of artists for their most recent compilation release that dropped March 2004. And honestly, there isn't much on this comp that I don't like, which is cool since many of the featured MC's and crews were new to my ears. The opening cut, "Check My Willz," featuring veteran Aceyalone is confidently killer on both lyrical and production fronts. It kept me hyped long enough to hear "Adversity Struck," featuring Atom's Family (Vast, Jest, Hangar 18 & Cryptic), which showcases the talented wordplay of those four MC's, backed up by a crazy-ass frenetic production track. Brooklyn MC, Tes, shines on "Bare With Me," a real catchy cut that hooks and sticks in your head; the following Tes joint, "Main St." was decent too and produced by him to boot. The Not For Nothin' crew of E-Dot, Loer Velocity & Donnan Linkz contribute a three-song offering that are all good, on "Eye Opener," "Uhhh Huh," and "Story," their lyrical style flows well with their production and I appreciated that. Babbletron (Calm Pete, Jaymanilla, & DJ Pre) round out this comp, and I thought their crazy, bugged-out production and vocal skills on all three of their cuts were very cool and listenable. It was ad of Ese and Hipsta to end this comp with a couple 12" 3-sides, although I liked the idea of their inclusion more than their actual sonic offering. And so it goes. Overall, a sick-ass collection that's worth having around to impress your pals with. (But more importantly, to potentially turn them onto something they've never heard that deserves their support).

Various Artists

Definitive Jux Presents 3
Definitive Jux
www.definitivejux.net



OK, so I'm admittedly not much of a sampler/compilation fan. To me, it's especially irritating when a label like Def Jux puts out a comp that's nothing more than a collection of 'leasers' lifted from upcoming full-length releases that'll drop two months later. At least throw us a more substantial bone, and include some previously unreleased material or B-sides. (Though for all I know, most of this "sampler" could be a virtual cornucopia of unreleased B-side shit. My promo-bot review copy didn't specify.) So this puppy dropped in March 2004 and to my ears, there are more misses than hits here. Check it out though, I'm no Def Jux hater by any means, as that'd be a ridiculous claim! I'm crazy about those kids and generally support what most of them are up to. But comps like this seem like a waste of resources to me, especially if it's getting pressed and marketed instead of remaining in promo format. With that said, there are some as should be expected dope cuts on this thing. "Make News" by Camage is way out with its production style and he spits some real hot verbals (MNPLS represent!); "Aquatic" by 4" Pyramid features a kicked-back, smoky vocal flow that's nice, though the bubbling bong thing is totally played out; "Medical Assistance" by The Perceptionists (Mr Lif & Akrobatik) is hella cool and that's a collaboration I look forward to hearing more from; "Weathermen Radio" with Camu Tao & El-P is an example of great storytelling with a catchy chorus to boot and I liked this cut a lot; "Oxycontin Pt 2" by El-P & Cage is a dark but well crafted story of love gone south and the vocal exchanges in conversation format is a smart technique; "Take No Chances" by Hangar 18 (from Atom's Family) also sounded real good; the final cut ends on a high note with "Clean Living" by Rjd2 who can do no wrong in my book. And that's just the way the story goes with the "sampler" scene, some get savored and others get served.

all reviews by SMLPXX

by Danae Voorhees

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a day in the life of



I first heard about Amy my freshman year of college. We were packed into a stuffed hall listening to journalist Allan Nairn speak. It was 1991. Nairn had just come back from East Timor where he and colleague Amy Goodman had been covering the Indonesian occupation. He described their witnessing the slaughter of 270 East Timorese; how they themselves were beaten badly by Indonesian soldiers, Nairn suffering, among other injuries, a fractured skull. I was profoundly moved. It was the first time I'd met someone who had put his life on the line to get a story told.

Pacifica Radio's Democracy Now! began in 1996 as a daily election show led by Amy Goodman, by then a long-time journalist. Just after September 11, 2001, and within blocks of Ground Zero, DN! began broadcasting on radio and television every weekday. Today, DN! is simulcast on more than 100 radio stations in the United States and overseas, and you can hear it on roughly 25 National Public Radio affiliates, watch it on Free Speech TV and 100 public access television stations, and access audio, video, and transcripts online.

by Anna Lappé

by Isis

6:05 a.m.

It's six o'clock in the morning and I'm not at Democracy Now! My alarm clock is still an hour from sounding, but Mike Burke, one of their producers is there, doing last-minute prep and compiling the day's headline news.

7:32 a.m.

The converted firehouse that DN! and Downtown Community Television Center call home is bursting at the seams. DN!'s main office is stuffed with desks and monitors, videotapes and posters. Waiting for the show to start, I sit next to a stack of books, with a couple of Tariq Ali's *Bush in Babylon* teetering on top. Behind me, a poster reads: "US Out of Humboldt County." Taped on the file cabinet next to me is a list of 100 cities and their college radio stations.

The production team is testing camera angles and mics. Eight computers and 12 monitors pack a small room with a window onto the studio. John Kerry's voice booms out from the B-roll.

A guest paces nervously. He asks me where he should put his coat; I tell him I'm as lost as he is. He glances nervously at the monitors and to the empty seat across a round, wooden table where he will soon be sitting.

7:44 a.m.

Amy Goodman arrives, her arms spilling over with notes. She gives a warm hello before she rushes into the studio.

The clock ticks toward 8 a.m.

DEMOCRACY NOW!



Someone shouts: "I'm not getting channel 7! I'm not getting channel 7!" From inside the studio, someone calls out: "Wait, Amy's not ready."

"I'm ready, I'm ready," she insists.

"She's not ready. She's still wearing her coat," comes the voice from the other room.

7:53 a.m.

Amy takes off her coat, adjusts her headset.

The guest is now sitting next to me. He won't be on until the end of the show. He's still nervous. I try to reassure him, but I'm nervous, too, nervous for everyone.

Amy practices her lines: "On January 16, Nicholas Yarris walked out of a state prison in Pennsylvania after spending two decades on death row. DNA had proven his innocence. He joins us in our studio today."

I realize I'm standing next to Nicholas Yarris. He's listening to Amy, too, and smiles on the introduction.

7:59 a.m.

"Roll numeric, let's go. Roll music," Uri Gal-Ed, the Television Director, commands. And the show begins.

Amy reads today's headlines: Iraq, civil unions, Kerry and Edwards, Bush and the National Guard, Haiti, the proposed Comcast bid on Disney.

8:13 a.m.

Thirteen minutes go by in a flash. I hadn't realized I'd spent all of them on the edge of my seat. The show airs live, that means live cuts and every mistake matters. Uri shouts continuously, "Take 5! Take

7!" as he edits between camera angles, choosing shots from a bank of monitors.

They cut to their first guest, Hannah Sassaman, program director at Prometheus Radio Project, a Philadelphia-based advocacy group for low-power radio stations. She's speaking to Amy from a cell phone on the courthouse steps of the Third Circuit Court of Appeals as she heads into oral arguments for a case brought by several organizations calling for a stay on the media ownership rules passed by the FCC in June 2003.

Later when I talk with Amy, she stresses the importance of this story: "We have to cover every stage of the struggle for keeping media independent. The FCC is creating rules that amount to a takeover of our media, where basically 2, 3, 4 moguls will control everything. It is essential to cover because the airwaves are ours, they are public's — they are not their property."

When I ask Amy and others at DN! what makes now such a ripe moment for alternative media — and how DN! has been able to grow with relatively little resources — the unanimous answer is: collaboration, frustration, and technological innovation.

Ana Nogueira, one of DN!'s two television producers, put it this way: "DN! is successful because it's the largest public media collaboration project in the country. It relies on Independent Media Centers from all around the world, it relies on small radio and public television stations, it relies on Free Speech TV, it relies on people who like our mission and want to donate technology services or web support."

The support for DN! and other alternative media has also emerged because people are fed up. As Amy puts it, people are "tired of a media that they don't identify with — a media that they don't believe in."

8:27 a.m.

It's the first break of the hour. Ana rolls B-roll from Iraq while music plays. During these breaks and throughout the show, they use some of their own footage and a lot that is sent in by supporters around the world. As recently as a few years ago, they all remind me, access to this high-quality footage was next to impossible. And for on-site reporting, the costs of satellite transmission were prohibitively high. Now all that has changed.

As one of the best examples, everyone points to the reporting of DN!'s Jeremy Scahill and Jacquie Soohen from Iraq in the lead-up to the invasion. Saddam Hussein was controlling all information coming in and going out of the country. Only small emails could be sent

“Our mission is to make dissent commonplace in America.”

from Indymedia coders, Jeremy and Jacquie used an enhanced version of Split, a software that dices video into small, emailable bits and compiles it back together on the other end. And so for the year leading up to the invasion, Jacquie and Jeremy produced www.IraqJournal.org with streaming images from the ground.

8:29 a.m.

Amy introduces her next guest, Michael Massing, who has written a critique about the media's role in the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq.

The speed of cuts and the complexity of the programming is dizzying. Ana later tells me this is one of their biggest challenges: communication during the show to ensure seamless transitions and perfect cuts. Broadcast networks spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on the programs that create these “run-down systems.” A price tag DN! can't afford. So, in another collaborative effort, they're creating their own. “Open Flows, a collective, radical technology company, is building it with us,” Ana explained. “Once it's done, we're going to make it available as open source to any community group that needs it.”

8:33 a.m.

Cut to a press conference with White House spokesman Scott McClellan responding to questions about President Bush's service in the National Guard: “The president fulfilled his duties,” McClellan is saying. The press conference is broadcast uninterrupted for several minutes.

McClellan again: “The President recalls serving both when he was in Texas and when he was in Alabama.” And a minute later: “These documents clearly show that the President fulfilled his duties.” And again: “And I think that the facts are very clear from these documents. These documents — the payroll records and the point summaries — verify that he was paid for serving and that he met his requirements.”

I can't imagine seeing a clip this long on anything but C-SPAN (and how many people watch C-SPAN?). It makes all the difference to hear McClellan repeat himself over and over again, but this simply wouldn't fit in the soundbite-driven news of mainstream media.

After the show, Amy suggests a more precise term. “I wouldn't call it ‘mainstream media,’ she said. “It should be called ‘corporate media.’ It is a minority elite. A small number of pundits who know so little about so much and comment on everything.”

And we've learned a lot about the state of this “corporate media” in their coverage of the war, Amy argues. “In the runup to the war, the media got it all wrong,” she said. “They were simply the megaphones of those in power. But now, we've got the media basically doing press for the White House. And now that we know they got it wrong — and *they* know it — they're still bringing on the same people, asking how did we get it wrong? What about letting someone who *didn't* get it wrong speak?”

“The whole philosophy of journalism is to hold those in power accountable to the public, to be the guardian for the public interest, and to broadcast those whose voices we would otherwise not hear. We go to where the silence is. That's our job.”

8:59 a.m.

The show ends with Amy's moving conversation with Nicholas Yarris. As the cameras stop rolling, Amy reaches over and shakes his hand. He looks much more relaxed.

With the taping done, the team immediately switches gears: Transcriptions need to be made and put up on the web, fallout from the show (including a call from a *New York Times* reporter who wants to rebut Massing) need to be handled, and tomorrow's show needs to be planned.

Much of what makes the show run, I hear again and again, are the volunteers. Certain tasks, like show transcriptions, are handled completely by them. “We have transcribers across the country,” Ana tells me. One of their transcribers, the guy who “does Tuesdays,” even emailed from an Internet café in Paris where he was on vacation. He was waiting for his transmission to do his weekly transcription.

In addition to transcription volunteers, dozens of other people are involved in the day-to-day operations: “We have one or two volunteers in every day to help with the flood of administrative details... We also seek and use highly skilled volunteers, from video techs, database experts, GIS professionals, set designers, and directors. We call on volunteers to help set up a temporary studio and at events like a recent one in Berkeley with 3,500 people,” Denis explains.

As Amy puts it: “DN! and IMCs are built on almost nothing except the goodwill, curiosity, passion of people who are tired of seeing their friends and neighbors through a corporate lens and particularly tired — and afraid — that that image is being sent around the world.”

4:50 p.m.

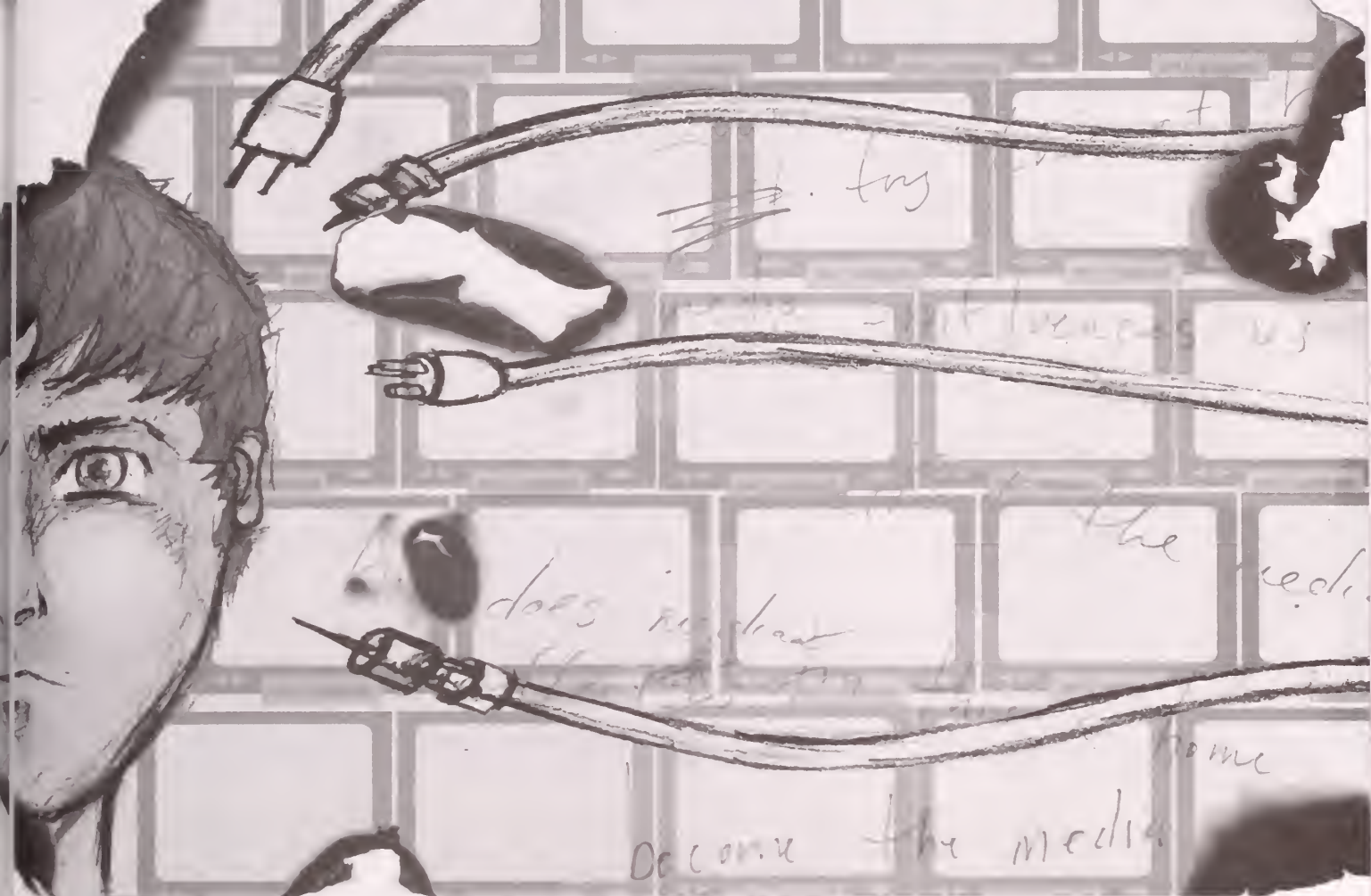
By now, tomorrow's show is set. Amy, Ana and Elizabeth (Press, the other television producer), and Mike, Jeremy, and Sharif (Abdel Kouddous, another producer) are sitting in the studio. Ana and Elizabeth are finding footage for tomorrow's show. Mike and Jeremy are on the phones trying to find the best people to interview.

The big-screen TVs are broadcasting CNN. We watch the sixth repeat of the Jackson-Timberlake top-tearing Superbowl fiasco and listen as a guest from the Family Research Council laments the loss of family values. We all look at each other perplexed when CNN quotes Bush saying the media solution is to: “Turn the ‘off’ button on.”

As I sit in the studio surrounded by everyone hard at work to deliver news unfiltered by corporate bias, I think of Mike's words: “My biggest hope is that DN! encourages and inspires independent media makers to develop their own shows. If every town had their own DN!, this country would be a very different place.”

“Our mission is to make dissent commonplace in America,” Amy stressed. “Dissent is what makes this nation healthy — it comes out of the finest tradition that built this country — and we have to fight for it.”

Spending a day in the DN! world, it's easy to forget about the media most Americans turn to. To give myself a healthy dose, I return home and channel-surf FOX News, ABC, CBS, and NBC. It only takes an hour or so to begin feeling disheartened. Even though DN! is growing, it still only reaches a fraction of the American public. Meanwhile most people are watching maggot-eating identical twins on Fear Factor or hearing the nightly news declare tonight's breaking story: “the ending you *didn't* see on Sex and the City.” But as I feel myself descending into despair, I remember what Amy said when I asked her how she keeps her head up in a time of — as Orwell would have put it — universal deceit: “We don't have a choice,” she'd answered. “We either make the world a better place or we don't. I prefer to try.” ★



Work in the Age of Reality TV

word: Anne Elizabeth Moore
illustration: Willie Johnson

A 14-year-old boy in my home state lit himself on fire while conducting a school project about how media affects youth. I was arrested by the story, as I had recently begun working on a book attempting to explain to youth (and the adults that work with them) how they can affect the media. As a writer, I was intrigued by the intricacies of the plot: copying a stunt from MTV's *Jackass*, the Minnesota boy covered himself with mineral spirits, gazed into the lens of a video camera, warned viewers "Don't try this at home," and sparked a lighter. He covered over 65 percent of his body with third-degree burns and had three major surgeries, but was expected to ultimately survive his project about how media affects youth. (The *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, who broke the story, never reported the boy's name in order, they claimed, to protect him from the media.)

The story didn't appear much on TV — certainly not on MTV, and definitely not on MTV's *Jackass*. I'm not surprised. That show would never take responsibility or offer condolences for the boy's physical damage because it wouldn't fit the show's theme of *Jackass*-ness. The station would not mention the incident because it wouldn't fit MTV's theme of sexy, rock-and-roll rebelliousness, and the story wouldn't get much TV play because TV itself clearly bears fault. This was unfortunate: This boy made a clear and resounding statement about how the media affects youth, but TV, in refusing to enter into a dialogue about it, wouldn't allow his statement to affect the media.

As a journalist, I wanted to find out more about this boy's project and its disastrous results; but as a media activist and active member of the media, I knew that this boy had come as close as he

probably ever would to the media again. And this, too, was unfortunate: since TV wouldn't properly tell his story, and he had probably been scared off of telling it himself, it falls to me and other writers to piece together what he learned. And, more importantly, what we can learn from him. This, in a grand sense, is my work.

I came across the story in a boxed piece on the front page of the *Billings Gazette* while on a cross-country excursion. I was struck at once with the impact of this boy's mistake. I was at the time traveling home to Seattle after working with youth in Chicago on a different kind of project about how media affects youth. Everyone — kids and adults — in this after-school arts program made a zine as a way of responding to the media. The zines we made in that program (and everywhere else I went that spring) and the Minnesota boy's video made the same point: the media, including television, radio, Internet, newspapers, magazines and even books, are influencing us in negative ways. We don't like this influence. It is harmful.

The statement made by the video of the boy in Minnesota, however, was much more

effective than our zines. He was recreating a "human barbecue" stunt in which a guy in a fireproof suit covers himself in meat and climbs onto a grill. As countless papers reported, he even repeated the warning given before TV stunts when he told people not to try his stunt at home. Unfortunately, he was trying it at home and it was extremely dangerous. It nearly killed him. The message in his video (which I have not seen and do not wish to see) that we didn't point out in our zines — the message he didn't even mean to convey, as it damaged him so severely — is that the media lies blatantly.

And this was his mistake: in allowing the media to exist in his life unmediated — in simply recreating something directly that he had witnessed on television — this Midwestern boy was permitting a whole array of damaging influences entrance to his life. He claimed, *ha ha*, to "get it." He believed (falsely) that he was in on the prank. "Don't try this at home," he inside-joked, perhaps thinking his viewers, presumably all early teens themselves, would "get it" too. *Ha ha*, they might have laughed, had the stunt proceeded as the boy intended, as he had been promised by television it would.

And had the stunt proceeded as the boy clearly intended it too — had he been able to copy MTV's *Jackass* prank successfully and complete his home video unscathed — the joke would have been profound. "Don't try this at home," he would have been able to repeat, in an ironic way, for the rest of his

life, knowing that *he* had tried it at home, and nothing had happened to him. His video would thus have become infamous in that Minnesota high school. I know. I might have gone there. Catching TV at its own game was always good, clean fun when I was growing up.

But the stunt did not proceed as the boy had seen it on TV, because the media lies blatantly. If not in word then in deed. No matter how many times we hear the phrase "reality television," the two concepts are not interchangeable. *Ha ha*, you can almost hear MTV, the inventor of that genre, responding.

TV, even more than other media, is tricky: it may tell you not to do something, but it also shows you how to do the thing you're not supposed to do. Given the number of conflicting messages we all filter through to make sense of TV, it is perfectly understandable that a boy could have heard and repeated the phrase "Don't try this at home," while trying something dangerous at home. The media constantly convey untruths, biased opinions, and pointless trivia. Christina Aguilera's hair color. Our exciting victory in Iraq. That trouble-maker Ralph Nader. Paris Hilton. Michael Jackson. *Sex in the City*. This slew of pointless messages shouldn't be able to harm you, but the boy in Minnesota proved that it can.

Despite our full knowledge of this, *all* of this, the media remain our primary sources for information about the world. We learn about romance from Sean Connery, about

happy families and healthy bodies from TV commercials about life insurance and breakfast cereals, about what's cool from Britney Spears, about communication from websites like Gaia and cell phone packages like Verizon, and about danger and fear from daily newspapers, owned often by people who profit from the purchases of car alarms and missile defense systems we make to lessen our anxiety. The lesson of the boy in Minnesota is that we need to find a better way of using the information gleaned from TV besides emulating it in our daily lives. Unmediated, these messages damage us.

As I mentioned, it is my job as a writer to find the messages in this boy's experience. And in this case, I am forced to do so without this boy's input. It's peculiar work, writing. I couldn't have stopped that boy even if I had been invited to try. I'm not a firefighter, I'm not a negotiator, I'm not a psychologist, I'm not his parent, and I'm not the inventor of an exciting new barbecue-proof suit for kids. Ok, I *am* a member of the media, and that makes the situation somewhat more confusing, but *my* work is to describe for you what we should and shouldn't — really, honestly — try at home.

Don't emulate messages from the media to prove how damaging the media can be. Don't attempt to dismantle the master's house with the master's tools. Make your own tools, be they zines, videos, or exciting new barbecue-proof suits for kids. Re-mediate your media. Do your own work. ★

60-SECOND SHOUT OUTS

Thankfully, the rate that people put out amazing projects far surpasses how often we're able to put out magazines. Here are a few things you shouldn't put down this issue of Clamor without knowing a little bit about. Plexifilm (plexifilm.com) has recently released Justin Mitchell's (*Songs for Cassavettes*) *Dirty Old Town* film on DVD. The film chronicles a day in the life of Ted Leo and Pharmacists as they prove in one well-edited hour of footage why they are the hardest working independent musicians in the biz. Even though the Coney Island show that is featured is also the day that Leo succumbed to throat/voice problems, the performance still shines. Another right-coaster, Atom and His Package has sadly hung up the Casio for the indefinite future, but not before recording a CD/DVD of his last show for Hopeless Records (hopelessrecords.com). The package is a worthy tribute to the artist whose sincerity and wit have won over thousands of fans worldwide. I'm already looking forward to the next project, though we may have to wait until after Atom and his wife have settled into their new roles as parents before that happens! While some legends hang it up, others are dusting off the equipment. It's been eight years since the Descendents have released a full length, but this spring they've launched a punk rock juggernaut *Cool To Be You* on Fat Wreck Chords (fatwreck.com). A skeptic of the reunion-genre, I was surprised by the energy and insight on this CD — growing older seems to have engendered an appreciation for subtlety without sacrificing the blistering speed and

pop sensibilities that won us over back in the day. It's also a healthy "Fuck you, this is how you do it!" to all the shitty mall-punk that's littering the streets these days. A lot of artists have also spent the last couple years trying to figure out how to capitalize on the electronic rock craze that bands like *The Faint* (where's that new album fellas?) bulldozed the globe with — most have failed miserably at it. We've commented in Clamor how *Stylex* brilliantly fuse Devo and Brainiac, and now it seems that Heartcore's (heartcorerecords.net) *Addicted 2 Fiction* are entering the ring. The female Brooklyn-gone-L.A. trio creates ethereal pop and goth music that earns them a seat alongside the likes of *Ladytron* and *Interpol*, and while the CD is hot, A2F begs to be seen live. Speaking of the Faint, bassist Joel Peterson has just released his second release (*Fulfilled/Complete*) under the solo project name *Broken Spindles*. *Broken Spindles*, in my unrefined opinion, continues Saddle Creek's (saddle-creek.com) perfect batting average — putting out innovative records that are also incredibly inviting to the average music fan. San Francisco's Deerhoof have been accomplishing the same feat around the globe. On the heels of their 2003 critically-acclaimed *Apple O'* release, *Deerhoof* kicked off the spring by releasing *Milk Man* on Kill Rock Stars (killrockstars.com). The CD is an

overwhelmingly beautiful CD that is simultaneously ominous and airy — disarming and inviting. And while some have said that *Deerhoof* have a tendency to dabble in the inaccessible, *Milk Man* is anything but. That inaccessibility has been a big reason why I've never been able to get into *Amps for Christ*, the "folkcore" project created by ex-*Man Is The Bastard* guitarist/organist Barnes. However the newest AFC release, *People at Large* on 5 Rue Christine (5rc.com) has been getting extended play around here. Don't get me wrong, it's still all kinds of crazy (two versions of Auld Lang Syne on different homemade electronic instruments?), but it's also a beautiful intersection between folk and hardcore — and I'm NOT talking about the punk shit that assumes something is folk just because it's unplugged. This is authentic Appalachacore. And finally on the aural front, Pinback's Armistead Burwell IV (also formerly of *Three Mile Pilot*) has graced us with a new EP under the name *Systems Officer*. The self-titled CD follows in the tradition of other Burwell projects that foreground haunting beauty with emotionally compelling (and technically complex) arrangements. The EP will be released May 11 by Ace Fu Records (acefu.com) -Jason Kucsma



TV-piquetera

television
from our
perspectives and
our barrios



by Marie Trigona

"We are working to construct an identity and thinking that reflects the working class's and exploited sectors' specific interest and necessities. The camera is a tool, another weapon."

-Grupo Alavío, direct action and video

Alternative media in Latin America, particularly in Argentina, has played a fundamental role in generating organization and direct actions over the last one hundred years. At the onset of the 20th century, anarchists in Argentina used the printing press to mobilize workers and began a tradition of constructing outlets allowing each group to create its own media and express a multitude of ideas. Another tradition these groups left behind is the necessity to utilize the printing press not as an end or purely as symbolic resistance, but to generate revolutionary actions such as striking, work slow downs, machinery sabotage, and free love.

The adaptation and appropriation of technologies has been one of the most important tools for activists to develop new communication practices. TV-piquetera is one experience emerging from debates about the necessity for movements to create their own media and to go beyond limitations that alternative media has self-imposed. Grupo Alavío and the Popular Unity Movement-December 20 (MUP-20), an unemployed workers organization based in several neighborhoods in Greater Buenos Aires, began working together to launch media projects. From this collaboration, a new and powerful organic media

alternative was realized: TV-piquetera. TV-piquetera transmits live pirate TV signals during road blockades and from poverty-stricken neighborhoods on the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Media activists Enrique Carigao and Ricardo Leguizamon launched TV-piquetera in the aftermath of the popular insurrection of December 19 and 20, 2001. But the project did not take off until Grupo Alavío facilitated TV-piquetera's first broadcasting experience during a direct action on September 25, 2003.

It was during an ongoing piquetero road blockade at the Argentine transnational beer brewery, Quilmes, that protestors transmitted a live pirate television signal to a local channel. The antennas were oriented toward the blocks surrounding the factory, where many of the factory's 500 workers reside. One of the objectives of the transmission was to counter-inform the mass media's criminalization of the action by informing the neighbors surrounding the factory about the conflict and explaining the piqueteros' demands for dignified work. During the transmission protestors articulated their reasons for the blockade, expressed solidarity with the Quilmes' workers, and described what it's like to be a piquetero. Grupo Alavío also broadcasted self-produced short documentaries.

Argentina's working class has been plastered by the economic crisis while most economic sectors have profited from the intense devaluation of workers' salaries. According to National Statistics Institute (INDEC) 2003 data, unemployment stands at 16 percent; meanwhile, the government considers the 2.2 million receiving precarious welfare-to-work plans of 150 pesos (about 50 US dollars) as "employed" in the census. Since the 1990s, unemployment has swelled to levels never seen in Argentina's history. Today, 58 percent of the population is living in poverty and 44 percent of the active population is either unemployed or underemployed. Without access to the factory and utility of tools for liberation such as striking, sabo-

tage, and factory occupation, unemployed workers sought out new practices for struggle — the road blockade, which is a method to prevent merchandise from arriving to the market. Just as anarchists organizations used the printing press, MUP-20 is using the television transmissions to accompany the road blockade.

TV-piquetera has since broadcasted in several neighborhoods, rotating transmissions and programming. During the transmissions in MUP-20's community center, a shack in the neighborhoods in Solano in the southern Greater Buenos Aires district of Quilmes, piqueteros from MUP-20 participated in every aspect of the community television experience — planning the programming, producing the specially prepared news pieces, arming the studio, cooking empanadas and pizza, raising the antenna and watching the programming in the screening room in the movement's kitchen.

Like other pirate TV experiences, TV-piquetera ruptures with dominant discourse and expropriates technologies originally aimed for ideological control. MUP-20's publication explained the motives for the transmission: "It demonstrates that we do not need to depend on bosses and owners to make ourselves visible and communicate with our neighbors. To tell our story with our own media is to think with a logic different than that which the system imposes on us."

For the transmissions in Solano, the content of programming was decided in plenary sessions for the broadcast. The first transmission included a documentary about water pollution caused by factories in La Florida, Solano, the same neighborhood where TV-piquetero has transmitted. Piqueteros from MUP-20 participated in the script writing, production, and filming and a group went with Grupo Alavío to film and produce the piece. Neighbors reported that a meat packing plant and other factories were dumping unprocessed chemicals and blood into the stream that runs through La Florida. Nearly every time it rains, the putrid, toxic water floods the community's homes. Children and adults have chronic respiratory problems and skin sores from the polluted water. While no media has ever reported on flooding in La Florida, many of the neighbors expressed anguish at seeing the documentary piece on water pollution in their neighborhood.

Many of Argentina's social conflicts have been ignored by alternative media collectives, who are fascinated with the spectacular, making it difficult for them to cover and reflect on daily conflicts. One of the debates after December 19 and 20, 2001 was the necessity for movements to have their own media. However, there have been many groups that have launched media projects, each group appropriating technologies and media language to reflect the thinking of its group and affinity. While there is an obvious challenge to overcome fragmentation among movements, there is also an opportunity to construct new media projects and rethink alternative media's integration into social movements, direct action, and audience participation.

The second transmission included pre-edited news pieces about the Quilmes blockade, which began by appropriating a Quilmes beer television commercial — the most expensive Argentine advertisement produced in years — to parody corporate representations of elite culture with footage of piqueteros blocking the beer factory. Other pieces included: the struggle for the freedom of political prisoners, Bolivia after the insurrection, resistance in Iraq, and a blockade in front of supermarkets.

Participation of the audience and media makers in the TV-piquetera experience has been one of its strongest components. Participants not only learn how to use technologies and audiovisual language but also form analysis of political and social conflicts (integrating local, national, and international issues).

The most recent TV broadcast was during MUP-20's end of the year and anniversary street festival on December 27, 2003. The festival included programming, table discussions of the second anniversary of December 20, 2001, food, and live music. Into the night,

bands continued to perform with piqueteros filming the concert. As the festival was winding down, two police trucks drove into the corner where the audience was dancing. Police got out of their trucks and tried to provoke a violent confrontation. Participants immediately mobilized to prevent the police from creating a conflict — using sticks and rocks to drive the police out. The need for self-defense is ever present as with the road blockade.

Local neighborhood Peronist political practices (controlling the neighborhood through corruption, controlling families through clientalism, and repressing youths with drugs and police violence) has been re-intensified in Solano. Neighbors working with MUP-20 have been targeted in particular due to MUP-20's community work. Grupo Alavío and MUP-20 are launching a counter-cultural campaign (music, theatre, film projections, and TV-piquetera transmissions) in the neighborhood to fight this repression and continue working with the community. Grupo Alavío began video and press workshops with unemployed worker activists participating in organizations in the region. The workshops are to be dedicated to women struggles and will produce a video and pamphlet about women activists.

TV-piquetera's objective is to transmit in different neighborhoods with the intention of ultimately building a network of community television and/or radio stations that can function autonomously under a larger umbrella of collaboration and mutual support.

TV-piquetera is an attempt to use a media such as television and transform it into a tool for political organizing and liberation. Fundamental to the experience is to use media activism not as symbolic resistance but to directly confront the state, boss, and politicians. The transmission alone is only a symbolic act, but it correlates to the actions of struggle to reach social revolution.

For more information, visit www.revolutionvideo.org/alavio.

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Word on the Streets

street papers amplify the voices of the voiceless



Israel Bayer
Stephen Voss

In a time when media consolidation has taken over the market, more than 47 homeless newspapers in the United States and Canada have taken a more grassroots approach.

Between 1989 and 1992, several newspapers grew out of a groundswell of homelessness, seizing their voices and creating their own media outlets. Today this has become a movement for social change.

Street Sheet in San Francisco, *Street News* in New York, *Spare Change* in Boston, *Street Wise* in Chicago, *Journal'itinaire* in Montreal, and across the Atlantic in London, *The Big Issue*, were all unveiled in the late '80s and early '90s, seizing a hard-earned voice of people on the streets.

"The age old practice of hawking newspapers has been a tradition for as long as there has been a free press," says Bryan Pollard, the former managing editor of *Street Roots*, Portland, Oregon's homeless newspaper. "Street newspapers are a true movement of the people, by the people, and for the people. They consist of concerned people working together to get the truth and information to the community."

Today there are nearly 90 papers worldwide in 27 countries, all with different voices. They range from small circulation semi-monthly publications to popular weekly newspapers that offer job training and social service delivery.

"The street paper movement, with its direct voice of the poor, immediate benefits to homeless people, and possibilities for long term change, is the past decade's most profound innovation in poor people's organizing," said Timothy Harris, founder of *Real Change* and President of the North American Street Newspaper Association (NASNA).

In 1996, street newspapers across the U.S. and Canada came together to explore the possibilities of creating a network of papers. The following year the North American Street Newspaper Association became a reality when 37 papers agreed on a mission, goals, and other strategies to build unity in the movement. After only a handful of papers survived seven hard fought years, dozens of papers were spreading like a wildfire across the country.

"NASNA is finding that the existing street newspapers are growing in terms of stability, staffing, circulation, advertising,

and its acceptance and influence in their respective communities," said Michael Stoops, a NASNA board member with the National Coalition for the Homeless.

"Street newspapers serve to educate the general community about poverty and homelessness issues," Stoops continued, "while bringing a much needed alternative for people who find themselves on the streets with no employment."

At the heart of most street papers are their vendor programs. Vendors buy the paper for a percentage of the costs of printing and sell the paper for a dollar out in the community.

"Not everybody can sell street newspapers; it's a somewhat difficult thing to do," said Bear, a homeless vendor for *Street Roots*. "It's work." Bears says with a swagger. "I make as much money doing this as I would make a job paying minimum wage."

In San Francisco, *Street Sheet* takes a different approach with its vendor program. The paper is one of the only papers in the country to not charge vendors a percentage for the paper they sell. "I would feel pretty crappy charging someone on the streets 15 bucks for 100 papers, when they are not making a livable wage," said Chance Martin, editor of the Bay paper. "We are a dignified alternative to panhandling."

Other newspapers are finding it harder to survive working on shoestring budgets. *What's Up* magazine in St. Louis is published every other month and focuses mostly on art and culture. "St. Louis is [a] bit more conservative; we couldn't just start throwing bricks at the system and expect to see results," says Jay Swoboda, founder and editor of the paper. "That's why we've tried to raise awareness through the arts."

Dan Newth, production manager, reporter, and a homeless vendor with *Street Roots* says *Street Roots* has brought meaning back into his life. "As a homeless vendor I talk to people of all classes while selling the newspaper and work to dispel some of the myths about homelessness," said Newth. "The ability to communicate to people and the feedback I get with my writing is validation for me."

Many street newspapers claim they have had to fight to gain respect among the homeless populations of their respected cities, the community itself, and the media elite. *Street Roots* is no different.

continued next page

In 1988, *Street Roots* took over for the former homeless newspaper, the *Burnside Cadillac*, with five homeless vendors, three volunteer staff members, and a press run of 2,000 papers monthly. Today, the "homeless rag," as some have called it, is a bimonthly publication with a press run of 18,000 papers, more than 20 volunteers, 50 vendors, and three paid staff members.

People experiencing homelessness are involved in all aspects of the organization, from the production of the paper, to the writing and selling of the newspaper. *Street Roots*, like many homeless newspapers throughout the country, take their lead from the homeless population.

The majority of seats on the *Street Roots* Board of Directors are either vendors who are experiencing homelessness or have experi-

enced homelessness in the past.

"*Street Roots* taught me how to write," says Newth. "I flunked English in high school; now I'm writing articles and growing into an activist. It's enabled me to walk within my beliefs. This is one of the few opportunities a homeless person has for self-actualization in Portland.

Vendors have created their own system at *Street Roots*, working on a seniority model that allows senior vendors to sign up on "turf" from 8:00 a.m. until 9:00 a.m., after which time junior vendors can sign up as well. The vendors at *Street Roots* have full capacity to organize themselves and the vendor program to best fit the entire group. Vendor badge numbers three and 13 are retired at *Street Roots*, in honor of two vendors who died while on the streets, one from a drug-over-

dose and the other from natural causes.

"I think it's one of the only venues and publications that has reality and truth in it from our perspective," said Bear. "It's our paper!"

The future of the street newspaper movement is wide-open. Every newspaper is dealing with its own set of circumstances. But one thing is for sure: the movement towards dignity and a free press has arrived on the streets of North America and around the world.

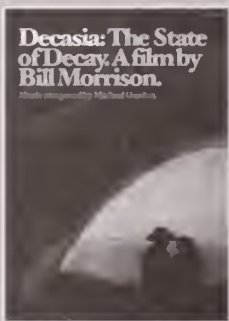
For more information on street papers, visit www.nasna.org. The author works for *Street Roots* (www.streetroots.org).

REVIEWS PLEXIFILMS

Decasia: The State Of Decay

A Film By Bill Morrison
Music Composed by Michael Gordon
www.plexifilm.com

Let's just get this on the table first — I love this kind of thing, but I also recognize that this type of film is not for everyone. If you are not a fan of "plot-less," "arty" kinds of films that do not fall into the narrative or documentary category of film making, then this film is not for you. On the other hand if you are a fan of avant-garde film making, if you find beauty in the texture of film stock and the flicker of the projector, or if you like the types of film experiments that Brakhage did so well — like his 'mothlight' or his hand painted films, then this is a film you should see.



Decasia was created entirely out of found footage. The film is beautifully edited from old footage that has been severely damaged by time and most likely by other elements as well. I have seen first hand what mold, dampness, and heat can do to film stock, and assume these other elements had a role in the deterioration of the material used in this film. The degeneration of the black and white film stock and emulsion creates hauntingly beautiful images. Some solarized, some distorted, and some almost completely obscured by the decay.

The haunting feeling of the found footage in this state is heightened by the musical score composed by Michael Gordon. His dissonant orchestral score helps to shape the tone of the film. With all of these elements working together the film creates a hallucinatory experience. The footage of eras gone by has the sense of a fading memory, and a disconnect with our own human past. There is a feeling of both triumph and futility with images like a boxer jabbing at an amorphous blob, babies being born in solarized negative, whirling dervishes, obscured city streets, and anonymous faces that stare blankly into the camera.

In an age where near perfect copies can be made by encoded digital bits without degeneration from copy to copy this film is very refreshing. There is a beauty to the ravages of time that can get lost with the clean, crisp aesthetic of digital technology. With this DVD edition of

Decasia you can now see the beauty of this decay in a format comprised of digitally encoded bits. It is worth it, and I love that more of this type of work is being made available on DVD. That said, this kind of work still begs to be seen projected in its original form. A DVD no matter how well produced will never have the same warmth in the quality of light as film stock does being projected onto a screen.

-Brandon Bauer

Space is the Place

Sun Ra and his Intergalactic Arkestra
Directed by John Coney, 1974
Re-released by Plexifilm, 2003
www.plexifilm.com

There has never been another musician quite like Sun Ra. He was truly a musical maelstrom. Playing for more than fifty years, and releasing over 100 albums he continues post-mortem to be one of the most admired and influential jazz musicians in history. He experimented with electronic instruments, African chanting and unusual percussion instruments. In addition to his unusual musical palate, Ra incorporated into his repertoire glittery space-age costumes, Egyptology, astrology, an other-worldly mythology (he said he was from Saturn), and a black liberation philosophy that involved saving the black race by transporting them to space.



And now his 1974 cult classic feature length movie "Space is the Place", a melding of 70's blaxploitation, sci-fi, psychedelia and Ra's own liberation philosophy, has been re-issued thirty years later from the depths of obscurity.

The basic storyline is as follows: Ra, wanting to liberate the black race, comes down to earth from years of space travel in his music-fueled spaceship. He has found a suitable planet for the black race to inhabit, free of racism and oppression. Landing in Oakland, California in 1972, he tries to convince disenfranchised blacks to come with him into outer space. All the while his nemesis, the Overseer, a pimp-like figure profiting from the exploitation of the black race, is trying to outdo

him for control. They vie in an extra-dimensional card game with cards drawn by each of them to determine how the events in the movie will proceed and use an abacus to keep score. Ra is also being trailed by the FBI and NASA, both of whom wish to find the secrets of his black space program. He is ultimately forced to return to space, able to save only a few souls, only moments before the earth explodes (we're not really sure, however, why this happens).

I must say, a cinematic masterpiece it is not. There are numerous holes in the plot, the acting is pretty bad, and the movie as a whole clumsily lumbers along, more collage-like than narrative. Being collage-like is not necessarily a problem, but it seems to want to be a narrative and falls a bit flat in that regard. Whoever was doing continuity must have been completely stoned as things often don't match up from shot to shot. Some of the scenes are really hokey and out of place, like when a woman's pastie flies out of her bra, supposedly from the intensity of Ra's piano playing as he pounds away on a smoking piano in a nightclub, or the random *menage a trois* at the hospital between two nurses and the Overseer. In another scene that I found puzzling Ra gets a bit heavy handed on some black youth. He basically says that if they don't come with him into space he'll "chain them up and make them go, just like the slave traders." I don't get that one...liberation through enslavement?? The film also has a large dose of sexism, which could be dismissed as merely a sign of the times, but was disappointing nonetheless. Basically, every woman in the entire film is a boy toy, overly sexually eager and hanging on the men, ready to actualize male fantasy.

Don't get me wrong though, in spite of its shortcomings the film is entertaining in many ways, and without a doubt bizarre. The b-movie style special effects are classic. The live Arkestra performances are great. And I was tickled when the NASA thugs try to torture Ra by making him listen to Yankee Doodle as they interrogate him on how he converts music to energy. Also to its credit, the film does attempt to address many of the social problems affecting the black community, suggesting a spiritual awakening as part of the solution, as well as other, more tangible solutions.

As someone who loves Sun Ra's music in its eccentricity, as well as its sociopolitical undertones, I came to the movie with rather high expectations. The film wasn't as deep, enlightening or wise as I had hoped it would be, nor as engaging visually or conceptually, but it was amusing to watch and a must-see for Sun Ra fans -j powers



The Fixer

brings outsiders **IN**
to get the truth **OUT**
about what's really happening in Iraq

Driving on this road feels suicidal. Less than 24 hours ago, two French guys were capped along this section of pavement west of Baghdad. Although we are not OGAs — the often-targeted spooks from Other Government Agencies — or, like the deceased, high-paid contractors, there is no way to predict today's target of the Iraqi insurgents who stalk the highways between Fallujah and Ramadi. My palms are sweaty and I can't understand how the dapper 27-year-old riding in the passenger seat of the mini-van can be singing and snapping his fingers to Arabic pop music so joyfully amidst this danger.

But the passenger, named Mahr, is used to this stress. He is a fixer — someone whose job it is to arrange, or fix, interviews important to a visiting journalist's story. Arriving in Ramadi, or the "wild, wild West" as one of my colleagues calls it, Mahr gets to work. Jumping from the vehicle, he races into a large, beautifully tiled mosque adjacent to a busy marketplace in the town's center. We're seeking out a prominent sheikh who can give us some insight into abuses dealt out by the Army's 82nd Airborne, currently operating in this area of central Iraq. A long five minutes passes and Mahr emerges from the mosque's courtyard. Smiling, he re-enters the van with directions to the sheikh's home nearby.

Mahr's work comes with enormous emotional pressure. By escorting reporters through Iraq's cavalcade of disaster, he hopes they will truthfully portray events and help bring justice to the Iraqi people. Every day, he witnesses the death, destruction, and humiliation cruelly administered by the US-led occupation. Daily, he puts himself as close as possible to the pain of the Iraqi people in order for their story to be told. Thus, he absorbs hundreds, thousands of horrific tales and shoulders the collective misery of all those he meets.

A few days after our trip to Ramadi, Mahr and I are relaxing at Saj al-Riff, a trendy pizza joint located in a Christian section

of Baghdad's Karada neighborhood. For three weeks, we've been working together. We've spent our time in towns openly rebelling against the Americans: Samarra, small villages around Tikrit, the Adhamiya neighborhood of Baghdad, and the "wild, wild west." The resistance, we've found, is pretty active. So, too, is the American counter-insurgency. We've witnessed an intense collective punishment of the people of the so-called "Sunni Triangle" and thus are in need of some down time to reflect and recharge our batteries. Pizza, a few beers, and a couple of mornings of sleeping in are the only things on our schedule.

At Saj al-Riff, we begin our decompression. Here, nicely suited men on their lunch breaks mingle with young couples laughing, talking, and playfully flirting with one another. Protruding from the wood-paneled walls of the restaurant, small television screens play music videos. The iconic images, along with the sounds of the nearby conversations, create an oasis-like environment. For a moment, it's easy to forget we're inside a devolving metropolis of six million and a country seething under a foreign military presence. In this sublime environment, I take the opportunity to learn a little about Mahr.

After the March 2003 bombing subsided, work was scarce and times were desperate in Baghdad. Service sector employment, such as driving a cab or selling products on the street, was out of the question. Crime soared — physical attacks and car-jackings were a regularity after sundown. Mahr, though, had an important asset — he could speak English.

The heavily fortified Palestine and Sheraton hotels are ground zero for the international press corps. Mahr began to spend much of his time there. By schmoozing a Marine who was regularly posted on the hotel's perimeter, he was able to access the Fourth Estate and canvass those inside for work. After a few weeks of networking, he landed his first gig with an Italian documentary film crew.

continued next page

Meager job opportunities and possessing the essential translation skills weren't the only reasons he became a fixer. Mahr grew up in Baghdad's Adhamiya neighborhood — home to many Baathist apparatchiks during the Saddam years and now an epicenter of fierce opposition to the American-led invasion. For the bulky ex-weightlifter, the people of Iraq are all part of his extended family. An attack on them is an attack on him. Witnessing attacks by US forces in his neighborhood triggered a need to do something. He felt he could not stand by and watch his family be harmed by a brutal foreign force. He had to fight the occupation — but in his own way. "I am part of the resistance," he says. His charming personality, personal connections, and Adhamiya pedigree enable him to fix interviews with prominent Iraqis and to enter the homes of victims who might not otherwise be willing to speak openly with international journalists.

Showing the nature of the American military occupation doesn't just involve portraying Iraqis as victims, he says. It always requires showing their strength. "When you go and see someone whose house has been demolished, you can see that they are angry. But you will also see them smile. This shows how strong the Iraqis are. This makes me proud of my people."

Mahr doesn't work for just anyone. He is acutely aware of the politics of corporate news agencies. Offered a job two weeks ago by a large media company, he declined. He says he doesn't like to lie and news agencies like Fox and CNN are lying. Or, to a lesser degree, conservative editors often reel in reporters willing to follow a good lead. "I can't tell them the truth. They are like the soldiers. They don't have the right to say what they want."

Shunning steady work and good pay, he continues to help hard-nosed independent journalists and filmmakers. "I know these journalists are small — not widely published. They try to tell the truth, though. I want everyone to know what's happening to my country."

Mahr's contempt is not reserved just for the international press corps. He holds many of the Non-Government Organizations

currently working in Iraq in equally low regard. Accusing most of doing nothing but collecting pay checks and partying at their hotels, Mahr's litmus test for an NGOer's credibility is simple: are they out in the street helping Iraqis? Mahr says most aren't and so he doesn't work with them either.

The subject of our conversation turns to the future. Will the Americans leave? What about the Shia protests demanding direct elections? Mahr isn't optimistic about the immediate path ahead. "In a forest fire, the live tree will burn with the dead tree," he says. Ultimately, though, he believes the pride and strength of Iraqis will prevail. He provides a poetic analogy: "A pregnant woman giving birth will cry. But when she sees her child — she will forget the pain. Iraq is like this baby. We see Iraq and the Iraqi people and it puts a smile on our face."

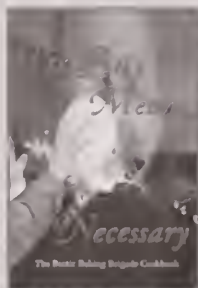
Families who've lost loved ones or have had homes or property destroyed weigh heavily on Mahr's conscience. The constant exposure to the destruction of Iraq is clearly getting to him. I ask him where he would like to see himself in the future. He laughs cynically and says, "If I want a future, I must leave this country." Not an easy decision for a man who is immensely dedicated to making Iraq a free and thriving society. Also, this is a dream given that he has no passport and Iraq has no government to issue these documents.

We've barely touched our food and the need for beers has hit us like a freight train. Mahr lights a cigarette and lets the small yellow-orange flame of the ignited match slowly burn. "This is how the Americans treat my country." Seeing this and hearing his tales, it's difficult not to see Mahr as the live tree he's just described being burned in the thick, dead forest of conflict. After three weeks, I'm already mentally drained. However, I get to leave. Despite Mahr's wish to live in exile, away from the country he loves so deeply, he has no choice. He will stay and continue his work amidst the destruction, dreaming of a better day somewhere else. ☆

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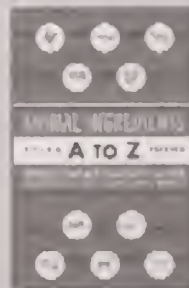
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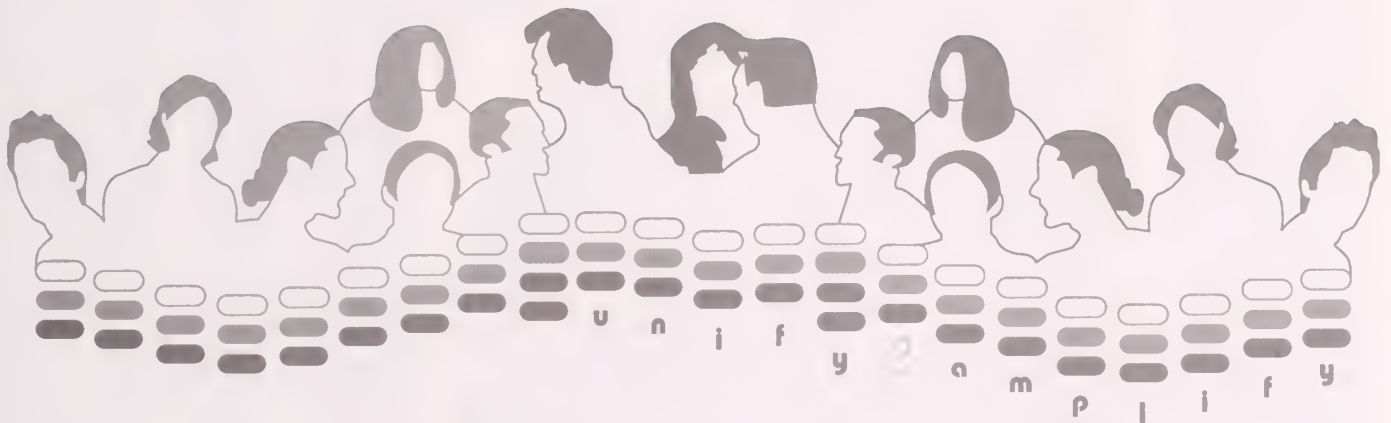
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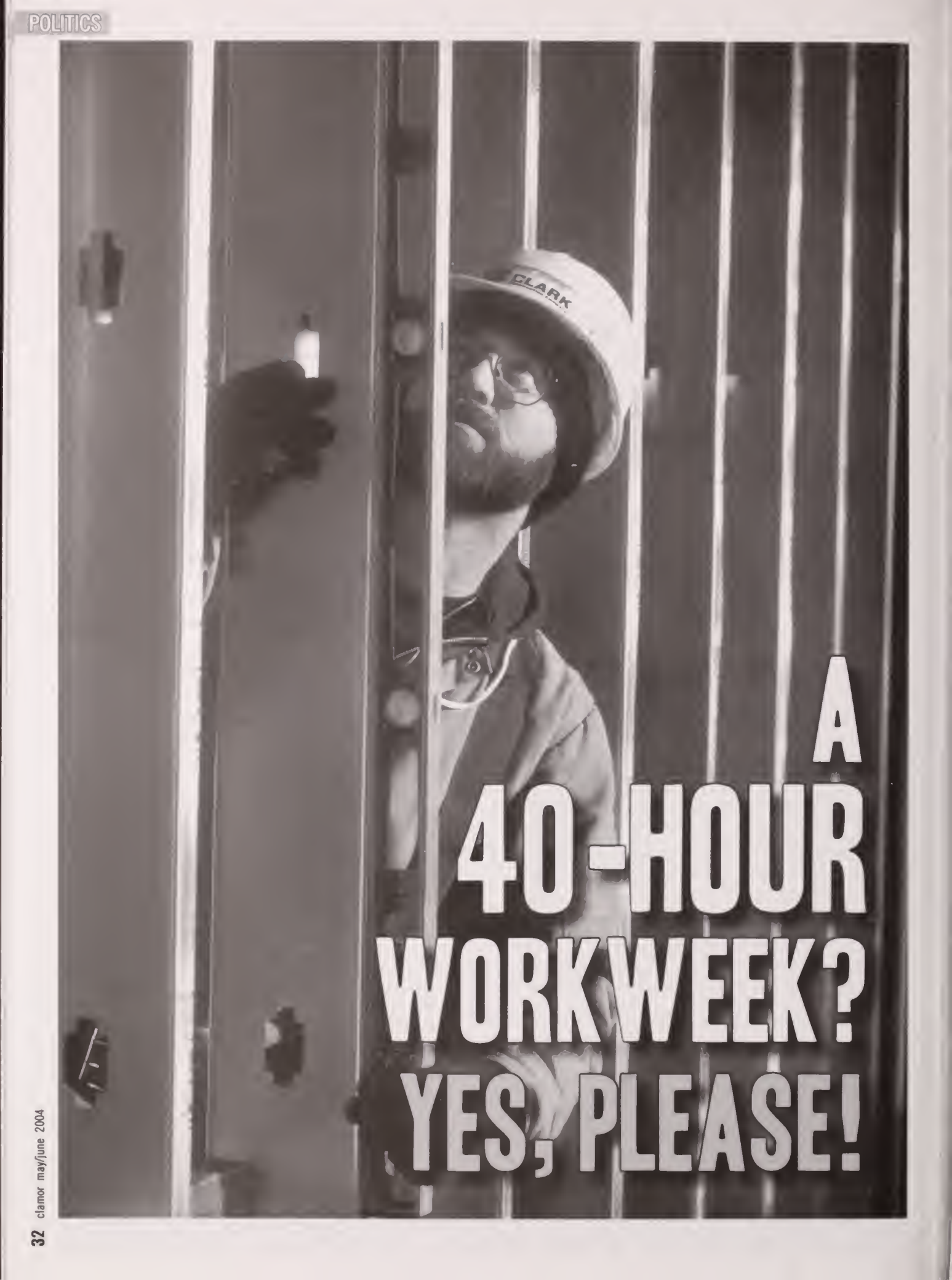
Every year in June, hundreds of the most passionate people from the world of independent media converge on Bowling Green, Ohio, for the Allied Media Conference. The AMC focuses on sharing skills, building alternatives to corporate media, and using media for positive social change.

In addition to hands-on, DIY workshops, the conference includes film screenings, artist presentations, and a large exhibition hall to share our work. There will be caucuses for microcinemas, community newspapers, and Indymedia, plus a series of workshops for educators on using independent media in the classroom. Set in a small, midwest town, it's also a space to strengthen our community and enjoy each other's company.

For more information or to register, visit www.alliedmediaprojects.org

ATTENTION TEACHERS: Be sure to come Friday for the Symposium on Media Literacy in Education: one day of presentations and workshops geared toward helping you teach your students to become critical readers of mass media.

The Allied Media Conference and the Symposium on Media Literacy in Education are presented by Allied Media Projects, the American Culture Studies program, and the Division of Teaching and Learning at Bowling Green State University.



**A
40-HOUR
WORKWEEK?
YES, PLEASE!**

family, leisure, and sanity are traded for the memory of an 8-hour day

word Kari Lydersen photo Jim West

Dennis Hopkins, a 34-year-old father of three in Chicago, works 70 hours a week as a cook and home care attendant. He gets up at 4:30 a.m. to be at work cooking for the Board of Education by 6 a.m. At 2:30 p.m. he heads off to work six more hours taking care of a homebound patient.

"I don't think anyone can make a living off working 40 hours a week anymore," he said. "Maybe 10 or 20 years ago, but not now. Unless you become an electrical engineer or a doctor, but even doctors are usually working 60 hours a week and they're so stressed out they die even earlier than everyone else!"

For decades, the 40-hour workweek has not been a reality for many people across the income scale. Low-income people regularly put in more than 40 hours, often doing as much overtime as possible at hourly jobs to augment low wages, or even working a total of 60 or 70 hours a week at several jobs.

Noe, a Mexican immigrant living in Omaha, Neb., has regularly worked up to 17 hours a day at two jobs (though he is currently only working one job for 45 hours a week). In the past he worked at a lumber processing company from about 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Afterward he cleaned offices from 5 p.m. to 1:30 a.m.

Noe, who didn't want his last name used, said, "I only slept three or four hours a night for three years. I was very tired, physically and mentally."

Higher-income professionals like doctors, lawyers, and engineers are also expected to work more than 40 hours a week for their salaries. Many jobs, ranging from nursing to assembly-line factory work, require mandatory overtime, meaning the worker can be fired for refusing to work 50- or 60-hour weeks.

So how could it possibly get worse? If the Bush administration has its way, not only will people be working more than 40 hours a week, but many won't get paid for this extra work. Changes in the way the Department of Labor implements the Fair Labor Standards Act and legislation gutting overtime pay protections are currently on the table. The changes in the FLSA are expected to take effect in March. (*At press time, this decision is yet to be known — Ed.*) The legislation has so far not passed Congress. Essentially, these measures are a huge gift to industry since forcing people to work more hours for the same amount of pay equates to pay cuts and employer profits.

The Rise and Fall of the 40-Hour Workweek

When President Franklin Roosevelt instituted the 40-hour workweek, he based it on the premise that people shouldn't be worked to the bone, but that they should have time for their families and leisure. Passed in 1938, the FLSA, which also banned child labor and set the minimum wage at 25 cents an hour, set the maximum work week at 44 hours and mandated that if workers toiled more than 40 hours a week, they would be paid double for those hours.

At the time labor abuses were rampant. The Labor Department's Children's Bureau found that out of a cross section of 449 children, nearly a fourth were working 60 hours or more per week at median wages of slightly over \$4 a week. In the South, it was normal for women to work 10-hour days in canneries for \$4.50 a week.

The FLSA and labor activism of the era led to some improvements in worker safety and health, including the reduction of hours worked. The idea behind overtime pay was that this would prevent employers from demanding extensive overtime of their employees, and, when they did, the employees would be rewarded for their sacrifices.

Peter Rachleff, labor historian, explained that the FLSA was not created so workers could earn more money. "It was to force employers to hire more workers and create more jobs," he said.

Over the course of the century, however, the trend of working more, both for low-income people just trying to scrape by and upper-income people trying to keep up in the rat race, has accelerated. The Economic Policy Institute says that, on average, middle-income couples with kids have added an average of 20 weeks of work over the last 30 years. Americans work an average of nine weeks a year more than Europeans, and the average work year grew by 184 hours during the 1990s, according to Kevin Phillips, author of *Wealth and Democracy*.

"In the 1970s and '80s the Japanese were known as the world's workaholics," Rachleff said. "But Americans have far surpassed the Japanese without much recognition. You see many repercussions — the growth of fast food, the growth of childcare. By the time everything is added and subtracted, we're no farther ahead because of the cost of maintaining this lifestyle."

The Push to Gut Overtime Pay

The Department of Labor's proposed changes will mean millions of workers who were previously paid by the hour and eligible for overtime pay will be reclassified as "managers" or other high level positions exempt from overtime pay — with no pay increase to go along with their new title.

The changes were proposed in March 2003 as a "notice of rule-making." The DOL said it was reviewing "outdated" standards at the behest of industry groups. The changes did not have to pass through Congress.

Under the rule changes, a worker making \$10 an hour in charge of the poultry department at a supermarket who gets "promoted" to manager can be required to work 50 hours or more a week with no overtime pay.

Under the changes, a similar modification is likely to happen to nurses, technicians, engineers, or others who are judged to be "professionals" because of higher education or specialized training will not be eligible for overtime pay. This will have a particular effect on veterans who received medical, technical, or other training in the military.

continued next page

Nicholas Clark, general counsel for the United Food and Commercial Workers union, said, "Someone who received some medical training in the military would be considered the same as a doctor as far as not getting overtime."

The changes will also allow an employer to pay for overtime in future time off (comp time) instead of cash. The employer can generally determine when the worker gets this comp time, enabling them to award it at a slow business time when the worker isn't needed anyway. The comp time could even be given up to a year after the overtime worked, essentially delaying any kind of pay for overtime and causing the worker to lose this benefit if the company goes out of business. The comp time provisions also mean employers will require other workers to pick up the slack for a worker who is taking comp time.

Clark noted that the comp for overtime bills essentially amount to a no-interest loan for employers, since the employer is able to hold off on paying workers at all for up to a year, giving them prolonged access to the funds they should have paid out. If they borrowed the same amount from a bank, they would be charged an interest rate.

"Taking away overtime pay is just a way to help employers," Laura Kai, spokesperson for the Chicago branch of the community organization ACORN, said. "For masses of people it's really going to cause a problem. A lot of workers really rely on overtime pay to make ends meet."

Currently about 71 million U.S. workers are eligible for overtime. The administration says 3.3 million workers will be affected by the changes, but experts say that at least 8 million workers will be affected.

"The administration's numbers are just wrong," Clark said.

The changes will also affect high-wage earners, since they mandate that people earning over \$65,000 a year are not eligible for over-

time.

And there are absolutely no restrictions on the total number of hours someone can work.

"The only restriction is how many hours you can take before you quit," Clark said. "You're off the clock and you work whatever they tell you to."

Clark said if the changes go through, litigation will probably ensue.

"They're arguing that they're just interpreting the FLSA differently, so it didn't have to go through Congress," he said. "We're arguing that they're actually changing it."

Meanwhile proposed House and Senate legislation, the Family Time and Workplace Flexibility Act in the Senate and the Family Time Flexibility Act in the House, could also gut overtime pay for workers by institutionalizing the comp time provisions. Congress has yet to take action on the bills; it is expected that if a Democrat is elected in November they won't see the light of day.

"There was such an uproar about them that they haven't moved," Kai said.

With the same kind of doublespeak that characterized the Clear Skies, No Child Left Behind, and Healthy Forests initiatives, the administration tried to sell the bills as measures to give people more time off with their families when, in reality, they mean people will be earning less money to support their families.

Clearly, the Bush administration's attacks on overtime pay and the already-bedraggled concept of the 40-hour week are just one more way of advancing the trend in which corporate employers are able to treat people as dispensable tools for their own profit, without respect for the way more work and less pay will affect people's families, health, and mental well-being. ☆

REVIEW WAR OF INDEPENDENTS

Books Lie

Hall of Fame of Fire
(plus singles and b-sides).
Level Plane Records
www.level-plane.com



I've got a pre-requisite for music to be featured on my day-to-day soundtrack at the Clamor HQ. I work long hours (often by myself), so whatever I'm listening to has to be able to move my ass and encourage singing along at the top of my lungs. Unfortunately for hardcore and a lot of newer punk, this leaves me mostly listening to hip hop and guilty pop pleasures. Rarely does a hardcore CD come across my desk that moves me to either disgust or enthusiasm - I consider that an indictment for those of you who might take such a statement personally. Books Lie are the rare exception. They combine raw energy, humor, and an incisive, politically charged tongue to create something that is intellectually stimulating and butt-shakingly dance-able. Every time I put the CD on, I'm immediately transported to a tiny damp room where a hundred kids hop in unison to the anthems cranked out by the Books Lie contingent with fists in the air. This is beauty.

-Jason Kucsma

Chromelodeon

in the year 20XX
www.chromelodeon.com



The wack-ass cover art for this CD doesn't betray the genius of Chromelodeon's debut CD (unclear .is this the debut?). I almost passed it off as a half-assed attempt to endear the CD to the hip

hop and graf culture with its cartoonish caricature raising his fist in the air over a pile of industrial rubbish. Truth is, this is pure gold. Chromelodeon is an instrumental powerhouse (with some minimal vocals) that creates epic tracks out from rock and new wave roots - creating something that sounds like Godspeed You! Black Emperor facing Mr. Bungle in a Nintendo Gameboy songwriting competition. This is truly an example of a book that should not be judge by its cover. I consider myself schooled.

-Jason Kucsma

Shuttlecock

Machine-Extended
Iron Compass Records, 2002
www.ironcompassrecords.com



Shuttlecock has been around for about five years, rising out of the ashes of Omaha. They play quirky, art-damaged post-punk that you could call prog-rock or math rock, if that makes you happy. The songs are based around slaccato riffs, with plenty of tempo changes and quiet parts, and the odd electronic effect. The vocals are a bit geeky, but geeky-menacing like Devo was, and the lyrics are cryptic and sparse. The quieter songs reminded me of FIREHOSE, but maybe that's just because both bands have amazing drummers and vocalists with Midwest twangs. The band is capable of genuine beauty, but the overall effect of *Machine-Extended* is a feeling of unease and anxiety due partially to the edgy riffs that will never allow you to fall into a groove, and partially due to the lyrics, which make references to memory, technology, mathematics, and the concept of time. Shuttlecock are intellectual without being pretentious, and listening to this record gave me the same feeling of satisfaction as

looking at an abstract painting; it seemed to say a lot without saying anything directly, and I knew that I liked it even if I didn't totally understand it. Shuttlecock make guitar-driven music sound relevant and contemporary, which is no small feat in this day and age.

-Patrick Taylor

The Opus

Breathing Lessons
Mush Records, 2004
www.dirtyloop.com



Mr. Echoes and The Isle of Weight make up The Opus- an impressive duo, no doubt. This is instrumental hip-hop at its best. As usual for most hip-hoppers, vocal samples are thrown down here and there and from time to time. The duo's programming skills are quite unique, better than anyone in the mainstream currently. This is true underground hip-hop, without the vocals, although Lord 360 appeared on vocals briefly on one of the tracks. His rhymes are very poetic and dark. The music is often driving, almost drum n' bass-like but without much speed. This is more mid-paced hip-hop music. The duo has worked with many notable artists in the electronic scene including Meat Beat Manifesto. This duo is capable of doing any styles of electronic music because they are that good as producers. With proper management, The Opus could go as far as becoming the next Neptunes duo, or maybe even bigger and better.

-Ahdab At-Farhan

Wanna write reviews for Clamor? Visit us online at www.clamormagazine.org/freestuff.html!

NORTH AMERICA

While the average workweek in the United States hovers around a 40-hour mark, proposed changes to overtime rules may strike a blow for millions of workers' right to fair compensation (see related article).

People often think of sweatshops as only being in Third World countries, but there are countless undocumented workers laboring long hours in sweatshops in the United States. In Los Angeles, there are 4,500 sweatshops; in New York City, there are 3,500.

Ontario's government recently announced plans to roll back the 60-hour maximum workweek to the previous 48. Critics of the 60-hour limit say workers may feel their job security threatened if they refuse to work extra hours.



EASTERN EUROPE

In most countries, men are more likely to work long hours than women. Central and Eastern European countries, however, have the highest proportion of both men and women working excessively long hours, according to the International Labour Organization. More than 75% of both sexes work 40 hours a week or more. In Russia, although the official workweek is 40 hours, it is rarely enforced. Many work 10- or 12-hour days—and have been known to be paid in vodka at the height of the wage crisis in the late '90s.

CENTRAL/SOUTH AMERICA

Central and South America are rife with American corporate sweatshops. One report from a Guatemalan factory included workers being forced to work until 4 a.m. only to report back four hours later. In Honduras, Gap factory workers were reportedly forced to work overtime—and to take pregnancy tests and meet extremely high production goals for \$4 a day. As these companies realize they can get cheaper labor in Asia, however, many are starting to relocate to the other side of the globe.

WESTERN EUROPE

The European Union's Working Time Directive mandates a 48-hour workweek. Recently, Britain has called for an opt-out, arguing that people should be able to work more if they wish. Britons work the longest hours in Western Europe: 43.6 hours on average, compared to 38.4 in Belgium, the country with the lowest average. The government in France has plans to dismantle their 35-hour week, which has been blamed for France's economic problems. Belgium, France, Ireland, and Portugal have all seen decreases in hours in recent years.

In Germany, the maximum workweek is 48 hours and 17% of the country's production comes from illegal immigrants, many of them from Turkey, which has huge unemployment—one figure says only 46% of working age in Turkey have jobs.

Sweden has often been held up as a model for labor. Workers average 35.8 hours a week, and most belong to unions. There is only 4% unemployment.

MIDDLE EAST

Middle Eastern countries often require workers put in long hours. In Kuwait, the workweek is 48 hours, but domestic servants—usually foreign workers excluded from labor laws—work more.

In Jordan in the past few years American companies have set up a remarkable number of sweatshops in "Qualified Industrial Zones," employing over 40,000 workers in substandard conditions. The QIZ's are a result of the 1994 peace agreement with Israel, allowing for duty-free trade with the United States. Workers in these zones are often on the job 65 hours a week, making items for J.C. Penney, Wal-Mart, Target, and others.

ASIA

Asian workers, according to the International Labour Organization, log the most hours across the globe, the top six being Thailand, Malaysia, Hong Kong (China), Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and South Korea. In India, the legal workweek is 48 hours, but these rules are regularly not enforced, especially in the garment industry. Sweatshops are also a huge problem in China—producing for businesses like Nike, Disney, and especially Wal-Mart. Eighty percent of Wal-Mart's suppliers are in China. This sweatshop economy is prevalent all over Asia. Just last year, the Philippines passed a law that children under 15 could not work more than 20 hours a week.

In Japan, workers take on average only 8 days of leave a year. Not shockingly, 10,000 Japanese a year die of *karoshi*—the Japanese word for "death by overwork."

AFRICA

It is difficult to measure Africa's workweek because so much labor is agricultural. In South Africa, for example, the workweek is 45 hours, though most farmers live in poverty working 12-hour days with no overtime pay.

In Zimbabwe, the maximum legal workweek is 54 hours, with one day off required. Zimbabwe has many unregulated workers from Malawi and Mozambique who are often subject to abusive working conditions. Recently, the Transport and General Workers Union in Zimbabwe called for a reduction of working hours for bus and truck drivers to reduce accidents. Most drivers, according to the union, were working 48 hours a week, and drivers were falling asleep at the wheel.

Over one million children work in Egypt, often making hand-made knotted rugs for tourists and in textile factories. Many work 10-hour days; 73% of the children in textile factories work 12-hour days.

AUSTRALIA

Although Australia pioneered the 40-hour workweek in the late 1880s, it is no longer such a worker's paradise. Only 2 in 5 actually work that today, with 1 in 5 working more than 50 hours a week. In 1999, a study by the Australian Council of Trade Unions found that 1 in 4 workers took time off because of stress, making it the most common job-related illness.

Where in the world is the 40-hour week?

Compiled by Madeleine Baran and Amanda Luker

All information is from daily newspaper sources unless otherwise cited.

Workin' for

At the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth, Mich., Kebby Warner waited almost five years for a job. During that time, her request for parole was turned down twice. The reason? She didn't have a job.

Although there are 96 women on her unit, there are only 15 jobs available. Once an inmate is placed on a job, she must work at least 90 days. If she is fired or quits before then, she is forced to stay in her cell for 30 days and risks being ticketed for "Disobeying a Direct Order" or being "Out of Place." The hourly pay scale on her unit ranges from 74¢ to \$2.08. Those who work in food service earn even less: 17.5¢ to 32.5¢ an hour. Despite the lack of jobs and poor working conditions, the parole board holds unemployment against applicants.

While the prison-industrial complex has attracted much criticism and protest in recent years, the lack of jobs and poor working conditions of women prisoners have yet to garner much attention. Almost 100,000 women are now incarcerated in the United States, representing about 7 percent of all inmates — a 42 percent increase since 1995.

However, female prisoners are speaking out, arguing that gender-based economic inequality does not stop at the prison gate. Indeed, incarcerated women have significantly less access to jobs than male prisoners. When they are able to find work, it is often undesirable. They are often paid less, and not given necessary training. Their male counterparts have access to better jobs and better wages.

At the Women's Correctional Center in Salem, Ore., inmate Barrilee Bannister said, "Most jobs are not available to women prisoners." Many women there said that if they work, they are given jobs considered "feminine," such as cooking, cleaning, clerking, or teaching.

Until 1996, the Oregon prison offered its inmates the opportunity to work in its corporate division. Inmates answered phone calls from people on the outside requesting business information. However, in 1996, the division was transferred to one of the male prisons, leaving women inmates with prison jobs that paid anywhere from \$8 to \$84 a month.

Oregon's male prisoners also do the same types of work but, for the most part, men's prisons have more job choice. The state's Measure Seventeen mandates that all prisoners work; but male inmates have access to jobs which provide them with skills such as small engine repair, cabinetry, welding, furniture making, plumbing, and computer programming. They also have the opportunity to work for the clothing manufacturer Prison Blues, which, after deducting incarceration costs, victim restitution, family support, and taxes, pays about \$1.30 an hour. Women prisoners have been excluded from this opportunity.

Twelve hundred miles away, at the women's section of the Colorado Women's Correctional Facility in Canon City, Colo., inmates fare little better. All prisoners are required to either work or attend school. Until February 2002, the daily pay rates ranged from 63¢ to \$2.53 for jobs such as kitchen, laundry, housekeeping, maintenance, library, secretary, and GED teacher. Inmate Dawn Amos earned 63¢ for each of the four days she worked scrubbing and buffing the floors. The prison lowered wages further in March 2002.



the Man

words Victoria Law

illustration Amy DeVoogd

The prices in Canon City's canteen do not reflect the women's income and purchasing power. One generic Tylenol costs 40¢; a box of tampons cost \$3.60; the cheapest soap available is the equivalent of a day's earnings—63¢. There are no free items.

Women at Canon City have virtually no job mobility. "If you want to leave a job for another one, it doesn't mean you can. It all depends on if your boss wants to let you go or not," Amos said. Thus, efficiency on one job can work against the ability to transfer to another.

In some prisons, work environments resemble sweatshops. At the Dwight Correctional Center in Dwight, Ill., the prison pays female seamstresses by the piece. According to "Elsie," an inmate there who wishes to remain anonymous, "Women rushing to make the cut-off day have injured themselves on sewing machines — sewing their fingers." The average monthly pay is \$15 to \$20 for 40 hours of work.

In some prisons, there is even more risk of injury. At the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla, Yolanda, an inmate who had grown up in Los Angeles, was assigned to work on the prison's farm. Despite the fact that she had never been on a farm, she received no training for her job. Shortly after she began, her head was run over by a tractor by another inmate, who had also never received training. Although she survived, both women were disciplined.

In addition to the low pay and hazardous working conditions, female facilities seldom offer coveted jobs working for large corporations. (Although prison activists often complain about corporations' use of prison labor, these jobs tend to pay more than internal prison work.) The Central California Women's Facility is one of the few exceptions. Inmates there have the opportunity to work assembly-line jobs putting together equipment for Joint Venture Electronics, an electronics manufacturer. After standard deductions for taxes, room and board, victim restitution, savings for release, and family support, these women earn about \$1.15 to \$2.30 an hour. Compared to a daily 63¢, this paycheck is considered high.

The lack of jobs has been used to keep women inmates from complaining about prison conditions. Shortly after filing a grievance against a male officer, Warner, the Michigan inmate, was assaulted by a co-worker at her job in the library. Although Warner was the victim of the assault, she was terminated from her position "for the safety and security of the institution." Similarly, Bannister, the Oregon inmate, said prison officials fired her from her position as visiting room photographer in 2002 after she reported a male officer's sexual harassment.

However, women prisoners have been fighting back in ways large and small. One anonymous inmate in Texas, a state which requires all inmates to work without pay, refused her assignment. "I refuse to work," she said. "I have sat down and quit doing prison altogether." Oregon inmate Laura Maca not only quit her job as visiting room photographer, but also wrote an exposé about a controversial prison policy.

Despite these protests, the "industry" in women's prisons has garnered little or no attention, let alone outcry, from outside groups and organizations. Those doing research and work around prison issues and labor issues need to examine the ways in which their neglect and dismissal of labor conditions within women's facilities adds to the silencing and invisibility of women prisoners and their issues. ☆

Further Reading:

Juanita Diaz-Cotto. *Gender, Ethnicity, and the State: Latina and Latino Prison Politics*. SUNY Press, 1996.

Karlene Faith. *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance*. Press Gang, 1993.

Nancy Kurshan. *Women and Imprisonment in the U.S.: History and Current Reality*.

<http://prisonactivist.org/women/women-and-imprisonment.html>



Red, White, and Wal-Mart Blue

Interstate 540 could be called the highway that Sam Walton built. Follow I-540 through the Ozark hill-country of northwest Arkansas towards Bentonville, Ark., and you will find the converted warehouse that is Wal-Mart's corporate headquarters. Paved in the early '90s, I-540 allowed Wal-Mart trucks to get goods in and out of warehouses in the Ozarks faster than ever before. The hills along northern I-540 are now being leveled in favor of mini-malls, subdivisions, and high-rise hotels. Some locals have gone so far as to speculate that Bentonville and its surrounding cities on the I-540 corridor are a blueprint for the Wal-Martization of the world.

Every June, thousands of Wal-Mart shareholders gather half an hour from Bentonville at the Bud Walton Arena in Fayetteville, Ark., to celebrate the ascension of Wal-Mart as the largest company ever. Sam Walton used to love his shareholders' conventions, and they have kept growing even after his death. The convention is basically a huge pep rally supporting union busting, urban sprawl, and the cheap sweatshop-made goods that have made Wal-Mart the undisputed champion of retailing.

Each convention has its own theme; last year's theme was "It's My Wal-Mart." There is singing, some jerky dancing, and even a band that kicks off the whole weekend. Yes, folks, Guido and the Wal-Mart band rock the shareholders' convention at 6:45 a.m. with hits like "Wal-Mart Pride," "Mr. Sam," and the inevitable title track of their debut album, "It's My Wal-Mart." Quoted in the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, Guido said, "I write about swimming upstream, going the distance, pride, what their goals are. It's all red, white, and Wal-Mart blue."

Unions, environmentalists, sprawl campaigners, anarchists, peace activists, and human rights activists will be converging in Fayetteville this summer to form a counter presence to Wal-Mart's shareholder convention. There will be free housing, food, workshops, strategy sessions, networking, non-violent actions, and a whole lot of partying as we celebrate the largest movement Arkansas has ever seen.

E-mail againsthewal@gofairtrade.net

or visit www.againsthewal.org for more information and to download materials to help you organize your community to make that trip in June.

Joe Diffie
Jerry Business

Welcome to the Military! May I Take Your Order?

Say the word “military” and most leftists recoil with horror. But for many of the 1.5 million enlisted men and women, the U.S. Armed Forces isn’t a political statement; it’s a job. If you believe the “Be All You Can Be” hype, joining the military is a great way to escape inner-city violence, rural boredom, and low-paying employment at a fast food restaurant. But is the military really a better job than, say, Taco Bell? Read below to find out!

- If the Taco Bell manager wants you to stay late on a Friday and you refuse, you could be denied a raise or fired. In the military, officials can issue a “Stop-Loss order” to extend your deployment indefinitely. Even if you signed up for three years of active duty, you could find yourself doing four, five, or even six years — just ask the 7,000 troops in the Middle East who have been serving extra time since January.

- At your job at Taco Bell, if you refuse to clean the deep fryer, you could be “written up” or fired. In the military, if you refuse a direct order in the middle of combat, you could be shot by your commanding officer.

- If you decide you’re sick of smelling like tacos and want to quit your job, you just need to tell your boss. You could give two weeks notice — or you could just walk out in the middle of making nachos and never look back. If you quit your job as a soldier before your official last day, you could be court-martialed and thrown in prison.

- Unless you happen to serve a soft-shell taco to a violent, hard-shell-taco-loving serial killer, chances are you will not be murdered at your job. But if you’re in the military, those chances increase dramatically. At press time, 548 soldiers had been killed in the Iraq War and 3,039 have been injured. And if you’re a minority, your odds are even worse. In the first Gulf War, over 50 percent of the front-line troops were people of color.

- If you work at Taco Bell full-time for a year, earning \$7 an hour and taking two weeks vacation, you’ll earn \$14,000 — slightly more than the average army recruit, who will earn \$13,460 plus housing. Also, once a soldier retires from the military, he or she will earn, on average, about \$1,700 less per year than non-veterans.

- Unlike Taco Bell, the Armed Forces offers money for college; but if you read the fine print, it’s a complicated story. To qualify for the full Montgomery G.I. Bill, you need to serve four years in active duty and four in the reserves. You have to get an honorable discharge. You also need to pay \$100 a month for the first year — \$1,200 total — just to have the option to get the funding once you leave the military. To get money from the Army Navy College Fund, you need to be a high school graduate, score in the top 50 percent on a standardized test, and take a less-than-desirable job. Two-thirds of recruits never get any college funding. Most who do qualify go to two-year community schools. Assuming that a two-year school costs \$4,000 each year, the total payment from the military, minus the \$1,200 you already put in, would be \$6,800. If you stretched that over the four years of full-time soldiering, that’s a lousy 85¢ more each hour for a job that could send you to Iraq indefinitely, earning almost minimum wage, while dodging suicide bombers and stray bullets. Anyone need a Taco Bell application?

Information based on interviews conducted by Madeleine Baran with Douglas Smith, military spokesperson based in Fort Knox, KY, and Kevin Ramirez, the coordinator of Military Out of Our Schools.



A few months ago, my roommate’s union went on strike. She started pacing the apartment and devouring several books a day to take her mind off not knowing when she’d go back to work. AFSCME Local 3800 clerical workers walked out over health insurance, among other things — one of seven labor unions to strike last year demanding better health care in the Twin Cities.

This trend locally reflects a growing nationwide discontent with an inadequate, even catastrophic, health care system. However, in Ithaca, NY, a group of citizens have decided to fight the battle for affordable health care in do-it-yourself fashion. They created their own: the Ithaca Health Fund. Health care advocates in the Twin Cities and elsewhere are taking notice.

For many, health insurance, no matter how inadequate, is a luxury they can’t afford. According to the Centers for Disease Control and National Center for Health Statistics, an estimated 14.8 percent of all Americans had no health insurance coverage in 2003. That translates to 42.3 million Americans with no health insurance.

Those who need health care the most are those least able to access it. When I lost my graduate health insurance, I decided to continue it through the COBRA program, which allows me to pay out of pocket for a year and a half. My monthly health care bill is higher than my food bill. According to the American Medical Association’s 2003 Health Care Financial Trends

Taking Back Our Health

The Ithaca Health Fund's Model for Change

rely on it while in school. The cost is \$100 a year for adults regardless of age, gender, or pre-existing conditions, and hasn't changed since it started. For those who have difficulty affording that, the IHF established a grant to give 20 memberships away per year. Ithaca's community social service agencies determine who gets them.

"Our long range plan," Glover said, "is to create our own clinic for medical and dental care [and] holistic care so that we're not just making larger payments into the profit system or more categories of care, but controlling the cost and the quality within the highest standards of humanity."

The IHF makes payments to any provider anywhere in the world and requires no deductible, but the type of coverage is limited to emergency-based care with the highest payment being \$2,500 (for broken bones). The elected board members decide which procedures are eligible for coverage. The only elective surgery covered is vasectomy, a controversial vote among members that eventually won out in the name of population control.

IHF board member and Family Nurse Practitioner Elizabeth Salon acknowledges that the fund is not yet able to address major illness or end of life care. "IHF is not a Blue Cross," Salon said, "but it works at a basic level. Until we have universal health care, it's a great deal."

There are two different beliefs at the core of the health reform debate. At one end of the spectrum is market-based health care where the commodity of care is distributed according to one's ability to buy it. At the other extreme, health care is considered a social service distributed according to need. Single-payer health care is based on this principle. One way to think of it is as Medicare for all, and countries like Canada, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark practice it.

Despite maintaining poor availability and distribution of health care, the United States still spends more than any other country on

health care. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United States spent approximately 13.9 percent of its Gross Domestic Product in 2001; that's 47 percent more per person than the second-ranked country, Switzerland.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, experts project that health spending will account for 18.4 percent of the GDP by 2013, and if personal consumption rates continue, more than one in every four of those dollars will be spent on health care.

So far, the IHF has paid \$38,479.50 in grants to members. The fund's website lists their payments and their denials with the date, dollar amount, claim number, and type of service. They also accept Ithaca Hours (an alternative "local dollar" system also founded by Paul Glover) for partial payment of the fund. The IHF also extends provider discounts for local — especially alternative — health practitioners and their services, such as acupuncture, Reiki, or midwifery.

IHF is not a legally recognized health system, but has been held up as a model for something better. The Center for Prosperity, a Twin Cities non-profit consulting service/think tank for democratic economies, is recruiting members for IHF in an effort to build its own fund. "This project is good in itself and is a tangible real life example of something beyond the individual versus bureaucracies paradigm," Program Coordinator Erik Esse said. "We're going to show here that we can do this."

As a conscientious objector during the Vietnam War, Glover has always known there was more than one way to fight a good fight. "We agree that the poor should be marching on Washington, demanding righteously that American health [insurance] heal rather than kill," he said, "but we regard this as another way to organize health consumers to raise that demand." ☆

More information is available at:

Ithaca Health Fund

Box 362 Ithaca, NY 14851, (607) 387-8344

www.ithacahealth.org

Center for Prosperity: www.prosperitycenter.org



word by Susan Leem
illustration by Chris

Report, the percent growth of premiums from 1998 to 2002 was four times greater than that of consumer prices (43.4 percent versus 10.4 percent).

As the national health care system has shut more and more people out, the uninsured have been forced to seek alternative solutions. In February of 1997, Paul Glover founded a member-run 501(c)(3) nonprofit health financing system, an "assurance rather than insurance" program called the Ithaca Health Fund. IHF has over 600 members in 22 states, over \$296,000 of available funds, and only pays one employee, Paul Glover. After working years for free, Paul now accepts \$8.50 an hour for about 10 hours of work a week, and has refused raises.

"The idea behind the fund is that the wealthier and stronger help the less strong and less wealthy," Glover said. "A society means that people help each other; a dogfight means they exploit each other. It is anti-social, inhuman, and anti-American to make a profit from misery."

The ages of the members range from two to 87. Over a dozen Ithaca businesses use IHF to insure their workers, senior citizens supplement their Medicare with it, and students

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A Poet's Challenge to the Unelected President



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In Memoriam was originally inspired by a person full of hope, curiosity, and goodness, Tatiana Prosvirina, a student who died at the age of seventeen. The later poems of the collection were written in response to the reckless and immoral celebration of the militarism of the Bush Administration. After the 9-11 attacks the world needed vision, humanity, and sophistication; instead it got blind, simple-minded warmongering. The Bush Administration's selfish commitment to war and wealth has been barbaric, obscene, and monstrous.

The Administration's declaration of global war on terror is an antediluvian approach to finding ways to address the world's problems of sectarian conflict, organized crime, overpopulation, poverty, hunger, despair, increasingly virulent diseases, environmental depredation, reckless depletion of global resources, and degradation of traditional cultures by the West's culture of consumption, amusement, and spectacle.

That so many Americans voted against George Bush indicates that many millions of Americans are still inspired by a romantic idealism and spirituality rooted not in blind nationalism but in the love of family and community and in a reverence for nature--God's handiwork. This is a spirituality of love, not hate, a spirituality of the sacred moment, not of an eager anticipation of Armageddon, a spirituality of sharing, not of greed, a spirituality that comes from living wisely, not simplistically.

It will be task of Tatiana's generation to restore spiritual health to an American way of life that has become obscenely wasteful and destructive of habitat, human and natural, of families and communities, and of individuals. It will be this younger generation that will reestablish America's moral authority in the world and make America a force of good for all human beings.

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INTRODUCTION BY KATHLEEN CLEAVER



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Conjuring the Ghosts



I've got an appetite for Jane Fonda movies, 1969–1980.

It's been oft reported that, during those years, Fonda herself had an appetite limited to yogurt, cigarettes, and diet pills. Nothing uncommon about that for a movie star on the losing side of a rigid gender system in which standardized Body Beauty is one of the firmest pillars. There's also her much-discussed radical leftist activism during those years. But talk about movie stars' "real" lives abounds, and while I think the realities of life as a movie star provide significant fodder for cultural analysis, I also think it's worthwhile, sometimes, to focus on the work itself, on the creature on the screen, doing its job of performance, embodiment, *being* a movie star. So, those contextualizing notes aside, can I let Ms. Fonda's repeatedly run-through-the-mud personal life dry off a few minutes and talk a bit about her work? Because it's brilliant.

No matter the role — self-aware stalked prostitute, Depression-era desperate, lone rancher, tough and talented playwright, foreign correspondent, military-wife-turned-military-system-critic (read, also: '70s liberated woman) — Jane Fonda is solid. She grabs focus not merely or primarily with her beauty, but with her strength. She's the biggest force in the scene, every time. Whatever romantic or career or emotional strife her character is dealing with, she doesn't resort to physically expressing it with the fragile kind of distress typical of big-screen femmes. When she sinks, utterly drained, onto a cot several days into the '30s dance marathon of *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* it's not a delicate, breakable body that's sinking there. It's a body that's strong by necessity; it's a moment that shows not weakness but strength, pushed to its absolute limits. In *Tout va bien*,



of Fondas Past

when she argues with her husband (referred to throughout the film as “the reporter’s husband” opposite unmodified, possessive-free references to her character, “the reporter”), she faces him head on, from the middle of the couch, body open.

The ‘70s were a magical period in U.S. cinema. It was a decade full of smart, often political/socially aware movies. Big studios no longer dominated film production, which meant production was increasingly in the hands of producers and independent studios (distribution was, and is, another story). Sixties counter-culture, both artistic and political, informed a new generation of young filmmakers. It was the decade of — the standard cinema histories tell us — the rise of Scorsese (*Mean Streets* in ‘73 and *Taxi Driver* in ‘76), Francis Ford Coppola (*The Godfather*, ‘72), Robert Altman (he released

14 movies between ‘69 and ‘79, among them *M*A*S*H*, *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *Nashville*, and *Three Women*), John Cassavetes, and Hal Ashby.

What most of the last-Golden-Age-of-Hollywood histories manage not to mention is that, smack in between his stories of small-time hoods and a mohawked sociopath, Scorsese directed *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore*, in which an unexpectedly widowed housewife and mother (Ellen Burstyn) finds herself suddenly unanchored, with no money and no experience in shaping a life of her own. She hits the road with her son to find her way through life after housewife-hood, life as a working single mom in full charge. Five years later, another on-screen working mom appeared, this one staying up late to read Dylan Thomas and standing on tables by day, shouting demands to unionize the

small-town textile factory where she worked (*Norma Rae*).

The preface to editor Charles Harpole’s 600-page *History of the American Cinema, Volume 9*, which covers the period from 1970 to 1979, makes deliberate note of the decade’s historically anomalous suggestion that “mainstream American movies might aspire to the sort of serious social or political content” evidenced in films critical of Vietnam (*Coming Home*, *The Deer Hunter*, *Apocalypse Now*), of the Nixon presidency (*Shampoo*, *All the President’s Men*), of “frontier capitalism and, by extension, of the American economic system at large” (*McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *Heaven’s Gate*), etc., but makes no mention of feminism, the decade’s women’s movement, films that presented either characters or narratives (or both) that challenged gender hierarchy, patriarchy, and sexism.

Yes, it was the decade of the ascendancy of young-buck auteurs criticizing capitalism, government, and war. And it was the decade of the first blockbusters (*Star Wars*, *Jaws*). But it was also the decade of Alice, Norma Rae, and Maude.

Sure, even *Alice*, *Norma Rae*, and *Horold and Maude*, featuring feminist icons as they do, were directed and produced by men. There was little '70s magic happening when it came to shifting the gendered distribution of labor and power in the film industry (pretty women in front of the camera, smart men behind it). And it's no accident or anomaly that Jane Fonda was near-starving to maintain her ability (read: desirability) to perform so many versions/visions of the complex woman. Or that the best-known aspect of Sally Field's *Norma Rae* story is her "you really like me" Oscar acceptance speech. Even as audiences' appetites for strong, multidimensional female characters increased, those mediated appetites still preferred women who were skinny and lovable, and the actors knew it.

Still, beauty-and-lovability standard problems notwithstanding, what about that audience appetite for strong, complex female characters? For Jane Fonda *after* she made the transition from '60s sex kitten to '70s serious actor/activist? In the early part of the decade, the most "bankable" female stars, according to *Motion Picture Almanac's* annual survey, were Julie Andrews, Barbra Streisand, Elizabeth Taylor, and Ali MacGraw. (That's mother-figure in a musical, ambitious-performer-diverted-by-desperation-for-a-man in a musical, sexpot seductress, and love-of-his-life.) By decade's end, Barbra was joined on the bankable list by Diane Keaton and Jane Fonda.

In a single 11-year span, Fonda played a smart (not cutesy heart-of-gold-style)² prostitute attempting to reckon consciously with the discrepancy between her ambitions and her psychological and financial needs; a ranch-running, land-defending cowgirl; a housewife turned anti-war activist; *Lillian Hellman*, of all improbable film heroines, in a film about a romantic friendship (or more?) between two women; and a divorced woman who joins two co-workers at her first-ever wage-earning job in deliciously getting even with their butt-pinching, promotion-denying boss. These were very successful movies. *Nine to Five* made over \$100 million. There was an audience for this stuff.

There's no doubt the second-wave women's movement had a lot to do with it. In many ways, Fonda's '70s roles were a reflection of how broadly that decade's feminist movement affected the entire culture. While lacking (but of course) the movement's radicalism and explicit, nuanced political analysis, the very existence of these films proves that women's liberation hit the

Audiences (markets) are all about collective appetites. When we're talking about a very costly medium like film, audiences/markets matter a lot, and so mass appetites are very much mediated, cultivated, manipulated, and shaped.

mainstream. Middle-class white women were suddenly entering the workforce in large numbers; marriage had been interrogated and individual women were leaving oppressive marriages or choosing not to get married in the first place; women's relationships with each other were revealed to be substantive, meaningful. In consciousness-raising groups across the country, women started telling each other their stories, and all that story-telling helped to encourage an end to formerly pervasive feelings of isolation and a beginning of story-telling about women's lives on a large scale. In the late 20th century, the very biggest story-telling medium was film. Embodied by Jane Fonda and a few other extraordinarily talented actors, a new kind of women's stories hit the big time in the '70s.

Audiences (markets) are all about collective appetites. When we're talking about a very costly medium like film, audiences/markets matter a lot, and so mass appetites are very much mediated, cultivated, manipulated, and shaped.

According to Harpole's history, "strategic or 'scientific' marketing in the motion picture industry began in 1972 with Paramount's spectacular success in promoting...*The Godfather*...*Business Week* pointed out that recent market changes had forced the movie industry 'to do what most other industries had to do generations ago: synchronize production and marketing.' That is... 'assume a market that would justify the outlay.'" By decade's end, audiences were flocking to the first blockbusters. (While I was editing this, the latest *New Yorker* plopped into my mailbox, containing, among other things, a piece that quotes critic Stephen Farber's comment that "Audiences who think they made 'Jaws' a success are pitifully naïve about the mass media." Farber maintained that an "aggressive media blitz" for the film "pummeled" audiences into their theater seats.)

Interesting, then, that someone like Jane Fonda — solid where movie heroines before her (and since) revert to coyness, to delicate versions of fear and other forms of distress; playing a diverse array of multidimensional characters — should be among the most bankable female stars in the decade that started strategically considering concepts like "bankable." Interesting that movie-money folks were able to "assume a market [to] justify the outlay" for not just, say, *Norma Rae* or *Nine to Five* as singular anomalies, but for a decade full of nuanced and often defiant female leads. And this

without any female writers or directors making mainstream films. How much was that assumption a response to emergent audience appetites, inspired by feminist movement and corresponding changes in individual and group lives? How was that emergent appetite shaped/mediated by the new strategic marketing in the film industry? (And, tangential to this discussion but important to consider, how did de-politicized or watered-down responses to representations of women's liberation affect feminist movement and the culture it was seeking to change?)

Although the mere fact of 2002's *The Hours* has me hopeful that maybe U.S. audiences have a renewed taste for character-driven stories about multidimensional women, there's not (yet, at least) a Jane Fonda for this generation. There's no one the industry can bank on to keep a mass of us in our chairs to watch nuanced explorations of women's lives. Of course, the increase (though slow and hard-won) in female (even feminist) directors and producers — Christine Vachon of Killer Films (*I Shot Andy Warhol*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Hedwig*, and so many more) not least among them — combined with the advent of digital video technology (i.e., the possibility of making movies for hardly any money at all, compared to traditional and highly prohibitive restrictive production costs) gives that hope³ a whole new aspect.

And while we hope, let's also indulge our appetites for good movies, and especially, in these fearful, conservative times, transgressive ones: Join feminist/queer indie⁴ first-weekend clubs and show the appetite-benders how you've developed your own taste. If you're gonna plop down any discretionary dollars at all these days, why not earmark a few of them for supporting transgressive films, or at least ones that qualify as some kind of good in your book? Buy a ticket for a movie that speaks to your appetite. Go ahead, as poet Cynthia Nelson tells us, and sing your public thirst. ☆

Footnotes

¹ There is also no mention of films that address race, anti-racist work, etc.

² The movie's penultimate chapter does involve some extended musing on Hollywood's other favorite way to treat female sex workers: prostitute as temptress, corruptor, cause of any violence inflicted against herself or other women.

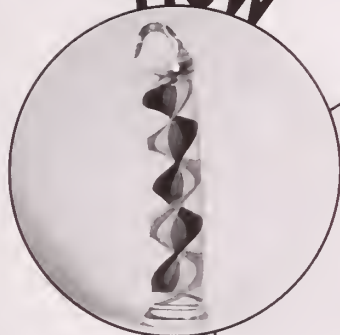
³ To maintain my hope, I'm going to try and ignore the fact that the IMDB tells me Jane Fonda's going to make her comeback in a proposed 2005 film called *Monster-in-Law*, in which she'll play — say it isn't so — JLo's "horrifying mother-in-law."

How

Safe

Are Your

Toys?



by Jennifer Grant

We all know the value of eating organic, getting regular exercise, using holistic medicine and natural remedies, campaigning for the environment, and cutting down on our toxin intake. We also know the importance of healthy sexuality to one's general well-being. For many, this means incorporating sex toys, lubricants, love potions, and other adult products into their lives. Sex has become more mainstream than ever and, in spite of the abstinence advocates, there's no stopping it.

Nowadays, there are clean, well-lighted sex toy shops in every large city. Even if you live in the sticks, it's easy to find a reputable company on the Internet that will deliver sex products discreetly to your door and include a great deal of education on how to use, care for, and clean them. This trend has been developing for the last 10 years, and now the "sex-positive" industry is in full swing. This is great for everyone. It means you no longer have to risk being seen entering that seedy 24 hour XXX store, and the quality and selection of sex products has gone up while prices have dropped.

The problem is, we Americans are evolving sexually as a culture, but not to the point where we're questioning the standards that go into the manufacture of the sex products we consume. We're ok with buying them, but what are we really getting? The adult industry is loath to self-regulate, consumers aren't putting up a fuss, and the government's not interested in safety right now; they'd rather prosecute housewives for selling vibrators at home parties. So what's a health-conscious horny person to do?

The first thing to remember is that the same principles that go into purchasing, say, a Palm Pilot don't apply when you're shopping for sex toys. Even with all the advancements, the sex toy industry is still overrun with shoddy and potentially unsafe products. This has a lot to do with stubborn taboos and the fact that most people don't complain at the Better Business Bureau about the rash they got from their new vibrating dong.

In my job as a sex advice columnist and owner of an online sex toy shop, I hear a lot of stories about dildo burn, lube rash, and other negative reactions to adult products that could have been avoided. The interesting thing is these

stories often come from people who normally are very conscious about what they put in their bodies.

This is because even post-sexual revolution, sex is still a complicated thing. We all do it, but it remains mysterious and can bring up all sorts of awkward feelings. It's ok to own a vibrator if you're a woman, but most don't talk about it. And forget about being a guy and telling your homeboys about your girlfriend fucking you in the ass with her strapon. We still have a long way to go before we can truly talk openly about sex, and of course this climate of shame and silence affects the way the sex toy industry markets their products.

Basically, there have been few formal, scientific studies done anywhere on the safety of sex toy materials. One private study commissioned by a German magazine found high toxin levels in sex toys. Because of this, both European and Canadian health authorities considered studying the effects of the plastics in question, but eventually decided against further research.

The European Union has banned the use of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics in children's toys (which are the same as those used in sex toys), but has not addressed the safety of adult products. The United States FDA has also investigated children's toys, but somewhat predictably, they concluded that a child chewing on a rattle that smells like a toxic waste dump won't suffer any considerable harm.

Pure PVC plastic is used widely around the world. It's normally hard and inflexible, like plumbing pipes. To soften it, whether you're making a jelly dong or a teething ring, chemicals must be added. When pressure is applied to the softened plastic product, it leaches estrogen-like substances called phthalates that cause liver and kidney damage in lab rats. Over time, PVC plastics will emit these toxins on their own, which is why your sex toy may turn cloudy or discolored after a few months, while its chemical odor gets worse.

The EPA has little to say about phthalates. "No information is available," states their web site, and phthalates fall under Group D, which means "not classifiable as to human carcinogenicity." What environmental and activist groups suspect is that phthalates do cause problems ranging from

hormonal disturbances to immune deficiency in humans, with similar effects on wildlife. Short-term, you may experience a rash, burning, pain, even a vaginal infection from your sex toy.

The children's toy industry has done some self-regulation, but in the world of adult toys, it's another story. Currently the sex toy community is large and financially strong enough to carry political clout, should it wish to go the greasy palms route of so many other large corporations. But there's a reason why people download porn on Kazaa all day long while thinking twice about stealing that new Beyonce single. The government and the adult industry have never exactly been friends. Usually, their only face time is when sex industry leaders are defending themselves in court. People in the adult industry associate on a business level with each other, their lawyers and their bankers, and that's about it.

Adult toy companies in the U.S. classify their products as "novelties." This is why you never receive an instruction manual with your sex toys. If they tell you how to use it, it becomes a medical device and manufacturers must follow a whole other set of restrictive and expensive regulations. Novelty classification is easier on the toy companies, but it's not so good for the consumer.

The best thing to do is educate yourself on the different materials and ingredients used to make commonly available toys, lubricants, and love potions. The next best thing is to exercise good judgment and common sense. The FDA is certainly not the highest authority on what's safe. If your adult toy, condom, or massage oil smells toxic, it probably is. If it gives you a strange reaction, stop using it and look for safe alternatives.

The only safe sex toys are those made from food or medical-grade silicone, or non-porous materials like stainless steel or Pyrex™ glass. Lubricants, massage oils, warming lotions, and other products marketed for sexual use may also contain toxic ingredients. Here's a breakdown of what may be good and bad for you, and why.

Potentially UNSAFE Materials and Ingredients

PVC Plastics – Any soft, flexible sex toy that's not silicone is probably made from PVC and is potentially unsafe. These are often called "jelly" toys. Realistic toys like Cyberskin™ and Realskin™ products are also PVC. Small bullet-style vibrators sometimes come covered with jelly material, so make sure it's safe before you buy.

Latex – It's not as common these days, but sex toys often used to be made from latex rubber and some older models are still sold. Latex will break down over time and is hard

to clean. Latex allergies can be severe, so if you have one, make sure the toy is safe for you. Most sex toy companies are good about clearly labeling their latex products.

Nonoxynol 9 – For years it was suspected that this spermicide caused more damage than it prevented. This is because Nonoxynol 9 was originally formulated for use as an industrial cleanser. Recent studies have proven that N9 is so abrasive it causes tiny cuts in the genitals, which increases the chance of spreading diseases like HIV. Amazingly, some condoms and many personal lubricants still use N9. Avoid it at all costs.

Mass-Marketed Lubricants – Many lubricants for sex contain a cocktail of unpronounceable chemicals. As with sex toys, there aren't a lot of studies on the effects of these. But if you use organic soaps, shampoos, or beauty products, you'll be happy to know there are a few alternatives available. A company called Sensua Organics recently released the first widely available organic sex lube. Unlike previous products which tended to be too watery, Sensua's lube is slippery and gel-like. A good online store or catalog will include ingredient listings for their lubricants.

Silicone or Oil-Based Lubricants – Silicone lube is great for occasional sex in the water, but it doesn't interact well with PVC and can make a toy's surface sticky, shedding bits of plastic. Household items like oils and petroleum jelly do the same thing, plus they can give women a vaginal infection. Silicone lube also interacts with silicone toys. Make sure your lubricant is water-based and you won't have any problems.

Vibrators – Although vibrators made from hard plastic are generally safe in terms of toxin emissions, their electronics are often less than high-tech. Especially with waterproof toys, check for protruding wires or worn contacts and discard if you find any. Vibrators made in Japan or Germany are generally of better quality. Chinese-made toys are cheaper and good if you are experimenting, but remember the safety precautions and

more toy tips

Use condoms over jelly toys to protect the skin from potential toxins. It may be impossible to find your favorite sex toy in a safe material like silicone. So, just slip a condom (without Nonoxynol 9!) over it. This also makes cleanup easier.

Purchase your adult products at a reputable business. Whether it's online or in a physical store, a good sex toy shop will have friendly staff who can answer your questions about the materials or ingredients in the products they carry and be able to tell you where the toys were made. If they can't, keep looking and find a company that cares enough to educate themselves and their customers on the safety of sex toy materials.

While it may be far-fetched to expect the adult manufacturing industry to clean up its act on its own, awareness is growing and more safe sex toy alternatives are cropping up all the time. It's imperative that those of us who use sex toys are given choices, as well as the information we need to make informed decisions. Just as you consciously decide where to buy your produce, you can make a difference by choosing sex products that truly promote healthy sexuality.

use common sense. A reputable sex toy store will answer your questions about where their products are made.

Safe Sex Toy Alternatives

Silicone – Sex toys made from food or medical-grade silicone are gaining in popularity as a soft, flexible replacement for PVC. Not only are silicone toys non-toxic, they warm up quickly and retain heat, they're easy to disinfect, and they don't degrade, which means they can last a lifetime. They're more expensive, but in the long run they are quite literally more bang for the buck. Make sure the toy is high-grade silicone, as some companies will attempt to fool you by using impure silicone plastic compounds and labeling it "silicone." Manufacturers that specialize in silicone toys are less likely to use dangerous compounds.

Glass – Although it may sound freaky, toys made from high-grade Pyrex glass and purchased from a reputable dealer are perfectly safe. What's more, glass is entirely non-toxic and because it's non-porous, it's even easier to clean than silicone. You can share glass with others, which is not recommended with any other toy material except metal. The heaviness of glass combined with its smoothness makes for a new and decidedly sensual experience.

Metals – Dildos and butt plugs in metal are safe, but only if they're unpainted. Almost all of the painted toys on the market are prone to flaking, and nobody needs paint chips in their body. Unpainted metal and stainless steel are excellent alternatives and, like glass, lend a whole new dimension to lovemaking.

Granite, Marble, Wood – If your dildo doesn't have splinters, varnish, paint, rough edges, or seams, go for it. These are the original sex toy materials, used safely by humans for thousands of years. ★

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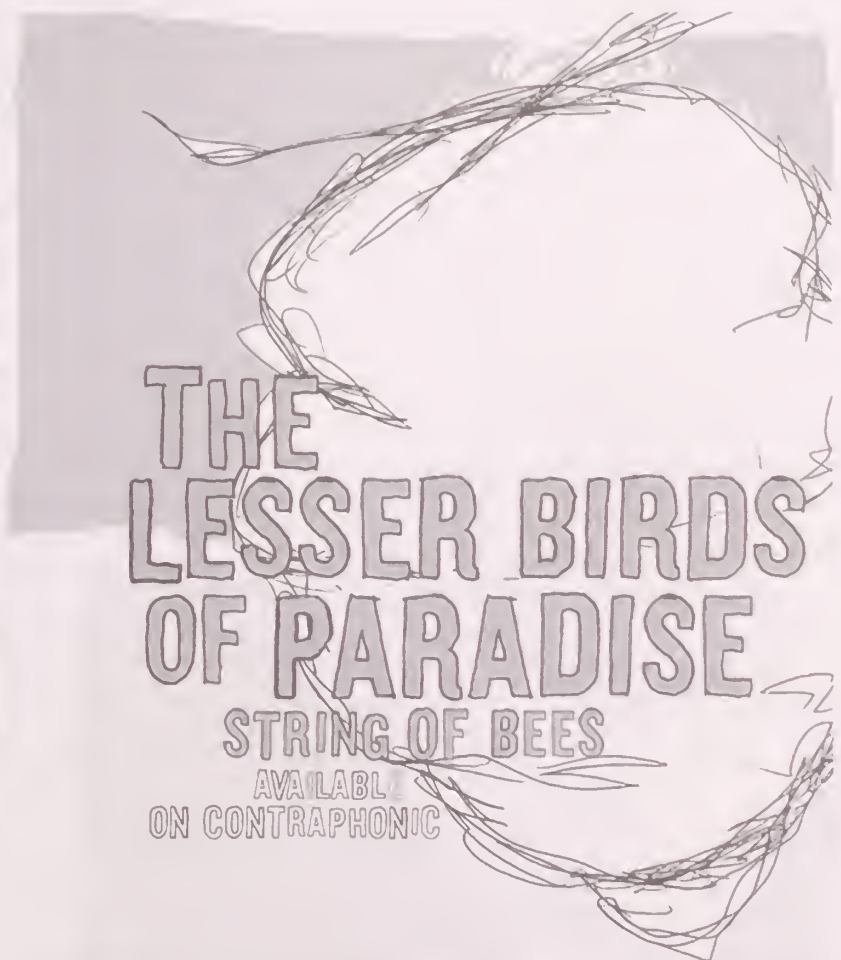
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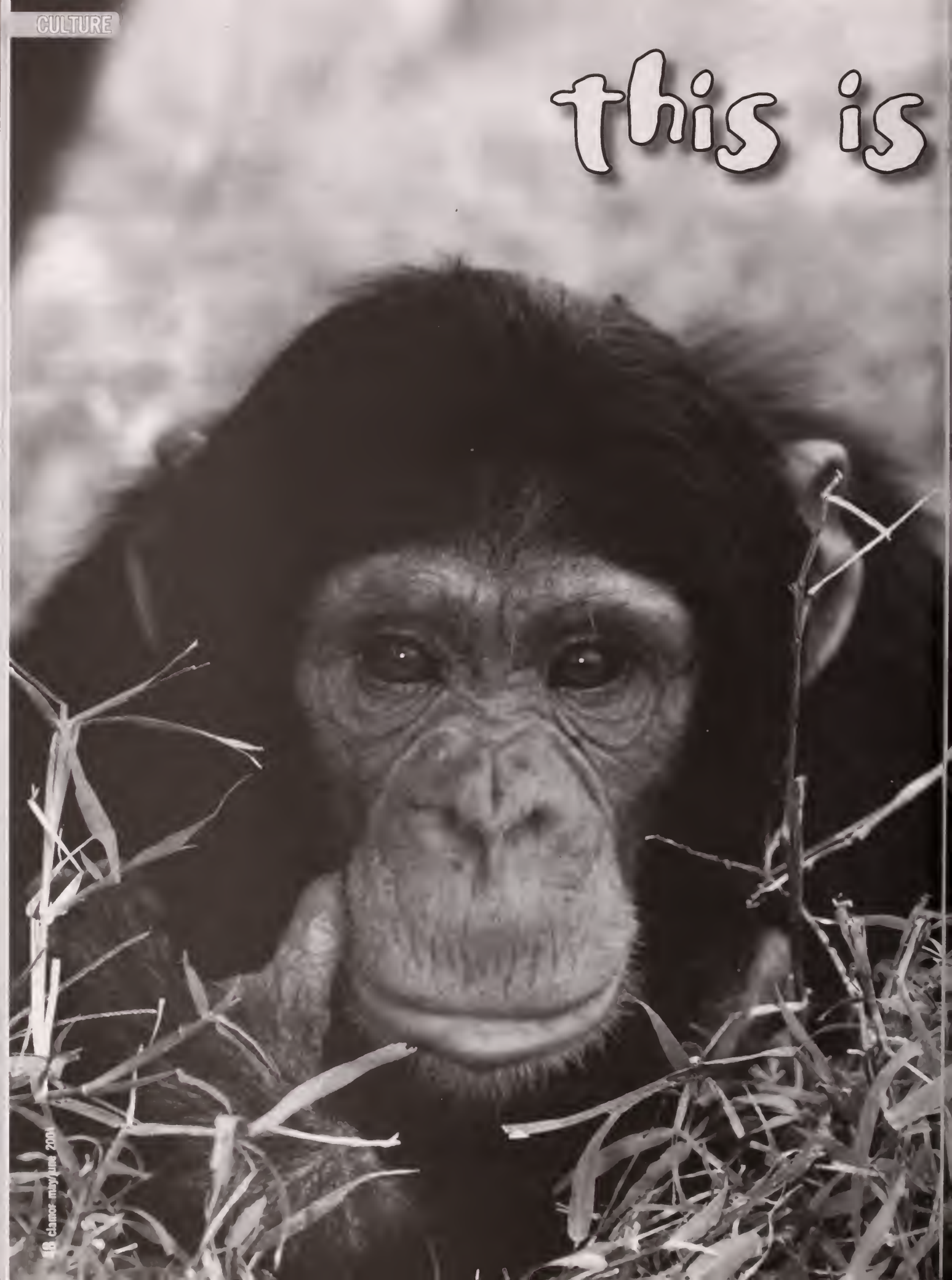
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Entertainment?

As hilarious as you might think a chimp dressed in people clothes is, there's more to these working chimps' stories that you should know.



Sarah Baeckler with Charles Spano

Imagine the worst job you ever had. Maybe your first summer job. It wasn't all it was cracked up to be — mowing lawns for less than minimum wage, pulling weeds, babysitting, maybe flipping burgers or slinging fries. It was probably pretty lousy. But however low the pay, however awful it seemed, you were compensated for your work and you were there by choice (parental ultimatums do not constitute forced labor). Now imagine a really awful job. It involves imprisonment, rigorous training regimes, impoverished living conditions, daily beatings, no pay — and the workers are children.

I spent over a year working undercover at a major Hollywood animal training facility, researching the practices and protocols used in the film and television industry. At the time, the compound housed five chimpanzees. As a primatologist, I specialize in the relationships that occur between captive chimpanzees and their human caregivers, so I used my training to assess exactly what these chimpanzees were experiencing as working screen actors.

Those unfamiliar with chimpanzee behavior could be misled by appearances, as is often the case on set and on screen. Actors, directors, and crew working with chimpanzees will claim they “looked happy enough,” or “seemed affectionate with their trainer.” Dennis Miller, in a strange preemptive attack on animal activists on the first episode of his CNBC talk show, mocked the idea that his chimpanzee “co-host” might be unhappy, offering, “If someone could come in and show me the [chimpanzee’s] unhappy, I’ll let her go.” This was likely attention-baiting hyperbole; however, if he were to make good on his offer, a primatologist (which chimpanzee trainers are *not*) could easily provide proof of the detrimental effects of entertainment work on the chimpanzee’s life.

Many viewers watching films will assume that, just because chimpanzee actors are wearing human clothes and making big, open-mouthed grins, they are pampered movie stars, a notion as remote from the truth as possible. For example, chimpanzees don’t smile the way humans do. When you see a chimpanzee “smile” onscreen, you’re actually seeing what is called a “fear grimace.” This is not the sign of a happy chimp. It’s the sign of a frightened chimp. When acting chimpanzees cling to their trainers, this isn’t because they love their trainers. It’s because they’re terrified to leave their trainers’ sides, for fear of what might happen if they do. World-renowned primatologist Dr. Roger Fouts notes that this “clinging” behavior in chimpanzee actors is also found in abused children — particularly that they cling to the abusive parent. And, most simply, that is what entertainment chimpanzees are — horribly abused children. According to Dr. Fouts, “It’s wrong to use chimps in entertainment for the same reason it is wrong to force children to work in sweatshops [and]

to allow parents to beat and dominate their children. Chimps in entertainment basically is a form of domination and exploitation.”

The average day in the life of an acting chimpanzee starts at about 6:00 a.m. The chimp — we’ll call him “Bob” — wakes up in a 15-square-foot cement cage with several cage mates. He sleeps in a three- by five-foot plywood denbox. It’s dirty with old scraps of food and garbage because his caregivers don’t clean it very well. The cage is outside and made of chain link fence, so it gets pretty cold at night. Bob often wakes up shivering.

Around 8:00 a.m., Bob’s caregivers arrive and take him out of the cage to change his diaper. He hoots when he sees them coming because he knows they are bringing breakfast. Once he and his cage mates have eaten, one or two caregivers come into the cage and start cleaning. Because this is an area that Bob and his cage mates consider their own, they sometimes bite the people who are cleaning in defense of their personal space. Also, since Bob is a playful chimp, he tries to “help” the cleaners by grabbing their mops or running off with their tools. This is where Bob and his friends get their first beatings of the day. Any behavior considered “improper” during the morning cleaning is promptly “punished.” Bob gets punched in the back or kicked in the head when he does something the cleaners think is wrong. Bob is two years old.

After cleaning, Bob and his cage mates are left alone for a few hours. Sometime in the afternoon Bob will leave his cage for a training session. The trainers sit Bob down on a rock or stool and ask him to perform. If he does the trick right, he is rewarded with verbal praise and a jellybean or other small treat. If he does it wrong, he is yelled at and told to try again. If he continues to do it wrong, the trainer will grab him and force him to do it. Bob screams in fear when this happens. He’s really too young to be required to pay such close attention. He’s very similar to a human two-year-old: playful, curious, and rambunctious. He doesn’t want to sit still and do boring behaviors. He wants to run around and explore and play. If he does this, though, he gets beaten. If he runs away during a training session, his trainers throw rocks at him and yell at him until he comes back.

After his training session, Bob is given some “playtime” to explore and interact with his cage mates. He is tied up on a leash and allowed to play for a little while. If he does anything wrong, though, he’ll get beaten. If he tries to run off, he’ll get punched or kicked. If he bites someone, which is one of the ways baby chimps play with each other, he will definitely get punched. So playtime isn’t really that much fun for Bob.

Around 4:00 p.m., Bob and his cage mates get dinner. After another quick cage cleaning, the trainers go home. Bob doesn’t go to sleep until it gets dark outside. He and his cage mates are left alone from 5:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m. the next day. Bob sometimes wraps himself up in a blanket and sits there rocking back and forth, staring blankly. He looks like someone in a psychiatric hospital. He is so mentally and physically brutalized that sometimes the most comforting thing he can do is tune out.

Some days, Bob must go on an acting job. He is taken from his cage and changed into pretty-looking clothes so he

looks “cute.” Bob is put into a dog carrier or small wooden cage in the back of a big van and driven to the set. When they arrive, Bob gets a quick “tune-up” from his trainer. Tune-ups serve to remind Bob that if he misbehaves, he’ll be sorry. The trainer tunes Bob up by yelling at him, taking a brush and jabbing him with it, or pinching and poking him. This is scary for Bob but he knows his trainers “mean business” so he tries to act “good.” He knows if he doesn’t he’ll get beaten, just like what happens at home on the compound.

The set can be very scary for Bob. There are all sorts of new sounds, new people, and big equipment. Bob wants to look around, but he’s not allowed to. If he tries to run off he’ll get punched. So he clings to his trainer. It may look like he really loves his trainer the way he hangs on so tightly, but really he’s just trying to make sure he doesn’t get beaten. When the time comes for Bob to act, he’s even more scared. He might have to hold hands with a stranger. He might have to do things he’s not comfortable with. He might want to run away so he doesn’t have to be so scared. But he can’t, because he knows he’ll get beaten.

This is what I witnessed chimpanzee actors going through, day in and day out. I saw trainers punch the chimps in the back, kick them in the head, throw their whole bodies into pummeling the chimps with their fists. They hit the chimps using rocks, mallets, and sawed off broom handles. I once saw a chimp receive a brutal beating with a stick; the trainer swung at the four-year-old chimpanzee with the force of a baseball swing. I saw evidence of using a cattle prod. The chimpanzees are punished for things that are completely beyond their control. They are punished for doing things that are completely normal chimpanzee behaviors.

The abusive treatment really takes its toll. Some exhibit signs of psychological distress called “stereotypies,” the most common of which I witnessed was rocking. They’ll gather up some blankets, or grab onto each other, and rock back and forth. When they do this, they seem a million miles away and it’s very difficult to get their attention. It’s really a coping mechanism for them, a reaction to their experiences, and it’s quite disturbing to see. Other signs of distress are more covert. Sometimes the chimps get obsessively attached to a certain object and it becomes like a security blanket. Sometimes they injure themselves or pull their hair out. Sometimes they pace back and forth endlessly.

It’s important to remember that these chimps are *babies*, perfectly comparable to human babies. In the wild, a five-year-old chimpanzee — the oldest of the chimps I worked with — would still be traveling around with her mother. The youngest ones, the two-year-olds, would be riding on their mothers’ backs and dependent on them for all of their needs. Imagine subjecting your two-year-old child to the things

I saw these chimpanzees go through daily. Imagine learning that children were not just being forced into strenuous work regimes, but that two- to five-year-olds were being pounded in the head by the closed fist and all the might of a 230-pound man.

What goes on at entertainment chimpanzee training facilities is so horrifying that, when I share my experiences, people ask if it is an isolated case. They’re shocked and appalled at how this can be done to babies who want nothing more than to forage in the wild with their mothers. Sadly, these terribly abusive training







practices have been so naturalized by the industry that they are not only common but the rule. There are only about four major chimpanzee training facilities and they work together closely.

I visited two of the other compounds and saw the same red flags I saw at the compound where I worked. I took classes at the school that turns out many of today's trainers, and it was part of the curriculum that chimpanzees must be beaten in order to perform. Dr. Fouts has seen trainers carrying hot shots (small cattle prods). He also notes, "I've had trainers tell me the best way is the two-by-four technique — to hit them for reason," referring to a method of chimpanzee training that involves beating the chimps with two-by-four boards. Famed primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall explains, "The trainers want to establish a relationship based on fear so that they get instant obedience, and there are various methods. One that I've been told about is an iron bar, but it's surrounded by newspaper... then on the set, you just need a rolled-up newspaper." I've had trainers that I witnessed abusing chimpanzees tell me about other trainers *they* considered to be brutally abusive.

People often ask how someone could possibly do something so unconscionable. Unfortunately, the system is so ingrained that trainers and their staff don't think to question it. The staff members are not experts in animal behavior — and as obvious as it is that this treatment is absolutely abnormal, obedience to authority is a powerful social influence — so they do as they are told. Chimpanzees endure abuse for running off or doing a behavior wrong, and the logic for beating them is they need to be punished for "acting out" so they won't do it again. The point that is missed on many trainers and their staff is if the chimps weren't in these uncomfortable, unnatural situations, against their will, they wouldn't be "acting out." They'd just be acting like chimps.

Frankly, it is impossible to train chimps to be in television and motion pictures without abusing them. It's simply not interesting enough to a young chimpanzee to sit still and pay attention for long periods of time. The only way to train them is to use fear: if chimpanzees are constantly in abject fear of physical pain, they will pay attention, learn tricks, and perform on cue. As a primatologist, I believe this is the only way to train a chimpanzee for Hollywood. This may seem contradictory to the "no animals were harmed" tag at the end of many major motion pictures. But the Film and Television Unit of the American Humane Association (AHA), the organization responsible for this disclaimer, by their own admission, has no jurisdiction over the training compounds.

Earlier this year, Karen Rosa, director of the AHA Film and Television Unit confessed to *National Geographic's* Jennifer Hile, "We would love to be in a position to certify training compounds, recommend some while blacklisting others, but we don't have the funding or the jurisdiction." But without access to the compounds, the AHA is not present during any training, which is where the majority of the abuse occurs. They aren't always present on-set — Rosa also admitted they don't police the majority of reality shows, talk shows, or commercials. If Rosa admits the AHA has no jurisdiction over the phase of



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But by age six or seven, an entertainment chimp becomes too strong to control and has to stop "acting." So the next 50 years will either be spent as a breeder, producing offspring who will immediately get taken away and put into the training cycle, or in another substandard facility. One trainer dumps chimps at a roadside zoo in Texas which was recently the subject of an investigation that revealed horrifying violations of state and federal animal welfare codes.

Trainers say they "work" chimpanzees. "Working" a chimpanzee is not work at all, but painful, degrading exploitation of our closest kin for human entertainment. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker has said, "The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for whites or women for men." There is no compromise. Chimpanzees shouldn't be used in movies, television, or commercials at all. The only answer is abolition. The cost to them is too great. Not only does the industry contribute to the abuse of countless individuals, but it also comes at a cost to the species. Using them in "cute" or "funny" roles makes a mockery of them and masks the critical nature of their endangerment in the wild. Chimpanzees and their habitats are disappearing at an alarming rate, and putting them on a talk show or in a beer commercial is irresponsible.

Fortunately, there are a growing number of people in the entertainment industry who agree that this abuse must stop. After working with various animals (including a chimpanzee) in *Being John Malkovich*, Cameron Diaz said, "I won't do movies with animals anymore. I'm an actor by choice. A dog is not an actor by choice." Although the campaign to stop this abuse is young, a growing number of producers, writers, directors, and actors are pledging not to be involved with any production involving chimpanzees. This movement has been spearheaded by an organization I work with, the Chimpanzee Collaboratory (www.chimpecollaboratory.org). It's a ground-up campaign, because the major studios are hesitant to make any sort of strong statements, instead relying on the AHA (which admittedly is powerless) to ensure the animals are well cared for. Things will only start to change when the individuals who make Hollywood tick defend chimpanzees and their well-being. ☆

production that results in the most abuse, how can the organization in good conscience give their "no animals have been harmed" stamp of approval? Bob Barker, star of *The Price Is Right*, believes that you simply can't trust the AHA disclaimer. "You cannot accept that," he told Vancouver *Sun* writer Nicholas Read in 2001. "When you see animals in pictures, you are putting them at risk."

Chimpanzee "actors" don't have much to look forward to in retirement, either. Chimpanzees are more than five times stronger than humans. Chimpanzees in captivity can live well into their 60s and sometimes even 70s.



MICRANOTS INTELLIGENCE

Minneapolis-St. Paul is the home of Rhymesayers Entertainment (RSE), a nationally renowned, independent Hip-Hop label collective that developed in the mid '90s. Rhymesayers has since fostered the growth of the Midwest scene with artists like Atmosphere, Los Nativos, Musab, Eyedea & Abilities, and Brother Ali N, all legends in their own right. Springing forth from this MPLS-based pack are visionary pioneers, Micranots. This unified duo consists of DJ Kool Akiem, the production architect and master of sonic imagery and storytelling, and MC I Self Devine, the conscious professor and speaker of truth, enlightenment, and tangible content. Following the release of their album *Obelisk Movements* in 2000 (by and large one of the most impressive Hip-Hop releases of our time) on the Subverse label, Micranots signed with RSE in 2002. They have since re-released their first full-length, *Return of the Travellers*, and in February premiered the conceptual follow-up to *Obelisk Movements* entitled *The Emperor & the Assassin*. I spoke with I Self Devine in early February via telephone and the interview that follows is an abbreviated version of that dialogue.

Clamor What sparked your interest to be an MC?

I Self Devine: Basically I would say that the movement in general is what inspired me. I mean prior to Hip-Hop, we were listening to all of the things that hip-hoppers were born from, you know, reggae, funk, disco, rock. And so when the phenomenon spread, I was right there and I was young. To me, Hip-Hop is pretty much everything, it's the attitude and it transcends. You know, I'm 31 years of age and I've been participating whole-heartedly since '79. I'm a teacher but I'm also a student, and I'm equally both.

Would you consider yourself an MC for the working class?

Definitely. I'm an average dude, you know. I have two kids and for me to be able to make do, I have to constantly supplement. For the most part, I've always had a job. But it's weird, because the jobs that I have to take are often temp jobs. Because I need a job that I can leave if I'm touring with my music. And a

Samuel Pixley talks with

MC I Self Devine

lot of times when you let employers know that you're a musician, they're not going to want to mess with you anyway because they're trying to run their business. And when you're in these factories, you have union situations where you have a hierarchy. I've had a lot of jobs where I've been able to use my physical strength and there's no question that I'm able to do that. Now I want to be able to use my mind. So now I do a lot of freelance teaching of Hip-Hop art, which is the tenet of Hip-Hop broken down into collages, having reference points of people and artists. That's what I do now, but it's never been where this shit can cover my whole financial situation. And so for me, I'm trying to create that which I have not seen which is suitable for myself in terms of what I'm trying to accomplish in life.

Right, which is what I think we're all ultimately striving for at our own pace. There are a lot of people in the music industry that are more entertainers than educators. What I really appreciated most about Obelisk Movements when I heard it, aside from DJ Kool Akiem's production, was what you were professing on the mic. Have you ever had any regrets about your lyrical content?

I do have some regrets but these regrets are more about the way in which the course of music goes. Kind of like how America eats itself, so does each genre. For me, the *Obelisk Movements* should have come out in 1988. Because there was not a lot of music coming out then, and there was not a lot of other diversions in life, like video games and such. I feel that that album was very dense, and it was created that way purposely. We didn't want to compromise at that point in time, and we wanted to make an album strictly for the heads, to where you could listen to it years down the line and still hear something that you didn't hear previously. But beyond the content of my music, I'm an MC. And an MC has the job of handling fire. You have to be able to create your own hype, but you cannot believe in your own hype.

For me, I don't lose sight. I don't see myself as an activist, even though there are some things that I do off-record that can fall into that category. So where I'm at right now, I've been putting together a formula that I feel will be able to reach many people without compromising the material.

How do you feel like you've been received on-stage?

I would say that even on this last tour, sometimes I felt out of place in terms of speaking to people that maybe didn't necessarily want to hear it. Also being that most of the crowd was white, maybe what I said would have been more accepted coming from Eminem.

As an MC, we get caught up in a certain box, and for me I don't want to be caught up in that box. That's why it's very important for each release that I deal with to show some type of progression, but to be able to try and break the mold every time.

So in working with Rhymesayers, do you feel like Micranots have complete control over their releases?

Realistically, it's pretty much a co-op, man. We handle our projects the way we want to and they're cool with it. What they'll do is basically voice their opinions. We all don't necessarily agree, but everybody has full integrity. It's not like, "Yo, pull the plug on that!" Everybody is pretty much accountable for themselves. If you don't move to push your shit, then your shit doesn't move. I think that the whole purpose is to get with motivated people who have a vision and see where they want to go.

Are you registered to vote, and do you exercise that right?

I have not exercised that right, and I've been around people who thought it was just blasphemous, like a crime or something. They'd be like, "I can't believe it, how could you not want to make a difference, and how can you complain about things that occur if you don't stand up?" I realize many of my people have died for the right to vote. But now I feel like the actual process of voting is like sugar water, it's placebo. It's designed to make us feel like we do have power. Maybe on a smaller scale it works, but otherwise it's like they've got their candidates determined long before the voting begins. For me, I don't believe that it's effective because they got the shit on lock; it's a circle, inside of a circle, inside of a circle, and the motherfuckers in the center know everything.

The revolutionary tone of Micranots releases continues to be an inspiration to a lot of folks. Where do you think we're headed?

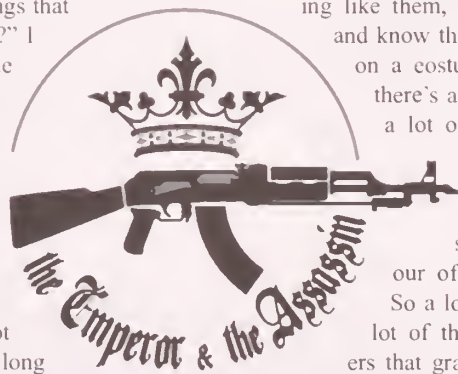
I think more than anything what we're doing is probably headed toward oblivion. And I think the only thing that will save us is the Earth cleansing itself. I was rewriting a song recently that was talking about money, saying that money is not the root of all evil, it's people. And I feel like where we are right now in life, there won't ever be a utopia. There has to be some negative to counter the positive. I don't think everybody would want to

live in an ultimately positive world. In terms of some grand revolution, I think that the revolution of change happens on a very small scale every day. It happens with that tree that falls in the forest that nobody hears, and it's the big crash that smashes into a storefront. In America, if we were to have an armed revolt, it would be very hard because we just don't have the resources. It'd have to go deeper than that. Pound for pound, you can't really go up against what you don't have the necessary resources to undo.

So for me, I'm on a personal quest. Each day I'm trying to be a better father, a better man, a better brother, and to be able to share the knowledge and the wisdom that I have. The thing that I feel is my best asset is working with these kids through art to be able to provide them with different avenues. A lot of times I'm going to these schools that with all this gentrification are way out in the 'burbs. One of the places I've been working at, the county had gotten sued for not having a diverse enough curriculum, so they brought us in there. And to an extent that can be seen as a token. You know, let's bring in some urban shit to appease the financiers or whatever. Regardless of the situation, I come in there just how I dress on the street, and I give these kids many different opportunities and visions to see a black man doing something else

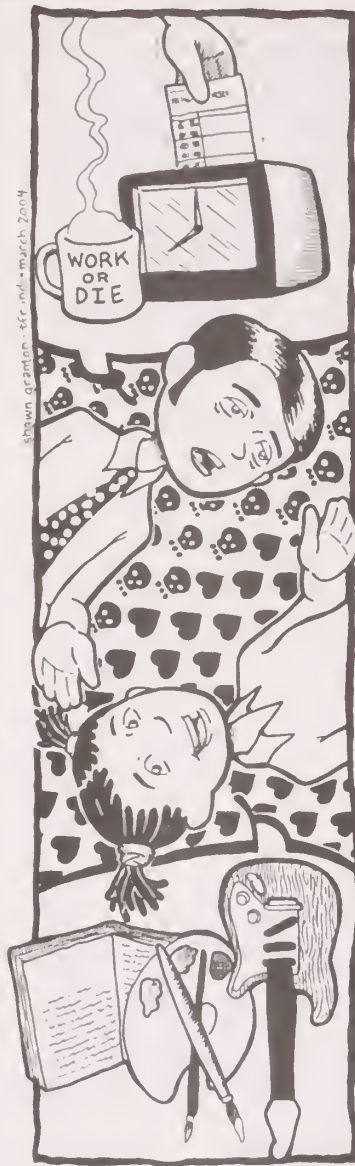
beyond sports and rappin'. And by dressing like them, they can identify and know that I'm not putting on a costume, so therefore there's a connection. With a lot of our people and in general with a lot of males, we just don't stick around with our offspring, our kids. So a lot of times I get a lot of these young brothers that gravitate toward me because they're not getting that energy at home. And when you take on this job, there are a lot of other things that come with it, like social work. You may think, "Damn, I just wanted to come in and do this art!" But then you might find yourself mediating between families, between principals and pigs. You never know. So for me, that's where my change comes in, being able to reroute some of these kids. Because you know how the prison systems are, and I don't want to send out these kids to get slaughtered. But, at least for our youth, I'm like, what can I really offer them these days? I just feel in general that the American population isn't as informed as it should be and I feel like in my position, I have to be very careful in terms of how I drop that information.

An extended version of this interview is online at www.clamormagazine.org/issue26.html.



What's Your Passion?

with Stella Meredith illustration Shawn Granton



shawn granton - 68r.ind - march 2004

So, you're in a bar or a coffeehouse, at a church social or a political meet-up. You meet a person who attracts you. Maybe it's the shoes. Maybe it's the vocal timbre. Maybe it's the fact that this person is in a place you enjoy, a good sign of compatibility. The conversation lags a little and you fill in the gap, "So what do you do for work?"

You just blew it.

Suddenly, the conversation takes a mundane turn — icky bosses, too many hours or too many cutbacks, boredom, toxic environments. Hindrance upon hindrance to the things you really want to do. Of course, there are people who are "working" at "jobs" they really love, but far too often "work" is considered one of the biggest setbacks to the fulfillment of dreams.

When someone asks what you do for work, what they really mean is "What do you do for money?" Why do we ask strangers how they get cash? What kind of a premise is that to build a new friendship? Do we spend so much time making money, and so little time following our dreams, that our cash-chasing defines us more than what we are passionate about?

Despite what some may think, the word "work" was not always synonymous with the daily grind!

It could be said that everything we do is work, but not everything we do is monetarily rewarding. Technically, eating a sandwich is work; I don't define myself as a sandwich-eater. When I answer the "what do you do" question honestly, people are genuinely confused. Saying that I'm a writer leads them to assume that I'm a published writer. I can say I'm "working" on a novel or on a series of illustrations. This is literally what I do with most of my time. Yet people would not consider that what I do for work. They want to know how I make a living.

When I tell them how I live, they're still confused. If I tell them I work in a backpacker's hostel, people assume

I am paid to do so. When I explain that I'm not paid but earn my rent by helping maintain the facility, lots of people ask if I'm looking for a job. I have a job! I just don't get paid in dollars to do it.

Let's say I work 15 hours a week at the hostel, and the average rent for a place comparable to my housing in this area is \$400 a month. That would mean I get paid around \$6.70 an hour to do general housekeeping and reception duties part time. Are you bored yet? Of course you are! Why would anyone I just met want to hear the abstract details of my rental arrangement?

When I meet people, I want to know what makes them tick. I don't need to know the details of their lifestyles right off the bat: I just want to know what kind of people they are. New meetings would be much more honest and interesting if we acknowledged these things:

- What we do for money does not define who we are
- Everything we do is work
- Work is not a bad thing

I propose a new ice-breaker: "What's your passion?" Art, music, old cars, botany? Do you spend every free minute volunteering at the library? Are you saving money to study comparative religion in Japan? Do you dream of travel, growing roses, sculpting a masterpiece? So, what's your passion?

What do you "do, perform, or practice" that makes you truly happy? ☆

REVIEW FANNING THE FLAMES

The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism

Edited by Vivien Labaton, Dawn Lundy Martin
Anchor Books
www.anchorbooks.com
www.thirdwavefoundation.org

Feminism needs a makeover. At least, that's so according to *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism*. Or perhaps, not so much a makeover as an expansion, a way of revamping it, revolutionizing it. *The Fire This Time* offers us a stew of essays that gives us a briefing of this expansion—ideas ranging from critical thinking on hip-hop music to independent media to the prison system to globalization. What feminism needs, according to *Fire's* writers, is to cross all boundaries of oppression. To gain strength in the feminist movement, feminist activists need to embrace issues such as sexism, homophobia, racism, and classism. Though I think most feminist activists would say that is indeed what they HAVE been doing all along, feminism in general, as a concept, has not been thought of, or treated by the mainstream audience, as an open movement. What feminism needs, according to the book, is more. The definition of feminism requires a change. Opening feminism's doors and melting its rigid definitions is what it needs to truly gain the power to push the movement forward.

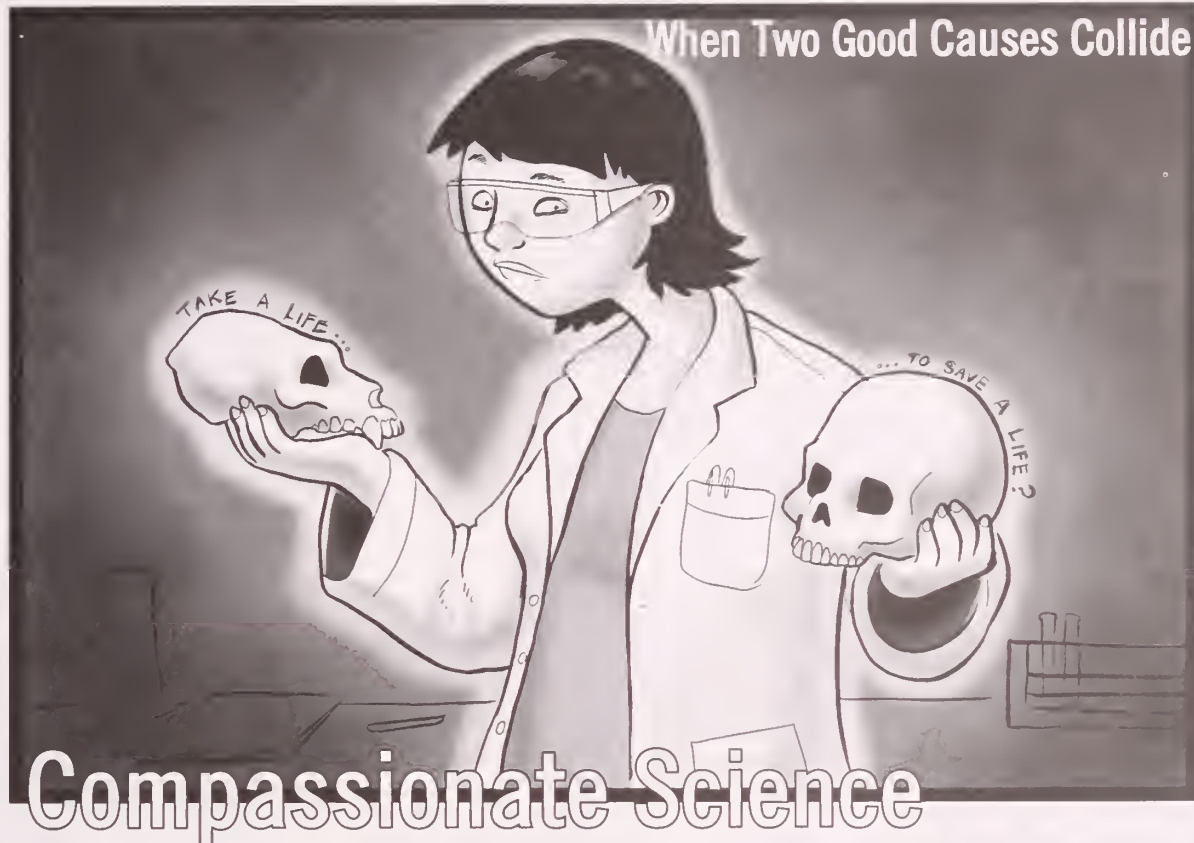
As a woman who's considered herself a feminist since the ripe age of 10, I've done my fair share of reading feminist essays and books. *The Fire this Time* breathes new life into old feminist ideals and gives us new perspectives to work with and think about. Reading this book reminded me of reading *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Generation*, edited by Barbara Findlen, when I was 15, a book which provided essays full of vigor, and voices I wasn't used to hearing. It was an enlivening, exhilarating experience to read these essays as a disillusioned teen, revving me up inside about things to come, about a revolution that was taking place, moving us forward.

The Fire This Time provides the same hopefulness and urgency to act. *Fire* does a good job of tackling its sundry issues, each very different from one another, but which weave into one another's stitches nonetheless. The essays seem interlaced instead of scattered and disjointed, which seems to be exactly the book's overall theme: feminism is a quilt of many patches instead of one



solid blanket. Once this concept is realized, feminism can truly be embraced and treated accordingly, becoming a more encompassing, open movement, creating something that everyone can declare being a part of. *Fire* is perfect for both budding feminists wanting to be exposed to new ideas, and feminists who have graduated from books like *Listen Up* and Jennifer Baumgardner's and Amelia Richards' *Manifesta*. Above all, this book should be read by not only progressive activists but also those who are curious about the future of the feminist movement, what it is today and where it will take us. As many books of this nature that bring up issues of oppression and social injustices, it's both hopeful and heartbreaking, and invigorating as it is perhaps unsettling. The book is also anything but dry; issues are brought up in a new and fresh way that make it an unusually quick read, which is exactly what it needs to be in order to bust that door wide open.

—Alison Parker



Compassionate Science

with Emily Sloan | Illustration: Melly Curphy

No matter how frugally I live, there are always pesky bills (like rent — why must a roof over my head cost almost half my salary?) plus I haven't figured out a way to stop eating and stay alive at the same time. So like most other people, I've worked full-time for years — cleaning dog kennels in the middle of a stinking hot summer, cocktail waitressing in the witching hours, and splashing around in the river as a nature camp counselor. One thing I've learned while clocked in is that if I'm going to devote over a third of my time to anything, it better be intellectually stimulating and purposeful. After all, my will-power is easily tempted by sunshine, breezes, and a bicycle to play hooky for an afternoon in the park, strangely absent from the giant medical center where I currently work as a technician in a genetics laboratory. Luckily I find my research on human disease interesting and worthwhile enough to keep me in the lab, and therefore employed.

Scientific research can be dull, painstaking, and stressful, but beyond the tedium and frustration of daily lab research lurks a serious conflict of interests. Not only am I a scientist, I am a vegan, and, unfortunately, biological research and animal use go hand in hand. In choosing my scientific career, I have had to break my own self-imposed rules of not using animal products in any form.

For the last two years I have worked in a human genetics research lab investigating an inherited disease called Schimke immuno-osseous dysplasia (SIOD). Children with this disease will suffer from skeletal deformities, growth failure, a weak immune system with T cell deficiencies, and kidney failure. Very few SIOD patients live past the age of 20, and most die before they are 10 years old. The disease occurs when a child inherits two mutated copies of the SMARCAL1 gene, one copy from each parent. Everybody requires a working copy of this gene for survival, although we don't know why a dysfunction SMARCAL1 protein causes SIOD. Enter my research: When I go to work, I design and conduct experiments to understand the function of the SMARCAL1 protein and the role it plays in the body. Hopefully our research will lead us toward better diagnosis and treatment of SIOD.

I fully believe in the cause of my research. Who wouldn't agree that curing disease is a worthwhile, noble, and important task? Likewise, I fully believe that a vegan lifestyle can have dramatic effects

on individual and environmental health, and is also a compassionate and aware personal choice. I became vegan over two years ago after living in Costa Rica, where I was studying organic agriculture and sustainable development. I saw first-hand the diversity and potential of endangered rainforest habitats, as well as the devastating effects of livestock grazing and conventional (chemical-using) agriculture on these ecosystems. I also realized how much water and food were required to raise animals, and that I could circumvent the entire pathway by eating lower on the food chain. After being exposed to such facts, I couldn't shut the door on them and live in good conscience. Consuming animal products in any form contributed to a system I could not support.

From Mice to Men

My vegan ethics blurred upon entering the lab. I wanted to remain 100% vegan but could not find a way to do this and stay in biological research. Simply put, current methods of scientific research require animals. I am not talking about testing cosmetics, shampoos, or drugs on animals, which is for the most part unnecessary and cruel. There are an increasing number of alternatives to this antiquated practice: in vitro experiments using bacteria are becoming more cost-efficient than drugging rabbits and rats, cultured human tumor cells are replacing monkeys and dogs for drug trials and toxicity tests, and sophisticated computer systems such as HUMTRN can predict the effect of drug molecules on the human body without a living model. Many medical schools have switched from animal vivisection to computer-based models, much to the relief of pound dogs everywhere.

The majority of biomedical research uses animals in two ways. First, animals are used as tools for examining the pathology of many diseases. Mice and fruit flies are two commonly used organisms, and have several advantages over humans for disease research. First, their relatively short generation times (only two weeks for fruit flies) reduce the time required for genetic experiments. Also, with fewer chromosomes, disease research becomes less complex (humans have 46 chromosomes, fruit flies only four). Their genomes have been com-

pletely sequenced, giving scientists a huge amount of accessible information. Model organisms also often share enough similar genetic material with humans to accurately model disease (the mouse SMARCAL1 protein that I research is 72 percent identical to the corresponding human protein). Scientists can essentially recreate a human disease in a mouse by manipulating its genome. Further studies can then elucidate the function of a protein, study interacting molecules, or test methods for "rescuing" the mouse from the disease, eventually extrapolating the information to humans. Model organisms are a truly powerful research tool.

Sometimes animal testing cannot be avoided by law. The Helsinki Declaration states that humans should not be used in research unless appropriate studies have already been conducted in animals. This makes the issue of being a vegan biomedical scientist really tricky. To study SIOD in our lab, we use human cell culture, mice, and fruit flies to examine the disease from a physiological, biochemical, and genetic perspective. The data complement each other, but one approach cannot replace another. The only way to understand how Schimke immuno-ossaceous dysplasia affects children and search for a cure is to use animals. What's a vegan scientist to do?

I went to the websites of animal rights organizations, which have successfully pushed for legislation to reduce mandatory animal testing and increase funding for researching alternatives, to look for suggestions for how compassionate scientists like me could conduct their research. I found that, while most organizations condemn the use of animals for disease research, they offer few alternatives for this crucial endeavor. The American Anti-Vivisection Society (aavs.org) suggests that scientists can "abstain from animal research by pursuing scientific endeavors that do not involve animals." Okay, that sounds like a reasonable idea; in fact, I did this myself by choosing to work with human cells instead of mice or flies. Unfortunately, in order to grow the cells, I have to supplement them with fetal bovine serum. And my protein experiments on the cells require antibodies derived from rabbits and mice, which were killed for that purpose. But I thought I was avoiding animals by working on humans!

Here we see the second, less obvious way that animals are used for biomedical research: their serum, protein, antibodies, and tissue turn up all over the lab in an indirect and sneaky manner. Keeping in mind that I never work directly with animals in the lab, on a weekly basis I still use over 10 animal-based products in my experiments on human cells. It's not easy to find alternative products, either. In cell culture, for example, human cells require serum (from blood) to survive.

If the serum did not come from animals, most likely raised and sacrificed for that purpose, it would have to come from humans. And, without getting too far into the ethics of using humans for medical research, let's just say that would be one giant headache.

The prospects of eliminating model organisms from biomedical research are not too bright either. As I said before, they are a powerful resource and can give us lots of information about disease that we could not otherwise collect. Additionally, scientific research is a conservative and dogmatic field, slow to change or accept new methods of experimentation. Animal studies are necessary for research to be considered thorough and acceptable for publication. Because of the current trend in animal models, even if a scientist were able to do high quality research without using animal models, her work would often not meet acceptable standards in a journal and would not be published. And in the academic world of "publish or perish," where journal articles equal funding and tenure, it is hard to challenge the established system yet remain inside it. There are no easy alternatives to an animal-based approach to scientific research.

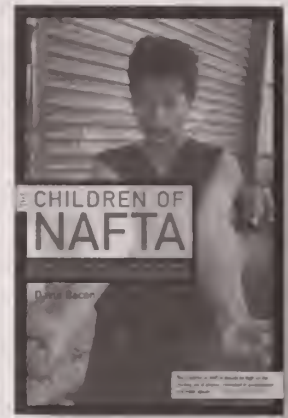
Meanwhile...

Working on human disease these last two years has forced me to reconsider some of my values in terms other than black and white. In order to choose whether or not to work on animals, my ethics went into triage, and research came up on top. I sacrificed some vegan ideals by working with animal products in order to conduct research that could potentially benefit many individuals and have greater impact on understanding human disease as well.

When it comes to science and veganism, there are few consistencies. At times I feel that my personal values are as indistinct and blurry as the Houston skyline on a red alert day. The scientific community doesn't necessarily condone compassionate science either, so I don't get much support in my daily working environment. I definitely do not know any other vegan scientists, though this may be more a feature of Texas than one of scientists in general. I wonder if other strict vegans would accept animal research if it were for the "greater" cause of curing disease. Because, like it or not, animals and their products are used everywhere in medicine, from preliminary research to the flu vaccines you get in the winter. As I have found, it's incredibly hard to be a purist. It will take a long time, if ever, before animals are eliminated from science and alternative methods become affordable and acceptable enough to use. ☆

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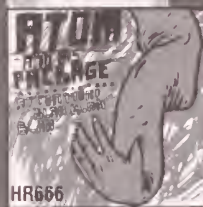
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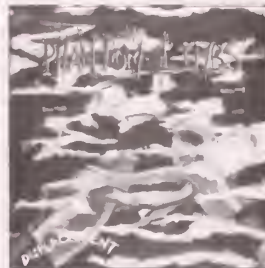
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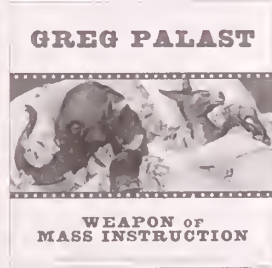
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WORKING OUT

Tobey Grip finds purpose and distraction in a prison work program that teaches rather than exploits prison workers.

"Hey, Boss," Tobey Grip calls from under the husk of the 1970 Mustang in the body shop. Tobey arrived at the Bolduc Correctional Facility, Maine's prison farm, a year ago, after spending over three years in high-security prisons around the state. He has already completed the six-month Auto Body program, but has stayed on to help his instructor, Brad Davis, with the next set of students. Working in the shop, he says, helps him endure the time that separates him from home. It takes his mind off of what's happening without him in the outside world.

Brad crosses the garage and peers under the car, where Tobey lies on the creeper, a drive shaft cradled in his left elbow. It's not fitting into place. Once the two agree that the part is too long, Tobey's legs appear from under the front end, then his chest, and last, his head. Tobey is 28 years old and has a young, clean-shaven face with prominent cheekbones. Around the body shop, Tobey moves with purpose, striding from one side to the other to find a tool or consult the boss. Tobey loves to work and always has. He left high school early to install windshields and storefronts for Oaks and Parkhurst Glass Company, a job to which he says he'll return after his release. At Bolduc, he pursued the Auto Body program with such determination that the administration allowed him to skip the waiting list and enter three weeks after his arrival.

Though Bolduc is tamer and offers more programs than the 'supermax' where Tobey was before, it is still a prison. You cross the front lawn, use the bathroom, attend class, eat lunch, and the guards are watching. They informally count you every hour on the hour; they formally count you six times a day:

All prisoners will be in their assigned rooms for formal counts and remain there until the officer conducting the count releases them. Neither your body nor your time is yours. You, your room, and your property are subject to search by staff at any time. Searches may be conducted with or without the prisoner present. The rules dictate everything you do and everywhere you go. Prisoners may sit at, but not on, picnic tables at appropriate times, but may not "hang out" outside the housing units or Admin. Building. Smbathing is allowed only after work hours and on weekends/holidays on the grass directly behind the Admin. Building.

Tobey is 18 months away from home. He's serving a six-year sentence for nearly beating his uncle to death. He becomes subdued when he talks about the incident. "A few people know," he says, "and that's about it. I really don't talk much about it." His words come slowly, and silence creeps between his sentences. He crinkles his brow and looks down at his hands. Tobey's uncle — his father's foster brother — sexually abused a member of his family, and when Tobey found out, he confronted his uncle. "I went over there, got in a fight with him, and probably fought a little longer than I should have," he recalls. "But it just happened so fast, and you get so mad, and the next thing you know, emotion just takes over, and before you know it, you've gone too far."

Because the authorities didn't know whether his uncle would live or die — and whether to try Tobey for assault or murder — he did not go on trial for about a year after the assault. After seven months, the uncle finally emerged from his coma. Tobey says that if he were in the situation again, he would most likely do the same thing. His uncle

had molested somebody before, gone to jail, gotten out, and had done it again. "Somehow, you've got to break that chain," he says. "The system can't do it, and there was no other way, and that was the only way I knew how to do it," he continues. "I myself don't feel like I did anything wrong, and nobody in my family feels like I did anything wrong. It was something that had to be done, unfortunately."

Though prison has not affected Tobey's sense of justice, it has changed his character in other ways. Working in the Auto Body shop, Tobey says, has boosted his self-confidence. It has given him pride in his work and taught him patience. Since he has taken on the role of shop assistant, he feels more comfortable interacting with others. He has become more introspective as well. "I've learned a lot about my feelings, and I think a lot more about things than I did before," he says. "I definitely think about life a lot more, because a lot of stuff out there you take for granted."

In the tiny bedroom that he shares with three other men, Tobey opens the doors of his locker and pulls a photo album from a shelf. He turns to snapshots of a beaming brown-haired boy, his five-year-old son Matthew, born to his girlfriend a month after he landed in prison. "He's my little pride and joy, my little buddy," says Tobey, grinning. "He's so full of life, it's crazy."

Tobey says that he and Linda haven't yet explained the concept of prison to their son; they're waiting until Tobey's out and settled at home. Meanwhile, Matthew thinks that his father is at work. "Last night, he was like, 'How much longer are you going to work — a million-trillion hours?'" he says. "He don't understand why I can't be at home when he wants me to be. He's like, 'I'm so ready for you to get a new job.'" When Tobey was in a prison bounded by razor wire, Linda did not bring Matthew to visit, but since he has been at Bolduc, they have come almost every weekend.

At the end of this past September, Tobey and Linda married among the paperbacks in the Bolduc library. Their 20-minute ceremony included his parents, her mother, their son, and a few flowers. Tobey points to a picture of himself and Matthew standing side-by-

words Christina Cook
photos Daneë Voorhees



side after the ceremony. "He had to have his hair spiked up, and we had to have identically matching outfits," he remembers. "Our sweaters were a little different," he adds, "and he wasn't happy about that. He wasn't happy at all." Matthew started feeling better about the situation after Tobey pointed out that he could use his extra pocket to hold the wedding rings.

Soon after his 24-hour honeymoon furlough, Tobey returned to his prison bedroom — to his lower bunk, boron-soaked foam mattress, and clear plastic alarm clock that exposes its wires and anything hidden inside. He returned to the tidy stacks in his metal locker and his plastic shower sandals arranged neatly on the linoleum tiles beneath his bed. He returned to his world within the world, where rules and routines keep life constant. "I'm here, in one spot. Everything's the same," he ruminates. "Out there, everything's all revolving. There's constant change. And when you go back, you're just in awe."

Stars pierce the black sky above Bolduc, but inside a bright cedar-scented craft room, inmates hammer, saw, sand, and paint their way through what might otherwise be a dull, endless evening. Among the workbenches, Miss Maine model boats, log cabin bird feeders, wooden dogs on wheels with strings, cedar hangers, and sailor's knots lie in various stages of completion. Tobey dials his combination into the padlock on locker #30. He swings wide the wooden door beneath his space at the workbench and pulls out one of his scallop-shaped boxes, which matches the size of his outspread palm. Tobey sells his finished boxes for \$12 each in the Maine State Prison Showroom in the nearby town of Thomaston. He can earn up to \$10,000 in a year, which he'll use to support himself after his release.

As the sun rises over the ocean, sets over the pasture, and rises once again, and as the snow falls, melts, and falls once more, Tobey moves closer to what's out there beyond the Bolduc Correctional Facility, beyond Cushing Road, and beyond Warren, Maine. He moves closer to the house he knows, the family he loves, and time that is all his own. He can't wait to move in with his wife, teach his son to ice skate on frozen ponds near the house, and eat hot ham and cheese sandwiches whenever he wants. Until then, he stays put in prison. He studies dent repair and welding, builds scallop boxes and wooden ships, and avoids breaking the rules and being sent back to the supermax. ★



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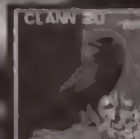
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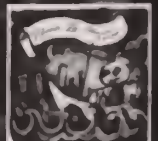
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Chris Abani



by Tess. Lotta

Two years after the publication of his first novel *Masters of the Board*, Chris Abani was arrested and imprisoned for six months. It was 1985, the year the Nigerian writer turned eighteen. He was accused by the regime in Nigeria of masterminding a political coup. The plot of his novel — a thriller about the return of the Third Reich — was suspected of supplying the blueprint. Two years later *Sirocco*, his second novel, was published. He was arrested for sedition and sentenced to a year in Kiri-Kiri, a maximum-security prison in Lagos. After his release, Abani began his studies at university and was arrested once again in 1990 after the performance of his play *Song for a Broken Flute*. The performance was attended by a head of state, and this time Abani was sentenced to death for treason. He spent over a year at Kiri-Kiri, much of it in solitary confinement. Concerned friends were eventually able to bribe prison officials and secure his escape. Abani moved to London where he continued to write and publicly challenge the regime. In 1999 he fled to America after his neighbor — the only other Nigerian in his London apartment building — was murdered. Abani feared it was a case of mistaken identity.

Chris Abani now lives in Los Angeles where he teaches, writes, and is earning a Ph.D. in English literature at University of Southern California. *GraceLand*, his latest novel, was published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in early February of this year. His literary resume shows several awards for works of fiction and poetry, including the prestigious Pen USA West Freedom to Write Award, which he won in 2001. His work inches away from the images of the past, but the history remains.

Abani was born in Nigeria to an English mother and Nigerian father. *Daphne's Lot* (2003), a highly personal book of poetry, draws from his family life. Daphne, the book's protagonist, is a characterization of Abani's mother, a woman who struggled with dual enculturation. It explores, among many things, racism, the Nigerian-Biafran civil war, love, family, masculine constructions, the epic as a form, as well as the very construction of the truth.

"I know nothing of truth," the narrator laments in the book's first poem "Only a Small Prayer," in which the narrator works to unite truth and memory for the remainder of the work. Daphne's experience supplies the validation:

*Her parents had not met any black men until
Michael's purple-black sheen and easy smile;
Grampy said it reminded him of that other black
fella with the trumpet. And granny — little eth —
heating and reheating the spread 'cause
"They like hot food," until the tea was sharp enough
to cut and cucumber sandwiches
peeled away, like pages curled from use.*

"The whole idea of truth is called into question from the first line ... [Yet] as a Black writer you must occupy the real," Abani's tone is faintly sarcastic. "You are not allowed to occupy the imagined. I based Daphne's Lot on facts, on aspects of my story — or else I would have written an autobiography. But art, by its use, modifies things. You have to go beyond your specific circumstance to find something essentially human that allows other people... to plug into a universal idea of humanity."

continued next page

Universality is a heavy literary burden in these times of personal technology products and instant video gratification. It is too abstract, too lengthy of a concept to be bothered with. Privilege may make it difficult for some to relate to *GraceLand*'s protagonist, Elvis Oke, a boy whose dreams are trapped by a horrific life in a Lagos ghetto. Oke survives a hostile family environment, as well as the violent aspects of his culture, one imbued with the products of American popular culture. The union of Western images of excess and hardened poverty creates parallel, if ironic, experiences.

"America has sort of a Calvinistic patriotism that does not allow for a dialogical position," Abani says, "so the irony may have a somewhat difficult time surviving [for some readers]. But I think it has to do with powerful factors of American society. The very products you and I are able to acquire," Abani continues, examining his living room, "means that somebody else has to go without. If one is experiencing pleasure, there is somebody experiencing pain. In order to continue, capitalism tries to cast away our guilt by saying, 'They envy our lifestyle.' I am trying to expose these narratives of irony in my work, not only ironies of the West, but how Nigerian culture absorbs Western culture and transforms it into something different."

Abani has been hailed as one of the best contemporary post-colonial writers: "A watershed moment in post-colonial literature," one American critic wrote of *GraceLand*. Although this is good news to Abani, this mouthful of a label belies a Western shortsightedness.

"It is a 'post-colonial' book in the sense that it is dealing with resistance to colonialism," corrects Abani, "but not in the colonialism that conceives that we [Nigerians] are former British subjects. It explores [colonialism] in terms of what is happening today, which is this global whiteness that attempts to engulf the whole world, and how America creates its empire through exportation of its myth and mythology.

"People will always need their shelves to put their post-colonial literature on," Abani offers a smile, "to show off that they have post-colonial literature," he reflects on the subtle racism of literary categorization. "What I have control over is the internal crafting of the work. I can't diss the critics," he says, "I teach critical theory, and part of critical theory is that I do this to other books. I am aware of the process, so I try to write beyond that."

At live readings Abani is more casual than his literary voice implies. One discovers a 30-something artist, budding jazz musician, and humanist with a sharp wit and easy manner. He is usually accompanied by one of his beloved saxophones (one of which is named Matilda). It is not uncommon to find him sharing the stage with other writer and musician friends who join in with voice, turntables, horns, and bass guitars. Abani calls these impromptu jazz compositions 'sound poems.'

"Growing up, my mother played lots of music," Abani explains, "all of my art has come to me through women and has been defined in resistance to men. My father would not allow me to learn an instrument because, as a middle class Nigerian, musical instruments would lead you to a life of music ... My obsession with jazz comes from the idea that once you know what you are doing, you can do whatever the hell you want. Jazz does not buy into the idea of exclusivity. It is the most non-fascist art form ever.

"The most important thing to me" Abani says of his work, "is how literature builds bridges, but," he hesitates for a moment, then smiles, "I think art in general should do that, or does it, rather. If you have the ability to articulate, in whatever form, then it is incumbent on you to articulate, but ... you must never buy into that incumbency. Everyone has a valuable story to tell" ☆

JOB

It was the corpse that did it.

Luo Kai Ming probably would have stayed in the Tianjin suburb of China's Xiao Ding Village, helping his father and brother work as fieldhands digging lotus roots for a local farmer, if he and his brother hadn't gone to a nearby pond and happened upon a dead body bobbing in the water. The female corpse was wrapped in rags, rotted beyond recognition. He and his brother had just drained the pond to irrigate the field and unwittingly revealed the secret harbored by the shallow pond he had swum in and drank from for months. So the 21-year-old native of Anhui province decided that he should explore other career options.

His brother told him not to look, but Luo, who had always been a somewhat unruly kid, couldn't contain his curiosity. "Once I saw it, I was frightened. At bedtime...once I closed my eyes I'd see the dead woman's image." For a week, he couldn't sleep or concentrate on his work. What disturbed him most was speculation on how the body had gotten there.

"At the time, I had heard that Tianjin people were pretty wild...A lot of *Xiao Jie* (prostitutes) were being killed and their bodies were being thrown away." He had only heard rumors until that point, but when the dead girl appeared in his field, he began to piece together her story: near the farm were several restaurants that offered additional "services." The girls who worked in these places had nowhere to go, vulnerable to rape and robbery.

Though he took the corpse incident as a sign, Luo was already disenchanted with the area's general lawlessness, particularly with regard to migrant workers. Not just young girls, but ordinary farmhands fell prey to coercion and brutality, and in China, rule of law is known for being somewhat slippery. "Some police might say, 'you're just *waidiren* [migrants from other areas of China]; it doesn't matter.'"

The body catalyzed Luo's frustration with the hardships of migrant farm labor. He had tried to work in Shanghai before, but had returned after a month when he discovered that the training he had received in Anhui in woodworking and construction was inadequate for Shanghai's competitive market. This time, however, he was determined to stay. "I saw that people who left home to work were making ten or twenty thousand RMB (under US \$2500) a year...they seemed pretty happy. When they came back to celebrate the New Year, they had cash to spend." At other times during the year, it's hard to find anyone in their twenties still living in the town; most young people have left to work. He knew that Shanghai, as one of China's largest cities, would also contain

a startling find causes Luo Kai Ming to reconsider his career path

RELOCATION

word Michelle Chen
illustration Sunshine



its share of hazards, but it couldn't be any worse than Tianjin.

Moreover, settling in Shanghai was also a matter of pride. "In our village, if you went to Shanghai and came back after a month, the experience would be seen as pointless...you'd lose face. So the second time I came to Shanghai, I had to take advantage the opportunities here."

After searching for 10 days, he almost lost hope, since most migrants turn back if they don't find work within two weeks. But a friend set him up with a job earning 400 kuai a month (US\$50), doing metal work and installation. He's remained at this job ever since. He lives in a tiny dormitory behind his metal working shop with three other young men from Anhui. One loft bed and two bunk beds are squeezed into a tiny space alongside a few chairs, shelves, a wok and gas tank for cooking outside on the sidewalk, and a crude sink. When not blasting metal beams in the workshop, they manage to entertain themselves. An old television and VCD player form the centerpiece of the room. And Luo has recently endeavored to play music with his roommates. He purchased three wooden flutes and a small electronic keyboard so they could practice together. Luo taught himself to play flute back in his village, where he would ride barefoot on the back of an ox playing folk tunes. He also borrowed an English textbook and cassette with the hope of picking up where his grade school education left off.

Today, the country boy turned migrant farmer turned manual laborer is many steps removed from his Anhui village. Instead of tilling fields or scooping cow dung fertilizer, he installs florescent lights in apartment complexes, fashions shelving units out of sheets of metal and plastic behind a corrugated steel gate on Song Hu Road, and rides to his job sites on a motorized bicycle.

With no days off, he seldom returns home except during the Chinese New Year. His main connection to his home province is through a small network of Anhui migrant youth who work in local beauty salons, and whenever he has a free evening, can be found in a salon smoking cheap cigarettes and chatting in his dialect with *lao xiang*, friends and distant relatives from his home village. The comforting language of his childhood allows his face, worn rough by construction and farm work, to melt into a humble smile, his crows feet gathering beneath closely cropped hair awash with complementary shampoo lather. But on quieter days, or when the weather is bad, he finds virtual escape in far corners of the country. He hits the *wang ba* (internet café) next door, where he can chat in his free time with other youth from Sichuan, Jiangsu, Hainan Island, and other provinces he will probably never visit.

It has been seven years since Luo abandoned the lotus fields and their horrible secret. He still shares the hardships faced by migrants everywhere in China – financial instability, a lack of government benefits, and a cultural distance between himself and native urbanites. But unlike in Tianjin, Shanghai offers the peculiar safety of a densely crowded city. He no longer has to endure the eerie nights and unnerving isolation of the interface between the quiet countryside and encroaching urban sprawl. Shanghai, according to Luo, is relatively civilized compared to other Chinese cities. "It can be wild, but just not as wild as Beijing." Here, at least, he can work peacefully without anyone hassling him for money.

After the Chinese New Year in January, he gathered his saved wages, made arrangements to leave his boss, and set out to start his own repair and installation business. His plans, however, were abruptly shelved by the discouragement of his parents, who want him

to get married and settle down in his home village. For the older generation, an independent business venture seems risky and self-aggrandizing. His mother, supposedly for her son's own good, harassed one of his friends into taking back the money he promised Luo to help him rent a storefront in the city. The ambition of seven years of labor had been snuffed in moments by a matriarch's iron-clad traditionalism. Luo recently went back to his hometown to plead with his mother, but he fears he is fated to be an underling forever. Still, there's always a way out: If he can't pursue his hopes in China, his far-flung backup plan is to spend his savings on a plane ticket to a new destination: a friend told him that Japan and Korea are hungry for migrant workers and you could make much more money there than in China.

But for now, Luo considers Shanghai his adopted habitat, if not his captive home. One clear afternoon, he borrowed a friend's digital camera and took it to his worksite. During a break, he snapped pictures of himself in front of the Shanghai Gymnasium, the city's main stadium. It is one of the many tourist attractions that Luo, with his meager salary, can only view from the outside while he's on a job assignment in the surrounding neighborhood, the moneyed Xujiahui district. As a boy, he spent his afternoons stealing fruit from neighboring orchards and dodging the teachers at his primitive rural schoolhouse. Now, his mischievous streak still peeks through his gaunt 28-year-old frame as he looks for loose gates at the gymnasium's perimeter to sneak in. Striking a pose next to golden Roman statues, he seems at play in the global village, an itinerant laborer riding China's economic boom as far as it will take him. ☆

The Unlikely Striker

The Grocery Workers' strike brings out a side of Leilani Clark's mother that she had never seen before.

The stirrings of strike talk filled the air in Southern California in September, 2003. Grocery worker contracts were up and Ralph's (Kroger), Vons, and Albertsons, the three major grocery chains in the state, offered up a joke of a package. They wanted to slash health benefits along with pensions while creating a two-tier wage system which would guarantee that new hires could never make as much as current employees. In the course of a month, the whisper became a roar and there was a strike vote. On October 11, 2003, the wave began and Vons employees went on strike. In a move of solidarity between the corporations, Albertsons and Ralph's locked out their own employees. As of mid-February, 70,000 United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) remain on strike as negotiations move at a snail's pace with no resolution in sight. The reasoning behind the strike is clear. The corporate grocery leaders such as Steve Bird (CEO of Vons Corporation), in an attempt to keep up with the Jones' known as monolithic Wal-Mart, want to alter the state of labor relations in California. The unions are viewed as an obstacle to maximum profit potential.

My mother has been an employee of Ralph's since 1987. She began as a deli worker, chopping meats and slabs of cheese for long lines of customers. While I suffered through the tribulations of junior high school, my mom worked nights and weekends in addition to her daytime job at an elementary school so that our family could have access to health benefits (after the Reagan administration

busted unions in the early 1980s, many laborers, including house painters like my father, lost guaranteed medical benefits and vacation pay). Working in the deli was hard on my mom, but she did it and eventually she was promoted to a managerial position in that same department and often moved from store to store. As it cut new hires, Ralph's increased the hours worked by managers — 50-hour work weeks were a

normal occurrence. I was in college at the time and I remember reading an article in the local paper about the CEO of Ralph's Corporation. According to the story, he had recently bought the most expensive house ever sold in La Jolla. The house had a 35-car garage and some insanely huge number of bedrooms. He planned on living there with his wife and son. My mom had chapped and bleeding hands, the onset of carpal tunnel syndrome from using the meat slicer all day, and an exhaustion that never really passed. She lived with us in a two-bedroom house with a one-car garage.

I mentioned the article to my mom and she didn't seem to think much of it at the time. That was just the way things were, was her opinion. As a result of the strike, her attitude has changed dramatically.

"These businesses were built on the sweat and blood of their workers, that is what has built them up over the years, and they have proven that they don't care. Most corporations are corrupt and I think that they'll do just about anything to make a buck for themselves, to exploit the working class people, and they exploit people in foreign countries that are working as slaves for slave wages."

These are the words that come from my mother's mouth now.

As a woman who has sacrificed most of her life to the raising of her children and the happiness of her husband, at 53 my mother has begun to find her own voice as a worker, an agitator, and even an activist. After spending long hours on the picket line, locked out by the very company

that she has dedicated 17 years of her life to, she entered into a new arena of political expression — or at least one that I have not seen her in before.

Picketers have lost medical benefits and thousands of dollars in wages. Along with the economic toll, a general sense of depression has settled in amongst the strikers as funds dwindle. At the same time, if my mom is any sort of representative example, there is an empowering knowledge of the importance of standing up to these corporations that want to strip employees of any bargaining power. Although they may not have considered themselves activists before, or even political for that matter, grocery workers have been forced into a political tightrope game.

"I liked my job and I felt like we were important to our bosses, but since the strike started I realized they don't care anything about workers," my mother says. "The only thing they are about is their stock, stockholders, and making profits."

Life on the picket line hasn't been easy. Strikers have been falsely accused of harassment by "scabs," monitored by the cops, and flipped off by speeding drivers. On the other hand, there are customers that support the strike and have refused to shop at major grocery chains, instead patronizing places like Trader Joe's and other smaller businesses. Locked-out employees are sometimes challenged by line-crossers and sometimes they initiate the challenge. "Sometimes customers go in and stop and make excuses, or they apologize. Some people call us lazy and tell us to 'go out and get a job.'" My mother has encountered her own confrontations on more than one occasion. It's hard not to with the mounting frustration combined with the attitudes of some line-crossers. "I confronted one man because he had been a regular Ralph's customer," she recalls. "He said that not crossing the picket line would not make any difference. I told him he could use it as a teaching tool for his son, to show him not to cross the picket line. He laughed about it and said that he was teaching his son that it was okay to cross a picket line. Sometimes people say mean things but I just think that they are naive and ill-informed and they don't understand what is really going on."

As the strike moves into its fifth month at the time of this writing, UFCW members are falling into an increasing economic stranglehold. Hundreds of thousands have been affected by this strike. Single mothers trying to support their children on one paycheck, people dependent on prescriptions who suddenly have no medical insurance, and those who cannot find work to supplement the meager strike pay are just a few of the common scenarios. Picketing wages have fallen to \$100 per week because the union strike funds have dwindled. As a result, my mother was forced to look for other employment and she is now working almost 40 hours a week at a local department store while still picketing the required 20 hours a week.

"I was one of the lucky ones," she says. "I was able to find work. A lot of people have not been able to find work. They are blacklisted by companies if it is found out they are on lockout from Ralph's because they know they won't be staying. It's kind of a desolate feeling. It's like futile attempts at looking for work."

The first week of the strike was filled with excitement and motivation but as the strike continues on, the contrast is palpable. My cousin, also an employee of Ralph's, is on strike as well. An economic and emotional struggle has ensued for her as she tries to organize her life in the midst of massive job upheaval. When my family gets together, there is always an underlying tension in the air: Should we talk about the reality of this situation or not? Or just pretend it's not happening? It's a difficult choice to make. When the strike becomes a topic of discussion, the conversation ends up highly political and charged with anger. And even when there is no discussion, it is always hanging over us, in the air, all around.

Even so, I have seen an amazing change take hold within my mother as she experiences the emotional and financial tolls of employer



betrayal. Here is a woman who for the most part has lived her life in my father's political shadow. As an avowed Trotskyist and dedicated member of the Spartacist League, my father has always carried his politics on his sleeve with a proud "fuck you" to the government. My mother, though quite liberal in her political views, has always tended to be much more quiet when it comes to statements on the political environment. It was as though she never wanted to go too far over the line. This may have been a remnant of the generation that she grew up in or just part of her interior personality. My father has always been so vocal in his demand for an armed worker's revolution that my mom has probably felt that there was no room left for her voice in the political topography of the family. I used to attribute my opinionated nature to my father but I now realize that my mother's quiet inner strength is equal in influence.

The burgeoning anti-corporate stance espoused by my mother has been truly exhilarating. I have heard the phrase "fucking corporation" come out of her normally beatific mouth on more than one occasion. She lays it all down in a passionate and righteously angry manner. "Labor over the whole country has to unite and come to a halt to make enough of an impact on the corporations that they will see that without the working-class people this country will come to a grinding halt and we are the ones that make the country run," she says.

In December, a friend and I went to a book reading by political writer Mike Davis. My parents had talked about going but it was crowded and we couldn't find them so we sat down in the front row. After the introductions, a question-and-answer session began. After somebody brought up the UFCW strike which was then in the beginning stages, I heard a strong woman's voice from the back. I turned around to see my mother standing up tall and proud. Each person in that audience paid close attention to her words as she eloquently and passionately laid out the details of the strike. How could they not? There was so much power and knowledge behind what she had to say. I had never seen my mother like that before. At the end of her short speech, the audience clapped enthusiastically, and my mother glowed. She had found her voice. ☆

ed. note: On March 1, 2004, after a two-day vote, the United Food and Commercial Workers approved a new contract, bringing an end to the nearly five-month long strike and lockout. Under the new three-year agreement, union members will pay no premiums toward their health care plans in the first two years and may have to pay from \$5-\$15 for coverage in the third year. The contract maintained the two-tier wage system for entry-level employees who will receive substantially less pay and fewer benefits.



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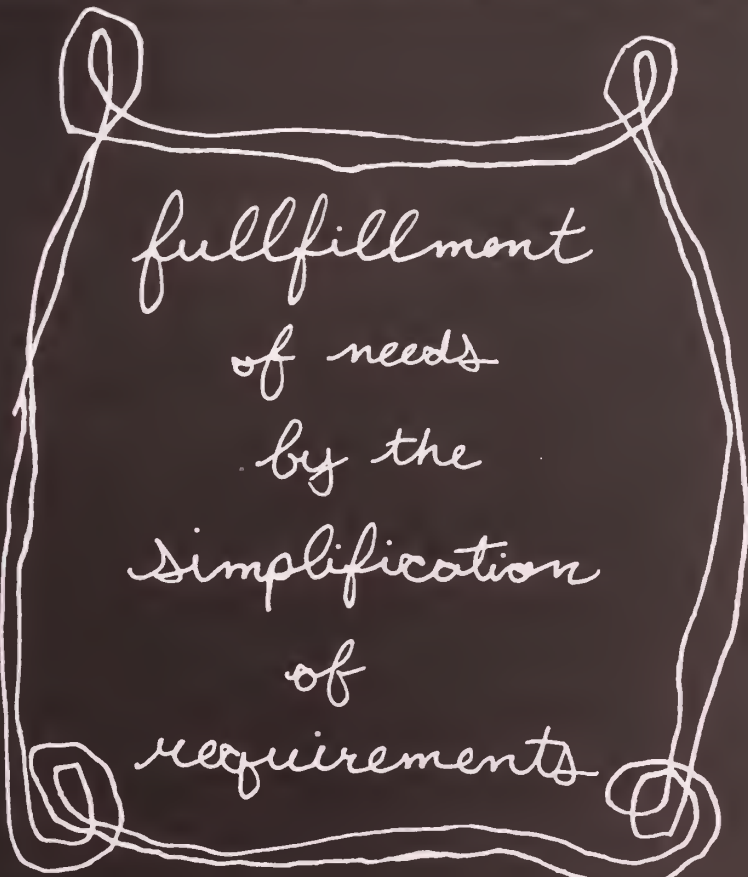
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Winona, MN
Worcester, MA

This year Clamor worked with amazing people across the country to stage the groundbreaking nationwide Clamor Music Festival — featuring over 150 performers in 32 cities coming together all on the same night! What follows, in teeny-tiny print, is our gigantic thank-you card for making it all happen. Put your magazine down and give these folks a hand. These are props well-earned.



The Performers

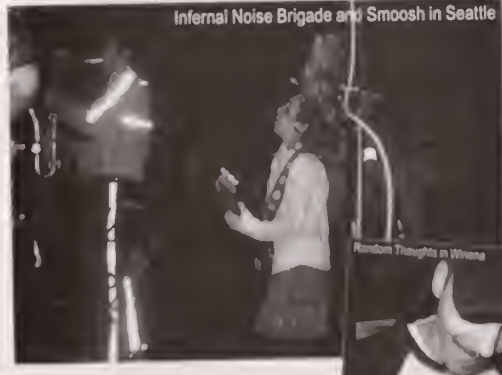
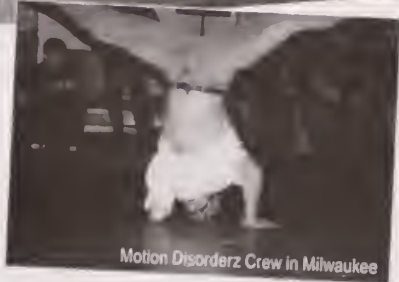
Aaron Carter
Al Larsen
All or Nothing H.C.
Apollo Up
Are You Fucking Serious
Athletic Mic League
The Axes of Evil
Baba (Open Thought)
Bad Folk
BBQ Kings
Beat Grrl (DJ Christal)
Bernie Allen
Best Friend Suicide Pact
Beth Simpson
Big Noise Films
Bleeding Hickeys
Blood Of Patriots
Blood Red Sky
Booner
Boxing Water
Breed/ Extinction
Breeze Evahflowin
Brendon
The Bryan Funck MCs
Bustin Beats
Cache
Caliche Con Carne
The California Navels
Campo Bravo
(cH)evron
The Childers
Chip Cruz
Choke Their Rivers With Our Dead
Chris Milhausen
Climbing poeTree
City Sleep
Communist Guitar
Conspiracy of Thought
David Soto
Davies Vs. Dresch
Dead Beat Dads
Desert Rat
Dialogue Elevators Crew
DJ Assfault
DJ Ese (Def Jux/Embedded)
DJ Haircut
DJ Kajika
DJ Munk
DJ Sie one
DJ ZoZo
Fear Kittens
Felonious
Fields of Industry
The Fight Within
Finale
Five Story Fall
Forealious

The Free Radicals
Freedom Sold
Hazel Levy
He Taught Me Lies (HTML)
The Hellfire Club
The Highway Matrons
Hobo Jazz
Illlogical Spoon
The Impossible Shapes
In Museums (ex-Intima)
Industries of the Blind
Invincible
Jazio Blaq
Jean Grae
JoAnn Riedl
Johnny Cheapo
Jon Brion
Joshua Coast
Kamau
Karo
Kate Pollack
Kennedy
Kres
Lars Din
Last Call
Lily
Lord Finch
Los Yama
Losten Found
The Malcontent Party
Man at Arms
Marathon
Mashup Sound System
Matt E. P
Mea Culpa
Mega
Mezklah
Miguel Ortega
Mista J the Titan
Monsterpuss
Motion Disorderz Crew
Murder of Crows
Myello
Nakatomi Plaza
The New Harmful
New Kevin
New Kiwa Motions Puppettheatre
Noble Savages
Nomo
The No-Name Poetry Collective
The Nothing
Oggatron
One Gram
Peace Terrorists
Pegosos
People Again
Perfection is a Myth

Peter Baldwin
Phoenix
Piedmont Charisma
Polyrhythmic
Poverty & Vixta
Prozack Turner
PS I Love You
The Quicks
Radical Cheerleaders
Rebel DJ T (XLR8R Magazine)
Ricanstruction
Robber Barons
Ross and the Hellpats
SaberTooth Tiger
Sarah Kanouse
Sarah Kate Albrecht
Sara
Schleprok MC
School of Accuracy
7th Street Coincidence
Sharon Olds
Shore Leave
Shotgun Monday
Shuttlecock
Sie One
Signal Drift
Sine Nomine
The Skulls
Small Town Tragedy
Some Garage Band
Sounds From Afar
SourPuss
Stem Cell Research
Styles for Modern Living
Stylex
Superhopper
Taste Emcees featuring Armagideon
Telecast
Theilllogicalspoon
Things Fall Apart
Those Rotten Beats
Threnos
Thunderbirds Are Now!
Tony Danza Tap Dance Extravaganza
Triple Eagle
Turn Around Norman
Tyde
U S S R
Uwharria
Walidah Imanisha
The Whole Fantastic World
The Whole Sick Crew
Work
Xenogia Spoken Word Collective
Zach Miller
Zoe Swords
Zubabi

The Volunteers

Adam Hurter
Allen Harrison
Amanda Luker
Andy Grim
Anne Elizabeth Moore
Bob Cahill
Brandon Bauer
Bryan Funck
Chris Burnett
Chris Tracey
DJ Mega
Doug Bohm
Greg Schweizer
Jason Powers
Jeff Vandenburg
Jen Loy
Jenny Lee
Jerianne Thompson
Jethro Ford
John Rash
Joshua Medsker
Karla Lorena Aguilar
Kayle Young
Kristina Rizga
Maggie St. Germain
Mark Sarich
Martha Riecks
Matt Roff
Mike Medow
Molly McCluskey
Pete Baldwin
Rob Monk
Samuel Pixley
Sara deAloia
Sara Helen
Sheila Bishop
Tim Raket
Tina Bold
Yael Grauer
Zoe Swords



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Toledo, Ohio



The Toledo Area Artists exhibition is co-organized by the Toledo Museum of Art and the Toledo Federation of Art Societies. It is sponsored by Sky Bank and is supported, in part, by the Ohio Arts Council.

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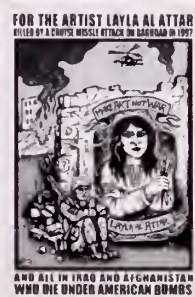
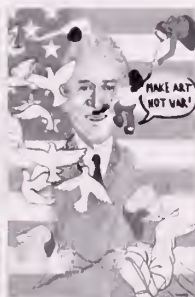
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